

CHAPTER 10

Narration and Representation

I have emphasized in the previous chapter the role of music's expressive properties in the setting of operatic texts. There is good reason, I think, why the expressiveness of music has been such a major player in opera, and in other forms of music, in the modern Western tradition, where words are sung. The reason is this.

The expressive properties of music, within a certain narrow range, as we have seen, are clearly discernible to all listeners. (I am speaking here, of course, only of Western music, and listeners practiced in listening to it.) Because of that, they—the expressive properties—provide the most dependable, the most reliable, material for a composer trying to make her music appropriate to her text. For, because the emotive properties of music *are* so readily, so universally, recognized by even the most naive listeners, the composer can be sure that the appropriateness of music to text will be recognized. Just as long as the text expresses one of the emotions that music can be expressive of, then, if the composer makes the music expressive of that emotion, all listeners in our culture will recognize the emotion in the music and so recognize the music's appropriateness to that text.

But this is not to say that composers have restricted themselves only to the emotive properties of music in setting texts, nor that the expression of emotions is the only thing the texts they set do. Far from it. An example here will help.

Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* is about estranged couples who, in the end, resolve their differences, and come together. The resolution of their differences occurs in the last few measures of the opera. And Mozart 'represents' this resolution by, at

nearly the very end, taking the music from the key of G major to the key in which the opera began, D major. As a musician might say, Mozart 'resolves' finally to the key of D. So, in a fairly obvious sense, it at least seems as if Mozart has used his music in this place as a representational art. But is that really so? Can music really be a 'representational' art in the true sense of that word? And what is the true sense, anyway.

Let us begin by distinguishing two kinds of representation. I shall call them 'pictorial representation' and, for want of a better term, 'structural representation.' An example of pictorial representation is the *Mona Lisa*: an example of structural representation is the resolution to D major in *The Marriage of Figaro*. What's the difference?

In pictorial representation, I shall say, following the concept and terminology of the British philosopher Richard Wollheim, that we 'see in' the picture the lady's face. The analogous concept in music would be 'hearing in.' But we don't 'hear in' Mozart's resolution to D major the three couples resolving their differences and coming together. People resolving their differences doesn't *sound*, and can't be heard in the music. What happens here is that we hear and perceive in the music a structural analogy to the resolving of differences among the couples: hence my term 'structural representation.' And there is no doubt that without words and dramatic setting we would not, and certainly would not be entitled to, construe the resolution to D major as a representation of the couples resolving their differences (or a representation of anything else, for that matter).

This latter point suggests a second distinction: that between pictorial representations where what is 'seen in' the picture can be seen in without the aid of words and what can be seen in only if we have a hint from some accompanying text or title. Anyone can see the woman's face in the *Mona Lisa* without being told that it is a portrait of a lady. But there is a beautiful painting by the British artist J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) in which we can see a sunset in the painting only if we know the title: *Sunset over Lake*. We really *do* 'see in' the picture the sunset over the lake—only, however, when we know the title. Without the words there would be no 'seeing

in': only the impression of a non-representational color composition. For obvious reasons, then, I shall distinguish between what I call 'aided' and 'unaided' pictorial representations: those that require words for 'seeing in' and those that do not.

Here two interesting questions arise. Is music capable of pictorial representations at all, and, if so, is it capable of unaided as well as aided ones? We have seen already that it seems capable of structural representation. And I am going to assume that structural representation, at least in music, is always *aided*. That is to say, we can never determine that there is structural representation in music without a text or title—without words—to make us perceive the structural analogy.

Now visual pictorial representations represent what is *seen*: we see the woman in the *Mona Lisa*. Likewise, pictorial representations in music, if indeed there are any, represent what is *heard*: we *hear* in the music whatever it pictorially represents. So it seems clear that pictorial representations, if any, in music, must be representations of *sounds*. This does not mean music cannot represent other things besides sounds, or paintings things other than sights. But they can't represent them *pictorially*.

Not very much sober reflection is required to conclude that, if music is capable of pictorial representation at all, of the unaided kind, it must be a very limited capability indeed. For it is very hard to come up with any real, incontestable examples. Bird calls, like the cuckoo's, come to mind. Beethoven represented bird calls in his Sixth Symphony, the *Pastoral*. But we know from the title of the work and the titles of its movements to expect such things; and the composer even writes the names of the birds whose calls he is representing in the score.

The twentieth-century French composer Arthur Honegger (1892–1955) wrote a famous piece for orchestra called *Pacific 231*. A 'Pacific' is a kind of steam railway locomotive, and Honegger's composition represents the sound of the engine starting up, barreling along at top speed, slowing down, and finally coming to rest. It is as close to an example of unaided pictorial representation as I have ever encountered in music.

People who remember what a railway steam locomotive sounds like usually, in my experience, recognize without textual help what the music represents. But even they at least need to be told they are hearing a representation of *something*. And, anyway, such examples are so hard to come up with that it is probably best to give up the point and admit that unaided pictorial representation in music is, if possible at all, too rare a phenomenon to be counted as belonging to music's repertoire of aesthetic possibilities.

Aided pictorial representations, however, are another matter entirely. They seem to abound. Here are some examples, drawn from fairly well-known compositions. They are of two kinds: pictorial representations of natural or man-made sounds, and pictorial representations of musical sounds; that is, musical representations of music.

Some pictorial representations of natural sound events I have already adduced: Beethoven's representations of birdsongs—quail, cuckoo, nightingale—in his *Pastoral* Symphony. Other examples from that work are the pictorial representations of a thunderstorm, with loud musical crashes and drum rolls, and the pictorial representation of a gently meandering stream with a continuous 'flowing' melody in the strings. As for man-made sound events, there is, for example, Schubert's pictorial representation of a spinning wheel's whirling sound, in the piano accompaniment of his song 'Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel,' and, in Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*, the representation of a stone cover being rolled off the top of a cistern, with a low, 'grumbling' motive in the bass instruments of the orchestra. Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely; there is no dearth of them.

But composers also do something that seems to be best described as representing music with music. Here is an example. The opening scene of Wagner's opera *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, the plot of which revolves around the life of the poet-singer Hans Sachs (1494–1575), takes place during a church service. In the scene the congregation sings a Lutheran hymn. Wagner, we might want to say, 'represents' the hymn, which is music, with his, Wagner's, music.

These examples of aided pictorial representation seem straightforward enough to me. But others have not found

that to be the case. In fact, two basic objections have been raised against such examples, based on what are perceived by most of us to be necessary conditions for pictorial representation: a distinction between representation and the thing represented, and that we be able to 'see in' or (in this case) 'hear in' the pictorial representation what is represented there.

The British philosopher Roger Scruton has argued that the first condition is not fulfilled in what I have been calling pictorial representations in music. He argues that, in the case of music's representing non-musical sounds, the music does not so much 'represent' as 'reproduce' the sounds; it is sound imitation. And, in the case of music's representing music, there is no representation either, because the music just is what it is (mistakenly) described as representing. Wagner's so-called representation of the Lutheran hymn just is a Lutheran hymn.

As for 'hearing in,' the American philosopher Jenefer Robinson has simply claimed that we *don't*. We just don't experience in music the kind of thing that we experience in painting, for example. There is not that sense of perceiving in the musical representation what is represented there, as there is of seeing, in the *Mona Lisa*, what is represented *there*.

With regard to Scruton's claim that when music represents music it just is what it represents, it suffices to observe that his own example belies that claim if the example is described in enough detail. The hymn that the congregation sings in *The Mastersingers* is a sixteenth-century hymn; for the sixteenth century is when the events are represented as taking place. But the music that we hear is not *really* a sixteenth-century hymn. It is a hymn accompanied by a huge orchestra, interrupted by orchestral interludes, and in distinctively nineteenth-century harmonies. There is no way one could mistake this music for a sixteenth-century hymn. And the most reasonable way I can think to express what is going on here is to say that a sixteenth-century hymn is being represented in a nineteenth-century musical style, as we would say that a vase of flowers is being represented in a nineteenth-century painterly style. A sixteenth-century hymn is the object of the representation, nineteenth-century

Wagnerian harmonies are the medium.

Moving on to where non-musical sound is the object of pictorial representation in music, there seems even less reason to think that object and medium coalesce. Musical representations of music *are* music. But musical representations of thunderstorms, birdsongs, and the sound of spinning wheels certainly are *not* those sound events. The medium is music, and there is little temptation to mistake the medium for the object of representation, even though *both* are *sounds*. There is a big difference between an imitation of a birdsong—there *are* people and gadgets that do that sort of thing—and a musical representation of one, played with expression and musicianship on an oboe or clarinet.

In sum, then, there seems no reason to think that, in pictorial representations in music, medium cannot clearly be distinguished from the object represented. It appears that Scruton's objection does not hold up. What about Robinson's?

I think the best way to counter the notion that there is no genuine 'hearing in' in musical representation, significantly like 'seeing in' in the visual arts, is to be very careful in distinguishing, to begin with, between 'seeing in' and illusions. When we say that we 'see in' the *Mona Lisa* a woman, we do *not* mean to say that we really think we see a woman in the canvas, or even that we are momentarily tricked, as we are in the kind of painting called *trompe l'œil* painting, painting that, literally, 'deceives the eye.' We are aware that we are in the presence of a representation of a woman, and aware that there is a *medium* of representation, oil paint.

'Hearing in' should be thought of no differently. In particular, we should not set a 'standard,' so to speak, of 'hearing in' any higher than that for 'seeing in.' Of course we are not fooled by the accompaniment of Schubert's song into thinking we are really hearing a spinning wheel, in the sense either of an illusion, or of *trompe l'œil*. But nor are we fooled into thinking we are in the presence of a real woman, in the sense either of an illusion, or of *trompe l'œil*, when we look at the *Mona Lisa*. Nevertheless we 'see in' the *Mona Lisa* a woman. Why should it not be the case that we 'hear in' Schubert's song the sound of the spinning wheel?

Perhaps it might be replied that the 'seeing in' of the woman in the painting is more 'vivid' than the 'hearing in' of the spinning wheel's whirling in the song. Well, however you measure 'vividness,' I guess the vividness of 'seeing in' varies from work to work; and I guess the vividness of 'hearing in' must vary from work to work as well. I also guess that, where vividness declines 'enough,' however 'enough' is measured, people won't be able to 'see in' and pictorial representation will fail. But, even if it should be the case (and I have no reason to think it is) that the most vivid cases of 'hearing in' never exceed in vividness the least vivid cases of 'seeing in,' there is no reason whatever to think that 'hearing in' consistently falls below the level of vividness necessary for successful pictorial representation in music (always to be understood as the *aided* kind). Indeed the readiness with which people recognize such pictorial representations as the whirling of the spinning wheel in Schubert's song, or the babbling brook in the *Pastoral*, strongly suggests that 'hearing in' occurs vividly enough and frequently enough—assuming, of course, that there is a text present to facilitate it. For that is the real difference between 'seeing in' and 'hearing in.' 'Seeing in' is usually unaided. 'Hearing in' probably never is.

So I think it is fair to conclude that neither the objection of Scruton's, nor that of Robinson's, is successful in convincing us that aided pictorial representation in music does not occur where we think it does. Let us, then, consider that case closed. We must now spend a moment considering structural representation.

Representing things other than sounds and sound events in music is a very old tradition in Western music. It was a going concern in the Renaissance. But it perhaps reached its peak in the music of the Baroque period, roughly between 1600 and 1750, and had its most ardent devotee in Johann Sebastian Bach. The point of Bach's 'tone painting,' as it is sometimes called, was to 'reflect' or 'illustrate' in his music concepts or images in the religious texts that he set. (He held, for the major part of his creative life, the post of Cantor in St Thomas Church, Leipzig, which meant that he was employed to compose music for the service of that

church, as well as to rehearse the choir and orchestra, and to serve as the church organist.)

Of course the texts that Bach set, both from Scripture, and by religious poets of his day, were filled with Christian concepts and symbolism, as well as allusions to events in Scripture. These frequently elicited tonal 'images' from Bach. Thus, for example, in a text that mentions the Ten Commandments, the music is based on ten repetitions of what one might well describe as a very 'command-ing' theme. Bach represents the faithful Christian following the precepts of Christ with two themes that 'follow' one another: each thing that one melody does the other repeats right after. (This is called a musical 'canon.' 'Canon' means 'rule'; and the 'rule' here is: the second melody does just what the first one does, or something like that.)

Or, again, when Bach sets a text that mentions Christ descending from heaven, the theme descends, and when it mentions his ascending to heaven, the theme ascends. And music to the text 'the rich he has sent away empty' Bach ends with a single, 'empty' chord on the keyboard, all of the accompanying instruments having dropped out the measure before, in such an obvious, conspicuous way that it is clear Bach has 'emptied' the piece of its accompaniment. Such examples abound, in Bach particularly, but in the music of other composers of the period as well, and it would be pointless to continue enumerating them.

But with some of these examples before us it can be seen why I call this kind of musical representation 'structural' representation. For the common characteristic is that, in each, some structural element in the music corresponds with something in the text that the structure, so to say, analogizes. The tenfold repeating structure corresponds to the Ten Commandments; the following structure of the two themes—the canon—corresponds to the Christian metaphorically following Jesus; the empty concluding chord corresponds to the rich sent away empty; the descending and ascending structure of the melodies corresponds to the descending and risen Christ.

Of course there can be no question with structural representation of 'hearing in.' There is nothing to 'hear in' the

music, because the music, in these instances, does not represent sound, or sound events, but abstract concepts and things seen but not heard. One hears the musical structure, understands the text, and perceives, cognizes, the structural analogy.

But there is a very important thing that pictorial and structural representation in music have in common, at least on my view. They are both *aided* representations. They cannot be heard or perceived without the aid of a sung or read or implicitly understood text. They require the resources of language. And that is why, in previous chapters, I have objected so vigorously to literary and philosophical interpretations of absolute music. (This is a point I shall return to, once again, at the close of the present chapter.)

Taking stock, now, we can see that music has (at least) three ways of being perceived as *appropriate* to a text it sets or accompanies. It can be expressively appropriate: that is, it can be expressive of the same emotions the text expresses. It can be representationally appropriate in a pictorial way if it paints a sound picture of a sound event mentioned or described or implied in the text. And it can be representationally appropriate in a structural way if it analogizes in its structure some event or image or concept that the text contains.

Opera has harvested all three of these ways in which music can be appropriate to its text, but the expressiveness of music most especially, as I have said before. However, in the nineteenth century two other musical forms were exploited, and, if not invented (which they were not), at least developed more fully, explored more thoroughly, than heretofore. They are the programmatic symphony and the tone poem. They are worth—perhaps even demand—a look from the philosopher.

There is some marked ideological tension between the musical impulse and the literary impulse in nineteenth-century musical thought. On the one hand, it was in the nineteenth century that the concept of absolute music became solidified. The nineteenth century has been called the Romantic century and music *the Romantic art*. And a famous nineteenth-century art historian and critic, Walter Pater,

remarked that *all* of the arts 'aspire' to music—*absolute* music obviously meant. Yet, on the other hand, the nineteenth century saw the rise for the first time of the 'literary' composer—the composer as person of 'arts and letters.' Indeed, three of the greatest composers of the century, Robert Schumann (1810–56), Hector Berlioz (1803–69), and Richard Wagner, each left behind a literary legacy as well as a musical one: music criticism in the case of Schumann and Berlioz, philosophical speculation on music in the case of Wagner, not to mention that Wagner wrote his own opera texts, and Berlioz wrote one of the most readable and fascinating autobiographies of the century. Furthermore, and most importantly, the century that gave us the concept of absolute music tried as hard as it could, nevertheless, to give instrumental music a literary content.

The major, most powerful impulse, in the nineteenth century, to make instrumental music a literary art is not, in my view, very difficult to trace to its philosophical source. It is, it seems certain, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), whose philosophical presence was felt throughout nineteenth-century philosophical thought in general, thought on the philosophy of the fine arts in particular, and who decreed, at the time the status of music as a fine art was being debated, that absolute music could not be a fine art without a content and could not have a content without a text. It is this ukase that, either consciously or unconsciously, drove the century that invented the concept of absolute music to go on to subvert it with a music that was both instrumental and 'literary.'

As well, if sung conversations bothered you, and you thought opera and music drama 'absurd' on that account, 'literary' instrumental music solved that problem for you, as melodrama was supposed to do, but, in addition, did what melodrama never could: gave you *real music* to chew on. I do not say that this was ever fully stated as an aesthetic agenda by the supporters of 'literary' music. But I do say that it was at least an undertext.

Two musical forms, both generally referred to as 'program music,' and not always very easy to distinguish from one another, developed in the nineteenth century as attempts to give literary content to instrumental music. These are the

'symphonic tone poem' and the programmatic symphony. What, in general, they have in common is some 'extramusical' idea, or some set of such ideas that works in these genres are supposed to contain or, if you will, present, and a written text making this extramusical content explicit. Tone poems are generally in one movement, program symphonies multi-movement works. And the text, the 'program,' can range in complexity from a mere title to a fully worked-out story.

Let us suppose the limiting case: a single movement with the title *Tragic Overture*, but no other textual baggage at all. It is by Johannes Brahms (1833–97) and is in clearly recognizable sonata form. What are we to make of it?

Now, once the composer gives his work a title, even one as vague as *Tragic Overture*, it licenses us to search the work for representational aspects. My own take on Brahms's overture is minimalist. I merely infer from the title that Brahms wishes to make explicit that his work is expressive of tragic emotions rather than other kinds of dark emotions it might suggest to the listener. But, if someone were to hear *King Lear* in the music, there is certainly no reason to rule such a reading out of court without a trial. By giving the work that title Brahms has invited us to look for representational content if we like, and the search for *Lear* in it is not excluded, as it would be, in my view, if the work had no title at all.

What would the defender of a *Lear* interpretation have to bring to the table in her defense of it? Obviously she would want to point out musical aspects of the work that represent, pictorially or structurally, events and characters in the play and emotive properties in the work that might be expressive of the emotive tone of the play at various points.

When we are confronted with something more elaborate than a single movement with a title as its only accompanying text, let us say a program symphony with an accompanying story-text, then, of course, we have more to go on: a far more definite correspondence between events and characters in the story and expressive or representational features in the music. A real musical example I think would help here, so let us consider one: Hector Berlioz's *Symphonic fantastique*,

perhaps the most famous (and controversial) work of program music in the repertoire.

Symphonic fantastique—the *Fantastic Symphony*—is in five contrasting movements, each with a title: *Reveries-Passions*; A Ball; Scene in the Country; March to the Scaffold; Dream of a Witches' Sabbath. Each movement also has attached to it from one to two paragraphs describing what happens therein.

Briefly, the story is as follows. A young musician falls in love, at first sight, with a woman who excites in his musical imagination a melody that Berlioz calls an *idée fixe*, and that occurs periodically throughout the symphony (*Reveries-Passions*). The musician is at a ball, where the image of the beloved appears to him (A Ball). He wanders in the country and hears shepherds playing their pipes; but his tranquility is disturbed by thoughts of his beloved's possible infidelity (Scene in the Country). He takes opium in an attempt to kill himself, but instead of dying he has a ghastly opium dream in which he is led to the guillotine and executed (March to the Scaffold). The dream continues with visions of witches dancing in a devilish orgy, which ends in the musician's own funeral, accompanied by the Gregorian funeral chant: *Dies irae* (Dream of a Witches' Sabbath).

As might be expected, all of the kinds of representation I have enumerated, as well as the emotive properties of music, are utilized by Berlioz in 'telling' his story in music. There is pictorial representation of music: a waltz at the ball, the piping of the shepherds, the funeral music. There is pictorial representation of non-musical sounds such as the guillotine's fall. There is structural representation of the witches' orgy. And, of course, the emotional tone of the music at all times reflects the emotional tone of the events in the narrative.

But does the music actually tell the story? Not really, which is why, of course, I put 'telling' in scare quotes in the preceding paragraph. We know music can't tell a story for reasons I have already gone over thoroughly in previous chapters. What, then, is the music doing? It seems to me that the best way to answer this question is by analogy with the silent movies.

Berlioz's *Symphonic fantastique*, and program music like it, is, I want to suggest, the sound analogue of the silents in these

respects. The music is 'moving' sound images, the film is 'moving' visual images. (I put 'moving' in scare quotes because neither the sound images nor the visual images literally move: that is an illusion.) The written text of the symphony is to the music what the titles of the silent movies are to the pictures on the screen. The music does not tell the story. It is the text that tells. (An illustrated novel might be another analogue.)

Of course program music is *music*, after all. And being music, it must fulfill the 'syntactical' and formal requirements of its period and style. The *Symphonie fantastique* is a symphony—although it has five movements rather than the usual four (as does Beethoven's *Pastoral*). And most of its movements are in familiar symphonic form. The first movement, for example, is in somewhat eccentric but recognizable sonata form. One way to put this is to say that, even without the written text, program music, at least of the 'better' kind, can be musically appreciated in its own right, purely as music, without the text—in fact, without knowledge of the text. This fact has suggested a philosophical objection to the whole concept of program music.

Roger Scruton, whom we have mentioned before, in a similar context, argues that, *since* program music or representational music in general can be fully appreciated, musically, without knowledge of what story it tells, or what it is supposed to represent, then it can't truly be described as narrative or representational at all. For in true representational arts it would be absurd to claim that someone could fully appreciate it without knowing what it represented. (Recall my example of the guy who said he loved Renaissance painting but was unable to perceive what was represented in it!)

The problem here rests on the word 'fully.' For when I said that program music of the better sort can stand on its own as music alone, I was *not* allowing it could be *fully* enjoyed as music alone. That is because there are always (or at least usually) musical features of it that 'don't make sense,' or at least don't make *as much* sense, if you don't know what the program is.

For instance, Richard Strauss (1864–1949) describes his tone poem *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* as in 'rondo form.' And, like all rondos, it is tied together by a recurring, easily recognizable theme: the theme that represents 'Till. But many of the contrasting themes are very 'odd'; and there seems no real musical reason why they are as they are, or why they come when they do. So as a rondo it doesn't totally 'hang together' until you know what these other themes represent in the story, and what the storyline is, all of which explains their 'oddness,' and why they come when they do.

Or, to return to our previous example, *Symphonie fantastique*, in spite of its clearly recognizable symphonic form, still is oddly 'disjointed' in many respects as compared, for example, to the tightly organized symphonies of Beethoven, Haydn, or Berlioz's great contemporary, Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47). The *idée fixe* theme keeps recurring, throughout the symphony, as an 'organizational' theme might, in a work of absolute music. But it enters in odd, awkward, at times musically 'unprepared' ways, which often have no particularly musical explanation. As well, the entrance of the Gregorian chant *Dies irae*, towards the close of the symphony, seems quite inexplicable on musical grounds. Why this? Why *here*? These kinds of musical peculiarities abound in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*; and they don't make sense—musical sense—until they make narrative sense. And they don't make narrative sense, obviously, until you can fit the program to the music. The program is the major organizing principle of the symphony, as musical as it nevertheless is on its own.

Thus it is certainly true that *Symphonie fantastique* can be appreciated as absolute music, in ignorance of its program (and later in his life Berlioz expressed the wish that it be appreciated just that way). But it is certainly not true that it can be *fully* appreciated just that way. There are, however, two ways in which this claim can be understood, and they should be carefully distinguished.

If we mean that the *Symphonie fantastique* cannot be fully appreciated as a *work of art*, that is to say, as *the work of art* that it is, without knowing the program, that of course is trivially true. *Symphonie fantastique* is a work of art, and its programmatic text is part of that work of art. So, if you are

not aware of that part, you are not fully appreciating that work of art. Something in your appreciation is lacking.

But what could you mean by saying that *Symphonie fantastique* cannot be fully appreciated as absolute music unless the program is known? Because, when you know the program, you can't, by definition, be appreciating, any more, a piece of absolute music at all. Music with a program isn't pure, absolute music.

There is, however, another way to construe 'appreciate fully' that can make better sense, non-trivial sense of the claim that you cannot appreciate the *Symphonie fantastique* fully as pure instrumental music. For, if you compare it, without the program, as absolute music, to pure instrumental music by other composers of Berlioz's stature, like Beethoven or Mendelssohn, you will see that it has gaps and defects, as *absolute music*—just those gaps and defects that the program makes good. So *Symphonie fantastique* is not fully rewarding, as *absolute music*, in comparison to those works, by the acknowledged masters, meant to be heard as pure music. Another way of saying this is that it cannot be as fully rewarding as those other works: or, in other words, it cannot be *fully appreciated* that way.

However, Scruton is certainly right in his insight that there is a very big difference between, let us say, representational painting and representational or program music. Certainly it *would* be nonsense to say that we could appreciate a Renaissance painting (say) *at all* if we had no idea whatever what it represents. Whereas it does make sense to say that we could appreciate (at least to a substantial degree) *Symphonie fantastique* without having the least idea what it represents.

Nevertheless, the above is a very misleading observation. For the fact is we *can't* perceive a Renaissance painting without perceiving what it represents. We seem to be 'hard-wired' in that respect. But that is exactly what we *can* do with representational music because, unlike representation in most painting, representation in music is, of necessity, *aided*, not unaided representation. And, if you accept the concept of aided representation in music, then the disparity Scruton points out, between representational painting and

representational or program music, has no purchase. It is simply irrelevant as an objection. The defender of representation accepts the premise of the objection.

I have, in this chapter and the previous one, outlined some of the ways, in opera, music drama, and program music, that music can be appropriate to a text. It can be emotively appropriate, the music being expressive of those emotions mentioned or implied in the text or dramatic situation. It can represent, pictorially, what the text mentions or implies, if what it mentions or implies is a musical, or man-made or natural sound event. And it can structurally represent almost anything mentioned or implied in a text just as long as what it mentions or implies can be structurally reflected in the music.

With these possibilities before us I can now suggest a way of looking at absolute music that explains a lot about why fictional interpretations at least *seem* to work so well, and are so easy to come up with. Absolute music always possesses the potential for being used to underlie a text or dramatic situation. One could, for example, write a program for a work of absolute music just because it is an expressive structure that *could* fit numerous programs or dramatic plots. Not only could one do it; it was done in the nineteenth century. But, when one does that, one is, of course, creating a new work of art: a program symphony using someone else's music; it is a collaboration. It is something similar to what a choreographer does when she creates a dance with a plot, performed with the accompaniment of a piece of absolute music.

Absolute music is, in a way, like pure mathematics. For example, non-Euclidean geometries were discovered (or invented, if you prefer) as pure mathematical structures. They didn't represent anything. Indeed it was generally believed that the real world, *our* space, was Euclidean. It was represented by Euclidean geometry—the kind of geometry you learned in high school. But, when physicists came to a different view of the world, non-Euclidean geometries were waiting there for them to use. They were then given the role of representing the real world, *our* space.

Musical structure is like that. It is there waiting to be used,

by composers like Berlioz and Richard Strauss, to illustrate and represent. If it didn't have the structures it did, it couldn't be so used. But it does have them; and it has them when they are fashioned into works of absolute music. And that is why it is so easy to put fictional stories to absolute music. All you need do is fit *your* fictions to that music. Whatever that is, however, it is not interpretation. Interpretation tells us what is there, not what we can put there with little more effort than we exert in seeing things in clouds. To show that absolute music 'means' requires more than merely showing that it 'could have meant,' since its structures are expressive and capable of pictorial and structural representation. What must be shown is that absolute music exists as a representational or linguistic system. And that, so far as I know, has never been shown by any of those who practice the fictional or representational interpretation of the absolute music repertoire.

There is one further, and important, point to make before we go on to other matters: a point that is valid both for opera, and for the kind of music with text we have been looking at in the present chapter, although perhaps in varying degrees. It is that when text is added to music, particularly if it results in fictional narrative, the arguments against the musical work's potential for arousing the garden-variety emotions goes completely by the board. Once the conceptual apparatus of language is added to music, the work becomes *as* capable of arousing 'real-life' emotions as any other literary work of art.

Of course, as we saw earlier, there is a problem of how *any* fictional story can arouse the life emotions in its audience. For the emotions in 'real life' are aroused, in part, by our beliefs that things are really happening to real people. And in fictional works that is not so.

But the problem of how, or whether, fictional works can arouse real emotions—how, or whether, we *really* feel sorry for Anna Karenina, are *really* afraid that the Frankenstein monster will kill the little girl—is a problem not for the philosophy of music particularly; rather, for the philosophy of art as a whole. My own opinion on this matter is that we *really do* feel sorry for Anna, *are* afraid for the little girl, and,

similarly, *really are* sorry and afraid for operatic heroes and heroines. It is not my place, however, to argue for that point of view here. What is relevant for me to do is to remind the reader that he or she should be very careful to distinguish between the question of whether absolute music can arouse the garden-variety emotions from that of whether texted music can. My answer to the first question has been an emphatic *No*, and I have presented detailed arguments for that negative opinion. My answer to the second question is at least a tentative *Yes*, and I give no arguments for that positive opinion here as it is not in my province as philosopher of music to do so.

At this point in our proceedings we have reached the end of a long story that has gone from theories about music and the emotions, to an outline of the doctrine known as formalism, the version of that doctrine I have called enhanced formalism, which I have defended, the critique of that doctrine and my answer to it, and the use to which music has been put in the setting of dramas and texts. But now we must turn to other things; and first to the difficult problem of what we are really talking *about* when we talk about *music*, in particular, musical *works*. Here is what I mean.

I have, throughout the preceding chapters, referred quite freely to 'works' of music, without any explanation or excuse. Probably you all knew what was meant. For it is just the ordinary way we talk about music. There are 'works' of music; and, of course, there are 'performances' of those works. Music is a performing art.

Yet, when one tries to dig beneath the surface of such perfectly ordinary talk, some quite extraordinary and puzzling difficulties become apparent, and one begins to realize that what one thought was perfectly clear about what a work is, and what a performance of it is, are not so clear after all. In the next two chapters I will examine some of these difficulties, and present what I think works and performances are. But I should emphasize that what I have said in the preceding chapters is perfectly consistent with various other views about the work-performance thing. You can reject what I say in the next two chapters, and accept the rest, though I hope, of course, that you will accept it all.