

BERLIOZ, HOFFMANN, AND THE *GENRE FANTASTIQUE*
IN FRENCH ROMANTICISM

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Taking Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* as its focus, this dissertation explores the idea of a musical fantastic in nineteenth-century France. It offers a series of new readings of Berlioz's first symphony that trace the work's connection to literature, politics, visual art, and science, reconnecting it with the broader culture of the fantastic that evolved in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe. Drawing extensively on nineteenth-century criticism, it identifies Berlioz as one of the key exponents of the *genre fantastique*, a musical category closely tied to the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Jacques Callot, Victor Hugo, Salvator Rosa, and Dante Alighieri, and theorized in major journals and dictionaries of the period.

Chapter One begins by gathering together Berlioz's own commentary on the musical fantastic, examining its implications for form, syntax, and orchestration. It goes on to look at reception of the *Symphonie fantastique*, tracing theories of the musical fantastic as they emerge in the nineteenth-century press and at broader notions of fantastic genius that permeate Hoffmann's tales and French *contes fantastiques*. Chapter Two examines relationships between Berlioz's symphonic program and emerging French psychiatric theory, identifying the *idée fixe* at the center of the work as the primary symptom of a pseudo-scientific disease called monomania. It reopens old questions surrounding the relationship between art and life in the *Fantastique*, linking Berlioz's symphonic self-fashioning with the strategies of the Romantic confession.

Chapter Three turns to questions of sound and form in the musical fantastic, theorizing connections between Berlioz's distorted shapes and experimental timbres and the aesthetics of the grotesque. Here, music is drawn into discourse with visual culture and with notions of literary caricature and humor central to works by Hoffmann, Gautier, Jean-Paul Richter, and Victor Hugo. Expanding outward, Chapter Four examines the broader repertory of the *genre fantastique*, undermining long-standing notions of Berlioz as an isolated and eccentric composer. It looks not only at other fantastic symphonies but at a range of orchestral, chamber, and keyboard works bearing the "fantastique" label. The fantastic emerges as a concrete musical category and Berlioz as one of the pioneering figures in a vital but little-known compositional tradition.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Francesca Brittan was born in London, England and grew up in Canada and Mexico. She completed a Bachelor's Degree in Musicology at the University of Western Ontario, followed by *Certificat* studies in historical performance at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Holland. While pursuing Master's and Doctoral work at Cornell University, she studied fortepiano with Malcolm Bilson. Currently, she holds a Research Fellowship at Queens' College, Cambridge.

*For my parents, Cora and Eric Brittan,
whose love of and belief in the fantastic have made this work possible.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1. CONFIGURING A FANTASTIC BERLIOZ	8
Gluck, Berlioz, and the Rhetoric of the Musical Fantastic Echoes of the Political and Philosophical Fantastic Dante, Salvator Rosa, and the Fantastic Sublime Hoffmann and the Literary Fantastic Berlioz, Blaze, and the Musical <i>École fantastique</i>	
2. FANTASY, PATHOLOGY, AND ROMANTIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY	108
<i>Idées fixes</i> : Uncanny Returns The Trope of Pathology in the ‘Fantastic’ Letters Early Psychiatry and the Formulation of a ‘Monomania’ Diagnosis Of Monomaniacal Heroes and Fixated Artists Pathology and the Poetics of Romantic Self-Writing	
3. FANTASTIC FORM AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE GROTESQUE	168
<i>“In Callots Manier”</i> Configuring the Romantic Grotesque A Historical Tour of the French Grotesque Victor Hugo’s Preface to <i>Cromwell</i> Hugo—Boulanger—Berlioz: A Grotesque Continuum Schumann’s Review: The Framework for a Grotesque Reading of the <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> Beyond Schumann: The <i>Fantastique</i> Today	

4. BERLIOZ IN CONTEXT:	
THE <i>GENRE FANTASTIQUE</i> BEFORE AND AFTER	241
The <i>Fantastique</i> Past and Present	
The Other Fantastic Symphonies	
The <i>Pièce fantastique</i> in Mid-Century France	
Berlioz in Retrospect or The Fate of the <i>Genre fantastique</i>	
APPENDIX	300
BIBLIOGRAPHY	320

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure 1</u>	Gargoyles from the Cathedral of St. Pol de Léon.	185
<u>Figure 2</u>	Jacques Callot, <i>The Temptation of St. Anthony</i> .	188
<u>Figure 3</u>	Jacques Callot, <i>The Temptation of St. Anthony</i> , detail.	189
<u>Figure 4</u>	Louis Boulanger, illustration for Victor Hugo's <i>La Ronde du Sabbat</i> .	205
<u>Figure 5</u>	Soubre, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , concert announcement.	251

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table 1</u>	Turbry, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , literary program.	248
<u>Table 2</u>	Programmatic and Structural Links between Berlioz and Soubre.	255
<u>Table 3</u>	Prose description of Arnal's <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> .	262
<u>Table 4</u>	Parodical symphonic program, <i>Le Corsaire</i> , 1838.	264
<u>Table 5</u>	Parodical symphonic program, <i>Le Ménéstrel</i> , 1836.	266
<u>Table 6</u>	Parodical concert program, <i>Le Ménéstrel</i> , 1837.	271
<u>Table 7</u>	Select bibliography of <i>Fantastique</i> instrumental works.	272

INTRODUCTION

Les questions sur le fantastique sont elles-mêmes du domaine de la fantaisie.

[Charles Nodier, 1830]

In France, literary scholars have long been fascinated with the fantastic. Pierres Georges Castex produced one of the first modern studies on the subject, *Le conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (1951), which sparked a wave of interest leading from Louis Vax's *La séduction de l'étrange; étude sur la littérature fantastique* and Roger Caillois' *Au coeur du fantastique* (both 1965), to Tzvetan Todorov's well-known *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (originally published as *Introduction à la littérature française*; 1970).¹ For Todorov, the fantastic was an impulse native to France and vital to the collection of the political and aesthetic impulses he calls Romanticism.² It had its roots in Jacque Cazotte's *Le diable amoureux* (1772), re-emerging in mid-century writing by Nerval, Nodier, Gautier, Sand, Baudelaire, Maupassant, and others. Even E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales, translated in the late 1820s and early 30s, were 'naturalised,' becoming more

¹ Pierres Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Corti, 1951); Louis Vax, *La séduction de l'étrange; étude sur la littérature fantastique* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1965); Roger Caillois, *Au coeur du fantastique*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1965); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated by Richard Howard (Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973); orig. pub. as *Introduction à la littérature française* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); see also Irène Bessière, *Le Récit fantastique: la poétique de l'incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974), pp. 70-74. The French were also among the first to anthologize fantastic tales; see P.G. Castex, *Anthologie du conte fantastique français* (Paris: Corti, 1963) and Louis Vax, *Les chefs d'oeuvre de la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).

² The term 'romantique' is an unavoidable though problematic one with a complicated history. French dictionaries of the early 1830s define it as both a genre and a school ("Le genre romantique"; "L'école romantique"), linking it with new trends in literature. More broadly, a "romantique" work was one that emancipated itself from "des règles de composition et de style établis par l'exemple des auteurs classiques" (*Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 1832-35). It is in this rather general sense – the sense of something new, reactionary, and daring – that Berlioz also applied the term in his "Aperçus sur la musique classique et la musique romantique" (*Le Correspondant*, 22 October, 1830). However, he would have been aware of the term's political, aesthetic, and even moral implications, which are too complex to be fleshed out fully here. For more on the etymology of the term and its evolution through the 1820s and 30s in France, see Gabriel Lanyi, "Debates on the Definition of Romanticism in Literary France (1820-30), *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (Jan-Mar 1980), 141-50.

influential in France than they had been in either Germany or England. The centrality of the fantastic both to nineteenth-century France and to Romanticism at large has been underscored by more recent studies, many of which respond directly to Todorov; these include Amy J. Ransom's *The feminine as fantastic in the conte fantastique* (1995), Lucy Armit's *Theorising the Fantastic* (1996), and David Sandner's panoramic *The Fantastic: A Critical Reader* (2004).³

The authors of these works ask a similar set of questions: is the fantastic a genre? a mode? what are its models? its narrative strategies? its semiotic markers? Answers have proven elusive, highlighting the slipperiness and complexity of fantasy – its tendency to hover in a liminal space between forms and genres, between reason and unreason, between disciplines themselves. Rather than a containable literary medium, the fantastic has begun to emerge as a broad aesthetic impulse which – particularly in France – permeated early Romanticism on all levels, inflecting politics, science, and the arts at large. Among visual historians, this idea is hardly new – the link between fantastic literature and painting, between the distorted figures populating *contes fantastiques* and the imagery of Goya, Boulanger, Delacroix, and Callot has long been recognized. Nor have social historians been slow to acknowledge the importance of the fantastic. Tobin Siebers and José Monleón, extending the arguments made in 1830 by Charles Nodier, have figured fantasy as central not only to early-nineteenth-century politics, but to post-Revolutionary science and psychology. Even

³ Amy J. Ransom, *The Feminine as Fantastic in the Conte fantastique: Visions of the Other* (New York: P. Lang, 1995); Lucy Armit, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London and New York: Arnold, 1996); David Sandner, ed. *The Fantastic: A Critical Reader* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004). Also notable are Rosemary Jackson's psychoanalytic study: *Fantasy, the Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981); Christine Brooke-Rose's semiotic approach to the fantastic: *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Neil Cornwell's engagement with postmodern theory and the fantastic: *The Literary Fantastic from Gothic to Postmodern* (New York, London, etc.: Harvester, 1990).

more recently, Marina Warner has drawn philosophy, science, and early cinema into the discussion, beginning to trace links across disciplines and time periods.⁴

Conspicuously absent from existing literature on the French fantastic is a consideration of music. We have developed a strong sense of the literary, visual, and even political fantastic but we have a much murkier notion of its manifestation in *sound*.⁵ This is surprising, given the centrality of music to E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales, as well as to those of Sand, Nerval, Gautier, and a host of lesser known French *fantastiquers*. It is even more surprising given the importance, both historically and today, of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* – a clear marker of music's entwinement with fantastic culture as early as 1830, at the height of the so-called Hoffmann craze in Paris. Of course, much has been written on form, musical narrative, and biographical content in the *Symphonie fantastique* – too much, according to many scholars, who argue that the work has been both overemphasized and degraded, reduced to the level of a sensational program note. Popular fixation on the *Fantastique* has, paradoxically, generated scholarly resistance to musico-fantastic exploration and, perhaps more importantly, obscured the broader culture of the musical fantastic that produced and embedded Berlioz's first symphony. Jacques Barzun set an unfortunate trend when he declared all contextual and especially *fantastic* interrogation of the *Fantastique* irrelevant:

⁴ Tobin Siebers, *The romantic fantastic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); José B. Monleón, *A specter is haunting Europe: a sociohistorical approach to the fantastic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Marina Warner, *Fantastic metamorphoses, other worlds: ways of telling the self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵ The implications of a musical fantastic in Germany have been more fully explored. Scholarship in this area has tended to focus on the genre of the Fantasy; see, for instance, Annette Richards *The Free Fantasy and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); also, recent articles on the nineteenth-century Fantasy by Nicholas Marston, John Daverio and Jonathan Dunsby: "Im Legendenton: Schumann's 'unsung voice'," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 16/3 (Spring 1993), 227-241; "Schumann's *Im Legendenton* and Friedrich Schlegel's Arabeske," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 11/2 (Fall, 1987), 150-63; "Adorno's image of Schubert's Wanderer fantasy multiplied by ten," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 21/1 (Summer 2005), 42-48.

If we could by magic clear our minds of cant, all we should need as an introduction to the score would consist of a musical analysis such as Schumann wrote, or more recently T.S. Wotton. But there is the “program” to dispose of, and Harriet Smithson, the opium dream, the Red Terror and the Fantastic – in short the apparent confusion of music, literature, and biography.⁶

Despite Barzun’s efforts, the literary, political, and autobiographical discourse hovering around Berlioz’s first symphony has proven difficult to eradicate, as has the fantastical language that permeated virtually every nineteenth-century review of the work from 1830 onwards. Indeed, Schumann’s 1835 essay on the *Symphonie fantastique* – Barzun’s claim notwithstanding – was a fantastic and even schizophrenic account that intensified rather than dismantling the composer’s eccentric persona. It has provided a starting point for a number of recent and controversial essays on the symphony including those by Fred Maus, Ian Bent, and Ian Biddle. But many Berlioz experts are still on the defensive, choosing to focus on ‘the music itself’ – its competence and logic – rather than on hermeneutic or contextual reading. Only slowly has the ‘fantastic’ Berlioz crept back into scholarly consciousness. Christian Berger’s analytical study *Phantastik als Konstruktion* (1983) laid important groundwork for such a renaissance. More recent work, including Laura Cosso’s *Strategie del fantastico: Berlioz e la cultura del romanticismo francese* (2002) and Andrea Hübner’s *Kreisler in Frankreich: E.T.A. Hoffmann und die französischen Romantiker* (2004) bears testimony to a growing interest in the musical fantastic, pointing out links between Berlioz’s compositional language and the narrative strategies of contemporary *contes fantastiques*.⁷ The present study makes

⁶ Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Generation*, Volume I (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), p. 153.

⁷ Laura Cosso, *Strategie del fantastico: Berlioz e la cultura del romanticismo francese* (Orso: 2002); Andrea Hübner, *Kreisler in Frankreich: E.T.A. Hoffmann und die französischen Romantiker* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004). Also notable are two monograph-length analyses of the *Symphonie fantastique*: Wolfgang Dömling, *Hector Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique* (Munich: W. Fink, 1985) and Christian Berger, *Phantastik als Konstruktion: Hector Berlioz’ "Symphonie fantastique"* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1983).

broader and more radical claims, identifying the fantastic as an impulse that underpins not only Berlioz's first symphony, but his early works in general, his notions of artistic genius, his self-construction, and his critical reception. It opens up intersections between music, science, visual art, and autobiography, tying together seemingly disparate strands of fantastic culture and offering a series of new readings of the *Symphonie fantastique*. Returning to the roots of the 'fantastic' Berlioz, it draws together the extensive body of nineteenth-century criticism that generated his other-worldly reputation, as well as tracing Berlioz's own role in the construction of the Romantic-fantastic composer. And perhaps most importantly, it identifies the *genre fantastique* as a musical idiom that stretches well beyond Berlioz's first symphony, infiltrating the works of many of his contemporaries, and evolving into an entrenched musical category much-discussed by French critics and composers.

We begin, in Chapter 1, with Berlioz's own commentary on the musical fantastic – its implications for form, syntax, and especially orchestration. Berlioz links the *genre fantastique* to both opera and literature (as do his early reviewers) and to new notions of creative fantasy that have their roots in Goethe, Jean Paul, and Hoffmann. His 'programmatic' first symphony reflected a broader trend, in German and French *contes fantastiques* of the early 1830s, to locate the fantastic in an interdisciplinary – and overtly Hoffmannesque – space hovering between word, tone, and image. From Hoffmann, too, came a template for the fantastic composer – the mad *Kapellmeister* Johannes Kreisler – who became a model not only for Berlioz but for many of his contemporaries.

Looking more closely at the figure of the fantastic artist, Chapter 2 examines its medical and psychological underpinnings. Here, we identify Berlioz's *idée fixe* as the signal of a creative disorder called monomania which, according to nineteenth-

century French psychiatrists, afflicted a great many writers and composers of the period, from Hoffmann to Balzac and George Sand. As we delve into French psychiatric theory, we also reopen old questions surrounding the relationship between life and art (self and *Doppelgänger*) in the *Fantastique*, linking Berlioz's symphonic self-fashioning with the strategies of the Romantic confession.

Chapter 3 turns to questions of sound and form in the musical fantastic, linking the distorted shapes and experimental timbres of the *Fantastique* (and surrounding works) to the aesthetics of the grotesque. Tracing connections between Berlioz and Victor Hugo, we look at ways in which the rehabilitation of ugly and monstrous impulses in French Romantic drama inflected contemporary music. We theorize the grotesque as a compositional mode fundamental to Berlioz's *Fantastique*, drawing music into discourse with visual culture and with notions of literary caricature and humor central to works by Hoffmann, Gautier, Jean-Paul Richter and other writers of fantastic tales.

Expanding outward, Chapter 4 examines the broader repertory of the *genre fantastique*, undermining long-standing notions of Berlioz as an isolated and eccentric composer. We look not only at other Fantastic Symphonies, both serious and parodical, but at the explosion of orchestral, chamber, and keyboard works bearing the "fantastique" label that appeared before and after Berlioz's first symphony. Here, the musical fantastic begins to emerge as a concrete and well-theorized musical category in France, and Berlioz as a pioneering figure in the field.

Questions about the fantastic do – as Nodier warned – lead to answers which are themselves tarred with the brush of fantasy. This dissertation is no exception; it approaches both Berlioz's *Fantastique* and the broader repertory of the musical fantastic in arabesque-like fashion, making no claim to a totalizing definition or an

exhaustive survey. Rather, its purpose is to open up a new space for exploration – to reanimate the ‘fantastic’ Berlioz and to follow wherever he leads.

CHAPTER ONE

CONFIGURING A FANTASTIC BERLIOZ

Gluck, Berlioz, and the Rhetoric of the Musical Fantastic

Among the formative musical experiences of Berlioz's youth was his discovery of Gluck, first as a child and then as a young man in Paris hearing *Iphigénie en Tauride* for the first time. He had waited for weeks – and breathlessly – for the opera to be performed and when the moment came, he was not disappointed. A letter to his sister Nanci written barely six weeks after his arrival in the capital documents his ecstatic response to the work, “A moins de m'évanouir,” he wrote “je ne pouvais pas éprouver une impression plus grande.”⁸ He described the sights and sounds of Gluck's opening storm: black clouds and flashes of lightening accompanied by ominous orchestral murmuring at the beginning of the overture. But even more gripping was the music of Act I, especially the barbaric chorus of the Scythians and, later, Oreste's Act II aria “Le calme rentre dans mon coeur,” in which Gluck seemed to conjure up the specters of Oreste's unconscious. The images on the Opéra stage struck Berlioz forcefully, but even more compelling was the orchestra, whose power and vividness made an indelible effect: “Et l'orchestre! Tout cela était dans l'orchestre. Si tu entendais comme toutes les situations sont peintes par lui...”⁹ So strong was the impact of Gluck's “somber melodies” that, even years later, Berlioz recalled sleepless nights in which they echoed through his mind, torturing but also enticing him with music that seemed beyond his powers of description:

⁸ “Short of actually fainting, I couldn't have felt stronger emotions.” *Correspondance générale de Hector Berlioz* (henceforward *CG*) (Paris: Flammarion, 1972-2003), Vol. I: 10 (13 December, 1821).

⁹ “And the orchestra!” All that was in the orchestra. If you could only have heard how it describes every situation...”. *Ibid.*

Décrire ce que j'éprouvai en la voyant représenter n'est pas en mon pouvoir; je dirai seulement que l'effet de ces sombres mélodies se continua longtemps après, et que j'en pleurai toute la nuit; je me tordais dans mon lit, chantant et sanglotant tout à la fois, comme un homme sur le point de devenir fou."¹⁰

We are tempted right away to dismiss this account as self-consciously theatrical – an example of the youthful hyperbole that colors so much of Berlioz's early writing. But where Gluck was concerned, Berlioz's rhetoric did not dim over time; on the contrary, his first encounter marked the beginning of a lifelong passion for the composer, and one that influenced both his own music and his critical writing. Much later, however, when he came back to *Iphigénie* in a series of articles for the *Gazette musicale* (November–December, 1834), he had gained greater distance and learned to control, if not suppress, his initial enthusiasm for the work: "L'influence des premières impressions est telle et mon admiration pour Gluck est encore si grande, que je crois qu'il sera prudent à moi, en analysant celui de ses ouvrages qui m'a le plus frappé, de me tenir en garde contre les souvenirs des uns et l'entraînement irréfléchi de l'autre."¹¹ Watchful of his own tendency toward exaggeration, Berlioz returned to Act 1 of *Iphigénie*, and to those passages that had struck him so forcefully in 1821. Now he could offer not only focused analyses of Gluck's orchestral language but broader observations about his musical aesthetic; he began not only to describe but to define the orchestral idiom that had once seemed ineffable.

¹⁰ "To describe what I experienced upon seeing it [the opera] on stage is not within my power; I will say only that the effect of those sombre melodies echoed long after, and that I cried the whole night; I writhed in my bed, singing and sobbing at the same time like a man on the verge of going mad." From the first of a four-part series on *Iphigénie en Tauride* by Berlioz published in the *Gazette musicale* (9 November, 16 November, 23 November, 7 December, 1834). All quotations from Berlioz's critical writing are taken from the *Critique musicale* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1996-). Throughout this dissertation, translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Quotations from French journals and from the Berlioz correspondence will be given in the original language with English translations in footnotes. Quotations from German and Italian sources will be given in English in the main text and their translators acknowledged in footnotes.

¹¹ "The influence of first impressions is so strong, and my admiration for Gluck also so intense, that I think it will be prudent for me if, in the course of analysing these works of his which have most gripped me, I guard against the memories of the former and the irrational enthusiasm of the latter." Berlioz, "Iphigénie en Tauride," (9 November, 1834).

Among Berlioz's most detailed analyses is a passage that returns to the Scythian sequence of Act I that he had singled out in his 1821 letter. This episode begins with the entry of the Scythian chorus – servants of the barbaric King Thoas. They have discovered two strangers shipwrecked on the shore and have come to demand blood in accordance with the sacred law decreeing death for all foreigners. Berlioz described their music as savage and terrible – a sound largely generated by Gluck's exotic orchestration, which mixes piccolos, drum, and cymbals. The result is a sharp, metallic timbre which, coupled with the relentlessly syllabic setting of the words themselves, produces music teetering on the edge of noise:

Ici, pour la première et dernière fois, Gluck a employé les petites flûtes, les cymbales et le tambour de basque. En voyant entrer en scène cette troupe de cannibales, aboyant une harmonie heurtée et syllabique, pendant que le bruit métallique des cymbales semble résulter du cliquetis de la forêt de haches que brandissent les Scythes et qu'on voit s'agiter dans l'air, il est difficile de ne pas éprouver un saisissement profond.¹² In the second chorus, "Il nous fallait du sang," Gluck's brutal sound is intensified.

Oddly modal harmony combined with what Berlioz described as "course and clumsy" phrasing conjured the image of "drunken butchers" intent on a kill. Though the text and vocal setting contribute to the effect, Berlioz pointed out that the orchestra alone was capable of sustaining it: "L'horreur tragique excitée à un si haut degré par les voix ne diminue point quand l'orchestre seul se fait entendre." The Scythian aesthetic continues through the ballet that follows, a piece whose pianissimo and staccato texture is still punctuated by the sound of steel on steel. Berlioz described dancers

¹² "Here, for the first and last time, Gluck used the piccolos, cymbals and basque drum. When one sees this troupe of cannibals come on stage, barking out jerky, syllabic harmony coupled with the metallic noise of the cymbals (which seems to come from the forest of hatchets brandished and waved in the air by the Scythians) it is difficult not to feel a profoundly violent shock." Berlioz, "Iphigénie en Tauride" (7 December, 1834). The quotations in this paragraph also appear in Katherine Reeve's dissertation chapter entitled "The Orchestral Fantastic" which draws together much of the evidence that I reconsider in this opening section. I am greatly indebted to Reeve's work, which has provided a starting point and sounding board for my investigation, although my conclusions about the nature of Berlioz's "fantastique" idiom differ significantly from hers. See Katherine Kolb Reeve, "The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1978).

bearing “l’aspect hideux” of cannibals who passed to and fro across the stage like phantoms. The cumulative effect of all this was “profound”; indeed, Gluck’s Scythian music was as moving in 1834 as it had been on first hearing, but now its characteristic sound was one that Berlioz placed in a specific – if controversial – musical category: “Le genre fantastique se montre là dans toute sa puissance,” he writes. “[Mais] il ne faut pas le dire trop haut: quelques admirateurs de Gluck seraient capables de nous traiter de blasphémateurs, et de regarder l’épithète maudite accolée à l’une de ses oeuvres comme une insulte grave.”¹³

The term “fantastic” was, as Berlioz recognized, a loaded one, for it resonated with the broader and overtly political debate surrounding Classic and Romantic aesthetics that had been raging in Parisian intellectual circles since the early 1820s. We will come back to this debate in a later section, but for now, suffice it to say that Berlioz – an outspoken champion of Romanticism – embraced the fantastic as a desirable mode and one with important musical implications. His references to “fantastique” sound were scattered and his use of the term itself was rather loose; indeed, Berlioz never provides us with a coherent definition of the musical fantastic, and yet he linked it with a set of musical practices to which he was clearly drawn. References to “fantastique” effects are scattered not only through his analyses of Gluck, but his discussions of Weber, Beethoven and Mozart – composers whom he held in the highest esteem.

Coming back to *Iphigénie*, we find that Berlioz applied the term “fantastic” to a second passage in the opera’s first Act – King Thoas’s aria “De noirs presentiments,” which he called “le terrible et fantastique morceau de Thoas.”¹⁴ Here,

¹³ “The *genre fantastique* appears there in all its power, [but] one must not say so too loudly; some of Gluck’s admirers might style us blasphemers, and regard the application of such an accursed term to one of his works as a grave insult.” Berlioz, “Iphigénie en Tauride” (7 December, 1834).

¹⁴ *Journal de débats* (24 January, 1841).

music evoked not only the barbaric, but the nightmarish, sounding the depths of the King's unconscious to materialize the phantasms of his mind. Oppressed by "black presentiments" and guilty terrors, Thoas gives way to infernal imaginings; he hears "sinister voices" condemning him to endless torment – threats that are echoed in the orchestra, whose inexorable repetitions of a "rythme sinistre" hold Thoas in an iron grip while the basses rumble below. A fiery crevice seems to open at his feet – an "abîme effroyable" – out of which comes a sudden burst of sound, an "éclat soudain de tous les instruments," which Berlioz hailed as "un effet incroyable."¹⁵ As in the Scythian scene, the fantastic emerges here as an instrumental idiom – one that relies on effects of orchestration, rhythmic innovation, and novel timbres. The same techniques, according to Berlioz, were borrowed by later composers to generate demonic sound – he hailed the aria as "un modèle d'expression grandiose et terrible," claiming that it provided the template for one of Mozart's most famously supernatural scenes: the Statue sequence in *Don Giovanni*.¹⁶

Berlioz's 1834 articles also linked *Iphigénie* with a series of supernatural passages from Gluck's earlier operas, including the "acte des enfers" in *Orphée*, the "merveilleuses scènes de dénouement" in *Iphigénie en Aulide*, and – not surprisingly – the oracle scene in *Alceste*, in which a statue in the temple of Apollo prophecies the death of Admetus.¹⁷ Berlioz came back to a discussion of the "terrible" and "fantastique" in *Alceste* more than once over the following several years. In an 1835 article for the *Journal des débats*, for instance, he paired the oracle scene with an aria from Act II of the Italian version of the opera (Alceste's "Chi mi parla?"), writing: "Quoi de plus terrible que la scène de l'oracle, de plus fantastique que ce récitatif mesuré (*ove fugo...ove m'ascondo*) qu'on a malheureusement supprimée dans l'*Alceste*

¹⁵ Berlioz, "Iphigénie en Tauride" (7 December, 1834).

¹⁶ Ibid. This connection has since been widely acknowledged.

¹⁷ Berlioz, "Iphigénie en Tauride" (16 November, 1834).

française.”¹⁸ Like the oracle scene, Alceste’s aria derived its *frisson* in part from its supernatural narrative, but Berlioz located its “fantastique” aesthetic largely in the music itself, which – more powerfully than any visual backdrop – evoked Gluck’s terrible landscape. The agitated rhythm of muted strings, combined with an eerie “rattling” in the winds produces what he called an “étrange et lugubre” effect, giving voice to the specters awaiting Alceste in the forest. Timbre is vital to the “fantastique” effect of the passage, but here, Berlioz also emphasized form – or formal ambiguity – as an important factor. “Chi parla?,” he noted, was neither an air nor a recitative but a piece that occupied a middle ground between the two – it hovered oddly between forms, just as Alceste hovered in an uncanny space between the world of the living and that of the dead. From a later essay in *A Travers Chants*:

Ce n’est pas un air, puisque pas une phrase formulée ne s’y trouve; ce n’est pas un récitatif, puisque le rythme en est impérieux et entraînant. Ce ne sont que des exclamations désordonnées en apparence....[Alceste] court effarée ça et là, bouleversée de terreur, pendant que l’orchestre, agité d’une façon étrange, fait entendre son rythme précipité des instruments à cordes, avec sourdines, qu’entre coupe une sorte de rôle des instruments à vent dans le grave, où l’on croit reconnaître la voix des pâles habitants du séjour ténébreux.¹⁹

In contrast with the “dark fantastic” of *Iphigénie* and *Alceste*, Berlioz identified what he called the “graceful fantastic” in the Overture to Weber’s *Oberon*: “*Oberon* est le pendant du *Freischütz*,” he wrote. “L’un appartient au fantastique sombre, violent, diabolique; l’autre est du domaine des féeries souriantes, gracieuses,

¹⁸ “What could be more terrible than the oracle scene, more fantastic than the measured recitative which has, unfortunately, been excised in the French version of *Alceste*.” In a review of the third Conservatoire concert, *Journal des débats* (20 February, 1835).

¹⁹ “It is not an air, since one finds there hardly a single fully-formed phrase; it is not a recitative, since the rhythm is pressing and continuous. These seem like nothing but disordered exclamations... [Alceste] races madly here and there, convulsed by terror, while the orchestra, agitated in a strange fashion, gives voice to a hurried rhythm in the muted strings, interrupted by a kind of rattling in the low register of the winds, in which one seems to recognize the voices of the pale inhabitants of the underworld.” Hector Berlioz, *A Travers Chants*, ed. Léon Guichard (Paris, Gründ, 1971), p. 207.

enchanteresses.”²⁰ In an 1834 article for *Le Rénovateur* he described the ethereal music of *Oberon*: “la vaporeuse harmonie, les chants si mollement rêveurs, l’instrumentation toute fantastique.” These are the sounds that open onto “un monde idéal des fées et des esprits, et nous jeter au milieu de ces délicieuses créations des poètes du Nord, où tout est chaleur, parfums, harmonie et lumière.”²¹ Later, in a similar passage from the *Memoirs*, Berlioz identified in *Oberon* “the fantastic in a cool, serene, unassertive form” which derived its chief attraction from its harmony.²² But also important were its rhythmic and melodic ambiguities: melodies begin and end unexpectedly, often grouped in asymmetrical units that produced, for Berlioz, a fluid, unpremeditated feel: “Weber admet la liberté absolue des formes rythmiques; jamais personne autant que lui ne s’est affranchi de la tyrannie de ce qu’on appelle la *carrure*.”²³

The “féérique” fantastic, Berlioz emphasized, was neither an easily accessible idiom nor one that relied on shocking effect, but a subtle and difficult language more palatable to the German than to the French intellect. Rather than “noisy” (as in his examples of the “terrible” fantastic), its harmonies were “vaporous” – airy, hard to pin down. But fantastic music at both ends of Berlioz’s spectrum had a tendency toward “wavering” or “wayward” form and capricious musical unfolding. Fantastic sound, like the fantastic imagery it evoked, hovered between the readable and the unreadable, between the familiar and the fabulous: “Le surnaturel dans *Obéron*,” according to

²⁰ “*Oberon* is the counterpart of *Der Freischütz*. The one belongs to the dark fantastic – violent, demonic; the other is all smiling fairyland, graceful and bewitching.” *A Travers Chants*, p. 259.

²¹ “...an ideal world of fairies and spirits, and casts us amongst those delicious creations of the Northern poets, where all is warmth, perfume, harmony, and light.” In a review of the third Conservatoire concert, *Le Rénovateur* (2 March, 1834). Later, Berlioz will put Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* music in the same category.

²² This and the following quotation are taken from the *Memoirs*, translated by David Cairns (London: Gollancz, 1969), pp. 88-89.

²³ “Weber embraces absolute rhythmic liberty; never had anyone before him freed himself from the tyranny of what is called “la carrure” [the four-square phrasing that Berlioz associated most clearly with Rossini’s music].” *A Travers Chants*, p. 259.

Berlioz, “se trouve si habilement combiné avec le monde réel, qu’on ne sait précisément où l’un et l’autre commencent et finissent et que la passion et le sentiment s’y expriment dans un langage et avec des accents qu’il semble qu’on n’ait jamais entendus auparavant.”²⁴ Both “real” and “unreal,” the fantastic existed in a liminal space that blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction, and estranged familiar passions – and familiar harmonies – just enough to render them new and powerful.²⁵

For Berlioz, then, the fantastic was an experimental mode, and one that applied not only to visual imagery and literary narrative but also to music. As we draw together his isolated references to “fantastique” sound, they begin to coalesce into a set of identifiable – if still rather indistinct – musical markers related to orchestration and timbre as well as to harmony, phraseology, and form. But in Berlioz’s writings, the fantastic is not simply a new approach to composition, it is a marker of creative “fantasy” itself – a signal of genius. He hailed *Iphigénie* – a locus of the *genre fantastique* – as Gluck’s masterpiece and Gluck himself as a model for the Romantic composer, a man “doué par la nature de toutes les qualités qui constituent le *poète*, l’homme de génie.”²⁶ Not simply a producer of “fantastique” sound, Gluck was a musician whose creative voice itself emerged out of a fantastic landscape: “Le génie de Gluck,” Berlioz wrote, “aime à errer aux portes des enfers, sur les rochers, les plages arides.”²⁷

²⁴ “In Oberon, the supernatural is so well blended with the real world that it is hard to tell exactly where one ends and the other begins, while passion and sentiment are expressed in an idiom and accents that one feels have never been heard before.” *A Travers Chants*, p. 259.

²⁵ The notion of the fantastic as a defamiliarizing mode – one which distances or estranges our sense of the real rather than supplanting it – has been much discussed in scholarship on literary fantasy. For a thorough treatment of the idea, see Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in narrative and structure, especially of the fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 51ff.

²⁶ In the second of Berlioz’s two-part sketch of Gluck published in the *Gazette musicale* (1 and 8 June, 1834).

²⁷ “The genius of Gluck loves to stray towards the portals of the inferno, across rocks and arid plains.” Berlioz, “Aperçus sur la musique classique et la musique romantique,” *Le Correspondant* (22 October, 1830).

Not surprisingly, Berlioz described his own imaginary world in similar terms. In a well-known letter to his father (5 June, 1830), he wrote of an internal “monde fantastique” – a visionary space peopled by the figures of Classical legend and the phantoms of his own unconscious. Berlioz traced the origins of his fantastic experience back to childhood, recalling a hallucinatory episode in which Biblical figures and characters from Virgil’s *Aeneid* seemed to come to life, conjured by echoing fragments of the Vespers chant. Drawn irresistibly into the unregulated world of his own imagination, he felt the first stirrings of the painful – even terrifying – creative energy that was to fuel him for the remainder of his career:

I can recall those miserable days I spent gripped by emotion with no subject or object. I can see myself now, On Sundays especially, during the period when you were explaining Virgil’s *Aeneid* to me, in the congregation at Vespers. The influence of the calm, monotonous chanting, together with some of the words like ‘In exitu Israel’ which conjured up the past, was so great that I was seized by an affliction that drove me almost to despair. My imagination surrounded me with all my Trojan and Latin heroes...[which], all blended and mixed with ideas from the Bible and memories of Egypt and Moses, brought me to such a pitch of indefinable suffering that I should have liked to be able to weep a hundred times as bitterly. Well, this fantastic world [*ce monde fantastique*] is still part of me, and has grown by the addition of all the new impressions that I experience as my life goes on. I have found only one way of completely satisfying this immense appetite for emotion, and that is music.²⁸

Here, Berlioz identified the fantastic not simply as an external aesthetic or a medium for musical innovation but as an integral facet of his being – one that “comes from the way I am made.” Though it tormented him, it also inspired him, opening a window onto his innermost self and sparking musical response. Berlioz figured himself, like Gluck, wandering into the fantastic realm of nightmare – teetering on the edge of an emotional abyss – in order to reach the seat of his artistic power.

²⁸ CG, I: 155 (19 February, 1830); Translation by David Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist* (California: California University Press, 1999), pp. 357-58.

Hardly a straightforward aesthetic, the fantastic begins to emerge as a psychological and even physiological impulse for Berlioz as well as a set of musico-structural attributes. Of course, the many “fantastic” associations he traces do not all originate with him, but resonate back through the etymology of the word itself, drawing on subtleties that had evolved over the course of several centuries. As far back as 1606, we find “fantastique” in Nicot’s *Trésor de la langue française*, where it is traced to its Greek root *phantasticus* and, by extension, to *phantasia*, meaning literally, “a making visible.” The fantastic, as Berlioz’s examples from Gluck confirm, was a mode intensely concerned with the visual – with materializing the imaginary and placing it under the eyes of the listener. Repeatedly, we hear him describe Gluck’s “speaking” orchestra, which converted musical language into visual “description” via an uncanny species of generic transmutation. This notion of the fantastic as a species of poetic “image-production” goes back to Longinus (in Boileau’s 1674 translation), who defined *phantasia* as “the situation in which enthusiasm and emotion make the speaker *see* what he is saying and bring it *visually* before his audience.”²⁹ The fantastic, according to these descriptions, was not an alien realm but an interior space linked to the workings of the fantasy and to the phantoms conjured by an inspired imagination. The 1762 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* underscored the connections between these terms: “Comme on a dit autrefois *fantaisie* pour *imagination*, on a aussi appelé *fantôme*, les images qui s’y forment.”

Jumping back to 1694, we find “fantastique” given as “visionnaire, chimérique.” It stimulated the production not only of illusory but of fabulous images;

²⁹ From the treatise *Peri Hupsous* (On the Sublime) attributed to Longinus, a Greek teacher of rhetoric thought to have lived between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. The treatise came to light in 1554 when it was published by Robortello in Basle; it achieved broad circulation only once it had been translated by Boileau in the later seventeenth century. The English translation cited here is taken from *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations*, ed. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 477.

the fantastic was a mode “plein des chimères” – full of monstrous creatures, which (like the chimera itself) combined the head of one animal, the tail of a second, and the body of a third. It is hardly surprising, then, to find Berlioz linking unidentifiable bodies or formal uncertainty with the fantastic. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “fantastique” (or the related “fantasque”) was described as something “bizarre” and “extraordinaire dans son genre.”³⁰ Nor was Berlioz’s link between inspiration and the fantastic a new idea; from 1694 onwards, “l’homme fantasque” was subject to “caprices” – to sudden gushes “d’esprit et d’imagination” – as well as to “inégalité d’humeur.”

When Berlioz attached the rubric “fantastique” to his own first symphony in 1830, it carried all of these implications – it was a word saturated with meaning, and one of whose richness he was surely aware. His *Symphonie fantastique* highlights the crucial slippage between fantasy and fantastique at the root of the word itself – it invites us into the “monde fantastique” so intimately bound up with his own creative process, while showcasing many of the formal and orchestrational innovations that Berlioz had traced to Gluck and Weber. But it also gestures toward new literary, autobiographical, and even medical meanings of the fantastic – those that had evolved in the early nineteenth century as part of the broader culture of French Romanticism. The title of Berlioz’s symphony – and above all, the term “fantastique” – can hardly be dismissed as a “tag” as Jacques Barzun suggests, or a “patent overextension” that applied only vaguely either to Berlioz or to the music itself.³¹ Nor does it seem enough simply to link Berlioz’s use of “fantastique” either with the musical “fantasia”

³⁰ See the first, fourth, and fifth editions of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1694, 1762, and 1798 respectively).

³¹ Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), I, pp. 162; 166.

as does Julian Rushton, or with a diffuse notion of imaginative “fantasy” as does Hugh Macdonald.³²

Even Katherine Reeve’s pioneering investigation of Berlioz’s “orchestral fantastic” opens with a surprisingly narrow definition. According to Reeve, “Berlioz was completely matter-of-fact, in his writings, about what he considered to represent the ‘fantastic’ genre in music.” She argues that his definition is “something quite simple”: the fantastic denotes the representation of the supernatural in music and, in this sense, is “identical with the tradition of the ‘merveilleux’ in opera.”³³ Although appealing in its straightforwardness, this claim is also problematically reductive, smoothing out complexities in Berlioz’s own commentary and excluding some of his key musical examples. The “fantastic” Scythian sequence from *Iphigénie*, for instance, is by no means overtly supernatural but instead, draws on the barbaric and exotic. Nor does Thoas’s aria draw on either fabulous or other-worldly experience, but opens up a nightmarish psychological space. It describes not an actual but an imagined encounter with the demonic; the sinister voices that haunt Thoas emerge from “the depths of [his own] heart” – from an interior “monde fantastique” such as Berlioz ascribed to

³² See Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz* (London: Dent: 1982), p. 91 and Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 258. By the time Berlioz was composing his *Symphonie fantastique*, the keyboard fantasia had evolved away from its improvisatory and “fantastic” origins, toward the theme-and-variations model showcased in works by Liszt and Thalberg. However, the generic and harmonic innovations of eighteenth-century fantasies resonate interestingly with Berlioz’s own fantastic music and with the history of the term “fantastique” itself. Two studies that make these connections clear are Annette Richards, *The Free Fantastic and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Peter Schleuning, *Die Fantasie* (Köln: Verlag, 1971).

³³ Reeve, “The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz,” pp. 234; 247. Reeve derives this definition, indirectly, from Berlioz’s review of Weber’s *Euryanthe* (*Journal des Débats*, 1857), in which he complains about overuse of the term “fantastique” in general, as well as its blanket application to all of Weber’s work. He claims that, since there is nothing supernatural in Weber’s opera, it should not be stamped with the “fantastique” label. But Berlioz’s commentary here is clearly reactionary – meant as a corrective to the Parisian fashion which, by the 1850s, had begun to label everything “fantastique.” It does not map onto his earlier descriptions either of the musical fantastic in Gluck and Weber, or of his own “monde fantastique.” Indeed, the 1857 review was written by an older Berlioz – a man far removed from the period of the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Huit Scènes de Faust*. We cannot, I suggest, assume that he felt the same way about fantastic culture and aesthetics throughout his life; fantastic fashion waxed and waned, and Berlioz’s opinion of it surely did the same.

himself. These examples hardly map onto the old operatic “marvelous,” which was linked with a securely “other” realm of make-believe and mythological magic. Indeed, the terms “fantastic” and “marvelous” were by no means synonymous in Romantic discourse but often theorized as separate domains. An article in *La Revue française* (January 1830), for instance, described the marvelous as an imaginary and even escapist realm, while the fantastic engaged with politics, with “the world of ideas,” and with philosophical “ideals.”³⁴ Dictionary entries of the period bear out this differentiation, as does twentieth-century fantastic scholarship, which has dwelt at some length on the historical distinction between the two terms.³⁵ Perhaps more importantly, Berlioz configured the musical fantastic primarily as an instrumental rather than a theatrical medium. His enlarged orchestra was essentially an opera orchestra, but it had been emancipated from the pit, its effects no longer wedded to stage scenery or action. The fantastic was an intensely pictorial mode, but its images were not concretized; they hovered on the screen of the imagination, projected by the mind’s eye.

Despite her detailed documentation of Berlioz’s “fantastique” effects, Reeve ends (like Barzun) by dismissing the fantastic as a meaningful mode. She calls it “a gold-mine of justifications” for Berlioz’s orchestral experiments – a “tacked-on” term rather than a properly musical medium. In large part, she suggests, Berlioz was simply attaching a literary buzzword to his symphony, “responding to the current vogue” generated by Hoffmann’s *contes fantastiques*.³⁶ Part of the trouble with this conclusion is that it collapses the fantastic with Hoffmann, suggesting that it had not existed as a meaningful aesthetic in France – or at least, that it had not influenced

³⁴ *La Revue française* XIII (January, 1830).

³⁵ See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), pp. 9ff; Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, pp. 33-35; Neil Cornwall, *The Literary Fantastic From Gothic to Postmodernism* (New York, etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 35-41.

³⁶ Reeve, “The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz,” pp. 231-2; p. 246.

Berlioz – before Hoffmann’s rise to popularity in the late 1820s. But we can hardly seal off Hoffmann’s work from the broader impulse toward the Gothic, macabre, and supernatural that gave rise, well before 1830, to Goya’s *Caprichos* and Boulanger’s *Ronde du sabbat*, as well as to the barrage of *romans noirs* that inundated the Parisian market in the first decades of the century.

Turning back to Berlioz, we find that references to the “terrible,” “monstrous,” and “demonic” weave through his early letters, permeating his musical sensibility considerably before Hoffmann became an influential figure. As early as 1825, he reported delightedly to Albert du Boys that his Mass produced “un effet d’enfer,” especially the moment of the “jugement suprême,” whose shocking noise, sinister vibrations, and “grincements de dents” made a superb impact.³⁷ Later, he told Humbert Ferrand that “le feu de l’enfer” itself has dictated his *Francs-juges* overture, a work full of “stupefaction and terror,” and one that Berlioz summed up as “monstrous, colossal, horrible!”³⁸ Nor was the term “fantastique” unknown in musical circles before the rise of the literary *conte fantastique*; Berlioz’s teacher Le Sueur, for instance, had included a *Sinfonie fantastique* in Act 3 of his opera *Ossian, ou les bardes* (performed at the Opéra in 1804). And, more tellingly, Berlioz himself was described as “fantastique” before his own *Symphonie fantastique*: in May of 1829, in a review of the “Huits Scènes de Faust,” François Fétis – editor of the influential *Revue musicale* – dubbed Berlioz “bizarre,” “savage” and “tormented,” a composer whose imagination was “empreinte d’une couleur fantastique et bizarre.”³⁹ Several months later, and now more pointedly, Fétis used the term again. Reviewing a concert that included the *Waverley* overture, the *Concert des sylphs* and the *Franc-juges* overture,

³⁷ CG I: 48 (20 July, 1825).

³⁸ CG I: 93 (6 June, 1828)

³⁹ François Fétis, “Huits Scènes de Faust, Musique de M. Berlioz,” *Revue musicale* Sér. 1/3A/vol. 5 (May 1829). Reeve makes note of this review in “The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz,” p. 233.

Fétis wrote by way of summation: “Vraiment, le diable au corps est on ne peut mieux dit à propos d’un compositeur comme M. Berlioz! Quelle musique fantastique! quels accens de l’autre monde!”⁴⁰

Having said all this, we must not underestimate the impact of Hoffmann on Parisian culture and on Berlioz himself, whose music – Reeve’s claim notwithstanding – responded keenly to the literary fantastic. Recent work by Laura Cosso explores the Hoffmannesque elements of Berlioz’s musical language, bringing both contemporary and nineteenth-century fantastic theory – writing by Todorov and Jackson as well as Gautier and Baudelaire – to bear on the construction of the *Symphonie fantastique* and surrounding works.⁴¹ Her study opens up new points of connection between fantastic musical and literary narratology, linking Berlioz’s local and large-scale constructions as well as his experimental timbral effects to the uncanny landscape of the *conte fantastique*. Interestingly, though, Cosso always assumes that fantastic literature *preceded* fantastic sound; the influences she traces are one-way, figuring music always as responsive rather than initiative. I will argue, in this chapter, that the relationship between text and sound in fantastic culture was more complex – that the two evolved together, especially in the works of Hoffmann, each shaping and defining the other. Moreover, I will suggest that the Romantic composer himself, and especially Berlioz, emerged simultaneously as both a literary and a musical figure – a doppelgänger who hovered between the concert stage and the pages of a *conte fantastique*.

Beyond even the literary, we shall find that Berlioz’s notions of the musical fantastic (and of his own fantastic self) were intimately linked to visual, philosophical, and scientific culture – not only to Hoffmann but to Dante, Goya, Goethe, Étienne

⁴⁰ Fétis, “Concert donné par M. Hector Berlioz, dans la grande salle de l’Ecole royale de Musique le 1^{er} novembre 1829,” *Revue musicale* Sér. 1/2A/vol. 3 (November, 1829).

⁴¹ Laura Cosso, *Strategie del fantastico: Berlioz e la cultura del romanticismo francese* (Alessandria: Orso, 2002). Cosso devotes individual chapters to *Roméo et Juliette*, *La Damnation de Faust*, and *Les Nuits D’Eté*, but strangely, not to the *Symphonie fantastique*.

Esquirol, and Jacques Callot. The rhetoric of the fantastic did, as Reeve notes, become pervasive, infiltrating the arts at large and dominating fashionable conversation, but this did not render it insubstantial or “meaningless.”⁴² Rather, it became *too meaningful*, encrusted with cultural significance and laboring under an increasingly dense network of associations. We must take a broader view both of fantastic culture and of Berlioz’s place within it, in order to develop a sense of how music contributed to the overall discourse. Rather than focusing exclusively on Berlioz’s own sketchy commentary on the subject, or even on his compositions themselves, we must begin by directing our attention to the larger rhetoric of the musical fantastic. Berlioz’s contemporaries had much to say on the matter and, indeed, were responsible not only for documenting but – to large degree – shaping what they called Berlioz’s “fantastic style.” Their commentary points us in new and fruitful directions, drawing us into the centre of the cultural debate to which Berlioz himself alluded, and demonstrating clearly the ways in which his own life and music reflected, refracted, and constructed fantastic ideologies. Far from providing us with a monolithic “definition” of the musical fantastic, the writings of Berlioz’s critics render it increasingly entangled. But they do begin to identify vital strands of the aesthetic – its philosophical, political, psychiatric, and social implications as well as its better-known literary connections. These facets of the whole cannot easily be distinguished one from the other, nor is it possible to examine all of them here. But in the following sections, I sketch out – sometimes in necessarily scanty detail – some of the most prominent threads of Berlioz’s fantastic reception. Those which seem most important (or at least too complex to be dealt with properly in an opening chapter) I return to in later portions of this dissertation, which look more closely at some of the meanings and legacy of what nineteenth-century music critics called “l’école fantastique.”

⁴² Reeve, “The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz,” p. 232.

Echoes of the Political and Philosophical Fantastic

In Fétis's 1829 review of the *Huit Scènes de Faust*, we find that – considerably before Berlioz's first symphony – his relationship with the musical and psychological fantastic had begun to solidify. Fétis linked Berlioz's "bizarre et fantastique" sensibility with German aesthetics, and his musical experimentation with a particularly Goethian sensibility: "Faust était le sujet le plus favorable au développement de ses idées originales."⁴³ Here, as in a later review of the same year, Fétis praised the "instruments magiques" and "rêves délicieux" of the *Concert des sylphes*, as well as the "sensation étrange" of the *Roi de Thulé*. The "fantastique" flavor of Berlioz's work was compelling – proof of a "bizarre originality" – but also dangerous, an irrational aesthetic foreign to French taste and reason: "Si M. Berlioz...calme un peu cette fièvre de sauvagerie dont il est tourmenté, nous n'hésitons pas à lui prédire les plus grands succès."⁴⁴

In his November review of Berlioz's first major concert (featuring the *Waverly* overture, *Francs-juges* Overture, and *Jugement-dernière*, among other repertory), Fétis reiterated his "fantastique" assessment of Berlioz's character and music, now providing a sharper sketch of the composer's temperament. Berlioz was endowed with an "imagination passionné" – a genius that sprang not from study but from audacity, recklessness, and fierce independence:

M. Berlioz n'est point de ces gens que la nature a façonnés pour l'étude; c'est plutôt un de ces esprits tout de feu qui s'indignent des entraves, si légères qu'elles soient, et qui ne connaissent d'autres règles que celles de leur volonté, ni d'autres guides que leurs penchans. Son talent se révèle par l'audace, qui tantôt sert de guide au génie, et tantôt fourvoie la témérité dans des routes dangereuses.... on ne peut nier qu'il ait cette

⁴³ Fétis, "Huits Scènes de Faust, Musique de M. Berlioz." The other composer who was "fantastique" during this period in Fétis's writing was Beethoven.

⁴⁴ "If M. Berlioz...calms a little that savage fire that torments him, we do not hesitate to predict the greatest success for him." Ibid.

qualité sans laquelle Voltaire assure qu'on ne fait rien dans les arts: Le diable au corps.⁴⁵

If the devil was in Berlioz's person, it was also in his music, which embraced "des formes singulières, tourmentées; des harmonies sans résolutions et sans cadences." Unfettered by rules or regulations, his work emerged out of a perilous yet irresistible fire that threatened to consume both the composer and his audience: "C'est la fièvre qui le domine; mais cette fièvre n'est point celle d'un homme ordinaire."⁴⁶

The demonic overtones of Fétis's criticism, and its references to Germanic and particularly Faustian aesthetics, carried through early Berlioz reception at large and permeated the composer's own youthful self-construction. Joseph d'Ortigue, for instance – Berlioz's friend and first biographer – could claim in an 1833 review of the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Le Retour à la vie* that, "Par le génie, Berlioz est d'origine allemande."⁴⁷ Other critics made similar observations, often tracing Berlioz's "terrible" or "infernal" impulses to Germanic roots; an 1834 report in *L'Artiste* was typical when it embraced the *Symphonie fantastique* as Berlioz's most representative work, claiming that "ce poème tient de l'inspiration de Byron, d'Hoffmann et du *Faust* de Goethe."⁴⁸ Much later, Gautier would reiterate this set of connections in his *Histoire du romantisme*: Berlioz's artistic predilections, he insisted, "le poussaient vers l'Allemagne" – toward Germany – where he was most vigorously applauded. Berlioz himself was a figure marked by "bizarreries," "obscurités" and "exagérations." He was

⁴⁵ "M. Berlioz is by no means among those whom nature has predisposed toward study; rather, he is one of those fiery spirits who strains against fetters, no matter how light, and who knows no rules other than his own will, no guide apart from his own inclination. His talent revels in audacity, which sometimes serves as a guide for genius, and sometimes leads boldness along dangerous paths...one cannot deny that he has that quality without which Voltaire assures us that one can do nothing in the arts: *Le diable au corps*." Fétis, "Concert donné par M. Hector Berlioz, dans la grande salle de l'Ecole royale de Musique le 1er novembre 1829."

⁴⁶ "It is fire that dominates him; but this fire is not that of an ordinary man." Ibid.

⁴⁷ Joseph d'Ortigue, "Deuxième concert de M. Hector Berlioz," *Le Quotidienne* (4 January, 1833).

⁴⁸ Anon. "Concert de M. Hector Berlioz," *L'Artiste* (November, 1834). The program of this concert included *Sara la Baigneuse*, the *Roi Lear* Overture, and the *Symphonie fantastique*.

an artist animated by “une énergie que rien ne ferait ployer” and a Goethian character whom Gautier compared to Oréas, the mythological mountainbuilder of *Faust*.⁴⁹

In his own letters and memoirs, Berlioz too, embraced musical and literary Germany as an artistic mainspring. Weber and Beethoven were the source of “new and unfamiliar forms” while Goethe, alongside Shakespeare, provided models of Romantic genius.⁵⁰ Writing to his family and friends over the course of 1828-30, Berlioz waxed rhapsodic over the works of what he termed the “great, free geniuses” – figures who had clearly become templates for his own persona. In a note to Ferrand (September 1828), for instance, he writes:

Nous lirons Hamlet et Faust ensemble. Shakespeare et Goethe! les muets confidents de mes tourments, les explicateurs de ma vie. Venez, oh! venez! personne ici ne comprend cette rage de génie. Le soleil les aveugle. On ne trouve cela que bizarre.⁵¹

Hamlet and *Faust* – works famous in France for their supernatural content – inspired Berlioz’s own “incalculable energy” and motivated his first serious attempts at composition. Together with the experimental language of Beethoven and Weber, they pointed the way toward a new configuration of both art and artist – a template “bizarre” to French tastes and in direct opposition to the regulations of the Academy. For Berlioz, their allure was irresistible: “J’ai connu certains génies musicaux, j’ai ri à la lueur de leurs éclairs et je grince des dents seulement de souvenir! Oh! sublimes! exterminiez-moi! appelez-moi sur vos nuages dorés, que je sois délivré!”⁵²

⁴⁹ Théophile Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme suivie de Notices Romantiques et d’une Etude sur la Poésie Française 1830-1868* (Paris: Charpentier, 1874), pp. 269; 262.

⁵⁰ In a letter to Nanci Berlioz, *CG* I: 100 (1 November, 1828); Translation by Roger Nichols in *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, ed. Hugh Macdonald (New York: Norton, 1995), pp. 49-51.

⁵¹ “We’ll read *Hamlet* and *Faust* together. Shakespeare and Goethe! The silent confidants of my torments, the elucidators of my life. ...No one here understands this frenzy of genius. The sun blinds them. They just find it bizarre.” *CG* I: 155 (19 February, 1830) to his father; *CG* I: 155 (16 Sep, 1828) to Ferrand.

⁵² “I’ve come to know several musical geniuses,” he writes to Hiller, “I’ve laughed in their glittering light and even to remember the fact makes me grind my teeth! O sublime beings! Destroy me! Summon

The attraction that Berlioz felt toward Goethe, Jean-Paul and their literary compatriots, and the broader links between Germany, genius, and fantastic aesthetics that emerged both in his own self-writing and his early reception owed much to Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, which introduced German "Romanticism" to France for the first time in the 1810s. Enormously influential, Staël's work ran through twenty-five French editions between 1813 and 1883, laying the groundwork for both French criticism and imitation of German literature. In *De l'Allemagne*, Staël began to forge connections among philosophical, aesthetic, and nationalistic strands of Romantic thought and – above all – to consider new notions of genius and inspiration that had evolved in Germany in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Schlegel and Kant were, for Staël, the philosophical foundations of Romanticism, but Goethe was the greatest of its literary exponents – a genius whose works embraced the gamut of current thought from metaphysics to politics and theology. His writing was imbued with "un genre d'imagination dont les Italiens, les Anglais ni les Français ne peuvent réclamer aucune part," and which cast aside the strictures of taste and even reason to venture into the realm of the fantastic:

J'ai dit que Goethe possédoit à lui seul les traits principaux du génie allemand, on les trouve tous en lui à un degré éminent: une grande profondeur d'idées, la grâce qui naît de l'imagination, grâce plus originale que celle formée par l'esprit de société; enfin une sensibilité quelquefois fantastique, mais par cela même plus faite pour intéresser des lecteurs qui cherchent dans les livres de quoi varier leur destinée monotone, et veulent que la poésie leur tienne lieu d'événements véritables.⁵³

me to your gilded clouds and deliver me!" CG I: 156 (3 March, 1830) to Hiller; Translated by Nichols, *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, pp. 66-67.

⁵³ "I have said that Goethe possessed in himself alone all the principal features of German genius; they are all indeed found in him to an eminent degree: a great depth of ideas, that grace which springs from imagination – a grace far more original than that which is formed by the spirit of society: in short, a sensibility sometimes bordering on the fantastic, but for that very reason the more calculated to interest readers, who seek in books something that may give variety to their monotonous existence, and in poetry, impressions which may supply the want of real events." Anne Louise Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne: Nouvelle Édition publiée d'après les manuscrits et les éditions originales avec des variantes, une introduction, des notices et des notes*, ed. Jean Page and Simone Balayé, Vol. II (Paris: Hachette, 1959), pp. 77; 83-84.

Mingling the real with the unreal, the forms of the external world with those of private imagination, Goethe's work brought together with greatest clarity the qualities of radical individualism and introspection that Staël associated with the German character. Her sketch of Goethe provided an early and important model for Berlioz as well as for his reviewers, who saw in the composer many of those attributes identified by Staël as markers of Romantic genius. Keywords from her description of Goethe – in particular, her emphasis on “audace,” “individualité,” and “extravagance” – featured overtly in Fétis's 1829 profiles of Berlioz, which emphasized both the strangeness and markedly Germanic flavor of his talent.⁵⁴ Here too, we find early examples of the other-worldly and Faustian rhetoric that aligned Berlioz with Staël's Goethian model of genius and – inevitably – with her broader commentary on the fantastic.

For Staël, *Faust* was Goethe's finest and most representative work, and one whose fusion of the familiar with the fabulous linked it with the broader category of fantastic writing that included tales by both Wieland and Bürger. The works of these men ventured into an intermediate space between imagination and reality that facilitated, not escapism, but revelation of the human heart. “La sensibilité ne s'allie guère en général avec le merveilleux,” Staël wrote, “mais Wieland a l'art de réunir ces fictions fantastiques avec des sentiments vrais, d'une manière qui n'appartient qu'à lui.”⁵⁵ In Bürger, as in certain of Goethe's poems, the fantastic had a darker flavor, jolting the mind with the sensation of horror and opening onto the “fixité solennelle” [solemn fixity] associated with “l'empire des ténèbres et de la mort” [the empire of

⁵⁴ For more on the importance of these keywords in *De l'Allemagne*, see John Clairborne Isbel, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne, 1810-1813* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 48ff.

⁵⁵ “Sensibility is not in general much connected with the marvellous but Wieland has the art of uniting fantastic fictions with true sentiments in a manner peculiar to himself.” Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, Vol II, p. 146.

shadows and death]. Terror itself provided what Staël called “la source inépuisable des effets poétiques” in Germany, where “les revenants et les sorciers plaisent au peuple comme aux hommes éclairés.” Placing “l’ombra à côté de la réalité,” superstition alongside religion, German poets tapped into a dark but rich spectrum of effects which had been little exploited in France.⁵⁶

Indeed, for Staël, the fantastic was an idiom foreign to French sensibility, a near-irrational mode that ranged outside the realms of decorum. Its very freedoms made it a perilous medium available only to the most “extravagant” genius:

Il n’y a guère d’exemples dans les pièces français de ces plaisanteries fondées sur le merveilleux, les prodiges les sorcières, les métamorphoses, etc.: c’est jouer avec la nature, comme dans la comédie de mœurs on joue avec les hommes. Mais il faut, pour se plaire à ce comique, n’y point appliquer le raisonnement, et regarder les plaisirs de l’imagination comme un jeu libre et sans but. Néanmoins ce jeu n’en est pas pour cela plus facile, car les barrières sont souvent des appuis; et quand on se livre en littérature à des inventions sans bornes, il n’y a que l’excès et l’emportement même du talent qui puisse leur donner quelque mérite; l’union du bizarre et du médiocre ne seroit pas tolérable.⁵⁷

Staël saw in Goethe’s *Faust* precisely the “excess of genius” that rendered the fantastic justifiable: it “[could] not be exceeded in boldness of conception” nor could it be judged according to established aesthetic criteria. Goethe’s drama flung off the strictures of genre, form, and taste itself, adopting instead the mysterious language of the visionary:

⁵⁶ “the inexhaustible source of poetic effects”; “ghosts and sorcerers please both common people and educated men.” Ibid., pp. 193; 201.

⁵⁷ “The French language has scarcely any specimens of these pleasantries founded on the marvelous, on prodigies, witchcrafts, transformations, etc.: this is to make sport with nature, as in comedies we make sport with men. But to derive pleasure from this sort of comedy, reason must be set aside, and the pleasures of the imagination must be considered a licensed game, without any object. Yet this game is not the more easy on that account, for restrictions are often supports; and when, in works of literature, men give scope to boundless invention, nothing but the excess, the very extravagance of genius, can confer any merit on these productions; the union of wildness with mediocrity would be intolerable.” Ibid., Vol. III, p. 83. Stael may be overstating her case here; after all, the tradition of caricature and burlesque had a long history in France, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

Goethe ne s'est astreint dans cet ouvrage à aucun genre; ce n'est ni une tragédie, ni un roman. L'auteur a voulu abjurer dans cette composition toute manière sobre de penser et d'écrire (...) une telle composition doit être jugée comme un rêve; et si le bon goût veilloit toujours à la porte d'ivoire des songes pour les obliger à prendre la forme convenue, rarement ils frapperoient l'imagination.⁵⁸

At its climax, *Faust* drew its readers into the darkest depths of the fantastic – the inferno itself – where language hovered on the edge of dissolution, held together only by the force of Goethe's imagination. The festival of the Sabbath represented truly the “Saturnales de l'esprit” according to Staël – a maelstrom in which “les images et les idées se précipitent, se confondent, et semblent retomber dans les abîmes dont la raison les a fait sortir.”⁵⁹

In her discussion of *Faust*'s most hellish scenes, and of Mephistopheles himself, however, even Staël's enthusiasm falters and we sense the boundaries of her own tolerance for the “fantastic” genius: “Quel mauvais goût,” she writes, “de faire paraître le diable dans une pièce! [...] On pourrait mettre de côté dans la pièce de *Faust*, l'existence surnaturelle de Méphistophélès et le considérer seulement comme un caractère de haute méchanceté.”⁶⁰ Staël's notion that Mephistopheles might be converted from the Devil into a more conventional human villain reflected her revisionary attitude toward the play at large. Despite her enthusiasm for Goethe and for *Faust* itself, her own self-proclaimed “French” sensibility – her aversion to

⁵⁸ “Goethe has submitted himself to rules of no description whatever in this composition; it is neither tragedy nor romance. ...such a composition ought to be judged like a dream; and if good taste were always watching at the ivory gate to oblige our visions to take regulated forms, they would seldom strike the imagination...” Ibid., Vol. III, p. 124-26.

⁵⁹ “...[the] festival of the Sabbath represents truly the saturnalia of genius. Images and ideas rush headlong, confound themselves, and seem to fall back into the abysses from which reason has called them.” Ibid., Vol. III, p. 112.

⁶⁰ “What bad taste to include the Devil in a play! ... One may put aside, in *Faust*, the supernatural existence of Mephistopheles and consider him simply as a character of the greatest evil.” From a manuscript version of *De l'Allemagne*; this line did not appear in the published edition, but its sentiment was carried over, underscoring Staël's revisionary attitude toward *Faust*, as I argue in the pages to follow. For more on early sketches and variants in *De l'Allemagne*, see Isbel, *Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne*, pp. 70ff.

extravagance, moral ambiguity, and formal uncertainty – colored both her commentary on and her translation of the work. Indeed, although Staël devoted more space to *Faust* than to any other drama (forty-four pages in the first edition), she also altered it drastically, engaging in a calculated program of excision, addition, and suppression. She smoothed over Goethe's fragmented narrative (its leaps from one place and event to another), relocated scenes, revised the original language of the play, and recast its principal characters so that they embodied clearcut dramatic "types." In short – as Isbel points out in his analysis of Staël – she nudged the play "in the direction of French neoclassical tragedy" to produce what she called "un genre intermédiaire entre la nature de convention des poètes français et les défauts de goût des écrivains du nord."⁶¹

It was precisely Staël's simultaneous enthusiasm for and disapproval of Goethe's writing – her attraction to its vigor but anxiety surrounding its vulgarity – that was so clearly reiterated in early Berlioz reception, which alternated between admiration and rejection, between fascination and condemnation. When Fétis counseled Berlioz to temper his "hardiesse" and reign in his extravagance, he was attempting – like Staël – to mediate the alterity of the fantastic, to render more "French" what was understood as a fundamentally German impulse. He was arguing for a 'middle way' – one which might bring together "l'audace qui fait sortir de la route commune, au tact du bon goût."⁶² But this kind of concession – either to academic taste or practical marketability – was out of the question for Berlioz, who polemicized famously against Fétis's own "corrections" to Beethoven and against similar alterations to Weber and Mozart. For Berlioz, there could be no compromises,

⁶¹ "An intermediate genre between the conventional style of French poets and the faulty inclinations of Northern poets." Isbel, *Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne*, p. 72.

⁶² Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, Vol. III, p. 227.

no domestication of the fantastic idiom, which was itself essentially an idiom of refusal – a medium in which form, genre, and language itself were divested of their restrictive power, and all artificial regulation incinerated by the fire of the “great, free genius.” Unfortunately, even for French critics sympathetic to Romantic ideas, the discourse of the fantastic often proved too radical; not just Fétis but Blanchard and others found themselves unable – for aesthetic, political, or even moral reasons – to accept the fantastic in its untempered form. They ended by warning against its potential descent into chaos, many echoing Staël’s own final assessment of *Faust*:

La pièce de Faust...n’est certes pas un bon modèle. Soit qu’elle puisse être considérée comme l’oeuvre du délire de l’esprit ou de la satiété de la raison, il est à désirer que de telles productions ne se renouvellent pas; mais quand un génie tel que celui de Goethe s’affranchit de toutes les entraves, la foule de ses pensées est si grande, que de toutes parts elles dépassent et renversent les bornes de l’art.”⁶³

The extremism of the fantastic was linked, for Staël, to its interiority – its amplification of the introspective impulse associated more broadly with German poetry. “Romantic” art, she argued, was less concerned with external happenings than with the inner realm of mind and spirit – with “cette réflexion inquiète qui nous dévore souvent comme le vautour de Prométhée.”⁶⁴ She talked at some length about what Isbel calls the “mouvement de repli” – the movement of withdrawal – that lured German artists indoors, insulated them from the influence of the world, and encouraged the absorption of “la passion réfléchissante.” The romantic temperament, she wrote, “tend toujours plus en général à se replier sur lui-même, et cherche la

⁶³ “*Faust* ... is certainly not a good model. Whether it be considered an offspring of the delirium of the mind, or of the satiety of reason, it is to be wished that such productions not be multiplied; but when such a genius as that of Goethe sets itself free from all restrictions, the crowd of thoughts is so great, that on every side they break through and trample down the barriers of art.” Staël, *De l’Allemagne*, Vol. III, p. 127.

⁶⁴ “...that uneasy reflection which, like the vulture of Prometheus, often internally devours us.” Ibid., Vol. II, p. 132.

religion, l'amour et la pensée au plus intime de son être." At its most dangerous, the "withdrawal" that Staël described involved not only reflection and contemplation but retreat into the experience of dream and hallucination. Here, on the fringes of the conscious mind, in a realm of semi-delirium, stretched Goethe's fantastic realm, which was neither a mythological nor foreign place but an internal realm haunted by "le fantôme le plus puissant et le plus terrible de tous" – the phantom of our own lives.⁶⁵

Staël's association between Goethe's "delirious" absorption and his fantastic mode was carried forward clearly in Berlioz's own self-writing, where – as we've seen – he located the "monde fantastique" as an internal, dream-like space, and the *genre fantastique* itself as a mode that externalized the private experiences of reverie. The same echoes of Staël ran through d'Ortigue, whose early critical and biographical writing on Berlioz was among the most influential. In a review of the *Symphonie fantastique* published in *Le Quotidienne* in 1833, he linked Berlioz's idiom with an aesthetic of inwardness whose origins lay in Germany and emerged first in the music of Beethoven. Beethoven, he claimed, conceived of music as an "infinite" and "profound" language – a medium without limitation – emanating from the depths of the soul and the mysterious realm of meditation: "Rêveries, désespoir, consolations, méditations, prières, histoire et analyse du coeur, tel fut le domaine de la musique entre les mains de ce puissant génie."⁶⁶ Berlioz – the rightful heir to Beethoven, according to d'Ortigue – intensified the interiority of the Romantic impulse, moving increasingly further from the "real" world toward the realm of dream and memory. His music communicated not actual but imagined experience, not "bonheur" but the "rêve de bonheur" – the world transfigured by fantasy and even delirium. In his hands, the

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

⁶⁶ "Reveries, despair, consolations, meditations, prayers, history and analysis of the heart: this is the domain of music in the hands of this powerful genius." d'Ortigue, "Deuxième Concert de M. Berlioz," *Le Quotidienne* (4 January, 1833).

symphony became “un tableau pour l’imagination” – a dreamscape that drew listeners into the realm of private fantasy.

D’Ortigue described the experience of irresistible absorption sparked by the *Symphonie fantastique*, whose recurring melody seemed to hold him prisoner, stifling physical sensation and thought itself as it drew him inward toward the “most profound” core of his being:

Cette mélodie, je l’ai retenue, ou plutôt elle s’est emparée de moi, elle me poursuit sans cesse, elle m’absorbe à tel point qu’elle endort mes sens et refole mes pensées, mon esprit, tout mon être, dans la partie la plus profonde de moi-même.⁶⁷

If it became compulsive, the act of solitary self-contemplation could result in illness, according to Staël, who noted that the German temperament was particularly susceptible to “l’irritabilité malade des nerfs” and to “maladies de l’imagination.” The fantastic artist, we can extrapolate, was at greatest risk of developing such a pathology – of being drawn permanently into his own dream world, disconnected from the external, rational realm. And indeed, Berlioz himself – as we shall see – was increasingly linked with nervous illness, as was fantastic literature more broadly; *contes fantastiques* by Gautier, Nodier, Sand, and especially Balzac were permeated by descriptions of mental and physical disorders, drawing their language from emerging French psychiatric theory.

The new medical discourse that sprang up in both France and Germany in the early decades of the nineteenth century evolved alongside (and in many senses overlapped with) an increasingly sophisticated metaphysical language – both, as Staël observed, media through which to articulate the new experiences of self that arose

⁶⁷ “I embraced this melody, or rather it possessed me; it pursued me ceaselessly, it absorbed me to the point where it numbed my senses and drew my thoughts, my spirit, my whole being, into the most profound part of myself.” Ibid.

from Romantic introspection. Emotional inwardness was tied inextricably to intellectual absorption as artists and theorists struggled not only to understand but to communicate the workings of the heart and the vagaries of dreams. According to Staël, Germany's "école nouvelle" linked "deux penchants qui semblaient s'exclure, la métaphysique et la poésie, la méthode scientifique et l'enthousiasme."⁶⁸ Many of Berlioz's early critics recognized this apparent contradiction in his work, their reviews vacillating between charges of irrationalism and claims that his music was "plus cherché" – that it withdrew into the realm of dream while also indulging in arcane intellectualism. Not surprisingly, it was Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* – and fantastic works more generally – that brought into sharpest relief the tension between madness and method characterizing Staëlian Romanticism. Reviews in *Le Figaro*, for instance, remarked on the intense subjectivity of Berlioz's first symphony – it communicated "avec des instrumens...une histoire comme celle de René, comme celle de Werther" while also relying on the "science" of calculated "effects."⁶⁹ And, coming back to d'Ortigue's early criticism, we find that Berlioz's apparently untrammelled flights of musical imagination were grounded in an intellectual framework – the fantastic, he suggested, was a philosophical as well as a sensual medium:

Nous ne sommes plus le seul à affirmer et à reconnaître qu'un grand développement a eu lieu dans l'art musical en France, et que cette révolution data précisément de la

⁶⁸ "...two tendencies that seem mutually exclusive: metaphysics and poetry, scientific method and enthusiasm." Staël IV 380/1; Quoted by Isabel, *Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne*, p. 42.

⁶⁹ The narratives referenced here are, of course, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Châteaubriand's *René*. "Episode de la vie d'un artiste," *Le Figaro* (4 December, 1830); see also the review of the *Symphonie fantastique* in *Le Temps* (27 November, 1834), which takes note of both the "capricieuses fantaisies" and the "science des effets" that shape Berlioz's work. Observations surrounding the relationship between fantasy and science in his music also predate Berlioz's first symphony; they appear, for instance, in the review of his first major concert in *Le Figaro* (3 November, 1829).

symphonie fantastique: il y dans cette oeuvre une partie philosophique à laquelle la partie purement musicale est subordonnée...⁷⁰

The “partie philosophique” of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* was linked, for d’Ortigue, not only to personal contemplation but to political ideology. He figured the fantastic as both a private and a public mode – not simply a retreat into irrationalism or dream but a new species of spiritual and emotional autonomy with revolutionary implications. Politics were, of course, uppermost in the minds of Parisians in 1830, the year of the July Revolution as well as the year of the *Symphonie fantastique*’s debut. When d’Ortigue hailed Berlioz’s first symphony as a turning point for art, he mapped the political struggle of the period (the liberal overthrow of an increasingly repressive Charles X) onto a parallel aesthetic clash (the resistance of the young Romantics against the conservative stronghold of the French Academy). Berlioz himself associated political with musical freedoms and was, during his early Parisian years, an impassioned republican. To his great dismay, he was confined to the *Institut* during the heat of the July Revolution writing his fifth *Prix de Rome* cantata. He emerged eager to aid the anti-royalist effort, but could find only “a pair of long cavalry pistols without any ammunition,” and regretted bitterly that he was not among those “brave people who bought our liberty with their blood.”⁷¹ But, as d’Ortigue suggested, Berlioz’s first symphony was itself a landmark act of rebellion – a work that drew music into the artistic revolution that had begun in the literary sphere in the late 1820s with Hugo’s Preface to *Cromwell* and *Hernani*. Indeed, the entanglement of Romantic aesthetics and politics in France had begun long before d’Ortigue published his

⁷⁰ “We are no longer alone in asserting and recognizing that a great development has taken place in musical art in France, and that this revolution dates precisely from the *Symphonie fantastique*: in this work there is a philosophical part to which the purely musical part is subordinated.” d’Ortigue, “Grand Concert au profit des inondés de Saint-Etienne.—Premier Concert de M. Hector Berlioz,” *Le Quotidienne* (12 November, 1834)

⁷¹ CG I: 170 (2 August, 1830); in a letter to his father. Translated by Nichols in *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, p. 69.

Berlioz criticism. Staël had theorized the social underpinnings of the “mouvement de repli” in 1813, arguing that the “uneasy reflection” characterizing Romanticism was a response, in part, to political unrest – it could hardly have emerged, she wrote, “au milieu des rapports clairs et prononcés qui existoient dans l’état civil et social des anciens.”⁷²

If Romantic inwardness was provoked in part by a sense of social disorder, the fantastic responded to (and generated) something more extreme – not simply unrest but, as d’Ortigue suggested, revolution. It went beyond introspection to the edges of madness, challenging with greatest force both the constraints of classical-rational ideologies and the institutions that upheld them. José Monleón, in his study of the social roots of fantasy, links the rise of fantastic literature and art in the late eighteenth century with the storming of the Bastille. The breaching of the city’s most famous prison, he argues, was far from just a political victory for the revolutionaries – it was also a moment of crucial psychological change. Not only did it return madmen and criminals to the streets of “enlightened” Paris, it released them into the social and literary psyche, eradicating the elaborate systems of confinement that had held the irrational at bay.⁷³ Political radicalism, in other words, was tied to aesthetic radicalism: it opened the door that readmitted monsters and demons into the everyday world, creating the rupture in intellectual order that gave rise to fantastic expression.

Not only did *contes fantastiques* emerge out of turmoil, they perpetuated it; Jules Janin, alongside other French literary critics, noted the artistic “revolution” sparked by E.T.A. Hoffmann’s tales, which shaped the writings of virtually all the

⁷² “... in the midst of the clear and pronounced relationships that existed in the civil and social state of the ancients.” Staël, *De l’Allemagne*, Vol, II, p. 132.

⁷³ José Monleón, *A Spectre is Haunting Europe: a sociohistorical approach to the fantastic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), see Chapter 2.

young Romantics, from Sand to Gautier.⁷⁴ Music critics understood the fantastic in similar terms – as an extremist mode that generated the most outrageous and illegitimate works of the “new” school. In his *Nouveau dictionnaire de musique illustré* (1855), Frédéric Soullié linked “musique fantastique” with radical Romanticism [“romantisme outré”], citing Berlioz’s works as examples. He described the fantastic as an aesthetic of rupture – an overturning of established rules and a tendency toward formal dissolution. It was this notion of the fantastic that colored the writing of many of Berlioz’s early reviewers, who heard in his music a reflection of social disease and political turmoil and, in some cases, the sound of revolution itself.

An 1836 report on the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold* in *Le Ménestrel* – one that summed up ideas from a number of earlier articles in the same journal – noted that “M. Berlioz a un penchant pour les situations extrêmes, pour les sentiments grandioses et violens.” The brutal and dissonant sounds contained in his early symphonies – “les tempêtes, les ouragans, le bruit de la mer en furie et le fracas du tonnerre” – echoed the strains of his own heart, but also of the convulsed world around him: “M. Berlioz est le véritable enfant de notre époque,” according to the critic, “mais il ressemble trop à sa mère.” Drawn to the most chaotic scenes, he took his inspiration – especially in the *Fantastique* – from “shadows,” “thunder” and “tumult.” The result was music devoid of light or melody, which mirrored the darkest potential of Berlioz’s own generation: “Nous nous y reconnaissons trop, et nous reculons effrayés, pour ne pas nous voir comme nous sommes.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See the entry under “Fantastique” in Jules Janin, *Le Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* (Paris: 1836).

⁷⁵ “We recognize ourselves too clearly, and we recoil terrified, in order to avoid seeing ourselves as we are.” Anon. “M. Berlioz,” *Le Ménestrel* (7 February, 1836).

Even more politically charged was an essay by Raymond de Saint-Félix, published in 1838 in *L'Artiste*.⁷⁶ St.-Félix opened by linking the new movements in poetry, literature, and the visual arts with social change. They were the products of an unstable era, he argued, in which the authority of monarchs had been dismantled, and art “descend[ed] to the people.” No longer slaves to royal whim or convention, poets turned to their own lives for inspiration, faithfully representing the “morals and ideas” of the modern world: “Il est dit chaque jour,” wrote St.-Félix, “que les poètes ne sont que les échos de leur siècle; que tout ce qui s’agite et crie autour d’eux doit être reproduit fidèlement dans leurs écrits, et que leurs ouvrages ne peuvent avoir du retentissement que tout autant qu’ils représentent fidèlement les mœurs et les idées de leur époque.”⁷⁷ Here, St.-Félix reproduced the ‘definition’ of Romanticism that had, by the mid-1830s, become standard – one that had been championed by Stendahl and later elaborated by Hugo. He summed up the broadly populist and liberal politics associated with the new aesthetic school, whose proponents (both artists and critics) had adopted a carefully moderate tone.⁷⁸

It was precisely this moderation that was lacking, according to St.-Félix, in modern *musical* works, which seemed to him less palatable and understandable: “En musique,” he wrote, “il semble plus difficile d’analyser ces révolutions.” Berlioz, of course, was the leading figure among young composers, and one whose tone was far from temperate. His music set a dangerous example, going beyond cautious experimentation toward exaggeration, beyond Romantic idealism into the realm of

⁷⁶ Raymond de St.-Félix, “Esquisses Musicales de la musique au dix-neuvième siècle. Concert Liszt et Berlioz,” *L'Artiste* (Sér. 1/vol. 12/liv. 29), pp. 294-95.

⁷⁷ “It is said every day, that poets are only the echoes of their age; that everything which shakes and cries about them must be faithfully reproduced in their writing, and that their works must reverberate with all around them in order to faithfully represent the habits and ideas of their time.” Ibid.

⁷⁸ For a detailed account of the politics that underpinned early French Romanticism, and the evolving definition of the term “Romantic” itself, see Gabriel Lanyi, “Debates on the Definition of Romanticism in Literary France (1820-30),” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (Jan-Mar 1980), 141-50.

hallucination. Marked by “idées les plus fantasques, les plus originales,” his works embraced precisely the aesthetic of hyperbole from which moderate Romantics had distanced themselves. St.-Félix noted with distaste (and some bewilderment) their chaotic effects:

Où trouver la cause de cette orgie d'instrumens à cuivre? d'où nous viennent ce désordre d'idées et ces chants éternels qui hurlent comme des bacchantes? C'est toujours du bruit, du cuivre, de la sonorité; un tonnerre continuel de grosse caisse, cymbales, ophicleides, timbales, etc. (...) Ecoutons, en effet, l'ouverture des *Francs-Juges*, de M. Berlioz; on y retrouve tout ce que l'imagination la plus effrénée peut enfanter de désordre et de bruit...⁷⁹

The roots of Berlioz's noisy idiom lay, in part, St.-Félix speculated, in the collapse of moral and social order that marked the end of the eighteenth century – in the din of revolutionary canons and the roar of the mob. Not only were his works unbearably loud, but their structure and syntax were disordered, even mutinous, transformed by a new and powerful subjectivity that rejected all external rule, recognizing the creative self as the only authority. Rather than reflecting the populism of the moderate Romantics, St.-Félix suggested, Berlioz's “fantastic” mode emerged out of the radical individualism that gave rise to the revolution itself. It was predicated on a transfer of aesthetic power from the aristocracy to the individual – from the Academy to the artist.

Berlioz turned not only inward toward the anti-social space of fantasy, but also backward. His work reflected a resurgence of old fears and superstitions whose

⁷⁹ “What is the cause of this orgy of brass instruments? from whence come these disordered ideas and these eternal songs that howl like the bacchantes? There is constant noise, of the brass, of sound; a continual thunder of the bass drum, cymbals, ophicleides, kettledrums, etc. (...) Listen, for instance, to the overture of the *Francs-Juges*, by M. Berlioz; one discovers there all that the most deranged imagination could beget of disorder and of noise.” St.-Félix, “Esquisses Musicales de la musique au dix-neuvième siècle.”

influence on musical works St.-Félix traced back to Gluck's *Orfeo*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Of Gluck and Weber, he wrote:

Dans son Orphée, Gluck nous avait peint par la seule force des chants les cris des démons. Weber, en plaçant son enfer sur les montagnes d'Allemagne que l'imagination avait peuplées d'êtres fantastiques, et en puisant les sombres harmonies dans les superstitions germaniques, s'est rapproché des idées de son époque, et leur a dû sa grande vogue.⁸⁰

The same era that witnessed the turmoil of the revolution developed an attraction to demonic narratives and soundscapes. Earthly disorder opened the door to irrationalism, engendering what St.-Félix calls an "imagination effrénée" – a lawless fantasy divorced from order and reason.

St.-Félix's historicization of the fantastic echoed the ideas of Charles Nodier, whose landmark essay "Du Fantastique en littérature" (1830) constituted the first sustained defense of fantasy, and one that identified it not simply as a literary mode but a broader political, aesthetic, and social impulse.⁸¹ Although St.-Félix took a decidedly negative view of the musical fantastic, he, like Nodier, understood it as the logical outgrowth of earlier aesthetic movements, endowing it with a sense of teleology and even inevitability. What St.-Félix described in terms of decline, however, Nodier understood as progress; he identified the fantastic as the culminating stage in the evolution of human literature – the third in a series of stepping-stones that led from the "material" poetry of primitive man, to the "spiritual" musings of the

⁸⁰ "In his *Orphée*, Gluck has portrayed for us via powerful melodies alone the cries of demons. Weber, by placing his inferno in the mountains of Germany, which the imagination has populated with fantastic beings, and by conjuring up the somber harmonies of German superstition, has drawn together the ideas of his time and endowed them with great popularity." Ibid.

⁸¹ Nodier's essay first appeared in the *Revue de Paris* on 28 November, 1830 and became an important point of reference in later fantastic theory. The page references I give here are taken from the following edition of the collected works: *Oeuvres de Charles Nodier: Romans, Contes et Nouvelles*, Vol. V (Genève: Slatkine, 1968); reprinted from the Paris edition of 1832-37.

ancients, and finally the “monde fantastique” of the modern artist.⁸² The fantastic opened up what Nodier called an “intermediate world” between the spiritual and the material – a space of unfettered imagination linking the human with the divine. Drawing on Staël, he argued that Germany had special access to this fantastic realm – that its moral and intellectual landscape encouraged a “ferveur d’imagination.” But for Nodier, the creative individuality of German artists had as much to do with politics as it did with a “penchant universel à l’idéalisme.” Imaginative freedom, he claimed, was tied inextricably to social liberty:

...plus indépendante des conventions routinières et du despotisme gourmé d’une oligarchie de prétendus savants, elle [la liberté] a le bonheur de se livrer à ses sentiments naturels sans craindre qu’ils soient contrôlés par cette douane impérieuse de la pensée humaine qui ne reçoit les idées qu’au poids et au sceau des pédants.⁸³

The absence of political and intellectual freedom in France, particularly under the rigidly classicist regime of Louis XIII, had stifled exploration of the fantastic, according to Nodier, who insisted that, “Ce n’est par sur le sol académique et classique...que cette littérature, qui ne vit que d’imagination et de liberté, pouvoit s’acclimater avec succès.”⁸⁴ Even in modern times, he argued, fantastic works were still decried “par les arbitres suprêmes du goût littéraire.” But the revolution itself had marked the beginning of a vital change, sparking a period of political rejuvenation in France which, in turn, allowed for a creative rebirth (or reflowering, to borrow

⁸² Nodier, “Du Fantastique en Littérature,” pp. 70-72. Nodier’s notion of a three-stage poetic evolution culminating in the “age of the fantastic” may have responded, in part, to Hugo’s Preface to *Cromwell*, which laid out a similarly tripartite teleology, culminating in the “age of the grotesque.” The links between Nodier’s and Hugo’s essays (between the fantastic and the grotesque) were more than rhetorical, as I shall argue in Chapter 3.

⁸³ “...more independant of routine conventions and the rigid despotism of an oligarchy of false scholars, it has the pleasure of giving itself up to natural sentiments without fearing the censure of that imperious police officer of human thought who sanctions only ideas bearing the stamp and seal of pedants.” Ibid., p. 104.

⁸⁴ “Not under the sun of academicism and classicism...could this literature, which requires imagination and liberty to survive, establish itself with success.” Ibid., p. 95.

Nodier's metaphor) that facilitated the rise of the fantastic. "Le fantastique," he writes, "demande à la vérité une virginité de l'imagination et de croyances qui manque aux littératures secondaires, et qui ne se reproduit chez elle qu'à suite de ces révolutions dont le passage renouvelle tout."⁸⁵ For Nodier, the fantastic not only emerged out of revolution but became its voice – the "expression inévitable des périodes extrême de la vie politique des nations." It readmitted the supernatural, the terrible, and the irrational into modern life, forcing open the portals of the "intermediate world" and reuniting reason with unreason, light with darkness. It released what Nodier called man's "innate" capacity for the marvelous – the "instrument essentiel de sa vie imaginative" – which shielded him against the "misères inséparables de sa vie sociale." The French demand for liberty he argued, was equally a demand for the fantastic.⁸⁶

The tie between politics and aesthetics that underpinned Nodier's essay proved influential, flavoring both literary and, as we've seen, musical reception of fantastic works. It explains, at least in part, the discomfort that Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* evoked amongst conservative reviewers, who began to identify his fantastic idiom not only as "foreign" but as subversive – part of a radical aesthetic tide which could not be stemmed. Of course, Nodier could already point to a corpus of fantastic fictional works, both German and increasingly French, which bore testimony to the rise of a literary "fantastique." But critics like St-Félix had greater difficulty outlining a history

⁸⁵ "The fantastic requires, in truth, a virginity of imagination and belief that is lacking from second-rate literature, and cannot exist except during the course of revolutions – periods of transition when everything is renewed." Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 78-79. Nodier's notion that the fantastic emerged as a "shield" against social misery resonates with Sade's much earlier claim that Gothic novels functioned as vehicles for the disclosure of revolutionary horror – social safety valves. In his *Idées sur le roman* (1800), Sade writes of the "roman noir": "This genre was the inevitable product of the revolutionary shocks with which the whole of Europe resounded. For those who were acquainted with all the ills that are brought upon men by the wicked, the romantic novel was becoming somewhat difficult to write, and merely monotonous to read: there was nobody left who had not experienced more misfortunes in four or five years than could be depicted in a century by literature's most famous novelists: it was necessary to call upon hell for aid in order to arouse interest, and to find in the land of fantasies what was common knowledge from historical observation of man in this iron age."

for the musical fantastic and even greater trouble assessing Berlioz's place within it. St.-Félix argued that Berlioz was the unworthy inheritor of the eighteenth-century fantastic – a composer whose music had drifted from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the arresting to the incomprehensible. On the other hand, d'Ortigue, as we've seen, hailed the *Symphonie fantastique* as a key moment of arrival and a marker of precisely the revolutionary change that Nodier described. Berlioz himself, of course, linked his own work with the tradition of Gluck, Mozart, and Weber (as well as Beethoven and Spontini), embracing not only the composers that St.-Félix had singled out, but many of the same works. He, at least, could trace his *Symphonie fantastique* confidently back through a musical pedigree, and one very much bound up with the “genre fantastique.” More obviously, he described a creative “monde fantastique” that came close to Nodier's notion of the “intermediate realm” – an inner space of hallucinations and visions that blurred the material with the spiritual, approaching “la région moyenne du fantastique.”⁸⁷ Not only did Berlioz's self-description resonate easily with Nodier's configuration of the fantastic poet, but he was linked, in wider reception, with many of the figures that Nodier cited as harbingers of the “third age” of literature: Shakespeare, Goethe, and especially Dante. We have already explored Berlioz's Goethian connections, and shall return to his obsession with Shakespeare in Chapter 2. In the following section, we turn to Dante, and to the connections between Berlioz and the aesthetics of the fantastic sublime.

Dante, Salvator Rosa, and the Fantastic Sublime

For Nodier, Dante was the “le premier génie” of the fantastic – a poet who invoked, not the fairy realm of the “fantastique poétique” but the dark and terrible world of the

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

“fantastique religieux.”⁸⁸ His *Inferno* – the first part of the *Divine Comedy* – conjured a “terrible fantasmagorie” whose power had never been rivaled; for Nodier, it superseded all possible infernos, embracing “all the aspects of life,” “thought,” and “spirit” with untrammelled imagination:

Dans son architecture colossale, il contient tous les enfers, et il est propre à recevoir pendant les siècles éternels toutes les générations des méchants. (...) Sa grandeur est dans sa liberté sans frein, dans le droit conquis de faire jouer incessamment sur le miroir à mille facettes de l’imagination tous les aspects de la vie, tous les reflets de la pensée, tous les rayons de l’âme.⁸⁹

It was this species of dark fantastic with which Berlioz was most often and most vigorously associated (despite his attraction to Weber’s fairy-like *Oberon* and his own well-known *Queen Mab* scherzo). From the outset of his career, rumors of the diabolical hovered around both Berlioz and his works. As early as 1830, in one of the few reports on the *Symphonie fantastique*’s premiere, a critic in *Le Temps* summed up Berlioz as follows:

M. Berlioz’s talent is preeminently dark and fantastic; he seems to aim at ferocity. His ideas are always in some way charged with anger, and he only really excels in painting violent emotions, lacerations of the soul and convulsions of nature.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Nodier’s distinction between the “fantastique poétique” and “fantastique religieux” may well have influenced Berlioz’s similar distinction between the “dark” and “graceful” fantastic (see p. 7 of this chapter). Dante’s status as a master of the fantastic was reinforced by later theorists and lexicographers, including Pierre Larousse, whose *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX siècle* (1866-76) listed him among the primary exponents of the “genre fantastique.”

⁸⁹ “In its colossal architecture, it contains all possible infernos and it is fitting to receive, throughout eternity, all the generations of evil-doers. (...) Its grandeur is in its unrestrained liberty, in the hard-won right to set in permanent motion in the multi-faceted mirror of the imagination all the aspects of life, all the reflections of thought, all the emanations of the spirit.” Op. cit., p. 88.

⁹⁰ *Le Temps* (26 December, 1830). I have been unable to locate this review in the original. It is given in English translation in Michael Rose, *Berlioz Remembered* (London: Faber, 2001), pp. 40-42.

This review set the tone for the following decade, during which Berlioz's link to the infernal fantastic solidified, due in part to the sound and imagery of his own music, and in part to increasingly sensational reports in the press. By 1834, his *Symphonie fantastique* had become the work for which he was best known, and one that was considered representative of his idiom at large. *Le Figaro* summed up popular opinion when it claimed that the final movement – the Witches' Sabbath – was the one in which Berlioz's true inspiration – his “diabolical” muse – revealed itself most clearly:

La masse funèbre a été applaudie à deux reprises et redemandée. C'est que toutes les inspirations de l'artiste deviennent saisissables, et que chacun peut suivre avec l'oreille les nuances d'idées diaboliques qui ont travaillé sa tête.⁹¹

Berlioz's own writings on music – both in published commentary and private correspondence – did nothing to dispel this image. As we've already seen, delighted references to the “monstrous,” “infernal,” and “terrible” weave through his early letters, applied to the music and literature he loved.⁹² And in more than one case, Berlioz traced this complex of effects back to Dante; the “horreur fantastique” of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for instance, was due, in part, to what Berlioz termed an “inspiration dantesque.”⁹³ Dante also features in his *Memoirs* as a youthful influence – a figure whose powerful individuality, troubled life, and exile resonated with Berlioz's own evolving self-image. In an extravagantly Romantic passage recalling his time at the Academy in Rome, Berlioz described his sense of connection to the fantastic legends of old. He wept simultaneously over the tribulations of the classical heroes

⁹¹ “The funeral mass was applauded through two repetitions and demanded again. It is here that all the inspirations of the artist are made manifest, and everyone can follow the musical nuances of the diabolical ideas at work in his brain.” “Concert de M. Berlioz,” *Le Figaro* (11 November, 1834).

⁹² Clearly, in the letters, these terms are sometimes operating as colloquialisms rather than serious aesthetic markers, and yet they resonate compellingly through Berlioz's published commentary on his own and others' music.

⁹³ In a report on the Parisian premiere of *Don Juan* published in *Le Rénovateur* (16 March, 1834).

and the trials of his own life “until, collapsing in the midst of this maelstrom of poetry, and murmuring fragments of Shakespeare, Virgil and Dante...I fell asleep.”⁹⁴ Jules Janin, writing in the *Journal des Débats*, underscored the composer’s Dantesque temperament, claiming that he was drawn equally to Beethoven and to Dante – that he had inherited the “abnormal,” “other-worldly” genius of both the German and Italian fantastic.

Il [Berlioz] en voulait à l’Italie du Dante comme il en voulait à l’Allemagne de Beethoven. C’est, je vous dis, un bizarre génie, homme excentrique et vivant seul; dédaigneux des formes reçues, honteux du monde réel, se plaisant et s’exaltant de préférence dans tout ce qui est anormal dans l’art et dans la vie sociale.”⁹⁵

Other critics made similar links, associating Berlioz’s character and his ungrammatical musical style with fantastic literature. Fétis, in one of the famously antagonistic reviews of the mid-1830s, argued that Berlioz was “no musician.” His compositions did not reflect musical training but were modeled on painting and fiction – not just *Hamlet* and *Faust*, but Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.⁹⁶

It was not the *Divine Comedy* at large that Fétis had in mind, however, but the *Inferno*, which remained the best-known part of Dante’s masterpiece well into the

⁹⁴ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, translated by David Cairns, p. 173.

⁹⁵ “He [Berlioz] is drawn to Dante’s Italy as he is drawn to Beethoven’s Germany. He is, I tell you, a bizarre genius, an eccentric and solitary man; scornful of established forms, exiled from the realm of the real, he is pleased to embrace, and delights by choice, in all that is abnormal in art and in social life.” In review of the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Lélio*, *Journals des Débats* (10 December, 1832). Beethoven was also identified as a “Dantesque” composer during this period; see, for instance, the article “Des Origines de la musique” in *L’Artiste* (6/26), which calls him “le Dante de la musique allemande.” German and Italian “fantastic” impulses were thus united – seen as part of the same aesthetic current, of which Berlioz was the primary French exponent.

⁹⁶ Fétis, “Concert donné par M. Berlioz,” *Gazette musicale* (30 November, 1834). References to Berlioz’s Dantesque style appeared most often in connection with his supernatural works – not just the *Symphonie fantastique*, but *Faust*, the *Franco-Juges* Overture, the *Messe des morts*, etc. Joseph Mainzer, for instance, in the first (and only) edition of the *Chronique musicale*, denied that Berlioz’s Requiem had been inspired by religious sentiment; instead, he argued, it reveled in images of Dantesque death and horror: “la destruction des mondes, la résurrection des trépassés et toutes les diableries de l’enfer du Dante” (p. 28).

1840s and 50s. As Michael Pitwood has shown, the French vogue for Dante, beginning with Diderot and Voltaire in the mid eighteenth century, was really a vogue for the *Inferno*. It was Dante's portrait of Hell that attracted the first translators in the opening years of the nineteenth century – amateurs including Lesbroussart, Talairat, Bridel, and others.⁹⁷ During the same period, the imagery and rhetoric of the *Inferno* began to infiltrate the works of French writers and painters. As early as 1806, Delille's long poem, *L'Imagination*, drew on the *Inferno* to describe the ravages of storm and shipwreck, referring to Dante himself as a poet of "black tones" and "graveyard shades."⁹⁸ Other authors, from Charmettes and Chateaubriand to Sand and Lassailly, drew on the language of Dante to describe supernatural horrors, cannibalism, and infernal visions.

Although Deschamps produced a more complete French edition of the *Divine Comedy* in 1829, the *Inferno* continued to be the most frequently translated and published portion of Dante's poem, appearing in five new versions before 1840. For many of the major Romantics – Musset, Larmartine, Delacroix, Boulanger, and Vigny, among others – Dante was synonymous with the *Inferno*.⁹⁹ Hugo called him the "poet of Hell," and borrowed liberally from him in the Gothic evocations of *Notre Dame de Paris*, as well as in the poetry collections *Feuilles d'automne*, *Chants du crépuscule*, and *Les Orientales*. Well before these works, Dante had emerged as a Romantic figurehead, a poet tied inextricably to the darker impulses of the new literary school. An 1825 poem entitled "Le Temple de romantisme" by Hyacinthe

⁹⁷ Michael Pitwood, *Dante in French Romanticism* (Genève: Droz, 1985). See Chapters 2 and 3 for a chronology of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century translations as well as a detailed account of Dante's influence on early Romantic scholarship and aesthetics. For two other discussions of Dante's nineteenth-century influence, see Vasconcellos, *L'Inspiration dantesque dans l'art romantique français* (Paris: 1925) and Braidia, *Dante and the English Romantics* (New York: Macmillan, 2004).

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 68; Pitwood also draws our attention to Esménard's poem, "La Navigation" (1805), which invoked Dante in a description of the labyrinthine catacombs of Rome.

⁹⁹ Of all of these figures, according to Pitwood, Delacroix had the most thorough knowledge of the *Divine Comedy*. His *Barque du Dante* (1822) created a lasting sensation, as did his *La Justice de Trajan* (1840), which was based on a passage from Purgatory.

Morel claimed that Romanticism itself was concocted in “l’enfer de Dante / Près de l’atelier de Callot.”¹⁰⁰ The upsurge of interest in the Italian poet among translators and artists was accompanied by a barrage of critical writing, including biographies, commentaries, and analytical articles. Slowly, Dante himself began to be perceived as an infernal figure – a man of wild, misanthropic, and even superhuman character. This strand of Dante reception reached its most outrageous in Gabriele Rossetti’s 1832 study, which claimed that the *Divine Comedy* was written in a code coined by a secret society whose aim was to overthrow the church. Here, Dante was figured not only in demonic but (unsurprisingly) in revolutionary terms – the chaos of the *Inferno* had begun to reflect back upon the man himself.¹⁰¹

Rumblings (both positive and negative) surrounding Dante’s alleged religious and political radicalism resonated with much older misgivings surrounding his poetic style. The *Divine Comedy* was a work with no discernable model, according to critics – it was marred by a perceived lack of unity that emerged, in part, from its wanton mixture of Classical and Christian mythologies, of epic and sonnet, of divine and monstrous imagery. Among the common adjectives applied to Dante’s work were “uneven,” “excessive,” “incoherent,” and “extravagant.”¹⁰² Not only generically difficult, the *Divine Comedy* (and particularly the *Inferno*) was criticized as vulgar. Dante’s depictions of the tortured souls in Hell constituted a breach of aesthetic etiquette – his grotesque imagery fell into the “tasteless” category to which Staël had relegated Goethe’s *Faust* and Fétis had consigned Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Pitwood, p. 99. The reference to Jacques Callot here is not unimportant; we shall return to it in Chapter 3.

¹⁰¹ The image of the exiled Dante proved irresistible to the Romantics, who constructed him as a lone and persecuted genius. Gaston de Flotte’s 1833 poem “Dante exilé” struck a tone of Dante-worship that resonated equally strongly through the writings of Staël and Chateaubriand.

¹⁰² For commentary on Dante’s mixed reception and the lively exchange it sparked between key literary critics of the period, both English and French, see Pitwood, Chapter 3 as well as Ralph Pite, *The Circle Of Our Vision: Dante’s Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Indeed, the charges against Dante became, in some cases, a model for those levied against Berlioz – the two men seemed to share both aesthetic and temperamental affinities.

But it was not just Berlioz's tone and imagery that tied him to Dante – it was also his sound. The *Inferno* was an infamously loud space: a literal *pandaemonium* of wailing, booming, snarling, and teeth-gnashing. There was, as Maria Roglieri has pointed out, no music in Dante's Hell. Unlike the melodious realms of Purgatory and Paradise, it was a space dominated by irrational and bestial sound, including the howling of dogs and the inarticulate roaring of Satan's minions.¹⁰³ Roglieri draws our attention to the third Canto, in which Dante – at the very outset of his journey – is struck by the fearful dissonance of Satan's realm:

Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai
risonavan per l'aere senza stelle,
per ch'io al cominciar ne lagrimai.
Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira
sempre in quell'aura senza tempo tinta,
come la rena quando turbo spira.¹⁰⁴

Berlioz, too, was a master of noisy evocation, which was perceived as central to his “fantastique” idiom. As early as 1829, Fétis complained of an “excès de bruit” in his compositions (undoubtedly, he had the *Jugement-dernière* or the *Franco-juges*

¹⁰³ Maria Rossi, “The Antimusic of Hell: Screams and Lamentations,” *Dante and Music: musical adaptations of the commedia from the sixteenth century to the present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 155-194.

¹⁰⁴ “Here sighs and lamentations and loud cries/were echoing across the starless air,/so that, as soon as I set out, I wept./Strange utterances, horrible pronouncements,/accents of anger, words of suffering,/and voices shrill and faint, and beating hands-/all went to make a tumult that will whirl/forever through that turbid, timeless air,/like sand that eddies when a whirlwind swirls.” Ibid.; Quoted and translated by Rossi, p. 156.

overture in mind, although he does not specify).¹⁰⁵ Similar complaints of excessive volume, tunelessness, and incoherent “blasting,” especially in the *Symphonie fantastique*, the *Messe des morts*, and *Faust* resonate through Berlioz criticism of the following several decades – the examples are too well-known and numerous to warrant detailed reproduction here. An 1836 report in *Le Ménestrel* summed up popular opinion neatly when it claimed that Berlioz’s music, and particularly his “fantastique” idiom, was in fact a species of “anti-music” (*antithèse-musicale*) – an illogical and discordant mishmash.¹⁰⁶

Sound itself had long been connected to the “terrible” fantastic through the aesthetic theory of Edmund Burke, who cited it as one of the possible triggers of terror, and therefore of the sublime.¹⁰⁷ In his well-known *Philosophical Treatise on the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke identified a range of sounds productive of the sublime, the first being “excessive loudness”: “the noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder or artillery” and “the shouting of multitudes.”¹⁰⁸ Noises of this type, he claimed, easily overpowered the mind and confounded the imagination, producing “a great and awful sensation.” Related to loudness was suddenness – the “sudden beginning or sudden cessation of sound,” whose shock produced an equally terrifying effect. Burke extended this to include bursts of repeated

¹⁰⁵ Fétis, “Musique le 1^{er} novembre 1829,” *Revue musicale* (early November, 1829).

¹⁰⁶ “M. Hector Berlioz,” *Le Ménestrel* (11 December, 1836).

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Page references refer to the Oxford World’s Classics edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The sublime itself – as we’ve already seen – had been linked to the fantastic as far back as Longinus, and continued to be understood as central to the “terrible” fantastic in Romantic literary and musical criticism. As David Sandner has argued, the aesthetics of the sublime were key to nineteenth-century fantastic fiction, which explored to the fullest degree the sensation of transcendental terror that Burke described. See Sandner, “From the Romantic to the Fantastic Sublime,” *The Fantastic Sublime: Romanticism and Transcendence in Nineteenth-Century Children’s Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 49-65. The sublime was also a marker of the musical fantastic, according to Berlioz and his contemporaries; St.-Félix, for instance, (whose commentary on the political fantastic we have already encountered), linked the “idées fantastiques” of Mozart and Weber with a broader “école sublime.”

¹⁰⁸ Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 74-75.

sound, including “the striking of a great clock, when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dissipated,” a “single stroke on a drum, repeated with pauses,” and “the successive firing of cannon at a distance.”¹⁰⁹ In a third category were the “angry tones of wild beasts” and “such sounds as imitate the natural inarticulate voices of men, or any animals in pain or danger.” These sounds – signals of immanent peril – stimulated the primitive mind, conjuring images of lurking brutes. Finally, Burke cited “low, confused, uncertain sounds” – those “leaving us in the same fearful anxiety concerning their causes, that no light, or uncertain light does concerning the objects that surround us.”¹¹⁰ Here, he linked his discussion of sound with his earlier remarks on obscurity, comparing low, unfamiliar tones with the opacity and disorientation of night and even (as his quote from Milton attests) with Death itself. For Burke, then, as for Dante, the realm of the unknown (night, nightmare, and the underworld) was a realm of noise – a maelstrom of unregulated sound.

Burke’s ideas concerning the relationship between sound and sensation were influential but by no means new. Composers since the time of Monteverdi had been using sound to stimulate (or simulate) the experience of terror. Birgitte Moyer, in her article “*Ombra* and Fantasia in Late Eighteenth-Century Theory and Practice,” draws our attention to the theoretical and musical genesis of the *ombra* trope – the musical signal for fear, awe, foreboding, and the supernatural.¹¹¹ “*Ombra*” itself, meaning “shadow” or “shade,” referred to scenes set in hell or the underworld, and – more broadly – those involving ghosts, demons, or other uncanny elements. Wye J. Allanbrook traces such scenes back to seventeenth-century Italian opera, and to a

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹¹¹ Birgitte Moyer, “*Ombra* and Fantasia in Late Eighteenth-Century Theory and Practice,” *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, ed. W.J. Allanbrook et al. (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1992), pp. 283-306.

specific set of musical markers: low orchestration (often featuring trombones), chromatic inflection, tremolos, angular rhythms, rhythmic disruption (especially syncopation or unexpected pauses), and unusual dynamic contrasts (often involving muted timbres or *fortissimo* blasts).¹¹² As she and others (including Clive McClelland) have noted, this collection of effects maps easily onto the categories of “terrifying” sound laid out by Burke, prefiguring the low, loud, and rhythmically unpredictable noises he locates as triggers of the sublime.

From Jommelli onwards, *ombra* music became a fixture in supernatural scenes, ossifying into an operatic trope easily recognizable in works by Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries. Moyer cites a host of examples, including Act II, Scene 1 of Gluck’s *Orfeo* (the introduction of the furies and monsters), the same composer’s *Alceste* (Act III, Scene 2, foretelling Alceste’s descent to the underworld) and, of course, Act II, Scene 15 of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (the Commandatore’s return and Don Giovanni’s damnation) – all passages that Berlioz had dubbed “fantastique.”¹¹³ By the second half of the eighteenth century, *ombra* music had seeped out of opera into instrumental music. It had been absorbed into the elaborate topical language of the period, appearing in Mozart’s “Prague” Symphony (K. 504) and D-minor piano concerto (K. 466), and Haydn’s “Lamentatione” Symphony (No. 26), to give only a few examples. The “sounding sublime” itself had been to some degree domesticated, incorporated into the musical grammar of Classicism. Rather than an unregulated infernal sound, it had become a sign for that sound – a stylized symbol for death, horror, and the other-worldly. In many senses, the eighteenth-century inferno was a “Staëlesque” place: a Hell tempered by taste and musical logic,

¹¹² Wye J. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 361. See also Clive McClelland, “Ombra Music in the Eighteenth Century: Context, Style and Signification” (Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2001).

¹¹³ Moyer, “*Ombra* and Fantasia,” p. 292ff.

and one which allowed the audience to hold chaos at arms length. The fantastic, for Enlightenment composers, was still a musical space, rather far from the noisy landscape of Dante's *Inferno*.

In early nineteenth-century repertory, however – and especially in Berlioz – the *sound* rather than the *sign* of the sublime became increasingly prevalent. *Ombra* music did not disappear, by any means, but it began to evolve toward something more radically Dantesque. The idea of the inferno (heard at a safe distance) was replaced by the evocation of *pandaemonium* itself – music began to make manifest the chaos of literary Hell. The result was the aural equivalent of what Sandner calls the “fantastic sublime” and David B. Morris terms the “Gothic sublime” – a space in which “words and images grow radically unstable,” no longer simply representing terror, but themselves bearing witness to its disruptive power. Morris's Lacanian commentary on the “images” of the nineteenth-century sublime applies equally aptly to sounds:

Images maintain a new relation with language, whereby the descriptive and pictorial techniques of the eighteenth century no longer carry the same function or value. What lies outside of consciousness also, as Lacan would tell us, lies outside of speech – or lies cryptically, fictively, irrevocably inscribed within a language that both is and is not our own.¹¹⁴

Of course, the shift in musical language that separated eighteenth- and nineteenth-century invocations of the “terrible” hardly happened overnight. Coming back to Berlioz's examples of the *genre fantastique* in Gluck and Mozart, we find that already, the safe realm of *ombra* is hovering on the edge of something more radical. Noise itself is precisely, I argue, what attracts Berlioz to the scenes that he singles out for commentary – the “bruit métallique” of Gluck's *Scythian* sequence in *Iphigénie*

¹¹⁴ David B. Morris, “Gothic Sublimity,” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 16/2 (Winter, 1985), pp. 299-319.

and the “*éclat soudain*” that emerges out of Thoas’s imagined “*abîme effroyable*.”¹¹⁵ Nor was Gluck the only composer to draw on these kinds of effects. Alongside his experiments with sublime sound, we might also place Haydn’s Chaos music, from the *Creation*, and Beethoven’s so-called Schrekens fanfare from the final movement of the *Ninth Symphony*. Weber’s famously terrifying “Wolf’s Glen” scene from *Der Freischütz* draws us even further in the direction of unregulated sound. But Berlioz’s compositions, I argue, represent a radical turning point; his “fantastique” evocations blur the boundaries between “music” and “noise” to a much greater degree, allowing a broad range of shrieking, howling, clicking, and scraping into the canon of orchestral effects.

Nowhere does Berlioz make the link between fantastic aesthetics and noise clearer than in his orchestration treatise, which, as Kolb-Reeve argues, is “a veritable treatise on the fantastic.”¹¹⁶ Here, he expands the notion of instrumental “voice” well beyond conventional boundaries, admitting sounds outside the realm of the human and of rational language itself – sounds that had begun to creep into Gluck’s and Weber’s otherworldly scenes and that played a crucial role in his own “*musique terrifiante*.” Fétis himself, as early as 1835, recognized that a novel approach to orchestration was at the root of the fantastic idiom; his musical handbook – *La musique mise à la portée de tout la monde* (1835) – contained one of the first published definitions of “*musique fantastique*,” and one which was surely aimed directly at Berlioz: “*La musique fantastique*,” wrote Fétis, “est composée d’effets d’instrumentation sans dessin mélodique et avec une harmonie incorrecte.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ See pp. 3-5 of this chapter for the original discussion of these passages.

¹¹⁶ Kolb-Reeve, “Berlioz and the Poetics of the Orchestra,” p. 242; see also the following several pages for Kolb-Reeve’s discussion of the orchestration treatise.

¹¹⁷ As Kolb-Reeve has also noted, Fétis’s definition appeared in the second edition of his Handbook (1835), in a lexicon of musical terms.

Berlioz's exploration of new and uncanny "effets d'instrumentation" extended to every section of the orchestra, from the piccolo to the unpitched percussion. Beginning with the upper strings, his *Grand Traité d'Orchestration and Instrumentation* described the violins as the orchestra's "truly feminine" voice, capable of a wide range of sounds but especially suited to passionate, tender, and slow melodies. Certain alterations in playing technique, however, rendered the instrument more threatening. What Berlioz called the "dry" tone produced by playing "près du chevalet" [near the bridge], especially during a *fortissimo* tremolo for the full violin section, resulted in "a noise like a mighty cascade." It was this "shuddering" effect that Gluck called upon in the first Act of *Alceste*, in combination with "striding, menacing" brass, to produce his "orchestral cauldron." Berlioz borrowed the same "harsh, metallic" timbre for Mephistopheles' entry in *La Damnation de Faust*. This sound also appears in the *Symphonie fantastique*, although here, Berlioz introduced an even stranger effect – what he called the "crackling" noise of strings playing *col legno*, which conjures the laughter of witches in the symphony's final movement.¹¹⁸

Extra-musical sound, now in the middle strings, was equally central to the "sensation of horror" produced by Oreste's aria "Le calme rentre dans mon coeur" (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, Act 2), according to Berlioz. Here, the muffled orchestra depicts "sobbing and convulsive moans," which, as the furies circle the sleeping Orestes, are "pervasively dominated by the persistent horrifying mutterings of the violas." Berlioz himself employed a similarly "muffled" and "raw" effect (in the cellos) in his own *Requiem*, in conjunction with "the terrifying dissonance of a low minor second."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ All quotations from Berlioz's *Orchestration Treatise* are taken from Hugh Macdonald's translation: *Berlioz's orchestration treatise: a translation and commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 17-19.

¹¹⁹ In a passage from the *Rex tremenadae* in which the cellos have been separated from the double basses; see Macdonald's commentary, *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Of all the strings, the double basses had the greatest capacity for noise, and therefore the clearest link with the aesthetics of the fantastic. Bass tremolando, which produces “a dull murmuring sound,” set the mood for Thoas’s “De noirs presentiments,” and was later (according to Berlioz) borrowed by Mozart for the entrance of the Statue in *Don Giovanni*.¹²⁰ Even more gripping, was the “raucous barking” of the basses in the Hades scene of Gluck’s *Orphée* – an effect created by grace notes blurred via quick *glissandi*. Here, Gluck approached the cacophonous barking of Dante’s *Inferno* – the “horrible howling of foaming, raging Cerberus.”¹²¹ In addition to the ominous sounds of the lower bass register, Berlioz reported that M. Langlois (a player from Piedmont) could produce “the sound of a woman shrieking” on his double bass, by gripping the top string “between his thumb and forefinger.” Sadly, Berlioz seems unable to have found a Parisian player able to reproduce the effect. His own most infernal works, however, notably the “Cours à l’abîme” of *Faust* and the fourth and fifth movements of the *Symphonie fantastique* resound with the growling, menacing sound of the bass (see, for instance, the dry, *pizzicato* chords at the beginning of the *Marche au supplice* and the double bass “slides” that introduce the opening soundscape of the *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat*).

Among wind instruments, the clarinet was most capable of producing a range of uncanny noises; Berlioz embraced its low, indistinct register as “ideal for those icily menacing effects, those dark expressions of repressed fury.” He noted Weber’s use of this effect, which also featured in his own *Chanson de Mephistopheles*, *Faust*, and “Au cimetière.” Equally terrifying were the clarinet’s “piercing shrieks” – “vulgar”

¹²⁰ Macdonald points out that, in modern editions of *Don Giovanni*, the same dotted rhythm appears in all the string parts, “so perhaps in the Opéra performances of 1834 a tremolando bass line was substituted.” (Ibid., p. 57)

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 59. Berlioz also notes the “hurried” bass notes in the storm movement of Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*, “which give the effect of violent wind and rain and the dull rumble of gusty squalls.”

and “degrading” sounds that featured in the parody of the *idée fixe* in the final movement of his *Symphonie fantastique*. But Berlioz called on an even stranger noise to produce the “ghostly music” of the *Aeolian harp* scene in *Lélio*: “to give the clarinet sound as indistinct and distant a quality as possible I had the instrument enclosed in a leather bag as a substitute for a mute. This desolate murmuring and the half-stifled sound of the solo ... have always made a deep impression on an audience.”¹²² But it was the piccolo – an instrument whose sound was always in danger of slipping into “shrieking” and “yelling” that lent itself most easily to fantastic effects. “The top notes,” wrote Berlioz, “are excellent, *fortissimo*...for a storm...or in a scene of ferocious, satanic character.” Coming back to Gluck’s *Choeur des Scythes*, he reminded us that it was the piccolo’s “shrill notes,” combined with “the baying of the savage horde and the incessant, rhythmic clatter of cymbals and small drum” that generated such a terrifying effect.¹²³ The piercing noise created by the piccolo-cymbal combination “causes an instantly lacerating, stabbing sensation, like a swordthrust.” Berlioz borrowed the effect for two of his famously satanic passages: the appearance of Mephistopheles in *Faust*, and the closing crescendo of the *Franks-juges* Overture.

Repeatedly, Berlioz linked the noises of nightmarish or demonic scenes with the aesthetics of the sublime.¹²⁴ For him, the fantastic was a space resounding not only with Burkian sound – with barking, growling, murmuring, muttering, and blasting – but with a range of new and even more extraordinary noises. Unsurprisingly, it was the brass and percussion that furnished Berlioz’s most terrifying effects. The dead,

¹²² Ibid., pp. 122-27.

¹²³ Berlioz also traces the piccolo-cymbal combination to Spontini, who uses it in the *Bacchanale* of his *Les danaïdes* – a piece which “later became an orgiastic chorus in *Nurmahal*.” Ibid., p. 147. Macdonald reminds us that Berlioz often adds grace notes to the piccolo’s satanic “shrieks,” accentuating the dissonance of the effect.

¹²⁴ The “wailing of a suffering, despairing shade of the departed” in the flute, for instance is “a thousand-fold sublime,” as is the dull murmuring of the viola in Oreste’s “Le calme rentre dans mon coeur.”

“muffled” sound of a heavily stopped horn was suitable for “scenes of silent horror” and could even evoke “the voice of a dying man” with a kind of “instrumental death-rattle.”¹²⁵ But more horrifying by far were certain sounds produced by the trombone, the acknowledged king of the underworld. Berlioz described “low harmonies of exceptional savagery,” citing his own *Symphonie fantastique* and *Faust* as pieces that warranted such effects. Indeed, the deep pedal tones of the *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat* seem to emerge out of hell itself; too low to be perceived as pitches in such close harmony, they register as monstrous, ground-shaking reverberations. Three trombones in unison could produce blasts of epic effect, according to Berlioz. He described their “sublime,” “colossal” sound “replying as if with the enraged voice of the God of Hades to Alceste’s entreaty “Ombra! larve! compagne di morte!” But the trombone could also “bellow” and “threaten,” and – in a *pianissimo* register – produce breathy, horrifying sounds: “Especially if the chords are short and interspersed with rests one can imagine strange monsters in the darkness breathing roars of rage barely held in check.” Finally, trombones could “shriek like demons,” echoing the voices of the furies or of wrathful spirits. They were often paired with ophicleides, whose rough, monstrous sound was suitable only for the most hideous evocations. Still more barbarous, was the serpent, which should be used, according to Berlioz, only to double the *Dies irae* plainchant: “Its cold, horrible bawling is doubtless appropriate there...as accompaniment to those words embodying all the horror of death and the vengeance of a jealous God.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 172; Macdonald draws our attention to the “death rattle” remark, which appeared in a passage on Méhul’s *Mélodore et Phrosine* in *Les soirées de l’orchestra*. Berlioz notes another extraordinary horn effect in Gluck: “...the three notes imitating Charon’s conch in the air “Caron t’appelle” from *Alceste* must be cited as a stroke of genius. They are on the note *c*¹¹ played by two D horns in unison, but the composer had the idea of placing the bells one against the other, making each instrument act as a mute to the other. The colliding sounds thus seem distant and cavernous in the most strange and dramatic way.” (p. 176)

¹²⁶ See Berlioz’s full section on the trombone (Ibid., pp. 208-227) as well as his shorter commentary on the ophicleide and serpent (pp. 232-237; p. 242).

Percussion instruments – the “noise producers” of the orchestra – were linked pervasively in Berlioz’s writing to fantastic evocation. Timpani produced a “mysterious, darkly menacing sound,” low bells invoked the supernatural, and bass drums made “strange terrifying noises” signifying cannon fire or natural disaster. Cymbals produced a “noise...of extreme ferocity” signaling “horror or catastrophe” – effects which Berlioz exploited to the full in his own *Requiem* (the *Dies irae* and *Lacrimosa* call for ten pairs of cymbals). The gong (tamtam) “is used only for scenes of mourning or for the dramatic depiction of extreme horror,” as in the rising of the nuns in Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable*. Finally, the triangle made a “strange, bizarre” sound suitable for otherworldly or barbaric evocation.¹²⁷ In Berlioz’s own apocalyptic and infernal music, these effects appear in full force. The furious climax of *Faust*, for instance, in which Mephistopheles takes Faust on his final descent to Hell, draws us further and further into the realm of noise, allowing the ‘real’ world to transition into nightmare, rational sound into cacophony. The music of hymn-singing peasants quickly gives way to shrieks, followed by the sudden intrusion of growling trombone pedal tones, then twittering piccolos and flutes, the ominous striking of a low bell, and finally, the thunderous noise of *Pandaemonium* itself. In Hell, Berlioz draws together all the terrible noises his *Treatise* describes, from trombone blasts, to bass-drum tattoos, and the cymbal and piccolo clashes borrowed from Gluck. The breakdown of musical order is aptly mirrored by the language of the demons themselves, who sing in the barbaric nonsense syllables of an untranslatable tongue.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See the individual entries for these instruments, *Ibid.*, pp. 265-293.

¹²⁸ In the *Orchestration Treatise*, sounds outside the conventional orchestral palette are central not only to the “terrible” but to the “féérique” fantastic. “Crystalline” harmonics, heavily muted sounds, whispers, and whistling or sighing invoke the realm of dream and the enchanted world of sylphs and fairies. Although Berlioz was less securely connected, in the critical literature, with this species of fantastic evocation, we recognize its musical markers in the sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique*, *Lélio*, as well as in *Roméo et Juliette*, the *Concert des sylphs*, and elsewhere.

Here, as elsewhere, Berlioz's sound and imagery seemed indebted to Dante's literary model, but they were equally tied, according to critics, to visual art, and especially to the works of the Renaissance painter, Salvator Rosa. Rosa himself was often described as a "Dantesque" figure – an artist steeped both in other-worldly aesthetics and political radicalism. The three men – Dante, Rosa, and Berlioz – emerged in nineteenth-century criticism as a triumvirate whose works, separated though they were by time and genre, seemed to resonate together, evoking the sound, image, and language of the "terrible" fantastic.¹²⁹

Like Dante's verse, Rosa's ominous, often supernatural scenes proved irresistible to the Romantics, who hailed him as a kindred spirit. His works enjoyed widespread popularity in England through the eighteenth century, and rose to prominence in France in the wake of Lady Morgan's *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, published in French translation in 1824.¹³⁰ In Morgan's richly embroidered, semi-fictional account, Rosa emerged as the *enfant terrible* of the Renaissance – a man who rejected conventional rules, refused to satisfy the whims of patrons, and produced "fantastic" works outside the boundaries of both art and the law:

Dans sa manière d'agir fantasque et original, laissant à des talens plus timides, à des sentimens moins exaltés que les siens, la routine *banale* des académies et des ateliers, il prit une direction que n'autorisait aucun précédent, et s'attacha à l'école où aucun

¹²⁹ E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale, "Signor Formica" (a fictional account featuring Salvator Rosa) was one of many places in which Rosa and Dante were linked: Rosa's "wild fierce, fantastically attired figures" and his "gloomy fearful wildernesses" owed much, according to Hoffmann, to the landscape of Dante's *Inferno*. Hoffmann also noted the link between fantastic imagery and noise: "Salvator Rosa's works are characterized by arrogant and defiant originality, and by fantastic energy both of conception and of execution. Nature revealed herself to him not in the lovely peacefulness of green meadows, flourishing fields, sweet-smelling groves, murmuring springs, but in the awful and the sublime as seen in towering masses of rock, in the wild seashore, in savage inhospitable forests; and the voice that he loved to hear were not the whisperings of the evening breeze or the musical rustle of leaves, but the roaring of the hurricane and the thunder of the cataract." *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1967), pp. 308-9.

¹³⁰ For a comprehensive account of Rosa's influence and reception in France, see James S. Patty, *Salvator Rosa in French Literature* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2005).

maître ne donne des lois au génie entreprenant, où aucun élève n'est servilement astreint à en suivre: l'école de la nature!¹³¹

Rosa's paintings often depicted nature at its wildest: rocky vistas dotted with black and stunted trees, lone mountain peaks, and foaming torrents under ominous skies. Colossal ruins dwarf the lone figure in the forefront of Rosa's "Landscape with Hermit" – a symbol for the powerlessness of man in the face of nature. More energized are the rebels pictured in his "Bandits on a Rocky Coast," who capture the lawlessness of the terrain itself, and of Rosa's own alleged temperament. Morgan described his "life" amongst the bandits of the Abruzzi during the 1647 Neapolitan revolt led by Masaniello (Tommaso Aniello): amongst "des rocs, des montagnes, des torrens, des masses d'ombras...Salvator s'était abandonné, même à l'excès, à son goût philosophique et à ces pensées spéculatives dont il forma dans la suite le tissu de ses compositions."¹³² According to popular legend, Rosa was a member of the ruthless *Compagni della morte* – a band of rebels led by Masaniello himself, whose activities were shrouded in mystery. Rumors of the other-worldly echoed through the writings of Rosa's nineteenth-century biographers, who were spurred on by his demonic imagery. Indeed, wild nature was linked, in Rosa's work, to the supernatural; his "Scene with Witches," for instance, shows a darkened landscape in which night creatures gather around the scene of an evil incantation. Even more gripping, was his "Saul et la Pythonisse," which was housed in the Louvre from revolutionary times

¹³¹ "In his fantastic and original manner, unavailable to more timid talents, to sentiments less exalted than his, [to] the routine banality of academics and studio artists, he took a direction sanctioned by no precedent, attaching himself to a school in which no master handed down laws governing the interpretation of genius, and no student was servilely bound to follow them: the school of nature!" Morgan, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*. 2 vols. London : H. Colburn, 1824. Translated by Adèle Sobry as *Mémoires sur la vie et le siècle de Salvator Rosa, par Lady Morgan* (Paris: Eymery, 1824), I, p. 73.

¹³² "[Amongst] the rocks, mountains, torrents, massed shadows...Salvator abandoned himself to excess, to his philosophical whim and to those speculative thoughts from which he formed the fabric of his compositions." Morgan (tr. Sobry) II, p. 67; Quoted in Patty, *Salvator Rosa in French Literature*, p. 84.

onwards, and well known to the French intelligensia. Gautier, in his *Guide de l'amateur au musée du Louvre*, devoted considerable space to the painting, which depicts a sorcerer conjuring the spirit of Samuel, surrounded by skeletons, disembodied horse-heads, and the “forms fantastiques” of writhing attendants.¹³³

The lawless and fantastic aura that hung around Rosa began to attach to Berlioz in the earliest years of his career. Already, in 1830, in one of the few reviews of the *Fantastique*'s premiere, a reporter for *Le Temps* linked Berlioz's “infernal” and “explosive” aesthetic with Rosa, forging a connection that would resonate through the following decade. Critics heard in Berlioz's music the same savagery that marked Rosa's painting, and even speculated that Berlioz himself had joined a band of brigands. Again in *Le Temps*, several years later, the following Rosa-esque description of the composer appeared:

...j'imagine qu'en Italie, ou il a passé plusieurs années, il aura fait souvent de longues et solitaires excursions dans les régions les plus sauvages des Apennins, il se sera ennuyé à la rage de la monotonie de la vie bourgeoise, et dans ses courses aventureuses, il aura souvent appelé, non sans quelque terreur délicate, quelque rencontre étrange, périlleuse, par exemple de brigands, comme Salvator Rosa; il aura promené d'énergiques passions à travers les rocs et les glaciers, il aura passé des nuits entières au pied de quelque sapin à la clarté de la lune, livré à des rêveries ardentes.¹³⁴

But it was not just the aesthetic of the sublime – the sight and implied sound of roaring cataracts and storm-whipped trees – that linked Rosa to Berlioz, it was also his

¹³³ Gautier, *Guide de l'amateur au musée du Louvre* (Paris: Charpentier, 1867), pp. 110-11.

¹³⁴ “...I imagine that in Italy, where he spent several years, he would often have taken long and solitary excursions in the wildest regions of the Appenines; he was bored to tears by the monotony of bourgeois life and in the course of adventures, must often have invited, not without a certain delicious terror, strange and perilous encounters, with brigands, for example, like Salvator Rosa; he must have walked with energetic passion amongst the rocks and glaciers, he must have passed entire nights at the foot of some fir tree in the light of the moon, absorbed in ardent reveries.” “Concerts de M. Hector Berlioz,” *Le Temps* (27 November, 1834). Not only did music critics draw on Rosa to describe Berlioz, but art critics referenced Berlioz in discussions of Rosa; see the sketch of Rosa by Saint-Chéron in *L'Artiste*, Sér 1, vol 9, pp. 205-210. As we shall see, Berlioz himself encouraged links between his own and Rosa's biographies as part of a calculated program of fantastic self-construction.

predilection for the monstrous. Like Dante, Rosa was interested in distorted, twisted shapes. But Rosa's monsters were no longer confined to the inferno; they appeared in terrestrial landscapes, in dangerous proximity to the everyday world. His collusion of the "natural" and the "unnatural," the ugly with the beautiful, linked him with Jacques Callot and the aesthetics of the grotesque. Through the 1820s, Rosa became central to new French theories of monstrosity, and to wider Romantic interest in the anti-beautiful. His connection to Berlioz, therefore, is complicated. To call Berlioz "Rosaesque" is both to point backward toward the images and sounds of the Burkean sublime, and also forward, toward the Hugolian reworking of Burke's dialectic that resulted in the *Preface to Cromwell*. Berlioz's relationship to the grotesque, and the notion of a "musical grotesque" itself are issues too complex to be dealt with here – we shall come back to them in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Hoffmann and the Literary Fantastic

E.T.A. Hoffmann's star began to rise in France in 1828, when smatterings of his work appeared, in French translation, in *Le Globe*. By 1829, Loève-Veimars had embarked on a larger translation project, bringing out a series of Hoffmann's *contes fantastiques* in the *Revue de Paris*, and then in a collection of independent volumes. He was soon joined by a rival team of translators – Toussenel and Richard – who raced to offer new and as yet unknown Hoffmann tales to a voracious public. Quickly, the German *fantastiquer* became the most read, the most debated, and the most influential figure in Parisian literary circles. Critics produced an avalanche of writing on Hoffmann's "fantastique" style and mysterious personal life, launching a vogue for all things

fantastic that endured well into the 1830s.¹³⁵ Their reviews borrowed from Hoffmann's own language, describing a "vaporous," "vague," "effervescent," and "grotesque" idiom borne of hallucination and nightmare. Typical, was a description published in late 1829 in the *Journals des Débats*:

Le domaine d'Hoffmann, c'est la fantaisie et l'imagination. Ce domaine est vaste; comme on voit. (...) Essaierons-nous de dire de combien d'expressions vagues, mystérieuses, bizarres, superstitieuses, inattendues, romanesques, notre âme est susceptible? C'est là le fond inépuisable ou puise Hoffmann. Tous les sentiments, toutes les idées où la raison et la réflexion n'ont point de part, sont de son ressort.¹³⁶

This rhetoric – the rhetoric of the literary fantastic – was quickly taken up by music critics, especially early writers on Berlioz, whose first reviews of the *Symphonie fantastique* appeared during Hoffmann's heyday. A collapse of fictional and critical, literary and musical language ensued, tying Berlioz to Hoffmann rhetorically as well as gesturing toward more substantive continuities in style and structure between the "fantastique" composer and his literary counterpart. The 1834 review of the *Symphonie fantastique* in *Le Temps* described Berlioz's perceived eccentricities in explicitly Hoffmannesque terms:

... il y a dans sa manière quelque chose d'inattendu, de brusque, de fantasque qui répond parfaitement aux besoins de ses inspirations préférées. Je suppose que M. Berlioz doit aimer passionnément Hoffmann, qu'il a lu souvent les *Mille et une Nuits* et que dans son enfance il aura été bercé avec des contes de revenant.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ For a detailed account of Hoffmann's reception in France, see Elizabeth Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France* (Genève and Paris: Droz and Minard, 1961).

¹³⁶ "The domain of Hoffmann is that of fantasy and imagination. This domain is vast; as one might imagine. (...) Shall we try to say how many vague, mysterious, bizarre, superstitious, unexpected, romanesque impressions to which our spirit is susceptible? This is the inexhaustible source on which Hoffmann draws. All the sentiments, all the ideas in which reason and reflection have no part, are within his province." "Contes fantastiques d'Hoffmann, traduits par M. Loève-Veimars," *Journal des débats* (27 January, 1830).

¹³⁷ "...there is something unexpected, sudden, fantastic in his manner that articulates perfectly his native inspiration. I suppose that M. Berlioz must love Hoffmann passionately, that he must often have read the *Thousand and One Nights* and that, in his childhood, he must have been lulled to sleep with tales of

But critics hardly needed to mention Hoffmann's name when their reviews drew so overtly on the language that saturated his early reception. A report on "L'Episode fantastique de la vie d'une artiste" in *Le Ménestrel*, for instance, referred to "Cette création si bizarre, si pleine de verve, si vague, si inexplicable, si diabolique," noting that it had been recieved "avec des transports et des trépignemens."¹³⁸ As late as 1846, Maurice Borges still described Berlioz's "fantastique" idiom in Hoffmannesque terms – his review of *Faust* notes a return of the hallucinatory and capricious idiom that was so strongly linked to the *Symphonie fantastique*, ascribing its intensification to Berlioz's recent travels in Germany:

L'élément fantastique est cette fois poussé à un degré tel qu'il sera malaisé à M. Berlioz de se dépasser lui-même. Que les pérégrinations récentes de l'auteur en Allemagne aient eu l'influence d'activer sa fantaisie capricieuse, de la raviver, de la porter à sa plus haute puissance, c'est de dont nous ne voulons pas douter. Les émanations subtiles du génie allemand, rêveur idéal, mystique, inspiré, et parfois aussi vagabond, filtrent par tous les pores de l'oeuvre nouvelle.¹³⁹

Of course, "fantastique" – as I argued in the first section of this Chapter – was by no means a novel term in the late 1820s, nor was the rhetoric of dream and mysticism that surrounded Hoffmann entirely new. The literary fantastic itself had much older roots in France, stretching back to Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) – a tale which, according to nineteenth-century critics, had originated the

ghosts." *Le Temps* (27 November, 1834). See also, the 1830 review, in which Berlioz's link with Hoffmann is already clear: "There is a quality of despair in this extraordinary talent. There is something of Salvator Rosa, of Hoffmann, but it's darker still." (translated in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 42.)

¹³⁸ "Salle des Menus-Plaisirs," *Le Ménestrel* (16 November, 1834).

¹³⁹ "The fantastic element is, this time, extended to such a degree that it will be difficult for M. Berlioz to surpass himself [in future]. That the author's recent travels in Germany have been responsible for sparking his capricious fantasy, for reviving it, for amplifying it to its greatest power – of this we have little doubt. The subtle evocations of the German genius, ideal dreamer – mystic, inspired and occasionally unpredictable – seep through every pore of the new work." Maurice Borges, "La Damnation de Faust," *La Gazette musicale* (13 December, 1846).

tradition to which Hoffmann belonged.¹⁴⁰ Before Cazotte, works featuring diabolical pacts and demonic possession had paved the way for the development of the literary fantastic, as had the older cabbalist, alchemical, and Rosicrucian traditions.¹⁴¹ As Castex points out in his classic study, the writings of Swedenborg, Martines de Pasqually, and Louis Claude de Saint-Martin introduced much of the theosophical rhetoric – the language of spiritualism, mysticism, and magic – that permeated not only Cazotte, but later writers of *contes fantastiques*, from Gautier to Baudelaire. Lavater and Mesmer coined a pseudo-scientific vocabulary that became central to Hoffmann’s tales, just as Casanova and Saint-Germain popularized the occult language that later ran through Gautier’s and Balzac’s stories.¹⁴²

Cazotte and the late eighteenth-century theosophists were largely forgotten in the tumult of the Revolution and, in the early years of the new century, were supplanted by imitation Gothic novels and foreign imports. But Hoffmann reinvigorated the discourse of mesmerism and occultism and, most notably, replaced the make-believe realm of the Gothic with a tantalizingly “real” fantastic – a mode that “hesitated” (as Tzvetan Todorov would have it) between reality and unreality, allowing supernatural impulses to infiltrate the everyday world. Reviewers in *Le Figaro* in *Le Journal des débats* referred to the “surnaturel vrai” in Hoffmann’s tales – the “lutte perpétuelle entre le spiritualisme le plus subtil et l’existence matérielle la

¹⁴⁰ J.J. Ampère was one of the first French Hoffmann reviewers to make this claim, in an article for *Le Globe* (2 August, 1828). The idea was famously taken up by Tzvetan Todorov, who cited Cazotte’s *Le Diable amoureux* as a paradigmatic fantastic tale – one which blurred the boundary between reality and unreality, generating the sense of “hesitation” at the heart of Todorov’s definition of the fantastic; see *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, tr. by Richard Howard (Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973); orig. pub. as *Introduction à la littérature française* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

¹⁴¹ For more on this, see Irène Bessière, *Le Récit fantastique: la poétique de l’incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974), pp. 70-74.

¹⁴² Pierres Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Corti, 1951), pp. 13-25; 455.

plus rétrécie.”¹⁴³ Gautier made a similar observation some years later, noting the difference between Hoffmann’s “occult” idiom and earlier fairy stories like the *Tales of A Thousand and One Nights*:

...le merveilleux d’Hoffmann n’est pas le merveilleux des contes de fées; il a toujours un pied dans le monde réel... Les talismans et les baguettes des *Mille et une Nuits* ne lui sont d’aucun usage. Les sympathies et les antipathies occultes, les folies singulières, les visions, le magnétisme, les influences mystérieuses et maligne d’un mauvais principe qu’il ne désigne que vaguement, voilà les éléments surnaturels ou extraordinaires qu’emploie habituellement Hoffmann.¹⁴⁴

This was the “real” fantastic to which Berlioz (clearly drawing on contemporary Hoffmann critique) had referred in his essay on Weber’s *Oberon*. It was also the mode that influenced Nodier, Gérard de Nerval, the young Gautier, Balzac, Georges Sand, and Jules Janin, inspiring a barrage of Hoffmannesque tales published during the middle years of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁵

But more important, for our purposes, than Hoffmann’s “surnaturel vrai” was his conception of the fantastic as an interdisciplinary idiom – one which not only hovered between reality and fantasy, but between sound, text, and image. Hoffmann’s

¹⁴³ *Le Figaro* (8 April, 1830); *Le Journals des débats* (22 May, 1830). Both of these were reviews of the Loève-Veimars translations.

¹⁴⁴ “...the marvelous in Hoffmann is not the marvelous to be found in fairy tales; he always has one foot in the real world... The talismans and wands of the *Thousand and One Nights* are of no use to him. Occult sympathies and antipathies, unusual forms of madness, visions, magnetism, the mysterious and malign influences of an evil force which he perceives but vaguely – these are the supernatural or extraordinary elements that are pervasively employed by Hoffmann.” Théophile Gautier, “Contes d’Hoffmann,” *Chronique de Paris* (14 August, 1836). Fantastic theorists have written at length on the relationship between “real” and “unreal” markers in fantastic narratives; see, for instance, Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 19ff.; T.E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 2ff.; T.E. Little, *The Fantasts* (Amersham: Avebury, 1984), pp. 9ff.; Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 20ff.

¹⁴⁵ Much has been written on the literary fantastic in France after 1830; the bibliography is too well-known and extensive to give here. Of particular note, however, is a fairly recent study by Andrea Hübner that considers both literary and visual works of the French fantastic school, and devotes one chapter to Berlioz; see *Kreisler in Frankreich: E.T.A. Hoffmann und die französischen Romantiker* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004).

tales were full of references to the “correspondences” linking color with tone and poetry with painting; indeed, the three media became virtually inextricable in his writing, part of a mysterious synaesthesia that allowed reading to be transmuted into seeing or hearing. French critics were quick to note the aesthetic of mixture at the heart of his idiom – the mingling of “les sons, les couleurs, et les sentiments,” as Gautier put it.¹⁴⁶ References to the viscosity of his prose, and especially his connections to Callot and Goya were common, but for many critics, it was music above all that defined Hoffmann’s fantastic. This was hardly surprising, since Loève-Weimars’ earliest efforts at translation had privileged Hoffmann’s most “musical” tales. A fragment of “Le Pot d’or” [“Der Goldene Topf”] had appeared (as Hoffmann’s debut piece) in 1829 in the *Revue de Paris*, followed by “Gluck” [“Ritter Gluck”] “Marino Faliéro,” and “Don Juan,” all within a matter of months. Close on their heels came “Le Majorat,” “Le Sanctus,” and “Le Violon de Crémone” [“Rath Krespel”] and, early in 1830, fragments of “Kreisleriana.” These stories, which featured composers (both historical and fictional), singers, violinists, and music enthusiasts ensured that, from the outset, the *genre fantastique* would be received in France as a musico-literary idiom.

Sound itself, in Hoffmann’s narratives, emerged as a key portal to the “other” world: “crystalline tones” in “Le Pot d’or” lure Anselmus into the realm of the “golden salamander,” mysterious music envelops the ghost of “Ritter Gluck,” and song itself becomes synonymous with soul in “Rath Krespel.” Nor, of course, was the connection between music and magic confined to Hoffmann’s fiction, but stood at the center of his critical writing, which theorized instrumental music as a quintessentially Romantic medium – the language of the “spirit realm” and the hieroglyphic imprint of

¹⁴⁶ Gautier, “Contes d’Hoffmann,” *Chronique de Paris* (14 August, 1836).

nature itself.¹⁴⁷ Landscapes became soundscapes in Hoffmann's tales – uncanny spaces resounding with the airy strains of the Aeolian harp and the half-heard murmuring of “spirit voices.” For French critics immersed in his musical tales, the language of the fantastic was essentially the vaporous language of sound, translated into a semi-readable idiom that hovered between word and tone. Pervasively, they described the *conte fantastique* in musical terms, and Hoffmann himself as a literary “conductor” or “composer.” A review in *Le Temps* (February, 1830), for instance, claimed that Hoffmann's work originated as a species of instrumental “noise” and his images themselves as orchestral effects painted “près de son chevalet” – both “close to his easel” and – in a clever musical pun – also “close to the bridge”:

Le drame d'Hoffmann est né en quelque sorte au bruit d'un instrument de musique. Il le commence sur son clavecin, le continue au cabaret entre sa pipe et son verre, puis l'achève en se livrant, près de son chevalet, aux fantaisies de son pinceau.¹⁴⁸

Other reviewers were quick to take up the “orchestral” metaphor: an 1831 essay in *Le Globe*, for instance, tied Hoffmann's “spiritual” idiom to “l'orchestre de son imagination.”¹⁴⁹ A few months later, a critic for *L'Artiste* described “Le Pot d'or” as “un magnifique concert où toutes les harmonies sont confondues.”¹⁵⁰ More tellingly, a biographical sketch by Loève-Veimars published in 1832 tied Hoffmann's literary fantasies to his bizarre musical education and the “fantastic instrumentation” of his own orchestral works.¹⁵¹ The very interdisciplinarity of Hoffmann's writing rendered

¹⁴⁷ For more on the links between “natural” magic, pantheism, and music in Hoffmann's writings, see Abigail Chantler, “Art Religion” and “Hoffmann's Musical Hermeneutics Revisited,” *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Aesthetics* (Hants, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁴⁸ “Hoffmann's drama is born, in some sense, out of the noise of a musical instrument. He begins at his keyboard, continues in the café amidst his pipe and his glass, then finishes by abandoning himself, close to his easel [close to the bridge], to the fantasies of his brush.” *Le Temps* (28 February, 1830).

¹⁴⁹ *Le Globe* (9 November, 1831), in a review of Balzac's “Roman et contes philosophiques.”

¹⁵⁰ *L'Artiste* (11 November, 1832); a more sustained discussion of this quote appears in Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France*, pp. 168-69.

¹⁵¹ Loève-Veimars, “Vie d'Hoffmann: Fragment Inédit,” *L'Artiste* (20 May, 1832).

it critically impenetrable, according to a review in *Le Corsaire*. Wavering between sound and sense, it resisted both explanation and easy interpretation, foiling readers and critics alike:

Tel est Hoffmann! C'est la harpe éolienne, elle retentit et chacun l'entend avec ses sensations intimes; vienne le critique, il jugera le drame et son style, mais la commotion...chacun l'éprouve et nul ne peut décrire sa force attractive ou répulsive. Chose vaine et puérile que de soumettre Hoffmann à des appréciations d'écoles, d'articles ou de préfaces.¹⁵²

The literary fantastic was a confusingly “musical” medium in France, just as the musical fantastic was a “literary” mode. At the same time as Berlioz’s works were described in language borrowed from Hoffmann’s *contes fantastiques*, Hoffmann’s own writing was theorized in terms of the “confused” and “noisy” orchestral language so strongly linked with Berlioz. Rather than evolving out of (or modeling itself on) literary aesthetics, then, the musical fantastic emerged as a simultaneous and inextricable impulse. We might argue that Hoffmann’s fantastic tales had musical “programs” – the works by Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven that resonated through his stories – just as Berlioz’s first symphony had a literary program. In both cases, the relationship between the two media was fluid; one did not point unidirectionally at the other so much as it purported to transform *into* the other. Essentially unstable, fantastic works hovered in a nebulous space peopled by the “vague,” “obscure,” and “vaporous” forms that Hoffmann described in his *contes fantastiques* and Berlioz himself embraced in his well-known definition of “musique romantique.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² “Such is Hoffmann! He is the Aeolian harp which reverberates and strikes the most intimate chords with each listener; then comes the critic, he judges the drama and its style, but what a commotion... each examines it but none can describe its attractive or repulsive force. It is a vain and gauche thing to subject Hoffmann to the critique of schools, articles, or prefaces.” *Le Corsaire* (2 April, 1830).

¹⁵³ See Berlioz, “Aperçus sur la musique classique et la musique romantique,” *Le Correspondant* (22 October, 1830).

The fluidity that characterized Hoffmann's fantastic mode – that allowed it to vacillate not only between sound and text but between reality and unreality – extended to his characters, too, who hovered on the cusp between life and art. Often writers, painters, and musicians, Hoffmann's protagonists included both real and imaginary figures. Tales featuring Gluck and Salvator Rosa inserted historical personalities into fictional settings, embroidering and even reinventing the lives of well-known artists. Working in reverse, the tale of "Don Juan" allowed Da Ponte's *Donna Anna* to step out of the fictional into the material world, where she disclosed her most intimate feelings to Theodore himself. Even Hoffmann's strictly "imaginary" characters seemed to acquire substance and agency in French reception: both the violin-maker Krespel and his singing daughter Antonia (protagonists of the well-known "Violin de Crémone"), were subject to lengthy interrogation by Parisian critics and often cited as exemplars of Romantic "musical" temperament. Indeed, as Teichmann notes, Hoffmann's tales did much to invent the profile of the artist in early nineteenth-century France; his imaginary poets, painters, and musicians became models for a rising generation of Parisian intellectuals, who began to identify the artist as a semi-fictional and even fantastic creature – the hero of a *conte fantastique*.¹⁵⁴ According to St.-Beuve, in an 1830 review for *Le Globe*, Hoffmann's tales both captured and constructed the very essence of the artist, recording his secret thoughts and plumbing the depths of his nature:

...personne jusqu'ici, ni critique, ni poète, n'a-t-il senti et expliqué à l'égal d'Hoffmann ce que c'est qu'un artiste. Il sait l'artiste à fond, sous toutes ses formes, dans toutes ses applications, dans ses pensées les plus secrètes, dans ses procédés les plus spéciaux, et dans ce qu'il fait et dans ce qu'il ne fera jamais, et dans ses rêves et dans son impuissance, et dans la déprivation de ses facultés aigries, et dans le

¹⁵⁴ See Teichmann, "Vogue d'Hoffmann le Fantastique," *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France*, esp. pp. 61-62.

triomphe de son génie harmonieux, et dans le néant de son oeuvre, et dans le sublime de ses misères.¹⁵⁵

Of course, Hoffmann's most influential hero was his own fictional alter-ego, Johannes Kreisler, a figure whose fame in France established the musician as the quintessentially Romantic – and fantastic – artist. As with Hoffmann's Gluck and Salvator Rosa characters, his own fantastic profile became more real in France than his "factual" self. Almost immediately upon his Parisian debut, Hoffmann's history began to intertwine with that of his imaginary *Kapellmeister* Kreisler; he emerged from a barrage of "biographical" sketches flooding the Parisian papers as a confusing amalgam of history and fantasy: a mad, brilliant, intoxicated, but also isolated artist whose music evolved out of poetry and dissolved back into the hazy images of his own *contes fantastiques*. Hoffmann, the man, elicited as much response from critics as did his tales, and none was more instrumental in establishing his Romantic biography than Loève-Veimars himself, whose early portraits of the German *fantastiquer* set the tone for all that followed.

Loève-Veimars' first Hoffmann sketch for the *Revue de Paris*, published close on the heels of his early translations, opened with a quote from *Twelfth Night*: "Is this a madman?"¹⁵⁶ Titled "Les Dernières années et la mort d'Hoffmann," it identified the German author as "un homme dont la vie fut une fièvre continuelle, un cauchemar sans fin." Pathology and overindulgence, according to Loève-Veimars, were central to

¹⁵⁵ "...nobody until now, neither critic nor poet, has sensed and explained, as well as Hoffmann has done, what it means to be an artist. He knows the artist at his core, in all his forms, all his applications, his most secret thoughts, his most particular behaviors, what he does and never does, his dreams and his impotence, his deprivations and ill-humored tendencies, the triumph of his harmonious genius, the nothingness of his work, and the sublimity of his miseries." St.-Beuve, "*Oeuvres complètes d'Hoffmann*, Contes nocturnes," *Le Globe* (7 December, 1830).

¹⁵⁶ Loève-Veimars, "Les Dernières années et la mort d'Hoffmann," *Revue de Paris* (October, 1829); this piece was reprinted in *Le Voleur* (15 November, 1829). Rumors circulated that Loève-Veimars had known Hoffmann in his later years; this was untrue, but it did much to facilitate the 'factual' reception of his fictional biographies.

Hoffmann's genius: they had stimulated his imagination while also eroding his health. In clouds of tobacco and punch-induced hallucinations, he had glimpsed a fantastic and even transcendental world, but the price was illness and, finally, madness. Hoffmann belonged to the second of two types of genius: the first was born of happiness and health but the second emerged from misery and affliction:

...s'il est des écrivains qui trouvent leur immense talent et leur verve dans le bonheur et dans l'opulence, il en est d'autres dont la route a été marquée à travers toutes les afflictions humaines, et dont un fatal destin a nourri l'imagination par des maux inouis et par une éternelle misère.¹⁵⁷

Loève-Weimars' bipartite delineation of genius (and his articulation of a link between talent and affliction in Hoffmann's case) echoed Fétis's and Berlioz's analyses of Beethoven – surely an intentional aligning of Hoffmann with his Romantic idol. But more importantly for our purposes, Loève-Weimars' two categories resurfaced in d'Ortigue's biographical sketch of Berlioz, to which I shall return presently.

Early profiles of Hoffmann published over the course of 1829-30 stimulated a raft of later biographical pieces that elaborated increasingly fabulously on the historical facts.¹⁵⁸ Even more so than his Gluck, Beethoven, or Krespel, Hoffmann himself (now indistinguishable from Kreisler) became a key model of musical genius and, more broadly, a vehicle for the literary construction of the Romantic artist. A review of the second book of Hoffmann's *Contes fantastiques* in *Le Figaro*, for instance, advertised the imminent appearance of Loève-Weimars' next Hoffmann sketch which, so the critic claimed, would sum up not only Hoffmann's life, but the dramatic temperament of the artist at large; it was to be “un drame passionné, un

¹⁵⁷ “... if there are writers who derive their immense talent and their energy from happiness and opulence, there are others whose route is destined to traverse all human afflictions, and in whom a fatal destiny nourishes the imagination with inexplicable evils and eternal misery.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ In addition to those mentioned here, see the piece entitled “Hoffmann et Devrient” published in the *Revue des deux mondes* (October-December, 1830).

drame vivant de détails, d'individualité; en un mot, une silhouette exacte d'une carrière agitée, heureuse, amère, déçue, d'une existence d'artiste, en un mot."¹⁵⁹ What followed, in at least one of Loève-Veimars' later biographical pieces, was an allegedly true account of Hoffmann's early life which was actually a retelling (and in some places, a drastic embroidering) of Kreisler's story as related in the fragmentary novel, *Kater Murr*. Loève-Veimar described Hoffmann's unhappy childhood with his aunts and uncles following the separation of his parents and departure of his father from Königsberg. The broad outlines of his story are based in reality, but his tale begins to slide into the realm of the fantastic when he tells us that Hoffmann's aunts and uncles constituted "un assemblage de pygmées" and his grandmother "un colosse majestueux, puissant et rubicond, qui dominait tout ce petit peuple." Not only does Hoffmann collapse into Kreisler, but biography itself collapses into fantasy – Hoffmann is absorbed into one of his own *contes fantastiques*.¹⁶⁰

We see this process showcased even more clearly in an earlier piece by Jules Janin, entitled "Kressler [sic], conte fantastique."¹⁶¹ Here, Janin abandons any pretense to historical accuracy, instead situating Hoffmann as the protagonist of an imaginary narrative. His tale explores the fictionalization of biography itself – the processes of self-construction and self-discovery that produced the Romantic artist. Writing in Hoffmann's own voice, Janin described a late-night café full of mysterious sights and sounds: he hears mysterious music in the clinking of wine glasses, composes rhapsodic poetry, and – amidst clouds of smoke – seems to see specters hovering amongst his fellow patrons. Wine and tobacco transport him into the realm of shadows; he sees his own altered silhouette projected on the wall behind him: a figure

¹⁵⁹ "a passionate drama, a drama vibrant with details, with individuality; in short, the precise silhouette of an agitated, happy, enraged, deceitful career – of the existence of the artist." "Contes fantastiques d'Hoffmann," *Le Figaro* (8 April, 1830).

¹⁶⁰ Loève-Veimars, "Vie d'Hoffmann: Fragment Inédit," *L'Artiste* (20 May, 1832).

¹⁶¹ *L'Artiste* (20 February, 1831).

“avec une tête penchée, un air pensif, des cheveux en désordre ... une figure que je fus tout de suite porté à aimer.” In his inebriated, “other” state, he encounters (transforms into) the famous Kreisler, his “genius” self – a “rêveur idéal,” creator of fantastic visions and composer of celestial music. “Kreisler a plus de génie que moi,” writes Hoffmann, “[il] est beau, plus beau que moi.”

The Romantic genius, Janin’s tale suggests, was a transcendental self – a fantastic persona accessible only in the altered states of dream or drunkenness. This idea had been prefigured in his earlier piece entitled “Etre Artiste!,” which appeared in the inaugural issue of *L’Artiste* (January, 1831) as a foundational definition for the journal itself and a Romantic rallying cry. Here, Janin provided an impassioned description of the modern artist: his history, temperament, and physique. Already, in the essay’s opening paragraphs, Janin’s profile has a distinctly Kreisleresque flavor: his new artist is “a dreamer” and a “careless philosopher,” a man “qui n’a souci que de son, de couleur, d’ait, d’âme et de coeur.” He owes much to the contemplative quirkiness of Sterne and to Shakespeare’s Yorick, but his real debt is to Hoffmann, whose fantastic self has provided a new mold:

Après Yorick, Théodore; après Sterne, Hoffmann. C’est une découverte toute moderne que le fantastique. C’est une nouvelle source d’émotions que l’artiste fantastique, le fantasque, qui remplace l’arlequin usé, le pantalon fatigué, tous les gilles du monde; le fantasque, qui n’est autre chose que le Pasquin de notre siècle.¹⁶²

Unpredictable and even mad, the fantastic artist was a figure steeped in the sounds and imagery of reverie: “un cauchemar est son inspiration la plus puissante, le rêve est son état naturel, l’ivrognerie est sa vie, le son est sa folie.” He represented, according to

¹⁶² “After Yorick, Theodore, after Sterne, Hoffmann. The fantastic is a completely modern discovery. The fantastic artist is a new source of emotions, the *fantasque*, who replaces the old Harlequin, the tired Pantalón, all the clowns of the world, the *fantasque*, who is none other than the Pasquin of our time.” Janin, “Etre Artiste!” *L’Artiste* (January, 1831).

Janin, the future of art, and of the artist: “Voilà une mine toute nouvelle que nous exploiterons certainement.” The new generation of artists, he implied, were to discover (or uncover) their own dream selves, just as Hoffmann had done – to embrace their potential for Kreisleresque genius.¹⁶³

Perhaps more keenly than any of his musical contemporaries, Berlioz responded to Janin’s (and Loève-Weimars’) “fantastique” delineation of the modern artist. As we have already seen, critical reception of his works linked Berlioz with the aesthetics of the Romantic fantastic early in his career. His temperament and taste mapped, seemingly effortlessly, onto the Hoffmannesque profile circulating in the press; it was not just Berlioz’s music, in other words, but Berlioz himself who began to emerge as an artist cast in the fantastic mold. Descriptions of his eccentric, Kreisleresque appearance – his unruly hair, disheveled clothing, and flashing eyes – abounded, cited by the press as proof of his innate genius. From the 1830 review in *Le Temps*:

He is a slender, frail-looking young man, with long fair hair whose unruly disorder somehow carries with it a suggestion of genius. The lines on his bony face are strongly marked, and under a broad forehead the great cavernous eyes flash with light. The knot of his cravat seems to have been tightened in anger; his clothes are only elegant because his tailor made them that way, and his boots are splattered with mud because the impetuosity of his character won’t tolerate the inaction of being transported in a carriage, because it is absolutely necessary that the activity of his body complements the activity of his head.¹⁶⁴

Berlioz’s friends described him in similar terms; Legouvé recalled his “comical” and “diabolical” mien, while Hiller noted his “extraordinary and individual features”:

¹⁶³ “a nightmare is his most vital inspiration, dream is his natural state, drunkenness is his life, sound is [the expression of] his madness”; “Here is a an entirely new vein which we shall certainly exploit.” Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ *Le Temps* (26 December, 1830); translated in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 40.

... the high forehead sharply cut away above deep-set eyes, the strikingly prominent hawk-like nose, the thin finely sculptured lips, the rather short chin – all this crowned by an astonishing abundance of light brown curls whose fantastic proliferation had never suffered the restraining influence of the barber’s scissors.¹⁶⁵

Berlioz’s “fantastic” look was certainly cultivated, but his musical connections to Hoffmann seemed more innate. His love for Gluck and Spontini and his reverence for Beethoven (all, of course, composers who featured in Hoffmann’s tales) certainly predated French translation of the *contes fantastiques*, as did his attraction to the supernatural. More significantly, Berlioz’s exploration of a new orchestral soundscape – his experiments with unusual instrumental noises and “combinations” – began well before Hoffmann’s arrival in France, although this facet of his idiom would later be cited as “Kreislereque.” Hoffmann’s *Kater Murr* linked Kreisler’s eccentric musical idiom with his fascination for unusual instruments and his penchant for “fantastic orchestration,” but it was hardly true that Berlioz’s innovations constituted a “response” to this description; if anything, his new approach to instrumentation represented an uncanny point of connection between his own music and the imaginary works of Hoffmann’s alter-ego. Berlioz was, in some sense, “Hoffmannesque” before Hoffmann – his connection to the German *fantastiquer* was more than skin deep.

Through the early 1830s, however, Berlioz began self-consciously to amplify his own “fantastique” image, encouraging the eccentric profile that had already begun to take shape in the press. As Christian Wasselin has pointed out, Hoffmann’s *contes fantastiques* made a considerable impression on Berlioz; early letters to both his sister Nanci and his friend Humbert Ferrand describe them as curious and compelling.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ For a more complete account of Legouvé’s and Hiller’s Berlioz portraits, see Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, pp. 56, 65.

¹⁶⁶ See the letters of 28 December, 1829 (to Nanci Berlioz) and 2 January, 1830 (to Humbert Ferrand). For another discussion of the Berlioz-Hoffmann connection, see “Au miroir d’E.T.A. Hoffmann,” *Hector Berlioz: cahier*, ed. Christian Wasselin and Pierre-René (Paris: Herne, 2003), pp. 258-267.

The artist-heroes of the *contes fantastiques* as well as Hoffmann's own Kreisleresque profile began to shape both Berlioz's private self-construction and his early autobiographical writing. His first attempt at a conventional self-history (a short sketch dating from 1832 and written in the third person) reads much like a fantastic tale, drawing heavily on Hoffmannesque tropes: the quest for an unattainable ideal, the isolation and misery of the artist, the sudden epiphanies of genius, and the lawless abandon of the inspired creator.¹⁶⁷ Beginning in La Côte St.-André, Berlioz spun a tale of unhappy childhood. He described his early yearning for music, his father's disapproval, his forced medical studies, and the insults heaped on his first attempts at composition. From the beginning, he insisted, he was possessed by "le démon musicale" although hindered by a lack of practical training. Everything changed "in an instant" when he encountered a quartet by Haydn – the "secrets of composition" were spontaneously revealed, allowing him to compose his first quintet, which was warmly applauded:

Ce fut un quatuor d'Haydn qui lui révéla enfin spontanément ce que pouvait être l'harmonie. A force de l'écouter, de le lire, de le mettre en partition, Berlioz dévoila le mystère de la basse fondamentale, et, dès ce moment, comprit tout ce que le fatras des livres didactiques avait dérobé à son intelligence. Il composa aussitôt un quintette pour flûte, deux violons, alto et basse, qui, cette fois, ne fut pas hué, mais fort applaudi par les exécutants.¹⁶⁸

Berlioz's happiness was short-lived, however. His father refused to support full-time musical study in Paris, retracting his financial support and leaving his son penniless in the capital. Like Kreisler, Berlioz was alone in the world, and forced to

¹⁶⁷ Berlioz's 1832 essay is reproduced in Julien Tiersot, *Lettres de musiciens écrits en français du XVe au XXe siècle*. Vol II (Paris: Alcan; Turin: Bocca, 1924), pp. 172-78.

¹⁶⁸ "It was a Haydn quartet that finally revealed to him, spontaneously, the nature of harmony. By listening to it, reading it, creating a score of it, Berlioz discovered the mysteries of fundamental bass and, from this moment, understood all that which the jumble of textbooks had hidden from him. He composed, in an instant, a quintet for flute, two violins, viola, and bass which, this time, was not mocked but roundly applauded by its players." Ibid., p. 173.

take a miserable job singing in the chorus at the Théâtre des Nouveautés. Just as his material circumstances seemed to be improving, he fell prey to an emotional malaise – a passion of “terrifying violence.” As Berlioz described the period of his obsession with Harriet Smithson (a retelling, of course, of his own symphonic program), his life-story slides inexorably in the direction of fantasy: “Tout ceci, toutes ces circonstances produites par le hasard,” he acknowledges, “donne à notre biographie l’air d’un roman.”¹⁶⁹ Like so many of Hoffmann’s artist-heroes, he was consumed by an ideal and unattainable passion. Descending into despair, he experienced “intolerable suffering,” illness, and even madness, transforming into an unmistakably Kreisleresque figure – a character “pale of face, and unkempt, with his long hair and beard dissheveled.”¹⁷⁰ Normally silent and melancholy, he now experienced fits of “sudden and wild laughter” or explosions of tears. Later, he wandered unwittingly into the countryside, going without food and sleeping in ditches. In Berlioz’s tale, as in Hoffmann’s *contes*, delusion and deprivation are the price of inspiration; as the lovesick episode draws to an end, Berlioz transmutes suffering into art, writing his *Symphonie fantastique* and winning the long-sought Harriet.

Now his self-portrait began to shift from Kreisler- to Rosa-esque: no longer a melancholic lover, Berlioz became a brigand roaming the wilds of Italy, living off the land and carousing with bandits. Drawing clearly on the fictionalized biographies of Rosa circulating in Paris during this period (including Hoffmann’s own “Signor Formica”), he cast himself as a reckless, Devil-may-care figure wandering

dans les montagnes du royaume de Naples, un fusil sur l’épaule, vivant de sa chasse ou à peu près, hantant tous les repaires des bandits, passant des journées entières à bâtir des pyramides de pierres sur la pointe des rochers de Subiaco, ou fumant une douzaine de cigares couché au soleil comme un lazaronne, se jettant tout habillé dans

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 177.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 177.

l'Anio au risque d'en mourir de la fièvre trois heures après, gai jusqu'à l'extravagance ou muet et brutal, suivant que ses souvenirs irlandais l'assaillaient ou le laissaient en repos...¹⁷¹

Throwing in a final, Gothic twist, Berlioz described falling in love with the corpse of a Florentine lady, whose hand he kissed, and whose funeral train he followed to the cemetery. All of this smacks not only of a fantastic tale but, as Berlioz admits, a “great romance of Byron.” It captured the imagination of both his public and of subsequent biographers, who began to confirm and even amplify Berlioz's own fictionalized self-portrait.

Nobody was more influential in establishing Berlioz's public image than his friend and longtime advocate, Joseph d'Ortigue, who published a series of Berlioz sketches through the mid-1830s. His earliest Berlioz profile was a piece in the *Revue de Paris* which appeared as part of the “Galerie biographique des artistes français et étrangers.”¹⁷² It took Berlioz's own autobiography as a starting point, reinscribing and extending the Hoffmannesque and Byronesque personas at the heart of the composer's self-telling. D'Ortigue placed the *Symphonie fantastique* unabashably at the centre of his profile, using the work not only as a frame for his narrative, but as a summary of Berlioz's essential characteristics. His Berlioz is absorbed inexorably into the “fantastique” tale of his own symphonic program which, in d'Ortigue's hands, grew increasingly complex. It mingled with a series of other tales, both “real” and

¹⁷¹ “[Berlioz roamed] through the mountains in the Kingdom of Naples, a rifle over his shoulder, living almost entirely on what he could hunt and frequenting the haunts of bandits, passing entire days building pyramids of stone on the rocky peak of the Subiaco mountains or dozing in the sun, smoking a dozen cigars like a Neapolitan lazybones, flinging himself fully dressed into the Anio despite the risk of dying from fever three hours after, gay to the point of extravagance or dumb and surly depending on whether his Irish memories tormented him or left him in repose...” Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁷² Joseph d'Ortigue, “Galerie biographique des artistes français et étrangers. V: Hector Berlioz,” *Revue de Paris* (December, 1832), pp. 281-98. See also, d'Ortigue's article on Berlioz in the *Revue européenne* (23 December, 1832) and his later piece for the *Gazette musicale* (10 May, 1835). A Berlioz sketch clearly indebted to d'Ortigue, although attributed to an anonymous author, appeared in *La Bagatelle* (11 April, 1833).

“fictional,” which together, produced a patchwork biography composed of a web of quotations, anecdotes, and literary digressions. Pieces of Berlioz’s original autobiography are woven together with excerpts from contemporary novels, passages of analytical writing, and musings on musical aesthetics so that the whole begins to approach the fragmented narrative structure of one of Hoffmann’s own tales.

Before he introduced Berlioz, d’Ortigue introduced the *Symphonie fantastique*, arguing that it represented not simply a musical work but a foray into the unconscious, an experiment with novel forms and genres, and a new direction for art. It became, in d’Ortigue’s telling, synonymous with the composer himself, whose life-story took on a decidedly “fantastique” cast. D’Ortigue reiterated the details of Berlioz’s early childhood, pausing to amplify the mysterious moment of “revelation” described in the composer’s original self-profile. It became “cet éclair instantané, cette explosion de clarté, qui se fit dans l’âme de Berlioz.” Not simply a turning point, the episode was transformed into a veritable “explosion” of genius: “Le génie se révèle tôt ou tard,” d’Ortigue writes.¹⁷³ After reminding us of Berlioz’s early financial struggles and the misery occasioned by his father’s rejection, d’Ortigue arrived at the focal point of his narrative: Berlioz’s great infatuation and episode of lovesick despair. Now even more unfathomable and terrifying, it emerged as “un état de déchirement et d’exaltation nerveuse que d’intolérables souffrances” and a sensation “effrayant par sa violence et sa ténacité.”¹⁷⁴ Such a sentiment, d’Ortigue claimed, had parallels only in the realm of fiction: he compared it to “cette singulière passion de la Marquise de R*** pour le comédien Léo, qu’un écrivain spirituel a décrite avec tant de talent dans la *Revue de*

¹⁷³ Joseph d’Ortigue, “Galerie biographique des artistes français et étrangers,” p. 283.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 287.

Paris.”¹⁷⁵ In a lengthier passage, he tied Berlioz’s passion to the doomed love of Oswald (Lord Nelvil), the melancholic hero of Staël’s novel, *Corinne*.

Berlioz is a figure, d’Ortigue implies, who can exist only in the realm of imagination or dream, and indeed, it is in the hallucinatory space of the *Symphonie fantastique* that he is most fully revealed. There, Berlioz both encounters and becomes his ‘other’ self – his Kreisleresque incarnation. In order to understand the artist, d’Ortigue insists, we must study his symphony – we must look at “l’homme dans l’ouvrage”¹⁷⁶ – for it is there that we will discover Berlioz’s alter-ego, his inner genius:

La symphonie fantastique est un drame, un tableau, un poème. C’est un rêve passionné et poétique d’imagination et de coeur, que Berlioz nous explique à l’aide de l’interprète musical. Il prend une réalité de sa vie, il l’achève dans son esprit, il l’élabore avec son art, et voilà sa symphonie.¹⁷⁷

D’Ortigue closes by repeating the tale of the “beloved cadaver” and devoting a few paragraphs to a description of *Lélio*, the sequel to the *Fantastique*. Returning to the realm of anecdote, he tacks on the well-known story of Paganini and Berlioz:

Paganini’s first hearing of the *Fantastique*, his extravagant admiration for the work and later bequest to Berlioz. Here, d’Ortigue connects Berlioz with the other overtly “fantastique” figure of the period – the demonic violinist and the Dantesque composer are mysteriously conjoined.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ “that singular passion of the Marquise de R*** for the comedian Lélio, which a witty writer [George Sand] described with talent in the *Revue de Paris*.” Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁷⁷ “The *Symphonie fantastique* is a drama, a tableau, a poem. It is a passionate and poetic dream of the imagination and the heart, which Berlioz relates to us with the aid of music. He takes a real event from his life, he refines it with his spirit, he embroiders it with his art and produces his symphony.” Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁷⁸ Paganini’s alleged demonic possession and the rumor that he had sold his soul to the Devil are well-documented facets of his reception history. In France, he was linked routinely to the aesthetics of the fantastic, notably, in Jules Janin’s tale “Hoffmann et Paganini,” which posited a meeting between violinist and *conteur*. Janin was also one of the primary constructors of Berlioz’s “fantastique” persona,

D'Ortigue's later biographical writing on Berlioz – notably, an 1835 essay for the *Gazette musicale* – shored up not only the image of a fantastic, pseudo-fictional composer, but of a misunderstood genius.¹⁷⁹ Echoing Berlioz's own description of Beethoven, and Loève-Weimars' later characterization of Hoffmann, d'Ortigue situates Berlioz in the category of the visionary but isolated artist. Outlining two now-familiar categories of brilliance, he describes first the “happy geniuses” [les génies heureux] and then “les autres” – the persecuted, neglected artists whose works are rejected by an unfeeling public. Misery itself is the signal of this second category of geniuses, and humiliation their lot:

La persécution! c'est là le caractère, le signe infaillible auquel on reconnaît le génie, la vérité, tout ce qui a vie et avenir, tout ce qui est destiné à agir puissamment sur l'humanité.¹⁸⁰

But just as the educated populace changed its mind about Beethoven, d'Ortigue argued, they will alter their opinion of Berlioz; he will come into his own, once the world has discovered how to translate his mystical musical language.

Despite their obvious promotional agenda and their tendency toward Berlioz-mythologizing, d'Ortigue's essays contain thoughtful observations on musical form, reception, and aesthetics. The same cannot be said of articles by Berlioz's more flamboyant supporters, among them Jules Janin, whose commentary on the *Symphonie fantastique* and its composer strays into the realm of fabrication. Janin's seminal article for *L'Artiste* (a key forum for Romantic prosyletizing) did much, as we have seen, to establish the “new” genius as a fantastic figure. His Berlioz essays were

which encouraged a sense of connection among Hoffmann, Paganini, and Berlioz, all three falling into Janin's category of the “modern” fantastic artist.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph d'Ortigue. “Grand Concert Dramatique de M. Berlioz. Symphonie fantastique. Mélologue, ou retour à la vie,” *Gazette musicale* (10 May, 1835).

¹⁸⁰ “Persecution! that is the character, the unmistakable signal by which one recognizes genius, truth, all that has life and vision, all that is destined to act powerfully upon humanity.” Ibid.

written with this definition in mind; they drew both the composer and his work into an unambiguously Hoffmannesque realm. Nowhere was this strategy clearer than in Janin's articles for the *Journal des Débats*, which figured Berlioz as a wild and eccentric composer estranged from the real world and from normal society. As if beginning one of his own well-known *contes fantastiques*, Janin opened his 1832 *Débats* essay by inviting spectators to enjoy an exhibition of the bizarre: "venez quelque part avec moi: nous allons voir un étrange jeune homme, fanatique, hardi."¹⁸¹ Berlioz's oddity is intimately bound up with his genius: "C'est, je vous dis, un bizarre génie, homme excentrique et vivant seul (...) Vous n'avez qu'à le regarder pour jurer que c'est un esprit à part."¹⁸²

Janin's Berlioz, like d'Ortigue's, is a composer plagued by misery and isolation; he occupies that fantastic realm of dream and reverie – of "songes dorés" – out of which "modern" music is born. Indeed, his *Symphonie fantastique*, according to one of Janin's later articles, is a patchwork of dreamscapes:

...rêves de la nuit, rêves du jour, rêves de la fièvre, rêves du printemps, rêves de l'hiver, rêves des montagnes, rêves italien et allemand, pensé et exécuté en italien et en allemand, une véritable fièvre sans relâche et sans repos.¹⁸³

Steeped in literary effusion, Janin's anticipation of the 1832 performance of Berlioz's *Fantastique* and its sequel could easily have been taken from one of Hoffmann's musical tales. His prose bursts at the seams, piling up adjectives willy-nilly, and adopting the Devil-may-care attitude he ascribes to Berlioz himself:

¹⁸¹ "Come along with me. We are about to see a strange young man, fanatic and bold." Janin, "Concert de M. Hector Berlioz," *Journal des Débats* (10 December, 1832).

¹⁸² "He is, I tell you, a bizarre genius, an eccentric and isolated man. (...) You have only to look at him to ascertain that he is a different sort of man." Ibid.

¹⁸³ "...dreams of the night, dreams of the day, fevered dreams, dreams of the Spring, dreams of the Winter, dreams of the mountains, Italian and German dreams, imagined and executed in Italian and in German – a veritable fever without release and without repose." Janin, "Concert de M. Berlioz," *Journal des Débats* (24 November, 1834).

Ce concert sera romantique, fantastique, diabolique, qui lui importe? Ce sera beau, mauvais, bon, ridicule, extravagant, gracieux, sans nom, sans analogie, que lui importe? Cela sera repli de prétentions et bouffi d'orgueil, que lui importe! Pourvit que cela soit neuf ou à peu près, sa tâche est accomplie. Il ne veut rien de puis, lui. C'est un être tranchant, vaniteux et insolemment convaincu. Le voilà écoutez-le, jugez-le, quelle que soit votre opinion, que lui importe! La sienne est faite depuis longtemps.¹⁸⁴

Janin's later pieces on Berlioz became increasingly extravagant. Among several articles in *L'Artiste*, for instance, was a pseudo-biography entitled "Miss Smithson et Berlioz," which recounted/reinvented the tale of Berlioz's youthful love affair.¹⁸⁵ Here, fact gives way almost entirely to fantasy, and the "real" Berlioz to Romantic projection. Janin collapsed the story of Harriet Smithson with an account of Berlioz's trip to Italy, suggesting that the *Symphonie fantastique* emerged, not only out of thwarted love, but out of Berlioz's "brigand" days, and his mad Rosa-esque wanderings in the mountains of Abruzzo. The genesis of Berlioz's monodrama, *Le Retour à la vie*, is confused, in Janin's account, with the origins of the *Fantastique* itself; he drew together both pieces into a tale of desperation and adventure that warrants generous quotation:

Berlioz s'en va loin de Paris; il va à Rome tout seul, à Rome; la grande ville pèse sur lui. Il n'a pas un chant, pas une idée, rien de l'âme, pas même des larmes. Il quitte Rome; il va dans les montagnes; il porte dans les Abruzzes son génie et son amour. Là, sur les pics foulés par Salvator Rosa, Berlioz retrouve son amour, et partant son génie. Alors toutes ses douleurs, toutes ses passions, toutes ses amours, toutes ses espérances lui reviennent. Que d'harmonie dans la tête de cet amoureux jeune homme! Mais qui lui donnera un drame? ...Quel Scribe assez agreste et assez sauvage se rencontrera dans ces montagnes pour composer un opéra à Berlioz? Personne! Eh bien, ce sera lui qui sera son poète à lui-même; ce sera lui qui se fera son drame! Alors

¹⁸⁴ "This concert will be romantic, fantastic, diabolical, what does it matter to him? It will be beautiful, ugly, great, ridiculous, extravagant, gracious, without name, without analogy, what does he care? It will be full of pretensions and puffed up with pride, what does he care! Provided that it is new, or nearly so, its task is virtually accomplished. He wants nothing more, does he? He is a decisive, vainglorious, insolently persuasive being. So there – listen to it, judge it; your opinion matters little to him! His own mind was made up long ago." Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Janin, "Miss Smithson et Berlioz," *L'Artiste* (Sér 1/Vol. 6/liv. 17th).

il rappelle ses rêves, il se retrace sa longue maladie, ses longues angoisses; ne se trouvant pas assez malheureux, avec son amour malheureux, il se suppose criminel; il lui faut des remords pour que son génie amoureux soit à l'aise. L'insensé et le malheureux! Il rêve qu'il a tué sa maîtresse. Quand il l'a tuée, il s'abandonne à la vie de bandit dans les montagnes; puis, des montagnes, il descend dans l'église; il se met à genoux et il prie. Après sa prière il retrouve sa maîtresse, mais morte, étendue au cercueil, et il entend les saints psaumes.¹⁸⁶

Now Berlioz descends into madness, according to Janin, reliving “tout ce qu’il a senti: amour, bonheur, nuits d’été, orages, printemps, meurtre, brigands, et enfin et toujours ce triste et perpétuel *Miserere* qui bourdonne à son oreille.” Out of delusion itself emerges the *Fantastique*: “le musicien sort vainqueur de cette lutte acharnée; son drame est accompli: l’oeuvre qui était dans sa tête, la voilà sur le papier, réelle, réalisée, palpable!”¹⁸⁷ Berlioz puts on clothes, cuts his matted hair and his fingernails, and returns to society: “il redevient un homme comme tous les hommes, tant qu’il peut, et il rentre à Paris.” His life-story, according to Janin, summed up the “drame si singulier d’une vie d’artiste.” Berlioz was “tout à la fois le poète, le musicien, le martyr et le héros” – the protagonist of his own fantastic narrative. Janin closed by comparing Berlioz’s tale directly to those by Hoffmann: “Il n’y a rien de plus

¹⁸⁶ “Berlioz takes himself far from Paris; he goes to Rome all alone; in Rome the great city weighs on him. He is without melody, without ideas, without spirit, even without tears. He leaves Rome; he goes into the mountains; he takes his genius and his love into the Abruzzos. There, amongst peaks well-trodden by Salvator Rosa, Berlioz recovers his love and hence his genius. And then all his sorrows, all his passions, all his loves, all his hopes come back to him. What harmony resounds in the head of this lovesick young man! But who will give him a drama? ...What Scribe rustic and savage enough is to be found in these mountains to compose an opera for Berlioz? None! And so, he will become his own poet; he will fashion his own drama! He recalls his dreams, he retraces his lengthy illness, his long anguish; as if the unhappiness of his miserable love was not enough, he imagines himself a criminal; he must feel remorse in order to put his amorous genius at ease. The wretched madman! He dreams that he has murdered his mistress. When he has killed her, he abandons himself to the life of a bandit among the mountains; then, from the mountains, he descends to the church; he falls on his knees and prays. After his prayer he rediscovers his mistress but she is dead, laid out in a coffin, and he hears the holy hymns.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “all that he had experienced: love, happiness, summer nights, storms, spring, murder, brigands, and through all of this the sad and eternal *Miserere* that echoes in his ear.”; “the musician emerges victorious from this fierce struggle; his drama is written: the work that was in his head appears on the paper, real, realized, palpable!” Ibid.

intéressant” he insisted, “et de plus neuf dans les contes fantastiques de l’Allemand Hoffmann.”

Janin’s own *contes fantastiques*, many of which appeared in the *Gazette musicale* through the mid-1830s, aligned Berlioz still more clearly with Hoffmann. These tales became vital vehicles for Janin’s defense of Romantic aesthetics and his promotion both of Berlioz’s music and his “fantastique” persona. In one story (titled simply “Hoffmann, conte fantastique”), Janin described an imaginary encounter with the German author himself.¹⁸⁸ In Hoffmann’s smoky and cluttered Berlin rooms, the two discuss art, criticism, and the modern composer. Janin put many of his own ideas directly into Hoffmann’s mouth, appropriating his “fantastic” authority and situating him as a (posthumous) Berlioz supporter. When Hoffmann breaks off to play the overture to Gluck’s *Iphigénie*, the conversation turns to new orchestral music. We are reminded of Kreisler’s proclivity for unusual instruments and “fantastic effects” – a lead-in to Hoffmann’s commentary on the “secret art” of instrumentation, which acts on the human body to produce mysterious “resonances.” Resistance to the experimental effects of new composers, Hoffmann insists, implies resistance to the future of art. Imitating the pedants of the Academy, he denounces the unlistenable soundscapes of Romantic orchestral works: “down with all this noise and clatter; forget all modern music; forget Mozart and Beethoven, and especially ****.” Here, Hoffmann breaks off, although we are clearly meant to insert Berlioz’s name – surely the “noisiest” of the three composers on the list. Ventriloquizing Janin, Hoffmann solidifies Berlioz’s status not only as a composer in the true “fantastic” style, but an inheritor of Beethoven’s legacy, and a Romantic pioneer.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Jules Janin, “Hoffmann, conte fantastique,” *Gazette musicale* (30 March and 4 April, 1834), pp. 99-102; 109-112.

¹⁸⁹ Many of Janin’s later tales featured thinly-disguised Berlioz characters, notably “Stradella, ou le poète et le musicien,” in which Berlioz is clearly the Romantic musician – “a young man full of fire, full of spirit, one of those powerful natures you recognize immediately by certain signs which I cannot

As the decade progressed, a barrage of other musico-fantastic tales by Janin and his literary contemporaries appeared, including works by Gautier and Sand.¹⁹⁰ Modeled on Hoffmann, these stories confirmed the fundamental intertwining of musical and literary impulses at the centre of French fantastic culture, and reinforced the composer as a stock hero of the genre. Kreisler remained a key model for later artist-protagonists, but in the wake of d'Ortigue's and Janin's writings, Berlioz himself emerged as a new template for the fantastic musician. *Le Ménestrel*, for instance, published a tale entitled "L'Elève du conservatoire," featuring a young man (Louis Desespont) whose prodigious musical talent is intensified by his love for the unattainable Céline. Excessive passion for his beloved renders Louis first melancholy and then mortally ill. In his final moments, he wins a competition (and Céline's heart) by playing his own *Concerto fantastique*, only to drop dead at her feet.¹⁹¹ Here, art imitates life imitating art; Berlioz's Hoffmannesque self-construction cycles back into literature, producing a new kind of fantastic hero – one who not only hears other-worldly sound but composes "fantastique" works of his own.

Of course, Berlioz was by no means the only artist of the period to adopt a fantastic veneer. Paganini crafted a famously diabolical image, and Liszt encouraged the supernatural whispers that echoed through his early reception (generated by both his own "fantastique" works and his well-known transcriptions of Berlioz's early symphonic pieces).¹⁹² Nor did the trend toward Hoffmannesque self-construction amongst young poets and composers go unnoticed in the press; *L'Artiste*, for instance,

explain – the eyes which sparkle under his darkened lids, the enjoyment of life glowing through his coppery skin, his long and flowing hair so frequently disordered by his restless hands!" The tale appeared in the *Gazette musicale* (10 and 17 July, 1836), pp. 239-41; 248-51.

¹⁹⁰ The *Gazette musicale* alone published scores of musico-fantastic tales through the 1830s, including "Le Dîner de Beethoven," "L'Homme vert," "Le Concert dans la maison," "Les cignes chantent et mourant," and "La Fontaine d'ivoire." A thorough consideration of music in the French *conte fantastique* is not possible here.

¹⁹¹ Jeanette Lozaouis, "L'Elève du conservatoire," *Le Ménestrel* (August-September, 1833).

¹⁹² See Chapter 4 for more on Liszt's connection to the musical fantastic.

published an essay by St.-Chéron entitled “Philosophie de L’Art: La vie poétique et la vie privée,” which described the phenomenon succinctly. Chéron complained of a tendency toward “self-doubling” in the modern artist – a division of the “exterior, public” self from the “interior, private” one.¹⁹³ “L’homme et l’artiste sont aujourd’hui deux êtres dans le même être profondément séparés,” he argued.¹⁹⁴ The “man” – the everyday persona – had little to do with the “artist,” whom Chéron identified as a debauched and even immoral figure derived from fiction: “le fantasque et déréglé créateur du roman, du drame ou du tableau que vous avez lu et vu.”¹⁹⁵ In a passage articulating the two personas more clearly, he wrote:

Celui qui vit comme nous tous, soumis à toutes les chances de la fortune, à toutes les émotions de la vie individuelle, celui qui fume son cigare, qui prend sa tasse de café chez Tortoni, qui montre sa garde, l’homme; puis celui qui a de sombres ou gracieuses visions, dont l’imagination entend des sons divins, voit des couleurs magiques, saisit des formes bizarres ou charmantes, celui qui prend sa plume, son pinceau ou son ciseau, et qui crée, l’artiste.¹⁹⁶

Nothing was more dangerous than this multiplication of the self, which had “une influence fâcheuse sur l’art,” encouraging insincere or at least incomplete expression. The poems, novels, and musical works of the modern artist were produced, not by the whole man but by his “fantastique” persona. They resulted, Chéron claimed, in “un art

¹⁹³ (4/24), pp. 269-271 finish citation; add date.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 269.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 270. The remainder of the quotations in this paragraph are taken from pp. 269-70. Chéron’s notion of the divided artistic self resonates clearly with the broader trope of the Romantic double – a topic that has been well-explored by literary scholars. See, for instance, the following: Christof Forderer, *Ich-Eklipsen : Doppelgänger in der Literatur seit 1800* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1999); Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: double visions in German literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Otto Rank, *The double; a psychoanalytic study*, Transl. and ed. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Paul Coates, *The double and the other: identity as ideology in post-romantic fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁹⁶ “He who lives as we all do, subject to all the whims of fate, to all the emotions of private life, he who smokes his cigar, who drinks a cup of coffee at Tortoni’s, who controls himself – the man; he who has sombre or fairy visions, whose imagination perceives divine sounds, sees magic colors, is gripped by bizarre or charming forms, he who takes up his pen, his brush or his chisel and who creates – the artist.” Ibid.

de cauchemars, de débauches, d'orgies, d'assassinats" that had little to do with "l'expression intime et vraie d'une personnalité, l'inspiration spontanée et naïve d'une individualité."¹⁹⁷

Chéron's anxieties surrounding the authenticity of the "fantasque" (the "artistic" self) echoed persistently through Berlioz reception through the mid-nineteenth century. Repeatedly, critics and even friends struggled to reconcile his private and public selves – to map the fantastic image constructed in his autobiographical writings (and in the press) onto the man himself. Mendelssohn, upon meeting Berlioz at the French Academy in Rome, denounced him as a fake; "[he] is actually worse than the others because he is more affected in his behavior. Once and for all, I cannot endure these blatantly extrovert passions, these affectations of despair for the benefit of the ladies, this genius proclaimed in gothic lettering, black on white."¹⁹⁸ Even Ernest Legouvé, one of Berlioz's literary collaborators and closest friends, acknowledged his reputation as "an eccentric who gloried in his own eccentricity" – a man generally regarded as "a poseur." Certainly, Legouvé conceded, his behavior bordered on hyperbole, but it was not born of insincerity. As if responding directly to Chéron, he suggested that Berlioz's "artistic" self (like Hoffmann's) was a genuine representation of the inner man – not an act of concealment or even calculation but one of revelation:

...I seem to see before me once again that touching, extravagant, ingenuous creature, violent, scatterbrained, vulnerable, but above all sincere. It has been said that he was a *poseur*. But to pose – that's to conceal what you really are and show the world what you are not, to pretend, to calculate, to be master of yourself. And where would he have found the strength to act such a role, this being who lived at the mercy of his nerves, who was the slave of every new impression, who dashed precipitately from

¹⁹⁷ Despite their famous literary alter-egos, Chéron claims that both Byron and Hoffmann *do* express real selves through their work. Not all imaginary self-constructions, then, imply insincerity, although Chéron does not offer us any criteria by which to distinguish "legitimate" from "sham" identities.

¹⁹⁸ In a letter to his family, 29 March, 1831; transl. by Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 46.

one emotion to another, who winced, turned pale, wept in spite of himself, and could no more control his words than the muscles of his face?¹⁹⁹

As Legouvé suggested, the issues surrounding Berlioz's self-construction were complex; they were hardly easily settled and, indeed, occupied the attention of critics through the latter half of the 1830s.²⁰⁰

During this period, Berlioz was perceived as a growing threat. Whether his eccentric persona was sincere or insincere, it proved dangerously influential, as did his music. Berlioz's self-construction began to inspire not only other "fantastique" artists but – according to critics – a "school" of fantastic composition. Those who had dismissed his noisy, formless, and vaporous style as a passing fad – mere, "baggage fantastique" – now began to fear that it was establishing a trend. Berlioz, they suggested, was a musical Hoffmann; he was doing in the realm of composition what the German *fantastiquer* had done in the literary world. According to essays by Henri Blaze and Joseph Mainzer, Berlioz was at the head of a new and insidious movement: a *musical* "école fantastique."

Berlioz, Blaze, and the Musical *École fantastique*

The 1838 premiere of Berlioz's first grand opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*, marked him as a composer worthy of serious critical attention, giving rise not only to detailed reviews of his opera, but to broader commentaries on his musical language and aesthetics.

¹⁹⁹ Ernest Legouvé, "Hector Berlioz," in *Soixante ans de souvenirs*, Vol. I (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1886-87), p. 299. Transl. by Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 67. Legouvé's memoir is not always a reliable source of factual information – his dates and places are sometimes misremembered – but his character sketches of Berlioz are written with care and reveal an intimate knowledge of the composer.

²⁰⁰ Further consideration of the relationship between Berlioz and his fantastic "doppelgänger" takes us beyond Hoffmann into a broader investigation of Romantic genius; see Chapter 2.

Among these were two monograph-length essays published within months of one another: the first was written by the German ex-patriot Joseph Mainzer and appeared as the first and only issue of the *Chronique musicale*; the second was by the critic Blaze de Bury (son of the well-known Castil-Blaze), and occupied twenty-five pages in the *Revue des deux mondes*.²⁰¹ These essays, both conceived as large-scale stylistic overviews, were permeated by references to the musical fantastic, which had become an increasingly pressing issue and one intimately tied to Berlioz's *oeuvre*. It was Blaze who addressed the question most clearly: his article, entitled "De l'École fantastique et de M. Berlioz," drew together many of the threads of "fantastique" reception that had woven through Berlioz criticism of the previous decade, and posited the emergence of a distinct musical "école fantastique" with Berlioz at its head. This idea was not precisely new; rather, it represented the culmination of a critical trend that had long since identified the *Symphonie fantastique* as Berlioz's defining work and the fantastic more broadly as the aesthetic guiding his musical idiom. As early as 1834, reviewers had begun to sum up Berlioz as "the composer of the *Symphonie fantastique*," and to point out markers of the fantastic in many of his other works.²⁰² Blaze's article both responded to and solidified these ideas, suggesting that the *genre fantastique* was no longer hovering on the edge of Romantic musical consciousness but had emerged as an established compositional category. His assessment was hardly positive, however – he denounced the fantastic as a false idiom and Berlioz himself as a misguided composer.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Joseph Mainzer, "M. Berlioz," *Chronique musicale* (1re Livraison, 1838), pp. 1-95; Henri Blaze, "Musiciens français II: De l'École fantastique et de M. Berlioz," *Revue des deux mondes* (October, 1838), pp. 97-121.

²⁰² Two early articles in *L'Artiste* signaled the beginnings of a tendency to hail the *Symphonie fantastique* as Berlioz's signature work: see "Concert de M. Hector Berlioz," (November, 1834) and "Grand Concert vocal et instrumental donné par MM. Hector Berlioz et Girard," (November, 1835). References to both the *genre fantastique* and to Berlioz's "bagage fantastique" appear in a review of the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold en Italie* in *Le Ménestrel*, (11 December, 1836).

²⁰³ The intense negativity of Blaze's article is interesting, in light of his earlier appreciation of Hoffmann (see Teichmann, *La fortune d'Hoffmann en France*, pp. 109ff).

Blaze's essay reads like a synopsis of all the musical, aesthetic, and biographical tropes that had been linked with Berlioz's fantastic idiom since the late 1820s. Bringing together political, literary, and analytical observations, many of which we have already examined, he began to construct a more complete idea of the musical fantastic – a concentrated summary of current thought. Among the first tropes that Blaze re-emphasized was the long-standing link between fantastic music and radical politics. Like d'Ortigue, St-Félix, and others before him, he argued that Berlioz's was a "revolutionary" idiom, tied to the social and moral upheavals of the late-eighteenth century: "Dès le premier jour," he claimed, "M. Berlioz est entré dans l'art avec les allures farouches d'un jacobin."²⁰⁴ Blaze's first description of Berlioz is one that combines Kreisleresque and Rosa-esque tropes with echoes of political dissidence: Berlioz is an "energetic and savage" character subject to "caprices désordonnés" and driven by "la fougue excentrique de son tempérament révolutionnaire."²⁰⁵

Here, as elsewhere, the fantastic was perceived as a disruptive mode whose link to social disorder translated, in music, into syntactical irregularity, melodic deficiency, and sheer noise. "La mélodie," wrote Blaze, "c'est l'âme immortelle de la musique, la lumière qui sème l'ordre et la clarté dans le chaos des sons." By jettisoning melody, Berlioz's music embraced a realm of incoherent sound:

Toutes ces bizarreries dont nous parlons contribuent à rendre par momens la musique de M. Berlioz inappréciable: comme le chant des oiseaux, ce ne sont plus des notes qui se combinent pour l'harmonie, mais des bruits qui se rencontrent et se mêlent au hasard. Dès-lors vous oubliez l'orchestre, les voix, la symphonie; vous n'êtes plus au Conservatoire ou à l'Opéra, mais dans un moulin en travail, au milieu de toutes sortes de rumeurs incohérentes.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Blaze, "De L'École fantastique et de M. Berlioz," p. 98.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

²⁰⁶ "All of the oddities noted here combine to render Berlioz's music at times unlistenable: like bird songs, these are no longer notes combined to create harmony, but noises thrown together in a random jumble. Soon one forgets the orchestra, the voices, the symphony; one is no longer at the Conservatory or the Opera, but inside a working mill, surrounded by all sorts of incoherent sounds." Ibid., p. 119.

In Mainzer's critique of Berlioz, we find much the same claim, now linked with the familiar rhetoric of the Dantesque fantastic. The "horrible fracas d'instrumentation" that marked Berlioz's idiom called to mind "satanic" and "infernal" noise:

...avec une prédilection toute particulière pour tout ce qui est bizarre, il emploie tout ce que les fabricants d'instruments ont pu imaginer: les petites flûtes et les grosses ophycléides, les hautbois agrestes et les trombones sataniques, l'innocent tintillement du triangle et le terrible roulement des tambours, des grosses caisses et des tymbales, et jusqu'à l'infernal tam tam.²⁰⁷

For Mainzer, as for Blaze, the greatest fault of the fantastic idiom was its focus on orchestrational effect over beautiful line. Abandoning the "grâce" and "suavité de mélodie" to be found in the airs of Rossini, Grétry, Dalrymple and their predecessors, Berlioz embraced a kind of Hoffmannesque alchemy: an "art des hiéroglyphes." His music aspired to metaphysical and even magical heights but in doing so wandered outside the realm of the human: his "inspiration ne parle pas les langues des hommes," Blaze wrote. Mainzer agreed, chastising Berlioz for his disrespectful rejection of the old melodists: "Nous demanderons à nos lectures, et à M. Berlioz, si un morceau de l'école fantastique peut effacer les airs des muses qu'il nomme dédaigneusement provinciales, et qu'il gratifie de son souverain mépris."²⁰⁸

Connections between noise and the musical fantastic were by this point, of course, well-established, but Blaze points out that Berlioz's incoherence derives not simply from his anti-musical effects but from his Hoffmannesque mingling of actual and imagined sound and, by extension, of "real" and "imaginary" worlds. By

²⁰⁷ "...with a special predilection for all that is bizarre, he presses into service everything that the instrument-builders have been able to imagine, from the piccolos and bass ophicleides, the rustic oboes and satanic trombones, the innocent ringing of the triangle and the terrible rumbling of the drums, the bass drums, to the infernal gong." Mainzer, "M. Berlioz," p. 13.

²⁰⁸ "We ask our readers whether a piece in the style of the *école fantastique* can efface the airs of those muses whom he [Berlioz] calls hopelessly provincial and rejects with extreme scorn." Ibid., p. 56.

importing referential noises – bells, birdsong, plainchant, and even alphorn music – into the “abstract” soundscape of instrumental music, Berlioz generates precisely the sense of disorienting hesitation underpinning Hoffmann’s tales:

Ce que vous entendez ne se peut définir: les clapotemens de l’eau que la roue inquiète, la voix rauque du meunier qui gourmande sa femme; puis, dans le voisinage, les chiens qui aboient, les troupeaux qui bêlent, les cris de la basse-cour, le tintement monotone des clochettes, que suis-je?²⁰⁹

Vacillation between the realms of the real and unreal was related to the broader trope of generic wavering in Berlioz’s work. His music was always on the edge of morphing into text or image – of transmuting from the ethereal to the material, or vice-versa. In a passage that resonates with contemporary Hoffmann criticism, Blaze rejected the famous “correspondences” espoused by the German *fantastiquer*:

La peinture, la musique, la poésie, désormais ne font plus qu’un seul art immense, universel, que les mêmes lois gouvernent, qui tend au même but par les mêmes moyens: le poète colore son vers, le musicien dessine un paysage. On ne chante plus un air, on le dit. Inventions sublimes! Voilà les Muses accouplées (...) Insensés!²¹⁰

The result of this senseless mixture was music that ceased to operate within the logical boundaries of the discipline – music that lost itself in “plasticité sonore,” in “l’expression peurile de la lettre” and, to borrow Mainzer’s language, in “ce qui n’est

²⁰⁹ “What one hears cannot be defined: the splashing of water through the paddle-wheel, the raucous voice of the miller who chides his wife; then, in the vicinity, barking dogs, bleating flocks, the cries of the poultry-yard, the monotonous ringing of bells, where am I?” Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz” in the section on Benvenuto Cellini, p. 119. Laura Cosso explores the notion of Hoffmannesque “hesitation” between real and unreal tropes in the *Symphonie fantastique* and elsewhere; see *Strategie del fantastico*, pp. 91-92.

²¹⁰ “Painting, music, and poetry are not, unfortunately, part of a single, universal art governed by the same laws, which achieve the same ends via the same means: the poet colors his verse, the musician designs a landscape. One no longer sings an air, one speaks it. Sublime inventions! The arts entwined ...Insane!” Ibid., p. 102.

saisissable que par la vue.”²¹¹ As Berlioz abandoned taste and reason, his formal and syntactical structures began to erode. The symphony itself – the most hallowed of all musical genres – was in danger, under his influence, of degenerating into meaningless grotesquerie.

Not surprisingly, Blaze linked Berlioz’s music with German art and philosophy – with the “académique” theories of Kant and Herder and the poetry of Schlegel and Goethe. But most insidious of all was Hoffmann, whose *contes fantastiques* were at the root not only of Berlioz’s compositional aesthetics but his emotional malaise. The musical fantastic, Blaze claimed, was wedded to the literary fantastic, whose “convictions fausses” had spread from one discipline to the other, proving uncontainable:

Il y a des livres dont l’influence est d’autant plus funeste que l’ironie amère qui en fait le mêlé, comme une espèce de morphine vénéneuse, aux élémens généreux qui les composent. Vous lisez ces livres pour vous distraire, et la cervelle vous tourne; vous buvez cela pour vous désaltérer, et vous êtes ivres. Qui le coroirait? Ces rêves insensés du merveilleux conteur de Berlin, ces créations extravagantes dans leur essence, grotesques à force de mélancolie et d’enthousiasme, soufflées d’air et de son, qui ne se meuvent que dans les nuages du tabac, l’écume du vin nouveau, les vapeurs de la théière, il s’est rencontré d’honnêtes gens qui les ont prises au sérieux, des hommes de chair et d’os qui se sont mis en tête de régler leur personnage sur de semblables patrons, des fous sublimes qui passent leur vie à creuser de leurs ongles la couleur et le son, pour y surprendre le Salvator Rosa ou le Kreissler du conte fantastique. En vérité, Kreissler a déjà fait au moins autant de victimes que Werther...²¹²

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 108; Mainzer, “M. Berlioz,” p. 7.

²¹² “There are some books whose influence is more deadly than the bitter irony of which they are composed, just as a kind of poisonous morphine [is more deadly than] the noble elements of which it is composed. You read these books to distract yourself, and to turn your head; you drink such [books] to satisfy your thirst, and you become drunk. Who would believe it? These insane dreams of the marvelous Berlin teller-of-tales, these creations - extravagant in essence, grotesque to the point of melancholy and madness, whispers of air and sound, which reveal themselves only in clouds of tobacco smoke, in the froth of new wine, in the vapors of the teapot - one meets reasonable people who have taken them [these dreams] seriously, men of flesh and blood, who get it into their heads to shape their own personae along similar lines, sublime madmen who spend their days in digging with their fingernails for color and sound, in order in this manner to catch by surprise the Salvator Rosa or the Kreissler of a conte fantastique. In truth, Kreissler has already created at least as many victims as did Werther...” Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz,” p. 104.

Both Hoffmann and his mad Kreisler, according to Blaze, had seduced the new generation of poets and composers, inspiring widespread imitation. Kreisleresque personages – young men who had succumbed to Hoffmann’s charm – roamed the streets of Paris like phantoms, their faces pale and their long hair in disarray. They hovered in the vaporous space between this world and the next, consumed by melancholy, plagued by visions, and with eyes upturned, listening for “la mélodie qu’ils cherchent vainement ici-bas.” Their music reflected their utter self-absorption. Divorced from the rest of the world, it reproduced “leur vagues incertitudes, leurs extases séraphiques...leur maux,” in anguished tones drawn from their own heartstrings:

... une musique de regards langoureux et mourans, d’étreintes chaudes et fatales, de pamoisons instantanées; musique du présent et de l’avenir, de la vie et de la mort, du ciel et de l’enfer, où les fibres se brisent dans les poitrines et les cordes dans les claviers.²¹³

Though Berlioz demonstrated “une raison plus saine” than many of his Kreisleresque fellows, he was nevertheless in the same camp, according to Blaze: “On ne peut le nier, M. Berlioz est de cette école à sa manière.” His compositions negated the most essential elements of music – melody, rhythm, and “la voix humaine” – placing in their stead orchestral cacophony born of “raisonnemens sublimes et théoriques élucubrations.” “De quel nom appeler cet assemblage monstrueux, quelquefois grandoise?,” Blaze asks. “Vraiment, je ne le sais.” Though Berlioz’s works were both powerful and magnificent they were not of this earth, and indeed,

²¹³ “...a music of langorous and dying glances, warm and fatal embraces, of instant swoons; music of the present and of the muture, of life and death, of heaven and hell, which breaks the strings of the heart along with those of the clavier.” Ibid., p. 105.

were not music at all: “Non,” insists Blaze, “la musique n’est pas ce que vous pensez.”²¹⁴

Mainzer was equally suspicious of the *école fantastique*, although his condemnation was less total. He classed it unambiguously as a species of descriptive or “literary” music whose aspiration toward text and image led to errors in form and style. But its “vaporous” harmonies are not always out of place – Mainzer argued that “le fantastique peut parfois apparaître comme second plan dans une oeuvre d’art, ainsi que Goethe l’emploie dans sa *Nuit du Sabbat*.” It could, in other words, operate as a special effect – a temporary release from the normal regulations of composition – which should be followed by a return to the “real” world. Coming back to Goethe’s *Nuit du Sabbat*, he argued that “tout le reste de *Faust*, quoique en apparence fantastique, n’est pourtant que trop réel et touche au vif.” The trouble arose, as in Berlioz’s work, when the fantastic became the foundation for entire works and even for a total compositional aesthetic. “La musique purement fantastique,” according to Mainzer, “est sans base et sans but, aucun intérêt ne s’y attache: c’est un vide perpétuel, comme le tonneau des Danaïdes.”²¹⁵

Not only was the *Symphonie fantastique* among those empty works dominated by the fantastic, but more disturbingly, Mainzer saw the *genre fantastique* creeping into many of Berlioz’s other works, which demonstrated a similar tendency toward noise, ungrammatical construction, and pictorialism. The *Grand messe des morts* was a clear example:

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-6.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

Porté par prédilection vers le genre dans lequel il a réussi, le genre fantastique, la musique descriptive et pittoresque, Berlioz en a transporté le type dans le grand ouvrage qu'on vient d'exécuter aux Invalides.²¹⁶

Here, Mainzer heard Berlioz's "fougueuse imagination" at work: a "calcul froid et étroit" in the conception of the work, a tendency toward "combinaisons bizarre" in the orchestration, and an anti-melodic style that resulted in "des contorsions effroyables" in the vocal lines. The overall effect, he observed, drew close to "le style et le caractère des symphonies fantastiques."²¹⁷

Both Mainzer and Blaze saw the fantastic as a broader, more threatening, impulse than did earlier critics, drawing our attention to its insidious effect on musical construction. But they also identified, with greater urgency than ever before, its psychological and even physiological implications, taking us back to Staël's earlier link between fantastic interiority and nervous illness, and suggesting fresh approaches to Berlioz himself. The *fantasque*, Blaze reminded his readers, was an artist who had withdrawn from the public realm of order and reason into a world of private imagination. His very isolation – his unmooring from reality – led inevitably to mental error and therefore to the aesthetic aberrations that marked all fantastic artworks. Citing the *Symphonie fantastique*, Blaze pointed out that its final movements – those which contained Berlioz's most obvious formal and melodic "mistakes" – were also those in which he turned entirely inward. Alone, he floundered in "an ocean of confused notes" driven by the irrational forces of "individual enthusiasm":

²¹⁶ "Drawn by his own nature toward the genre in which he has already succeeded, the *genre fantastique*, descriptive and picturesque music, Berlioz has transferred this musical medium into the great work [the Requiem] which will be performed at the *Invalides*." Mainzer, "M. Berlioz," pp. 11-12.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 30. We find almost exactly the same claim in Blaze: "M. Berlioz écrivait une messe tout comme il aurait composé une symphonie, et pensa qu'un monde nouveau, plein de religieux mystères et de vagues terreurs, allait se dégager des explosions surnaturelles de son orchestre." And earlier, resonating with Mainzer's collapse between the *genre fantastique* and the "genre descriptif": "Sa musique [in the *Messe des morts*], à la fois chargée de couleur et terne, bruyante et inanimée, s'épuise à chercher l'expression peureuse de la lettre, sans s'élever jamais jusqu'à l'esprit, et se perd dans une sorte de plasticité sonore." [pp. 108; 113].

Tout à l'heure, dans les morceaux suivans [the final movements of the *Symphonie fantastique*], vous allez le voir seul, livré à son propre enthousiasme, en proie à ses inspirations personnelles, se débattre, s'emporter et se perdre sous un océan de notes confuses, qui montent ou descendent, s'apaisent ou s'irritent, sans que nulle volonté supérieure semble les contenir ou les pousser, et vont à leur gré, en dehors de toutes les convenances du rythme, de toutes les lois de la mesure, de toutes les traditions humaines, du goût et du sens commun.²¹⁸

The final portions of the symphony were not only estranged from “common sense” but exiled from the realm of decipherable language altogether. Berlioz’s illusion of emancipation – freedom from artistic regulation – was really a new species of confinement, according to Blaze. He was held captive by his own delusions, battered by the violence of unreason. His symphony was not art – it was not the product of refined thought – but the unmediated representation of an irrational self.

Blaze was by no means the first critic to note the collapse between art and artist – subject and object – that marked the *Symphonie fantastique*. Long before, critics had begun to describe Berlioz and his music as synonymous – a closed system that operated according to its own arcane law. A reviewer for *Le Figaro*, for instance, had pronounced Berlioz’s music impervious to critical study, since it was not music at all, but an aural imprint of Berlioz himself. Rather than formal analysis, he implied, it was psychoanalysis that was called for; describing the 1834 concert featuring the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold*, he wrote, “le concert donné dimanche par M. Berlioz devait être considéré comme une révélation de M. Berlioz tout entier.”²¹⁹ And as early as 1832, Janin had come to the same conclusion in a review of the *Fantastique* and its sequel. Here, the “invisible orchestra” in *Le Retour à la vie* becomes a

²¹⁸ “All of a sudden, in the following movements [of the *Symphonie fantastique*], you will see him alone, seized by his own enthusiasm, in the grip of his personal inspirations, struggling with himself, carrying himself away and losing himself in an ocean of confused notes which ascend or descend, lull or irritate him, seemingly without any superior power containing or motivating them, moving according to their own will, outside of all rhythmic propriety, of the laws of the barline, of all human tradition, taste, and common sense.” Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz,” p. 111.

²¹⁹ *Le Figaro* (11 November, 1834). See Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, p. 262 for a similar claim.

metaphor for Berlioz's music at large, which seemed to emanate directly from his innermost self, liberated not only from academic form but from the materiality of the body itself. We no longer see the players, we only hear "un écho invisible" that reproduces the beating of Berlioz's own heart and produces the "random" sound that represents his most intimate passions:

Berlioz se place en tête de tout ce monde musical; il le suppose invisible, lui tout seul présent. Soyez tranquilles! C'est lui seul qui va jouer tout son drame. Dans sa pensée, ces musiciens que vous voyez là assemblés n'existent pas; tout cet orchestre est un écho invisible qui va répéter les battements de son cœur. La pythonisse ne procéderait pas autrement. Attention et silence! ...le voici. C'est un artiste, musicien ou poète, peu importe! L'art d'abord, la forme ensuite. D'abord l'artiste s'abandonne à ces passions vagues et sans but qui on fait René et Werther. L'orchestre s'en va chantant au hasard, poussant de petits cris de joie qui entrecouperont cette rêverie mélancolique. Nous sommes donc au commencement de cette vie d'artiste.²²⁰

Where Janin saw inspired self-revelation, however, Blaze saw intoxication and self-degradation. Berlioz was among those fantastic artists who had crossed over into the danger realm; he was an unstable composer burdened with "une imagination déréglée" whose flights of fancy had begun to translate, just as Staël had warned, into physical illness. Blaze claimed that his music was born of fever and madness – of deranged ideas that "l'exaltent jusqu'à l'ivresse." Mainzer agreed, pointing out that Berlioz himself had admitted a connection between pathology and fantasy in his own

²²⁰ "Berlioz places himself at the head of this entire musical world; he supposes it invisible, and he himself the only one present. Stay calm! It is he alone who will perform the entirety of his drama. According to his thinking, the musicians which you see assembled there do not exist; the entire orchestra is but an invisible echo which will reproduce the beating of his heart. The pythoness [fortune teller] proceeds in precisely this fashion. Attention and silence! ... here he is. He is an artist, musician or poet, who cares! Art first, form second. At the outset, the artist abandons himself to his vague passions without object, as did René and Werther. The orchestra sings at random, allowing little cries of joy to interrupt this melancholic reverie. We are now at the beginning of this artist's life." Janin, *Journal des débats* (10 December, 1832). Janin is speaking both literally and metaphorically in this passage. During the 1832 performance of the *Symphonie fantastique* at which *Le retour à la vie* was premiered, the orchestra was concealed behind a scrim for the entirety of the concert. Berlioz alone was present on stage – the music seemed to emanate directly from his soul.

autobiographical writing, where he described the pains and convulsions that accompanied his “fantastic” creative process. Nor were these ailments confined to himself; his own listeners had begun to feel the perilous effects of the *genre fantastique* – to complain of physical ills sparked by Berlioz’s music. According to Blaze:

Selon lui et son école, c’est faire une sorte de sacrilège que de demander à la musique de distraire l’esprit et de réjouir les oreilles. Pour que le but de l’art soit atteint, il faut que la sensation s’exalte jusqu’à la douleur physique, que les yeux se baignent de larmes, que les membres se tordent, et que la poitrine haletante suffoque, jusqu’à se briser sous les efforts de l’âme en délire.²²¹

Blaze’s claim echoed earlier reports of “second hand” delirium, notably in d’Ortigue’s 1832 biographical sketch, where he described the “rêve fatigant et confus” produced by Berlioz’s first symphony and its ravaging effects on the sensitive listener: “J’en appelle à tous ceux qui ont une âme; ne se sentent-ils pas tour à tour emportés dans une molle rêverie, charmés, ravis, heurtés, tantôt en proie à un rire convulsif, tantôt glacés de torpeur?”²²² A reviewer for *Le Ménestrel* writing several years later reported the same phenomenon, urging Berlioz to take his audience’s health into greater account – to bear in mind “l’instabilité de l’esprit humain et la délicatesse de nos nerfs qui ne nous permettent pas de subir longtemps de suite les mêmes et surtout de violentes émotions.”²²³

²²¹ “According to him and his school, to demand that music distract the spirit and please the ear is to commit some sort of sacrilege. In order for art to achieve its goal, it must exalt to the point of physical illness, to the point at which the eyes are bathed in tears, the limbs are convulsed, and the heaving breast suffocates, to the point where the spirit itself breaks under the pressure and is cast into delirium.” Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz,” p. 106.

²²² “I call on anyone who has a soul; do they not feel by turns transported to a state of sweet reverie, charmed, ravished, wounded, now in the grip of convulsive laughter, now stuck with torpor?” d’Ortigue, “Galerie biographique des artistes français et étrangers,” *Revue de Paris* (December, 1832), p. 292.

²²³ *Le Ménestrel* (7 February, 1836).

The notion of passive illness that was associated with Berlioz's music resonates with the Platonic theory of passive genius, which held that listeners might experience the divine enthusiasm of an inspired performer. Instead of radiating illumination, however, Berlioz's music was spreading disease – a disease that he himself, according to Blaze, had contracted from Hoffmann. And of course, Hoffmann had been linked with both madness and addiction from his earliest reception in France. Walter Scott's influential 1829 review (published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* and then, in partial translation, in both the *Revue de Paris* and the preface to Loève-Weimars' first Hoffmann edition), denounced him as a drunkard and a madman and the "German" fantastic more broadly as a dangerous idiom. Hardly the "visions of a poetic mind," Hoffmann's tales, according to Scott, "had scarcely even the seeming authenticity which the hallucinations of lunacy convey to the patient." This was hardly surprising, given the "diseased state" of Hoffmann's own person; he was ravaged by physical ailments and alcoholism so that, as Scott argued, "we cannot help considering his case as one requiring the assistance of medicine rather than of criticism."²²⁴

Hoffmann's own tales did nothing to dispel such ideas; his own alter-ego, Kreisler, was an acknowledged madman whose "fantastic" visions were wedded to pathology. Many of Hoffmann's *contes fantastiques* themselves embraced wine and tobacco as portals to the "other" world and referenced mysterious ailments, from nervous disorders to epilepsy. Not all of these illnesses could be traced back to Hoffmann himself; his supporters, especially Sand, argued vehemently that untrammelled imagination rather than mental weakness had given rise to his tales, and

²²⁴ Walter Scott, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Compositions; and Particularly on the works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann," *Foreign Quarterly Review* (July, 1829), pp. 60-98. The first portion of this essay was reproduced in the *Revue de Paris* under the title "Du Merveilleux dans le roman," (12 April, 1829), pp. 25-33. It also appeared, in translation, in the preface of Loève-Weimars' first edition of Hoffmann translations (November, 1829). Quotes from Scott given in this paragraph are taken from a collection of his writings reproduced in *Sir Walter Scott On Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. 352-53.

even suggested that Scott's assessment was born of professional jealousy. Nevertheless, prevailing opinion linked the *genre fantastique* securely to pathology in France, and led eventually to a series of medical articles positing direct links between fantasy and illness. Many of these essays were written by doctors (who must also have been avid readers), including a piece in the *Gazette medicale*, which tied *contes fantastiques* to "triste aberrations du sentiment et du raisonnement" and denounced them as enemies to "les lois de l'hygiène."²²⁵ More focused observations began to link fantastic tales, and Hoffmann himself, to specific mental disorders. Especially important, for our purposes, was an article by Le Baron de Mortemart-Boisse (the French translator of Bürger's ballad, *Lenore*), which claimed that psychiatrists had "diagnosed" Hoffmann: "Aujourd'hui il demeure prouvé qu'Hoffmann écrivait sous l'influence continuelle d'un cauchemar, sous le joug d'une *idée fixe*, et souvent sans savoir ce qu'il voulait."²²⁶ Here, we discover another crucial link between Hoffmann and Berlioz, one that suggests clear interconnections among music, medicine, and notions of fantastic genius. It is, I suggest, no accident that the protagonist of the *Symphonie fantastique* suffers from precisely the ailment ascribed to Hoffmann. Blaze's (and Scott's) suggestion that "fantastic" inspiration was essentially a medical condition – that both Hoffmann and Berlioz were suffering from a concrete illness – opens up a series of vital questions, providing us with a fresh approach to the *Symphonie fantastique*, which we shall explore in Chapter 2.

We come back, by way of closing, to Mainzer, whose fears surrounding the influence of the *genre fantastique* proved portentous. Mainzer holds out some hope,

²²⁵ Anon., "De l'Influence hygiénique du fantastique en littérature," *Gazette musicale* (27 October, 1832); this piece was reproduced in the *Cabinet de lecture* on 4 November of the same year. For further discussion, see Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France*, pp. 84-85.

²²⁶ "Today it stands proven that Hoffmann wrote under the continual influence of a nightmare, under the yoke of an *idée fixe*, and often without knowing what he was doing." Mortemart-Boisse, "Léonore, traduit et imité de Bürger," *Revue des deux mondes* (October, 1830).

toward the beginning of his pamphlet, that Berlioz might grow out of (or grow tired of) his fantastic mode – that his musical eccentricities might constitute youthful experiments soon forgotten:

...nous nous rangeâmes néanmoins du côté de M. Berlioz, car nous regardions ces compositions comme des essais, des extravagances de jeunesse, nous pensions que l'âge et l'expérience l'éclaireraient, modéreraient son imagination fougueuse et désordonnée, et développeraient, au contraire, les qualités brillantes dont nous nous plaisions à lui reconnaître le germe.²²⁷

But only a few pages later, Mainzer is forced to acknowledge that the musical fantastic is waxing rather than waning. Not only has it seeped into Berlioz's most recent works – his Requiem as well as his opera – but it has begun to influence other composers, especially Liszt:

Nous regrettons de voir entrer Liszt comme Berlioz dans la voie du fantastique. C'est à ceux qui sont doués d'une telle force et d'un tel talent qu'il appartient de travailler plus solidement, d'éveiller en nous de nobles pensées et des sentiments profonds, au lieu de se vouer à un genre qui n'a d'action ni sur les uns ni sur les autres.²²⁸

Undoubtedly, Mainzer had in mind Liszt's *Rondeau fantastique*, a piece which had been enthusiastically received by the press despite his own damning appraisal. Clearly, the musical fantastic was spreading; it was no longer a vaguely defined category, nor a mode restricted to Berlioz. Instead, it was on the rise as a powerful influence – one with an increasingly rich set of literary, visual, and even medical connections. Nodier, St.-Félix, and others had identified the fantastic as a genre with a substantial political

²²⁷ "We come out nevertheless, as supporters M. Berlioz, because we regard his compositions as trial-runs, as extravagances of youth; we think that age and experience will bring him clarity, moderate his fiery and disordered imagination, and develop instead those brilliant qualities which we are pleased to believe we recognize in incipient form." Mainzer, "M. Berlioz," p. 3.

²²⁸ "We regret to see Liszt fall, like Berlioz, into the void of the fantastic. Those blessed with such vigor and talent should devote themselves to something more substantial, should encourage noble thoughts and profound sentiments in us, instead of dedicating themselves to a genre which does neither of these things." Ibid., p. 11.

and literary past. It was also, as we shall see in Chapter 4, destined to have a significant musical future. Berlioz's "fantastique" works – despite Mainzer's hopes – were to prove the beginning, rather than the end, of the *genre fantastique*.

CHAPTER TWO

FANTASY, PATHOLOGY, AND ROMANTIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Idées fixes: Uncanny Returns

*How can I ever hope to give you the faintest idea of the effect of those long-drawn swelling and dying notes upon me. I had never imagined anything approaching it. The melody was marvelous – quite unlike anything I had ever heard. It was itself the deep, tender sorrow of the most fervent love. As it rose in simple phrases. . . a rapture which words cannot describe took possession of me – the pain of boundless longing seized my heart like a spasm.*²²⁹

In his 1814 story, “Automata,” E.T.A. Hoffmann described an unusual love-sickness afflicting the young and impressionable artist, Ferdinand. The malaise is born during a dream-vision – a “half-conscious state” brought on by alcohol and fatigue – during which Ferdinand hears a melody of such exquisite effect that it transfixes him with “boundless longing.” The melody is sung by a mysterious woman, whose “spirit voice” awakens the innermost sounds sleeping in his heart, articulating a long-sought ideal:

I recognized, with unspeakable rapture, that she was the beloved of my soul, whose image had been enshrined in my heart since childhood. Though an adverse fate had torn her from me for a time, I had found her again now; my deep and fervent love for her melted into that wonderful melody of sorrow, and our words and our looks grew into exquisite swelling tones of music, flowing together into a river of fire.²³⁰

Ferdinand is afflicted with a consuming passion for the dream-woman – a species of obsession that Hoffmann earlier diagnoses as an *idée fixe* – which compels him to

²²⁹ E.T.A. Hoffman, “Automata” (*Die Automate*); this tale first appeared as a whole in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* in 1814, although it was written earlier, between parts of “The Golden Flower Pot.” This and subsequent quotations are taken from the English translation by Major Alexander Ewing in *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1967), p. 85.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

“give up everybody and everything but the most eager search for the very slightest trace of [his] unknown love.”²³¹ By an uncanny coincidence, every time he glimpses the lady, Hoffmann’s young lover hears the “long-drawn swelling and dying notes” of her bewitching melody; beloved woman and mysterious music are inextricably linked as a musico-erotic fetish that begins to exert a hostile influence upon his “whole existence.” Eventually – having lost his beloved forever – he gives way to a “distracted condition of the mind,” fleeing to a distant town and writing only that he might never return.²³²

Several years later, in Paris, Mme de Duras described an amorous illness of similar cast – an obsessive love manifesting itself through the relentless grip of an *idée fixe*. Her 1825 novel, *Édouard*, tells the tale of a solitary youth plagued by melancholic reveries and restless dissatisfaction. As a young man, Édouard travels to Paris, where he falls hopelessly in love with Natalie Nevers, the daughter of an old family friend and a lady of high rank. She is the woman he has dimly imagined and unknowingly sought since childhood; indeed, she combines the fictional and even celestial perfections of an ideal beloved: “Je trouvais à Mme de Nevers la beauté et la modestie de l’Ève de Milton, la tendresse de Juliette, et le dévouement d’Emma.”²³³

²³¹ Ibid., p. 87. Hoffmann introduces the term “*idée fixe*” in the first section of the tale to describe a variety of uncanny and supernatural obsessions. The sisters Adelgunda and Augusta, for instance, fixate on the specter of the White Lady, an apparition haunting the garden of their family home. Of Adelgunda, Hoffmann writes: “There was, of course, no lack of doctors, or of plans of treatment for ridding the poor soul of the *idée fixe*, as people were pleased to term the apparition which she said she saw” (p. 75). The fixation, in the case of both sisters, arises from a “disordered imagination” and culminates in insanity. Among other types of *idée fixe*, Hoffmann describes a “musical” haunting – a man fixated on an invisible keyboardist whose “compositions of the most extraordinary kind” are to be heard every night, although the player himself never materializes (p. 78). These fixations foreshadow Ferdinand’s own obsession with the musical lady, which Hoffmann aligns clearly with the earlier *idées fixes*, although he does not use the term again.

²³² Ibid., pp. 100-101.

²³³ “I found in Mme de Nevers the beauty and modesty of Milton’s Eve, the tenderness of Juliette, and the devotedness of Emma.” Presumably, Édouard is referring to Jane Austen’s *Emma*. This excerpt (p. 124) and all others are given in my translations of the following edition: *Mademoiselle de Clermont, par Mme de Genlis et Édouard, par Mme de Duras*, ed. and with *Postface* by Gérard Gengembre (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1994). Mme de Duras (1778-1828) was born Claire Louise de Kersaint; she published two successful novels in the mid 1820s in Paris (*Ourika* in 1824 and *Édouard* in 1825).

Within days, Édouard's passion becomes overwhelming and, absorbed in the "imaginary joys" of amorous fantasy, he retreats into solipsistic reverie:

"Livré à mon unique pensée, absorbé par un seul souvenir, je vivais encore un fois dans un monde créé par moi-même. . . je voyais Mme de Nevers, j'entendais sa voix, son regard me faisait tressaillir, je respirais le parfum de ses beaux cheveux. . . . Incapable d'aucune étude et d'aucune affaire, c'était l'occupation qui me dérangeait..."²³⁴

Imaginary pleasure soon gives way to torturous mental fixation; Édouard's love for the unattainable Mme de Nevers devolves into "a real misery" [un véritable malheur] and, suffering hallucinations and palpitations, he describes the delirium of an *idée fixe*: "Je tombai bientôt dans un état qui tenait le milieu entre le désespoir et la folie; en proie à une idée fixe, je voyais sans cesse Mme de Nevers: elle me poursuivait pendant mon sommeil; je m'élançais pour la saisir dans mes bras, mais un abîme se creusait tout à coup entre nous deux."²³⁵

Hounded even in sleep by images of his beloved, Édouard flees to the country in hopes of finding relief in the pastoral landscape. But on his rambling walks, he is visited by "hollow and terrible phantoms" [ombres vaines et terribles] and by inescapable thoughts of his Natalie, which, plunging him deeper into disorientation and despair, spark suicidal impulses – "Je n'ai plus d'avenir, et je ne vois de repos que dans la mort."²³⁶

A scant five years later, the love-illness troubling Édouard, and Ferdinand before him, afflicted the *jeune musicien* of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) in

²³⁴ "Given over to my single thought, absorbed by one memory alone, I lived once more in a world of my own creation . . . I saw Mme de Nevers, I heard her voice, her glance made me tremble, I breathed in the perfume of her beautiful hair. . . . Incapable of any study or other affair, I was sickened by this occupation..." Ibid., pp. 89-90.

²³⁵ "I fell soon into a state hovering between despair and madness; consumed by an *idée fixe*, I saw Madame de Nevers ceaselessly; she pursued me during my sleep, I rushed forth to seize her in my arms, but an abyss opened suddenly between us." Ibid., p. 131.

²³⁶ "I have no more future," he proclaims, "and I look for no repose but that of death." Ibid., p. 120.

one of the nineteenth century's most famous tales of "fixated" passion. Berlioz's story resonates immediately with both Hoffmann and Duras, echoing fragments of both narratives, and detailing the now-familiar tortures of an amorous *idée fixe*. Most striking is the resemblance between Hoffmann's and Berlioz's musical fetish; Hoffmann prefigures the "double" *idée fixe* – the yoking of amorous and aural fixation – so often identified as a key innovation of the *Fantastic Symphony*. Parallels between Berlioz and Duras are equally transparent; indeed, *Édouard* is a work the composer is likely to have known, and one that foreshadows many of the key elements of his own fantastic narrative.²³⁷ Berlioz's protagonist, like Duras' hero, falls in love with an ideal beloved who embodies the perfections of a dream creature. But amorous fantasy escalates into the consuming obsession of an *idée fixe* that pursues the *jeune musicien* both sleeping and waking, tormenting him even on a pastoral country retreat. As in Duras, love leans toward pathology, and descriptions of the *jeune musicien*'s amorous attachment are increasingly permeated with the rhetoric of disease. A diffuse *maladie morale* linked with the melancholy and restlessness of Chateaubriand's *vague des passions* quickly escalates into a more serious problem characterized by hallucinations, delusional reveries and "black presentiments."²³⁸ Wild alternations of "groundless joy," "frenzied passion," fury, jealousy, and tears culminate in a state of suicidal desperation. Like Édouard, the *jeune musicien* is lured inexorably inward, toward a realm of disordered imagination from which there is no retreat. Indeed, when

²³⁷ As Elizabeth Teichmann points out in her study, *La Fortune D'Hoffmann en France* (Paris and Geneva: Minard and Droz, 1961), "Automata" was not among the Hoffmann tales published in French translation during the 1830s. It is doubtful, therefore, that Berlioz had read the tale himself although he may have heard of it through some other avenue. That he knew Duras's novel is much more likely, for he was an avid reader well versed in the prose and poetry of his Parisian contemporaries.

²³⁸ Chateaubriand describes the *vague des passions* in his *Génie du christianisme* (II, 3, Ch.9; 1802) as "un état de l'âme qui...n'a pas encore été bien observé; c'est celui qui précède le développement des passions, lorsque nos facultés, jeunes, actives, entières, mais renfermées, ne se sont exercées que sur elles-mêmes, sans but et sans objet." ["a state of the soul which...has not yet been sufficiently studied, namely, that which precedes the development of our passions when our faculties are young, active, and whole, but closed in and exercised only on themselves, without aim or object."]

Berlioz introduces the familiar *idée fixe*, in Part One of the *Fantastique*'s program, we can already anticipate his hero's ill fate:

Rêveries. – Passions.

L'Auteur suppose qu'un jeune musicien, affecté de cette maladie morale qu'un écrivain célèbre appelle le Vague des Passions, voit pour la première fois une femme qui réunit tous les charmes de l'être idéal que rêvait son imagination, et en devient éperdument épris. Par une singulière bizarrerie, l'image chérie ne se présente jamais à l'esprit de l'artiste que liée à une pensée musicale, dans laquelle il trouve un certain caractère passionné, mais noble et timide comme celui qu'il prête à l'objet aimé.

Ce reflet mélodique avec son modèle le poursuivent sans cesse comme une double idée fixe. Telle est la raison de l'apparition constante, dans tous les morceaux de la symphonie, de la mélodie qui commence le premier Allegro. Le passage de cet état de rêverie mélancolique, interrompue par quelques accès de joie sans sujet, à celui d'une passion délirante, avec ses mouvements de fureur, de jalousie, ses retours de tendresse, ses larmes, ses consolations religieuses, est le sujet du premier morceau.²³⁹

Clearly, Berlioz was not the first to document the mysterious malady signaled by an amorous fixation, nor was "idée fixe" itself a "new term in the 1830s" as Hugh Macdonald has recently suggested.²⁴⁰ Rather, Berlioz's love-illness boasts a rich literary pedigree and a considerably longer history than has thus far been imagined. Alongside the tales of erotic fixation by Hoffmann and Duras, we could place Louis Lanfranchi's novel, *Voyage à Paris, ou Esquisses des hommes et des choses dans cette*

²³⁹ "The author imagines that a young musician, afflicted with that moral disease that a well-known writer calls the vague des passions, sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being he has imagined in his dreams, and he falls desperately in love with her. Through an odd whim, whenever the beloved appears before the mind's eye of the artist it is linked with a musical thought whose character, passionate but at the same time noble and shy, he finds similar to the one he attributes to the beloved.

This melodic image and the model it reflects pursue him incessantly like a double idée fixe. That is the reason for the constant appearance, in every moment of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first Allegro. The passage from this state of melancholy reverie, interrupted by a few fits of groundless joy, to one of frenzied passion, with its movements of fury, jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations – this is the subject of the first movement." From the 1845 version of the program published with the score. Translation by Edward T. Cone, in *Berlioz: Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score, Historical Background, Analysis, Views, and Comments* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 23.

²⁴⁰ See Hugh Macdonald's entry under "idée fixe" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), XII, p. 72.

capitale [Voyage to Paris, or Sketches of the people and things in that capital; Paris, 1830]. As Peter Bloom has also noted, Lanfranchi's chapter titled "Episode de la vie d'un voyageur" features a young man with another "double" obsession, this time a visual-erotic fixation: he searches through Paris for a beautiful woman whose imaginary image appears in his mind "like an *idée fixe*" whenever he sees a rose.²⁴¹ Even the "musical *idée fixe*" had precedents, notwithstanding Macdonald's claim that Berlioz "coined" the idea; well before Hoffmann imagined a musico-erotic fetish, the Italian composer Gaetano Brunetti had incorporated a malignant "fixed idea" into his programmatic Symphony No. 33, titled "Il maniático."²⁴²

Far from new, then, Berlioz's amorous obsession resonates with a host of earlier fictional fetishes.²⁴³ Although I do not suggest that he knew all of the *idées fixes* cited here, it is clear that his symphony participated in an existing tradition of literary fixations – obsessions that reached well beyond general romantic attachment into the realm of clinical disorder. By 1825, in the popular *Physiologie du goût*, the *idée fixe* was figured as a recognizable and treatable pathology remedied – so Brillat-Savarin claimed – by a dose of "amber chocolate."²⁴⁴ As this fanciful "cure" suggests,

²⁴¹ Peter Bloom, *The life of Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 51.

²⁴² Written in 1780, Brunetti's "Il maniático" not only prefigures Berlioz's recurring musical device, but makes an early reference to an obsessive type of madness later named and defined in French psychiatric theory. The symphony "describes (as far as possible, using only instruments, and without the help of words) the fixation of a madman on one single purpose or idea." Brunetti represents mental fixation with a repeating cello motif that permeates all the movements of the symphony, before the "madman" is finally coaxed away from obsessive repetition. For a modern edition with preface, notes, and the above quote from the symphony's program, see *Classici italiani della musica*, Vol. 3, ed. A. Bonacorsi (Rome: Lorenzo del Turco). My thanks to Ralph Locke for bringing Brunetti's symphony to my attention.

²⁴³ Reviews in both *Le Figaro* (11/12 April 1830) and the *Journal des débats* (22 February 1830) bear witness to another narrative of "fixated" passion – a tale entitled *Idée Fixe* by the anonymous author of *La Fille d'un roi*. Although the novel seems not to have survived, we learn from these reviews that it revolves around the sufferings of M. Léopold – "a soul entirely occupied and exalted by a profound and deep passion" for the "celestial" Noëma. As with many similar tales, the hero's obsessive *amour* leads to "desperation" and "the sad resignation of suicide." (Quotes are taken from the *Figaro* review)

²⁴⁴ Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du Gout ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante. Ouvrage théorique, historique, et à l'ordre du jour dédié aux gastronomes Parisiens* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1824), p. 118.

the history of Berlioz's fixation lay not only in the realm of literature but in the scientific sphere, at a curious intersection between medicine and aesthetics. Fiction begins to overlap with psychiatric theory and literature with "real life" as we trace the origins of the *idée fixe*; indeed, Berlioz drew on his own obsessive temperament as a model for the *jeune musicien*.

The first known draft of Berlioz's symphonic program, contained in a letter from the composer to Humbert Ferrand, is prefaced by a provocative autobiographical claim: "Now, my friend, here is how I have woven my novel [mon roman], or rather my history [mon histoire], whose hero you will have no difficulty recognizing."²⁴⁵ Berlioz was referring, of course, to the link between his hero's torturous infatuation and his own difficult love life – a history of unrequited *amour*, which manifested itself first as a hopeless childhood crush and later, more intensely, during his famous pursuit of the Irish actress, Harriet Smithson. The rapport between art and life in the *Symphonie Fantastique* is by no means simple – Berlioz himself suggested an overlap between novelistic and autobiographical modes²⁴⁶ – but the composer made an unambiguous point of contact between himself and his *jeune musicien* in a letter to Stephen de La Madelaine (early February, 1830), in which he described his escalating infatuation with Smithson in precisely the pathological terms defining his hero's malady:

Je comptais aller vous voir aujourd'hui, mais l'état horrible d'exaltation que je supporte avec tant de peine depuis quelques jours, ayant encore augmenté ce matin, je ne suis plus capable d'un entretien parlé un peu raisonnable. Une idée fixe me tue, tous mes muscles tremblent comme ceux d'un mourant.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ *Correspondance générale* (henceforward *CG*), I: 158 (16 April, 1830). This and subsequent translations of Berlioz's letters are mine unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴⁶ The autobiographical status of the *Fantastique* is a complex question to which I shall return in the last section of this essay.

²⁴⁷ "I was going to come and see you today, but the frightful state of nervous exaltation which I have been struggling against for the past few days is worse this morning and I am incapable of carrying on a conversation of any reasonableness. An *idée fixe* is killing me; all my muscles twitch like a dying

Berlioz, it seems, was suffering from the same affliction he ascribed to his symphonic protagonist – a malignant *idée fixe* triggering convulsive muscular tremors and precipitating a state of nervous malfunction. No longer an ailment confined to the imaginary realm, mental fixation emerges here as a real illness with a set of concrete medical symptoms – an affliction that draws Berlioz’s “novel” closer to a “history,” and suggests that pathology itself mediated a key intersection between the composer and his programmatic alter-ego. Berlioz’s self-description grounds fictional accounts of mental fixation in quasi-scientific rhetoric, situating the *idée fixe* as a diagnosable medical phenomenon and proposing a complex relationship between physical and fantastic disease.

In fact, the malady plaguing both Berlioz and his symphonic hero had been familiar to doctors and romance-readers alike since the first decade of the nineteenth century and well-theorized in early psychiatric texts. Berlioz’s self-descriptions, scattered throughout his personal correspondence during the gestation period of the *Symphonie fantastique*, borrow liberally from an evolving vocabulary of scientific language to describe the mental “aberration” that plays such a central role in his symphonic narrative. As we explore the intersection between science and fantasy at the heart of his fantastic tale, we begin to map “fiction” onto “real life” and to uncover the medical underpinnings of the composer’s program. His letters over the course of 1829 and early 1830 are suffused with references to the physical debilitation, psychological disturbances, and imaginative excess occasioned by his *idée fixe*. Together, they read as a series of meticulous self-diagnoses tracing the unfolding narrative of his erotic fixation in emotional and physiological detail. As we investigate

man’s.” *CG*, I: 153. I am by no means the first to note Berlioz’s reference to his own *idée fixe* (see, for instance, David Cairns’ recent *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist* (California: California University Press, 1999), p. 357), but the full medical and literary significance of the term has not, to my knowledge, been brought to bear on either Berlioz’s biography or his first symphony.

Berlioz's own pathology, the analogous condition afflicting his symphonic alter-ego comes into sharper focus. Disease itself – as theorized in early nineteenth-century France – provides a vital context in which to consider the mechanisms of self-representation at work in the *Fantastique*. Berlioz's *idée fixe* leads us inexorably outward, toward a web of literary, philosophical, and psychiatric discourses integral to the aesthetic construction of the *Fantastique*, while drawing us simultaneously inward toward the fundamental and intimate processes of autobiographical construction at the heart of the composer's fantastic self-telling.

The Trope of Pathology in the “Fantastic” Letters

The evolution of the *Fantastic Symphony* stretched over more than a year, during which Berlioz's correspondence is peppered with references to a planned instrumental composition of “immense” proportions.²⁴⁸ Despite frequent references to the work, Berlioz was unable to begin composition, paralyzed by melancholic anxiety, hallucinations, and even convulsions brought on (in part) by an unrequited passion for Harriet Smithson. Indeed, the symphony was inextricably intertwined with Berlioz's amorous obsession; he claimed repeatedly that the work would draw him nearer to his beloved, allowing him to satisfy the relentless craving of his *idée fixe*. His sufferings built to a climax in the winter of 1830 but they had begun considerably earlier, the result of a serious malady whose development he described in a series of letters to Edouard Rocher, Humbert Ferrand, and Albert du Boys.

²⁴⁸ David Cairns provides invaluable commentary on the creative emergence of the *Fantastic Symphony* in his review of Berlioz's letters over the period 1829-30; see *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist*, pp. 355-361. Here, I take the same epistolary journey, although I am primarily interested in documenting the evolution of Berlioz's self-diagnosed *idée fixe* and examining links between pathology and creative impulse that permeate his self-accounts during this period.

Berlioz opened a letter to Rocher (11 January, 1829) with the melancholy notion that he could write only of “suffering,” and of the “continuous alternation between hope and despair” provoked by his passion for Harriet Smithson. The composer’s lovesick distress mingled with a gripping ambition to achieve “new things”; the torment born of his “overpowering passion” was to be transmuted into revolutionary musical form, misery itself giving shape to his ideas:

Oh! si je ne souffrais pas tant!...que d’idées musicales fermentent en moi (...) Il y a du neuf à faire et beaucoup, je le sens avec une énergie extrême; et j’en ferai, sois-en sûr, si je vis. Oh!, faudrait-il que toute ma destinée soit engloutie par cette passion foudroyante?...Si, au contraire, elle tournait à bien, tout ce que j’ai souffert servirait à l’augmentation de mes idées musicales, je travaillerais avec une activité...mes moyens seraient triplés, tout un monde musical s’élancerait armé de mon cerveau et plutôt de mon cœur...²⁴⁹

In the months that followed, Berlioz’s obsession with Harriet intensified; his letters document a series of convoluted communications with friends and acquaintances of the actress, through whom he hoped to reach the object of his infatuation. Via the English impresario, Turner – who chaperoned Smithson and her mother on their European travels – Berlioz relayed a series of love letters to Harriet, but they failed to

²⁴⁹ “Oh, if only I did not suffer so much!...So many musical ideas are seething within me (...) There are new things, many new things to be done, I feel it with an intense energy, and I shall do it, have no doubt, if I live. Oh, must my entire destiny be engulfed by this overpowering passion? ... If on the other hand it turned out well, everything I’ve suffered would enhance my musical ideas. I would work non-stop...my powers would be tripled, a whole new world of music would spring fully armed from my brain or rather from my heart...” *CG*, I: 111. Translated by Cairns in *The Making of an Artist*, p. 355. Berlioz’s fixation on Smithson, which became intertwined with a Shakespearean obsession, had begun some time before. He first encountered both actress and English playwright in September of 1827, when Harriet appeared as Ophelia in a production of *Hamlet* at the Odéon theatre. Berlioz recalls the overwhelming emotional and psychological effect of the experience in his *Mémoires*, couching his description in unmistakably pathological terms: “A feeling of intense, overpowering sadness came over me, accompanied by a nervous condition like a sickness, of which only a great writer on physiology could give any adequate idea. I lost my power of sleep and with it all my former animation, all taste for my favorite studies, all ability to work. I wandered aimlessly about the Paris streets and the neighboring plains.” [Transl. by Cairns in *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz* (London: Gollancz, 1969), pp. 95-96.]

elicit a response. Even a note in English proved unsuccessful and, after weeks of fruitless pursuit, Berlioz seemed reconciled with his amorous failure, declaring “everything over” in a miserable letter to Albert du Boys.²⁵⁰ But only days later, he renewed his efforts, hatching a desperate plot to communicate with Harriet through the *maître de la maison* at her Parisian residence. The results were disastrous: Harriet was both annoyed and frightened and, in reply to Berlioz’s pleas, insisted brusquely that the composer’s advances were unwanted, that she “absolutely could not share his sentiments,” and indeed, that “nothing was more impossible.”²⁵¹ “Il n’y a rien de plus impossible”: the phrase reverberates through Berlioz’s correspondence in the following months as the melancholic leitmotif of his *idée fixe*, yet even in the face of Harriet’s explicit rejection, he continued to refer to her as his darling, to speak of her love, and to anticipate their union.

Letters of this period seldom refer to Harriet by name; instead, Berlioz called her *Ophélie*, a reference to the Shakespearean guise in which he first encountered her. For Berlioz, who had never exchanged a word with Harriet, the tragic heroine of *Hamlet* was more immediate than the actress herself. In the composer’s imagination, Harriet hovered between the fictional and the actual, her theatrical personas accruing substance and agency in his letters. At times, Berlioz perceived her as a conflation of imaginary characters: in an outburst to Ferdinand Hiller, he wrote, “Oh! Juliet, Ophelia, Belvidera, Jeanne Shore, noms que l’enfer répète sans cesse.”²⁵² Harriet’s rejections were incapable of weakening Berlioz’s passion for, in his mind, she was not

²⁵⁰ CG, I: 117 (2 March 1829). Berlioz’s love letters do not survive, but his *Mémoires* suggest that they were numerous; indeed, Harriet finally instructed the maids at her Amsterdam hotel to stop delivering the composer’s amorous pleas.

²⁵¹ CG, I: 117. Berlioz’s letter to Du Boys describes a series of events stretching over several weeks, from the failure of his English letter to Harriet, to his ill-fated interactions with her Parisian landlord, and subsequent despair.

²⁵² “Oh Juliet, Ophelia, Belvidera, Jane Shore, names which Hell repeats unceasingly.” CG, I: 156 (3 March, 1830). These were all, of course, roles in which Smithson appeared on the Parisian stage at the height of her fame.

a flesh-and-blood woman but the symbol of an ephemeral ideal – an imaginary perfection which, like the poetic vision of the symphony itself, was as yet agonizingly beyond his reach. Indeed, Berlioz's *idée fixe* was intimately tied to his evolving creative process; the obsession motivated him toward “immense” musical thought and concentrated his compositional power. In his letters, disease itself is figured as a generative force and a central impetus for the *Fantastique*: Berlioz tells Ferrand that “cette passion me tuera” although, only a few letters earlier, he had assured his friend that “L’amour d’Ophélie a centuplé mes moyens.”²⁵³

The symphony, it seems, was not merely generated by Berlioz's fixation, but promised to perpetuate it. Again, to Ferrand, the composer wrote: “Quand j’aurai écrit une composition instrumentale, immense, que je médite...j’obtienne sous ses yeux un brillant succès.”²⁵⁴ While goading him onwards, Berlioz's fixation proved increasingly destructive to his emotional and psychological stability. In the March 2nd letter to Albert du Boys, he was already reporting a condition of intense misery and alienation from the “physical and intellectual” worlds. Here, we read of a sensation of utter isolation in which, bereft of his rational faculties, he is abandoned to the imaginative realm of “memory,” and unable to order his thoughts:

Il me semble que je suis au centre d’un cercle dont la circonférence va toujours en grandissant, le monde physique et intellectuel me paraît placé sur cette circonférence qui s’éloigne sans cesse, et je demeure seul avec la mémoire, dans un isolement toujours plus grand. Le matin quand je sors du néant où le sommeil me plonge, mon esprit qui s’était accoutumé si facilement aux idées de bonheur, se réveille souriant; cette rapide illusion fait bientôt place à l’idée atroce de la réalité qui vient de nouveau m’accabler de tout son poids et glacer d’un frisson mortel tout mon être. J’ai beaucoup

²⁵³ “...this passion will kill me.”; “Ophelia’s love has increased my powers a hundredfold.” *CG*, I: 126 (3 June, 1829) and I: 114 (18 February, 1829) respectively.

²⁵⁴ “When I have written an immense instrumental composition, on which I am meditating...I will achieve a brilliant success in *her* eyes.” *CG*, I: 126.

de peine à réunir mes idées. (...) Je suis obligé de reprendre ma lettre à plusieurs fois pour aller jusqu'au bout.²⁵⁵

By June, Berlioz's condition had worsened considerably. Suffering from physical weakness and depression, he consulted a doctor, who diagnosed a nervous disorder brought on by emotional strain:

...ma vie à moi est si pénible que je ne puis m'empêcher de regarder la mort comme une délivrance. Depuis quelques jours, je sors très peu, je ne puis plus me tenir; mes forces disparaissent avec une rapidité étonnante. Un médecin que j'ai consulté avant-hier attribue cela à de la fatigue du système nerveux, causé par des émotions trop vives. Il aurait pu ajouter, et par un chagrin qui me tue.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ "... it is as though I am at the centre of a circle whose circumference is continuously enlarging; the physical and intellectual world appear placed on this unceasingly expanding circumference, and I remain alone with my memory, and a sense of isolation which is always intensifying. In the morning when I wake from the nothingness wherein I am plunged during sleep, my spirit – which was so easily accustomed to the ideas of happiness – awakes smiling; this brief illusion is soon replaced by the atrocious idea of reality which overwhelms me with all its weight and freezes my entire being with a mortal shudder. I have great trouble gathering my thoughts. (...) I have been forced to recommence this letter many times in order to arrive at the end." *CG*, I: 117. Susan Ironfield examines Berlioz's lifelong tendency toward melancholy and *mal de l'isolement* in "Creative Developments of the 'Mal de l'Isolement' in Berlioz," *Music and Letters* LIX/1 (January 1978), 33-48. Citing nervous "exacerbation" as a condition permeating much of Berlioz's life, she identifies a more intense period of illness surrounding the production of the *Symphonie fantastique*, a work which "gives the fullest and purest expression of the *mal d'isolement*." But Ironfield gives an aesthetic rather than physiological description of Berlioz's condition; it is a vague pathology "perhaps liable to some fairly prosaic medical explanation." Although she identifies "love" – and even ideal fantasy – as the "fundamental element" of Berlioz's malaise, Ironfield does not explore the psychiatric ramifications of the composer's *idée fixe*, a term that points toward a much more concrete species of nineteenth-century pathology. She posits a link between illness and creative impulse in Berlioz's psychology, but resists the suggestion that the composer might have regarded disease itself as an impetus for composition, claiming that "it is no longer fashionable to attribute genius to some abnormality of temperament, imbalance, or even madness." While I agree that associations between mental aberration and creative vision may have fallen out of fashion today, such connections were alive and well in the early nineteenth century and, as I shall claim, underpin Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony* as well as permeating many aspects of romantic literary and medical culture.

²⁵⁶ "...my life is so painful to me that I cannot help but regard death as a deliverance. In the past days, I have gone out very little, I could not abide it; my strength disappears with an alarming rapidity. A doctor, whom I consulted the day before yesterday, attributed the symptoms to fatigue of the nervous system caused by an excess of emotion. He could also have added, by a sorrow that is killing me." *CG*, I: 127 (14 June, 1829); to Edouard Rocher.

The baths and solitary rest prescribed by Berlioz's physician provided only temporary relief. Ten days later, he complained of "anguish" and "terrible despair" sparked by Harriet's departure for London, linking the return of his physical suffering to a familiar sense of isolation, now coupled with a near-convulsive impulse:

Et elle est partie!...Londres!...immense succès...moi, je suis seul...errant la nuit dans les rues, avec une douleur poignante qui m'obsède, comme un fer rouge sur la poitrine. Je voudrais pouvoir me soulager en me roulant à terre!...La société ne fait rien: je m'occupe toute la journée sans me distraire. Depuis quatre mois, je ne l'ai pas vue (...) Tu me parles de mes parents, tout ce que je puis faire pour eux, c'est de vivre; et il n'y a que moi au monde qui puisse savoir le courage dont j'ai besoin pour cet effort.²⁵⁷

February of 1830 found the composer in a "frightful state of nervous exaltation" accompanied by convulsive muscle tremors. The cause of his misery was the obsessive passion that Berlioz now identified specifically as an *idée fixe* (see page 7) – a diagnosis that located his illness squarely within the realm of psychiatric discourse and, as we shall see, referred to a specific category of known mental disorders.²⁵⁸

Plans for the *Fantastic Symphony* continued to progress, despite Berlioz's distress. As early as February 6, he informed Ferrand that "the whole thing is in my head," although he had not been able to write it down. The symphony would trace the course of Berlioz's "infernal passion"– not simply his infatuation with Harriet

²⁵⁷ "Now she's left! ... London! ... Enormous success! ... While I am alone ... wandering through the streets at night, with a poignant misery which obsesses me like a red-hot iron on my chest. I feel like rolling on the ground to try to alleviate it! ...Going out into society doesn't help; I keep myself busy all day long but I can't take my mind off her. I haven't seen her for four months now (...) You talk to me of my parents, all I can do for them is to stay alive; and I'm the only person in the world who knows the courage I need in order to do this." *CG*, I: 129 (25 June, 1829); to Rocher. Transl. by Roger Nichols in *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, ed. Hugh Macdonald (New York: Norton, 1995), pp. 55-56.

²⁵⁸ *CG*, I: 153 (early February, 1830).

Smithson, but the obsessive illness that had resulted. Nervous overstimulation, trembling, and a painful sensitivity of all the faculties began to torment the composer: “I listen to the beating of my heart, its pulsations shake me like the pounding pistons of a steam engine. Every muscle in my body quivers with pain . . . Futile! . . . Horrible!” At times he seemed to lapse into a semi-delirious state; he wrote of “clouds charged with lightning” that “rumbled” in his head.²⁵⁹ A longer and more detailed letter to his father followed several weeks later, in which Berlioz interrogated not only the immediate symptoms of his illness but also its preconditions. As he implied in a later letter to Rocher, Berlioz was reluctant to reveal to his father that Harriet was the focus of his “cruel *maladie morale*” and omitted mention of the actress in the diagnosis of his affliction that he sent to Papa.²⁶⁰ Here, Berlioz suggested that anxiety and emotional excess were fundamental aspects of his character – they “come from the way [he is] made” – and have tormented him since early youth. His tendency toward melancholy, he explained, was fueled by an imagination so vivid that he experienced “extraordinary impressions” akin to opium hallucinations. Berlioz’s fantastic interior realm [ce monde fantastique], according to this letter, had only grown in breadth and power as he aged, exerting increasing influence over his rational faculties. Indeed, he described his fantasy world as a darkly pathological place marked by disorientation and excess: it had become “a real malady” [*une véritable maladie*]. Illusory images and magnified passions now drove him into a convulsive state close to hysteria; he almost “shouts and rolls on the ground.” Only music could harness and control his wayward fantasy, and yet even the enormous symphony in gestation was unable to draw his mind away from destructive imaginings:

²⁵⁹ CG, I: 152 (6 February, 1830).

²⁶⁰ CG, I: 165 (5 June, 1830). Berlioz reminds Edouard Rocher that his father must know nothing of his attachment to Harriet: “Mais que mon père n’apprenne rien de ma cruelle maladie morale pour H. Smithson: c’est inutile.”

Je voudrais trouver aussi un spécifique pour calmer l'ardeur fiévreuse qui me torture si souvent; je ne le trouverai jamais, cela tient à mon organisation. En outre, l'habitude que j'ai prise de m'observer continuellement fait qu'aucune sensation ne m'échappe et la réflexion la rend double, je me vois dans un miroir. J'éprouve souvent des impressions extraordinaires dont rien ne peut donner une idée, vraisemblablement l'exaltation nerveuse en est la cause, cela tient de l'ivresse de l'opium. (...)

Eh bien, ce monde fantastique s'est conservé en moi et s'est accru de toutes les idées nouvelles que j'ai connues en avançant dans la vie; c'est devenu une véritable maladie. Il m'arrive quelquefois de ne pouvoir qu'à peine supporter cette douleur morale ou physique (car je ne sais faire la distinction), surtout dans les beaux jours d'été, me trouvant dans un lieu espacé comme le jardin des Tuileries, seul; oh, alors, M. Azais a raison, je croirais volontiers qu'il y a en moi une *force d'expansion* qui agit violemment, je vois tout cet horizon, ce soleil, et je souffre tant, tant, que si je ne me contenais, je pousserais des cris, je me roulerais par terre. Je n'ai trouvé qu'un moyen de satisfaire complètement cette *avidité immense d'émotion*, c'est la musique. Sans elle certainement je ne pourrais pas exister.²⁶¹

Reports of anguished hallucination followed: Berlioz told Hiller that he “saw Ophelia” shedding tears and “heard her tragic voice,” going on to describe a series of odd imaginings in which Beethoven “looked at him severely” and Weber “whispered in [his] ear like a familiar spirit.” Suddenly breaking off, he acknowledged that his behavior was bordering on madness: “Tout ceci est fou...complètement fou, pour un joueur de dominos du café de la Régence ou un membre de l'Institut... Non, je veux vivre...encore...” The letter dissolves into near-incoherence as Berlioz returns again to his idée fixe: “Hors de moi, tout à fait incapable de dire quelque chose

²⁶¹ “I wish I could also find a remedy to calm the feverish excitement which so often torments me; but I shall never find it, it comes from the way I am made. In addition, the habit I have got into of constantly observing myself means that no sensation escapes me, and reflection doubles it – I see myself in a mirror. Often I experience the most extraordinary impressions, of which nothing can give an idea; nervous exaltation is no doubt the cause, but the effect is like opium intoxication. (. . .)

Well, this imaginary world [ce monde fantastique] is still part of me, and has grown by the addition of all the new impressions that I experience as my life goes on; it's become a real malady [c'est devenu une véritable maladie]. Sometimes I can scarcely endure this mental or physical pain (I can't separate the two), especially on fine summer days when I'm in an open space like the Tuileries Garden, alone. Oh then (as M. Azais rightly says) I could well believe there is a violent “expansive force” within me. I see that wide horizon and the sun, and I suffer so much, so much, that if I did not take a grip of myself I should shout and roll on the ground. I have found only one way of completely satisfying this immense appetite for emotion, and that is music. Without it I am certain I could not go on living.” *CG*, I: 155 (19 February 1830); translation adapted from David Cairns, *Berlioz: the Making of an Artist*, pp. 357-58.

de...raisonnable...il y a aujourd'hui un an que je LA vis pour la dernière fois...Oh! malheureuse! que je t'aimais! J'écris en frémissant que je *t'aime!*" A desperate attempt to locate his obsession in the past tense fails, the fixation quickly reasserting itself in the present. As the letter draws to a close, Berlioz seems to sink into despondency, unable to master his ravaging imagination: "Je suis un homme très malheureux, un être presque isolé dans le monde, un animal accablé d'une imagination qu'il ne peut porter, dévoré d'un amour sans bornes qui n'est payé que par l'indifférence et le mépris."²⁶²

Desperate for a reprieve from his pathological fantasies, Berlioz suddenly received it: slanderous reports of Harriet's moral character reached the composer in March of 1830, temporarily weakening the grip of his *idée fixe* and allowing him to refocus his imaginative powers. Berlioz poured out the tale of his suffering and obsession in musico-literary form, describing an amorous illness taken directly from personal experience. His symphonic narrative resonated clearly with the records of his own mental and emotional torment, yet his "autobiographical" hero traversed a darker path: the *jeune musicien* of the *Fantastique* not only attempted suicide but also imagined, under the influence of opium, that he had killed his beloved. David Cairns has recently suggested that the news of Harriet's alleged indiscretions was not a deciding factor in the creation of the grotesque finale of the work, claiming that "the 'plan of the symphony' had been in existence for some while before the discovery in question."²⁶³ In Cairns' view, to argue that petty "revenge" was a motivating force in

²⁶² "All this is crazy. . . completely crazy, for a man who plays dominoes in the Café de Régence or for a member of the Institut. . . No, I want to live. . . once more. . ." ; "I'm beside myself, quite incapable of saying anything . . . reasonable . . . Today it is a year since I saw HER for the last time . . . Unhappy woman, how I loved you! I love you, and I shudder as I write the words."; "I am a miserably unhappy man, a being almost isolated from the world, an animal burdened with an imagination that he cannot endure, devoured by a boundless love which is rewarded only by indifference and contempt." *CG*, I: 156 (3 March, 1830); quoted passages rely on the translation by Roger Nichols, in *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, pp. 66-67.

²⁶³ Cairns, *Berlioz: the Making of an Artist*, p. 361.

the creation of Berlioz's dark narrative is to misunderstand the composer's musical and personal motives. What, then, was the source for the composer's murderous plot twist and sinister alter-ego? Why does his hero's *idée fixe* lead to more dangerous and ominous imaginings than those that Berlioz was ascribing to himself?

Contextualization and partial elucidation of both Berlioz's obsessive illness and its reconfiguration in the program of the *Fantastique* is to be found – I argue – in the realm of medicine and, more specifically, in the writings of early nineteenth-century psychiatrists, whose new and sensational diagnoses of madness had far-reaching effects in both scientific and artistic circles. The writings of the early *médecins-aliénistes* [doctors of mental medicine] point toward a specific diagnosis of the maladies afflicting the composer and his musical hero, providing a richly theorized backdrop for the debilitating and potentially fatal *idée fixe*. As we shall see, the link between Berlioz's famous fixation and early French psychiatric theory has already been noted, though not explored at length, in recent scholarship within the field of medical history.

Early Psychiatry and the Formulation of a “Monomania” Diagnosis

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a burgeoning interest in psychological health in French medical thought, as physicians linked to the circle of the *Idéologues* began to expand the definition of medicine to include study of both *le moral* and *le physique*.²⁶⁴ Recent studies of the emerging psychiatric profession in

²⁶⁴ These are terms which, as Jan Goldstein points out in her invaluable study, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), were first paired in Pierre-Jean-George Cabanis's 1802 treatise, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*. Cabanis and members of his intellectual circle were termed *Idéologues* for their interest in *idéologie* – the “science of ideas” – which encouraged a merger of medical discourse and

early nineteenth-century France and elsewhere – work by Jan Goldstein, Ian R. Dowbiggin, and Elizabeth A. Williams – inform us that a new “medicine of the imagination” was rendering mental functions and even the mechanisms of sentiment accessible to rational examination, and bringing insanity to the forefront of medical attention.²⁶⁵ Pioneering work by P.-J.-G. Cabanis and Phillipe Pinel at the turn of the century proposed a complex symbiosis between “internal impressions” of the imagination and physical sensations transmitted via the nervous system, laying the theoretical foundation for the first generation of psychiatrists.²⁶⁶ Mental disorders [maladies morales] began to be described and defined with a newly precise body of language; references to *hysterie*, *hallucination*, and *idées fixes* permeated medical and legal texts and soon filtered into popular discourse. Through the early 1800s, psychiatry evolved as an autonomous and increasingly important medical field, and the new *médecin-aliéniste* as a powerful figure both in the scientific and public realms.²⁶⁷

philosophical method (see pp. 90-91 for further clarification). Goldstein explores not only the philosophization of medical practice that began during Cabanis’s career, but its evolution into “an all-embracing science of man” which, extending the sensationalist psychology of the Enlightenment, interrogated both physical and mental functions (pp. 49-55).

²⁶⁵ “Medicine of the imagination” was a broad designation that applied both to speculative practices including Mesmerism and to the newly rigorous and “scientific” field of French psychiatry; see Goldstein pp. 54; 78-79. During the early nineteenth century, similar developments in “imaginative” medicine were underway in Germany and England, although French physicians played a central role in establishing the new science. In addition to Goldstein, the following sources have proven useful in my own work: Elizabeth Williams, *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Ian Dowbiggin, *Inheriting Madness: Professionalization and Psychiatric Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

²⁶⁶ As Goldstein points out, Pinel’s 1801 *Traité médico-philosophique sur l’aliénation mentale, ou la manie* – the first comprehensive treatise on insanity – elaborated upon Cabanis’s notion of “internal impressions” or “instincts” which, in conjunction with reason, constituted the newly important realm of “le morale.” (see pp. 50; 71)

²⁶⁷ For a discussion of “hallucination” – a new term in the early nineteenth century – and “hysterie” see Goldstein pp. 263; 370; 323-331 and Williams pp. 252-53; see also Goldstein p. 99, n. 126 for the etymology of “aliénation mentale,” a term which led to the later designation “médecin-aliéniste.” I am most concerned here, of course, with the medical implications of the term “idée fixe,” which I explore in greater detail over the following several pages.

Foremost among doctor-psychiatrists of the new school was Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol, a student of the revered Pinel, who devoted his long career almost exclusively to the study, definition, and systematic classification of madness, becoming the principal *médecin-aliéniste* of the first half of the century. Among Esquirol's chief contributions was the theorization of a new mental malady called "monomania," which he first identified around 1810 and later defined and classified in an 1819 paper published in the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*.²⁶⁸ Here, as Goldstein explicates in her chapter on "Monomania," Esquirol situated *monomanie* as a circumscribed type of mania involving a "partial delirium" or localized "disorder of the understanding." Classing it as a disorder of the nervous system, he identified monomania's primary symptom as the pathological fixation on a single idea – an *idée fixe*.²⁶⁹ Monomaniacs were consumed by one thought, idea, or plan of action, a state of mental fixation producing an "energetic" effect while also causing "nervous exaltation," "illusions," feverish thought patterns and – in advanced cases – hallucinations, convulsions, and disturbing dreams. Sufferers might also experience melancholic symptoms, the frustration of their desires leading to depression, despair, and sorrowful withdrawal.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Goldstein pp. 155-56. See also her full chapter on monomania (pp. 152-196) – the most comprehensive study of the subject available, and one which must serve as a starting point in any exploration of Esquirol's disease. This section relies significantly on her historical narrative, while the following sets out new evidence garnered from mid-century musical and literary sources.

²⁶⁹ Esquirol, "Monomania," *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, Vol. 34 (1819), pp. 117-22; quoted in Goldstein, pp. 156-57. The terms *monomanie* and *idée fixe* were coined well before 1818. "Monomania" appears in Esquirol's early writings, circa 1810; *idée fixe* dates from the same period in both Esquirol and in Gall and Spurzheim's commentary on Esquirol, contained in their treatise on phrenology, *Anatomie et physiologie du système nerveux en général et du cerveau en particulier* (Paris: F. Schoell), 1812 (see Goldstein p. 153 n. 6; p. 155 n. 21).

²⁷⁰ These are symptoms described in Esquirol's later treatise, *Des maladies mentales: considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et médico-légal* Vol. 2 (Paris: Baillière, 1838), in which he consolidated his earlier writings on monomania, detailing case studies gathered over several decades of work in Parisian asylums and hospitals; see pp. 1-4. These and subsequent quotations are given in translations adapted from those of Raymond de Saussure, in *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*; A Facsimile of the English Edition of 1845 (New York and London: Hafner, 1965).

According to Esquirol's later treatise on insanity – *Des maladies mentales: considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et médico-légal* (1838) – monomaniacs were those “qui paraissent jouir de leur raison; mais dont les fonctions affectives seules semblent lésées.”²⁷¹ In all areas outside of their fixation, they reasoned logically; indeed, Esquirol suggested that the minds most susceptible to *idées fixes* were those endowed with marked intelligence, sensitivity, and vivid imagination. Such persons were given to ambitious or “exaggerated” projects and fantastic imaginings, often allowing setbacks and frustrations to drive them to mental instability:

“Les tempéramens sanguins et nervoso-sanguins, les individus doués d’une imagination brillante, vive, exaltée; les esprits méditatifs, exclusifs, qui ne semblent susceptibles que d’une série d’idées et d’affections; les individus qui, par amour-propre, par vanité, par orgueil, par ambition, s’abandonnent à des pensées, à des projets exagérés, à des prétentions outrées sont, plus que les autres, disposés à la monomanie.”²⁷²

Esquirol's 1838 treatise warrants closer attention, for it was here that he synthesized his earlier writing and research on monomania and described certain subclassifications of mental fixation in greater detail. Drawing on a series of case studies, he detailed the symptoms and effects of theomania, incendiary monomania, monomania from drunkenness, and – most important to our investigation – erotic monomania.²⁷³

Erotic fixation (or erotomania) was a species of obsession characterized by an “amour

²⁷¹ Maniacs, according to Esquirol were those who “appear[ed] to enjoy the use of their reason, and whose affective functions alone seem[ed] to be in the wrong.” Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, p. 94.

²⁷² “Sanguine and nervous-sanguine temperaments, and persons endowed with a brilliant, warm and vivid imagination; minds of a meditative and exclusive cast, which seem to be susceptible only of a series of thoughts and emotions; individuals who, through self-love, vanity, pride, and ambition, abandon themselves to their reflections, to exaggerated projects and unwarrantable pretensions, are especially disposed to monomania.” Ibid., p. 29. See also, Goldstein's discussion of *monomanie ambitieuse*, pp. 160-61.

²⁷³ Not all of these subtypes of monomania were new to Esquirol's diagnosis, but they were presented in 1838 with fresh evidence. Goldstein draws our attention to the “specific forms of monomania,” including erotomania (p. 171), although she does not explore *monomanie érotique* in any detail.

excessif” [an overabundance of passion] in which “les affections ont le caractère de la monomanie, c’est-à-dire qu’elles sont fixes et concentrées sur un seul objet.”²⁷⁴ Esquirol distinguished erotomania from the languor and “douce rêverie” of youthful love, which he designated simply as melancholy, although – like Berlioz – he recognized early bouts of amorous depression as frequent forerunners of more serious nervous disorder. Despite its romantic nature, erotomania was not to be confused with the shameful and humiliating condition of nymphomania for it intensified “les affections vives du coeur” [the ardent affections of the heart] without invoking unchaste desires: “L’erotomaniaque ne desire, ne songe pas même aux faveurs qu’il pourrait prétendre de l’objet de sa folle tendresse, quelquefois même son amour a pour objet des êtres inanimés.”²⁷⁵

Esquirol reported that some men were seized with monomaniacal passion for mythical characters, imaginary creatures, or women they had never met but to whom they assigned all manner of physical and moral perfections. These unfortunates were consumed by fixated devotion, and “pursued both night and day by the same thoughts and affections,” although their sentiments were directed toward an unattainable object:

“En contemplation devant ses perfections souvent imaginaires, désespérés par l’absence, le regard de ces malades est abattu, leur teint devient pâle, leurs traits s’altèrent, le sommeil et l’appétit se perdent: ces malheureux sont inquiets, rêveurs, désespérés, agités, irritables, colères, etc. (. . .) leur activité musculaire augmentée, a quelque chose de convulsif.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ “the affections take on the character of monomania; that is to say, they are fixed and concentrated upon a single object.” Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, p. 47.

²⁷⁵ “The erotomaniac neither desires, nor dreams even, of the favors to which he might aspire from the object of his insane tenderness; his love sometimes having for its object, things inanimate.” Ibid., p. 33.

²⁷⁶ “While contemplating its often imaginary perfections, they are thrown into ecstasies. Despairing in its absence, the look of this class of patients is dejected; their complexion becomes pale; their features change, sleep and appetite are lost: these unfortunates are restless, thoughtful, greatly depressed in mind, agitated, irritable and passionate, etc. (...) their augmented muscular activity is convulsive in its character.” Ibid., pp. 33-34.

Animated, “expansive,” and often frenetically lively, erotomaniacs were “ordinairement d’une loquacité intarissable, parlant toujours de leur amour.” They lived in a constant state of emotional unrest resulting in nervous pains, fever, convulsion, and often “conversation desordonnée” [irrational conversation]. Esquirol described their tortured passions, noting that “l’espoir, la jalousie, la joie, la fureur, semblent concourir toutes à-la-fois ou tour-à-tour pour rendre plus cruel le tourment de ces infortunés” – they were “capables des actions les plus extraordinaires, les plus difficiles, les plus pénibles, les plus bizarres.”²⁷⁷ Personalities particularly susceptible to erotomania – those with an intense emotional capacity – suffered an exaggeration of their natural passions, which, in serious cases, led to delirium and suicidal despondency.

As Goldstein has noted, Esquirol’s monomania diagnosis created a significant stir in medical circles, catapulting both the doctor and his system of classifications for *aliénation mentale* to the forefront of the psychiatric field. Teachers of *médecine mentale* in Paris focused heavily on the concept of monomania, and a spate of supporting research began to appear in the early 1820s. By 1826, monomania “was the single most frequent diagnosis made of patients entering Charenton,” becoming a virtual epidemic that dominated medical debate and captured the imagination of the public at large.²⁷⁸ In Parisian salons, mental illness and psychiatric theory were fashionable concerns, and references to monomaniacal fixation began to surface in

²⁷⁷ Maniacs were “ordinarily exceedingly loquacious, and always speaking of their love.”; “fear, hope, jealousy, joy, fury, seem unitedly to concur, or in turn, to render more cruel the torment of these wretched beings” [who were] “capable of the most extraordinary, difficult, painful and strange actions.” Ibid., p. 34.

²⁷⁸ Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, pp. 153-54, where she also notes references to “monomania” in writing by both Tocqueville and Balzac in the 1830s and observes that the term “had already percolated down to the nonmedical French intelligentsia and been incorporated into their language by the late 1820s.” As I have already shown, references to *idées fixes* began to appear in fictional writing as early as 1814 both in outside of France; this evidence suggests a somewhat earlier popularization of Esquirol’s terminology and – as the final sections of this essay shall argue – a more pervasive intertwining of French medical theory and early romantic literature.

journalism, fiction, and even visual culture (notably, in the series of “monomaniac” portraits painted by Géricault in the early 1820s).²⁷⁹ When, in 1830, Berlioz assigned his symphonic hero the symptoms of monomania – a melancholic-frenetic delirium characterized by an *idée fixe* – he was not describing a vague or imaginary nervous disorder, but a *maladie morale* that would have been easily identified by many of those in the concert-going public. As Martina Van Zuylen has also noted, the composer’s reported symptoms bear a clear resemblance (both rhetorical and substantive) to Esquirol’s general delineation of monomania and – I argue – to the more specific diagnosis of the erotomaniac. Indeed, it could well be that Berlioz was constructing his own erotic disorder and that of his “fantastic” protagonist according to the detailed descriptions of manic fixation saturating scientific and journalistic writing of the period. Once a medical student himself, and the son of a doctor, Berlioz would have been better equipped than many of his contemporaries to follow developments in the psychiatric field, and was likely to have been aware of the popular debate surrounding Esquirol’s new disease.²⁸⁰

Obvious links between the erotomania diagnosis and Berlioz’s illness are underscored by a case study published in Esquirol’s 1838 treatise. Following his

²⁷⁹ Goldstein lists a series of articles on monomania published in leading French journals through the mid-late 1820s, including pieces in the *Globe*, *Journal des débats*, *Figaro*, and *Mercure de France aux XIX siècle* (see p. 184, nn. 114-116). To these, I can add two slightly later articles: “Les Monomanies,” *Figaro*, 13 October 1833 and “Monomania,” *Figaro*, 13 September 1834. On Géricault’s portraits of monomaniacs, see Margaret Miller, “Géricault’s Paintings of the Insane,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1941), 151-63. Goldstein reproduces one of these portraits, “The physiognomy of monomania” [ca. 1822] on Plate 3, p. 223.

²⁸⁰ Goldstein notes, in passing, Berlioz’s use of the term *idée fixe* in the *Symphonie fantastique* (p. 155, n. 21), as does Stephen Meyer who, in a footnote to his discussion of monomania among Marschner’s operatic villains, identifies the *Symphonie fantastique* as “the most famous musical expression” of “fixed delusion” (see “Marschner’s villains, monomania, and the fantasy of deviance,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12/2 (2000), p. 115, n. 15.). More recently, Martina van Zuylen, in the Introduction to her study *Monomania: The Flight From Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005) notes that Berlioz “was the first artist to make music and monomania coincide,” drawing our attention both to his *idée fixe* and his tendency toward “dark depression” (pp. 9-10). These references, though brief, point toward the broad medical implications of Berlioz’s symphonic program and suggest that a more detailed exploration is warranted.

general definition of erotic fixation, the doctor recounted the tale of a young man “d’un tempérament nerveux, d’un caractère mélancolique [of a nervous temperament and melancholy character] who moves to Paris in the hopes of advancing his career. While in the capital, “il va au spectacle et se prend de passion pour une des plus jolies actrices de Feydeau, et se croit aimé; dès-lors, il fait toutes les tentatives possibles pour arriver jusqu’à l’objet de sa passion.”²⁸¹ The young man talks constantly of his beloved, imagines their blissful union, and devotes himself fully to the pursuit of his *idée fixe*. He waits for the actress at her dressing room, goes to her lodgings, and attends her performances assiduously: “Chaque fois que Mad... joue, M... se rend au spectacle, se place *au quatrième* vis-à-vis la scène, et lorsque l’actrice paraît, il secoue un mouchoir blanc pour se faire remarquer.”²⁸² The actress rebuffs his advances, refuses to acknowledge his letters and visits, and expresses her annoyance with his constant attentions. Nevertheless, the young man insists that she loves him, that her rough treatment is only a ruse to deceive others, and that they will soon be united. Eventually, he begins to experience delusions, believing that he hears the voice of his beloved and imagining that she is in the house. Esquirol reported that his obsession intensified over time, becoming an all-consuming and dangerous fixation despite the fact that he reasoned logically on all other subjects.

Here, we find a striking parallel to Berlioz’s illness – so much so, that one wonders whether erotomania for Parisian actresses was a common malady. As with Esquirol’s young patient, Berlioz developed an *idée fixe* for a lady of the theatre to whom he has not even been introduced, attended her performances compulsively,

²⁸¹ “He goes to the theatre, and conceives a passion for one of the most beautiful actresses of [the Théâtre] Feydeau, and believes that his sentiments are reciprocated. From this period he makes every possible attempt to reach the object of his passion.” Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, p. 37.

²⁸² “Whenever Mad... appears upon the stage, M... attends the theatre, places himself on the fourth tier of seats opposite the stage, and when this actress appears, waves a white handkerchief to attract her attention.” Ibid., p. 38.

lavished her with unwanted attention, and believed stubbornly that he would be united with the object of his devotions. His passion was directed toward a fictional and therefore unattainable character: it was suffused with the quality of rapturous worship rather than lusty *amour* for a woman of the flesh. As Berlioz's *idée fixe* escalated, he demonstrated the wildly "expansive" energy and tortured passions that Esquirol described, as well as the delusional, convulsive, and finally suicidal symptoms associated with manic fixation. It is hardly necessary to enumerate the connections between Berlioz's pathology and Esquirol's disease: we are left with little doubt that, in the composer's case, "erotic monomania" would have been the psychiatric diagnosis of his own time.

Painting, writing, and music were often prescribed as therapeutic activities for monomaniacs. Such intellectual-emotional remedies fell into the broad category of "moral treatments," which were distinguished from purely physical cures including baths, purging and bleeding.²⁸³ When Berlioz consulted a doctor, as he described in letters to Rocher and Ferrand, the *médecin* diagnosed a nervous disorder and prescribed physical remedies including purifying baths and quiet rest. But Berlioz's symphonic alter-ego in the *Fantastique* does not mention undergoing such pragmatic treatments; rather, in the wake of his "melancholy reverie" and "frenzied passions," he describes "religious consolations" [consolations religieuses] which are preceded by tears and a "return to tenderness."²⁸⁴ Although this language does not strike a particular chord with the modern reader, some sectors of Berlioz's audience may have recognized "religious consolations" as a standard type of *remède morale* administered

²⁸³ *Remèdes moraux* were described at length in Pinel's *Traité* and prescribed by Esquirol and members of his school. Dowbiggin discusses both the early implementation of such remedies among French psychiatrists and their later rejection by François Leuret and his followers (see pp. 10; 38-53). See also Goldstein, pp. 72-89.

²⁸⁴ This portion of the program, as well as the corresponding *religioso* section of the first movement of the symphony, were added during Berlioz's tenure in Italy in 1831.

to the insane. In Goldstein's chapter entitled "Religious Roots and Rivals," she examines "the moral treatment as religious consolation," tracing an intertwining of medical and spiritual cures in psychiatric discourse of the period. She shows that many religious orders active in hospitals advocated a special branch of *douce remède* known as *consolation religieuse* – a gentle moral intervention in which "sweet," tender, and courteous treatment encouraged lunatics to "return to themselves."²⁸⁵ The consolation method proved considerably successful and was employed by medical as well as spiritual practitioners in Paris through the first half of the century. Berlioz's reference to tenderness and *consolations religieuses* may have been an acknowledgement of such moral remedies as popular treatments in insanity cases. The melancholy monomaniac of his symphonic program would have been a prime candidate for religious therapy, although, as his narrative progresses, the hero's disorder threatens to degenerate into a more dangerous, less manageable condition – a subtype of manic fixation in which passionate brooding was replaced by violent and involuntary action.²⁸⁶

Certainly, not all the manifestations of monomania were as pathetically appealing as erotomania; an 1825 pamphlet published by Esquirol's student Etienne-Jean Georget identified a sinister species of fixation called *monomanie-homicide* [homicidal monomania] which, characterized by a sudden "lesion of the will," drove

²⁸⁵ Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, pp. 197-225; the above quotations are taken from pp. 200-202. Goldstein points to a substantial body of literature on "religious consolation," notably Xavier Tissot's *Manuel de l'hospitalier* (1829), which was well-known to doctors and clergy alike.

²⁸⁶ Barzun suggests that, since Berlioz considered himself an atheist during his early years in Paris, the *religioso* section of the *Fantastique's* first movement, and parallel reference to *consolations religieuses* in the revised program, "should be a further warning against literalism in discussing the relation between art and life;" see *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), I, p. 163, n. 27. I propose, however, that Berlioz was not depicting his own religious sentiment but referencing a *remède morale* that would have been standard treatment for an erotic monomaniac; such a reading incorporates the *religioso* section as a logical part of the symphony's psychiatric narrative.

otherwise sane persons to commit murderous crimes.²⁸⁷ Although Georget argued that homicidal fixation might occur spontaneously and without prior symptoms, other doctors held that murderous monomania was preceded by a set of telltale signs: strange “internal sensations,” “extreme misery,” “an *idée fixe*” or “une illusion, une hallucination, un raisonnement faux” [an illusion, a hallucination, a process of false reasoning].²⁸⁸ Oddly, according to Georget, homicidal monomaniacs were often “compelled to kill the persons they loved the most”: his case studies (some borrowed from Pinel) record children killing their siblings, mothers their children, and husbands their wives.²⁸⁹ Such murderers, he argued, were neither monsters nor criminals but sufferers from a terrible mental affliction – unfortunates who could neither prevent nor explain their actions.

As Goldstein informs us, *monomanie homicide* began to feature regularly as a defense in criminal trials through the mid-1820s, sparking widespread debate surrounding the legal, medical, and social ramifications of the disease.²⁹⁰ Crowds gathered to witness court proceedings, consuming each new tale of “fixated” murder with greater relish and rendering homicidal monomania a profoundly fashionable disorder whose wide publicity (according to Esquirol) encouraged a spate of

²⁸⁷ E.-J. Georget, *Examen médical des procès criminels des nommés Léger, Feldtmann, Lecouffe, Jean-Pierre et Papavoine, dans lesquels l'aliénation mentale a été alléguée comme moyen de défense, suivi de quelques considérations médico-légales sur la liberté morale* [“A medical examination of the criminal trials of Léger, Feldtmann, Lecouffe, Jean-Pierre et Papavoine, in which mental illness was proposed as a means of defense, followed by some medico-legal considerations surrounding moral liberty”] (Paris: Migneret, 1825). I rely, here, both on my own reading of Georget’s pamphlet and on Goldstein’s detailed commentary, in which she explores the wider medical and legal implications of Georget’s “lesion of the will” and describes the case studies laid out in the first section of his pamphlet: these include the famous murderer Papavoine, “an apparently impeccable fellow who had suddenly stabbed two young children to death in the Bois de Vincennes” and Léger, “the winegrower who withdrew...into a secluded grotto where, overcome by cannibalistic urges, he murdered a young girl and drank her blood.” (see pp. 162-184).

²⁸⁸ Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, pp. 94-96; see also Goldstein’s commentary on Brierre de Boismont, p. 174.

²⁸⁹ “Durant ses accès, [le monomane] se sentait poussé à tuer même les personnes qu’il affectionnait le plus.” Georget, *Examen médicale*, p. 94.

²⁹⁰ See, in particular, Goldstein pp. 165-66, where she details Henriette Cornier’s sensational 1826 trial – the first in which Georget’s *monomanie-homicide* diagnosis was invoked as a legal defense.

“imitative” murders: “Un femme coupe la tête à un enfant qu’elle connaissait à peine, est traduite en jugement; ce procès a beaucoup de retentissement, et produit par imitation un grand nombre de monomanies homicides sans délire.”²⁹¹ Self-perpetuating and increasingly rampant, homicidal madness held the public in a state of horrified suspense as they waited for the next monomaniac to strike.

Little surprise, then, that Berlioz created a hero whose fixated passions evolve into gruesomely murderous imaginings; his symphonic narrative capitalizes unashamedly on popular fascination with criminal madness. The grisly plot twist in the final two sections of Berlioz’s program suggests that his protagonist not only suffers from erotomania, but is teetering dangerously on the edge of homicidal monomania. Succumbing to suicidal despair, the *jeune musicien* poisons himself with opium, and – in a nightmarish hallucination – dreams that he has killed his beloved and is on trial for murder. All this resonates unmistakably with the theories of Esquirol, who later noted that monomaniacs who had committed murder “m’ont avoué que les idées d’homicide les avaient tourmentés pendant leur délire, particulièrement au début de leur maladie.”²⁹² Both Berlioz and his “fantastic” alter-ego manifest many of the symptoms cited by Esquirol as preconditions for a violent “lesion of the will”: gloomy melancholy, disturbing hallucinations (both visual and aural), and extreme misery. But the murderous episode described in the program of the *Fantastique* does not have a clear autobiographical correlative; Berlioz made no mention of violent impulses toward Harriet Smithson in his letters (although he may well have dosed himself with opium during the period of his *idée fixe*). He constructed his own illness within the law-abiding bounds of the erotomaniac, hinting tantalizingly at criminal

²⁹¹ “A woman cuts off the head of a child whom she scarcely knew, and is brought to trial for it. The trial is very extensively published, and produces, from the effects of imitation, many cases of homicidal monomania without delirium.” Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, pp. 101-02.

²⁹² “These men... confessed to me that ideas of homicide tormented them during their delirium, particularly at the commencement of their disorder.” *Ibid.*, p. 104.

monomania only in the context of his symphonic “retelling.” The *Fantastic* narrative was thus a cleverly gauged mixture of fact and fiction – a tale that recorded Berlioz’s own melancholic sufferings while allowing his *jeune musicien* to explore the sensational category of homicidal madness. Still, Berlioz seems to have been unwilling to cast his alter-ego as an outright murderer. The hero of the *Symphonie Fantastique* kills only in the context of delirious imaginings, never translating his violent impulses into waking action.

It is worth noting, however, that Berlioz was not without dangerous inclinations and, according to his *Memoires*, came remarkably close to committing a “monomaniacal” crime of his own. Having abandoned his pursuit of Harriet Smithson in the Spring of 1830, the composer quickly transferred his erotomaniacal obsession to the young pianist, Camille Moke. Rapturous references to “Ariel” replaced his earlier adoration of “Ophélie,” and Berlioz proposed marriage to Moke almost immediately.²⁹³ Her mother grudgingly agreed to the union, only to retract her assent during Berlioz’s tenure in Italy, informing him that the girl had become engaged to the piano-builder, Camille Pleyel. Already melancholy over his separation from the new “beloved,” Berlioz was catapulted into a state of rage:

Something within me seemed suddenly to give way. Two tears of rage started from my eyes. In that instant I knew my course: it was to go at once to Paris and there kill without compunction two guilty women and one innocent man. As for subsequently killing myself, after a *coup* on this scale it was of course the very least I could do.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Though there are clear differences between Berlioz’s infatuation with Harriet and his relationship with Camille, the element of idealization and fictionalization remain constant; clearly, the composer had not rid himself of his tendency toward obsessive fixation, despite claims to Ferrand that he was “en train de guérison” (on the road to a cure).

²⁹⁴ *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, transl. David Cairns, p. 152. Although Berlioz’s recollection of the incident is permeated with humor, it seems fair to suppose that, during the incident itself, he was absolutely in earnest.

Packing two loaded pistols and vials of laudanum and strychnine, he set out from Rome on his murderous mission “in the grip of a passion” and in a stagecoach headed for the Italian border:

A tempest of rage and grief swept over me, more violent than any that I had yet experienced. I raged like the sea and, clutching the seat with both hands, made a convulsive movement as if to cast myself headlong, at the same time letting out a wild “Ha!” of such hoarseness and ferocity that the unfortunate driver, as he sprang back, must have definitely decided that his passenger was some demon.²⁹⁵

Berlioz did not commit the intended crimes, yet he describes himself as having experienced something like the murderous delirium referenced in his *Programme* and theorized by both Georget and Esquirol. The tale of his wild flight from Rome is conflated, in Berlioz’s memoirs, with references to the *Fantastic Symphony*. The composer describes putting aside ongoing revision of the work in order to embark on his tempestuous journey, leaving only a note on how the piece was to be completed. Of course, since the *Programme* was conceived (at least in its first form) well before Berlioz’s Italian “incident,” it cannot be read as a response to his sudden murderous impulse. Rather, it seems that the narrative of the *Fantastique* had begun to acquire generative force, mapping the homicidal imaginings of Berlioz’s symphonic alter-ego onto the composer himself in a dangerous collapse between actual and imagined identities.

The program of the *Fantastic Symphony* “diagnoses” aspects of Berlioz’s psyche, exploring – in nineteenth-century psychiatric terms – his overt and latent monomaniacal behaviors. It is not only a record of the composer’s own psychological travails but also a sensational “mad story” that targets a public with an increasing appetite for tales of psychological disturbance. Indeed, the *Fantastic* program, as we

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

shall see, was only one among many contemporary novels, plays, and poems exploring the phenomenon of localized insanity and the wider implications, both moral and aesthetic, of manic fixation. In the wake of Hoffmann's "Automata" and Duras' *Édouard* – whose amorous obsessions we have already explored – other tales featuring erotic, political, or morbid *idées fixes* began to appear. These works, like Berlioz's symphonic narrative, reflected a growing interest in the fantastic internal terrain theorized in emerging psychiatric discourse, and a keen awareness of the growing link between aberrant imagination and the profile of the romantic artist.

Of Monomaniacal Heroes and Fixated Artists: the Fantastic Symphony in Context

*When I am dead,
Reflect betimes and mourn my dreadful doom;
Let thy angelic orisons be said,
Above thy sire's – the monomaniac's tomb!*

[Joseph P. Robson, *The Monomaniac, A Poem in Two Books*, 1848]²⁹⁶

By the time Berlioz interpolated a monomaniacal *idée fixe* into the literary program of his symphony, it was a term that had long-since been absorbed into literary discourse (although even in a fictional context, it retained clear medical connotations). As early as 1813, Benjamin Constant referred to an *idée fixe* as a "sentiment habituel" in his *Cours de Politique Constitutionnelle*;²⁹⁷ by 1816, the term had gained greater currency, featuring prominently in the private journals of statesman-philosopher Pierre

²⁹⁶ *The Monomaniac and Minor Poems* by Joseph P. Robson (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Robert Ward, 1848), p. 50.

²⁹⁷ The term appears in his essay "De L'Esprit de Conquête"; see *Cours de Politique Constitutionnelle*, (Paris: Guillaumin, 1872), II, p. 252.

Main de Biran, who described his own obsessions as *idées fixes* as well as noting incidences of mental fixation among his friends and colleagues. In an entry musing on the nature of obsession he wrote, “L’homme solitaire qui nourrit une passion malheureuse ou telle idée fixe relative au monde extérieur, peut être dit se *dévor*er lui-même.”²⁹⁸ Biran’s tendency to link pathological obsession with introverted and emotionally sensitive characters is reflected in contemporary works of fiction, which increasingly figured monomaniacs not as criminals or madmen, but as passionate and imaginative heroes. “Fixated” protagonists proliferated through the 1820s and 30s, as novelists and playwrights borrowed the scientific terminology associated with medical discourse to explore the aesthetic and dramatic potential of pathology. Quasi-humorous tales of monomania, including Charles Honoré Rémy’s *Bonardin dans la lune, ou La monomanie astronomique* (February, 1830) were followed by tales featuring more serious fixations, notably Eugène Sue’s *Atar-Gull*, Honoré de Balzac’s *Gobseck*, Charles Nodier’s *La fée aux miettes*, and Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ “The solitary man who nourishes an unhealthy passion, or some *idée fixe* relative to the exterior world, may be said to devour himself.” Biran, *Journal intime*, ed. H. Gouhier (Neuchâtel: Édition de la Baconnière, 1954), II, p. 209. Biran’s diaries from 1816 onward contain numerous references to *idées fixes*; some are trivial fetishes while others escalate “to the point of near madness;” see, for example, I, 109, p. 186.

²⁹⁹ A complete list of the fictional works featuring monomaniacal fixations published in the 1830s is too extensive to give in full; in addition to those mentioned above, it includes Musset’s *Lorenzaccio*, Saint-Beuve’s *Volupté*, Scribe’s *Une monomanie*, Nodier’s *Jean-François les Bas Bleus*, Hugo’s *Dernier jour d’un condamné*, Vigny’s *Chatterton*, Stendhal’s *Vie de Henri Brulard*, Barbey d’Aurevilly’s *Memorandum*, Charles Duveyrier’s *Le monomane*, and many works by Balzac, who had a voracious interest in the new psychiatric medicine (see, for instance, his *La peau de chagrin* (1831), *Eugénie Grandet* (1834); *Le lys dans la vallée* (1836); *Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau* (1837)). The visual arts, too, demonstrated familiarity with Esquirol’s disease, highlighting a newly aestheticized attitude toward madness; Géricault’s portraits of monomaniacs (1821-24) are finely drawn depictions of obsessive sufferers, whose fixated gazes strike us as both compelling and remarkably genteel. I have noted Goldstein’s discussion of Géricault (see n. 51 above); she also makes reference to Duveyrier’s play (in connection with medico-legal concerns in the 1820s) and directs our attention to Balzac’s interest in psychiatric discourse; see pp. 152; 153, n. 7; 182-83. On Balzac and medical theory, see also Madeline Fargeaud, *Balzac et “La recherche de l’absolu”* (Paris: Hachette, 1968), 138-45. There is no broader literary study, to my knowledge, that draws together the above collection of works based on their “monomaniacal” content. However, we can turn to Martina van Zuylen’s recent *Monomania: The Flight From Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (cf. note 52 above)

These works established monomania as a quintessentially romantic illness – an affliction not only of the hero, but of the creative and eccentric genius. In Balzac’s novel *La peau de chagrin* (1831), Raphael’s insistence on solitude and peculiar rituals of etiquette is rumored to be monomania and linked to the intense intellectual absorption demonstrated by writers and philosophers. An old professor who comes to visit assumes that Raphael is hard at work on a poem, or “something very important.” The professor associates obsessive fixation with the impassioned reveries of great thinkers, claiming that “au milieu de ses travaux intellectuels, une homme de génie oublie tout.”³⁰⁰ Eugène Scribe’s play, *Une monomanie*, given at the Théâtre du gymnase dramatique the following year (August 1832), emphasizes, and even parodies, the link between psychological disturbance and creative genius. In order to prove himself an artist of substance, the impressionable hero Émile must not only suffer from melancholy and *ennui*, he must develop an *idée fixe* and, succumbing to delirium, drown himself. Émile writes his own obituary, sends his final verses (“Mes adieux à la vie”) to a fellow writer, and throws himself in the river. He is rescued, but his status as an artist – a creator of “pathological temperament” – is ensured, and his work is snatched up by eager publishers. When Émile’s uncle demands an explanation for the young man’s attempted suicide, his nephew replies only, “Que voulez-vous! Je n’ai qu’une excuse! Une justification: c’était plus fort que moi, c’était une idée fixe, une monomanie.”³⁰¹

for an enlightening chapter on Nodier’s monomaniacal writings in which she considers both his essay “Monomanie réflexive” (to which I shall return) and his tale *Jean-François les Bas Bleus*. Zuylen devotes the majority of her study to later literary *idées fixes* in works by Flaubert and Baudelaire as well as in contemporary fiction by Elias Canetti, Nina Bouraoui, and Jean-Michele Ribettes.

³⁰⁰ “When he is engaged in intellectual endeavors, a genius forgets everything else.” (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974), p. 260. Of course, the true cause of Raphael’s distress is the sinister “shagreen skin” which shrinks with each wish he makes, and will eventually claim his soul in fulfillment of the Faustian bargain made at the beginning of Balzac’s fantastic tale.

³⁰¹ “What can I say? I have but one excuse! One justification: it was stronger than I, it was an *idée fixe*, a monomania.” Eugène Scribe, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: P.H. Krabbe, 1854), X, p. 167. Overnight, Émile becomes an attractive and desirable man in the eyes of both Henriette Maugiron and her aunt, Mademoiselle Palmyre Maugiron, who regard the young stranger rescued from the river as a man of

The notion that monomania was a disease of brilliance was highlighted by a collection of essays edited by Renault and published in 1835 under the title: “Les fous célèbres; histoire des hommes qui se sont le plus singularisés par leur monomanie, leur originalité et leurs extravagances” [Famous madmen: a history of the men who have most distinguished themselves by virtue of their monomania, their originality and their extravagances]. Renault stoked the public appetite for monomaniacal eccentricities in a series of biographical sketches describing famously (and infamously) mad characters including the Marquis de Sade, the murderer Papavoine, and the demonic violinist Paganini. In these accounts, as in Scribe’s play, monomania ceases to be an affliction and becomes a mark of originality and creative potential. It is precisely Paganini’s “bizarrerie de son esprit” – his strange fixations and odd quirks – that mark him as a musical genius: “Pugnani [sic] était, comme on le voit, un fou d’une intelligence peu commune; sa folie même en a fait un homme célèbre: il est vrai que, dans son cerveau, elle était bien voisine du génie, et que génie et folie sont deux choses que l’on confond trop souvent.”³⁰²

Renault linked the circumscribed insanity of monomania with the self-absorption of creative process, citing the long standing equation between madness and imagination that echoed through romantic fiction and philosophy. Nowhere was this dangerous link more clearly articulated than in the well-known writings on inspiration by De Quincey and Coleridge. Here, the genius was figured as a dreamer whose art evolved from the fantastic visions generated by a mind reaching beyond the rational language of the sensible world. Although the artist was meant to control his imaginative flights, creative dreaming could slip all too easily into involuntary mental

appealingly “pathological” personality; Henriette remarks delightedly that he has “an exquisite sensibility, a profound melancholy, and a bitter disgust for life.” (p. 171)

³⁰² “Paganini was, as is well known, a madman of rare intelligence; his madness itself made him a famous man: it is true that, in his brain, it [madness] was akin to genius, and that genius and madness are two things often confounded.” Renault, *Les hommes célèbres* (Paris: Renault, 1835/6), p. 180.

wandering or lead to over-indulgence in reverie; indeed, a fascination with the imagery produced during hallucination propelled Coleridge and others toward opium addiction (what the French would have termed a “monomania for opium”),³⁰³ resulting in works shaped by the products of deranged fantasy.

French doctors, including Esquirol, commented on the tendency for geniuses (especially artists) to court sensational excess, noting that such “errors of regimen” could easily escalate into fixation and madness.³⁰⁴ As Zuylen observes, Charles Nodier was also aware of the danger posed by overindulgence of the imaginative faculties.³⁰⁵ In an essay entitled “Rêveries Psychologiques de la Monomanie Réflective” (1841), Nodier posited a new species of fixation – “reflective monomania” – characterized by an obsessive exercise of the fantasy. Great men, he claimed, were those endowed with vivid imaginations, but they often became pathologically absorbed in their own dreamworlds. Although they were capable of heroic acts, such persons were equally disposed toward madness; Nodier compares the “reflective monomaniac” to “une médaille frappée d’un seul coup de balancier, qui offre d’un côté le type immortel d’un grand homme, et au revers la tête infirme d’un maniaque.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Esquirol theorized substance addiction, specifically alcoholism, as a species of monomania (“monomania from drunkenness”). Berlioz himself recognized such a disease, describing Harriet’s overindulgence in alcohol as a “monomania or illness” (*monomanie ou malade*) in a letter to his sister Nanci of 26 July, 1845 (see *CG* III: 981). An addiction to opium would almost certainly have been explained in similar terms.

³⁰⁴ Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, pp. 41-42.

³⁰⁵ See Zuylen’s chapter “The Cult of the Unreal: Nodier and Romantic Monomania,” pp. 41-61. Both in her discussion of Nodier’s essay and his tale *Jean-François les bas-bleues*, Zuylen interprets monomania as “the padding that protects against an unwanted condition” – that of the “inevitable boredom and insipidity of the habitual.” It is an escapist disease that allows sufferers to construct and control “a visionary and redemptive form of existence.” (see pp. 68-72) Though Nodier certainly figures “reflective monomania” as a mode of mental escape, I suggest that he, like Renault, also underscores its status as a signal of genius. In *Jean-François les bas-bleues*, the hero’s monomania for scholarly study – his utter absorption in scientific and occult matters – is what renders him brilliant. Of course, his *idée fixe* is also (as Nodier observes) the source of his madness – genius exists only as the flip side of insanity

³⁰⁶ “A medal struck with a single blow of the press, which offers on one side the immortal figure of a great man, and on the reverse, the infirm head of a maniac.” “Rêveries psychologiques de la monomanie réflexive,” *Ouvres complètes de Charles Nodier* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968; orig. pub. Paris, 1832-37), X, p. 53.

Musicians, along with poets and painters, were linked pervasively to the extravagances and monomanias of genius both in works of fiction and scientific writing. Through the 1830s and 1840s, journals including the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, *Le Ménestrel*, and *La France musicale* published numerous essays detailing the “Monomanies des compositeurs” – the fetishes, superstitions, and localized insanities of well-known composers. Here, as elsewhere, inspiration and the mechanisms of imagination were linked to dream-visions produced by wine or tobacco, and to the fixations of the solipsistic creator.³⁰⁷ By the 1830s, artistic monomania had become a virtual epidemic; in an essay in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* titled “Les monomanies artistiques” Henri Blanchard dubbed the young composers and poets of the day “une foule de monomanes” [a crowd of monomaniacs], whose obsessive afflictions had taken on a distinctly theatrical flavor. He assessed their melancholies and *idées fixes* as “peu naturel,” noting that they overlapped suspiciously with the extravagant madnesses of fictional characters and suggested calculated self-construction.³⁰⁸

Blanchard acknowledged the compelling link between genius and mania but was no longer able to separate genuine creative illnesses from their fictional or semi-fictional counterparts. His doubts about the status of monomania as a containable

³⁰⁷ The following articles appeared in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*: “Monomanies de compositeurs,” [Anon.] (3 January 1836) and Henri Blanchard, “Les monomanies artistiques” (3 May 1840). Two separate essays both titled “Monomanie de Quelques Compositeurs” appeared in *Le Ménestrel* (17 January 1836 and 7 July 1839), as well as several pieces featuring a newly invented type of monomaniac – the “mélomane” – defined in the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française* (1832-35) as “Celui, celle qui aime la musique à l’excès, avec passion” [One who loves music to excess, with passion]. Publications exploring the figure of the “mélomane” included “Tablettes d’un Mélomane,” (10 August 1835) and “Du Mélomane Autrichien” (14 June 1835) as well as a *Romance* entitled “Le mélomane moderne: Bêtise en 3 ou 4 Couplets” by Ruotte, which tells the story of a man “crazy” for modern music and especially for the loud, newfangled instruments of the orchestra. (One wonders, of course, whether the author had Berlioz in mind!) *La France musicale* ran a series of articles through the early 1840s titled *Caprices, manies, excentricités d’artistes*, detailing the odd quirks and fixations of well-known composers. Outside of France, obvious spin-offs on the French articles appeared, including one by Piazza, titled “Monomanie di alcuni maestri di musica [Abitudini di Haydn, Gluck, Sarti, Zingarelli, Salieri, Paër, Paisiello],” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (21 February 1847), 57-58.

³⁰⁸ Cf. note 78 above. Blanchard was a prominent music critic and a colleague of Berlioz’s.

scientific category raise larger issues surrounding the slippage between nature and artifice marking descriptions of obsessive pathologies from Esquirol to Berlioz and Scribe. Appropriated by novelists almost immediately upon its inception, the monomania thesis occupied an ambiguous relationship with fiction, borrowing the rhetoric of romantic narratives while simultaneously situating itself as a scientific discourse. In his assessment of artistic manias, Blanchard suggested that life was imitating art, but there is reason to believe that science, too, took its cue from the realm of novels and poetry.

Both Esquirol's writings on monomania and Berlioz's autobiographical accounts of the disease were permeated by self-staging theatrical language and by the conscious construction of a performative pathology. Indeed, hyperbolic sentiment had long been the stuff of drama and obsessive lovers a mainstay of popular eighteenth-century novels – one need only think of *Werther*.³⁰⁹ Esquirol acknowledged such fictional monomaniacs, identifying Nina and Lucretia as sufferers from erotic monomania. He went on to draw wider connections between fiction and pathology, suggesting that those “qui s'exaltent par la lecture des romans, qui on reçu une éducation molle et efféminée” [who exalt the imagination by reading romances and have received a voluptuous and effeminate education] were more likely to fall prey to erotomaniacal fixations.³¹⁰ Literary narratives become central to Esquirol's diagnoses as both catalysts and models – not only are his erotomaniacs often described as “artistic” persons of highly charged, melancholic, and sensitive passions, but his case

³⁰⁹ Sentimental fiction (and by extension, sentimental drama and opera) was itself a literary mode permeated by theatrical displays of “sensibility” which, in extreme cases, like that of Nina, gave way to gentle and melancholic madness.

³¹⁰ “Mademoiselle repulses all the advice, prayers, and consolations of her parents and friends. After five days, vainly employed in endeavors to overcome her resolution, they decide to recall her lover; but it is now too late. She succumbs, and dies in his arms on the sixth day.” Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, p. 48.

studies take on a remarkably novelistic tone, echoing the plots and rhetoric of popular fiction.

In one such study he tells the tale of “a young lady of Lyons” who falls in love with a local man to whom she is promised in marriage. Having initially agreed to the union, the girl’s father retracts his assent and suggests a new suitor. His daughter is plunged into erotomaniacal despair; she “says nothing, confines her self to her bed,” and “refuses all nourishment.” Separated from the object of her affections, her condition quickly deteriorates:

“Mademoiselle repousse tous les conseils, toutes les prières, toutes les consolations de ses parens, de ses amis. Après cinq jours vainement employés à vaincre sa résolution, on se décide à rappeler son amant; il n’était plus temps; elle succombe et meurt dans ses bras le sixième jour.”³¹¹

Esquirol provides no physiological explanation for the girl’s demise, nor does he examine her case with the clinical detachment applied to other patients. She literally “dies for love,” succumbing to a melancholic and compellingly pathetic illness as did so many sentimental heroines in the dramatic realm. Here, Esquirol allows medicine to stray into the realm of literature, facilitating an aestheticization of disease that resulted in the “pathological heroes” of popular fiction. Mingling anatomy with aesthetics, he encouraged the pseudo-scientific discourse that led to a “medical” profile of the romantic artist – an amalgam of clinical and novelistic attributes that, as Blanchard noted, quickly ossified into cliché.

When we read Berlioz’s detailed account of the mental and physical suffering occasioned by his *idée fixe*, we have little doubt that the composer believed himself afflicted with a genuine psychological disturbance – a “real” misery with recognizable medical symptoms. And yet, in his self-accounting, quasi-scientific description

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 41. For a similar case study, see pp. 42ff.

mingled with passages of overtly literary character – a stylistic duality familiar from Esquirol’s case studies. Reports of the composer’s painful condition were often couched in consciously theatrical language, for instance, in the letter to Ferdinand Hiller (3 March, 1830):

Pourriez-vous me dire ce que c’est que cette puissance d’émotion, cette *faculté* de *souffrir* qui me tue? Demandez à votre ange...à ce séraphin qui vous a ouvert la porte des cieux! ...O mon ami, savez-vous?...J’ai brûlé, pour l’allumer, le manuscrit de mon *Élégie en prose*!...des larmes toujours, des larmes sympathiques; je vois Ophelia en verser, j’entends sa voix tragique, les rayons de ses yeux sublimes me consomment. O mon ami, je suis bien malheureux? c’est inexprimable!³¹²

Here, illness becomes sensationally performative, with Berlioz borrowing the rhetoric and extravagant typography of sentimental drama and even recording his own hyperbolic “staging.” As in Esquirol, factual and fictional illness begin to mingle, and we can no longer separate Berlioz from his self-constructed dramatic persona. It was, after all, a delusional overlap between art and life that gave rise to the composer’s painful affliction in the first place. Berlioz’s erotomaniacal fixation was sparked by his first viewings of Shakespeare which, as Esquirol warned, excited his senses to a dangerous degree, and fueled a pathological merger of imaginary and actual realities:

After the madness and the melancholy of *Hamlet*, after the pangs of despised love, the heartbreak and bitter irony, the continual brooding on death, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, after Denmark’s dark clouds and icy wind, to steep myself in the fiery sun and balmy nights of Italy, to witness the drama of that immense love, swift as thought, burning as lava, radiantly pure as an angel’s glance, imperious, irresistible, the raging hatreds, the wild, ecstatic kisses, the desperate strife of love and death

³¹² “Can you tell me what it is, this capacity for emotion, this force of suffering that is wearing me out? Ask your angel, the seraph who has opened for you the gates of paradise [Hiller’s love interest, the pianist Camille Moke]. ... Let’s not complain... Wait a moment, my fire’s going out... Oh, my friend, do you know? To light it, I used the manuscript of my “*Élégie en prose*”!... Tears, nothing but tears! I see Ophelia shedding them, I hear her tragic voice, the rays from her glorious eyes burn me up. Oh my friend, I am indeed wretched – inexpressibly!” *CG*, I: 156.

contending for mastery – it was too much. By the third act, hardly able to breathe – as though an iron hand gripped me by the heart – I knew that I was lost.³¹³

The “melancholy madness” of *Hamlet*, and “immense love” of *Romeo and Juliet*, which Berlioz so rapturously described, become models for his own erotomaniacal pursuit of “Ophelia” and marked the beginning of what he later termed “the supreme drama of my life.”³¹⁴ Berlioz, quite literally, became the monomaniacal hero of his own play – pathology both imitated and produced art.

The notion that illness played a central role in Berlioz’s conception of the Artist and his understanding of creative process is made explicit in a letter to Ferrand (October, 1830), in which he sympathized with his friend’s melancholic sufferings: “Vous vous rongez le coeur, je gage, pour des malheurs qui ne vous touchent qu’en imagination; il y en a tant qui nous déchirent de près (...) Pourquoi? ... Ah! pourquoi! Je le comprends mieux que vous ne pensez; c’est votre existence, votre poésie, *votre chateaubrianisme*.”³¹⁵ Imaginative pathology, according to Berlioz, was integral to the poetic impulse and emotional excess a signal of artistic sensibility. Like both Esquirol and Renault, he suggested a complex intermeshing of delusion and creative fantasy. In the detailed letter to his father (19 February, 1830) describing his own “fantastic illness,” Berlioz noted a tendency toward compulsive self-scrutiny; he “constantly observes himself” as though seeing himself “in a mirror,” drawn into disorienting

³¹³ Berlioz, *Memoires*, transl. David Cairns, p. 97. Berlioz saw *Hamlet* for the first time, at the Théâtre de l’Odéon on September 11, 1827, and *Romeo and Juliet* four days later; Charles Kemble and Harriet Smithson performed the principal roles in both plays.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³¹⁵ “I expect you’re eating your heart out because of miseries that affect you only in your imagination. There are so many that beset us at close quarters (...) Why!, O why!... I understand it better than you think; it’s your way of life, your poetry, your Chateaubriandism.” *CG*, I: 182. Berlioz makes a similar connection between creativity and psychological aberration in his three-part biography of Beethoven (*Le Correspondant*, 1829); here, he underscores the role of “caprices” and “bizarreries” in the genius’s temperament, describing a great composer riddled with miseries and oddities and isolated from the world – “un homme à part, un homme différent des autres hommes par son génie, par son caractère, par le mystère de sa vie.”

meditations on the oddities and minute machinations of his own mind. Berlioz's description of solipsistic absorption resonates with similar accounts of creative fixation in Renault and Balzac, who noted neurotic self-awareness as a hallmark of the artistic mind. As Frederick Burwick has argued, French and English writing of the period increasingly reconfigured inspiration in terms of illness, describing it in psychiatric terms borrowed from the new *médecine mentale*. In his study *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination*, Burwick pinpoints the shift in aesthetic and medical philosophy that facilitated a collapse between poetry and pathology in the early decades of the century: "The major change that had taken place in the concept of the *furor poeticus* was that it could no longer be described simply as a moment of inspiration. From this time forward, it must bear the burden of psychiatric scrutiny. No longer miraculous, it was now definitely pathological."³¹⁶

Berlioz's self-construction as a monomaniac, in both his correspondence and his symphonic program, responded to a wider discourse of "creative aberration" permeating medical and literary culture. The obsessive focus signaled by an *idée fixe* underscored his artistic potential, testifying to his medical status as an original genius and aligning him with the most compelling and "inspired" novelistic heroes of his day. In effect, Berlioz created the ideal romantic persona coveted by Scribe's *Émile* – a character residing midway between fact and fiction, whose very pathology was the proof of his creative power. Berlioz's "poetry" became synonymous with his "way of life" – his imaginary and actual "miserics" intertwined, such that we are unable to discern where self-revelation ended and self-invention began.

³¹⁶ Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), p. 12. See, in particular, the Introduction, "Creativity and Madness," and Part 1, "Poetics of Madness" for a thorough investigation of romantic links between artistic production and psychiatric pathology.

Pathology and the poetics of Romantic self-writing

This leaves the final question: is the drama of the Fantastique autobiographical?
[Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*]³¹⁷

Given the overlapping layers of self-portraiture at work in Berlioz's *Fantastic* program and in the voluminous correspondence written during the symphony's gestation, it is hardly surprising that the autobiographical status of the *Fantastique* has proven a thorny issue. As early as the first draft of the program, Berlioz foregrounded the generic ambiguity of his narrative; it was both "novel" and "history," and he, as hero, was a figure teetering between the fictional and the actual.³¹⁸ Later, in his memoirs, Berlioz would describe the *Fantastique* and its sequel, the monodrama *Lélio*, in less ambiguous terms as records of lived experience: here he identifies himself as the *jeune musicien* (*Lélio* in the *Retour à la vie*), Harriet Smithson as the heroine, and his own tortured passion as the subject of the "strange and doleful drama" that unfolds across the two works. Recalling their first performance as a musical pair, Berlioz described the autobiographical underpinnings of the symphony and its sequel:

The program consisted of my *Fantastic Symphony* followed by its sequel *Lélio* or *The Return to Life*, the monodrama which forms the second part of the "Episode in the Life of an Artist." The subject of this musical drama, as is known, was none other than my love for Miss Smithson and the anguish and "bad dreams" it had brought me. ... The title of the symphony and the headings of the various movements somewhat astonished her; but it never so much as occurred to her that the heroine of this strange and doleful drama might be herself.³¹⁹

Although he characterized the *Fantastique* as a work of self-description, Berlioz's "life drama" intersected self-consciously with the fictional idioms of

³¹⁷ I, p. 157.

³¹⁸ See p. 7 for full quotation.

³¹⁹ *Memoires*, transl. David Cairns, pp. 214-15.

Chateaubriand, Hoffmann, Duras, and others, to produce a complex aesthetic account that resists easy correlations between literary characters and their living counterparts. Scholars have long struggled to reconcile competing journalistic, fantastic, novelistic, and self-referential impulses in Berlioz's program. Some read it as a direct response to personal experience, others describe an artistic distillation of "real life" or a "quasi-autobiography," while others, pointing to an obvious slippage between "truth" and "fiction" in the composer's narrative, deny it autobiographical status altogether. Conflicting perceptions of literary modality in Berlioz's symphonic drama gesture toward a larger dispute surrounding the nature of self writing and the fundamental definition of Romantic autobiography. Such issues are far from resolved and become increasingly pressing as we struggle to interpret new layers of medical signification in Berlioz's program – links between literal and literary illness that render the composer's relationship with his pathological "other" both subtle and difficult.

Jacques Barzun, in his seminal study, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, answers his own question ("Is the drama of the *Fantastique* autobiographical?") with a definitive negative. Barzun is anxious to distance Berlioz from his fantastic symphonic protagonist, disclaiming any concrete connection between composer and *jeune musicien*. The Fantastic program cannot be classed as autobiography, he argues, since it does not document verifiable historical events; its departure from the physical facts of Berlioz's love affair renders it untenable as a piece of self writing:

Now or never is the time to be literal in order to judge the commonplace that Berlioz wrote the symphony about himself and Harriet Smithson. The striking thing is the total lack of connection between Berlioz' relations with the actress and the scenes he chose for his story: he had never taken her to a ball, never been with her in the country – much less at a public execution: he hardly knew her except across the footlights.³²⁰

³²⁰ *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, I, p. 157. Barzun not only dismisses the program as an autobiographical account, but relegates it to the status of nonessential 'promotional aid,' suggesting that it evolved as an *ad hoc* and intentionally sensational explanation for Berlioz's recurring leitmotif. Of

Autobiography, Barzun implies, is a journalistic idiom defined by the literal recounting of lived events and fundamentally incompatible with creative fiction; the program of the *Fantastique* is a poetic flight of fancy that reflects Berlioz himself “only in the generalized sense that all works of the mind distill the experience of the creator.”³²¹

For Edward T. Cone, the Fantastic program is a distillation of a less diffuse sort – a summation of Berlioz’s emotional experience and an expression of the “leading motives” of his early life: “infatuation at first sight,” “hopeless longing for the ‘Unattainable One’,” and dedication to “the ideal of space-defying and time-conquering love.”³²² Although Cone acknowledges the autobiographical foundation of Berlioz’s narrative, he makes a clear separation between actual events and their fictional representation, insisting that “the persona is always to be distinguished from the composer” and further, that “the reactions, emotions, and states of mind suggested by the music are those of the persona, not the composer.”³²³ Here, the ‘real’ man is confidently distinguished from his fantastic ‘other’; Cone suggests that Berlioz wields his musical alter-ego with conscious power, creating a fictional self-portrait through which to project the voice of an actual self. Autobiography in this sense becomes a form of ventriloquism – a mouthpiece that echoes and inevitably distorts lived experience.

Later commentaries by D. Kern Holoman and Hugh Macdonald embrace an autobiographical reading of the Fantastic program with less equivocation, pointing out that Berlioz’s own contemporaries received the symphony as a work of self-portraiture; Holoman reminds us that “As everybody knew, Berlioz himself was the

course, many younger scholars have argued that the program plays a more vital role in the *Fantastique* and indeed, that an intertwining of music and literature stands at the centre of the symphony’s aesthetic conception.

³²¹ Ibid, p. 157.

³²² Edward T. Cone, “The Composer and the Symphony,” in *Berlioz: Fantastic Symphony*, p. 5.

³²³ Edward T. Cone, “A Lesson from Berlioz,” in *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 84-85.

“young musician troubled by that spiritual sickness which a famous writer [Chateaubriand] has called *le vague des passions*’”³²⁴ For Macdonald, it is “unashamedly autobiographical, as no symphony had ever been before,” life itself shaping both Berlioz’s literary and musical narratives:

Many would prefer to hear the work as a musical utterance on its own terms, but for Berlioz himself it signified a prolonged personal experience to which his letters, his memoirs and the symphony’s programme give the key. Of Harriet Smithson’s identity as the ‘beloved’, portrayed by an ‘idée fixe’ in the form of an obsessive theme that recurs in all the movements, there can be no question.³²⁵

Here, the Fantastic program is no longer a vague distillation of Berlioz’s emotional self, or a fictional narrative based loosely on lived events, but the record of a “prolonged personal experience” whose principal characters are drawn unambiguously from life. Indeed, Berlioz’s narrative seems, in Macdonald’s critique, to have acquired unqualified status as an autobiography, and yet two decades later, Julian Rushton retreats from such a definite position, terming the Fantastic program “quasi-autobiographical,” and even “fictitious.”

Rushton brings us full circle, pointing to the mixture of imaginary and historical elements in Berlioz’s narrative as impediments to an autobiographical reading; again, it is an absence of literal recounting and emphasis on fantastic experience that disqualifies the Fantastic program as self-biography, compelling us to class it instead as a work of fiction:

³²⁴ D. Kern Holoman, *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), p.114.

³²⁵ Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz* (London: 1982), p.119. Macdonald’s reading is essentially a reversal of Barzun’s argumentation. For Macdonald, life generated both literary and musical autobiographies; for Barzun, the symphony itself generated a program which, though fictional, accrued the status of a ‘life record’.

Berlioz never saw Harriet at a ball; he imagined that in such a situation, she would ignore him. If he dreamed of her in the countryside, with cowherds and thunder in the offing, the third movement is inwardly concerned with a deeply ingrained sense of rejection going back to adolescence...³²⁶

Rushton cites Cone's distinction between composer and persona, underscoring the separation between Berlioz's written and writing selves that relegates one character to the 'real' and the other to the literary realm. And yet 'truth' itself, he suggests, resides neither in fact nor imagination; for Rushton, the essence of the symphony is not its "painting" of historical or fictitious events, but its "expression of feeling." The program – and the musical narrative that parallels it – are fictions imbued with intensely personal emotion. David Cairns, in his recent biography of Berlioz, gestures in a similar direction, pointing to the symphony's epigraph (borrowed from Victor Hugo) as a summation of the work's subjective aesthetic: on the title page of the manuscript, Berlioz refers to "My heart's book inscribed on every page," "All I have suffered, all I have attempted".³²⁷ Cairns reads the Fantastic program as an all-encompassing repository of self – a record of lived events enlarged and intensified to include Berlioz's "entire imaginative existence up till then." The composer's expression of both actual and fantastic selves – of both the historical and the imaginary – sparks the collapse of one literary idiom into another: "Autobiography is absorbed into art."

I suggest that – as Berlioz himself implied – no such generic distinctions are possible, that a vacillation between history and fiction lies at the heart of Romantic self-writing and indeed, that autobiography *is* art. Debate surrounding self-referentiality in the *Fantastique* has tended primarily to assess links between the composer's symphonic program and the documents (letters, memoirs, personal

³²⁶ Julian Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 159ff.

³²⁷ Cairns, *Berlioz: the Making of an Artist*, this and the following quotes are taken from pp. 366-367.

accounts) that record historical evidence of his activities – between ‘fiction’ and ‘real life’. But clearly, Berlioz’s letters and private writings themselves engage in conscious self-construction, rendering any notion of a ‘real’ or essential identity fundamentally problematic. It becomes difficult to articulate the relationship between Berlioz’s ‘actual’ self and his fantastic symphonic alter-ego, or to claim a concrete separation between composer and persona, given that our notions of Berlioz’s character are mediated in all cases by the constructs of literary narrative.

It is undeniable that Berlioz departs from the historical facts of his life in the drama of the *Fantastique*, incorporating dreamed events and fantasized encounters, yet his mingling of physical and imaginary selves does not disqualify the program as an autobiography. On the contrary, Romantic authors understood self-writing as a generically mixed medium – a composite of factual and fictional (external and internal) experience rather than a journalistic mode limited to literal recounting. The barrage of memoirs, *journaux intimes*, and personal accounts published in France and elsewhere in the decades surrounding the *Fantastique* mix ‘poetry’ and ‘truth’ in various degrees, giving voice to new notions of personal autonomy and to what Karl Weintraub calls a “fascination with individual specificity.”³²⁸ Eugene Stelzig, in a recent study of Romantic autobiography, traces the slippery evolution of modern self-writing at the turn of the century, pointing to an overlap between historiographical and novelistic impulses in seminal works of self-portraiture including Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

In their [Romantic autobiographers’] retrospective life-narratives and self-accounts, imagination comes to the help of memory, or – to use a favorite word of Rousseau’s – supplements it. Their pasts are stylized, poeticised, even fantasized. So in the *autos* of

³²⁸ Weintraub locates the emergence of a “specifically modern form of self-conception” at the end of the eighteenth-century, citing this change in personal awareness as a key precondition for the rise and proliferation of romantic autobiography; see *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

Romantic self-writing, poetry facilitates telling the truth of the *bios*. ... life takes on the coloring of fiction...³²⁹

Stelzig's claim that poetic and fantastic gestures have an important function in Romantic life-narratives echoes through a host of other recent writings on the subject, notably, Paul John Eakin's 1985 study, in which he cites scholarly 'separation' of fact from fiction – "hard and fast taxonomical distinction between autobiography and novel" – as a central impediment to understanding the poetics of self-writing. Eakin, alongside Robert Folkenflik and Michael Sheringham, point to the inevitable fictionalization of a self pressed into narrative form and tailored to the linear unfolding of literary storytelling.³³⁰ Attempts to draw meaningful lines between the 'fictional' and 'autobiographical' strands of a self-account tend to create rather than dispel ambiguity, these studies suggest, obscuring the vital element of mixture at the heart of self-writing – a generic blur allowing for rich representation of selves that cannot be confined within the narrow limits of physical fact. To separate 'real' from 'fictional' is to suggest that autobiography can render selfhood objectively or as a series of verifiable historical events – a notion as untrue in modern self-writing as it was for nineteenth-century authors, to whom the realm of imagination was often more real and vital than the external world.

Peter Bloom argues that it is "wrong to read Berlioz's "real life" through the program of [his] symphony" – and certainly, a simplistic correlation between life and

³²⁹ Eugene Stelzig, *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography: Rousseau and Goethe* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 12-13.

³³⁰ The past several decades have witnessed an explosion of interest in autobiographical theory and an upsurge of publications in the area; here, I cite those sources that have proven useful to my own work: Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985); Robert Folkenflik, ed. *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Jerome Buckley, *The turning key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Michael Sheringham, *Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

literary representation is misleading – and yet to imply an inverse relationship between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ in the context of romantic self-writing is to impose a problematic frame of reference, since Berlioz, as with many contemporary autobiographers, is primarily concerned with articulating an internal self – a sense of identity defined by fantasy and dream rather than by physical events that we can verify as ‘actual’.³³¹ Whether the psychological and emotional experiences he describes are ‘authentic’ is beyond our ken. The question of ‘truth’ or ‘faithfulness’ is a thorny one, for the relationship between written and writing selves in the autobiographical process is fluid, always subject to the mediating influences of both memory and imagination. As Robert Folkenflik suggests, “there is no such thing as a ‘uniquely’ true, correct, or even faithful autobiography ... Perceiving and remembering are themselves constructions and reconstructions.”³³²

Bloom is undoubtedly justified in claiming that we cannot read the Fantastic program as a “transparent courtroom confession,” but it is precisely the absence of such factual self-accounting, in favor of a more complex mingling of the journalistic and novelistic, that identifies Berlioz’s narrative as a species of Romantic autobiography. Indeed, Bloom points us toward a particularly French form of self-writing – not the literal confession of the courtroom, but the rich and subtle mode of ‘confessing’ popularized by Rousseau. Here, perhaps more intensely than in other nineteenth-century autobiographical mediums, we encounter an overlap between self-representation and self-construction; confessions, especially those published in the early decades of the century, borrow self-consciously from fiction in order to depict inner, fantastic, and often pathological selves, translating into language the intimacies of both lived and imagined experience. As we shall see, Berlioz’s autobiographical

³³¹ Peter Bloom, *The Life of Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 53.

³³² Folkenflik, *The Culture of Autobiography*, pp. 39-40.

tale has much in common with the confessions of his fellow romantics, whose literary selves emerge in fragmentary and frequently disturbing episodes.

In the wake of Rousseau, confession became an important autobiographical vehicle; works in this mode were published in England, by de Quincey (1822), Charles Lamb (1813) and James Hogg (1824) and in France, by Jules Janin (1830), Alfred de Musset (1836), Frédéric Soulié (1840), Arnould Frémy (1857), Georges Sand (1865), and others. Confessions by these authors emphasized, perhaps more intensely than other mediums of self-writing, a self-conscious overlap between self-representation and self-construction, interrogating inner, often moral or imagined selves. As Susan Levin notes in her recent study of romantic confession, illness, obsession, and psychological trauma were key themes in such works, which, rather than relating retrospective chronologies, “confessed” to circumscribed, usually youthful episodes involving painful or shameful debauchery, madness, and even criminal behaviors.³³³

Drawing heavily on novelistic mechanisms as well as on the scientific rhetoric offered by a new *médecine mentale*, confessors projected themselves through invented alter-egos, “revising the autobiographical convention in which the subject of the text is identical in name to the author in the text.”³³⁴ Musset spoke through the character of Octave, and Janin through Anatole, just as Berlioz adopted the persona of the *jeune musicien* (and later, Léo). Levin identifies the veiled relationship between author and protagonist in romantic confessions as the key to a distinct autobiographical mode – a

³³³ Susan Levin offers detailed readings of confessions by both French and English authors in *The romantic art of confession: De Quincey, Musset, Hogg, Frémy, Soulié, Janin* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998). Levin’s introductory chapter, “Romantic Confessional Writing in Britain and France” (pp. 1-17) figures nineteenth-century confessional narratives as works that respond distantly to Augustine’s *Confessions*, but more immediately to Rousseau’s secular self-writings. Romantic confessors, she argues, rejected the notion of “comprehensive completeness” promised by Rousseau, claiming that total self-disclosure was an impossibility, and aiming for a more “plausible” project. They redefined the confessional idiom as a partial self-narrative meant only to communicate a fragment of the author’s life experience – an isolated episode often revolving around “unacceptable, even criminal” behaviors. (See especially, pp. 5-6).

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

species of self-writing emphasizing “a certain deliteralizing process.” Confessions, she argues, detail lived events through fictional frameworks that (like the screen dividing a confessional booth) provided the illusion of privacy in order to facilitate heartfelt and unrestrained self-disclosure.³³⁵ Romantic confessors often insisted on the verity of their narratives while freely acknowledging the importance of fantasy in their self-unfoldings; when Berlioz identifies his *Fantastic* episode as both history and fiction, he echoes pointedly “mixed” descriptions of many confessional narratives. As we set Berlioz’s self-portrait alongside contemporary confessions, the autobiographical relationship between composer and alter-ego begins to come into focus. We recognize the drama of the *Fantastique* as a specific species of self-narrative, and its central pathological trope as a characteristic feature of confessional constructions. No longer merely medical, or even fictional, psychiatric pathology emerges as a defining feature of “confessed” romantic identity.

The published confessions chronologically closest to Berlioz’s own “episode,” are those by Janin (1830) and Musset (1836), whose fragmentary self-portraits both echoed and anticipated the narrative of the *Fantastique*.³³⁶ Musset’s *La confession d’un enfant du siècle* relates the activities of three years dominated by “Octave’s” tempestuous love affair with Brigitte Pierson (a thinly disguised account of Musset’s own liaison with Georges Sand).³³⁷ Octave suffers from a youthful “maladie morale,”

³³⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-7, where Levin elaborates on the difficult relationship between “truth” and “fiction” in confessional narratives, noting that “on the one hand, romantic confessions describe the personal experience of their authors in a recognizable manner; on the other hand, romantic confessions distance and disguise these events.”

³³⁶ Of course, Berlioz also knew De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (in Musset’s 1828 French translation), a work in which pathology, transgression, and delirium (as well as a pervasive tendency to fictionalize lived events) are key features of the author’s self-telling. For more on De Quincey’s confessional idiom see Edmund Baxter, *De Quincey’s Art of Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

³³⁷ On the romantic relationship between Musset and Sand and its resonances in *La confession d’un enfant du siècle*, see Levin, pp. 43; 49-50, where she also notes that Musset wanted to “immortalize himself and Sand” through the *Confession*. Though Levin does not dwell on Musset’s references to madness (which are, of course, central to my own reading of the text), she does observe that “the motifs

an emotional malaise that permeates his narrative as an integral constituent of identity: “La souffrance vit dans mon crâne,” he tells us, “elle m’appartient.”³³⁸ Exhausted by a life of dissipation and apathy, he retreats to the town of his birth, where he meets and falls in love with an “ideal” woman; Brigitte is a “saint,” an “angel,” and even “la fée Mab” – a creature of almost supernatural stature. But Octave’s infatuation quickly escalates to the level of obsession, becoming “un fatal amour, qui me dévore et qui me tue.”³³⁹ He conquers the ideal beloved but is almost immediately tormented by suspicions of her infidelity. Gripped by jealous paranoia, Octave descends into a state of “horrible, frightening madness” [une démence horrible, effrayante] that manifests itself first as suicidal despair and then as a murderous impulse.³⁴⁰ Standing over his beloved, he holds a knife to her bare chest: “Ah! Dieu me préserve! Pendant qu’elle dort, à quoi tient-il que je ne la tue?” He loosens her blouse, and prepares to commit the bloody deed: “J’avais approché le couteau que je tenais de la poitrine de Brigitte. Je n’étais plus maître de moi, et je ne sais, dans mon délire, ce qui en serait arrivé...”³⁴¹ The sight of a wooden cross around Brigitte’s neck halts Octave in the final second and, emerging from his delirium, he stops short of murder.

Janin’s earlier confession (called simply, *La Confession*) is similarly disturbing, foreshadowing the pathological and even criminal self-constructions of both Berlioz and Musset. Like Musset, Janin had a youthful and tempestuous love affair with Georges Sand which, distanced and transmuted by the confessional idiom, became the framework for a more complex self-telling marked by madness, murder,

of sickness, disease, death, and fever” permeate Musset’s confession, constructing a man who “we would now term schizophrenic.” (pp. 46, 55).

³³⁸ “Suffering lives in my brain, it belongs to me.” *Confession d’un enfant du siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 305.

³³⁹ “An inexorable love that devours and destroys me.” Ibid., p. 178.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 294.

³⁴¹ “Ah! God forgive me! While she sleeps why should I not kill her?” Ibid, p. 303; “I directed the knife I held in my hand against Brigitte’s bosom. I was no longer master of myself, and in my delirious condition I knew not what might have happened...” Ibid., pp. 306-7.

and neurotic self-absorption.³⁴² Through his alter-ego, Anatole, Janin painted himself as a young man exhausted by *ennui* and afflicted with the vague dissatisfaction of youthful melancholy. In his confessional tale, he becomes engaged to a young girl – Anna – whose beauty and naiveté at first entrance him but who, over time, seems to undergo a malignant transformation. Anatole is increasingly estranged from his fiancée; he “suffers horribly” at their wedding ball, imagining his bride as an old and ugly woman. Dark fantasies begin to affect his rational faculties and, alone with Anna after the celebrations, Anatole can no longer remember her name, perceiving her only as a “sweaty”, “white,” and repugnant figure.³⁴³ Quoting Hamlet, he cries, “Nous sommes tous au fond des misérables – Ils m’ont rendu fou.” Faced with his wife’s hideous form, and overcome by the “violent despair” of temporary derangement, Anatole succumbs to a moment of homicidal fury in which he strangles the girl:

“Il était seul...seul en proie au plus violent désespoir; il cherchait un nom qu’il ne pouvait prononcer, un nom qui devait la tirer de son sommeil, ce nom qu’il avait perdu. “Anna! dit-il enfin, entendez-moi, Anna! C’est moi, Anna!” et en même temps ses deux mains robustes entouraient le cou de la malheureuse fille, avec la fureur d’un homme qui se noie et qui s’attache à un roseau. Quand il détacha ses mains, la pauvre Anna poussa un grand cri, un cri de malaise et de mort: c’est ainsi qu’elle répondit à l’appel de son époux.”³⁴⁴

³⁴² On the relationship between Janin and Sand, see Levin, *The Romantic Art of Confession*, p. 124.

³⁴³ Anna has become “une figure blanche et fatiguée...des bras pleins de sueur.” *La Confession* (Paris: Imprimerie-Librairie Romantique, 1830), p. 52. Subsequent quotations are taken from the same edition. Levin borrows this description for her own plot summary (p. 124), which goes on to describe Janin’s climactic murderous scene. Her reading of Janin’s narrative (pp. 123-127) highlights interactions between literary and religious confession, centering around the “searing comment on the processes of organized religion” implicit in Janin’s horrific tale.

³⁴⁴ “He was alone . . . alone and in the grip of the most violent despair; he searched for a name that he could not utter, a name that should draw her from her sleep, this name that he had lost. “Anna!” he said finally, “listen to me, Anna! It’s me, Anna!” and at the same time his two robust hands encircled the neck of the poor girl, with the fury of a drowning man who clutches at a reed. When he released his hands, the poor Anna let out a great cry, a cry of malaise and of death: thus did she respond to the call of her husband.” Janin, *La Confession*, pp. 56-57.

Having murdered his new wife, Anatole faints and does not regain consciousness till morning. His crime is dismissed as an incidence of violent “apoplexy” – an act of uncontrollable and unconscious violence that the medical profession would undoubtedly have termed *monomanie homicide*.

The tales of youthful malaise, deranged love, and (imagined) murder related in self-writings by Musset and Janin overlap conspicuously both with one another and with the narrative of the *Fantastique*, encouraging us to locate Berlioz’s autobiographical program squarely within the aesthetic and rhetorical realm of Romantic confession.³⁴⁵ Indeed, the composer’s artistic contemporaries “confess” to pathological selves – identities marked by excessive imagination and delirious violence – that bear a remarkable resemblance to Berlioz’s own *jeune musicien*. Although neither Octave nor Anatole identify themselves explicitly as monomaniacs, their self-unfoldings are permeated by the rhetoric of psychiatric illness. Musset, like Janin, suffers not simply from melancholy, but from devouring obsession and psychosis. We are drawn into inner realms of fantasy and hallucination in their self-accounts which, deviating markedly from historical “facts,” document psychological rather than physical selves.

In both confessions, as in the *Fantastique*, imagined experience is projected through fictional alter-egos, yet the confessors testify to the fundamental “truthfulness” of their self-accounts. As Levin reminds us, Janin halts his story several times to assure us that the tale he tells is not a fabrication, “qu’il n’invente pas,

³⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Berlioz himself distinguishes between types of self-writing; in the *Memoires*, he notes emphatically that “I do not have the least intention to ‘appear before God, book in hand,’ declaring myself the ‘best of men,’ nor to write ‘confessions’. I shall tell only what I wish to tell and the reader who refuses me his absolution must needs be harsh to the point of unorthodoxy, for I will admit none but venial sins” (*Memoires*, “Preface,” transl. David Cairns; Berlioz’s quotations are taken from Rousseau’s *Confessions*). Here, the composer discriminates (as did Musset) between the autobiographical modes of memoir and confession, the former comprising a selective and retrospective account of lived events, while the latter demanded unreserved and intimate disclosure of the moral and emotional self.

qu'il n'est pas à la suite d'un fiction" [that he does not invent (the story), that he is not pursuing a fiction]. Musset makes the same claim, writing, "J'ai à raconter maintenant ce qui advint de mon amour et le changement qui se fit en moi. Quelle raison puis-je en donner? Aucune, sinon que je raconte, et que je puis dire: 'C'est la vérité'"³⁴⁶ But Musset's truth, like Berlioz's, cannot be couched in literal recounting (nor would it have been prudent for either man to "confess" actual names and places). Instead, revelation of the emotional self demanded a mingling of the factual and the fantastic – a generic blurring that Musset acknowledged in a letter to Franz Liszt. His *Confession*, he wrote, is "pas assez vrais pour des mémoires à beaucoup près, et pas assez faux pour des romans" [not true enough to be a memoir by any means, but not false enough to be a novel].³⁴⁷ As with Berlioz's *Fantastic* narrative, his self-account is essentially unclassifiable. History must negotiate with poetry in order to approach the greater totality of a rich and subtle self.

We cannot separate Berlioz's historical and confessional selves ("autobiography" from "fiction"), any more than we can divorce Musset from Octave or Janin from Anatole, for to do so is to suggest that fantasy is less vital than material fact in the shaping of identity. Confessions by Berlioz's contemporaries allowed referential and imagined personas to overlap, acknowledging the inevitable mingling of memory and imagination that produces a sum self. We witness the same strategy in the self-portrait of the *Fantastique*, which calls upon fiction to articulate as well as generate psychological identity. Berlioz's life both models and is modeled by his *jeune musicien* in a fluid interplay between written and writing selves (composer and

³⁴⁶ "I have now to recount what happened to my love and the change that took place in me. What reason can I give for it? None, except that as I tell the story I can say, 'It is the truth'." Quoted and translated in Levin, *The Romantic Confession*, p. 187.

³⁴⁷ This paragraph borrows from Levin's observations on confessional "truth"; she notes both Janin's and Musset's claims to truthful and "complete" recounting (pp. 43, 126), and discusses Musset's letter to Liszt in some detail (pp. 42-43).

persona) such that – in Paul de Man’s words – “they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution.” “We assume,” continues de Man, “that life *produces* an autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life?”³⁴⁸ For Berlioz, as for Musset and Janin, confessional self-writing facilitated both projection and production of identity, simultaneously diagnosing and engendering the eccentricities and pathologies that “determined” the life each man coveted: that of the Romantic artist.

In the aberrant alter-egos confessed by Berlioz and members of his artistic circle, we recognize the profile of the creative genius as it emerged in popular and medical discourse in the early decades of the nineteenth century – a solipsistic, delusional, and potentially dangerous persona whose artistic prowess was linked ever more clearly with pathology, and often with the fixations and violent emotions of the monomaniac. Confessional autobiographies both claim and confirm such a profile, allowing fictionalized psychiatric theory to transition into the “actuality” of confessed identity – a culminating stage in the process we have traced from Esquirol through Duras and Renault. Like Berlioz’s narrative, the self-portraits of Musset and Janin function as diagnoses of genius, constituting public and even scientific claims to the title “Artist.” Their confessions are prospective rather than retrospective – acts of literary self-empowerment that project artistic identity and potential. Particularly for Berlioz and Janin, the confession was a kind of “coming out” narrative – a psychological debut – for young men eager to establish a place in the artistic world and to advertise the richness of their internal landscapes. Responding quite literally to Victor Hugo’s claim that “Un poète est un monde enfermé dans un homme” [A poet is

³⁴⁸ “Autobiography as De-Facement,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 70.

a world locked inside a man],³⁴⁹ they turned their inside worlds outward, “unlocking” dark and often disordered selves in order both to reveal and create the persona of the romantic poet.³⁵⁰

Returning to Barzun’s provocative question, and to issues surrounding romantic self-representation that have resonated through much of this essay, we must conclude that the narrative of the *Fantastique* is unambiguously autobiographical and that its central pathological trope responds to a quasi-scientific ideology of “creative aberration” integral to many artistic self-portraits of the period. Berlioz’s fantastic *Episode*, self-generating as much as self-reflective, struggled toward the romantic artistic identity celebrated by Renault, Musset, Janin, and others, projecting and empowering a creative self as yet perceived only partially in dreams and imaginings. The composer leads us into the realm he wishes us to regard as his innermost self – a pathological *monde fantastique* “locked within” – to disclose the visions that constitute his aesthetic identity and the substance of his creative potentiality. As in the confessions of his contemporaries, he divulges a fantasy of perfection, a utopian inner vision of self and beloved that both motivates and tortures the external man. Berlioz’s convulsive struggle to realize and articulate identity – to mediate the discourse between external and imagined selves – underpins his symphonic program, which draws us into a fantastic realm of autobiographical construction. Borrowing self-

³⁴⁹ *Le Légende des Siècles*, XLVII.

³⁵⁰ Many other examples of “monomaniacal” self-portraiture exist amongst the self-writings of romantic artists, who often described incidences of amorous or sinister fixation. George Sand, for instance, reported a youthful episode of pathological obsession in *L’histoire de ma vie*. Like Berlioz’s malady, Sand’s illness develops under the influence of Chateaubriand and Shakespeare, whose somber tales induce “morbid imaginings” while also sparking her own first poetic attempts. She meditates obsessively on suicide, barely resisting the compulsion to throw herself into the river: “The temptation was sometimes so alive, so sudden, so strange that I could certainly attest the fact that I had fallen prey to a kind of madness. It took the form of an obsession and from time to time bordered on monomania.” Sand’s dangerous fixation dogs her for weeks and culminates in an abortive suicide attempt; she is rescued by a friend, and writes “There seemed no point in his rebuking me for my sickness since it was involuntary and something I struggled against.” (*Story of My Life: The Autobiography of George Sand*, A Group Translation ed. Thelma Jurgrau (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991.), pp. 792-794.

consciously from the realm of literature, he allies (and in some sense justifies) his experimental “self-sounding,” with a written confession which, engrossed in intensely private examination, nevertheless responds keenly to external models of selfhood.

Berlioz’s *idée fixe* functions as both a creative and destructive force, and the signal of an illness central to his sense of identity. Through the narrative of the *Fantastique*, he becomes the melancholy and obsessive sufferer theorized by Esquirol, fictionalized in a host of nineteenth-century plays and novels, and recognized by the concert-going public as a quintessentially “artistic” figure – the monomaniacal genius. Although Berlioz wrote to Ferrand that he was “on the path to recovery” as he finished the first draft of the symphony, he could not relinquish his fixation either permanently or entirely. A complete cure for the artist’s sufferings was unthinkable, as he later told Gabriel Vicaire, since such woes – and particularly the “excruciating pains of the heart” – were the hallmark of the romantic creator.³⁵¹ In the sequel to the *Fantastique*, the *Retour à la vie*, we witness a reprieve from death but not a release from Berlioz’s amorous obsession. The melologue is replete with echoes of “la voix adorée” and impassioned appeals to the elusive Juliette, Ophélie, and Miranda. There could be “no remedy, no palliative” for the emotional and psychological malaises afflicting a creative temperament, Berlioz insisted, for pathology itself was integral to artistic production: “And there, perhaps, is the reason why we prefer to suffer rather than recover.”³⁵²

The illness at the centre of Berlioz’s first symphony illuminates the vital connections between art and mental infirmity, between popular pathology and romantic identity, which motivate the composer’s confessional self-telling. Hovering between science and fiction, the *idée fixe* emerges as a pivotal cultural referent,

³⁵¹ CG: IV, 1860 (13 May 1854).

³⁵² Ibid.

drawing together the literal and the literary, cutting across psychiatric, imaginary, and philosophical discourses, and illuminating the “medical” strategies of autobiography that give shape both to the romantic Artist at large, and to Berlioz’s own fantastic self.

CHAPTER THREE

FANTASTIC FORM AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE GROTESQUE

“In Callots Manier”

A poet or writer who envisions figures of ordinary life in his inner, Romantic realm of spirits – and who subsequently represents them in a strange and bizarre costume in keeping with the atmosphere there – could easily justify his aims by stating that he wanted to work in Callot’s manner.

[E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier*]³⁵³

Hoffmann prefaced the collection of tales and essays constituting his *Phantasiestücke* with an homage to the Renaissance artist Jacques Callot, describing his “juxtapositions of human and animal” and “teeming” compositions as hallmarks of a fantastic style. Callot’s prints, he noted, revel in monstrous confections and metamorphoses, crowding together a multitude of figures that “protrude individually as themselves yet remain as integral parts of the whole.” In *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Hoffmann observed delightedly that the Devil’s nose transforms into a musket, and that a musical instrument emerges inexplicably from the nether regions of a winged demon. Exploding form and disrupting visual syntax, Callot works in the style of the grotesque, an idiom of “secret meanings” that materializes “the fantastic and whimsical apparitions called forth by the magic of his exceptional imagination.” His compositions embrace disorder and asymmetry, “surpassing the rules of painting,” by demonstrating both “profound intellect” and fecund fancy. Indeed, Hoffmann embraced Callot as a model, claiming that the fantastic artist was one who worked “in

³⁵³ This and subsequent quotations are given in translations adapted from those of Joseph M. Hayse, in *Fantasy Pieces in Callot’s Manner, Pages from the Diary of a Traveling Romantic* (Schenectady, New York: Union College Press, 1996), pp. 3-4.

Callot's manner" – who drew on the fusions, distortions, and dark humor of the grotesque.

Little surprise, then, that Berlioz – hailed as a primary exponent of the musical *école fantastique*³⁵⁴ – was often described not only as a Hoffmannesque composer, but an artist working in the tradition of Callot. Heine, in an 1838 review in the *Gazette musicale*, underscored a link between visual, literary, and musical caricature, likening Berlioz's fantastic "monstrosities" (both physical and musical) to those of Hoffmann and Callot:

La tournure de son esprit le porte au fantastique... Il a une grande affinité avec Callot, Gozzi et Hoffmann, et son extérieur en annonce déjà quelque chose. Il est dommage qu'il ait fait couper sa monstrueuse chevelure anté-diluvienne, toison hérissée qui se dressait sur son front comme une forêt primitive sur une roche escarpée.³⁵⁵

Henri Blanchard made the same connection, identifying Berlioz's strident sound and "hallucinations harmoniques et mélodiques" as effects deriving from a Callot-esque aesthetic.³⁵⁶ Decades later, Debussy would reinstate such long-standing links between Berlioz's compositional style and both literary and visual aesthetics, arguing that the composer's "feverish" and "negligent" idiom derived largely from non-musical models: "Berlioz is an exception, a monster. He is not at all a musician; he gives the illusion of music with procedures borrowed from literature and painting."³⁵⁷ Broader

³⁵⁴ This term was applied by Blaze de Bury, Joseph Mainzer, and others; see Chapter 1, pp. 90ff.

³⁵⁵ "His [Berlioz's] natural bent is for the fantastic... He has a close affinity with Callot, Gozzi, and Hoffmann, and even his outward appearance suggests this. It is a shame he has allowed his monstrous, antedeluvian locks to be cut off – that swelling mop of hair which used to tower above his forehead like a forest on a rugged cliff." Heine, "Lettres confidentielles," *Gazette musicale* (4 February, 1838). Heine's often-exaggerated literary style must (as Berlioz himself cautioned) be taken with a grain of salt; in this case, however, he is merely underscoring a set of connections (between Berlioz, Hoffmann, and Callot) that had become fairly standard. Carlo Gozzi is a fitting fourth figure in Heine's group; born in Venice in 1720, he was an author of fantastic tales known for their grotesque conflation of the heroic, comic, supernatural, and exotic.

³⁵⁶ Henri Blanchard, *Gazette musicale* (6 February, 1842).

³⁵⁷ *La Revue bleue* (2 April 1904); quoted and translated in Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 544. Rosen does not flesh out the implications

complaints surrounding Berlioz's tendency toward caricature, ugliness, and generic incoherence resonate through Berlioz reception, often tied to the composer's "fantastique" style and to the Fantastic Symphony in particular.

Writing to his family in 1831, Mendelssohn described Berlioz's first symphony as "indescribably horrible" – a work full of "grunting, shouting, and screaming" in which "one's most cherished ideas [are] distorted and turned into perverse caricatures."³⁵⁸ We find his outraged response to the *Fantastique* reiterated in Fétis's seminal reviews (1832 and 1835), which dismiss Berlioz's symphonic reverie as musical trash: "songes-erreux" in which "il n'y a que des monstruosités d'harmonie, sans charme, sans effets qui réveillent."³⁵⁹ The *Fantastique* was marred, according to Fétis, by illogical musical syntax and rhythm: "Examinez tous les morceaux de sa symphonie, et vous verrez qu'il manque toujours quelque chose dans l'un ou l'autre des membres de la phrase, en sorte que le rythme périodique est constamment boiteux ou insensible."³⁶⁰ Berlioz's music was dubbed both unreadable and unshapely in reviews through the later 1830s. *Le Ménestrel* rejected the movements of the *Fantastique* as forms "qui ne rassemblent à rien," and Berlioz's compositional style as a mere jumbling of heterogeneous elements: "Il [Berlioz] a pris une poignée de croches, de doubles croches, de blanches, de noires, de dièses, de

of Debussy's claim, nor does he exonerate Berlioz from the charge of "formal negligence," instead allowing the composer to hover as a "puzzling figure."

³⁵⁸ Translated in Edward T. Cone, *Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score, Historical Background, Analysis, Views and Comments* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 282.

³⁵⁹ "empty daydreams...[in which] there are nothing but harmonic monstrosities, devoid of charm or excitement." Fétis, "Analyse critique, Episode de la vie d'un artiste, Grand Symphonie fantastique par Hector Berlioz." *Gazette musicale* (1 February, 1835).

³⁶⁰ "Search all the movements of the symphony and you will see that something is missing from either the antecedent or the consequent of each period, so that the phrase rhythm is constantly halting or crude." Ibid.

bémols, de soupirs et de points d'orgue; il a jeté tout cela dans un sac, puis il a remué le sac et s'est écrié: 'Que ma partition soit!'"³⁶¹

To Wagner, the *Fantastique* was "a devilishly confused musical idiom" and Berlioz himself "an incoherent phenomenon." Wagner's 1841 report in the *Dresdener Abendzeitung* compared the symphony to an erupting volcano, describing musical shapes writhing in a state of metamorphosis, structural outlines blurred and inconsistent, and every reassuring "beauty of form" dissolved in a fiery inferno:

What we see are gigantic clouds of smoke, separated and modeled into fleeting shapes only by lightning and streaks of flame. Everything is monstrous, bold, but endlessly painful. Nowhere is there beauty of form to be encountered, nowhere that majestic stream to whose calm, assured flow we would entrust ourselves in confident expectation. The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony would seem an act of pure kindness to me after the Fantastic Symphony.³⁶²

Not only "endlessly painful," the *Fantastique* was also "drunk with noise," according to a later assessment by the ultra-conservative critic, Paul Scudo, who summarized many of Berlioz's perceived faults. Incongruous voice-pairings, Scudo noted, produced a burlesque effect while the sheer force of Berlioz's dissonant sound jammed the symphony's semiotic gears, rendering it unintelligible:

... he thunders, he explodes...He runs the gamut of sound perceptible to our ears, he piles up the harshest dissonances and the most vexatious rhythms...he revels in the coarsest contrasts, sets up amorous dialogues between the bass drum and the piccolo, between the oboe and the tam-tam...³⁶³

³⁶¹ "He [Berlioz] has taken a handful of eighth and sixteenth notes, white notes, black notes, sharps, flats, rests, sighs, and pedal points; he has thrown them in a bag, then shaken the bag and cried: 'Let there be music!'" *Le Ménestrel* (16 September, 1838).

³⁶² "On Berlioz and the Fantastic Symphony," *Dresdner Abendzeitung* (5 May, 1841). Translated in Cone, *Fantastic Symphony*, p. 286. Wagner's opinion of Berlioz degenerated over time (as did Berlioz's opinion of Wagner). In 1841, Wagner was still defending the author of the *Fantastique* against charges of charlatanism, insisting that "his outward appearance is in rare accord with his inner genius."

³⁶³ In an 1850 collection of reviews assembled by Scudo himself; translated in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, pp. 112-113. Claims that 'music' degenerated into mere 'noise' in Berlioz's work abounded; an 1835 review in *Le Pianiste*, for instance, declared that "his music is often nothing but

Scudo denounced the *Fantastique* as anti-beautiful, likening its “howling” and “shrieking” to the music of savages. He echoed earlier reviewers in both *Le Ménestrel* and *L’Artiste*, who referred to the symphony as a “primeval” or “pre-rational” work, tracing Berlioz’s disorienting effects to his “manière primitive.”³⁶⁴ Other critics, following Wagner’s lead, compared Berlioz to a volcano, and his music to the bulbous formations of molten lava. Primitivism was linked, in these volcanic descriptions, to gigantism – to the unrestrained productions of an erupting imagination. Heine underscored such an aesthetic when he called Berlioz “a colossal nightingale, a lark as big as an eagle, such as must have existed in the primitive world”; his compositions, suggested Heine, contained ideas too large for any form and therefore representable only as monstrous partialities.³⁶⁵ By 1868, we find F. Clément’s biographical sketch of the composer reinforcing long-standing ties between Berlioz and an aesthetic of regression, drawing on an architectural metaphor to highlight connections among primitivism, monstrosity, and the fantastic. Of Berlioz and other members of “his school” he wrote:

Ils démollissent l’édifice harmonique, et quand tous les matériaux sont à leur pieds, ils tentent de le reconstruire, d’après un nouveau plan. Mais ils ont négligé de numérotter les pierres, de sorte qu’au lieu d’un édifice bien ordonné, ils reviennent fatalement à une architecture primitive, fantaisiste et naïve.³⁶⁶

unintelligible, unharmonious noise” (2/5, 1835, p. 37). For more on the fantastic implications of noise, see Chapter 1, pp. 39ff.

³⁶⁴ See Jérôme Soldièze’s comments on the *Fantastique* (embedded in a review of the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*) in *Le Ménestrel* (16 August 1840) and *L’Artiste*, “Miss Smithson et Berlioz” (Vol. 6, Sér 17, pp. 197-98), in which Berlioz himself is figured as a savage. References to primitivism and to links between fantasy and a regressive or “barbaric” mode in Berlioz’s other early works abound; see, for instance, remarks on the Requiem in *Le Constitutionnel* (6 December 1837); also, Gautier’s *Histoire du Romantisme* (1830-1868) in which he links Berlioz’s “bizarreries, obscurités, et exagérations” with “une force primitive.”

³⁶⁵ 25 April, 1844; quoted and translated in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 150.

³⁶⁶ “They demolish the edifice of harmony, and when all the pieces are at their feet, attempt to reconstruct it according to a new plan. But they have forgotten to number the bricks, with the result that, in place of an ordinary building, they return inevitably to a primitive architecture, fantastic and naïve.” F. Clément, *Musiciens célèbres depuis seizième siècle jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: L.Hachette, 1868), pp. 516-517.

We shall encounter a similar idea in Schumann's 1835 review of the *Fantastique*, where he described "music...gravitating back to its primeval origins," and suggested that a period of primitive artistic creation might be dawning, asking: "Could it be Berlioz's symphony that ushers this moment in?"³⁶⁷

Outside the bounds of known form, Berlioz's symphony was both marvelous and monstrous; it "surpassed the rules of music" just as Callot surpassed those of painting, drawing on a "secret language" of caricature and dissonance. Not simply ungrammatical, the work was generically unidentifiable – a half-formed, perplexed composition. The *Symphonie fantastique* was a "bizarrerie la plus monstrueuse," according to an 1830 review in *Le Figaro*, in part because it was no symphony but "un véritable roman musical." Vacillating between the musical and the literary, it resisted allegiance to either category. Schumann placed it midway between theatre and concert hall; it was a symphony written "as if" it were a play: "Four movements were too few for [Berlioz]; as if writing a play, he opts instead for five."³⁶⁸ Of course, Berlioz himself blurred the boundaries between drama, opera, and instrumental work in his own *Note* to the first edition:

Le plan du drame instrumental, privé du secours de la parole, a besoin d'être exposé d'avance. Le programme suivant doit donc être considéré comme le texte parlé d'un Opéra, servant à amener des morceaux de musique, dont il motive le caractère et l'expression.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Schumann, "[Review of Berlioz: *Fantastic Symphony*], *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (3 July-14 Aug 1835); Translated in Ian Bent, *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 175-76. I refer to Schumann's review from this point forward as Schumann/Bent.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

³⁶⁹ "The outline of the instrumental drama, which lacks the help of words, needs to be explained in advance. The following program should thus be considered as the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce musical movements, whose character and expression it motivates." Translation by Cone, *Fantastic Symphony*, p. 21.

Simultaneously a novel, opera, play, symphony, and “episode,” the *Fantastique* lumped together known generic categories to create an unidentifiable totality which, as late as 1885, still struck Hugo Wolf as “shattering and annihilating.” It was a work in metamorphosis, which, like Callot’s paintings, “crowded together” a multitude of forms that “protrude[d] individually as themselves yet remain[ed] as integral parts of the whole.”

Such a symphony could hardly, according to Fétis, qualify as a work of art according to established standards of taste, for it betrayed “little feeling for beauty.” Instead, it adhered to “a new musical religion” characterized by barbarity and irrationality – an aesthetic most apparent in the symphony’s final movement, which Fétis described with hyperbolic dismay: “La cinquième partie, le *Songe d’une nuit du Sabbat*, est une alliance du trivial, du grotesque et du barbare; une saturnale de l’emploi des sons et non de la musique. La plume me tombe des mains!”³⁷⁰ Here, of course, Fétis is echoing Berlioz’s own program, which describes a host of monsters, sorcerers, and the defiled beloved dancing to a “grotesque” tune. The term *grotesque* – linked to both literary and visual works of the *école fantastique* – was applied to Berlioz with increasing frequency through the 1830s. Mainzer’s 1838 pamphlet (the first book-length appraisal of Berlioz’s style by a French critic) summed up the composer’s “fantastique” allegiance by declaring: “Tout ce qui est bizarre et grotesque, tout ce qui jure contre les règles adoptées provoque l’admiration de M. Berlioz.”³⁷¹ Wagner underscored Mainzer’s assessment, declaring that “he [Berlioz] lacks all sense of beauty and with few exceptions his music is a grotesque

³⁷⁰ “The fifth part, the *Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath*, mingles the trivial, the grotesque, and the barbarous; it is a saturnalia of noise and not of music. The pen falls from my hand!” Fétis, “Analyse critique: Episode de la vie d’un Artiste,” *Revue musicale* (1 February, 1835).

³⁷¹ “All that is bizarre and grotesque, all that violates established conventions, provokes the admiration of M. Berlioz.” Joseph Mainzer, “M. Berlioz,” *Chronique musicale* (1re Livraison, 1838), p. 78.

caricature.”³⁷² Blanchard, too, cited the grotesque as a key facet of Berlioz’s idiom, acknowledging the visual roots of the aesthetic when he noted that some critics rejected the composer as “nothing but a grotesque Callot.”³⁷³

Applied pejoratively by Berlioz’s detractors, the *grotesque* label was enthusiastically embraced by his supporters. Heine, for instance, identified “ghastly, bloody grotesquerie” as the most compelling aspect of Berlioz’s idiom: the *Fantastique* was “une farce où tous les serpents que nous portons cachés dans le coeur se redressent en sifflant de plaisir.”³⁷⁴ D’Ortigue, too, praised Berlioz’s grotesque aesthetic, identifying musical noise and disorder as central to the composer’s language; he notes that “les plus fantastiques” effects of instrumentation are contained in the final movement of the first symphony, where muffled and dying voices evoke the eerie sounds of spectres. “Tout cela est plein de vie, de couleur, de verve désordonnée,” he writes; “C’est le sublime du grotesque.”³⁷⁵

Though Berlioz’s perceived monstrosities were (as we have seen) associated with a Renaissance visual tradition, D’Ortigue’s pairing of grotesque and sublime echoed more contemporary theory: Victor Hugo’s well-known Preface to the drama *Cromwell* (1827), a Romantic manifesto in which the grotesque occupied a central position.³⁷⁶ Critics (both friendly and antagonistic) were quick to note connections

³⁷² *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* (1 and 8 February, 1843); Translated in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered*, p. 92.

³⁷³ *Gazette musicale* (6 February, 1842). A general assessment of Berlioz’s idiom embedded in a review of *Harold en Italie*, which (as we shall see) was also linked with the aesthetics of the ugly.

³⁷⁴ “a farce that light-heartedly releases the hidden snakes that we carry in our hearts.” *Gazette musicale* (4 February, 1838).

³⁷⁵ “Everything here is full of life, color, exuberant disorder. It is the grotesque at its most sublime.” *Le Quotidienne* (4 January, 1833).

³⁷⁶ The terms “monstrous,” “ugly,” and “grotesque” permeated reception of Berlioz’s early works and were often used interchangeably by French critics. They also appeared together in Hugo’s Preface to *Cromwell*, which linked the literary grotesque with medieval monsters [“the gargoyles of Rouen, the *grauilli* of Metz, the *sallée* of Troyes, the *drée* of Montlhéry, the *tarasque* of Tarascon] and, more broadly, the aesthetics of “laideur” [ugliness]. It is not my intention, however, to collapse these terms unproblematically. The category of the monstrous was broad and complex, sparking Romantic debates that intersected with but did not overlap entirely with those surrounding the grotesque. For recent writing on monster theory, see *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe*,

between Berlioz and Hugo. Among many well-known remarks linking the two men were Hiller's claim that Berlioz was "le Victor Hugo de la musique," and Henri Blaze's more pointed observation that "M. Berlioz, lui aussi, voulut faire sa préface de Cromwell."³⁷⁷ Such remarks identified Berlioz not only as a champion of the Romantic school, but as a promoter of the Hugolian grotesque – a philosophy of formal, grammatical, and aesthetic experimentation underpinning French Romantic drama as well as inflecting painting, sculpture, and (as I shall argue), music.³⁷⁸

Part of a Romantic movement to rehabilitate the ugly, grotesque ideology posed a direct challenge to the imposed symmetry, clarity, and generic conformity of Classicism. Rejecting Enlightenment definitions of art as imitation/idealization of beautiful nature, the grotesque artist envisioned by Hugo and his theoretical predecessors embraced precisely the attributes ascribed to Berlioz: unstable form, syntactical confusion, primitivism, monstrosity, and caricature. In Paris, artists of the 1820s and 30s drew on the grotesque imagery of the Flemish painters, Bosch and

edited by Laura Knoppers and Joan Landes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); *Monster theory: reading culture*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, monsters, and machines: science fiction and the cultures of science in the nineteenth century* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2006); Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's shadow: myth, monstrosity, and nineteenth-century writing* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1987).

³⁷⁷ "Berlioz too wished to write his Preface to *Cromwell*." Blaze, *De l'École fantastique et de M. Berlioz*, *Revue des deux mondes* (October, 1838), p. 100.

³⁷⁸ My interest in the aesthetics of the grotesque was sparked by seminar lectures and talks given by Annette Richards at Cornell University, 2002-2004, and by her own work on Haydn and the grotesque; see "Haydn's London Trios and the Rhetoric of the Grotesque," in Tom Beghin and Sandner Goldman, eds., *Haydn and the Performance of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 249-76. Wider literature on the musical grotesque centers to large degree around Shostakovich; for recent work, see Caryl Emerson, "Shostakovich and the Russian literary tradition," *Shostakovich and his world*, ed. Laurel E. Fay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 183-226; Bettina Wagner, *Dmitri Schostakowitschs Oper Die Nase: Zur Problematik der Kategorie des Grotesken in der Musik* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: P. Lang, 2003); Ester Scheinberg, *Irony, satire, parody and the grotesque in the music of Shostakovich: A theory of musical incongruities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Reed Merrill, "The grotesque in music: Sostakovic's muse," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, 23 (1990), pp. 303-314. The figure of the grotesque dancer in eighteenth-century opera has also been explored; see, for instance, *The grotesque dancer on the eighteenth-century stage: Gennaro Magri and his world*, edited by Rebecca Harris-Warrick and Bruce Alan Brown (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

Bruegel, and of their own compatriots, Rabelais and Callot to shape their own work. We recognize Callot's contorted figures in the imagery of Goya, Boulanger, and Géricault as well as in the other-worldly writings of Nodier, Gautier, and especially Hoffmann. Indeed, in the dreamlike and often demonic works of these artists, the grotesque operates as the mouthpiece of the fantastic – its underlying language and aesthetic framework. The shapes, forms, and syntax of fantastic literary works were, as Hoffmann noted, modeled on the calculated chaos of Callot's idiom.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the musical fantastic was also permeated, in its reception and production, with the attributes of the grotesque, translating into sound the narrative discontinuity associated with fantastic visual and literary works. In order to theorize Berlioz's 'sounding grotesque,' we must develop a broader understanding of the term: its history, evolution, and long-standing connection to fantastic artworks. Section 2 of this chapter will, then, begin with a brief historical tour that traces the grotesque from its origins in visual culture to its emergence as an independent aesthetic category in the writings of eighteenth-century French and German theorists whose works underpinned Hugo's *Preface*. Aiming to place the *Fantastic Symphony* in context, we go on to review Hugo's commentary as both codification and ratification of a darkly comic aesthetic that had seeped into French Romantic art through the first half of the century and permeated Berlioz's own writings on music. Turning to the *Fantastique* itself, Section 3 draws on Schumann's 1835 review as a starting point for grotesque analysis of the symphony, investigating the mechanisms of musical monstrosity as they manifest in Berlioz's score. Finally, Section 4 examines trends in twentieth-century analysis of the *Fantastique*, drawing attention to some of the labeling problems that arise from what Schumann calls "conventional dissection" of the work. Imposing fixed classical models on Berlioz's local and large-scale forms,

as we shall see, renders his symphony generically flawed and grammatically problematic, obscuring its Hoffmannesque and Hugolian innovations.

The links I identify here, between Berlioz and Hugo, and between Berlioz and the grotesque more widely, are not in themselves new. Scholars have long coupled the *Fantastic Symphony* both with Hugo's *Preface* and his experimental drama *Hernani*. D. Kern Holoman, for instance, notes that "The world of the *Fantastique* must have seemed every bit as disruptive, even to intellectuals, as Victor Hugo's *Hernani* had been."³⁷⁹ Hugh Macdonald makes the same connection between the two works, noting that in Paris during the 1820s, "the macabre and the grotesque were no longer unacceptably ugly; they had their own new fascination."³⁸⁰ But neither Holoman nor Macdonald pursues these claims further; it does not become clear how Berlioz's disruptive language resonates either with Hugo's *Preface* or with the broader aesthetics of the "macabre and grotesque."

Jacques Barzun goes so far as to suggest that "it was praise when the *Figaro* termed the entire work 'bizarre' and 'monstrous,' for these were qualities in demand after a long course of pallid operatic conventions."³⁸¹ He links Berlioz's "drame instrumental" with Hugo's revolutionary "drame romantique," claiming that "Berlioz was accomplishing reforms parallel to Hugo's."³⁸² He goes on to acknowledge in Berlioz's first symphony "rough textures, discontinuities, distortions" – what he calls "antitheses of structure as well as of substance" that challenge ready-made formulas. Here, we recognize the rhetoric of the grotesque clearly, but Barzun – who is quick to

³⁷⁹ D. Kern Holoman, *Berlioz* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 109.

³⁸⁰ Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1982), p. 11.

³⁸¹ Jacques Barzun: *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1950), Vol. I, p. 151.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, I: pp. 129, 157. Barzun notes the importance of Hugo's writings to Berlioz's early career at large, observing the revolutionary spirit of *Cromwell* in Berlioz's music as early as the composer's 1826 cantata on the Death of Orpheus – a work declared "unplayable" by the Prix-de-Rome judges of the Institute; see *Berlioz and the Romantic Generation*, Vol. I, p. 73.

shield Berlioz from challenges of eccentricity and “literariness” – insists that the *Fantastique* was “not an adventure into the bizzare.”³⁸³

Among those who disagree with Barzun are Christian Berger and Julian Rushton, both of whom draw attention to the aesthetics of the ugly as relevant to Berlioz’s early works.³⁸⁴ Berger notes connections between Hugo’s and Berlioz’s innovations in the brief opening section of his study *Phantastik als Konstruktion*, where he maps the harmonic and structural irregularities of Berlioz’s first symphony onto Hugo’s delineation of the “modern” drama. He goes on to provide a thorough thematic and motivic analysis of the *Fantastique* which, in a closing section, links Berlioz’s formal “disorder” and “irrationality” with the broad structural conventions of the fantastic.³⁸⁵ But Berger does not tell us how the fantastic and the grotesque interact; he does not, in other words, explore the connection between a general aesthetic category and its underlying grammar.

Julian Rushton, on the other hand, gestures toward such a link in a tantalizingly brief section of his recent *The Music of Berlioz* entitled “The grotesque, the supernatural, the sublime.” Here, Rushton ties Berlioz’s other-worldly imagery – his fascination with “witches, ghosts, angels, or devils” – to the newly popular idiom of the grotesque: “In the year of *Cromwell*,” he writes, “Ferrand took a willing Berlioz down the Gothick road in Les Francs-juges, so that the first musical results of Berlioz’s fashionable preoccupation with the grotesque produced the villain

³⁸³ Ibid., I, p. 383. According to Barzun, neither the fantastic (nor the grotesque, we can infer) as they emerged in Romantic literature are to be considered direct shapers of Berlioz’s musical language. Barzun’s radical rejection of the “literary” Berlioz resonates discordantly with Schumann’s seminal 1835 review of the *Symphonie fantastique* and has been considerably revised in recent musicological scholarship.

³⁸⁴ Also worthy of note is Patricia Testerman Pinson, “The Shattered Frame: a study of the grotesque in nineteenth-century literature and music,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1971, which devotes a chapter to Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*.

³⁸⁵ *Phantastik als Konstruktion* (Kassel, Basel, London: Bärenreiter, 1983), see in particular the sections entitled “Victor Hugos Konzeption des romantischen Dramas” (pp. 3-7) and “Phantastik und Konvention” (pp. 162-184).

Olmerick.”³⁸⁶ The grotesque, Rushton argues, plays an even more central role in the *Fantastique*. In the symphony’s final movement, “distortion of the subject,” “deformed fanfares,” and “diminished seventh concatenations” are elements which readily relate” to the grotesque, although he does not explain this idea further, nor does he pursue a more detailed analysis of the passages in question – tasks perhaps outside the scope of his project.³⁸⁷ Rushton’s work both underscores the importance of the grotesque to Berlioz’s early works and leaves us with a series of unanswered questions revolving around the etymology of the term itself, its significance in nineteenth-century France, and its application to music: How, precisely, did monstrosity translate into musical form and in what sense did it inflect Berlioz’s compositional language? How did the musical grotesque resonate with broader visual and literary traditions? What were Berlioz’s nineteenth-century reviewers implying when they claimed that the *Fantastique*, like Hoffmann’s *Phantasiestücke*, was a work “in Callot’s manner”?

It is with these queries that my own investigation begins. Taking up where Rushton leaves off, I argue that a closer examination of the grotesque provides a missing piece in our investigation of Berlioz’s “fantastique” idiom – not simply his extramusical imagery but his notions of structure, syntax, and compositional logic. Penetrating the inner workings of fantastic narratives – their manipulation of form and their recourse to certain kinds of linguistic disruption – means understanding the semiotics of the grotesque. This idea, expressed clearly in Hoffmann, was also familiar to French criticism of the late eighteenth century which, as we shall see, identified the

³⁸⁶ Julian Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 133. Rushton also points out Berlioz’s connection, both literary and musical, with Hugo, noting that he assisted in the rehearsal of Louis Berton’s *Esmerelda*, Hugo’s own adaptation of *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-56.

genre fantastique as a literary category modeled on the aesthetics of grotesque painting and architecture.

Placing (or replacing) Berlioz's *Fantastique* in the aesthetic space of the grotesque not only opens up a framework for the theorization of his fantastic sounds and structures, but allows us to challenge his long-standing profile as a clumsy, and ill-trained composer – in Charles Rosen's words, an "incompetent genius" whose works lacked unity and organizational clarity.³⁸⁸ In grotesque artworks, discontinuity and generic opacity were intentional innovations rather than accidents borne of ineptitude – experiments that disrupted the "conventional beauty" that Berlioz so decried.³⁸⁹ As we look more closely at both the alternative beauty and anti-reason of the grotesque we free ourselves from the struggle to regularize and domesticate Berlioz's works – to defend him against the kinds of criticisms that Rosen reinscribes.³⁹⁰ Instead, we move toward a new kind of musical reading – a strategy of dissection not aimed at aligning Berlioz with classical notions of clarity and unity or at rendering his music easily decodable, but at investigating the "apparent confusion" that Berlioz himself described as "the perfection of art."³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ *The Romantic Generation*, p. 544; see also p. 568, where Rosen describes Berlioz as "unconvincingly eccentric" and refers broadly to "Berlioz's failures."

³⁸⁹ In the context of a discussion of Michaelangelo's "Last Judgment" in the *Mémoires*, Berlioz records his "acute disappointment" in the work, admitting that he has "little feeling for conventional beauty." (See the translation by David Cairns (London: Gollancz, 1969), p. 255) As we saw in Chapter One, the composer rejected the "pleasant" in favor of the violent, terrible, monstrous, and sublime as desirable aesthetic effects.

³⁹⁰ Although Barzun does not position Berlioz as a 'grotesque' composer (cf. n. 25 above), he argues, as I do here, that uncomplimentary comparisons between Berlioz's works and "set" classical models is both nonsensical and fruitless: "...far from lacking a sense of form or neglecting its claims, the Romanticist abandons the ready-made formula because its excessive generality gives it too loose a fit. He constantly alters or invents formal devices – as Berlioz did in the *Symphonie fantastique* – so that the work of art may satisfy the several requirements of subject, substance, and meaning, rather than simply fulfill a routine expectation. The result is a characteristic distortion or asymmetry which may be observed equally in Gothic and Romantic work, in Shakespeare, Goethe, Berlioz, Hugo, Delacroix, or Stendhal. Hence, the folly of applying a classic or symmetrical "stencil" over a Romanticist conception: the parts that come through to the observer are bound to seem incoherent and to violate "the" form." (*Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, I: p. 383)

³⁹¹ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, Translated by Cairns, p. 294, in a passage praising Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* and describing the midnight pagan ritual to which the work refers – a musico-religious

Configuring the Romantic Grotesque

I: A Historical Tour of the French Grotesque

Noting that the grotesque has frequently been conceived as a figure either for a “pure” art or for the impurities and ambiguities of art, I argue that the grotesque appears to us to occupy a margin between “art” and something “outside of” or “beyond” art. In other words, it serves as a limit to the field of art and can be seen as a figure for a total art that recognizes its own incongruities and paradoxes.

[Geoffrey Harpham]³⁹²

It is precisely the *Fantastique*'s status as a work simultaneously “outside of” and “beyond” art, a work that celebrates what Harpham calls “its own incongruities and paradoxes” that draws it into the category of the grotesque.³⁹³ The generic and syntactical conundrums it posed were neither new nor unrecognizable; indeed, when nineteenth-century reviewers compared Berlioz's musical language with that of Callot and Salvator Rosa, they gestured backward in time toward the visual origins of the grotesque. Derived from the Italian *grotto*, grotesque referred to an ancient style of ornamental design discovered during fifteenth-century excavations of the underground caverns in Rome. Well known to antiquity, grotesque decoration had been described as early as Vitruvius's *De Architectura* (c. 27 BCE) where, already the subject of anxiety, it was linked to decadence, monstrosity, and illegitimate conflation of the real with the imaginary:

For our contemporary artists decorate the walls with monstrous forms rather than reproducing clear images of the familiar world. Instead of columns they paint fluted stems with oddly shaped leaves and colutes...and little stems supporting half-figures

event in which “sacred hymns” of priests mingled with the “gruesome shouts, shrieks, and groans” of their sentinels.

³⁹² Geoffrey Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 5.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

crowned by human or animal heads. Such things, however, never existed, do not now exist, and shall never come into being...³⁹⁴

Fascinated by the lost grandeur of Rome, Renaissance artists began to experiment with grotesque design, sparking a fashionable revival of the style. Among the most famous results were Raphael's decorations for the papal loggias of the Vatican (1515). Here, playful confusion reigned: human figures were fused with animal and vegetable forms, familiar objects sprouted monstrous appendages, classical symmetries gave way to exuberant irregularities, and Biblical narrative was infiltrated by pagan imagery.³⁹⁵ Raphael's grotesques, like those of his contemporaries, reveled in the imaginative freedom of the ancient style – its mingling of monsters, plants, human figures, and purely decorative shapes. The distinction between nature and fantasy collapsed in grotesque decoration, which hovered in a realm of semiotic ambivalence, blurring the real with the unreal, the representational with the non-representational. Associated with dream and hallucination, grotesque depictions became known, in the sixteenth century, as *sogni dei pittori* (dreams of painters).³⁹⁶

The vogue for Italian ornament quickly spread north of the Alps, coming first to France. According to Frances Barasch, the earliest recorded use of the term 'grotesque' dates to 1532, but the style was certainly known before then. By 1530, Francis I had imported a group of Italian artists – first Rosso, then Primaticcio and Barozzi – to assist in the decorations of Fontainebleau. These artists adorned the borders of the palace's large compartments with floral designs intermingled with

³⁹⁴ Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, Translated by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1963), orig. pub. as *Das Grotteske: seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung* (Oldenburg and Hamburg: Stalling, 1957), p. 20.

³⁹⁵ Goethe described Raphael's paintings in the 1789 essay *Von Arabesken* (published in *Der Teutsche Merkur*); here, he uses 'arabesque' in place of 'grotesque,' two French terms which, along with 'moresque,' became interchangeable from the seventeenth century onwards.

³⁹⁶ Kayser identifies this term as "a synonym for grotesque which came into usage during the sixteenth-century" and persisted through eighteenth- and even nineteenth-century discussion of the ornamental style. (*The Grottesque*, pp. 21-22)

pagan figures and hybrid creatures.³⁹⁷ Their imagery was fashionable, but its fanciful monstrosities could not have seemed entirely new either to Francis I or his visitors. France, like Germany and England, had a rich history of fantastic illumination and decoration. Manuscript illustrations of the medieval period abounded with grotesqueries, though they – like the ornamental designs of the ancient world – had often been regarded with suspicion. Echoing Vitruvius, Bernard de Clairvaux (writing in the twelfth century) had complained of a “strange kind of shapely shapelessness” in the marginal ornamentation of monk-scribes:

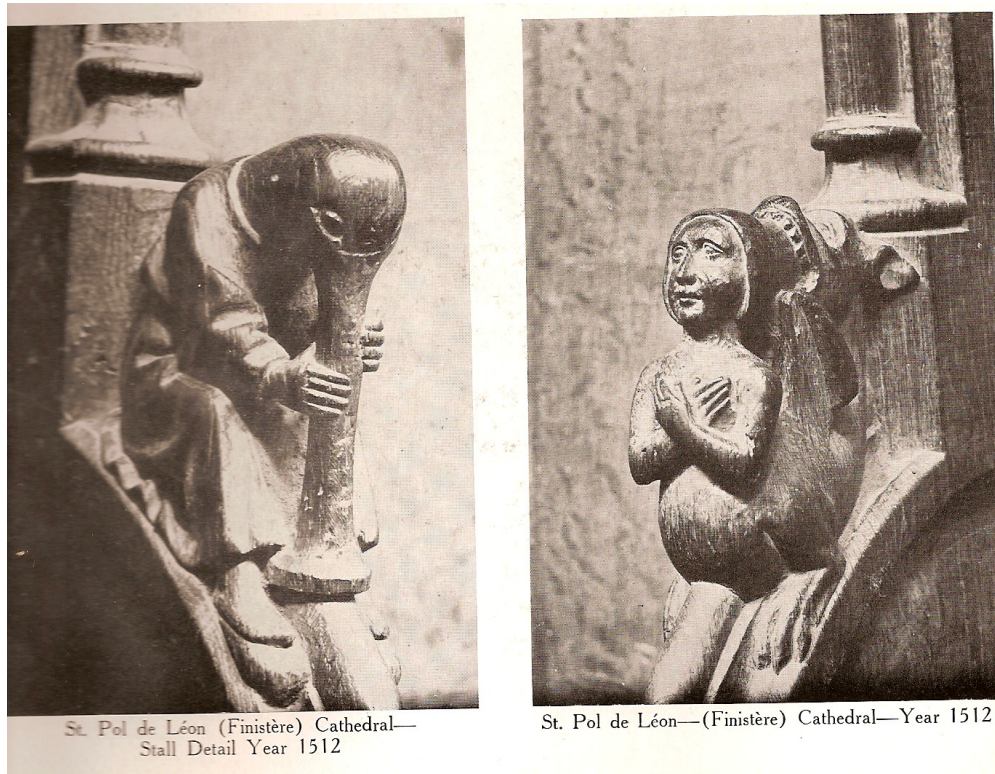
...what is the point of such ridiculous monstrosity, the strange kind of shapely shapelessness? Why these unsightly monkeys, why these fierce lions, why the monstrous centaurs, why semi-humans... You can see many bodies under one head, and then again, one body with many heads, here you see a quadruped with a serpent’s tail, here a fish with the head of a quadruped. Here is a beast which is a horse in front but drags half a goat behind...³⁹⁸

The illegitimate fusions – “semi-humans” – that Clairvaux described were equally apparent amongst the gargoyles affixed to the ledges and roof-tops of French Gothic cathedrals. Outlandish and often demonic, these figures disrupted the architectural lines of the church itself, creating protuberances that fused the monstrous with the divine. Figure 1 shows two gargoyles from the Cathedral at St. Pol de Léon: a human figure topped by a strangely small head whose snout morphs into a musical

³⁹⁷ Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 22-23. In addition to Barasch and Kayser, I rely in this section on Bruno Pons, “Arabesques ou nouvelles grotesques,” *L’Art décoratif en Europe: Classique et baroque*, edited by Alain Gruber (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 1992), pp. 159-209; Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth Century Paris* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1988); *Le Grotesque: théorie, généalogie, figures*, edited by Isabelle Ost, Pierre Piret, Laurent Van Eynde (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 2004); Virginia E. Swain, *Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau, and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

³⁹⁸ Quoted in Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 34.

instrument, and a praying woman whose body expands bulbously in the lower half, culminating in a clawed foot and animalian tail.³⁹⁹



St. Pol de Léon (Finistère) Cathedral—
Stall Detail Year 1512

St. Pol de Léon—(Finistère) Cathedral—Year 1512

Figure 1: Gargoyles from the Cathedral at St. Pol de Léon. Reproduced from Bridham, *Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in French Gothic Sculpture* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1930), p. 105.

Although they predated the grotesque vogue of the sixteenth century (and the term itself), we shall find that medieval monsters and gargoyles became part of the history of the grotesque in nineteenth-century writings by Hugo, Gautier, Baudelaire, and

³⁹⁹ For a broader selection of images, see Lester Burbank Bridham, *Gargoyles Chimères, and the Grotesque in French Gothic Sculpture* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1930). For more on monsters in medieval France, see Paul D. Ruggiers "The Grotesque in French Medieval Literature: A Study in Forms and Meanings," *Versions of Medieval Comedy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), pp. 101-34.

others, who linked Raphael's decorative style with an older tradition of chimerical depiction. Indeed, while it was originally received as an Italian style, the grotesque was quickly naturalized in France, and its meaning broadened. The *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* (1694) acknowledged that the roots of the grotesque lay in the visual arts – “figures imaginées par le caprice du Peintre” – but the term also denoted extravagant or bizarre modes of dress, manner, or conversation: “un habit grotesque, ce discours est bien grotesque, mine grotesque, cet homme est bien grotesque.”⁴⁰⁰ As early as the 1530s, references to the grotesque had seeped into literature, appearing in the first book of Rabelais' *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, as well as in works by Ronsard, Du Bartas, and Vauquelin.⁴⁰¹ Montaigne was the first to apply the term to a literary style. He defined the “crotresque” as “peintures fantasques,” [qui] n'ayants grace qu'en la varieté et estrangété.” His own writing fell into the same category; it was composed of “chimeras,” “fantastic monsters,” and “shapeless masses.” Of his essay on Friendship (“De l'Amitié”) he wrote: “Que sont-ce icy aussi à la verité que crotresques et corps monstrueux, rappez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite, ny proportion que fortuité? [“Of what is this [essay] composed but of grotesque and monstrous bodies pieced together of diverse members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence or proportion other than accidental.”]⁴⁰²

By the seventeenth century, the fantastic creatures and landscapes associated with grotesque design had begun to creep from the periphery to the center of painters' canvasses. No longer relegated to the status of ornament, the grotesque had become an independent genre of painting. In France, this shift was largely associated with

⁴⁰⁰ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1694; see also the entries for 1762 and 1787.

⁴⁰¹ The aesthetics of the grotesque in Rabelais' work have been thoroughly studied in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1968). Here, Bakhtin explores both the comic and terrible facets of the monstrous style, linking it with the liberating social space of carnival.

⁴⁰² *Essays de Missre Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne*, 2nd edition (Bordeaux, 1582), I: 28, pp. 150-51. Translated in Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 75.

Jacques Callot (1592-1635), whose connection to both Hoffmann and Berlioz we have already established. Callot was a caricaturist, painter, and printmaker whose *commedia dell'arte* sketches and teeming depictions of street festivals and masquerades earned him the title “master of the grotesque.”⁴⁰³ His *Temptation of St. Anthony* – the work that Hoffmann reproduced in his *Phantasiestücke* – had a darker flavor indebted in part to the works of Heironymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) and Pieter Bruegel (c.1564-1638), two Flemish painters who had also been dubbed ‘grotesque’ by French critics. In Callot’s painting, we see a crowd of demonic and semi-human creatures jumbled around the cave into which St. Anthony has retreated (Figure 2). In the foreground, a lobster has grown arms and legs and carries a lantern; to his right a hunched figure that might once have been human still wears its spectacles although it has gained a dog-like snout and a pair of dragonish wings (Figure 3). Here, elements of the recognizable and imaginary worlds are juxtaposed in a wild fusion of bodies and forms. The eye is unable to trace a clear path through Callot’s morass; rather, it leaps from one place to another, constructing a scrambled narrative in which unexpected metamorphosis replaces logical teleology.⁴⁰⁴

Callot’s grotesque idiom – in its terrifying as well as its humorous form – was taken up by poets including Mathurin Regnier, Paul Scarron and Saint-Amant, who were described in Paul Pellisson’s *Histoire de l’académie françoise* (1653) as authors working in “grotesque” and “burlesque” style.⁴⁰⁵ Carrying on the tradition of Rabelais, they encouraged political and social satire that drew on increasingly lewd and

⁴⁰³ In Monet’s *Dictionnaire* (Paris, 1620).

⁴⁰⁴ The *Temptation of St. Anthony* was a favorite vehicle for grotesque depiction; however, in the works of Callot and Bruegel at large, an increasing secularization of the grotesque is evident. No longer confined to hellish or apocalyptic scenes, the monstrous style began to infiltrate the landscapes of everyday life, suggesting an uncomfortable proximity between the real and the fantastic.

⁴⁰⁵ These authors also figured in a collection of essays by Gautier written in the mid-1830s for the journal *La France littéraire* and later collected under the title *Les Grotesques*. In the opening paragraphs of the first essay, on François Villon, Gautier claimed that his articles would introduce a series of little-known French poets: masters of “le grotesque, le fantasque, le trivial, l’ignoble.” Gautier, *Les Grotesques*, edited by Cecilia Rizza (Schenen-Nizet, 1985), p. 46.



Figure 2: Jacques Callot, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. Etching, 1635.
Reproduced from Daniel, *Devils, Monsters and Nightmares* (London, New York, Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), illus. 53.



Figure 3: Callot, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, detail

monstrous caricature. By the end of the century, the meaning of ‘grotesque’ had overlapped inextricably with ‘burlesque’ and ‘caricature,’ and had come to denote anything excessive, ridiculous, chimerical or monstrous in politics, philosophy, painting, poetry, or even fashion.

The complexities of grotesque aesthetics in France over the following decades are too complicated to be explored here in full. Suffice it to say that, through the eighteenth century, the grotesque became both more influential and increasingly controversial. Vitruvian criticism began to reassert itself as neoclassical ideals resurfaced. André Dacier, in his translation of and commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1692), rejected the grotesque as a faulty poetic idiom, as did Boileau, in his much-cited *L’Art poétique* (1674). Here, Boileau used “‘grotesque’ interchangeably with the terms ‘gothique’ and ‘burlesque’ to denote a barbarous style without order, harmony, or reason.”⁴⁰⁶

By the second half of the century, the *philosophes* were demanding that the influence of the grotesque be contained and regulated.⁴⁰⁷ Not only had it permeated the visual arts and poetry but it was encouraging a pernicious trend in fiction, according to an article by Marmontel in Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (1751-72). Here, Marmontel argued that grotesque painting and architecture had led to a similar species of literature, which he called the *genre fantastique* – an idiom marked by “l’assemblage des genres les plus éloignés et des formes les plus disparates, sans progressions, sans proportions, et sans nuances.” The monstrosities of Raphael and his followers (“le palme terminée en tête de cheval...le corps d’une femme prolongé en

⁴⁰⁶ Rousseau’s polemic against the operatic grotesque, in his dictionary article on Opéra, emerged out of this species of criticism.

⁴⁰⁷ The entry for “grotesque” in Diderot’s/d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* warned that “l’art des ornemens ou des *grotesques*” encouraged disorder and excess among painters, counseling “l’usage circonspect et modéré” of the style. See also C.-H. Watelet and P.-C. Lévêque’s *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture et gravure* (Paris: Prault, 1792), where arabesque/grotesque images are linked to a resurgence of interest in pagan cults, mythological monsters, and superstition.

console ou en pyramide...le cou d'une aigle replié en limaçon") had seduced "quelques poètes de nos jours" into thoughtless imitation, sparking literary innovations in which Marmontel saw little merit.

Diderot's writing, particularly the *Neveu de Rameau*, suggested that Marmontel's condemnation had had little effect. Diderot's narrative style reflected the disjointed forms of the grotesque and his characters the exaggerated gestures of *commedia* figures. In his works, the grotesque began to emerge unmistakably as a literary category, although it was not until the nineteenth century that French critics would embrace it as such. When they did, the impetus came largely from Germany, where the idea of a literary grotesque had emerged earlier and been received more favorably. Mid-century treatises by Justus Möser and Christoph Martin Wieland had celebrated the chimeric world of the *commedia*, arguing for an expanded definition of comedy that acknowledged the grotesque as a legitimate species of drama, and one that could have moral purpose.⁴⁰⁸ Later, Goethe, Andreas Riem, Johann Dominicus Fiorillo (and his students Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck) identified the grotesque/arabesque as an aesthetic category central to modern literary production and to the imaginative freedoms of emerging Romanticism.⁴⁰⁹ French critics of the 1810s may not have known Möser's work, but they were certainly aware of Wieland, Goethe, and the later German theorists, and much influenced by Friedrich Schlegel, whose *Gespräch über Poesie* [Dialogue on Poetry, 1800] called the grotesque "the oldest and most primitive form of the imagination," defining it as "that artfully regulated confusion, that charming symmetry of contradictions, that strange and

⁴⁰⁸ Justus Möser, *Harlekin oder die Verteidigung des Grotesk-Komischen* [Harlequin or Defense of the Grotesque-Comic, 1761]; Christoph Martin Wieland *Unterredungen mit dem Pfarrer von **** [Conversations with the Parson of ***, 1775]. For more on these treatises, see Burwick, "The Grotesque in the Romantic Movement," pp. 38-40 and Kayser, *The Grotesque*, pp. 30-37.

⁴⁰⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Von Arabesken* (1789); Johann Dominicus Fiorillo, *Über die Groteske* (1791); Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1796).

constant alternation between irony and enthusiasm present in even the smallest parts of the whole.” Its “peculiar and fantastic” mien rendered the grotesque a quintessential vehicle for modern expression: “grotesques and confessions like those of Jean Paul and Sterne,” Schlegel insisted, “are the only Romantic products of our unromantic age.”⁴¹⁰

Jean Paul Richter’s novellas became models of the literary grotesque; generically obtuse, they juxtaposed real events with dream sequences and hallucinations, jumbling sinister automatons, wax dolls, and satanic doubles into disjointed narrative forms. (Not surprisingly, it was Jean Paul who wrote the preface to the first edition of Hoffmann’s *Phantasiestücke*.) In his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* [School for Aesthetics, 1804], a work which became known in France in the 1810s, Jean Paul elucidated the philosophical underpinnings of such a style, describing the grotesque as a darkly comedic mode – a species of “annihilating humor” in which the heterogeneous conflation of incompatible elements depicted a world “turned upside down.” The Devil, according to Jean Paul, was the “greatest humorist.” And yet, the sinister and incoherent were not entirely destructive, since they enhanced and illuminated the good; Satan himself, for all his repulsiveness, was only “the world’s shadow which helps to make the body of light more prominent.”⁴¹¹ For Jean Paul, the ugly and distorted were wedded to the virtuous and beautiful in an inextricable pairing, each defining and delimiting the other. His theorization of the grotesque as an aesthetic which illuminated truth by reaching toward the “idea of the infinite” was underscored in contemporary theoretical writing by Coleridge and De Quincey, and reiterated several decades later in Victor Hugo’s 1827 Preface to *Cromwell*, a

⁴¹⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, “Brief über den Roman,” translated in Jay Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 288-290.

⁴¹¹ Jean Paul cited both Möser’s *Harlequin* essay and Flögel’s *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*; he takes his examples of the grotesque not only from his own writing but from the works of Bruegel and Rabelais.

document central to the emergence of French Romanticism, and one which shaped the philosophical discourse of Berlioz's Paris.⁴¹²

II: Victor Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell*

*It is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types
that modern genius is born.*

[Hugo, Preface to *Cromwell*]

By no means simply a preface, the essay preceding Hugo's *Cromwell* was an independent literary work that set out the tenets of an evolving French Romantic aesthetic and became a rallying point for the young artists of Berlioz's generation.⁴¹³ Denouncing the classical stronghold of the Academy, Hugo upset established notions of beauty, form, and expressive purpose, drawing on the writings of Madame de Stael, Jean Paul, and Friedrich Schlegel to assert the ascendancy of "a new form of art...whose type is the *grotesque*."⁴¹⁴ Art, wrote Hugo, should not limit itself to the imitation of beautiful nature but should faithfully represent all nature, striving for a truthfulness and totality that acknowledged deformity alongside perfection giving equal place to both:

⁴¹² In France, among the best known of Jean Paul's works was his "Speech of the Dead Christ," which was translated as "Un songe" in Madame de Stael's *De l'Allemagne* (1813).

⁴¹³ Among the famous literary prefaces of Hugo's time, only Gautier's *Préface de Mademoiselle de Maupin* occupied a similar status, overshadowing and outstripping the work to which it was attached. Hugo's aesthetic manifesto drew not only on the philosophical tracts of his German and French predecessors but also on his own earlier writings, including the prefaces to the *Odes* (June and December 1822), and to the *Odes et ballades* (October 1826). See Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist*, pp. 240-41.

⁴¹⁴ Excerpts are taken from *Victor Hugo, Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Martel, vol. 4 (Givors: A. Martel, 1948-55). My translations are adapted from those of Eliot in *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: F.P. Collier & Son, 1909). Page numbers refer to the Martel edition.

...la muse moderne verra les choses d'un coup d'oeil plus haut et plus large. Elle sentira que tout dans la création n'est pas humainement *beau*, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière.⁴¹⁵

It was the rehabilitation of ugly forms that “separate[d] Romantic literature from classical literature,” according to Hugo. The grotesque in both its “horrible” and “bouffon” forms stood at the centre of modern sensibility, shaping life, art, and thought itself:

Dans la pensée des modernes...le grotesque a un rôle immense. Il y est partout; d'une part, il crée le difforme et l'horrible; de l'autre, le comique et le bouffon. C'est lui qui sème...ces myriades d'êtres intermédiaires que nous retrouvons tout vivants dans les traditions populaires du moyen-âge; c'est lui qui fait tourner dans l'ombre la ronde effrayante du sabbat, lui encore qui donne à Satan les cornes, les pieds de bouc, les ailes de chauvre-souris.⁴¹⁶

Nightmarish landscapes, imaginary monsters, and satanic revels all fell within the province of the grotesque, which Hugo traced back to the Middle Ages, linking the “abnormal and horrible” with its painterly and architectural roots. He described the gargoyles of Gothic cathedrals and the chaotic idiom of Callot (“the burlesque Michaelangelo”), examining the evolution of the grotesque from a visual idiom to an aesthetic permeating literature, religion, “customs,” and “national manners”:

Il attache son stigmatte au front des cathédrales...déroule ses monstres, ses dogues, ses démons autour des chapiteaux, le long des frises, au bord des toits. Il s'étale sous

⁴¹⁵ “The modern muse will see things in a higher and broader light. It will realize that not everything in creation is humanly beautiful, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light.” (p. 11)

⁴¹⁶ “In the idea of men of modern times...the grotesque plays an enormous part. It is found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the abnormal and the horrible, on the other the comic and the burlesque. ...It is the grotesque which scatters lavishly...those myriad intermediary creatures which we find alive in the popular traditions of the Middle Ages; it is the grotesque which impels the ghastly antics of the witches' revels, which gives Satan his horns, his cloven feet and his bat's wings.” (p. 14)

d'innombrables formes sur la façade de bois des maisons, sur la façade de pierre des châteaux, sur la façade de marbre des palais. Des arts il passe dans les moeurs...⁴¹⁷

Though the ancients knew ugly and misshapen forms, they marginalized such monstrosities, relegating them to edges and peripheries. In the modern psyche, however, the grotesque occupied a central position, standing alongside the beautiful and even usurping it. Hugo figured the past ages of man as a mere gestation period for the Romanticism of the so-called “third civilization” – the “age of the grotesque”:

Il serait surabondant de faire ressortir davantage cette influence du grotesque dans la troisième civilisation. Tout démontre, à l'époque dite *romantique*, son alliance intime et créatrice avec le beau. Il n'y a pas jusqu'aux plus naïves légendes populaires qui n'expliquent quelquefois avec un admirable instinct ce mystère de l'art moderne. L'antiquité n'aurait pas fait la *Belle et le Bête*.⁴¹⁸

Indeed, conflation of *la belle* and *la bête* were to revolutionize not only art, but intellectual life at large, uniting the beast with the intellect, the physical with the divine, and evolving a new aesthetic medium in which truth – uncensored human experience – might be freely represented:

...la poésie fera un grand pas, un pas décisif, un pas qui, pareil à la secousse d'un tremblement de terre, changera toute la face du monde intellectuel. Elle se mettra à

⁴¹⁷ “It affixes its mark on the facades of cathedrals...exhibits its monsters, its bull-dogs, its imps about capitals, along friezes, on the edges of roofs. It flaunts itself in numberless shapes on the wooden facades of houses, on the stone facades of the chateaux, on the marble facades of palaces. From the arts it makes its way into the national manners...” (p. 17)

⁴¹⁸ “It is unnecessary to dwell further upon the influence of the grotesque in the third civilization. Everything tends to show its close creative alliance with the beautiful in the so-called “Romantic” period. Even among the simplest popular legends there are none which do not somewhere, with an admirable instinct, solve this mystery of modern art. Antiquity could not have produced *La Belle et la Bête*.” (p. 18) Hugo divides history into “three great ages”: the primitive (age of the ode), the ancient (the age of the epic), and the modern (the age of the drama). This ternary parsing of the literary and aesthetic past echoes Chateaubriand’s historical narrative in *Le Génie du christianisme* and is taken up by Nodier in his essay “Du fantastique en littérature.”

faire comme la nature, à mêler dans ses créations, sans pourtant les confondre, l'ombre à la lumière, le grotesque au sublime.⁴¹⁹

For Hugo, the grotesque was the opposite of the sublime, and art a Janus-faced creature whose perfection engendered its own defect. His sublime cannot be understood in the Burkian sense, as a countercategory of the beautiful, for he equates sublimity with loveliness, grace, and charm – Hugo's sublime *is* beautiful, and cannot alone sustain a work: "Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful." Articulating the two categories more clearly, he writes:

Le premier type, dégagé de tout alliage impure, aura en apanage tous les charmes, toutes les grâces, toutes les beautés... La second prendra tous les ridicules, toutes les infirmités, toutes les laideurs. Dans ce partage de l'humanité et de la création, c'est à lui qui sera luxurieux, rampant, gourmand, avare, perfide, brouillon, hypocrite...⁴²⁰

The grotesque was a necessary agent of the beautiful, its roughness and distortion functioning as a foil for the smooth and pleasant – "a starting point whence one rises toward the beautiful with a fresher and keener perception." Beauty became, for Hugo, contingent on ugliness for its very definition, the two wrapped inextricably together at the centre of artistic production. From monstrosity was born symmetry and from confusion clarity, just as the Earth itself emerged from a void. Blemishes were the inseparable consequence of beauty and a mark of "originality" – "efface one and you efface the other." The genius, insisted Hugo, recognized art itself as a marriage of contraries:

⁴¹⁹ "...poetry will take a great step, a decisive step, a step which, like the upheaval of an earthquake, will change the whole face of the intellectual world. It will set about doing as nature does, mingling in its creations – but without confounding them – darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime." (p. 12)

⁴²⁰ "The first type [the sublime] delivered of all impure alloy, has as its attributes all the charms, all the graces, all the beauties... The second type [the grotesque] assumes all the absurdities, all the infirmities, all the blemishes...it is sensuous, fawning, greedy, miserable, false, incoherent, hypocritical..." (p. 16)

Il est temps que tous les bons esprits saisissent le fil qui lie fréquemment ce que, selon notre caprice particulier, nous appelons *défaul* à ce qui nous appelons beauté. Les défauts, du moins ce qui nous nommons ainsi, sont souvent la condition native, nécessaire, fatale, des qualités.⁴²¹

Excluding nothing, the grotesque artwork embraced warring aesthetics and contradictory forms, adopting “free and open” structures un beholden to existing generic norms. The ugly, strange, and eccentric, Hugo pointed out, could hardly be bounded in conventional molds; rather, the grotesque artwork – rooted in an aesthetic of unpredictability – resisted formal constraint, tending toward disruption, overflow, and invasion:

Le beau n’a qu’un type; le laid en a mille. C’est que le beau, à parler humainement, n’est que la forme considérée dans son rapport le plus simple, dans sa symétrie la plus absolue, dans son harmonie la plus intime avec notre organisation. Aussi nous offre-t-il toujours en ensemble complet, mais restreint comme nous.⁴²²

Here, Hugo figured beauty as generic, tied to the regulations of convention and therefore subject to the imposition of externally conceived “symmetries.” In order to express the “intimate” and the “characteristic,” however, form needed to be self-generating, allowing for spontaneous additions and subtractions, digressions, and free combinations. Hugo called the defenders of strict form “dogmatic mutilators” and

⁴²¹ “It is time that all acute minds should grasp the thread that frequently connects what we, following our special whim call ‘defects’ with what we call ‘beauty.’ Defects – in all events those which we call by that name – are often the inborn, necessary, inevitable conditions of good qualities.” (pp. 51-52). Hugo’s notion that ugliness operates as an enhancer of beauty (and indeed, that the noble may rely for its very existence on the ignoble) is prefigured in many earlier tracts on the grotesque. It bears clear similarities to Jean Paul’s ideas but also resonates backward through English and Italian sources. As early as the Renaissance, Michaelangelo claimed that the artist “might rightly decorate better when he places in painting some monstrosity (for the diversion and relaxation of the senses) rather than the customary figures...however admirable these may be.” The monstrous, suggested Michaelangelo, was necessary and appropriate, since it both accentuated the beautiful and provided welcome relief from it.

⁴²² “The beautiful has but one type, the ugly has a thousand. The fact is that the beautiful...is merely form considered in its simplest aspect, in its most perfect symmetry, in its most entire harmony with our make-up. Thus the ensemble that it offers us is always complete, but restricted, like ourselves.” (p. 16) Hugo acknowledges but rejects the Kantian notion of beauty as a function of form, suggesting that imposed forms became empty and restrictive shells.

their arguments “wretched quibbles with which mediocrity, envy, and routine have pestered genius for two centuries past.” He rejected models as fundamentally antithetical to the modern sensibility, and to the essence of the grotesque aesthetic, proclaiming all artworks self-governing and hailing the truly eccentric form as the most inspired:

Mettons le marteau dans les théories, les poétiques et les systèmes. Jetons bas ce vieux plâtre qui masque la façade de l’art! Il n’y a ni règles, ni modèles; ou plutôt il n’y a d’autres règles que les lois générales de la nature qui planent sur l’art tout entier, et les lois spéciales qui, pour chaque composition, résultent des conditions d’existence propres à chaque sujet.⁴²³

Denouncing artificial regulation, Hugo called for a free play of conventional structures – a species of generic interfacing deriving from the conflation, fragmentation, and caricature of existing forms. This was not a freedom, he insists, that derived from wanton license, but from the exuberance of nature – from “the grand, harmonious order of a primeval forest of the New World.”⁴²⁴ He empowered the Romantic artist to “follow at all risks whatever he takes for his inspiration, and to change molds as often as he changes details,” adding that “one must not condemn oneself to having but one form in one’s mind.” On the contrary, explosion of structural integrity via heterogeneous combination and generic blurring become a hallmark of the grotesque aesthetic. Applying the new aesthetic to dramatic verse, Hugo described the liberating asymmetries and extravagances of the monstrous style:

...un vers libre, franc, loyal, osant tout dire sans prudence, tout exprimer sans recherche; passant d’une naturelle allure de la comédie à la tragédie; du sublime au

⁴²³ “Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither rules nor models; or rather, there are no other rules...than the special rules which result from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition.” (p. 31)

⁴²⁴ Though links between primitivism and the grotesque resurface in the Preface to *Cromwell*, I borrow this quote from Hugo’s earlier Preface to the *Odes et ballades* (1826).

grotesque...profond et soudain, large et vrai, sachant briser à propos et déplacer la césure pour déguiser sa monotonie d'alexandrin; plus ami de l'enjambement qui l'allonge...inépuisable dans la variété de ses tours, insaisissable dans ses secrets d'élégance et de facture...prenant mille formespouvant parvourir toute la gamme poétique, aller de haut en bas, des idées les plus élevées aux plus vulgaires, des plus bouffonnes aux plus graves, des plus extérieures aux plus abstraites...⁴²⁵

Despite his contempt for models, Hugo – like Möser, Lenz, and Jean Paul before him – cited Shakespeare as a guiding influence in the emergence of the Romantic grotesque: “Shakespeare, c’est le...drame, qui fond sous un même souffle le grotesque et le sublime, le terrible et le bouffon, la tragédie et la comédie.”⁴²⁶ It was *Macbeth* and, above all, *King Lear*, that constituted Shakespeare’s “revolutionary contribution” – Hugo saw in these plays precisely the mixture of style and affect characterizing the monstrous style. In the scene between Lear and his jester, “the shrill voice of the grotesque mingles with the most sublime, the most dismal with the dreamiest music of the soul.” Shakespeare’s exaggeration, obscenity, “annihilating nonsense,” and pervasive conflation of the real with the fantastic rendered him truly modern. Hugo identified such mixtures and distortions as integral and necessary, arguing that they interrupted and stretched Shakespeare’s forms and invigorated all that was beautiful in his works. Shakespeare was not to be copied – he did not codify a set of rules – yet his works heralded the dawning of the “age of the grotesque” and provided a beacon for Hugo’s devotees.

⁴²⁵ “...a free, outspoken, sincere verse, which dares to say everything without prudery... which passes naturally from comedy to tragedy, from the sublime to the grotesque...profound and impulsive, of wide range and true; verse which is apt opportunely to displace the caesura in order to disguise the monotony of Alexandrines; more inclined to the enjambment that lengthens the line...verse that is inexhaustible in the variety of its turns of thoughts, unfathomable in its secrets of composition...assuming a thousand forms... capable of running through the whole gamut of poetry, of skipping from high to low, from the most exalted to the most trivial ideas, from the most extravagant to the most solemn, from the most superficial to the most abstract...” (p. 39)

⁴²⁶ “Shakespeare is the drama which, with the same breath moulds the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy.” (p. 18). Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* also figure in Hugo’s preface as exemplars of a grotesque aesthetic.

The young artists of Berlioz's circle (Gautier, Nerval, Boulanger, Delacroix, and others) responded keenly to Shakespeare's work and to the broader Romantic ideologies with which he had become associated. Bolstered by Hugo's fiery rhetoric, they began to question the regulation of the Academy and absorb the tenets of the grotesque into their own works – and none more resolutely than Berlioz.

III: Hugo–Boulanger–Berlioz: A Grotesque Continuum

On the title page of Berlioz's manuscript of the *Symphonie fantastique*, two epigrams appear: the first is a quotation from *King Lear*, and the second a passage from the first poem of Hugo's *Feuilles d'automne*. These fragments alone signal Berlioz's aesthetic allegiance, tying him to Hugo's revolutionary Romantic project and to Shakespeare, the grotesque idol of the new school. Famously fired by what he called the “madness, melancholy, and wild ecstasy” of Shakespeare, Berlioz was equally attracted to Hugo. We can assume that he knew the Preface to *Cromwell* – a work which circulated widely among the young literati and permeated all corners of Romantic Paris – but the plethora of Hugo quotes and references running through Berlioz's letters and *Mémoires* are testimony to a deeper connection between the two men.

Arnaud Laster's 1976 article details a lifetime of artistic exchange between Berlioz and Hugo, beginning with Berlioz's appreciation of the *Orientales*, his attraction to *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* and his early settings of “La captive,” “Sara la baigneuse” and the lost “Chanson des pirates.”⁴²⁷ Later, Berlioz acted as rehearsal coach for Louise Bertin's *Esmerelda* (Hugo's own operatic adaptation of

⁴²⁷ Arnaud Laster, “Berlioz et Victor Hugo,” *Romantisme: revue de la Société des études romantiques* 12 (1972), 27-33. The factual details of this paragraph are drawn from Laster's article.

Notre Dame de Paris), and wrote glowingly of the poetry in *Les Rayons et les Ombres*.⁴²⁸ Hugo, for his part, attended Berlioz's concerts in the early 1830s, supported him during the difficult time surrounding *Benvenuto Cellini*, and even safeguarded his position as librarian of the Conservatoire in 1848. The relationship between the two men was one of respect and, especially on Berlioz's part, reverence. As early as 1832, D'Ortigue could write, "Beethoven en Allemagne, Shakespeare en Angleterre, en France Victor Hugo, tels sont les trois hommes-types avec qui le génie de Berlioz sympathise le plus, et vers lesquels il se sent attiré avec le plus de prédilection."⁴²⁹

Berlioz certainly saw *Hernani* – and was impressed by its rejection of the old Aristotelian unities⁴³⁰ – but he seems to have been most inspired by Hugo's prose works. A letter of April 20, 1830, written to Hugo from Rome (where Berlioz was revising the *Fantastique* and writing *Lélio*) records an impassioned response to *Notre-Dame de Paris*, a novel whose language and aesthetic resonated with Berlioz's own sensibility:

Oh! vous êtes un génie, un être puissant, un colosse à la fois tendre, impitoyable, élégant, monstrueux, rauque, mélodieux, volcanique, caressant et *méprisant*. (...) Songez donc, si je vous écrit, si je divague, si j'absurde, si je vous fais détourner la tête un instant par mes cris importuns d'admiration, songez que je suis à Rome, exilé, pour deux ans, du monde musical (...) j'ai fini par obtenir *Notre-Dame de Paris*, que je viens de la lire au milieu des pleurs et des grincements de dents, et vous concevrez que je vous écrive (...) Est-ce ma faute ou la vôtre? qui m'a gonflé le coeur? qui a fait de ma tête un brûlant alambic, d'où suintent presque continuellement depuis deux jours des larmes corrosives? qui a augmenté mon mépris et ma haine pour tout notre monde

⁴²⁸ For a detailed account of Berlioz's involvement in the *Esmerelda* project, see Holoman, *Berlioz*, pp. 178-79.

⁴²⁹ "Beethoven in Germany, Shakespeare in England, and in France, Victor Hugo: these are the three types of men with whom Berlioz's genius most sympathises, and with which he feels the greatest affinity." Joseph D'Ortigue, *Hector Berlioz*, *Revue de Paris* XLV (1832), p. 20.

⁴³⁰ See Berlioz's letter of April 20, 1830 (*CG* I: 159) to his sisters Nanci and Adèle. "...Hugo a détruit l'unité de temps et l'unité de lieu; à ce titre seul, je m'intéresserais à lui comme au brave qui, à travers les balles, va mettre le feu à la mine qui doit faire sauter un vieux rempart."

de sottise et de stupidité? qui m'a fait blasphémer des nuits entières? qui? si ce n'est vous.⁴³¹

Berlioz praised both the annihilating imagery of Hugo's tale and its unfettered fusions of style and affect; indeed, it is Hugo's jumbling of the tender with the raucous, the melodious with the volcanic – his *grotesque* idiom – that provoked “cries of admiration.” The composer's own response threatens to ramble, exaggerate, and dissolve into incoherence, mirroring back the very idiom it embraces – the idiom promoted in Hugo's Preface.

We can contrast Berlioz's response to Hugo with his commentary on Lamartine, whose failure to acknowledge both beautiful and ugly forms rendered his work fundamentally flawed. Moore's writing, according to Berlioz, was similarly problematic, but Byron, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller were more truthful in their works. And, perhaps most importantly, Berlioz identified Beethoven and Weber as artists who had embraced a Hugolian aesthetic, suggesting that music, too, could aspire to the grotesque:

Oh! c'est un grand poète! Quel dommage qu'il soit si incomplet! Il ne sort pas des cieux; et pourtant un poète devrait être un miroir où tous les objets, gracieux et horrible, brillants et sombres, calmes et agités se réfléchissent. Moore est un peu comme Lamartine, mais Byron, mais Hugo (en prose) mais SHAKESPEARE, GOETHE, Schiller...et parmi les miens, BEETHOVEN, Weber!...quels noms!⁴³²

⁴³¹ “Oh! You are a genius, a man of power, a colossus who is both tender, pitiless, elegant, monstrous, raucous, melodious, volcanic, affectionate, and scornful (...) Know then, if I am writing to you, if I ramble, if I exaggerate, I force you to turn your head for a moment with importunate cries of admiration, know that I am in Rome, exiled for two years (...) I finally managed to get hold of Notre-Dame de Paris, and I have just read it amid weeping and gnashing of teeth, and you will understand why I am writing to you (...) Is it my fault or yours? Who has inflamed my heart? Who has turned my head into a still from which, these two days past, corrosive tears have run unceasingly? Who has magnified my disdain and hatred for the whole of our stupid, idiotic world? Who has made me blaspheme for nights on end? Who, if not you?” *CG* I: 254; Translated by Roger Nichols in *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, ed. Hugh MacDonald (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 95. Berger also draws our attention to this letter (*Phantastik als Konstruktion*, p. 7).

⁴³² “Oh! he is a great poet! [Lamartine] What a pity that he is so incomplete! He never descends from the heavens and, as we know, a poet must be a mirror who reflects all object, gracious and horrible, brilliant and somber, calm and agitated. Moore is a little like Lamartine, but Byron, but Hugo (in prose)

Well before *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Berlioz was familiar with Hugo's prose works and Jean Paul's writings. A letter to his sister Nanci written in the winter of 1829 gave a rapturous account of the *Dernière jour d'un condamné* and recommended Jean Paul: "Jean Paul, voilà un penseur! il n'est pas froidement pédant comme tant d'autres que je connais et que je détest."⁴³³ Berlioz was well versed in literary innovations of the period and equally struck by visual representations of the monstrous which began to infiltrate Paris in the 1820s: the menacing figures of Goya's *Caprichos*, the winged demons (half human, half animal) of Delacroix's *Faust*, and the piling up of bodies dead and alive on Géricault's *Raft of Medusa*. Articles on Callot and Rabelais abounded in Parisian literary journals of the period, praising the eccentric humor of the old grotesque painters.⁴³⁴ Dwarves, gnomes, and hunchbacks (including Hugo's famous Quasimodo) became popular figures in political cartoons and published stories, and Dantan's popular *Musée grotesque* showcased bizarre caricatures of well-known literary and musical figures.⁴³⁵ Indeed, by 1834, an essay in the the *Nouveau Tableau de Paris du XIXe Siècle* could rightly claim that "revolutionary" artists had released a barrage of monsters into contemporary life:

but SHAKESPEARE, GOETHE, Schiller...and of course, my own BEETHOVEN, Weber!...what names!" CG I: 485.

⁴³³ "Jean Paul, there's a thinker! He's not coldly pedantic like so many others I know and detest." CG I: 120 (29 March, 1829)

⁴³⁴ See, for instance, the article on Callot in *Le Voleur* (Nov 15 1830), as well as the long pieces on Rabelais in both *Le Figaro* (16 April, 1830) and the *Revue Française* (several in 1829).

⁴³⁵ Elizabeth K. Menon documents the emergence of a popular hunchback called M. Mayeux in Parisian political cartoons, novels, plays, and advertisements of the 1820s. Figured as both an endearing character and a monster, *le petit bossu* reflected Romanticism's broader engagement with the aesthetics of the grotesque and may have influenced both Hugo's and Eugène Sue's well-known hunchback characters. See "The Science of Deformity: Mayeux *le bossu* and the Romantic Grotesque," *European Romantic Review* 7/1 (Summer 1996), 26-39. Dantan's *musée grotesque* was a well-known Parisian attraction that showcased caricatures of Berlioz, Liszt, Rossini, Monpou, and many other musical figures. In an article entitled "Musée Grotesque et Sérieux de Dantan considéré sous son rapport musical" published in the *Gazette musicale* (16 August, 1835), Edouard Monnais praises the inspired ugliness and monstrous transformations of Dantan's sculptures, speculating that musicians may one day respond, with a composition "au genre grotesque" lampooning Dantan himself.

Ils inventèrent une espèce humaine, hideuse, effroyable, maudite, telle enfin, qui si Dieu avait par vengeance animé tous les monstres qui composaient cette odieuse famille, nous aurions vu dans la société s'agiter, se presser, se pavaner quelque chose de cent fois plus horrible que la population dégradée des hospices. On ne saurait dire le nombre de bras et de jambes que le dessin de l'école révolutionnaire a cassés, le nombre de cagneux et de bossus qu'il a faits, le nombre de têtes démoniaques qu'il a créées. Il a eu la prétention de copier la nature, qu'il a indignement calomniée; aussi a-t-il promptement révolté tout ce qui a le sentiment juste de la mission de l'art.⁴³⁶

Certainly among the works to which this critic objected were Hugo's poem "La Ronde du Sabbat," published in the *Odes and Ballades*, and Louis Boulanger's lithograph of the same name (Figure 4) – works often cited as precursors of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. In Hugo's poem and Boulanger's illustration we discover not only models for Berlioz's Witches' Sabbath but unmistakable exemplars of the visual grotesque.⁴³⁷ Boulanger makes manifest "les larves, les dragons, les vampires, les gnômes" of Hugo's verse, fusing them together into a teeming jumble reminiscent of Callot. Snakes twine around human and demonic forms and bodies mingle one into the other in a cacophonous whirlwind that explodes beyond the boundaries of the frame:

⁴³⁶ "They have invented hideous, shocking, execrable deformations of the human form; indeed, if God were to animate, for the sake of vengeance, all the monsters of this odious family, we would witness thronging and strutting through society creatures a hundred times more horrible than those to be found amongst the miserable population of the hospitals. One can only imagine the number of arms and legs that the images of the revolutionary school have amputated, the number of whores and hunchbacks they have made, the number of demonic portraits they have created. They have had the audacity to copy nature, which they have sorely slandered; and in doing so, they have irrevocably repulsed all who retain true sentiments regarding the mission of art." A. Jal, "l'Ecole de peinture 1800-1834." *Nouveau Tableau de Paris du XIXe Siècle* (1834), p. 229.

⁴³⁷ In her study *Spanish Painting and the French Romantics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), Ilse Hempel Lipschutz documents the influence of the grotesque visual style on both Hugo and Boulanger, pointing out their connections to Callot and Goya, and their admiration for the older Flemish masters of the monstrous style.



Figure 4: Louis Boulanger, illustration for Victor Hugo’s *La Ronde du Sabbat* (1828). Reproduced from Lipschutz, *Spanish Painting and the French Romantics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 178.

The parallels not only to Berlioz’s own *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat* but to the wider aesthetic of noise and metamorphosis that marks his symphony are obvious. As we saw in Chapter One, Berlioz often applied the terms “hideous,” “terrifying,” and “barbaric” to music he admired – he was only half-joking when he told Ferrand that he wanted to write “un concert de cris d’horreur accompagné d’un orchestre de pistolets

et de carabines, du sang et du lacryma-christi, un lit de lave bercé par des tremblements de terre.”⁴³⁸

Both Hugo’s and Boulanger’s work was warmly received in the press: Hugo was praised for his “laideur fantastique” [fantastic ugliness] and Boulanger for the violence, rage, and “burlesque terrible” of his “figures bizarres et postures grotesques.”⁴³⁹ But Berlioz’s innovations, as we have seen, evoked a more perplexed and often hostile reception. The category of the grotesque, which had long since become legitimate in the visual and literary realms, had yet to achieve status in the musical world. What was found vigorous and captivating in Boulanger’s and Hugo’s work seemed incomprehensible in Berlioz’s compositions. Even amongst Berlioz’s supporters, few could articulate the nature and origins of his innovations –structural or harmonic – in other than the vaguest terms. An important exception was Schumann, whose monumental 1835 review of the *Symphonie fantastique* pointed toward a new and fundamentally interdisciplinary analytical approach – one which read music in terms usually reserved for art and literature.

Only by considering the connections among music, poetry, and “the other arts,” argued Schumann, could the analyst penetrate Berlioz’s aesthetic: “It takes someone who is not only a musician with philosophical grounding but also a connoisseur well versed in the history of the other arts, someone who has reflected upon the significance of and connection between individual products and also upon the underlying meaning of their broad succession.”⁴⁴⁰ Repeatedly, Schumann

⁴³⁸ “a concert of horrified screams accompanied by an orchestra of pistols and rifles, of blood and *Lacryma Christi*, a bed of lava rocked by the tremblings of the Earth.” *CG* I: 216; written from Rome, in a letter that waxes rhapsodic over the brigands, earthquakes, and volcanoes of a Romanticized Italy.

⁴³⁹ The review of Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* in *L’Artiste* (Sér. 1, vol 7) is characteristic; it praises not only the grotesque imagination that produced Quasimodo, but his pairing with the beautiful Esmerelda in a “truly Romantic” juxtaposition of the ugly and beautiful. Above, I quote from a review of Boulanger’s *Ronde du sabbat* in *Le Figaro* (4 June 1828); see also, Gautier’s similar comments on the work in *L’Histoire du romantisme*.

⁴⁴⁰ Schumann/Bent, p. 170.

compared the *Fantastique* to the style and structure of Jean Paul's works and, in defense of the caricatured fifth movement, wrote:

Anyone who chooses to run counter to the general drift of an age that can tolerate a *Dies irae* as a burlesque is going to have to re-enact what was said and written many long years ago against Byron, Victor Hugo, Grabbe and their ilk. At certain moments in eternity, poetry has donned the mask of irony so as to conceal its pain-racked face from the public gaze.⁴⁴¹

Criticism of the burlesque and grotesque in Berlioz's symphony seemed redundant to Schumann, given the widespread acceptance of such "new freedoms" among the leading proponents of the other arts. However, he recognized Berlioz's *musical* application of these aesthetics as new; it was Berlioz's aesthetic transference – his invention of a hitherto "unknown" musical category – that occupied Schumann's attention, generating the impassioned (though at times disapproving) rhetoric of his review. As we shall see, Schumann documented in Berlioz's symphony the same generic stretchings, asymmetries, and incongruities celebrated by Jean Paul and theorized in Hugo's *Preface*. His review drew music into an aesthetic category already occupied by the other arts, describing not only the poetry and imagery but the revolutionary *sound* of the grotesque.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, p. 194.

**Schumann's Review:
The Framework for a Grotesque Reading of the *Symphonie fantastique*⁴⁴²**

“A wondrous feeling came over me as I cast my first glance at the Symphony,” wrote Schumann. The experience of the *Fantastique* called to his mind an episode of childhood sleepwalking – a “dream with curious sounds” in which he found himself improvising unaware at the piano.⁴⁴³ Berlioz’s music was similarly elusive and hallucinatory – it derived, not from the ennobling conjunction of “talent, religion and art” that produced Haydn’s *oeuvre*, nor from any “external pattern of behavior” but from an internal and intensely subjective impulse – it was “unlike anything that has gone before it.”⁴⁴⁴ Berlioz eschewed what Schumann calls the “refining power of the human hand” – the rational ordering of ideas and passions. His was not the coherent music of the waking mind but the surreal language of dream, an idiom marked by distortion, fragmentation, and the violent fusion of opposites. Resistant to conventional reading, his music provoked perplexity and even shock; it mingled the recognizable with the unrecognizable, form with formlessness in an “astonishing” though also “admirable” jumble.

Schumann’s own response was similarly jumbled. Comprising two parts, the first signed by Florestan and the second by Schumann, his review is a conflation of disparate voices and critical approaches – a grotesque creation in its own right. From the impassioned rhetoric of its opening section, it gives way to detached analytical commentary accompanied by explanatory diagrams, only to wax poetic again, with

⁴⁴² The tradition of reading the *Fantastique* through Schumann’s review – as an amplification, corroboration, or rebuttal – has a venerable history that encompasses essays by Leon Plantinga, Edward T. Cone and, more recently, Fred Everett Maus and Ian Bent. Barzun also takes Schumann as a starting point, suggesting that clear-headed consideration of the *Fantastique* should begin with “a musical analysis such as Schumann wrote.” (*Berlioz and the Romantic Generation*, I: p. 159) It is this tradition that I carry forward here, allowing cues from Schumann to guide my own theorization of a musical grotesque.

⁴⁴³ Schumann/Bent, pp. 166-67.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

rhapsodic references to Scottish castles and “fantastic silhouettes.” Schumann careens from the evocative to the analytical, the psychological to the scientific, interrogating Berlioz’s formal eccentricities while reproducing them in his own response. Here, the grotesque spawns a creature of its own kind – Schumann’s attempt to explicate monstrosity ends in imitation. Indeed, he compares his analytical project to a grotesque process of dismemberment: investigating Berlioz’s compositional process is like “dissecting the head of some handsome murderer.”⁴⁴⁵

Fred Everett Maus draws our attention both to the importance of Part One of Schumann’s essay (which has often been ignored) and to the critical gap between the review’s two sections, encouraging us to consider the ramifications of such a heterogeneous approach.⁴⁴⁶ But the “explicit contrast” that Maus observes between Florestan’s and Schumann’s responses is not maintained cleanly throughout the essay; instead Schumann’s and Florestan’s voices mingle in both sections of the review in a constant vacillation between emotional and analytical response, between consideration of the music itself and attention to its broader aesthetic and poetic associations. Ian Bent describes this species of analytical heterogeneity aptly in his discussion of Schumann’s “hermeneutic” approach to the *Fantastique*: “Again and again, Schumann does what is typical of true hermeneutic analysis...namely, he steps outside the arena of discussion and broadens the frame of reference before returning to the detail of the argument, bringing back fresh insight as he does so. It is not *digression* or *excursion* with which we are dealing, but a *temporary expansion of the horizon of reference* [Bent’s emphasis].”⁴⁴⁷ Schumann jumbles together contrasting images, formal models, and poetic analogues in his review, “broadening the frame of reference” by allowing

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁴⁶ Fred Maus, “Intersubjectivity and Analysis: Schumann’s essay on the Fantastic Symphony,” in *Music Theory in the Age of Romanticism*, ed. Ian Bent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 125-137.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 122-23.

music to come into dialogue with other disciplinary discourses. He approaches the *Fantastique* from both in and outside the work, not only as a composer and poet, but as “a connoisseur well versed in the history of the other arts” – a music critic willing to stretch the generic and rhetorical boundaries of his own response by reaching into the realms of psychology, architecture, literature, and painting.

If the review reflects the monstrosity of its musical subject, Schumann’s description of Berlioz characterizes the composer himself as a visual grotesque. He painted Berlioz as a fusion of man and reptile, serpentine Music coiled around his human body: “Like Laocoon’s snake, music has entwined herself around Berlioz’s feet. Without her he cannot take a single step. Thus he wrestles with her in the dust; thus she drinks with him in the sun.”⁴⁴⁸ Here, art itself is grafted onto Berlioz’s form in an indissoluble fusion of bodies that figures the composer himself as one of Callot’s fantastic creatures. Schumann’s ‘painterly’ approach to Berlioz extends through the review at large – he describes the *Fantastique* in pervasively visual terms. Responding first to the physical appearance of the score, he meditates on the “strangely intricate” patternings formed by its note-shapes. Later, it is akin to a “Scottish castle” and then a murky landscape whose winding trails lead to “strangely lit clearings.”⁴⁴⁹ Schumann “sees” the symphony, mapping Berlioz’s dream language onto the processes of fragmentation and distortion linked with grotesque imagery – with the *sogni dei pittori*. Particularly fascinating to Schumann is the figure of the beloved, a creature who exists only in Berlioz’s nightmares and reveries as a “haunting” and “irksome” obsession.⁴⁵⁰ She emerges in Schumann’s descriptions not as a musical motif but as a visual character who undergoes a monstrous metamorphosis. He traces her transformation in pictorial detail: through his eyes, we watch the *idée fixe* devolve

⁴⁴⁸ Schumann/Bent, p. 167.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

from Berlioz's noble beloved, to a menacing apparition, a headless ghoul, and finally an infernal caricature. Hers is a body in flux, fragmented and uncontainable.

When Schumann hears the *idée fixe* for the first time he also sees her; she is "pale, slender as a lily, veiled, silent, almost cold."⁴⁵¹ Berlioz's program describes her as "passionate but at the same time, noble and shy," and indeed, she enters alone in the upper winds and strings in a chaste eight-measure phrase (m.72ff). But almost immediately, her melody transforms, dropping down a fourth and losing one measure so that a second, asymmetrical version of the musical beloved is fused to the first. A menacing accompaniment undergirds the *idée fixe*, arriving 'too early' on the tonic in m. 84, in a moment of disquieting tonal displacement that draws attention to the melody's truncation. Unfolding through three iterations of a four-bar sequence beginning in m. 87, the *idée fixe* is spurred onward by an increasingly volatile bass, and suddenly lengthens by half a bar in the fourth leg of the pattern. It stretches into an eight-measure phrase whose graceful triplet motive is disrupted by syncopated jolts in the upper strings and culminates in an oddly lascivious falling sixth that swoops through the chromatic line in mm. 108 and 109. The noble form of the 'ideal' beloved proves mutable from the outset, balance and 'beautiful' symmetry already marred by distorted repetition and erotic suggestion. From the very beginning, the sublime is wedded to the grotesque and, in truly Hugolian fashion, beauty contains its own deformity as "an inborn, necessary, and inevitable condition."⁴⁵² As in the fantastic tales of Hoffmann, Nodier, and Gautier, the *femme fatale* is an inherently grotesque

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 168.

⁴⁵² Rosen points out that the "surface" irregularity of the *idée fixe* is underpinned by a deeper symmetry – a "four bar grid" masked by shifting accents. This is certainly true, although it only underscores Berlioz's decision to foreground asymmetry as the theme's most immediate feature – the visceral "surface" sound heard by the listener. He was, capable of writing the *idée fixe* in a regular form: see, for instance, its appearance in mm. 412-419 (Movement I) without the initial antecedent-consequent asymmetry, and its similarly regularized structure in the Waltz, March, and Finale. Clearly, we are meant, in retrospect, to appreciate its initial asymmetry.

character – a Janus-faced creature who vacillates between virgin and harlot, between maiden and witch. She is always already contaminated, always already both beauty and the beast.⁴⁵³

For Schumann, the metamorphosis of Berlioz's beloved – the inevitable deformation whose germ is contained within her own musical body – begins well before the fifth movement, happening in incremental stages over the course of the symphony's unfolding. He describes a slow and ominous transformation, as though one of Callot's grotesques had been set in motion, allowing us to watch its disfiguration unfolding before our eyes. Already, when it is recapitulated in the first movement (mm. 41 *lff*), the once-modest *idée fixe* has become "a squirming melody shrieking its way through chords in C-major" and emerging fortissimo from a wildly modulatory passage propelled by ascending chromatic figuration. Gone is the "veiled and lovely lady" of Berlioz's opening reverie; instead, Schumann sees a writhing and raucous figure for whom Berlioz has developed conflicting emotions: "he rushes toward her" while also "shrinking back" – he "loves her...monstrously."⁴⁵⁴

Perhaps more disturbing is the fragmentation of the *idée fixe* that happens in the final section of the movement (mm. 453-63). Here, the voice of the musical beloved fractures into contrapuntal multiplicity; she is heard first (in truncated form) in the flute, then echoed by the clarinet, and finally darkens and slips downward in

⁴⁵³ As Laura Cosso has also noted, the trope of grotesque metamorphosis is common to many fantastic tales, whose female figures often betray mutable and monstrous bodies; see Cosso, *Strategie del fantastico. Berlioz e la cultura del Romanticismo francese* (Edizioni dell'Orso, 2002), p. 83. Biondetta, the heroine of Jacques Cazotte's seminal *Le Diable amoureux* is both demonic and human, both charming and repulsive. Female protagonists in both Hoffmann's *Abenteuer in der Sylvesternacht* and Nodier's *Smarra* undergo nightmarish and even satanic transformations. Seemingly young, beautiful, and virginal women in fantastic tales by Gautier are eventually revealed to be hags, demons, or corpses (as in *La Morte amoureuse*). In some cases, feminine seductresses are rumored to be automata or, as in Eichendorff's *The Marble Statue*, inanimate objects vested with supernatural power. Fantastic authors, particularly Hoffmann, often link the ominous transformations of their heroines to images from grotesque painting; like Berlioz's critics, they trace such monstrous metamorphoses back to the *sogni dei pittori*.

⁴⁵⁴ Schumann/Bent, p. 181.

minor-mode oboe and bassoon reiterations. Divested of her shapely central curve, the *idée fixe* undergoes an oddly mechanical metamorphosis in this passage. Her solo voice is replicated by the clockwork regulation of counterpoint, which, as its mechanism winds down, begins to slow and to drop in pitch – Berlioz marks this section “retenu, rallentando poco a poco,” allowing it to move from *ff* to *p* during the final, lower, iterations of the familiar motive. Perhaps it is this transformation that Schumann has in mind when he claims that the musical beloved becomes an “automaton-like figure”⁴⁵⁵ – here, the organic does indeed seem wedded to the mechanical, as in the bizarre confluences of Rabelais’s grotesques.

By the time we reach the *Scène aux champs*, the *idée fixe* has become a frenzied figure distorted, according to Schumann, by “a most fearful passion” (mm. 87-111). Here, the melody of Berlioz’s lyrical beloved is fused with fortissimo explosions in the lower winds and strings, her *espressivo* feminine voice forced into an increasingly menacing duet. The solo flute of the *idée fixe* climbs to a shrieking A-natural while accelerating and intensifying passagework underneath reaches a deafening climax. There is nothing quiet or refined about the musical beloved now; just as we feel she has reached a deranged pitch and will break out of any formal containment, she “swoons,” literally fainting away into wavering nothingness like a phantasmagorical projection that has been suddenly dissipated. Schumann couches his description of the passage in familiarly visual terms: “As if overcome by fever, [Berlioz] sees the dear figure loom up before him from the wall and sink down suffocatingly upon his breast. He thrusts her away, and with shrill laughter a harlot throws herself onto his lap asking him what he is lacking.”⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 169; Schumann’s term is *Automatenfigure*.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 181, 168.

Most monstrous and certainly most famous are the beloved's transformations in the final two movements of the symphony. In the *Marche au supplice*, we witness her musical beheading, the once-lovely object of Berlioz's desire now brutally disfigured (mm. 164-69). Dreaming that he has killed his darling, the symphony's hero waits for the fall of the guillotine. But in Schumann's account, the fatal blow decapitates not the murderer but his victim: the musical beloved "tries to raise its voice once more, only to be cut off by the *coup fatale*."⁴⁵⁷ We hear the *idée fixe* masquerading in its old *dolce* soprano guise in the clarinet, only to witness its brutal truncation, musical consequent irrevocably severed from its antecedent. Now mutilated and ghoulish, the beloved reappears in Berlioz's final nightmarish movement as an infernal caricature (mm. 40-60). As in so many Callot and Bruegel paintings, the scene is set in Hell and populated by "a frightful troupe of ghosts, sorcerers, and monsters of every kind." Now we are in the realm of the unalloyed grotesque, where Schumann describes the last, irreversible deformation of Berlioz's beloved: "shrunk, emaciated, and degenerate, she appears in the yelping tones of C and E-flat clarinets."⁴⁵⁸ Rather than returning his heroine to her original form, Berlioz celebrates her degradation, allowing her to hover as kind of musico-visual grotesque. His configuration of the *idée fixe* across the symphony at large realizes Hugo's ideal to the letter: conjuring a creature both beautiful and ugly, both noble and ignoble; he "mingles in his creations, but without confounding them, darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime."

But the influence of the grotesque on Berlioz's symphony extends well beyond its principal theme, shaping not only the work's monstrous musical imagery, but its form and fundamental compositional language. The aesthetic of asymmetry, fusion,

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 182.

and metamorphosis that marks the *idée fixe* applies, on a broader scale, to the *Fantastique* as a whole, which emerges in Schumann's analysis as a work hovering between beauty and deformity. Speaking as Florestan in the first section of the review, Schumann characterizes Berlioz as both "uncouth" and "high-minded" and his symphony as a work permeated by the same incongruous mixture – "violent, destructive rage" as well as "tenderness."⁴⁵⁹ Of the *Scène aux champs*, Schumann/Florestan writes, "What music the third movement contains! What intimacy, what contrition, what warmth! – its images could not be "more fitting or more beautiful." But Berlioz immediately expresses a contrary impulse – a "destructive rage" – "striking at everything in sight" and "enclosing his dreams...in an embrace hateful and crude." And yet, even in the repugnant fourth and fifth movements, Florestan hears "terribly soft reminiscences" of Romantic poetry.⁴⁶⁰ Beauty, he suggests, is wedded inextricably to ugliness, art with something 'outside' of art.

As the second section of the review opens, Schumann embarks on a more formal exploration of the aesthetic contradictions identified in Florestan's poetic response. Beginning with form, his analysis gestures toward the problem of categorization surrounding Berlioz's musical structures. Schumann begins by declaring the *Fantastique* both coherent and classifiable: he notes its predictable key structure and broad adherence to classical symphonic form (what he calls "the customary sequence of events"). But almost immediately, he contradicts his initial claim to generic normalcy by comparing the work to an "outlandish building" – an "ancient Scottish castle...[with] higgeldy-piggeldy windows and precariously perching towers." The castle is unpredictably laid out and oddly formed – Schumann invites us

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 168-69.

on “a tour of its fantastically winding passageways.”⁴⁶¹ Here, form already wrestles with “apparent formlessness,” an analytical conundrum that intensifies as he makes his way through the first movement. Again, he figures the work as both intelligible and indecipherable, both familiar and fantastic, providing us with two analytical models. His symmetrical “arch” diagram maps conventional sonata form onto the symphony’s first movement, slotting it neatly into a generic niche. But his prose description undermines the regularity of the diagram itself, describing a movement whose structure is far from predictable. Already, in the symphony’s introduction, Schumann admits that form is difficult to discern; stable passages (“two variations on a theme”) seem to alternate with “free *intermezzi*” although the ordering of material is “not immediately clear.” As we reach the Allegro, Schumann abandons harmonic analysis altogether, in favor of a visual analogue; he leads us along “mysterious pathways” through a dense landscape in which “fantastic shapes” emerge sporadically out of the darkness.⁴⁶²

What emerges clearly from Schumann’s double analysis of Berlioz’s symphony (his diagrammatic versus his prose dissections) is the sense that it both conforms to and departs from established generic categories – that it cannot be adequately defined or contained. Schumann’s references to both “form” and “formlessness” recall Bernard de Clairvaux’s complaint of “shapely shapelessness” in the decorations of medieval illuminators. And indeed, the species of generic and analytical uncertainty that Schumann’s critique reveals is among the primary attributes of grotesque forms, which suspend us in a space between the categorizable and the uncategorizable. Like other grotesque objects, the *Fantastique*’s first movement seems

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 172.

⁴⁶² Ibid., pp. 173-74. Schumann’s use of picturesque language to describe Berlioz’s fantastic mode resonates with earlier Fantasy criticism; see Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

neither so foreign as to be unnamable nor so regular that it lends itself to easy identification. Maus also notes the disparity between parts of Schumann's diagrammatic and prose descriptions of the symphony, remarking that "The analytical passages immediately before and after the diagrams differ markedly from the diagrams themselves; the resulting tensions make it difficult to read the whole analysis in terms of a single coherent set of analytical assumptions."⁴⁶³ Maus points out that to privilege one analytic model over the other is to attribute a misleading clarity to Schumann's analysis. Here, I extend that observation, claiming that the review's contradictions and tensions may themselves be essential aspects of Schumann's analysis – features of a new critical mode that seeks, on some level, both to articulate and acknowledge grotesque musical form.

Schumann's language itself, as he leads us through the symphony's first movement, resonates with the rhetoric of the monstrous. He describes a densely knit mass of musical material through which the listener can hardly navigate; indeed, "anyone who dallies on the way to look at details will fall behind and get lost."⁴⁶⁴ Berlioz's musical ideas are "so tightly packed in together," that it is difficult to understand their logic – musical periods "expand and contract," changing shape and direction unpredictably. As the movement grows increasingly convoluted, we find ourselves in a dark landscape populated by fleeting and terrifying shapes:

Little by little the shadowy outlines assume a living form...the initial pattern of the main theme undergoes the most distorted fragmentation... Now the entire first theme, in terrifying splendor...and now completely fantastic shapes, which remind us of familiar ones only once, and then as if smashed to pieces. All vanishes.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ Maus, "Intersubjectivity and Analysis," p. 130.

⁴⁶⁴ Schumann/Bent, p. 173.

⁴⁶⁵ *Translated by Cone, in Berlioz, Fantastic Symphony, An Authoritative Score*, p. 230.

Distortion, fragmentation, fusion, and narrative disruption: the key features of Berlioz's musical language, according to Schumann's prose description, are also the primary attributes of the grotesque. Indeed, traveling through Berlioz's musical terrain, with Schumann as guide, is akin to navigating one of Callot's or Bruegel's canvasses – strangely misshapen lines and figures lead unpredictably to other, vaguely familiar figures as logical narrative begins to give way to capricious unfolding.

What applies to the movement as a whole, Schumann points out, also applies to Berlioz's individual phrases; like Fétis, he notes that “scarcely ever does consequent phrase conform to antecedent phrase, answer to question.”⁴⁶⁶ Pervasive asymmetry disrupts the semiotic logic of Berlioz's melodic writing, rendering it unreadable according to the conventional grammar of classicism. Schumann does not provide specific examples of Berlioz's irregular constructions, presumably because they are so obvious and profuse. Alongside the famously irregular *idée fixe*, we could place the second theme of the first movement, the principal theme of the third movement, and countless other passages whose asymmetries have been well-documented by twentieth-century analysts.⁴⁶⁷ Schumann suggests that Berlioz's unpredictable melodic structure – his “novel mode of expression” – takes literature as its model, straining toward a “higher poetic phraseology.”⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, many recent commentaries on Berlioz echo this idea, characterizing the composer's melodic language as a species of musical prosody. Brian Primmer, for instance, notes that Berlioz's lines are often “examples of melodic prose rather than instances of tuneful verse.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Schumann/Bent, p. 175.

⁴⁶⁷ See, for instance, Cone's detailed examination of Berlioz's phraseology in “Schumann Amplified, An Analysis,” *Berlioz: Fantastic Symphony, An Authoritative Score*, pp. 249-77.

⁴⁶⁸ Schumann/Bent, p. 175.

⁴⁶⁹ Brian Primmer, *The Berlioz Style* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), p. 15. This is an observation that goes back at least as far as Gautier and has been reiterated in many contemporary analyses of Berlioz's style. Rushton makes a similar observation in *The Musical Language of Berlioz* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983): “Classic and Romantic melody usually implies harmonic motion of some consistency and smoothness; Berlioz's aspiration to musical prose tends to

But returning to Schumann's review, we find that Berlioz's asymmetries are modeled not simply on "prose" at large but on specific literary models: they reflect the ancient style of Biblical and Greek epics (so revered by the Romantics) and "the prose writings of Jean Paul."⁴⁷⁰ Hugo himself, of course, identified freedom from formal poetic strictures as a key feature of grotesque literature, demanding that drama be released from the "tyranny of the caesura" (the enforced pause in the middle of the Alexandrine). Schumann sees Berlioz effecting a similar revolution – rescuing music from "the shackles of rhythmic periodicity" by allowing it to gravitate back to what he calls "its primeval origins."⁴⁷¹ Here we encounter the familiar aesthetic link between the grotesque and the "primitive" that derives not only from Hugo's writing but from earlier commentaries (recall, for instance, Schlegel's claim that the grotesque was "the oldest and most primitive form of the imagination.") A resuscitation of unrefined, archaic form, according to Hugo, rendered grotesque artworks "truthful" – precisely the quality that Schumann hears in Berlioz's melodies. Indeed, the bulges, expansions, and contractions of the *Fantastique*'s phrases are what renders them both powerful and convincing: the symphony's melodies may be "obscure," according to Schumann, but they are "idiomatic and true to nature."⁴⁷²

But it is not Berlioz's melodic irregularity alone that aligns his music with the aesthetics of the grotesque. Equally telling is his reliance on metamorphosis – that quintessentially Callot-esque process in which shapes are stretched, mutated, and transformed – as a key element of form. The *idée fixe* is the most obvious instance of Berlioz's melodic mutation but metamorphic procedures are just as evident in other

resist such consistency" (p. 145). See also, Berger's useful discussion of the eighteenth-century French aesthetics and the rise of the "carrure" in *Phantastik als Konstruktion*, pp. 42-45.

⁴⁷⁰ Schumann/Bent, p. 175

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 175; Schumann quotes a long passage from Johann Ernst Wagner (a German writer influenced by Jean Paul) on the grievous "tyranny of beat in music," and the need for modern composers to strive for rhythmic emancipation.

⁴⁷² Schumann/Bent, p. 188; this observations comes from Schumann's later section on Melody.

passages, which seem to unfold ‘out of themselves’ in a curiously protean process of self-evolution. Schumann noted the malleability of the *Fantastique*’s melodies, observing that “the second theme of the first movement flows as if directly out of the first theme. (...) So intimately interwoven are they that the beginning and end of the period cannot be detected with certainty until the point is finally reached at which the new idea detaches itself.”⁴⁷³ Looking more closely at this passage (mm.150-67), we find that the new theme does indeed emerge as a variant of the *idée fixe*, differentiating itself only gradually via a process of incremental transformation and addition.⁴⁷⁴ It begins with a variant of the symphony’s principal theme (heard in the solo voice of the musical beloved), which is followed by four bars of new material in the strings. Immediately, in an overlapping phrase, we hear the slightly altered *idée fixe* begin again, but this time, the solo flute extends the melody, allowing it to morph into a longer exposition of the new material. Finally, in a third phrase, the beloved’s voice is replaced by a wind trio and then a full orchestral texture, which draws the theme – now fully detached – to a decisive cadential close. Here, like Callot and Rabelais, Berlioz explores shapes in the process of transformation, showing us their gradual evolution and opening up a space in which they are temporarily unnamable, neither fish nor fowl, neither vegetable nor mineral. We are unclear where the first theme ends and the second begins, where the voice of the beloved dissolves and a new voice emerges. Form itself becomes auto-generative in much the manner that Hugo prescribed; melodies morph one out of the other in a seamless process of becoming that blurs the boundaries between musical shapes, and creates the sense of ontological uncertainty so central to the grotesque.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁷⁴ For other discussions of this passage, see Cone, “Schumann Amplified: An Analysis,” *Norton Score*, p. 257 and Berger, *Phantastik als Konstruktion*, pp. 55-57; here, Berger points to the similarity between themes “one” and “two” of the first movement as signals of Berlioz’s “formal ambivalence.”

Barzun gives a compelling description of Berlioz's metamorphic language, noting the composer's "seemingly endless power to make a musical idea generate others." "The common term 'development' hardly describes what is rather a species of procreation."⁴⁷⁵ Although he does not tie his observation to a larger aesthetic framework, Barzun draws our attention to the intertwining of all the melodies of the *Fantastique's* first movement. He could, of course, have noted a similarly organic approach in the *Scène aux champs*, in which the opening melody undergoes a series of metamorphoses, recurring in stretched, contracted, and otherwise altered forms across the movement. But Berlioz is interested not simply in processes of musical evolution (the species of metamorphosis that comes close to variation) but also in devolution – the dissolution of musical shapes into passages of melodic and harmonic shapelessness.

This process of 'reverse' metamorphosis is showcased with particular clarity in the passages of chromatic sliding found in the first and last parts of the symphony. We first encounter such a passage at m. 200 of the opening movement. As the second theme (now in C) comes to a cadence, Berlioz opens onto a disorienting space marked by rising and falling chromatic sixths. Melody dissolves into the "writhing" morass that Wagner describes, and readable harmony into non-functional progression. We find ourselves in a place *between* – a place that explores the uncanny moment of metamorphosis when one shape has not quite become another, when recognizable material hovers in a state of temporary formlessness. As Schumann himself notes, the passage is "meaningless" – it is in some sense 'outside' of meaning but for that reason, curiously compelling.⁴⁷⁶ As it progresses, however, it begins to generate a sense of harmonic expectation, to coalesce into readable syntax. Rising two-note slurs in the

⁴⁷⁵ Barzun, *The Romantic Century*, I, p. 161.

⁴⁷⁶ "The chromatic sixth chords, rising and falling steeply, though meaningless in themselves, must be mighty impressive in context." (Schumann/Bent, p. 180).

winds grow increasingly insistent, finally expanding into a full chromatic scale that climbs to a *fortissimo* dominant (V of V with respect to the G-centered passage that follows). A three-measure silence prolongs the moment before we relax back into recognizable harmonic territory, then Berlioz offers up a *pianissimo* resolution – a D in the horns. But we return to the realm of decipherable melody only gradually; Berlioz reanimates the *idée fixe* via a familiar process of incremental metamorphosis as if reconstructing its form piece by piece. Out of the sustained D he draws a rising fourth (A-D) in the second violins, which becomes a higher fourth (D-G) as the first violins enter. Finally, the full orchestra returns, elongating the reiterated fourth of the upper strings into a full statement of the *idée fixe* (now in G), which emerges, so it seems, as an organic and inevitable extension of its own surrounding texture.

Berlioz plunges us repeatedly back into the chromatic void in both the first and fifth parts of the symphony; see, for instance, Movement I: mm. 442-50 and 464-74 and Movement V: mm. 306*ff*. In mm. 360-408 of the first movement we encounter a denser and more complex elaboration of the chromatic sixth motion described above: here, fragments of the *idée fixe* are tossed back and forth amongst the strings against the backdrop of a rising and falling chromatic bass that surges forward and falls back in a series of wave-like motions. Berlioz wanders far from the C-major tonality of the previous passage, allowing our sense of harmonic teleology to dissolve into a disorienting blur. But ever-closer imitation of the *idée fixe* fragment begins to create energy, allowing shape to reemerge from shapelessness as Berlioz arrives at V of C in m. 408. A full iteration of the *idée fixe*, now solidly in C major, does indeed (as Schumann notes) seem to “squirm” its way out of the morass, or to “lurch” back onto its feet via a series of repeated chromatic semitones in the strings that morph, finally, into the opening phrase of the principal theme.

Here, as in the earlier examples, Berlioz's experimentation with 'shapelessness' is confined to an isolated passage that emerges out of, and evolves back into, familiar musical syntax. But Primmer suggests that Berlioz's compositional language relies on a more pervasive species of metamorphosis – what he calls “evolving harmony” or “organic reharmonization,” a process in which musical lines are repeatedly re-harmonized throughout a work. The initial presentations of Berlioz's themes, he argues, are “unformed and raw”; they represent “the first steps in an organic harmonic scheme which will not be completed, nor make any real sense, until the whole work or movement has run its course.”⁴⁷⁷ Not only melody, but harmony, according to Primmer, emerge through a process of incremental transformation in Berlioz's works, which exist in a perpetual state of becoming – in the monstrous condition of the almost- or pre-formed.

Certainly, in Schumann's descriptions (and in the 'volcanic' metaphors that permeate contemporary reviews) we get the sense that the symphony is in motion – that it cannot be pinned down to static structures or even harmonies and is therefore without discernable shape. The second movement, according to Schumann, “pursues a winding, gyrating course,” the third “swings ethereally pendulum-like up and down,” and the last two “have no centre of focus whatsoever and surge unceasingly towards the end.” The symphony is held together not by “logical” but by “spiritual” coherence;⁴⁷⁸ here, again, Schumann references Jean Paul, whose aesthetic philosophy seems to him akin to Berlioz's own – a philosophy admitting “deliberate digression,” and moments of syntactical obscurity that reach beyond the boundaries of rational

⁴⁷⁷ Primmer, *The Berlioz Style*, pp. 149-151. The “organic” process of reharmonization that Primmer sees extending over Berlioz's entire works also operates on a local level. Berlioz was especially attracted to pedal tones, which allowed him to transition incrementally from one sonority to another in a slow process of harmonic unfolding – what Cone calls “progressive reinterpretation” (“Schumann Amplified: An Analysis,” *Norton Score*, p. 269). See the pedal A-flat in mm. 46ff in the first movement of the *Fantastique* for an oft-cited example.

⁴⁷⁸ Schumann/Bent, p. 177.

language. Indeed, Berlioz's music often hovers on the edge of unreadable sound, according to Schumann, embracing "anything to which the name pitch, sonority, noise or resonance could be given."⁴⁷⁹ He notes Berlioz's use of bells and muffled timpani; to these extra-musical noises we could easily add the scraping *col legno* effects and high-pitched chromatic twittering of the fifth movement. Equally inscrutable are the growling trombone sonorities in the March, so low that they sound as terrifying vibrations rather than discernible pitches, and the oddly thick sound of the 'walking' bassoon quartet (recall Berlioz's own commentary on the grotesqueness of the bassoon).⁴⁸⁰ In the fourth movement, we also encounter Berlioz's famously jarring chord progressions: the crashing C-sharps in m. 130 and the enjambed D-flat and G-minor sonorities in mm. 155-60. Unmoored from any conventional harmonic progression, these passages cease to operate as 'music' and become incoherent 'sound' – blotches on the work's readable surface.

Schumann identifies many of Berlioz's noisy and indecipherable progressions as defects, which he groups together with examples of parallel octaves, doubled leading tones, and faulty part-writing in a systematic breakdown of the *Fantastique's* blemishes:

...we frequently stumble over harmonies that are crude and common-sounding
 ...harmonies that are faulty, or at least forbidden by the old rules...harmonies that are
 vague and indistinct...harmonies that sound badly, that are tortured, distorted...⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 189.

⁴⁸⁰ Of the bassoon, Berlioz wrote: "Its tone is not very loud and its timbre completely lacking in brightness and nobility; allowance must always be made for its propensity to sound grotesque when exposed." In Meyerbeer's opera *Robert le diable*, the bassoon's middle register provided what Berlioz called "a pale, cold, cadaverous sound." See Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise. A translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 113-114.

⁴⁸¹ Schumann/Bent, p. 180.

These passages, Schumann points out, can hardly be considered graceful or elegant in any conventional sense; indeed, he compares them to “hunchbacks” and “lunatics” – surely a tacit reference to Hugo:

May the time never come when such passages as these are sanctioned as beautiful, any more than the century in which hunchbacks and lunatics are held to be Apollos and Kants with respect to beauty and reason.⁴⁸²

And yet Schumann acknowledges that such “coarse and bizarre elements” are vital to the symphony’s total effect – its “distinctive and indomitable spirit.” Berlioz’s parallel octaves and false relations are both “faulty” and “bad-sounding,” but “they must strike us to the depths of our being.” By correcting such defects, one runs the risk of draining the symphony of its energy and force: “One has only to try adjusting things here and there, improving them a little...to discover instead how lacklustre and insipid is the result!”⁴⁸³

Berlioz’s blemishes serve as a foil for the “tender and exquisite” moments of the *Fantastique*, which Schumann elucidates in a shorter list. Beauty and depravity are fused together not only in Berlioz’s symphony but also in his temperament: “All that he hates he grabs wrathfully by the scruff of its neck, all that he loves he crushes in his ardour.”⁴⁸⁴ Here, Schumann echoes Florestan’s observations surrounding the aesthetic confluences of the symphony; it is marked by a set of incongruities that draws close to Hugo’s grotesque ideal: a work in which the noble stands along side the ignoble, the tender alongside the raucous, melody alongside noise. Despite his wariness of Berlioz’s crudities, Schumann begins to approach Hugo’s own claim that “there are defects which take root only in masterpieces”:

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

Telle tache peut n'être que la conséquence indivisible de telle beauté. Cette touche heurtée, qui me choque de près, complète l'effet et donne la saillie à l'ensemble. Effacez l'une, vous effacez l'autre. L'originalité se compose de tout cela. Le génie est nécessairement inégal. Il n'est pas de hautes montagnes sans profonds précipices. ... il y a de ces fautes qui ne prennent racine que dans les chefs-d'oeuvre; il n'est donné qu'à certains génies d'avoir certains défauts.⁴⁸⁵

Schumann is hardly willing to sanction all of the *Fantastique's* "deep ravines" or to embrace its "blemishes" unreservedly, however. He wavers between admiration and disapproval, but is quick to acknowledge (and seems even to envy) the creative daring that generates Berlioz's "novel mode of expression" – "We only wish we possessed a truly colossal imagination," Schumann writes, "and could then pursue it wherever it goes."

But too daring even for Schumann was the breach in readable musical language opened up by Berlioz's *Songes d'une nuit du sabbat*, which he calls "ugly, strident, and repulsive."⁴⁸⁶ Here, in the symphony's final movement, the tropes of fusion, asymmetry, and metamorphosis are brought together in terrifying concert, and we hear the grotesque in its most concentrated form. Indeed, we open, in the introductory *Larghetto*, onto the realm of the nightmare – a space populated by monsters, witches, and ghosts. Berlioz's dream landscape is dark and frightening: "strange sounds, groans, and bursts of laughter" emerge erratically out of the musical texture. Indeed, music teeters on the edge of noise – dissonant scratchings and twittering chromaticisms in the strings. Melodic shapes – remote cries in the winds – begin to materialize, only to trail off in dying *glissandi*. We have little sense of rhythmic impulse or harmonic sense – form itself seems to dissolve into irrationality.

⁴⁸⁵ "Such a blemish can be only the inseparable consequence of beauty. The rough stroke of the brush, which offends my eye at close range, completes the effect and gives relief to the whole picture. Efface one and you efface the other. Originality is made up of such things. Genius is necessarily uneven. There are no high mountains without deep ravines." Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Martel, p. 52.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 180. Schumann was working from Liszt's transcription of the *Symphonie fantastique*, but he argued that he could 'hear' the orchestral effects clearly, partly due to the sensitivity of Liszt's work.

We move from one detail to the next, unable to construct a linear or coherent narrative; Berlioz, like the grotesque painters, draws on a language outside the realm of readable syntax – an idiom that D’Ortigue hails as “the grotesque at its most sublime.”⁴⁸⁷

As the caricatured *idée fixe* enters, to a roar of infernal delight, we are ushered into a world in which shape, line, and tonality itself are subject to disfiguration and conflation. Tolling bells introduce the *Dies irae*, but almost immediately, it is infiltrated by fragments of Berlioz’s witches’ music, exuberant flourishes in the strings and winds entwining themselves around the *Dies irae* as if a party of wicked revelers had inexplicably joined the funeral train. Such welding together of incompatible materials is both monstrous and darkly comic; it forces us to imagine a “merry funeral,” evoking the “annihilating humor” that defines the Jean-Paulian grotesque. Slowly, in a series of lengthening interjections over the course of the *Dies irae*’s exposition, the witches’ dance evolves toward a complete statement (another example of Berlioz’s thematic self-generation). When it appears in full form (m. 241), it too, embraces a monstrous contradiction: Berlioz sets the dance as a fugue, couching his infernal melody in the contrapuntal language of sacred music. Hell itself becomes paradoxically ‘orderly’ in a passage that pries apart form from meaning, sign from signified. Berlioz, quite literally, sends convention “to the Devil” – he “skip[s] from high to low, from the most exalted to the most trivial ideas, from the most extravagant to the most solemn, from the most superficial to the most abstract,” applying to music

⁴⁸⁷ Rushton is also drawn to painting as a fruitful analogue for Berlioz’s music and, although he does not refer to Callot or Bruegel as specific models, he describes an aesthetic of disjointed detail – an absence of total narrative – that comes close to the syntax of the visual grotesque: “Berlioz’s most individual large forms are like a painting on a curved surface which cannot be seen all at once. The eye is led from point to point, encountering details whose significance can only be grasped by looking back or, in time, remembering from some distance what has already been traversed. It cannot comprehend the whole synoptically”; *Musical Language of Berlioz*, pp. 200-01.

the structural and stylistic freedoms that Hugo had embraced in Shakespeare and codified in his own Preface.⁴⁸⁸

By m. 305, the dance has unraveled, giving way to the familiar chromatic sliding that signals dissolution and metamorphosis. A series of drooping swoons (mm. 306-327) devoid of bass support take us into what Schumann calls “unclear and vague” harmonic territory. As in the chromatic passages of the first movement, Berlioz does not *transition* so much as he *transforms*, dissolving his musical texture into temporary nothingness, then allowing new shapes to emerge via a process of musical evolution. Out of the tremolo beginning in m. 329, fragments of the dance subject, now chromatically distorted, begin to form, gathering shape and energy in the bassoons and lower strings, and finally coalescing into a full fugal exposition in m. 355 – a twisted version of its former self. Now, in Schumann’s words, Berlioz’s music “threshes and convulses itself into a hopeless tangle.”⁴⁸⁹ The hideous transformation of the witches’ music is akin to the disfiguration of the beloved herself; indeed, in the nightmarish realm of Berlioz’s unmitigated grotesque, all forms are mutable, all shapes writhe in a state of terrifying transformation.

Berlioz himself is eager to draw our attention to the deformations and confections that permeate his Witches’ Sabbath. As Barzun, Rushton, and others have noted, the programmatic narrative of the *Fantastique*’s fifth part does more than provide a general emotional elucidation of the musical text. It ceases merely to “fill in the gaps which the use of musical language unavoidably leaves in the development of dramatic thought” – Berlioz’s own claim in a lengthy footnote to the revised program – and begins to describe musical construction.⁴⁹⁰ The final lines of the program read

⁴⁸⁸ See p. 29 for full quote and translation.

⁴⁸⁹ Schumann/Bent, p. 181.

⁴⁹⁰ See Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, I, p. 155 and Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz*, p. 254. The above quote from the *Fantastique*’s revised program is given in Cone’s translation, *Fantastic Symphony, An Authoritative Score*, p. 28.

“Funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*, sabbath round dance.” And finally, Berlioz’s most important conflation: “The sabbath round dance and the *Dies irae* combined.” These constructional cues guide listeners through a movement whose form is far from readily apparent, but they also underscore fusion, distortion, and burlesque as key facets of Berlioz’s idiom – elements of his musical language that he is quick to advertise. Not only in the program but in the score, Berlioz highlights the fifth movement’s most conspicuous thematic combination, marking the section following m. 414: *Dies irae et Ronde du Sabbat ensemble*. Here, winds and brass intone the funeral chant in A minor, while in the strings, we hear the buoyant strains of the G-major sabbath round. Berlioz’s earlier vacillation between dirge and dance evolves into an incongruous intertwining, as if portions of one score had been overlaid onto another. The result is a famously heterogeneous whole – and an unmistakably grotesque musical object.

It is worth noting an episode from Berlioz’s *Mémoires* in which he describes a similar musical instance of sacred-secular fusion. During his tenure in Italy, he attended a celebration of High Mass to celebrate the King’s feast day – a service involving full chorus and orchestra. Although the musicians were allegedly “the best in Rome,” Berlioz reports that their performance was bizarre and disorderly, that the organ was woefully out of tune, and that the orchestral players tuned and warmed up *while* the priests recited the chant:

In between, while the priests chanted their plainsong, the performers, unable to contain the demon of music that possessed them, tuned up loudly, with unbelievable sangfroid. The flute executed little flourishes up and down the scale of D major; the horn blew fanfares in E-flat, the violins practiced elegant *gruppetti*; the bassoon rattled its large keys and self-importantly displayed its bottom notes...⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, translated David Cairns, p. 185. Cairns identifies the date of this event as 1st May, 1832.

The result was a monstrous mingling of keys, affects, timbres and, most shockingly, of solemn chant with odd “flourishes” and “elegant gruppetti” – precisely the conflation that Berlioz himself had engineered in the *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat*. He describes the disordered Mass as a “demonic” experience and, most tellingly, “a gallimaufry reminiscent of Callot” – an evocation of the musical grotesque.

Of course, the symphony’s final movement was the one most often dubbed “monstrous” and “incoherent” by nineteenth-century reviewers. And indeed, it is here that Berlioz amplifies the structural, syntactical, and timbral experiments that permeate the *Fantastique* at large. Perhaps more so than any of the previous movements, the Witches’ Sabbath evades formal identification. It demonstrates elements of regularity – repeated thematic material, harmonic returns, and developmental passages – but refuses to coalesce into a recognizable structural shape. There is no name for Berlioz’s dream form – it does not unfold according to an external template but, in Hugolian fashion, draws its structure from its own content. Wolfgang Dömling puts this slightly differently when he argues that the movement derives its “unity” not from “standard categories of formal and thematic integration” but from what he calls its “semantic dimension.”⁴⁹²

The generic slippage that Dömling identifies (he locates elements of both rondo and variation form in the final movement) is elucidated in Rushton’s analytical breakdown.⁴⁹³ Here, we get a sense not only of Berlioz’s structural ambiguity but, on a more local level, his unrelentingly asymmetrical phraseology. The irregular groupings that pervade the symphony as a whole are intensified in Berlioz’s demonic *Songe*, whose phrases resist the antecedent-consequent formula almost entirely, falling

⁴⁹² Wolfgang Dömling, “Die Symphonie fantastique und Berlioz’ Auffassung von Programmusik,” *Die Musikforschung* 28 (1975), p. 263; see also Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz*, p. 254.

⁴⁹³ See Table 9.5 and surrounding commentary in Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz*, pp. 254-57.

instead into “predominantly...irrational units.”⁴⁹⁴ In the finale, too, we find the chromatic ‘dissolves’ introduced in the first movement and the technique of dissonant harmonic juxtaposition explored in the March revisited in prolonged and elaborate form. These innovations, which Schumann is able to accept (and sometimes laud) when they are introduced singly, become overwhelming – even “repulsive” – when Berlioz brings them all together. His final movement stretches the relationship between music and noise, between shape and shapelessness almost to the breaking point, testing the outer limits of his new idiom. But even here, Florestan hears “terribly soft reminiscences” of Romantic poetry. And although Schumann disapproves of Berlioz’s most unlovely passages he acknowledges that to rail against the “uglinesses” and distortions of the *Fantastique* – to reject the aesthetic impulse that produces “a *Dies irae* as a burlesque” – is to fly in the face of a much larger revolution; it is to reject the monstrous idiom long-since embraced by “Byron, Victor Hugo, Grabbe and their ilk.”⁴⁹⁵ For Schumann, then, Berlioz’s language is both old and new – it borrows established literary innovations but in doing so, produces in the realm of music “an unknown art” of powerful potential, and one which promises to rework notions of art itself.

Beyond Schumann: The *Fantastique* Today

Schumann’s review of the *Fantastique*, as Maus has pointed out, is as much an essay about the difficulties of analyzing Berlioz as it is a straightforward analytical essay.⁴⁹⁶ Grappling with the tensions between “inner coherence” and “outward formlessness,”

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁹⁵ Schumann/Bent, p. 194.

⁴⁹⁶ Maus, “Intersubjectivity and Analysis,” p. 137.

Schumann concludes that conventional analysis – what he calls “dismembering critique” – does little to elucidate the work’s structure. Instead, he insists, we must approach the *Fantastique* “on its own terms” and, above all, we must resist the impulse to force the symphony into conventional molds – “any attempt to refine it by artistic means,” writes Schumann, “or to confine it forcibly within certain limits, is doomed to failure.”⁴⁹⁷ Yet twentieth-century analyses of the *Fantastique* have tended to do precisely this; they have struggled to render the work identifiable, to locate it in known generic categories or to coin new categories (often modifications of classical forms) to describe its structures. The result has been an ongoing debate surrounding the labeling of Berlioz’s forms – the degree to which we can “confine” them within nameable generic spaces – underpinned by the disquieting sense that none of the proposed forms is entirely convincing.

Immediately, in discussions of the *Fantastique*’s introduction, we encounter an array of analytical options. Cone (responding to Schumann) suggests a theme and variation structure modified by an intervening “episode.”⁴⁹⁸ Rushton, though he acknowledges such a model as partially persuasive, points to the “blending” and “overlapping” of the proposed sections as problematic and suggests, instead, that “fantasy” is the distinctive feature of the introduction.⁴⁹⁹ Opinions surrounding the form of the *Allegro* are also divided: Nicholas Cook identifies sonata form as “a sensible starting point” but admits almost immediately that the movement “creates labeling problems” that get in the way of identifying both thematic and sectional

⁴⁹⁷ Schumann/Bent, pp. 174, 180. As Maus argues, Schumann himself diagrams the relationship between sonata form and Berlioz’s first movement mainly to defend the composer against charges of incoherence: “...one can suggest that Schumann temporarily adopts a narrowly limited concern for symmetrical structure, in order to rebut critics who find the piece formless.” (“Intersubjectivity and Analysis,” p. 130)

⁴⁹⁸ *Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score*, pp. 250-251.

⁴⁹⁹ Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz*, p. 257. The fantasy was, of course, a discrete musical genre characterized by unpredictable harmonic motion and improvisatory writing. Later, Rushton links “fantasy” with “fantastique,” moving from a musical to a more broadly interdisciplinary category.

divisions.⁵⁰⁰ Like Schumann, he encounters a tension between “inner” and “outer” coherence; he notes that “the underlying process that gives rise to the surface form is very different here from that on which the classical sonata is based,” and finally, that “the movement begins to be not really in sonata form at all.”⁵⁰¹ Holoman shares his misgivings, suggesting that instead of sonata form, we think of the opening movement as “a simpler arch.”⁵⁰² Rushton goes further, claiming that the label “sonata form” may not be applicable at all: “If Berlioz’s first movement, read as sonata form, appears inadequate, it could be the result of wrong reading rather than any flaw in [the] music.”⁵⁰³ He refers to the *Allegro* as a “fantasia,” suggesting that it is “best understood as the alternation of stability and flux.” Even so, Rushton acknowledges that Berlioz himself gestures tellingly toward sonata form – that he “tempts analysis on these lines by repeating the ‘exposition.’”⁵⁰⁴

I suggest that Berlioz not only “tempts” us toward sonata form, but that he allows it to partially materialize, playing with its gestures while resisting its potential to exercise global control. In the *Fantastique*’s first movement, as in the *Hamlet* march and the “Convoi funèbre” (*Romeo V*) – as Rushton himself points out – Berlioz allows sonata form to hover “in the background” as one of several competing structural models.⁵⁰⁵ An aesthetic of generic mixture is equally apparent (as we’ve already seen) in the *Fantastique*’s final movement. Holoman identifies the *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat* as “sectional, semi-sonata form”⁵⁰⁶ while Dömling describes it in terms of both rondo structure and variation technique. Although they attempt to pin down the

⁵⁰⁰ Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (London: Dent, 1987), p. 280.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 285.

⁵⁰² Holoman, *Berlioz*, p. 103.

⁵⁰³ Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz*, p. 258.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁵⁰⁵ Rushton, *The Musical Language of Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 186, 189.

⁵⁰⁶ Holoman, *Berlioz*, p. 107.

movement's form, these kinds of multi-partite generic designations only render it increasingly nebulous, piling up and conflating known categories into labels that accentuate the unconventionality of Berlioz's architecture. We are left with the sense, not that some of the implied structural models are right and others wrong, but that they are all equally and simultaneously valid; in other words, it is not a question of deciding which labels are more correct but of observing how multiple forms overlap and intersect – how Berlioz locates his symphony both in and outside of shifting generic spaces.⁵⁰⁷ The opening movement of the *Fantastique*, for instance, invokes sonata form while also drawing on the gestures of theme and variation, on an 'arch' structure, and on a more nebulous 'stability-flux' model. Berlioz allows it to hover self-consciously between forms, drawing on precisely the aesthetic of generic multiplicity – of structural slippage – championed in Hugo's Preface: "One must not condemn oneself to having but one form in one's mind," Hugo insisted. This advice was, I suggest, taken seriously by Berlioz and should be taken equally seriously by his analysts. They, like he, must be free to "change molds as often as [they] change details" – to acknowledge the aesthetic of metamorphosis at the heart of Berlioz's compositional language.

Of course, observations surrounding generic instability and uncertainty in Berlioz's works have long permeated the analytical literature. Not surprisingly, such commentary often draws on the rhetoric of monstrosity, pointing toward illegitimate confluences and distortions. Jeffrey Langford, for instance, describes the composer's symphonic form as a "fusion of elements drawn from both opera and symphony... an unorthodox hybrid genre."⁵⁰⁸ Paul Banks identifies what he calls a "deliberately

⁵⁰⁷ James Webster makes a similar argument about 'multivalent' form in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a work which almost certainly influenced Berlioz; see "The form of the finale of Beethoven's ninth symphony," *Beethoven Forum 1* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 25-62.

⁵⁰⁸ Jeffrey Langford, "The Symphonies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 53.

discontinuous structure” in the *Fantastique* – a form that juggles “coherence and diversity.”⁵⁰⁹ Rushton’s analyses of both the first symphony and other early works are replete with references to disfigured forms – to “evasion,” and to the “contrary” and “alien” (in *Le Corsaire*), to “fragmentations” and “distortions” (in *Lear*), to “vexatious” issues and “residues” of identifiable structures (in *Harold I*), and to “composed hesitations” (in the *Fantastique*).⁵¹⁰ These descriptions – which struggle to articulate the unnamable and unidentifiable, the experience of familiar shapes made foreign, and the sense of something almost but not quite recognizable – draw close to classic definitions of the grotesque:

Grotesqueries both require and defeat definition: they are neither so regular and rhythmical that they settle easily into our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all. They stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles.⁵¹¹

It is precisely this anxiety of categorization that surrounds scholarly discourse on the *Fantastique* – an anxiety that emerges out of the impulse to decipher and identify a work that resists generic regularity and classical logic. Indeed, in proposing the grotesque as a vital aesthetic framework for the symphony I am drawing together a host of existing observations and descriptions, responding not only to the work itself, but to the language that has permeated its reception. Paradoxically, it is this language of discomfort, opacity, and monstrosity that points toward an alternative approach to the *Fantastique* – one that allows Berlioz’s music to come into conversation with much older visual and literary traditions.

⁵⁰⁹ Paul Banks, “Coherence and Diversity in the *Symphonie fantastique*,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 8/1 (Summer 1984), p. 40.

⁵¹⁰ See Rushton, *The Musical Language of Berlioz*, pp. 192, 193, 196 and *The Music of Berlioz*, p. 258.

⁵¹¹ Harpham, *On The Grotesque*, p. 3.

Berlioz did not invent a new vocabulary for the *Fantastique*; instead, he rearranged language along unconventional lines, eliminating the logical connections between signs or fusing them into hybrids. Many analysts, from Tiersot to Holoman, have pointed out that Berlioz's chordal choices were remarkably conventional.⁵¹² Indeed, the fundamental building blocks of his compositional language were far from revolutionary; what was disconcerting was the way he moved from one place to the next – his practice of jumbling together warring sounds and harmonies or allowing functional progressions to dissolve into non-functionality. Berlioz did not change words themselves but, like Hugo, challenged the rules for their dramatic configuration – the regulations that held them in regular and 'coherent' patterns. He did not draw on alien models but, like Callot, created monsters by pasting together the constituent parts of recognizable creatures. His music eschewed the classical unity and coherence that so many twentieth-century analysts have striven to locate in the *Fantastique*, but this hardly meant that he composed carelessly or without a guiding aesthetic framework. On the contrary, his anti-logic comprised its own logic and adhered to a venerable set of conventions – a system of calculated disruption that valorized ugliness, embraced seeming disorder, and hovered around and between recognizable forms.

In the wake of Schumann, it was the critic Robert Griepenkerl who understood most clearly the peculiarities and innovations of Berlioz's style, encouraging analysts to embrace its "monstrous oppositions" rather than seeking either clarity or unity. In a substantial 1843 pamphlet published after Berlioz's Braunschweig concerts, Griepenkerl defended the composer against criticisms circulating in the Leipzig papers, and suggested a new approach to his music.⁵¹³ Like Schumann, he mapped the

⁵¹² Holoman, for instance, notes one of the elements of Berlioz's syntax as "an altogether conventional repertoire of chords deployed in unconventional manner," *Berlioz*, p. 74. See Primmer's similar remarks, *The Berlioz Style*, p. 16.

⁵¹³ Robert Griepenkerl, "Ritter Berlioz in Braunschweig," (Braunschweig, 1843), pp. 1-31.

composer's disordered aesthetic onto the incongruities of Shakespeare and Jean Paul. But Griepenkerl moved analysis out of the realm of analogy and into more concrete territory – he identified Berlioz as a *humorist*. Berlioz's humor was neither comic nor lighthearted, according to Griepenkerl, nor was it merely a surface 'effect'; rather, it was an approach to language and structure that drew on profound contradiction. No longer interested in Classical unity or undifferentiated beauty, the Romantic humorist reached toward a higher truth by allowing the noble to be infiltrated by "the pollution of the common and low," the *Idealmoment* by the *Realmoment*. The humorous artwork, Griepenkerl wrote, was a "whirlpool of opposing forces" in which "everything finite has its justification; even filth itself, the lowest of all entities, can be juxtaposed with the Idea without compromising the latter."⁵¹⁴ Here, we recognize Jean Paul's notion of "annihilating humor" – the notion of aesthetic oppositions that characterized his grotesque aesthetic. Of course, definitions of the grotesque as a darkly comedic mode resonated through many earlier German commentaries, including those by Möser and Wieland. French theorists, too, understood the grotesque as a species of absurd humor; among Callot's best known grotesques were his *commedia dell'arte* sketches, in which beaks, claws, and horns were added to human forms in unsettlingly comic mixtures. Citing Callot, Hugo defined the grotesque as a form of infernal humor, as did Baudelaire who, referred to it as the "absolute comic," which "has about it something profound, primitive and axiomatic."⁵¹⁵ Griepenkerl's "humor," then, was in many senses synonymous with the grotesque – an aesthetic of contradiction which he identified as the primary feature of Berlioz's work.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 16-17. "Hineingerissen in diesen Strudel gegeneinanderschäumender Mächte hat alles Endliche seine Berechtigung, ja selbst der Schmutz, das Niedrigste aller Existenz kann sich der Idee entgegenwerfen, ohne ihre Majestät zu beleidigen."

⁵¹⁵ Baudelaire, "The Essence of Laughter," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and translated Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaedon, 1964), p. 154.

⁵¹⁶ In his "'Ritter Berlioz' in Germany," *Berlioz Studies*, ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 136-147, David Levy provides insightful commentary on Griepenkerl's

The “curious diversity of opinions” surrounding Berlioz resulted, according to Griepenkerl, from the critics’ inability to understand musical humor. What had long since been acknowledged as a literary aesthetic had not yet been theorized in terms of sound: “What applies to poetry here, applies to the same extent to music. Art criticism has not yet detailed this humoristic element in music, and yet it seems to be the basis upon which we can understand many strange phenomena [in music] which, until now, having been examined from other viewpoints, were situated falsely.”⁵¹⁷ It was in Beethoven’s late works – another ‘misunderstood’ repertory – that musical humor first emerged, according to Griepenkerl. Unlike the comic effects or witticisms of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven’s humor was wild and even ugly; it produced “tangled-up combinations of periods,” strange “disproportions,” and rhythmic irregularities. Griepenkerl describes what he calls the “monstrous” innovations of the “Appassionata” Sonata, Op. 57:

The atmosphere of a simple, noble theme is turned into its opposite, flipping suddenly onto its negative side. The beautiful, melody-rich flow of episodes begins to be disturbed by unexpected rhythmic disruptions; tangled-up harmonic progressions, which but little fitting the prevailing mood of the melody, tease it incessantly. Soon this humorous element becomes the dominating force, determining the main color of the whole artwork.⁵¹⁸

essay, suggesting – as I do here – that Griepenkerl’s notion of humor resonates with Hoffmann’s fantastic aesthetic. Levy argues that Griepenkerl translated Hoffmann’s “metaphysical vision” into “more tangible concepts,” although he does not pursue this thesis.

⁵¹⁷ Griepenkerl, “Ritter Berlioz,” p. 18. “Was hier von der Poesie gilt, gilt in eben dem Masse von der Musik. Dieses humoristische Element in der Musik hat die Kunstkritik noch nicht erörtert; und doch scheint es der Boden zu sein, um zum Verständnisse mancher seltsamen Erscheinung zu gelangen, die bis dahin, von anderen Standpunkten betrachtet, eine falsche Stellung erhielt.” Musical humor has, of course, become an important focus of musicological attention in recent years although one that has centered largely around late eighteenth-century repertoire, especially Haydn. See, for instance, Gretchen Wheelock’s *Haydn’s Ingenious Jestings With Art: contexts of musical wit and humor* (New York: Schirmer, 1992); Mark Evan Bonds, “Haydn, Laurence Sterne, and the origins of musical irony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44/1 (Spring 1991) pp. 57-91; Elaine Sisman, “Haydn, Shakespeare, and the rules of originality,” *Haydn and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-56. Scott Burnham, “Haydn and Humor,” *The Cambridge Companion to Haydn* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 19. “Die Stimmung eines einfachen, edlen Themas wird in ihr Gegentheil verkehrt, schlägt plötzlich nach der Seite der Negation um. Der schöne melodiereiche Fluss der Episoden fängt an von

In Berlioz, Griepenkerl saw the logical continuation and amplification of Beethoven's musical humor. Berlioz, like his compositions themselves, was Janus-faced; he drew together the ugly with the noble, the placid with the turbulent, in order to "realize the whole infinity and majesty of the Idea" – to escape the limitations of Classical 'beauty' in favor of more complex expression.⁵¹⁹ When he "throws a rock" into the peaceful surface of his melodies, Berlioz is doing the work of the humorist. When he "makes the violins laugh demonically while the trombones warn us in a frightening manner of the last judgement," he is offering us what Griepenkerl calls "a concrete example" of the new aesthetic.⁵²⁰ Rather than glossing over or denying the structural and logical contradictions posed by Berlioz's humor, Griepenkerl encouraged critics to study it – to formulate a new language for its description and analysis. "Look at it once more!," he insisted, "One gets used to such things."⁵²¹ Berlioz himself, having read the German critic's pamphlet in translation some months after its publication, responded favorably, and – in the *Mémoires* – recalled that Griepenkerl had given "a very correct idea...of the force and direction of the musical current that carries me away."⁵²²

As we follow the "current" of Berlioz's musical humor, we find that Griepenkerl points back to Schumann, whose references to Jean Paul and Hugo resonate with the broader rhetoric of the ugly underpinning reviews by Fétis, Heine, D'Ortigue, and many other early critics. Together, this network of writing allows us to reconfigure Berlioz in the language of his own time – to resuscitate a grotesque

unerwarteten rhythmischen Einschnitten durchbrochen zu werden, verwickelte Harmoniefolgen, die der waltenden Stimmung der Melodie wenig entsprechen, necken unaushörllich. Bald wird dies humoristische Moment zum einzig Geltenden erhoben, die Hauptfarbe des ganzen Kunstwerks bestimmend."

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 27. "...die Geigen dämonisch lachen, während die Posaunen auf eine gar furchtbare Weise an das Weltgericht mahnen." Griepenkerl is referring, here, to the Finale of *Harold*, although he might as well have been describing the fifth movement of the *Fantastique*.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵²² Berlioz, *Mémoires*, Translated by Cairns, p. 302.

analytical approach which, as Griepenkerl suggested, provides an indispensable framework for understanding Berlioz's musical innovations. As we investigate the old and peculiar humor of the grotesque, we may be able to figure Berlioz not as the inventor of a new musical language but as an interdisciplinary translator. His first symphony, as nineteenth-century critics tell us, was hardly unprecedented; it was modeled not only on Hoffmann, but on the fantastic images of Renaissance painting – images whose wild and “primitive” construction inspired the grotesque literary theory of the early German Romantics, which in turn underpinned Hugo's Romantic manifesto. The *Fantastique*, Berlioz's first masterpiece, was a work not only “in Callot's manner” but in the manner of Rabelais, Salvator Rosa, Hugo and Jean Paul. Far from clumsy or haphazard, it was a calculated experiment in musical monstrosity – an expression of the “colossal,” “monstrous,” and “horrible” aesthetics that Berlioz revered in *Notre Dame de Paris* and in *Faust*, heard in patches of late Beethoven and Weber, and had struggled to express in the *Francs-juges* Overture. In the *Fantastique*, he took the “great and decisive step” of *Cromwell's* preface, translating into sound the noble ugliness and daring shapelessness championed by Romantic painters and playwrights to produce a work that, at least in France, “changed the face of the intellectual world like the upheaval of the earthquake.”

CHAPTER FOUR

BERLIOZ IN CONTEXT: THE *GENRE FANTASTIQUE* BEFORE AND AFTER

The *Fantastique* Past and Present

The notion that Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* is an isolated work goes back to Fétis's earliest reviews, which identified the symphony as a musical anomaly – the product of a bizarre and fantastic imagination. Rather than a “route nouvelle” for music, as Berlioz's supporters claimed, it opened up a false path – one that wandered outside the boundaries of what Fétis considered a legitimate musical tradition.⁵²³ Almost a decade later, Wagner located the symphony in a similarly isolated space. It was “a marvel without precedent” – a work with no clear genealogy and little sense of immediate musical context. Though it was full of gripping effects and novel orchestration, the language of the *Fantastique* was essentially idiosyncratic and therefore incoherent to anyone but its composer. It was caught in the private space of Berlioz's “labyrinthine fantasy,” according to Wagner, and disconnected from any known compositional tradition just as Berlioz himself was “completely alone amongst French musicians.”⁵²⁴

This tendency to compartmentalize the *Fantastique* – to place it in a category of one – has proven surprisingly tenacious, inflecting criticism well into the twentieth century. Many modern commentators (both admirers and detractors of Berlioz) have continued to characterize the *Fantastique* as a singular work – a composition hovering outside of its own musical moment. Charles Rosen, for instance, calls Berlioz a “puzzling figure” whose processes of musical thought are difficult to place in a larger

⁵²³ François-Joseph Fétis, “Concert dramatique de M. Berlioz,” *Revue musicale* (15 December, 1832).

⁵²⁴ Richard Wagner, “Nachrichten aus dem Gebiete der Künste und Wissenschaften. Korrespondenz – Nachrichten. Aus Paris,” *Dresdener Abendzeitung* (5 May, 1841).

context. Echoing Wagner, he claims that the *Fantastique*, and to some degree Berlioz himself, existed outside “the mainstream of musical thought.”⁵²⁵ Only slowly have Berlioz scholars begun to challenge this notion, pointing to the array of musical models that underpinned the *Fantastique*’s composition and its broader debt to the sounds and imagery of early Romanticism. They have begun, in other words, to construct a musical *past* for the work, reinvesting it with a sense of historical connection. David Cairns’ essay “Beethoven and Berlioz” underscores one of Berlioz’s clearest influences, and one he was eager to acknowledge. Cairns describes the liberating and even “cataclysmic” effects that Beethoven’s symphonies had on Berlioz, suggesting that they shaped his own early orchestral writing as well as his broader aspiration toward a “genre instrumental expressif.”⁵²⁶ Julian Rushton goes further, tying Beethoven directly to the *Fantastique*, in which he hears traces not only of the Sixth Symphony, with its pastoral program, but of the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, whose structural innovations provided templates for Berlioz’s own more radical departure from traditional form. Rather than talking about imitation or homage, however, Rushton describes the *Fantastique* as a willful perversion of Beethovenian models: “Berlioz perverts the design of the Fifth Symphony, with its breakthrough into triumph, prototype of the *per ardua ad astra* narrative beloved of nineteenth-century symphonists.”⁵²⁷ Instead of triumph, Berlioz’s symphony culminates in nightmare, giving way to the musical contortions of the grotesque. It constitutes both a critique and an extension of Beethoven’s forms, binding itself to the past while

⁵²⁵ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 544-45.

⁵²⁶ David Cairns, “Beethoven and Berlioz,” *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 223-234.

⁵²⁷ Julian Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 252-53. Berlioz’s debt to Beethoven is among the only ties between the *Fantastique* and earlier symphonic traditions routinely acknowledged by modern commentators. Berlioz enthusiasts often invoke the Beethoven connection as a defensive move – a bid for legitimacy – while detractors dismiss the tie between Berlioz’s *Fantastique* program and Beethoven’s “narrative” for the *Pastoral Symphony* as dubious.

bearing clear testimony to the musical and psychological distance between 1809 and 1830.

Moving beyond Beethoven, Rushton points toward a broader network of musical models for the *Fantastique*, including Weber and Gluck, whose supernatural orchestral effects paved the way for the *Marche aux supplices* and the *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat*. Drawing closer to home, we find that Berlioz's own earlier works provided much of the raw material for his first symphony. As Rushton's elaborate documentation demonstrates, the *Fantastique* is permeated with self-borrowings, including material from Berlioz's early *Romance* "Je vais donc quitter pour jamais" (which furnished the opening theme of the first movement), his Prix de Rome cantata "Herminie" (which became the *idée fixe*), his opera *Les Francs-juges* (from which the *Marche au supplice* was drawn), and his *Messe solennelle* (which provided the main idea of the *Scène aux champs*).⁵²⁸ To talk about the history of the *Fantastique*, then, is to investigate the formal and harmonic influences at play in many of Berlioz's other youthful compositions; suddenly, our field of vision is substantially widened and the roots of Berlioz's first symphony begin to dissolve into untraceable complexity. No longer exclusively German, they emerge as equally French; indeed, while we might agree with Rosen that Berlioz was operating "outside mainstream thought" as a Parisian symphonist in the 1830s (the genre was hardly flourishing in France during this period), we must acknowledge that the raw materials for the *Fantastique* came unambiguously from the realms of opera, song, and sacred music: genres at the very heart of French musical culture.

Holoman (among others) has raised this point, drawing our attention to the importance of French models for the *Fantastique*:

⁵²⁸ Ibid., see Rushton's chart and commentary pp. 264-65.

Precedents and models for many details of the Berlioz style – or styles – are indeed to be found, not just in Beethoven, Rossini, and Weber but in the thoroughly French tradition of Gossec and Méhul.⁵²⁹

It is well known that Berlioz's famous *Ranz des vaches* at the opening of the third movement echoes similar effects in the overtures not only of Rossini's but of Grétry's *Guillaume Tell* (Grétry, 1791; Rossini, 1829). Less obvious, perhaps, is his debt to Méhul's symphonies, to the works of Spontini, and to his teacher, Le Sueur. Of course, we have already documented his connection to Gluck, whose music underpinned what Berlioz himself called the fantastic style.⁵³⁰ Together, this network of influences begins to establish the *Fantastique* as a work with a rich set of historical ties – a substantial musical past. But, coming back to Holoman, we find that the *Fantastique* remains a work with a nebulous musical *present*. We no longer believe, as Wagner suggested, that it emerged *sui generis*, and yet our sense of its relationship with contemporaneous musical culture, French or German, is hazy at best. Of Berlioz's symphonies at large, Holoman writes:

...in truth, finding precedents for the details does little to locate the true aesthetic of his symphonies in any mainstream, French or Viennese; rather they seem a watershed that helped define Romanticism's approach to symphonic thinking and to form post-Romanticism.⁵³¹

Looking for a “mainstream” for the *Fantastique* may be futile (it was, after all, characterized as a revolutionary work by many of its earliest reviewers), but I will argue in this chapter that it had a much more vibrant and complex link to early nineteenth-century musical production than has often been suggested. It was

⁵²⁹ In a passage on the *Symphonie fantastique* in *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Holoman (New York: Schirmer, 1997), p. 111.

⁵³⁰ See Chapter 1, Section 1.

⁵³¹ Holoman, *Berlioz*, p. 111.

intimately tied, as we have seen, to French fantastic culture – a culture bound up not only with literature, politics, and medicine but (as Hoffmann, Bury, Mainzer, and many others pointed out), with *music*. By 1838, Mainzer had already noted that Berlioz was not the only composer to experiment with the sounds and forms of the fantastic: the *genre fantastique*, he acknowledged, was a burgeoning current style. Indeed, by 1835, two other Fantastic Symphonies had been written and performed, one in Paris and the other in Liège. These works were followed by a stream of parodical Fantastic Symphonies described in the Parisian press and, as the decade progressed, by a collection of other instrumental pieces bearing the term “fantastique” in their titles. These were, of course, not all inspired by Berlioz’s symphony, but formed part of a broader repertory of fantastic music – sonatas, dances, overtures, and concerti which, together, coalesce into an important context for the original *Symphonie Fantastique*.

Instrumental pieces of the *école fantastique* resonated obviously with the overlapping traditions of fantastic opera and ballet, which included well-known works including Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable*, Gomis’s *Le Revenant*, and Adam’s *Giselle*. A complete account of the cross-references and intertextualities that obtain across this broader repertory is beyond the scope of this chapter; here, our goal is merely to open a window onto the rich musical culture that produced and embedded Berlioz’s first symphony. Focusing on the “fantastique” instrumental repertory chronologically closest to Berlioz, we will examine his connection with an emergent compositional and critical discourse – a fragment of his larger context and one that situates the *Fantastique* in an important musical *present*. In doing so, we will begin to erode received notions of Berlioz as a fringe figure while also shedding light on his perplexed reputation – his ties, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism, to both the legitimate realm of high art and the marginal world of musical charlatanism. And finally, we will track the emergence of the *genre fantastique* itself from its formative

years in the 1830s to its relatively entrenched status in the 1860s, noting Berlioz's shifting critical profile across these decades and his persistent connection, well beyond the years of the *Huit Scènes*, the *Fantastique*, and even *Faust*, to the aesthetics of the fantastic.

The Other Fantastic Symphonies

Of the two *Symphonies fantastiques* composed post-1830, the one most closely connected to Berlioz was written by his friend and fellow composer, François-Laurent -Hébert Turbry (Turbri) – an eccentric though allegedly brilliant violinist and a staunch Berlioz supporter. Turbry was a member of Berlioz's circle as early as 1828 and certainly attended the 1829 concert featuring the *Waverly* and *Francs-juges* overtures and the *Jugement dernière*. Through the early 1830s, Berlioz inquired after Turbry's health and whereabouts on a number of occasions, including in a letter to Madame Lesueur, which contained a brief but telling character sketch:

Que fait Turbry? N'a-t-il point obtenu d'avancement à l'Opéra? ... Je pense bien souvent à lui et le voudrais voir plus heureux. C'est un excellent garçon qui aurait plus d'amis s'il ne pensait pas tout haut devant des gens que ses pensées offusquent.⁵³²

Berlioz's enigmatic commentary was more fully fleshed out in Fétis's *Biographie*, which described Turbry as an unreliable and volatile figure. After two brief stints at the Conservatoire in the 1810s, he held a series of posts in Parisian orchestras, none of which he was able to retain due to his frequent outbursts and absences. He produced a number of well-received quartets and trios as well as a grand opera (never performed)

⁵³² CG I: 258 (12 January, 1832). "What is Turbry doing? Has he not yet secured advancement at the Opéra? ... I think of him often and would like to see him happier. He is an excellent fellow who would have more friends if he did not think aloud in the presence of those whom his thoughts offend."

and several theoretical works. But ill health, both mental and physical, seems to have ended his career prematurely. Fétis gave the following summary of his temperament and fate:

Esprit bizarre, inconstant, sans ordre dans les idées comme dans sa conduite, il ne sut pas mettre à profit son heureuse organisation d'artiste, et finit par tomber dans la misère et dans la dégradation qui en est souvent la compagne.⁵³³

It could hardly have come as a surprise to Fétis that such an overtly Kreisleresque figure had produced a work in the fantastic style. Turbry's *Symphonie fantastique* was first performed in early October, 1835 – almost five years after Berlioz's work. That Turbry knew Berlioz's symphony is unquestionable; he may even have played in its premiere. For most of 1830 – the year of the original *Fantastique's* debut – Turbry managed to retain a position as violist in the Opéra orchestra, from which Berlioz recruited many of the extra players needed to fill his enormous string and brass sections. A place in the *Fantastique* orchestra itself would have afforded Turbry unique insight into Berlioz's work and perhaps provided the impetus for his own first symphony.

Turbry's piece was by all accounts a striking though immensely difficult work. The music for the symphony is now lost, but its literary program survives and, according to an acerbic review in *Le Ménestrel*, was widely disseminated – “posted, scattered, stuck up on walls, slid into hands, and thrust into pockets” – so that all Paris had a copy.⁵³⁴ Turbry's narrative is clearly indebted to Berlioz's, although it reorders

⁵³³ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1878-84). “Bizarre and inconstant soul, lacking order in his ideas as in his conduct, he could not put his artistic sensibility to good use, and finished by falling into the misery and degradation which so often accompany [such a temperament].” Jacques Barzun described Turbry as “perhaps the most gifted [among B's circle of musical friends] but “a composer whose will power did not equal his musical talents,” *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, Volume I (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), p. 213.

⁵³⁴ *Le Ménestrel* (4 October, 1835). This is also the source of Turbry's literary program. The *Ménestrel* critic, writing of Turbry's symphony on 4 October, referred to a concert “ces jours derniers” while

and reshapes elements of the first *Fantastique* (See Table 1). Jettisoning the autobiographical material laid out in Berlioz's first two movements, Turbry begins, essentially, in the middle of the original program, with a pastoral scene featuring shepherds and a rustic prairie setting. His second movement draws us directly into the supernatural realm: suddenly, without the intervention of a dream, a troupe of demons appears on the prairie, the landscape undergoes an eerie change, and we hear a *Ronde du Sabbat* – the witches' dance that Berlioz had reserved for his final movement. Turbry's third and fourth parts maintain Berlioz's sequence, moving from a *Marche nocturne* to a *Songe d'une imagination exaltée* [Delirious Dream], a variation on the original *Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat*. Here, Turbry brings back the witches' dance, the pastoral theme and the march, now in the tonic major, echoing both the famous melodic intertwinings of Berlioz's final movement, and its altered thematic recall.

Table 1: François-Laurent-Hébert Turbry, *Symphonie fantastique*; Literary Program.

1. Introduction Pastorale ... LA PRAIRIE.	1. Pastoral Introduction ... THE PRAIRIE
2. Soudain une nuée de Démons de toutes les formes et de toutes les dimensions, fond sur la Prairie; troupeaux et bergers disparaissent, le site lui-même devient en rapport avec les esprits infernaux, qui s'apprêtent à y danser une RONDE DU SABBAT en plusieurs figures.	2. Suddenly a host of Demons of all shapes and sizes swoops down on the Prairie; flock and shepherds disappear; the setting itself becomes attuned to the infernal spirits, who prepare to dance a RONDE DU SABBAT in varied figures.
3. UNE MARCHE NOCTURNE	3. NOCTURNAL MARCH
4. SONGE D'UNE IMAGINATION EXALTÉE, dans lequel reparaissent, la ronde des Démons, la Pastorale, et la marche qui cette fois est entendue dans le mode majeur principal, et termine la symphonie d'une manière grandiose	4. DELIRIOUS DREAM, in which the Demon's round, the Pastorale, and the march reappear, [the march] is heard this time in the tonic major and ends the symphony in a grand manner.

Berlioz's later review cited the concert date as 5 October. Clearly, either Berlioz misremembered the date or Turbry's symphony was performed twice.

Turbry's revisionary symphony, with its emphasis on the most sensational elements of its model, reflects an increasing public appetite for the supernatural as well as an interest in Berlioz's most novel musical effects. Berlioz himself reviewed the symphony, although his commentary is evasive. He notes the work's astonishing effects but reports that its "style passionné" and virtuosic passagework proved difficult for both orchestra and audience:

La symphonie de M. Turbri, qui succédait au solo de piano, a mis à une rude épreuve l'orchestre du Gymnase-Musical, comme aussi la majeure partie de l'auditoire, qu'une telle musique devait singulièrement étonner. Le final surtout, par la rapidité des traits, par le style passionné qui règne d'un bout à l'autre, nous paraît être de ces choses que des auditeurs, même assez avancés dans l'étude de la musique, ont besoin d'entendre plusieurs fois pour s'en faire une idée nette. Le premier morceau au contraire est extrêmement facile à comprendre; et l'auteur a prouvé par là qu'il était capable d'écrire dans le genre simple avec le même succès. Nous ne possédons pas assez complètement cette partition pour oser en parler avec plus de détails, et nous demandons en conséquence à l'auteur la permission d'ajourner notre analyse.⁵³⁵

Here, as elsewhere in Berlioz's critical writing, his reticence is certainly a signal of his disapproval – although he would have been too loyal to negate the work of a friend. He never pursued a more detailed analysis of the symphony, nor – to my knowledge – was it ever performed again. Other critics were less restrained in their responses. A decidedly negative report in *Le Ménestrel*, for instance, complained of "une foule de croches, de doubles-croches, de sauts et de soubre-sauts, force dissonances et de

⁵³⁵ "M. Turbri's symphony, which followed the piano solo, put the orchestra of the Gymnase-Musical to a harsh test, as well as the majority of the audience, who were understandably astonished by such music. The *finale*, above all, due to the rapidity of its passagework and the *style passionné* that reigned from start to finish, seems to us something that the audience – even those advanced in the study of music – would need to hear multiple times before forming a clear idea. The first movement, on the other hand, is extremely easy to comprehend; here, the composer proved that he is capable of writing in the simple style with equal success. We do not know the score well enough to dare to discuss it in greater detail, therefore we request permission to postpone our analysis." *Le Rénovateur* (12 October, 1835).

fracas,” bemoaning Turbry’s melodic deficiency and asymmetrical phrase structure.⁵³⁶ These were all, of course, criticisms that had been repeatedly levied against Berlioz’s *Fantastique* and which, by 1835, were perceived as hallmarks of his style. Clearly, Turbry had borrowed not only chunks of Berlioz’s literary program, but elements of his experimental musical language – and perhaps rather badly? The original *Fantastique* had begun to bear fruit – to generate its own context, sparking not only critical but musical response.

What Turbry could not have known when his symphony was first performed in late 1835, was that he had produced not the second but the third *Symphonie fantastique*. Earlier the same year, a young Belgian composer called Jean-Etienne-Joseph Soubre had premiered his own Fantastic Symphony – a work written in 1833 while he was a promising composition student at the Liège Conservatoire. Soubre began his studies as a bassoonist but quickly demonstrated a talent for both composition and conducting. He led the Opéra de Liège (in Liszt’s presence) in 1839, going on to conduct the newly formed *Société du Conservatoire* and the *Société Philharmonique* of Brussels, and finally taking up the directorship of the *Liège Conservatoire* in 1862. Although he made his name largely as a composer of vocal music, Soubre’s early works were instrumental, among them two symphonies, several overtures and a collection of smaller pieces.⁵³⁷ According to concert announcements in the *Journal de Liège*, his first symphony – the *Symphonie fantastique* – was given on January 9th, 1835 by the *Association musicale de Liège* and repeated a year later as

⁵³⁶ “...a crowd of eighth notes, of sixteenth notes, of leaps and jolts, violent dissonances and noise.” *Le Ménestrel* (4 October, 1835).

⁵³⁷ Biographical information on Soubre is to be found in the article by John Lade and Philippe Vendrix, *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001) and in Michelle Nennig, “Etude bio-bibliographique sur Etienne Soubre (1813-1871),” Master’s Thesis, Université de Liège, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1990.

part of a concert featuring his early works (The 1836 announcement is reproduced in Figure 5).

JOURNAL DE LIÈGE DES 2 ET 3 JANVIER 1836.

PROGRAMME du GRAND CONCERT vocal et instrumental
qui sera donné **LE 16 JANVIER (1)**, à la salle du Gymnase,
PAR ÉTIENNE SOUBRE, prix de composition pratique
au Conservatoire (concours de 1835).

1^{re} PARTIE.

- 1^{re}. Symphonie fantastique, composée par Étienne Soubre.
- 2^o. **LES GONDOLIERS VÉNITIENS**, chœur chanté par MM. les élèves du Conservatoire, musique de Ét. Soubre.
- 3^o. **RÈVE, DÉLIRE**, adagio et finale de la symphonie fantastique.
- 4^o. Solo de violoncelle, exécuté par M. Vanderheyden, 2^e. prix du Conservatoire.
- 5^o. Grand duo des **FRUITAINS**, musique de Bellini, chanté par MM. P. et B., élèves du Conservatoire.
- 6^o. Grand septuor de Hummel. La partie de piano sera exécutée par J. Massart, premier prix du Conservatoire.

SECONDE PARTIE.

- 1^{re}. Grande fantaisie dramatique pour orchestre, composée par Étienne Soubre.
- 2^o. **LE MOINE**, scène de Meyerbeer, chantée par M. B., amateur.
- 3^o. **LE SOIR**, chœur chanté par MM. les élèves du Conservatoire, musique de Étienne Soubre.
- 4^o. Grandes variations pour le piano, sur le duo des **FRUITAINS**, composées par H. Herz, exécutées par J. Massart.
- 5^o. **L'ANGE, — LES BLEUETS**, romances composées par Étienne Soubre, et chantées par M^r. M., élève du Conservatoire.
- 6^o. Chœur de **LA SURVE**, musique de Halévy, chanté par MM. les élèves du Conservatoire.

ON SOUSCRIT dès à présent au Conservatoire, à la **LIBRAIRIE GUILMARD**, rue Vinave-d'Ile, et rue de l'Étuve, n^o. 716.

(1) Retardé à cause des représentations du théâtre.

Figure 5: Concert announcement for Jean-Etienne Soubre's *Symphonie fantastique*, *Journal de Liège* (2/3 Jan, 1836)

In the early 1840s, Soubre traveled to Germany as a winner of the Belgian *Prix de Rome*, where his Fantastic Symphony became known to Liszt, Mendelssohn, Ferdinand Ries, and others. We have relatively little information about its reception: an 1893 report by Ledent notes that Soubre's "œuvres symphoniques lui valurent les

plus vifs encouragements de la part des musiciens allemands.” Later, during his 1844 visit to Paris, the *Gazette musicale* published a brief, mainly biographical, article noting “une Symphonie à trois parties, dans laquelle se trouve un *adagio* que Ries a qualifié de ‘très remarquable.’”⁵³⁸ A full set of manuscript parts for the *Symphonie fantastique* exists, and is housed in the archive of the Liège Conservatoire.

Upon first inspection, Soubre’s symphony is notable for the sheer size and breadth of its orchestra, which includes a double brass choir in the finale and a ‘Turkish music ensemble’ (cymbals, bass drum, and triangle) throughout. Certainly, it conforms to the noisy aesthetic associated with both Berlioz and Turbry. Although the symphony has no surviving literary program, its movements are marked with descriptive titles that trace a now-familiar fantastic narrative moving from agitation, to dream and delirium. The first movement (whose title, *Symphonie fantastique*, clearly applies to the work as a whole) is a restless C minor *Allegro molto* in clearcut sonata form. Its opening, Beethovenian theme is followed by two lyrical melodies, the first of which (in E-flat) features the flattened sixth scale degree as well as vacillating between G-natural and G-flat in a manner that brings to mind the *idée fixe* of the original *Fantastique* (Example 1).⁵³⁹ Though Soubre’s second lyrical theme, also in E-flat, is the more fully elaborated of the two (unfolding over a pair of eight bar antecedent-consequent phrases) it is nevertheless his first, more fleeting melody that dominates the development and therefore lodges in our memory.

⁵³⁸ See Ledent, “Notice sur le Conservatoire Royal de musique de Liège et sur ses directeurs” (Liège: 1893), pp. 10; 137 and the biographical piece on Soubre in the *Gazette musicale* (16 June, 1844), which referred to “a Symphony in three parts, which includes an *adagio* described by Ries as “truly remarkable.”

⁵³⁹ Musical examples are contained in the Appendix. I would like to thank Chris Younghoon Kim and the Cornell Symphony Orchestra for making a preliminary recording of Soubre’s symphony, which aided greatly in my study of the work. I would also like to thank the Department of Music at Cornell University for funding the project which made both score and recording possible.

Soubre's second movement, entitled *Rêve* [Dream], is in lilting triple time and ABA form. Its introduction opens with a single note for horn echoed by *pianissimo* responses in the paired oboes/clarinets and the muted strings. Both its sparse orchestration and lonely woodwind dialogue remind us of the beginning of Berlioz's *Scène aux champs*. As in the original *Fantastique*, its tuneful main theme gives way to *sforzando* rumblings in the bass and harmonic darkening in the B section. Soubre returns, in the final few bars, to the bare orchestration and *pianissimo* register of the introduction, which slips downwards in a daringly chromatic line leading to the final cadence. We are hard pressed not to hear connections here, to the narrative of Berlioz's pastoral scene, although Soubre's *Rêve* might also be mapped onto Berlioz's Ball movement (its song form, time signature, and long-breathed melodies are obvious points of overlap). Admittedly, however, Soubre's dream lacks the richness and breadth of either Berlioz's second or third movements.

Soubre's finale, entitled *Délire* [Delirium] draws us into a space of madness in which form and narrative are jumbled. Here, he borrows elements of both sonata and rondo structures but fails to satisfy the requirements of either, instead stringing together a series of programmatic sections. The opening C minor Vivace, *alla breve*, introduces two theme groups separated by a modulating transition, rehearsing the gestures of a sonata-form exposition. But in place of a development section (and the expected move to E-flat major), we encounter a double bar followed by a pastoral Andantino in 6/8 time (A-flat major), which unfolds in a self-contained ABA form. It is followed by a second Vivace (now back to the 2/2 the opening), dominated by a new theme in E-flat featuring double brass choir, *fortissimo*. As it draws to a close, this section gives way to a series of ever-quieter cadential gestures, arriving, now *piano*, at the dominant of E-flat. A new section follows, marked Scherzo, which resolves the hanging dominant seventh with a series of solo E-flats in the violins, now

in a jaunty 3/4. But almost immediately, the key shifts to C major and we find ourselves in the midst of a dance marked by an ornamented drone figure in the bass and punctuating chords in the brass. Like the Andantino, this section is cast in an ABA form and transitions into a Vivace – a final section which brings back the C minor tonality of the opening section as well as fragments of its material, although without substantial recapitulation.

Rather than a unified movement, Soubre's finale gives us the sense of three enjambed movements – a simple Andantino, a Scherzo, and an explosive Vivace – which point us irresistibly toward Berlioz's final three movements: an Adagio "scene in the country," a March, and an infernal Allegro (See Table 2). But a more tellingly Berliozian element of Soubre's finale is its moment of thematic recall – a device we also saw in Turbry's final 'dream' movement. As the Scherzo draws to a close, Soubre brings back the lyrical E-flat major melody that dominated his first movement, paring down the orchestration and reducing the dynamic to *pianissimo*. This is hardly a structurally motivated return – we cannot place it in the same category as Beethoven's recalled scherzo in the finale of the Fifth or Haydn's return to the minuet theme in the final movement of Symphony No. 46. Soubre's Scherzo is already in C major and might move directly into the C minor of his final Vivace without further ado. The interpolation of the E-flat major theme reads not as an organically connected or harmonically justified event but as an intrusion – a delirious remembrance reminiscent of Berlioz's *idée fixe* (Example 2).

The narrative and even structural continuities between Soubre and Berlioz raise obvious questions about the connection between the two composers. Since Soubre does not seem to have traveled outside Belgium until 1836, it is virtually impossible that he had heard Berlioz's *Fantastique* before embarking on his own first

Table 2: Programmatic and structural links between Soubre's / Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*

symphony. Nor could he have seen a score – even Liszt’s piano transcription was not available until 1834. But it is possible that Soubre heard accounts of Berlioz’s symphony from musical colleagues; Fétis, for instance, was back in Belgium by 1833 and certainly a reliable source of information on the work. It is even more likely that Soubre read reports of the original *Fantastique* in the Belgian papers, which routinely republished Parisian concert announcements and reviews. The two 1832 performances of Berlioz’s symphony were particularly well publicized; descriptions of the program and, in some cases, detailed analyses of the work’s musical content appeared in virtually all the major Parisian papers, from literary and music journals to mainstream papers including *Le National*, *Le Journal de Commerce*, and *Le Temps* (see Chapter 1). Soubre may even have had access to one of the hundreds of pamphlets containing Berlioz’s literary program that were distributed to audiences at both the 1830 premiere and the two 1832 concerts, and made their way not only outside of Paris, but as far away as Germany and – quite possibly – Belgium. Indeed, it seems more than likely that the *idea* for Soubre’s Fantastic Symphony – its title and programmatic narrative, as well as its oddly constructed finale and its moment of thematic return – came from Berlioz.

In any case, Soubre is unlikely to have invented such an unusual symphonic model entirely independently – and although Berlioz’s *Fantastique* was clearly not his only aesthetic influence, it would certainly have provided a compelling framework for a young composer eager to make his mark. We must bear in mind, though, that Soubre had the *Fantastique* only as a literary template – at best, his knowledge of Berlioz’s music was second hand. In his own symphony, therefore, we see him borrowing programmatic tropes from Berlioz (and possibly elements of orchestration garnered from written sources) while relying on other compositional models to shape the fundamentals of his musical style. Echoes of Weber’s *Der Freischütz* are clear,

particularly in Soubre's third movement, whose syncopated brass blasting takes its cue from the Wolf's Glen scene. Beethoven's influence is even more apparent both here and in the opening movement. The beginning of Soubre's *Allegro molto* for instance (three *tutti* blasts moving from vii^o7 to V; from F-G in the bass) reminds us of the Coriolan's opening gesture, which traces the same harmonic progression (somewhat extended) in a series of *fortissimo* chords which, like Soubre, give way to *piano* eighth-note motion in the strings. (Example 3)⁵⁴⁰ Later, Soubre will use a solo horn call to mark the recapitulation of the first of his two lyrical themes, just as Beethoven does; he also recalls this theme in C major (rather than C minor) – a quirk that underscores the Coriolan connection. Turning to the Eroica, we find that Soubre's transition (mm. 40*ff*; Example 4) borrows a syncopated dotted rhythm that reminds us very much of Beethoven's second theme and permeates both works. Another of Soubre's transitions, this time in the third movement, is drawn equally clearly from the Eroica: the passage following m. 276 leading out of the *Scherzo* (Example 5) maps onto mm. 99-103 of Beethoven's first movement. Here, however, the Coriolan's thumbprint is more generally in evidence especially in Soubre's repetitive harmonic and rhythmic patterns, which echo the famously 'locked' motives of Beethoven's overture. See, for instance, mm. 9-16 of Soubre (Example 6); the subdominant prolongation only adds to the resemblance.

Soubre may have relied on Beethoven as a model not simply because the music was close at hand (closer, as I have suggested, than Berlioz's) but – more compellingly – because Beethoven himself had already been drawn securely into the realm of the fantastic. Hoffmann's review of the Fifth Symphony, which embraced Beethoven's "magical tones," "monstrous sounds," and "nightmares," had appeared in

⁵⁴⁰ I do not give musical examples from either Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony or Coriolan Overture, as these works are readily available.

French translation in the early 1830s and, of course, Berlioz had long since declared his allegiance with the German symphonist. Perhaps more importantly, Fétis had labeled Beethoven a “fantasque” as early as 1829 in the three-paragraph character sketch attached to his review of the Pastoral Symphony; the review opened with the sentence, “Quel spectacle étonnant et bizarre que celui du génie de Beethoven!” As in his later and more substantial biography, Fétis attributed the composer’s final works to illness and madness (“une imagination en délire”), claiming that in Beethoven’s last years “composer n’était plus que rêver.”⁵⁴¹ For the critics Joseph D’Ortigue and François Stoepel, Beethoven’s symphonies were also a locus of the fantastic, although they applied the term more positively. In a *feuilleton* for *La Quotidienne* (23 March, 1833), D’Ortigue described “les convulsions du délire et du cauchemar” at the heart of the Seventh Symphony – a work whose individual movements were linked only by the most mysterious logic. Here, Beethoven “poursuit son rêve poétique à travers [les] mondes fantastiques que son imagination conçoit,” producing a work of “pure imagination.”⁵⁴²

Stoepel plumbed the depths of Beethoven’s “monde fantastique” itself, producing a lengthy program for one of the symphonies (he does not specify which one although the Ninth seems most possible, for reasons that will become clear).⁵⁴³ He prefaces his account by admitting that only in the wake of reading Jean Paul – “[le] célèbre écrivain de l’Allemagne, le noble modèle et ami du fantastique E.T.A. Hoffmann” – were the forms and images produced by Beethoven’s “musical humor” rendered transparent. Once he had penetrated the order underlying their seeming

⁵⁴¹ *Revue musicale* (1829).

⁵⁴² Beethoven “pursues his poetic dream across the fantastic worlds generated by his imagination.” Sylvia L’Écuyer quotes and comments on D’Ortigue’s “fantastique” description in her *Écrits sur la musique 1827-1846 / Joseph D’Ortigue; textes réunis, présentés et annotés* (Paris: Société française de musicologie, 2003), pp. 318-21.

⁵⁴³ François Stoepel, “Beethoven et sa Musique,” *Gazette musicale* (9 February, 1834).

confusion, the symphonies began to reveal themselves to him as marvelous narratives. Stoepel recounts one of these tales, which opens onto an unmistakably Hoffmannesque space in which the landscape itself resounds with the tones of a “langage surnaturel”:

... j’errai au milieu d’un jardin magique et embaumé où les harpes éoliennes résonnaient dans les airs, où toutes les feuilles des arbres semblaient exhiler de douces pensées, où toutes les fleurs se balançaient mollement comme bercées par un songe enchanteur, où le souffle du vent et le murmure de la cascade ressemblaient à un langage surnaturel.⁵⁴⁴

Here, in Stoepel’s “magical garden,” he encounters his ideal beloved – a beautiful woman who returns his affection. Suddenly separated from her, however, he finds himself first in a cemetery and then in front of a vast moonlit lake on the shore of which lies a glittering chateau with spires rising into the clouds. As he runs toward it, he falls into a black abyss populated by “demons invisibles,” “squelettes monstrueux” and “apparitions effrayantes.” Mysterious noises mingle with the roar of a cataract and the cracking of tree branches, which come hurtling toward him. In vain he shakes the chains that hold him fast; an overwhelming pain fills his breast and tears cloud his vision. Finally his pulse stops and he hovers on the edge of death. A blessed dream unfolds in his mind’s eye – a sweet hand reaches for him and he feels a burning kiss on his lips. He recognizes the blue eyes of his lost beloved, who leads him out of prison into a realm of eternal Spring. There, the world is flooded with light and joy and all beings unite their voices in a great hymn (the Ode in the final movement of the

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., “...I wandered in the midst of a perfumed and magical garden where aeolian harps resonated in the air, where all the leaves on the trees seemed to exhale sweet thoughts, where all the flowers balanced gently as if cradled by an enchanting dream, where the breaths of wind and the murmurs of the waterfall resembled a supernatural language.” This rhetoric resonates not only with Hoffmann’s passages of synaesthetic description but with the aesthetics of the picturesque. For more on Beethoven’s link with the ‘natural’ fantastic, see Annette Richards, “Picturesque Beethoven and the Veiled Isis,” *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 183-231.

Ninth?). He is enclosed in a passionate embrace and enraptured by “la voix célestial d’amour.”

We hear echoes of Berlioz’s own symphonic program (and monodramatic sequel) here: the search for ideal love, the pastoral interlude, the descent into hell and confinement of the condemned, and even the return to life. Is it possible that, after 1830, the *Symphonie fantastique* began to operate as a hermeneutic template for ‘readings’ of Beethoven?⁵⁴⁵ Such an idea perhaps invests Berlioz with too much importance. But we can argue without hesitation that Stoepel’s narrative, marked by a vacillation between waking and dreaming states and a collapse of the natural with the supernatural borrows from Hoffmann’s aesthetics. Indeed, Stoepel concludes his article by echoing a claim made by many of Hoffmann’s reviewers: the fantastic work, he argues, cannot be penetrated via conventional analysis. Beethoven’s symphonies – “choses purement fantastiques” – resist intellectual dissection and even rational reflection, revealing themselves only to the spirit:

Vouloir réfléchir, vouloir analyser des choses purement fantastiques, vouloir même faire de la critique pendant qu’on ne doit qu’écouter, c’est vouloir rétrécir le domaine du sentiment, le seul pourtant où la musique puisse nous transporter.⁵⁴⁶

This species of criticism may well have influenced Soubre, whose *Symphonie fantastique* – as we have seen – is as much a Beethoven as a Berlioz imitation. We cannot put it in the same category as Turbry’s work, which was a more obvious knockoff (or at least a piece whose primary influence is clear). Soubre’s work opens

⁵⁴⁵ James Davies bolsters this idea by noting a similar phenomenon at work in London through the 1820s: during this period, the program of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony began to shape readings of the Seventh and Ninth symphonies, which accrued oddly ‘pastoral’ narratives in the press. See Davies’ “Dancing the Symphonic: Beethoven-Bochsa’s *Symphonie Pastorale*, 1829,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 27/1 (2003), 25-47.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., To want to reflect, to analyse purely fantastic things, to want to critique while one should only listen, is to want to confine the domain of sentiment, still the only one to which music can transport us.”

up more complex questions about both the definition and dissemination of the fantastic style. It suggests not only that Berlioz's symphony had a wider range of influence in the early 1830s than we had imagined but also that the vogue for "fantastique" instrumental works had leaked out of Paris and penetrated even the relative backwater of Liège.

It was the threat of precisely this kind of influence that began to spur Berlioz's Parisian detractors to action in the late 1830s. The danger, according to his conservative critics, was that young composers might adopt not only Berlioz's programmatic model for the symphony but – as Turbry's work suggested – his overtly pictorial approach to orchestration. They responded with polemical essays and reviews (we have already examined the 1838 articles by Mainzer and Blaze) as well as parodical Fantastic Symphonies that lampooned both Berlioz and his experimental idiom. Of course, parodies of operas and plays were commonplace in Paris – part of the expected 'life' of any major work – but send-ups of orchestral works were virtually unknown. A parody of the *Symphonie fantastique*, therefore, was a double edged sword – one which both supported and undermined the project of Berlioz's critics. It ridiculed the *Fantastique* while simultaneously inflating its cultural currency, placing it alongside the most recent grand opera or ballet. Indeed, it was nothing short of an honor for Berlioz when a comic version of his first symphony was included as part of the entertainment for the first of the 1835 Opéra balls – a lavish occasion that showcased the most recent fashion and music and the most glittering social set in Paris.

Written by the French comedian Étienne Arnal and set to music by Adolphe Adam, this first and most famous satire of the symphony took Berlioz's full title as its point of departure: the *Episode de la vie d'un artiste* [Episode in the life of an artist]

became an *Episode de la vie d'un joueur* [Episode in the life of a gambler].⁵⁴⁷ No longer an obsessive young lover, Berlioz was transformed by Arnal into an obsessive young stock-broker, and his symphony from a diffusely programmatic work to one whose pictorialisms were ludicrously specific.⁵⁴⁸ A description of Arnal's program appeared on January 13 in *Le Quotidienne* (Table 3):

Table 3: Prose description of Arnal's parodic *Symphonie fantastique*

<p>Arnal, le comique le plus sérieusement plaisant que nous connaissions, est venu ensuite diriger une symphonie imitative <i>d'une séance de bourse</i>. Il s'agissait de dramatiser en musique une baisse de 2 francs 25 centimes sur le 3 pour cent, d'exprimer, avec des violons, des flageolets, des trompettes et des bassons, tous les proxismes d'une grande péripétie financière depuis l'ouverture des portes roulant et criant sur leurs gonds, jusqu'à l'arrivée d'une dépêche télégraphique interrompue par un brouillard. Il fallait représenter un gros speculateur descendant de cabriolet avec un habit bleu, un gilet jaune et des lunettes verts <i>au moyen de croches et de doubles croches</i>: les agens de change se pressant autour de lui sur des rentrées de quintes et de hautbois. Le désespoir des joueurs exprime à grands renforts de tam-tam, de tymballes et de grosse caisse.</p>	<p>Arnal, the most consistently amusing comedian we know then came out to direct a symphony imitating <i>a session at the stock market</i>. It was a matter of dramatizing in music a loss of 2 francs, 25 cents at 3 percent, of expressing with some violins, flageolets, trumpets, and bassoons all the paroxysms of a great financial turn of fortune, from the opening of the doors, rolling and screeching on their hinges, to the arrival of a telegraphic dispatch delayed by fog. He claims to depict a large trader descending from a cab with a blue suit, a yellow waistcoat, and green eyeglasses <i>by means of eighth and sixteenth notes</i>: the stockbrokers gather around him at the re-entry of the violas and oboes. The despair of the traders [players] is expressed to great effect with a large complement of gong, timpani, and bass drum.</p>
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In Arnal's new Fantastic Symphony, the orchestra depicted not just emotional states and imaginary landscapes but the mathematics of the stock market and even the color of a gambler's clothing. Sound became a plastic art; indeed, Arnal promised that

⁵⁴⁷ *Le Quotidienne* (13 January 1835). Subsequent quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same source. Arnal promised in his opening spiel that his next symphony would be even more diverting: a symphony "sur le *Code civil*!" Unfortunately, this second spoof never materialized nor – to my knowledge – does the score for the original *Episode de la vie d'un joueur* survive.

⁵⁴⁸ Arnal was the most famous comedic actor of his day; he spent over twenty years at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, where he played parts written expressly for him by authors including Lauzanne and Duvert.

the audience would “see” his hero in action – “I will paint him for you from head to foot.” No longer music in any conventional sense his symphony was composed of a series of dislocated orchestrational effects calculated to generate specific images. His was hardly a composition that “anyone could understand,” he informed his audience archly, for it dispensed with established harmonic and melodic conventions – with “the thousand irrelevant details for which your real genius has no use.” The new, Berliozian genius, he implied, was one immune to the strictures of taste and beauty, who operated outside the boundaries of the discipline itself.

The parody was a great success, although the *Quotidienne* critic wondered whether it had struck a bit too close to home. Berlioz took it in stride, however, and in a response printed in the *Gazette musicale* a few days later, wrote that it had “made him laugh as he had not laughed in a long time.”⁵⁴⁹ But he pointed out that the audience seemed unaware of the aesthetic issues at stake. In Germany, Berlioz argued, such a parody would have generated more serious discourse about artistic philosophy and the liberties of the composer. Instead of leading to serious public debate, however, Arnal’s parody simply led to more parodies. Some were fairly prosaic, including a mock concert announcement in *Le Corsaire* publicizing “La musique de M. Berlioz exécuté par les virtuoses du Journal des Débats.” It featured a raft of macabre, nocturnal, and loud works (including a *Marche de la chouette* and a *Chant funèbre*), and culminated in an imaginary *Symphonie fantastique* whose program was a snide revision of Berlioz’s original. The fifth part (see Table 4) underscored old complaints surrounding the symphony’s loudness and disorder:

⁵⁴⁹ *Gazette musicale* (18 January, 1835).

Table 4: *Symphonie fantastique*, literary program (Part Five). Printed in *Le Corsaire* (22 November, 1838).

<p><i>Cinquième partie</i> – Songe d’une nuit du sabbat, nuit affreuse, nuit charivarisée par la musique de M. Berlioz. Fantasmagories et déceptions. La musique de M. Berlioz rêve qu’elle existe encore, et qu’elle retentit plus que jamais dans le séjour des vivans. <i>Dies irae</i> burlesque et ronde infernale. Scène du jugement dernier. Les partitions de M. Berlioz sont jetées au feu éternel pour avoir assassiné le tympan des humains.</p>	<p><i>Fifth Part</i> – Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath, frightful night, night made uproarious by M. Berlioz’s music. Phantasms and deceptions. The music of M. Berlioz dreams that it still exists, and that it resounds more than ever in the abode of the living. Burlesque <i>dies irae</i> and sabbath round. Scene of the final judgement. M. Berlioz’s scores are thrown in the eternal fire for having murdered the human ear.</p>
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More provocative was an earlier parody published in 1836 in *Le Ménestrel* and probably riffing on Arnal’s work. It was titled *Symphonie fantastique en 4 Parties – Episode de la vie d’un grammairien* [Fantastic Symphony in four parts: Episode in the Life of a Grammarian], and had been composed (so the journal’s editors claimed) by a student of Berlioz – a child prodigy who had honed his teacher’s idiom to a state of perfection.⁵⁵⁰ Now music could paint not only specific objects but abstract intellectual concepts: the rules and regulations of grammar. The program for Part One of this new symphony was the single sentence, “Grammar is the art of speaking and writing correctly” which was to be communicated via an *Allegro limpide*. In the *Unctuous adagio* of Part Two, the orchestra described, one by one, the nine parts of speech, a cello solo representing the noun, a viola and clarinet duo the adjective, and so forth, through the pronoun, article, adverb, and violent “interjection.” Sadly, the editors of *Le Ménestrel* observed, Berlioz’s new orchestral idiom confused hearing with reading, sacrificing beautiful melody to arcane philosophy. In Part Three – the learned “Treatise of Participles” – music teeters on the edge of noise: we witness “a succession of motives that interlace, collide, and destroy one another.” And by Part

⁵⁵⁰ [Anon]. “Sinfonie fantastique,” *Le Menestrel* (8 May 1836).

Four, the symphony has convulsed itself into “a mixture of fugues, of syncopations, of timpani and triangle blows (...) of sharps, flats and naturals, thirty second notes... tied notes, dissonances and consonances” – a series of jumbled effects representing Berlioz’s musical *Syntax* (Table 5).

This parody was a clever one, for it suggested not only that Berlioz was a laughably literal composer but, more importantly, that he was disseminating a new symphonic language. His fantastic idiom was rooted in a mysterious grammar that produced not music, but unreadable sound. The same idea, as we saw in Chapter 1, surfaced in Blaze’s 1838 essay on the *École fantastique*, which identified Berlioz’s syntax as other-worldly: “votre inspiration ne parle pas les langues des hommes,” he wrote.⁵⁵¹ Instead, Berlioz drew on the vaporous and untranslatable “spirit” language of Hoffmann – a language that Blaze believed was anathema to music: “l’art des sons,” he insisted, “n’est en aucune manière l’art des hiéroglyphes.”⁵⁵² The notion of the hieroglyph was central to Hoffmann’s writing on transcendental language and music, emerging as a central theme in the collection of fictional and critical fragments constituting *Kreisleriana* (translated in France in the early 1830s).

Here, in his essay on Beethoven’s instrumental music, we find a passage on the musical “grammarian” that may well have sparked the 1836 parody of the *Fantastique* (and in any case, is a fitting response to it):

Only a composer able to affect the emotions of men through harmony has truly penetrated its secrets. The proportional calculations that, to the grammarian who lacks genius, remain dead, rigid problems in arithmetic, are magic charms a gifted composer uses to conjure up an enchanted world.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ Henri Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz,” *Revue des deux mondes* (October, 1838), p. 109.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁵³ E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” *Fantasy Pieces in Callot’s Manner: Pages from the Diary of a Traveling Romantic*, Translated by Joseph M. Hayse (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1996), p. 37.

**Table 5: SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE EN 4 PARTIES – *Episode de la vie d'un grammairien*.
Printed in *Le Ménestrel* (8 May, 1836).**

<p><u>Première partie.</u> – <i>Allegro limpide</i> exprimant ces mots: “LA GRAMMAIRE est l’art de parler et d’écrire correctement.”</p> <p><u>Deuxième partie.</u> – <i>Adagio onctueux</i>, composé de neuf périodes, et représentant les neuf parties du discours. L’<i>adagio</i> commence par un solo de violoncelle figurant le SUBSTANTIF; de là, par une heureuse transition opérée par l’alto et la clarinette, il entre dans l’ADJECTIF.</p> <p>Une savante dissonance effectuée par le violon et le haubois, prépare l’ARTICLE. Douze coups d’archet détachés, démonstratifs et monosyllabiques amènent le PRONOM. Le VERBE s’annonce bientôt par une série de motifs à deux temps, à trois temps et à quatre temps, qui passent successivement par différents modes.</p> <p>Un solo de flûte exprime ensuite la gracieuse PRÉPOSITION; quelques suaves triolets représentent l’ADVERBE et la CONJUNCTION, et disposent agréablement l’auditeur à la violente INTERJECTION qui s’annonce par un coup de tamtam, suivi d’un point d’orgue.</p> <p><u>Troisième partie.</u> – <i>Menuet compliqué</i>, figurant le TRAITÉ DES PARTICIPES. On remarque une succession de motifs qui s’entrelacent, s’entrechoquent et s’entredétruisent, et dont quelques accords sont frappés à contretemps pour exprimer les difficultés de l’accord du <i>participe passé</i>, précédé de son <i>régime direct</i>.</p> <p><u>Quatrième partie.</u> – <i>Stretta très animée</i>, mêlée d fugues, de syncopes, de coups de timbales et de triangle, de pavillon chinois, de trompette à piston, de petite flûte et de cornemuse, de dièzes, de bémols et de béquarres, de triples croches, de notes détachées, de notes coulées, de dissonances et de consonances, représentant la <i>Syntaxe</i> avec toutes ses règles et avec toutes ses exceptions, les traditions du langage avec tout ses caprices, les exigences de l’orthographe avec toutes ses bizarreries.”</p>	<p><u>First Part:</u> <i>Limpid Allegro</i> expressing these words: “Grammar is the art of speaking and writing correctly”</p> <p><u>Second Part:</u> <i>Unctuous Adagio</i>, composed of nine sentences, and representing the nine parts of discourse. The <i>adagio</i> begins with a cello solo representing the NOUN; from there, by a happy transition brought about by the viola and the clarinet, it enters into the ADJECTIVE.</p> <p>A learned dissonance effected by the violin and the oboe prepares the ARTICLE. Twelve detached bowstrokes – demonstrative and monosyllabic – introduce the PRONOUN. Soon the VERB announces itself by a series of motives in double time, in triple time and in quadruple time, which pass successively through different modes. Thereafter, a flute solo expresses the gracious PREPOSITION; some suave triplets represent the ADVERB and the CONJUNCTION, and render the listener receptive to the violent INTERJECTION that announces itself by a stroke of the gong, followed by a pedal point.</p> <p><u>Third Part:</u> <i>Complicated Minuet</i>, representing the TREATISE OF PARTICIPLES. One notices a succession of motives that interlace, collide, and destroy one another, in which some syncopated chords are struck to represent the difficulties in agreement created by a past participle, preceded by its object.</p> <p><u>Fourth Part:</u> <i>Stretta très animé</i>, mixture of fugues, of syncopations, of timpani and triangle blows, of <i>pavillon chinois</i>, of piston trumpet, of piccolo and of bagpipe, of sixteenth notes, of sharps, flats and naturals, of thirty second notes, of detached notes, of tied notes, of dissonances and of consonances, representing <i>Syntax</i> with all its rules and all its exceptions, the traditions of language with all its caprices, the exigencies of orthography with all its oddities.</p>
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Only a genius could produce the “proportional calculations” – the secret grammar – that generated musical enchantment, and by the same token, as Hoffmann reminds us, only “enchanted souls hearken to the unknown language and understand the most secret presentiments that possess them.”⁵⁵⁴

A musician who had penetrated the veil of the spirit spoke in a language beyond the realm of the human:

...he is able to speak in the tongue of that unknown, romantic realm. Then, unwittingly, like the sorcerer’s apprentice reading aloud from his master’s book of magic, he calls forth glorious apparitions from within, and they fly through his life in a dancing radiance, filling everyone who is privileged to see them with infinite, ineffable longing.⁵⁵⁵

To the uninitiated, however, this language remained dead and rigid – a mere jumble of effects, just as Berlioz’s ridiculers suggested. In place of an inspired composer they perceived a mere grammarian and instead of “magical apparitions,” they heard only ridiculous pictorialisms.

For Arnal and the critics of *Le Corsaire* and *Le Ménéstrel*, Berlioz’s language was illegitimate in part because it seemed founded on gratuitous orchestrational effects. Blaze traced this evil, too, to Hoffmann, who cited orchestration as the most mysterious and “magical” musical art and one which had been little explored. “The full-voiced score,” Hoffmann wrote, was “a veritable book of musical magic that preserves all the miracles of the art of composition and the mysterious chorus of the multiplicity of instruments.”⁵⁵⁶ Its sounds, if properly mixed, transcended the boundaries of the discipline, “calling to life, in thousands of glowing colors, all the lovely, gracious images that the master, with magic power, locked up in his work.”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁵⁵ Hoffmann, “Ombra adorata,” *Fantasy Pieces*, p. 24.

⁵⁵⁶ Hoffmann, “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” *Fantasy Pieces*, p. 36.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

The science of orchestration that Hoffmann described could be neither learned nor fully explained, but was transmitted to the genius directly from nature itself in the form of inscriptions – musico-visual hieroglyphs. “Music,” he argued, “reveals the common language of Nature. She speaks to us in marvelous, mysterious accords. In vain we struggle to fix them in symbols for that artificial sequence of hieroglyphs captures for us merely the suggestion of what we have heard.”⁵⁵⁸ The whispering of wind in the trees, the stirring of leaves, and the roaring of a cataract constituted, for Hoffmann, sacred sounds, which might be transmuted into an instrumental language by the inspired composer. According to the pantheistic philosophy that underpinned this idea, the supernatural was revealed through the natural – God himself spoke through Hoffmann’s enchanted landscapes and through the music of those attuned to its spirit voices.

The charge made by the *Corsaire* parodists that Berlioz’s orchestration was excessively “literal” – that it reproduced the sounds of nature in gross form – now begins to make sense in the context of his broader connection to the Hoffmannesque fantastic. Blaze, too, had noted the naturalistic ‘noises’ that seemed to permeate Berlioz’s music. Unable to interpret them, he dismissed them as instances of tasteless imitation – markers of the “pittoresque” trend that marred Berlioz’s orchestral writing:

Toutes ces bizarreries dont nous parlons contribuent à rendre par momens la musique de M. Berlioz inappréciable: comme le chant des oiseaux, ce ne sont plus des notes qui se combinent pour l’harmonie, mais des bruits qui se rencontrent et se mêlent au hasard. Dès-lors vous oubliez l’orchestre, les voix, la symphonie; vous n’êtes plus au Conservatoire ou à l’Opéra, mais dans un moulin en travail, au milieu de toutes sortes de rumeurs incohérentes.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁸ Hoffmann, “Johannes Kreisler’s Apprentice Letter,” Ibid., p. 293.

⁵⁵⁹ “All of the oddities of which we speak combine to render Berlioz’s music unlistenable in moments: like the songs of birds, his are not notes which combine to create harmony, but noises mixed and mingled at random. Indeed, one forgets the orchestra, the voice, the symphony; one is no longer at the Conservatory or the Opera, but inside a noisy windmill, in the midst of all sorts of incoherent sounds.” Blaze, “De l’École fantastique et de M. Berlioz,” p. 119.

Berlioz's idiom was paradoxically both too readable and not readable enough; it was both "grossly material" and "other-worldly," drawing on a transcendental naturalism that proved outside the ken of Blaze, Arnal, or the *Ménestrel* reviewers, for whom the language of spirit was as yet unknown. Berlioz's supporters responded to these critics in much the manner that Hoffmann himself had addressed the Beethoven disparagers:

What does it matter if the profound, intimate coherence of each Beethoven composition eludes your puny glance? Isn't it your fault that you do not understand the master's language – which is understandable to the initiated – and that the gates to the inner sanctum remain closed to you? ⁵⁶⁰

This line of attack fell on deaf ears, at least where Blaze and the *Fantastique* parodists were concerned. They regarded Berlioz's Hoffmannesque idiom, not as a step forward for art, but as a signal of drastic decline. But this was not an opinion shared by Berlioz's younger contemporaries, many of whom were drawn to the philosophical ideas espoused by Hoffmann and the new orchestral palette that emerged from both Berlioz's "fantastique" music and the supernatural effects of Meyerbeer and Weber. By 1838, Mainzer noted that Liszt had "fallen into the void of the fantastic," and warned that Berlioz's disease was spreading. His fears proved only too true – the symphonies by Turbry and Soubre had already been joined by a host of other fantastic instrumental works. In the following section, we will look more closely at this motley group of pieces which, despite their differences, were classed together under the category of the *genre fantastique*.

⁵⁶⁰ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," *Fantasy Pieces*, p. 34.

The *Pièce fantastique* in Mid-Century France

Berlioz's *Symphony fantastique* had been at least partially responsible for the symphonies by Turbry and Soubre, but we can hardly identify it as a model for the host of other fantastic pieces published in mid-century Paris. Liszt's *Rondeau fantastique* appeared in 1836, the same year that witnessed Moscheles' *Concerto fantastique* and Clara Schumann's *Scène fantastique*. Two years earlier, Robert Schumann had published an *Etude fantastique* and Hiller a *Caprice fantastique*. And, as early as 1825 – five years before Berlioz's first symphony – Charles Bochsa had published one of the first independent instrumental pieces to bear the “fantastique” label: a *Morceau fantastique* for the harp. By January of 1837, over a year before Bury's essay and Mainzer's warning, the Parisian caricaturists had already begun to lampoon the trend toward “musique fantastique” – to parody not only Berlioz's symphony, but fantastic compositions at large.

An article in *Le Ménestrel*, for instance, announced with mock seriousness that the era of “rational melody” had come to an end. The modern composer was “a delirious creature,” disheveled, and even epileptic whose music was inspired by nervous attacks and convulsions.⁵⁶¹ The article concluded with a mock-program (Table 6), which featured a raft of diabolical, frenetic, and “vaporous” compositions belabored with thirty-second notes, difficult key signatures, and contrapuntal effects:

⁵⁶¹ It is worth noting that Berlioz had referred to his own first symphony as “la symphonie fantastico-épileptique” in a humorous piece for *Le Rénovateur* (2/3 November, 1834). Clearly, “fantastique” composers were well aware of the parody this term invited.

Table 6: Parodical concert program published in *Le Ménestrel* (29 January, 1837).⁵⁶²

<i>PREMIÈRE PARTIE</i>	
1 ^o	Grand trio frénétique avec accompagnement de grincemens, étourdissemens et frémissemens.
2 ^o	Yo que soy contrapontista, fugue, fougue et sabbat chromatique.
3 ^o	Sonate infernale avec douze bémols à la clé.
<i>DEUXIÈME PARTIE</i>	
1 ^o	Hallucination en 3 parties, con piangendo, et palpitamento.
2 ^o	Grand fantaisie à vapeur contenant 16,000 doubles croches.
3 ^o	Accès de délire en la mineur, avec accompagnement de syncopes.
4 ^o	Paroxysme à grand orchestre, vertiges, défaillances, palpitations, crispations et contorsions.

The second item on the program – titled *Yo que soy contrapontista, fugue, fougue et sabbat chromatique* was an obvious jab at Liszt’s “Rondeau fantastique,” which borrowed the theme from Manuel Garcia’s well-known song, *Yo que soy contrabandista*. The obvious implication was that Liszt, like Berlioz, and now many other composers, had fallen into the clutches of the fantastic idiom. And perhaps more alarmingly, that the Kreisleresque model of genius had taken a firm hold amongst modern composers.

Through the middle decades of the century, the repertory of fantastic instrumental music increased steadily, emanating from both in and outside of France and amounting to well over 150 pieces by the late 1860s (see Table 7 for a select bibliography). It is worth noting that even German and English composers tended to use the term “fantastique” rather than their own equivalents even when this resulted in oddly polyglot titles – perhaps a signal that the fantastic vogue was emanating, at this

⁵⁶² This was a parody of an actual concert program given by Liszt and two string players (Batta and Urhan) on 4 February, 1837; the program showcased Beethoven’s music alongside Liszt’s “fantastique” piece.

Table 7: Select bibliography of “fantastique” instrumental works published 1825-1865.⁵⁶³

- Bazzini, Antonio, *La ronde des lutins, Scherzo fantastique*. Paris, 1852.
 ———. *La Danse des Gnômes, morceau fantastique pour Violon, Op. 43*. Paris, 1860.
 Berlijn, A. *Sonate fantastique Op. 34*. Amsterdam, 1843.
 ———. *Souvenir de Paris: Marche fantastique pour grand orchestre, Op. 101*. Amsterdam, n.d.
 Berlioz, Hector. *Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14*. Paris: prem. 1830/pub. 1843.
 Bertelsman, G.A. *Nocturne fantastique pour le piano, Op. 43*, Paris, 1862.
 Bizet, Georges. *Chasse fantastique pour Piano*, Paris, 1865
 Bletzen, H. Rondeau fantastique pour le Piano Forte, *London: Coventry & Hollier, 1835*.
 Bochsa, Robert. Napoleon's Dream. Morceau fantastique pour la harpe, in which are introduced the new effects, etc., *London: Goulding & D'Almaine, 1825*.
 ———. La valse de feu. Impromptu fantastique pour la harpe, écrit sur la Vesuve, *London: 1847*.
 Boehlman-Sauzeau, Henri. Barbe Bleu. Quadrille militaire fantastique, *London and Paris, 1846*.
 ———. Le Génie des tempêtes. Quadrille fantastique, *London and Paris, 1848*.
 Brassin, Louis. Galop fantastique (I and II). *Paris, 1860*.
 Chaliou, Charles, Songe de Napoleon, Morceau fantastique imité de Bochsa et arrangé pour le Piano. *Paris, 1827*.
 Burgmüller, A. Reveries fantastiques à son ami Liszt, Op. 41. *Paris: Richault, 1839*.
 Filby, William Charles. Le rivage écaillé. Morceau fantastique, *London: Robert Cocks, 1858*.
 Fumagalli, Adolph. Le Reveil des ombres. Danse fantastique, Op. 100. *Paris: Parent, 1854*.
 ———. Les Sorcières. Caprice fantastique, Op. 51. *Paris: Boieldieu, 1849*
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 Soubre, Jean-Etienne. Symphonie fantastique, *Manuscript parts, Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Liège. comp. 1833; perf. 1835*.
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 Voss, Carl. Les Harmonies du Coeur. Poésie fantastique pour Piano, Op. 277, *Paris, 1863*.

⁵⁶³ Dates refer to year of publication except where noted.

point, largely from France. This is not to suggest that works bearing the fantastic label fell into an easily homogeneous group; on the contrary, they embraced a broad variety of forms and instrumentations, from solo piano works to pieces for full orchestra, from ‘serious’ concert music to salon ephemera. Rather than a genre in any stable sense, the musical fantastic was an aesthetic mode that drew on a common pool of sounds and gestures, and a particular species of music syntax. Here, I will begin to trace some of these continuities, but it is not my intention to smooth over the obvious diversity of the repertory, nor to imply a single point of origin. Fantastic instrumental works drew their soundscapes as well as their forms and imagery from a complex nexus of sources, including opera, literature, visual culture, and earlier instrumental works.

Gluck, Meyerbeer, Weber, Gomis and the broader tradition of the theatrical “fantastique” was as central as Berlioz’s symphony or Liszt’s *Rondeau*; the “scolastique” fantastic associated with Hoffmann, in other words, mingled with a broader vogue for the supernatural whose roots we can trace back to the Gothic culture of the late eighteenth century. As we expand outward to consider an array of fantastic compositions, the goal is not to arrive at a set of pat generalizations. Instead, it is to open up a broader sense of the musical fantastic as it was understood by nineteenth-century composers and their critics. And, most importantly, it is to consider Berlioz’s place in this context – to look at the ways in which his first symphony both shaped and was shaped by the larger repertory of the *genre fantastique*.

Among the most obvious links between “fantastique” works was their reliance on pictorial language and their interlacing of musical with literary and visual material. Well before Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, Bochsá’s *Morceau fantastique* was published with an elaborate narrative attached to the score. The full title of the piece is *Napoleon’s Dream: Morceau fantastique pour la harpe*. Its program is a lengthy poem describing Napoleon’s final reverie – an episode in the life of the French conqueror,

which traces a series of remembered and fantasized events culminating in death.⁵⁶⁴

Boschsa's music follows the tale closely, unfolding in a sequence of loosely connected sections, each with its own descriptive title. We open, in the first scene, onto the confused landscape of reverie:

The mental elements are lashed to storm;
The glorious past – the present, with its woes –
The barren future, where no hope-flower glows –
The strife—the triumph—and the fatal fight
Confused, commingled, crowd upon his sight.

Arpeggios in the lower register generate a mysterious wash of sound through which we hear the echoed sounds of battle interspersed with passages of *pianissimo* harmonics (Example 7). A Bridal March follows: “And see, the Victor proud, with glory crowned, / Now yields in turn, by Love’s light fetters bound.” This is followed by a section “con molto espressione e passione” in which Napoleon has an imaginary encounter with his son, promising him a reunion and a return to victory. Halfway through, the music shifts into martial rhythms and trumpet fanfares, then to a semi-independent piece in 6/8 entitled “Napoleon’s favorite Air.” But finally Boschsa’s hero admits despair and defeat: “So cried the extatic Victor, and – awoke, / To mourn th’illusion and to feel the yoke / That wears the uncomplaining heart away, / By voiceless grief’s perpetual decay!” A *Recitativo con espressivo, parlante* corresponds clearly to this passage of text, and is followed immediately by a *Marche funebre*: “Till underneath his favorite willow’s shade / In death’s cold arms the hero should be laid.”

⁵⁶⁴ It is unclear whether Boschsa himself was the author of this text. At least two other poems by the title of “Napoleon’s Dream” were written in the early part of the nineteenth century, one in 1813 by Mary Mitford and the second in 1826 by Alaric Alexander Watts. The poem by Watts is a grisly piece featuring the return of Napoleon’s army from the dead as a “ghastly white legion” mounted on “shadowy chargers.”

Bochsa's primary program is intertwined with a network of other texts: literary cues and elucidations on the score itself, elaborate performance instructions, and an independent epigram borrowed from Byron's "The Dream." This poetic fragment, which Bochsa places on the first page of his score, ushers us into a liminal space "between the things misnamed Death and existence" – into the realm of sleep, populated by "Spirits of the past" and "Sibyls of the future" and echoing with distant voices. Here, fact mingles with fantasy, melody with pictorial effect. Indeed, Bochsa's piece is a strange amalgam of sign and sound – a multi-vocal object that hovers between text, music, and phantom image.⁵⁶⁵ Clearly, it is indebted in some sense to the eighteenth-century tradition of battle music, and yet it goes far beyond the reproduction of canon sounds and trumpet calls; in Bochsa's piece, these are woven into the fabric of a dream whose hazy outlines are generated via virtuosic new playing techniques. In order to render performance of the work possible, Bochsa attached a table of "new harp effects and passages" to his *Morceau*, which explained how to produce muffled tones, slides, difficult harmonics, and "undulating sounds." In Bochsa, as in Berlioz, the fantastic necessitated an expanded soundscape, opening up a space for serious timbral and technical experimentation.

Few fantastic works had programs as detailed as Bochsa's *Morceau*; instead, they carried their narratives at the top of the score and often snippets of text throughout to specify points of programmatic correspondence. Adolphe Fumagalli's *Danse fantastique*, "Le Reveil des ombres" (1854, for piano), for instance, includes a prose fragment describing a moonlight scene in which "musique étrange" heralds the appearance of "formes blanches" lurking amongst the trees of a forest. Believing them

⁵⁶⁵ For more on Bochsa's interest in "visualizing" instrumental music (particularly Beethoven), see James Davies, "Dancing the Symphonic: Beethoven-Bochsa's *Symphonie Pastorale*, 1829."

to be specters, the protagonist is seized by terror and flees.⁵⁶⁶ The strange sounds described in Fumagalli's text are reproduced in the first section of his score, which features staccato octaves (*pianissimo* and *a capriccio*) in the lower register of the keyboard, interspersed with *sforzandi* chords in the treble (Example 8). This series of fragmentary opening gestures gives way to a *Presto* section (presumably depicting the terror and flight of the observer) and then a "Danse des Ombres" – a nocturnal revelry that extends the action of the initial program.

To some degree, Fumagalli's music actualizes the sounds already described in his programmatic narrative. His work draws our attention to a feedback loop between fantastic musical and literary works that became increasingly entrenched: authors drew on existing "fantastique" compositions as models for their own fictional soundscapes while composers in turn extracted those musical descriptions and used them as programs for their pieces. This symbiotic relationship between fantastic sound and text was nowhere more obvious than in Juliette Godillon's series of musical *Contes fantastiques* for the piano published through the late 1840s. Godillon took Hoffmann's own most famous tales as programs, claiming to have "translated" them scene by scene into musical form – a project the German *fantastiquer* would surely have appreciated. The collection extended to nine "musical tales" (although only two are extant) and incorporated passages of Hoffmann's text as well as illustrations by Charles Bour.

A substantial review in the *Gazette musicale* gives us a sense of the 'regulated chaos' in which Godillon couched her "idées fantastiques": "Cette musique," wrote Blanchard, "jetée sur la papier sans règle, sans méthode, a pourtant sa logique, sa marche régulière dans ses divinations; c'est comme la traduction de ce vers: *Souvent*

⁵⁶⁶ Fumagalli attributes the text to "A.B." – quite likely, Aloysius Bertrand, although the source of the quotation eludes me.

un beau désordre est un effet de l'art."⁵⁶⁷ Unfolding in programmatic sections, Godillon's pieces shifted between meters, key signatures, tempi, and textures, conjuring the images and sentiments of Hoffmann's narratives. They were marked by "excentricités harmoniques," drawing together melody with pictorial sounds and passages of sheer noise in the disjointed manner of a dream. Of the seventh tale, Blanchard wrote:

La Porte murée est une scène de somnambulisme, un cauchemar, une fantaisie, par conséquent doublement fantastique, par le contraste de la romance au clavecin dite par Séraphine, le vent dans les arbres, et la marche nocturne du somnambule Daniel. Cela est étrange, bizarre, mais dramatique.⁵⁶⁸

Difficulties pinning down any coherent style "dans la musique de ce genre" became increasingly pronounced in Godillon's later pieces. Her rendition of "Le Reflet perdu" – the tale of Erasmus's lost shadow – seemed to translate the protagonist's (and by extension, Hoffmann's) own madness from literary to musical form: "Ce morceau est le poème de la déraison: c'est quelque chose de fanatiquement fantastique."

Rather than 'composing' music, Blanchard implied, Godillon appeared to draw it directly from the text as if she was recording an aural imprint of the *contes fantastiques* themselves. In doing so, she aligned herself with Hoffmann's own well-known commentary on the indivisibility of music and language. Indeed, the first tale of her collection, "Le Violon de Crémone," opens with a scene depicting the "Réunion des frères du joyeux club de Sérapion" – a reference to Hoffmann's story called *The Serapion Brethren* (Die Serapions-Brüder, 1819), which contained some of his

⁵⁶⁷ "This music, thrown onto the paper without rule, without method, nevertheless has its logic, a regularity in its divinations: it is like the translation of this verse: "Often beautiful disorder is an effect of art." Blanchard, "Revue Critique: Les Contes fantastiques d'Hoffmann, traduits pour le piano par Mlle Juliette Godillon, organiste de la cathédrale de Meaux," *Gazette musicale* (23 Avril, 1848).

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., "*The Walled Door* is a scene of somnambulism, a nightmare, a fantasy, by consequence doubly fantastic, [rendered so] by the contrast between Séraphine's *romance* at the keyboard, the wind in the trees, and the nocturnal march of Daniel, the somnambulist. This is strange, bizarre, but dramatic."

clearest commentary on the relationship between word and tone. Here, in the context of a discussion on opera, Hoffmann described what he called the Serapionic principle: the notion that music and language were fundamentally interrelated and, more specifically, that in the case of a good libretto “the music springs directly from the poetry as a necessary product of it.” “The secret of words and sounds,” he explained, “is one and the same” – both originated together at the moment of inspired creation.⁵⁶⁹ Godillon’s project took this idea quite literally; rather than a shift from one medium to another, her pieces purported to unearth and transcribe the music already implicit in Hoffmann’s narratives, which functioned as ‘libretti’ for her own operatic ‘scores.’ Her reference to the Serapion dialogue was both an explanation and justification for her project, suggesting that the inspired Hoffmann devotee could “hear” and “read” simultaneously.

Godillon’s pieces not only promised to make manifest the hieroglyphic musical imprints of Hoffmann’s texts, they also engaged in a more literal kind of translation: like Fumagalli’s “fantastique” works, they actualized the sounds described in Hoffmann’s tales. In her version of “Le Violon de Crémone,” for instance, Godillon rendered audible the famous “voix d’Antonia” – the voice of Councilor Krespel’s musical daughter. Godillon’s music for Antonia maps easily onto descriptions of her singing that appear in the final portion of Hoffmann’s tale, the first an account of the healthy Antonia and the second of her fatal final performance. Before the onset of her illness, Krespel tells us, Antonia’s singing is marked by “long-sustained notes... nightingale trills [and] undulations of musical sounds” which well up “to the strength of organ notes” only to die away “to the faintest whisper.”⁵⁷⁰ Transferring this account

⁵⁶⁹ Hoffmann, “The Poet and the Composer,” *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, translated by Martyn Clarke, edited by David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 196-97.

⁵⁷⁰ E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Rath Krespel,” *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, Translated and edited by E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1967), p. 232.

to the keyboard, Godillon offers us rising and falling “undulations” amplified by sustained pedaling in the bass; in the treble, a flexible melody *con grand espressivo* is interspersed with “nightingale trills” in the upper register. The melody rises to a resounding *fortissimo*, finally giving way to an explosion of “warbled” figuration to finish (Example 9 reproduces the first part of this passage).

The dying Antonia who sings in the final paragraph of Hoffmann’s tale is also heard in the last pages of Godillon’s piece. First, according to Krespel, her voice recalls the faint sighing of an aeolian harp, but then rises to a terrible climax which gives way in its last gasp to a hymn-like melody:

Then Antonia’s voice was heard singing low and soft; soon, however, it began to rise and rise in volume until it became an ear-splitting *fortissimo*; and at length she passed over into a powerfully impressive song which B *** had once composed for her in the devotional style of the old masters.⁵⁷¹

The faint murmuring, *pianissimo* and *misterioso*, in the treble of Godillon’s final page whispers dissonantly like the wind through the strings of a harp; underneath, a quiet melody unfolds, giving way to the chorale-like texture of B***’s “devotional hymn” and then to a series of *sforzando* chords, *capriccio* and *martellato* – the “ear splitting *fortissimo*” – and finally, a return of the hymn texture and a funereal close.

The tale of Antonia and Councillor Krespel (which followed, in Hoffmann’s 1819 publication, on the heels of his Serapion dialogue) foregrounded precisely the issues surrounding musico-textual “translation” that had permeated Hoffmann’s discussion of opera, and which underpinned the mysterious “correspondences” that wove through his *contes fantastiques*. When Antonia grows too ill to perform, she ‘sings’ through her father’s Cremona violin, shifting from vocal to instrumental articulation, from verbal to non-verbal sound. Godillon’s musical rendition of the tale

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 235.

extended this idea, allowing Hoffmann himself to ‘speak’ through the keyboard – to tell his tale in the language of tones rather than the language of signs. Her project underscored the potential for fantastic literary works to give rise fluidly (and even inevitably) to musical works, suggesting that the sound of inspired or transcendental language was essentially the sound of the musical fantastic.

Well before 1848, the kind of translation that interested Godillon had already been attempted, although in the opposite direction. George Sand had extracted what she called a “lyrico-fantastique” narrative from Liszt’s *Rondeau fantastique* (1836), shifting from a musical to a literary medium – proposing, in other words, that a fantastic musical work might be translated into its own literary program (its ‘embedded’ fantastic text). Appearing in the *Gazette musicale* in early 1837, Sand’s program was prefaced by descriptions of both Liszt’s *Rondeau* and the song by Manuel García (“El Contrabandista”) from which he took his theme. Here, the issue of musico-textual translation comes up almost immediately: Sand argued that word and tone were inextricably linked in García’s song – that his text was “impossible to translate” largely because it could not be separated from the music.⁵⁷² Liszt’s elaborate reworking of García’s theme, according to Sand’s logic, was also by definition a reworking of García’s narrative; in other words, Liszt’s musical paraphrase (in the form of a *Rondeau fantastique*) gave rise inevitably to an analogous text – what Sand termed a “paraphrase fantastique.” The piece as a totality hovered in a state of vaporousness – sound teetered on the edge not only of word but of image. Liszt’s

⁵⁷² This is a claim that is often made of exotic as well as fantastic works, the implication being that language alone cannot capture the essence of either ‘foreignness’ or ‘other-worldliness.’ Both exotic and fantastic aesthetics are tied to a discourse of primitivism that undercuts their access to written text, situating them instead in the emotional/visceral realm of sound and image. Berlioz identifies Gluck’s ‘barbaric’ Scythian music as a locus of the *genre fantastique*, Soubre incorporates a Turkish music ensemble’ into his *Symphonie fantastique* and, of course, Liszt incorporates García’s Spanish rhythms into his *Rondeau fantastique*. The musical and aesthetic interconnections between the two modes – the overlapping sounds of ‘Otherness’ – are too complex to be fully explored here.

Rondeau, according to Sand, was “un vaste poème, création bizarre et magnifique qui fait passer toute une vie, tout un monde de sensations et de visions sur les touches brûlantes du clavier.”⁵⁷³

Sand described the origins of her program in typically Hoffmannesque terms: one evening in Autumn, a friend of Liszt’s sits smoking a cigar in the dark and listening to the *Rondeau*. Intoxicated by tobacco and transported by the music, he experiences a vision which unfolds like a scene from a novel. Later, he “translates” this dream into language [“il prit la plume en riant et tradisit son rêve”] although, as Sand warns us, his text cannot capture the full essence of the experience. Not surprisingly, the program is cast in operatic form, parsed into *Airs*, *Recitatives*, and *Choruses*; it is, as Hoffmann would claim, the implicit “libretto” wedded to Liszt’s score. Sand’s tale/libretto tells of a brigand-hero who wanders down from the mountains and encounters a wedding party. When the revelers ask him who he is, he runs through a long list of options (each riffing on the opening phrase of Garcia’s song text), before finally identifying himself as a Poet – a figure who draws together facets of all the previous characters. His narrative is concerned, at large, with self-construction – with the profile of the Poet-Artist – who appears at the culminating moment of Sand’s narrative and, according to her program, the high point of Liszt’s *Rondeau*: the central “Adagio fantastico.” Here, we find ourselves in a place between fantasy and reality – “entre la lumière et les ténèbres, entre la foi et le doute, entre la prière et le blasphème.” The Adagio is a visionary space of inspiration, creativity, and even celestial communion – the realm of the Kreisleresque Artist, and one that recalls Berlioz’s own “monde fantastique.” It echoes with a mishmash of noise, melody, and referential sound – in Sand’s words, “les bruits lointains de la vie, les chants, les

⁵⁷³ “A vast poem, a bizarre and magnificent creation that conjures an entire life, an entire world of sensations and visions, through the ardent sounds of the keyboard.” George Sand, “Le Contrebandier,” *Gazette musicale* (1 January, 1837), pp. 1-9. Quotations in this paragraph are taken from pp. 1-2.

pleurs, les menaces, les cris de détresse ou de triomphe...”.⁵⁷⁴ Her description responds directly to Liszt’s music in the Adagio, which allows melodic line to dissolve into chromatic figuration, fluttering trills, and virtuosic sound effects generated by dissonant and *pianissimo* double thirds. Only as Sand’s poet-brigand retreats into the mountains does Liszt return to more stable harmonic and melodic territory, closing his *Rondeau* with a recapitulation of the main theme of Garcia’s song.⁵⁷⁵

Liszt’s/Sand’s *Rondeau* resonates with fantastic aesthetics on many levels, but this is not the place to flesh out those implications in full. Here, I want to make a simpler point: Liszt’s *Rondeau* stands alongside Godillon’s *Contes*, Bochsa’s *Morceau* and Fumagalli’s *Danse* as one of the many “fantastique” works published before and after 1830 to incorporate (or acquire) a literary program, and to animate that program via a specifically pictorial set of musical gestures. Clearly, the *plasticité sonore* associated with Berlioz’s first symphony – its tendency to “translate” into (or waver between) text and image – was a key feature of fantastic compositions more broadly. Rather than solid or fixed forms, these pieces were marked by vaporous bodies, always on the verge of generic or interdisciplinary metamorphosis.

Even “fantastique” works without physical programs often had explicit textual links. The most straightforward example is the group of pieces subtitled variously “Ronde du sabbat,” “Valse infernal,” “Scherzo fantastique,” or a similar permutation.⁵⁷⁶ There was little need for the authors of these pieces to attach narratives

⁵⁷⁴ Sand, “Le contrebandier,” pp. 2; 8.

⁵⁷⁵ For further observations on Liszt’s *Rondeau fantastique* and Sand’s literary response, see David A. Powell, “Musical-Literary Intertextuality: George Sand and Franz Liszt,” *Le siècle de George Sand*, ed. Powell and Malkin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 164-76. Sand was interested, broadly, in the interchangeability of music and text in the fantastic mode. Her own “fantastique” tales are permeated with musical description and, in some cases, actual musical notation – they hover between sound and text, between disciplines and forms, unable to materialize as ‘solid’ bodies.

⁵⁷⁶ In addition to Lavainne’s *Ronde fantastique*, discussed in the following paragraph, the list of such pieces includes Chaulieu’s *Ronde du sabbat* (1830), Camille Schubert’s *Ronde fantastique* (part of *Les Talismans du diable*, *Quadrille fantastique*; 1846), Godefroid’s *Ronde fantastique*, “*Les Sorcières*” (1860), and Perrelli’s *Ronde fantastique* (1870).

to their works, since the literary and visual programs were clear: Hugo's "Ronde du sabbat," Boulanger's painting of the same name, Faust's "Hexenküche" and "Walpurgisnacht" and, later, Théophile Dondey's "Banquet satanique" and infernal "Ronde." Of course, by the early 1830s, there were also a number of musical models in play, including Berlioz's *Ronde* in the "Songe d'une nuit du sabbat," and Meyerbeer's "Valse infernal" in the third Act of *Robert le diable* (both, of course, paired with texts).

These pieces, exemplars of the Dantesque fantastic, underscore the centrality of grotesque aesthetics – noise, caricature, and syntactical irregularity – to "fantastique" compositions well beyond Berlioz's first symphony. Ferdinand Lavainne's "Ronde fantastique" (the final movement of his *Fantaisie fantastique* for keyboard and orchestra; 1836) is typical. Marked *Allegro infernale*, it opens with the chiming of a clock, whose twelve strokes in the bass are interspersed with diminished-seventh twittering in the upper register (Example 10a). Already, we are "hesitating" between referential and non-referential worlds (and between sound, sign, and number), experiencing the semiotic confusion so pervasively tied to the *genre fantastique*. Lavainne's clock (as with Berlioz's bells) signals our entry into a chaotic and dissonant space. Kastner, in a review for the *Gazette musicale*, described it as the realm of "dark spirits," where music is replaced by dissonant "rugissements" and "éclats." Lavainne's ugly music – his "chant sauvage, ironique et strident" – is precisely what Kastner expects: "Bravo, M. Lavainne!," he writes, "vous n'avez pas menti à votre titre!"⁵⁷⁷

In Lavainne's infernal space, the tuneful and shapely have been exiled; instead, we discover noisy bass tremolos, fragments of melody interrupted by *sforzando*

⁵⁷⁷ G. Kastner, "Revue Critique: Fantaisie fantastique pour piano avec accompagnement d'orchestre," *Gazette musicale* (4 December, 1836).

chords, and isolated gestures separated by registral and dynamic gaps. The sustained, *pianissimo* chords that intervene in Lavainne's texture produce breaks in rhythmic motion – ominous moments of stasis that lead without transition back to the feverish movement of the opening. Sounds are atomized and their pitches distorted via dissonant ornamentation that reminds us of Berlioz's grotesque *idée fixe* (Example 10b). The aesthetics of parody and dark humor are at work in these passages, which juxtapose warring rhythms and sonorities. Only as we draw toward the middle of Lavainne's *Ronde*, does his music become more continuous – we find ourselves in the midst of whirling triplet motion that grows increasingly louder and more chromatic. (Example 10c). This effect may have been derived from Meyerbeer's "Valse infernale" (*Robert le diable*, Act III), whose opening syllabic setting gives way to racing triplets as the infernal revelry escalates. It resonates equally clearly with the swirling, circular imagery of Boulanger's visual "Ronde" – itself indebted to Hugo's poem, which describes monsters, demons, and sorcerers flying in a ring around Lucifer himself:

Les mains cherchent les mains... Soudain la ronde immense,
Comme un ouragan sombre, en tournoyant commence.
A l'œil qui n'en pourrait embrasser le contour,
Chaque hideux convive apparaît à son tour;
On croirait voir l'enfer tourner dans les ténèbres
Son zodiaque affreux, plein de signes funèbres.
Tous volent, dans le cercle emportés à la fois.
Satan règle du pied les éclats de leur voix;
Et leurs pas, ébranlant les arches colossales,
Troublent les morts couchés sous le pavé des salles.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁸ "Hands search for hands ... Suddenly the enormous circle, / Like a dark hurricane, begins to whirl. / To an eye which cannot take in its (total) shape, / Each hideous guest appears in his turn, / One seems to see the inferno turning in the shadows / Its hideous zodiac, full of funereal signs. / They all fly, carried round together in the circle. / Satan beats time, regulating the din of their voices; / And their steps, shaking the colossal arches, / Trouble the dead sleeping under the stones of the halls." Hugo, "Ronde du sabbat," *Odes et ballades* (1827).

Lavainne's *Ronde* borrows the drone figures and dance rhythms associated with the pastoral mode; however, these topical markers no longer signal either innocence or simplicity but are perverted by dissonance and chromatic contortions. Infernal rounds by Litolf, Hiller, and Raff employ a similar strategy; indeed, we might describe the *Ronde fantastique* as a piece that relies on the inverted pastoral – on a dystopian rather than utopian aesthetic which, instead of celebrating religious sentiment and social order, revels in blasphemy and chaos. Here, we discover nature in a dark and frightening guise: not the sunlit world of shepherds and trilling birds, but a pagan landscape populated by witches and sorcerers.⁵⁷⁹

Lavainne's *Ronde* is clearly cast in a dance form, but the title of his work as a whole, *Fantaisie fantastique*, suggests a different generic affiliation – a link between the fantastic as a mode and Fantasy as a genre. The two often came together in mid-century repertory (“fantastique” fantasies and caprices were not uncommon) but were by no means synonymous or inextricable. A fantasy might be “fantastique,” in other words, but not all pieces bearing the “fantastique” label were fantasies, nor did they adhere to the improvisatory aesthetic of the Fantasy (in either C.P.E. Bach's mold or the later theme-and-variation model)⁵⁸⁰ but were heavily composed – reliant on carefully orchestrated effects. The association between “fantastique” and Fantasy arose in part as a result of the pictorial/textual aesthetic of the *genre fantastique*, which encouraged generically ambiguous works like Godillon's *Contes* – pieces that unfolded as a series of loosely connected sections dictated largely by programmatic content. When the term “fantastique” was attached to works in fixed genres (march,

⁵⁷⁹ Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* showcases the pastoral in both guises. Compare the woodwind dialogue of the cowherds and ensuing flute/violin melody in the introduction to the “Scène aux champs” with the woodwind/horn dialogue (“cries that other cries seem to answer”) and emergent “grotesque” *idée fixe* in the first part of the “Songe d'une nuit du sabbat.”

⁵⁸⁰ See Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

sonata, symphony), it sometimes implied a loosening of structural norms and in other cases, it had a more local effect – it blurred phraseology and distorted (without eradicating) formal teleology by introducing asymmetrical, non-melodic, and rhythmically ambiguous material.

In a review of Heller's *Scherzo fantastique* (1847), for instance, Fétis described a grotesque sense of 'orderly disorder'; the piece was riddled with bizarre harmonies and confusing rhythms, he claimed, and yet it was not entirely without shape: "sous une apparence de désordre, il y a de la suite, de la logique dans les idées." A derivation of the fantastic *Ronde*, the 'Scherzo fantastique' became a favorite vehicle for other-worldly depiction, and one that extended from Heller to Stravinsky.⁵⁸¹ It, like Berlioz's and Lavainne's infernal dances, was characterized by the noisy, tuneless, *misterioso* effects tied to the *genre fantastique*. Not surprisingly, Fétis condemned Heller's piece, arguing that its energy and spirit could not compensate for its melodic deficiency: "C'est en vain que des compositeurs de nos jours ont cru pouvoir créer un genre indépendant de ce soutien de toute musique: rien n'a vécu, rien ne vivra sans le secours de la pensée chantante."⁵⁸² Once again, Fétis counseled against the *genre fantastique* ("je ne conseillerais pas à M. Heller de multiplier les choses de cette espèce") although, of course, his warning did little to stop the composers of the following half century.

⁵⁸¹ Among the many other programmatic Scherzi to appear over the following several decades were Liszt's "Mephistopheles" scherzo (the final movement of the *Faust* Symphony), Raff's *Scherzo fantastique*, Mahler's 'grotesque' scherzi in the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*, Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (subtitled 'scherzo'), and Stravinsky's *Scherzo fantastique*. Less Dantesque and more *féerique* were Mendelssohn's scherzo from the *Midsummer Night's Dream* music and Berlioz's *Queen Mab* scherzo. By mid-century, it seems the scherzo had become securely connected to other-worldly aesthetics, which – I speculate – hovered around even those examples of the genre which were not designated "fantastique."

⁵⁸² Composers of today believe in vain that they can create a genre of music independent of this [underlying] constant of all music: [but] nothing can succeed, nothing can live without the succour of melodic thought." Fétis père, "Revue critique: Scherzo fantastique (Op. 57) de Stephen Heller," *Gazette musicale* (28 March, 1847).

Heller's work was written for piano, although its sustained chords, pointillistic texture, and extended tremolos drew clearly on the supernatural orchestral soundscape opened up by Berlioz, Weber, and Meyerbeer, amongst others. This was true for many "fantastique" pieces, which tended to be written for the keyboard (for the sake of marketability) but were by no means pianistic. Fumagalli acknowledged this openly by giving orchestrational indications on his scores – 'explanations' in some sense for his odd keyboard textures (Example 11). His *Caprice fantastique* ("Les Sorcières") showcases this practice, opening with a pedaled effect marked "campanella," which imitates the open-string strumming of a lute or guitar. This is followed by a sudden shift into the lower register for a typical 'striking clock' gesture – three *sforzandi* blasts whose overheld E-naturals simulate the echoed ringing of a churchbell. Now up in the high treble, we hear the chromatic chattering of what are surely piccolos, followed by the return of Fumagalli's imaginary bell. Hardly 'music' in the melodic or thematic sense, this passage is composed of a collection of orchestral effects which, strung together, produce the fractured, illegible surface that both Fétis and Bury identified as a marker of the *genre fantastique*. Shifting time signatures, registers, and tempi erode any sense of coherent pulse or key. Clearly, Fumagalli is operating outside the realm of conventional musical grammar; his 'music' lapses into the realm of *plasticité sonore*, meant to generate the imagery of a phantom narrative. Indeed, as we shift into 12/8 time, we encounter a chromatic fragment in the treble marked "come recitativo" (m. 8) – a circular gesture that repeats at various pitch levels over the following several systems, in dialogue with an inverted *presto* echo in the high register. We find ourselves in a familiarly vaporous space between sound, text, and image – spectators at a phantom opera whose libretto is clearly other-worldly. As the section draws to a close, we return to the *campanella* texture of the opening, under

which heavily ornamented bass gestures produce the muffled, dissonant effect that Berlioz had described in the *Orchestration Treatise*.

Fumagalli's "fantastique" works, as with those of Liszt, Schumann, Heller, Moscheles, Litolff, and many of their contemporaries, were forums for serious textural and harmonic experimentation. They were pieces of considerable difficulty, often composed as concert showpieces by leading pianists of the day. Passages of double thirds and octaves, extended trills, sudden registral leaps, and rapid chromatic figuration were common features, rendering such pieces well beyond the ability of the amateur. Since Berlioz (and perhaps even Bochsá), the fantastic had been a virtuosic mode whose complex key signatures, rhythms, and textures – as we've seen – were regularly lampooned by the press. Not only difficult, the fantastic mode was pervasively described as 'academic,' tied to the aesthetic innovations of Hoffmann and Jean Paul and to Hugo's new ideas surrounding dramatic form and syntax. As critics were quick to note, the soundscape of the fantastic was one that stretched not only the capabilities of both instruments and performers, but the definition of music itself.

As the century progressed, however, and the vogue for the fantastic widened and broadened, it began to lose its status as a medium for serious experimentation. *Pièces fantastiques* became mass-produced commodities – ephemeral works with spooky titles and a few stock musical effects. Fantastic quadrilles and polkas appeared by the dozen in fashionable salons and disappeared just as quickly. No longer either a virtuosic or a "scolastique" medium, this strand of the *genre fantastique* devolved into fashionable pop music aimed at the domestic market. Camille Schubert's collection of quadrilles published through the late 1840s and early 50s were typical, each with a fanciful title and an elaborate cover image. Example 12a reproduces the title page of Schubert's second *Quadrille fantastique*, entitled "Les Talismans du diable," which was followed by "Faust aux enfers" – the first for piano with optional quartet

accompaniment and the second for two keyboard players. The music of these quadrilles was simple indeed; Example 12b shows the fifth piece from “Faust aux enfers,” which begins (predictably) with the bare octaves signaling the *ombra* trope, followed by a *fortissimo* elaboration of the opening material, and a bolero-like second half (another indication of the fantastic-exotic connection). Schubert’s quadrilles were followed by works of a similar cast by Alphonse Leduc and Henri Boehlman-Sauzeau, both of whom produced a steady stream of “fantastique” salon pieces through the mid-1850s.⁵⁸³

Inevitably, this repertoire began to color the reception of more serious “fantastique” works, casting a pall of cheap sensationalism over pieces by Berlioz, Liszt, and their fellow innovators. The *genre fantastique* itself – already a suspect medium – was rendered even more marginal. It hovered in a difficult place between the concert hall and the penny theatre, Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* rubbing shoulders with Antony Lamotte’s *Grande Polka fantastique* (1863), a strange work for two choirs and orchestra featuring Satan with his infernal hordes. Despite the mixed quality of fantastic compositions, their sheer quantity bore witness to the lasting popularity and influence of the idiom – a fact that critics and historians were hard pressed to ignore. By the mid-1850s, even music dictionaries began to acknowledge the *genre fantastique* as a discrete and significant musical mode. Almost invariably, they listed Berlioz as its key exponent, although by this point he had begun to distance himself not only from the “fantastique” aesthetic itself, but from avant-garde music in general. His protests did nothing, however, to change the press’s perception of him; his elaborate Kreisleresque self-construction (and the parallel efforts of his supporters) had done their work – history would remember the young rather than the old Berlioz,

⁵⁸³ The pieces by Boehlman-Sauzeau are particularly amusing; see, for instance, *Le Génie des tempêtes, quadrille fantastique* (1848), *Les Péchés du Diable, quadrille fantastique* (1853), and *La Chasse Infernale, quadrille fantastique* (1855).

the composer of the *Symphonie fantastique* rather than the sober author of *L'Enfance du Christ*.

**Berlioz in Retrospect
or
The Fate of the *Genre fantastique***

By 1855, Charles Soullié's *Nouveau dictionnaire de musique illustré* listed the *genre fantastique* under an independent heading, describing it as an expression of "extreme romanticism." The label applied equally to music and literature, according to Soullié, indicating an "exaggerated," and "extravagant" style that had at first found little favor with French critics. He cited Berlioz and Monpou as key pioneers of the style, and Félicien David as a more recent convert.⁵⁸⁴ Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire* (1866) gave a fuller explanation, dividing the "Fantastique" entry into sections on literature and music which summed up the attributes of both while acknowledging their intimate connection. Beginning with the *conte fantastique*, Larousse separated it clearly from the *merveilleux* tales of the ancients, identifying the fantastic as a modern phenomenon deriving from "l'art subtil, incohérent et sinistre" of Hoffmann. It was characterized by "exalted dreams and bourgeois realities," sudden contrasts, "humoristic caprices," and creative exaltation deriving from alcohol and tobacco. The strange forms linked with the fantastic arose from overexcited imaginations and from a preoccupation with romantic philosophy – "la prétendue science de la vérité" – which advocated a Hugolian mingling of the beautiful with the ugly. The result was an unreadable language divested of logic and meaning.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ Frédéric Soullié, *Nouveau dictionnaire de la musique illustré* (Paris: E. Bazault, 1855).

⁵⁸⁵ Larousse, *Dictionnaire du XIX siècle français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.* (Paris: Administration du Grand dictionnaire universel, 1866).

Music followed suit, according to Larousse, generating a *genre fantastique* marked by unusual forms, new instrumental combinations, and a language freed from all normal restrictions. The opening paragraph of his definition cited Berlioz as the leading figure in the field:

On a donné le nom de musique fantastique à un genre de composition où l'on trouve un grand nombre d'idées et de cantilènes présentées sous des formes nouvelles, avec des combinaisons inusitées, et où il est fait un emploi particulier des instruments. Dans ces sortes d'ouvrages, le compositeur agit avec une entière liberté, et son esprit a toute carrière. Nous citerons: la Symphonie fantastique de Berlioz, la Damnation de Faust, et plusieurs oeuvres du même auteur...⁵⁸⁶

Larousse's assessment of the *genre fantastique* was hardly positive – he reiterated old charges surrounding its anti-melodic, ugly, and even “épileptique” aesthetic and its links to madness and physical illness. But he also pointed out that a total rejection of the idiom was unwarranted; to argue that it was simply noisy, disorganized, and text-bound was to underestimate its aesthetic contribution: “Cette proscription en bloc n'est pas juste, et le genre nous offre des exceptions qu'il ne faut pas dédaigner” [This blanket condemnation is not just, [for] the genre offers exceptions which must not be disregarded.] The fantastic style was problematic, he suggested, but not without possibilities. In the realm of opera, for instance, he found it more palatable, hailing Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* a masterpiece in the realm of *opéra fantastique* – a work whose German flavor and “musique savante” still admitted gracious melody:

Le chef d'oeuvre de Meyerbeer, *Robert le diable*, éternelle lutte du bien et du mal, est aussi le chef-d'oeuvre de l'opéra fantastique. Cette musique savante, profonde, toute psychologique, où apparaît le catholicisme avec ses superstitions, ses demi-jours

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., “One gives the name *musique fantastique* to a type of composition in which one finds a great number of ideas and melodies presented in new forms, in unusual combinations [according to unusual contrivances], in which the instruments are employed in a particular manner. In these sorts of pieces, the composer operates with entire liberty, and unrestrained genius. We cite: Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, [his] *Damnation de Faust*, and many other works by the same composer...”

mystérieux, ses tentations, ses longs cloîtres bleuâtres, ses démons et ses anges, toutes ses poésies fantastiques, unit, dans une orchestration exubérante, les mélodies gracieuses et les chants puissants à tous les effets mystérieux et étranges du surnaturalisme allemand.⁵⁸⁷

Well before either Soullié or Larousse, composers outside of France had already recognized the fantastic as a discrete and significant mode, and an arena in which Berlioz was a key player. Glinka, who met Berlioz during a trip to Paris in 1845, described him as a colossal figure “in the realm of fantastic music,” by which he meant, an innovator in the realms of form, harmony, and especially orchestration:

Certainly, for me, the most wonderful thing that has happened has been meeting Berlioz. Not only have I heard Berlioz’s music in concert and rehearsal, but I have also grown close to this man who, in my opinion, is the foremost composer of our century (in his own province, of course) – as close, that is, as one can be to an extremely eccentric man. And this is what I think: in the realm of fantastic music, no one has ever approached his colossal and, at the same time, ever new conceptions. In sum, the development of details, logic, harmonic texture and finally, powerful and continually new orchestration – this is what constitutes the character of Berlioz’s music.⁵⁸⁸

Vladimir Stasov, another Russian and an influential music critic, embraced precisely the vaporous forms that Larousse had condemned, suggesting that they provoked not illness but a new kind of vision that offered up glimpses of the other world. “This vagueness,” he wrote, “endows each work with a sense of incompleteness, of uneasiness, a sense of reaching out for something, of futile seeking after form. It is as

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., “Meyerbeer’s masterpiece, *Robert le diable*, eternal struggle between good and evil, is also a masterpiece in the realm of fantastic opera. This learned, profound, wholly psychological music, which features Catholicism with all its superstitions, its mysterious twilights, its temptations, its long and shadowy cloisters, its demons and angels, all its fantastic poetry unites with exuberant orchestration, gracious melodies, and powerful song to produce all the mysterious and strange effects of German supernaturalism.”

⁵⁸⁸ Translated by Florence Jonas, in Vladimir Stasov, *Selected Essays on Music* (Longon: 1968), p. 147; quoted in Rose, *Berlioz Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 156.

though you saw before you shades wandering disconsolately along the banks of the Lethe, finding no repose.⁵⁸⁹

The shift in attitude toward the musical fantastic implied in Russian reception of Berlioz crept into France during the last half of the century despite the resolute opposition of Larousse and other conservatives. Many reviewers began to take a broader and longer view of the *genre fantastique*, reassessing its musical and aesthetic status. Among them was Frédéric Lavoix, whose two-part article entitled “Du fantastique et du surnaturel dans la musique dramatique” (*L’Art musicale*, 1867) reversed some of the key criticisms of the fantastic style that had been in circulation since the late 1820s. Adopting a historicist approach to the fantastic, Lavoix identified it not only as a long-standing musical mode, but an essential facet of modern French composition.

Lavoix opened by claiming that the fantastic was the true province of music, which was uniquely suited to depict “les horreurs de l’enfer, l’extase du rêve, [et] la terreur religieuse des oracles.” No other art could penetrate the mysteries of the other world – they could not be captured in visual imagery nor described in language.⁵⁹⁰ The supernatural was a space accessible only via sound: “musique...entre tout à fait dans son domaine lorsqu’elle essaie de nous initier aux mystères de la vie surnaturelle.” The broadest and richest range of sounds were to be found in the orchestra, which Lavoix hailed as the mouthpiece of the fantastic. Indeed, he pointed out that the wealth of new orchestral effects available to composers had evolved during precisely the

⁵⁸⁹ Translated in Stasov, pp. 27-28; quoted in Rose, p. 159.

⁵⁹⁰ Lavoix, “Du fantastique et du surnaturel dans la musique dramatique,” *L’art musical* (12 and 19 Décembre, 1867). The only art apart from music which had access to the fantastic, according to Lavoix, was architecture, which enveloped and transported the mind in much the way that music did. This was a notion that went back to Goethe, whose well-known essay on Gothic architecture is echoed here: “Seule l’architecture, et dans l’architecture, le style gothique, peut jusqu’à un certain point transporter l’âme hors de la réalité. La masse imposante des cathédrales, la forme élancée de l’ogive, le demi-jour qui règne perpétuellement dans ces nefs immenses, tout ce spectacle oblige l’homme le plus matérialiste, si tout sentiment du beau ne lui est pas refusé, à rêver à ce monde qu’il n’a point vu, que personne n’a vu, et dont chacun cependant se fait une vague idée.”

period in which the fantastic had risen to prominence. In order to ‘sound’ the supernatural, in other words, composers had begun to stretch and expand instrumental capabilities. They had refined the ‘science’ of instrumental combinations, building on a repertory of effects found in Gluck and Mozart. Melody and harmony still operated as foundational elements of composition, he argued, but in the fantastic mode, orchestration was the most important tool:

Le pizzicato des violon, élégante dentelle posée sur le tissu musical, l’emploi tout moderne des sons harmoniques, le chant mystique des cors, les soupirs de la clarinette, la voix imposante et dominatrice des trombones, les perles de la harpe, le son sépulchral du basson, les cris stridents du piccolo, toute la magie de l’orchestre, en un mot, permet à l’homme de génie de transporter à son gré les auditeurs.⁵⁹¹

Lavoix’s argument opened up a vital line of defense for the genre fantastique, which had for so long labored under the criticism of melodic and harmonic deficiency. Music of the other world, he suggested, was not easily singable nor could it be analysed according to the rules of harmony, but only conjured by the “magic of the orchestra.”

Hardly defective or degenerate, the musical fantastic emerged in Lavoix’s writing as a vital mode and one with an impressive pedigree. Like Berlioz, he traced its roots to opera, citing the supernatural scenes of *Iphigénie*, *Orphée*, and *Don Giovanni*. But he made it clear that the source of the fantastic lay not in the sets, costumes, or lights of opera but in its music. The supernatural sounds produced by nineteenth-century instrumental composers called on an opera orchestra that had been released from its servile position in the pit and its tie to physical spectacle. Once emancipated and set into motion by Berlioz, Weber, Mendelssohn and others, it began

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., (December 12). “The pizzicato of the violin, elegant lacework imposed on the musical texture, the entirely modern use of harmonies, the mystical song of the horns, the sighs of the clarinet, the imposing and dominant voice of the trombones, the pearls of the harp, the sepulchral sound of the bassoon, the strident cries of the piccolo, all the magic of the orchestre, in one word, allow the man of genius to transport the audience at his will.”

to conjure landscapes more fabulous than any to be found in the theatre : “l’ouverture d’*Obéron*, le scherzo de *la Reine Mab* dans la symphonie de Berlioz, l’ouverture de *Tannhäuser*, le *Songe d’une nuit d’été*... n’ont pas besoin de mise en scène pour émouvoir profondément le public et le transporter hors de la réalité.”

Perhaps responding to the slew of second-rate “fantastique” compositions flooding the Parisian market (and the unsystematic application of the term at large) Lavoix argued against a ‘false’ fantastic, which he defined as a collection of stock effects applied indiscriminately. He also pointed out that, even among respected composers, very few could generate a truly fantastic sound. Halévy, despite “les rêves, les apparitions, les résurrections” that saturated his works, and the noisy orchestral effects that accompanied them, failed to generate either wonder or terror – “il [Halévy] n’avait pas le sentiment du fantastique.”⁵⁹² Gounod was equally unsuccessful; Lavoix described in detail the scene from his *Faust* in which Mephistopheles conjured the image of Marguerite, describing its Berliozian orchestration: the first violins “imitent le bruit monotone du rouet, la harpe laisse à chaque temps de la mesure tomber une perle, et les second violons, les altos, les violoncelles divisés dessinent tantôt *pizzicato*, tantôt *arco*, l’harmonie du chant.”⁵⁹³ The markers of the fantastic – its innovative textures and timbres – were in full evidence in this passage, and yet it fell short of the transcendental. What it lacked, according to Lavoix, was “l’étincelle de Prométhée” – the spark of genius that activated the magical properties of these sounds, opening the portals of the other world.

Lavoix’s article marked a moment of crucial change for the *genre fantastique*. No longer outside the boundaries of music, as Fétis had claimed, it now stood at the

⁵⁹² Ibid., (19 December). All remaining quotations from Lavoix are taken from this source.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., the first violins “imitate the monotonous noise of the spinning wheel, at the same time, the harp drops a pearl on each beat of the measure, and the second violins, the violas, [and] divided cellos, now *pizzicato*, now *arco*, sketch out the harmony of the song.”

very centre of the discipline. Only composers of the greatest genius – Berlioz, Weber, Meyerbeer, and a handful of others – had access to its sounds and special syntax. These composers were simultaneously musicians and magicians – orchestral alchemists whose soundscapes transported listeners to another sphere, sometimes the realm of sprites and fairies and sometimes a darker domain. Lavoix closed by suggesting that Wagner was the inheritor of the fantastic, although it manifested itself in his music in a new form: a “*fantastique symbolique*” that drew together the sounds of past and present, of this and the next world to create “*une langue universelle*.” The results of such an experiment were as yet unknown, according to Lavoix, although they promised to open up a rich (if perilous) new chapter in the history of the genre.

Lavoix, like Larousse, Soullié, and many contemporary critics, identified the *genre fantastique* not only as an established musical category but one whose influence was substantial and ongoing. They situated Berlioz in a rich context, placing his work alongside a broad repertory of fantastic opera and instrumental music (both pre- and post-1830), and an overlapping tradition of fantastic literature. Berlioz emerges in their writing as a pioneer but hardly – as Wagner had suggested – an anomalous or isolated composer. On the contrary, we have a sense of his profound connectedness – we begin to understand his first symphony (and his “*fantastique*” orchestral innovations more broadly) as expressions of a widespread impulse that permeated Romanticism at large. As we have seen, a great number of Berlioz’s contemporaries – both established and obscure composers – experimented with the fantastic mode. The result was not simply a spate of Berlioz imitations and parodies, but more importantly, an outpouring of “*fantastique*” works by composers of all ranks and nationalities whose music responded to literary and visual culture as well as to existing operatic and instrumental models.

Berlioz was by no means the inventor of the *genre fantastique* – nor did nineteenth-century critics identify him as such – but he was in many senses the creator of Lavoix’s “fantastic orchestra,” and a composer whose persona at large took on a distinctly other-worldly character. His *Orchestration Treatise* became a handbook for supernatural evocation, drawing together many of the “fantastique” effects that he had admired in Gluck, Weber, Mozart, and Beethoven, as well as codifying the infernal, often extra-musical sounds that permeated his own early instrumental works. Well before the *Treatise* itself, these effects had begun to resonate through orchestral works, and even keyboard pieces, of other composers. Equally influential (though also not entirely new) was Berlioz’s approach to syntax, rhythm, and form; these facets of his fantastic idiom had clear analogues in literature and visual culture; their relationship with the “grotesque” and “vaporous” works of Boulanger, Hoffmann, Nodier, Gautier, Sand, and other self-identified members of the *école fantastique* was well documented by both his supporters and detractors. As Lavoix reminds us, the fantastic mode was essentially interdisciplinary; rather than simply a species of program music, it was a liminal mode in which music mingled with the phantom images of the opera house, the characters of *contes fantastiques*, and the imaginary landscapes of Gothic paintings.

In this dissertation, we have begun to investigate the set of intertextual impulses that underpinned fantastic works, drawing music into a scholarly discourse normally centered around literary and visual culture. We have taken the first steps toward the excavation of a “fantastique” repertory, moving from a focused investigation of Berlioz toward a broader project, and one that opens onto a rich musical and literary expanse. Rather than drawing concrete conclusions, in other words, we have begun to generate the next set of questions, which lead beyond the instrumental repertory treated here toward a more global exploration of the musical

fantastic. Among the clearest starting points for such an exploration is a more detailed study of fantastic opera and ballet. We have dealt briefly with the operas by Gluck, Weber, and Mozart that underpinned Berlioz's "fantastique" orchestration, but have devoted little attention to the profusion of other-worldly pieces that dominated French theatres through the middle decades of the century: Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, Josse's "Oratorio fantastique," Halévy's opera "La Magicienne," and Gabrielli's fantastic ballet, "Les Elfes," to name only a few. These works point toward a related repertory of supernatural ballads and *romances* including Niedermeyer's *La Noce de Léonor* and *La Ronde du sabbat*, whose effects were rooted in long-standing conventions of musico-fantastic pictorialism.

Even in the realm of instrumental repertoire, this dissertation has focused only on pieces with the "fantastique" label. But what of the many works that borrow fantastic sounds, forms, and syntax without making reference to the word itself? Liszt's *Totentanz* and Schumann's impromptu "Le Sabbat" are obvious examples, as are Offenbach's *Chants du crépuscule*, Ambroise's "La nuit du sabbat," and a host of spectral, phantasmagorical, and macabre pieces by lesser known composers. These works rely on the noisy and grotesque effects that figure so prominently in Berlioz's early writing – the sounds of the Dantesque fantastic. But we must not forget about pieces at the other end of the spectrum: the *féerique* fantastic. Mendelssohn's music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* falls into this category, as does Berlioz's *Queen Mab* scherzo. Here, in landscapes that hover between the real and the unreal, we encounter a different collection of effects dominated by what Hoffmann called "crystalline tones": unusual harmonics, muted and whispering sounds, pointillistic wind textures, and the "spirit voices" of aeolian harps. Descriptions of these sounds permeated not just Hoffmann's writing but a host of French *contes fantastiques*, whose link with

fantastic musical works (and the figure of the Romantic-fantastic artist more broadly) we have only begun to explore.

Moving well beyond the *Symphonie fantastique*, then, this dissertation closes by gesturing toward the next project. It ushers us further into the imaginary realm – the domain of demons and spirits and the psychological “monde fantastique” so central to Berlioz’s self-fashioning. Gautier, Sand, and perhaps even Berlioz himself might argue that such a project takes us to the heart of French romanticism, which was permeated both by a fear of revolutionary ghouls and a penchant for utopian idealism. The fantastic was, as Nodier claimed, neither marginal nor frivolous; it was one of the vital and characteristic impulses of the age – a revolutionary mode that gave voice not only to poets and painters, but to a new generation of composers:

Le fantastique prend les nations dans leurs langes, comme le roi des aulnes si redouté des enfants, ou vient les assister à leur chevet funèbre, comme l’esprit familier de César; et quand ses chants finissent, tout finit.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁴ Charles Nodier, “Du fantastique en littérature,” *Revue de Paris* (28 November, 1830), p. 80. “The fantastic takes nations in their swaddling clothes, like the Erlking so feared by children, or comes to assist them on their funeral bed, like the familiar spirit of César; and when its songs finish, everything finishes.”

APPENDIX

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 1: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*; *Allegro molto*, mm. 44-60. First lyrical theme in E-flat (Draft score, F. Brittan 2006).

44

Picc. Fl. Obs. Ba Cls. Bsns.

44

E♭ Hns. Ins. in C E♭ Tpts. Ito Tbn. T. Tbn. B. Tbn.

44

Timp. Perc. Vln. I Vln. II Vla. Vc. Cb.

301

**Example 2: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*; *Délire* mm. 246-287;
End of Scherzo with return of E-flat major theme.**

The musical score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, Violins, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score is in E-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a variety of dynamics including *p*, *f*, *marcato*, and *pp*, and includes markings for *arco* and *legato*. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system covering measures 246-287 and the second system covering measures 288-327.

261

Picc.

Fl.

Obs.

B♭ Cls.

Bsns.

E♭ Hns.

Ins. in C

E♭ Tpts.

Uto Tbn.

T. Tbn.

B. Tbn.

Timp.

Perc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Viyace

275

Picc. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

Fl. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

Obs. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

B♭ Cls. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

Bsns. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

E♭ Hrn. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

Ins. in C *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

E♭ Tpts. *pp* *cresc.* *f* marcato *f*

Uto Tbn. *f* marcato *f*

T. Tbn. *f* marcato *f*

B. Tbn. *f* marcato *f*

Timp. *pp* *f* marcato *f*

Perc. *f*

Vln. I *pp* *cresc.* *ff* marcato *f*

Vln. II *pp* *cresc.* *ff* marcato *f*

Vla. *pp* *cresc.* *ff* marcato *f*

Vc. *pp* *cresc.* *ff* marcato *f*

Cb. *pp* *cresc.* *ff* marcato *f*

Example 3: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*; *Allegro molto* mm. 1-14.

Soubre

Allegro Molto

Piccolo

Flute

Oboes 1 and 2

Clarinets in Bb 1 and 2

Bassoons 1 and 2

Horns in Eb

Horns in C

Trumpets in Eb

Alto Trombone

Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Timpani

Percussion

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Example 4: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*, *Allegro molto*, “Eroica” rhythm, note mm. 40-46

35

Picc.

Fl.

Obs.

B♭ Cls.

Bsns.

35

E♭ Hns.

Ins. in C

E♭ Tpts.

Alto Tbn.

T. Tbn.

B. Tbn.

35

Timp.

Perc.

35

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vcl.

Cb.

44

Picc. *ff*

Fl. *ff*

Obs. *ff*

B♭ Cls. *ff* *solo* *dolce*

Bans. *ff*

E♭ Hns. *f*

Ins. in C

E♭ Tpts.

Alto Tbn. *f*

T. Tbn. *f*

B. Tbn. *f*

Timp. 44

Perc.

Vln. I 44 *ff*

Vln. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *f*

Cb. *f*

Example 5: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*; *Délire*, “Eroica” transition, mm. 276-286.

[illegible]

Example 6: Soubre, *Symphonie fantastique*, *Délire*, “locked harmonies,” mm.10-17.

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The top section includes woodwinds (Picc., Fl., Obs., Bu. Cls., Bsns.) and brass (E. Hns., Ins. in C, E. Tpts., Alto Tbn., T. Tbn., B. Tbn.). The bottom section includes percussion (Timp., Perc.) and strings (Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., Cb.). The score is marked with a tempo of 10 and a key signature of two flats. The 'locked harmonies' texture is achieved through sustained notes and chords across multiple instruments, creating a dense, static harmonic environment.

310

Example 7: Charles Bochsa, "Napoleon's Dream," *Morceau fantastique*, p. 1.

Bochsa
"Napoleon's
Dream"
Pièce fantastique

3

Our Life is twofold: Sleep hath its own World,
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death & existence: Sleep hath its own World
And a wide realm of wild reality,
And dreams in their development have breath,
And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy:
+ + + + +
They pass like Spirits of the past, they speak
Like Sibyls of the future:
And shake us with the vision that's gone by.
+ + + + +
Byron.

Misterioso & sempre stacc.

Allegro.
assai.

Drums at a distance. *pp*

pp

pp (G₄)

pp (F₄)

rf pp *sempre pp*

smorz.

Napoleon's Dream.

Example 8: Adolphe Fumagalli, "Le Reveil des ombres," *Danse fantastique*, p. 1.

LE REVEIL DES OMBRES.

Danse fantastique.

A. FUMAGALLI Op. 100.

à Mme la Marquise Joséphine PORRO-TRIVULZIO.

1

« La lune venait à peine de paraître à l'horizon, lorsqu'une musique étrange se fit entendre dans la forêt des grands chênes, et tout à coup, j'aperçus comme des formes blanches se dresser parmi les buissons; croyant reconnaître des ombres, je m'enfuis aussitôt glacé d'une frayeur mortelle. »

A. B.

All.^{to} non troppo.

PIANO.

a capriccio pp somesso.

Exemple 9: Juliette Godillon, “Le Violon de Crémone,” *1^{re} Conte fantastique*, p. 4, “La voix d’Antonia dans le violon de Crémone.”

[illegible]

Example 10a: Ferdinand Lavainne, *Fantaisie fantastique*;
“Ronde fantastique,” p. 1, Striking bell.

RONDE FANTASTIQUE.

All° infernal.

Cloche sonnant minuit.

D. 54. et cie

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10. 11. 12.

pp *pp* *cres* *cres* *f* *ff* *P*

Example 10b: Lavainne, “Ronde du sabbat,” grotesque ornamentation.

Example 10c: Lavainne, “Ronde du sabbat,” demonic whirling.

Example 11: Fumagalli, "Les Sorcières," *Caprice fantastique*, pp. 1-2.

LES SORCIÈRES.
Caprice fantastique.

A. FUMAGALLI Op. 51. à M. le Comte César CASTELBARCO

Allegro a capriccio.

INVITO. Campanella.
f Ped:

Allegretto vivo.
pp

GRAVE. *sf* *pp*

legatissimo.

Allegretto vivace.
pp

GRAVE. *sf* *pp*

legatissimo.

S.S.I. E. 847.

2

Andante. *presto.* *presto.* *presto.*

come recitativo.
p *presto.* *presto.* *presto.*

ben pronunciato il canto.

presto. *animandosi.* *presto.*

8 *accelerando.* *presto.*

ff *furioso.*
Ped.

8 *lento.*
Ped. Campanella *p* *ppp sussurando.*

GRAVE. *calmo.* *mf* *tremolo.* *rall?*

S. S. E. 847.

Example 12a: Camille Schubert, “Talismans du diable,” *Quadrille fantastique*, Titlepage.

LES TALISMANS DU DIABLE
2^{ème} QUADRILLE FANTASTIQUE.

à Monsieur **DARRÉ** de Rouen.



POUR LE PIANO, PAR

CAMILLE SCHUBERT

N^o ——— OP. 137.

Paris, **PRILIPP**, Editeur de Musique, Boulevard des Italiens, N^o 19.

QUADRILLES NOUVEAUX:
Les petits Saltimbanques.
Le Chevalier Bagard.
Une fête à Crinon.
Les Diables-Mobiles.

London, Robert Cook.

N^o 1, Piano seul.
4 f. 50.

VALES ET POLKAS:
La Reine des Sœurs, Valse.
Les Enchantement, ... d.
Les Magiciennes, ... Polka.
Une couronne de fleurs, d.

N^o 2, à 4 mains.
4 f. 50.

Propriété de l'Editeur.
PRILIPP

Example 12b: Camille Schubert, “Faust aux enfers,” *Quadrille fantastique*, Titlepage.

6316

QUADRILLE FANTASTIQUE

FAUST AUX ENFERS

POUR LE PIANO



OP. 350.
N° 1, Piano.

CAMILLE SCHUBERT

PR. 4^f 50.
N° 2, à 4 mains.

Londres, Mayence, Bruxelles, Schott.

Paris, C. PRILIPP Editeur, Boulevard des Italiens, 19.

Propriété des Editeurs dans tous pays.

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⁵⁹⁵ Reviews cited in this dissertation are listed chronologically by journal. Authors are given only when named in the original review.

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