

**From Sight to Sound:
Musical Ekphrasis in the Long Nineteenth Century**

Sherina Yoga Ratnapalasari

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Sydney Conservatorium of Music

The University of Sydney

Declaration

I, Sherina Yoga Ratnapalasari, hereby declare that this submission and its intellectual content are my own work. This thesis contains no material previously submitted for any other academic degree. All assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis examines musical ekphrasis, a subgenre of program music that involves a deliberate attempt to respond to and re-present a visual artwork. The process by which art is transformed into music experienced by the viewer-listener is called transmedialisation. This project's conceptions of musical ekphrasis and transmedialisation are adapted from Siglind Bruhn's seminal book, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (2000). Bruhn's theorisation of musical ekphrasis addresses the re-presentation of subject matter but the transposition of art's formal parameters into musical parameters remains minimally addressed. This neglect stems from musicology's lack of nuanced dialogue with the visual arts which result in surface-level descriptions of an artwork's content and often overlook its formal complexities. I argue that close analysis of an artwork's formal parameters in addition to its subject matter will result in a more comprehensive understanding of the ekphrastic process.

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduces a reconstructed model of transmedialisation that is enhanced by closer engagement with art history and visual formalism. My two-step methodology examines the content and formal elements of the original visual work and of the musical ekphrasis separately; these are then compared and contrasted to characterise the transmedialisation at play. Firstly, I draw on Norman Bryson's visual semiotics and on topic theory to comprehend representation in art and music respectively. Secondly, I develop a generalized list of visuo-musical analogies that links a visual parameter to a comparable musical parameter. By comparing and contrasting visual artwork to musical work, I define four types of transmedialising functions: replication, alteration, supplementation, and exclusion. Functions act as a bridge between the original artwork and musical ekphrasis whether in the matter of content or form, permitting us to identify visuo-musical analogies such as colour to timbre, visual composition to musical structure, and visual representation to musical topics and styles.

With the methodology thus established, I analyse three case studies of musical ekphrasis. Chapter 2 looks at Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* Op. 29 (1908) inspired by Arnold Böcklin's painting of the same name (fourth version, 1884). Rachmaninoff's symphonic poem involves replications, alterations, and supplementations to the visual artwork which makes for a comprehensive demonstration of the procedures involved in creating a musical ekphrasis. Chapter 3 examines Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht* (1857) inspired by Wilhelm von Kaulbach's painting *Die Hunnenschlacht* (1854) as exemplifying the alteration function. Chapter 4 parses Liszt's *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* (1882) inspired by Mihály Zichy's drawing *Du berceau jusqu'au cercueil* (1881) which highlights the differing approaches taken in representing the passage of time in spatial and temporal art.

This thesis's new framework of ekphrasis and transmedialisation provides a replicable methodology to analyse musical ekphraseis (plural). More broadly, this study re-examines how visual art which operates in a spatial and visual medium may (or may not) be reconciled with music which operates on a temporal and aural medium. Musical ekphrasis as a subgenre of programmatic music speaks to the burgeoning currents of artistic interconnectivity in the long nineteenth century. Deeper engagement with other art forms in collaboration with music enriches our understanding of program music and representation.

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Introduction

In 1874, Modest Mussorgsky visited the memorial exhibition of his friend, the late architect and painter Viktor Hartmann. The exhibition showcased over 400 of his visual works including architectural drawings, stage designs, and watercolours, most of which are now lost. It was from this viewing experience that Mussorgsky was inspired to compose his *Pictures at an Exhibition*: a ten-movement piano suite that was a musical depiction of his visit through the exhibition. Each movement was named after an illustration which Mussorgsky saw; he also created a recurring promenade theme, initially between each movement, later, more intermittently, as if to represent the viewer walking through the exhibit. As the suite progresses, this theme undergoes reharmonizations and textural alterations to reflect the mood of the adjacent illustrations. Each movement offers a vividly distinct re-presentation of the visual work through the deployment of musical characteristics unique to each movement. For example: the winding contour and chromatic runs in “Tuileries” suggest children running in the gardens; the angular intervallic jumps and explosive accents in “The Hut on Hen’s Legs” imitate the supernatural movements of Baba Yaga’s hut; and the suite ends victoriously with thick consonant chords, and scalar movement imitating carillons to represent the Bogatyr Gates.

Pictures at an Exhibition is perhaps the best-known example within the Western Art Music tradition of a musical ekphrasis, which I define as a musical work that responds to and re-presents a visual artwork. As a type of music that draws from extramusical sources, a connection which is sanctioned by the composer, musical ekphrasis is a subgenre of program music.

Ekphrasis itself has its origins as an Ancient Greek literary and rhetorical practice. Originally ekphrasis did not mean to re-present or recreate a work of art in another medium but to describe at length. The word “ekphrasis” is composed of two Greek words: *ek* = “out” and *phrazein* = “to speak”, combined meaning “to speak out” or “to show clearly and completely”.¹ It was “a vivid description intended to bring the subject before the mind’s eye of the listener.”² The first instance of ekphrasis is typically said to be Homer’s lengthy description of the Shield of Achilles designed by the gods in the *Iliad* (c. 8th century BCE). In his first *Idyll* (c. 3rd century BCE), Theocritus describes a goatherd’s decorated cup in great detail. Later in Virgil’s third *Eclogue* (c. 1st century BCE), he describes the two prize cups wagered by Damoetas and Menalcas referring back to

¹ Sofie Behluli and Gabriele Rippl, “Ekphrasis: Intermedial and Anglophone Perspectives,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Asun López-Varela Azcárate, and Miriam de Paiva Vieira (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 47.

² Ruth Webb, “Ekphrasis,” in *Grove Art Online* (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T025773>.

Theocritus's cup.³ The term 'ekphrasis' is also used by Philostratus the Younger in his book *Imagines* (c. 3rd–4th CE) where he describes works of art.⁴ Furthermore, factual description was not the aim. Instead, extensive descriptions displayed the authors' rhetorical skills, their impression of the subject and emotional response to this, what the characters in the work (if depicted) might be feeling, and the possible narrative context before and after the scene shown. By rousing the listener's emotions, the audience would become quasi-eyewitnesses to the physically absent but mentally present object.⁵

The concept of ekphrasis went through multiple developments from late antiquity to the Enlightenment where each strand emphasised certain aspects of ekphrasis. Horace (65–8 BCE) in his *Ars Poetica*, paraphrased Simonides of Ceos's (late 6th century BCE) equation of painting with poetry, thereby coining the famous saying *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry) with its implication that painting and poetry functioned on the same rules.⁶ In the Middle Ages, ekphrasis thrived as a rhetorical technique to bring something vividly to the mind's eye. *The Knight's Tale* (c. 1380) and *The Parliament of Fowles* (c. 1380) by Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) feature ekphrastic descriptions of temples, frescoes, and paintings.⁷ In the Renaissance, a disciplinary distinction between the sister arts emerged which developed into the debate of the *paragone*. Although literally meaning "comparison" in Italian, this refers to the way in which discourses surrounding the art forms (primarily painting and sculpture) became competitive, such as is seen in Leonardo da Vinci's (1452–1519) collection of essays, *A Treatise on Painting*, which unsurprisingly posited the supremacy of sight and painting.⁸ Jumping forward to the eighteenth century, in 1766, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) published his influential essay *Laokoon: Oder, Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* in which he argued for the inherent differences between poetry and painting such as their distinctive temporal and spatial modes which impacted how each must depict beauty.⁹

As seen from all the above examples, traditional ekphrasis is concerned with transference from the visual to the verbal. Scholars have since argued for expanding the scope of ekphrasis to include

³ Grant F. Scott, "The Rhetoric of Dilation: Ekphrasis and Ideology," *Word & Image* 7, no. 4 (1991): 302–303.

⁴ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 8.

⁵ Behluli and Rippl, "Ekphrasis," 50.

⁶ Behluli and Rippl, "Ekphrasis," 51.

⁷ Behluli and Rippl, "Ekphrasis," 51; Mike Rodman Jones, "Chaucerian Ekphrasis: Craft, Intertext, Dispenca," *Parergon* 41, no. 1 (2024): 191–212.

⁸ Leonardo da Vinci, *A Treatise on Painting*, trans. J. F. Rigaud, (Online: Project Gutenberg, 2014), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/46915>.

⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon: Oder, Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, eBook ed., (Online: Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6889>. This essay was inspired by the famous Hellenistic sculpture discovered in Rome and now in the Vatican Museums. A photograph is available at: https://www.museivaticani.va/content/dam/museivaticani/immagini/collezioni/musei/museo_pio_clementino/02_03_laocoonte.jpg/jcr:content/renditions/cq5dam.web.1280.1280.jpeg (accessed 28 Feb 2025).

musical re-presentations of art (and indeed, literature). The broadest understanding would lay no prescriptions as to what art form the intended object of ekphrasis and the ekphrasis itself could be (literature inspired by music, music inspired by art, art inspired by literature etc.) as long as there is a distinction in medium between the originating artwork and the resulting one. This greater flexibility of modern theories of ekphrasis as opposed to Classical ekphrasis was due in part to the semiotic turn in the late twentieth century under the influence of intermedial studies.¹⁰ The semiotic shift began in literary studies as a way to understand the verbal descriptions in ekphrasis. The most influential and standard definition of ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of visual representation” was offered by James A. W. Heffernan in his *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (1993).¹¹ Intermedial studies spearheaded by Claus Clüver shifted the conception of ekphrasis from vivid description to the complete re-presentation of visual artworks in other mediums by way of intersemiotic translation. This semiotic reconceptualization fostered a more parallelist approach which valued the parsing of signs and meaning—no matter the medium—thereby creating the theory of intersemiotic systems to comprehend the process of ekphrasis.¹² Clüver’s 1989 essay “On Intersemiotic Transposition” argued that verbal-to-visual translations are just as possible as the traditional visual-to-verbal movement on the grounds that the same meaning can exist in different semiotic systems, thereby nuancing what ekphrasis could be.¹³ His later work refined many aspects of ekphrasis such as the inclusion of music in the pan-directional web of potential ekphrasis and the privileging of the spectator, reader, or listener when experiencing an ekphrastic work.¹⁴

Taking on this modern semiotic approach of ekphrasis, Siglind Bruhn’s 2000 book *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* is the seminal text on musical ekphrasis. Where ekphrasis and ekphrastic work denotes the result of the interart re-presentation, Bruhn coins the term ‘transmedialisation’ to describe the process that the original artwork undergoes into becoming the ekphrasis. The process largely operates by “resemblance, mimesis, or emulation—terms [which] denote that one aspect of the object ... is artfully reproduced.”¹⁵ She differentiates resemblance in music into two categories at the opposite ends of a spectrum: depiction and

¹⁰ Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira and Thaïs Flores Nogueira Diniz, “An Updated Survey of Early Interart and Intermediality Roots: Claus Clüver,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Asun López-Varela Azcárate, and Miriam de Paiva Vieira (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 31–46.

¹¹ James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

¹² Oliveira and Diniz, “Early Interart and Intermediality Roots,” 34–35.

¹³ Claus Clüver, “On Intersemiotic Transposition,” *Poetics today* 10, no. 1 (1989): 55–90.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive summary of Clüver’s ideas, see Oliveira and Diniz, “Early Interart and Intermediality Roots.”

¹⁵ Siglind Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*, (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000), 9.

reference. Depiction is the presence of a sensory resemblance between artwork and musical work such as “hues, shapes, and spatiality”. Meanwhile, reference relies more on “cultural and historical conventions” as means of indicating a resemblance which may not be as readily accessible to the lay listener.¹⁶

Other scholars have investigated musical ekphrasis from philosophical and analytical perspectives. Lydia Goehr presents a historical review of the two conceptions of ekphrasis (Ancient description or modern re-presentation), and is not so much concerned with musical ekphrasis as a genre but with laying out how ekphrasis has operated in the arts in general.¹⁷ Thomas C. Connolly analyses Jacob Gilboa’s orchestral composition *The Chagall Windows* (1974) based on Marc Chagall’s *Jerusalem Windows* (1962) in a synagogue so as to offer a critique of Bruhn’s own analysis of the same work.¹⁸ Connolly’s article aims to recentre the rhetorical and descriptive attributes of Classical ekphrasis instead of a re-presentational ekphrasis. Whereas modern ekphrasis emphasises work-to-work relations and re-presentations of meaning and form, Classical ekphrasis were not understood as “the same work in a different form” but instead as a description that evoked the original work. Orit Hilewicz balances both conceptions of ekphrasis in her article exploring Gunther Schuller’s *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* (1959), Peter Maxwell Davies’s *Five Klee Pictures* (1959/1976), and Tan Dun’s *Death and Fire* (1992), three different musical ekphrasises of Paul Klee’s painting *Die Zwitschermachine* (1922).¹⁹ Hilewicz highlights that listening to musical ekphrasises is a multitextual activity that affects the listener’s perception of the original artwork, in effect creating three different versions of Klee’s *Twittering Machine*. More recently in a 2020 book chapter, Bruhn gives an ekphrastic analysis of Ravel’s *Ondine* based on Aloysius Bertrand’s poem of the same name, and the second and third movements of Marta Ptaszyńska’s *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra* (1985) based on *The Eye of Silence* (1943) by Max Ernst and *Thorn Trees* (1945) by Graham Sutherland respectively.²⁰

Bruhn’s theorisation of musical ekphrasis addresses the re-presentation of subject matter but the transposition of art’s formal parameters into musical parameters is only minimally touched upon. Connolly’s analysis attempts to supplement this aspect of Bruhn’s theory by highlighting the

¹⁶ Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis*, 10.

¹⁷ Lydia Goehr, “How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 4 (2010): 389–410.

¹⁸ Thomas C. Connolly, “Walking in Colour: Another Look at Musical Ekphrasis through Marc Chagall’s Jerusalem Windows,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 51, no. 1 (2018): 161–178.

¹⁹ Orit Hilewicz, “Reciprocal Interpretations of Music and Painting: Representation Types in Schuller, Tan, and Davies after Paul Klee,” *Music Theory Online* 24, no. 3 (2018).

²⁰ Siglind Bruhn, “Musical Ekphrasis: The Evolution of the Concept and the Breadth of Its Application,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Music Signification*, ed. Esti Sheinberg and William P. Dougherty (London: Routledge, 2020), 345–358.

material form of Chagall's stained-glass windows and their context in a synagogue, and yet, whenever formal analyses of musical ekphraseis are conducted, the authors' methodologies are always ad hoc. This neglect of visual formalism stems from musicology's lack of nuanced dialogue with the visual arts which mostly results in surface-level descriptions of an artwork's formal design and often overlooks formal complexities which may well influence the transmedialising process and resulting ekphrasis. Meanwhile, semantics and representation in visual art and program music are thoroughly covered by semiotic approaches. However, I argue that close analysis of both visual musical artworks' formal parameters in addition to their subject matter will result in a more comprehensive understanding of the ekphrastic process.

In the scope of this study, I define a musical ekphrasis as a musical work that responds to and represents a visual artwork. While ekphraseis are the objects of my research, my main object of study is transmedialisation i.e. the process by which art is re-presented as music. How does ekphrasis come about in the first place? How can we compare the original artwork and the ekphrastic work to find relationships that support the claim for ekphrasis? Although I am analysing paintings and drawings for the purposes of this project, transmedialisation could also be applied to other forms of visual art such as sculpture, photography, and architecture. This thesis will look at musical ekphraseis created in the long nineteenth century to contextualise ekphrasis in the domain of program music. This was an era which saw an increasing entwinement of the arts, particularly around the *fin de siècle*. The methodology I have come up with has been crafted in response to semiotic and formal codes particular to nineteenth-century Europe, and due care would be needed when adopting this to explore ekphraseis from outside this period. Should the methodology be applied to ekphraseis of other cultures and time periods, I highly advise the analyst to refer to the semiotic and formal codes appropriate to the creators' contexts.

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduces a model of transmedialisation largely adapted from Bruhn's model but reconstructed to afford closer engagement with art history and visual formalism. My two-step methodology examines the content and formal elements of the original visual work and of the musical ekphrasis separately; these are then compared and contrasted to characterise the transmedialisation at play. Firstly, I draw on musical topic theory and Norman Bryson's visual semiotics to comprehend representation in music and art respectively. Secondly, I develop a generalized list of visuo-musical analogies that links a formal visual parameter to a comparable musical parameter. By comparing and contrasting visual work to musical work, I define four types of transmedialising functions: replication, alteration, supplementation, and exclusion. Functions act as a bridge between the original artwork and musical ekphrasis whether in the matter of content or form, permitting us to identify visuo-musical analogies such as colour to timbre, visual

composition to musical structure, and visual representation to musical topics and styles. Alongside the formulations of my methodology, I discuss further theories of ekphrasis, intersemiotic systems, visual and musical semiotic competency, and the differences between spatial and temporal art forms.

With the methodology thus established, I analyse three case studies of musical ekphrasis. Chapter 2 looks at Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* Op. 29 (1908) inspired by Arnold Böcklin's painting of the same name (fourth version, 1884). Rachmaninoff's symphonic poem involves replications, alterations, and supplementations to the visual artwork which makes for a comprehensive musical ekphrasis. Chapter 3 examines Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht* (1857) inspired by Wilhelm von Kaulbach's painting *Die Hunnenschlacht* (1854) as exemplifying the alteration function. Chapter 4 parses Liszt's *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* (1882) inspired by Mihály Zichy's drawing *Du berceau jusqu'au cercueil* (1881) which highlights the differing approaches taken in spatial and temporal art forms to representing the passage of time.

This thesis's new framework of ekphrasis and transmedialisation provides a replicable methodology with which to analyse musical ekphrases. Grounded in a more robust visual formalism that provides the language and tools to analyse art, I aim to facilitate a better understanding of visual art which will inform how the transmedialising process into a musical ekphrasis may operate. More broadly, this study re-examines how visual art, which operates in a spatial and visual medium, may (or may not) be reconciled with music, which operates on a temporal and aural medium. Musical ekphrasis as a subgenre of programmatic music speaks to the burgeoning currents of artistic interconnectivity in the long nineteenth century. Deeper engagement with other art forms in collaboration with music enriches our understanding of program music and representation. This thesis carves an intermedial space between musicology and art theory through its focus on the long-standing tradition of ekphrasis.

Chapter 1

Musical Ekphrasis and Transmedialisation

... true music suggests similar ideas in different minds. Moreover, *a priori* reasoning, without further analysis and without comparisons, would not be ridiculous in this context; for the only really surprising thing would be that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not give the idea of melody, and that sound and colour were unsuitable as media for ideas; since all things always have been expressed by reciprocal analogies, ever since the day when God created the world as a complex indivisible totality ...²¹

Charles Baudelaire

Musical Ekphrasis

In her seminal study of musical ekphrasis, Siglind Bruhn lists four different types of visual inspirations for music which might be understood as musical ekphrasis, but both she and I agree that only one of these constitutes ekphrasis proper. There are subtle differences between each scenario and although only scenario 4 aligns with the focus of this study, the nuances are useful for fine-tuning the definition of musical ekphrasis, a practice which can be easily lost in the sea of program music. Scenario 1 describes musical works that take inspiration from scenes in the real world, resulting in what she calls musical scenes. Scenario 2 is called cumulative ekphrasis, and describes the case where a composer sees multiple different versions of a real-life scene or artwork and condenses her impressions of them all into one final musical work. As a hypothetical example, if Rachmaninoff had seen all five versions of Böcklin's *Isle* and then written his composition, this would be a case of cumulative ekphrasis. Scenario 3, which she calls fictional ekphrasis, is when one and the same person is both the painter and composer of the primary artwork and secondary artwork. Scenario 4 is what Bruhn and I refer to as musical ekphrasis proper: a single work of art transmedialised into a single musical work, each artwork by a different person.²²

²¹ Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris," in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), 330–331.

²² Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis*, 56–7.

Music's collaboration with other art forms can be seen in genres such as song and opera. Poetry has been set to music, librettos have been turned into operas, choreography shaped to incidental music, but my definition of musical ekphrasis is emphatically not multimodal. Within the scope of this study, musical ekphrasis involves a purely visual artwork transmedialised into a purely aural artwork. Hence this study only looks at instrumental music to highlight the transmedialisation of one artform into another artform. Opera, song, and other multimedia works which would require a lengthier investigation to account for the web of interacting art forms, are excluded from this study.

Determining whether a programmatic instrumental work is musical ekphrasis is the initial challenge. The most telling evidence for calling a work a musical ekphrasis is through its possessing a programmatic title referring to the primary (i.e. visual) artwork. Musical responses to literary works may take the form of programmatic symphonies and symphonic poems such as Liszt's *A Faust Symphony* and *Hamlet*, and Strauss's *Don Juan* and *Don Quixote*. Other than a title that reveals the source of inspiration, the composer may also provide program notes as a sort of rationale of their artistic 'translation', thus denoting the musical work as a composer-sanctioned ekphrasis. In the case where a musical ekphrasis does not make itself clear as an ekphrasis, it might be a hypothetical musical ekphrasis such as Debussy's *La Mer*. The symphonic sketches are widely thought to have been inspired by one of Katsushika Hokusai's *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of views of Mount Fuji. However, the composer never confirmed this in writing, nor does the score of *La Mer* include any explicit signalling to a Hokusai work. Furthermore, Debussy generally enjoyed boat trips to the sea which may have been the direct inspiration for *La Mer*. Whatever the case, I argue that making a case for musical ekphrasis requires knowledge of the original artwork, and therefore a named artwork to intermodally compare to the musical work. Hypothetical ekphrasis are interesting in and of themselves and composers are not always vocal or truthful about their source inspirations but for this study, I will only examine musical ekphrasis where the composer has explicitly confirmed their source inspiration.

One important thing to note about the visual entity which musical ekphrasis draws on is that it must be an artwork i.e. an artistic representation of something. Musical ekphrasis is art inspired by art, not art inspired by scenes from real life (which would be Bruhn's scenario 1) or imaginary scenes; in other words, musical ekphrasis must have a reference to a named artwork that is available to be seen. Therefore, Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture*, which is based on the composer's perceptions of and response to mainland Scotland and Fingal's Cave, would not be a musical ekphrasis. He did sketch the scenery of Scotland with notation of the overture's main theme

attached to it, but I contend that that sketch pales in comparison to what Mendelssohn experienced first hand and, at most, the sketch functioned as an aide memoire for the scenery he saw.²³ Schumann's *Waldszenen*, which depicts activities in a generic, possibly imaginary forest, is also not a musical ekphrasis. In this case, the subject matter being fictive does not diminish *Waldszenen*'s capacity to be a musical ekphrasis; rather, it is the fact that we do not have a visual representation of said forest to look at and compare with the music. In cases where the programmatic work does not reference a named artwork but a recognisable landmark or cultural idea such as forests, oceans, hunts, etc., this vagueness of program is comparable to Leonard Barkan's anecdote of trying to understand an ancient sculpture "whose representations were often impossible to identify with any precision."²⁴ For example, Schumann's work is about forests *but which forest* and *which artwork* of said forest?

In that sense, I argue that musical ekphrasis is a twofold representation (as Heffernan's definition quoted in the Introduction also requires). The first representation occurs when a painter perceives the real world, digests it, and turns it into a work of art. I will not touch on this starting level of representation from the artist's perspective but I will address the viewer's semiotic competency to comprehend what is actually being represented in the artwork. The second representation is precisely the act of ekphrasis which transmedialises the visual work into musical work.

In 1988, John Hollander proposed that there were actual and notional literary ekphrasis, where an actual ekphrasis evoked real existent artworks and a notional ekphrasis is based on a fictive artwork. I apply this distinction to musical ekphrasis as well. Labelling an ekphrasis as actual or notional is useful insofar as it determines "whether an ekphrasis is more interested in referentiality or in invention."²⁵ In practice, referentiality and invention are often separated by a thin line: representation may necessitate some degree of newness and alteration whether due to the composer's personal preferences or the limitations of music to convey aspects of visual art. If we were to use Hollander's categories, Homer's Shield of Achilles from *The Iliad*, the *fons et origo* for this whole practice, would be a notional ekphrasis. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I argue that notional ekphrasis has to be considered essentially different to visual-musical ekphrasis studied, because in my methodology *it is vital for the viewer-listener to know what the primary artwork looks like* – which is impossible in the case of notional ekphrasis. I am not arguing that

²³ The drawing in question along with the musical sketch of the main theme is reproduced in Benedict Taylor, "Seascape in the Mist: Lost in Mendelssohn's Hebrides," *19th Century Music* 39, no. 3 (2016): 196.

²⁴ Thomas S. Grey, "Tableaux vivants: Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn's Orchestral Music," *19th Century Music* 21, no. 1 (1997): 68.

²⁵ Behluli and Rippl, "Ekphrasis," 58.

Homer's Shield of Achilles is not an ekphrasis but for the purpose of this study, I emphasise that the original artwork must have once existed in real life. It does not matter if the subject of the artwork has a real-world equivalent or not, as long as we know that the artwork itself once existed. To proceed to analyse the musical ekphrasis, the original artwork must still be visible.

My definition of a musical ekphrasis excludes Homer's Shield of Achilles because I am using the modern conception of ekphrasis as opposed to the Ancient Greek conception. Connolly argued that Bruhn's definition of ekphrasis as a representation of a representation only serves to limit what musical texts can be described as ekphrastic. The graver limitation for him, however, is that Bruhn's definition

... notably ignores the rich past of ekphrasis, particularly evident in antiquity, when ekphrasis was an advanced exercise in a school pupil's rhetorical training. ... As a tool designed to capture and direct the visual imagination of the listener, ekphrasis was implicated in the power relations of ancient rhetorical practice. ... [A]ny understanding of musical ekphrasis should be prepared to look beyond the role of ekphrasis in modern literary criticism, and toward the transformative (and maybe even political) properties of its ancient manifestation.²⁶

Two important questions arise from a combination of Connolly's criticism and Hollander's ekphrastic categories that need to be addressed at the outset of a study like this one: (1) are we ultimately investigating aesthetic or rhetorical matters through the lens of ekphrasis; and (2) might there have to be a necessary refinement of the definition of ekphrasis when dealing with art forms beyond visual art and literature? If we agree with the second suggestion, we have already departed from the ancient conception of ekphrasis for the modern one of re-presentation and intermedial studies, in effect directing our attention to aesthetics rather than rhetoric. To describe a visual work at length is a rhetorical exercise; to 'transpose' a visual work into a musical work is more an aesthetic exercise rather than a rhetorical one.

Ekphrasis is related to a number of other concepts but it is important to distinguish what is and is not ekphrasis. Musical ekphrasis is not synaesthesia. Synaesthesia is a personal experience individual to a composer or viewer instead of a subgenre of program music. For example, Messiaen explained how he heard different chords as equivalent to specific colours in his *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*.²⁷ Synaesthesia is not a concept which can be discerned by the listener as there is no shared musical 'language' to comprehend the synaesthetic intent other than the composer's own words, therefore rendering the program of the music arbitrary; a note or pitch class is unlikely

²⁶ Connolly, "Walking in Colour" para. 5.

²⁷ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* (Paris: Éditions Musicales Alphonse Leduc, 1994).

to look like a certain colour for the majority of listeners without being told so by the composer. Synaesthesia is not equivalent to musical ekphrasis but it can certainly be a tool in creating it for the composer. It operates on a sensory level as a parallelism of visual and aural senses.

More generally, composers and others may have reached for colours as metaphors for the effect of different pieces of music. Specific cases of synaesthetic works clearly showed how each composer saw and heard the world differently. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Mendelssohn spoke with insistence of a particular trumpet passage needing more violet than purple also suggesting that he, too, was synaesthetically inclined. AB Marx said to Felix, “Here purple would have to be used: the horns were dampening the splendor of the trumpets’; and Felix replied, ‘No! No! That shouts too loudly; I want violet.’”²⁸ In a letter from Hugo von Hofmannsthal to Richard Strauss dated 27 April 1906, the former wrote, “The blend of colour in the two [operatic] subjects strikes me as quite different in all essentials; in *Salome* much is so to speak purple and violet, the atmosphere is torrid; in *Elektra*, on the other hand, it is a mixture of night and light, or black and bright.”²⁹

In summary, for the purposes of this project, musical ekphrasis is a musical work inspired by a visual artwork and consisting of a deliberate attempt at re-presenting the source artwork. Musical ekphrasis is composer-signalled and can be traced back to the source of inspiration i.e. a specific known artwork, which sets it apart as a particular subcategory of program music. Bruhn puts it nicely when she defines musical ekphrasis as “by no means a matter of vaguely impressionistic ‘program’, but a case of a transformation of a message – in content and form, imagery and suggested symbolic signification – from one medium into another.”³⁰ My emphasis on specificity and knowing what the artwork looks like is addressed towards broader issues regarding intermediality. Any semantic clarity that can be gained in spite of music’s equivocality is a testament of some legible ‘translation’ happening between artforms. Knowing that there is semantic consistency, I posit that at least some of the means of this parallel clarity is made possible from a formal level. For instance, is there something about the way conflict was visually designed in Kaulbach’s *Hunnenschlacht* (Chapter 3 case study) that gave rise to the musical structure in Liszt’s *Hunnenschlacht* which would have been less likely had the composer only had a *general idea* of conflict? Hence, I privilege the availability of seeing the original artworks in my methodology

²⁸ Adolf Bernhard Marx and Susan Gillespie, “From the Memoirs of Adolf Bernhard Marx,” in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 212 quoted in R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 91.

²⁹ Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, trans. Hanns Hammelmann, (London: Collins, 1961), 4.

³⁰ Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis*, xvi.

because it was *Kaulbach's painting* that inspired Liszt, not the generalised subject depicted in said painting.

Transmedialisation

Transmedialisation is the process of re-presenting an artwork in a different art form such as a painting into a musical work. While musical ekphrasis is the focus of this study, I suggest that transmedialisation is the core process by which ekphrasis occurs. Intermingling of the arts flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a sort of pseudo-ekphrastic (and sometimes genuinely ekphrastic) endeavour. Many artists and composers (and writers) alike commented fondly on visual art's likeness to music and vice versa. Paul Gauguin wrote to a friend that "One must suggest and not describe in painting, just as music does, by the way."³¹ Odilon Redon described a painting using musical terms, calling it, "a little grey, three or five main tones, whose arrangement occurs rhythmically or contrapuntally—in analogy to a fugue."³² Arnold Böcklin wished all arts to be received equally, saying: "A work of art should tell a story and give the spectator food for thought, just as much as a work of literature, and make an impression on him just like a piece of music."³³ Charles Baudelaire equated melody to the unity of colour when he said, "Melody means unity of colour, in other words, of a colour scheme. A melody needs to be resolved, in other words, it needs a conclusion, which all the individual effects [colours] combine to produce."³⁴

It should be noted that ekphrasis and transmedialisation operate on parallelism i.e. finding an aspect of one art form to compare to an aspect of the other art form. The strengths of each art form are apparent and the artworks do not collaborate except that one is a re-presentation of the other; they are two distinct works. Therefore in ekphrasis, the artworks are formally separate but maintain a level of comparability. Adjacent to parallelism is perhaps the more well-known concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, coined by Wagner, which advocates for the unity of art into a total artwork. However, parallelism does not equal unity. Wagner believed the art forms had quite different roles and it was precisely their differences which, when marshalled, would create a total artwork. For Wagner, the arts in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* are unified but different. In his essay "Music of the Future", he stated that:

³¹ Hans H. Hofstätter, "Symbolism in Germany and Europe," in *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870–1920. Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds (Munich: Prestel, 2000), 18.

³² Hofstätter, "Symbolism in Germany and Europe," 18.

³³ Hofstätter, "Symbolism in Germany and Europe," 18.

³⁴ Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris," 57.

Bearing in mind the findings of the most important art critics—for example, the investigations of Lessing into the boundaries between art and poetry—I drew the conclusion that each of the arts tends to stretch its capacities to the limit, but cannot in the end transcend these limits without running the risk of becoming incomprehensible, fantastic and even absurd. At this point I seemed to behold how each branch of art longed for the helping hand of another related art, which alone could supply it.³⁵

In essence, the total artwork celebrates diversity whereas ekphrasis celebrates comparability in the diversity—that in spite of difference in medium, we may appraise how one art form is related to another.

Time and Space, Aural and Visual Art

The first hurdle that one encounters when attempting to transmedialise art into music is the fundamental incongruence between operating in a spatial medium and in a temporal one. A temporal art form, such as literature or music, has its various parts “take place little by little [*nach und nach*] in the sequence of time,” whereas a spatial art form like painting and architecture “is a visible static act, the various parts of which develop next to one another [*nebeneinander*] in space.”³⁶

There have been many attempts by historians and theorists to bridge the time-and-space gap or at least approach time and space simultaneously. How and why has music been described as picturesque? Is there something about a visual artwork – despite being motionless – that seems to evoke motion? Or is there a temporal aspect intertwined in an artwork’s ontology? Below is a non-exhaustive list of ways in which scholars have unpacked this elusive overlap between time and space:

1. The contextual time surrounding the creation of the visual artwork.
2. The historical significance that an artwork gains over its lifetime.³⁷
3. Lessing’s pregnant moment: “a presentation that is all at once.”³⁸ The pregnant moment best highlights the chasm between art and music. Music literally requires time to be presented to the world. It progresses linearly, is presented little by little, is in fact transient, and is only complete when the piece has finished. In other words, we only have access to

³⁵ Richard Wagner, *Three Wagner Essays*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (London: Eulenberg, 1979), 21.

³⁶ Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9. The terms *nach und nach* and *nebeneinander* are from Lessing’s original essay, cf. Lessing, *Laokoon: Oder, Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*.

³⁷ Keith Moxey writes extensively about topics 1 and 2. See especially Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey, *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology, and Anachrony* (Milton: Routledge, 2018).

³⁸ Dabney Townsend, “The Picturesque,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 4 (1997): 367.

the whole after a certain amount of time has passed. In contrast, a specific amount of time (i.e. duration) is not required to access a visual artwork (especially illustration) because it is phenomenologically already complete the first time it presents itself to us.

4. Time may be present in an artwork through the progression of a narrative in an artwork's represented content e.g. multiple scenes in one canvas which may or may not be delineated by frames, happening simultaneously or successively, designed as a triptych, and more. There are multiple ways to depict a succession of temporal states in art which as a result conveys narrative.³⁹
5. The clock-time (*temps durée*) that it takes for a viewer to move their eyes around an artwork.
6. The perceived-time (*temps espace*) that it takes for a viewer to move their eyes around an artwork.⁴⁰

When comparing the spatiality and temporality of art and music, is one speaking of the work itself or the person's experience of it? If it were the latter, temporality is a given for both art forms because just as one takes time to listen to music, one also needs time to view an artwork too. One could argue for similarities between painting and music in this way, but it detracts from the crux of the ekphrastic issue which is that a visual artwork has been re-presented as an aural artwork. There are undeniable immanent differences between an image fixed on a surface and a transient tune. Karol Berger explicates the matter thus: "The concepts of narrative and lyric are concerned neither with modes in which artworks exist in the real world, nor with modes in which they are experienced. Rather, what is at stake with these concepts is the structure, temporal or atemporal, of the world which comes into existence in the work, the world which the work makes present."⁴¹ So if one were to focus on the artworks themselves as opposed to the experience of viewing or listening, it is undeniable then that there will always be an essential incongruence. Our temporal experience of viewing a painting does not change the fact that the artwork is still, in fact, a stationary phenomenon and is presented to the viewer all at once; it remains a spatial art form.

Having laid out the above disclaimer, the six approaches to time get rapidly narrowed down. My approach to time is concerned with Lessing's pregnant moment (a mistranslation from the German *prägnant* = concise, but the pregnant metaphor is well-established). A pregnant moment is typified by a complex scene presented visually all at once. However, I highlight another, lesser-known

³⁹ Cf. Jan Koenderink, Baingio Pinna, and Andrea van Doorn, "Capricious Texture of Time in Awareness and Art," *Art & Perception* 8, no. 2 (2020): 188–236.

⁴⁰ Alfred Schutz and Fred Kersten, "Fragments on the Phenomenology of Music," *Music and Man (present: Journal of Musicological Research)* 2, no. 1–2 (1976): 34.

⁴¹ Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 196.

quality of Lessing's pregnant moment which is the potential for movement in the frozen image. Indeed, despite the mistranslation, the adjective 'pregnant' works in the sense that an image may be filled to the brim with action potential; there is unreleased tension in the frozen moment. For example, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) by Delacroix depicts Liberty as a woman holding the tricolour flag of the French Revolution mid-stride over bodies of the fallen with a group of people following behind.⁴² The subject matter and density of the painting naturally lends itself to the pregnant moment but the body language of the figures also play a big part in creating the dynamicity present in pregnant moments.

In analysing spatial and temporal art forms and trying to find similarities between the two, I concede that visual art and music simply present themselves as two different phenomena: visual art is presented all at once whilst music takes time. However, despite the phenomenological immediacy of visual art, movement can still be implied in its contents which in turn finds kinship with music. I argue that it is the design of the objects, especially body figures, which instil a kinetic energy into the stationary artwork. Heffernan and Henri Cartier-Bresson provide two similar rationales for movement in the pregnant moment which I believe converge well into one explanation. Heffernan states that "the 'pregnant moment' of action is the arrested point which most clearly implies what came before the moment and what is to follow it. [. . . Ekphrasis] typically delivers from the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication."⁴³ Heffernan is speaking of literary ekphrasis but his statement remains true for musical ekphrasis as well, as it may well convey a series of events, whether programmatically or intra-musically such as the development of themes; listeners may anticipate the next note or chord to come or also recall material that just passed. As literary ekphrasis describes what might not be explicitly present in the artwork through inference, so too does musical ekphrasis. For example, a section of a musical work can clearly represent victory after a battle where there was no implication of this victory in the painting that inspired this musical ekphrasis.⁴⁴ Similarly, Cartier-Bresson coined a term in photography called the *decisive moment*—an intentionally selected key moment in the middle of a kinetic act that presents a pleasing composition.⁴⁵ Naturally, this frozen moment in the middle of a movement is strongly suggestive of what the image would have looked like before and what it will look like after.

⁴² The painting is reproduced on the Louvre Museum's website: (accessed 28 Feb 2025), <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010065872>.

⁴³ Heffernan, *Museum of Words* 5.

⁴⁴ For a concrete explanation of how musical ekphrasis goes beyond the primary artwork, see the next subchapter on functions of transmedialisation and the case studies in Chapters 2–4 for further examples.

⁴⁵ Koenderink, Pinna, and van Doorn, "Capricious Texture of Time in Awareness and Art," 203.

Heffernan and Cartier-Bresson's views on how best to capture a frozen moment ultimately consolidate Lessing's pregnant moment which suggests that, "the visual arts must never depict a moment of climax, which inevitably seems ready to slump into a less intense state."⁴⁶ By this principle, a sense of momentum is better conveyed in a moment right before the climax instead of the climax itself. An artwork that typifies this anticipatory point which also cleverly implies the events before and after is Bernini's marble sculpture *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–1625). The sculpture depicts the onset of the transformation of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree to escape Apollo's advances. Her limbs have begun to transform into branches and leaves but the transformation is still incomplete and Apollo's limbs are clearly designed to depict him mid-stride and reaching out to her.⁴⁷ The fact that the Classical subject matter concerns a chase and the clear progression of transformation allows the pregnant moment to be identified that much more easily.

Methodology for Analysing Transmedialisation

In her 2000 book, Bruhn outlined five categories of relationships between primary artwork and secondary artwork which she called variations on the ekphrastic stance. In her method, a musical ekphrasis can only fall into one of the categories. The categories are supplementation, association, interpretation, playfulness, and transposition. Her supplementation is the addition of musical elements that the painting would otherwise not have been able to include due to differences between the two media. Supplementations might be relevant to the subject matter, further nuancing the topic or reframing it in a different light; or they might even be irrelevant i.e. out of place, in the original artwork, instead constituting a highly personal addition by the composer. Whatever the treatment, this musical element does not have a parallel in the visual artwork. Association is the composer's personal understanding of the artwork's subject matter, inserted into the musical ekphrasis. In a similar but slightly different vein, interpretation is the composer tapping into their contemporaneous sociocultural understanding of the subject matter to then insert into the musical ekphrasis. Playfulness is, as the name suggests, a degree of wit and humour employed by the composer when re-presenting the artwork in music. Transposition, in brief, is the translation of stylistic and formal qualities of the artwork into music. I argue that this variation on the ekphrastic stance is highly important which I discuss further in Table 1.1.

Bruhn laid a comprehensive foundation for parsing musical ekphrasis but I suggest that there are some tangled lines and peripheral highlights in her ekphrastic stances. Association and

⁴⁶ Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 9.

⁴⁷ The marble sculpture is currently in the Borghese Gallery in Rome. A photograph of it is available at (accessed 28 Feb 2025), <https://borghese.gallery/wp-content/uploads/Apollo-and-Daphne-by-Bernini-1.jpg>.

interpretation are too closely related to deserve parsing into separate stances, and playfulness is more an emotional byproduct of the ekphrasis or could even be subsumed under association. Supplementation and transposition are the two stances which seem most integral to the nature of musical ekphrasis discussed thus far. I propose that transposition is a prerequisite for ekphrasis and not just one of many possible features.

My methodology for understanding transmedialisation, which adapts some of Bruhn's ideas, is scaffolded into two steps. The first step separately examines musical and visual elements closely and designates them as either concerning matters of content or form (steps 1a and 1b). A semantic element (i.e. one concerning content, representation, and subject matter) in an artwork will have a comparable semantic element in a musical work and likewise for formal elements. However, there are instances where content and form are intertwined.⁴⁸ These complications will be further discussed in the case studies. The second step identifies the relationship between elements in the visual art and their musical parallels (if such exist). As perceivers of both the musical ekphrasis and original artwork, we are tasked to compare and contrast both works to identify these elements and what function of transmedialisation they have undergone. As a result, a thorough analysis will likely switch back and forth between steps one and two to cross-check that the identified visuo-musical element does indeed correspond to a transmedialising function or if the analyst has intuitively found a function but is unsure what visuo-musical elements are most immediately concerned. We the perceivers who try to find transmedialisations will notice an element in either musical or visual artworks first, even though the composer is more concerned with a so-called 'genetic descent' of their ekphrastic work. In other words, the analyst is examining relations between the primary and secondary artwork without a necessary commitment to the priority of the visual artwork.

Step 1: Recognition and Musical Semiotics

Within step 1a (content) is a pre-requisite competency in recognising signs in both visual art and music: this step I call recognition. Recognition is assumed within representation. Here, I refer to recognition as semiotics, reading meaning into art and music, perceiving visual objects in a painting, and accepting the composer's invitation to hear programmatic content in their music. Recognition is the competency of the viewer and listener to grasp the represented content in both mediums. Bruhn does not explicitly investigate this aspect in her analyses of musical ekphrases proper but her interpretations of the musical and visual works reflect an underlying acknowledgement of the importance of competency. I see it as vital to have a well-rounded account of interart competency

⁴⁸ For a further historical and theoretical discussion of content and/or/as form, see Thomas S. Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18-41.

because ekphrasis is concerned with intermediality; one needs to be familiar with the semiotics of art *and* of music to recognise an ekphrasis.

The representation of objects in paintings can involve shapes and colours not wholly identical to real life, and yet, (in figurative painting at least) one generally recognises what is *meant* to be represented. Our capacity to ‘fill in the gaps’ and associate objects in paintings with their natural counterparts requires a level of imagination at play. In some cases, the artwork title or description label will give form to the previously unrecognisable paint strokes along with named particulars of who or what is being depicted. The most basic instance of the gap that we fill is the use of simplified shapes to represent what would be intricately-shaped objects in real life. The further the art exaggerates natural form, the more stylised the representation. Given the right context, a dab of unshapely paint somehow registers to us as shrubbery or human figures or other representations of objects that we recognise. Step too close to a painting or digitally zoom into a picture and the previously-perceived human figures will suddenly become unrecognisable brush strokes that have lost their representational value. If we want an analogy in music, a melody is not meant to be chunked and heard note-by-note since the melody is a string of notes that become meaningful through their connection. Arguably, music is not about single moments in time or individual notes: the smallest meaningful unit may be the motif.⁴⁹ In both of the above visual and musical examples, our manner of experiencing the art is vital to creating the intended aesthetic result.

For visual theory, I subscribe to Norman Bryson’s concept of recognition. His account of visual semiology is a strongly social and societal one where he argues that all activities surrounding painting i.e. creating, viewing, circulating, selling, etc. are activities of disseminating discourse. To partake in any part of painting is to more broadly participate in economic and political discourse but for our purposes of analysing transmedialisation, a visual sign system is most vital for expressing meaning where it is under a different guise in a musical sign system. Bryson states:

It takes one person to experience a sensation, it takes (at least) two to recognise a sign. And when people look at representational painting and recognise what they see, their recognition does not unfold in the solitary recesses of the sensorium but through their activation of codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others, in the acquisition of human culture.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For a phenomenological exploration of how music and its parameters are distinct from ‘normal’ sound including one view of melody as moving pitches over time, see Chapter 2 “Tone” in Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19–79.

⁵⁰ Norman Bryson, “Semiology and Visual Interpretation,” in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith P. F. Moxey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 65.

He highlights the contemporaneity of a sign, understood at the time of its creation by an interpreter and understood years past its creation by another interpreter. Writing about art is therefore framed as a “double mandate: it is both archival and hermeneutic.”⁵¹ Likewise, I stress that our recognition of what is being depicted in representative art should be informed by what the creators thought they were depicting and what the contemporary audience would have thought of the artwork. Beyond simply recognising who or what is depicted in an artwork, signs serve to imply further related ideas prompted by the given sign. For example, a depiction of a funeral mass may further signify grief, loss, the afterlife, religion, spirituality, lateness, sickness, and more. Knowing the context of an artwork’s creation will lead the interpreter to the most relevant implications of a sign. What a sign can imply in the first place is a broader issue of how discourse disseminates and becomes established in a cultural community. I echo Bryson’s point that the image is “a discursive work which returns into the society.” A painter—who is a participant in the discourse like any other viewer—affirms or subverts a sign and a viewer also affirms or subverts the sign, recirculating signs into society “as fresh and renewing currents of discourse.”⁵²

As in painting so in music: I posit that music has signs and meaning which I define through representation, program, and topic theory especially. A topic is a type, style, or idiom of music with distinct formal musical characteristics that listeners of the Western art music culture are familiar with. Topics are musical signs made up of a signifier and signified (to use Saussure’s terminology). The signifier is what is happening in the music and the signified is the type or style is being expressed through those particular combinations of notes. Agawu writes that certain types of topics are typically matched with harmonic functions such as the musette with harmonic and rhythmic stasis, and Sturm und Drang for harmonic instability.⁵³ Hence, the kind of topics that are deployed can also go hand-in-hand with what the structure of the music calls for at that point in the music or indeed vice versa: the topic may decide the outcome of the structure. The way that the topic is presented in the music, especially its texture, can give rise to different examples of one single topic. Other than texture, we might hear the topic in different contexts of the musical structure which turns that specific topical statement into a more meaningful one knowing what has come before and what will come after. Therefore, the same topic can be transformed by being orchestrated differently or with different harmonies such that the nuance of that topic is altered and so could give rise to some form of narrative in the music.

⁵¹ Bryson, “Semiotics and Visual Interpretation,” 61–73.

⁵² Bryson, “Semiotics and Visual Interpretation,” 70.

⁵³ Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 37.

Topics were widely used in the eighteenth century and there was a degree of competency expected of listeners when composers used topics in their music. In other words, there is nothing natural about topics: they constitute a learned sign system in music. Much like Bryson's theory of semiology in painting, I posit that there is a feedback loop of sorts between composers and listeners wherein we come to listen to a work with expectations and those expectations are modified through our experiences of new works. Wye Jamison Allanbrook goes so far as to say that Classical music is mimetic not of nature but of human nature.⁵⁴ Topics are an act of extroversive semiosis. They are found in the music itself but how we came to associate specific topics (signifieds) with specific musical markers (signifiers) speaks more about sociohistorical influences and the prevalence of such signs in order for them to be understood by many—to the point that they seem natural.

Agawu states that “thorough grounding in the sonic residue of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles, which constitutes a prerequisite for effective topical analysis, is not something that can be taken for granted.”⁵⁵ We come to be familiar – and therefore recognise – the figures, gestures, and depictions, that composers and artists of a particular time period would typically use to represent certain things. I suggest that acquiring competency loosens the criteria for what a representation can be – no longer is mimesis a requirement but stylisation and exaggeration of the depicted object can be just as convincing as a realistic representation. This looser type of artistic rendering is common in music because a realistic representation is hardly achievable: a timpani roll may sound *like* a thunderstorm but it is never a thunderstorm, shrill high woodwinds may sound *like* swinging swords or shooting arrows but they are never definitively, objectively, swords and arrows. Instead, these musical representations are *sufficiently* mimetic for the competent listener. Programmatic music balances tonally moving forms with mimesis clear enough to make the representation ‘legible’ to the listeners. Contrast this complicated capacity to the visual artist who is able to depict objects realistically on a canvas so that these are all easily identifiable as long as the viewer knows what these look like as real-life objects and can accept the convention whereby three-dimensional objects are rendered on a two-dimensional surface. It is only once these representations are stylized or abstracted (such as in Cubism) that they become somewhat harder to instantly recognize.

⁵⁴ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3. Referenced in Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 48.

⁵⁵ Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43.

Step 2: Comparing Art and Music

The formal side of musical ekphrasis seeks to analyse the formal parameters of the artwork and the musical work, identifying analogies, and articulating them so as to give a rationale for the transmedialisation that took place. Recalling Bryson's theory of recognition, I see stark similarities with listeners playing what James Hepokoski calls 'the composer's game' in writing program music, whereby one is invited to take into account paratexts and meaningful signs to read meaning into an artwork.⁵⁶

Dealing with the formal analogies of art and music is trickier than finding analogies of representation (since there is a subject matter to refer to) because, technically speaking, the drawing the formal analogies is a completely interpretive act. We are forced to confront the material differentness of art and music. How could a colour on a surface correspond to tone colour? Furthermore, can there be a good degree of intersubjective agreement for what visual parameter corresponds to in aural parameters? What persists, however, is the role of semantics in both art and music to communicate meaning to their audience. It is no surprise, then, that musicologists including Bruhn have largely focused on representation in musical ekphrasis instead of formal features of the art and music. Art and music have different systems and symbols to convey meaning and yet, both art and music purposefully convey *something*. Knowing what is represented, and how it is represented in art and music, I look adjacently to the formal dimension to see if there are comparable means being used to convey the subject matter.

An argument for ekphrasis through formalism could start from the observation that the absence of an indisputable authoritative referentiality in music is advantageous in allowing it to connect with the sensual experience of colours and textures in painting. Visual art may be able to represent objects more concretely but strictly speaking in terms of metaphysical formalism (i.e. notwithstanding material difference), art and music share the same palette: art has static forms and music has tonally moving forms, both with the potential to be conveyors of meaning. Abstract art is closer to music because it does not seek to define mimetically, only suggest. This was arguably an ideal even for certain nineteenth-century artists; as Walter Pater said, the form and the content of visual art ought to be one and the same, as (in his view) they were for music:

⁵⁶ James Hepokoski, "Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's *Don Juan* Reinvestigated," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 136–137.

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.⁵⁷

Listening to music and seeing art are ultimately sensory activities, and there is inherently no imperative to discern a verbal meaning in visual or musical artworks. Bruhn states that, “like the media of visual art, [music] conveys to its audience the sensual experience of colours and textures, rather than referring to them as language does.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Wassily Kandinsky argued that “form and colour in themselves constitute the elements of a language adequate to express emotion; that just as musical sound acts directly on the soul, so do form and colour. The only necessity is to compose form and colour in a configuration that adequately expresses the inner emotion and adequately communicates it to the observer.”⁵⁹ In his treatise, he emphasises the importance of “poise and the systematic arrangement of parts.”⁶⁰ For Kandinsky, it was not necessary for form and colour to represent entities or objects we are familiar with; rather, it was the way we arrange those forms and colours could themselves be the means of conveying meaning.

The analogies I draw between musical and visual art parameters under formalism are my attempt at outlining cross-medium parallels that are standardized to an extent or at least have some degree of consistency across my three case studies for this thesis (see Table 1.1). The interart relations are not one-to-one but may encompass more than one parameter. For example, bright lighting in a painting may be one parameter in art but lighting itself can be the cause of emphasis and focal points. Transposing ourselves to music, lighting can be rendered as a major tonality but that emphasis caused by the light can also cause the composer to give the highlighted area of the canvas a great focus in the musical work. Hence, light can be analogised to both major tonalities and greater focus (and doubtless other ways as well). While my analogies are a guide, the final ekphrastic interpretation should always refer to the case study at hand to account for the nuances of the phenomenon. All of the ekphrastic analyses in Chapters 2–4 feature some degree of this open-ended dynamic.

These analogies come from my own interpretive analysis which informs the theory, and also the words of many contemporary artists and musicians who have remarked on visuo-musical intermediality. Baudelaire and Delacroix have commented on the capacity to discern a painting’s inherent ‘musicality’ by looking at it from a distance in a sort of proto-abstractionist manner. For

⁵⁷ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies of Art and Poetry*, 6th ed. (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), 129.

⁵⁸ Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis*, 26.

⁵⁹ Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 171.

⁶⁰ Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, 172.

Baudelaire, “The appropriate way to determine whether a painting is melodious is to look at it from a distance so as to be unable to comprehend its subject or its lines.”⁶¹ Delacroix went so far as to compare painting to music in distinguishing both from literature:

There is an impression that results from a certain arrangement of colours, lights, shadows, and so forth. It is what one might call the music of the painting. Before you even know what the painting represents, ... when you are too far away from it, ... you are conquered by this magical accord.⁶²

The analogy between visual composition and musical structure could work in reverse: Schenker likened the overall musical form to a highpoint where one would be able to sweep their eyes over a landscape:

But the highest triumph in listening to a work of art, the proudest bliss, is to elevate the ear as it were to the power of the eye, to intensify it. ... And now one climbs to a point from which one glance encompasses the entire landscape. ... Thus there is also, somewhere high above a work of art, a point from which the spirit can clearly see and hear the work of art, with all its paths and goals, its dalliances and storms, all its variety and limitations, its every dimension and their relationships.⁶³

Table 1.1 lists what I regard as fairly intuitive links between formal parameters of visual art, and approximately equivalent or parallel facets of music. These parallels are expanded upon below.

	Art	Music
1	Colour, local colour (not to be confused with <i>couleur locale</i>)	Instrumentation, timbre. Combination of instrument timbres recontextualised when surrounded by other timbres
2	Light, shade; tone	Tonality, modality, harmony
3	Pattern, repetition	Thematic and motivic work
4	Composition i.e. design	Overall musical structure, treatment of themes and motifs included

⁶¹ Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1846,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–1976), 425 quoted in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

⁶² Eugene Delacroix, “Réalisme et idéalisme,” in *Oeuvres littéraires*, vol. 1 (Paris: Crès, 1923), 63–64 quoted in Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories*, 3.

⁶³ Heinrich Schenker, *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Rezensionen und kleinere Berichte aus den Jahren 1891-1901*, (New York: G. Olms, 1990), 103 quoted in Mark Evan Bonds, “The Spatial Representation of Musical Form,” *The Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 298–99.

	Art	Music
5	Depth and emphasis: foreground, middleground, background, focal point	Melody, fill-in harmonies, bass/accompaniment. Functions of musical textures (accompaniment or melody) and focal point of listening (tendency to focus on melodic lines in WAM)
6	Texture, brushwork	Articulation
7	Posing, dynamicity	Rhythm, dynamics

Table 1.1 A table of analogies between formal parameters in art and their parallels in music.

1. **Colour** in art can find analogies with tone colour in music (although harmony can also play a role). Colour can encompass everything from hue (any pure colour from the spectrum of white light), saturation (the vividness or intensity of the colour), and value (how much white or black pigment is in the colour). In music, different instruments each produce distinct tone colours and a symphonic work is particularly excellent at exploiting a wide range of instrumental tone colours due to the combination of the sounds of each instrument. Local colour (not to be confused with *couleur locale*) in particular is concerned with the interaction of colours with other colours which often ‘trick’ our eyes into seeing idealised colours which are not the actual colours on the artwork. Take a red apple as an example and how a painter would represent it in painting. More often than not, the apple will not appear truly red, or other *idealised* colours of an apple. This colour that we assume an object to be is the local colour.⁶⁴

Lighting plays a huge role in the representation of objects in painting. “Artists experimented with colour interaction throughout the nineteenth century. ... Painters became increasingly preoccupied with rendering *perceptual colour*, the optical sensations of colour as they are perceived by viewers under a particular set of conditions, as opposed to local colour.”⁶⁵ Once we look closely at the apple, it may seem uncanny to find out that it is not the local colour we were expecting and yet, we do not question this discrepancy when we view a painting. An artist well-versed in colour theory suspends our idealisation of colours and somehow convinces us that these representations of objects in paintings are reasonable. “Colour perception is relative, not absolute or predictable as the traditional colour wheel suggests. ... By the same quirk of perception, two applications of the same colour may appear quite different, and two different colours may appear alike, depending

⁶⁴ Amy Tucker, *Visual Literacy: Writing about Art*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 36.

⁶⁵ Tucker, *Visual Literacy*, 35–36.

on how they are positioned relative to one another.”⁶⁶ Similarly in music, certain combinations of instrumental tone colours will also produce interesting results that would not have been possible with just a single instrument. In general, nineteenth-century composers were keen to experiment with unconventional instruments to exploit new tone colours as seen in the glass harmonica in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*; the serpent and ophicleide in Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*; and Tchaikovsky’s excitement over the celesta in the *Nutcracker* ballet.

Observations about the use of colour in visual art and literature reveal an important distinction in the way that artists and writers use colour in their crafts, the former dealing with the actual sense of vision in the real world and the latter more concerned with colour in the mind’s eye. Charles Lock Eastlake in his note on Goethe’s *Theory of Colour* goes so far to say that artists and writers have different goals in their usage of colour, with writers being more attuned to the affects and associations that arise from colours in the mind’s eye, not the sensory eye.⁶⁷ This is unsurprising as, after all, writing and reading rarely if ever involve the use of colour other than as metaphor. Music too, in its pure aural medium does not make use of colour *per se*. I posit that music’s approach to colour especially with regard to programmaticism and semiotics is closer to that of writers than artists.

2. **Light and shade** in painting might be parallels to consonance and dissonance in music respectively. Chiaroscuro is the effect of contrasting bright and dark lighting in a painting which the eighteenth-century composer Charles Avison described is “a fundamental ingredient of good [visual and musical] composition.”⁶⁸ As glaring light is to continuous consonance, shade and discord are necessary to relieve the senses. In response to Avison, Johann Nikolaus Forkel agreed that “a clever mixture of consonance and dissonance in music might be seen to parallel light and shade in painting.”⁶⁹ More generally, there needs to be contrasts within the work of art to create interest. How interest is maintained in both painting and music can be achieved in a number of ways. In painting this might be through complementary colours (the most contrasting colours, positioned opposite each other on the colour wheel); different brush strokes and brush shapes; or as Avison and Richards suggested, chiaroscuro. Likewise in music, changing harmony may inflect the music towards different affects; orchestration and control of texture influences the mood of

⁶⁶ Tucker, *Visual Literacy*, 35.

⁶⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), par. 748, 758.

⁶⁸ Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

⁶⁹ Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque*, 92.

the music; and dynamics alter the volume of the soundscape through tense instrumental swells or fading echoes. The aforementioned are only some of the endless ways one might perceive contrast and interest in a painting and musical work.

3 and 4. **Pattern and repetition** can correspond to thematic or motivic work (for my purposes, these two terms are interchangeable) and these often contribute to musical structure in the next formal analogy. Although visual composition can include pattern and repetition, they are not necessary for all types of composition. A recurring visual pattern or brushstroke could be analogised as (1) musical material that returns at a later point in the work; (2) fragments of musical material spread across the texture of a passage, and (3) developed themes that have changed since their first appearance. In art, repetition creates patterns and unity in the work. So too do repeated themes and reprise sections create musical structure and unity in the work. For example, the shape of the stylised foam ends in Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (c. 1830–1832) is distinct and persistent throughout the whole image. That continuity can be even more subtle when once notices that the shape of one of largest waves imitates the shape of Mt Fuji in the background. On a still larger scale, the cloud in the sky closely resembles the shape of the big wave too.⁷⁰

5. **Depth** is the perception of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional artwork or the physicality of a three-dimensional artwork itself. For the purposes of this study I will be looking at two-dimensional artworks. Depth can be organised into the foreground, middleground, and background. (These art terms are not related to Schenker's use of foreground, middleground, and background, nor will I draw parallels to his theory here.) The foreground is what is closest to the viewer, and it may gradually transition farther into the other depths or move in a terraced manner according to however the image is organised. Placing certain things at a particular depth serves to create emphases, highlights, and focal points.

In Western art music, music can be parsed into streams of music functioning as melody, harmonies, or bass line. The focal point in a musical texture can be passed around different voices and is affected by dynamics too. Forkel raised the issue of the intermedial disparity between painting and music that is space and time: “[He] questioned Avison’s more ambitious idea that the various degrees of distance in painting—foreground, middleground, background ... may be compared with the different parts in music—bass, tenor, and descant.”⁷¹ I do not think the parallels Avison made were too audacious; in fact, the parallel between depth in painting and texture in music is an

⁷⁰ A reproduction of the print is available at (accessed 28 Feb 2025), <https://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/as/original/DP130155.jpg>.

⁷¹ Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque*, 92.

apt one that preserves some sense of spacing in music. Berger states that, “since a piece of instrumental music, no less than a vocal one, presents a world consisting of figures heard against a more or less distinct ground, one can find inexact analogues of the personage (the line) and the setting (the accompaniment) even in instrumental music.”⁷²In general, the higher in register musical material is (relative to the rest of the texture), is the more analogous it is to the foreground because melodies tend to be placed on top of the texture. However, tessitura is not always an indicator of prominence but more so the function of an orchestral part. Texture is audible to listeners as the different voices and instruments coalesce together in music.

6. **Texture** in art can either be actual or implied. Actual texture is physical and tangible on the artwork itself, whereas implied texture is drawn on the art surface so as to imply the illusion of texture without its tangibility. Plastic arts such as sculpture or ceramics lend themselves more naturally to actual texture but it can also be achieved in two-dimensional art by applying thick layers of paint, pasting another material onto the work surface, using specialised paper or canvas, and more. Brushwork is one significant indicator of texture (both actual and implied) whereby the process of creating the art remains visible in the final work. I link the physicality of brushwork to the physical act of playing certain articulations on an instrument. For example, pointillist brushwork is equivalent to staccato and sfumato which creates no visible brushstrokes is equivalent to smooth, *legato* music. The analogy between art’s texture and music’s articulation lies in the mimetic qualities of the art produced to the bodily movements that made them.

7. **Dynamicity and rhythm** evoke movement in a static visual art. Dynamicity and rhythm refer to any method that makes art seem like a living, breathing, and moving entity in spite of its frozen state. I argue that the overarching means of discerning dynamicity—both in art and music—is the comparison between something (say, a human figure or standard 4/4 meter) in its normative, default state and changes imposed onto said default state. Hence, there is a distinction between what is standard and what is novel; dynamic, rhythmic, and different, so to say. In art, the posing of figures is exceptionally potent as in Lessing’s pregnant moment and Cartier-Bresson’s decisive moment. Specifically, figures are frozen in the middle of a kinetic act and not the climax but right before it. Presenting the audience with a scene right before the climax creates anticipation and a projection of what is to come. Furthermore, the overall shape of human figures in action tend to create what is known as a line of action. When drawing any figure in motion, the principle states that the figure—stripped down to its basic forms and shapes—should be designed in a way to

⁷² Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 174.

represent one line in the middle of the body's axis like the trajectory of movement.⁷³ This line tends to be an expressive curved line which is essentially the foundation of the figure's pose; the represented body itself with all its details, is ornamentation. Lines of action work especially well when figures and objects are stylised such as being stretched or squashed which imply a kinetic force acting on them by altering their standard form. Recalling my earlier stance that dynamicity is difference, I suggest that rhythm in music, especially syncopation, creates such difference and excitement. Music is already a temporal art form but movement can be heard in the music itself from the contrast that idiosyncratic rhythms provide when juxtaposed with a stable meter. Therefore, it is the unstable rhythms in particular that give rise to a sense of movement.

Functions of Transmedialisation

I have discerned four relationships or functions of transmedialisation: *replication*, *alteration*, *exclusion*, and *supplementation*. These functions are dependent on the composer's treatment of a particular formal or semantic element. Determining which function is operating requires back-and-forth examination between the identified parallelisms in both artworks to discern which function best captures the relationship between primary and secondary artworks.

Replication is the most straightforward function for the perceiver to notice. Here, the composer has succeeded in finding an equivalent for the visual element despite differences in medium, hence a replication of the element. Replication is possible by virtue of there being a sign (content) or formal parameter (form) in the visual arts that is understood to have its equivalent in music. With regard to content, the means of expression will inevitably be different due to the tools available in a visual and an aural art but the signified is nonetheless successfully replicated. With regard to form, a parameter in one art form links closely to a parallel parameter in the other medium.

Alteration describes cases of less literal replication whether due to constraints of the new medium or the composer's personal interpretation. The identity of the element is sustained to some extent, but has been altered to a recognisable degree. For example, if a painting depicts two equal groups in a conflict, but the two sides are *not given equal weight* in their musical representations, this would be an alteration.

Supplementation was one of Bruhn's variations on the ekphrastic stance and my definition is consistent with hers. It is the presence of elements in the secondary artwork that the primary artwork did not depict. In practice, an ekphrasis is highly likely to exhibit both alteration and

⁷³ Andrew Loomis, *Figure Drawing for All It's Worth*, (London: Titan Books, 2011), 103.

supplementation. No ekphrasis is a perfect one-to-one re-presentation of the original artwork precisely because of the different affordances that art and music provide the creators.

Lastly, exclusion is when a notable element of the artwork is not present in the musical ekphrasis. Excluded elements should be notable i.e. ‘surprisingly’ absent because some parameters of art or peripherally depicted objects in an artwork might be normatively excluded. Not every rapid brushstroke must link to a *spiccato* and not every colour used must link to an instrument in the ensemble. Similarly, not every human figure in a large history painting must have their own musical theme. However, omitting a significant figure from the artwork by not creating any musical material associated with them would be an exclusion. In some cases, an element might not be fully excluded but altered into a lesser-significant or entirely different role in the ekphrasis.

This chapter has contextualised ekphrasis, musical ekphrasis, and transmedialisation for the purposes of this study. The first step of my methodology analyses the original artworks (of visual art) and ekphrastic works (musical compositions) separately. By doing so, I emphasised the importance of gaining a better understanding of the semiotics and formalism of both art and music in order to grasp the process of transmedialisation. Having a more rounded comprehension of both art and music allows one to more clearly parse the relationships between original artwork and musical ekphrasis which is the aim of my second step. What follows in each of the next three chapters is a case study of a musical ekphrasis which exemplifies the analytical methodology explained above. The table of intermedial analogies and list of transmedialising functions have been spelled out but any individual instance will not necessarily demonstrate all the above types of relationship. In the case studies which follow, I will apply some of the above ideas as and when they seem relevant to the specific case. Each chapter will give an overview of the artist, the context surrounding the creation of the work, a visual analysis of the artwork, and the events leading up to the composer’s decision to create a musical ekphrasis. I then provide a musical overview of the work as a map for the ekphrastic analysis to come. The analysis identifies functions of transmedialisation at play and specifically which parts of the artwork and musical work are participating in the relationship.

Chapter 2

Rachmaninoff-Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead*

Arnold Böcklin is best known to musicians, but also more generally, as the painter of *Die Toteninsel* or the *Isle of the Dead*, which in fact exists in five separate versions created between 1880 and 1886. The many iterations of this subject matter was due to a huge appetite for Böcklin's art in continental Europe launched by his successful partnership with art dealer Fritz Gurlitt from 1880. The *Isle* paintings and their copies enjoyed widespread popularity, earning a reference in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Invitation of a Beheading* (first published 1934) which claimed "nearly every Berlin home" owned a copy of the *Isle of the Dead*.⁷⁴

Owing to Böcklin's popularity, composers came to know his paintings, either through exhibitions or print copies which were more accessible. In 1907, Rachmaninoff would see a black-and-white print of the fourth painting and decide to re-present it in musical form, composing the symphonic poem *The Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29 (1909). But he was far from the only one to respond musically. The *Isle* series was the most frequently transmedialised by composers but other paintings from later in the 1880s also inspired music. Heinrich Schulz-Beuthen composed a *Symphonische Dichtung* with the subtitle *Die Toteninsel* (1890) nearly twenty years before Rachmaninoff's version.⁷⁵ Swedish Romantic composer Andreas Hallén wrote *Die Toteninsel* Op. 45 (1898), another symphonic poem. The Hungarian Dezső d' Antalfy wrote yet another symphonic poem titled *Die Toteninsel* (1907). The case study for this chapter, Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* Op. 29 (1909), is therefore chronologically the fourth known ekphrasis of Böcklin's *Isle*. In 1910, Felix Woyrsch would compose *3 Böcklin-Phantasien für Orchester* Op. 53 comprising three movements: I. *Die Toteninsel*, II. *Der Eremit*, and III. *Im Spiel der Wellen*. (*Der Eremit* is based on *Der Einsiedler* (1884) which now hangs in the National Gallery, Berlin and *Im Spiel der Wellen* is based on the painting of the same name from 1883 now held by the Neue Pinakothek, Munich.) Max Reger's ekphrasis of Böcklin's paintings are the second most well-known musical renditions after Rachmaninoff's. He composed *Vier Tondichtungen nach Arnold Böcklin* Op. 128 (1913), with each tone poem based on a different painting: I. *Der Geigende Eremit*, II. *Im Spiel der Wellen*, III. *Die Toteninsel*, and IV. *Bacchanal*. The chosen paintings for Woyrsch and Reger's ekphrasis all overlap except for the latter's inclusion of *Bacchanal*, based on c.1856 painting whose last known owner is the canton of Zurich where it

⁷⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation of a Beheading* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 66.

⁷⁵ Carl Bauman, "Schulz-Beuthen: Symphony 5; Isle of the Dead; Negro Songs & Dances; Farewell Sounds," *American Record Guide* 66, no. 3 (May/June 2003): 141.

has been held in their private collection since 1960.⁷⁶ The two composers were contemporaries but it is unknown if Reger's specific choices were in response to Woysch's, his personal partiality for these paintings, or if these happened to be the most famous Böcklin paintings at the time. Around 1913, Fritz Lubrich Jr, a student of Reger, composed *Die Toteninsel* as the third piece in a set of organ compositions called *Drei Romantische Tonstücke* Op. 37.

Böcklin and *The Isle of the Dead*

The *Isle* paintings' multiplicity and scantily recorded history leaves a number of unanswered questions. Tracing the provenance of the Böcklin's paintings in general is difficult due to secrecy that has accompanied their high monetary value.⁷⁷ The original *Isle* painting was commissioned in 1880 by Marie Berna who had recently been widowed by the death of her husband Dr Georg von Berna. At the time of the commission, she had just gotten engaged to Count Waldemar von Oriola. She visited Böcklin's studio in Florence to commission an artwork in memory of her husband when she took a liking to one of the unfinished canvases that she saw. This unfinished canvas is presumably either the Basel or Metropolitan Museum version— (it is contested which is the first and second versions. For the purposes of this thesis, I will assume, as most art historians have, that the Metropolitan Museum has the second version.) During Berna's visit, Böcklin suggested a happier scene of children dancing but she wanted a landscape, "something to dream about."⁷⁸ Böcklin worked on two versions of the commission and at her request, added the draped coffin and veiled white figure in the rowboat as an allusion to the late Georg von Berna. Böcklin called this painting "A Still Place", "A Silent Island" and later, "Island of the Graves" but it was the art dealer Gurlitt who invented the title "Island of the Dead".⁷⁹ Carlo Böcklin, the artist's son, suggested that the Aragonese Castle on a small island east of the island of Ischia at the northern end of the Gulf of Naples was the inspiration for the *Isle of the Dead's* design but there have been many other candidates for the 'real' isle, and he conceded that the purpose of his father's painting was to escape allusions to reality.⁸⁰

The first painting has been owned by the Kunstmuseum Basel in Switzerland since 1919. Brigitte Rechberg notes that Böcklin began the first version in May 1880 for Berna, but left it unfinished

⁷⁶ Rolf Andree, "Katalog der Gemälde," in *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde*, ed. Rolf Andree (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1977), 462.

⁷⁷ Hans Holenweg, "Das Schicksal der Gemälde Arnold Böcklins," in *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde.*, ed. Rolf Andree (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1977), 92–105.

⁷⁸ "Frau Berna wollte aber eine Landschaft, 'etwas zum Träumen'." Quoted in Heinrich Alfred Schmid, *Arnold Böcklin*, 2nd ed. (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1922), 44.

⁷⁹ Andree, "Katalog der Gemälde," 418–419. A similar case is Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, whose nickname was the creation of the poet Ludwig Rellstab.

⁸⁰ Düsseldorf Museum, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901. Exhibition Catalogue* (Düsseldorf: Rheinisch-Bergische, 1974), 60.

and sold her the smaller, second version which is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁸¹ The second one was “given a softer expression by increasing the flowers on the island of tombs.”⁸² Between 1883 and 1886, Böcklin painted three additional versions of the subject, each slightly different and increasingly bright in colour. The third version was painted for the dealer Gurlitt, possibly to make the most out of the widespread popularity of the first two versions since Böcklin was struggling financially up until 1880.⁸³ At one point, the third painting was in the private possession of Adolf Hitler who personally purchased it and it is now in the Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin. The fifth version was specifically commissioned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Leipzig and remains there today. Little is known about the fourth version but it was passed over to multiple individuals, dealers, and museums, as is typical of all the *Isle* paintings. The present whereabouts of the fourth painting is unknown but it is likely that it was destroyed in WWII.

Böcklin was a late Romantic and early Symbolist artist, who drew on the legacy of earlier nineteenth-century artists especially Caspar David Friedrich. There are clear parallels in the Romantic subject matters of both painters’ works. In Böcklin’s landscape paintings without people, the rugged wilderness of nature emulated the kind of loneliness and alienation that one would find in Friedrich’s frozen mountainscapes and forests. The Romantics were fascinated by nature, the wanderer, death, religious experiences, and yearning for the unattainable or yet attained (*Sehnsucht*). These ideas were illustrated by paintings of mountains in the distance merging with clouds, foreboding seascapes, untraveled paths in dark forests, abandoned churches and crosses in the wilderness, and moody snowscapes.⁸⁴ Some of Friedrich’s best-known paintings include *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1815), *Cross in the Mountains* (1808), and *Winter Landscape* (1811). The stillness in Friedrich’s paintings was unlike what people had seen in landscape art at the time, with contemporary viewers wondering “at the disorienting barrenness of Friedrich’s landscapes.” In one account, cultured visitors to the artist’s studio “sometimes mistook his mountain scenes for seascapes, or praised pictures which they viewed upside down on the easel, mistaking the dark clouds for waves and the sky for the sea.”⁸⁵ Friedrich’s paintings with sacred buildings in ruins contrasted the ephemerality of humanity with the endurance of nature. It was a common Romantic preoccupation to ponder on the tension between the human and the natural, whether tending

⁸¹ Brigitte Rechberg in *A. Böcklin, 1827-1901 Exhibition Catalogue*, vol. 2, ed. Bernd Krimmel, (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 1977), 130-31. Source available in digital scan in the New York Public Library (accessed 28 Feb 2025), <https://www.nypl.org/research/research-catalog/bib/cb37163>.

⁸² Bryson Burroughs, “The Island of the Dead by Arnold Böcklin,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 21, no. 6 (June 1926): 148.

⁸³ Burroughs, “The Island of the Dead by Arnold Böcklin,” 148.

⁸⁴ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 2nd ed., (London: Reaktion, 2009), 29.

⁸⁵ Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 22.

towards convergence—as in pastoralism and the figure of the lone wanderer—or more adversarial where one overcomes the other. Geographic and historical landmarks may invite the viewer to go back in time and imagine the scene populated with people, whether historically accurate or imagined.⁸⁶

Although Böcklin was initially trained in the Düsseldorf School of painting and more broadly painted in the German Romantic style cultivated earlier in the century, it was his choice and treatment of subjects from the middle of his career that made him a Symbolist.⁸⁷ Hans H. Hofstätter has usefully defined Symbolism as:

a mental attitude, manifested in literature and visual art, which had recourse to motifs and depictions that were unreal. The underlying idea was that visible, measurable, definable reality represents merely the foreground of an ineffable universal scheme. It was impossible to convey an experience of this scheme directly; it could be done only through suggestions or allusions.⁸⁸



Figure 2.1 Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (first version), 1880, oil on canvas, 110.9 × 156.4 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

⁸⁶ Grey, “*Tableaux vivants*,” 56.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Clegg, “Böcklin, Arnold,” *Oxford Art Online*, 2003, accessed 11 Nov 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T009486>.

⁸⁸ Hofstätter, “Symbolism in Germany and Europe,” 17.



Figure 2.2 Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (second version), 1880, oil on wood, 73.7 × 121.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 2.3 Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (third version), 1883, oil on wood, 80 × 150 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.



Figure 2.4 Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (fourth version), 1884, oil on metal, 81 × 151 cm, likely destroyed in WWII, a black-and-white photograph remains of which Rachmaninoff saw.⁸⁹



Figure 2.5 Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (fifth version), 1886, oil on wood, 80 × 150 cm, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig.

⁸⁹ The fourth version's provenance according to Andree, *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde. Exhibition Catalogue*, 422 is as follows: Viktor Benary, Berlin, 1884; National Gallery, Berlin, 1912 (bequest of Viktor Benary); heirs of Viktor Benary, Berlin, 1925; art dealer Karl Haberstock, Berlin, and art dealer Galerie Caspari, Munich, 1926; collection of Rohoncz Castle, Lugano, 1926; lost since 1945.

In general, the subject matter of Symbolist works could be anything that “takes one to the frontiers of normality and reality—religious fervour, intoxication, dream, love, death.”⁹⁰ For Böcklin, these subjects were mythological creatures and situations such as Pan playing the panpipe, a bacchanale, nereids, and island villas in the middle of the sea. Art historians have identified a number of techniques in Symbolist art which contribute to the practice which they describe as ‘symbolistic alienation’. In the case of Böcklin’s *Isle of the Dead*, the methods of symbolistic alienation which apply are naturalistic permutation and rendering the subject in a vague or veiled away.⁹¹ Naturalistic permutation is the depiction of unreal things, figures, and phenomena as if they were normal everyday occurrences. The normalisation of the supernatural and/or impossible highlights the Symbolist aesthetic of using signs as a pathway into the deeper unconscious human mind precisely because these deeper truths could not be grasped by realistic means. It is as if Symbolist art unearths the psyche and represents it through allusions and suggestions. The second ‘alienation’ that occurs refers to the visual representation of subject matter as being obscured, hidden, or semi-visible in some manner. Figures might be painted as being literally veiled as in the *Isle* and their faces turned away from the viewer’s eye. More conceptually, there is a general sense of anonymity in the subjects of Böcklin’s paintings which contributes to the mysticism of his works.

Before the five *Isle* paintings, Böcklin did a similar series titled *Villa am Meer* (*Villa by the Sea*). There is a total of seven paintings starting with an 1863 sketch: thereafter follow the realised version of the sketch in 1864, and subsequent iterations on this same subject in the years c.1864/65, c.1871/74, 1877, 1878, and c.1878/80. There are continuities of theme and atmosphere from *Villa by the Sea* to *Isle of the Dead* with the deployed features of jagged rockwork, cypress trees, shrubbery, water surrounding an isle, and obscured archaic architecture within the isle. In all the *Villa* paintings, a lone female figure stands in the foreground at the bottom of the canvas, below the horizon line such that the rest of the island hovers above her—much like the veiled figure and boatman in *Isle of the Dead*.

Perhaps Böcklin’s Symbolist style resonated with music’s underdetermined nature which suggests rather than specifies meaning, resulting in the numerous musical renditions of the *Isle* by different composers. A more radical Symbolist artist Odilon Redon said in 1922, “My drawings suggest, and cannot be defined. They determine nothing. Like music, they spirit us into the equivocal world of the indeterminate.”⁹² Symbolism’s aim to obscure and design meaning into layers is a fitting counterpart to music’s polysemy. Music historian Max Friedrich Schneider described Böcklin as a

⁹⁰ Hofstätter, “Symbolism in Germany and Europe,” 19.

⁹¹ Hofstätter, “Symbolism in Germany and Europe,” 18–23.

⁹² Hofstätter, “Symbolism in Germany and Europe,” 17.

musical painter but not a Wagnerian, noting that “Böcklin never accepted the Wagnerian idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”⁹³ In 1878, Cosima Wagner initially asked Böcklin to create the stage sets for *Parsifal* but he declined. Later in 1880 when Böcklin was travelling to Naples, the artist went to Wagner’s villa at Posillipo for a courtesy visit but came away from the visit with no better opinion of Wagner and again rejected the request to create stage sets.⁹⁴ Perhaps he was not convinced that the full gamut of the arts could coalesce into one totality, although the link between two of the arts, painting and music, unquestionably resonated with Böcklin. He once said “Who would ever have been able to anticipate the effect of music before having heard it? Painting should pervade the soul in the same way, and as long as it does not do this, it is nothing more than a brainless handicraft.”⁹⁵

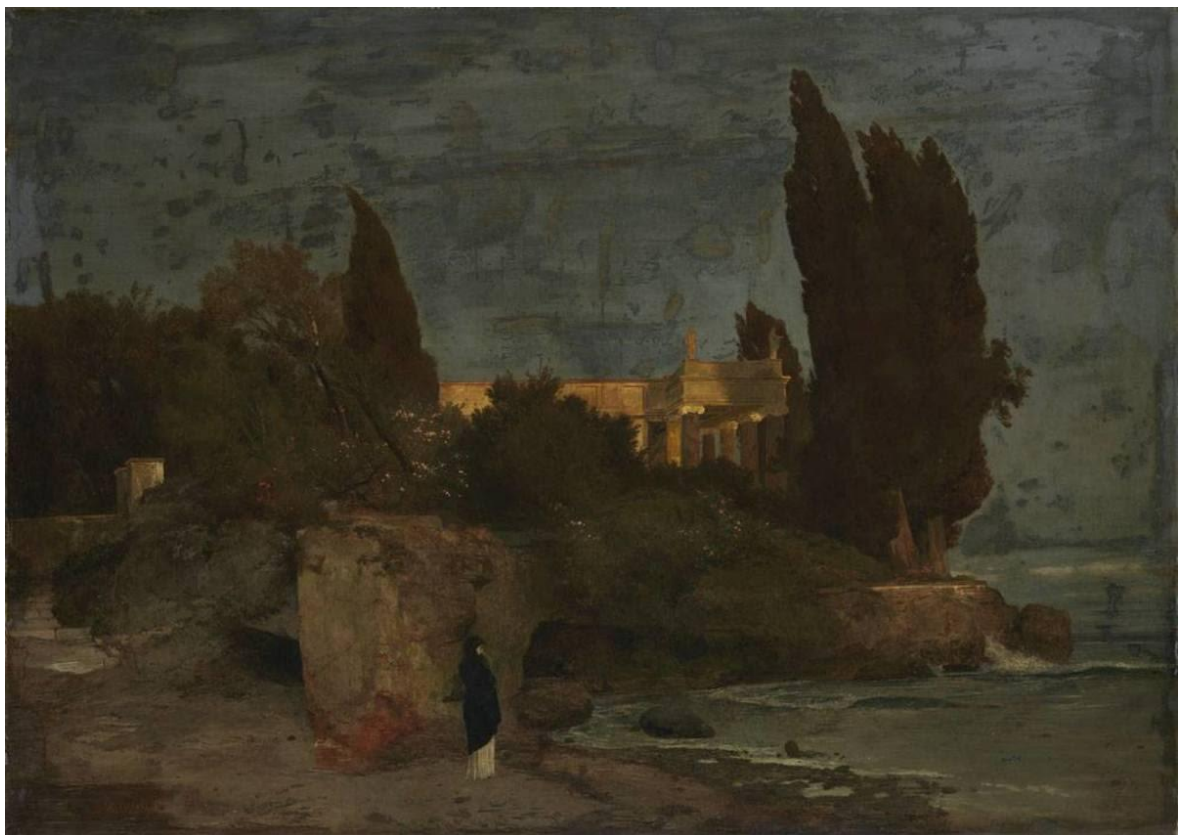


Figure 2.6 Böcklin, *Villa am Meer I*, 1864, oil on canvas, 124.5 × 174.5 cm, Sammlung Schack, Munich.

Böcklin’s depiction of musical instruments in art reflected his fondness for music. These instruments were painted sometimes realistically and other times humorously. *Der Einsiedler* illustrates a hermit with a hunched posture bowing a fiddle. Alfred Berner interprets the hermit’s

⁹³ Eero Tarasti, *Semiotics of Classical Music: How Mozart, Brahms, and Wagner Talk to Us* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 383.

⁹⁴ Kunstmuseum Basel, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Plastiken. Exhibition Catalogue*, (Basel: Schwabe & Co, 1977), 19; Andree, *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde*, 28.

⁹⁵ Arnold Böcklin, *Böcklin*, trans. Thomas Bourke (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1975), 12.

posture and amateur skill as humility and as such the hermit is shown grace by the heavens, represented by the three cherubs around him.⁹⁶ *Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle* (1872) partially depicts a detailed violin but with only the G string on the instrument like a sliver of life hanging by a thread while death as a skeleton is bowing the string. Böcklin painted many works featuring Pan and fauns playing the panpipe. The instrument and the blower's lips are painted so precisely clues us in to the fact that Böcklin himself was a flautist and would be familiar with appropriate embouchure.⁹⁷ He would sometimes play around with Pan's imagery and depict him with a piccolo instead of a panpipe as in *Faun, einer Amsel zupfeifend* (second version c.1864/65) where the faun is seen whistling to a blackbird with a piccolo on top of a pile of sheet music beside him. In *Pan im Kinderreigen* (1884), he is playing a transverse flute instead. In these paintings with modern instruments, the instruments and posture are depicted accurately, as a trained flautist would know.



Figure 2.7 Böcklin, *Faun, einer Amsel zupfeifend* (second version), c.1864/65, oil on canvas, 48.8 × 49 cm, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover.

Visual Analysis

Böcklin's *Isle* painting is saturated with oblique death symbols: a man rowing the boat (possibly Charon), a veiled soul heading towards the isle (possibly Orpheus or Eurydice), cypress trees (a Classical symbol for mourning and often found near tombs), literal tombs in the cliffs, still water,

⁹⁶ Alfred Berner, "Einige Erläuterungen zu Musikinstrumenten in den Werken Arnold Böcklins," in *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde.*, ed. Rolf Andree (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1977), 543.

⁹⁷ Berner, "Einige Erläuterungen zu Musikinstrumenten in den Werken Arnold Böcklins," 542–543.

and (at least for Rachmaninoff) the muted black-and-white scheme of the photograph. The mythical candidates for the figures in the painting all have associations with the underworld: Charon guides departed souls into Hades, and in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, both characters travel into the underworld. As coniferous trees cypresses can further symbolise longevity and durability in cold winters, suggesting the continuation of life after death. Stillness and the black-and-white scheme work as symbols of death by virtue of absence and in this case, the movement and vibrancy which co-occur with life.

The visual composition of the island is an instance of what American landscape artist Edgar Payne would call a group mass. In his seminal 1941 book *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, Payne elucidates the functions of numerous formal parameters such as colour, rhythm, perspective, and placement that contribute to composition. He posits that every decision about the composition of a painting is measured and deliberate. In his description of the nineteen archetypes of visual composition, he states that

Unity may be achieved by placing several masses into a larger group. However, this usually requires that the main group be of considerable size and contain a variety of form, values and colour within its boundaries. Usually it demands, also, that the main contours suggest stability. This naturally suggests a leaning towards the pyramid or silhouette. ... Its compactness calls immediate attention to the work.⁹⁸

A group mass is a dense collection of a variety of shapes that draws the viewer's attention to it as a collective whole. Not only are the individual elements grouped together, but the variety within the collection is vital to create interest in the mass. The group mass creates visual weight in the canvas and in Böcklin's *Isle*, the weight is condensed in the middle. Small details in the island's rocky formations and the tombs create interest along with the sharp shapes and dark contrast of the trees in the middle. However, there is ultimately minimal kinetic activity in the painting and this is owing to the group mass's perceived symmetry. In fact, although the painting appears to be symmetrical in general, on a closer inspection it is more accurate to describe it as near-symmetrical because the trees and cliffs are clearly not symmetrical. Near-symmetry "promises symmetry but then delivers subtle differences between the two [bilateral] sides of the image."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Edgar Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 7th ed. (Bellflower, CA: Deru's Fine Arts, 2016), 122.

⁹⁹ John Alexander Parks, *Universal Principles of Art: 100 Key Concepts for Understanding, Analyzing, and Practicing Art*, Digital ed. (Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers, 2015), 187.



Figure 2.8. Payne's examples of group mass composition.¹⁰⁰

The groups of shapes are clearly compartmentalised into sections of the isle: the trees are still, the figures in the boat stand upright, the cliffs reach up to the skies, and the calm reflective water is only slightly disturbed by the boat's approach. The sharper contour of the cypress trees is enclosed by the rectangular cliffs, their similar vertical forms creating a consistent pattern which strengthens the perceived symmetrical balance. For Böcklin, symmetry was also a sign of solemnity.¹⁰¹ Art historian Robert Delevoy comments "it is as if we are being drawn on, in the cold, humid darkness, towards some inevitable place of destiny."¹⁰² Indeed from a formal lens, the perspective in the painting is rigorously ordered, almost like a study of one-point perspective (see Figure 2.9). I argue that the feeling of being drawn into darkness that Delevoy described was caused by this construction of the elements that is imposed on top of a one-point perspective with a vanishing point in the centre of the canvas. There is a projection of linearity (imaginary lines) in the forms of the vertical cliffs, vertical trees, horizontal water line, horizontal island 'stone fence' entrance, slightly diagonal rows of tomb entrances, and slightly diagonal direction of the boat; all of the representational elements (recognisable objects) in the painting are elaborations on linework radiating from the vanishing point.

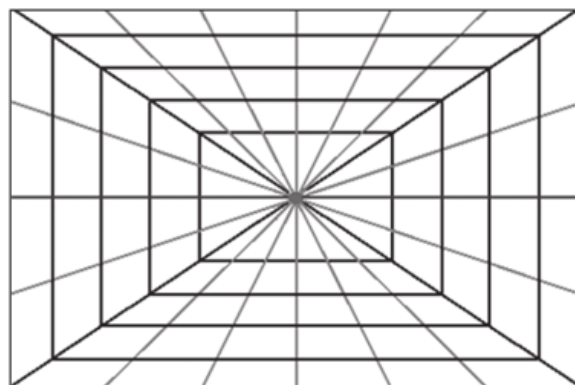


Figure 2.9. A one-point perspective grid that illustrates the underlying scaffolding of Böcklin's *Isle*.

¹⁰⁰ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Heinrich Alfred Schmid, *Arnold Böcklin*, 2nd ed., (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1922), 45.

¹⁰² Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), 54.

Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*

When Rachmaninoff relocated to Dresden in 1906, he befriended Nikolai von Struve, a fellow Russian composer, who would suggest Böcklin's painting for the subject of a symphonic poem. It is no surprise then that at the top of the first page of the score is Rachmaninoff's dedication to Struve "*Herrn Nicolas von Struve freundschaftlich gewidmet.*" Rachmaninoff first encountered the artwork in the summer of 1907 in a gallery in Paris which happened display a black-and-white photograph copy of the fourth version of the painting. Upon seeing one of the coloured versions later in Berlin, he stated, "I was not much moved by the colour of the painting. If I had seen the original first, I might not have composed my *Isle of the Dead*. I like the picture best in black and white."¹⁰³

Rachmaninoff was a programmatic composer, actively reaching into the other arts and lived experience for inspiration. He said, "When composing, I find it of great help to have in mind a book just recently read, or a beautiful picture, or a poem. Sometimes a definite story is kept in mind, which I try to convert into tones without disclosing the source of my inspiration."¹⁰⁴ While he *did* disclose the source of his inspiration in the case of *The Isle*, the relevant point here is his casual highlighting of the potential transmediality of semantics and formal qualities between visual art and music when he spoke of converting stories into tones. In addition, Bertensson and Leyda noted that Rachmaninoff was quite detailed in his account of composing the *Isle*:

My composing goes slowly. I go for a long walk in the country. My eye catches the sharp sparks of light on fresh foliage after showers; my ears the rustling undernote of the woods. Or I watch the pale tints of the sky over the horizon after sundown, and they come: all voices at once. Not a bit here, a bit there. All. The whole grows. So *The Isle of the Dead*. It was all done in April and May. When it came, how it began—how can I say? It came up within me, was entertained, written down.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 156. There are divergent accounts as to where Rachmaninoff first saw the reproduction and original. According to Oskar von Rieseemann (*Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, trans. Dolly Rutherford (New York: Routledge, 2015), 139) Rachmaninoff first saw the painting (unclear if the original or a reproduction is meant) in a Leipzig gallery. According to an interview published as "Rachmaninoff Remembers", *The Musical Observer* May 1927, 16, he saw the reproduction in Dresden and the original subsequently in Berlin.

¹⁰⁴ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 156.

Musical Overview

The music comprises several major rotations (R), each of which contain smaller subrotations (SR).¹⁰⁶ While not all of these subrotations are perfectly identical to each other within a single rotation (i.e. SR1–SR3 in R1) or across other rotations (i.e. SR1 in R1 and SR1 in R2 are different), they do carry two distinct motivic figurations that are found in all of them: the rowing ostinato (Example 2.1) and the chant-like figure (Example 2.2). Also significant is a chromatic dissolution which signals the end of a subrotation as if the music were receding (Example 2.3). This last process is typically applied to a chromatically descending version of the rowing ostinato as seen in bb. 21–24 in the second violin. In any one subrotation, Rachmaninoff deploys these two motifs and this musical process; typically, the rowing motif is heard first and then the chant-like figure, but there is variation in how often each motif is repeated and manipulated, which gives rise to slightly different subrotations throughout.¹⁰⁷

In the initial subrotation, the chant-like figure is not clearly present, but I suggest that the alternating major and minor 2nds in the bass clarinet of bb. 5–12 are the precursors to the chant motif. The instrumentation is noteworthy because there will be a significant return of this motif at the end of the symphonic poem in the bass clarinet too. Otherwise, in every subrotation the rowing ostinato and chant figure typically appear in the said order, creating a gradual swell in the ‘wave’ of the music with variations of the chant then finally closing the swell before moving onto the next subrotation. This ordered succession of subrotations with their constituent motifs appear in a clear manner throughout R1 wherein its SR1, SR2, and SR3 consist of the now-established sequence of motifs in the subrotation.

After the first chromatic dissolution, SR2 starts with both the rowing ostinato and chant motif, this time in D minor but still anchored to an A pedal (b. 25). Horn 1 sounds the first proper impression of the chant motif (bb. 25–27) which by the end of the work will be revealed to be the incipit of a well-known chant.

¹⁰⁶ I adopt the terms “rotation” and “subrotation” from Hepokoski and Darcy’s *Elements of Sonata Theory* where “rotation” is defined as an “architectural principle of large-scale recurrence”. Rotations contain a sequence of musical elements which are recycled and repeated in the piece, with possible alterations and reordering of material in each rotational iteration. Within a rotation, it is possible to have a subrotation where a smaller cycling through of material can be observed, distinct from the larger-scale rotation. Both rotations and subrotations are established at the outset of a piece and the overall structure of the piece is influenced by their returns. James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 611–612.

¹⁰⁷ The application of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s rotation principle plus the three main figurations are adapted from Truman See, “Hear My Desire: Rachmaninov’s Orphic Voice and Musicology’s Trouble with Eurydice,” *19th-Century Music* 44, no. 3 (2021): 187–216, especially 201. Our rotational analyses are largely similar except for our differing treatments of episodes and subordinate motifs within a subrotation, especially in R2. I also omit See’s Adornian interpretation of the contrasting section since it is not as relevant for an ekphrastic approach.

Bar	Section		Key	
1–24	R1	SR1	a	
25–44		SR2	d	
45–74		SR3	a, ends in f	
75–94	R2	SR1	a	
95–97		SR2	e	
98–114			motif a	e, a
115–152			motif b	C, B \flat , A \flat
153–200	motif c	f, chromatic		
201–259	R3	SR1	c, chromatic	
260–340	B1 (life section)		E \flat , C, a, b \flat , chromatic	
341–413	B2 (life section)		Chromatic	
414–427	Transition to R4		Chromatic	
428	R4	SR1	a	

Table 2.1 The structure of Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*.

The image shows a musical score for four parts: Violoncellos 1, Violoncellos 2, Contrabasses 1, and Contrabasses 2. The time signature is 5/8. The Violoncellos play a melodic line with the instruction 'sempre legato' and a dynamic marking 'p'. The Contrabasses play a drone accompaniment with a dynamic marking 'p'. The score covers measures 5 and 6.

Example 2.1 The rowing ostinato in the cello and drone in the basses, bb. 5–6

The image shows a musical score for Horn 1 in 5/8 time, measures 25-27. The score shows a chant-like figure with the instruction 'poco marcato' and a dynamic marking 'p'. The figure consists of a series of notes with a long note value, followed by a shorter note value, and then a final note with a long note value.

Example 2.2 The first appearance of the chant-like figure proper, bb. 25–27, Horn 1 at concert pitch



Example 2.3 The first chromatic dissolution, bb. 21–25 in Violin II.

The chant motif appears in the guise of a brief horn chorale in F minor in bb. 69–71, and will be heard again numerous times in different guises to demarcate important sections in the music. This particular statement marks the end of R1. As the piece progresses, brass chorale textures with a contour akin to the chant are heard as demarcation points for the start and end of a new rotation. R2 begins in b. 75 and from this point onward the content of the subrotations is expanded with the addition of new motifs which I call the a motif (*leggiero*, Example 2.4), b motif (*Naturthema*, Example 2.5), and c motif (an imitative version of the chant-like figure, compare Examples 2.6 and 2.2).¹⁰⁸ R2:SR2 introduces the skittering motif (a) in the violins (bb. 98–104) which is then repeated in the flutes and oboes (bb. 109–114). Marked *leggiero e stacc.*, the detached semiquavers in the higher register give rise to the skittering quality.

R3:SR1 starts out like what a normative subrotation would be with the three familiar motifs: rowing ostinato, chant, and dissolution into the next subrotation. However, instead of going into a new subrotation, the established trajectory is subverted by a frenetic dissolution in E minor (b. 221) that abruptly dissipates by b. 229 where the music returns into a mysterious atmosphere and sparse texture, also changing into 3/4 time.

The contrasting life section (B1 and B2, bb. 260–413) introduces new material. This part of the piece is quite extensive and developmental, without the normative repetitions that we have heard previously. The new melody which I call the life theme (Example 2.7, bb. 260–264) is in the key of E \flat , often raising the fourth degree to an A natural which hints at the Lydian mode. There is a metrical change from 5/8 to 3/4 and the frequent use of triplets almost makes the music sound like it is in compound triple time. Compared to the music heard thus far, the life theme is more lyrical and free. Furthermore, the lower instruments are absent for the moment until b. 291, where there is a reprise of the life theme, now more lush and spanning the full gamut of orchestral tessituras. Limiting instrumental range anywhere in the tessitura is a simple yet effective way of connoting certain archetypes and emotions. Where the music was lurking in the murky lower

¹⁰⁸ I borrow the term *Naturthema* from Norman Del Mar, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works*, vol. 1 (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1978), 135 where Del Mar describes the bare 5ths in *Also sprach Zarathustra* as “the simplest of all *Naturthema*.”

ranges previously, the concentration of higher ranges in the life theme now may even suggest a vision of a brighter afterlife or perhaps recalling a life lived.

1 u. 2 Pult.
Violin I div. 3 Pult.
p
leggiero e. stacc.
p
leggiero e. stacc.

5
pp
pp
pp
pp
cont.

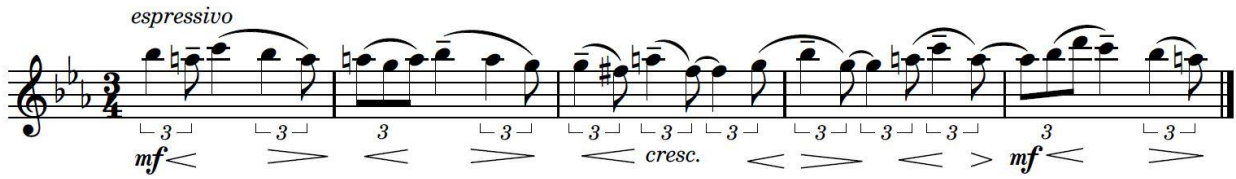
Example 2.4 *Leggiero* motif (motif a), bb. 98–106.

1 u. 2 Pult.
senza sord.
mf molto cantabile
f
mf

Example 2.5 First appearance of the *Naturthema* (motif b) in C, bb.115–120.

Solo
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf

Example 2.6 Woodwind cascade motif (motif c), bb. 153–156.



Example 2.7 Life theme, bb. 260–264.

In the bars leading up to the last rotation, the music’s texture builds from b. 341 in a stretto-like manner using the chant figure but with a narrowed intervallic range, creating chromatic tension. The figuration is fragmented from b. 363 until the climactic collapse at b. 377–380 where the orchestral force is pushed to excess and dissonance. Although this moment in the music may sound like the dramatic climax of Rachmaninoff’s narrative after three standard rotations and two “life” rotations thus far, I argue that program for this symphonic poem deliberately ignores a linear dramatic trajectory. Ultimately, the piece returns to a standard rotation which re-emphasises the centrality of the circular, stasis-like rotational structure, which I will later argue is due in part to the visual composition of Böcklin’s painting.

The last rotation (R4) begins at b. 428 in the key of A minor. As with all the stable rotations in this work, the three motifs of rowing ostinato, chant-like figure, and chromatic dissolution are present. The smaller motifs *Naturthema* and woodwind cascade which were introduced in R2 reappear in R4. Most clearly, the *Naturthema* is heard in bb. 434–462 in the first violin which now has an added descending arpeggiation of A minor. The woodwind cascade is heard less distinctively but is implied, particularly rhythmically by the sequence of falling woodwind solos in bb. 458–461, similar to how they took turns stating the chant last time in R2 (bb. 153–156). The chromaticism is less apparent, now situated in the middle of the rotation (bb. 449–457 in the upper strings) rather than the end in order to finish on a stable A minor. Just as motifs b and c were brought back from earlier in the piece, there is a sense of completion and closure when the bass clarinet and bassoon in bb. 462–468 (Example 2.8) state a longer version of the chant figure, as if confirming that the fragmentary motif we have heard throughout was the incipit of the infamous *Dies irae* chant all along. Even here we do not get an irrefutable statement of the chant, but as Rachmaninoff unequivocally used the iconic melody in many of his other works and considering the title which the composer gave to the symphonic poem, it is not an overreach to assume that the multiple variations of the chant’s incipit are embryonic references to the actual *Dies irae*.

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Bass Clarinet in Bb and Bassoon. The music is written in 5/8 time and consists of eight measures. The melody is a single line of music with a series of eighth notes, some beamed together. The dynamics are marked as follows: *p marc.* (piano, marcato) in the first measure, *cresc.* (crescendo) in the second measure, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the third measure, *dim.* (diminuendo) in the fourth measure, and *p* (piano) in the fifth measure. The sixth measure is a continuation of the *dim.* marking, and the seventh measure is a continuation of the *p* marking. The eighth measure is a final measure with a double bar line. The instruments are indicated by their names on the left side of the score.

Example 2.8 The reveal of the lengthier *Dies irae* chant, bb. 462–468, at concert pitch.

Ekphrastic Analysis

There are replications, alterations, and a possible supplementation in the Böcklin-Rachmaninoff case study. Firstly, there is a replication of the black-and-white photograph in the low orchestral registers and low instrumental timbres that dominate the work. This analogy aligns with typical parallels between colour in art and timbre in music. The rendering of the painting as black and white removes a more nuanced atmosphere leading to a different emotional response. Based on Burrough's account when the original fourth version was still available, we know that the third, fourth, and fifth are noticeably brighter than the first and second. The black-and-white photograph has a different effect to the warm and relatively saturated brown shades of the cliffs in the first, second, and fifth versions.

Secondly, if we compare the boat in the painting to the rowing ostinato in the music, we can speak of a replication both in terms of content and form. This replication is complex in that it highlights the fundamental difference between spatial art and temporal art, and the conflation of content and form in music which leaves the transmedialising function open to interpretation. As identified earlier, the rowing ostinato is a recurring motif throughout the piece that aptly represents the boat approaching the isle. Note the 5/8 time signature which, although not unusual in Russian music, could also allude to the 'proper' 6/8 time signature of a barcarolle's rowing motion, now turned into an uncanny barcarolle for programmatic purposes. The discreet presence of the still water in the painting, amplified by the black-and-white scheme which makes it blend into the rest of the isle (since there is no clear colouration change to distinguish water from land), is replicated in the unassuming drone of the music which appears together with the rowing ostinato. Parallel 4ths and 5ths in the drone themselves typically signify hollowness in harmony due to a missing triadic note. I do not think it was a coincidence that the resulting music was based on a print absent of colour and a dreary subject matter with frozen atmosphere.

However, a complication arises when the topic of a barcarolle—which is only fully solidified by paratextual signalling—is overshadowed by the more general pictorialism of flowing water. In other words, the wavelike contour of the ostinato—without programmatic information—is more strongly correlated to water than barcarolles. This becomes more apparent in R2 when the rising swells of the ostinato leads the listener to re-interpret rowing as waves. Furthermore, the rotational and subrotational nature of the form which swell up and down also mimics this wave-like motion on deeper structural levels. The calm and light ostinato from the beginning of the piece reflects the painting more accurately than what the ostinato turns into as the piece develops. By this point, it is more plausible to hear the ostinato as water waves instead of extremely dramatic rowing.

Should the musical figuration be interpreted as water instead of rowing, we might speak of alteration instead of replication because the water in Böcklin's painting is still: so still, indeed, that there is a reflection of the isle on the water's surface. Therefore, this water has been altered by Rachmaninoff to fit the limitations of the musical medium. After all, it is difficult if not impossible to programmatically represent water in music unless it is flowing. Working in a temporal art form, Rachmaninoff was required to infer movement from a still picture, as if bringing the painting to life but not literally replicating what *is* in the artwork. Typical representations of water in Western art music from Vivaldi's *Spring* to Smetana's *Vltava* deploy *legato* and undulating contours to mimic water's flowing property—in effect also creating a wave-like pattern on the score itself—but it would be counterintuitive to think of the water being represented as still when the music presents itself otherwise. Should the music attempt to represent 'stillness', the flowing property of the music must likely be discarded, thereby removing the one prominent musical sign of water.

Ultimately, I argue that the 5/8 quaver ostinato is a rowing ostinato because of: (1) its kinship with a standard 6/8 barcarolle ostinato that represents the rowing motion of a gondolier, (2) the inferred movement of the rowboat in Böcklin's painting heading towards the island, and (3) the bass drones as a replication of the still water instead of the flowing arpeggiations of the ostinato. The movement of water certainly co-occurs with rowing. However, both rowing and water flowing are actions moving in time while their depictions in painting are stationary. Even in this static painting there are telltale signs of movement: a trail of disturbed reflections in the water behind the rowboat and the rower's hunched figure as if in the act of pulling on the oars. The passionate animation of Rachmaninoff's music in R2:SR1 that is contrasted with Böcklin's stately painting might be the result of each individual's different emotional approach to the subject but semiotically speaking, Rachmaninoff composed a replication of the moving rowboat and still water.

The third case of transmedialisation concerns what I have called the life section and how it can possibly be linked to the painting considering the death-ridden subject. The contrasting life theme (b. 260) introduced in this section is more lyrical and free than the meandering minor chant motifs thus far. The theme is in the key of E \flat , which starkly contrasts to the predominant A minor key of the rest of the work. The distant tritone relation further suggests a deliberate contrast designed by Rachmaninoff. Furthermore, the lower instruments are absent until b. 291, a reprise of the life theme, where it is lush and spans the full gamut of the orchestral tessitura. I titled this the 'life' theme for a combination of reasons: its musical contrast in the context of the art's eschatological subject, the bright sky peeking behind the isle, and the composer's words. These last two points are discussed further below.

There are two possible transmedialising functions at work in the life section. The first would regard it as a supplementation (an interpretation which relies on the composer's words, as well as topical evidence). In a letter of appreciation to Leopold Stokowski dated 25 April 1925 after a performance of the piece, Rachmaninoff commented that he disagreed with the conductor's interpretation of the middle section. Rachmaninoff stated that this section was his own invention, not part of Böcklin's painting. Through this primary source, we can surmise that supplementation is occurring here. The composer wrote:

It should be a great contrast to all the rest of the work—faster, more nervous and more emotional—as that passage does not belong to the 'picture'; it is in reality a 'supplement' to the picture—which fact, of course, makes the contrast all the more necessary. In the former is death—in the latter life.¹⁰⁹

The second interpretation would regard this section as a replication of the painting's use of bright light behind the isle, also supported by topical evidence. If we look at Böcklin's painting once more, we might perhaps hear the life section as an unconscious replication of the bright sky behind the isle, as if the brightness is a silver lining of death which is the release from mortal coil. Recalling Burroughs's observations about the lighter third, fourth, and fifth *Isles*, it is reasonable to imagine that the black-and-white print Rachmaninoff saw would at least reflect this brightness to some extent. I describe this transmedialisation as unconscious because it would seem to go against the composer's words. Looking at art affects us in ways we are not always aware of which is why Rachmaninoff claimed the life section as his own invention whereas he might have unknowingly been affected by this element of the painting. Based on the black-and-white print, the white clouds behind the isle form an extreme contrast with the much darker cypress trees. He might not have

¹⁰⁹ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 205.

consciously noted this contrast but he still perceived it and intuitively knew that the isle in the painting was not all about death and despair. This play of light and shade may have inspired the key change from A minor to E \flat , the new lighter theme, and the higher orchestral register in this section.

The next point of transmedialisation speaks to the aforementioned point about artists' subtle yet intentional decisions in the visual artwork that ultimately affect the viewer's experience, often without the viewer's cognisance of these artistic choices. I suggest that there is a replication of the perceived symmetry and group mass in the visual composition in the rotational form of the music. As outlined earlier, the overall musical structure of *Isle of the Dead* consists of three rotations (R1–R3, each with subrotations), then one expansive contrasting section (with its own two subrotations B1 and B2) where a newly introduced life theme is developed before returning to a final brief rotation (R4). I suggest that Rachmaninoff expertly transposed this perceived symmetry and group mass composition in the details of his rotational form, specifically the use of inconsistent subrotations. The subrotations are imbalanced writ large just like the visual composition. R1 has three subrotations. R2 starts right after with subrotation 1 but the disproportion begins in subrotation 2 where three new small motifs: a, b, and c are introduced periodically. R3 has one standard subrotation. Then comes the contrasting section B with subrotations B2 and B2. Lastly, R4 has a single subrotation where b and c reappear. On a micro but pervasive level, the 5/8 rowing ostinato is another point of near-symmetry as it falls just one quaver short of a symmetrical rhythm; it flows with the shadow of 3+3 behind it. In essence, there is some semblance of structure and stability in Rachmaninoff's work but the details are subtly inconsistent, just like the details in Böcklin's painting.

Lastly, there is a replication of death symbols in the elusive fragments of a chant eventually revealed to be the *Dies irae* chant. Throughout the musical work, a fragment of the *Dies irae* chant incipit permeates the four rotations but isn't substantive enough to be identified as the chant until the end of the piece at bb. 462–468, as if the chant itself were veiled. The *Dies irae* has been used multiple times throughout Western art music to evoke death. Interestingly, there is also a fitting ideological parallel between Symbolism's veiled significations and Rachmaninoff's treatment of not revealing the complete recognizable incipit of the *Dies irae*.

It should be noted, however, that these supposed allusions to the chant are almost always incomplete statements, usually only sounding out the first four notes and utilising them motivically. Andreas Wehrmeyer has observed that

[alt]hough many commentators attributed Rakhmaninov's incessant use of the *Dies irae* to a morbid obsession, it is more likely that Rakhmaninov enjoyed the compositional opportunities afforded in this theme, as well its threatening undertow. ... Anglo-American scholars could be criticised for obsessively making the *Dies irae* theme the focal point of their analysis and for being blind to the nuances involved.¹¹⁰

In 1930, Rachmaninoff divulged that both *Études-Tableaux* Op. 33 and 39 were inspired by landscapes in real life but he did not specify from where. He commented that the *Dies irae* chant in Op. 39, No. 2 was supposed to represent the sea and seagulls, not the Day of Judgement or other eschatological representations that one might expect from the original context of the chant.¹¹¹ The fact that the composer can (on his own admission) use the chant to connote things other than death may well suggest that he was simply tinkering with it as a compositional tool. Rachmaninoff certainly should not be reduced to a death-obsessed figure lest the musico-autobiographical readings become excessive.

Rachmaninoff's most salient link to the painter remains this symphonic poem but there are other works which he claims were inspired by Böcklin paintings. Prelude, Op. 32, No. 10, was inspired by Böcklin's *Die Heimkehr* (1887, usually called *The Homecoming* or *The Return*). In a conversation between the Russian pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch and Rachmaninoff, the former

once ventured to tell Rachmaninov that whenever he played the B minor Prelude [Op. 32, No. 10] he always saw in his mind's eye this painting, which is called *The Return*. The composer, amazed by Moiseiwitsch's remarkable perspicacity, admitted that it was this very picture which had inspired his music.¹¹²

Études-Tableaux, Opus 33, No. 8, was likely inspired by *The Spring Awakening* (1880) and according to Leon Botstein, the C-minor *Études-Tableaux* from Opus 39 seems to have been inspired by *Im Spiel der Wellen*.¹¹³ Rachmaninoff's evocative melodies, orchestration, texture, harmonies, and structural work in the *Isle of the Dead* exemplify his potential as a strongly ekphrastic programmatic composer with more avenues to explore.

¹¹⁰ Andreas Whermeyer, *Rakhmaninov*, trans. Anne Wyburd, (London: Haus Publishing, 2004), 108.

¹¹¹ Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 84, cited in See, "Rachmaninov's Orphic Voice," 199.

¹¹² Patrick Piggott, *Rachmaninov* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 68.

¹¹³ Unclear if the etude Botstein is referring to is No. 1 or No. 7. Leon Botstein, "Aesthetic Ambition and Popular Taste: The Divergent Paths of Paderewski, Busoni, and Rachmaninoff," in *Rachmaninoff and His World*, ed. Philip Ross Bullock (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 331.

Chapter 3

Kaulbach-Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht*

Kaulbach and *Die Hunnenschlacht*

Wilhelm von Kaulbach (1805–1874) was considered one of the most prominent painters of his time who gained acclaim for his 1834 painting *Die Hunnenschlacht*. The subject has been reproduced multiple times by the artist and is now best known as a mural in the Berlin Neues Museum. Kaulbach was a student of Peter von Cornelius in Düsseldorf (not to be confused with the Peter Cornelius who was a minor composer in Liszt's circle), court painter to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, and director of the Academy of Arts in Munich.¹¹⁴ Kaulbach was a part of the Nazarene movement, a style which favoured biblical themes and drew inspiration from artists of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance.¹¹⁵

Hunnenschlacht began as a pencil sketch which grew to widespread popularity. Kaulbach drew the first pencil sketch in 1833 and another one in 1834 as plans for a larger painting. The 1834 sketch was then exhibited in the Munich Art Association which began the snowball of events leading to Kaulbach's acclaim. The trade journal *Stuttgarter Kunstblatt* on 1 February 1834 highly praised Kaulbach's genius and had high hopes for him as a leading artist of their time.¹¹⁶ Copper engravings were made to create copies of the artwork and "Kaulbach was a famous man overnight."¹¹⁷ In 1835, on the back of its fame, Count Atanazy Raszyński, a prominent Berlin art collector and patron of the time, commissioned a large oil painting of *Hunnenschlacht*. By 1837, despite Kaulbach not finishing the painting in full oil colour (only the underpainting was finished), the count was still satisfied, exhibited it, and once again the painting met with great enthusiasm.¹¹⁸

The last version of *Hunnenschlacht* was the monumental mural in the Berlin Neues Museum staircase hall which was supported by King Frederick William IV of Prussia. The museum was designed by architect Friedrich August Stüler, built from 1843 to 1855 with the staircase hall of the Neues

¹¹⁴ Wolfram Steinbeck, "Musik nach Bildern zu Franz Liszts Hunnenschlacht," in *Töne – Farben – Formen: Über Musik und die Bildenden Künste*, ed. Elisabeth Schmierer, et al. (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995), 22.

¹¹⁵ Klaus H. Carl and Dorothea Eimert, *German Painting: From the Middle Ages to New Objectivity* (New York: Parkstone International, 2016), 138.

¹¹⁶ Hans Müller, *Wilhelm Kaulbach* (Berlin: F. Fontane & Co., 1893), 297.

¹¹⁷ "Ein Sturm der Begeisterung brach los" und "Kaulbach war mit einem Schlage ein berühmter Mann." Müller, *Wilhelm Kaulbach*, 297, quoted in Steinbeck, "Musik nach Bildern," 23.

¹¹⁸ Steinbeck, "Musik nach Bildern," 23. An underpainting is a base layer of paint in neutral tones, typically monochromatic, used as a plan for the final painting's values (shade and lighting) and to establish a working surface colour that differs from the material's surface. The underpainting of this particular painting for the count was done in sepia.

Museum being the centrepiece of the building which housed Kaulbach's six murals, each around 6 x 7 metres big. The Neues Museum's website informs us that "the imagery of the murals was discussed in detail with the King of Prussia, Frederick William IV, the Director-General Ignaz von Olfers and the artist Wilhelm von Kaulbach." The six murals formed part of a cycle which begins with "the construction of the Tower of Babel as a symbol of the genesis of the world's various cultures, and ends with a depiction of the Reformation as a representation of [comparatively] recent history."¹¹⁹ Kaulbach began working on this project in 1847 and all six murals were finished by 1865, with *Hunnenschlacht* completed in c. 1854/5.¹²⁰ The other five murals were (in chronological order): *Die Zerstörung des Babylonischen Turmes* (*The Destruction of the Tower of Babel*), *Homer und die Griechen* (*Homer and the Greeks*), *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems* (*The Destruction of Jerusalem*), *Die Kreuzfahrer vor Jerusalem* (*The Crusaders in Front of Jerusalem*), and *Das Zeitalter der Reformation* (*The Age of Reformation*), with *Hunnenschlacht* in the fourth position after *The Destruction of Jerusalem*.¹²¹ However, the museum was severely damaged in WWII and only black-and-white photographs of these murals remain. It was not until 2003 that restoration work on the building began under British architect David Chipperfield but the project did not restore the murals.¹²²

The version I will be using as reference for the ekphrastic analysis is an oil-on-canvas painting by Kaulbach from around 1834–7 (perhaps the completed version of Count Raszyński's commission) which was acquired by the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in 1889 (Figure 3.2).¹²³

Visual Analysis

Composition, colour, and lighting are the three most prominent formal features in Kaulbach's painting. Kaulbach was often praised at the time for his visual composition and *Hunnenschlacht* illustrates a measured approach of establishing and intensifying conflict that appears to be happening equally in two halves. The compositional archetype employed by Kaulbach in the painting is, very fittingly, the balanced scale (Figure 3.3). The composition is divided into two halves down a vertical axis like a weighing scale's beam. The left and right halves are then filled with relatively symmetrical (or at least similar) material and equal visual interest to balance the materials on each side. Payne suggests that the balanced scale "lends itself admirably to wall

¹¹⁹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, "10 Years of the Neues Museum," accessed 29 Sep 2024, <https://www.smb.museum/en/exhibitions/detail/10-years-of-the-neues-museum/>.

¹²⁰ Steinbeck, "Musik nach Bildern," 23–24.

¹²¹ Black-and-white photos of these murals in the Neues Museum's main staircase hall before the damage in WWII can be found at <https://recherche.smb.museum/> (accessed 29 Sep 2024).

¹²² Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, "Neues Museum," accessed 29 Sep 2024, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/neues-museum/about-us/profile/>.

¹²³ Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, "Die Hunnenschlacht auf den katalaunischen Feldern," accessed 29 Sep 2024, <https://www.staatsgalerie.de/en/node/49321>.

decoration or mural work where formal balance corresponds to the equal measures of architecture.¹²⁴ Kaulbach did paint two other murals in the Neues Museum—*The Destruction of the Tower of Babel* and *The Destruction of Jerusalem*—utilising this visual composition too.

The painting is rife with diagonal lines which, as a general principle of art, evoke instability. Indeed, there is no perfect symmetry found in the painting: a long diagonal row of bodies stretches across the canvas from the top left to the lower right and each warring party has a diagonal thrust of soldiers meeting in the middle of the conflict. To further destabilise all the diagonal lines in the painting, the limbs of the soldiers stick out of the imaginary outlines formed by the mass of bodies as if they were geometrically imperfect. Looking closer at the figures of the soldiers who rise up to meet in the middle, their bodies are streamlined, in the middle of a striving pose as if stretched, whereas the ones in the centre mass are curled inwards in a tangle of limbs (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.1. A black-and-white photograph of Kaulbach's *Hunnenschlacht* mural inside the main hall of the Berlin Neues Museum, 1920.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 113.

¹²⁵ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv, accessed 29 Sep 2024, <https://id.smb.museum/object/1753314/>.



Figure 3.2. Kaulbach, *Die Hunnenschlacht*, c. 1834–37, oil on canvas, 137.5 × 172.5 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Kaulbach utilises complementary red and green colours to represent opposing sides of the battle: the Christian leader on the left, Visigothic King Theodoric I, is draped with red, while King Attila of the Huns on the right is wearing green. ‘Splashes’ of red and green are scattered throughout the painting like a subtle recurring motif. There are a few soldiers draped in red and green but the colours are not consistently associated with one side or other. Note also the two red shields found among those lying on the ground and the woman clad in a green dress on the foreground. The choice to colour the Christian victor in red is not accidental; in the first half of the nineteenth century many people believed that red “conveys an impression of gravity and dignity, and at the same time of grace and attractiveness.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, par. 796.



Figure 3.3. Payne's visual composition archetype of balanced scale.¹²⁷

There are two distinct sources of lighting in the painting. The ghostly soldiers in the air, especially the amalgamation of bodies in the middle mass, have a green hue to them (distinct from their clothing). In contrast, the people on the ground, including the floating women at the bottom left corner, have conventional white lighting on them. The lighting difference is subtle but not insignificant: for instance, the woman in a white dress on the ground gazing up at the battle is not wearing the same shade of white as any of the soldiers' white clothes in the air, precisely because there are two coloured lights acting on the figures of the painting. To put it in modern terms, it is as if a colour filter has been put on the air-borne soldiers to give them a ghostly appearance. Some of their clothing can be inferred to be white despite their perceived off-white colour; our mind still discerns them as the local colour of white with the knowledge that other surrounding colours are affected by the unusual lightning. In addition, the backdrop of the blue sky which is complementary (i.e. on the opposite point of the colour wheel) to brown, heightens the lighting difference because the colour palette of the figures on the ground are predominantly brown. The most standard usage of complementary colours in western art is to juxtapose and contrast.¹²⁸ Therefore, the earthly figures are under brownish-white lighting whereas the soldiers in the sky are covered by a greener light. All in all, apt decisions were made on Kaulbach's part to differentiate the living from the dead. I would argue that the women on the bottom left are floating not because they are deceased but to heighten the drama of the artwork.

Depth in the masses of soldiers in the air is achieved by different shades of lighting. As the human figures fade into the background, their forms become less vivid, more simplified; some are faceless, almost becoming like clouds in the air. In the middle mass of soldiers that form the central axis between the two warring sides, the upper half of figures are treated under a darker green-blue light. Much further behind them are little silhouettes of raised arms and weapons blending into the form of a cloud (Figure 3.4). There is a similar depiction of weapons to Attila's left which is clearer but less cloud-shaped. This general blending of the distant soldiers into clouds happens multiple times in the mural (such as in Figure 3.5). Note in particular the leftmost edge of the painting where the

¹²⁷ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 117.

¹²⁸ Tucker, *Visual Literacy*, 35.

shaded forms of the three soldiers' faces seem to repeat behind them as three more soldiers' faces albeit considerably less vivid, highlighting the fantastical nature of the battle in the sky (figure 3.6). At the top right corner are Hun soldiers soaring in the air with a monochromatic (one hue, different lights and shades) blue palette. The soldiers' soaring pose which stretches the body to a stylised also mimics the shape of clouds. The hard-edged shading (instead of a smooth gradation of shades) is consequence of Attila's harshly bright light. The mixing of human and cloud forms is also present to the left of the cross bearer with two cloud-like praying figures.



Figure 3.4. Details of silhouettes in the far background.



Figure 3.6 The central mass of bodies.



Figure 3.5. Roman soldiers' figures repeated as cloud-like figures behind them.

Liszt and *Hunnenschlacht*

Hunnenschlacht, completed in 1857, is the eleventh symphonic poem by Liszt. Kaulbach and Liszt were in fact contemporaries and close friends, the artist having painted two oil portraits, a pencil drawing, and a caricature of Liszt. Accounts of their meetings and friendship are limited but

Kaulbach's daughter has a diary entry recording their close friendship, and Liszt would refer to him as an "excellent friend" in his letters to Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein.¹²⁹ The composer received a reproduction of Wilhelm von Kaulbach's mural *Die Hunnenschlacht* from Carolyne in the summer of 1855.¹³⁰ When Liszt visited the Neues Museum in Berlin in the summer of 1857 with Kaulbach (*Hunnenschlacht* having been composed and completed at this point) and saw the other murals (there were only five at the time, since the "Reformation" mural had not yet been completed), the Hungarian conceived of the idea of composing a series of symphonic poems inspired by Kaulbach's works.¹³¹ He planned for *Hunnenschlacht* to form part of a multimedia series titled *Die Weltgeschichte in Bildern und Tönen von W. Kaulbach und Franz Liszt*, for which he would compose music based on Kaulbach's mural series and a to-be-decided author would write accompanying/explanatory poetry as well.¹³² In a letter from Liszt to Kaulbach's wife, Dingelstedt was mentioned—likely the German poet and dramatist Franz von Dingelstedt—as a possible third person for this three-way ekphrastic project. An earlier symphonic poem—*Héroïde funèbre* (1857)—was also planned to be incorporated into this *Weltgeschichte* series.¹³³ Kaulbach responded warmly and excitedly to this idea of a *Weltgeschichte* series, writing to Liszt:

Your original and spirited idea—the musical and poetic form of the historical pictures in the Berlin Museum—has taken hold of me completely. I much wish to hear yours and Dingelstedt's ideas of this performance. The representation of these powerful subjects in poetical, musical, and artistic form must constitute a harmonious work, rounded off into one complete whole. It will resound and shine through all lands!!¹³⁴

However, the *Weltgeschichte* series was never realised. There is some debate as to what Liszt preferred to be his stimulus when composing programmatic works. His letters always spoke of Kaulbach's *Hunnenschlacht* mural favourably but Johns suggests that "he preferred to use a written text as the basis of his composition—a text in which the concerns of the painting were transferred into prose." Liszt himself wrote, "Music in its masterpieces tends more and more to appropriate the masterpieces of literature."¹³⁵ Without a writer to create program notes out of the five other murals (literary ekphrasis, that is), Liszt found himself thwarted by the lack of formalisation and

¹²⁹ Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 209, 244.

¹³⁰ Keith T. Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, ed. Michael Saffle (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 56.

¹³¹ Steinbeck, "Musik nach Bildern," 22.

¹³² Joanne Cormac, *Liszt and the Symphonic Poem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 13; Jonathan Kregor, *Program Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125.

¹³³ Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, 56.

¹³⁴ Letter no. 183 in *Franz Liszt, Letters of Franz Liszt*, ed. 'La Mara', trans. Constance Bache, vol. 1. *From Paris to Rome: Years of Travel as a Virtuoso* (Online: Project Gutenberg, 2003), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3689>.

¹³⁵ Franz Liszt, "Berlioz and his 'Harold' Symphony," trans. Oliver Strunk, in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Leo Treitler (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 1171.

ordering of his inspiration.¹³⁶ *Hunnenschlacht* was ultimately composed but the other five musical ekphraseis were not realised.

Some more context surrounding the conception of the symphonic poem can be gleaned through Liszt's French version of the program notes, which in its greater length and detail contrasts to the German one. Despite the incompleteness of the *Weltgeschichte* series, the composer's high praise for Kaulbach's work suggests that the six murals in the Berlin Neues Museum were highly celebrated at the time. It is interesting to note that there is a difference in the time of day of the *Hunnenschlacht* legend as told by the historian who spoke to Kaulbach and the painting by the artist: nighttime by the historian and daytime by Kaulbach.¹³⁷ Liszt also references Mérovée the Frank and Aetius the Roman who supported King Theodoric in the Catalaunian battle (named but not located in the painting), and other religious figures who came out victorious in a conflict due to "Celestial succour".¹³⁸ He mentions the fields of Lake Trasimene where another battle occurred 234 years before the one at the Catalaunian Fields, which further evinces his familiarity with Christian history and explains his keen interest in the symphonic poem's program.

Musical Overview

Below is an overview of *Hunnenschlacht*'s musical structure to provide some bearing for the ekphrastic analysis to come.

Bars	Section	Key
1–30	Section A. Theme 1: the Huns. Identifiable from the sol-le-ti-do and winding chromatic quavers. The theme's head is used at the beginning of Liszt's <i>Fantasia on Hungarian Folk Themes</i> .	c; chromatic (especially dim7)
31–62	Section A proper. Theme 2 introduced = the Huns' battle theme.	Dim7
52–62	Reappearance of theme 1 which builds sequentially up to b. 63.	f
63–76	The Huns' theme (theme 1) reprise, unison in the strings and getting louder up to 69 then fragmenting and fading away.	c
77–85	Martial fanfare topic as part of the Christians' thematic complex (theme 3).	c
85–134	The Christian army's approach in the distance. Noticeably calmer music than the Huns and their battle theme, the horse gallop accompanies the <i>Crux fidelis</i>	c - dim7

¹³⁶ Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, 45–46.

¹³⁷ Franz Liszt, *Symphonische Dichtung Nr. 11 und 12* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1910), 1.

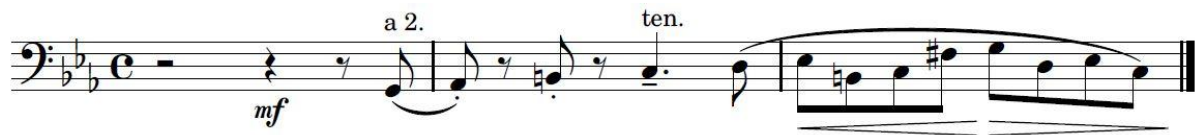
¹³⁸ Liszt, *Symphonische Dichtung Nr. 11 und 12*, 2.

Bars	Section	Key
	chant.	
98–100	<i>Cruce fidelis</i> chant introduced = the Christians.	
106–134	Martial calls, arpeggios. Up a fifth from b. 77. Horse gallop (b. 114 = b. 95) but now in g min; <i>Cruce fidelis</i> in b. 127.	g
135–150	Christian battle music (part of theme 3 complex) with martial fanfares.	c
151–162	The Christian cavalry march (part of theme 3 complex).	c. Ends with triplet horn calls on Cdim.
163–198	Section A climax: the Huns and Christians clash in battle. Tritone key change. The Huns' theme in shrill woodwinds and viola is pitted against the Christians' dotted rhythms in bb. 167–171.	f#
199–216	A gradual building-up in intensity with both sides (Huns and Christians) alternating. Brass calls and battle theme returns in bb. 205 and 214.	g
217–246	Continuation of the texture from the climax battle theme (b. 163).	b–B
247–261	Section A coda, transition into <i>cruce fidelis</i> -centric section.	E♭
262	Section B: Christian victory and thanksgiving sections.	E♭–G (b. 304)
312	Warm Romantic section, like a dream, parallel 6ths.	E♭
344	Reaching higher into the heavens, more ethereal texture (flute arpeggios).	E
352	Section C: Celebration. Festive feast of the Christians after defeating the Huns. <i>Cruce</i> theme surrounded by jubilant scales and passagework	C
398	Accelerated version of the sequence's head from b. 314	V/C
421	Tutti <i>Cruce fidelis</i> reprise. Final statement of the <i>Cruce fidelis</i> at b. 466.	C

Table 3.1. Structural overview of Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht*.

The music begins with a timpani roll on top of which the Huns' theme (Example 3.1) enters in the bassoon and tremolo cellos in bb. 2–4. A key area is not securely established but the contour of this theme suggests a C minor horizon. The first theme that is heard is associated with the Huns, signalled by the presence of the Gypsy or *verbunkos*-minor scale. In diatonic terms, this scale is a combination of the normative minor 3rd and minor 6th in a minor scale plus an augmented 4th and major 7th, creating its characteristic two augmented seconds (in semitones, 2:1:3:1:1:3:1) which

signals ‘Gypsiness’.¹³⁹ However, even though the Huns in the battle of the Catalaunian Fields are not Hungarians, Liszt still uses *verbunkos* music (which gives Liszt’s music its Hungarian flavour)—to brand them as ethnically other.¹⁴⁰ Note also the contour of the theme which aligns with what Hungarian musicologist Bence Szabolcsi described as typical *verbunkos* phraseology: “sharply divided but widely arched melodic patterns.”¹⁴¹



Example 3.1 The Huns’ theme (theme 1) bb. 2–4.



Example 3.2 The opening of Liszt’s *Fantasy on Hungarian Folk Themes*, bb. 1–7. Compare with the head of the above example.

The Huns’ theme is then repeated in the clarinet and subsequently the oboe, each time doubled by a tremolo string part. The Huns’ battle theme (Example 3.3, theme 2) is introduced in b. 31. The flurry of triplets marked *violente* and arpeggiating diminished 7 harmonies on B is apt for depicting a battle. Liszt added a footnote saying, “*Die Triolenfigur sehr schwungvoll mit Bravour gespielt, und die mit > bezeichneten Achtel sehr scharf?*” (the triplet figures very energetic and with bravura, and the accented quavers very sharp) to emphasise the shift in the music’s atmosphere. Furthermore, the tempo markedly increases with the direction *Più mosso. (Allegro energico assai.)* An early return of the Huns’ theme appears in b. 52 in the subdominant (F minor) just as the music backs away momentarily.

¹³⁹ Shay Loya, *Liszt’s Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 9, 51.

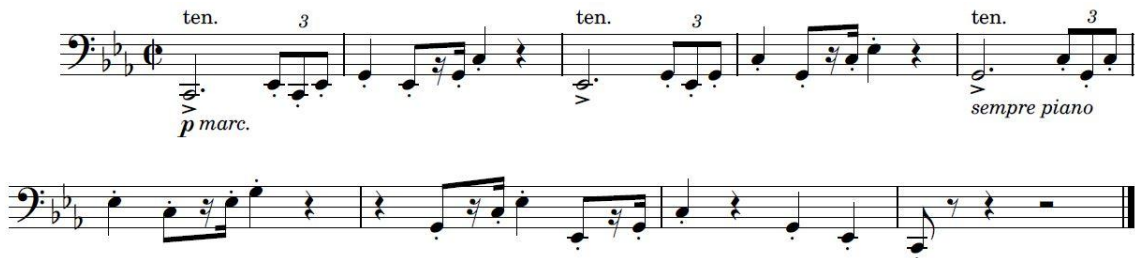
¹⁴⁰ Ralph P. Locke (*Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51–54) discusses how art music attempts to ethnically represent certain regions but ultimately does not have distinct musical vocabulary for each culture and instead reduces non-Austro-Germanic entities to monolithic signifiers of exoticism such as repetition, drones, ornamentation, and non-diatonic scales.

¹⁴¹ Bence Szabolcsi, *A Concise History of Hungarian Music*, (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), 56. Quoted in Loya, *Liszt’s Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition*, 34.



Example 3.3 The Huns’ battle theme (theme 2), bb. 31–35.

Trumpet calls appear in b. 69 which foreshadow the triplet martial calls to come in bb. 77ff (Example 3.4) which is the first tonally assured material, also in the tonic C minor, as befits a fanfare. In b. 85, there is a metrical change from 2/2 to 3/4 as the Christians’ distant horse gallop figuration is introduced, characterised by dotted rhythms and chromatic movement. In bb. 98–100 (Example 3.6), the first statement of the *Crux fidelis* hymn is heard amidst the anxious gallop of the detached strings and woodwinds. The introduction of this martial section displays Liszt’s dramatic imagination and invoking the image of armies approaching in the distance through the use of softer dynamics and pizzicato.¹⁴² Although nervous and accented with furious winding triplets (bb. 86, 88, 90, etc.), it is comparatively more tonally stable than the Huns’ theme. Overall, the Christians’ thematic complex is comprised of the distant triplet fanfare, dotted-rhythm horse gallop, and *Crux fidelis* chant.



Example 3.4 The Christians’ distant fanfare, part of the Christian thematic complex, bb. 77–85 (at concert pitch).

¹⁴² Mendelssohn and Berlioz used a similar technique of fading out themes in the ‘Italian’ Symphony and *Harold in Italy* respectively to evoke spatial depth. See Grey, “*Tableaux vivants*,” 55.

Example 3.5 The Christians' dotted-rhythm horse gallop, part of the Christian thematic complex, bb. 85–91.

Example 3.6 The *Crux fidelis* motif, part of the Christian thematic complex, bb. 98–100.

The battle finally ensues with the return of the Huns' theme in b. 163 (Example 3.7). Liszt depicts the battle of the Huns and Christians in a simple but effective manner: he sounds the Huns' theme and a part of the Christians' theme (the dotted rhythms) in tandem like two polyphonic lines. Bb.

247–261 is all part of a long dominant pedal point and the run-up to the proper victory demarcation in b. 262. The rising tremolo, *crescendo*, and thick orchestral texture are similar to the climax in Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, a later Romantic symphonic work also depicting victory after conflict. In b. 262, the Christians emerge victorious (before even halfway through the run-time) with a triumphant statement of the *Cruz fidelis*. For the rest of the symphonic poem, the *Cruz* theme is redeployed in both religious manners (i.e. chorale style with organ) and grandiose orchestrations.

Alla breve.
Poco a poco accelerando (sin al Andante maestoso).

ff strepitoso

f sempre stacc. e strepitoso

f sempre stacc. e strepitoso

Example 3.7 The climax battle theme featuring a synthesis of the Huns’ theme and the Christians’ dotted-rhythm gallop, bb. 163–171.

Bar 271 introduces the organ into the texture which adds to the religious topic. The triumphant celebrations repeatedly alternate with religious asides (there are a total of three of these asides: bb. 271–274, 284–286, and 296–311). Alternating between common time and 6/4 time evokes the

sense of nonmetric plainchant in these asides, harmonised in a quasi-chorale style.

The chorale texture gradually dissipates starting from b. 304 as the first violin plays a rising line that fades away into the next variation on religious topics. The music remains in E \flat but there is a noticeable reduction in orchestral size, almost transforming the sound of the orchestra into an extended string quartet. This subsection is highly Romantic but perhaps also medieval with its smooth lyrical melody (a variation on *Crux fidelis*) and parallel 6ths like a fauxbourdon which could allude to a vaguely archaic time period represented by the older musical style along with expressive markings such as *espressivo pietoso* and *dolce*. Anne Liu argues that there are two apotheoses in Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht*: the first one being the Christians' victory in the middle of the symphonic poem for programmatic purposes (b. 262) and the second when the Huns' melodic contour is affected by the *Crux fidelis* (b. 314) as a formal finale.¹⁴³ However, I do not interpret the Huns as being converted as Liu does but rather hear this second passage as a non-specific religious musical style representing the Christians' thanksgiving.

Through an act of enharmonic gymnastics in b. 340, the flute's solo line which seems to undulate around E \flat is shifted little by little into E major until a tonic in E major is reached on the last beat of b. 344. The music has a more ethereal affect now with shimmering high strings and winds. The semitonal modulation up might suggest displays of numinous power and gratitude from the Christians for their victorious battle. Furthermore, E major has often been identified by scholars as Liszt's religious key, representing devotion and the sacred.¹⁴⁴

After the brief vision in E major, the music is pulled back down to reality in b. 352 as the flute's solo line resolves to a G \natural (instead of the expected G \sharp), tilting us firmly to C major by the reharmonised G \natural . The music gradually gains momentum once more through the cantus firmus texture where the woodwinds and brass play long notes of the *Crux* motif whilst the strings play a flurry of scalic passages. The final resounding *Crux fidelis* in C major is stated in b. 421 by the whole orchestra and triplet arpeggiations on the tonic and brass fanfares decorate the victorious celebration. Brief diversions into B major (b. 454) and A \flat (b. 457) major create tension in the music but the uncertainty is quickly eased as the orchestra intensifies into a grandiose C major final fanfare (b. 473), interestingly not emphasising the tonic-dominant relation but substituting tonic-mediant movement instead. The organ resounds over the orchestra until the very end and we are reminded once more of the program of this work as the music not only confidently states the

¹⁴³ Anne (Yen-Ling) Liu, "Listening as Gazing: Synaesthesia and the Double Apotheosis in Franz Liszt's 'Hunnenschlacht,'" *Studia Musicologica* 54, no. 4 (December 2013): 386.

¹⁴⁴ Dolores Pesce, *Liszt's Last Decade* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 218, 235.

winner of the battle but also praises God for His aid in achieving the victory.

Ekphrastic Analysis

The consistent element across Kaulbach and Liszt's renditions of *Hunnenschlacht* is the dichotomy between two warring sides, although, interestingly, this gets treated differently by artist and composer. Simply put, Kaulbach divides his mural equally and gives equal interest to both the Romans and the Huns but Liszt emphatically highlights the victory of the Christians in his symphonic poem, a victory not signalled in the painting. This different approach can serve as a reminder of how musical ekphrasis is not a copy of the original artwork but the composer's take on the subject matter and formal parameters of the artwork as they understand it in their time.

Structurally, Liszt's organisation of the first half his symphonic poem aligns closely with how Kaulbach organised his group of masses. There is a replication of two opposing sides through creating distinct thematic identities for them, supported by topical associations. Identifying which theme belongs to which party is made possible by religious and exoticist musical features, the former indicating the Christians and the latter the Huns. In the French program notes, the composer also explicitly stated that his intention was to have the two principles of "barbarism and civilisation" clash with each other.¹⁴⁵ Liszt utilises a clearly demarcated grouping of people and events into associated themes: theme 1 and 2 as the Huns; theme 3 complex as the Christians; and the climax battle theme as both Huns and Christians. There is a clear replication of Christian themes in the painting's subject matter through music that would be heard in a church. In particular, there are two substantially Christian passages in the music's structure, each with their own connotations and formal parameters associated. The *Crux fidelis* first appears compartmentalised from the rest of the musical texture in bb. 97–106 then 127–135 like a cantus firmus. Later, the chant is weaved into the texture multiple times in fauxbourdon-like passages in bb. 271–274, 284–286, 296–311 which are also marked *dolce religioso*. In b. 271, Liszt explicitly identifies the chant in a footnote in the score. In contrast, the Huns are replicated by their theme (Example 3.1) and their battle theme (Example 3.2) which are more angular, dissonant, and frenetic. The character of their themes could allude to the Huns' nomadic culture but most importantly the themes serve as a counterpoint to the Christians' tonal assurance and martial topics.

Liszt's musical ekphrasis is especially solid in its representation of battle through stormy harmonies, rugged orchestration, martial topics, and the ordering of the themes to reflect a sort of call-and-response musical battle between Huns and Christians. Not only are the identities of the two sides

¹⁴⁵ Liszt, *Symphonische Dichtung Nr. 11 und 12*, 1.

established, but their roles also as two *warring* sides are replicated. Kaulbach depicted this opposition simply by dividing the canvas into ‘left’ and ‘right’ halves. Musically, we hear a call-and-response passage of the Huns’ and Christians’ themes to represent the two warring themes. Bb. 163–246 are the most apparent representation of action happening in a battle. The battle between the Huns and Christians reaches its climactic section in b. 163 in the distant key of F# minor (a tritone away from the previous C minor) as the Huns’ and Christians’ thematic elements are now heard together i.e. the Huns’ theme and Christians’ dotted rhythms. A near-exact reprise a tritone away from the main tonality intensifies the battle. The tritone’s diabolical and unearthly associations could possibly signify the continuing battle in the form of ghosts according to legend. Moreover, Liszt stated in the French program notes that the incorporeal state of the battle and choice of contrasting lights representing the two sides led him to compose “supernatural” music which represented the two sides using two motives.¹⁴⁶ More generally, reprises with modulation imply the passage of time in the same continuing event. This subtle inflection to the tone of the music due to its key has often been paralleled to the use of colour in painting and the changing of light. This climactic passage goes through a number of keys: C minor, F# minor, G minor, and B minor. An extended tail of the Huns’ theme is also introduced in b. 167 with the shrilling runs of high piccolos, flutes, and violins like weapons being swung or arrows flying. In the French program that Liszt wrote for *Hunnenschlacht*, he mentions musical representations of cries of the dead and the clash of weapons.¹⁴⁷

Hunnenschlacht as a musical ekphrasis has some background differences to the other two case studies in this project, namely that it is based on a historical event. Perhaps because of this distinction, the music has a linear trajectory; in other words, a narrative is more explicitly laid out in the music here than in the other works studied. The historical event illustrated in Kaulbach’s mural and Liszt’s symphonic poem is the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields which took place in 451CE with the two opposing sides led by Visigothic King Theodoric I and King Attila of the Huns. On a fundamental level, the idea of a battle lends itself more naturally to the temporal art of music which can convey different moments and stages of the battle from the beginning to the end. However, musical ekphrasis does not necessitate narrative; it is an additional element subsidiary to transposition. Narrative does provide the potential for a more elaborate ekphrasis by virtue of ‘going beyond the canvas’ as Liszt does. Instead of being limited to the contents of the

¹⁴⁶ Liszt, *Symphonische Dichtung Nr. 11 und 12*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ Franz Liszt, *Symphonic Poem, No. 11: Hunnenschlacht*, (London: Ernst Eulenberg, 1976), iii–iv.

painting itself, Liszt employs numerous alterations and supplementations which are outside—yet still relevant to—Kaulbach’s painting.

Where the viewer of the canvas has the ability to jump back and forth, examining now one feature and now another and then returning to the first, the auditor has to experience the work in the flow determined by the composer. Liszt must adapt the ordering of the theme appearances into more like a linear narrative where he first introduces each side separately and only then combines the two into the battle theme which certainly makes more sense for a temporal art. Kaulbach does not need to paint a constant alternation of armies: Huns, Christians, Huns, Christians, etc. to depict a battle. Rather, painting masses of bodies with some markers of identification is sufficient. Liszt on the other hand, must be more aware of which section represents which forces and how to craft a battle theme that successfully represents the clash of the two earlier-introduced sides. In the aftermath of a battle, as shown in the lower half of Kaulbach’s painting, it may be more difficult to distinguish which fallen unit belonged to which group. Despite there being no visible living, galloping horse, Liszt composed a horseback figuration which would make this musical material an alteration of Kaulbach’s work. However, the alteration is reasonable on multiple levels: according to legend, the corporeal battle continued into a spiritual one, and a riding gesture is typical in the nineteenth-century gestural lexicon for battle music. Jonathan Kregor argues that Beethoven’s *Wellingtons Sieg* (1813) “codified characteristics of the genre [battle piece] that many later nineteenth-century composers interested in depicting legendary conflicts in music would draw on and develop.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Liszt’s methods of depicting battle in *Hunnenschlacht* draw on familiar tropes of battle such as “highly differentiated melodies” to identify participants, counterpoint to represent struggle, and arranging the musical material in a narrative manner.¹⁴⁹ Liszt alternates the Huns’ battle theme with the Christians’ fanfare like an antiphonal style in bb. 135–150 and deploys two lines of imitative polyphony in bb. 231–242. In the former, the associated identities of the themes are juxtaposed to evoke two warring sides whereas polyphony creates a complex texture which could be likened to a tumultuous battle.

Liszt’s moulding of the musical structure into a tri-partite form which narrates the battle into the sections: conflict, victory, and affirmation is an alteration of the overall battle depicted in Kaulbach’s painting. In the painting—in fact in any history painting—the detailed events of the historical event are not clearly illustrated since the painting is only able to depict one decisive moment frozen in time over what could be days or weeks of a long battle. Therefore, the beginning,

¹⁴⁸ Kregor, *Program Music*, 24.

¹⁴⁹ Kregor, *Program Music*, 24.

middle, and end of that particular battle are unclear. Art's constraint of having to capture so much history in a single frame impacts the capacity for narrative such that some degree of creative puzzle-piecing-together will need to be done to understand the historical content being depicted. In contrast, Liszt has clearly composed a beginning, middle, and end of the battle. He has technically supplemented a beginning and end but in effect, altered the content being depicted in Kaulbach's painting.

The tri-partite structure of Liszt's work amounts to a reorganisation of the design of Kaulbach's painting. Specifically, what is being given weight has entirely shifted in Liszt's work. There is an alteration in the matter of the cross, with its prevalence considerably expanded significantly in the music. In Kaulbach's mural, the cross is only a small element relative to the entire artwork. It is placed in the top left corner away from the action of the battle. I would argue that, if it were not for the warm yellow light emanating from the cross, it would be easy to miss its presence entirely. By contrast, Liszt's symphonic poem is centred around the cross; he writes the action-packed battle music as if it was a prelude to the Christian victory and celebration. The alteration of Kaulbach's painting to such a Christian-centric symphonic poem is a reflection of Liszt's increasingly evident self-positioning as a Catholic composer, which became particularly evident in the 1860s, further evinced by his post as Kapellmeister in Weimar. A year before *Hunnenschlacht* was composed, the first performance of the *Gran Mass* was met with great success, receiving praise from Monsignor Gustav Hohenlohe and Pope Pius IX.¹⁵⁰ It seemed natural then for Liszt to continue embedding his publicly religious outlook in his music.

Had someone listened to Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht* first before viewing Kaulbach's *Hunnenschlacht*, I suggest that they would be surprised at the minimal visual representations of Christianity. Liszt himself acknowledged that he musically emphasised the Christians in the composition in a letter to Kaulbach's wife on 1 May 1857:

As I already intimated to Kaulbach in Munich, I was led by the musical demands of the material to give proportionately more place to the solar light of Christianity, personified in the Catholic chorale "Crux fidelis," than appears to be the case in the glorious painting, in order thereby to win and pregnantly represent the conclusion of the Victory of the Cross, with which I, both as a Catholic and as a man, could not dispense.

Kindly excuse this somewhat obscure commentary on the two opposing streams of light in which the Huns and the Cross are moving; the performance will make the matter bright and clear—and if Kaulbach finds something to amuse him in this somewhat venturesome mirroring of his fancy I shall be royally delighted.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Eftychia Papanikolaou, "Liszt and Religion," in *Liszt in Context*, ed. Joanne Cormac (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 168–169.

¹⁵¹ Letter no. 183 in Liszt, *Letters of Franz Liszt*, vol 1. *From Paris to Rome: Years of Travel as a Virtuoso*.

The opposing streams of light that Liszt interpreted into music may well be the two themes of the Huns and Romans which are juxtaposed and appear together in the climax of section A (bb. 163–246). The two sources of light in the mural are associated with the leaders of each army: the cross on the left behind the Visigoth King Theodoric emanating a warm yellow light and the pale white light seeming to come from around King Attila of the Huns. It is noteworthy that one light source comes from an object—a symbol which would have resonated with many of Kaulbach and Liszt’s audience—and the other a likely unfamiliar figure from history. The light on the Christians’ side does not come from King Theodoric but the cross which suggests that their belief in a higher power was what brought their victory. The symbol of the Christian cross thought to be a bringer of victory was not new at the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields and a similar divine intervention was believed to have occurred in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE between Roman Emperors Constantine I and Maxentius. Constantine had received a vision of marking the shields of his soldiers with the Chi Rho sign and after he won the battle, he converted to Christianity.

Furthermore, note the more evenly distributed warm light of the cross in Kaulbach’s painting compared to Attila’s cold white light. The cross’s light embraces all of Theodoric’s soldiers whereas Attila’s troops on the farthest right side of the mural are covered by a greenish-blue shadow. In fact, much of the sky on the right side is coloured a deep blue with vague forms of Hun soldiers. A green-blue hue might have had associations with sickness as well as what Liszt mentioned in the preface, that Attila was clothed “with a greenish, livid and cadaverous aura, like an unwholesome deed.”¹⁵² The sickly aura that Liszt remarks on is the yellow-green haze over the sky and indeed, Goethe himself in *Theory of Colours* makes the same association with that specific yellow hue tinged with a bit of green. He writes, “[yellow] is extremely liable to contamination, and produces a very disagreeable effect if it is sullied, or in some degree tends to the *minus* [cool colours] side. Thus, the colour of sulphur, which inclines to green, has a something unpleasant in it.”¹⁵³

The emphatic alteration of the cross’s significance in the symphonic poem would later affect critics’ reviews of the music. In a letter from the Villa d’Este-Tivoli to Franz Brendel dated 21 July 1865, the composer mentioned feeling oppressed by the way his works had been listened to in recent years.

[...] the Christian significance of Kaulbach’s picture—as represented in the “Chorale”—seemed to me a stumbling-block in the way of favorable criticism. Kaulbach had indeed suggested this interpretation by having thrown a special light upon the cross...yet there are neither mendicant friars nor bishops in the picture...and, besides, at the time of the “Battle of the Huns” the organ

¹⁵² Liszt, *Symphonic Poem, No. 11: Hunnenschlacht*, v.

¹⁵³ Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, par. 770.

was not yet invented! This last sweeping argument was triumphantly hurled at me in Weimar by the infallible censors. Since then I have hesitated to allow the work to be performed, and have remained satisfied with sending Kaulbach the arrangement for 2 pianofortes.¹⁵⁴

On multiple occasions Liszt referenced the peculiar lighting in Kaulbach's work which influenced his decision to emphasise Christianity. In addition to Liszt's devout beliefs, it seems that it was the formal treatment of lighting that encouraged him to make such a decision. In other words, it was precisely this particular visual stimulus that moved Liszt to make a musical ekphrasis instead of a general idea of the battle at the Catalaunian Fields.

When dealing with programmatic music that is based on another work of art, I argue that there is a good amount of liberty in how 'accurately' the composer treats the source inspiration. In Chapter 1, I described four transmedialising functions which were replication, alteration, supplementation, and exclusion. Naturally, alteration and supplementation are usually markers of the composer having taken liberties. In the conclusion of his analysis of Strauss's *Don Juan*, Hepokoski argues that rarely is a composer limited to the paratext they have chosen for themselves, if ever.

That all of the above [the entire symphonic poem] suggests things beyond the thirty-two lines of Lenau selected by Strauss (in fact, beyond the actual content of the entire Lenau poem or the Don Juan tradition) is obvious. This need not invalidate the poetic idea proposed here. Rather, it raises the issue of whether a musical work may go beyond the concreteness of its avowed program – whether a piece can be in dialogue with its paratext rather than remaining bound to it. The point, ultimately, lies not so much in the verifiability of my programmatic suggestions (short of discovering a note from Strauss mapping out the 'secret program' of *Don Juan*, how could one be certain of the details?) than in the exercise itself.¹⁵⁵

In the musical ekphrasis of *Hunnenschlacht*, Liszt supplemented Kaulbach's painting with a beginning and ending section and, in the process, skewed the focus of the original painting. Due to Liszt's personal favouring of Christianity, the musical work devotes vastly more time to Christian themes than is apparent in Kaulbach's painting. Lastly, this work exemplifies the ways in which battle can be represented and more generally conflict between two sides when we are provided with only one chronological timeline instead of a canvas that can be divided into two clear halves.

¹⁵⁴ Letter no. 41 in Franz Liszt, *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache, vol. 2. *From Rome to the End* (Online: Project Gutenberg, 2003), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3750>

¹⁵⁵ Hepokoski, "Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?" 162.

Chapter 4

Zichy-Liszt's *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*

Zichy and *Du berceau jusqu'au cercueil*

Mihály Zichy (15 October 1827 Zala, Hungary – 28 February 1906 St Petersburg, Russia) was a Hungarian painter and graphic illustrator who spent a significant part of his career in Paris and Russia. Zichy's first art teacher was Jacobo Marastoni in Budapest and in 1843 he began taking private drawing lessons from Ferdinand-Georg Waldmüller, Professor of painting at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. He enjoyed widespread popularity during his lifetime, not only in his homeland, but also in Central Europe more generally and Russia. In Hungary, several books with his illustrations were published and in Russia, his work was often covered by the press. After his death, Zichy was remembered less frequently but on the 100th anniversary of his birth in 1927, interest in his work was revived in Hungary leading to the publication of two books dedicated to his art and a later exhibition of his works in 1952.¹⁵⁶

According to Liliya Aleshina, Zichy was “a virtuoso draughtsman” and “less known as a painter”.¹⁵⁷ He moved to St Petersburg in 1847 after a trip to Italy and in 1853 created a cycle of pencil sketches and watercolour paintings of everyday urban life in the Russian capital. Aleshina argues that these sketches were “a preparatory stage on the path of Zichy's mastery of a genre of everyday drawing that was new to him.”¹⁵⁸ She notes the closeness of the figures to the foreground, the measured poses deliberately chosen by the artist, and the framing of each scene like a slice of life which evoked a sense of intimacy. His subjects included peddlers, passengers waiting for cabs, delivery boys, window washers, and more. There was a multiplicity to these sketches as figures would reappear in other sketches and become recognisable characters in different settings. Zichy drew these St Petersburg sketches on location to capture the accuracy of person and pose. In the late 1850s, Zichy began working with lithography as a way of expanding viewership whilst staying within the genre of graphic art.

¹⁵⁶ Liliya Stepanovna Aleshina, *Mihály Zichy* (Moscow: Fine Art, 1975), 5.

¹⁵⁷ “виртуозный рисовальщик” and “Менее известен Зичи как живописец”. Aleshina, *Mihály Zichy*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ “тех его работах, которые были как бы подготовительным этапом на пути овладения Зичи новым для него жанром бытового рисунка.” Aleshina, *Mihály Zichy*, 17.

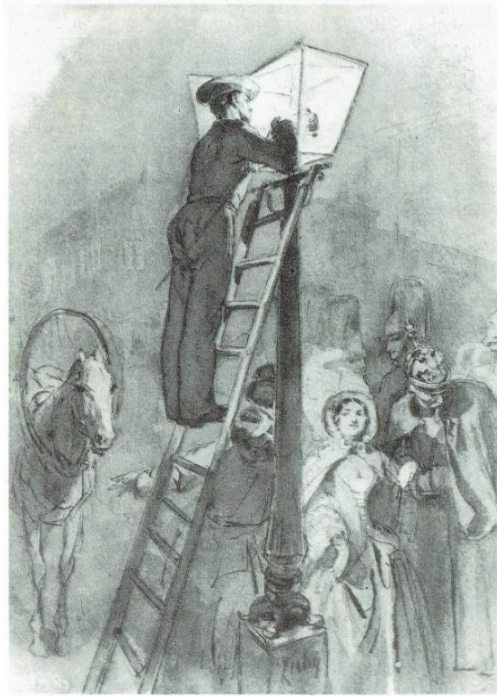


Figure 4.1 *Street with people walking and a lamplighter* (1853–1854).¹⁵⁹



Figure 4.2 *Merchant family* (1853–1854).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Aleshina, *Mihály Zichy*, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Aleshina, *Mihály Zichy*, 22.

Zichy was born into a noble family and held the title of count. In 1881, he returned to his family's home estate in Zala, Hungary. (He is not to be confused with Count Géza Zichy—another friend of Liszt's, and a composer and one-armed pianist, who was a distant relative and also from the same noble house.) In Zala, Mihály Zichy was inspired by the nation's pride in Liszt and conceived a large-scale project that would be the precursor to *Du berceau jusqu'au cercueil*. The initial large-scale project was a series of paintings on a horizontal scroll which depicted the significance of music in a person's life from the cradle to the grave, although the current whereabouts of this scroll is unknown.¹⁶¹ The medium of a single continuous scroll gave the narrative experience of seeing a person's life unfold. When unfurled, the scenes would actually appear chronologically from right to left (instead of left to right) but would naturally be viewed as such when unrolling the scroll. The scenes were painted like an epic “but also in a fresco-like manner” because Zichy intended the scroll's lengthy medium to be a plan for a concert hall frieze.¹⁶² In total, Zichy created a sketch for the scroll and the scroll itself but it is unknown if the concert hall frieze was realised. Later, it is Zichy's smaller drawing derived off the scroll (Figure 4.3) that would inspire Liszt to compose his symphonic poem, *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*.

Little is known about Zichy and Liszt's friendship due to the paucity of records of their interactions. Ilona Berkovits writes that Zichy and Liszt met in Vienna in April 1881. Indeed, the drawing that Zichy gifted to Liszt (not the sketch for the large-scale project) is dated 6 April 1881. In a letter Liszt wrote to Zichy just six days after the drawing was completed, he thanks the artist for the gift and expresses his intent to set it to music:

Celebrated Artist!

You have given me a magnificent gift. Your drawing about the genius of music is a miraculous symphony. I am trying to set it to music and I shall offer it to you. Please accept my heartfelt and profound esteem.

F. Liszt

Vienna, 12 April 1881¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Liszt never saw the scroll nor the sketch of the scroll. A detailed description of each scene in the scroll is available in Ilona Berkovits, *Zichy Mihály Élete és Munkássága (1827–1906)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964), 206. Additionally, the sketch for this larger project (not the one on the cover of Liszt's sheet music) was previously owned by László Arany, and then came into the ownership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from the legacy of Géza Vojnovich.

¹⁶² Berkovits, *Zichy Mihály*, 205.

¹⁶³ The original letter is in French; translated into English in Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, 70. Zichy also wrote home to Zala of his meeting with Liszt and according to Berkovits (207n891), the Zichy Museum in Zala has Zichy's letter preserved.

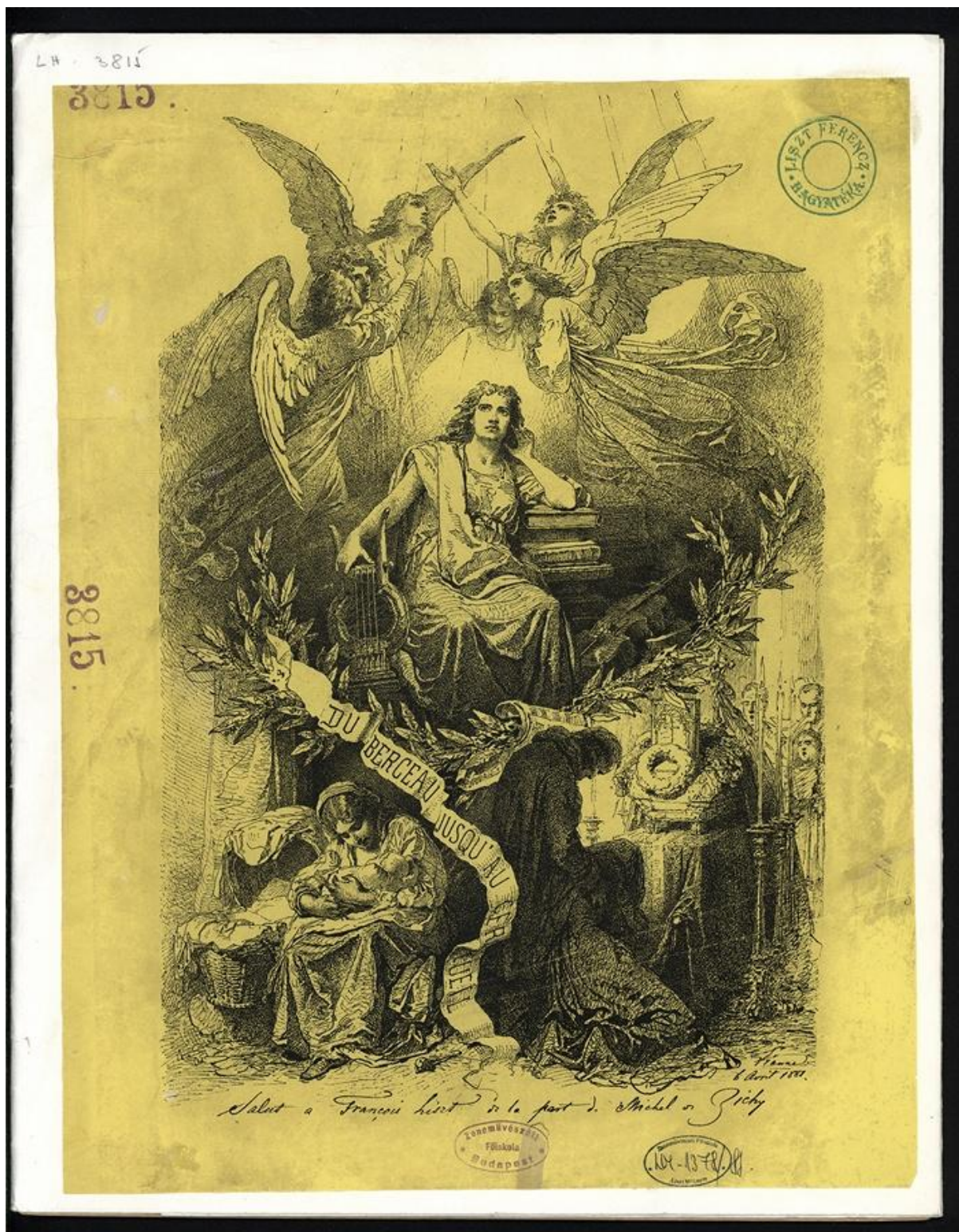


Figure 4.3 An engraved copy of the pen and ink drawing gifted from Zichy to Liszt. This version is included on the title page of the piano 4-hands score of Liszt's *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* and a first edition copy is held in the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. The yellow colour of the page is likely due to aging and not a deliberate choice on Zichy's part.

Some historians claim the large-scale scroll was made for Liszt and that Zichy personally presented it to him but there is no evidence for this: in fact, it is uncertain whether Liszt ever saw the scroll or a copy of it.¹⁶⁴

Visual Analysis

Zichy's drawing for Liszt is divided into three unequal sections. The bottom left and right corners are a straightforward representation of the drawing's title: cradle and casket. To the left is a mother holding a baby in her arms with a cradle on the left side. The mother's huddled form replicates the cradle's shape, her upper body echoing the hood and her legs the base of the cradle. To the right is a funeral-mass scene, centred on a casket with a wreath and what is presumably the Bible on top. Rows of tall standing candles line the sides of the casket, the table which holds the casket is draped with a patterned cloth and there are garlands hanging on the casket. There are two hunched figures seen mourning with their backs turned to the viewer, perhaps a child or children of the deceased. Alternatively, Berkovits has suggested the casket might be a baby's because of its smaller size and considering the foreshortening (perspective and angle which alters the overall shape of a drawn object), the casket as laid on top of the table does seem too small to be an adult's. However, depicting a casket of a baby is counterintuitive to the aim of Zichy's scroll project so I posit that the foreshortening in the funeral scene is slightly misleading. Behind the casket is a group of male choristers in the act of singing with their O-shaped mouths.

While the bottom two sections of the drawing are straightforward representations of the drawing's title, the upper middle section is not linked in any obvious way to the title and has a more complex relationship to the two bottom scenes. The large central figure in the drawing seems to be non-human. Six angels are flocking above her, some with heads lifted and outstretched arms reaching up as if praising a higher being. These angels are the most dynamic figures in the drawing. They illustrate Cartier-Bresson's *decisive moment*: the moment that provides the best suggestion for what happened before and what is going to happen after the frozen moment, thus elevating a static image's potential for rhythm and movement. Zichy's experience in drawing from live scenes in Russia likely trained him in the skills of observing live figures. The central figure's placement near the angels as well as the middle axis of the drawing demonstrates her superhuman status. Her garb is akin to a toga that Classical figures are depicted wearing. From this we can infer she is a mythological figure or more generally a learned person, something further suggested by the stack

¹⁶⁴ Berkovits, *Zichy Mihály*, 205–207 and Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, 70.

of folios on which she rests her left arm. She performs what might be a listening gesture with her left hand as if listen to the words or songs of the angels; conversely, it might just be a simple laid-back pose, further suggesting her godly status. If the hearing gesture looks ambiguous, the items around her are clear musical signs. Her right hand rests on a lyre, there is a furled music score near her feet, and a violin or other string instrument near the bottom right of her frame. The figure might be one of the nine canonical muses but since there is no one definitive mythology of the muses, it is difficult to unambiguously identify Zichy's hypothetical muse just by the items around her; she is likely a generic depiction of a goddess of music with an amalgamation of godly symbols. Her relation to the rest of the drawing is more cryptic: she might be the auditor or overlooker of the course of life that will be lived or some other higher supernatural figure.

Ultimately there are numerous symbols for 'light' in the top half of the drawing where Classical Apollonian and Christian iconography collide. The lyre and the olive leaves framing the goddess's scene are distinctly Classical whereas the winged angels with flowing robes are obviously Christian. The white space behind the goddess's head, which blends into the dress of one of the angels, also creates a halo effect as if depicting her as a saint. Knowing the artist's intention for the multi-scenic scroll project helps to establish what the middle section of this smaller drawing represents i.e. a characterisation of Music who overlooks a person's life from the cradle to the casket.

There are three different light sources in the drawing, each scene having its own but overall there is a gradual increase in shading from the centre of the drawing expanding outwards. The darker areas serve as boundaries between the three scenes, with the olive branches, banner, and scroll acting as the boundary lines. The result of this central weight of shading is three distinct light areas at three corners of the drawing that create a three-spot composition which extend to a triangle composition. The three bright points of interest are the mythological figure on top, the mother and baby, and the front of the casket. A triangle composition is possible by a combination of linear means (actual drawn lines or lines imagined by the forms of the objects), a triangular-shaped mass, and/or three distinct spots which represent the vertices of a triangle.

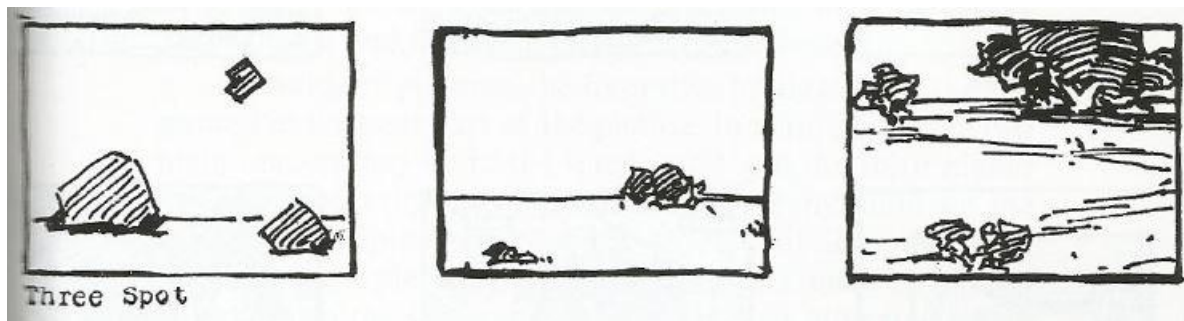


Figure 4.4 Payne's archetype of a three-spot composition.¹⁶⁵

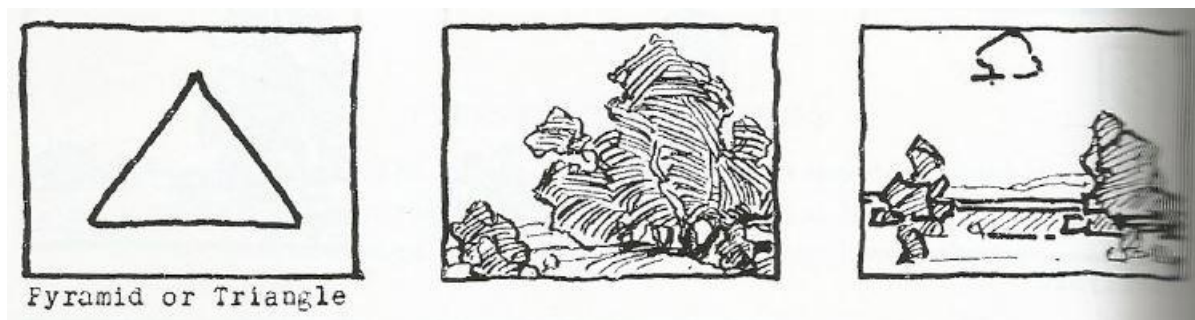


Figure 4.5 Payne's archetype of a pyramid or triangle composition.¹⁶⁶

Payne says:

in deliberately using the three spot idea as a form of composition, the eye will naturally gravitate first to the three largest masses. These form the chief stem of the arrangement. When the three main "spottings" of values are once placed so that good balance is achieved, the lesser values and contrasts should merely strengthen or maintain this balance in its larger sense.¹⁶⁷

In the middle square in Figure 4.4, the horizon line is counted as a point of interest. A triangular composition (Figure 4.5) exudes stability in the way that its three vertices are spread out over the canvas and indeed, the aim of a three-spot composition is to establish balance. Payne states that this composition is more a natural law of vision than an aesthetic creation. If two spots are placed unequally on a space, "place a third mass and the observation becomes better."¹⁶⁸ In Zichy's drawing, a triangle is formed by three items to focus on instead of imaginary lines or a triangle-shaped mass.

¹⁶⁵ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 119.

¹⁶⁶ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 118.

¹⁶⁷ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 121.

¹⁶⁸ Payne, *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, 121.

To enhance the three-spot composition Zichy deploys light and shade to create focal points within the clearly-sectioned scenes. Wherever there is light, that is an important part of the drawing. The straightforward placement of both goddess and mother in the foreground make them easily noticeable but the scene with the casket displays more subtle foregrounding. Despite the comparatively larger size of the couple and their placement in the foreground, the contrast created by the bright lighting on the casket directs our attention to this middleground item first. In fact, one might not even notice the couple to start with since their silhouettes subtly blend into the goddess's draped dress. The simple outlines of the silhouettes markedly contrast to the ornateness of the decorated casket too.

The drawing also demonstrates Zichy's skill as a draughtsman. With different art mediums come a different set of skills required to utilize the medium of the art effectively. Drawing is primarily concerned with marking lines onto a plane surface using a dry or wet medium—in this case wet (pen and ink)—and is arguably the simplest form of art. Zichy's linework is dominated by hatching, a technique whereby parallel lines are condensed in an area to create the illusion of 3D form. Cross-hatching is an intensified version of hatching where perpendicular sets of lines intersect with the previous hatching to darken the shading. This technique is often combined with stippling where the density of dots is used to represent shade and create form as well.

Liszt and *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*

Over the course of 1881–1882, Liszt composed multiple arrangements of his musical ekphrasis of Zichy's drawing. In 1881 he produced a version for solo piano (S. 512) and then arranged it again for piano 4 hands (S. 598). The symphonic poem (S. 107), which is the version considered here, was finished later in 1882 and he made further edits to it before publishing it in 1883. All of these were published in 1883 by Bote & Bock in Berlin. The first movement was also arranged for 4 violins by Liszt in 1881 (S. 133) but this version is lost.

On 26 June 1881, Liszt reported to Carolyne that he had been working on the orchestration of *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*:

Perhaps you have read in some newspaper that Michel Zichy (some sort of cousin of my friend Géza Zichy) presented me with a pretty drawing representing music, surrounded by several angelic figures, etc. At the bottom is the inscription "from cradle to grave." In my note to Zichy thanking him, I told him that the drawing will serve as a program for a musical composition, which I have written for piano, but not yet orchestrated. I am not displeased at all with the motives; I will perhaps develop them in writing the score, despite my growing antipathy to polyphonic obesities, to which my leanness [sparse musical texture] hardly adapts itself. To express the Ideal in music, what a fine

dream! I will pursue it. Beethoven and other grand masters, including our friend Berlioz, have attained it occasionally...¹⁶⁹

Musical Overview

Liszt's symphonic poem is divided into three movements:

- I. *Die Wiege* (The cradle)
- II. *Der Kampf um's Dasein* (The struggle for existence)
- III. *Zum Grabe: Die Wiege des zukünftigen Lebens* (To the grave: The cradle of the future life)

There are four main themes in the work which reappear throughout:

1. Cradle theme bb. 1–4 and 17–20 (Examples 4.1 and 4.2)
2. Struggle theme bb. 129–136 (Example 4.3)
3. Hymn theme bb. 149–156 (Example 4.4)

Patrick Boenke argues that there are traces of a larger sonata structure at play which correspond to each of Liszt's movements: the first movement as exposition, second movement as development, and third movement as recapitulation.¹⁷⁰ However, I argue that these relations are abstract and vague at best because they do not actively engage with what makes an exposition an exposition (two contrasting themes, a modulatory journey, and more) nor with the typical thematic and tonal characteristics of the other sections of a sonata form. At best, there is a large-scale ABA' structure based on the repetition of materials where each letter represents a movement.¹⁷¹

All the themes are redeployed throughout the work multiple times with slight variations as the timeline of the fictional life from cradle to grave progresses. No substantially new material appears in the third movement: the themes from the first and second movements are redeployed in altered forms, much like Liszt's manipulation of the first (Faust) and second (Gretchen) movement themes in the third (Mephistopheles) movement in his *Faust Symphony*. The brief statements of seemingly 'new' material are, in fact, topical derivations from previous themes but are noticeably different pitch- and rhythm-wise. The following table and paragraphs outline the main musical events in the work to orient the subsequent ekphrastic analysis.

¹⁶⁹ Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 187.

¹⁷⁰ Patrick Boenke, "Collapse and Dismantlement: On Form and Dramaturgy in Liszt's Late Symphonic Poem 'From the Cradle to the Grave,'" *Studia Musicologica* 54, no. 4 (2013): 435.

¹⁷¹ Jürgen Schläder, "Der schöne Traum vom Ideal: Die künstlerische Konzeption in Franz Liszts letzter Symphonischen Dichtung," *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft [Programm Musik: Studien zu Begriff und Geschichte einer umstrittenen Gattung]* 6 (1983): 51.

Bars	Section	Key
First movement		
1–8	Tonally ambiguous cradle theme swaying between E and G, and a response in 3rds, always missing the 5 th chordal note	Implied C
9–12	Slight chromatic meandering with leading tones to A and G	Implied C or a
13–24	The second half of the cradle theme with more constant rocking movement than bb. 1–8. The first C major triad (in first inversion) is heard in b. 17.	C
25–41	Chromatic modifications of the cradle theme and thinning out of texture. Bb. 36–41 feature only one violin line.	Chromatic
42–50	Transition passage into C major proper. The music modulates using the common tone of B (initially as V of E, becoming the leading note in C).	V of E
51–61	C major in root position heard for the first time at b. 51. Flowering of the cradle theme, new distinctive arpeggio texture in the flute.	C
64–76	Gradual chromatic rises of the cradle theme and arpeggio gesture. The music centred around D [#] (b. 71) is reinterpreted into E _b at b. 73	Centred around B → C → D [#] → reinterpreted into E _b → V of D _b
77–87	Variation of the arpeggio gesture with further tonal explorations. A _b is reinterpreted into G [#] to lead into the tonal area of A in bb. 80–81.	D _b → A
88–99	Descending 3rds that act like a concluding passage for the previous section.	f [#]
100–112	Chromatically altered cradle theme with chordal decorations; goes through a number of harmonies with prepared dissonances, anchored around B.	Chromatic, implied B
113–128	Fragmenting of the cradle theme to just the head of the rocking gesture (dotted minim and crotchet). A minor is implied in bb. 113–117 but the repetition of E in the viola afterwards suggests E minor as the tonal centre.	Implied a or e
Second movement		
129–148	Struggle theme. In bb. 141–148, there is a break from the previous texture, now with the theme heard in call-and-response between the low strings and high woodwinds. This passage likely acts as a smoothing out of the textural and affective shift into the subsequent section.	Ambiguous
149–167	Hymn theme. It gradually increases in textural layers and volume.	D _b
168–173	The hymn theme is heard in conflict with the struggle theme which has now appeared in the texture (horns). The two themes clash in dissonance and keep getting louder.	D _b

Bars	Section	Key
174–193	Reprise of bb. 129–148 but a tone higher.	Ambiguous
194–212	Reprise of bb. 149–167 but a tone higher.	E \flat
213–233	Clashing of the struggle and hymn themes.	E \flat
234–249	Break in the texture where the two themes are heard independently of each other like a call and response.	Implied a minor
250–261	New trumpet fanfare in B heard above the struggle theme.	B
262–269	Collapse and excess	Ambiguous
270–281	Fading away on timpani rolls and the rhythm of the struggle theme.	Ambiguous, D \sharp as centre pitch
Third movement		
282 – 312	Grief theme. Bars 300–312 feature an augmentation of the first half of the grief theme.	Ambiguous, tritone intervals
313–336	Transformed cradle theme.	Diminished 7ths
337–346	Meandering chromatic lines, transitory passage ending in Ab7 third inversion.	Chromatic \rightarrow A \flat 7
347–357	Reprise of bb. 77–87 from the first movement.	D \flat \rightarrow A
358–377	Reprise of bb. 88–99 and 113–128 without the intermediary section of chromatic chords.	f \sharp \rightarrow a
378–404	Non-exact reprise of hymn theme sections from the second movement; not getting louder and texturally more dense but just getting higher.	C
405–417	Bars 405–409 is a transition passage that sets up the homophonic texture and meditative mood. Bars 410–417 has a modal chorale theme derived from the hymn theme.	D Dorian
418–425	Distant horn fanfares set up the reprise of the thematic clash that occurred in the second movement.	E \flat \rightarrow D \flat
426–429	Brief appearance of the struggle theme.	Implied V of e
430–441	Quasi-reprise of bb. 270–281 with the fading away of the music on short, quiet notes.	Ambiguous
442–476	Reprise of the cradle theme, with slightly wider rocking intervals towards the end of the piece.	B \rightarrow C \sharp , ending on the 5 th degree (G \sharp)

Table 4.1 The structure and musical events in Liszt's *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*.

The beginning of the work, I suggest, does not so much represent the cradle proper as it does pre-birth in the timeline of life; in other words, the music is representing “*Vor der Wiege*” (before the cradle), not “*Von der Wiege*”. Initially, the cradle theme is played in ambiguous thirds hinting at both C major and A minor. I argue that birth proper happens at b. 51 when a C major triad in root position is heard for the first time. In bb. 51–61 flute arpeggios that float upwards introduce a

distinctive texture after all the cradle-rocking in the strings. After the cradle theme flowers into life (bb. 51ff), the music fades away and in bb. 100–111 a chromatic progression appears which might contain the seeds of the dissonant version of the cradle theme to come later in the third movement (bb. 312ff).

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

con sord.

p

con sord.

p

con sord.

p

Example 4.1 The first half of the cradle theme, bb. 1–4.

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

dolce

dolce

sempre legato e dolce

Example 4.2 The second half of the cradle theme, bb. 17–20.

The second movement showcases a dialogue between two themes battling for dominance, introduced separately at first, then clashing at the same time. The start of the movement (bb. 129ff) is marked *Agitato rapido* and the tempo is faster than before. The struggle theme is marked *violente, fortissimo*, and features a distinct staccato, accented, and triplet rhythm at the end of it. The theme does not have a clear key. In bb. 149–173, the contrasting hymn section has a written key change into D \flat . This new theme (bb. 149–156) has the topical markers of a hymn: homorhythmic movement of the parts, the use of descants, and the expressive direction *nobilimente cantando* (nobly singing) in the woodwinds. The hymn theme continues to grow in power, getting louder and higher (bb. 164–172); this coincides with the rhythm of the struggle theme, shorn of its characteristic intervals, sneakily appearing in the texture (bb. 168–172) through the brass.

Violins 1
ff violente

Violins 2
ff violente

Violas
ff violente

sempre ff

sempre ff

sempre ff

Example 4.3 The struggle theme, bb. 129–136.

mf nobilmente cantando

Example 4.4 The hymn theme, bb. 149–156.

Afterwards, there is a reprise of the struggle section but a tone higher (bb. 174–193) and similarly, the hymn section reappears a tone higher (bb. 194–217). The struggle theme once more finds its way into the hymn territory; this time, the clash of hymn and struggle is more extensive (bb. 213–249). In bb. 250–261, a new trumpet fanfare in B major is heard above the struggle rhythm in cellos, trombones, and other instruments, and the music then collapses (bb. 262–269). The music fades away into the rhythm of the struggle theme, the movement ending with a quiet timpani roll and short punctuated beats, perhaps like a dying heartbeat.

The third movement features reprises and transformations of past themes. It opens with the head of the struggle theme (first five notes) but with the first interval expanded to a tritone and the

theme shorn of its rising repeated-note conclusion (bb. 282–286). In bb. 313–332, we hear a chromatic transformation of the cradle theme from the first movement (same rhythm and general contour as bb. 17–20), now harshly dissonant and *forte*. The sonority in these four statements of the theme might be classified as a diminished 7th or half diminished 7th depending on which alternating note (swaying 2nds) in the cradle theme is regarded as the chordal tone and which the neighbour note. For example, bb. 313–316 are either sounding an (enharmonic) F diminished 7 or F half diminished 7.

Afterwards, a moment of reprieve as a section of the first movement is reprised with its pure and heavenly soundscape retained (bb. 347–364, reprise of bb. 77–94). Next, the hymn theme from the second movement the struggle theme's interjections is deployed (bb. 378–409), further diminishing the struggle theme's presence in the third movement thus far. In bb. 410–417, a new modal chorale theme based on the hymn theme (bb. 149–156) is deployed but does not reappear. I posit that the added modality is significant with regard to the program as the previously eschatological hymn theme—which was tonal—is now heading towards a modal soundscape of afterlife which will have ekphrastic implications. A sequence of distant horn fanfares in bb. 418–425 also recalls an earlier fanfare topic (bb. 250–261) but now subdued. Afterwards, the struggle theme makes a brief reappearance in bb. 426–429 with its original intervals but without the triplet rhythm, creating a more subdued and weak character. Overall, the third movement sees the return of previous themes and topics but reharmonised and recomposed.

What follows from bar 442 might be considered the coda and afterlife proper as the music takes on an even more serene atmosphere. In bb. 444–450, we hear the second half of the cradle theme (the rocking 2nds from bb. 3–4). The notes are a semitone higher than on their initial appearance in the first movement, perhaps signifying an enlightened state after going through the struggles of life. Note also the written poly-key change into four sharps (violins, cellos, basses) and seven sharps (flute, oboe, clarinet in A, viola). Next, the rocking 3rds of the cradle theme return in bb. 452–476 as a sort of bookend to the symphonic poem, now with more freedom to take bigger (musical) leaps away from the shackles of life. The return of the cradle theme at the end of the work is a fitting musical representation of the afterlife i.e. the cradle of life to come that Liszt suggested.

Ekphrastic Analysis

There are numerous transmedialising functions intertwined with one another in *Von der Wiege* and at the crux of it is Liszt's treatment of the goddess figure in the drawing. Overall, there are strong semiotic replications of the cradle and the afterlife symbols in the form of the angels and funeral

mass choir. Secondly, there is a wholesale alteration of the goddess figure's form and function in the symphonic poem.

Liszt's musical themes are more cryptic than Zichy's straightforward visual depictions of a cradle and casket. There is a clear replication of the cradle as the rocking theme introduced at the very beginning. There is not, however, a casket—or grave, as Liszt would have it—theme, in effect excluding the visual representation of the casket in this musical ekphrasis. There is a fitting replication of the lyre via the harp passages in the first movement which also aligns with the instrument's delicate and heavenly associations. The harp appears during the flowering of the cradle theme into life proper (bb. 61–86) and is aptly paired with the high registers of the flute. Although Zichy's drawing contains no colour, the harp and flute's tone colours matched together create a very suitable palette to represent the purity of infancy. Simply from the drawing on a sheet of paper, purity from the lack of colour might be inferred. Patrick Boenke observed that the symphonic poem has a “chamber music-like orchestration as well as the lack of grand musical gestures that had been obligatory earlier in his [Liszt's] career.”¹⁷² On one hand the musical fingerprints align with Liszt's late style but the nature of the drawing as a personal gift from Zichy, the small scale of the artwork, and the informal pen-and-ink medium, may have also inclined Liszt to compose the symphonic poem in the intimate style he did. The lack of a grand celebratory telos also makes sense considering the drawing's more reflective and spiritual subject matter.

There is no movement *solely dedicated* to the goddess which is in contrast to how he has treated the other two scenes (cradle and casket) in the drawing. There is however a theme associated with her: the hymn theme which is a replication of the angelic connotations of the goddess figure. The theme has consonant harmonies and descants and concentrated woodwind timbres. An important affective quality is its forced sound which arises from the gradual *crescendos* and rising tempo, illustrating that the hymn is under pressure to overcome the struggle theme.

There is a crucial functional difference in how Liszt has treated the goddess in his symphonic poem in contrast to his treatment of the cradle and casket and it has to do with time. I argue that the struggle theme is a supplementation by Liszt. More broadly, there is a supplementation through the addition of an intervening section between the cradle and casket i.e. life itself. By inserting this middle movement, it is as if Liszt has displaced the goddess's middle placement in the drawing and moved her elsewhere whilst a new entity (the struggle for life) takes up the middle position of the visual work's structure. I suggest that Liszt has made the goddess not as perceptible as the cradle and casket are to the viewer. Essentially, Zichy's cradle and casket scenes exist in one linear timeline

¹⁷² Boenke, “Collapse and Dismantlement,” 434.

but the goddess is not part of that timeline, instead overlooking the person's life and appearing when she wishes (as she does through the hymn theme). The means of representing separate realms of time seems to be easier in visual art than it is in music, restricted as it is by its unfolding in a single temporal continuum.¹⁷³ Different scenes can be clearly demarcated by panels and the passing of time can be inferred by the changes between these panels that mimic similar experiences of the passing of time in real life. In music, however, the composer is relegated to one plane of time. The music might be materially episodic or be partitioned by movements but it is particularly difficult to not hear the previous bars as anything but the past in the musical narrative. In other words, musical narrative tends to progress in a linear and chronological manner. Therefore, Zichy's goddess who exists outside of the linear timeline of progression (towards the casket) had to be assimilated by Liszt into a linear musical progression.

By creating semantic content for a middle movement with no precedent in the visual work, Liszt is in effect drawing a narrative of his own from a starting point (the cradle) to an end point (the grave). Here we see an echo of something Liszt did in *Hunnenschlacht*: he creates a linear narrative out of a non-linear image. Admittedly the title of "from cradle to grave" already incentivizes a trajectory more than simply "battle of the Huns" but with regard to the drawing itself, we are only given a starting point and end point to which Liszt felt the need to supplement a middle point. Kaulbach's painting on the other hand, depicts precisely this middle point rather than the start or the end.

In Liszt's rendition, trajectory (from birth to death) and cycles (life after death) coexist in the journey from cradle to grave. Perhaps they can exist because there is no telos (i.e. end goal), only momentum. Schläder also argues that the work's narrative is more circular than teleological due to the composer's shifted focus towards the middle movement. This shift in focus likely refers to the aforementioned supplementation of a "struggle for life" movement and its spatial discrepancy with the goddess's placement in the middle i.e., the second movement 'should have' been about the goddess. Schläder says, "the path to be covered seems more important than the goal, or at least equally important. ... The composer's 'narrative' represented by three movement headings is therefore not goal-oriented, but circular or spiral."¹⁷⁴ Schläder argues that the circular narrative of the symphonic poem is due to the focus on living life than a certain goal to be achieved through living one's life. The lack of a goal could be connoted in the music through the recycling of all the themes encountered thus far in the third movement; there is no distinctly new theme. Secondly,

¹⁷³ Carolyn Abbate famously claimed that "music seems not to 'have a past tense,'" in Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52.

¹⁷⁴ Schläder, "Der schöne Traum vom Ideal," 50–51.

there is no particularly climactic point in what is supposed to be the finale; instead, the music deliberately mellows out.¹⁷⁵ In terms of content, Zichy's drawing and its title itself certainly convey telos as opposed to cycles. However, I posit that visual composition and artistic medium may have had an impact in causing the sense of circularity that comes out of Liszt's symphonic poem. Had Liszt seen Zichy's linear scroll with fifteen detailed scenes of a lifetime lived instead of the smaller drawing with a three-spot, almost circular composition, would the composer still have altered the journey into a cyclic one? Although the three-spot composition would have to a degree influenced Liszt's creative choices, I suggest that the absence of the scroll is theoretically a bigger cause. Ultimately, I maintain that form affects the musical ekphrasis as much as content does.

We assume that the hypothetical protagonist of the symphonic poem has died by the end of the second movement and the theme at the start of the third movement (entitled 'the grave', let it not be forgotten) is an offshoot of the cradle theme. The performance expressions *dolente* and *espressivo dolente assai* are emphatically stated in the opening of the third movement. Liszt's redeployment of the cradle theme and later repurposing into an afterlife representation has significant ekphrastic consequences. In a literal sense, both at the start and end of life, the person is in a 'bed' of sorts. Physically and mentally, there is growth and decay at the respective ends of life like a revisiting of infantility at old age. As Shakespeare would say in *As You Like It*, the seventh and final age of man is "second childishness." Hence it is fitting for the music to have this mirror-like construction. Just as the opening of the first movement is not yet life but the space before the start of life (*Vor der Wiege*), so too after death is the space before the start of the afterlife that Liszt alluded to and added to Zichy's title in the title of the third movement: "To the grave, the cradle of the future life".

Liszt's musical structure exhibits a circularity that is an alteration of Zichy's depicted telos of cradle to casket. Life, as Liszt interprets it in this symphonic poem, can be heard through the loosely palindromic deployment of themes which in turn seems to connect the beginning and end of the symphonic poem. There is a distinct section of the first movement that is nearly identical to a section in the third movement: bb. 347–364 is parallel to bb. 77–94. The ambiguous key areas of B and C# at the very end (442ff) are also each a semitone apart from C, the implied key at the beginning of the work. A modal chorale theme is also introduced in bb. 410–415 like a combination of the texture and wave-like contour of the earlier hymn theme except this theme arching over a longer course of time. It is melodically distinct but the topical qualities are similar. The modal harmonies and homophonic texture might suggest religious music of the Middle Ages.

¹⁷⁵ Liszt's late style may well be a contributing factor to this circularity and absence of climactic telos in his music too. Cf. Boenke, "Collapse and Dismantlement," 431–442.

On the one hand the religious topic is apt for Zichy's depiction of a funeral mass but on the other, deploying modality for this ending part of the work also supports the cyclical view of life.

The idea of struggle is illustrated in the second movement through thematic reprise and modulation. In *Von der Wiege*, bar 174ff is a reprise of bar 129ff a whole tone higher. A clear tonal area is absent in both appearances of the struggle theme but an implied key is identifiable in the hymn theme. Reprising at a higher transposition is an apt musical representation of struggle, especially intensifying struggle. Psychoanalytically, this can be read as a repetition compulsion where one tries to recreate history in order to process a traumatic event and perhaps attempt to 'fix' the past, albeit most of the time failing to do so.¹⁷⁶ It could alternatively be a comment on human progress more generally: we die, but hopefully our achievements are the starting point for others to build on. Repeating the past in hopes for a better future (albeit most of the time failing in this) is a suitable representation of the existential struggle for existence. The more explicit struggle that we hear is the musical battle between chorale and struggle themes.

The lack of an apotheosis in such a spiritual and programmatically rich symphonic poem distinguishes it from earlier works by Liszt such as *Hunnenschlacht*. The sparse texture, comparatively limited forces, and tonal experimentation are all markers of the composer's late style.¹⁷⁷ This symphonic poem begins also ends in a tonally ambiguous fashion. The acceptance of tonal ambiguity, while reflective of currents in New German music, may also reflect Liszt's religious outlook in his late life. Liszt had a desire to imitate Christ, with Saint Francis of Assisi and Thomas à Kempis—author of *De imitatione Christi*—sometimes held up as intermediaries.¹⁷⁸ The composer's letters in his final decade demonstrate that he was a firm believer in Kempis's message of accepting suffering to incite hope. One such letter to Carolyne states "the chief obligations of Catholics are obedience and submission, at once resigned and loving, to our Lord Jesus Christ, who was obedient even unto death on the Cross."¹⁷⁹ Having lived through the narrative of the symphonic poem—musically and perhaps in-person for Liszt—the tonal ambiguity at the end presents itself as a number of influences in the composer's life where the symphonic poem now almost seems autobiographical.

¹⁷⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II: Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), 147–156.

¹⁷⁷ Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 171–245.

¹⁷⁸ Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 114.

¹⁷⁹ Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade*, 115. The English translation was provided by Pesce and the original French letter is provided in the same source, 115n25.

Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe presents a number of straightforward replications framed under a more holistically complex transmedialisation. The cradle theme and hymn theme are clear replications of Zichy's cradle and the goddess with the angels. The treatment of each theme as they appear in each movement also follows a logical progression as prescribed by Zichy's title of 'cradle to casket'. Liszt's alterations and supplementations to this life trajectory introduces several complexities to this musical ekphrasis. The most impactful changes Liszt made are supplementing a "struggle for life" or middle section which was not present in Zichy's drawing and altering the conception of Zichy's casket into a grave, which Liszt calls the cradle of future life. As a result, the cradle theme is recomposed in the third movement instead of creating a new grave theme. Liszt's supplementation of a middle section substantially altered the way he organised musical form in comparison to Zichy's organisation of visual form. Most importantly, the goddess's depiction as a single central figure is altered instead into scatterings of angelic and religious topics throughout the work. At the root of this complex transmedialisation is music's limitation to a kind of linear narrativisation in contrast to visual art's open-ended narrativisation i.e. music presents itself little by little whereas a painting presents itself all at once. Zichy presents two separate visual foci (goddess and cradle-casket pair) whereas Liszt decided to focus on cradle-struggle-grave with implicit representations of the goddess.

Conclusion

In this study, I have investigated musical ekphrasis of visual artworks while taking greater cognisance of art theory and history and in so doing created a replicable methodology for analysing the process of how an artwork is re-presented as music. By defining musical ekphrasis as a composer-signalled representation traceable to a specific source inspiration, I have sharpened the concept to bring about a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary elucidation of the type of cross-modal transference at play. As long as there is a speech act conveyed in any artwork, it can be transmedialised into another art form; at least for ekphrasis, the medium is not the message. Additionally, I reiterate that unity does not equal parallelism and that ekphrasis, although related to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal, ultimately has different objectives. Despite the rift between spatial and temporal art forms laid out by Lessing which is so often agonized over by scholars, I argued that temporality can still be present in a stationary work of art through its formal parameters in figure posing, stylisation, and repetition of patterns. Following Berger and Schutz, I too maintain that temporality in the experience of viewing and temporality implied within the canvas (e.g. by gestures of action and blurring suggesting movement) is an important distinction.

The process of parsing transmedialisation starts from the discernment of meaning in the artwork and musical work separately which requires competency in two distinct semiotic systems. Then, each work is interpreted separately. Finally, the two are compared and contrasted to identify the transmedialising functions at play. In spite of the semiotic differences, I posited that meaning can be translated between the two. Drawing from the words of past artists, musicians, and my case study analyses, I formulated an intersemiotic guide for the formal parameters of art and music. Familiar musical parameters are analogised with visual parameters and nuanced by their respective theories where appropriate such as colour theory, archetypes of visual composition, and Lessing's pregnant moment. Only through sufficient competency and an intersemiotic system can one see and hear more clearly the relationship between ekphrastic work and source of inspiration. My functions of transmedialisation—replication, alteration, supplementation, and exclusion—can be applied to an ekphrasis in any medium.

Each of the case studies I analysed showcased a different take on ekphrasis with varying treatments of the original artwork and transmedialising functions at play. In my analyses, I focused on identifying elements of content and form then compared and contrasted music and art. At the same time, numerous external factors influence the resulting ekphrasis: the unavailability of a colour print for Rachmaninoff, Liszt's personal preference to highlight Christianity, and the age-old complication of representing the passage of time in music.

The scope of this dissertation necessarily limited its ambitions, and there are several further lines of enquiry that could be pursued using a similar methodology. Early in this essay I mentioned that only painting and drawing would be the visual art forms studied here, but sculpture and architecture are still considered potential sources of ekphrasis. Marc Chagall's *Jerusalem Windows* (1962) which were examined by Bruhn and Connolly are an example of architecture which inspired Jacob Gilboa and John McCabe's orchestral pieces *The Twelve Glass Windows of Chagall in Jerusalem* (1966) and *The Chagall Windows* (1974) and respectively. Refinements of past analyses would be to gather the necessary competency required to comprehend the design of stained-glass windows, its context in Jerusalem and a synagogue, the musical style of this period, and what each composer would have known about the windows. Most importantly, I suggest that comprehending architecture as opposed to painting would be an entirely different task from this current thesis.

Another potential expansion of this project would be to look at musical ekphrasis in the twentieth century. Paul Klee is a prominent twentieth-century artist whose works—especially *The Twittering Machine* (1922)—are the subject of many musical ekphrasis. Composers who have transmedialised his illustrations include Giselher Klebe (1950), David Leo Diamond (1957), Gunther Schuller (1959), Peter Maxwell Davies (c. 1978), and Tan Dun (1992).¹⁸⁰ Klee has already rightfully received attention in musicology but engagement with musical ekphrasis of his other artworks could lead to an insightful profiling of the capacity of Klee's art to be transmedialised. Why were composers attracted to his art and what are the similarities and differences across composers' treatments of his works? Studies can be written on Diamond's *The World of Paul Klee* (1957) which has eight movements each based on a Klee work, Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes by Paul Klee* (1959), and Davies's *Five Klee Pictures* (c. 1978).

Like Klee's *Twittering Machine*, Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* has been re-presented numerous times by different composers. There is plenty of potential work remaining to be done by examining the seven musical ekphrasis of Böcklin's paintings. For the current project, it seemed most logical to use distinct case studies for the purpose of developing an overarching ekphrastic methodology. Only then should we turn to musical ekphrasis of the same artwork to develop a sharper account of musical ekphrasis to survey a wider variety of initiating artworks and map out what a musical ekphrasis can be.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Hilewicz, "Reciprocal Interpretations of Music and Painting: Representation Types in Schuller, Tan, and Davies after Paul Klee." Also Chapter 9 "The Twittering Machine: Sound Symbol of Modernity" in Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis*, 361–380.

This thesis looked at examples where the musical work was composed relatively close in date to the creation of the visual work, the farthest gap being between Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* (1884) and Rachmaninoff's tone poem of the same name (1909). Should the historical constraints of this study be lifted, there are cases where the musical ekphrasis might not be contemporaneous with the original artwork. For example, Mahler was quoted as saying in a Dutch review of Symphony No. 7 (1905) that *Nachtmusik I* was influenced by Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642), artworks created over two and a half centuries apart.¹⁸¹ However, this work does not strictly fall under my definition of musical ekphrasis since the ekphrastic signal is barely public. A number of Liszt's programmatic works also draw from older visual sources such as *Sposalizio* (1839) inspired by Raphael's *La Sposalizio* (1504). Such gaps leave much to think about with regard to the capacity of an intersemiotic system to capture what is involved: is a semiotic approach even possible? In other words, are the semiotic systems from two different periods *so* different that their signified contents—which I posited were normally comparable—are not comparable anymore? Essentially, the methodology I have built incentivises the need to understand source-work and ekphrastic-work on their own terms before finding relations but this latter step is made convenient by the very fact that there are explicit cultural overlaps which led to the creation of the ekphrasis. Should the temporal gap widen, it could be that composers' ekphrastic motivations are more personal or very specific instead of an organic societal mingling of the arts, resulting in ekphrasis with idiosyncratic semiotic systems.

This project has been an attempt to actively engage with the disciplines of both the ekphrastic work (musicology) and the source work (art history and theory). Subject matter has been thoroughly studied in intermedial and ekphrastic studies but the language and theories required to understand the full complexities of music and art are indeed specialised. I hope to have encouraged other interdisciplinary undertakings to be just as deeply engaged in their secondary field as their first. In an art form such as music where representation is intertwined with form, having a better grasp of the latter can only contribute to the elucidation of the former as in programmatic music. In art where representation is distinct from form, we learn to value the artistic syntheses of the two, borne out of the artist's deliberate choices. In musical ekphrasis, we are invited once again to question the borders between content and form.

¹⁸¹ Anna Stoll Knecht, *Mahler's Seventh Symphony*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 165–166.

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