An Essay on Musical Narrative Theory and Its Role in Interpretation, with Analyses of Works for Saxophone by Alfred Desenclos and John Harbison

Ian MacDonald Jeffress
University of South Carolina - Columbia

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An Essay on Musical Narrative Theory and Its Role in Interpretation, with Analyses of Works for Saxophone by Alfred Desenclos and John Harbison

by

Ian MacDonald Jeffress

Bachelor of Music
Furman University, 2002

Master of Music
Ithaca College, 2004

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in
Music Performance
School of Music
University of South Carolina
2013

Accepted by:

Clifford Leaman, Major Professor
Chairman, Examining Committee

Reginald Bain, Committee Member

Michael Harley, Committee Member

Jennifer Parker-Harley, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
DEDICATION

For my wife and daughter, whose love, support, and patience made this possible.
ABSTRACT

In recent years the field of semiotics has increasingly been applied to musicology, with particular attention paid to the area of narrative theory. This study will provide an introduction to the essential concepts of semiotics and narrative theory, the development of a methodology of narrative analysis with examples from the saxophone repertoire, and the application of that analytical approach to Alfred Desenclos’ Prélude, Cadence, et Finale and John Harbison’s San Antonio. The goal of this study will be the demonstration of narrative theory’s applicability to a variety of styles pertinent to the concert saxophone repertoire. It is hoped that this demonstration will be of value in future interpretive efforts in the area of saxophone performance, and in the performance of contemporary repertoire generally.
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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTS IN NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Whatever the level of one’s involvement in a given musical act – be it as composer, performer, audience, or analyst or critic – the problem of determining a satisfactory sense of meaning, or even the presence or absence of meaning, in a given work is basic to the experience. The issues embedded within the problem of meaning are manifold: where in the musical act does meaning reside – the creation, the performance, or the reception, to list only a few? Can multiple differing (even contradictory) assigned meanings for a given work be equally valid? While the history of proposed answers to this problem are equally manifold, recent work in the field of musical semiology, and particularly in the area of narrative theory, has particular promise in its focus on the identification of the elements, and their interplay, that can be understood as carriers of musical meaning.

This approach has several advantages. While reliant on the score, it has the flexibility to incorporate cues from
both the creation and the reception of the work. It is similarly flexible in its treatment of musical parameters, focusing its attention on, for example, elements of linear or vertical pitch, register and orchestration, or rhythmic structure, wherever meaningful oppositions seem to occur within a given work. Perhaps most importantly, viewing a work as a narrative allows for the creation of an interpretation that has the potential for usefulness to all participants in the musical act, while freely allowing for the possibility of the creation of other interpretations of potentially equal value.

The development of narrative theory has its origins in the foundational work in the field of semiology by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce. Both Saussure and Pierce developed theories of signs as essential elements in the conveyance of meaning. As these concepts are integral to our understanding of narrative theory, a brief overview of their respective approaches is in order.

Saussure’s formulation of the sign is binary and fixed in character: his definition of the sign consists of two elements, the “signifier” and the “signified,” which
together constitute the sign as a whole.\textsuperscript{1} The signifier is a sensory object that generates the psychological concept that is the signified. For example, the somewhat abstract, complex concept of sister can be signified by the word “sister,” whose sound sensorally calls to mind the concept. The concept can also be generated by, say, an image of physically similar girls or women via the sense of sight.\textsuperscript{2} Saussure conceives of the bidirectional, referential relationship that constitutes the sign as essentially stable. The sign itself only gains value through its opposition to other signs within the system containing them. That opposition, in Saussure’s conception, fails if the relationship between signifier and signified is malleable, as observed by musical semiologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez.\textsuperscript{3}

Pierce’s conception of the sign shares in Saussure’s atomic construction (in that the totality of the sign is composed of indivisible, interacting elements), but differs profoundly in the implications of its construction. For

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 66-68.
\end{itemize}
Pierce, there are three constituent parts of the sign system: the ‘sign’ (equivalent to Saussure’s ‘signifier’), which relates to its concept or ‘object’ via the understanding of the person perceiving that relationship. That perception forms an equivalent sign, the ‘interpretant.’ The essential point is that the interpretant is itself a sign, which can stand in the same relation to the object as the original sign; this means that “the process of referring effected by the sign is infinite…. [Thus,] the object of the sign is actually a virtual object, that does not exist except within and through the infinite multiplicity of interpretants, by means of which the person using the sign seeks to allude to the object.”

This difference in conception between Saussure and Pierce is critical, as it finds expression throughout the development of narrative theory and musical narrative in particular. Saussure’s concept of the fundamental nature of oppositional relationships in the construction of meaning is basic to, for example, Claude Levi-Strauss’s exposition of the structure of myth (which in turn proves a


5. Ibid., 7.
fundamental influence in the development of narrative theory).\textsuperscript{6} Pierce’s malleable, observer-dependant nature of sign interpretation, however, finds expression in recent approaches to narrative theory (for example in the work of James Ja{\c{c}}{\i}{\k{a}}b Liszka and, subsequently, Byron Alm{\e{n}).\textsuperscript{7}

With the establishment of definitions for signs, and the relationships within and between them, comes the beginning of a system for conceiving meaning as it is conveyed and understood within a symbolic medium. The medium itself is relatively unimportant. It is the level of relationships between signs that will determine the usefulness of the theory to various media, including music. The historical foundation of semiotic thinking in linguistics and literary theory profoundly influenced both its analytical language and its parametric biases for some time, which led to disagreement over the applicability of semiotic, and subsequently narrative, theory to music. The growing consensus that semiotic thought is largely valid


\textsuperscript{7} See James Ja{\c{c}}{\i}{\k{a}}b Liszka, \textit{The Semiotic of Myth: A Critical Study of the Myth}, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), and Byron Alm{\e{n}, \textit{A Theory of Musical Narrative} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
regardless of medium is, thus, an important development to this study. Independent of medium, there are three basic levels of relation that are useful to analysis: the symbolic, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic. Each serves an essential analytical function, though it will become clear that narrative analysis is essentially concerned with the syntagmatic relationships within a sign system.

Roland Barthes provides a clear summary of Saussure’s views on these various relations. The symbolic level is the “interior” relationship between signifier and signified, which is to say that it is the relationship that defines the concept of the sign. The paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels, though, are both “exterior” relations that exist between signs or even groups of signs. The paradigmatic relation “implies the existence, for each sign, of a reservoir or organized ‘memory’ of forms from which it is distinguished by the smallest difference necessary and sufficient to effect a change of meaning.” To explain this another way, analysis at the paradigmatic level is concerned with how specific signs are chosen and with the connotations of those signs. For example, in the analysis


9. Ibid., 211-212.
of tonal music, a paradigmatic reading would focus on the choice of a specific chord from a given functional family (e.g. predominant) at a given moment rather than the other available options.\textsuperscript{10}

In the syntagmatic relation, on the other hand, “the sign is no longer situated with regard to its (virtual) ‘brothers,’ but with regard to its (actual) ‘neighbors.’”\textsuperscript{11} The focus here is on how signs attain signification through their temporal or spatial relationships to other signs, and are thus constructed into sign groups. In comparison with paradigmatic relations, then, the focus becomes “the way that elements are combined as opposed to how they are selected.” To continue the above example, a syntagmatic analysis would take into account the varying effect, or even the varying function, of the chosen chord as it appears in the context of different progression types.\textsuperscript{12} The recognition of how signs interact at these different levels leads to a systematic view of how at the syntagmatic level


\textsuperscript{11} Barthes, “The Imagination of the Sign,” 212.

signs can ultimately form themselves into dynamic, temporal structures. It is at this point that we can begin to speak of narrative and its analysis.

The concept of narrative is, for our purposes, inextricably interwoven with that of meaning. The investigation of narrative discourse in music is a means to the determination of possible meaning in that music, so that our definition of narrative is to some extent contingent upon our formulation of meaning. Our understanding of meaning, both in a general sense and as an initial definition of musical meaning, is given in an elementary form by Levi-Strauss: “‘To mean’ means the ability of any kind of data to be translated in another language.”¹³ By “another language,” Levi-Strauss means another system of signs or another level of signification, rather than another language of the same type (e.g. French or German).

This basic definition is expanded upon by Roman Jakobson’s formulation of content relationships that “create meaning isomorphically through a corresponding set

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of semantic relationships."\textsuperscript{14} Isomorphic relations are those between systems in which rules operate in parallel. This idea is carried over into Almén’s definition of musical meaning, which he explains as “that rule of translation by which we signify [the meaning of a musical event] by a more explicit sign in a different system.”\textsuperscript{15} There is, then, a well-developed argument for the notion that meaning is reliant upon the elements of translation and parallelism. While a consensus definition of the concept of narrative is more difficult to isolate, these elements also play a key role in that discussion.

An introductory definition of narrative is provided by Gerard Genette in his \textit{Narrative Discourse}: “Since any narrative...is a linguistic production undertaking to tell of one or several events, it is perhaps legitimate to treat it as the development...given to a verbal form, in the grammatical sense of the term: the expansion of a verb.”\textsuperscript{16} Genette conceives of narrative as, at its essential level, the unfolding of an action. He further specifies that said

\textsuperscript{14} Almén, \textit{A Theory of Musical Narrative}, 40.

\textsuperscript{15} Liszka, \textit{The Semiotic of Myth}, 40.

unfolding is undertaken via three aspects: the “story,” or the content being transmitted; the “narrative,” or ordering of the content; and the “narrating,” or the production of the situation (real or fictional) in which the narrative takes place.\textsuperscript{17}

Genette, a literary theorist, is understandably approaching the issue of narrative in specifically literary terms. Though it is not difficult to see the beginnings of parallels between his literary definition and a musical equivalent, there are significant hurdles impeding such a parallel, most notably: the difficulty of providing a precise musical analogue to the verb; the difficulty of distinguishing story versus discourse elements in music; and the location of a narrating element in a musical work. As we will see, these impediments are due not to the inapplicability of narrative analysis to music. Rather they are simply due to the mistaken desire to derive an understanding of musical narrative from its literary counterpart.

Just such an understanding, expressed primarily by Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Carolyn Abbate, stymied the field of musical narrative theory for some time. For Nattiez, the quality of narrative is reliant upon the presence of both

\footnotesize{17. Ibid., 27.}
“events” and “existents” or “actors”. In language and literature, narrative is self-evident, as Nattiez’s definition is simply a variation of Genette’s (i.e. language itself is built from verbs (the “events”) and subjects and objects (the “existents”) that cause the action to unfold and are in turn affected). Given music’s linear, temporal construction, Nattiez allows that a listener may impose a sense of narrativity on a musical work, but argues that such imposed narratives tend to rely on verbal cues from the composer (titles, texts, programs, etc). The lack of purely musical existents leaves the music without referentiality, rendering talk of narrative in music merely metaphorical.

Abbate, on the other hand, is more concerned with the perceived lack of tense, and consequent lack of a narrator, in music. Abbate asserts: “music seems not to ‘have a past tense,’” given its “existence as a temporal art.” For


19. Ibid., 242, 257.

Abbate, this lack of tense precludes the separation of story and narrative (to use Genette’s terminology), which is reliant on the presence of a mediating narrator. Music is thus lacking elements essential to Abbate’s conception of narrative.  

21 However, these objections are convincing only so long as musical narrative is seen as a derivative of literary narrative. As we approach a media-neutral definition of narrative, the applicability of narrative to music becomes considerably more apparent.  

A more neutral definition of this sort appears in the work of James Jakób Liszka. He begins by re-situating narrative media in relation to each other as “siblings”, all of which are descended from myth. Liszka argues that myth can be seen as “the archetype of all other fable,” not only in terms of content, but because myth is responsible for “a common form, a narrative heritage, as well as a series of teloi [meaning here their goals or reasons for existing] which tie [other genres or media] intimately to the cultures in which they are generated.”  

22 Central to this

21. Ibid., 53-56.

22. Almén, A Theory of Musical Narrative, 12-13. See also 28-37 for a thorough, point-by-point rebuttal of the common (i.e. literary-based) critiques of musical narrativity.
mythic form is Levi-Strauss’s notion that myth arises from “an inherent genetic or biological tendency toward opposition,” explaining that the “inherent disparity of the world sets mythic thought in motion.” 24

This “tendency toward opposition” leads to a formulation of myth as a semiotic system. Indeed, this point is made also by Barthes, who further notes that “myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiotic system.” 25 Myth, as a system incorporating signs constructed from “first-order” symbols, becomes capable of the transmission of meaning both through the employment of those first-order symbols and through the dynamic treatment of those symbols over time. This is the key to Liszka’s development of a definition of narrative. As Liszka defines it, narrative “takes a certain set of culturally meaningful differences and transvalues them by means of a sequence of action.” 26

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26. Liszka, The Semiotic of Myth, 117
particularly technical definition, it excises literary considerations in favor of placing three necessary concepts into their essential relationship. First, Liszka’s concept of “difference” refers to the translation of symbols and the meaning it generates. Second, “transvaluation” refers to the evolution of meaning of those symbols over a temporal span. Third, the narrative proper is the course of action that brings that evolution about. Freed from literature-specific terminology, these concepts are manifest in music, making the narrative analysis of music possible and fruitful.

While an increasingly diverse body of theoretical works and analysis is developing around the concept of musical narrative, the application of Northrop Frye’s concept of the “narrative archetype,” as adapted by Byron Almén, is of special interest to the present study. Frye’s concept of the narrative mythoi, or archetype, follows from his investigation of oppositional duality in narratives, which he conceives as a para-cosmological system. The direction and destination of motion within the narrative cosmology defines the archetype of that motion as one of four possibilities: romance, tragedy, irony/satire, or
comedy.\textsuperscript{27} This concept intersects smoothly with Liszka’s understanding of narrative and is enriched by Liszka’s concept of transvaluation.

Determining the type of motion in Frye’s cosmology relies on understanding the nature of the hierarchical order existing between the symbols in a narrative. Over the course of the narrative, that order is threatened by transgression; the resolution of this threat is achieved through the transvaluation of the symbols involved. The result of this transvaluation reveals the archetype of the narrative.\textsuperscript{28} Frye’s and Liszka’s parallel conceptions of the possible narrative mythoi are summarized in Table 1.1.\textsuperscript{29}

The interpreter translates the specific unfolding of symbolic relations within the narrative via the assignment of a narrative archetype. This explains Liszka’s specification of “culturally meaningful differences” in his definition of narrative. As he explains, “myth [and,

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{28} Liszka, \textit{The Semiotic of Myth}, 15.

\textsuperscript{29} Frye, \textit{Anatomy of Criticism}, 162f, and Liszka, \textit{The Semiotic of Myth}, 129-133.
\end{flushright}
consequently, narrative]...and its interpretation form a symbolic web by means of which humans control the rules and

Table 1.1. Narrative archetypes according to Frye and Liszka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype or mythoi</th>
<th>According to Frye:</th>
<th>According to Liszka:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>Narratives of spring and renewal; upward motion from experience to innocence</td>
<td>The victory of transgression over normative order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>Narratives of summer and apotheosis; the ideal of innocence</td>
<td>The victory of a normative order over transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>Narratives of autumn and the fall; downward motion from innocence to experience</td>
<td>The defeat of a transgression by the normative order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>Narratives of winter and dissolution; the nadir of experience</td>
<td>The defeat of a normative order by transgression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

norms which govern and constitute the culture."30 Thus the employment of narrative archetype in analysis allows for an interpretation encompassing both absolute meaning intrinsic to the musical work, and referential, culturally informed extrinsic meanings. 31

This, then, brings us within sight of a methodology, via Almén, for narrative analysis of music:

30. Ibid., 16.

An analysis of musical narrative must take into account 1) an assessment of the semantic characteristics of musical elements, both in isolation and in context; 2) an understanding of how these elements mutually influence and mutually define each other as they succeed one another in time; and 3) an awareness of the cumulative, global effect of these relationships in terms of the opposition "order vs. transgression" and the logically possible outcomes of such an opposition, or narrative archetypes.\(^{32}\)

This study will, as a rule, follow Almén’s prescriptions for analytical focus, though, as noted above, a number of additional exercises in narrative analysis inform the recent scholarship and will prove valuable in synthesizing a robust analytical methodology for the investigation of the works that are the focus of this essay.

The foundation of a narrative-based analytical methodology rests upon the idea of oppositional forces at work in a given piece, and, essentially, on the idea that such opposition instigates the evolution of those forces’ meanings. The actual analytical method will depend on the piece itself, and will emerge from the analyst’s discernment of the oppositional forces and relationships involved, and the means of evolution or transvaluation. That said, there are a number of broad considerations that can determine how the parameters of a given piece will be prioritized and interpreted, regardless of the piece’s pitch language, formal plan, or historical style. This chapter will address those considerations and provide a brief overview of some pertinent analytical methods, as well as employing short analytical examples from the saxophone repertoire to address specific problems related to the narrative analysis of post-tonal or atonal works.
The previous chapter explored the relationship of narrative to myth, noting Levi-Strauss’s contention that myth arises from “an inherent or biological tendency toward opposition.” This condition of myth is also important to narrative generally. The idea of asymmetric opposition is what enables the transvaluation that, in turn, creates the narrative. The emphasis on asymmetry is not idle: a symmetrical opposition would be inherently static, whereas Levi-Strauss’s “initial asymmetry” necessitates a dynamic relationship. Identifying the ways in which such a relationship plays out over the duration of a work must then take first priority in developing a method of analysis.

Robert Hatten, in his book *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, introduced the concept of markedness to address “the asymmetrical valuation of an opposition.” Markedness provides a means of generalizing such oppositions through two generally opposed states, the unmarked and marked terms. The unmarked term represents the normative condition


to which the marked term reacts. Almén succinctly summarizes that the unmarked term “is genetically prior (it can signify independently of the marked term), occurs more frequently, and has a wider range of meanings.” These terms can represent musical units of various parameters, for example thematic material, registral divisions, stylistic divisions, and key or mode divisions, among others. The divisions are, however, typically paradigmatic in nature, as we will see in the discussion of the primary narrative level below. The choice of one type of unit over another is the determining factor in the establishment of markedness. By contrast, evaluation of the interplay of these units at the syntagmatic level is instead concerned with rank, which indicates the transvaluative process.

If rank drives the transvaluative - and, consequently, narrative - process, and if rank proceeds from changing markedness relationships, then an understanding of those relations and their changes should be the essential goal of any narrative methodology. This goal is complicated by the fact that any narrative work contains a vast number of marked/unmarked pairs. The goal, then, is not merely to

35. Almén, Theory of Musical Narrative, 47.

36. Ibid.
enumerate those pairs, but to determine which of that multitude is essential in driving the work to its climax. Almén refers to this as the “primary narrative level,” the “musical domains within which the narrative conflict is articulated.”

The high point of a work is essentially intertwined with the determination of the locale of that narrative conflict, giving narrative analysis a logical starting point. A brief investigation of climaxes and high points is thus in order before further exploring primary narrative level.

Leonard Meyer defines climaxes as events fulfilling roles of either “reversal” or “apotheosis” as follows, according to which of these respective roles they fulfill:

A syntactic climax is the result of... a change in which forms and processes shaped by the primary parameters of melody, rhythm, and harmony move from a state characterized by relative mobility, ambiguity, uniformity, or irregularity, to one of relative stability, coherent process, and clear form. A statistical climax... on the other hand, consists of a gradual increase in the more physical attributes of sound, the arrival of a tensional “highpoint,” followed by a usually rapid decline in activity.

Meyer notes that syntactic climaxes also often demonstrate features of statistical climaxes as “symptoms,” but the

38. ibid.
distinction between the two types is made primarily for reasons of style, not primacy.\textsuperscript{39} Kofi Agawu, to some extent, conflation these two types of climax in his description of the “high point” as an analytical criterion. He explains that a high point is a “superlative moment” that “usually marks a turning point in the form,” but postulates that “perhaps high points are superficial, … to be set aside as soon as the search for deeper-level processes begins.”\textsuperscript{40} Agawu’s condensation of syntactic and statistical climaxes into the single category of high points is relevant to the analysis of narrative, as both formal turning points and superlative superficial moments are inevitably tied up with the perception of transvaluation and subsequent understanding of narrative archetype. Seeking out these moments in a work, then, becomes a logical starting point for a narrative analysis. Consideration of the works’ high points will determine the oppositions that led to them, in turn leading to an understanding of the primary narrative level of the work.

In exploring the connection between high points and primary narrative level, Michael Djupstrom’s \textit{Walimai} for alto saxophone and piano offers an interesting test case to

\textsuperscript{39} Meyer, “Exploiting Limits,” 190, 194.

\textsuperscript{40} Agawu, \textit{Music as Discourse}, 61-62.
use as a brief introduction to these topics. The work is in
the form of an ABABA rondo with a substantial coda; the
high point of the work, marked particularly by the
statistical climactic elements of dynamic, range, density
of texture, and tempo, occurs at the transition into the
final A section. As the thematic material of each section
is clearly distinct from the other, the possibility of
locating the primary narrative level at this opposition of
themes is a likely starting point. These themes can be seen
in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Primary thematic material of Walimai

The two themes prevalent in the work present clearly
opposed contours and rhythmic patterns, as well as being
presented in contrasting tempi, dynamics, and tessituri.
The A theme is first heard clearly in the saxophone part in
measure 39, following the end of the introductory portion
of the first A section. Prior to this, a number of
fragmentary motives sharing interval relationships with the
A theme are introduced. By contrast, the B theme is
immediately introduced at the start of the first B section (m. 124) and remains the only melodic material introduced over the course of the first two phrases of the section. At the high point of the work, in measures 241-242, the A theme recurs, rhythmically augmented and fortissimo. This statement follows the disintegration of the B theme into a chaotic tritone canon at the eighth-note between the hands of the piano, accompanied by descending semitone pairs ascending in cross-rhythm in the saxophone part. This moment of extreme activity then transitions into a repeat of the final introductory material of the A section.41

If this interaction of opposed themes is the essential element in leading the work to its high point, it is necessary to establish markedness relations. From there we can track their relative rank as the work progresses to and from the high point. In a thorough analysis, this would constitute much of the work to be done; however, in this example it will suffice to provide a summary of the findings regarding the interaction of themes, especially in the turning point of a climax.

The A theme fits the description from the beginning of this chapter of an unmarked member in several respects. It is genetically prior, occurring as it does early in the first sections (indeed, immediately after the conclusion of the fragmentary introductory material). It is ultimately responsible for generating more thematic and motivic material over the course of the work, and its structure and placement combine to suggest a wider range of meanings.

Regarding this last point, the material and content of the melody are suggestive of a closing gesture, as the initial ascending fourth gives way to an ornamented minor triad arpeggio, ending on the root. The incongruity of such a motive at the opening of the piece creates the expectation of transvaluation and, thus, the expectation that the theme will occupy multiple roles over the course of the work. Conversely, the B theme is distinctly more limited in its construction, and its unstable rhythm and static boundary pitches suggest neither opening nor closing but a continuous middle. That limited structure suggests that it is the marked, or transgressive, member of this oppositional pair. Simultaneously, the more insistent

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42. For a more thorough discussion this concept, please see the discussion of Alfred Desenclos’ Prelude, Cadence, et Final in Ch. 3, as well as its origin in Agawu, Music as Discourse, 51-61.
nature of its introduction suggests tension indicative of low rank when compared to the expansive introduction of the A theme.

The assignment of rank is of course subjective, and we will see below that a different reading of the B section and its thematic material could result in a different assignment. However, when comparing theme against theme, the relative clarity of the A theme, and its suggestion of closure, ensures a sympathetic hearing. Consequently, high rank for the A theme, especially given the rhythmic instability and middling intervallic content of the B theme, reinforces a high/low ranking of A/B.

While a thorough analysis would trace the evolution of the treatment of these themes over the course of the work, it will suffice here to compare this initial valuation directly to the themes’ treatment at the work’s high point. In doing so, we can see that the disintegration of the B theme into an intensified re-statement of the A theme (at the same pitch level, and including the introductory melodic material that preceded it in the first A section) suggests a reinforcement of that ranking. Subsequently, it becomes apparent that the normative, unmarked theme has in a real sense triumphed over the marked, transgressive
element opposed to it. This triumph of order over transgression reveals the work as a romance narrative, in accordance with Liszka’s formulation of narrative archetypes.

Establishing a narrative archetype in any work allows the performer or listener to make fuller sense of that work generally, but in this case the analytical process can be of use in interpreting the work in light of the composer’s accompanying detailed program note. Djupstrom explains that Walimai’s genesis lies in his reading of the eponymous short story by Isabel Allende, and he provides a detailed synopsis of the plot, in which a young man who is a member of a forest-dwelling indigenous people is responsible for the death of a woman and must undertake a journey into the deep forest to assist her soul in its passage to the afterlife. Djupstrom notes that “Allende’s work first provided the inspiration for this piece, and to some extent, suggested its dramatic and emotional trajectory, which traces a path from clarity and freedom through a terrible loss toward an eventual release from suffering and return to peace.” In identifying the musical evolution that roughly parallels the quest story of Allende’s protagonist, the preceding analytical foray points the

43. Djupstrom, Walimai, prefatory note to the score.
audience toward a more focused reading of the work. However, it is possible that in some cases – indeed, as we are about to explore in this same piece – a careful narrative analysis may suggest otherwise imperceptible nuances or subversions of the musical or programmatic foreground.

As traced above, the theme-against-theme opposition present in Walimai convincingly leads the work toward its climax and, moreover, coincides with the stated narrative intentions of the composer. It is a model for the primary narrative level as it has been defined, on a purely musical level within the work itself. But looking outside the work, it becomes evident that the possibility exists for a further level of complexity in interpreting the work, as the B theme discussed above bears striking resemblance to material from another recent programmatic work dealing with related themes.

Thomas Adès’ *America: A Prophecy*, for soprano and large orchestra with chorus, depicts the fall of the Mayan empire at the hands of newly-arrived Spanish conquistadors. The soprano’s text is taken from writings of the *chilam*
balam or “jaguar seers” of the Mayans.\textsuperscript{44} The work begins with an oft-repeated motive representative of Mayan culture before the arrival of the Spanish; as Paul Griffiths notes in his program note to the work: “The Maya music of America: A Prophecy, as it first appears, is both blissfully simple – a rotating pattern of three, then four notes – and constricted, dogged, numbed in sensibility.”\textsuperscript{45} The similarity of this music to the B theme of Walimai, as seen in Figure 2.2, is striking. This kinship invites the listener to hear the material of Walimai’s B sections in a way not suggested by the music itself, which has implications for the assignment of rank and the understanding of the work’s high point.

![Figure 2.2. Related themes in Walimai and Thomas Adès, America: A Prophecy](image)


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
If the listener is aware of this kinship between Walimai’s B theme and America: A Prophecy, it is possible to hear this music as not marked material of low rank, but as an expression of the indigenous peoples referenced in both America and Walimai. This association suggests a high rank for this material and demands re-evaluation of Walimai’s A theme. Following in the vein of programmatic association, the A theme could be seen as representative of the unchanging forest setting in which the program’s plot transpires. In this reading the initial assessment of the theme as unmarked and conveying a more panoramic set of possible meanings holds true. However, in this analysis, the events of the high point result in a very different understanding of the work’s essential transvaluation. The now-high rank of the B theme is undone by its disintegration as it leads up to the high point, and that high rank is transferred to the re-emerged A theme in measures 241-242. Again, a more thorough tracing of these processes over the course of the work would be essential in a full analysis, but this cursory reading suggests, rather than a romance archetype, the defeat of the transgressive B theme by the normative A theme, making the work an archetypal tragedy.
This archetype, too, could be discerned from the work’s program: Djupstrom details the bond that develops between the young man and the soul of the dead woman during his travails, and her eventual departure, rather than his efforts to free her. This could easily be seen to be the true punishment for his abrogation of his society’s laws.\footnote{Djupstrom, \textit{Walimai}, prefatory note.} 46 In either reading the discernment of the high point allows us to locate the musical materials involved in its creation, but the assignment of rank is a flexible process informed by the analyst’s priorities and awareness of associations outside the work itself.

The intrusion of external influences recalls a related concern addressed briefly in Chapter 1. Carolyn Abbate’s objection to the widespread assignment of narrative properties to music arises from music’s apparent lack of tense or narrator, both of which are central to a literary conception of narrative. Abbate suggests, however, that narrative in music is possible in cases where an intrusive voice interrupts the normal passage of musical ideas. Such an intrusion suggests an act of narration with an external origin.\footnote{Abbate, \textit{Unsung Voices}, 19.} 47 While this idea of an intrusive gesture bears resemblance to the events in \textit{Walimai}, we have established
that a narrative process is evident with or without awareness of the external influence present. Another short analytical example can demonstrate Abbate’s conception of an interruptive act that informs the narrative trajectory of a work.

Ryo Noda’s Improvisation I for unaccompanied alto saxophone is a brief study in idiomatic instrumental techniques. The work has a discernable high point – in fact, it has two statistical climaxes that occur in quick succession, separated by a short passage that is the object of this exercise, as shown in Figure 2.3. The first high point, at “Più vivo”, features the greatest degree of technical activity in the piece accompanied by severe accents and a dynamic of fff, and concludes with a sustained timbral trill. The second high point features one of the work’s longest sustained notes in the sole descent to the lowest register of the instrument, accompanied again by a loud dynamic and by direction for an unusually intense vibrato. The intervening melodic material is opposed to these high points in practically every way: marked “mp, doux et expressif,” it features the only discernibly regular rhythm in the piece and the only small-scale melodic voice leading reminiscent of tonal function. In other words, this intervening material is strongly
reminiscent of “traditional” post-tonal saxophone repertoire, and as such is entirely at odds with the surrounding material. It is as if another, more conservative piece has been following along and finally, having experienced the extremes of the first high point, felt the need to step in before the Improvisation reaches a point of no return in its radical course.

![Figure 2.3](image)

**Figure 2.3.** High points, with interruption, in Improvisation I

Lawrence Kramer, exploring the presumed limitations of narrative in music along lines very similar to Abbate’s, states that “music provokes us to the narrative metaphor precisely when it seems to be undercutting its own foundations.” Abbate, writing about opera, locates these moments often at the “scene of narrating,” in which the plot of an opera is furthered in a moment of apparent musical tedium:

Moments of operatic narration...generate for most listener-spectators some sense of deflation, of having been abandoned by action on one hand and by music on the other.... But is this always the case? Or should we ask with narrative pragmatists whether narrators use narrating to seduce or otherwise mislead an interlocutor, thereby underscoring the scene of narrating as an allegory of art’s power over its listeners? More radically still, do scenes of narrating constitute an interlude of reflexivity, as which the narrative performance reflects upon the greater performance in which it is embedded?49

For both Abbate and Kramer, narrative becomes not a mode of analysis, but a creative technique of the work. Specifically, it is a distancing technique in the manner of literary manipulations of tense or voice, or filmic techniques of perspective or editing. Abbate clarifies that music “is not narrative, but it possesses moments of narration, moments that can be identified by their bizarre and disruptive effect. Such voices seem like voices from elsewhere, speaking (singing) in a fashion we recognize precisely because it is idiosyncratic.”50 As discussed in Chapter 1, the literary model of narrative analysis that Abbate and Kramer find inadequate is, in fact, unnecessary for musical narrative theory. That does not invalidate this distancing narrative technique, it merely means that the technique is itself subject to narrative analysis.


50. Abbate, Unsung Voices, 29.
The question, then, is whether the material interposed between *Improvisation I’s* two high points is in fact an example of this narrative technique. The material is separated from the rest of the work on one side by the very long timbral trill—a unique event in the work, and one considerably removed from the traditional formal and voice-leading concerns that follow—and on the other by a silence as long as any occurring in the work. This literal separation highlights the unique qualities of the melodic material itself. The rhythm is not only regular, but suggests two equal phrases of simple duple time. The voice-leading supports this: the first phrase is harmonically open, beginning as it does with an ornamented descending fifth from E-flat to A-flat, and ending with an unresolved half-step down from G to F-sharp, while the second phrase begins with complete neighbor-tone ornaments before ascending to the A that marks the registral high point, and which resolves down by perfect fifth to D, forming a closed statement that follows from the first phrase by chromatic linear descent.

The material, then, forms a balanced, rhythmically simple, harmonically closed phrase pair (as can be seen in Figure 2.4), and the temporal separation of this material from the surrounding high points is explained by the
remoteness of the material itself. This distancing allows the material to perform the role of an “‘internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative in simple, repeated, or ‘specious’ (or paradoxical) duplication.’”\(^{51}\)

Despite the sudden drop in surface-level activity amidst the work’s high points, the “paradoxical” nature of the phrase group draws attention, via its own incongruity, to possible analogues between itself and the rest of the work. Underlying simple rhythmic motives or voice-leading patterns, particularly those involving descent by fifths, or semitone pairs, are likely analogous features. Thus, the technique of simulating a disruptive narrating voice allows Noda to comment on unifying elements of the work that might easily be overlooked amidst the novel idiomatic sounds that dominate the surface of the Improvisation.

![Figure 2.4: Improvisation I, “doux et expressif,” re-beamed to highlight phrasing](image)

Musical narrative theory is, in a sense, a theory in want of a methodology. While there are often strong

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connections between compositional style and analytic technique, narrative theory’s adaptability makes it applicable over a wide range of periods, styles, and genres. Fortunately, as this chapter has begun to show, preexisting analytic techniques suitable to a given work are entirely capable of supporting narrative analysis. Employing these techniques with an eye toward the key factors of narrative theory is the essential task. The existence of asymmetrically opposed pairs of musical material, the marked or unmarked status of those elements, and the transvaluation of rank as the work reaches its global high point, are the factors that must be considered. Tracing the primary narrative level revealed by these considerations can be achieved in a variety of ways, but the end result will be a better understanding of the meaning of the oppositions involved in the work and, consequently, an identification of the work’s underlying narrative archetype.
CHAPTER 3

TWO EXAMPLES OF DETAILED NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The following two analyses present a continuation of the techniques explored in Chapter 2, with additional detail offering a chance to more fully engage with the long-term process of transvaluation. The works discussed, Alfred Desenclos’ Prelude, Cadence et Finale and John Harbison’s San Antonio, both for alto saxophone and piano, offer a useful mixture of similarities and differences in gauging the effectiveness of narrative analysis. Both works are broadly reliant on tonal structures without employing large-scale tonal progressions, and both works are broadly tripartite in form. Conversely, Prelude, Cadence, et Finale is an abstract work, as opposed to the explicit programmatic content of San Antonio. Most importantly, the works employ significantly different primary narrative levels.
3.1 An Analysis of Alfred Desenclos’ *Prelude, Cadence et Finale*

In Alfred Desenclos’ *Prelude, Cadence et Finale*, we are presented with a piece that combines considerable small-scale pitch and rhythmic complexity with a fairly straightforward formal organization. This analysis provides an opportunity to explore the areas where that complexity reduces itself to basic oppositional elements, as well as the moments when the formal plan contributes to our evolving understanding of those oppositions. In a piece that is so central to the instrument’s traditional repertoire, there is always the risk – from the performer’s point of view – that long familiarity will dull the appreciation of the complexities and subtleties involved, making a fresh lens through which to view the work even more welcome.

In the short analytical examples of Chapter 2 the need to trace the primary narrative level over the course of the work was discussed, but not accomplished; this analysis presents an opportunity to do just that, but doing so requires foreknowledge of the work’s high point and essential transvaluation. To begin, it will be helpful to know that this analysis of the work will conclude that it fits the tragic archetype. The primary narrative level
moving the work to its tragic resolution is found in the opposed motivic materials first encountered in the Prelude of the work.

The first element of that opposed pair begins the first theme we hear in the piece, while the second element similarly begins the second section of the Prelude, as seen in Figure 3.1. The first theme begins with an arpeggiated diminished ninth chord motive, which sounds at the start of all but one of the phrases in the first section of the Prelude. This motive additionally forms the template for related pitch class sets throughout the work. The second element is a motive equivalent to a minor trichord with its leading tone, and begins three of the first four phrases of the second section. In each case, phrases continue to develop the material presented by each element, but the consistent repetition of the elements themselves imposes their importance on the listener. The formal placement of the two elements, each stated clearly at the beginning of its respective section of the prelude, reinforces this imposition.

![Figure 3.1: Opposed thematic elements in Prelude, Cadence et Finale](image)

Figure 3.1: Opposed thematic elements in Prelude, Cadence et Finale
The pitch class sets of the motives share similarities in spite of their opposition. The set (01369) comprises the first motive, while the second is (0134). There are also noteworthy similarities in the arrangement of specific pitches: both end their first statement with the pitch class C#, and the pitch class D begins the first motive (though the motive is sounded over a pedal G that sounds first) and serves the role of the tonic scale degree in the second. Despite these similarities, the two sets also have significant differences and, notably, perform sonically opposite functions that will be important in the transvaluation of their roles later in the work.

In the first motive, the root of the diminished ninth chord is the last pitch to sound, giving the motive a sense of closure. By contrast, the second motive, which features references to tonality despite being ultimately non-functional, begins with a familiar minor scale fragment leading to the pitch D, which could be heard in this context as the tonic. This sense of tonic is generally relevant only within the context of the motive, though Desenclos does prepare the listener to interpret D as tonic in the first utterance of this motive (m. 15) via an A dominant seventh chord with added sixth and flat ninth, sounding in beats three and four of the preceding measure.
Once the minor trichord sounds, it is followed at the end of the motive by a move to the leading tone, leaving the motive harmonically open. Additionally, the implacable, even pulse of the opening rhythm is set against the mutable, ornamented rhythm of the latter. The repetition of the opening motive at exactly the same transposition in much of the Prelude’s opening section is also in contrast to the continual transposition of the second motive.

All of these facts in conjunction suggest that the opening diminished ninth chord motive is, in fact, the normative element in this oppositional pair. Its singular sonority – the diminished chord it outlines – gives it a broader range of potential meaning than the implied progression of the second motive, and its simpler rhythmic structure leads us to hear the ornamentation of the latter motive as a reaction, rather than a feature in its own right. The minor-mode motive, then, assumes the role of the marked or transgressive element in this pair, and our problem becomes tracking the rank of these elements as they recur throughout the piece. With this established, the first motive will be referred to as “N” or “motive N,” indicating its normative status, and the minor-mode motive will be labeled “T” for its status as the transgressive element.
The thematic materials of Desenclos’s piece are some of its most memorable features, and T, with its marked status and evocative character, merits particular attention in this respect. This theme represents a concept not frequently found in saxophone repertoire, the idea of musical topic. Topical associations in music are an old idea given recent attention with regard to questions of musical meaning in the work of Robert Hatten. They involve the notion that certain musical events gain specific extra-musical associations over time that are clear to those versed in that music’s style period. The rapid evolution of stylistic movements of the 20th and 21st century contributes to the lack of recognized musical topics in the modern saxophone repertoire. However, certain topics from the 18th and 19th centuries are robust enough to adapt between styles, and thus maintain their relevance even beyond the end of common-practice tonality.

Amongst these topics could be included the group of tragic topics. Tragic topics are generally minor-mode and feature downward-contoured “sighing” gestures. The accumulation of such topics can lead us to readily

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52. For more detailed information on the concept of musical topic, please see: Robert S. Hatten, Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004].
understand a work as having a tragic character, but this character may or may not coincide with a tragic narrative structure. The most obvious example of this topic in the Desenclos occurs at the beginning of the second section of the Prelude when motive T is heard for the first time. As seen in Figure 3.2, this motive is representative of what our culture understands as a tragic topic. In its role as one half of the opposed pair that makes up the primary narrative level, it is continually present throughout the work and contributes to lending the work as a whole a tragic character. For readers already familiar with the Prelude, Cadence et Finale, the assertion above that the work exemplifies a tragic archetype was likely to come as less than a surprise, for this very reason. Thanks to motive T, the work is suffused with a tragic character, and the transvaluation of themes that results in the assignment of the archetype serves to reinforce this surface-level characterization.

Figure 3.2: Theme T as a tragic topic
The opening of the Prelude occupies for the listener an initially low rank. The slow evolution of the rhythmic pattern, including the abundant use of off-beat attacks and rhythmically weak phrase endings, suggest that this material is introductory in character; thus, the listener is primed to hear the resolution of the introduction as more valued than the introduction itself. The interaction of pitch class sets within the opening phrases also contributes to this. The musical material following the (01369) motive is most commonly derived from an augmented chord and related to the set (0148), which contrasts the diminished sonority of motive N but fails to offer an audible functional change over the course of a phrase. Desenclos does offer a heightened sense of closure in the first and last phrases of this section (the phrases concluding in mm. 4 and 14, respectively) by ending these phrases with material closely related to the (01369) set, but otherwise uses motive N at the beginning of gestures.

The relative clarity of the second motive, then, grants it high rank, which leads the audience to view the tonally and rhythmically recognizable second motive sympathetically. While the second section of the prelude is no more functionally tonal than the first, it is more suggestive of traditional progression in the relationship
of motivic materials. Motive T, (0134), is frequently answered by the related motive (01347) that serves to heighten tension in the phrase. This heightened tension comes, in part, from association with the only prior appearance of (01347) in the work, in m. 10 of the first section of the Prelude. This appearance comes at a moment of sudden increasing tension in the work, with a sudden ascent to the saxophone’s upper register, increased rhythmic activity in the piano complemented by an unexpected rest disrupting the motion of the solo line, and a drastic crescendo to forte. When the (01347) material reappears in the second section of the Prelude, it serves to elaborate the appearance of the leading tone at the end of the (0134) motive, capitalizing on this pre-existing association with increasing tension.

The sympathetic reading of motive T is heightened by the first variation of the second motive, given by the saxophonist as seen in Figure 3.3. The mode is changed to major and the motive concludes instead with an ascending gesture, both of which play on the audience’s cultural conditioning to hear major mode and ascending lines as aspirational. The fact that this major variation is immediately answered by a consequent phrase congruent with the original minor statement is the first subtle indication
of the ultimate shape of the work.

The Cadenza marks the point in the piece where we begin to see the initial ranks of these opposed themes be challenged. The saxophone’s Cadenza begins with embellished statements of T juxtaposed with material derived from N. This alternation develops in the extended passage of arpeggios that mark the local high point of activity in the Cadenza. This arpeggiated passage begins by alternating minor seventh chords, \((0358)\), with a sonority \((0147)\) drawn from the material that follows the first statements of T. This alternation of a minor sonority with a chord derived from the \((01347)\) set used previously as a source of tension.
clearly recalls the structure of the second section of the Prelude, at which point T enjoyed high rank. Two successive phrases follow this alternating pattern, and in each the phrase is concluded with a half-diminished sonority, (0258). This set serves an intermediary role between motives N and T, as it shares features of both. In the remaining phrases of the arpeggiated high point, this (0258) material predominates in various transpositions.

As the activity of this section winds down through rhythmic augmentation, the (0258) sonorities give way to new arpeggios related to the set (013469), which is itself closely related to motive N. These new arpeggios are interrupted once by a chromatic scale leading to a last statement of the high-tension (01347) set (concluded with a fermata at forte). The conclusion of the saxophone Cadenza employs three successive statements of the (013679) set that also concluded the first phrase of the piece, and the return to material derived from N is accentuated by the fact that the four strong beats of this phrase (the first note of each set plus the finale A on the downbeat of m. 42) outline a fully diminished seventh chord. This progression is traced in Figure 3.4.

The progress of the saxophone’s Cadenza is thus the failed attempt by the transgressive theme to sustain itself
beyond a high point, and the eventual assertion of the normative motive provides the first perceived drop in the transgressor’s rank. This process affirms Meyer’s interest in climaxes as turning points. Here, the extreme activity of the saxophone arpeggios marks the high point in all but register, but more importantly it is also the turning point toward the re-emergence of the normative motive.

A second noteworthy point suggested by the Cadenza relates to Agawu’s concept of beginning/middle/ending paradigms: the idea that beginnings, middles, and ends are all structurally recognizable, but once that recognition occurs composers are free to play with the placement of these events for narrative purposes.53 We have already investigated the different perceived harmonic functions of our primary narrative level themes, but we should say more specifically that theme T suggests the function of an opening – the minor trichord is succeeded by its leading tone, leaving it harmonically open at its end – while the theme N suggests the function of an ending, as the root of the fully diminished seventh chord is the last note to sound. These functions are initially obscured by their

Figure 3.4: Materials in the saxophone cadenza of Prélude, Cadence, et Finale
inverse placements in the Prelude, but their eventual “natural” ordering comes to the fore here in the cadenza, and further reinforces the diminishing rank of the transgressive minor theme. The opening of the piano Cadenza continues this diminishment immediately by restating the concluding set of the saxophone Cadenza, (013679), in a new, aggressively propulsive rhythm. This new rhythmic vitality forms the core of the piano’s Cadenza and is explored through two related uses of the set, as seen in Figure 3.5.

![Figure 3.5: Rhythmic material in piano cadenza of Prélude, Cadence, et Finale](image)

After introducing these new rhythmic approaches to the material of motive N, the piano Cadenza returns to music first heard in the second section of the Prelude. Measures 46 and 47 present a variation of the music first heard in mm. 16 and 18, interposed between the first statements of motive T. Employing the set (024579) and the steady eighth note pulse of the opening, these measures provided obvious contrast to the more marked transgressive motive, but by m.
25 were reduced to the role of cross-rhythm accompaniment to the melody built on motive T. The Cadenza employs this material within new melodic contours alternating between simple and compound time. By m. 56 this new material leads back to a statement of T, but the compound time melody quickly overtakes it in a reversal of roles from the Prelude. The compound time melody segues seamlessly into the new, rhythmically vital version of N, which concludes the piano Cadenza.

The Finale of the work completes the process of transvaluation begun in the cadenza. The rank of the transgressive motive, having been diminished, must either rebound in this final section or be surrendered entirely to N; the former would result in a reading of the work as a romance, and the latter as an example of the tragic narrative archetype. The first major appearance of theme T (measures 100-116) mirrors its first appearance in the saxophone in the Prelude; however, is now accompanied, first by a rhythmic variation of the N material from the piano cadenza, and then by a restless polytonal imitation that highlights T’s harmonically inconclusive nature. When the parts finally do realign harmonically, it is only to set up the transition to a new statement of theme N. The second appearance of T (measures 134-142) returns to a
simpler accompaniment pattern, and is reliant on the major mode variation in a way not before heard. If we were to anthropomorphize the motive, we might say that it is finally aware of its decline and is mounting one last desperate attempt to regain its initial high rank. This second appearance is followed by a long, harmonically ambiguous accelerando leading into the third and final statement of the transgressive theme in measure 152.

This marks the high point of the work as a whole, denoted by register (barring the lone altissimo A in the coda) dynamic, and by the sudden, extreme sparseness of texture. As with the local high point in the cadenza, this global high point is a decided turning point, as the statement dissolves after a single utterance into material drawn from N, which is all we hear from that point onward. Thus the initially highly ranked, sympathetic transgressive theme is undone by a flaw built into its structure: its role as an opening paradigm is unable to support its rank and it eventually succumbs to the more harmonically flexible, and thus more ably conclusive, normative theme. The tragic character of theme T offers the listener forewarning of this process, meaning that the narrative shape and archetype of the work is more than simply a
structural choice of the work’s background; it is an essential element of its audible progress.

3.2 An Analysis of John Harbison’s San Antonio

Agawu suggests in Music as Discourse an analytic model based on identification of a work’s paradigmatic and syntagmatic content. Agawu’s stated aim in developing this model is to reduce the analyst’s (and reader’s) reliance on preexisting familiarity with tonal idioms in order to “engender a less mediated view of the composition.” While this distancing from more familiar approaches to the analysis of tonal music is advantageous to Agawu in shifting the focus of the analytical work toward narrative, it is also useful in approaching works with less thoroughly-investigated idioms, including post-tonal and atonal works. Agawu’s summary of his approach is admirably clear and concise:

“Thinking in terms of paradigms and syntagms essentially means thinking in terms of repetition and succession. Under this regime, a composition is understood as a succession of events (or units or segments) that are repeated, sometimes exactly, other times inexactly. The associations between events and the nature of their succession guides our mode of meaning construction.”

54. Agawu, Music as Discourse, 163.

55. Ibid.
Agawu’s interest in repetition as the foundation of a paradigmatic approach to analysis stems from the work of Nicolas Ruwet, whose interest in potential parallels between music and the field of generative grammar led him to explore in depth the concept of segmentation in musical analysis. For Ruwet, “the crucial question is, first and foremost, the following: What are the criteria which, in such and such a case, have presided over the segmentation?” Ruwet points out that traditional means of identifying criteria for segmentation - rests, melodic and/or harmonic cadences, timbre, rhythmic motives, etc - can, when applied independently to the same music, lead to distinctly varying segmentations. This leads him to wonder:

“Do universal criteria exist? Would it be useful to distinguish essentially syntagmatic criteria (the rests) from paradigmatic criteria (based on elements’ internal and/or external equivalence), or criteria depending essentially on the substance (rests yet again, timbres) from those depending on essentially formal criteria (repetition, variation)?”

Ruwet settles on repetition as an essential criterion, and offers a series of analytical examples demonstrating paradigmatic analysis using repetition and transformation


58. Ibid.
(his umbrella term for a variety of types of variation) as the criteria for segmentation.\textsuperscript{59} These sample analyses are geared primarily toward establishing the ability of this model to recreate results reached by traditional analysis, in keeping with Ruwet’s initial goal of investigating the possibility of an analogue between musicology and generative grammar. As Ruwet explains:

“The application of explicit discovery procedures to more familiar musical systems can well lead only to obvious conclusions, already intuitively recognized. But that in itself is not insignificant. It is indeed very useful to be able to verify the elaboration of a procedure step by step by recourse to intuition; once this procedure has been completely determined, it can then be applied to the study of less well-known materials.”\textsuperscript{60}

This is a notion furthered by Agawu, who notes that “the real value of paradigmatic analysis may well lie in its ability to illuminate compositional features and strategies sensed intuitively.”\textsuperscript{61}

Paradigmatic analysis can offer a wealth of information that informs readings of a work’s transvaluations. Relative frequencies of the occurrence of elements can help clarify marked/unmarked status and, potentially, the change in that

\textsuperscript{59} Ruwet, “Methods of Analysis,” 17-19.

\textsuperscript{60} Ruwet, “Methods of Analysis,” 15.

\textsuperscript{61} Agawu, Music as Discourse, 173.
status over the course of a work. Depending on the specificity of the analysis, specific types of transformation can be charted and compared. Additionally, syntagmatic relations may emerge more clearly in a table than in score form, particularly in cases where the repetitions being evaluated are not directly visible in the score or involve multiple voices. Paradigmatic analysis is not inherently narrative oriented, but its focus on the progression and evolution of elements over time and its potential to clearly depict marked/unmarked status of a given element, again over time, makes it an excellent method for investigating the narrative content of a work.

The technique of paradigmatic analysis is of interest here because John Harbison’s San Antonio, while superficially accessible and explicitly programmatic, offers a more difficult path to establishing narrative archetype than any of the works previously considered. While the melodic motives and themes of the work occupy oppositional states, they have little to do with the work’s high points. We will need to look elsewhere for the primary narrative level; to find it, the work’s two high points must first be examined.

Similarly to the Prelude, Cadence et Finale, San Antonio exhibits two high points: a local high point
characterized by its extreme activity occurring at the end of the first movement, and a global high point occurring at the mid-point (m. 65) of the third and final movement. The high point in the third movement, however, lacks many of the features typically expected of a high point. Its register, its dynamic, its level of technical activity, are all middling, but it arrives in a unique fashion: it is preceded by the only intra-movement tempo change in the work, a two measure ritardando accompanied by a crescendo from pp to mf; more essentially, it demonstrates a texture unique to the piece as a whole. This suggests that the moment is, in Meyer’s language, a syntactic climax (that, in this case, happens to be unaccompanied by symptoms of statistical climax), and further points us toward the primary narrative level, as it is the texture of the phrase that is most strikingly unique.

Working backward from that realization, it becomes apparent that the first movement’s high point, in addition to its registral and dynamic extremes, is also the product of manipulation of texture. The first movement takes the form of an ABABACA rondo, with each segment distinguished primarily by its texture as can be seen in Table 3.1. At first glance, it seems likely that the primary opposition operating in this movement exists between the tutti and
canonic passages. Despite their textural differences, the A and B sections share rhythmic and melodic motives (seen in Figure 3.6), and in each case but the first, the tutti sections transition seamlessly into the following non-tutti sections. The most notable contrast in the movement comes instead between the homophonic section C and the surrounding tutti sections. In the lone homophonic section, the saxophone and piano each pursue separate previously introduced motivic figures, revealing sympathies between motives that are predictable, given the close relationships between the various rhythmic motives, but until now unheard. Following this revelation, the final tutti section dissolves into ever shorter fragments of the second motive, with the dissolution emphasized by the relentless ascent into the shrill upper register.

Table 3.1. Formal structure of *San Antonio*, movement I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Location in movement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 1-25</td>
<td>Tutti 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm. 26-69</td>
<td>Canon 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 70-97</td>
<td>Tutti 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm. 98-116</td>
<td>Canon 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 117-123</td>
<td>Tutti 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>mm. 124-142</td>
<td>Homophony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 143-172</td>
<td>Tutti 4 (incl. high point)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we will see below, the remainder of the piece lacks the first movement’s emphasis on canonic writing, making it unlikely that the canon/tutti dichotomy is the essential opposition of the primary narrative level. This fact strengthens the subsequent possibility that, though it is late in arriving, it is in fact the distinction between tutti and homophony that most informs the work’s narrative. The presence of the canonic sections of the first movement does, however, serve a vital narrative purpose. Harbison imposes an initial high rank on the tutti passages, by allowing them to appear to offer resolution of the complexities of the various canons. The tutti texture also operates as the unmarked member of the oppositional pair: not only does it occur first and most frequently in the movement, but it also exhibits all of the movement’s
motivic material, widening the scope of its potential meaning. Consequently, the lone section of homophony enjoys an initially low rank; indeed, given its late introduction, inattentive listeners may even mistake it for another canonic section.

Even in the first movement, though, all is not well with the high rank of the tutti passages. Their occurrences are marked, progressively, as “guttural,” “all out,” and, finally, “unforgivably crude,” and the disintegration of the “crude” motive into simple eighth-note pairs succeeds in degrading the tutti texture’s rank by the end of the first movement. In the second movement, which follows attaca from the first, homophonic texture returns in a much gentler setting, with a sparse ostinato accompanying a new triadic melodic motive. While tuttis and canons return over the course of the movement, their importance is reduced and the overall form simplified, as can be seen in Table 3.2. The second movement, then, is a ternary form with its sectional divisions punctuated by brief tutti statements. The prevailing homophonic texture, with its own logic of contrast and return over the course of the movement, succeeds in capitalizing on the degraded rank of the previous movement’s tutti and claiming it for its own.
Table 3.2. Formal structure of *San Antonio*, movement II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Part in movement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A₁</td>
<td>mm 1-35</td>
<td>Homophony (harmonized melody w/ ostinato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A₂</td>
<td>mm 36-50</td>
<td>Homophony (solo melody w/ canonic ostinato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₁</td>
<td>mm 51-55</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B₁</td>
<td>mm 56-65</td>
<td>Homophony (dissonant harmonization w/ solo ost.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B₂</td>
<td>mm 66-80</td>
<td>Homophony (solo w/ ostinato in diminution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₂</td>
<td>mm 81-85</td>
<td>Tutti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A₂'</td>
<td>mm 86-105</td>
<td>Homophony (solo with new ostinato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A₁'</td>
<td>mm 106-135</td>
<td>Homophony (solo w/ original ostinato)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contrast between the endings of the first two movements is particularly noteworthy in light of a specific similarity. The final section of each movement is 29 measures in length (with additional notated silence for the purposes of the *attaca*) and features the eventual dissolution of its motivic makeup. But where the first movement’s final A section begins that dissolution immediately and highlights it with increasing tension of register and dynamic, the final A section of the second movement sustains itself for most of its duration before “fading out” (the movement’s final stylistic direction) via separation and repetition of the ostinato’s two rhythmic motives. The contrast between these two sections is extreme, and it becomes the job of the third movement and
its final high point to either re-reverse the drastic change of rank effected in the first two movements, or confirm it.

Formally, the third movement is again simpler than the movement before, and, even before the high point is reached, seems to confirm the enhanced rank of the homophonic texture by dint of the complete absence of tutti passages contained in it. The form can be seen in Table 3.3. The relative simplicity of this movement, relying as it does on the marked melody-and-accompaniment texture whose rank has already been reversed from low to high in the second movement, raises an interesting question: why is the high point of the work so late in arriving? To answer this, it is useful to examine the program provided with the work.

Table 3.3. Formal structure of San Antonio, movement III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part in movement</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm 1-32</td>
<td>homophony (solo w/ ostinati borrowed from II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm 33-64</td>
<td>polyphony (solo w/ countermelody and accomp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>mm 65-89</td>
<td>as A, w/ filigreed obligato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’</td>
<td>mm 90-125</td>
<td>as B, fragmented countermelody/accomp., w/filigree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harbison’s program for the work provides a movement-by-movement synopsis of the work: in the first movement,
“The Summons,” a “traveler” in San Antonio sets out to tour the town’s river promenade but is instead “lured by a sound” up a long stairway, where he finds a small fiesta in progress; in the second movement, “Line Dance,” the assembled crowd (excluding the traveler) performs a line dance familiar to all of them; in the third, “Couples’ Dance,” the crowd “sinks into” the heat of the square and the dance continues in couples. “Toward the end, a young girl asks the traveler to dance. He declines. But a year later, when the tourist jots down the memory of the sounds—something about a saxophone, and a few rhythms—in his distorted memory, he accepts.”

Deriving musical meaning from extra-musical material can be hazardous, but in the case of Harbison’s program, there is no need to attempt to map the action of the prose to that of the music. The point of interest is Harbison’s own implied transvaluation within the prose: the traveler, initially isolated and lost, finds and observes a party, eventually “sinking into” the experience, but still sufficiently separated from it to decline the invitation to join in the dancing himself; only in retrospect does he join in, creating a “distorted” postlude to the experience. This moment alone seems to have a direct musical analogue: the high point in measure 65 of the third movement, where
the form renews with the addition of a filigreed obligato in the solo part. The second half of the third movement’s binary form maintains this ornamented solo element as the most noteworthy change to its progress, and when, like the previous two movements, the motivic material decays in the final section, the filigree continues until it is all that remains.

This convergence of program and primary narrative level, then, provides a clear understanding of the work’s narrative archetype and the pacing of the work’s turning points that reveal the archetype. The transgressive homophony of the first movement, initially of low rank, readily achieves the transvaluation of rank in the second movement, but in the course of the third movement is held in check until the renewal of the movement’s form allows not only for the confirmation of the work’s primary transvaluation, but for a correlation to the work’s programmatic resolution in the memory of the protagonist. This achievement of high rank by a transgressive element is indicative of the comedic archetype, which follows the work’s program thanks to the superimposition of the traveler’s “distorted memory.” While the program and the musical content can exist independently of each other,
their cooperation creates a more convincing and nuanced narrative trajectory for the work.

### 3.3 Conclusions

These two analyses present a means of viewing large-scale compositions through a narrative lens that can provide insight into a work’s potential meaning. Other analyses highlighting different features are possible, and could result in drastically different readings of the works, as shown in the sample analyses in Chapter 2. The combination of possibilities for detailed analysis and varied interpretation is one of the great strengths of narrative theory, and a feature of particular interest to performers, who may see in it a means of articulating their own changing and deepening understanding of works over time.

The ultimate aim of both analyses was the same – the identification of the works’ high points and the primary narrative level of opposed musical elements that informed those high points. However, the techniques of achieving that aim could be tailored to the specifics of the work and the priorities of the analyst in a way that should prove useful to performers, analysts, and attentive listeners of all stripes.
SOURCES CONSULTED

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


APPENDIX A

DMA RECITAL PROGRAMS

This appendix includes programs for the three solo recitals and one chamber recital that, together with this document, comprise the dissertation requirement of the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree at the University of South Carolina.
Presents

IAN JEFFRESS, saxophone
In
Doctor of Musical Arts Degree Recital

Thursday, April 6, 2006 • 5:30 p.m. • Recital Hall

Assisted by:
Rebecca Grausam, piano

The Garden of Love (2001)                Jacob ter Veldhuis
                                          (b. 1951)

A Savage Calculus (2001)                  John Fitz Rogers (b. 1963)

Divertissement (1953)
  Allegro vivo
  Lent et Doux
  Scherzando

Maî (1975)                                Pierre Max Dubois
                                          (1930-1955)

Vocalise, Op. 34, no. 14 (1912)            Sergei Rachmaninoff
                                          (1873-1943)

Contact (2005)                             James Matheson
                                          (b. 1970)

Mr. Jeffress is a student of Clifford Leaman. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
Presents

IAN JEFFRESS, saxophone
in
Doctor of Musical Arts Degree Recital

Assisted by
Irina Pevzner, piano
Kelly Mayo, soprano

Wednesday, November 15, 2006 • 7:30 PM • Recital Hall

Concerto (1949, rev. 1953) Ingolf Dahl
Recitative - Passacaglia (1912-1970)
Rondo alla marcia

from Ten Blake Songs (1958) Ralph Vaughan Williams
Infant Joy (1872-1958)
The Piper
Cruelty has a Human Heart
Eternity

To Play the Saxophone (1993) Peter van Onna
(b. 1966)

Two-Part Invention (1944-1998)
La Follia Nuova: A Lament for George Cacioppo
Scherzo "Will o' the Wisp"
Recitative and Dance

Mr. Jeffress is a student of Clifford Leaman. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
Presents

IAN JEFFRESS, saxophone

Doctor of Musical Arts Degree Recital

Winifred Goodwin and Aimee Fincher, piano

Monday, April 30, 2007 • 4:00 PM • Recital Hall

Billie (2003)  Jacob ter Veldhuis  
(b. 1951)

Sonata (1997)  Mark Kilstofte  
Prelude  
Recitative  
Variations  
Toccata  
(b. 1958)

(1925-2003)

Eternal Enamor (2007)  Andrew Hannon  
Playful  
Fragile and Delicate  
Brash and Aggressive  
(b. 1977)

Two Elegies Framing a Shout (1994)  Mark Anthony Turnage  
(b. 1960)

Mr. Jeffress is a student of Clifford Leaman. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
IAN JEFFRESS, saxophone
in
DOCTORAL CHAMBER RECITAL

The Assembly Quartet
Robert Young, soprano
Ian Jeffress, alto
Matt Younglove, tenor
Adam Estes, baritone

Friday, September 20, 2013
7:30 PM • Recital Hall

Mic Check (2012) Simon Fink
(b. 1980)

Saxophone Quartet (1995) Philip Glass
I. qn = 116
II. qn = 144
IV. qn = 144
(b. 1937)

Into Xylonia (2005) Carl Schimmel
I. gleaming teak parquet, boundless, oceanic...
II. Babinga buttons and ash pegs bubble in clumps
III. Newelposts and dominoes jostle with alphablocks, caespite and shrubby
IV. Ligneous tendrils bear fattening spindle tips, shooting about dowelspouts
V. PYROGOIDAL PEPPERMILLS AND PEGLEGS -
MAMMOTH AXEHANDLES - TITANIC BIEDERMEIER BEDSTANDS
VI. From the barbicans flutter deckle and chads, tickertape and timbersplinters,
crepe paper billowing like hennin cloth
(b. 1975)

Pale Horse (2012) Girard Kratz
I. Allegro con moto, optimistic
II. Marche Funèbre
III. Allegro con fuoco, angry
(b. 1970)

Petit Quatuor pour Saxophones (1935) Jean Fraçaix
I. Gaguenardise
II. Cantilène
III. Serénède Comique
(1912-1997)

Mr. Jeffress is a student of Dr. Clifford Leaman.
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in performance.