NARRATIVE ARCHETYPES: A CRITIQUE, THEORY, AND METHOD OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Byron Almén

I. Introduction

The application of narrative theory to music has been an important aspect of theoretical research in the last twenty years or so, with significant articles, books, and conference papers appearing on the topic by Edward T. Cone, Anthony Newcomb, Fred Maus, Robert Hatten, Eero Tarasti, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Carolyn Abbate, and numerous others.[1] However, after a period of intense interest in musical narrative between about 1987 and 1994, the topic has moved somewhat out of the spotlight, leaving the impression that enough may have been said on the matter. I believe that there are three significant reasons for this:

1. Several insightful critiques have been published, most notably by Nattiez and Abbate,[2] suggesting that musical narrative is, at best, a metaphorical and limited concept, or, at worst, a product of wishful thinking. These critiques have largely remained unanswered, perhaps leaving readers to conclude that the topic lacks sufficient foundation for further research.
2. Assuming that one could place musical narrative on a firmer footing, there is nevertheless no universally-agreed-upon definition of

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what it might actually be: that is, what its preconditions, sources, and most significant properties are. Consensus about the characteristics, strengths, and limitations of musical narrative might lead to a better sense of direction with respect to research and analysis.

3. Although there have been excellent individual analyses of particular pieces by Schubert, Schumann, Mahler, Beethoven, Chopin, and Dukas, among others,[3] there has been, to my knowledge, no comprehensive attempt to map out the parameters of a *narrative* analytical method, and to illustrate such a method in all its parameters.

In the following pages, I will address these three factors in an attempt to revive the debate about musical narrative. To this end, I will examine the most significant arguments leveled against its existence, most prominently those of Nattiez and Abbate. I will suggest that these arguments can themselves be problematized by an examination of other theories in literature, or by the discussion of other ways to think about the issues involved. This critique must be undertaken before any theoretical treatment can be appropriately framed. Although I do not claim to have definitively answered the objections of the above writers, I will show that they are not insurmountable for the purposes of establishing a new foundation for studying narrative.

Next, I will both suggest a preliminary definition of musical narrative and highlight a number of features that contribute to this definition. Using this discussion as a backdrop, I present a model for narrative analysis, centered around the concept of *narrative archetype,* that is informed by myth criticism, by the "classic" writings of Northrop Frye,[4] and by more recent treatments by the semiotician James Jakob Liszka.[5]

Finally, I will illustrate a single narrative archetype with a short analysis of Frédéric Chopin's *Prelude* in C minor, op. 28, no. 20. For reasons of space, a complete illustration of all four narrative archetypes must await a later treatment of this material.[6]

II. A Meta-critique of Musical Narrative

Surveying the literature over the last decade or two, one can find a number of arguments *against* the presence of narrative in music. Most take as their starting point a fundamental kinship between musical narrative and its literary counterpart. This kinship, though almost certainly necessary at *some* level, is both problematic and rarely questioned by those critical of musical narrative. In fact, opponents and supporters sometimes seem to be speaking about two different models when employing the label "narrative," a *descendant model* in which musical nar-

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rative is a transposed reflection of literary narrative, and a *sibling model* in which the two media share a common foundation but varying manifestations.

The descendant model results in insuperable difficulties, since it is undermined by qualities that are apparently critical to literary narrative but that are lacking or deficient in music, particularly its lack of semantic specificity and the uncertain application of literary concepts like character, plot, narrator, and action. This model leads to a preoccupation with programmatic music and requires one to negotiate the tenuous bond between program and musical syntax. It may also lead to a desire to authenticate a "correct" interpretation in order to render it analytically manageable.

I will argue that the more productive model with respect to music is the sibling model. If narrative is understood as an ideal structure, a way of articulating the dynamics and possible outcomes of conflict or interaction between elements, then many of the difficulties attached to the descendant model do not apply. Music has its own syntactic potentialities, its own ways of manifesting conflict and interaction. A theory of musical narrative that recognizes the different languages and organizing principles of literature and music would not be focused on the question "How is music really like literature in disguise?" Instead, it would highlight issues which are far less intractable: the identification of the essential elements of narrative common to temporal media, the ways in which music uniquely employs these elements, an understanding of the differences between music that makes use of narrative principles and those that do not, and useful strategies for integrating narrative theory with analysis and historical studies.

Before developing this theory in more detail, let us consider the primary arguments leveled against musical narrative in the scholarly literature. Four arguments (as outlined by Nattiez, Abbate, etc.) might best be associated with a descendant model and a fifth argument arises in relation to the sibling model. These arguments can be summarized as follows:

1. The verbal cue argument
2. The causality argument
3. The narrator argument
4. The referentiality argument
5. The drama argument

The first argument suggests that musical narrative always requires the presence of a title, accompanying text, and/or program, which engages a specifically narrative listening strategy. Arguments two through four involve the necessity of a *metalinguistic discourse* in establishing narrative. Narrative requires a separation between story and discourse; that is, it requires an ordering mechanism by which individual musical events can

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be organized into a unified whole. This distinction is lacking (or not consistently present) in music. The second argument suggests that temporal sequences in and of themselves do not constitute a narrative. They must be supplemented by an explanatory chain of causal relationships, but this cannot be established for music. The third argument suggests that narrative requires a narrator to situate itself within a "past-tense" framework and to organize the plot or story in a unified manner. In musical works, however, a narrator is generally either absent or functionally dissimilar. The fourth argument suggests that narrative requires an explicit series of referential objects to constitute itself. Unfortunately, we cannot usually determine to what music refers. The fifth argument, unlike the other four, presupposes an orientation to narrative that recognizes significant differences between its various manifestations in music, literature, or drama. It suggests that if musical narrative does not require verbal cues, causal chains, narrators, or referential objects, then there is little, if anything, that it embodies that cannot be described under the heading of "drama" (as described most effectively in the area of music by Fred Maus in his article "Music as Drama"[7]). If there is no distinction between these two concepts, then "narrative" as a topic need not be considered separately.

Let us examine each of these arguments in turn. The referentiality argument requires more extended treatment, since it is bound up with my informal definition of narrative, and so it will be examined most fully in Section III. The drama argument can best be examined in light of an analytical application, so discussion of this argument will be left until the end of the article.

1. The verbal cue argument

This argument is most cogently stated by Nattiez in his article "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?"[8] In this article, Nattiez suggests that it is the presence of a text or program that engages our narrative listening strategies, that we do not hear a narrative unless we are given a linguistic cue.[9] But while it is certainly true that *what* we hear (narrative) depends on *how* we hear (a particular listening strategy), we might ask whether Nattiez is considering *all* the ways that a narrative listening strategy could be cued.

For there are also *musical cues* that might lead one to attempt to hear a narrative. These can appear in any number of ways; for example, this might include the dialectical process of conflicting textures, dynamics, key regions, or themes in a movement in sonata form. Here we have a temporal framework in which variously distinct musical elements come into conflict and eventually emerge into a fundamentally new relationship. Sonata form movements need not appeal to text, program, or descriptive title in order to suggest a strategy of "initial problem leading to solution." One might reply that the cue is still extra-musical, since the

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title “Sonata” itself carries with it expectations of conflict, development, and (potentially) resolution. But knowledgeable listeners, hearing a sonata form movement for the first time, even when unaware of its title, would almost certainly become aware of this “preferred” listening strategy, since such an approach has become both pervasive and conventional. Furthermore, since the discourse of eighteenth-century sonatas and symphonies initially developed out of opera, it seems likely that a listener would be prompted to hear a narrative when sonata form movements employ one of any number of opera’s semantic conventions. When, for example, great excitement gives way to calm (or vice versa), might not a listener infer a narrative, or devise one to fit, even in the absence of verbal cues? Indeed, even modern listeners are accustomed to such occurences in opera, film, or television.

Of course, as Robert Hatten suggests, our listening strategies tend to arise both from conventional and idiosyncratic musical behaviors.[10] The crucial point, however, is that an awareness of musical style, genre, and syntax is the *primary* way that a listener orients him/herself within a piece. While a text or title may add greater semantic specificity, they are not responsible for most of what leads to the choice of a listening strategy.

Assuming, then, that it is possible (as Nattiez puts it) “to link the succession of sound events according to a plot”[11] using musical cues, it would appear that the problem of musical narrative is not insoluble. However, Nattiez makes a more telling critique when he argues that music lacks a *metalinguistic discourse*[12]; that is, there is no consistent process by which individual musical events are organized into a unified whole, no explanatory force to make sense of musical temporality.

2. The causality argument

There are three aspects of this critique that require examination. The first is the role played by *causality*. Nattiez argues that temporal sequences of historical facts, individual actions, or musical events do not themselves constitute a narrative, because those sequences do not appear with a “relation of causality which explains them.”[13] Apparently, causality is a prerequisite for the existence of narrative.

The implication here is that literature, which can organize itself as narrative, *does* link events together into a causal network. But is this true? There are several ways in which *literary* narrative can problematize or deny the operation of causality. A recently published short story by Kazuo Ishiguro, “A Village After Dark,”[14] exemplifies the fragility of conventional rules of causality. I will summarize this story below.

> The protagonist, a Mr. Fletcher, arrives in a village where he apparently exercised great influence when he was younger. He is disoriented, a fact which he attributes to advancing age, and cannot find a recognizable land-

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> mark. After a time, he encounters a young women who is apparently aware of his reputation, so much so that she and her friends consider him a sort of hero. She invites him to meet with them that very evening, but he declines, and takes his leave of her. Knocking on a door at random, he happens to stumble upon a familiar location: "I had chosen the cottage quite at random, but now I could see that it was none other than the very one in which I had spent my years in this village." The tenants welcome him somewhat reluctantly, and upon finding his old bed in the sitting room, Fletcher goes to sleep. When he awakens, he converses with an older woman who was apparently an associate from his years in the village. Although she seems to know him well and was apparently his lover for some time, he does not recognize her but gives no outward sign of this as she accuses him of ruining her life with his uncanny influence on her. Observing another group of people conversing nearby, he imagines them to be discussing his unwelcome presence and their fear that he will affect the younger generation similarly. He responds to this imagined conversation, claiming that he *will* do the very thing that they fear, and the others respond in such a way as to confirm his impression of their prior conversation.
>
> Fletcher leaves and encounters the young woman he had earlier met on the street, and this time agrees to go with her. While following her, he meets another old acquaintance, this time a man he had known while a young student in Canada who he had bullied but who nevertheless admired him. This man, too, claims to have been changed by Fletcher's behavior toward him: he is now no longer a weak coward, but a leader in the community. In the course of conversing with the man, Fletcher realizes that he has lost track of the girl. The man takes him to the village square, where he can take a bus to the house where the youths are meeting, for it is apparently located over two hours away. Fletcher eagerly awaits the arrival of the bus, although he is unaware of when or whether it will appear, as the story comes to an end.

We do not believe that the narrator could have stumbled at random upon his old house and upon so many people who knew him well. We infer that these events were no coincidences, and yet there is no evidence of this given by the narrator. In short, the narrator is unreliable, and we cannot make sense of the events in the story by taking him at his word.[15] It is not true that causality does not operate in this story, but the causal relationships that do appear seem contrived and arbitrary. The sequence of events often appear motivated by the beliefs of the narrator, but there is no indication that these beliefs are anything more than constructions, ways to justify behavior after the fact. If a narrator need not accurately reveal the connection between events, then to what extent is causality an essential element?

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One might argue that the above story is an extreme case, that the unreliability of its narrator marks it as a non-narrative work. However, even relatively conventional works make use of pseudo-causal constructed explanations. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare repudiates his wife Tess for having been with another man before meeting him, even though he himself had been with another woman.[16] He rejects Tess because his love was based on an over-idealized image of her. Angel's behavior may make more sense than Fletcher's behavior in the Ishiguro story, but they are both rationalizations of more complex phenomena. We are often unaware of the reasons for our own conduct, and our explanations of events can be inaccurate or incomplete, either because we are unaware of the truth, or because we are unwilling to see it, or even because there is no coherent explanation that link events together. Causal relationship are always in some sense provisional, subject to question or to alternate readings.

The same difficulty applies to relationships between historical events, individual actions, or musical successions. It is the observer that ultimately makes connections between events. There can be no unequivocally true or false explanations, only more or less convincing ones. A literary narrator may be a useful guide to making connections, but our judgment is still required when determining the reliability of this narrator. The narrator's role in the apprehension of narrative may frequently be supplemented or supplanted by the listener's or reader's role.

There is no qualitative distinction, then, between the way narratives are constructed in literature and the way they are constructed in music. In each case, *we* must infer connections. Nattiez's claim that music cannot support narratives but only suggests one could equally be applied to literature. Since this would leave us with no narrative phenomena at all, it would be more useful to assume that literature *and* music both operate in a similar way.

For the same reason, then, there can be no *one* narrative that fits appropriately with a musical work. There may be more or less convincing narratives, but if connections cannot be causally determined, there can be no preferred narrative. It is not appropriate, therefore, to criticize particular analyses for being arbitrary, since it is impossible *not* to be arbitrary.

We must not overreach, however, when we claim that narrative listening strategies in music are prevalent. This is because, unlike literary or filmic works, in which the reader/viewer is almost always expecting a narrative, a musical work can elicit a variety of listening strategies, depending on its function or performance setting. Background music, for example, would not be likely to invite a narrative listening strategy, nor would ritual or functional music like dances, marches, or wedding music. However, we might reasonably claim that *certain kinds* of music, music that we sit down and listen to, music belonging to a variety of vocal and

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instrumental types, would be expected to be listened to as narrative (excepting the counter-examples given above) and not in some other way. Such music would likely require several features: 1) a syntax that could group constituent elements into dialogic and/or conflictual relationships; 2) the continued coherence of these groupings over time; 3) teleological directedness (at least one significant change in the relations between elements from the beginning of the piece to the end); and 4) cultural preconditions of performance which permit or invite a listener to be attentive to the above features. Although there are many works that might possess these features, it would be presumptuous to claim that music is universally a narrative phenomenon.

3. The narrator argument

This leads us to the second aspect of Nattiez's critique: the role of the narrator. Is there anything that a narrator contributes to narrative that is crucial for its unfolding? Or, put another way, can we find narrative to be present in the absence of a narrator?

The arguments discussed above provide a partial answer to these questions. It would seem that the two primary functions of the narrator are to 1) situate the related events in the past, as having already occurred, and to 2) organize the plot or story in a coherent manner. With respect to point 2, we have seen that the task of making connections between events in a temporal sequence does not depend essentially upon the presence of a narrator, that the reader/listener/observer *may* play the primary role in this respect. The narrator's role, then, is to present a preferred, though not necessarily most convincing, understanding of events. If this is the case, then a narrator is not *required* in order to provide coherence among events.

A similar argument can be made for point 1. Gérard Genette discusses two fundamentally different approaches to portraying events in a temporal frame, approaches that are represented by the dichotomy *scene/summary*.[17] In a summary, the "narrator describes what happened in his/her own words (or recounts what characters think and feel, without quotation)."[18] In a scene, there is a "direct presentation of words and actions of characters," which is the primary mode of presentation in drama.[19] The relative proportions of scene and summary shift from work to work, but wherever the scene predominates, the presence of the narrator becomes obscured. One might argue that a narrator is still present, if less intrusive, but there is no effective difference between an obscured narrator and an absent narrator with respect to the presentation of material, other than a background awareness of a narrator being present. Is this sufficient to generate a narrative? If a novel that relies primarily on summary makes occasional use of scene for the sake of variety, any narrative that is unfolding does not fall apart at these moments. And as we increase the pro-

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portion of scene to summary, there is no reasonable point at which we could argue that narrative is no longer present. Ultimately, this question can be reduced to another well-rehearsed question: "Does narrative apply equally to both drama and literature?" If the answer to this question is yes, then we are much closer to establishing the appearance of narrative in music. I believe that at a definitional level, music, drama, and literature can unfold a narrative, but that they differ with respect to its character and its concrete manifestation. I will pick up this thread of the discussion at a later point in this article.[20]

In support of these arguments, we can add those of Ann Banfield, who, in her 1982 book *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction*, showed that, in fiction, there is strictly speaking *no narrator*, no one who is telling the story.[21] There are several features of fiction that reinforce this claim, which Wallace Martin summarizes in his book *Recent Theories of Narrative*.[22]

First, writers often make ungrammatical use of tenses and of so-called *deictics*, words like "this," "there," "here," "now," "today" that are meant to locate the *speaker* in space and time. Wallace Martin points to a sentence in Hemingway's "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber" that illustrates this usage: "'It was now lunch time and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the tent pretending that nothing had happened.'"[23] In this sentence, the words "was" and "now" are inappropriately used together, since one refers to the past and one to the present. This can be explained by the fact that the word "now" locates the story's characters, not its narrator, in space and time. Although the word "was" still appears in the past tense and seems to point to the narrator's separation from the events of the story, the use of the past perfect "had happened" in the second half of the sentence indicates something that occurred *before* the events of the first half of the sentence. As a result, *the past tense (with deictics) actually represents the present, while the past perfect represents the past*. The altered use of tenses, though different from factual communication, nevertheless creates its own coherent separation of past and present without reference to a narrator. Fiction thus creates its own tense-system without relation to a narrator or an external reality.[24] Note that this can also stand as a critique of Abbate's assertion that music cannot possess narrative because it does not have a past tense.[25] If literature can use an idiosyncratic tense structure unconnected to a narrator, then a past-tense requirement for music is unmotivated, since there can be multiple means of establishing temporal distinctions.

Second, the frequent employment of a hybrid method for representing consciousness, combining elements of scene and summary, called *free indirect style*, has the effect of erasing the presence of a narrator in fiction. Martin calls attention to a passage from Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" in which this style is employed: "'Oh, Harry!' 'Yes?' What had

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she to say? She'd nothing to say."[26] In this passage, it is unclear to whom the last two sentences should be attributed. They do not belong to the character (Bertha), who would have thought "What shall I say?" (present tense, first person). Alternatively, we might think that the question is a rhetorical one posed and immediately answered by the narrator. But the following sentence in the story, "She only wanted to get in touch with him for a moment,"[27] makes it clear that we are to understand these thoughts as representations of Bertha's thoughts. The reader recognizes this without dwelling on the grammatical incongruity. This situation, in fact, simply involves a literary convention representing a verbal *translation* of the character's thoughts. (Notice also the use of tenses described above.) What we see in these instances is a peculiarly fictional mode of representation that lies between scene and summary. This is important, because it places the work outside the world of a supposed narrator and into an entirely fictional world.

According to Martin, the effect of these techniques is to "separate pronouns from their usual association with one or another speaker. Consciousness and the self are thus cut loose from 'I', and we as readers are allowed to experience something we cannot otherwise experience in this world: subjectivity freed from its connection with our own bodies and voices."[28] Note that, although it has its own conventions, music also provides us with this kind of subjectivity.

We cannot, then, convincingly argue that the narrator is a prerequisite for narrative with respect either to music or to literature. If Nattiez's arguments require that narrative and narration always operate together, then he may simply be defining "narrative" in a way that is specifically designed to exclude music; but then the same conclusions must apply to narrative in literature.

4. The referentiality argument

In light of what has been shown above, it appears that narrative need not be inextricably linked with a narrator. If narrative does not rely upon text, narrator, or causality, then there are fewer obstacles to finding it in music. The most significant remaining obstacle is the third aspect of Nattiez's critique: music's lack of referentiality.

This critique can be summarized in the following manner: although music contains expectations, resolutions, repetitions, and the like, it does not fulfill the conditions for a narrative because we cannot specify *what* is acting or being acted upon. According to Nattiez, any attribution of referential qualities to musical events can only be a metaphor.[29] This is certainly true, but *is an explicit series of referential objects necessary to establish a narrative*? Nattiez certainly thinks so, and in fact, it is for this reason that a "plot imagined and constructed by the listener from functional objects"[30] cannot in itself constitute a narrative.

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However, there is no agreement on this issue, even with respect to literary narrative, where if anything the referential element is stronger. In the first place, many theorists have pointed out that the concept of "realism" itself is essentially conventional, and that while there may be objects that are suggested within fiction, this referential "pointing" is nevertheless conventional and ultimately constructed by the reader, the same process that is insufficient for Nattiez.

Furthermore, scholars such as Vladimir Propp, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Lord Raglan have suggested that it is the *relations between elements* and not the elements themselves that are the foundation of narrative.[31] For these writers, we cannot approach meaning until we understand the various functions that appear. From the standpoint of narrative, there is no functional distinction between "John found a dollar under the couch cushion" and "Prometheus discovered fire." Both involve the attainment of an object of value, and this is the narrative unit, rather than the identity of the subject and object. If analysis involves the determination of function, independent of reference, then music can be organized as narrative. What is required is a theory that need only be concerned with the identity of musical events insofar as they manifest a series of hierarchical relationships that, over time, become subject to rearrangement. If we can identify this process, we can begin to make observations about the nature of the narrative landscape in music.

III. Toward a Definition of Narrative and Narrative Archetypes

Up to this point, we have been dealing with various objections to musical narrative from the side of literature, in order to show that those aspects that are absent in music may also be absent or inessential in fiction as well. We have indicated that text, descriptive titles, programs, causality, narrators, and perhaps referentiality may not be essential qualities of narrative, either musical or literary. We have not, however, come any closer to the questions of what narrative *is*, and how it might appear in music. In order to answer this question, and to suggest an alternative to the referential definitions of narrative, we must take a different approach. In the following pages, I will lay out a new theory and definition of musical narrative, based on the semiotic writings of James Jakob Liszka.[32] In writing about mythic narrative, Liszka writes that narrative "takes a certain set of culturally meaningful differences and transvalues them by means of a sequence of action" in order to realign our perspective on cultural values.[33] He suggests that recognition of narrative involves an awareness of multiple levels of signification. Since music is capable of displaying hierarchical differences in non-referential form, it is amenable to narrative if certain conditions are met. Transvaluation, the crucial term in Liszka's definition, is a process by which meaning emerges *via* the recon-

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figuration of simultaneous and successive relationships between musical elements in the course of a temporal succession, as perceived or conceived by the listener. Drawing on Liszka, I define and situate musical narrative as follows: *Musical narrative is the process though which the listener perceives and tracks a culturally significant transvaluation of hierarchical relationships within a temporal span.* A piece's initial network of hierarchical relationships possesses a certain positive or negative cultural value, and the subsequent changes in these relationships instigate a crisis that will be resolved in a manner either acceptable or unacceptable to the culturally informed listener. Note that this process is critically dependent on the listener: narrative requires both a shift of hierarchical relationships and a recognition of that shift. Note also that narrative does not depend upon the presence of a narrative agent or upon a narrator that comments upon or manipulates its activity. However useful narrative agency or an implied narrator may be in further specifying the semantic content of a work, they are not fundamental to the definition of musical narrative, but are non-essential importations from literary narrative.

The understanding of musical narrative described above is sufficient to define the concept, but further unpacking is required to render this definition useful for narrative analyses. Drawing again upon Liszka, the following corollaries, which lay out a methodological direction, are given: *an analysis of musical narrative must take into account 1) an assessment of the semantic characteristics of musical elements, both in isolation and in context; 2) an understanding of how these elements mutually influence and mutually define each other as they succeed one another in time; and 3) an awareness of the cumulative, global effect of these relationships in terms of the opposition "order vs. transgression" and the logically possible outcomes of such an opposition, or narrative archetypes.*

Several important conclusions emerge from the above definition:

1. Musical narrative is not a secondary phenomenon derived from literature, but is uniquely manifested through the interaction of musical elements.
2. At the most basic level, the number of organizational patterns, or *narrative archetypes*, is limited and finite: only four distinct archetypes are needed to exhaust the narrative possibilities.[34]
3. Narrative organizational patterns are formed by the conflict between two or more hierarchically-arranged elements within a system; this conflict results in a revaluation of the constituent elements. Both music and literature possess this property, as do other media (film, theater) that share with music and literature their ordered, temporal nature.
4. The patterns have varying surface features and effects, depending

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on the medium of expression (music, literature, etc.). Thus, music manifests narrative in a unique manner.

5. These patterns must be *psychologically meaningful*; that is, their frequent appearances as formative principles in art are not due to logical necessity or chance but to the significance of these patterns for us on various levels (see the discussion of transvaluation below).

This study is not the first to claim an equal status for musical and literary narrative. In recent years, however, the prevailing opinion among theorists has been that musical narrative is subordinate to its literary counterpart.[35] This has had two principal consequences. First, the literature places a proportionately large emphasis on programmatic music or at least on music influenced by external reference or biographical facts. Second, readers have tended to confuse a particular verbal reading of a piece with a more general process. With regard to the first consequence, one of music's strengths is that it does not require a concrete semantic realization to display its essential features. Because of this characteristic, verbal programs attached to a score often seem to be just that—attachments. While programs do fit to some degree, they are also often at odds with the not-quite-distinct impressions that we each form as we listen. Gustav Mahler, for one, was well aware of this and resisted including programmatic explanations at performances of his symphonies. The status of a program as a verbal isomorphism for a piece, no matter how vociferously sanctioned by the composer, is compromised because it is nearly impossible for a listener to construct it from the musical data alone. On the other hand, when a listener is previously familiarized with a program, the relationships between word and music are often quite clear. Furthermore, some programs are more convincing than others; one cannot simply invent any plot and expect that it will be believable. Thus, a certain looseness of fit exists between program and music. It is not true that a program is an arbitrary appendage; instead, "hooks" in the musical texture seem to form the precondition for a narrative framework.[36] Since these hooks can and do appear in works for which the composer has supplied no program, narrative organization must be present in at least some non-programmatic music.

With regard to the second consequence listed above, a narrative analysis cannot realistically promote a specific verbal representation as the definitive program of a work (even the composer's own, except insofar as we might value a composer's analysis for its compositional insight). This is true for the same reasons given in the last paragraph; no strict one-to-one isomorphism applies between music and program, only a predisposition for a certain temporal course. An analyst may certainly propose a particular narrative in a musical analysis, but it cannot be taken as *the*

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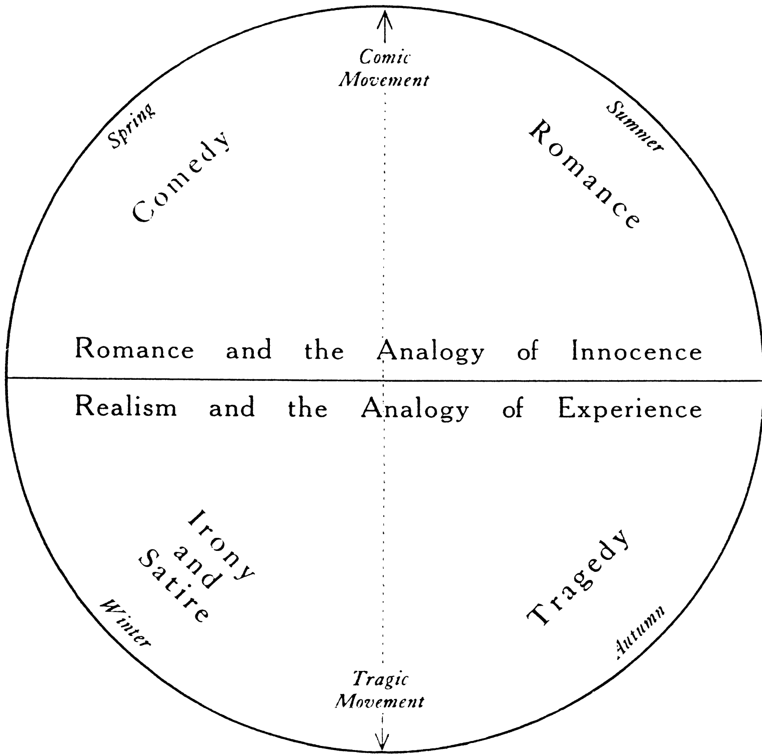

Figure 1. Frye's narrative categories
(Robert D. Denham, *Northrop Frye and Critical Method*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978. p. 68. Copyright 1978 by The Pennsylvania State University Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.)

only legitimate interpretation. This disclaimer applies to every type of analysis, yet narrative analyses are especially susceptible to the problem, perhaps because the interface between a narrative framework and its realization is not transparent. From the above remarks, it is clear that what is needed is a clearer description of this interface. In order to achieve this, however, a more general definition is required, involving a few useful digressions into literary criticism, psychology and myth studies.

In 1957, Northrop Frye, a literary critic influenced by the Jungian school of psychology, published *Anatomy of Criticism*.[37] This book was a fresh attempt to classify the analytical domain in literature, and it would become the standard-bearer for the Myth Criticism movement in literary

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criticism. *Anatomy of Criticism* contained four essays on historical modes of analysis, the use of symbols in literature, a new classification of literary genres, and a discussion of literary archetypes. All four essays were influential in their time, but the third essay, entitled "Archetypal Criticism," proved to be the most fruitful for other critics and readers. Frye's purpose in this essay was to "outline a few of the grammatical rudiments of literary expression" and to "give a rational account of some of the structural principles of Western literature."[38]

Frye then describes the mythically-derived narrative categories of literature. Most importantly, he argues that "there are two fundamental movements of narrative: a cyclical movement within the order of nature, and a dialectical movement into the apocalyptic world above."[39] All narrative structures can be imagined as moving around a portion of the circumference of a circle, representing the motion from innocence to experience and back, or from happiness to catastrophe, or the like.

The duality is further subdivided into four categories, representing the fundamental narrative categories (see Figure 1). I will quote at length from Frye:

> The top half of the natural cycle is the world of romance and the analogy of innocence; the lower half is the world of "realism" and the analogy of experience. There are thus four main types of mythical movement: within romance, within experience [*as expressed by irony or satire*], down, and up. The downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe. The upward movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after.
>
> We have thus answered the question: are there narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary literary genres? There are four such categories: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric. . . . We thus have four narrative pregeneric elements of literature which I shall call mythoi or generic plots.
>
> If we think of our experience of these mythoi, we shall realize that they form two opposed pairs. Tragedy and comedy contrast rather than blend, and so do romance and irony, the champions respectively of the ideal and the actual. On the other hand, comedy blends insensibly into satire at one extreme and into romance at the other.[40]

This is the central theme of the essay; Frye then elaborates on each of the four narrative categories.[41] Examples of each category come readily to mind. The myth of Hercules belongs to the romance category: the protagonist lives in an idealized world in which a quest is undertaken and successfully completed. There is no departure here from the innocence of

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the original state, since the emphasis is on the idealization of the mythical hero. Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy of the pregeneric type. In this type, a hierarchy with initially-conflicting elements moves toward a resolution in which a new order is formed around the protagonists. (In this case the word comedy is similar to the common usage, although the explanation provides for a more general treatment.) *Oedipus Rex* belongs to the tragic mythos, in which an individual is at odds with natural law. This conflict leads to catastrophe, both for the individual and for the society. Finally, *Brave New World* is a member of the ironic mythos, in which the romantic mythical ideals are held up to ridicule or exposed as illusions and reality wins out over idealism.

There are two significant difficulties involved in applying Frye's narrative categories outside of literature. First, the relationship between surface activity and these categories is unclear. Second, Frye does not intend that narrative categories apply to structures outside of literature and myth. Both difficulties are dispelled in a recent book by James Jakób Liszka entitled *The Semiotic of Myth*, which surveys traditional and current ideas in semiotics and myth studies in order to generalize the notion of narrative as applied to myth.[42] Liszka's generalized notion of narrative allows for the connection of Frye's theory with musical narrative.[43]

In his introduction, Liszka remarks that myth, by bequeathing to literary genres a common form, actually contains "the fundamentals of narration and the sociocultural function of the story."[44] The study of myth, he argues, involves the interplay of two elements, a *meaning analysis* that tries to clarify and situate the meaning of a myth, and a *rational analysis* that expresses myth as a series of "well-ordered relations between elements."[45] Neither is valid without the other; rational analysis by itself cannot explain how the relations between elements are meaningful, and meaning analysis by itself cannot explain how meaning is conveyed. Because of this interplay, however, and because the creation of a myth is dependent on complex factors, any attempt to explain a myth is constrained by certain limits. One cannot, through study, predict that a certain myth will appear, of what it would consist, or how it would be constructed. This is because the study of myth is an historical, rather than an experimental, science. What one can do, given an already existing myth, is to explain how such an entity and its structure are possible. This Liszka calls a *reconstructive* explanation, remarking that since myths can only be explained in this way, "there are no necessary causal relations between the elements in the systems that constitute the phenomena in question."[46]

The analytical limits of myth also apply to narrative (which shares its fundamental organizational patterns) and, interestingly, to music. In musical analysis, a knowledge of conventions, rules, and compositional techniques does not enable one to determine the content and structure of

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an as-yet-unwritten piece. Such knowledge is useful in studying an *existing* piece, to explain how the piece's content and organization are possible and how they contribute to meaning. The rule of avoiding parallel fifths illustrates how the reconstructive explanation applies to music. This rule, as any theory teacher knows, is not a *law* in the causal sense of necessarily following from a given set of conditions. Rather, it is a *rule* in the sense that composers found it effective to constrain themselves in this way to achieve a particular musical effect.

It follows that, in a rule-based medium, reconstructive explanations "focus more on the evaluative function of such rules."[47] If one says that a student who uses parallel fifths is breaking a rule, then one is really applying an evaluative mechanism. The same approach is taken, for different reasons, when analyzing music of historical interest, evaluating it with respect to another set of rules. Beginning with the motets, chansons, and madrigals of the sixteenth century, and continuing into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some composers included among their compositional goals a desire to achieve dramatic effect. It is not surprising, therefore, that narrative organization begins to appear in music from the sixteenth century onward.

Liszka observes that the sources of meaning-generation in any system arise from the rules of content organization in that system. He argues that, though little direct connection exists in a language between phonetic sounds and semantic meaning, the addition of rules of procedure creates a system that makes meaning possible.[48] Again, the same is true of music because similar conditions prevail. Although little connection exists between musical pitches or parameters and musical meaning, the organization of these parameters according to rules results in a system that generates meaning. It is also important to note that explanations, whether reconstructive or otherwise, must be supplemented by issues of meaning to be complete.

As for the second point, Frye's apparent restriction of narrative categories only to literature, here is Liszka's preliminary definition of narrative:

> The narration focuses on a set of rules from a certain domain or domains of cultural life which define a certain cosmic, social, political, or economic hierarchy, and places them in a crisis. There is a disruption of the normative function of those rules—they are violated, there is some transgression. The narrative then unfolds a certain, somewhat ambivalent, resolution to this crisis, depending on the pragmatics of the tale: the disrupted hierarchy is destroyed, leading to social anomie, or terrible tragic consequences, such as the introduction of pain, disease, or some sort of loss. The ambivalence of the resolution reveals the presence of a certain tension which serves as the dynamic of the narration, the tension between an order or hierarchy . . . and the possibility of its transgression.[49]

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One level of Liszka's analysis of myth is the narrative level. The purpose of this level is to arrange the actions involving the myth's functional characters into a conventional type that describes the effect of the whole.[50] Logically, as we will see, there are a finite number of types, which must describe plot organization at the most fundamental level. But this is precisely what Northrop Frye's narrative archetypes purport to do. Frye does not suggest that his four categories, and only those four categories, form a logically complete and comprehensive listing of types, other than to point to their traditional mythic derivation. Liszka, however, arranges Frye's categories into a logically exhaustive and consistent model of transvaluations and discusses the underlying nature of these categories.

According to Frye, the relationship between the four narrative categories can be illustrated on a circle that represents motion from triumph to defeat and back: romance, the triumphant quest of an ideal figure, moves into tragedy, the catastrophe of the ideal figure. This is followed by irony/satire, the absence of heroic figures, and finally by comedy, in which the hero reemerges and establishes a new order.[51] In contrast to this circular model, Liszka prefers a logical model in which the categories result from the intersection of two fundamental oppositions. He argues that the presence of hierarchy creates tension that can only be resolved in four different ways:

> the four mythoi are, in fact, the four basic strategies used by fantasy, by the narrative imagination, in playing out the tensions between the violence of a hierarchy that imposes order and the violence that results from its transgression.[52]

The playing out of these tensions between an order-imposing hierarchy and a transgression of that hierarchy results in the following strategies, which contain the central definitions of narrative archetypes:[53]

- I. Emphasis on Victory
  - A. Comedy—victory of transgression over order
  - B. Romance—victory of order over transgression
- II. Emphasis on Defeat
  - A. Irony/Satire—defeat of order by transgression
  - B. Tragedy—defeat of transgression by order

In the first two cases, the reader's sympathy is with the victors, while in the last two cases, it is with the vanquished. The four narrative categories, then, are attributed to the logical operation of the pairs victory/defeat and order/transgression. Liszka also argues that the effect of a myth of a rite using one of these strategies is that of catharsis, or displacement of violent tendencies inherently present within any hierarchy.[54] To put it a different way, the reader is given a constructive way of dealing with conflict that arises from inequalities in society or personal life. This provides an

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indication of how musical strategies might be organized, which will aid in the development of a general theory of musical narrative.

As a working analytical and descriptive approach, the theory set out above is incomplete. Adequate support has been provided there for the concept of narrative archetypes. However, the expressive function of musical material has not been discussed, indicating how a narrative archetype results from its arrangement within a piece. In other words, the "bottom-up" principles of musical expression remain to be specified.

Given that one accepts the basic premises upon which narrative archetypes are founded, they are intended to be flexible concepts not dependent on a particular analytical methodology. Because the archetypes are "top-down" phenomena, supported by innate, organizing structures, and coordinating more detailed and specific semantic data into a single paradigm, the actual method contributing this data need not be rigidly constrained, so long as it is capable of correlating musical material with semantic content. There are a great many ways that this can be accomplished, and so an analysis might employ one of any number of "bottom-up" methodologies, say, those of Tarasti or Hatten.[55] Methodological flexibility allows the analyst to find the best way to account for whatever semantic contributions seem to be most revealing. If narrative archetypes are to be useful as an analytical tool, they must be capable of adapting to a wide range of methods, circumstances, and ideological programs.

Recall Liszka's derivation of Frye's narrative archetypes, which was examined above. This derivation involves the interaction of two pairs of opposites arising from conflict between an order-imposing hierarchy and a transgression of that hierarchy. The first opposition concerns the conflict's outcome, the retention or replacement of the dominant order. The second opposition concerns the listener's sympathy, being placed either with the victorious or the defeated element. To apply this approach to analysis, musical events or stylistic tendencies must be correlated with the components of the two oppositions. The following issues must therefore be addressed when undertaking a narrative analysis:

1. For each analyzed piece, the musical elements that are in conflict must be identified; that is, the meaning of "order" or "transgression" in the piece's context must be determined. No single scheme exists through which this can be done, since the piece may involve conflict between motives, themes, programmatic entities, or even the alternative application of musical "rules. The process might also be described as a search for the *primary narrative level* (see below). Because of music's complexity and multivalent activity, many conflicting elements potentially exist within a piece, not all of which can be significant for a musical narrative. The significant elements represent a "problem" for

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which the music provides a resolution. In the same way, Liszka describes religious rites as utilizing narrative strategies to displace tendencies toward violence inherent in any hierarchy.[56]

2. The oppositional pole that elicits the analyst's sympathy as listener must be identified for each piece. This does not imply that the listener likes certain passages and not others, but that that listener, when aware of a conflict, hopes for a certain type of outcome. Recall the phenomenon by which listeners anthropomorphize musical activity, enabling them to identify with or against a passage. If a listener identifies with a passage that has a "striving" quality, he or she will feel frustrated if that striving is checked. This identification process can be aided by topical or conventional associations such as the contrasting use of major or minor, but such associations need not be present. In fact, such associations may instead be used to provide a glimpse into the outcome. For example, the minor mode, when employed in a piece, may imply a pervasive tragic or ironic mood, without contributing to the identification of one or the other oppositional pole. As with the above point, then, the nature of the musical material eliciting the listener's sympathy cannot be predetermined. Certain factors, however, such as initial placement, favorable associations, or qualities of striving, peacefulness, or attainment can influence the identification process.

The primary task of a narrative analysis is to correlate the details of musical activity with a temporal model that describes how the primary conflicting elements influence each other. Again, such an analysis must articulate the semantic intuitions of the analyst at least (and hopefully of a sufficient number of other listeners) in order to function as a tool for understanding these intuitions. As a result, an effective analysis must attempt to explain why certain musical events seem surprising, interesting, shocking, or otherwise salient. It must attempt to understand why music makes a listener feel uplifted, disturbed, regretful, confident, or resigned. It must attempt to coordinate the piece's musical universe so that the listener understands the relationship between its components, even if that relationship can only be described as one of fragmentation, incoherence, or chaos. Because music involves contrast, it can also invite a psychologically-meaningful arrangement of that contrast in many cases.

IV. A Short Analytical Example: Chopin, *Prelude* in C minor, Op. 28, No. 20

In the following analysis of the Chopin *Prelude* in C minor, the conflict involves the unbalancing effect of a motive's intervallic expansion

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and the reimposition of that balance, which serves as an important determinant of the piece's Tragic archetypal organization. The discussion also illustrates that even very short pieces, or pieces lacking programmatic connections, can be read and understood as narrative. This analysis is rather brief, for reasons of space, and the analytical approach employed might be described as Schoenbergian, centering on a hermeneutic arrangement of motive and gesture into a meaningful temporal sequence. It is not intended to illustrate a preferred mode of narrative analysis, since it can be successfully employed in conjunction with any meaning-centered method. Finally, the analysis is rather straightforward and is intended as a brief illustration of the model, not an exhaustive exploration of its possibilities, which must be left for later treatments of this topic.

Measures 1–4: The *Prelude* is divided into three four-measure units plus a cadential measure (see Example 1). The first unit, mm. 1–4, can be further subdivided into four single-measure groupings, each of which contains a melodic fragment comprised of two interlocking "motives." In m. 1 these motives take the form of a half-step neighbor figure on G4-A♭4-G4, whose rhythmic profile (*a*) remains constant in later measures while the melodic profile does not, and a descending dotted figure (*b*) on G-F-E♭, which preserves its rhythmic and melodic shape (spanning either a major or minor third) throughout the piece. These two motives are contrasted by their directionality. Motive *b* is entirely a descending figure, outlining a third. On the other hand, *a*'s first appearance consists of an ascent to the sixth scale-degree, followed by a return to the initial pitch G4. M. 1 thus represents the piece's seemingly harmonious "initial condition." The two halves of the measure are well- balanced; the neighbor figure combines smoothly with the descending third to form a melodic arch. Measure 1 is also tonally closed, beginning and ending with a C-minor tonic triad. Topically, the minor key, slow tempo, quadruple meter, repetitive quarter-note rhythm, and dotted descent figure suggest a funeral march with its gloomy and somber character.

This opening measure represents a balanced musical "order" before the appearance of "transgression." The "transgression" emerges gradually in mm. 2–4, with the intervallic expansion of rhythmic motive *a* over this span unbalancing the dotted descent figure of the second half.

Despite the harmonically self-contained, balanced arrangement of motives, this initial condition contains an element of incompleteness that leads to the conflict in mm. 2–4: the melody does not resolve to C4 in m. 1, but instead ends on the inconclusive third (E♭4). Furthermore, the pitch G4 gains extra prominence because it appears twice, framing the neighbor figure that spans the first three beats of the measure. Although there is little tonal ambiguity in m. 1, the prominence of G4 prefigures a harmonic conflict between C minor and G major in later measures. In the following three measures, narrative activity is indicated by the harmonic

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motion away from the tonic, with a consequent strengthening of *a*'s expanding quality.

In m. 2, the melodic line moves down a third to resolve on C4, removing the element of incompleteness from m. 1. The neighbor-note figure now comprises the pitches E♭4-F4-E♭4 and is followed by the dotted descent through D♭4 to C4. Although the melody resolves more emphatically, the harmony also shifts down a third to A♭ major, removing the musical material from the tonic region. The musical "order" is now compromised by the absence of the tonic.

The transposition of the melody line also has consequences for the balance of m. 2. In the first measure, the upper neighbor is A♭4, which,

Example 1. Chopin, *Prelude* in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20

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as the flatted sixth scale degree, strongly implies a return downward to G4. In m. 2, however, the shift to the major mode on Ab results in a whole step between E♭4 and its upper neighbor note F4. This upper neighbor is less strongly connected to E♭4 than A♭4 was to G4. This slight intervallic expansion of the neighbor figure from a minor second to a major second leads to further such expansions in mm. 3–4, expansions that unbalance the motives in favor of *a*.

In m. 3, the latent conflict becomes actual when motive *a* undergoes further intervallic expansion by continuing the ascent beyond the upper neighbor note. Beginning on D4, motive *a* now assumes an alternate form, ascending through E4 to G4. The motive is now entirely ascending in character, and its span of a perfect fourth now surpasses the subsequent descent of motive *b*. A conflict between motives now appears, manifested through oppositions of register (ascent of "transgressive" motive *a* vs. descent of "order" motive *b*), rhythm (quarter-note figure in *a* vs. dotted figure in *b*), and metric position (beats 1–3 in *a* vs. beats 3–4 in *b*). As I will discuss later on, this conflict also appears through the contrast between C minor (with a G major dominant) and G major (with a C minor subdominant).

The intervallic expansion of motive *a* reaches its fullest extent in m. 4, spanning a sixth from D4 through G4 and up to B4. This event corresponds to a shift from relative balance between motives in m. 1 to a predominant role for motive *a* in m. 4. The impact of this shift is emphasized by the crescendo in mm. 3–4.

The increasing prominence of motive *a* through mm. 1–4 is supported by the increasing prominence of G major with respect to C minor. The minor/major mode sequence of mm. 1–2 (C minor to A♭ major) repeats in mm. 3–4 (C minor to G major), but G major emerges as the most important harmony. After the motion to A♭ major in m. 2, C minor returns in m. 3, but its larger context is ambiguous. Based on the harmonic activity in mm. 1 and 2, C minor functions as a plagally embellished tonic. However, in light of the cadence on G major in m. 4, the C minor functions as the minor subdominant of G major. By m. 4, G major is no longer subordinate to C minor, but has in turn subordinated it.

One other item of interest in this section is the historical uncertainty about the location of the final melodic pitch of m. 3, which has variously been given in published versions of the piece as E or E♭.[57] This analysis does not support one interpretation over the other, but the subordination of C minor to G major is even more sharply pronounced if the long-disputed melodic E natural is used instead of E♭. Employing this pitch, C minor does not appear in m. 3, and the C major triad that ends that measure can easily be interpreted as IV of G major. In light of the continuing functional ambiguity of C minor in mm. 5–7 and 9–11, however, E♭ seems a more interesting choice, since it makes this ambiguity more pronounced.

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By the end of the first four measures, the alternate form of motive *a*, supported by the new prominence of G major over C minor, has surpassed motive *b* in narrative status, upsetting the balance of the initial measure. The joint employment of harmony, dynamics, melodic ascent, and phrasing toward this end contributes to the likelihood that the listener will empathize with the program of ascent initiated by *a*. We can now summarize the significant elements of the narrative analysis.

Musical elements representing "order": Arrangement of motives depicted in m. 1; harmonically self-contained, with emphasis on descent; descent manifested in the piece primarily by the *b* motive; harmonic support of tonic C minor, with G major as dominant.

Musical elements representing "transgression": Arrangement of motives depicted in m. 4; emphasis on ascent, brought about by intervallic expansion of the *a* motive; harmonic support of G major, with C minor as minor subdominant.

Listener's sympathies: Topical elements (funeral march) suggest gloom, somberness, reflected in repetitive quality of mm. 1–4; listener likely to support ascent, major-key tonicizations (mm. 2–4) and emphasis on G major which contradict these elements.

Measures 5–8: This four-measure group features the restoration of the initial motivic balance that was upset by the previous passage. This corresponds to the victory of the initial "order" over the "transgression" represented by the expansion of motive *a* and the emphasis on G major, and illustrates the *Tragic archetype*, which appears when the balance of motives and prominence of C minor from m. 1 is restored and the original emphasis on descent is reestablished. Several features contribute to this reversal. First of all, the dynamic increase in mm. 3–4, linked to the expansion of *a*, abruptly gives way to a soft dynamic level in m. 5, suggesting that the force of the "transgression" has now dissipated. Furthermore, the initial section's division into single-measure groupings associated with relatively quick harmonic changes, which gave this section a restless, undulating quality, has now been replaced by a passage in which the phrases have been lengthened and in which the harmonic activity, though chromaticized, is slower. The chromatic bass descent in mm. 5–6 helps to group these two measures together.

The C minor harmony returns in m. 5, but after the G major tonicization in mm. 3–4, the status of this harmony is still uncertain. C minor could function either as the tonic or as the minor subdominant of G major/minor. The prominence of G major is lessened, however, by the chromatic bass, which implies both G major and G minor in m. 5. The restoration of C minor as the primary harmony is confirmed by the V4/2 chord on the final beat of m. 6. Now G major clearly functions in support

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Example 2. Soprano/alto voice crossing in mm. 5–6

of C minor, which appears prominently in mm. 7–8. Obviously, in almost every tonal piece the primary status of the tonic is bound to be reinforced with respect to subordinate keys. Nevertheless, within the boundaries of the piece, subordinate keys do represent significant elements of contrast with respect to the tonic, and may or may function in support of the conflict, whatever we might understand about tonal and formal logic.

The reestablishment of the tonic harmony in mm. 5–8 serves to improve the position of the narrative "order." Motivically, this situation prevails as well. In m. 5, the soprano voice from m. 4 shifts down into the alto voice, while the alto voice in m. 4 (ending on D4) becomes the soprano voice (beginning on E♭5). By moving above the original soprano voice, this inner voice in effect submerges the conflict of motives *a* and *b* and restores the initial balance (see Example 2). This voice descends from E♭5 in m. 5 to B4 in m. 6, where it connects with the *b* motive moving in the same direction to G4. Before the two voices cross again in m. 7 (C5-C4 and G4-A♭4 in beats 1-2), B4 indirectly resolves to C5, the first melodic resolution on C5 in the piece. Overall, the voice crossing results in a descent which helps to restore the tonic harmony and the original melodic register (G4 in m. 7).

Meanwhile, the "transgression" of motive *a* has declined in effectiveness. In m. 5, the original neighbor figure returns in the alto voice (expanded to G-A♭-(G-F♯)-G). This figure now stretches over two measures, and it appears to be "stuck" on the pitch G4. The effect of the voice exchange has been to cancel the intervallic expansion of motive *a*, paving the way for a return to the "initial situation" in mm. 7–8.

This return differs somewhat from mm. 1–2. In m. 7, the melody begins on the pitch C5 rather than on the problematic pitch G4. The substitution gives less prominence to G4 in the melody and emphasizes the tonic more strongly. The resultant melodic pattern in m. 7 (C5-A♭4-G4-F4-E♭), with its initial skip, is an echo of the previous measure (D5-B4-A4-G4), and has the effect of connecting the two exchanged voices. The skip in this pattern is reminiscent of the skip in motive *a* in m. 3 (D4-E4-G4), but now this skip occurs in a descending pattern, emphasizing motive *b*.

The E♭ in the bass in m. 7 (supporting a i6 harmony) puts this bass voice in the "wrong" position compared to m. 1. An F-B tritone is required for the bass to resolve on C, and this changes the character of the

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passage. The intrusive quality of the tritone suggests that the harmony is wrenched into the proper resolution. In a sense, the relationship between *a* and *b* is no longer stable, requiring greater expressive resources on the part of *b* to reestablish the tonic. The prominence of motive *b* is confirmed by this imposition of the tonic harmony.

In m. 8, the melodic line is nearly identical to that of m. 2 and the initial motivic balance is restored, this time with the support of the tonic harmony. Measure 2 began and ended on the submediant, such that the original attempt to resolve the melody on C4 occurred in a more distant tonal environment. In m. 8, however, the tritone appears again in the bass, wrenching the harmonic progression back to tonic through a reinterpretation of the D♭-major triad as a harmonically strong Neapolitan function. The effect of this measure is to reinstate the "initial condition," but with tonic support for the melodic resolution to C4. For all practical purposes, the narrative conflict of the piece has been resolved in this section with the suppression of the "transgressive" activity of the *a* motive.

In mm. 5–8, then, an inner voice moves above the original melodic voice, resulting in the reversal of the expansion of motive *a*, the reestablishment of C minor as the primary harmony, and the return of the "initial situation," this time with tonic support in m. 8.

Measures 9–12: This is a near-exact repetition of mm. 5–8, functioning therefore as a confirmation of what has come before. A repetition is not surprising here, since topical elements have already suggested the character of a funeral march, in which repetition plays a common role. Nonetheless, this section differs from the previous one in two small ways, both of which contribute additional semantic material to the narrative reading. First, the dynamic level is further reduced to *pp* in m. 9. We have already likened the dynamic decrease in m. 5 to the decreasing effect of the "transgression" of motive *a*. As a result, the further decrease in m. 9 continues this process, as if whatever "transgressive" strength possessed by motive *a* in the previous passage were dissipating. Second, the expressive dynamic climax in m. 12 calls attention to the narrative resolution in m. 8. The motivic ascent to F4 above a ♭II sonority is the last point of resistance by motive *a*, and after having heard this section once before, its significance is now clear. Whatever else this section accomplishes, a further distancing of the musical material from the aggressive action of mm. 1–4 takes place.

Measure 13: Up to this measure, the constant quarter-note motion in the accompaniment has provided the piece with its topical environment. In the last measure, the music steps outside this environment with a single chord on the tonic. This chord's function in the narrative can be understood if it is remembered that this is the voicing and range toward which the *a* motive tended in mm. 1–4. This final sonority is presented in

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isolation, unconnected with the musical action, as if to comment on the Tragic fate of motive *a*, which was forced to abandon its expansion and reintegrate with motive *b*. Additionally, the stability and higher register of this chord lends a transcendent quality and a sense of finality to the musical action.

So, to summarize the principal narrative events in the piece:

Measures 1–4: Initial arrangement of motives (m. 1) gradually altered by intervallic expansion of *a* motive, leading to the primacy of motive *a* supported by G major.
Measures 5–8: Motive *b* and C minor are reestablished, supported by softer dynamic level, chromatic descent in accompaniment (mm. 5–6), less pronounced ascent by *a* motive.
Measures 9–12: Near-repetition and confirmation of mm. 5–8; softer dynamic level with climax on point of greatest harmonic tension (Neapolitan in m. 12).
Measure 13: Single chord appears outside the topical environment; commentary on defeat of motive *a*.

This *Prelude* features a musical "subject" (represented by motive *a* and by G major) that strives to achieve a status beyond that which it possessed at the beginning of the piece, but is forced to conform to the initial arrangement by subsequent events in the piece. The listener empathizes with the attempt of *a* to expand and develop, and is made aware of the relative powerlessness of that motive within the universe of the piece when the object is not attained.

Analyses like this one that make use of narrative archetypes should not be read as "proofs" of musical narrative organization. Like many other artistic concepts, narrative contributions to musical semantic content cannot be objectively established; one can at best persuade the reader of their usefulness or appropriateness in effectively confirming or reevaluating intuitions about the relevant piece. There is no single, correct narrative reading of a piece, only a more-or-less convincing one. Musical analysis does not show how musical events are causally related, but rather how they can be explained or characterized based on the *a posteriori* apprehension of signification. No two listeners, whatever their musical competence, will assign identical significations to a musical work. Even if it were possible and desirable to exclude the contributions of personal associations, music is complex enough that the number of semantic cues in a piece could be combined in any number of ways. However, multiple interpretations of a single piece will have many common features, and a convincing analysis should attempt to identify as many such relevant features as possible.

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V. Narrative Archetypes and Analytical Issues

Given the flexibility of music as an artistic language, capable of encompassing many different signifying systems, it is essential to recognize the vastly different ways that musical material is used in a musical narrative. Any parameter or combination of parameters can have very different narrative functions, depending on the context. Furthermore, musical elements or parameters can operate on multiple levels, representing aspects of considerable importance or aspects of fleeting or ancillary importance. Among the significant variables are the piece's length, stylistic conventions, the presence of a sung text, programmatic associations, the composer's intentions, audience preconceptions, and individual performance interpretations. Narrative analysis may also take a number of semantic issues into account, including but not limited to:

- the employment of musical *topoi*: particular combinations of musical elements that have acquired a conventional character.
- the attribution of anthropomorphic status and functional identity to musical figures.
- the implicative character of spatial and temporal aspects of music such as registral shifts or gaps, changes in a prevailing or normative key or rhythm, and the like.
- dynamic properties of musical parameters, such as the sense of increasing momentum associated with *accelerando* passages.
- any programmatic associations linked with themes, motives, textures, or with the work as a whole.
- the employment of secondary parameters to "color" other semantic implications, as when extra emphasis is implied by a *crescendo* or *marcato* marking.
- the use of text, descriptive titles, or supplemental explanatory material, when appropriate.

Not all of these aspects will be relevant in a particular context, but narrative analysis cannot ignore the contributions of semantic associations.

The above discussion also implies the existence of a *primary narrative level* or *levels*, on which the significant oppositions of order/transgression and victory/defeat are given the opportunity to interact. This will be different for each piece, suggesting a particular analytical "magnification"; that is, we do not expect most individual notes to contribute directly to a narrative interpretation in a long piece, but to other higher-level events that do contribute directly. In a musical miniature, on the other hand, each note may very well have a higher-level significance.

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One of the most important tasks in narrative analysis, then, is to find the primary narrative level and to coordinate this level with the others such that semantic content is laid bare.

In the interests of completing the description of my approach, I would like briefly to describe certain characteristics associated with the musical manifestations of each narrative archetype, although I will reserve a fuller discussion for a later time.[58] It should first be noted that archetypes do not arise primarily from the employment of topical material; rather, topical elements support the temporal unfolding of the structural tensions suggested by the above definition of narrative. In other words, while archetypes typically comprise both topical and structural components, the latter element is the critical one.

We have described Romance structure as a *victory of a desired order over an undesired transgression or opposition*. This is essentially a wish-fulfilling scenario, and because of the archetypal order's idealized nature, there is very little subtlety in its presentation.[59] There is no prescribed form for any of the archetypes, which operate across stylistic boundaries and use different musical frameworks as opposed elements, from a conflict of implicational goals to the interplay of Wagnerian leitmotifs. Keeping this in mind, some possible Romance scenarios might include:

- the careful employment of musical tension to create a static effect, as though transgression were continually overcome; here the difficulty would be to create this impression without also suggesting a sense of confinement.
- pieces like Ravel's *Bolero*, in which a theme increases in volume, textural density, and semantic assuredness, suggesting an inevitable victory.
- the temporal prevalence of one thematic entity over another (the precise conditions for this situation arising cannot be specified out of context).
- the use of nostalgic or patriotic musical topics to elicit the listener's sympathy.

The Tragic archetype depicts the *failure of a desired transgression (or an exercise of freedom) against a restrictive or undesired order*. This amounts to a situation in which a "comparatively free life" is narrowed into a "process of causation."[60] From the point of view of narratively significant events, there are only two important features: an original (or ongoing) act of violation followed by a provoked reestablishment of the original order. Music is capable of embodying this archetype in numerous ways:

- employing an intrusive musical element which is subsequently restricted from developing freely.

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- emphasizing a previously subordinate motive or theme, which temporarily usurps the role of the initial material but is then suppressed (see the Chopin analysis above).
- employing musical topics associated with sadness, fate, or tragedy to reinforce a Tragic temporal unfolding, both of a specific character, such as the "hammer blow of fate" in the last movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 6, and of a general character, such as the minor mode.

Irony refers to the *suppression or removal of a pre-existent order, resulting in an undesirable condition, whether chaos or a differently-valued order*. This archetype has the effect of giving "form to the shifting ambiguities and patterns of unidealized existence."[61] That is, because any system represents a simplification of reality, Irony is the means by which one is reminded of the unsystematized reality behind the system. Additionally, because it often achieves this goal by exaggerating idealized elements until they are recognized as grotesque, Irony is often expressed in the form of a parody of Romance. Again, music allows for several archetypal realizations:

- music that is very fragmentary or chaotic, such that the listener has difficulty making any particular sense of it (although if this characteristic is too pronounced, such a piece may escape the bounds of narrative altogether).
- pieces like Lutoslawski's Symphony No. 3, in which unsuccessful attempts are made to establish a musical order in opposition to fragmentary elements, or in which patterns or orderings are continually derailed, leading to incoherence.
- pieces like Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*, which begin conventionally, but spin out of control through the excessive use of some parameter or process.[62]
- topics that tend toward exaggeration or parody, or distortions of musical convention, used in support of structural elements (note the presence of Romantic musical gestures unsupported by tonal structures in Schoenberg's *Six Little Pieces for Piano*).

Finally, the Comic archetype concerns the *emergence of a new desired order (through a transgressive act) out of an undesired one*. This is analogous to a generational conflict in which an older society attempts to block the ascendance of a younger generation, but inevitably gives way (usually resulting in an integrative reconciliation of the opposed elements). This reconciliation often takes the form of a wedding in literary Comedies. The element of reconciliation is important to Comedy, since

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a violent suppression of the old order might create tragic overtones.[63] Musically, this description suggests the following manifestations:

- a musical theme or motive is at first unable to reach a tonal or registral goal, but ultimately succeeds in doing so.
- a hidden or subsidiary theme or motive is ultimately given primary status (as in the "Ode to Joy" melody in the last movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9).
- initially-opposed musical elements are integrated into a musical synthesis (this can be distinguished from a Romance narrative by the relatively greater degree of uncertainty in the initial situation).
- a theme or motive with a problematic element sheds that element and achieves fuller musical development.
- topics suggesting humor, heroism, or liveliness reinforce the euphoric character of the Comic resolution.

These elaborations of the four musical narrative archetypes are not to be considered exhaustive or valid in every sense; rather, they indicate general aspects which might be considered when applying a particular archetype.[64]

VI. Conclusion: Narrative and "Drama"

Looking back on the above reformulation of musical narrative and the analytical example, we are now in a position to consider the remaining argument introduced in Section II: the drama argument. If musical narrative is based upon the violence resulting from the transgression of an order-imposing hierarchy, and if this concept forms the basis of narrative analysis, in what sense does this differ from the dynamics of the theater, in which conflict is presented without mediation via spoken dialogue and action? The argument here is not so much that the above understanding is useless, but that it may in fact be identical to an already-formed conceptual framework which has generally been called "drama."

Fred Maus's "Music as Drama" introduces this concept into music theory by attempting to account for its appeal as a way to listen to music.[65] Maus, in this article, makes several points which are quite compatible with my position: that analysts (or audience) are responsible for explaining the connection between temporal events, that analysts explain musical events by anthropomorphizing them and by associating them with actions, that music is like a drama with indeterminate characters, that disequilibrium plays a pivotal role in a narrative model, and that music does not manifest narrative in the same manner as literature: "the

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goals, actions, and problems of the story are musical ones, and they share only rather general description . . . with everyday actions."[66]

Maus's observations about music and drama provide a first delineation of a common substratum which these two media possess with respect to narrative. If, then, we are concerned only with principles that apply across media, there may be little distinction between the notion of narrative and the elements of drama described above. But it should be equally clear that an understanding of musical narrative involves determining *unique, medium-specific* ways that music unfolds it. My response, then, to the drama argument is not that drama and narrative are different concepts; indeed, any parallels that we might identify between music and drama certainly make an understanding of narrative clearer. Instead, I would argue that the theory laid out above provides a basic set of principles that apply to all kinds of narrative and to musical narrative in particular. In stating these principles and showing how analysis can be undertaken when informed by them, we have a clearer sense of how music works intrinsically as narrative.

* * *

I have argued above that the critiques which have been leveled against the concept of musical narrative by previous authors can themselves be subject to critique, and that a second look at the viability of this concept is therefore necessary. I have suggested a preliminary definition of musical narrative that frees it from being subject to the same parameters as literary narrative. Finally, I have provided a simple, systematic model for understanding and classifying musical narrative according to four archetypes, and have given an example of how an analysis using this model might be undertaken. If we wish to continue the encouraging trend of integrating the difficult issue of musical meaning and signification with analysis, then narrative elements should be a primary tool in the theorist's arsenal.

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NOTES

1. Notable works include Abbate 1989, 1991; Agawu 1991; Almén 1998, 2004; Cone 1982; Grabócz 1998, 1999; Hatten 1994; Kivy 1980, 1984; Klein 2004; Korsyn 1994; Kramer 1990, 1999; Maus 1988, 1991, 1997; Micznik 2000, 2001; Monelle 1992; Nattiez 1990; Newcomb 1984, 1987, 1992, 1994, 1998; Ratner 1980; Tarasti 1994.
2. See note 1. Since Abbate's critique is concisely expressed in her 1989 article, I will refer to this rather than to the 1991 book in which a similar version of this material appears.
3. See note 1. Schubert analyses appear in Cone 1982 and Newcomb 1984, Schumann in Newcomb 1987, Beethoven in Hatten and Tarasti, Chopin in Newcomb 1994, and Dukas in Abbate 1989, 1991 and Nattiez 1990.
4. Frye 1957.
5. Liszka 1989.
6. See also Almén 1998, 155–72.
7. Maus 1988.
8. Nattiez 1990.
9. Ibid., 242.
10. Hatten 1994, 29–30, 44–45.
11. Nattiez 1990, 242.
12. Ibid., 243.
13. Ibid., 245.
14. Ishiguro 2001.
15. The notion of the unreliable narrator has been extensively examined in Booth 1983.
16. Hardy 1964.
17. Genette 1972.
18. Martin 1986.
19. Ibid., p. 124.
20. Part of the reason why "narrative" and "narrator" are so closely linked in narrative theory may be that they share the same syntactical root. Although it is tempting to link the two terms together because of this, their etymological similarity is scarcely a reason to suppose that one is a precondition for other. Instead, it might be safer to say that, since narrative theory arose from literature, and that narrators are frequently found in conjunction with narratives, the two have a certain kinship, although the narrator may be in fact be displaced in relation to narrative.
21. Banfield 1982.
22. Martin 1986, 136–42.
23. Ibid., 137.
24. Ibid., 136–37.
25. Abbate 1989, 228.
26. Martin 1986, 137–38.
27. Katherine Mansfield, "Bliss," in Martin 1986, 202.
28. Ibid., 141.
29. Nattiez 1990, 257.
30. Ibid., 249.
31. Propp 1984, Campbell 1949, Frye 1957, Raglan 1956.

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32. Liszka's narrative theory is given in Liszka 1989, 117–41.
33. Liszka 1989, 68.
34. There are certainly other parameters that one might wish to examine that would result in a different configuration of the system, but if one asserts that the presence of conflict, the listener's identification with one pole or the other, the initial condition, and the outcome are the essential elements of narrative, then the present configuration with four archetypes is the most basic, comprehensive formulation that might be reached.
35. The former position is represented in Maus 1988, the latter being taken by Nattiez 1989 and Abbate 1991.
36. The process of identifying and employing these musical "hooks" has been discussed in a somewhat similar context by Lawrence Kramer when he calls for the opening of "hermeneutic windows" on musical works that are by nature semantically opaque and resist overt attempts to ascribe meaning. Kramer's approach foregrounds the creative role of the analyst in interpretation, however, while the above discussion focuses on the constraints on that creativity established by social and cultural convention. See Kramer 1993, 6.
37. Frye 1957.
38. Ibid., 133.
39. Ibid., 162.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 163–239.
42. Liszka 1989.
43. Kevin Korsyn briefly touches upon the applicability of Frye's archetypes to music scholarship in his review of Mark Evan Bonds's *Wordless Rhetoric*. Here he is primarily concerned with how Bonds places the history of music rhetoric into a narrative plot analogous to the Romance archetype, the motion from original unity to disunity to final unity. See Korsyn 1994, 124–33.
44. Ibid., 1.
45. Ibid., 2.
46. Ibid., 6.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 7.
49. Ibid., 15.
50. Ibid., 129.
51. Frye 1957, 192.
52. Liszka 1989, 133.
53. This outline is a modification of that given in Liszka 1989, 133.
54. Ibid., 140.
55. Hatten 1994 and Tarasti 1994.
56. Liszka 1989, 140.
57. The original manuscript does not include a flat in front of the E in this measure. The Oxford Edition was the first to mention that a flat, apparently in Chopin's own hand, was added to the E in a student's copy of the piece. The uncertainty about this note is still reflected, however, in the various published editions. An E-flat is shown, for example, in Chopin 1968, while an E-natural appears in Chopin 1943.
58. I will examine this further in a book-length treatment of musical narrative, currently in manuscript.

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59. Frye 1957, 202.
60. Ibid., 212.
61. Ibid., 223.
62. In the case of the Bach example, the harpsichord gradually assumes a prominence well beyond its accompanimental role and derails the conventional ensemble with excessive figuration and virtuosity. See McClary 1987, 13–62.
63. Frye 1957, 165.
64. An earlier and more comprehensive treatment of this topic can be found in Almén 1998, 129–49.
65. Maus 1988.
66. Maus 1991, 14.

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