

*Robert Samuels*  
*The Open University, UK*

## **Music as Narrative's Limit and Supplement**

The contributions that have preceded this article have compelling and evident coherence as a group. So much so that I had to be assured by the conference organisers, during the event which originated the present volume, that this sequence, consisting of studies centring on American texts, followed by clearly-related and closely-related topics such as the Gothic as geographical / topological mode, or the British experience of slavery, were in fact fortuitous in their coincidence. It is the sort of collection which would have gladdened John Cage, where the narrative which a disinterested observer would more or less be forced to read from the titles of papers and the liveliness of discussion, is in fact a creation entirely of the observer rather than the result of intention.

And yet the sense persists that what is to be presented here is a sort of appendage, a supplement to the eight chapters that have preceded. For what I have to offer is in some senses more theoretically oriented than most of the other discussions, and in addition, the texts I use for examples, by contrast with the great majority of those found earlier in this volume, are already well-known, even canonical. However, I am more than aware of the intellectual absurdity of appearing marginalised within a volume on liminality, and the potential of the supplement is a central topic (if a supplement can be central) of what I have to argue. My title indicates that I write from a position as a musicologist, and thus a participant in a discourse outside literary textual studies. But if at the outset I raise the possibility that what appears as supplementary, as 'outside' may turn out, on closer inspection, to be that which gives the very possibility of meaning to the system which, nevertheless, necessarily excludes it, then I suppose that I am in fact an instantiation, in my professional persona, of the theoretical matter which I wish to discuss.

Thinking of the supplement in this way owes a debt to Jacques Derrida, as most readers are probably already aware. Derrida will recur in the final section of this chapter, when I try to contextualise the historical matter with which I am going to start. That matter has to do with the interrelationship of narrative modes

in literary and musical production in the nineteenth century. The selection of the materials and the historical situation is deliberate: this period is one in which practitioners in both literature and music see these arts as closely related, and often as in some way translatable one into another. There is a philosophical context to this, in which the relatively disparaging place allotted to music by Kant (for instance) is transformed, in a matter of a generation, into the supreme position it occupies within Schopenhauer's thinking, where it is the image of the Will, and thus the artistic mode in which Representation can be bypassed.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, then, composers consider music to be capable of bearing articulate thought, and thus the composer can become, in Schumann's phrase, a *Tondichter* or poet of sounds. And on the other, music is something that fascinates literary authors, and which intervenes on occasion at crucial moments in their narratives.

This chapter aims to place these two situations alongside each other, so that the place of narrative in musical organisation, and music in literary materials, can be assessed together. This is an activity which goes beyond the classic instruction to students to "compare and contrast", because the mirroring of function of each art in the other leads to strange, and, I would say, liminal byways.

There has been a great deal of interest recently in the place of music as subject within literary narrative. Apart from anything else, literary texts provide valuable historical source material, particularly for the place of amateur music-making within the home. But for my purposes, I want to look at the value that music carries within a narrative, and particularly within the most typically nineteenth-century form of narrative, the novel.

In novels, music is often the vehicle for the unsayable. Delia da Sousa Correa's study of George Eliot, for instance, concentrates on the place music assumes in expressing the unspeakable power of romantic attraction.<sup>2</sup> Here, music is both a signifier of the sublime or the transcendent, and, in realist terms, a social activity which regulates as well as enables rituals of courtship – even though the power it unleashes may have disruptive and uncontained effects.

### **Balzac at the opera**

In my first major example of music's appearance at a crucial episode of a novel, however, it is somewhat removed from this foregrounding. Here, the significance of music acts in a more subterranean way, particularly since it remains unheard for the character who should have attended to it most. The passage is a pivotal scene in Balzac's novel *Un grand homme de province à Paris* (*A Provincial Celebrity in Paris*), the second of the three parts of *Illusions perdues* (*Lost Illusions*). This novel, set in 1821-22, was written in 1839, suggestively during the period at which Balzac was receiving lessons in music from one Jacques Strunz.<sup>3</sup> Within the immense canvas of *La comédie humaine*, the action of this novel is quintessential, telling the story of the attempt by Lucien de Rubempré (an aspiring poet, the 'celebrity' of the title) to gain access to the world of Parisian aristocratic high society. There are many similarities between this novel and the earlier *Père Goriot* (1834), whose hero, Eugène de Rastignac, is engaged on a similar quest. Both young men, penniless, yet able and ambitious, recognise that the most

assured route to entry in Society is to gain an aristocratic mistress as protector. And in each novel, Balzac creates one of the extended set-piece scenes typical of his narrative technique as the occasion for the hero's first attempt to bring about the realisation of his ambitions. In both cases, the backdrop to this crucial scene is the opera; and the fact that Rastignac is successful, whereas Lucien's evening is a disaster, is counterpointed by the fact that the former begins his seduction of Delphine de Nucingen at a performance of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, whereas the latter finds himself embroiled in a tragedy, both on stage and in his personal life. The convergences of the two stories are perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that it is the now-successful Rastignac, hero of the earlier novel, who administers the blow that destroys Lucien's chances in the later one: he reveals that Lucien's surname, de Rubempré, is not in fact his own (it is, in fact, his mother's family name; Lucien's father was a provincial chemist) – in other words, his claim to noble birth is in fact an illusion.

Whilst the parallels between the two novels, especially in these two scenes and the immediately surrounding narrative, are subtle and detailed, and deserve more extended discussion than can be afforded here, for present purposes the crucial element to note is the resonance between the events on stage and those narrated off it. This very resonance is a subtle point, since the reader has to be fairly alert to register at all what the musical work is that is being performed. Indeed, in *Père Goriot*, it is only explicitly mentioned, with an apostrophe to Rossini entirely in keeping with that composer's reputation at the time, when Rastignac narrates his triumphant evening at the Italiens theatre to Father Goriot himself, two days later. To concentrate, however, on *Un grand homme de province à Paris*: the work in question, with Balzac's customary historical exactitude, is one which played no less than 127 times at the Opéra from its premiere in 1784 until 1828: Salieri's *Les Danaïdes*.

Whilst a casualty of the formation of the operatic canon, and rarely heard in the last hundred years, Salieri's opera was one of the best-known of its day, as its astonishing frequency of performance attests.<sup>4</sup> The significance of its use by Balzac, however, clearly goes far beyond its historical popularity or modishness on the part of the novelist. The *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* characterises it as 'a gruesome story of vengeance, deception and murder' (Rice 1992), and the more that one compares the action on stage with the narrated events in the boxes and lobby of the Opéra, the more the similarities suggest themselves to be intentional.

Briefly, the action of the opera surrounds the marriage of the fifty daughters of Danaus (the Danaïdes of the title) to their cousins, the sons of Aegyptus, in settlement of a long-standing feud. Danaus plans for his daughters to kill their husbands on their wedding-night. They promise to obey him, swearing an oath to Nemesis, except for his eldest daughter, Hypermnestre, who has fallen in love with her betrothed, Lyncée. She tells him just in time to flee (without telling him why). Lyncée returns with his army to slaughter the Danaïdes in turn and burn the palace to the ground. The final act of the opera shows the Danaïdes imprisoned in the underworld with Danaus sentenced to eternal torture.

It is significant in the present context that this story centres on the murder of young men by avenging women, and the destruction of Danaus's masculine

intrigue by the intervention of a powerful woman (Hypermnestre). Against this, Lucien de Rubempré is unsuccessful in his bid to manipulate the powerful women who have given him apparent protection and secured his presence at the Opéra. First of all, he instantly aspires to win as mistress the great lady whose box he has entered, the Marquise d'Espard (it is perhaps significant that in several classical versions of the myth, the Danaïds are acting in a sort of self-defence, since the plan to commit murder on the wedding-night had already been conceived by Aegyptus and his sons). Lucien's ambition necessarily involves a decision to abandon Louise de Bargeton, the woman who has brought him to Paris from the provinces as her lover. Simultaneously to developing this scheme, however, he ruins his chances of success, through his inability to understand the rules of the Parisian high society he wishes to enter. This tragedy, which will direct the course of the rest of the novel, is played out principally during the intervals between the acts of the opera, with the music itself giving opportunity for Lucien's mental schemes to develop.

Intriguingly, whilst Balzac refers to 'the great Inferno scene in the fifth act', the narrative appears only to follow three intervals in the performance, and we are told that Lucien and Madame de Bargeton arrive 'as the first act came to an end'. This may reflect the fact that, whilst the opera was indeed composed in five acts and performed as such at its premiere (in Paris), and so the 'inferno scene' was famous precisely as 'the fifth act', the work was actually compressed to four acts for the Paris productions of 1817 onwards (Loewenburg 1978). In any case, the following table summarises the parallelisms of scheming, growth of illusions, and disaster in both opera and novel:

<b>Salieri: Les Danaïdes</b>	<b>Balzac: A Provincial Celebrity in Paris</b>
First act: optimism at impending weddings	Lucien, Louise and the Marquise arrive at the Opéra
End of first act	Lucien commits disastrous <i>faux pas</i> whilst observing the members of Society
First interval	Lucien 'skirmishes' verbally with the young men of Society who visit the box of the Marquise
Second act: plotting between Danaus, Hypermnestre and Lyncée	Unheard plotting against Lucien in the other boxes; Rastignac betrays Lucien, revealing him not to be of noble family; Lucien is meanwhile distracted by the music on stage
Second interval	De Marsay reveals Lucien's self-misrepresentation to the Marquise
Third act: wedding festivities, ending with the sons of Aegyptus led, drunk, to their supposed nuptial beds	The Marquise and Louise leave, unnoticed by Lucien

<b>Salieri: Les Danaïdes</b>	<b>Balzac: A Provincial Celebrity in Paris</b>
Third interval	The Marquise and Louise confer in their carriage; Lucien strolls in the lobby and is cut by all members of Society
Final (fourth / fifth) act: Hypermnestre warns Lyncée to flee; the murder of the sons of Aegyptus is revealed; Lyncée returns with his army; the palace is burned to the ground; Danaus and his murderous daughters are tormented in the Underworld	Lucien is absorbed in the spectacle of the opera, and beset by illusions as he imagines his victorious entry into Society

The parallels in narrative structure between opera libretto and literary episode are evident from the above, and need no further discussion in the present context. However, the nature of Lucien's disastrous embrace of the eponymous Illusion of Balzac's novel deserves closer inspection. Fundamentally, Lucien is punished for his inability to control his semiotic identity. This begins before he even arrives at the Opéra, when he decides (quite correctly) that his provincial clothes are completely inappropriate for his attempt to enter Parisian Society. The result is that he spends more or less all the money he has on new clothes from an extremely expensive tailor. The result is that the box-office attendant regards him as looking like "a best man at a wedding". This inability to understand the force of his signifying actions is repeated with far worse consequence almost as soon as he is present in the Marquise's box:

"If any one comes to our box," [the Marquise] said, "perhaps we may discover the cause to which we owe the honor of the interest that these ladies are taking—"

"I have a strong suspicion that it is my old velvet gown and Angoumois air which Parisian ladies find amusing," Mme. de Bargeton answered, laughing.

"No, it is not you; it is something that I cannot explain," she added, turning to the poet, and, as she looked at him for the first time, it seemed to strike her that he was singularly dressed.

"There is M. du Chatelet," exclaimed Lucien at that moment, and he pointed a finger towards Mme. de Sérizy's box, which the renovated beau had just entered.

Mme. de Bargeton bit her lips with chagrin as she saw that gesture, and saw besides the Marquise's ill-suppressed smile of contemptuous astonishment. "Where does the young man come from?" her look said, and Louise felt humbled through her love, one of the sharpest of all pangs for a Frenchwoman, a mortification for which she cannot forgive her lover.

Louise de Bargeton may have neglected to buy new clothes (an oversight she corrects immediately after the evening narrated here), but she is in control of her semiotic status. She can convey "where she has come from", unlike Lucien. What is happening here, and continues throughout the performance, is that Lucien's conscious actions, his intentional signifiers, are accompanied by a disastrous sequence of signifieds which remain unperceived by him. The situation here is, of course, strikingly similar

to the relationship between narrative and music in opera. The true significance of events on stage is frequently given by the nature of their musical accompaniment, which remains “unheard” by the characters on stage, in the conventions of operatic narrative. And in this light, there is considerable depth to the authorial comment that immediately follows the passage just quoted:

In these circles where trifles are of such importance, a gesture or a word at the outset is enough to ruin a newcomer. It is the principal merit of fine manners and the highest breeding that they produce the effect of a harmonious whole, in which every element is so blended that nothing is startling or obtrusive. Even those who break the laws of this science, either through ignorance or carried away by some impulse, must comprehend that it is with social intercourse as with music, a single discordant note is a complete negation of the art itself, for the harmony exists only when all its conditions are observed down to the least particular.

Despite Balzac’s interest in music, metaphors such as the “harmonious whole [*ensemble harmonieux*]” and “single discordant note [*seule dissonance*]” above are rare in his writing. Here, in the context of events taking place during a musical performance, they appear as symptoms of the semiosis shared between the stage and the boxes. Music is an emblem of truth; that is, truth in the sense of hidden significance; and the explicit comparison of “*belles manières*” and music here marks the penetration into the narrative of the semiotic system suppressed by it. Lucien consistently fails to register the true significance of events. First of all he ignores the music, and simultaneously fails to comprehend a barbed remark of the Marquise concerning his provincial background: “Her remark was lost upon Lucien; the all-absorbing spectacle of the boxes prevented him from thinking of anything else.” Then he is distracted by the music of *Les Danaïdes*, committing a similar mistake as he is “glad when the rising of the curtain produced a diversion”. Put another way, this is novelistic narrative at its most musical.

### **Music and signification**

If music is an emblem of truth, as my reading of Balzac’s text contends, then what is the state of affairs when music does not have a specified alliance with text, as in the case of an opera score? For “absolute music”, as it is generally labelled, what is the nature of its signifying potential? Just as the nature of Balzac’s novelistic signifying strategies are a distinctively nineteenth-century phenomenon, so is the question of “absolute music”. Carl Dahlhaus, indeed, devotes a whole chapter of his *Aesthetics of Music* (1967) to a careful description of the “Emancipation of Instrumental Music”, which he locates as beginning in the late eighteenth century, but becoming the main distinctive feature of musical aesthetics in the nineteenth. Dahlhaus is concerned to trace a dialectic between the belief that music can signify solely through its manipulation of musical materials, and the belief that musical meaning must rest upon language in some sense. This constant debate, he points out, means that the most celebrated defender of the autonomy of music, Eduard

Hanslick, “felt compelled, when he maintained the primacy of instrumental music, to expound his thesis as polemic” (Dahlhaus 1967, p. 29). The opposite position in the dialectic is exemplified for Dahlhaus by Georg Gottfried Gervinus, who in 1868 “doubts whether instrumental music has any right to exist”, since “it is ‘nothing but imitation of vocal music’” (ibid., p. 30). At the centre of this debate, therefore, is the relationship of music and language, and the limits of signifying force; in other words, some of the same factors that are to be seen at work in Balzac’s resort to the Opéra as the necessary scene for the pivotal events of his novel.

Intrinsic to this debate is the function of musical form. The changing function of form within music during the nineteenth century traces the development of the concept of music’s capacity to signify. The clearest way to see this at work is to consider the musical form which more than any other typifies nineteenth-century practice and experiment, which is “sonata form”. The most basic outline of the form might be represented thus:

Sonata form				
Exposition		Development	Recapitulation	
First subject	Second subject	Combination of themes	First subject	Second subject
Tonic key	Secondary key	Various keys	Tonic key	

The terms used here are those which have become generally accepted; most are translations of German terms whose codification is often traced to A.B. Marx’s *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* of 1837-47. In other words, the formulation of the categories of sonata form (which was motivated partly by a desire to interpret complex works, especially the symphonies of Beethoven, and partly as a tool for teaching) became accepted at just the time that Balzac was writing *Un grand homme de province à Paris*. A diagram such as the above is of course only the most approximate and misleading guide to a musical form which has one of the longest histories in Western art music (arising in the mid-eighteenth century and still in use today). The point of presenting it here is simply to facilitate a few straightforward observations. Sonata form encapsulates the adherence in nineteenth-century musical practice to the concepts of development through time and resolution through closure. Arguably, these concepts characterise all formal thinking in music of the period. Immediately, points of contact with narrative practice suggest themselves, since at this level of abstraction, much the same can be said of nineteenth-century literature; the depiction of development through time is particularly a distinguishing feature of the realist novel. But to remain with sonata form, the factor which runs alongside these global concepts is the persistent use of this mode of formal thinking to give coherence to larger and larger scale works. The diagrammatic summary above can equally well describe a piece of music lasting a matter of a few dozen bars (sonata form emerges from the “binary form” of the baroque, a period in which individual movements are almost never of any great length even in very extended

works), or on the other hand, a Mahlerian symphonic movement of more than thirty minutes' duration. Whilst it is subject to a myriad variations and expansions of its contours, the development of rich and complex works necessarily requires hermeneutic strategies which can account for the gap between such a schematic understanding of formal outlines and the grounds for coherence (to use the most typically nineteenth-century metaphor, the grounds for organic unity) in the individual work.

Such a hermeneutic strategy more or less requires narrative as its explanatory mode. This arises from shifts of emphasis within the technique of constructing sonata form as its history unfolds during the nineteenth century. At the outset of the period, the fundamentally defining aspect of the form is its key structure: the move from the tonic (main) key to a secondary key and back again. Eighteenth-century theorists always describe form as a tonal, or key-based, structure. During the nineteenth century, the defining feature of the form becomes the deployment of the musical material associated with first and second subject areas respectively. In other words, what starts as a *tonal* form becomes, in the course of the century, a *thematic* form. A certain reification of the musical materials is inescapable; the "main theme" becomes an object which defines the "first subject" of the work. Once conceived in this way, changes to this object when it recurs, which are necessitated by the ideological commitment to avoid literal repetition (an empty or meaningless gesture), become the opportunity for constructing a history of this "musical idea". And any history implies a narrative.

This turn to narrative explanation of musical process is therefore inbuilt to compositional practice of the time. Theodor Adorno, in his monograph on Mahler, puts it succinctly: "It is not that the music wants to narrate, but that the composer wants to make music in the way that others make narratives" (Adorno 1960, p. 62, translation altered). Narrative intervenes to account for the excess to the sort of schematic description outlined above. That is to say, any ramified, complex work, in other words, any work written out of the prevailing aesthetic of the nineteenth century, will contain many elements within it which cannot be accounted for by the requirements of fulfilling a formal outline. The sorts of excess which typically engender narrative interpretation of works include the following:

- 1) Motivic variation of musical materials, often creating unexplained asymmetries between one occurrence of a theme and another.
- 2) Culminating moments within the form, presenting musical material unprecedented elsewhere.
- 3) Elements marking the music generically, for instance as dance, march or song. For instance, the scherzo movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is cast in the extremely unusual time signature of 5/4, but saturated with melodic and harmonic features which mark it quite unmistakably as a waltz. This music, evidently, is not simply a waltz, since it is impossible to waltz in 5/4 time; it is, in other words a *representation* of a waltz. A narrative of some sort is essential to the semiotic decoding of the generic signs.
- 4) Material which requires extra-musical explanation, for instance the invocation of pastoral, or other expressive modes drawn from programmatic or operatic writing. This process is often reliant on complex intertextual reference, as when Mahler imitates Wagner's *Naturlaut* (sounds of nature).

This constellation of factors (to use another Adornian term) leads to a phenomenon which I would describe as *double-duty form*. Two systems of signs within the musical text are simultaneously capable of being read as sources of coherence. On the one hand, a process, usually resting upon tonal (key) structure, aims towards finality and closure at the final cadence; the sort of linear, teleological process which receives its most subtle and technical investigation in the voice-leading analysis derived from the theory of Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). And on the other hand, a more discursive, more widely interpretive or hermeneutic process develops a narrative analysis of the sorts of features listed above, which escape the comprehension of tonal structure. What I am arguing is not that these are competing hermeneutic strategies one of which must in the final analysis be preferred, or one of which is mistaken or deficient. On the contrary; they are a slightly more technical way of identifying features which lead to the dialectic Dahlhaus describes, between ideologies locating musical meaning in musical materials or in language. The two faces of my “double-duty form” are quite distinct; but they are structures which nevertheless reinforce rather than undermine each other.

This dialectic is best shown in the debates surrounding programme music, the form of instrumental music which invokes language as necessary to its interpretation, without setting a text. To exemplify what I mean by double-duty form, I wish to argue for an instance where both the mutual reinforcement of the two processes, and yet the gap or distinction between them, become clearly perceptible in the surface of the musical text.

#### **Smetana and double-duty form**

The text in question is a well-known piece: *Vltava* (1874), the second of the symphonic poems in the cycle *Ma Vlast* (My Homeland) by Bedich Smetana. The title of the piece is the name of the river (known also as the German *Moldau*) that runs through the Czech capital, Prague. The programme of the piece is simplicity itself, a portrayal of the river from its beginnings as a pair of mountain streams (one warm, one cold, as Smetana put it), to its majestic eventual size, culminating in its dispersal as it reaches the Elbe. All the varieties of narrative markers listed above are employed; the narrative is created partly from musical gestures associated with depictions of nature, and partly from generic writing which suggests human activity (peasants dancing on the banks of the river, and so forth). There is a more or less unavoidable symbolic reading of the progress of the river as the progress of the Czech people, culminating in their destiny to mingle as part of wider humanity.

The musical form of the piece rests on constant variation of its main theme through episodes which enact a gradual crescendo, reaching a triumphant peroration at the end. This is a logical and comprehensible musical form, with a pedigree in traditional forms such as “theme and variation” and “rondo”. Its reinforcement of the programmatic narrative is also quite clear. Two systems of signification appear to be so synchronous that trying to tease them apart as I have done above seems misguided, or at least redundant. Yet a fissure between them nevertheless opens up at one moment in particular, and that is the very end of the work. This is noteworthy

because the form, whichever hermeneutic strategy one chooses to describe it, is prominently end-directed, beyond even the ideological requirement for closure common to all artworks of the period. Far from uniting the abstract structure of musical form and the expressive contour of narrative form in a gesture of artistically seamless integrity, the necessity of achieving aesthetically satisfying closure on both levels simultaneously acts to drive them apart.

The concluding passage of the work has a harmonic and textural clarity which makes the interpretation of its semiosis as straightforward as could be. A blazing brass chorale, accompanied by suitably fluvial strings, leads to the climax of the work in terms of dynamic level, the triple *forte* which begins the final thirty-three bars, which are entirely composed of a tonic E major chord. These bars gradually subside, the heavy brass fading out, then the woodwind, then the horns, finally leaving the strings on their own, their down-and-up arpeggios passing out of hearing:

The image displays a musical score for the ending of the piece 'Vltava', spanning measures 413 to 427. The score is written for a brass ensemble and strings. The key signature is E major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 413-417) begins with a triple *ff* dynamic and a *dim.* marking. The second system (measures 418-422) shows a dynamic of *af.* followed by *pp*, then *dim. af.*, and finally *ppp*. The third system (measures 423-427) starts with *emars.* and ends with a final *ff* dynamic. The music concludes with a double bar line.

*Vltava*, ending (bb. 413-27)

At least, that is the way that the narrative structure concludes. The gradual decrescendo (ending with the direction *smorz.*, i.e. *smorzando*, dying away) is a perfect symbolisation of the disappearance – passing out of sight, as Smetana himself described it – of the river as it concludes its journey, and its story. But the requirements of musical form, of the definite final cadence, have not, quite, been satisfied. To allow the work to end at the pause in bar 425, on a kind of “repeat and fade”, simply would not do; there is a sense of incompleteness which even thirty-odd bars of tonic chord has not assuaged. And this tension, evidently keenly felt by the composer, leads him to add an emphatic, double *forte* cadence for the full orchestra. These two chords, separated by silences from what has gone before and from each other, seem both entirely necessary as the confirmation of tonal closure, and completely unnecessary to the programme of the work. The two signifying systems, which have been kept in tight, mutually supportive synchrony for the entire work, cannot sustain this simultaneity at the very end. The double structure necessitates a double ending.

#### **Nineteenth-century narratives**

What seems to offer itself here is the observation that musical and literary texts, certainly in the practice of the nineteenth century at least, articulate themselves in a kind of symbiosis. When literary texts attempt to be most quintessentially literary, in the “realist”, truthful depiction of human affairs, then they display a tendency to rely upon signifying modes, such as the articulation of the unsayable, which draw close to, and often invoke, musical signifying processes. And when musical texts attempt the most evidently musical of aims, that is, the realisation of tonal structure through time, then they, too, seem to turn willy-nilly to signifying strategies reliant on language, and specifically on narrative interpretation. Uncovering this relationship of mutual supplementarity is, of course, the first part of a typically post-structuralist agenda; but before turning to such theorisation, it is worth marking the rootedness of this in nineteenth-century artistic assumptions. This is no post-factum rationalisation imposed upon texts; on the contrary, I wish to call two eminent witnesses to the awareness of these issues in the period itself.

Both witnesses are musicians, indeed the two musicians who wrote and theorised most about their own practice. The first is Richard Wagner. Wagner's encounter with Schopenhauer engendered not only the re-orientation of his musical practice which is evident in *Tristan und Isolde* and, famously, the Ring Cycle after the second act of *Siegfried*; it also led to the book *Oper und Drama*, one of the most extended reflections on artistic practice ever produced. One of Wagner's concerns throughout the book is to identify the source of music's power to express the otherwise inexpressible; this is its ability, in Schopenhauer's terms quoted earlier, to be an image of the Will. For Wagner, this project is also a reclamation of an immediacy and self-presence lost by the divorce of music and language, from which stem the shortcomings of both arts in contemporary practice. His line of argument becomes most explicit in the third part of the book, “The Arts of Poetry and Tone in the Drama of the Future”. The following sentence is noted by the translator as “the most difficult to interpret in all the book”, and it is arguably the most crucial:

But as every communication is aimed at a mutual-understanding, so also the poet's aim at last makes only for a communication to the Understanding: to reach this positive understanding, however, he does not assume it in advance, in the quarter to which he addresses himself, but in a sense he wishes to get it first begotten by a comprehension of his aim; and the bearing-organ for this begetting is, so to say, man's Feeling-power.<sup>5</sup>

Wagner has been working with the opposition between Understanding and Feeling (*Verständniss* and *Gefühl*). Here, considering the work of the Poet, he arrives at the question of how the Understanding understands. This "word-play" is noted by Ashton Ellis, the translator, as the source of his difficulty; but it is also the central problem for Wagner, the closure of the gap between abstract faculty and specific phenomenon, the realisation of self-presence. And the answer, paradoxically enough, is that such self-presence has to be deferred: "Feeling-power" is the faculty called on to enable such unity of meaning and expression. Language, as we are gradually to discover in the course of Wagner's investigation, can only become language by becoming, simultaneously, music.

Whilst Wagner's polemic contends that literature (or at least poetry) cannot contain meaning without falling back on music, an appropriately contemporary counterbalance is found in Robert Schumann's reflections on the reverse process, of listening for meaning in music. One of his most famous essays is his review of Schubert's Ninth Symphony, the "Great C Major", the manuscript of which was discovered by Schumann himself and first performed, at his instigation and with Mendelssohn conducting, in Vienna in 1839. Schumann's essay for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (which he edited) in 1840 anticipates the publication of the score, and seeks to establish the stature of the work as a masterpiece (successfully, as it was to turn out). The essay contains what is certainly the most-quoted phrase in the whole of Schumann's extensive writings, when he refers to Schubert's "heavenly length". What is nearly always omitted, however, is the conclusion of the revealing sentence in which it is found:

Here, beside sheer musical mastery of the technique of composition is life in every fibre, colour in the finest shadings, meaning everywhere, the acutest etching of detail, and all flooded with a romanticism which we have encountered elsewhere in Franz Schubert. And this heavenly length, like a fat novel in four volumes by Jean Paul—never-ending, and if only that the reader may go on creating in the same vein afterwards.<sup>6</sup>

Schumann has as elevated an ambition for musical meaning as Wagner. For both composers, this meaning has to be a plenitude, "meaning everywhere". But just as Wagner could not conceive of fullness of meaning without the intervention of music, so Schumann cannot conceive of the four movements of Schubert's symphony as other than a literary enterprise. The novel of Jean Paul (Schumann's favourite author) which lurks behind this sentence is *Titan*, which indeed falls into four volumes, and is possibly the most ambitious of his oeuvre. Without seeking to find parallels

between novel and symphony, however, it can be seen that Schumann no less than Wagner locates meaning as simultaneously inside and outside the text: it is definitely Schubert's text, and not Jean Paul's, that contains an experience of "life in every fibre"; but this meaning requires the literature on whose threshold the music stands, and its discovery entails not passive reception, but the work of "creating in the same vein afterwards". Meaning, in music, needs an additional element to bring it to birth, just as for Wagner, it is music that is needed to supplement language.

### Theorising the supplement

Derrida's notion of "supplementarity" is one of his ideas most adopted subsequently by theorists writing in all sorts of fields within and outside the humanities. It is first elaborated in *Of Grammatology* (1967). The general movement, or "logic of the supplement" that he traces is first to identify oppositional pairs of terms where one is considered to be a "supplement" to the other. Perhaps most fundamental is the pair speech / writing, where the latter supplements the former. Speech is deemed to be preferable to writing, since its meaning is present to the speaker as he or she utters it; writing, by contrast, is always open to misunderstanding in the absence of the speaker. The "logic of the supplement", however, leads Derrida to conclude that the closer one looks at the "supplementary" term as something "added on" to an already-complete entity, the more it appears as what "makes up to fullness" the lack in the original, apparently prior, term. Speech, it turns out, displays exactly those characteristics which led to the disparagement of writing. Rather than the true priority being the other way around, though, Derrida's notion leads to the conclusion that both speech and writing rely on something prior to both – an "arche-writing" that leads to the endless deferral and displacement of meaning that he terms the play of *differance*.

So much is the briefest of synopses of a movement of argument that has become very familiar in the world of post-structuralist criticism. But what is very often not recognised is the importance of music in the context in which Derrida first traces this supplementary logic. A large section of *Of Grammatology* is devoted to a careful reading of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, and the aim of that essay is to set forth a theory of music, preceded by a lengthy discussion of the nature of language. "Melody / harmony", and "song / speech" are both pairs of terms which Derrida identifies as having the typical structure of origin and supplement. He comments, of an aspect in which Rousseau's essay comes close to Wagner's despair at the loss of an original unity between music and language:

The growth of music, the desolating separation of song and speech, has the form of writing as "dangerous supplement": calculation and grammaticality, *loss of energy and substitution*. The history of music is parallel to the history of the language [...].<sup>7</sup>

Following this line of argument, one might expect Derrida to focus on "music / language" as a prime example of origin and supplement, especially given the constant interchange between the two which this chapter has attempted to chart. However, *Of*

*Grammatology* seems curiously to skirt around this question, perhaps because Derrida does not wish to ask how music, a non-linguistic system, can have the similarity to language's mode of signifying upon which a supplementary pairing rests. For Derrida, music continues to the end not to signify in the same way as language.

In the light of what I have traced above, however, perhaps the theoretical position should be considered as slightly different. It is undeniable that in Balzac and in Smetana, for Wagner and for Schumann, music and narrative supplement each other. However, it is much harder to answer the question of which term aspires to presence of meaning, and which appears initially as a supplement but eventually as indispensable. Neither music nor narrative seems to make the claim to self-present meaning that is the attribute of speech when it opposes itself to writing. Which term is origin, and which supplement, turns out to be literally undecidable: the appearance of music within narrative literature, and the invocation of narrative by music (programmatic or not), both indicate a more global problematic. At the moment that narrative is most narrative, it becomes most musical; and when music is at its most musical, it necessarily becomes narrative. The state of affairs is aporetic, in a suitably Derridean sense. Music and narrative remain suspended together in the dynamics of a forcefield. Neither can be translated into the other; but it is only by standing on each other's threshold that they can sustain their possibility of attaining to meaning.

#### END NOTES

1. Compare Kant's comment in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), that "in rational terms, then, music is of less value than any other of the fine arts", with Schopenhauer's, from *The World as Will and Representation* (1817): "Music is thus in no sense, like the other arts, the image of ideas, but the image of the *Will itself*." These quotations are both given in Le Huray and Day 1981, p. 161 and p. 219.
2. Da Sousa Correa 2003, particularly Chapter 3, "The Mill on the Floss: 'A Mind Susceptible to Music'".
3. The relationship between Balzac and Strunz is described in Barricelli 1990: 68–83. The most musically-oriented result was the novella *Gambara* (1837).
4. Details of the composition and performance history of the opera are taken from Loewenburg 1978.
5. Wagner 1852, p. 247. Ashton Ellis's comments are note 136, which reproduces the German text of this sentence..
6. Schumann 1840, pp. 165-66.
7. Derrida 1967, p. 199.

## REFERENCES

- ADORNO, Theodor W. 1960 *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (tr. Edmund Jephcott). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- BALZAC, Honoré de 1837–43 *Illusions perdues: I Les deux poètes 1837; II Un grand homme de province à Paris 1839; III Les souffrances de l'inventeur 1843* (ed. Philippe Berthier). Paris: Flammarion, 1990. The translation used is that by Ellen Marriage for the complete translation of the *Comédie humaine*, edited by George Saintsbury. London: Dent, 1895-98.
- BARRICELLI, Jean-Pierre 1990 *Balzac and Music: It's Place and Meaning in His Life and Work* (Garland Studies in Comparative Literature, ed. James J. Wilhelm). New York & London: Garland.
- DAHLHAUS, Carl 1967 *Aesthetics of Music* (tr. William Austin). Cambridge: CUP, 1982.
- DERRIDA, Jacques 1967 *Of Grammatology* (tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976.
- LE HURAY, Peter, and James Day 1981 *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LOEWENBURG, Alfred 1978 *Annals of Opera 1597-1940* (3rd ed.). London: John Calder.
- RICE, John A. 1992 'Danaïdes, Les', article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (ed. Stanley Sadie). London: Macmillan.
- SCHUMANN, Robert 1840, 'Schubert's Symphony in C' in *Schumann on Music* (tr. Henry Pleasants). New York: Dover 1965 pp. 165-68.
- SOUSA CORREA, Delia da 2003, *George Eliot, Music and Victorian Culture*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- WAGNER, Richard 1852, *Opera and Drama* (tr. William Ashton Ellis). Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Volume 2, pp. 1-376. London: Routledge Kegan Paul 1893.