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See table of contents

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Article abstract

In recent years, narrative theory has been an influential model for many writers on music. Things in musical syntax like repetitions, expectations, and resolutions make it tempting to speak of music as narrative, as an emplotment of events, yet such a model in fact involves more narrativization than narrative. It is perhaps more fruitful to focus upon the *musical* side of unambiguously narrative moments.

In this paper, I want to try to integrate recent approaches to musical narration by suggesting that narrative in music is a *performance* which functions according to the logic of the supplement. My approach will be two-fold: first, I want to justify restricting the enquiry to pre-existing narratives set to music by considering the limitations of the emplotment model; second, I shall use Kundry's Act II narrative in Wagner's *Parsifal* as a magnet to attract a number of narrative approaches: some will stick and some will not.

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NARRATIVE THEORY AND MUSIC; OR, THE TALE OF KUNDRY'S TALE

Stephen McClatchie

The late twentieth century has become fascinated with stories.[1] In a move which cuts across boundaries both within and outside of academe, writers, scholars, and theoreticians have pointed towards narrative as a means of making sense of their surroundings, whether disciplinary or public, of giving shape to everyday existence.[2] From narrative law to the narrative-centred sociology of scientific knowledge, narrative theory is ubiquitous in the university these days, a part of the general breakdown of disciplinary boundaries characteristic of the theoretical turn of recent years. Even musicologists and music theorists, who have long isolated themselves from the wider concerns of the arts and humanities by self-referential language and insular reliance on music's supposed autonomy from mundane concerns, have not remained aloof. Of course, in some senses, music has long been addressed in narrative terms: evocation of "narrative" music is a common, indeed ubiquitous gesture in the writing about music. There seems to be something about music that ineluctably compels us to speak of it as narrative: perhaps just the fact that it exists and unfolds in time. Many things in the syntax of music — repetitions, returns, expectations, resolutions — certainly make it tempting to speak of it in narrative terms, to see music as an emplotment of events, whether concrete or abstract. This commonly held view of music, however, begs the question of whether music *is* in fact narrative, which in turn enfolds other, more difficult, philosophical questions about musical signification: how does music mean? Is music a language at all?

In what follows, I would like to examine several broad schools of narrative theory and their various appearances in recent works by a number of musicologists and music theorists, always keeping in mind whether or not the issues raised are inherently *narrative* ones, or whether they have to do with non-narrative concerns such as musical signification or genre. Ultimately, I will conclude that narrative theory has only limited application to music, but may

1 The ideas presented in this paper have gestated over a number of years, beginning with a graduate seminar lead by Martin Kreiswirth at the University of Western Ontario in 1992 and concluding with my own graduate seminar at Western in the summer of 1996. A version was presented at the University of Regina Fine Arts Lecture Series in November 1996. I wish to thank Martin Kreiswirth and Philippe Mather for their helpful comments on earlier versions, and Elizabeth Raum for preparing the musical examples.

2 See Martin Kreiswirth, "Tell Me a Story: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences," in *Constructive Criticism : the Human Sciences in the Age of Theory*, ed. Martin Kreiswirth and Thomas Carmichael (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 61–87.

nevertheless have a salutary effect on the discipline if it forces us to become more self-conscious of the tropes we use to speak of music. To focus the discussion, many of my points will be illustrated with reference to Kundry's narrative in act two of Wagner's *Parsifal.*

1

It has been often remarked upon that Wagnerian characters spend an inordinate amount of time telling stories to one another; Gurnemanz in *Parsifal,* for example, exists primarily as a teller of other's tales. Although he is without any strongly defined character himself, he is onstage constantly in both the first and third acts; by far the largest number of lines per character in the first act belong to Gurnemanz — most of them in narratives.[3] That archetypal temptress, Kundry, tells stories as well. The central encounter of the drama, the confrontation of Kundry and Parsifal, begins with Kundry's narration of Parsifal's childhood: "Ich sah das Kind an seiner Mutter Brust."

Parsifal, the pure fool prophesied to redeem the Grail community, has stumbled upon the evil magician's, Klingsor's, magic garden, populated with beguiling flower maidens. The playful banter between them is abruptly halted by a seductively lengthened cry — "Parsifal! Weile!" — as Kundry comes into view, reclining on a couch of flowers. It is the first time that Parsifal has heard his name; he is caught, transfixed. The flower maidens scatter in fear, and Kundry begins her tale: while still in the womb he was named "Parsifal" by his father, Gamuret, before he was killed in Arabia. His mother, Herzeleide, hoping to avert the same fate for her son, has brought him up in ignorance, far from weapons and men's strife. Anxiously she waited while he roamed near and far, and, after Parsifal finally left for good, she died of grief.

Richard Wagner, Parsifal, *Act II*

Nein, Parsifal, du tör'ger Reiner!	No, Parsifal, you foolish innocent!
Fern — fern ist meine Heimat.	Far — far away is my home.
Daß du mich fändest, verweilte ich nur hier.	I tarried here only that you might find me
Von weit her kam ich, wo ich viel ersah.	I came from afar, where I have seen much.
Ich sah das Kind an seiner Mutter Brust,	I saw the child on its mother's breast,
sein erstes Lallen lacht mir noch im Ohr;	its first lisping still laughs in my ear;
das Leid im Herzen,	though sad at heart,
wie lachte da auch Herzeleide,	how Heart's Sorrow also laughed,
als ihren Schmerzen	that in her grief the apple of her eye
zujauchzte ihren Augen Weide!	should cry for joy!
Gebettet sanft auf weichen Moosen,	She fondly lulled to sleep with caresses
den hold geschläfert sie mit Kosen,	the babe cradled gently on soft moss;
dem, bang in Sorgen,	with anxious care a mother's yearning
den Schlummer bewacht' der Mutter Sehnen,	guarded its sleep

[3]For a discussion of Gurnemanz's tales, see Carolyn Abbate, "Parsifal: Words and Music," in *Parsifal,* English National Opera Guide, no. 34, ed. Nicholas John (London: John Calder, 1986), 43–58.

den wecht' am Morgen
der heiße Tau der Muttertränen.
Nur Weinen war sie, Schmerzgebaren,
um deines Vaters Lieb' und Tod.
Vor gleicher Not dich zu bewahren,
galt ihr als höchster Pflicht Gebot.
Den Waffen fern, der Männer Kampf und Wüten,
wollte sie still dich bergen und behüten.
Nur Sorgen war sie, ach! und Bangen:
nie sollte Kunde zu dir hergelangen.
Hörst du nicht noch ihrer Klage Ruf,
wann spät und fern du geweilt?
Hei! Was ihr das Lust und Lachen schuf,
wann sie suchend dann dich ereilt;
wann dann ihr Arm dich wütend umschlang,
ward dir es wohl gar beim Küssen bang?
Doch ihr Wehe du nicht vernahmst,
nicht ihrer Schmerzen Toben,
als endlich du nicht wiederkamst
und deine Spur verstoben!
Sie harrte Nächt' und Tage,
bis ihr verstummt' die Klage,
der Gram ihr zehrte den Schmerz,
um stillen Tod sie warb;
ihr brach das Leid das Herz,
und — Herzeleide — starb.

and the hot dew of a mother's tears
woke it at morn.
She was all mourning, child of sorrow,
for your father's love and death.
To shield you from like peril
she deemed her highest duty's task.
She strove to hide and shelter you safe
afar from weapons and men's strife and fury.

She was all concern and foreboding
lest you should ever acquire knowledge.
Do you not still hear her cry of distress
when you roamed late and far?
Oh! How great was her joy and laughter
when she sought and found you again;
when her arms clasped you tight
did you perhaps fear her kisses?
But you did not consider her woe,
her desperate grief,
when you finally did not return
and left no trace behind!
She waited night and day
till her laments grew faint,
grief consumed her pain
and she craved for death's release:
her sorrow broke her heart,
and Heart's Sorrow died.

It is a commonplace of Wagnerian criticism to focus on the leitmotive: short, pregnant musical gestures associated in the drama with a person, event, object, or emotional state. Wagner's operas have long been interpreted as a patchwork quilt of such motives, each called up to shadow the unfolding drama; Debussy notoriously mocks Wagnerian characters for presenting their "calling cards" upon their entrance.[4] Wagnerian narratives are generally understood as consisting of a string of such signs, each assumed to be self-identical, with meaning somehow immanent in the gesture.[5] Such a view of narrative may be termed the emplotment model: the idea that music traces or "sets" a preexisting plot, whether musical or literary. But, as we shall see, there are a number of ways to "emplot" Kundry's narrative, and this polysemousness acts to undermine the entire model.

Kundry's narrative proper, "Ich sah das Kind," is somewhat of an anomaly amongst Wagnerian narratives, as it is largely spun out of a single leitmotive:

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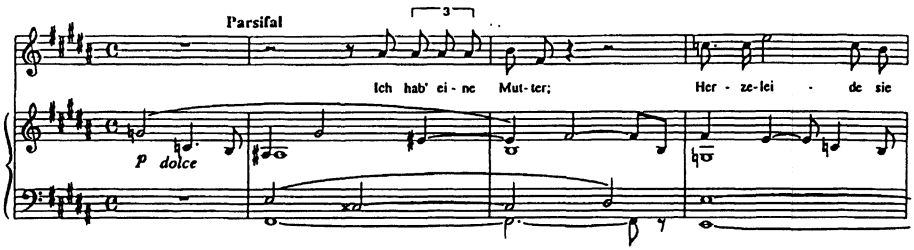
[4]The classic *Leitfäden* of Hans von Wolzogen are the first of many such interpretations; Ernest Newman's *The Wagner Operas*, repr. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) from mid-century is perhaps the most familiar in English.

[5]For a discussion of the Wagnerian view of the leitmotive, see Stephen McClatchie, *Analyzing Wagner's Operas: Alfred Lorenz and German Nationalist Ideology* (University of Rochester Press, forthcoming).

that associated with Parsifal's mother, Herzeleide (example 1). The motive was first heard soon after Parsifal's entrance in Act 1; its associations with Herzeleide are unambiguous, as it accompanies Parsifal's words "Ich hab'eine Mutter; Herzeleide sie heißt." The opening motive of the narration proper, a falling-sixth figure followed by a chromatic descent (which first occurred at Kundry's dismissal of the flower maidens, directly after her call to Parsifal at the beginning of the scene, and which has been rightly characterized as a "Wiegenlied") clearly stems from the Herzeleide motive, although the falling fifth of the latter motive is here expanded to a sixth (example 2).[6] The Herzeleide motive itself is heard in m. 8 of example 2. The only other motive in the narrative occurs near the end, at "Doch, ihr Wehe." Wolzogen calls it a "second Herzeleide motive" (or Liebeswehe) since it too is clearly derived from the former motive, contracting the original falling fifth to a tritone, and omitting the middle of the original motive, instead proceeding directly to the rising minor second (example 3).[7]



Example 1: Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I, mm. 937–40.

A traditional leitmotivic interpretation of the passage, therefore, will focus upon Kundry's self-identification with Herzeleide as central to her purpose of seducing Parsifal. Kundry is like a chameleon, taking on the character of Parsifal's mother, and relentlessly bending the music to her will. Accordingly, the motivic complex of the narrative is derived entirely from Parsifal's mother's music. This act of motivic theft reveals musically Kundry's assumption of Herzeleide's identity; indeed the scene itself begins with Kundry usurping maternal prerogative in naming (christening, even) Parsifal. Kundry strikes at the essence of Parsifal's conception of his mother by appropriating his primal image of her — the Herzeleide motive from the first act at "Ich hab'eine Mutter; Herzeleide sie heißt." Her plan to paralyse him with guilt at his abandonment of his mother is revealed in its full form as she essentially *becomes* his mother, musically.

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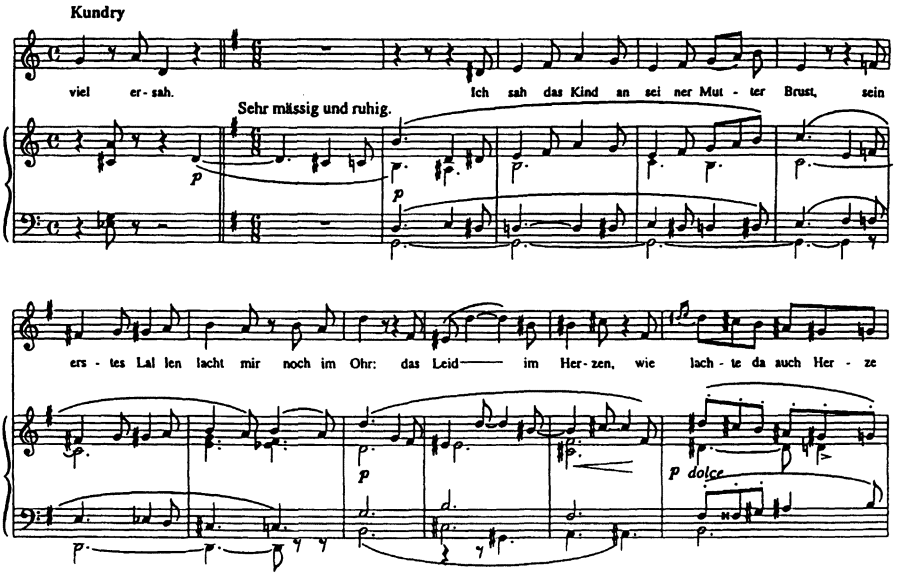
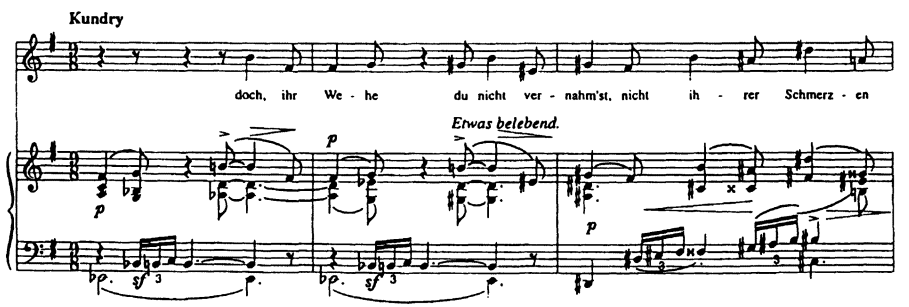
6 Alfred Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*, vol. 4, *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners "Parsifal"* (Berlin: Max Hesse, 1933; reprint, Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1966), 124.

7 Hans von Wolzogen, *Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagner's "Parsifal"* (Leipzig: Feodor Reinboth, 1882), 54.



Example 2: Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act II, mm. 823–34.



Example 3: Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act II, mm. 896–98.

While such an argument can be quite persuasive, there are places in the narrative which do not yield to leitmotivic coercion; for example, at "Den Waffen fern," or at "Sie harrte Nächt' und Tage," where the motivic content of the music flattens out to become simply "illustrative" filler. Leitmotivic interpretations tend to be reductive, and indeed often Procrustean; one has the sense that there must be more in the music than *that* (as there is: wholly unconsidered, for example, are the increasing chromaticism, accelerated tempo, increasingly disjunct vocal line, and internal temporality of the passage).

Leitmotivic interpretations of Wagnerian narratives are ultimately unsatisfying, being, as they are, doubly parasitic: first, upon the literary text, which

music only redundantly shadows, or mimes; and second, upon established and previous musical matter — the leitmotive — which must be established through present-time enactment in order to function at all. It is thus dependent upon an enacted genetic moment, and remains subordinate to it. Our reading of Kundry-as-chameleon is dependent upon Parsifal's mentioning his mother's name in the first act to the music used in the narration. All too frequently leitmotivic interpretations of narrative result in a space between the text and the musical setting: they occasionally meet, but they are not always isomorphous. Conventional Wagnerian criticism has created a convenient explanation for such "discrepancies." Leitmotives are held to have a "double function," one poetic, the other purely musical; if a referenial connection cannot justify a motive's occurrence, then some internal musical logic is evoked to explain away the contradiction.[8]

The problem with leitmotivic analyses of narrative is their hermeneutic promiscuity: easy analogies between music and literary models only point to the futility of trying to pin down music in language, and is dependent, as we have said, upon the metaphorical equation of development in music and an enacted plot. It is equally possible to change the metaphor, and "read" Kundry's narrative in absolute terms, in terms of genre and form.

"Ich sah das Kind" begins like any well-behaved aria. It is prefaced by a recitative-like half-cadence setting up G as tonic, and by an extremely conventional rhetorical gesture in the text: "Far, far away is my home. / I tarried here only that you might find me. / I came from afar, where I have seen much." After such a gesture, an ensuing set piece typically enlarges upon those things seen afar. This is the case here where all signs point towards an aria. The instability of the introductory section is replaced by a tonal centre of G, securely grounded by tonic and dominant pedals (see example 2). The unrhymed text of the introductory rhetorical gesture yields to a rhymed text which is restricted to indirect speech for the first thirteen lines. The phrase structure is a model of regularity: the first six lines of text form a sixteen-measure period which ends on the dominant at "Augen Weide." The conjunct vocal line is doubled by the accompaniment throughout. Harmonically, the opening consists of primarily subdominant, dominant, and tonic chords (albeit decorated chromatically). Here Kundry does not address Parsifal directly, but rather uses the third person (*das Kind, seiner, sein*). A single motive consisting of a leap followed by movement by semitone forms the musical fabric of the piece; this introductory gesture is inverted at "das Leid im Herzen," and elsewhere in the music. The spinning out of this motivic gesture forms the majority of the

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8On this "double logic," see Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form*, vol. 1, *Der musikalische Aufbau des Bühnenfestspieles "Der Ring des Nibelungen"* (1924), 73–74. Carolyn Abbate has been particularly critical of leitmotivic interpretations of Wagner's (and others) works, writing that leitmotive is "music's most familiar and least interesting narrative competence"; see, in particular, her *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 36–37, 161–70; the quotation is from page 86. Also Abbate, "Wagner, `On Modulation,' and *Tristan*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1 (1988): 33–38; and Abbate and Roger Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2 (1990): 187–95.

accompaniment for the piece. As a compositional technique, such a motivically derived accompaniment is entirely conventional.

This introductory strophe is followed by another which begins in almost the identical manner.[9] But this strophic feint is deflected at "Nur Weinen war sie," as the musical language gradually becomes more complex and chromatic, and the vocal line less conjunct. The ascending semitone motion, so prevalent in the opening two phrases, reverses direction, and new motives intrude. The music for "Den Waffen fern, der Männer Kampf und Wüthen" finds justification in the text itself. It now seems less "absolute," appearing instead as music summoned up by the immediacy of the text. Again, one could continue at length, but soon one is confronted with the feeling that these are simply narrativizing gestures: we are superimposing *our own* story onto Kundry's narrative, only this time the story is a purely musical one, one of form (the apparent strophic structure) and genre.

In a further twist of the tale, this formal model may be easily replaced by a narratological one. Many of the characteristics of narratives have already been mentioned. First and foremost, narrative demands some degree of spatio-temporal distancing: a distinction between the time of the story and the time in which the story is told (the discourse time). The spatial aspect is rather more straightforward: typically, stories are presented "out of order" in the discourse. In Wagner's *Parsifal*, for example, the opera-goer must coordinate two narrative instances to recreate the story of Parsifal's youth. Some of the information, like Herzeleide's death, was presented (again by Kundry) soon after Parsifal's entrance in the first act; therefore, even before Kundry begins her act two narration, we already know the main "kernels" of the story: Gamuret's death, Parsifal's sheltered youth and eventual flight, Herzeleide's grief and death. It is not until "Ich sah das Kind" that we learn the rest.[10]

The temporal aspect of narrative is rather more difficult. How might discursive distance be created in music? One consequence of the miming model is that if leitmotivic readings are parasitic upon the dramatic plot, there is accordingly no discursive distance between the alleged musical "narrative" and the plot as a whole; the narrative quality resides in the adjunct, in what is outside the music, in what the music traces. In linguistic narrative, of course, discursive distance is effected either through tense or the use of deictic indicators; language, unlike music, can create pastness instantly through the use of the preterite. Since musical syntax possesses no similar device, the logical conclu-

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9 Although in the final score the vocal lines differ, Wagner's original sketch of the passage shows that they originally were identical; he altered the opening measures of the first strophe sometime between the writing of the composition and orchestral sketches. I wish to thank William Kinderman for sharing his work on Wagner's sketches and drafts for *Parsifal* with me. Under his supervision, I studied the sketches and drafts for this scene. The resulting paper remains unpublished. Kinderman's own study ("Die Entstehung der *Parsifal*-Musik," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 52 [1995]: 66–97, 145–65) does not discuss this passage.

10 The *fabula/sjužet* distinction comes from the Russian Formalists; story/discourse from Seymour Chatman. For an introduction to the basic terms and concepts of narratology, see Steven Cohan and Linda Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988) or Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (New York : Routledge, 1988).

sion seems to be that music has no past tense. Such, indeed has been argued by Carolyn Abbate: music exists only as mimesis, and only in the present tense.[11] Repetition and return can remind us of the pastness of our listening, and therefore can create the effect of time passing or past, but they cannot instantly invoke the past.[12]

How does time work in "Ich sah das Kind"? Unlike a great many Wagnerian narratives, Kundry's narration establishes no great mythic distance between teller and tale. Although, as we have seen, one may distinguish a double-order of time — the *Erzählzeit* and the *erzählte Zeit* — these temporal signifiers remain embedded in the text of the narrative, not in the music. The first strophe of Kundry's narrative describes — entirely in the past tense — how Herzeleide nursed Parsifal, rocking him at her breast. The music is in 6/8 time, a "rocking" metre singularly appropriate for a lullaby and certainly used in many examples of the genre. A conjunct vocal line, and general lack of musical tension are likewise fitting for the circumstances. The effect of the music is replicated in the language itself, in the avoidance of harsh consonants and in the gentle rocking lilt of the frequent *l*s and the many sibilants. Were it not for the explicit pastness of the text — entirely in the preterite — this passage might be being sung to an infant at this moment.

In a pair of recently published papers, Karol Berger has problematised this common-sensical notion that music has no past tense.[13] In the first, he collapses the distinction between mimesis and diegesis (dramatic and epic), and, using Ricoeur's perceptual model, focuses instead upon poetic form of an event — that is, whether it is narrative or lyric. By so doing, Berger allows for a narrative moment that is in fact mimetic. Berger later argues that the distinction between mimesis and diegesis rests on the idea of voice: between direct, unmediated speech and speech reported or mediated by another voice. Musical diegesis requires a hierarchical split-time (a story-world embedded in a discourse-world) and the immediately speaking voice of a spatio-temporally distinct narrator which mediates a presented world. While a vocal text imposes its mode on the music and makes it possible to have the voice of a narrator in a piece, Berger points out that this is parasitic upon the preexisting literary text. He does suggest, however, that an instrumental voice can preserve its own identity and still mediate another voice belonging to another world through musical quotation or allusion.

Berger's argument is valuable because it reminds us that mimesis itself, like language, is always temporally displaced. Because it can never provide a one-for-one matching of the thing imitated — can never actually *be* that thing — any mimesis remains a representation of an action or thing. As such, it

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11 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 52–56.

12 In an earlier version of the second chapter of *Unsung Voices*, "What the Sorcerer Said," Abbate repeats the question "can music have a past tense?" throughout her discourse to make this point. See *19th-Century Music* 12 (Spring 1989): 221–30, esp. 228–30.

13 Karol Berger, "Narrative and Lyric: Fundamental Poetic Forms of Composition," in *Musical Humanism and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, ed. Nancy K. Baker and Barbara R. Hanning (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1992), 451–70; idem, "*Diegesis* and *Mimesis*: The Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Presentation," *Journal of Musicology* 12 (Fall 1994): 407–33.

remains open to Derrida's critique of representation: always a *re*presentation pointing to an absence. It is possible, then, that the displaced mimesis inherent in musical time does function like a tense in narrative.[14]

Carolyn Abbate has suggested that music may create the discursive distance needed for narrative through other means. In her recent theoretical study of music and narrative, *Unsung Voices*, she argues that moments of musical narration are marked by a different voice, by a certain disjunction or detachment from the surrounding music. In the case of Kundry, then, this schism is seen in the very different musical style of the narrative, which Abbate elsewhere has called "strangely neutral ... [and] self-contained, ... forg[ing] fewer links backwards or forwards to the remainder of the score."[15] Wagner's blatant generic allusion to the traditional operatic recitative-and-aria pattern (with a feint at strophic aria no less!) makes a marked break with his prevailingly chromatic late style, seen, for example in the encounter between Klingsor and Kundry which opens the act. In Kundry's narration, the naive simplicity of the musical idiom seems rather foreign to, or at least atypical of Wagner's mature style, and suggests the musical language of a simpler time, of the past.

Behind all of these musings about narrative lies the common assumption that its proper function is to trace, or emplot a series of preexisting and independent events, whether literary or musical. This emplotment model of narrative has particular difficulties when applied to music, and it is to consideration of these difficulties that we now turn.

2

In 1987 Anthony Newcomb published a seminal article in *19th-Century Music* which may be credited with sparking the current interest in narrative in music.[16] Much cited, Newcomb's article argues that musical events trace paradigmatic plots consisting of a series of functions (in the sense of the Russian Formalists and Tzvetan Todorov); music's paradigmatic plots are its reified formal types, such as the sonata, rondo, or fantasia. Its functions are those gestures in the music which can be identified as opening, closing, transitional, and so on. For example, the sonata "plot" consists of three large-scale divisions — exposition,

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14 Indeed the entire question of musical temporality is a far from simple matter. Very little has been written about the question, although several scholars have attempted to define different levels of time, particularly in operatic works (see, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, "Über das `kontemplative Ensemble,'" in *Opernstudien: Anna Amalie Abert zum 65.Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Faltin and Hans-Peter Reinecke [Cologne: Arno Volk, 1975], 37–47). Kundry's narrative scene in *Parsifal* offers a case in point. Wagner appears to go out of his way to create an atmosphere of utter stillness right from the moment that Kundry calls to Parsifal: long-held "*Tristan*" chords, as well as other half-diminished and diminished sevenths militate against forward-propelling harmonic progressions owing to the harmonic dislocation inherent in their symmetrical division of the octave; other devices, such as a slow harmonic rhythm and the resulting pedal-like effect of the bass line adds to the effect of a suspension of motion. This mood is maintained until after the crucial moment of the kiss and Parsifal's transfiguration.

15 Abbate, "Parsifal: Words and Music," 52.

16 Anthony Newcomb,"Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies," *19th-Century Music* 11 (Fall 1987): 164–74. See also idem, "Narrative Archetypes and Mahler's Ninth Symphony," in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 118–36.

development, and recapitulation — each made up of numerous actants or functions: an introduction, a first-theme group, a transition etc. Newcomb makes an analogy between following a plot and following a piece of music. In both, he argues, the reader/listener is forced to mediate between his or her knowledge of the plot paradigm — the "story," to use narratological terminology — and its often-skewed concretization in the discourse. A parallel may be drawn between the media because both employ similar strategies of interruption, embedding, digression, and reinterpretation in order to avoid the pure linearity of story.

Newcomb's conception of narrative is indebted to that of Paul Ricoeur.[17] Ricoeur defines narrative in terms of emplotment, invoking the Aristotelian notion of *mythos* with its attendant characteristics of wholeness, appropriate magnitude, and completeness. In Ricoeur the emphasis shifts from the narrative product to the process of narrating itself; he reinvests narrative with temporality, "unfreezing" narrative from the static models of the narratologists. Structuration is valued over structure: emplotment "must make an intelligible whole of the incidents"; it must "construe significant wholes out of scattered events."[18] That is, it must consist of a clear beginning, middle, and end. According to Ricoeur, any succession of events requires narrative activity before it may be interpreted. Ricoeur's temporal model of narrative, with its configurational dimension of "grasping together," seems particularly appropriate to the temporal art of music.

The work of Fred Maus, first presented in his Princeton doctoral dissertation, also bears traces of Ricoeur's thought.[19] Like Newcomb, Maus advocates an emplotment model of narrative, only instead of a paradigmatic plot, he speaks of fictional actions. The link between music and narrative lies in the fact that both involve following such a series of fictional actions. Maus draws on Aristotle's *Poetics*, with its discussion of dramatic agents, and its assertion that "Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life."[20] Therefore the traits of the individual characters are of less importance than the intelligibility and unity of the series of actions in the plot. Maus understands musical sounds as actions in the Aristotelian sense; they too require a story for their interpretation. This story is an intrinsically musical one: "the goals, actions, and problems of the story are musical ones, and they share only rather general descriptions (for instance, "trying to return to a position of stability") with everyday actions."[21] Maus's "general descriptions" recall Tzvetan To-

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17 See Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 165–86. Also idem, *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1–3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–85).

18 Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative and Hermeneutics," in *Essays on Aesthetics*, ed. John Fisher (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 152, 153.

19 Fred E. Maus, "Music as Drama," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988): 56–73; idem, "Music as Narrative," *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (Spring and Fall 1991): 1–34. Maus's dissertation is entitled "Humanism and Music Criticism" (Princeton University, 1989).

20 Cited by Maus, "Music as Drama," 72.

21 Maus, "Music as Narrative," 14.

dorov's model of narrative as inherently transformational, tracing a move from equilibrium through disequilibrium to reequilibrium.

But the emplotment model of musical narrative, so forcefully argued by both Newcomb and Maus (and others), has its problems, several of which we have already encountered in our examination of Kundry's tale. First and foremost, it is by no means clear that it is *narrative* which these scholars are addressing. Indeed, Newcomb's model especially seems to me more a theory of listening and perception — of genre really — than a theory of narrative. It is dependent upon a very Platonic notion of "story" in music: the equation of paradigmatic plots with (now discredited) textbook definitions of musical form. Secondly, narrative activity, provoked by music in both Maus's and Newcomb's theories, is not the same thing as narrative: where does the narrative reside? Obviously it is not immanent "in" the music, but is rather constructed by the listener while following a piece. A constructed narrative of a certain chain of events occupies a metalinguistic position in relation to the events themselves: these events do not narrate, but are narrativized.[22]

The mapping of narratological models — static things that they are — onto pieces of music allows musicologists and theorists to maintain a rigid, and traditional, binarism between form and content in a work. Indeed, it may be argued that

> narratology has acted as a kind of methodological halfway house in which musical meaning can be entertained without leaving the safe haven of form.[23]

It seems to me that the emplotment paradigm just revoices an old story — that of Hanslick — for late twentieth-century ears. If we conclude that music only allows us to hear the sound of narrating (the formal axis) but not what is being said (the content), are we not covertly returning to a nineteenth-century ideology of music pure and transcendent? The central thesis of Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* — "the content and object of music consist of forms set in motion by sounding" — is that music's only content is music itself.[24] How does this differ from Maus's intrinsically musical story? Hanslick's aesthetics of the musically beautiful revolves around the principle of dynamic analogy: the temporal processes of music suggest parallels with events in the real world. Both Newcomb and Maus appear to thus conclude, with Hanslick, "that music narrates without narrative content." Maus, however, evinces some discomfort with the conservative tendencies of the model when he admits (in a footnote) that "music is more like narrative theory than it is like narrative." But there is even more to it than that. Jean-Jacques Nattiez pinpoints the crux of the matter when he writes:

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22 Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *On Narrative*, 2.

23 Lawrence Kramer, "Musical Narratology: A Theoretical Outline," in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 99.

24 Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 8th ed. (Leipzig, 1891), 74. "Der Inhalt der Musik sind tönend bewegte Formen." The German original is notoriously difficult to capture in English; I have taken my translation from that of Martin Cooper in *Music in European Thought, 1851–1912*, ed. Bojan Bujić (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.

> [A] good number of "narrative" approaches to music ... seem to me to retreat into metaphorical illusion. ... If, in listening to music, I am tempted by the "narrative impulse," it is indeed because, on the level of the strictly musical discourse, I recognize returns, expectations, and resolutions, but of what, I do not know. ... But there is a serious risk of slipping from narrative *metaphor* to an ontological illusion: since music *suggests* narrative, it could itself *be* narrative.[25]

In arguing that music traces paradigmatic plots or a series of dramatic actions — and concluding that it is therefore narrative — Newcomb and Maus mistake metaphor for metonymy.

Ultimately any theoretical discussion about music must address the thorny issue of musical signification. As Carolyn Abbate has insisted, music is mute in a linguistic world: we must make it speak, give it meaning.

> [Our] constitution of music through words ... has largely to do with literary and institutional traditions, with recurring tropes in writing about music, and not merely with the musical work itself.[26]

A central tenet of deconstruction, perhaps most cogently argued by Paul de Man, is that all language is inescapably figural. The rhetorical figures or modes of argument which structure all thought are not merely the transparent vessels of grammar and logic (as in the medieval *trivium*), but rather their constituting force.[27] Put another way, meaning is merely an effect of the structures we choose; an effect of language, if you will. If this is indeed the case, then music is in some senses doubly figural because it must first be translated into a language which is always already figural. In order to escape this double bind, it may be useful to consider Julia Kristeva's expanded theory of signification, which seems particularly germane for music.

Kristeva writes in "The System and the Speaking Subject" that

> the major constraint affecting any social practice [i.e., signifying system] lies in the fact that it signifies; i.e. that it is articulated like a language ... [with] a double articulation (signifier/signified); [and] that this duality stands in arbitrary relation to the referent.[28]

She would see the production of meaning in terms of a signifying process rather than a sign-system, however, and points out that other paradigms — like gesture — can exist palimpsestically with the linguistic model. Kristeva is attempting to carve out an extra-linguistic space, a space for signification apart from representation. She writes:

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25 Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115 (1990): 244–45.

26 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 18.

27 Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 3–19; see also Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3–20.

28 Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 25.

> [T]here are non-verbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music for example). But ... this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.[29]

If musical signification is thus understood in Kristevan terms, as a palimpsest glimpsed dimly between the lines and in the spaces of language, then "music may thus escape philosophical critiques of language, perhaps even escape language entirely."[30] Kristeva has theorised what she terms a *sujet-en-procès* (subject in process/on trial) as a provisional articulation of a subject in order to allow one to proceed with analysis, whether psychological in her case, or musical in ours. A central question for musicological analysis then becomes: how then might we employ a Kristevan *sujet-en-procès* from which to speak?

Music, as Kristeva's semiotic, must still be constituted in and through language. It is precisely Newcomb's and Maus's constitutions of music as narrative which is at issue here — as well as my own readings of Kundry's tale: music becomes narrative only through our linguistic constitution of it. Certainly, at some level, when we write about music all we do is tell stories, but, this does not necessarily comprise immanent narrativity.

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There is one facet of narrative which is not addressed by the emplotment model: the act of narrating itself. Without consideration of this pragmatic dimension, we miss the essence of Kundry's tale. While other Wagnerian narrators narrate to convey information (Wotan, Tannhäuser, and Gurnemanz spring to mind), Kundry's motivation is less benevolent: she aims to seduce and destroy Parsifal just as she did Amfortas long ago. As Ross Chambers writes,

> [O]ne does not narrate with impunity ... to tell a story is an act, an event, one that has the power to produce change, and first and foremost to change the relationship between the narrator and the narratee.[31]

One thinks of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's minimal definition of narrative as an "act consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened."[32] Narrative is a dialogical act — one with real consequences. To focus upon the act of narrating in music — that is, upon the music to which narrative is set, is in some senses to carve out a purely musical space for narrative. If we wish to claim that music can do more than just imitate the sound of narrating,

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29 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 24.

30 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 18.

31 Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 74; cited in Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 97.

32 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," in *On Narrative*, 228.

we should consider it according to the expanded paradigm of musical signification discussed earlier. Music, considered as a speech act in its own right, can take part in activities of prohibiting and prescribing through Foucauldian networks of power and knowledge.[33] (However this participation generally occurs through the verbal constitution of music through accepted critical and analytical methodologies and/or reception history). To consider the musical side of an operatic narrative, then, we can look at its context, both musical and plot-wise.

Carolyn Abbate, the most cogent proponent of such an approach, argues that our traditional assumption that a narrator will speak the truth (at least in operatic narratives!) is subverted in the later Wagnerian operas.[34] She argues that by staging scenes of narrative mis-representation in the *Ring* (such as when Siegfried lies about his night with Brünnhilde), Wagner calls all narrating into question — even truthful narration. Kundry's narrative is a rather different case. A subsidiary assumption to this larger one of truth is that a narrator is somehow outside what is being narrated and is not exploiting the act of narrating for some personal gain. This is generally true in pre-Wagnerian opera, where typical narrators are ancillary characters such as captains of the guard, confidantes, or travelling monks; these types generally have to be prompted by others to tell their tales (though these tales often are reflexive of the plot of the opera as a whole.) But Kundry is not so altruistic. Her conte may be *true*, but this is somehow irrelevant to the situation in which it is told; all that matters is that Parsifal believes that it is true. She narrates with a purpose: seduction.

Narrative is more than the structure of an object (plot, event): it is also a way of speaking, of manipulating time, of using figural language, of constituting events (often in the context of performance). It seems more fruitful to concentrate on instances of *performed* narration within a fictional context of non-performance. Abbate focusses on moments when operatic characters specifically and self-consciously perform in the stage world which they inhabit; these are moments when they *hear* the music they perform, unlike their usual silent operatic milieu.[35] She argues that part of Wagner's position as a musical revolutionary rests in this transgression of this boundary between music heard and unheard:

> Wagner's later operas ... collapse [the] distinction between phenomenal song or performed sung narration and the music otherwise outside and unheard by the subjects in the stage world. The later Wagnerian operas represent narrating uncovered. Put another way: they involve movements when phenomenal musical performance seeps into the body of the opera, when a concealing fabric is therefore drawn from the opera-body, revealing its metamorphosis

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33 This is the primary claim of what has been termed "the hermeneutically oriented New Musicology." It has been cogently promulgated by Lawrence Kramer in both *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), particularly in chapter 1, "Tropes and Windows." See also Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*.

34 See *Unsung Voices*, chap. 5, "Wotan's Monologue and the Morality of Musical Narration."

35 See *Unsung Voices*, chaps. 3 and 4.

> into musically reflexive sound. The body of the opera, that is, echoes those acts of enunciation, structuring, and making, once only replicated in performed song.[36]

Such moments of narrating, she writes, are reflexive moments: moments which allegorise the activities of the characters into those of composer, performer, and listener.[37]

Kundry's narrative falls into this category of reflexive narration. It is identified as phenomenal song by the musical context, being "prepared by the kinds of signals — introductory recitative, exhortations to the listeners — that traditionally announce phenomenal song in opera."[38] As we have seen, "Ich sah das Kind" begins like a formal aria, with an implied strophic structure that subsequently collapses, but without destroying the illusion that the music comes from Kundry herself.[39] And if Kundry sings, then Parsifal hears.

Abbate argues that the resultant disjunction between phenomenal song and the rest of the opera body is music's means of creating the discursive distance necessary for narrative. By valorising moments of narration as "layered, complex, and primary, rather than thin, monotonous, and parasitic," Abbate reverses traditional understandings of narrative in music. These moments are marked by a different voice; they are places "contextually detached from the music that embeds it."[40] They are moments of Kristevan heterogeneity, moments of non-congruence; this "narrating voice generally does not shadow specific events; it is defined not by what it narrates, but rather by its audible flight from the continuum that embeds it."[41] Abbate writes:

> I propose that we understand musical narration not as an omnipresent phenomenon, not as sonorous encoding of human events or psychological states, but rather as a rare and peculiar act, a unique moment of performing narration within a surrounding music.[42]

Abbate presents narrative in rather Kristevan terms: narrative moments are revolutionary moments, moments when the semiotic — not wholly repressed by the symbolic world of language, but exerting pressure upon it, undermining it from within — irrupts into the symbolic. Kristeva refers to art as the *Aufhebung* of the semiotic into the symbolic.[43] Such irruptions "prevent the thetic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it ... and bar it from inducing the subject, reified as a transcendental ego, to function solely within the systems of science and monotheistic religion." Abbate similarly speaks of

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36 Ibid., 98.

37 Abbate is drawing on the thought of Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 74–75. In the monograph, Dällenbach attempts a typology of *mise en abyme* in (generally) non-performed texts.

38 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 202.

39 For Tannhäuser's narrative, see ibid., 98–118.

40 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 139.

41 Ibid., 29.

42 Ibid., 19.

43 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 69.

the score as the "opera body" which is then ruptured or violated by narratives that "break the body."

Yet, ultimately, Kristeva understands narrative to be entirely symbolic in nature, being "dominated, ruled by, and finally reduced to or viewed through the structure of the family" (i.e., the world of Law, the symbolic).[44] She goes on to valorise what she calls *text* practice as the locus of heterogeneity which allows the drive process to emerge.

> The drive process cannot be released and carried out in narrative. ... It needs a text: a destruction of the sign and representation, and hence of narrative and metalanguage, with all their lock-step, univocal seriousness. To do this, however, the text must move through them; it cannot remain unaware of them, but must instead seep into them, its violent rhythm unleashing them by alternating rejection and imposition.[45]

Kristeva's use of musical terminology is quite striking; earlier she writes of the semiotic rhythm operating within language as:

> Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement.[46]

Her mention of "univocal seriousness," with its obvious resonance with Bakhtinian concepts of voice and monophony/polyphony, is also suggestive.[47] In *Unsung Voices* Abbate attempts to reinvest music with just this sense of enigma, of multivalence, of heterogeneity: precisely that which is too often filtered out in our totalizing analyses which tend to silence music's polyphonic polyphony into a boring polyphonic monophony. Abbate presents operatic scores in terms strikingly similar to Bakhtin's polyphonic novel.

Kristeva equates music with the semiotic. When the semiotic irrupts into the symbolic in the text process, in art, it is therefore in some sense the irruption of *music* into a non-musical idiom. But what happens when the idiom is music? Since music is not and can never be symbolic, the semiotic — "musical, anterior to judgement" — can never undermine it as it is always already semiotic, always already self-undermining. When language is added to music, as in a song or throughout an opera, cantata, or oratorio, the resultant product is made up of at least two strands: the music and text, either or both of which may be polyphonic in Bakhtin's sense. So when a narrative is set to music, even though it may be entirely symbolic, the musical accompaniment foregrounds the process of the semiotic rhythm which undermines it. There are thus *two* (at least) narratives: the master narrative set to music, and the consequent alloy created by its musical setting. Within music itself, too, narrative fore-

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44 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 90.

45 Ibid., 103.

46 Ibid., 29.

47 See M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: *Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

grounds destabilizing forces, making explicit — often reflexively — different voices, points of view, questions of truth. To Abbate, then, narrative moments in music are moments of the irruption of the semiotic within the semiotic world of music itself.[48]

Another way of conceiving such moments would be as a Derridean supplement. For Derrida, the concept of the supplement "harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary." On the one hand, music as a supplement "adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude"; two self-sufficient systems brought into collusion. On the other hand, adding music to a pre-existing narrative "intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence."[49] That is, it somehow takes the place of the original. This is indeed often the case, particularly in opera; as Lawrence Kramer writes, "why bother to follow all that stuff Wotan is saying to Erda [in Wagner's *Siegfried*] when we can just listen to the doom-laden procession of the leitmotives?"[50] But there is a danger here: a naive reading of the musical supplement to Kundry's tale might simply reinvest music with transcendental power, with the traditional logocentric assumption that "music smooths and fulfils what language cannot define."[51] That is, somehow the music "reveals" Kundry's duplicity towards Parsifal. We could certainly narrativize the music to produce such a result, but it would be our result, our story.

It seems clear that narrative theory is most useful for music when it is used in conjunction with that for which it was conceived: preexisting narratives. Each of our readings of Kundry's tale offers certain insights and has certain advantages. Whether applied to operatic stories, songs, or programme music, narrative theory can be a powerful hermeneutic tool, capable of uncovering contradictions, refocusing critical attention, and demystifying underlying ideologies. It makes sense to use narrative theory in these situations to explore text and music together in a dialogical and non-totalizing fashion. If, however, all music is understood as narrative, its use quickly becomes banal, capable only of tautologously cloaking old viewpoints with trendy new clothing.

Understanding music as a supplement to narrative forms part of a larger project, however, because it reminds us that in order to speak of it at all, we must constantly constitute music in verbal terms. Like ventriloquists, we make music speak, we make it tells stories, we narrativise it, but it is essential to remember that without our linguistic mediation, without our inevitably subjec-

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48 One potential difficulty with Abbate's notion is the fact that she never addresses the question of whether the destablizing forces necessary to produce these moments are in fact destabilizing in a *temporal* sense. It does seem inescapable that some sort of spatio-temporal distancing is an absolute requirement for narrative.

49 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 144–45. According to Derrida, the term "supplement," like parergon, pharmakon, hymen, etc., inscribes *différence* within itself. See also Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

50 Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, 112.

51 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 156.

tive intervention, music must remain, in Macbeth's words, "full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing."

Abstract

In recent years, narrative theory has been an influential model for many writers on music. Things in musical syntax like repetitions, expectations, and resolutions make it tempting to speak of music as narrative, as an emplotment of events, yet such a model in fact involves more narrativization than narrative. It is perhaps more fruitful to focus upon the *musical* side of unambiguously narrative moments.

In this paper, I want to try to integrate recent approaches to musical narration by suggesting that narrative in music is a *performance* which functions according to the logic of the supplement. My approach will be two-fold: first, I want to justify restricting the enquiry to pre-existing narratives set to music by considering the limitations of the emplotment model; second, I shall use Kundry's Act II narrative in Wagner's *Parsifal* as a magnet to attract a number of narrative approaches: some will stick and some will not.