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Tilting at Windmills: The Suspension of Disbelief in Three Tone Poems of Richard Strauss

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Abstract

It is unusual and ill-mannered for a playgoer to leap onstage and steal Juliet’s knife prior to her suicide. Human reactions to representational artworks can produce such extreme responses, but more commonly involve lesser emotional reactions such as tears, smiles, or fear. Our reactions to these explicitly unreal artworks imply that we assign some degree of reality to them.

Describing this apparent contradiction, Samuel Taylor Coleridge appealed for a “willful suspension of disbelief” from his readers. Indeed, the idea that appreciators of representational artworks set aside reservations about the reality of objects or events is intuitively appealing. The interpretations of Walton, Holland, Tooby and Cosmides, Radford, Lamarque, Currie, Pavel, Zemach, Schaper, and Galgut (among others) also reveal the corollary concept of fictional worlds, in which hierarchical belief dossiers reflect the primacy of represented fictional propositional information over that of the real world. The immersion in such worlds can, however, be disrupted (“broken”) by techniques trumpeting the work’s fictionality, such as self-commentary, direct address of the appreciator, or excessive concentration on the medium (rather than the content) of representation.

The suspension of disbelief has not been applied to music because of disputes over the possibility and nature of musical representation: if one is to suspend disbelief in a musical work, there must be propositional information conveyed by that work to disbelieve. Instrumental programmatic music, however, claims extramusical representation. Its representational apparatus, clarified in the work of Kivy, Walton, Robinson, Wollheim, Goodman, Scruton, Levinson, and Davies (among others), reflects its hybrid origins: both extramusical text and the musical content itself may represent.
Analyses of Richard Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, *Eine Alpensinfonie*, and *Don Quixote* reveal the intricacy of musical worldmaking and the suspensions of disbelief required for such works. In particular, the conceptual (rather than perceptual) nature of music’s extramusical content becomes clear. Musical techniques of character-differentiation, event-progression, and description are evident, as are disruptive examples of musical suspension-breaking. The suspension of disbelief and the breaking thereof are as relevant in instrumental programmatic music as in the other arts.
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Introduction

Tilting at Puppets

And so said, so done, [Don Quixote] unsheathed his sword, and at one spring he planted himself close to the [puppet] show, and with a violent and unheard-of fury, began to rain hacks and slashes upon the Moorish puppets, overthrowing some, and beheading others, laming this, and demolishing that. . . . Master Peter cried out, saying:

“Hold, Señor Don Quixote, hold, and consider, that these figures you throw down, maim, and destroy, are not real Moors, but only puppets made of paste-board: consider, sinner that I am, that you are undoing me, and destroying my whole livelihood.”

For all that Don Quixote still laid about him, showering down, doubling and redoubling, fore-strokes and back-strokes, like hail. In short, in less than the saying of two Credos, he demolished the whole machine, hacking to pieces all the tackling and figures, King Marsilio being sorely wounded, and the head and crown of the emperor Charlemagne cloven in two. The whole audience was in a consternation; . . . even Sancho himself trembled mightily, for he had never seen his master in so outrageous a passion.

The general demolition of the machinery thus achieved, Don Quixote began to be a little calm, and said:

“. . . [H]ad I not been present, what would have become of good Don Gayferos, and the fair Melisendra? I warrant ye, these dogs would have overtaken them by this time, and offered them some indignity. . . .”

. . . [Later Don Quixote continued:] “I protest to you, gentlemen, that hear me, that whatever has passed at this time seemed to me to pass actually and precisely so: I took Melisendra to be Melisendra; Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos; Marsilio, Marsilio; and Charlemagne, Charlemagne. This it was that inflamed my choler; and, in compliance with the duty of my profession as a knight-errant, I had a mind to assist and succour those who fled; and with this good intention I did what you just now saw.”

Cervantes, Don Quixote de la Mancha, Part II, Chapter 26

That Don Quixote attacks wooden puppets is not a surprise, given that he also attacks windmills, sheep, and wine containers in the course of Cervantes’s novel. At the root of his gallant inanity is an inability to distinguish reality from imagination, sensory perception from mental conception. What is most significant about Don Quixote’s attack on the puppets is that it reflects, to an extreme degree, the human relationship with art. The knight-errant is convinced—never mind his mental fragility—of the reality of characters in the puppet show despite obvious sensory markers to the contrary, such as their wooden material and diminished size. The art of the puppet play is enough to spur him to action in the vain belief that his works can affect

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persons and objects that do not exist in the same sense that he does. The audience member who
leaps onstage to whisk away an endangered heroine in a play suffers from the same affliction, as
does the observer who tries to grab and eat a pear painted on a canvas. Ultimately, they wind up
rescuing an actress who needs no rescue and grasping for a two-dimensional cluster of dried oil,
respectively.

Art, in all forms, has a curious hold on the human mind. Representational art (as opposed
to abstract art) uses the basis of reality both so that its appreciators can relate to it and so that it
may present novel concepts; but representations themselves bear the implicit assumption of un-
reality, of perceptual existence for imitative purposes. Appreciators laud creators of
representations for those representations’ conviction or striking similarities to reality, or for
fresh, ingenious use of media to represent. And yet human emotions seem too easily prone to
gullibility and manipulation in representational art: we chuckle at the absurdity of Rosencrantz
and Guildenstern onstage, gasp at Harper Lee’s descriptions of Scout Finch’s nocturnal peril, and
gaze, enraptured and content, at floating water lilies. Representational art has some ineffable
characteristic that, despite its existence outside of (but somewhat parallel to) verifiable reality,
compels its appreciators to react to it as if it is indeed real.

The “willful suspension of disbelief,” a term popularized by Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
seeks to describe and justify this apparent contradiction. Coleridge asked a willful suspension of
disbelief from his readers in order for them to grant at least some measure of aesthetic
seriousness to his supernatural poems.² The idea that appreciators of representational art can set
aside their reservations about the reality of some object or event appealingly addresses the
apparent incoherence involved in emotional response to nonexistent entities. Yet how does the

Press, 1907), 5–6.
human mind comprehensibly deal with two opposing concepts of reality at once? Confounding matters, it seems equally true that an artwork can make the appreciator keenly aware of that artwork’s representationality, whether through unsettling acknowledgement of its own fictionality, through direct address of the appreciator, or through excessive concentration on its own representing medium. Such moments—“breaks” in the suspension of disbelief—disrupt the immersion one expects from a representational artwork through alternation of reality and represented propositional information. Chapter One of this thesis explores interpretations of the suspension of disbelief, its subsequent applications to the arts, and the “breaks” therein.

The concept of such a suspension, however, has been largely applied to the dramatic, visual, and literary arts. Is it possible to suspend disbelief in a musical artwork? No previous scholar explicitly speculates on this matter, perhaps because of the often vociferous doubts raised against music’s representational capabilities. Representational arts, after all, present propositional information for appreciators’ consumption and for their disbelief and suspension thereof. In music, one could hardly disbelieve a note or a sound, given their perceptual definiteness; they apparently indicate nothing other than themselves, as other media do in their representational products. A select segment of the musical repertoire does, however, explicitly claim representational capability: instrumental programmatic music. If music can represent extramusical phenomena, then music may present propositional information for appreciators’ consumption as do the other representational arts; such representations might necessarily involve a suspension of disbelief. Chapter Two reconsiders the details of musical representation, including origins of the arguments surrounding it, as well as concepts often confused with

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3 I focus on instrumental music rather than vocal music because the latter relies on methods of representation and proposition already well-established as involving suspensions of disbelief: text, visual images, and dramatic character enactment all figure prominently in the conveyance of propositional information in vocal music. The sonic medium of instrumental music offers the greater challenge.
musical representation, such as expression and narrativity. Programmatic music, being a hybrid art of both text (e.g., composer’s notes or program notes) and music, necessarily involves a symbiotic representational relationship between its two components for purposes of disambiguation and specification. Nonetheless, under these aided circumstances, music can be representational.

This thesis will show that the suspension of disbelief is relevant for works of instrumental programmatic music, specifically three of Richard Strauss’s tone poems: Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche (1895), Eine Alpensinfonie (1915), and Don Quixote (1898). Chapter Three applies the suspension-of-disbelief notion specifically to instrumental programmatic music, whereas Chapter Four focuses on the propositional-belief-establishment techniques utilized by Strauss in the three selected tone poems. In each case, close analysis reveals not only that suspensions of disbelief are relevant both for the perception of the musical medium and the conceptualization of extramusical content, but also that “breaks” in the suspension of disbelief exist in each tone poem through a variety of disruptive techniques.

This result indicates that there is something intrinsically captivating about the representational arts, something that elevates appreciators out of, or above, themselves, at least mentally or aesthetically. Some semblance of reality and/or self-control remains, for the majority of appreciators do not attempt to take part in or interact with representations as does Don Quixote. This close examination of a perceptual phenomenon as applied to music brings out, in enlightening detail, relations between the representational arts and the human relationship thereto.
Chapter One

Why Does Hamlet Speak English?
The Willing Suspension of Disbelief Defined

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wan’d;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in’s aspéct,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
For Hecuba?
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?

Shakespeare, Hamlet, II.ii.591–601

Some “Silly Questions”

(1) Why does Hamlet speak English, if he is the Prince of Denmark?

(2) How does the nutcracker turn into a prince?

(3) How can Siegfried sing while dying?

(4) Where can I see a swirled sky like the one in Starry Night?

(5) What is The Thinker thinking about?

(6) Why can I not talk Anna Karenina out of marrying Vronsky?

The Nature of a Paradox

Why are these questions silly? While reading Hamlet, a cynic may pause to ask (1) and continue, “It is far less realistic for a Dane to be speaking English than it is for a Dane to be speaking Danish.” As for the answer to question (2)—well, the nutcracker just does transform into a prince, magically. It is a silly question, because real nutcrackers do not do that. The answer to question (3): that is what operatic characters do! If Siegfried simply dropped dead


onstage, it would be a very boring and unmoving (not to mention uncharacteristic) opera. The swirled sky of Question (4) does not exist in reality; the viewer searching for such a spectacle searches in vain. It is the rare person who could read the mind of another, much less of an inanimate sculpture, and so Question (5) remains unsolved. Question (6) seems the height of silliness, as it is impossible for a reader to speak to a fictional character in a book (much less to expect a reply). But what makes these questions so silly in the first place? They are absurd because they deal with fiction and the conventions of fiction, not with reality or the conventions of the world that we humans actually inhabit.

In order to apply the willing suspension of disbelief to programmatic music, one must first define the concept. The definition itself derives from the problem that the suspension of disbelief purports to address, namely, the paradox of human involvement with, and subsequent emotional reaction to, fiction. Even though they often play with or even break away from the conventions of reality, fictions have a unique grip on the minds of humans, so much so that the silly questions outlined above rarely come to mind during the fiction-experience. It seems that, given the human appetite for accurate information, people would not tolerate information that runs contrary to true sensory experience.³ And yet, with fiction, they do.⁴ Moreover, fiction is markedly, explicitly false-to-reality—we know this from the paper of a book, the stage in a theater, and the frame of a painting.

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³ For instance, the irritation experienced when given incorrect directions. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides note that humans question information intended as accurate, whereas they do not question fiction, which is “explicitly marked as false” and not intended as accurate, suggesting something about the nature of fiction that places it beyond silly questioning (John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds?: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction, and the Arts,” SubStance 30 [2001]: 12).

⁴ Colin Radford notes that when a person reacts emotionally to a story he or she thought to be real, only to later find out that it was a fiction, that person will feel not only cheated but embarrassed at having been unable to distinguish fiction from reality (Colin Radford, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplement 49 [1975]: 68).
Hamlet recognizes the vagaries of drama when he observes an actor moved to passionate tears (or at least the appearance of passionate tears) by the mere contemplation of Hecuba. Does Hecuba exist, from Hamlet’s point of view? Certainly not; thus Hamlet cannot comprehend the magnitude of the actor’s apparent emotional reaction. Does Hecuba exist from the player’s point of view? Perhaps. Does Hecuba truly exist from our (the audience’s) point of view? Again, no. Does Hamlet exist, from our point of view? Of course—there he is, on stage. But he is fictional. Does he really exist, if he is fictional? In what sense?

The issues of existence, nonexistence, point of view, pretense, and the genuineness of reactions to fiction are those that the willing suspension of disbelief addresses. Yet, as will become evident below, even these issues are elusive in nature and prone to various interpretations. At the heart of the fiction-involvement paradox are two apparently true statements: (1) We react with emotion to the situations of fictional characters, and (2) We know that these same fictional characters do not really exist. It seems a fault of human logic that we can react to something that we believe does not really exist, for, as Noël Carroll claims in restating the cognitive theory of emotions, there is a “necessary bond between our beliefs and our emotions.”

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5 A question immediately arises, if it has not already: is programmatic music fiction? I will argue that, because of its capability of representation, it is indeed fiction-like. See Chapter Two for an in-depth consideration of the representational qualities of music and its subsequent fictive properties. Kendall Walton warns not to limit the term “fiction” to literature only in “Fiction, Fiction-Making, and Styles of Fictionality,” *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (1983): 83. His *Mimesis as Make-Believe* considers, among other things, drama, motion pictures, literature, paintings, drawings, and sculpture as forms of fiction.


7 Ibid., 61. This statement, too, is open to interpretation and even refutation. Carroll later refines his statement, saying that “not every emotional response requires existence beliefs” (77). According to Elisa Galgut, many cognitivist aestheticians argue that “passions are and ought to be the slave of reason” (Elisa Galgut, “Poetic Faith and Prosaic Concerns: A Defense of ‘Suspension of Disbelief,’” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 21 [2002]: 191).
Certainly emotional reactions to and involvement with fictional characters and situations are normal, if not nearly ubiquitous. Indeed, a primary goal of fiction is to move an audience; to be moved is not only expected of the audience, but also appropriate.8 We shake our heads in disgust at the jury’s verdict in To Kill a Mockingbird, we gasp in horror during the shower scene in Psycho, we laugh at Falstaff’s disgrace in The Merry Wives of Windsor, and we feel at peace in the lushness of Monet’s garden. It is at least part of the pleasure of fiction that the fictional events and characters are not real.9 Indeed, as early as 1765 Samuel Johnson wrote in his preface to an edition of Shakespeare’s works that “the delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real they would please no more.”10

It is clearly normal to be engaged by fictions, and those fictions to which we do not react are the ones we do not enjoy (e.g., a book given up for lack of interest in the characters or plot).11 Indeed, the creator carries part of the responsibility for involving the appreciator.12 The fact that nearly everyone reacts to fiction—not one but many people in the movie theater gasp when the killer leaps out of the shadows—somewhat alleviates the illogical nature of responding to

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8 Galgut contends that emotional responses to fiction develop both individual persons and cultures, shaping us and our thoughts (Galgut, “Poetic Faith and Prosaic Concerns,” 190). David Novitz states the importance and appropriateness of emotional reactions to fiction in “Fiction, Imagination, and Emotion,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 38 (1980): 279.


nonexistent things. This nevertheless leaves us with the “fiction-emotion paradox”: how can we, and why do we, genuinely react to and concern ourselves with fictions—the contents of which we know do not exist in the real world? The willing suspension of disbelief addresses this paradox, but as will be seen below, the phrase is open to interpretation and does not fully explain the phenomenon of human interaction with fictions.

**The Willing Suspension of Disbelief Defined**

The term “willing suspension of disbelief” first appears, famously, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* of 1817, in an excerpt describing the origin of his *Lyrical Ballads*:

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination. . . . The excellence aimed at [in the supernatural *Lyrical Ballads*] was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. . . . It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.\(^{13}\)

Coleridge’s concern was that his readers take his art seriously, despite the apparently unrealistic (“supernatural, or at least romantic”) characters and situations contained therein. The author notes that he and Wordsworth both realized the importance of an element of realism in the supernatural poems, and that the goal of the poetry was to “[interest] the affections” and “[excite] the sympathy” of the reader. Even so, because of the unusual supernatural nature of the poems,

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Coleridge asks for an element of “faith” from the reader in order to make such interest and excitement palpable. This momentarily trusting faith of poetic content, this acceptance of the author’s word as reality, is the willing suspension of disbelief. Coleridge asked this faith of his readers in such poems as “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “The Dark Ladie,” and “Christabel.”

Coleridge was certainly not the first to consider the problem of involvement with fictions (see note 14), nor would he be the last. Before the articulation of the term “suspension of disbelief,” Johnson considered the apparent duality of the fiction-experience in his 1765 preface:

> If the spectator can once be persuaded that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Caesar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation [my emphasis] above the reach of reason, or of truth. . . . There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in extasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.

William Kenrick, reviewing Johnson’s edition in the same year, reflected that “a spectator properly affected by a dramatic representation makes no reflections about the fiction or the reality of it, so long as the action proceeds without grossly offending or palpably imposing on the senses.” Like Coleridge, Johnson and Kenrick considered the experience of fiction as

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14 David Chandler traces the origin of the phrase “suspension of disbelief” to Jacob Brucker’s *Historia Critica Philosophiae a Mundi Incunabilis ad Nostra Usque Aetetam Deducta*, which summarizes the philosophy of Carneades (ca. 214–129 B. C.). Carneades’s term *assensus introducta suspensione* (“suspension of assent”) deals with “the way that the intellect judges ‘shadows of imagination,’” or mental images. Coleridge was familiar with both the English and the Latin versions of Brucker’s treatise, from which he possibly derived the phrase “suspension of disbelief” (David Chandler, “Coleridge’s ‘Suspension of Disbelief’ and Jacob Brucker’s ‘Assensus Suspensione,’” *Notes and Queries* 43 [1996]: 39–40).


17 Ibid., 190.
necessarily akin to that of reality, but recognized that the achievement of this feat required a “state of elevation” and a lack of contradictory sense-experience, respectively.

Coleridge’s aim in invoking the willing suspension of disbelief is to inspire the involvement and emotional reaction of the reader when faced with characters and situations of unrealistic natures; in this sense, then, he addresses the paradox of fiction described above. Kendall L. Walton offers a rough definition of the suspension of disbelief: “A person believes something which another part of him disbelieves, or that one finds oneself (almost?) believing something which he nevertheless know[s] to be false.”¹⁸ Many modern writers, however, argue that the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief” is not sufficient to explain the experience of fiction or the fiction-emotion paradox.¹⁹

The nuances of the phrase deserve attention, as it is to one or more terms therein that other authors object. The word “willing” implies a conscious, voluntary effort on the part of the fiction-appreciator to undergo this suspension of disbelief. One might assume that simply opening a novel or paying for a theater ticket constitutes an act of will with the expectation of a suspension of disbelief, for many people purposefully seek out the fiction-experience. Critics, however, argue that the willingness of such acts is questionable because of the nature of fiction—that is, that appreciators expect a suspension of disbelief because the work is fictional.


¹⁹ Carroll goes so far as to describe the “willful suspension of disbelief” as “an obfuscatory redescription . . . of the problem” (The Philosophy of Horror, 67), and Eva Schaper agrees in “Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief,” British Journal of Aesthetics 18 (1978): 31. Radford finds fault in that appreciators do not constantly remind themselves of the suspension; it is always clear that it is a play they watch, and thus the suspension of disbelief does not help solve the paradox; see “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 72. Some writers, on the other hand, take a different tack and suggest that the emotion experienced by the appreciator is not real (Walton, Michael Weston, and Harold Skulsky, among others). See “Make-believe theory” below for a fuller explanation.
and therefore need not will themselves into the suspension.20 Gregory Currie notes that “active
[and] occurrent” disbelief is an unusual way of experiencing fiction.21 In other words, one need
not say to oneself upon starting Anna Karenina that “the events in this book never really
happened”; this much is evident, the critics say, because of the book’s fictional nature.22 In fact,
consciously reminding oneself that something is not true effectively blocks one from engaging
emotionally with the fiction, for emotion is apparently at least somewhat dependent on belief in
real existence.23 Some critics also question whether people can will their own beliefs, as per the
Cartesian ideal of free will; as Carroll says, it is difficult to will oneself to believe that 5 + 7 =
1492.24 Indeed, when one attends Göttterdammerung, can one truly believe that Siegfried dies,
when one knows well that he will emerge from behind the curtain to take a bow after his death?
In some sense, then, belief and disbelief might be involuntary, especially given that fiction bears
explicit markers of falseness.

The word “suspension” is not quite so provocative. It implies a setting-aside or a
temporary ignorance—in this case, of one’s beliefs concerning the reality of the events and
characters before one.25 If anything, critics argue that “suspension” is not a strong enough word

20 In a twist to this view, Thomas G. Pavel writes, “The reader . . . must pretend that there was no
suspension of disbelief, that travel to the fictional land did not occur, and that the fictional egos have in a sense
always been there.” In other words, one must disbelieve the existence of a suspension of disbelief, and then suspend
that particular disbelief (Thomas G. Pavel, Fictional Worlds [Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University
Press, 1986], 89).


22 This reminder, however, is a common tactic with children, for whom the phrase “it is only a story”
alleviates worry caused by excessive intensity in the fiction (Galgut, “Poetic Faith and Prosaic Concerns,” 193).


24 Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror, 65. Note, however, that we react in much the same initially skeptical
way to propositions that might be true; they still require further evidence or sensory confirmation (Galgut, “Poetic
Faith and Prosaic Concerns,” 192).

for the experience of total immersion in a fiction. Indeed, the term “suspension” seems to be an attempt to have the best of both worlds—in which the appreciator fully trusts the content set forth in the fiction, but also knows that such content is objectively unreal. In this case, Carroll’s previously cited criticism of the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief” (see note 19) is correct: the “suspension” is circular and brings us right back to the problem by acknowledging that the appreciator holds two contradictory beliefs at once.

“Disbelief” is the thorniest of issues in the willing suspension of disbelief. Norman Holland interprets disbelief as “un-belief,” a “kind of imaginative or empathetic belief,” which would certainly accomplish the expressive and affective goals of Coleridge’s purported suspension. Carroll’s definition of disbelief is similar in that it is simply a negative belief. It is especially important to note, with regard to these two definitions, that disbelief is not a lack of belief that \( A \) is \( x \) (object \( A \) has the property \( x \)); rather, it is a belief that \( A \) is not \( x \). In a typical production of Richard III, the spectator enters the theater bearing certain disbeliefs: (1) Richard III is not alive; (2) Richard III did not wear blue jeans; and (3) It is not the fifteenth century. Setting aside (suspending) these beliefs that \( A \) is not \( x \) allows the spectator to tacitly assent to the following correspondent beliefs that \( A \) is \( x \): (1a) Richard III is alive; (2a) Richard

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26 This is the interpretation of William Charlton, who writes, “When enjoying fiction we may have to suspend some of our beliefs about what is probable or even possible . . . but we do not suspend our conviction that we are reading a novel or watching a play.” This, however, contributes nothing to the solution of the paradox; Charlton does not mention how such a separation is possible or likely (William Charlton, “Feeling for the Fictitious,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 24 [1984]: 207). In this sense, however, Radford has a flawed argument when he says that, because we do not believe in the real existence of Mercutio, we therefore do not believe in his death and thus should not be moved by it; our belief in the nonexistence of Mercutio has been suspended (Colin Radford, “Tears and Fiction: A Reply to Weston,” *Philosophy* 52 [1977]: 209).


III wears blue jeans; and (3a) It is the fifteenth century. In all cases, however, note that the beliefs deal with the truth or falseness of propositions expressed in the fiction: locations, temporality, character traits, values, actions, and logical possibilities, among others. Belief in the truth of something, however, need not imply the objective truth, as the following section on fictional truths and fictional worlds will show.

H. H. Price and M. H. Abrams further narrow the definition of belief. Price suggests the concept of “half-belief,” in which one neither believes nor disbelieves a proposition fully. This active skepticism, however, would seem to interfere with the ability to fully emotionally react to fiction. Abrams suggests that the suspension of disbelief is selective: the audience is expected to suspend beliefs about the real existence of King Lear, but not to suspend archetypal beliefs about good and evil.

Critics of the cognitivist view posited by Carroll (among others) insist that belief is not necessary for emotional response. Currie does not consider belief essential for successful communication, and says that our knowledge of fiction as an intentional product of the creator deeply affects our decisions on how to respond to fiction. Similarly, Barrie Paskins states

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29 Thus Galgut is incorrect in saying, “We seem to have emotions despite a lack of belief concerning the intentional object of the emotion” (“Poetic Faith and Prosaic Concerns,” 191).

30 I owe the Richard III example to Schaper, “Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief,” 35.

31 “Belief aims at truth” (Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 39).


34 Radford, for instance, agrees that belief in the veracity of a proposition is necessary for emotional reaction (Radford, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 77).

bluntly, “Emotion does not involve existential belief.”36 A case in point would be the person who imagines that there is a burglar outside and is consequently frightened, however much the person does not really believe in the actual existence of the burglar.37

But in setting aside the disbelief that a particular hero does not really exist, do we truly believe, as a result of the suspension, in his real existence? For if one truly believed an onstage hero to be in danger and feared for him—and belief appears to be a conviction of truth, objective or subjective—one would rush to the telephone and call the police.38 Indeed, the sensible, “real-world” belief that people onstage are never really in danger has been suspended, so why not call the police? It is true in the real world that the person on stage is not in danger, but the appreciator’s belief in the veracity of that statement has been suspended, resulting in an open question as to whether or not the person is in danger. Truth and falseness are very delicate terms when speaking of belief, and especially so in the experience of fiction. The paradox of emotional reaction to, and involvement with, fictions is no closer to a solution if the “willing suspension of disbelief” suggests voluntary belief in propositions that are inherently untrue and even nonexistent in reality. The phrase “‘true’ in the real world,” however, offers an enticing prospect for solution. If there is more than one applicable “world,” then perhaps there is more than one applicable truth and not just black-and-white contrafactuals. Several authors suggest the existence of “fictional worlds” and, with them, “fictional truths.” These, perhaps, will address the apparent falseness of propositions evidently accepted by appreciators of fiction.


37 This is an example from Walton’s “Fearing Fictions,” 6. Some would argue that it is the thought of the burglar that excites the emotions. See below, “Thought and transfer theories,” for a fuller explanation.
“Look, my lord, it comes, in the fictional world of the play!”

One of a drama appreciator’s real beliefs might be, “Mercutio did not and does not really exist;” this is objectively true. Yet a genuine reaction of sadness upon Mercutio’s death in *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that the appreciator does indeed believe in the veracity of Mercutio’s existence, for reacting to something that one knows to be really nonexistent (either Mercutio or his death) seems counterintuitive. Objectively, Mercutio does not exist, but subjectively, this does not seem so, for someone named Mercutio, with the properties of Mercutio, appears before our eyes. What is this subjective viewpoint, exactly? If objective truth is the way things *really are*, in the real world, then subjective truth is either (1) the way things *really are not*, in the real world, or (2) the way things *really are, not in the real world*? If we assume (2)—which seems the preferable definition since (1) appears to deny the existence of any truth but objective truth—then the possibility of alternative “worlds” arises as an explanation of subjective truth and/or experience. The concept of “fictional worlds,” as articulated by several authors, has much to contribute in this regard.

A fictional world is distinct in some way from the real world, as articulated by a given work of fiction. Thomas G. Pavel notes, “To establish a relation of alternativeness from one world to the next [e.g., from the real world to any fictional world], one needs a criterion—say the identity of the individuals who populate the worlds.”39 Such “salient structures” are those entities in one world that have no correspondences in other worlds.40 For instance, Atticus Finch does not inhabit the real world; instead, he inhabits the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world. Sancho Panza does not inhabit the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world or the real world; he inhabits the *Don-

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38 Ibid., 7.

39 Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, 44.
Quixote-de-la-Mancha-world. But Napoleon Bonaparte inhabits (inhabited) the real world, and also inhabits the War-and-Peace-world as a character. How is this possible? Such overlappings between the real world and fictional worlds (or between separate fictional worlds) are possible, common, and sometimes unavoidable; in this case, it is not Napoleon Bonaparte that distinguishes the War-and-Peace-world from the real world, but rather other characters, such as Natasha Rostova.41

But what is our evidence that Sancho Panza did not, does not, and will never inhabit the To-Kill-a-Mockingbird-world? There is none, at least none explicitly stated in Harper Lee’s novel. This introduces an important point: that fictional worlds are “intrinsically incomplete” by nature, by explicit design, and by implication. Pavel states that “oral and written [and visual] compendia cannot include all of the contents of the miscellany they imitate.”42 In other words, because a novel limits itself to particular fictional times, places, and people with a limited amount of descriptive words, it cannot possibly correspond in every particular way to the aspects of the real world that it purports to represent. It is impossible and impractical to describe every last detail of a fictional world—and, of course, the real world as well—without exhausting both creator and appreciator and without defeating the purpose of fiction.

Yet there are notable correspondences between fictional worlds and the real world in a great majority of fictions. In fictions as in reality, Earth’s seasons change and apples fall from

40 Ibid., 57.

41 Currie draws a distinction between “fictional worlds” and “possible worlds,” which he defines as “alternative possibilities, ‘ways things might have been.’” Possible worlds, however, are limiting, as they depend directly on reality and its subsequent probabilities and possibilities. Not all fictional worlds will be possible worlds (Currie, The Nature of Fiction, 53–54). Mannison objects: “There really are no ‘fictional worlds’; and this is because there are no worlds other than our own; which is a world that contains unactualized possibilities. What a fiction discloses to us are some of the possibilities within our world” (Mannison, “On Being Moved by Fiction,” 77). Nonetheless, fictional worlds such as those suggested by the science-fiction genre are often not only unactualized, but impossible. Also, fictional worlds are not actual or real worlds; they are conceptual ones.

42 Pavel, Fictional Worlds, 75, 69.
trees without hovering in mid-air; most if not all of the physical and natural laws of the real world still apply in fictional worlds. In fact, appreciators will assume such broad correspondences unless the fiction signals otherwise. According to Pavel, appreciators will assume complete correspondence of fictional worlds and the real world and make adjustments only as necessary for the definition and distinction of the fictional world; he calls these adjustments “minimal departures.” The fewer the number of necessary departures, the more “realistic” or “true-to-life” (real-world-correspondent) a fictional world is. Realism is a discursive effort by the creator to involve the appreciator more deeply in the fiction; if the transition between the real world and the fictional world is negligible because of overwhelming correspondence, belief and thus emotion are more plausible in the fictional world as well.

Representing reality also offers a foundation for later presentations of the objectively unbelievable in the same fiction.

Fictional worlds, then, are intrinsically incomplete “clusters” of propositions, some of which may be true in the real world, and some of which may be impossible in the real world. There is, necessarily, no limit to probability or possibility in fictional worlds, although those

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43 E. M. Forster’s objection, then, is inaccurate: “We have entered a universe [fictional world] that has only answers to its own laws, supports itself, internally coheres and has a new standard of truth. . . . The world created by words exists neither in space nor time though it has semblances of both. . . . We can best define it by negations. It is not this world, its laws are not the laws of science or logic, its conclusions not those of common sense” (E. M. Forster, Anonymity: An Enquiry [London: Hogarth Press, 1925], 14). It is rare to find a fiction with such hyperbolic dissonances, although Forster directs his Enquiry mainly toward poetry, to which his objection may be slightly more applicable.

44 Pavel, Fictional Worlds, 105.

45 Ibid., 87–89.

46 Yet emotion is also possible, even common, in unrealistic fictional worlds, implying that some intrinsic element of the fiction other than correspondence to reality affects human response (Michael Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement 49 [1975]: 88).

47 Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 116.
worlds will usually bear at least some correspondence to the real world. This means that fictional characters do exist, albeit conceptually, in fictional worlds; they do not exist objectively, in the real world. Currie’s term for these characters, appropriately, is “nonactual existents.” As Eddy M. Zemach writes, “Iago’s [real-world] nonexistence does not lessen his villainy, and Anna [Karenina]’s innocence is not compromised by her fictionality. . . . The view, that strictly speaking Iago is [really] not a villain, is based on the error that [real-world] nonexistents have no properties.” Indeed, it is because of these properties, posited in the fiction through descriptions in its medium (e.g., words and paint), that fictional characters exist at all. They are not actual people but collections of described properties, with still other indeterminate but implied properties. But when we discuss characters in a fiction, we do not discuss words on a page—“being-words” is not a property of these characters. Rather, we discuss thought-manifestations (or, in the case of drama and film, corporeal-manifestations) of fictionally described properties. This distinction is important; Peter Lamarque summarizes, “In the fictional world [fictional characters] exist as people [but] in the real world they exist only as the senses of descriptions.”

In the realization of certain fiction genres, notably drama and motion pictures, physical

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]

48 Ibid., 64.

49 Currie, The Nature of Fiction, 133.


52 Lamarque, “Fiction and Reality,” 70.

manifestations of these properties are necessary; these manifestations are not to be confused with
the characters themselves.

Despite the similarity of many fictional characters and fictional worlds to real people and
the real world, there are important distinctions between the conceptual fictional worlds and the
actual real world. For instance, there can be no physical interaction between worlds.54 I cannot
leap onstage to prevent Juliet from killing herself, for I do not exist in the Romeo-and-Juliet-
world, and the real-world actress is not in need of rescue. Such intervention is not only
metaphysically impossible, but also “inappropriate” in the conventions of fiction.55 As John
Tooby and Leda Cosmides write, “Fictional worlds engage emotion systems while disengaging
action systems.”56 The conventions of fiction are such that, however convinced we are of the
truth-in-the-fictional-world, we do not attempt to physically interact with the denizens and
objects of the fictional world.

Many authors take note of the fact that when we speak of fictional characters, we do not
say, for instance, “In the To-Kill-a-Mockingbird-world, Scout Finch is in first grade,” and we
rarely say, “In the novel, Scout Finch is in first grade.” Instead, we say, “Scout Finch is in first
grade,” which, by the sound of it, asserts that Scout really exists despite our objective knowledge
that she does not—but she really exists only as a set of properties in the fiction To Kill a
Mockingbird. We omit fictive qualifiers not only for the sake of verbal brevity, but also as part of
our involvement with the fiction, as if to say that we truly believe (subjectively) in the reality of

54 Ibid., 292. According to Walton, however, there can be psychological interaction (Kendall Walton, “How
See below, “Make-believe theory,” for more detail.


Scout Finch. It is even more facetious for the fictional Horatio to say, “Look, my lord, it comes, in the fictional world of the play!” upon spotting the ghost of Hamlet’s father; fictional characters cannot admit that they are in a fiction lest they disbelieve their own existence (in the fictional world).

Given that fictional worlds are legitimate, abstract constructs, the concept of “truth” necessarily requires refinement. It is objectively true that Scout Finch does not really (physically) exist, but it is true in the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world that she does exist. Therefore, it is a “fictional truth” that Scout Finch exists. “Truth-conditions” as expressed by the propositions in fictions apply directly to the analogous fictional worlds, but not necessarily to the real world. As Currie writes: “We call something true when it is true in the actual world. But if there are worlds other than the actual world, presumably there are things true in those worlds but not true in the actual world.” As real and fictional worlds often, but not always, have correspondences, it is not necessary that everything in the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world correspond exactly to the real world; in fact, the fictional existence of Scout Finch is one of the salient structures that separates the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world from the real world. Indeed, fully imaginative response to a fiction involves not thinking about whether propositions are objectively true or false in the real world but instead considering those propositions only in regards to the fictional world.

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57 This intersects significantly with Walton’s theory of make-believe, detailed below. See Walton, “How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?,” 20, and Walton, “Fearing Fictions,” 21.


What is “fictionally true” in a given fictional world often involves implication, a mental filling-out of a fictional world’s characteristics based on propositions given explicitly by the fiction and logical possibilities generated from those propositions. There is a core of direct, primary truths expressed in the fiction that affects subsequent indirect or implied truths based on the probabilities and possibilities of the real world. Walton calls these contextually assumed truths “mental furniture.” For instance, the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world fictionally takes place in the Alabama in the 1930s; because most of the propositions of the fiction correspond to “real world” truths of Alabama in the 1930s, we can assume a high degree of correspondence in implied truths as well. For instance, we can assume that the New York Yankees exist in the *To-Kill-a-Mockingbird*-world, even though the novel, in its incompleteness, never explicitly mentions the team.

Fictional worlds and fictional truths thus defer some of the concerns of the fiction-emotion paradox. We do not truly believe in the real existence of fictional characters and situations; instead, we believe in the fictional existence of characters and situations in fictional worlds aligned with particular plays, novels, poems, paintings, sculptures, and so on. Although “fictional worlds” is an important concept in several scholars’ interpretations of the fiction-emotion paradox, not all scholars agree on the applicability of fictional worlds to the fiction-experience. In fact, there are many theories as to the reasons and extent of human involvement with fictions.

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63 Ibid., 17.

64 Does this then mean that our emotional reactions, previously assumed as genuine, are not truly real? Some authors do not believe so; this point will be addressed more fully below.
Theories of Human Involvement with and Reaction to Fiction

Much has been written on the fiction-emotion paradox; there are numerous theories, from a variety of approaches and disciplines, as to why and how such involvement occurs. I will briefly outline seven of the more prominent theories of human involvement with fiction, many of which have valuable elements that contribute to the interpretation of the willing suspension of disbelief.

(1) Regression theory. Norman N. Holland interprets human involvement with fiction as “a regression to the stage in infancy when . . . the child feels the boundaries between itself and mother as blurred, uncertain, and permeable.”65 This earlier state is one in which emotion and trust functions, but identity and reality-testing does not. Holland notes that, as in the dependent pleasure of nursing, one neglects one’s body when involved with a fiction; neurological theory contributes the term “habituation,” meaning that one thinks about something (i.e., the fiction only) when one focuses on it.66 D. W. Winnicott’s idea of “transitional phenomena” also contributes much to regression theory. The transitional phenomenon occurs during the disillusionment of an infant after weaning. To that point, the infant considers the mother’s breast as part of itself, because of the complete trust and pleasure derived from the mother. A “transitional object”—a teddy bear, for instance—helps the infant eventually distinguish individuality and establish independence. As Winnicott says, “The term transitional object . . . gives room for the process of becoming able to accept


66 Ibid.
difference and similarity.” In terms of fiction and interaction with worlds, this translates into the distinction between objective and subjective realities. As Winnicott says, “The task of reality-acceptance is never completed . . . no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality . . . relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.).”

Fiction as a transitional object, then, makes sense in relation to Holland’s view of the willing suspension of disbelief as a regression to a blurred, permeable state of trust and expectation of pleasure. The idea of “losing oneself” in a fiction corresponds greatly to the identity-forming period of infancy mentioned by Holland. “We suspend reality-testing” because of our trust in pleasure-from-fiction, according to Holland; the physical isolation of fictions (e.g., frames and stage boundaries) allows us to keep the fictions safely away from us while enjoying them. Infant-like trust allows us to emote; isolation allows us to keep the transitional-object-fiction at a safe distance.

(2) Adaptation theory. The human attraction to fiction is difficult to explain in Darwinian evolutionary terms, for we “feel richly but act not at all, indeed losing awareness of

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68 Ibid., 13.


70 Ibid., 9–10; Holland, “The Willing Suspension of Disbelief: A Neuro-Psychoanalytic View.”

71 Despite the insights of this psychoanalytic view, Holland restates the problem of the suspension of disbelief, which is the apparent holding of contradictory beliefs (in this case, trust of the fiction and isolation from it). He does note, however, that the prefrontal cortex, with which we do our most complex thinking, has the capability of inhibiting action but not emotion, explaining somewhat the reason that we emote for a hero but do not call the police when he is in danger (Holland, “The Willing Suspension of Disbelief: A Neuro-Psychoanalytic View”).
our bodies and nonrelevant senses and activities.”

Tooby and Cosmides state that “this selectivity in how our mental subsystems respond suggests functional design.”

According to their interpretation, the fiction-experience is highly practical in a developmental sense. They state that, in evolutionary terms, human involvement with fiction is likely an accidental byproduct of reactions meant for non-fiction objects and situations. We attend to fiction, they say, because the mind detects that the information contained in the fiction may help to organize future adaptations to similar—but actual—situations. Tooby and Cosmides point to cognitive “decoupling”—the quarantining of “sets of representations” (real and fictional) from one another—as a primary tool for reasoning and problem-solving. The human mind “preserves storehouses of information whose truth value is suspended, in decoupled form, ready to be tapped to make inferences . . . or regulate behavior whenever the organism finds itself inside the scope of the conditions where such information applies.”

The idea is attractive in that it trusts the highly evolved human species to infer truth in both reality and fiction and connect them. For a theory that asserts an even more stringent divide between real and fictional propositions, see “Belief dossiers and ordered beliefs” below.

(3) Self-deception. As early as the eighteenth century, Kenrick opined that “the [drama] spectator is unquestionably deceived, but the deception goes no farther than the

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73 Ibid., 9.

74 Ibid., 10. The authors also consider that pretense may have helped our ancestors survive somehow, or that fictional engagement is a chance combination of genes. The authors consider the latter option far-fetched on the grounds that the artistic experience is too “organized” to be a random event (11).

75 Ibid., 20–21.
passions, it affects our sensibility but not our understanding; and is by no means so powerful a delusion as to affect our belief.”\(^{76}\) In 1925 E. M. Forster wrote that “the poet wrote the poem no doubt, but he forgot himself while he wrote it, and we forget him while we read.”\(^{77}\) The implication is one of conscious absent-mindedness; Jerry L. Guthrie substitutes the term self-deception, used in psychology, as the reason for emotional response to fiction. He defines self-deception as the simultaneous, purposeful, and fully conscious belief of \(A\) and not-\(A\). Psychologically, it is a form of lying to oneself.\(^{78}\) Not many authors expand on this idea, however, because it projects largely unattractive qualities upon fiction appreciators. The implication that one must trick oneself or be easily duped to appreciate fiction is unflattering, to say the least; it suggests a certain lack of control over one’s mental faculties.

(4) *Irrationality theory.* Colin Radford asks of drama spectators, “How can we feel genuinely and involuntarily sad, and weep, as we do, knowing that no one has suffered or died?”\(^{79}\) The idea is that, since we do not truly believe in the real existence of the characters, we also do not believe in the existence of their suffering, which allegedly causes our (real) emotion.\(^{80}\) Perplexingly, Radford sees no paradox inherent in *historical* novels or plays or in documentary films, “for these works depict and forcibly remind us of the real plight and of the real sufferings of real people, and


\(^{77}\) Forster, *Anonymity: An Enquiry*, 17.


\(^{79}\) Radford, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 77.

\(^{80}\) Radford, “Tears and Fiction,” 209.
it is for these persons that we feel. What seems unintelligible is how we could have a similar reaction to the fate of Anna Karenina, the plight of Madame Bovary or the death of Mercutio. Yet we do.”

He accurately objects that the response to a fictional death is much different than the response to a real death, which is far more intense, lasts longer, and is not in the least aesthetically pleasing. Radford concludes that emotional response to fictional (i.e., objectively nonexistent) characters “involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence,” and is thus an irrational behavior. As with self-deception theory, Radford’s irrationality theory is unflattering to the human species at large, implying widespread foolishness. Don Mannison, in his reply “On Being Moved by Fiction,” caustically suggests that inconsistent and incoherent fiction appreciators “stop drinking, study logic, and stay away from works of art such as Anna Karenina.”

(5) Thought and transfer theory. Carroll wonders why, if the emotional response to fiction is so genuine, we do not throw down horror novels and flee in fright. He posits a “thought theory” as a solution, suggesting that it is the thought of something, not an actual belief in its real existence, that motivates emotional response to fiction. The advantage to this theory is that the emotion remains real while the object—a

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81 Radford, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 69.

82 Ibid., 69, 76–77.

83 Ibid., 78. H. O. Mounce agrees that “it is only the irrational man [woman], succumbing to illusion, who grieves [for Desdemona, in this case]” (H. O. Mounce, “Art and Real Life, Philosophy 55 [1980]: 184).

84 Mannison, “On Being Moved by Fiction,” 80. Weston, in a symposium with Radford on “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” objects for a different reason. He states that the response to fiction is not an irrational response to nonexistent characters, but rather a rational response to works of art. He suggests that personal interpretation and context spur emotional response; see below, “Thought and transfer theory,” for further elaboration of Weston’s view (Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by Anna Karenina?,” 81, 84, 86).

85 Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror, 82.
mere thought, a mere mental construct—is not real or tangible in any world, thus ensuring that we do not believe in the existence of something that is objectively nonexistent.\textsuperscript{86} We are moved therefore not by the fictional character Anna Karenina, but by the thought of her innocence and her grisly end. Such thoughts, Mannison suggests, are prompted by potentialities, by possibilities that the same thought-contents could logically occur in the real world.\textsuperscript{87} H. O. Mounce logically asks that if situation \((A)\) moves us to response \((B)\) in the real world, why would a fictional representation of \((A), (A')\), not also move us to response \((B)\)? He argues that it is not the fictional \((A')\) that is the stimulus to response \((B)\), but rather the correspondent, real-life \((A)\).\textsuperscript{88} Currie concurs, suggesting a “transfer theory” of thoughts in which our emotions for fictional-character-thought-contents are causal, in that they remind us of real people and situations.\textsuperscript{89} Johnson, in 1765, thought much the same way: “It will be asked how the drama moves, if it is not credited. . . . It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or done. . . . Imitations produce pain or pleasure not because they are mistaken for realities but because they bring realities to mind.”\textsuperscript{90} Indeed, Weston suggests that objects and situations of the same “class” (e.g., death), whether real or fictional, can

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 79–80.


\textsuperscript{88} Mounce, “Art and Real Life,” 188–89.

\textsuperscript{89} Currie, The Nature of Fiction, 188.

\textsuperscript{90} Quoted in Vickers, Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, 71.
produce similar emotional responses. Lamarque offers a slight twist on thought theory in proposing that fictional characters enter the real world via descriptions, which, as mentioned above, direct thought- or corporeal-manifestations of these characters’ properties. Lamarque suggests that the descriptions become thought-contents for the appreciator, and the appreciator then directs fear, pity, or other such emotional responses toward those thought-contents. Lamarque posits another advantage to thought theory (in addition to thought theory’s acceptance of genuine emotion and dismissal of the fictional as “real in another world”): that it helps to explain why we do not totally act as if a real event, situation, or object is before us.

(6) Belief dossiers and ordered beliefs. Following the reasoning of self-deception theory and the distinct “banks” of representations proposed by Tooby and Cosmides, Zemach posits the existence of mental “belief dossiers,” divisions of the mind that accommodate otherwise inconsistent ideas. These dossiers, between which contradictory beliefs can coexist, allow for “double-think.” Dossiers are consistent within themselves, but not necessarily with each other. Elisa Galgut expands on this idea, proposing that human engagement with fiction involves both a real-world dossier and a fictional-world dossier; we therefore suspend the disbeliefs of the real-

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91 Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 83.

92 One might object: If characters are abstract, why take a genuine human interest in these collections of properties? Lamarque counters that our interest in real humans often takes an abstract form, such as natural curiosity, without exemplification of particular people; an example would be “rubber-necking” at accident scenes (Lamarque, “Fiction and Reality,” 70).

93 Lamarque, “How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?,” 302.

world dossier in order to enjoy fiction. The suspension of real-world disbeliefs, in this case, is not a full-fledged forgetfulness of the disbeliefs; Galgut claims that the real-world dossier is still present, but “backgrounded.” The fact that real-world beliefs remain in the background explains why we do not interfere with action in a drama. Real-world belief dossiers can, when necessary, “trump” other belief dossiers, as the real-world is the “dominant” belief dossier. Eva Schaper offers perhaps a more accurate description: first- and second-order beliefs. First-order beliefs deal with human artifacts and reality, in which there is no question of real existence. Second-order beliefs, like first-order, are contextual; however, they occur in the context of a fiction rather than in the context of reality. Zemach’s, Galgut’s, and Schaper’s contributions to self-deception and adaptational theories, then, include hierarchical systems of belief in which one “dossier” dominates and can overrule others when necessary.

(7) Make-believe theory. Kendall Walton suggests that a more accurate understanding of the fiction-emotion paradox occurs “not by promoting fictions to our level but by [our] descending to theirs.” He articulates a theory of “make-believe,” saying that “a work of fiction is a prop in a game of make-believe . . . played by appreciators.”

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95 Galgut, “Poetic Faith and Prosaic Concerns,” 194. Note that dossiers necessarily involve the acceptance of fictional worlds.

96 Ibid., 197.

97 Ibid., 196.


100 Walton, “Fiction, Fiction-Making, and Styles of Fictionality,” 87. Note that the actual, physical fiction-artifacts (e.g., the paper of a book or the performance of a play) are not the props, but rather the fiction-contents (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 51n32). Currie qualifies Walton’s definition of make-believe in stating that
Games, as he points out, are often make-believe theater, as in the case of children and their father playing “monster.” Walton uses “make-believe truths” in the same sense as fictional truths, only as applied to a “game.” Appreciators are participants in the fiction, albeit passive and reflective; they act as themselves and “play along” with the fiction. No longer is the appreciator an external observer from the real world, but a somewhat omniscient, action-incapable observer in the fictional world. As a result, Walton says, emotional reactions are not real, but “quasi”-emotional reactions: The appreciator only pretends to be (acts as if he or she is) in the fictional world, and thus only pretends to have a reaction. Entrance into the game still presupposes its tangible separation from reality, however; as Currie says, “The mature [appreciator] of fiction engages in an act of make-believe that is not productive of any obvious behavior.” This mature participant must remember that, after all, it is only a game, not reality. The disadvantages of make-believe theory are twofold, as outlined by Carroll. First, the term “quasi-emotion” implies that the emotion felt in the fiction-experience is not completely genuine, that it is merely reading fiction is a “largely internalized game of make-believe,” omitting some of the more overt, active implications of Walton’s term (Currie, The Nature of Fiction, 196).


103 The fact that the appreciator is incapable of action prevents physical interaction between real and fictional worlds.

104 Walton, “Fearing Fictions,” 6. One advantage to Walton’s theory is that it also explains how fictions retain suspense despite repeated exposure; no matter how many times one has experienced the fiction, one make-believedly does not know the outcome while participating in the game of make-believe (Walton, “Fearing Fictions,” 26).

acting on the appreciator’s part; sensory experience seems to indicate otherwise, even if the emotions are not as intense as those inspired by real situations. Secondly, the term “make-believe” relegates the fiction experience to folly, child’s play. Nonetheless, make-believe theory is attractive in that it involves a conscious separation from reality and encourages appreciator participation.

Clearly, there is no consensus on the details of the perception of and involvement with fiction. Disagreements range from the ontological quality of the fiction (is it part of a fictional world or simply nonexistent?) to the depth of human logic (is it natural to react to fictions, or irrational?) to human motivation for the fiction-experience (is it for expected pleasure or for subliminal adaptation?). It is not necessary to invent a new theory of fictional involvement, nor would such a theory be likely to please everyone. Instead, there are a few facets of these theories that are particularly applicable to a suspension of disbelief theory for programmatic music, which I will outline in Chapter Three.

What is it, exactly, that we disbelieve? In most cases with fiction, it is that \( A \) does not have the property of real existence, or that \( A \) does not really have the property \( \chi \). The suspension of this disbelief places it to the side and allows fictional worlds, with their own intrinsically incomplete but realistically correspondent properties, for consideration. The suspension also creates a hierarchy of distinct belief dossiers in which the real-world dossier coexists with the fictional-world dossier, but has no overwhelming dominance except in necessary cases preventing interaction between worlds. This allows for two strata of human thought: an immersion in, even passive participation in, a subjective fictional reality as expressed by descriptions in the fictional text or media. In many cases, the response occurs because of sets

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of properties described in the fiction and conceptualized in the appreciator’s mind as thought-contents or -manifestations: fictional characters and situations. The interaction of the two strata (reality and fiction) drives authors to question the rationality of juxtaposing such opposites. Some (such as Radford) say that two such strata cannot coexist, and that involvement with and reactions to one stratum results in irrational inconsistency with the other; others (Guthrie) see this as a sign of irreconcilable inner conflict through self-deception. Belief dossiers, ordered beliefs, and make-believe all establish a more practical hierarchy of belief systems in which one system momentarily supersedes the other. When experiencing a fiction, the appreciator’s real-world beliefs remain in the background while, at a more local and immediate level, fictional-world beliefs are prevalent. Should the fiction or the appreciator threaten to cross the conventional metaphysical and generic boundaries—by “saving” an onstage heroine, for instance—the dominant (real-world) belief dossier will override the fictional-world dossier, reminding the appreciator that “it is only a story” and preventing any such “silly” actions.

The willing suspension of disbelief suggests that fiction involves a voluntary aspect, which the organized hierarchy of belief dossiers elucidates: appreciators, knowing that they experiences a fiction (rather than a non-fiction), set aside one belief dossier in favor of another. The contents of this new fictional-world belief dossier develop and change constantly, using both explicit content and implication (itself based in part on logic, probability, and correspondences with the real-world dossier). The fictional-world belief dossier contains descriptions of properties to be experienced as truth, and it is these properties, experienced as subjectively real (rather than

107 It is important to note, however, that the appreciator can have an emotional reaction to the structure of a fictional work, such as the brushstrokes of a painting or the rhyme and meter of verse. In fact, much visual art seems to inspire reactions based not on particular fictional characters or situations, but on the translation of such objects through particular structures. The most vivid reactions, however, appear to be provoked by the linguistic arts: drama, motion pictures, and literature. These fictions seem to encourage involvement in part because of their temporal aspect; with a few exceptions, visual art is generally static over time save for surface wear-and-tear in its material (not its content).
as objective collections of words), with which appreciators involve themselves and for which they emote. The interaction with fiction is safe (trustful, as Holland would say) precisely because the dominant real-world belief dossier may interfere at any time to say that it is “only a fiction.” But as long as the fiction produces the desired pain-or-pleasure emotional effect, the appreciator is likely to mentally remain in the confines of the fictional-world dossier. If not, the appreciator quits the book, walks out of the movie theater, or ceases to pay attention. The suspension of disbelief, in these cases, is not worth the trouble, as it does not produce the result for which it exists.

**In Fair Verona, Where We Break the Suspension of Disbelief**

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur’d piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage,
Which but their children’s end naught could remove,
Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;
The which, if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss our toil shall strive to mend.

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 1–14

Hardly anything could ruin the effect of Juliet’s death scene more than a chirping cellular telephone. One of the fictionally true implications of the *Romeo-and-Juliet*-world is that no cellular telephones exist in Renaissance Verona. If one such device blares through the theater during the scene, sensory experience then defies the belief that there were no cellular telephones in Renaissance Verona. Hence, the suspension of disbelief is ruined, the aesthetic experience of


the fiction briefly shattered; the audience is perturbed rather than rapt, the owner of the phone labeled a rude and ignorant imbecile.110

The fiction-experience seems to require a certain concentration in order to maintain the aesthetic effect of emotional manipulation through fictional truths. Inconsistent attention to the properties and implications of the fictional world results in a far less intense experience. Not only the distracted appreciator but the fiction itself may upend the suspension of disbelief.

Perhaps the most frequent “breaking” of the suspension of disbelief occurs in the theater, one of the most intimate and immediately personal of fictions. Doris Fenton calls such theatrical conventions “extra-dramatic moments,” as they “constitute a stepping out of the world of make-believe into that of reality. . . . Such an interruption . . . by virtue of being an excursion into the actual, cannot at the same time be part of the world of fancy.”111 Fenton notes that prologues, epilogues, choruses, asides, and soliloquies all fulfill this function in the Elizabethan theater, its predecessors, and (less commonly) in later dramas.112 Direct address to the audience is the primary marker of such extra-dramatic moments; its purposes include humor, arousal of sympathy, information conveyance, and moral elucidation, among others.113 Fenton’s analysis of extra-dramatic moments rings heavily of make-believe theory and fictional worlds, predating Walton’s theory by some forty years. She uses the term “make-believe” frequently and notes that

110 Suggested by Radford, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” 72.
112 Ibid., 10, 87.
113 Ibid., 10.
in extra-dramatic moments, “The effect is less of the actor’s stepping out of his world, than of drawing the auditors into it, making them feel that they are actually part of it.”\footnote{Ibid., 11.}

One common technique of theatrical suspension-breaking is the aside. Bernard Beckerman notes two types of asides. First is the conversational aside, in which one fictional character addresses another while in the presence of other characters, who apparently do not hear them conversing. The second type of aside is the solo aside, in which one fictional character speaks, whether to the audience or to another object, without the rest of the onstage characters hearing him or her.\footnote{Bernard Beckerman, \textit{Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599–1609} (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 186.} It is a “convention of unheard speech” often used to comment on the action immediately past;\footnote{Ibid., 189.} it is unrealistic for the rest of the fictional characters not to hear the one(s) engaged in an aside, for they heard the character(s) previously and continue to hear him or her (them) afterward. Similarly, soliloquies address either the audience or an unknown object; they are just as “unrealistic” as asides, for their contents include “conscious thought brought to a point where it verges on speech.”\footnote{Ibid., 183.} The unveiling of the soul in such an intimate moment is unusual; humans do not realistically bare their innermost feelings verbally in conversations with themselves. Fenton uses, as an example, the title character’s opening soliloquy in \textit{Richard III}, in which the Duke of Gloucester both outlines necessary antecedent information and plans his course of action for the entire play. No such action would realistically occur if it were just Richard by himself; he tells \textit{the audience} this information for their own knowledge and entertainment, even without addressing any particular spectator.\footnote{Fenton, “The Extra-Dramatic Moment in Elizabethan Plays before 1616,” 92.}
Asides or soliloquies directed toward the audience are particularly unsettling—“surprising and even shocking,” in the words of Currie.\textsuperscript{119} In these cases, the appreciator’s role of observer or passive participant in the fictional world changes to an active one. It is fictional that a character addresses the appreciator. As Walton writes, “It is not commonly fictional . . . that characters notice or respond to us.”\textsuperscript{120} Direct address is a fictional character’s tacit admission that appreciators—who do not really exist in the same sense that the character does in the fictional world—watches him or her from another world, or from a special position in their own world. It is, in effect, a fictional character’s questioning of his or her own existence. Because we do not question our own actual existence, we believe that fictional humans, correspondingly, also do not question their existence. This clarifies why this limited moment of interaction is so striking and even destructive, just as the cellular telephone was.

Techniques and works that question their own subjective reality are so unsettling, Holland says, because “they create an uncertainty in us [the appreciators] as to whether the supposed fiction we are reading or watching is really a fiction or a reality about a fiction.”\textsuperscript{121} Holland uses, as an example, Laurence Sterne’s \textit{The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.}, which is about “writing the novel which is that novel.”\textsuperscript{122} An analogous technique of suspension-breaking in literature occurs with the use of footnotes in fiction. Footnotes, normally

\textsuperscript{119} Currie, \textit{The Nature of Fiction}, 96. In the case of excessive overuse of such techniques, the fiction-experience becomes far less intense: Witness the annoyance felt by the Duke’s party in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} when the \textit{Pyramus and Thisbe} players constantly interrupt their play for cautions and reminders to the audience (Fenton, “The Extra-Dramatic Moment in Elizabethan Plays before 1616,” 61).

\textsuperscript{120} Walton, \textit{Mimesis as Make-Believe}, 229.

\textsuperscript{121} Holland, “The ‘Willing Suspension of Disbelief’ Revisited,” 15.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 14. The aforementioned reaction to fiction’s structure is applicable in this case; the novel \textit{Tristram Shandy} might induce more of a reaction for its structural ingenuity than any of the characters or situations therein.
the domain of scholarly non-fiction writing, interrupt the fictional narrative to comment on it—in
effect, an authorial aside.123

If the admission of being fictional is a denial of true existence, then other techniques that
blur the lines between fiction and reality might also break the suspension of disbelief. Pavel
notes that fiction has borders, some of which are picture frames, the pages of a book, and the
platform of a stage. In addition to these physical features, the beginnings and ends of temporal
fictions are borders. In this sense, dramatic prologues and epilogues blur the definition of
fictions, as they often address the appreciator while establishing expository truths in the fictional
world.124 Examples are especially prevalent in the Elizabethan theater, one of which heads this
portion of the chapter. The prologue to Romeo and Juliet encapsulates the plot of the entire play,
rendering the performance useless from a general informational perspective. Yet the prologue
itself gives none of the pain-or-pleasure emotion that the actual fiction does. It serves a
transitional purpose from the real to the fictional world while also distinguishing the worlds from
one another. Similarly, Puck directly addresses the audience in the epilogue of A Midsummer
Night’s Dream, noting not only the illusory nature of his and his fellow characters’ existences
(“shadows”), but also the “slumber”-like state of the audience. He ends with an appeal for
applause:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber’d here
While these visions did appear. . . .

123 Shari Benstock, “At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text,” Publications of the
Jones as examples. A footnote is appropriate at this point to recognize Benstock’s contribution to scholarly non-
fiction; it would be inappropriate for me to cite her work should I write a novel about a music theory graduate
student writing his thesis on the suspension of disbelief in programmatic music. A corresponding technique in the
visual arts might be for an artist to paint a self-portrait of the artist painting a self-portrait, as George Gershwin did,
for instance.

124 Pavel, Fictional Worlds, 82.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.  
V.i.431–34, 445–46

As temporal and physical frames, prologues and epilogues effect transitions into and out of fictional worlds, respectively, and, as they comment on the contents of the fiction of which they are a part, involve no suspension of disbelief. In commenting on the fictional content of which it is marginally a part, a prologue or epilogue toys with—perhaps even prepares—the suspension of disbelief. In short, techniques that break or prepare suspensions of disbelief question the property of the fictional world’s existence, which the suspension purports to dismiss.

**The Unanswered Questions**

Where does this leave us, as far as a musical suspension of disbelief? The challenges of the concept in drama, motion pictures, literature, painting, and sculpture are apparent from the nuances and theories listed above. No such application of the willing suspension of disbelief to music has been attempted, and therefore the relevance of the concept to music requires justification. I began this chapter with some silly questions, and end it with some serious ones, intending to narrow the focus of a musical suspension of disbelief:

(1) Is a piece of music a fiction? If so, what properties give it the quality of fiction?

(2) Most fictions that involve a suspension of disbelief involve either explicitly tangible, perceptible linguistic and/or visual information, neither of which traditional instrumental programmatic music possesses. What adaptations must consequently be made to the concept of suspension of disbelief for music?

(3) Does the concept of fictional worlds apply to music? Does such a concept as a “fictional musical world” exist?

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(4) Do the same theories of human involvement with fiction offer similar insights to music, if a suspension of disbelief is applicable?

(5) If there is a musical suspension of disbelief, can it also be broken? How?

Chapter Two answers the most fundamental of these questions, namely (1). The question of music’s fictionality relates directly to its ability to express thought-contents through representation; it is this property of representation that Chapter Two treats in detail. Questions (2), (3), and (4) naturally follow. Chapter Three will consider the logistics of a theory of musical suspension of disbelief, including the breaking thereof (Question [5]), while Chapter Four will apply the concept to specific literature.
Chapter Two

Beethoven’s Cuckoo and Mendelssohn’s Ass
Musical Representation Reconsidered

Example 1: Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 6, II (“Scene by the Brook”), mm. 129–33.¹

Example 2: Felix Mendelssohn, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Overture), mm. 198–201.²

Cuckoos and Asses, or Trills and Diminished Triads?

The brief passage of music in Example 1 might innocently be described as the warbling of birds in the countryside as observed by Beethoven and recorded in his Sixth Symphony.

Example 2 has often been interpreted as Mendelssohn’s musical version of a braying ass—specifically, the transfigured Nick Bottom in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Literally, however, Example 1 merely contains an inordinate number of flute trills and relatively

¹ Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 6 in F Major (Pastorale), in Symphonies Nos. 5, 6, and 7 in Full Score (New York: Dover, 1989), 125–26. Reduction by the author.

² Felix Mendelssohn, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Overture), in Major Orchestral Works in Full Score (New York: Dover, 1975), 17. Reduction by the author.
stagnant, repetitious fragments centered on the tonic triad (it is, after all, a coda) in the clarinets and oboes—and nothing more.³ Example 2 is but a contrasting theme in an overture, possessed of large melodic intervals (i.e., major ninths) and notably prominent, lengthy dissonant sonorities (i.e., borrowed first-inversion diminished triads). As lifeless and deflating as the literal view sounds, one can hardly argue against it from a musically descriptive standpoint;⁴ simultaneously, the first proposals regarding birds and an ass, though wittily audacious and appealing, are difficult to defend as anything but metaphor, based on the music alone.

That music may suggest, imply, denote, and/or represent non-musical phenomena has long been a contentious statement in academic circles. This chapter focuses on the representational qualities of music through exhaustive conceptual definition of representation, historical perspectives on musical representation, current thoughts on the subject, and musical examples. Certain pieces of music—as with many other art forms—do indeed have representational qualities, albeit with limitations, and these representational qualities are paramount in the establishment of a suspension-of-disbelief phenomenon.

Indeed, for a suspension of disbelief to occur, there must be some proposition about which to suspend disbelief—something that is true in a fictional world or some property or characteristic about a denizen of or event in a fictional world. Programmatic instrumental music—the necessarily limited genre of this thesis—must be considered some type of fiction, or possess features overwhelmingly in common with fiction, to inspire a suspension of disbelief in

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³ Beethoven’s own indications of “Nachtigall” (nightingale), “Wachtel” (quail), and “Kukuk” (cuckoo) in the score complicate matters, and such extramusical texts will be discussed below.

⁴ Jenefer Robinson labels the literal view a “purist” one, in which “musical significance is always and necessarily internal to the music itself, and derives from . . . complex internal relationships” (Jenefer Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” in What is Music?: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music, ed. Philip Alperson [University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987], 167). Fred Everett Maus considers the (unnecessary) disjunction between musical structure and affect/meaning in great detail in “Music as Drama,” in Music and Meaning, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 107–111.
the appreciator. Superficially, it is unclear what such music contains about which one would
suspend disbelief; it is hard to believe or disbelieve a note in a score, or a tone produced by an
instrument. Music alone does not offer tangible propositions—propositions verifiable in and
comparable to the real world, or reliant upon real-world experience—for the appreciator’s
consideration as do drama, novels, poetry, and the visual arts; this is a result of music’s limited
dimensionality. The phenomenon of music is not visible, and thus does not transfer easily to the
most tangible, minutely tuned sense of sight, from which we gather a great deal of our verifiable
propositional information, or even visual metaphors; indeed, visual cues account for a majority
of semantic descriptive terms. If at all propositional, music must be conceptually (rather than
perceptually) propositional; this too is problematic, for as Plato observed, one cannot see what
one thinks. This leads Peter Kivy to conclude that music has a high “recalcitrance quotient” for
representation.

Recalcitrance, however, need not imply impossibility. The pleasure of viewing or
considering any representation, musical or otherwise, is dependent both on the recalcitrance of
the medium (e.g., bi-dimensionality in painting) and the relative success of the representation
(through medium-specific conventions) despite such recalcitrance. A theory of musical
representation must account for music’s sensual inscrutability against the definiteness, the

University Press, 1984), 95.

Robinson, 68n19; Kendall Walton, “What is Abstract about the Art of Music!?,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art


9 Kivy, Sound and Semblance, 98.

10 Ibid., 97, 99.
tangibility, of the actual objects and/or events that it is said to represent. One sees the likeness of a windmill in a painting, anger in an actor’s visage and behavior, but not the petals of a flower in a passage of music.¹¹

Instrumental programmatic music is the focus of this thesis for reasons that become clearer given the above difficulties with musical representation. Primarily, it is the genre under scrutiny because composers of instrumental programmatic music expressly indicate through titles and programs that the musical work possesses or indicates meaningful extramusical properties in addition to the intrinsic musical properties of the work—yet the musical properties, not any implied visual or tangible properties, of the work are the only ones perceptible to the appreciator.¹² This implies that the musical medium’s properties and content are somehow related to, dependent on, or indicative of the extramusical properties and content, a relationship that suggests (but does not solidify, or specify) representation. As purely instrumental music, the works sampled in this thesis can be analyzed as music alone, without the aid of other art forms or media often extrinsically juxtaposed with music (e.g., poetry and music in Lieder and operas, facial and bodily expression and music in ballet). Absolute music, or music without any claim to overt extramusical significance, could potentially possess such meaning, but the lack of such explicit claim as possessed by program music would make such efforts extremely difficult. The other arts, however, do offer useful perspectives on the meaning of representation. The following sections focus on representation as a general, inter-art concept, and define what it encompasses and what it does not.


¹² Robinson writes, “I suspect that musical significance does indeed largely consist in the complex internal structure of a musical piece. At the same time, however, there is a large body of music, such as program music, which explicitly lays claim to extramusical significance as well” (Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” 117).
Looking into “Seeing-in”

Definitions of “representation” and “representing” differ minutely from source to source, but all involve the re-creation of an actual object or event (or some plausibly real object or event) by means of an alternative medium. In this sense, then, a representation is not an imitation or a copy, as it does not seek to exactly replicate its source, but rather a literal “re-presentation,” an alternative interpretation or exhibition. Indeed, Kendall Walton equates “representation” with “fiction” as a vehicle of propositional truths in make-believe worlds (see Chapter One, “Theories of Human Involvement with and Reaction to Fiction, (7) Make-Believe Theory”). Although requirements of representation specific to music will be discussed below, certain recent theories contribute much to the understanding of representation as a general concept.

Richard Wollheim advocates a view of representation as “seeing-in,” in which one sees $b$ (the object of representation) in $a$ (the medium of representation). This sharpens Wollheim’s previously articulated concept of “seeing-as” (seeing $a$ as $b$), which he felt placed too much emphasis on the medium. The benefit of seeing-in, besides its attractive intuitive simplicity, is that it “permits unlimited simultaneous attention to what is seen and to the features of the medium.” This simultaneous attention is a crucial feature of the suspension of disbelief, and is a necessity for the consideration of an object as a representation. As an example, consider a painting of a mountain: by Wollheim’s account, one sees a mountain in the brushstrokes of oil on

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16 Ibid., 212.

17 Ibid., 213. Robinson also deems this a necessity for the enjoyment of the representation (Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” 118).
a canvas. One is aware both of the propositional content of the representation (the apparently
three-dimensional mountain, with its composite apparent properties) and of the representing
medium (layered oil on bi-dimensional canvas).^{18}

Wollheim’s concept is most easily applicable to the visual arts because of its semantic
emphasis on vision, but the attractive idea of “x-ing-in” (where x is a method of perception) may
translate to other arts and their representations. A full consideration of the practicality of the
analogous “hearing-in” experience for musical representation appears below with current views
on musical representation.^{19}

Nelson Goodman also offers many useful thoughts on the nature of representation. To
represent, he writes, c (the representational product in the medium) must symbolize, stand for,
and refer to d (the real-world content from which it derives); artifacts that represent “denote”
their contents.^{20} Perhaps most relevant to musical application is Goodman’s notion that
derotation is greatly dependent on preexistent symbol systems, articulated through conventions
and cultural inculcation; Goodman goes so far as to require symbolization for representation.^{21}
Jenefer Robinson summarizes Goodman’s position by stating that “representation is denotation

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^{18} Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 300–301.

^{19} The potential for misinformed or overly wrought “seeings-in” is great. One could see a very ugly dog in the *Mona Lisa*, but one is far more likely (and correct) to see an enigmatic woman in the painting. Titles,
conventions, and other factors dealing with the multiple possibilities of representational specifics will be discussed
below in conjunction with music’s specific requirements for representation. Roger Scruton also notes that some
seeings-in may be unintentional (where “intention” refers to the creator’s intention) and this leads him to conclude
that intention is necessary for representation to occur (Roger Scruton, “Representation in Music,” *Philosophy* 51

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^{21} Ibid., 41.
within a system.” In terms of music, such a “system” reeks of conventional gestures and semiotics; their importance will be explored below.

It is clear that Wollheim’s and Goodman’s concepts of representation have much to offer the arts as general, overarching approaches—the former as a balanced, participatory, and perceptual activity, and the latter as semantic definition. Their applicability to music—notoriously the most inscrutable of arts—remains to be seen. Before proceeding to the specifics of musical representation, however, it will be prudent to examine two issues marginally related to representation.

**What Representation Is Not: Narrativity and Expression**

Theories and definitions of narrativity and expression in music do not elide with the concepts of musical representation most relevant to this thesis, though both are related and absorbing, perhaps even necessary, corollaries. Narrativity is primarily a structural feature, independent of extramusical meaning or representation (though either may certainly occur in a narrative musical structure), whereas musical expression is a concept frequently confused with representation.

Narratological perspectives in the arts derive from literature, in which the goal is to provide archetypal paradigms of event successions and functions in plots; Thomas G. Pavel notes, “Generalized mythocentrism postulates the existence of a narrative level in every meaningful event,” including music. Numerous scholars do extend the narrative analogy to music, based on its inviting structural hierarchies as manifested in form and tonal motion over

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22 Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” 169; her emphasis.

time. As Carolyn Abbate writes, “Nineteenth- and twentieth-century analyses that describe musical works as narrative depend for the most part on a basic apprehension of narrative as any sequence of events (whether these are physical deeds, or changing internal emotional states).” Sonata-allegro form, for instance, lends itself easily to narratological analysis, given its oppositional binaries in tonal areas and melodic characters, and its establishment, disruption, and restoration of an overall tonal norm. Binary systems such as protagonist/antagonist and the establishment-disruption-restoration paradigm are, among others, important foundations of narratological theories in literature, and inspire easy parallels in much music. Musical analysts find counterparts to literary characters—those entities directly participating in and enacting a

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26 Ibid., 34, 40, 41.
literary plot’s action—in unspecified musical “agents” or “agencies,” usually (and most easily) palpable in melodies and key areas.

Though narratological theories are viable for many pieces of music, narrativity does not imply and often does not involve musical representation. Muscular narrativity is rather a set of structural relations that functions similarly to the archetypes described for literary narrativity. In addition, analysts often apply narratological theories to absolute music, which professes little or no extramusical significance of the kind associated with musical representation, and in which musical structure is the primary means of intrinsic meaning. Narrativity is certainly applicable to program music, and narrative structures probably exist in a large amount of such music because of its overt claim of extramusical influence and storytelling in particular. Representation in program music, in fact, has the potential to clarify ambiguous narrative agents into more focused entities. Yet, as is evident from the number of narratological analyses of absolute music, narrativity is not a phenomenon in strict association with musical representation, but rather an analog of structural features and functions that matches closely those posited for the structure


28 If the details of musical narrativity (event-successions, functions, and agents) seem rather vague, it is hardly by accident: Abbate notes the “modern fear of excessively specific analogies” between music and drama, stating that abstract terms make such analogies less objectionable. She ultimately agrees with the application of the “narrative” label to music, claiming that “narrativity” implies a “distance engendered by discursive formulation,” or a past tense perspective that music lacks (Abbate, Unsung Voices, 25–26, 53). Anthony Newcomb clarifies that “agents” refer to humans, whereas “agencies” refer to “individuals, social classes, or natural forces,” among other possibilities (Anthony Newcomb, “Agencies/Actors in Instrumental Music: The Example of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, Second Movement,” in Musik als Text: Bericht über den Internationalen Kongreß der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Freiburg im Breisgau 1993, Bd. 1: Hauptreferate, Symposien, Kolloquien, ed. Hermann Danuser and Tobias Plebuch [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998], 63n10).

29 Abbate, Unsung Voices, 47.

and progression of literature. Such structural features and functions are most often used as tools for analysis rather than intimations of extramusical significance.

In a similar vein, Fred Everett Maus proposes an analog of “music as drama,” focusing more on the notion of musical agents than on any structural succession of functional events. The emphasis on agents—the concept of which is a carryover from musical narrativity—allows for a variety of dramatic interpretations, as the agents not only relate to one another but also enact the structural events of the musical composition. Edward T. Cone proposes an agent-like “persona” as the “voice” and event-enactor of musical compositions; the persona (unspecified by nature) is an intermediary between composer and appreciator that allegedly clarifies meaning. Both Maus’s and Cone’s perspectives provide engaging dialogues on the event-successions of musical compositions in non-technical, dramatic, imaginative language; but again, as with narrativity, music-as-drama and agents/personas have no necessary connection with musical representation, nor are agents or personas represented by the music. Instead, agents are analytical tools—vehicles of and enactors of intrinsic musical meanings and functions, which analysts interpret with dramatic terms. Musical representation of extramusical events or objects may, but need not, occur.

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33 In response to the question, “If music is a language, then who is speaking?” (Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 1). Unfortunately, Cone’s germinal question relies on the false assumption that music is a language; its semantic non-specificity, however, rules this out.


35 “Music can be dramatic without imitating or representing determinate characters” (Maus, “Music as Drama,” 128).
Similarly, “expression” is a term often used in close association with musical representation. The differences between them are minute, but nonetheless significant in their ramifications for this thesis. Goodman notes that, in music, “representation” generally refers to the representation of objects and events, whereas “expression” refers to the expression of emotions and behavior.\textsuperscript{36} This is true to some extent—one never reads that a composition “expresses a thunderstorm”—but is too definite a separation. The most necessary distinction between them is that musical representation indicates (points to) something external, something outside of the music’s structural realm, whereas musical expression indicates something internal, something “figuratively possessed” by the music.\textsuperscript{37} Like narrativity, music may be expressive without representing.\textsuperscript{38} Paraphrasing Kivy’s distillation, works of art express something about their content, which is made palpable by representation.\textsuperscript{39}

Expression places meaning within the music, as a result of the music. To say that a composition expresses sadness cannot mean that it indicates sadness outside of the composition. In this case, whose sadness would it be? Not the appreciator’s sadness, for the appreciator was not necessarily sad when the music was written or performed,\textsuperscript{40} and not the composer’s sadness, for there is never a guarantee of a composer’s mood matching a composition’s expression.\textsuperscript{41} Cone would answer that the persona expresses sadness as a result of the composition’s structural

\textsuperscript{36} Goodman, \textit{Languages of Art}, 46.


\textsuperscript{39} Kivy, \textit{Philosophies of Arts}, 40.

\textsuperscript{40} The appreciator, however, may be moved to sadness by the expression of sadness.

\textsuperscript{41} Certainly not given the very long creative processes involved for some works of art (Goodman, \textit{Languages of Art}, 47).
and archetypal features (perhaps slow tempo, minor mode, numerous descending semitones), which, through numerous associations and conventions perpetuated throughout musical history, have been given the meaning of musically indicating sadness. Expression, then, abides in the music and because of the music. It would be inappropriate to say that the music represents sadness, implying that the music has re-created sadness (again, whose? What kind of sadness?) in an alternative medium, when it is the music itself, and not anything external, that possesses and expresses the sadness.

Expression may, however, aid representation. Jerrold Levinson, Kivy, and Walton even consider expression a subspecies of representation because of their close, even overlapping, relationship. A composer may use the expressive character of music to delineate or describe a represented extramusical object possessing that same expressive character. For instance, music of a sad character may occur in the illustration of a funeral procession, in addition to the representational clues of martial rhythms and instrumentation (e.g., timpani), among others. Internal characteristics of music may share adjectival descriptions with extramusical objects; in this way, expression may enhance representation, though not necessarily require or suggest it.

The difficulty with expression, then, is that it is the internal structure of music manifested externally, whereas representation is necessarily of an external nature. This being the case, Kivy states that conservative nineteenth-century critics such as Eduard Hanslick and Edmund Gurney were not denying the ability of music to represent so much as they were grappling with its

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42 An opinion also expressed by Levinson in “Musical Expressiveness,” 107.


44 Goodman, Languages of Art, 85; Kivy, Sound and Semblance, 133.

45 How would one know that it is a funeral procession for a hero and not, say, a pet fish? See below, regarding disambiguation.
expressional content.\textsuperscript{46} Hanslick claimed in his treatise \textit{On the Musically Beautiful} that “the content of music is tonally moving forms,”\textsuperscript{47} rather than any emotion or ideal, but nowhere did Hanslick argue against musical representation, though the emphasis on music’s formal and structural features was detrimental to the consideration of its expressive and representational features.\textsuperscript{48} Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century composers, facing an increasingly negative stigma against representational music among critics, often lapsed into obtuse justifications defending their representations as internally contained “expression.”\textsuperscript{49} It is no wonder, then, that expression and representation have been mentioned, even maligned, in the same breath, given the fine lines distinguishing them from one another. The intersection of the two concepts recurs often in the history of representation; a historical perspective on musical representation is useful for the development of modern ideas on the concept.

\textbf{Origins and Development of Musical Representation Philosophies}

Concepts of music’s relation to the extramusical have existed for at least two thousand years, as its careful consideration by the ancient Greeks demonstrates. Aristotle included music of the flute and lyre as a “mode of imitation” along with epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and dithyrambic poetry.\textsuperscript{50} In the essay \textit{On Music} from \textit{Politics}, he elaborated that rhythm and melody

\textsuperscript{46} Gurney struggled with music’s connections to external objects, suggesting two relations: the \textit{resemblance} of musical sounds and motions with extramusical ones, and the “general qualities” which music has the ability to reflect. The first relation indicates representation, as will be seen below, whereas the second relation is a very vague nod toward expression (Edmund Gurney, \textit{The Power of Sound} [London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1880], 349–50). On Hanslick’s and Gurney’s work, see Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 144–45.


\textsuperscript{48} Hanslick argued to the contrary, in fact, in writing of musical imitation, tone-painting, and portrayal (Hanslick, \textit{On the Musically Beautiful}, 20).

\textsuperscript{49} Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 125.

in particular imitated “anger and gentleness . . . courage and temperance . . . all the qualities contrary to these . . . [and] the other qualities of character which hardly fall short of the actual affections.”\textsuperscript{51} The similarity of these imitations caused one’s feelings to “move in sympathy,” which Aristotle viewed as almost akin to real feeling: “The habit of feeling pleasure or pain at mere representations is not far removed from the same feeling about realities.”\textsuperscript{52}

Aristotle’s emphasis on emotion and arousal gravitates toward expression rather than resemblance or representation. If anything, according to Kivy, Aristotle drew comparisons between the “tones and accents” of music and emotional speech, or between music and human motion.\textsuperscript{53} Aristotle’s term \textit{mimesis} (often translated as “imitation” or “representation”) inspires translational ambiguity. “Imitation,” negative in connotation, suggests a copy or reproduction, whereas “re-presentation” implies translation into another medium without strict counterfeit.\textsuperscript{54} Kivy asks of imitation, “How can sound be an artificial likeness, or a copy, or a counterfeit of anger, or grief, courage or temperance?”\textsuperscript{55} If music “imitates” (i.e., copies) anything, it seems that it would only be capable of imitating other music or sonic events, rather than any emotions or states of being—but this hardly seems to be Aristotle’s argument.

Eighteenth-century Enlightenment musicians and philosophers, who admired Greek philosophy for its rationality, continued to relate “imitation” to the expression and arousal of emotion, culminating in \textit{Affektenlehre}, which applied the rhetorical use of both logic and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 45.
\item\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{54} Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 4, 17.
\item\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 4.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
emotion to music. Scholars such as Johann Mattheson posited that music, by being structurally isomorphic with certain “animal spirits,” aroused emotions in humans. Johann Georg Sulzer elaborated on Aristotle’s ideas when he wrote that certain musical elements, including harmonic progressions, meter, melody, rhythm, dynamics, accompaniment, and modulation, were “ideally suited” for the “portrayal of emotions and passions”; the distinction of musical elements as bearers of meaning was progressive. Among the forward thinkers of the time were Charles Avison and Adam Smith. Avison’s 1752 *Essay on Musical Expression* began to bridge the gaps between imitation, expression, and representation by way of associationism. Music’s imitation, he argued, brought objects to the appreciator’s mind that spurred associated emotions. The imitation or arousal of object-concepts, rather than emotions or states of being, was a step closer to the modern definition of imitation and a step away from expression, which so many philosophers had previously purported to be “imitation.” Though Smith subscribed to the prominent arousal-of-passions theories of the time, his advanced writings on imitation and representation anticipated modern thoughts on the subjects. He recognized that pure imitation involved counterfeit, and considered it disgraceful; that music’s representational powers, though existent, lacked clarity; that perception of content and medium was both necessary and the

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57 Kivy, *Osmin’s Rage*, 113–15. Note that structural isomorphism—a shared, usually cross-modal, description between two disparate objects—is hardly direct imitation, and thus is somewhat a diluted version of Aristotle’s ideal of *mimesis*. Mattheson’s ideas appear in his 1739 treatise *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*.


source of aesthetic pleasure; and that resemblance was not necessary for representation—all ideas of great import for modern theories of musical representation.60

Representation’s heyday came about in the nineteenth century with the dawn of musical Romanticism. As composers expanded upon and moved away from traditional forms, program music, which laid explicit claim to extramusical influence and representation, gained enormous popularity. Composers such as Franz Liszt, Bedrich Smetana, and Richard Wagner, among others, extolled music as the vehicle not only of emotions, but also of objects, characters, and even metaphysical subjects, in part because of a quest for unity between the arts and their common aspirations and themes.61 In the words of Leslie Orrey, the thought was that “music not only could, and should, express the sublime, but . . . could also interpret philosophical ideas.”62

Though programmatic music had existed for many years prior, early nineteenth-century works such as Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, with intimations of programmism in its movement’s titles, paved the way for such massively programmatically detailed works as Hector Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique and Smetana’s Vltava.

One perhaps unintentional result of the rise of program music was the tendency for composers and critics alike to demand the impossible of music, or to read a wild extramusical

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60 Adam Smith, “Of the Nature of that Imitation which Takes Place in What Are Called the Imitative Arts,” in Essays on Philosophical Subjects, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 176, 189, 196. Unfortunately, Smith writes just as many backward ideas in the essay, echoing the Aristotleian notion that music may imitate “conversation and passion,” writing that music imitates the more sociable passions (rather than the ill-tempered ones) more easily, and stating that titles of artworks are unimportant. Though an early indicator of musical representation philosophies, Smith’s impact in music is understandably dwarfed by the wider geopolitical influence of his Wealth of Nations.


analogy in every detail of the music—whether programmatic or absolute.\textsuperscript{63} Other than the occasional reference to structural isomorphism, shared descriptions, or quaint arousal theories, composers and critics did not explore the nature—the “how”—of musical representation in great detail, but rather accepted its plausibility as given, just as representation was a given in the other arts.\textsuperscript{64} The result too often was a naïve, “irresponsible,” and/or fantastical interpretation that, through the attachment of an extramusical meaning to every phrase, detracted from the musical craft itself.\textsuperscript{65} Conservative critics such as Hanslick and Gurney ridiculed this tendency, especially as applied to absolute, non-programmatic music. In attempts to both satisfy the public (upon whom their incomes depended) and to appease critics (upon whom their egos depended), composers of music with suggestive titles or subheadings filibustered on the vague “expression” or “poetic idea” of their works in order to escape the dreaded stigma of “program music.”

Representation, which was so inherent to program music in the nineteenth century, became the target of composers’ ambivalence (preserved impeccably in the writings of Richard Strauss) and critics’ scorn.

A critical distance between absolute and program music emerged, with the former considered superior to, or “purer” than, the latter. When music admitted to literary or visual influence, argued the conservative critics, it lost its “music-ness,” the very material uniqueness that established its identity in relation to the other arts.\textsuperscript{66} The establishment of scholarly disciplines (musicology and music theory) for the sole study of music in the academies further

\textsuperscript{63} Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 157.


\textsuperscript{65} Kivy, \textit{Philosophies of Arts}, 49.

\textsuperscript{66} Kivy, “Is Music an Art?,” 369.
encouraged the separation of the “pure” musical medium (absolutism) from any corrupting extramusical meaning (referentialism), particularly through field-specific jargon developed for rigorous, science-like legitimization. As a result, musical representation, which necessarily involves extramusical meaning, is a topic explored more by philosophers and aestheticians than theorists or musicologists, at least until the late twentieth century. The subject deserves more attention, particularly in a thesis of an interdisciplinary nature such as this one, for here it is not solely music under examination, but the relationship of art to appreciator. After all, as Kivy writes, “It must be acknowledged that composers, including very great ones, have gone to a great deal of trouble to make musical pictures [representations]; and for that reason alone the subject deserves serious consideration.”

**Thou Shalt Not Represent**

. . . the fear, awe, and sense of blasphemy associated with the “graven image” has persisted as one of the deepest undercurrents in human feeling, since the law of Moses first forbade us to make gods of our creations. 

Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*

What, then, is musical representation—this phenomenon through which music claims connection to the world of material, tangible things outside of its own notes and sounds and systems? Michael Kennedy writes, “Can music sound like fountains, rivers, or fireworks? Like Falstaff or moonlight? Realistic ‘effects’ are one thing, character-studies quite another. Yet such is the suggestive power of music that we ‘see’ Falstaff as vividly in Elgar’s music as in

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70 Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 120.
Shakespeare’s words—when we know that it is about Falstaff.” Many scholars of both music and the other arts agree that resemblance to the represented object is a key feature of representation in any medium. Even a few scribbles of ink on paper can resemble a certain person’s face, and by extension that ink drawing can represent the person. Elaborate layerings of oil on canvas represent lily pads through easy—not exact—resemblance, and a stentorian man draped in a toga and laurels can represent Julius Caesar on a stage. Resemblance, clearly, is of a general and not a specific nature, for exact resemblance is tantamount to counterfeit or imitation; resemblance also apparently relies mainly on visual evidence and/or comparison to past experience.

Musical representation immediately encounters difficulty with the requirement of resemblance. What shall music resemble, besides sound? How could a passage of music resemble a rotating windmill? One could write notes on staves in the shape of a windmill, but then the actual sound of the music—the written system and the resultant sounding tones being the two inseparable halves of the musical medium—still does not resemble the actual windmill. One could write a passage of music that resembles the sound of the wind that turns the windmill, but then one has represented the wind, not the windmill. How is music to resemble anything visual or kinetic, or to resemble the quality or character of something, if it is primarily an aural art? It seems that music, being a sound can only resemble, and thus represent, other sonic phenomena.

Consider first the musical representation of sounds, before any attempt at cross-modal translation. The passages reproduced in Examples 1 and 2 both represent sounds—the warbling

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72 One dissenting voice is that of Goodman (see Languages of Art, 3).
of birds and the braying of an ass, respectively. Certainly neither composer claimed the magical replication of bird or beast; the passages only sound like (and certainly not exactly like) birds and asses sound, adapted to tonal frameworks. Kivy labels this phenomenon, the strictest definition of musical representation through resemblance, the “sounds-like” phenomenon. After all, if an arrangement of pigments can represent a visual stimulus, why can an arrangement of tones not represent an aural stimulus? Natural sounds such as animal noises, wind, and rushing water are among the most commonly represented in music, though representations of mechanical sounds are also plentiful (e.g., the representation of a locomotive in Arthur Honegger’s Pacific 231). As Kivy and others note, however, the sounds-like phenomenon seems a particularly “banal” manner of representation—“just too easy,” in his words. Music, it seems, has a high resistance to representation, but not of aural phenomena.

If, as Kivy writes, the musical representation of sound is banal, then is any other kind of musical representation hopeless, if sound cannot resemble visual or kinetic stimuli? One would think not, given the claims of numerous critics and composers (particularly of the Romantic era) that such-and-such a piece represents the heroic deeds of such-and-such a person. Indeed, music has more often been claimed to be representative of things with no particular sound, but rather a specific visual definition. If one loosens the definition of “resemblance” even slightly, music becomes far more capable of representation.

73 “Musical portrayals reduce natural sounds to diatonic ones” (Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 325).

74 Kivy, Sound and Semblance, 44. Ottorino Respighi’s use of recorded nightingales in his Pini di Roma is not representation, but rather a presentation; nightingale-sounds representing nightingale-sounds is a redundancy. Beethoven’s “Nachtigall” (Example 1), however, is a representation in which the oscillating notes on the flute “sound like” a nightingale.

75 Kivy, Sound and Semblance, 28.

76 Ibid., 100; Walton agrees, labeling it “childish [and] silly” (Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 335).

Resemblance in its purest sense may involve “looking like,” but in a general sense, something can more loosely resemble another thing by “being like” it, or by sharing qualities or descriptions with it. Visual resemblance is not the whole ball of representational wax—a person who looks like a horse certainly could not be said to represent a horse (at least on purpose). Visual art that is more abstract than the purely lookalike resembles its subject more through shared characteristics than through any “pure” resemblance. Being structurally isomorphic, or sharing a synaesthetic, cross-modal description, may allow a passage of music to more loosely resemble a visual or kinetic object or event; Kivy calls this kind of “structural representation” “analogizing.” “All that is necessary to preserve isomorphism,” he says, “is that relationships in one domain have relational counterparts in another. . . . What must be preserved is an analogy of structure.” For instance, music that “ascends” (i.e., music that progresses sequentially higher in pitch frequency) shares a synaesthetic description of progressive height with other events that involve spatial ascension, such as the climbing of a mountain or the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. A dissonant harmony, by virtue of being sonically disharmonious, shares a description with a villain’s evil intention or the tragic end of a conflict. If music’s structural isomorphisms and common qualities with other objects seem to engender a proliferation of resemblances, it is hardly surprising; music lacks the propositional specificity of visual

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79 For example, see Peter Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, which “looks like” nothing in particular, but shares Broadway’s bright colors.

80 Wilson Coker suggests that “sensory isomorphism” may also exist, suggesting such an origin for some descriptive terms used in music, such as “bright” and “sharp,” among many others (Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* [New York: The Free Press, 1972], 56–57).


82 Kivy, *Sound and Simblance*, 75; his emphasis.

83 Ibid., 46–47.
information and necessarily requires some other disambiguating information for exactness of representation. The general definition of resemblance—“being like”—is not sufficient to determine musical representation; what must accompany any structural isomorphisms or synaesthetic metaphors is an aid to representation, a discussion of which appears below.

The difficulties of the “being like” relationship also explains why there is only a very limited musical correspondence (“hearing-in”) to Wollheim’s “seeing-in” concept. It is easy enough to see a flower in a painting and to hear a cuckoo in music, but it is impossible to hear a windmill in music—what sound does a windmill make? It is also impossible to see a windmill in the music, for music has no sight and presents nothing for visual consumption, other than a score—which is only half of the musical medium. As Robinson writes, “There is no auditory equivalent of the seeing-in experience;” “hearing-in” applies only to the “sounds-like” phenomenon.

Expression is a specific kind of structural isomorphism that aids representation. As previously mentioned, expression is a characteristic internal to the music, indicative of a range of emotions or states possessed by the music. Though expression often appears independently of representation, a composer may use expression when the object or event represented has a characteristic expressive of the same emotion or state of which the music is expressive. Music expressive of sadness may indicate a representation in which the represented object is sad or has characteristics structurally isomorphic with sadness. For instance, music representing a mourning person may manipulate certain musical elements such that a motive associated with the person expresses grief through musical convention. As ever, there are many things that cause

84 Ibid., 183; Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” 184.
or possess sadness, and mere expression of sadness will not lead an appreciator to conclude, for instance, that the mourning King Lear is the represented object, for there are many possible persons or entities expressive of grief other than King Lear; therefore some kind of disambiguating text is again required.

Expression and representation both require the musical medium to convey information, whether about its internal content or the external content to which it points. Music differs from other arts in that it expresses and represents temporally, using large swaths of material to establish meaning.\(^8^7\) To do so, it must necessarily have embedded or acquired meanings made palpable through familiar gestures—familiarity being engendered by historical and cultural conditioning—much as words communicate meaning through learned definitions.\(^8^8\) Music suffers from a propositional poverty, especially in comparison to the visual media, and so its meanings are broader, more general, and its gestural vocabulary less developed and extensive.\(^8^9\) Nonetheless, musical conventional associations are greatly significant in musical expression and representation, and are vehicles of meaning that aid reference to extramusical objects, events, and states.\(^9^0\) Musical conventions, rather than resembling any extramusical phenomena, instead refer to them by virtue of gestures’ cultural familiarity and the process of signification more

\(^{8^6}\) Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 133.


\(^{8^9}\) Ferguson notes that “no . . . precise symbolism may be predicated of music as the (supposed) one-to-one relation of the verbal symbol with the thing symbolized.” The only musical argument against this statement is the Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*, which he dismisses as an artificial construct (Ferguson, *Music as Metaphor*, 35, 35n). Kivy calls the *Leitmotiv* an “internal representation,” contingent to individual works and based on an unusually explicit stipulation by the creator that the representation be considered as such (Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 52).

\(^{9^0}\) Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 51.
widely known as semiosis.\textsuperscript{91} The conventional use of the minor mode to express the “darker” emotions (e.g., sadness, anger) arises not through any resemblance (looking- or being-like) of the minor mode to those emotions, or in any structural isomorphism between the two, but rather from repeated, contextual musical use, such that the minor mode now engenders certain expressive associations. The musical convention of the descending semitone “sigh motive” is a more specific example; though it bears relatively little structural isomorphism with an actual sigh, repeated use has established its conventional extramusical meaning. Allusions encompass one of music’s signature practices of reference, that is, to itself; for instance, Berlioz’s use of the \textit{Dies Irae} in the final movement of the \textit{Symphonie fantastique} is not a representation of anything in particular (if so, what? Loud thirteenth-century monks?), but rather to evoke expressive associations of mortality, fear, and the supernatural.\textsuperscript{92}

In any consideration of musical representation, one must inevitably address a problem already frequently encountered above, that of multiple possible meanings, or what Carolyn Abbate calls “interpretive promiscuity.”\textsuperscript{93} A musical representation may tell the appreciator that a bird warbles, but not necessarily specify which bird; that something rotates, but not specify that it is a windmill; that some unidentified object ascends; that something is expressive of sadness,

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\item \textsuperscript{91} Coker, \textit{Music and Meaning}, 10, 12, 18. The use of inculcated symbol systems (of which music has a limited one with gestural conventions) is a highlight of Goodman’s representational theory (Goodman, \textit{Languages of Art}, 38). The study of musical semiotics, while not explored in depth here, is nonetheless an important one in terms of representation. Those representational devices referred to as “conventional gestures” in this thesis use semiotic processes to encode extramusical meaning(s) within musical systems. Semiotics has been widely applied to music of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which the majority of music written was absolute music. For this reason, many studies in musical semiotics refer to abstract “topics” familiar to contemporary audiences, but which had little or no connection to extramusical \textit{representation}. Such “topics,” when combined with additional information such as a title or program, do impart representational meanings in programmatic music. For a survey of musical semiotics, see: V. Kofi Agawu, \textit{Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Raymond Monelle, “The Search for Topics,” in \textit{The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 14–40; and Leonard G. Ratner, \textit{Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style} (New York: Schirmer, 1980).
\item \textsuperscript{92} Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 13.
\end{itemize}
but not whether it is a funeral procession or a pathetic clown. Some details may be insignificant—for instance, which bird warbles. In Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, it is a small matter whether the bird is a cuckoo or a pigeon; the representation is of a rural bird’s call, and no additional information is necessary for a significant conveyance. In considering interpretive promiscuity, music’s distance from the exactness of the visual media is painfully distinct; it is in some ways akin to descriptions of fictional entities in novels, which may include any number of adjectives or similes but will never achieve the perceptual sharpness of a visual image, as no such definitive image exists. The representational subject of a symphonic poem, without any title or program given, is difficult to determine, though general structural and expressive characteristics may be evident. In order to achieve the kind of unambiguous representation manifest in the visual arts, drama, motion pictures, and some novels and poetry, music requires some “minimal information” beyond its own text, be it a work’s title or a program. Stephen Davies even argues that knowledge of the title or program is necessary for the enjoyment and comprehension of representational works. Except for the sounds-like representation of aural

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96 Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, 101. This view runs counter to the allegations of Cone, who claims that “the best program music . . . can be heard as absolute music.” While the structural features of program music are as open to analysis and appreciation as in any other work, Cone’s view is a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of the artwork as music and program/text/title—inseparable components in a hybrid artwork (Cone, *The Composer’s Voice*, 169).
phenomena, musical representation falls into Kivy’s category of “aided” representations, requiring the assistance of language for disambiguation.  

There is nothing foreign or shameful about aided representation, even in the other arts—as Kivy says, “Sometimes it requires a little help to hear the semblance in the sound; there is nothing paradoxical in that.” The visual arts regularly call on titles for disambiguation of specifics, as in Peter Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, and literary works often rely on titles for illumination of prominent themes and/or allusions, as in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Levinson includes representational disambiguation as one of the many functions of titles, noting that a title may narrow representational focus for the appreciator. In considering the title as an integral component of the artwork, and not just an afterthought or insignificant appendage, Levinson and others open artistic intent to consideration. Descriptive or non-generic titles reveal, to some extent, a creator’s intent for representation of a certain focus within the work, though not definitively, as intention is a notoriously slippery issue.

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102 Levinson, “Titles,” 33. Levinson and Adams contend that the “true title”—the title given by an author to a text—is the only one relevant to aesthetic consideration (Adams, “Titles, Titling, and Entitlement to,” 9). An example of a “false title” might be the “Moonlight” sobriquet often applied to Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, Op. 27, No. 1. As ever, unintended representations may occur, just as unintended “seeings-in” may occur. Walton notes,
For representational musical works specifically, titles and programs are two of the more common disambiguating texts used by composers; composers’ notes and sketches often reveal representational insights as well. Like titles, programs are, together with the music, integral parts of the artistic text and warrant attention based on the composer’s purposeful inclusion of it. Titles such as Richard Strauss’s *Don Quixote* narrow representational focus. Expressive characteristics, structural isomorphisms, and musical conventions of Strauss’s tone poem of that name suggest struggles, piety, and yearning, among many others, but knowledge of the title and its contextual implications from Miguel de Cervantes’s novel specifies that the struggles may be between Don Quixote and his imaginary foes, the piety may be that of traveling pilgrims, and the yearning may be for the ideal Dulcinea. Nothing musical would be missed had one not known the title, but the title is also an object of information importation necessary for consideration for the entire artwork; otherwise, *Don Quixote*’s struggles, piety, and yearning might mistakenly be interpreted as the musical life of a violent, lecherous priest, among other possible readings. Programs narrow the representational focus of music even more by prescribing specific events to which the music corresponds, as in Strauss’s *Eine Alpensinfonie*, in which the titles of the twenty-one “movements” amount to a program of successive events. Had Strauss composed the work with only the title and not the twenty-one subheadings, certain representational and expressional characteristics would perhaps be apparent enough (e.g., the sunrise, cowbells, and

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103 To paraphrase Davies, knowledge of the title affects the appreciator’s phenomenological experience of the work, both from an aural and a perceptual perspective (Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*, 112; “Representation in Music,” 19). James Hepokoski suggests that titles are “attempts by the author to set up the framing conditions of a text’s reception” (Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s *Don Juan* Reinvestigated,” in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and his Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992], 136).

waterfall, among others), but far more would be vague and ambiguous, full of interpretive possibilities (e.g., night, the glacier, and the summit, among others). As Frederick Niecks notes, programs or titles provide something that the music by itself might not have been able to express, and vice versa.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, as is the case with *Don Quixote*, they import banks of potential representational information relevant and specific to a particular title or program; Strauss’s choice of Cervantes’s novel as an intertextual foundation for his tone poem assured him of at least some audience familiarity with the represented events, objects, and characters.

Ideally, one reads representational content *out of* the music rather than *into* it; according to Kivy, this process, with a healthy dose of caution and musical logic, guides responsible representational interpretation.¹⁰⁶ If a representational interpretation adds nothing to comprehension of the music, then it is unnecessary and was probably ill attempted in the first place.¹⁰⁷ It would be easy to read minute extramusical details into *Don Quixote*, given its title and the massive corresponding novel, were it not for the cautionary note that music establishes meaning over time and rarely does so instantaneously or in quick succession. Similarly, it is easy enough to devise a fanciful representational reading of a piano sonata by Beethoven or other absolute music, as Arthur Schering demonstrates,¹⁰⁸ but the basis for doing so is nonexistent. Musical representation *requires* a minimal extramusical text for confirmation, and the intrinsic, generic titles of absolute music—however full and varied of expression it may be—provide no


¹⁰⁶ Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 199.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 209.

¹⁰⁸ Orrey, *Programme Music*, 27. At the close of *Sound and Semblance*, Kivy laments, “Have I not opened the door again to those infernal asses who must find a story in Beethoven’s piano sonatas, and pictures in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* . . . thus transforming Beethoven’s Fifth into Rorschach’s First?” (Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 197).
such text. Critics allege that the required accompanying text of musical representations do too much of the storytelling; but does it not follow that music does some of the storytelling? After all, the music is the medium “doing the work” of representing what the text stipulates. This uneven and variable balance between the representational responsibility of the text and that of the music leads Levinson to label program music a “juxtapositional hybrid,” in which two arts combine to form a new one.

Musical representation, then, relies heavily and necessarily on extramusical text(s). The only exception, the only unaided musical representation, is the sounds-like phenomenon, the representation of aural events. Any other allegation of musical representation requires extramusical support to disambiguate the concept of what is represented. Music then symbiotically (with the text) represents through loose resemblance (structural isomorphism, synaesthetic description), expressive correspondence, and conventional gestures and references. Ideally, the resemblances, expression, and conventions in the music are plain enough and require only the pinpoint fleshing-out of the title or program—Kendall Walton considers them

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109 Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 118.

110 Kivy, “In Defense of Musical Representation,” 62. Kivy also notes, of the distinction between medium and representation, “We want to say that a few dabs of yellow represent a flower, make it fictionally true perhaps that the flower is there, in front of the apple. What we do not want to say is that the yellow dabs are represented. They are what is doing the representing. What we do not want to say is that the melody is fictionally delayed; its literal, musical delay is what is making it fictionally true that some character in an opera or programmatic symphony is fictionally delaying” (Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 49).

111 Jerrold Levinson, “Hybrid Art Forms,” Journal of Aesthetic Education 18/4 (Winter 1984): 8. Other examples of juxtapositional hybrids include mime with music and film with piano roll accompaniment. One can also argue for program music as a transformational hybrid, in which arts meld, but more in the direction of one than the other.

112 Some, such as Coker, argue to the contrary, saying that the work on its own should reveal the artist’s intentions if it achieves its goal, but the propositional poverty of music overwhelms this possibility (Coker, Music and Meaning, 146).
“instances” or “notions” of potentially specific objects or events\textsuperscript{113}—but music does inevitably rely on a textual crutch for specificity. Far be it from anyone, also, to suggest that music is primarily representational, that a large sample of programmatic representational music exists, or that music’s main purpose is to “tell a story”; as Kivy demonstrates, representation is a secondary characteristic and appears only in selected literature.\textsuperscript{114} But the understanding of representational music necessarily involves an understanding of not only the music, but also the object(s) represented.\textsuperscript{115}

A Flock, a Wagging Tongue, a Windmill, and a Storm: Examples

Perhaps the wisest choice is to allow music to speak for itself. The three symphonic poems chosen for this thesis—Richard Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, *Don Quixote*, and *Eine Alpensinfonie*—offer many excellent examples of musical representation, both aided and unaided, with a variety of informative representational texts accompanying them. Four brief musical excerpts below demonstrate the wide variety of musical representations utilized by Strauss, whose own views on musical representation are also relevant as background.

Strauss’s ambivalence toward program music is evident in his writings. As a widely recognized international figure, he walked a fine line of criticism and popular support, and the conservative stigma against program music in vogue at the dawn of the twentieth century was apparently a preoccupation for him. Though Strauss proclaimed his major concerns to be musical expression and form, musical illustration (representation) “was the central feature of his compositional personality, the talent that, more than any other, set him apart from his peers,”

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Kivy, *Sound and Semblance*, 19.
\end{itemize}
which he accomplished with a degree of realism approaching the naturalistic. Among his prevarications were extensive writings on the “poetic idea,” which James Hepokoski analyzes as a narrative consisting of both concrete and abstract representations. The balance of musical structure and extramusical meaning was a problem for Strauss from the very beginning: Hans von Bülow criticized the first version of Strauss’s 1888 tone poem *Macbeth* for concluding with a triumphant march for Macduff, sacrificing “poetic” (programmatic) logic for musical logic. Strauss could also defend and chastise program music within the same essay, as he did in his undated “Recollections of My Youth and Years of Apprenticeship,” claiming both that program music was “merely a term of abuse used by all those who are incapable of being original,” but that “whenever music is not developed logically from within, it becomes ‘literary music.’” He admitted that one could “paint in sounds” but that composers risked asking too much of music representationally, then later stated that the realistic musical portrayals of the *Alpensinfonie* had come to him as easily as a cow giving milk. Strauss publicly spurned the label “program music” to avoid critical distaste while fully aware of the representational nature of his

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117 Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s *Don Juan* Reinvestigated,” 139.


120 Ibid., 39 (from a 1929 essay entitled “On Composing and Conducting”).

compositions, even writing that those who dismissed programs should feel free to listen to his compositions as absolute music as well.\(^{122}\)

To satisfy audiences’ curiosity about the extramusical content of his tone poems, however, Strauss approved a series of analytical pamphlets and program notes explicating the “poetic ideas” of his tone poems. Strauss initially opposed the idea when first proposed for *Till Eulenspiegel* by Franz Wüllner, the conductor for its debut;\(^{123}\) he later relented and sent Wüllner a score annotated with extramusical correspondences, which critic Wilhelm Mauke later consolidated into an explanatory pamphlet with *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung*.\(^{124}\) Similar analytical programs appeared for *Don Quixote* and *Eine Alpensinfonie*.\(^{125}\) His purpose in circulating these programs was, superficially, to inform the audiences of the tone poems’ poetic ideas, but critics say that such comprehension was necessary for Strauss’s ego.\(^{126}\) Indeed, such programs may have backfired in that “audiences reduced Strauss’s music to a sonorous illustration of the texts.”\(^{127}\)

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\(^{122}\) Strauss was concerned that music not “lose itself in pure abstractions and drift in limitless directions”; to prevent it from doing so, a program held it “within bounds which determine a certain form.” He added, “And an analytical programme of this kind should be nothing more than a starting-point. Those who are interested in it can use it. Those who really know how to listen to music doubtless have no need for it.” These statements appear in a July 5, 1905 response to a letter from Romain Rolland, speaking of the “shock” Strauss’s program for the *Symphonia Domestica* inflicted upon him (Rollo Myers, ed., *Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland: Correspondence* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 29).


\(^{124}\) Werbeck, *Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss*, 248. Wilhelm Klatte wrote the initial analysis of *Till Eulenspiegel* for the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* shortly after its premiere.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 260, 277. Critic Arthur Hahn wrote the analysis of *Don Quixote*, and the *Alpensinfonie* analysis appeared in the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 279.

Strauss used a variety of extramusical texts to achieve representation in the three tone poems selected for analysis in this thesis. *Till Eulenspiegel* derives from a set of folk tales in *König Drosselbart* in the *Grimms Märchen*, whereas *Don Quixote* features several episodes drawn from Cervantes’s novel of the same name. The only extramusical texts associated with *Eine Alpensinfonie* are the twenty-one subheadings that appear in the score, which are descriptive enough to constitute a detailed program. Strauss’s attitude on programmism had shifted by that point (1915) to a view that emphasized the appreciator’s construction of a broad mental picture or conception from minute, naturalistic representational details.

Four examples from the three selected tone poems sample the variety of Strauss’s representational techniques and demonstrate the objects and events typical of extramusical connection in the works. From a simple sounds-like phenomenon to a complex web of

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129 Strauss’s conception of the *Alpensinfonie*, several years in the making, also included influence from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*, which shares a similar regard for the purity of nature. Strauss ultimately decided not to label the composition the *Antichrist Sinfonie*, as he had once intended (Rainer Bayreuther, “Zur Entstehung der ‘Alpensinfonie’ von Richard Strauss,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 51 [1994]: 245; Werbeck, *Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss*, 185).

Example 3: Richard Strauss, *Don Quixote*, mm. 222–26.\(^{131}\)

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expressional and structurally isomorphic designs, the examples encompass a wide range of
techniques and relations to their corresponding musical texts.

Example 3 shows one of Strauss’s most renowned samples of representation, from
Variation II of *Don Quixote*. Though nearly unaided, and certainly of the sounds-like variety, the
title *Don Quixote* disambiguates the exact object of representation. Strauss’s choice of
instrumentation—oboes, clarinets, and, significantly, muted horns, muted trumpets, and muted
trombones—favors the nasal timbres. Fluttertonguing suggests ululation or rapid repetition of the
same utterance, and multiple on- and offbeat entries of varying lengths demonstrate a plurality of
“voices” in unapologetic, purposeful dissonance. Though the notes in the score and the
description on paper offer at best a sketch, the combined *sound* of the passage bears an uncanny
resemblance to the bleating of sheep. Were there any doubt about the object of representation in
this example, the title of the tone poem disambiguates, for one of the most notorious adventures
of Cervantes’s hero involves an attack on a flock of sheep in Part I, Chapter 18.132 Strauss’s
approved analytical program and his own conversations with critics confirm the extramusical
content of this setting.133

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133 Werbeck, *Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss*, 543; Cornelia Rost, “Richard Strauss, *Don Quixote*,
Quixote* (London: Ernst Eulenberg, n.d.), ii.
Example 4 is a brief instance of representation in *Till Eulenspiegel* utilizing the sounds-like phenomenon, structural isomorphism, and aid from the extramusical text. The most noticeable aspects of the passage are the durational length of the chord in m. 370 and the semitone trills that accompany it. The range of the passage is decidedly high, and the instrumentation is again nasal thanks to a predominance of woodwinds and stopped brass.

Listeners are familiar with the melodic content of mm. 369–70, as it includes the head motive of the primary theme of the work (presumably associated with the character Till Eulenspiegel). The music preceding this long fermata was a contrasting theme expressing martial regularity and pomposity, even learnedness from fugal imitation. As this example is not strictly a “sounds like” phenomenon, however, the extramusical text is necessary for disambiguation. Strauss’s annotated score indicates that this is Till Eulenspiegel’s *grosse Grimasse* (great grimace), or the waggling of his tongue, at the learned “Philistine” scholars that he so despises (and attempts to infiltrate). The melodic connection with the primary/Till Eulenspiegel theme informs the

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Example 5: Richard Strauss, *Don Quixote*, mm. 181–98.\(^{136}\)

appreciator as to the culprit of the tongue-wagging; the length, loud, and rapid alternation of notes a semitone apart bears structural similarity to the same event, which involves the rapid and loud vibration of the tongue, often with accompanying change of pitch; and the nasality of timbre also indicates the juvenile action undertaken.

The representational intricacies of Example 5 are many and demonstrate well music’s ability to represent over time rather than instantly. Variation I of Don Quixote, from which this excerpt comes, is another of Don Quixote’s famous encounters. The four-note melodic figure played by clarinet II, bassoon III, violins II, and the violas in mm. 181–82 is a new figure in the composition, and one of apparent importance given its obsessive repetition in mm. 185–99 and the addition of trumpet III and tenor and bass tubas. The motive undergoes rhythmic diminution from mm. 185–92, and augmentation from mm. 192–99. The solo ’cello and bass clarinet passages in mm. 181–86 conventionally represent the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza through prior usage in the composition, suggesting their presence and/or communication. The diminution of the four-note motive begins, significantly, with the entrance of the piccolo, flutes, and solo violins in m. 186, implying some sort of causal relationship, particularly since the four-note motive augments after the flutes and violins fall silent in m. 192–93. These latter instruments are remarkable for their stasis, particularly for the rapid repeated notes in the piccolo and flutes, and thus may be structurally isomorphic to some event involving rapid but steady movement—whereas the diminution and augmentation of the four-note motive over the same timespan may indicate some event of varying speed or steadiness. The entrance of the solo ’cello with supporting horns in m. 190 is unremarkable, as it indicates the character of Don Quixote from prior usage of the melody. The ascending, developmental nature of the melody is indicative, conventionally, of anticipation and impending action. The astonishingly rapid,
fortissimo arpeggios articulated by the woodwinds, violins I, and solo ’cello in m. 192 indicate an event of sudden and emphatic importance (made still stronger by the crash of cymbals), and the subsequent rapid descent in the harp and solo ’cello indicates the reaction or counterbalance thereto, culminating in the sustained low F in the ’cellos.

Again, though the musical actions described above are dramatic in nature, their structures are very general and thus require the program for disambiguation. Strauss’s writings and analytical program confirm that this episode corresponds with Cervantes’s Part I, Chapter 8, in which Don Quixote attacks a windmill.137 Now the structural isomorphisms of the passage become apparent. The causal relationship between the static flute and violin lines and the obsessive four-note melodic motive is one of wind and windmill, respectively; only upon entrance of the motor-like flutes and violins in m. 186 (wind) does the repetitive four-note motive (rotating windmill, presumably with four corresponding blades) begin to diminish its rhythmic values in earnest (i.e., increase its turning speed).138 When the “wind” ceases, so does the motion of the “windmill’s” blades, resulting in rhythmic augmentation in mm. 192–99. The entrance or approach of Don Quixote is apparent enough in the primary theme in m. 190, and the knight errant’s brash attack shares the lightning-quick, dynamic force of the woodwind and violin attack in m. 192, not to mention the structurally isomorphic collision of the cymbals. The harp and ’cello’s arpeggiated descent is only too apparent as a structurally isomorphic, spatial descent—Don Quixote’s fall from his horse—and the length of the ’cellos’ low F corresponds to his stunned prostration on the ground. Imagination is required of the appreciator, as is knowledge

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138 Specht, Richard Strauss und sein Werk, 263.
of the program or at least inference of the program from the title of the work; but Strauss’s techniques are no less imaginative for this.

Example 6 reproduces one of Strauss’s most noted accomplishments of representation from *Eine Alpensinfonie*. Again, though event-successions are distinct, disambiguation is necessary from the program for exact determination of the representational objects. The excerpt begins with the very short, distinctive attacks of flute I, oboe I, and pizzicato violins I, joined shortly by piccolos, E-flat clarinet, harp, English horn, C clarinet, and B-flat clarinets, suggesting an event of growing magnitude and of structurally short, perhaps pointed, individual incidence. The four-note motive (B-flat, D-flat, F, A-flat) first outlined by the flutes, oboes, and violins in mm. 834–35 gains impetus from rhythmic diminution, the addition of instruments, and multiple simultaneous permutations beginning in m. 840, all of which suggest an event of repeated occurrence and simultaneous variation. The four-note motive grows over a sustained diatonic cluster pedal of mild discordance in the low woodwinds and brass, in addition to timpani and wind-machine, perhaps suggesting a sounds-like event of low frequency or expressive of some disharmonious event. Meanwhile, the ´cellos, violas, and violins II engage in rapid chromatic ascents and descents. In the tonal setting of the composition, the chromaticism is indicative of confusion or disorientation in relation to the tonic, as it is in many other tonal compositions; the potential expressive effects of such disruption are many, but as yet undefined for this particular portion of the composition. Crescendos and an *accelerando* for all instruments are musically isomorphic with the gain of momentum toward some event; that event is clearly the arrival in m. 847, after which the strands of musical activity simplify. The F pedal of the previous thirteen measures is now, in retrospect, the dominant to the current tonic of B-flat. The events of mm. 847–50 are clearly different in content than the preceding events. The repeated downward
Example 6: Richard Strauss, *Eine Alpensinfonie*, mm. 834–50.\(^{139}\)

patterns of the flutes and strings in mm. 847–49 are indicative of some structurally descending, repetitive event. The offbeat event encompassing the trumpets, E-flat clarinet, and piccolos in m. 850 interrupts this pattern briefly; the E-flat clarinet’s and piccolos’ five-note figure is notable for its rapidity, shrill timbre, and ascent. The fortissimo entrance of the timpani and bass drum similarly add a disruptive touch to the measure as the descending patterns in the flutes and strings resume.

The passage is striking, and may not even require the disambiguation of the Alpensinfonie’s programmatic subheadings. The excerpt begins in the portion entitled Stille vor dem Sturm (“Quiet before the Storm”), and the climactic m. 847 begins the portion entitled Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg (“Thunder- and Rainstorm, Descent”). The overall gain of momentum from mm. 834 to 846 is clearly the preparation for the full fury of the storm, which is apparent at the downbeat of m. 847. The four-note motive, beginning with the short attacks of the flutes, oboes, and violins in m. 834, represents raindrops, as the brevity of the attacks are structurally isomorphic with the brief impact of the falling, splashing water. The increasing density and frequency of the raindrops during the buildup to the storm is structurally isomorphic with the rhythmic diminution (i.e., increased frequency) and various permutations of the musical motive. The long, discordant pedal sonority is difficult to interpret representationally; with the addition of the timpani and wind-machine, it may be a sounds-like phenomenon representing the rumble of the approaching thunder, or it may merely bear expressive characteristics of impending cataclysm (e.g., uncertainty from the massed cluster of diatonic notes, fear from the discordance). The rapid chromatic ascents and descents of the strings are not only disruptive because of their anti-diatonic, expressive intrusion, but also structurally isomorphic to the rapid character and rising and falling pitches of whistling wind. The cataclysmic tempest of m. 847 is
apparent from the repeated descents in the flutes and strings, which are structurally isomorphic with the repeated spatial descents of torrents of rain. The interruptions of the piccolos, E-flat clarinet, trumpets, timpani and bass drum in m. 850, which disrupt the musical fabric established in mm. 847–49, represent lightning and thunder, with the rapid and shrill “flash” of the piccolos, E-flat clarinet, and trumpets followed shortly after by the percussion—a temporal isomorphism as well as a structural one. The subsequent ferocity of this storm, which this excerpt only begins to describe, is hardly the transcendent musical expression of meteorological beauty in the storms of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony or Britten’s *Peter Grimes*; instead, the hyper-realistic representational details of Strauss’s portrayal render the storm more prosaic than poetic, in the opinion of Norman Del Mar.141

Strauss’s representational techniques do lean toward the realistic, and perhaps this is the object of critical scorn of his “musical picture books”.142 that the representations too closely approach or imitate the objects or events represented143—the “blasphemy” suggested by Scruton. Indeed, there must be something of both the medium and the content in the representation, and this is the fine balance that troubles even successful composers. Though Strauss’s representations

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141 Ibid., 119.

142 Werbeck, “Richard Strauss’s Tone Poems,” 121.

may be unusually realistic, they are still at best representations, for the most part relying on extramusical texts to inform the appreciator of the specific objects or events represented.

Strauss’s vivid and imaginative representations offer the ideal subject for an examination of the suspension of disbelief in instrumental programmatic music. As is apparent from Strauss’s and other composers’ attempts at musical representation, representation hardly aims for the transcendent: a composition does not represent the unity of humanity or the beauty of nature, but rather the details from which such larger ideas or ideals derive. Musical representations recreate worldly, even mundane, details of persons, objects, characteristics, events. Chapter Three considers the application of the suspension of disbelief to instrumental programmatic music, for the details of the musical appreciator’s simultaneous interaction with the musical medium and musical content have yet to be explored in appreciable depth. The exploration tells us much about our perception of such works.
Chapter Three

A Theory of the Willing Suspension of Disbelief in Instrumental Programmatic Music

Concepts and Conditions

Hippolyta. This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

Theseus. The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

Hippolyta. It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.

Theseus. If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men.

Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V.ii.212–211

Art is not a copy of the real world. One of the damn things is enough.

Anonymous

Audiences are loath to disrupt the immersion brought on by the willing suspension of disbelief in fictions. Hippolyta’s frustration at the players of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is understandable: their long-winded explanations and caveats, well-intentioned though they are, detract from the pleasure their audience expects from a drama. Similarly, concert audiences would likely protest if conductors paused after every extramusically significant representation to explain details—for example, “That represented Don Quixote dashed to the ground upon attacking a windmill—but don’t worry, he’s fine.” Based on this hypothetical, I suspect that appreciators of instrumental programmatic music would react in the same annoyed way as Hippolyta reacts to the players, given the disruption of the medium for explanation of the content.

Jenefer Robinson, among others, writes that appreciators’ distinction and simultaneous perception of medium and content is vastly important for the successful conveyance of fictional

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information and appreciation of representations in all art forms.³ On the distinction of medium and content, Gregory Currie writes, “We ignore flatness in judging representation because flatness is a feature of the medium of painting, not a piece of information conveyed by the medium.”⁴ Representation, being the process through which propositional information is conveyed by resembling and conventional use of structure and description, is thus crucial in the establishment of fictional worlds, the contents of which deeply engage appreciators, often to the extent of emotional reaction. This leads Kendall Walton to use the labels “fiction” and “representation” interchangeably.⁵ Chapter One of this thesis examined the suspension of disbelief phenomenon as it has been applied to other arts—particularly drama, motion pictures, and the visual arts—and its corollary concepts of fictional worlds, fictional truth, and belief dossiers, among others. Chapter Two, meanwhile, examined the processes and conditions of representation, particularly for music. In this chapter, I propose a model of the suspension of disbelief for instrumental programmatic music, as the simultaneous perception of extramusical content⁶ and the musical medium’s structural features has yet to be explored in detail for this genre. The basic features of the suspension of disbelief, I believe, have much in common with the music appreciator’s perception of the programmatic musical artwork as a whole, though this chapter will show that there are some very significant differences specific to the art of music.

³ “Normally we are perfectly aware of the painted surface of the picture as well as what the picture represents: indeed our understanding and enjoyment of a picture depends upon our capacity to be aware at one and the same time of what is represented and the medium of representation” (Jenefer Robinson, “Music as a Representational Art,” in What is Music?: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music, ed. Philip Alperson [University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987], 168).


⁶ I specify extramusical content because music has many types of content, including its internal notational systems to—possibly most significant—expression, among others (Peter Kivy, Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 43–44).
The suspension of disbelief allows for the temporary admittance of existence beliefs about represented content, to which appreciators respond emotionally or by which they are engaged. In programmatic music as in other arts, however, such represented content is hardly the only aspect to which appreciators react or the only facet that arouses emotion in them; Leonard B. Meyer, among others, notes that musically expressed emotion (sensuality) and musical syntax (structure) may incite reaction or engagement just as much as represented content may, if not more.\footnote{Leonard B. Meyer, \textit{Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 34. His sentiments, particularly on the arousal of emotion by the artwork’s structure, are echoed in Don Mannison, “On Being Moved by Fiction,” \textit{Philosophy} 60 (1985): 73; Michael Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?,” \textit{Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement} 49 (1975): 90; Stephen Davies, \textit{Musical Meaning and Expression} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 121; and Fred Everett Maus, “Narrative, Drama, and Emotion in Instrumental Music,” \textit{Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} 55 (1997): 294.}

Chapter Two justifies the generic focus of this thesis, and I wish to clarify that I make no claim to a suspension of disbelief phenomenon in absolute music, because of its lack of explicit claim to extramusical significance, or in vocal music, which has significant differences in its representational apparatus. Ultimately, my claims apply to a relatively small percentage of the musical repertoire, and apply mainly to the consumption and appreciation of such artworks and their structural and extramusical features. As Peter Kivy and Kendall Walton note, representation is hardly the limit of or the most important aspect of musical significance,\footnote{Peter Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 19; Walton, \textit{Mimesis as Make-Believe}, 334.} yet I feel that something of import can be contributed to at least the perceptual aspect of instrumental programmatic music by the application of the suspension of disbelief.

Suspending the Ordinary

My examination of the suspension of disbelief in instrumental programmatic music begins with a question: what in *music* is there about which one would suspend disbelief? In the other arts, appreciators suspend disbeliefs about propositions associated with the fiction, allowing secondary belief dossiers to develop. The beliefs of these temporary dossiers, supported by immediate sensory evidence, push those of the real world dossier to the background, for use only when necessary—for example, in the prevention of interaction between worlds. The disbeliefs suspended for the artwork are hardly “deep” or transcendental; in fact, they deal with the mundane, worldly, ordinary details of perception—the visual, kinetic, and aural characteristics, or even the existence, of objects and events. Such disbeliefs include, for instance, that the Jabberwocky does not exist, that Richard III does not wear blue jeans, and that Indiana Jones did not steal the idol. Donald N. Ferguson states bluntly that the arts represent “things.”\(^9\) It is, however, slightly more complicated: objects or events of representation do appear to be mainly nouns, verbs, and adjectives—that is, people, objects, settings, descriptions, characteristics, actions, and motions. Emotions and transcendental or extrageneric meanings are not objects of representation: emotions are the realm of expression rather than representation in music (see Chapter Two, “What Representation is Not”), and any transcendental or extrageneric meaning as an artwork (e.g., Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as a triumphant manifestation of brotherhood or as an embodiment of darkness) occurs *in a posteriori* cultural interpretation.

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Expressive and cultural/historical elements in music, then, would involve no suspension of disbelief.\(^{10}\)

Otherwise, what in instrumental programmatic music is there about which one would suspend disbelief? Appreciators do not disbelieve a note or a sound, as these are the materials of the musical medium, and appreciators do not disbelieve the medium of proposition/representation.\(^{11}\) Like the other arts, there must be something about represented content to disbelieve. In music, therefore, one suspends disbeliefs about the content apparent in sounds-like representations or in aided, structural representations of objects or events disambiguated by an extramusical text. This proves the difficulty of any application of the suspension of disbelief to absolute music: there is nothing in music about which to suspend disbelief other than represented content, to which absolute music makes no explicit claim as does programmatic music.

As an example, consider the sounds-like representations in the second movement of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. One believes that fictionally, a nightingale sounds; in this case, one has suspended a disbelief that a nightingale does not sound, but rather a flute. The appreciator suppresses a real-world belief in favor of a secondary, Sixth-Symphony-belief, establishing a dossier-like hierarchy of beliefs. As sound-like representations require no extramusical text for disambiguation, they are the most unproblematic content about which one can suspend disbelief in music. Other representations, such as those involving structural isomorphisms or conventional semiotic gestures, however, involve a more complicated process.

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\(^{10}\) This is not to say, however, that expressive elements in the other arts do not involve a suspension of disbelief. It would be difficult to argue, for instance, that Hamlet’s expressions of manic anxiety involve no suspension of disbelief in the appreciator.

of suspended disbelief. These aided representations, as noted in Chapter Two, require the
disambiguation of an extramusical text for clarification, as they share structural features with
many possible extramusical phenomena. It is not quite so simple in music to say that (1)
fictionally, a windmill *turns*, as it is to say that (2) fictionally, a nightingale *sounds*. Indeed,
nothing in the music *literally* turns (how does a sound turn?), whereas music and content *do*
literally sound in the case of the nightingale. The musically turning windmill is a structural,
aided representation dependent on synaesthetic, structural isomorphism with the actual
phenomenon of a turning windmill. The difficulty in disbelieving the proposition of a turning
windmill in music is akin to the difficulty in “hearing-in” in music: one cannot hear a windmill
in the real world, and therefore, how is one to know what a windmill sounds like?¹²

The suspension-of-disbelief process for structural, aided representations in music thus
necessarily involves the disambiguating text as a framing device. Titles and programs are, as
James Hepokoski notes, attempts by the composer to frame the reception conditions of the
composition,¹³ and music’s semantic generality (lack of density, in Goodman’s terms)
necessitates the framing of otherwise ambiguous representations. It is insufficient to believe only
that something structurally turns, for that “something” could be a Ferris wheel or a windmill
(among many other phenomena), and a great deal about the representation could be missed by
assuming an incorrect object of representation. Whatever the art form, some degree of
comprehension of the represented content is both relevant and necessary. The suspension-of-
disbelief process for aided representations is one of generality narrowed into particular focus,

¹² Other than a windmill’s typical creaks or groans, of course; but there are many things that creak and
groan, and if one were to create a sounds-like representation of something creaking or groaning, it would require
disambiguation.

¹³ James Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s *Don Juan* Reinvestigated,” in
often with implicit knowledge derived from personal experience or relevant cultures associated with the artwork.\textsuperscript{14} Walton suggests such a focusing process from the abstract to the specific in program music by means of the title and/or program.\textsuperscript{15} To this end, knowledge of the extramusical text and its explicit and implied meanings is a prerequisite—however impractical it may seem—for representational music, for without it, full comprehension of the artwork and its component representations cannot occur.\textsuperscript{16}

Such a focusing process, for instance, might begin with a title: Richard Strauss’s \textit{Don Quixote}, for example, projects all sorts of propositional implications and representational possibilities on a musical composition of the same name, based on the (culturally) assumed correspondence with Cervantes’s novel. Without even seeing a score or hearing a note, the knowledgeable appreciator could expect a narrative structure or progression of some sort; recurring melodies or gestures representing primary character-entities such as Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, Dulcinea del Toboso, even Rosinante; certain expressive characteristics corresponding to emotions or states of these character-entities and/or their situations (e.g., nobility, yearning, insanity, worldliness); and representations of certain salient objects or events


of the novel, such as Mambrino’s helmet or the attack on the windmill. The Don Quixote example demonstrates the phenomenon of “interfictional carryover,” in which some beliefs and propositions in an artwork derive from similarities or overlaps with other texts or genres.

Based on programs and non-generic titles in representational musical works, appreciators have a rich bank of information from which to gather informed estimates of musical representations. Perhaps such a bank is too rich in information and possibilities: presumably, ambiguous musical representations could apply to more than one object or event even within the realm of the disambiguating title. Here a program or other text is indispensable for further specificity; if there is no other text, the details of the representations are entirely the domain of the appreciator’s culturally and representationally informed estimates. This occasional lack of clarity is hardly a surprise, given music’s tendency for propositional ambiguity. Indeed, later representations in the same composition may provide context or disambiguation, in hindsight, for previously encountered ambiguous objects or events. Music with detailed programs, such as Héctor Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique, suffers from fewer instances of interpretive promiscuity precisely because of the programs’ greater verbal and descriptive detail.

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17 Hepokoski notes that inferences based on an extramusical text, rather than being idle or superfluous speculation, may enhance the “poetic idea” of a programmatic composition rather than detract from it; the reluctance of composers to elucidate programmatic details based on the negative stigma of program music (see Chapter Two) certainly suggests that there may be more unstated extramusical connections in the genre (Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s Don Juan Reinvestigated,” 162).

18 Currie, The Nature of Fiction, 86.

Indeed, there seem to be different degrees or depths of suspensions of disbelief for programmatic works, as there are for fictional works in other media.\textsuperscript{20} Part of this is due to the limits of music’s representational clarity and success—after all, the more complete and detailed the fictional world, the more immersive, and thus convincing, the suspension of disbelief. Programs include more detailed event-progressions and thus can be expected to lead to a more immersive suspension of disbelief than will a suggestive title, with which only contextual assumptions and educated guesses can often be made about represented content.

One suspends disbelief in instrumental programmatic music in generally the same way as in the other arts, then—through the temporary dominance of secondary belief dossiers that acknowledge the existence, characteristics, and progression of fictional information (i.e., entities, descriptions, and events) conveyed by representations in a medium. The debate over musical representation is perhaps the chief factor in the omission of music from the literature considering the suspension of disbelief phenomenon. However, as demonstrated by Chapter Two, music is capable of representation, though most often with the aid of extramusical text. This fact emphasizes, however, that there are important differences in the suspension of disbelief for music, both in its nature and in the subsequent application of related concepts such as fictional worlds and the breaking of the suspension.

**Perception/Conceptualization**

Drama is perhaps the art most easily fitting, and certainly the most-discussed example of, the suspension of disbelief phenomenon.\textsuperscript{21} As a live performance involving human actors, their apparent expressions of emotions, their kinetic behaviors, the descriptions they speak and enact

\textsuperscript{20} H. H. Price notes that there are different degrees of assent, though he does not posit that any such “half-belief” state applies to the arts (H. H. Price, *Belief* [London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1969], 204, 307).

and embody, and stage settings and props, drama offers propositional information in an inarguably direct line to the appreciator through visual, aural, and perhaps even tactile channels. The appreciator of drama directly perceives both the medium—spoken and enacted text—and the content, which is represented through visual and aural manifestations of plot events, expressions, descriptions, and other information. Live performance and spatial proximity to actual humans enable a smoother, less recalcitrant suspension of disbelief. There is, however, still plenty to disbelieve in drama: twentieth-century dress for fifteenth-century settings, the containment of a great variety of exotic locales within a boxy stage, and the passage of years between scenes, among others.

Music’s semantic generality, especially in comparison to the acuity of visual media and language, is well documented.22 Though the representations of drama are far more specific because of their heavy reliance on visual cues and semantically dense language, music still has much in common with the dramatic arts. The distinction of character-entities is evident in both—visually and vocally in drama, and aurally in programmatic music.23 The presence of different onstage persons and their individual markers of visual and vocal difference distinguish them as separate entities; similarly, musical entities (chiefly melodies and key areas) contrast in melodic contour, character, articulation, length, rhythmic contour, and many other ways. Peter Lamarque and Harold Skulsky note that character-entities are most evident as collections of properties rather than perceived phenomena, and therefore propositional contrast is important for differentiation; this is particularly suitable to music’s structural focus on contrast.24 Music, like

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22 See Chapter Two.

23 For an example of key areas representing character-entities, see Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s Don Juan Reinvestigated,” 161.

drama, also enacts, in present tense, the representations that convey information about its content. Similarly, music’s represented content has the potential for temporal disjunction, that is, for large swaths of fictional time to pass in an instant of real time, as often happens between scenes in dramas. As Gregory Karl points out, “A minute in the life of one of the [drama’s] characters is virtually identical to a minute in the life of the audience, and the only temporal disjunctions take place between scenes and acts, where any amount of time may pass.” Though music rarely accomplishes such a one-to-one ratio between fictional time and real time, long passages of fictional time can take place over relatively little real-time.

Music’s fluid temporality is what separates it from the temporally static, but propositionally rich, visual arts; as Carolyn Abbate and Kivy note, music signifies only over time. Again, the visual arts’ reliance on sight allows for potentially greater propositional specificity and disambiguation (in representational images, at least); but the permanence of oil on canvas or hardened clay negates the possibility for propositional change over time, which is part of the attraction of music’s temporal fluidity. The representational visual arts present descriptions for the appreciator’s consumption and belief: for instance, fictionally, the woman has dark brown hair and an enigmatic smile. Kinetic events, which require change and/or motion

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28 There are obviously some exceptions to this generalization about the visual arts, such as kinetic sculpture. My intention in generalizing is to summarize the conditions of the suspension of disbelief for a majority of representational visual artworks, not all such works, and thereby to facilitate comparison to instrumental programmatic music’s suspension of disbelief.
over time, naturally occur only as excerpted instants in the visual arts: a painting captures a boat in one moment, at one point, of a presumably longer process of crossing the Delaware River.\textsuperscript{29} In the visual arts, one perceives both the medium (brushstrokes of oil, clay, etched marble, pencil, ink) and content, as in drama. One suspends disbelief about the existence and properties of visually represented objects and events, and one makes educated, culturally informed assumptions about the temporal events framing the artwork (i.e., the “before” and “after” of a painting, especially of a “frozen” kinetic nature), if applicable. Specificity, unlike in music, is not the weakness of the representational visual arts; rather, it is the static nature of most such artworks, for more conclusive propositional information about fictional worlds is provided by events that change over time, narrowing the focus on definitions and descriptions of objects and events in that world.

Surprisingly, however, the suspension of disbelief for instrumental programmatic music may be most like that for the literary arts. Literary works such as the novel and some poetry represent objects, events, people, movements, and so on with linguistic description and diegesis, not to mention a temporal unfolding bearing striking similarity to that of music. There is, however, a very important difference between the literary arts and the visual and dramatic arts: in the literary arts, one perceives the medium (i.e., the linguistic text), but one does not directly perceive the represented content. The appreciator receives no visual, aural, or tactile affirmation of the represented objects, but only descriptive words, which are not representational in the phenomenological sense.\textsuperscript{30} Instead of perceiving the represented content as or in something tangible, the appreciator of the literary arts conceptualizes such content in thoughts based on

\textsuperscript{29} Kivy, \textit{Sound and Semblance}, 168.

\textsuperscript{30} Kivy, \textit{Philosophies of Arts}, 74–75.
visual, aural, and tactile experience. This manner of mind’s-eye visualization occupies a no-
man’s-land between abstract thought and actual vision. Kivy calls the novel a “movie of the
mind.” Following the ideas of John Locke, Kivy suggests that, in the literary arts, words arouse
tokens of particular types in the mind—a conceptual transference of sorts.

Instrumental programmatic music, then, is something of a “sound novel,” though with
potentially less temporal completeness than a novel, which can encompass far more
representational content because of the semantic density and specificity of language. As in a
novel, the appreciator of programmatic music perceives the medium—hears the tones performed
from a notated score—but not the represented content, which consists of concepts for mental
interpretation. One does not conceptualize the represented content in sounds-like
representations, for the medium is the same material as the content—sound; rather, one must
conceptualize with aided representations involving structural isomorphisms and conventional
gestures. Description is profoundly significant in the visual arts, literary arts, and programmatic
music, but in far different ways: the visual arts rely on visual descriptions of properties, the
literary arts on linguistic descriptions of properties, and music on structurally isomorphic or

31 This interpretation owes much to Noël Carroll’s “thought theory” (see Chapter One), outlined in The
Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 79–82; see also
Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 306 for a discussion of the differences between fictional truth determination in
visual art versus linguistic art.

32 Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 58. Note that this analogy is anachronistic for pre-twentieth-century
appreciators, who would not have known what a “movie” is.

33 Ibid.

34 Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 335.

35 In novels, text representing text—whether the slogan “Some animals are more equal than others” or the
whole of an epistolary novel—has a similar effect. One sees words representing words in a fictional context—but
not as the words would fictionally appear, visually—and hears music representing sound in a fictional context—but
not as the aural phenomenon would fictionally sound.
conventional descriptions of properties (often tied metaphorically to linguistic descriptions of properties).

The suspension of disbelief in music, as in other arts, is one of simultaneous consumption of medium and content; the consumption, however, is not phenomenologically identical, as the musical medium is *perceived* and the content *conceptualized*. We gather from Strauss’s music a mental picture of Don Quixote as erratic, noble, zealous, and passionate, but these characteristics do not a *visual* picture make.\(^{36}\) Similarly, Cervantes’s novel tells of a man bordering on fifty, of “robust constitution, spare [body], [and] a meagre visage,”\(^{37}\) yet any visual conception is left to the appreciator’s judgment, based on archetypes of such characteristics. Inevitably, though, music and linguistic text are both intrinsically incomplete in the perceptual realm, and thus conceptualization is a significant part of their respective suspensions of disbelief.

Propositional incompleteness of any kind, however, is a reality in any representation, and is a particularly keenly felt vagary of fictional worlds.\(^{38}\) One might very naturally ask of the importance of fictional worlds in instrumental programmatic music and its corresponding suspension of disbelief. Fictional worlds do apply to such music, but because of music’s semantic ambiguity, in a very limited sense.

**Musical Worlds**

Relatively few scholars apply the concept of fictional worlds to instrumental programmatic music because of its propositional non-specificity and because of the comparably

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\(^{36}\) Similar to the “thought-manifestation of properties” posited by Lamarque in “Fiction and Reality,” 70.


\(^{38}\) See Chapter One.
larger amount of absolute music. In this thesis, however, with its focus on instrumental programmatic music and its representations, fictional worlds do apply and play an important role in the suspension of disbelief.

Thomas G. Pavel notes that “fictional worlds are the main repositories of structural features employed for referential purposes.” Indeed, these worlds contain the propositional information used by the appreciator, in combination with real-world experience, to interact with and react to the particular fiction. Such information may be visual, aural, and/or linguistic cues about characters, objects, settings, actions, thoughts, and/or emotions, and is conveyed via representations. The presentation of propositional information constructs these fictional worlds and narrows its definition in comparison to the real world. As noted in Chapter One, fictional worlds are inherently incomplete in terms of details, for it would be both irrelevant and impossible to attempt propositional completeness in any realm.

The connection with programmatic music, which claims representation of extramusical phenomena, is clear, but any application of fictional worlds to music includes subtle differences. Musical representation does convey information—mainly of an expository or descriptive nature, through structural isomorphism, conventional gestures, and so on, and sometimes of a

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39 As Jerrold Levinson notes, absolute music does not generate fictional worlds because it does not claim extramusical significance, and therefore has no need to convey propositional information other than information about the musical material itself (Jerrold Levinson, “Truth in Music,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 40 [1981]: 131).


42 “Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking” (Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978], 6). Goodman goes on to list several methods of worldmaking involving symbols and descriptions (7–14).

43 Pavel, Fictional Worlds, 69.
phenomenological nature, as in sound-like representations. However, as music establishes meaning through time (i.e., using large swaths of material\textsuperscript{44}), any fictional world associated with music would be very propositionally incomplete in comparison to, say, a drama or a novel, both of which are magnificently rich in visual and linguistic stimuli, respectively. Nelson Goodman notes that programmatic music presents a nonvisual, nonlinguistic world, but this essentially restates that music is a different medium.\textsuperscript{45} Yet, as Jens Kulenkampff notes, a mere sample of a fictional world is all that is necessary for its existence and comparison to the real world;\textsuperscript{46} the visual stimuli constructing the dramatic \textit{Waiting-for-Godot}-world, for instance, consists of two characters and a tree. Walton compares fictional musical worlds to zoos: they have discrete bits of fictional truths—“story fragments”—which may not necessarily seem to have significant or apparent interrelations.\textsuperscript{47} Music’s temporality places a practical limit on the extent of its propositional discourse—a composer attempting to convey numerous propositional details about the fictional world of his or her work will write an excruciatingly long composition. This explains, in part, why musical representation focuses on what may seem to be the ordinary or mundane propositional details of character-differentiation, expression, or simple structural description. These are also the most informationally basic, necessary cues for the establishment

\textsuperscript{44} Ferguson, \textit{Music as Metaphor}, 35.

\textsuperscript{45} Goodman, \textit{Ways of Worldmaking}, 106.


\textsuperscript{47} Kendall Walton, “Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?,” in \textit{Music and Meaning}, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 67, 64. Walton notes that the concept of story fragments appears to be contrary to the ideal of musical unity, but argues that the fragments of fictional worlds are extramusical and have no effect on the music’s (i.e., the medium’s) internal unity (Walton, “Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?,” 68).
of fictional worlds. Titles and programs, as extramusical texts, also convey propositional information about the fictional world; but as this is done through text, is it correct to call it a “musical fictional world”? Music represents, but the extramusical text also sets some conditions for representation, such as specific character-entity names, so rather than any strictly musical fictional world in instrumental programmatic music, I speak of the fictional world of the artwork, reflecting programmatic music’s hybrid status and its components’ joint representational capabilities.

What, then, is true in the fictional world of a programmatic musical work? Character-entity differentiation is certainly relatively simple; the musical conventions of theme or key assignation to character-entities exist both for program music and as metaphor in many formal analyses of absolute music. Thus, the expository introduction of themes (especially in contrasting key areas) can make it fictionally true that Character A and/or Object B (and so on) exists. Manipulation of the character-entity-motive or information from the title, program, interfictional carryover, or structure of the music may make it fictionally true that Character A possesses a certain characteristic or undertakes a certain action. For instance, both the title’s interfictional carryover and certain structural features of a musical theme (e.g., “wide” melodic intervals occurring at a slow speed) inform the appreciator that the primary character of Sir Edward Elgar’s *Falstaff* is fat: fictionally, in the Elgar-*Falstaff*-world, Sir John is fat. Sounds-like representations make it fictionally true that a certain sound is present in the fictional world: the abrupt attack of two timpani and a bass drum in *Eine Alpensinfonie* (see Chapter Two, Example 6), makes it fictional that thunder claps in the *Alpensinfonie*-world, especially given the context

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48 Fictional musical worlds may appear to be evident in some narratological interpretations of music; however, as noted in Chapter Two, narrativity in music is primarily a structural feature. Indications of character-entities (or agents) enacting event progressions do not form specific fictional worlds as might be indicated by a title or a program, but are rather abstractions of literary narratives for no propositional purpose.
of a fictional lightning strike immediately prior to that event. Expressive attributes of some music, particularly the transformation of motives associated with character-entities, may make it fictionally true that that character-entity feels a certain emotion or possesses a certain psychological state. As Karl writes, melodic transformations reflect on and change previous melodic appearances, adding and/or narrowing expressive and metaphorical (i.e., representational) meanings. Transformation of motives—itself a reflection of music’s temporality—is one of the most influential musical techniques for refining represented information about fictional worlds in programmatic works.

The various techniques of musical representation, then, all contribute propositional information about the work’s fictional world. The composer may manipulate the musical material of the work (i.e., the medium) for further derived meanings and information—as an artist manipulates pigments or a novelist manipulates text—particularly through self-reference and transformation. Music’s ability to refer to its own past musical content—thereby identifying, developing, and relating significant and potentially representational components to one another—is one of its strongest factors in information-conveyance for fictional worlds. The importance of extramusical text (e.g., composer’s notes, program notes, or prose in a score), however, must not be overlooked; it too conveys information, and music may elaborate on the characteristics of that information through various methods of description. So, too, must the knowledge of the appreciator be considered; titles often correlate with artworks with which the appreciator is familiar, importing a large bank of potentially represented propositional information.

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The purpose of fictional worlds, in collecting propositional information, is to provide a context in which to enjoy and react to fictions; fictional worlds’ foundations in the real world contribute to successful suspensions of disbelief and pleasurable aesthetic experiences. As Chapter One showed, however, that enjoyment can be ruptured by devices that break the suspension of disbelief, such as dramatic asides and soliloquies. If instrumental programmatic music involves a suspension of disbelief, can there also be a break in that suspension?

**Breaking the Musical Suspension of Disbelief**

A logical starting place for such a question might be an analysis of the common characteristics of the other arts’ breaks in their respective suspensions of disbelief. In drama, breaking the suspension is often the function of specific conventional devices such as the aside and the soliloquy; in motion pictures, a similar device is the direct address of the camera. Footnotes in a novel distract the reader’s attention from the narrative flow, as does gratuitous language or description.\(^50\)

All of these breaks in the suspension of disbelief involve disruptive devices, and what they disrupt, rather than the manner of disruption, is what connects them. They disturb the appreciator’s sense of fictionality or the existence of a fictional world in some way.\(^51\) Dramas and motion pictures do so by direct address of the audience, a convention that acknowledges the simultaneous existence of two worlds. In acknowledging that the world that they inhabit is fictional, actors destroy the aesthetic immersion and safety of the fictional world. In the literary arts (chiefly novels, as poetry places a higher value on the structure and manipulation of the medium), devices such as footnotes in novels disrupt narrative events to comment on them—

\(^50\) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 276.

effect, a textual aside acknowledging the representational function of the text. Gratuitous language or long passages of description place such an emphasis on the medium that the content becomes, in effect, an afterthought. In a broad sense, then, breaks in the suspension of disbelief tend to disrupt the progression or presentation of represented content through acknowledgement of the work’s fictionality.⁵²

Superficially, it is difficult to conceive of any analogous techniques music might use to break its suspension of disbelief, as the disruptive techniques above all appear to be medium-specific to at least some extent. In particular, it is difficult to imagine how music might directly address its appreciators, since it makes no distinction as to direction or perspective (as opposed to some other audible phenomena, such as talking or shouting).⁵³ Similarly, the concept of a musical composition commenting on its represented content, as does a dramatic aside or soliloquy, encounters difficulties. Because of music’s lack of direction, tense, or perspective, it seems that its only tools for self-commentary are the re-use and development of previous content/materials.⁵⁴ In programmatic music, however, such manipulation of musical materials (especially motives) is often for representational and descriptive purposes, and in fact is among the musical medium’s few tools for representation in the first place. Similarly, long passages of description in novels (and sometimes dramas) break the suspension of disbelief through excessive focus on the medium,⁵⁵ but in music, structural description is, again, a necessary and conventional representational tool used to delineate objects or events in a fictional world.

⁵² Kivy calls these “islands in the stream of narrative” (Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 77). See also Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 275.

⁵³ Walton, “What is Abstract about the Art of Music?,” 361; Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 340.


⁵⁵ Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 77.
Description, in excess so detrimental to the advancement of fictional events in language-based artworks, is essential to the establishment of fictional objects and events in programmatic music.

The obvious place to look for a break in the suspension of disbelief in programmatic music might be in the program for the work. Any portion of the program marked for narrational difference or content-discontinuity might be indicative of a break in the suspension of disbelief, especially if the program consists of largely concrete representations or is primarily action- or event-oriented. This is not to say, however, that fictional-world temporal discontinuities (i.e., the passage of a large amount of fictional time over a short period of real time) between represented events need constitute a break in the suspension of disbelief, as such discontinuities are conventional givens in many artworks such as drama, motion pictures, ballets, and novels.56 As music’s programs usually focus on the ordinary and the concrete—the better for representational clarity—any such narrative “islands” in the program would seem to be unlikely. An example of such a disruptive event, however, might be a character-entity’s reflections or thoughts, if the program is largely action- or event-oriented. The intrusion of a psychological aspect into a program based largely on event-succession seems anachronistic; analysis of the program in this manner is necessarily contextual.

Music’s admission of its own fictionality or disruptive narrational moments, then, seem overly difficult given the nature of the musical medium. But just as long descriptions and gratuitous language result in breaks in the suspension of disbelief in novels, music too can break its suspension with an excessive concentration on the medium. Disproportionate elaboration of non-representational music in a purportedly representational artwork might indicate a break in the suspension of disbelief. Extensive passages of non-representational music in a programmatic

composition will focus attention on the musical medium (specifically, structure and form) rather than the represented content. In addition, Karl writes that “musically satisfying repetitions [i.e., recapitulations/reprises/refrains] are often found to be dramatically superfluous.”

This sacrifice of represented content to musical or formal development creates a discontinuity from the flow of represented objects and events, potentially creating a break in the suspension of disbelief.

Hepokoski suggests such a break in Strauss’s *Don Juan*, in which there is a musically “jubilant recapitulation” that fits the formal needs of a sonata-form return but does not make sense in light of the extramusical program. At that point in the program, Don Juan loses his sexual appetite and is despondent to the point of suicide—hardly the triumphant event suggested by the music. The supposedly represented content is backgrounded for musical-formal reasons (i.e., the recapitulation), and such a disjunction between medium and content suggests a break in the suspension of disbelief in the *Don-Juan*-world.

It may seem that the determination of “non-representational music” in a largely representational work is an arbitrary exercise: how does one determine what music is representational, and what is not? The program is one clue, as it prescribes in words what specific objects or events are represented in the music; once the music seems to depart from any kind of structural isomorphism with or conventional description of such events, or anything associated with or implied by them, such a departure might be interpreted as the sacrifice of representation to medium.

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59 Hepokoski writes that the musical and verbal narrative planes do not always move parallel (Hepokoski, “Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?: Strauss’s *Don Juan* Reinvestigated,” 138).
instance, may move beyond description (given obsessive repetition) and toward a more purely musical function of transition. This is not to say, however, that particular notes should be picked out as non-representational and certain harmonies as representational; music’s representational meanings are apparent only in relatively lengthy portions, and it is only in an extended temporal context that one could ascertain representationality or non-representationality. Music with very clear representations—those that involve overwhelmingly correspondent structural isomorphisms or those that require relatively little disambiguation—lends itself more easily to this kind of contextual analysis. Strauss’s emphasis on representational realism\(^{60}\) is one reason for the selection of three of his tone poems for demonstration of the concepts of this thesis.

At this point, talk of general concepts and conditions becomes too vague, and musical examples are required for further elaboration. Chapter Four will demonstrate the establishment of respective fictional worlds and suspensions of disbelief in Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, *Don Quixote*, and *Eine Alpensinfonie*, and will also note occurrences in which and conditions under which those suspensions are broken. In the process, the musical characteristics of breaks in the suspension of disbelief will come under scrutiny, begging the question of whether those passages bear any particular musical or structural traits in common. A theoretical summation of the concepts of suspension of disbelief in instrumental programmatic music will be useful as preparation for this in-depth analysis.

**Summary**

In distilling the concepts with which the analysis in Chapter Four will be conducted, seven points are most significant about the suspension of disbelief in instrumental programmatic music:

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\(^{60}\) Noted in ibid., 165.
(1) Programmatic instrumental music (i.e., music with non-generic titles and/or programs) features the conveyance of propositional information about extramusical phenomena through representations. Such information is often of a necessarily limited, general, ordinary nature (e.g., description of structural features, expression, character-entity differentiation, event-successions), because of music’s semantic ambiguity.

(2) The propositional information conveyed by musical representations and extramusical text constructs a fictional world. The details of this fictional world are, like other fictional worlds, necessarily incomplete and more so in music than in the other arts. Reasons for this include music’s semantic ambiguity and its temporality.

(3) The appreciator’s beliefs about the programmatic work’s represented content trump beliefs that are true in the real world, establishing a system of hierarchical belief dossiers. The appreciator engages in a suspension of disbelief for the simultaneous appreciation of both medium and represented content in a programmatic instrumental work, a temporary dominance of a secondary belief dossier that acknowledges the existence, structures, and characteristics of fictional entities and events conveyed by representations in a medium.

(4) Knowledge of the extramusical text (i.e., title or program) is requisite for the establishment of a suspension of disbelief in a programmatic work. Aided representations in music require disambiguation and their suspension processes involve general structural features sharpened into specific focus by such disambiguation. Titles and/or programs provide banks of information that might be used by the appreciator, along with the appreciator’s own experiences and cultural
vocabulary, to narrow the definition of an ambiguous representation based on the context of a title and/or program. Interfictional carryover can be vital in this process. (5) In the dramatic and visual arts, appreciators sensually perceive the represented content in the same way as they do the medium of representation. In programmatic music, however, the appreciator conceptualizes the represented content, based on archetypes and experience, as in the linguistic arts (novels and poetry), and perceives only the medium of representation (sound/music). Only in fairly rare instances—sounds-like representations—does the appreciator perceive both the medium and represented content.

(6) There are different degrees or depths of suspensions of disbelief for programmatic works because of the different degrees of representational clarity and success in music, not to mention the varying extents of disambiguation specific to individual works. A program will include more details about a fictional world than will a suggestive title, and may therefore lead to a more immersive suspension. Similarly, a work with concrete, realistic, easily conceptualized musical representations may inspire a more immersive suspension of disbelief.

(7) Breaking the suspension of disbelief in the other arts involves the disruption of represented content through acknowledgement of the work’s fictionality or overindulgence in the medium of representation. Music cannot directly address its appreciators or comment on its represented content, as is done with asides and soliloquies in drama and motion pictures and footnotes in novels, because music lacks directional focus and because material manipulation is a tool more often used for musical representational purposes than for self-commentary. Instead, breaks in the
suspension of disbelief might be apparent in a work’s program—perhaps a
psychological “island” in an otherwise narrative, event-oriented flow of represented
content—or in the sacrifice of represented content to development or formal needs of
the musical medium.

Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Don Quixote, and Eine Alpensinfonie*
provide not only a variety of extramusical texts and musical structures, but also a variety of
immersive suspensions of disbelief. Chapter Four will explore the establishment of their
respective suspensions and fictional worlds, and will also search for breaks in their suspensions
of disbelief. The results explicate much in the way of appreciation of this specific genre of
instrumental programmatic music.
Chapter Four

Tilting at Windmills
The Suspension of Disbelief in Selected Tone Poems of Richard Strauss

Would that be a 9–8 suspension of disbelief?
Robert Zierolf

Suspension of disbelief—is that like the appoggiatura of doubt?
Richard Crawford

Programmatic Music and Worldmaking

The examination of suspensions of disbelief in the three tone poems chosen for this thesis begins, necessarily, with a study of musical methods of “worldmaking.” The propositions about which the appreciator suspends disbelief are the details that create and embody a fictional world. The representational and expressive processes by which the composer articulates these propositions are vital to the construction of the fictional world and the apprehension of the appreciators’ disbelief suspension, and about what they suspend disbelief, in instrumental programmatic compositions.

Nelson Goodman suggests five broad “ways of worldmaking,” or techniques of propositional generation: composition/decomposition, weighting of relevant/irrelevant aspects, ordering/derivation, deletion/supplementation, and deformation. Although musical representation is clearly the vehicle of propositional information about fictional worlds in programmatic works, its correspondences with these worldmaking functions remains, for the most part, unexplored. Jens Kulenkampff writes that music can name, describe, and represent in

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1 Robert Zierolf, electronic mail correspondence with author, November 2003.
2 Richard Crawford, conversation with author, 23 April 2004, Cincinnati.
4 Goodman’s ways of worldmaking apply very obviously to textual representations, which also play a major part in programmatic music’s worldmaking through disambiguation. Because Goodman considers music relatively briefly in Ways of Worldmaking, however, in-depth exploration of specifically musical worldmaking
worldmaking, but the processes by which composers do so vary. A brief examination of the predominant worldmaking techniques used by composers of instrumental programmatic music sheds light on the suspension of disbelief processes for the tone poems examined here.

The titles and programs of such artworks provide propositional information and thus are relevant to worldmaking and the suspension of disbelief. Titles textually compose or construct, and sometimes describe, the primary entity-focus (or -foci), event-focus (-foci), and expressive-focus (-foci) of the artwork, creating hierarchical analogues to the musical medium’s primary melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and/or textural foci. That is, given the explicit reference to representationality in the title, the primary recurring thematic material of Don Juan is likely to represent the character-entity Don Juan in some way, and in doing so, describes him and events and expressive elements associated with him in the fictional world by musical convention, metaphorical transfer of adjectival characteristics, and structural isomorphisms. The title Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche implies primary foci by titular emphasis on a character-entity (Till Eulenspiegel), events (pranks), and expressive elements (merriment), which are likely to be primary foci of the musical material, if the work represents accurately. Similarly, programs prescribe specific event-progressions within the realm of the fictional world, but the programs often do not describe, and never enact, the events—this is the function of the music, which, through structural isomorphism or expression or sounds-like properties, details specifics of the events as they occur over time. Both titles and programs accomplish construction with help

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6 For reasons of consistency and intentional certitude, I consider programs to be those extramusical notations entered by Strauss in his autograph scores or by critics in the analytical pamphlets that accompanied early performances of the works. Strauss approved the contents of such pamphlets, signaling his implicit agreement with
from the appreciator, who imports potentially relevant propositional information from knowledge associated with that title or program.

Composers of programmatic music weigh the relevant aspects of fictional worlds not only by textual inclusion of events and characters in the program or by primary focus in the title, but chiefly through the generation of musical material. This selection process is inevitable, given music’s semantic non-specificity and the inherent propositional incompleteness of fictional worlds. The establishment of primary musical and programmatic material occurs not only through titles and musical exposition, but also through that material’s consistent recurrence and/or transformation over the course of the work. The establishment of primary materials, then, occurs not only through exposition, but also through retrospect in that such continuous presence and development defines significant meaning in terms of both medium and content. The formal progression of most music, absolute or programmatic, usually supports the relatively rapid exposition of thematic elements (which, in programmatic music, correlates with primary character-entities, events, and/or expressive elements), allowing for the simple establishment of a musical foundation to which one compares later musical events.

Salient musical events are marked for difference both by notable musical techniques (textural isolation, harmonic dissonance, and/or distinct melodic contour, among many others) and by comparison to previous musical events. One such event is thematic novelty, which, by contrast with any previous melodic material, generates new potential meaning. In a programmatic context, such salient events necessarily imply extramusical novelty, or the

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7 “Marked for difference” and “difference-marking” are phrases derived in part from Robert Hatten’s study, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994).
presence of some new character-entity, object, or event. Indeed, in programmatic works new
entities and events are necessary not only for the sake of musical/formal progression, but also for
the progression of any narrative or development of character-entities and events or change of
expressive attributes in those characters or events. Being a temporal art, music naturally
undergoes change and/or development and derives meaning from such change, and
programmatic music derives analogous extramusical meaning from musical (i.e., the medium’s)
change. Novelty in programmatic music composes new elements of the fictional world, and
supplements previous elements with developed meanings.

Salient events need not encompass only new musical events, however; transformations of
previous musical materials with some element(s) marked for difference also draw attention to the
change in those materials. In programmatic music the transformation of previous materials (e.g.,
melodies, harmonies, contours, articulations, etc.) necessarily implies some analogous change in
the programmatic object or event with which the material was originally associated by
representation. Transformation is perhaps the most significant method of musical worldmaking,
for constant generation of new musical material to correspond to new programmatic events or
objects would be tiresome. Transformation allows existent musical materials to retain their
original extramusical identities while yielding new expressive, structural, descriptive, and kinetic
aspects analogous to new potential programmatic circumstances. Manipulation of elements as
simple as tempo or mode for a representational melody results in added and/or changed meaning
for that melody, with the automatic assumption that that new meaning applies in some way to the
represented object or event previously established by the melody. Transformation exemplifies
not just one but all of Goodman’s ways of worldmaking through its potential additions to

8 So-called “minimalist” music is no exception to this, as change does occur in its elements, only over
longer durations of time than is the custom for Western tonal music of the common practice period.
meaning, emphasis on relevant features, derivation from previous meanings, and supplementation of meaning.

The extension of syntactical norms (and deviations therefrom) from the musical medium to the represented content is another method of difference-marking. Listener expectations of tonal music in particular have a direct effect on its ability to represent. An abrupt modulation from the key of C major to F-sharp minor is remarkable in any composition, programmatic or not; in a programmatic work, it is more likely to add extramusical meaning potentially representative of some element or event of surprise, disjunction, or disruption, among other possible meanings. The norms of Western tonality, melodic construction, form, instrumentation, and other elements are not the domain of absolute music only, but are also significant tools for difference-marking in programmatic music.9

Marking a musical event for difference, whether through novelty, transformation of preexistent material, or manipulation of the norms of common-practice music, is therefore a primary vehicle of meaning. In programmatic music, extramusical elements necessitate another dimension to difference-marking, one in which musical events marked for difference have the potential for new extramusical meaning as well. As such, novel events or significant transformations of musical material in programmatic music cannot be ignored, even if their extramusical meanings are not initially clear, even with the aid of text. Given the musical medium’s semantic non-specificity, even potentially representational events in the music must be considered relevant for the suspension of disbelief and the breaking thereof.

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9 The norms of post-tonal music, and violations thereof, are another matter entirely. Given that program music enjoyed its apogee in the nineteenth century and given the tonal nature of the three tone poems chosen for this thesis, the norms of common practice Western tonality are those most relevant to the topic.
Because the actual musical structures doing the representing usually represent motions, actions, objects, or events in correlation with an extramusical text (program or title), it is the domain of the musical medium to describe those extramusical things. The way that it does so, of course, is through the characteristics of the musical materials themselves, which bear some descriptive, structural similarity (isomorphism) with features of the object of representation. Similarly, a representative melody expressing a certain emotion or state likely describes a represented object bearing that same emotion or state. Not only characteristics of musical materials, but also their transformations and contexts, control the programmatic interpretation of descriptions of a fictional world’s denizens or events, constructing and supplementing information about the world.

In considering the suspension of disbelief phenomenon for the selected works of programmatic music, one must therefore ask how Strauss constructs fictional worlds for Till Eulenspiegel, Eine Alpensinfonie, and Don Quixote, as it is the details of those fictional worlds about which one suspends disbelief. This chapter examines Strauss’s worldmaking techniques for each of the three tone poems and the resultant suspensions of disbelief in their fictional worlds. In addition, breaks in those suspensions of disbelief are apparent; the techniques establishing such breaks, and shared characteristics of them, will also be examined.

**Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche: Form over Content**

Strauss’s 1895 tone poem Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche demonstrates a variety of worldmaking techniques, yet a preoccupation with musical form (demonstrated below) disrupts the suspension of disbelief for the work to the extent of breaking it. Two primary framing devices for the work are, of course, the title and program. The title indicates a primary character-entity focus (Till Eulenspiegel), event focus (pranks), and expressive focus (merriment) that is
echoed by the primary musical aspects of the work. In addition, the title provides implications of propositional possibilities from interfictional carryover. Being a folk tale from the *Grimms Märchen*, the name “Till Eulenspiegel” naturally imports possible objects, events, characters, and expressive aspects into the tone poem’s programmatic dimension; Strauss’s weighting of the relevant possibilities (through assignation of representational qualities to musical entities and through inclusion in the program) determines which of those possibilities warrant inclusion in the necessarily limited fictional world of the work. The program—consisting of Strauss’s extramusical notes on the holograph score and Wilhelm Mauke’s analytical pamphlet for concertgoers¹⁰—emphasizes specific event-progressions (such as Till’s horse-ride through a market full of women, his sermon as a disguised pastor, his love for a maiden and subsequent rejection, his confrontation with “Philistine” scholars, and his trial and death), while adding some clues regarding expressive qualities (such as *Das war ein arger “Kobold”* and *Als Pastor verkleidet trieft er von Salbung und Moral*¹¹). While the title and program provide primary extramusical foci, they do not assign musical correspondents to these foci, nor do they describe the characteristics or developments of events or character-entities in any great detail. Instead, Strauss does this through the musical medium, specifically the establishment of primary musical materials, their transformations, difference-marking, and musical description.

The primary musical materials, revealed in retrospect through their prominent recurrence and development throughout the work, are the two melodies in mm. 6 ff. and 46 ff.,¹² with their


¹¹ Both quotes (“He was a terrible imp” and “Disguised as a pastor, he drips with unction and morality”) from Mauke’s pamphlet (Werbeck, *Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss*, 540).

¹² Although the melody in m. 46 derives from the melodic contour of mm. 1–2, the recurrences of the melody of m. 46 echo its rhythm, articulation, and tempo far more exactly than those of mm. 1–2; I therefore consider m. 46 to be primary melodic material despite its relation to the earlier measures.
constituent harmonies (notably the difference-marked altered vii\(^{6/3}\) in mm. 47–48 involving all semitone resolutions) and key of F major. The melodies recur consistently (most often with some transformation), indicating that they parallel some primary focus of the title and/or program, most likely the character of Till Eulenspiegel and/or expressive characteristics and events associated with him. Indeed, certain structural characteristics of the melodies and their transformations conventionally imply mischief (e.g., the mismatch of motive and rhythm in mm. 6–9 and the chromaticism of mm. 46–48), a tendency for musical elemental surprise (e.g., *sforzando* dynamics in m. 47), and piquancy (e.g., staccato articulations in both melodies). Texturally, they are marked for difference in that both passages occur in solo instruments (horn and clarinet, respectively) with little or no accompaniment. Their place in the form of the work also assigns primary importance to these two melodies: after the very brief introduction, these are the two immediately salient melodic events of the work. Having introduced his primary material by both extramusical and musical means, and by correlating the two, Strauss establishes a musical foundation for the rest of the work.

Many of the subsequent melodic events in the work refer to those two primary melodies, but certainly not all do. New melodies—set in new keys for additional difference-marking—naturally imply novel character-entities or events in addition to new musical material. Such utterly contrasting material, with no reference whatsoever to primary melodic material, occurs in mm. 50 ff., 179 ff., 196 ff., 293 ff., 375 ff., and 577 ff.; these melodies, with only two exceptions, occur only within their proximal formal groups (i.e., episodes) and do not recur elsewhere (the two exceptions recur with primary material, and the resultant meanings will be discussed below). Though their structural and expressive features do offer clues as to their representational meanings, these musical events are largely disambiguated by the programmatic
text, which reveals them to be occurrences such as Till’s sermon (m. 179 ff.) and his premonition of death (m. 196 ff.) and entities such as the Philistines (m. 293 ff.). Of these new events, two recur later in the work, but in doing so, clarify their own meanings retrospectively. The “sermon” melody of m. 179 recurs in m. 567 ff., immediately followed by the conventionally austere, foreboding material representing Till’s trial; this indicates some immediate connection between the two events (indeed, Till is tried for heresy, in most scholars’ interpretations). The motive signifying Till’s premonition of death in m. 196 recurs immediately following the conclusion of the trial, in m. 603 ff., again suggesting a programmatic link in the direct succession of discrete melodic units. In addition to the disambiguating text, the context and circumstances under which these melodies recur clarifies of their extramusical meaning.

Example 7a: Richard Strauss, *Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks*, mm. 46–49.13

Example 7b: Richard Strauss, *Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks*, mm. 97–102.14

Example 7c: Richard Strauss, *Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks*, mm. 113–16.15


14 Ibid., 10–11.

15 Ibid., 11.
Context has much to do with thematic transformation, in which previous melodic materials recur in some difference-marked way so as to signify new musical and extramusical meaning. The primary melodic materials, of course, are the main objects of transformation throughout *Till Eulenspiegel*. Consider, for instance, the meanings added by transformation of the second primary melody (Example 7a). Example 7b shows the head-motive of this melody transformed by hemiola and ascending sequences, adding new expressive connotations of haste (via the hemiola's compressed timeframe), anticipation (a conventional association of ascent), and uncertainty (the unpredictable termination of the sequence). The preexistent meaning of the melody indicates the presence of the Till-character and perhaps mischief or merriment; the new expressive information (possible hurrying, anticipation, uncertainty) conveyed by the transformation is programmatically significant in that it heightens the sense of mischief. Indeed, Richard Specht suggests that this moment represents Till creeping away from the scene of a prank.\(^{17}\) Strauss and Mauke do not specify any exact representational meaning in their programs, but certainly the passage at least supplements expressive meaning, given the high potential for representationality suggested by its marked difference. Example 7c reproduces a similar passage shortly thereafter, again of mischievous expressive quality via fragmentation, rhythmic

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 18. Reduction by the author.

transformation, spare texture, soft dynamics, and staccato articulation. Till’s transformation into a gentleman caller parallels the musical transformation shown in Example 7d, in which the motive undergoes significant change, via legato phrasing and consonance, to reflect a more subdued or romantic state of mind. Examples 8b and 8c show two of the transformations of the other primary melodic material (Example 8a), reflecting (again) Till’s love-struck state and a triumphant expressive quality, respectively.

Example 8a: Richard Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, mm. 6–12.18

Example 8b: Richard Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, mm. 229–33.19

Example 8c: Richard Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, mm. 485–93.20

Musical description of the fictional world of Till Eulenspiegel is particularly rich, as is evident in the vivid scenes involving Till’s chaotic ride through the market and the pompous learnedness of the Philistine scholars. The former event (m. 133 ff.) arises rather suddenly from a context of predominantly quiet dynamics and spare textures, and is precipitated by a very rapid scalar run in the bass clarinet and clarinets. Piccolo, flutes, oboes, and English horn shriek

18 Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, 1.

19 Ibid., 20.

20 Ibid., 42–43.
fortissimo semitones and then sustain a loud, discordant harmony over the strings’ presentation of the second primary Till melody. The head-motive of that same melody then appears, rhythmically displaced in two parts, in the high woodwinds. The multiplicity of distinctive events, the structural isomorphisms of shrieking voices, and the overall impression of chaos describe a scene of great confusion (though extramusical text is required for disambiguation of what exactly that confusion entails, i.e., Till riding a horse through a market full of women). The melody representing the Philistine scholars (m. 293 ff.) constructs and describes their fictional presence not only through novelty of melody and key area, but mainly through description. The martial rhythms and clear harmonic periodicity and closure are distinctively out of place in the freewheeling merriment of the composition, and therefore describe a certain contextual rigidity. The subsequent “fitting” of the first Till melody into such a martial stricture is not only humorous, but also structurally representational of his actions in imitating the scholars.

These few examples only begin to disclose the details of *Till Eulenspiegel’s* fictional world, but they do provide a sample of the worldmaking techniques employed by Strauss. The construction and weighting of both the primary extramusical and primary musical events occurs through the title, program, formal prominence of certain melodies, harmonies, and key areas, and the presence of difference-marking novel musical events or distinctive transformations of preexistent materials. Supplementation of this initial primary material, derivations of further meaning therefrom, and the definition of secondary entities or events are accomplished through thematic transformations and musical descriptions (via structural isomorphisms and conventional gestures), as well as the implicit changes of context in which thematic transformations take place. Perhaps these worldmaking techniques seem intuitive or seem to lack the necessity of explanation; indeed, the establishment of fictional worlds and the suspension of disbelief in them
by the appreciator are largely intuitive gestures in the appreciation of artworks in other media as well.

About what, then, does an appreciator suspend disbelief when listening to a performance of Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche? As in other arts, there are existence beliefs: the appreciator suspends the disbelief that Till Eulenspiegel, the market women, the fair maiden(s), the Philistine scholars, and the trial judges do not exist. The suspension of this disbelief allows for the admission of their conceptual existence\(^{21}\) in a fictional Till-Eulenspiegel-world, trumping the now-secondary belief dossier stating that these entities do not exist except as musical melodies—notes on a page and sounds from instruments. There is, as with the literary arts, a simultaneous perception of the medium and a conceptualization of the represented content. Furthermore, one suspends disbeliefs about these fictional entities and their emotions or states, and events taking place in the fictional world: the appreciator believes (in the momentarily primary belief dossier of the fictional world) that Till is mischievous or love-struck or scornful, and the appreciator believes that Till rides a horse through the market, Till sticks his tongue out at the Philistine scholars (see Chapter Two, Example 4), goes to trial, and dies. All of these beliefs momentarily supplant the originally primary beliefs that a musical motive consists of such-and-such structural features or is a transformation of a previous melody with such-and-such alterations. As in other arts, one perceives the medium, but the suspension of disbelief allows extramusical (representational) significance to arise from that medium’s material.

Yet it is clear on listening to Till Eulenspiegel that, despite its claims to programmatic status, not all of its music is involved in worldmaking. Indeed, Strauss breaks the suspension of disbelief in the Till-Eulenspiegel-world in select passages; concentration on the nature of

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\(^{21}\) As opposed to their tangible or perceptual existence; see Chapter Three for the difference and the definition of music’s represented content as conceptualized.
programmism in the work and Strauss’s preoccupation with the musical medium and form reveals such breaks.

One logical departure point for breaks in the suspension of disbelief involves the extramusical text of the work. The programmatic notes by Strauss and Mauke refer completely to events, objects, and brief descriptions, exhibiting a narrative event-progression. Such a wholehearted concentration on the event-flow of the narrative presents no anomalous psychological or reflective passages, but rather straightforward worldmaking and event-progression in that fictional world. The placement and proportion of programmatic text, however, reveals an intriguing irregularity of the tone poem.

Strauss’s and Mauke’s programmatic notes occur fairly regularly in terms of measure-quantity, and consecutive programmatic events occur in relatively close temporal proximity. In Mauke’s analytical pamphlet, consecutive programmatic events invariably occur less than 40 measures apart, which, given the rapid tempo of the work, is relatively little time for any digression past the establishment of a passage’s particular representational meaning. Strauss’s last programmatic note, however, occurs in m. 345 (out of 657 measures), and Mauke’s programmatic notes feature a lengthy gap of nearly 200 measures, from mm. 382 to 577, between consecutive programmatic events. Does nothing of programmatic import occur in such a period of time, in a work that overtly claims extramusical significance? Is there no musical event in that time that is marked for difference, with potential representational meaning? Quite to the contrary, the passage includes breaks in the suspension of disbelief in the *Till-Eulenspiegel-

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23 Ibid., 541.
world, belying Strauss’s preoccupation with musical form rather than outright musical/programmatic consistency.

The last programmatic note prior to this passage, in Mauke’s analysis, is *Tills Gassenhauer* (“popular melody”), immediately following his confrontation with the Philistine scholars, in mm. 375–82. The measures immediately following this are, however, marked for difference in that they contain anomalous silences, lengthy durations, and augmented transformations of the second primary Till melody; all of this indicates a gradual transition away from the *Gassenhauer*, connoting increasing distance from an event (softer dynamics, lengthier durations, and diminuendos). The next major textural change, signaling a departure from both the musical content and the programmatic content of the previous passage, occurs in m. 410. Measures 410–28, I contend, constitute a break in the suspension of disbelief in the *Till-Eulenspiegel*-world.

Example 9 reproduces the first eight measures of this passage; though the change in texture and new transformations of the two primary Till motives do mark this passage for difference, its lack of explicit programmatic significance is conspicuous. The textural change and motivic transformations are novel in retrospect, but they are also unremarkable enough to not produce any definitive representational meaning, and there is no disambiguating text to specify any such meaning. The passage tonicizes C major, the global dominant, with little harmonic interest or melodic variation within. The purpose of the passage remains unclear until m. 429, in which a perfect authentic cadence in F major precipitates a restatement of the first primary Till melody in its original form. The return, now solidly in F major (the global tonic), is clearly a

\[24\] Ibid.
reprise of sorts, and the meaning—albeit a structural meaning—of the preceding passage in mm. 410–28 is now clear: it is a retransition, prolonging the global dominant harmony in preparation for the reprise of the original melodic material and key area. Its character is so different from the preceding passage (mm. 375–409) that it is clear that this retransition has little or nothing to do with the programmatic meaning established for the Gassenhauer passage. Though somewhat marked for difference, this retransition’s relatively static nature (melodically, tonally, and texturally) does not immediately reveal any remarkable representational meaning,

Example 9: Richard Strauss, Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, mm. 410–18.26

25 Given the rondo-like form of the work, “refrain” is another possible term for this recurrence, but I prefer “reprise” because of the lack of any such similar passage in the work that so exactly reproduces the expository music of m. 6 ff.

26 Strauss, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, 35–36. Reduction by the author.
nor does any disambiguating text define any. Its only function, in fact, is formal, in that it steers
the harmonic focus of the work back to the global tonic, F major, for the reprise in m. 429. Given
that all musical events prior to this passage in the work were also imbued with representational
meaning (whether through clear difference-marking or through the aid of extramusical text),27
the purely formal function of this passage establishes a break in the suspension of disbelief in the
*Till-Eulenspiegel*-world.

What of the reprise, then? It also has no corresponding programmatic assignation from
either Strauss or Mauke, and any analogies to possible programmatic events are unconvincing.
Has Till “returned” in some way? Doubtful: he never left, as his melodic stamp is apparent even
in the episodes. Is Till triumphant in some way? Perhaps, but he had already been triumphant
against the Philistines, and this would be a redundant and belated celebration of only one of his
triumphs. Is Till in his original state of mischief and merriment as established at the beginning of
the tone poem (m. 6, analogous to m. 429)? Perhaps, but this would imply that all the
transformations and programmatic doings undergone throughout the tone poem ultimately
rendered no change whatsoever in Till. Yet the reprise is so markedly different in its exact
replication of the texture and melody of m. 6 that the potential for representation of some general
kind—however unclear it may seem, given a lack of disambiguating text—still exists. This is
particularly evident in m. 436, in which the Till melody suddenly modulates to D major rather
than the expected, continuous F major, as occurs in the analogous mm. 13–14—an unexpected,
altogether appropriate (given the mischievous nature of the protagonist) and potentially
meaningful shift in harmony.

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27 This is not to say, of course, that every note of every phrase up until m. 410 is representational. Music’s
establishment of meaning over time is a product of large swaths of the medium’s material, from which the
appreciator gathers an overall impression of representationality, which contributes to the details of a fictional world.
The markedly different reprise and its potential representational meaning, then, do not constitute a break in the suspension of disbelief, but the passage immediately following does. Like mm. 410–28, Strauss and Mauke do not mention mm. 443–84 and 500–66 in their programmatic notes, but these measures do constitute a lengthy portion of the tone poem. Measures 443–84 are highly developmental in nature, and are developmental in a much more consistent way and over a lengthier period of time than any prior passages in the work. Focusing chiefly on the two primary Till melodies, these forty-two measures feature fragmentation, transposition, rhythmic augmentation, imitation, and intervallic transformations of the melodies’ constituent motives, among other developmental techniques. Yet what is unclear is the programmatic purpose of these developments. The use of the Till melodies programatically indicates his presence or influence, but the consistent change in the motives without any additional context or information—especially given the lack of such consistent development in earlier programmatic episodes—limits any clear representational meaning in the passage. At most, one could ascribe expressive attributes of confusion or instability to these measures, given the lack of disambiguating text, yet such instability following an apparent return or triumph in the reprise seems anachronistic. As is the case with mm. 410–28, however, this may be music for music’s sake, or development for development’s sake, given the apparent abandonment of programmatic meaning for formal meaning. The transformations and developments of the motives are not markedly different—in fact they seem redundant—and they appear in such close proximity that extramusical meaning is difficult to come by in this passage. Again, Strauss sacrifices program for musical form, and in doing so breaks the suspension of disbelief in the continuous and symbiotic flow of musical/narrative events.
Measures 485–500 are so markedly different that, like the reprise in m. 429, the potential for representational meaning must be granted despite the lack of disambiguating text. A marcato, rhythmically augmented transformation of the first Till melody occurs over these sixteen measures and, given its textural and melodic consistency and the stability of the diatonic F-major harmonies supporting it, establishes a pocket of markedly different potential meaning after the programatically ambiguous meandering of the developmental passage immediately preceding it.

Measure 500, however, resumes the developmental character of the music from mm. 443–84 and continues in this manner until m. 566. Like the previous development section, the music focuses on largely redundant and unremarkable transformations of the two Till melodies, betraying no obvious programmatic connotations but for the possible expressive attributes of increased tension and anticipation from frequent transposition, fragmentation, and increasingly rapid tempo. Measures 500–66 are, again, development for the sake of development, and only the sudden reappearance of Till’s “sermon” melody in m. 567—marked for difference not only in its surprising recurrence but also in its key, texture, and dynamics—reestablishes some semblance of programmatic function. As James Hepokoski writes about Strauss’s Don Juan, the musical and narrative planes of a programmatic work do not necessarily move parallel or in lockstep;28 certainly the same concept applies to Till Eulenspiegel.

Finally, the Epilog (m. 632 ff.) constitutes a conventional break in the suspension of disbelief in the Till-Eulenspiegel-world, in much the same sense that an Elizabethan prologue or epilogue does in drama. Occurring after the clear closure of both the programmatic and musical

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aspects of the work (i.e., Till’s death and a quiet, sustained, repeated F-major triad), this epilogue has a purely coda-like musical function: it both prolongs the tonic harmony and revisits the primary melodic material of the work. In beginning with the same music as the opening of the tone poem, the epilogue retrospectively reveals the brief earlier passage’s introductory, non-programmatic function. In fulfilling a purely musical function, both the introduction and the epilogue constitute conventional suspension-breaking devices.

The construction of Till Eulenspiegel’s fictional world, then, involves many worldmaking techniques adapted to musical structure. Difference-marked transformations of themes, novel melodies, and musical descriptions act in tandem with the extramusical text in representing the character-entities, objects, events, and the component emotions and states of the fictional world. The relatively proximal occurrences of representational events provides a context in which it is possible to declare certain passages of the music to be non-representational (i.e., mm. 410–28, 443–84, and 500–66), given their lack of difference-markedness or extramusical-text-correspondence and their apparently purely musical functions. Like gratuitous text or description in the literary arts, such passages create undue emphasis on the medium in a work overtly claiming representational significance by disrupting the flow of represented events, creating breaks in the suspension of disbelief in the fictional world. The introduction and epilogue of the tone poem create conventional breaks in the suspension of disbelief (like dramatic prologues and epilogues) by framing the narrative: in the case of the introduction, by the text (Es war einmal) and by placement before the primary musical and representational materials of the work, and in the case of the epilogue by placement after the close of both the narrative and the musical planes.

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29 Strauss’s note for the introduction reads Es war einmal (“Once upon a time”). This is not, however, a programmatic note: It is rather one of several conventional gestures establishing or framing the work as a fiction, and therefore is outside of the suspension of disbelief. Similarly, the epilogue is a tacit “The End” (Werbeck, Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss, 540).
of the work. Strauss continued to hone his worldmaking and representational skills in the musical medium through numerous other tone poems, and the problem of delicate balance between medium and content nevertheless persisted. His last tone poem shows the extent to which his ingenuity in worldmaking developed.

_Eine Alpensinfonie: A Musical Trail of Bread Crumbs_

Completed in 1915, Strauss’s _Eine Alpensinfonie_ is another model of extensive and imaginative worldmaking with music, albeit with important differences from the other two tone poems studied above. One of Strauss’s subtle, yet highly significant, worldmaking techniques is the use of a narrative and musical form that features a very clear symmetrical arch (a Tolkienesque “there and back again” paradigm). Certain events become markers, or points of reference, on both “sides” of the symmetrical arch, both musically and extramusically.

First, however, the more conventional methods of worldmaking merit consideration. The title offers relatively little information about the fictional world of the work; in fact, some might not even consider it evidence of programmism, given the prominent generic emphasis in the title. If anything, the title establishes a general setting for the narrative (the Alpine region of Europe), but not much else.

The program, however, establishes far more propositional information about the _Alpensinfonie_-world. Rather than any outright essay or dialogue, the program takes the form of twenty-two textual subheadings. The text supplies the events of the narrative (e.g., night, sunrise, ascent, entrance into the woods, etc.) and in some cases, expressive descriptions of those events

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(e.g., *Auf blumige Wiesen* and *Gefahrvolle Augenblicke*). The program, notably, also establishes frames of time and place for the fictional world, noting specific sub-settings of the assumed mountain in question (e.g., a waterfall, a glacier, the summit) and specifying times of day at the work’s beginning and end (night, sunrise, sunset, and night again). This temporal aspect of the program and the musical correlations between them contribute to the symmetrical shape of the tone poem. In a notable departure from Strauss’s other tone poems, however, none of the programmatic text or musical events can be said to represent a person or persons; the extramusical text establishes no characters (with the possible but unspecific exception of the *Erscheinung* [“Apparition”]); rather, the program implies a hiker or group of hikers through the progression of settings and events. As a result, musical entities in the work cannot realistically be interpreted as representing specific characters, but rather events or movements or non-human objects. The lack of a human character dimension in the *Alpensinfonie* strongly emphasizes the Nietzschean regard for nature that influenced Strauss’s concept of the tone poem.31

Despite the generic and formal implications of its title, the *Alpensinfonie* is not a traditional symphony, nor are its “movements” musically distinct. The musical fabric is continuous, unlike the other two tone poems studied in this thesis, both of which are episodic in nature (*Till Eulenspiegel* through its loose rondo form and clear tonal divides, and *Don Quixote* through its variational episodes and movement-closing cadences). Musically salient structures and difference-markedness, then, assume increased responsibility for representation and event-progression in *Eine Alpensinfonie*, as no artificial constructs provide separation of the events and entities.

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Unlike *Till Eulenspiegel's Lustige Streiche*, there is no implication of a primary character-entity, event, or emotion from the title of *Eine Alpensinfonie*; the program suggests only an overall primary event in the collected events and actions encompassing a mountain ascent. In each case, there is no precedent for any primary musical material to represent a primary entity. If anything, the primary programmatic entity is the unnamed mountain, but recurrent musical material correspondent to the primary programmatic entity would, in this case, repeatedly and redundantly reinforce the notion of the mountain’s presence at certain points in the narrative—a forced and unnecessary assumption. There are three primary melodies in the tone poem (based on their recurrent frequency and tendency for transformation), reproduced in Examples 10a, 10b, and 10c, and there are numerous other unrelated, relatively minor melodies of various recurrent frequency. The referential meaning of Example 10a, given its highly difference-marked musical and programmatic context, is clear enough, but the meaning of the ubiquitous passage shown in Example 10b is vague; presumably it has something to do with, or describes, the primary entity of the mountain, as Norman Del Mar speculates. Example 10c, meanwhile, works through the program, structural isomorphism, and musical convention to represent the martial, spatial action of ascent. In this way the three melodies establish both musical (i.e., thematic) and extramusical (i.e., referring to the mountain or the sun) continuity throughout the work.

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Musical novelty, then, is an important factor in the Alpensinfonie’s worldmaking process, given the primacy of these three melodies. As in Till Eulenspiegel, this occurs through both new musical events and new transformations of previous materials. New melodies imply new programmatic events through assumed representational correspondence. Such instances occur with Sonnenaufgang in m. 46; Der Anstieg in mm. 74, 81, 91, and 122; Eintritt in den Wald in mm. 148 and 237; Erscheinung in m. 301; Auf blumige Wiesen in m. 342; Auf der Alm in mm. 366, 415, and 420; Auf dem Gipfel in mm. 566, 571, and 603; Nebel steigen auf in m. 729; and Elegie in m. 755. This relatively brief list of contrasting melodic presentations, some of which appear only once, confirms that the majority of melodic worldmaking in Eine Alpensinfonie occurs not through construction (composition) but rather through transformation (derivation).

Lest it be unstated or unclear from the analysis of Till Eulenspiegel, let me again emphasize that melodic novelty is hardly the only type of musical novelty, all of which encompasses difference-markedness. In the Alpensinfonie Strauss’s techniques of dynamic changes and abrupt modulations are particularly striking in their worldmaking properties, as is his use of textural novelty—not just through the orchestrational isolation of novel events, but

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also through various levels of polyphony and thicknesses of homophony. These elements of
dynamic, tonal, and textural change combine in Sonnenaufgang (m. 46) to create an event of
striking difference. Texturally, the dense polyphony of Nacht gives way to the melodically
articulate homophony of Sonnenaufgang. Dynamically, the gradual crescendo from nothingness
in Nacht culminates in a sustained fortissimo in Sonnenaufgang. Tonally, the key of B-flat
minor/major in Nacht abruptly shifts to A major in Sonnenaufgang. All of these elements
contribute to the novelty and markedness of the sunrise and establish its representational
significance.

Textural and orchestrational novelty is a particularly telling marker of difference in the
musical context of the Alpensinfonie, and several other instances of such novelty demonstrate its
worldmaking potential. The introduction of an offstage brass band in Der Anstieg (m. 126 ff.)
adds a performative dimension by creating sounds-like and structural similarities of distance
which, along with the conventional triadic figures the instruments play, represent a distant
hunting party. Indeed, Strauss’s programmatic indication, inserted in parentheses above m. 126,
reads Jagdhörner von ferne.34 Similarly, instrumentational isolation and anachronistic
instrumental techniques contribute to the representations of birdealls in Eintritt in den Wald, mm.
200–06, and chirps and bovine noises in Auf der Alm, mm. 366 ff.35 Texturally, the dense
polyphony of Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen, compared to the largely homophonic
context of the preceding music, establishes musical confusion that is structurally isomorphic to
the chaos and uncertainty of the titular wrong turns. Monophony—though potentially useful as
an expository texture—and silence are both unsettling in the overwhelmingly homophonic work,
and such instances occur at programmatic points of impending peril: *Gefahrvolle Augenblicke* (mm. 523–26) and *Stille vor dem Sturm* (mm. 791–93 and over a string pedal in 813–22). The lack of sonic cues in a composition of a sonic nature is isomorphically unsettling. The distinctive instrumental techniques of *Stille vor dem Sturm* and *Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg* establish sounds-like and structural properties of the *Alpensinfonie*-world during the thunderstorm, from the pizzicato plunk of raindrops to the rapid rise and fall of wind to the sheets of descending rain to flashes of lightning and rumbling thunderclaps. Worldmaking techniques of construction, ordering, and derivation abound in correspondences with musical manipulations of texture and orchestration.

Harmony and tonality have unusually prominent roles in worldmaking as well in the *Alpensinfonie*; in a diatonic context, of course, difference-marking can be as easy as mere chromaticism, but in Strauss’s late Romantic idiom, further difference is necessary for significant marking. In addition to its anachronistic polyphony, *Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen* also features unusually heavy chromaticism and tonal instability—yet another structurally isomorphic indicator of error and confusion. The relatively stable repose of D-minor tonality (in addition to the reestablishment of homophony and discernible, non-fragmented melodic motives) in m. 490 (*Auf dem Gletscher*) finally signals an end to the confusion. Similarly, *Gefahrvolle Augenblicke* structurally analogizes peril through a lack of harmonic footing or diatonic foundation; though the melodic motives contained therein have obvious triadic inclinations, the tremolo violins do not confirm any such harmonic or tonal stability, as they sustain intervals of between one and three simultaneous semitones in mm. 533–62. By contrast, however, the

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35 Strauss’s use of cowbells in the same section, like Respighi’s use of recorded nightingales in *Pini di Roma*, is a presentation rather than a representation, and involves no distinction between medium and content. See Chapter Two, note 73.
immediately succeeding *Auf dem Gipfel* indulges in pure, unadulterated triadicism and diatonicism to an unprecedented, sustained degree, analogizing both an exit from peril and a restoration of the “natural order” of the triad. The constantly shifting tonal instability of *Vision* and the nearly unperturbed diatonicism of *Ausklang* are also unusually skewed to an extreme of the diatonicism/chromaticism polarity and deserve attention; I will examine them in greater detail below in the context of breaks in the suspension of disbelief.

As in *Till Eulenspiegel*, thematic transformation is both a means of event-progression and of simultaneous description. Fragmentation of motives, which is particularly vivid in structurally isomorphing incompleteness and thereby confusion, occurs tellingly in *Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrewegen* (mm. 455–58, 471–73, and 474–77, transforming themes from *Der Anstieg*), *Gefahrvolle Augenblicke* (mm. 523–26, 529–33, 535–42, 544–47, and 549–59, also on themes from *Der Anstieg*), and *Die Sonne verdüstert sich allmählich* (mm. 741–42, 747–50, and 753–54, analogizing the infrequent appearance of the sun through fragmented transformations of motives that first appeared in *Sonnenaufgang*). One of the more clever transformations involves the primary melody of *Der Anstieg* (see Example 10c), which originally describes ascent through musical spatial ascent and conventional martial rhythms. In *Sturm und Gewitter, Abstieg*, Strauss inverts this melody against the backdrop of the thunderstorm, as shown in Example 11. In doing so he applies the structural isomorphism of inversion as opposition, or the turning-upside-down-of, to render the concept of descent (i.e., the opposite of ascent) palpable. In *Sonnenuntergang* the application of rhythmic augmentation and extremely slow harmonic rhythms to the melody originally occurring in *Sonnenaufgang* structurally parallels the perceptually ponderous descent of the sun below the horizon.
The worldmaking aspect most distinctive to the *Alpensinfonie*, however, involves musical self-reference. The there-and-back-again paradigm of both the program and the music suggests encounters of the same phenomena from different perspectives upon ascent and descent of the unnamed mountain. Indeed, motives serve as musical and extramusical placemarkers, establishing salient structures upon first encounter (during ascent) and revisiting them upon descent. Rather than being any of the three primary melodies of the work (Examples 10a, 10b, and 10c), however, these placemarkers tend to be novel melodies and/or transformations encountered once upon ascent and rarely (if ever) thereafter until the descent. The descent occurs in a greatly compressed time frame, during the harried chaos of the thunderstorm (*Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg*). Yet, like Hansel and Gretel following their trail of bread crumbs, Strauss revisits the salient motives established upon ascent for re-orientation amid the confusion of the storm.

The musical motives encountered during the thunderstorm include those first associated with *Der Anstieg* (mm. 74–81 and 122–24, both of which are primary and recurrent motives), *Eintritt in der Wald* (mm. 148–51), *Am Wasserfall* (mm. 295–300), *Auf der Alm* (mm. 366–68 and 420–25), and *Auf dem Gletscher* (mm. 492–500). During the storm, however, the motives occur in roughly reverse order (paralleling the reverse order of their occurrence upon descent), with the two primary ideas from *Der Anstieg* used throughout in inversion to represent spatial descent (for instance, in mm. 853–59 and 862–66). The motive from *Auf dem Gletscher* appears in mm. 871–75, the music from *Am Wasserfall* in mm. 886–91, the motives from *Auf der Alm* in

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Significantly, all of these recurrences also occur in the keys of their initial presentations, despite the global B-flat minor tonality of the thunderstorm. These musical “bread crumbs,” then, are highly significant in setting-orientation in the Alpensinfonie world, both formally and programmatically.

This variety of worldmaking techniques, then, establishes the contents of the Alpensinfonie-world about which appreciators suspend disbelief. Textual construction from the title and program provides information on the setting and fictional time frame, whereas musical elements describe and enact (construct, weight, and order) actions, objects, and events within that setting. Difference-markers of melody, motive, tonality, harmony, orchestration, instrumental techniques, texture, thematic transformation, and self-reference all establish potentially representational musical events, which the appreciator interprets programmatically and about which he or she suspends disbelief. One suspends disbeliefs involving time, allowing the fictional belief that the larger part of a day passes to subsume the real-world belief that fifty minutes passes; similarly, one suspends the disbelief that one does not encounter a phenomenon (a glacier, a waterfall) experienced earlier over the belief that a passage is just a melodic recurrence. One also suspends the disbelief that a bird does not chirp or lightning does not flash, displacing the belief that a new melody is nothing but a novel musical phenomenon. The appreciator thinks the same of actions: a melody does not progress in a certain manner, rather, some unnamed entity or entities fictionally ascend the mountain in a march-like way. Similarly, music engenders descriptive features of the fictional world rather than of the music: rather than being of a certain melodic contour, a passage represents the cascading, repetitive sprinkling of droplets over a waterfall.
Naturally, the fictional world of *Eine Alpensinfonie* is propositionally incomplete, as is that of *Till Eulenspiegel*. Yet between the simultaneous consumption of the textual and musical media, enough detail is readily apparent to appreciators that they can experience a rudimentary narrative and representational paradigm. Certainly this music, as with all representational music, does not claim the perceptual content-clarity of a drama, film, or painting, but it does claim *conceptual* clarity through the uniquely musical representation it exhibits. As with all suspensions of disbelief, the fictional belief dossier (e.g., that the sun rises gloriously, that the thickets are confusing, that fog rises, that the sunset is gradual) temporarily trumps the simultaneously present secondary (real-world) belief dossier. This, indeed, is what keeps appreciators from holding an umbrella over their heads during the thunderstorm, just as secondary real-world beliefs prevent the appreciator from leaping onstage to rescue a character in a drama.

Nevertheless, despite the constant and ingenuous use of a variety of worldmaking techniques, *Eine Alpensinfonie*, like *Till Eulenspiegel*, also includes several breaks in the suspension of disbelief. Its length, symmetrical form, and continuous nature discourage the kind of breaks in the suspension found in *Till Eulenspiegel*, that is, music of a purely formal purpose. Unlike *Till Eulenspiegel*, however, the *Alpensinfonie*’s program provides several clues as to the points at which breaks may occur. The programmatic subheadings consist almost entirely of events, setting specifications (objects), and sometimes descriptions. Three subheadings, however, disrupt the narrative flow of programmatic events in favor of reflection or stasis, much like a dramatic soliloquy or aside. These subheadings—*Vision*, *Elegie*, and *Ausklang*—all lack any clear significance as events in the narrative, and appear to exist for the purpose of commentary on the represented content or for disruption thereof. *Vision* occurs immediately after the
achievement of the summit, and there is no specification as to what the vision encompasses, though some scholars speculate as to otherworldly or supernatural meanings behind the word.\textsuperscript{37} 

*Elegie*, occurring after the obscuring of the sun and before the onset of the storm, seems to textually comment on the expressive attributes of programmatic events about to occur, and *Ausklang*, nestled somehow between the sunset and the night, appears to have no programmatic significance whatever. Each of these passages have characteristics that mark them as breaks in the suspension of disbelief in the *Alpensinfonie*-world.

First, however, a brief passage in *Eintritt in der Wald* deserves consideration as such a break. Measures 212–29 contain none of the markers for difference that make the rest of *Eintritt* so representationally potent. The “*Eintritt motive*” of mm. 148–51 (horns and trombones) establishes such potential through melodic novelty, and frequent alternations of this motive and the initial melody of *Der Anstieg* offer shifting representational foci in mm. 159–94. Tonal and harmonic changes also establish representational potential through novelty, as several key areas are present in this passage, from F minor (m. 159) to C minor (ca. m. 169) to E major (m. 186) to A-flat major (ca. m. 194) to A major (m. 200). Measure 212, however, again reaffirms the “*Eintritt motive*” as the primary melodic material of the passage over an E-flat pedal; the transformations of this motive in mm. 212–29 offer no new representational potential (i.e., are not marked for difference in any significant way) and are even redundant. The pedal tone and the E-flat and A-flat major tonalities of the passage also have none of the representational potential that the constantly shifting, often abrupt modulations of the preceding passage had. The next representationally potent event occurs with the recurrence of the *Anstieg* melody in m. 230, now in the novel (for this melody) key of A-flat major following the E-flat dominant pedal. The

passage from mm. 212–29 becomes, in retrospect, a relatively static, unremarkably stagnant 
harmonic transition and thus a break between representationally significant events, the 
progression of which is essential in maintaining the suspension of disbelief.

*Vision* has the opposite problem of being perhaps *too* marked for difference, or too 
consistently so. Its most distinguishing feature is the developmental quality of its music, the 
character of which is sustained and transformed with a consistency and over a length of time 
unprecedented in the work. The result is an uncannily odd, even disturbing, passage that Del Mar 
calls “weird” and Michael Kennedy calls “extraordinary.”38 It is so full of curious developments 
on previous motives that the wealth of new information boggles the mind both musically and 
extramusically, resulting in a lack of representational clarity that draws attention to inward 
development rather than external signification.

![Example 12a and 12b: Richard Strauss, Eine Alpensinfonie, mm. 566–70, 603–607.](image)

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*Vision* primarily develops two motives that first occur in *Auf dem Gipfel*; being the programmatic subheading immediately following this one, *Vision* necessarily bears some relation extramusically to the *Gipfel* because of its immediate development of *Gipfel*’s material.

Examples 12a and 12b reproduce the two motives in their original settings in *Auf dem Gipfel*; Example 13 reproduces the first portion of *Vision*. *Vision* immediately distinguishes itself from *Auf dem Gipfel* by means of an abrupt modulation. The preceding passage of *Gipfel* had

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40 Ibid., 88–91. Reduction by the author.
progressed from C major to A minor to E minor with regular phrase rhythm, whereas Vision begins abruptly with ambiguous implications of F-sharp major or B major in m. 653. Its abrupt shift to C-sharp minor in m. 657 is nearly as surprising as the sudden melodic and harmonic digression in mm. 661–64, in which both the Gipfel motives are abandoned and heavily chromatic voice-leading leads away from C-sharp minor toward G-sharp minor. The subsequent sequences, descending chromatic semitones of the bass, and dissonant transformations of the second Gipfel motive (with the noticeable tritone leaps in mm. 665–68) are all unprecedented in the scope of their developmental markedness and tonal ambiguity. This ambiguity only increases in mm. 669–72, in which the teleological uncertainty of the rising chromatic line in the woodwinds combines with the steadily descending and dissonant sustained tones of the oboes, heckelphone, trumpets, and trombone for a dissonant omnibus effect. The passage also involves sustained, prominent use of high range in the woodwinds (particularly clarinets), first horn, and trumpets. The addition of trills to nearly every note played by the string section—particularly the odd addition of a trill to every eighth note in the second violins, mm. 665–72—adds to the uncanny effect.

Measures 673 to 681 constitute a pocket of relative stability, both melodically (the Sonnenaufgang melody presented in its entirety) and tonally (consistently in A-flat major), following this initial passage of Vision, and for that it must be exempted from consideration as a break in the suspension of disbelief, at least in this context of rapid change. Measure 681, however, immediately resumes the tonal instability of Vision’s initial passage, with chromatic inflections of and fragmentations of both Gipfel motives. A fanfare-like motive from Nacht appears in m. 692–97 and facilitates several rapid modulations by chromatic third relations, from C-sharp minor to A major to F major to D-flat major, after which still more semitone voice-
leading and motivic developments of the Gipfel themes lead to further dissonance and constant modulation in mm. 698–705. This precipitates the most stunning passage of Vision, mm. 706–13, reproduced in Example 14. While trumpets, violas, and ’cellos present the Sonnenaufgang melody in C-sharp minor, violins and woodwinds engage in contrary-motion, sometimes dissonant counterpoint, all at a fortissimo dynamic level. The brazen tonal chaos continues in mm. 713–22, in which the rising chromatic lines and semitone-descending harmonies of mm. 669–72 return (still with no apparent tonal goal). The recurrence of Nacht’s fanfare motive in mm. 723–29 does little to alleviate the ambiguity despite its clearer representational meaning, as the contrary-motion chromaticism continues against it with no apparent care as to harmonic or melodic support. Only with the abrupt abandonment of this chromatic voice-leading, a perfect authentic cadence in B-flat minor, a sudden change in texture, and a new melody does m. 729 (Nebel steigen auf) finally end the developmental hedonism of Vision.


Why is this Vision a break in the suspension of disbelief, then, if it is so clearly, markedly different from the rest of the work? Its consistent inconsistency—constant development (rather than purposefully representational transformation) and rapid, unpredictable modulations, along with distinctive instrumental techniques and ranges and odd counterpoint—inevitably attracts the appreciator’s attention, but does this not mean it is full of representational potential? This is not

41 Ibid., 96. Reduction by the author.
necessarily so. The subheading *Vision*, for one, is highly unspecific representationally, and though representational potential exists, it is unclear what exactly a vision might have to do with such material; visions with such wildly aberrant change would seem to fall under the hallucinogenic category. Its immediate treatment of material from *Auf dem Gipfel*, without any clear representational goal, suggests commentary on that material rather than any specific transformation for representational purposes (as is so apparent with other transformations throughout the work). If Strauss intended to represent a situation of uncanny eeriness and otherworldliness, then he succeeded; but otherwise, *Vision* is a purely developmental self-commentary that breaks the progression of narrative and description in the *Alpensinfonie*-world.

Despite its title, *Elegie* has very little such disruptive effect and is far less a break in the suspension of disbelief. From its content, it is clear that it serves as a continuation of the musical and representational material of *Nebel steigen auf* and *Die Sonne verdüstert sich allmählich*, the two immediately preceding passages. The only new musical content provided by *Elegie* is the key (F-sharp minor) and a new motive, distinctive in both melodic contour (a large proportion of oscillating semitones) and rhythmic shape (a preponderance of dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures). This new material occurs in mm. 755–65, after which the content of *Nebel steigen auf* and *Die Sonne verdüstert* . . . promptly resumes. Though the new *Elegie* material intervenes at later points, it is overshadowed by the *Nebel* and *Sonne verdüstert* content. It is questionable as to whether mm. 755–65 can even be called a break in the suspension of disbelief; the new material’s subsequent recurrence seems to suggest at least some extramusical significance, even if it is only as a foreshadowing of the uncertainty and uneasiness of the coming thunderstorm.

*Ausklang*, however, is a clear break in the suspension of disbelief, but not in the same manner in which *Vision* is. The title of the subheading itself is significant: alternately translated
as “conclusion” and “echo,” it bears elements of both of these, and both words suggest not programmatic or representational purpose, but a formal one. In this sense, it might resemble some of the breaks in *Till Eulenspiegel* in which the narrative event-progression is disrupted for formal reasons. *Ausklang* follows the representationally significant events of *Sonnenuntergang*—its very slow recurrence of the *Sonnenaufgang* melody, coupled with slow harmonic rhythm—and precedes the resumption of *Nacht*, with its characteristically quiet, descending cluster of diatonic pitches. Programmatically, there seems to be very little purpose for *Ausklang*, as it occurs between two apparently contiguous events (sunset and night); twilight or dusk would seem to be the only available programmatic options, but this also seems representationally difficult.

After a brief introductory transition from *Sonnenuntergang* by the organ, first horn, and first trumpet, *Ausklang* settles into a recapitulative recount of music from *Auf dem Gipfel* (mm. 607–33) in mm. 1047–74. In *Ausklang*, however, major perceptual differences result from slower tempo, quieter dynamic levels, and transposition to E-flat major, the key of the original ascent (*Der Anstieg*). The texture is spare, involving at most two-part counterpoint with the organ as harmonic background. The harmony is (as before) diatonic, even static, given the lengthy pedal tones in the organ. Strauss’s expressive marking for this passage—*in sanfter Extase*—provides insight as to its interpretation. Its relative simplicity and its recounting of the triumphant climax of the work make *Ausklang* an idealized reflection on the journey, both musical and extramusical.

Measures 1074 to 1096 continue this idealized recounting of the immediate past through persistent tonal stability (E-flat major until a brief interruption in mm. 1095–96), diatonic progressions centered chiefly around tonic and dominant harmonies, and melodic recollection of
motives from Der Anstieg and Auf der Alm. Measures 1097 to 1105 resume the diatonic stability and progressions of E-flat major and recreate the conclusive authentic cadence of mm. 118–22 (in Der Anstieg), albeit with the much slower, reflective tempo and harmonic rhythm predominant in the passage. The remainder of Ausklang (mm. 1105–30) similarly revisits previous motives in an overwhelmingly diatonic context, then retransitions into Nacht by modulation to B-flat minor. Ausklang, then, is a break in the suspension of disbelief not only through its reflective title and correspondent idealized presentation of previous musical material, but also through its coda-like recapitulative function, which preempts any apparent representational function of the passage.

Eine Alpensinfonie’s worldmaking techniques, then, demonstrate Strauss’s facility with the musical medium’s abilities to convey limited propositional information in conjunction with textual supplementation. In this case, unlike in Till Eulenspiegel, breaks in the suspension of disbelief result not only from the preemption of representational for formal needs (Ausklang) but also from reflective, self-commenting passages that have musical peculiarities and not simply programmatic oddities indicative of islands in the stream of event-progressions. As will be evident below, such worldmaking and world-breaking is not limited to just one or two of Strauss’s tone poems, however.

**Tilting at Windmills: Don Quixote**

It is only appropriate that a study of the suspension of disbelief in programmatic instrumental music conclude with a study of Strauss’s Don Quixote (1898). Cervantes’s novel of the same title explores themes of reality versus imagination and perception versus conception that closely parallel the themes of this thesis. The individual nature of perception/conception and the suspension of disbelief is evident both in the apparently insane imaginings of Cervantes’s
knight errant and in Strauss’s musical interpretation of the *Don Quixote* narrative, which establishes its fictional world (and breaks its suspension) in ways related to, but still distinct from, the other tone poems chosen for this thesis.

As with *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Eine Alpensinfonie*, the title and program of *Don Quixote* figure prominently in its worldmaking. The title, of course, imports an overwhelmingly immense bank of propositional information for potential application to any work derivative of Cervantes’s novel, for with such a distinctive and well-known title, one can assume a large degree of correspondence between the two works as regards propositional information. A vast array of characters, settings, actions, events, and expressions are possible in a shared, interfictional *Don-Quixote*-world; one might even go so far as to say that Cervantes’s novel establishes the propositional information while Strauss’s music specifies particular character-, event-, and setting-entities from that propositional bank. Indeed, the program (here consisting of Strauss’s programmatic notes in the four-hand piano holograph and Arthur Hahn’s analytical program booklet) also does this by passing reference to specific events and chapters, though description, elaboration, and enactment is left to the music.

The form of the work—to which the subtitle, like that of *Till Eulenspiegel*, refers⁴²—plays a more distinctive role in worldmaking than in either of the two previous tone poems. The overt claim to variation form forces an episodic interpretation on the work—one parallel to the

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⁴² The full title is *Don Quixote (Introduzione, tema con variazioni e finale): Fantastische Variationen über ein Thema ritterlichen Characters* (Richard Strauss, *Don Quixote*, in *Tone Poems, Series I: Don Juan, Tod und Verklärung, and Don Quixote* [New York: Dover, 1979], 193).
Examples 15a, 15b, 15c, 15d, 15e, 15f, and 15g: Richard Strauss, *Don Quixote*, mm. 13–17, 211–14, 246–48, 382–84, 510–15, 582–90, and 616–17.\(^{43}\)

episodic nature of Cervantes’s novel, in which separate chapters contain distinct adventures.

Variation form in the tone poem separates not only programmatic events, but also distinctive musical events (e.g., melodies and tonal centers). The demarcation between variations (and thus between programmatic episodes), with few exceptions, is a cadence in the global tonic of D major/minor.\(^{44}\)

For the conclusion of most variations, Strauss uses a cadential formula


\(^{44}\) The exceptions occur at the end of Variations IV and V, the reasons for which will become clear below, and at the end of Variation VII, the entirety of which is a prolongation of the D-minor tonic harmony and achieves cadential finality through the long fermata in the concluding measure (525).
established early in the Introduction, shown in Example 15a. Examples 15b, 15c, 15d, and 15e show the recurrence of this cadence at the conclusions to Variations I, II, III, and VI; Variations VIII and IX end with different cadences, though still tonicizing D. Variation VIII’s plagal cadence, marked *religioso* and reproduced in Example 15f, conventionally represents piety and gratitude in the context of the variation’s programmatic events (a life-threatening boat ride); Example 15g shows the concluding cadence of Variation IX.

Another noticeable formal and cadential worldmaking technique involves the use of the half cadence as a distinction between the reality and fiction of the *Don-Quixote*-world (i.e., the “real” character of the man Don Quixote and the imagined knight errant character prevalent in his own mind). Both the Introduction (m. 122) and Variation X (m. 690) end in half cadences in D, and only these two sections utilize the half cadence as their demarcating devices. They are also, significantly, points of transition between Don Quixote’s “real” world and his imagined one. The Introduction leads immediately into the *Tema* portion of the work (introducing Don Quixote’s knight-errant identity, apparent in its change of mode to D minor, as well as that of Sancho Panza), and the conclusion of Variation X leads into the Finale, in which the gentleman Don Quixote dies at his home. The half cadence is an ambiguous buffer, implying neither major nor minor mode. The *Tema*, established in D minor after the half cadence, is thus a clear contrast from the D major of the Introduction, and the D-major key of the Finale is a clear contrast after the predominantly minor tonality of the ten variations preceding it. The major/minor opposition, though subtle, mirrors the opposition of reality and imagination within the *Don-Quixote*-world itself.

Reality and imagination have parallels not only in harmonic and modal worldmaking techniques, but also in melodic ones. As in *Till Eulenspiegel*, the primary melodic material of the
work occurs at the work’s outset, and thus its primacy is analogous to the primary entity established by the title, that is, Don Quixote. The normalcy of the gentleman Don Quixote is evident in the diatonicism of the initial presentation of the primary melody, for in a tonal context, normalcy corresponds to adherence to diatonic/harmonic practice. In the Tema—already set apart by the half cadence preceding it and the change to minor mode—this normalcy is clearly not present. What had been a conventional cadential figure cementing the D-major tonality of the opening in mm. 4–5 becomes, in the Tema, a tonicization of the subtonic, C major (mm. 126–27). This digression, in comparison to its source in mm. 4–5, is unstable, paralleling the fragile instability of the deluded knight-errant Don Quixote. Examples 16a and 16b reproduce these two instances of character exposition and the differences between the gentleman and the knight-errant.

Examples 16a and 16b: Richard Strauss, Don Quixote, mm. 1–5 and 123–27.  

There are, of course, other character-entities implied by the title Don Quixote, most notably Sancho Panza and Dulcinea del Toboso. As ever, melodic novelty is most significant in

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establishing thematic representations for these characters, especially as melody is the most memorable element of music. The representation of Dulcinea is first evident in mm. 25–32, which establishes contrasting style, dynamic level, key area, and instrumentation compared to the preceding Don-Quixote-music. This passage represents Dulcinea, not another character such as Sancho Panza, because of its musically conventional associations with the eternal feminine, especially given its oppositional characteristics in comparison to the Don-Quixote-music. There are no further novel melodies until the Tema passage, in which Don Quixote’s knight-errant music occurs, and in which a novel melody clearly represents and introduces Sancho Panza in mm. 140–61 through a variety of conventional and structurally isomorphic gestures (e.g., instrumentation, texture, phrasing, simplistic content). The point of Sancho’s music is not contrast with Don Quixote, as was Dulcinea’s music, though his music is markedly different; instead, his music is related tonally to Don Quixote’s by relative keys (F major, to Don Quixote’s D minor). As the opening to Variation I demonstrates (mm. 161 ff.), the two melodies can also work in counterpoint with one another. The two entities (melodic and programmatic) are therefore clearly companionable, whereas Dulcinea’s is musically isolated both by style and by key.

The primacy of these three melodies, like Till Eulenspiegel’s motives, becomes apparent through frequent recurrence and transformation throughout the work. Other novel melodies occur only within the context of individual variations and do not recur elsewhere in the work, again

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46 In addition, by way of elimination of possible character options, Sancho Panza is neither graceful nor quiet.

47 With the brief exception of a fanfare figure in mm. 33–37, which is clear enough as an expressive and conventional indicator of Don Quixote’s knightly profession and/or conduct.

48 The melodic and tonal distinction of these three character-entities is also apparent in another version of the Don Quixote narrative: Mitch Leigh, Joe Darion, and Dale Wasserman’s Man of La Mancha. Again, Don Quixote’s and Sancho’s music work in counterpoint, whereas Dulcinea’s music is separate in both key and style.
cementing the episodic nature of the tone poem and giving each variation an individual meaning. New melodic entities in mm. 181–99, 222–41, 398–422, 599–612, and 623–39 all relate to specific adventures and become representationally apparent through both musical description (structural isomorphisms and conventional gestures) and specification of the program.\footnote{They are, respectively, windmills, sheep and shepherds, a procession of pilgrims, two monks, and the Knight of the White Moon. These all occur only within the context of their respective variations but for one exception, the music of the shepherds in Variation II (mm. 227–32), which recurs in Variation X (mm. 657–70) as a means of representing Don Quixote’s intent to retire to shepherding following his defeat and disillusionment.} The primacy of the three main melodic and programmatic entities is also apparent through tonality. All variations utilize one of four main keys, each associated with one of the character-entities’ original presentations: D major/minor (Don Quixote), F major (Sancho), or G major (Dulcinea). Instrumentation is yet another technique of character-differentiation: after the Introduction, each character’s primary melodies occur in large part in one instrument or group of instruments. Programmatic occurrences associated with Don Quixote invariably occur in the solo ’cello, while programmatic occurrences associated with Sancho occur in the bass clarinet, tenor tuba, and/or solo viola. The instrumentation of Dulcinea’s melody is less definite and consistent, but it does occur most often in the high woodwinds and high strings. This fluid notion of instrumental assignation is analogous to her more symbolic presence as an ideal rather than her tangible presence as an active character.

Having established primary musical and programmatic entities and situationally appropriate entities for individual variations/adventures (e.g., windmills and sheep), Strauss uses mainly difference-marked thematic transformation for worldmaking purposes. Variation form implies the consistent and repeated return of like musical material, but in some altered guise, and Strauss uses this to his advantage. Programmatically, the presence of one of the three primary melodies implies a certain character’s presence in, or at least influence on, a particular situation;
in *Don Quixote*, recurrence of those primary melodies is somewhat redundant given variation form, and therefore the transformations of the primary melodies propel the event-progressions and descriptions of the fictional world. Difference-marking is therefore a symbiotic necessity of the variation form and of worldmaking in *Don Quixote*.

Thematic transformation is, of course, a matter of reference to the original presentations of melodies and notation of difference; that difference is what becomes programmatically significant and descriptive beyond the mere presence of an entity. The transformation of a fragment of Don Quixote’s music in the Introduction (mm. 83–85) and its subsequent recurrence adds descriptive meaning to the nobleman’s music, a meaning full of conventionally martial, rigid, militaristic connotations from its instrumentation (trumpets and trombones), rhythm (particularly the short-short long model), and articulation (*marcato*). If further support of the meaning of this transformation were needed, Strauss’s programmatic note in the four-hand piano holograph reads, “[Don Quixote] determines to move about the world as a knight-errant.”50 In Variation I, mm. 190–98 clearly represent Don Quixote’s presence together with the windmills (by introduction of his melody into the windmill music), his rise and fall against them (by rising tessitura and a downward arpeggiated fully diminished-seventh chord), his lengthy proneness on the ground immediately thereafter (by the inordinately long, sustained F in the ’cello) and his hesitant recovery (by the grace note offbeat entries of mm. 197–98); all of these are transformations of Don Quixote’s motives, and they accomplish a number of representational meanings despite being based on only one melodic source.

By contrast, mere fragmentation and thematic succession convey the sense of a conversation in Variation III. The presence of motives associated with Sancho and Don Quixote

indicate their extramusical presence in a new situation or setting, but the lack of any other novel music leaves them as the only characters in the scene. The fragmentation and relatively rapid succession of their motives analogizes an exchange between the two, and the musical features of the transformations describe the manner(s) of the exchange: Sancho’s interruptions, Don Quixote’s consistent and relatively unchanged rebuttals, Sancho’s banal predictability, and Don Quixote’s subsequent anger. Measure 332’s abrupt shift of key and affect signal a new approach from Don Quixote in the more graceful and lyrical presentation of his motives, and the presence of Dulcinea’s melody in m. 350 ff. indicates her influence and/or inspiration. After the final cadence of this passage, Sancho’s timid interruption (m. 381) again sparks anger from Don Quixote, showing that the more the melodies have changed, the more their interaction has remained the same.

Variation VI’s transformation of Dulcinea’s melody (mm. 472–75, 488–94) is clever: it is a far more rapid, pointed version (through tempo and staccato articulation) than any of the graceful legato presentations previously encountered. Its metrical setting (5/4) renders it perceptibly awkward, structurally paralleling the awkward fit of Sancho’s “Dulcinea” assignation to a random peasant girl. The maid is as much Dulcinea as the contrived melody is—a faint resemblance.

The thematic transformations of Variation VIII are among the more ingenious of the tone poem. According to the program, this variation corresponds to the “adventure of the enchanted bark,” and the wide, oscillating rise-and-fall of the harmonic background (i.e., horns) supports a structural analogy with flowing water, as does the conventional gesture of rising and falling scalar passages in instruments such as the bass clarinet, bassoons, and ’cellos. The

51 Ibid., 544.
transformation of Don Quixote’s motives into a 6/8 meter conventionally suggests the barcarolle style, another water-association that constructs the setting of this passage in the fictional world. Later in the variation, as both harmonic and dynamic tension builds, Sancho’s melody appears in inversion (mm. 556–59) and unmistakably analogizes a reversal or overturning by structural isomorphism; indeed, the boat capsizes in the corresponding adventure in Cervantes’s novel (Part II, Chapter 29). The results of the adventure are evident in mm. 567–81, as the strings play pizzicato fragments of both characters’ melodies—a structural analogy that, like the Alpensinfonie’s raindrops (see Chapter Two), suggests dripping water.

Difference-marking, then, is largely the domain of the three primary melodies of the characters. Differences within subsequent presentations of those melodies are potentially programmatical significance in reference to those three characters, whereas novel events not related to those three primary entities are clearly in reference to some external circumstance (e.g., settings, other minor characters). The usual contextual markers are evident for the demonstration of difference: anachronistic polyphony or extreme dissonance (for instance, in the Introduction, mm. 58–121) in a largely homophonic and diatonic context, banal predictability (in Sancho’s music, for instance, mm. 151–59) in a lush Romantic context, texture and instrumentation changes (as in Variation V’s “wind,” m. 452), and novel melodies and transformations, among others. Beyond the initial structural characteristics of the primary melodies as originally encountered, differences also function in a descriptive fashion, as in the cadential description of Don Quixote’s slightly unsettling digressive. Combinations of the musical elements—including even tonality and form—provide worldmaking techniques ranging from simple construction (i.e., establishment of new programmatic entities through new melodic

52 Ibid.
entities) to complex derivative and deformative meanings (based on subsequent transformations and their structural features).

Despite the remarkably resourceful use of musical materials and extramusical text for worldmaking, there are nonetheless three passages in *Don Quixote* in which the suspension of disbelief breaks. The first occurs in the Introduction, the title of which suggests formal rather than programmatic purpose. The Introduction does, however, fulfill a programmatically expository function by way of entity-differentiation. It establishes musical motives for both Don Quixote and Dulcinea that recur throughout the tone poem, so in this way, the Introduction is programmatically significant. From mm. 57–112, however, a passage of such developmental complexity occurs that no programmatic determination is possible; like the reprise of *Till Eulenspiegel* or the *Vision* passage of *Eine Alpensinfonie*, this passage is apparently for formal purposes only, for purely musical (i.e., not programmatic) commentary on existent materials. Although some material is notably marked for difference and even has specific programmatic meaning as indicated by Strauss (i.e., the martial transformation of Don Quixote’s head motive in mm. 83–85), the majority of this passage involves polyphonic complexity, tonal instability, developmental fragmentation of melodies, and motivic redundancy unprecedented in the rest of the tone poem. The lack of programmatic implications given by the title “Introduction” creates part of the breaking effect in that, once its expository function is complete, further presentations of existent motives become redundant without extramusical intervention. The ambiguous chromaticism and anachronistic tonal instability, particularly in retrospective comparison to the relative stability of later variations, are also curious. If anything, the chromaticism, instability, and polyphony of this passage in the Introduction are expressive of growing confusion and chaos, yet are correspondent with no particular representational/programmatic event other than
Don Quixote’s gradual mental instability. Indeed, it does accomplish this accurately, but with such excessive development and over such an extended period of time (especially in comparison to the subsequently brief but propositionally rich variations) that the music becomes an excessive description, drawing attention to the medium rather than the simultaneity of medium and content in representation. In doing so, Strauss breaks the suspension of disbelief established by the exposition of musical (and correspondent programmatic) entities earlier in the Introduction. Only the extremely harsh, marked dissonances of mm. 113–21, which Del Mar interprets as the snapping of Don Quixote’s mental faculties,\footnote{Norman Del Mar, \textit{Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on his Life and Works}, Vol. 1 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 152.} reestablishes any potential representational meaning.

The second break in the suspension of disbelief occurs during Don Quixote and Sancho’s conversation in Variation III, from mm. 332–80. Much of its breaking status results from the context in which it occurs, that is, during an exchange of melodic fragments, the whole of which is evident as the representation of a conversation. With the onset of m. 332, however, the musical focus becomes extremely limited—a particular transformation of Don Quixote’s motives, heard in mm. 333–35, and Dulcinea’s melody\footnote{Though a Sancho-Panza-motive does briefly occur in mm. 369–71.}—unlike the previously engaging exchange of varied transformations of Don Quixote’s and Sancho’s music. The nature of the melodies in this passage, however, is overwhelmingly similar in terms of contour and rhythm, and so relative novelty as programmatic demarcation disappears. The tonality of this passage is also remarkable: an abrupt modulation to F-sharp major places it in a remote key unrelated to any of those four primary keys established along with the primary melodies (i.e., D major/minor, F major, and G major). The programmatic content of the passage—or as much as is discernible—also sets it
apart from the variation in that it is far more reflective and descriptive than any kinetic progression of representational events. Hahn’s program notes label it “Paradise,” or Don Quixote’s interpretation of the rewards awaiting him and his sidekick for their noble deeds.\textsuperscript{55} Like the Introduction, the passage exhibits a lengthy descriptive nature and a lack of musical (and thus programmatic) novelty; this static nature isolates the passage, in addition to its tonal (F-sharp major) distinction. The resumption of the conversational exchange of motives in m. 381 finally restores the fictional world’s progression of events.

The final and most striking break in the suspension disbelief takes place over most of Variation V (mm. 432–52, 453–71). In every sense, this variation is a musical soliloquy, the effect of which breaks the dramatic suspension of disbelief in Elizabethan plays by direct address of the audience and reflection on the content of the drama; Kennedy remarks that “Elgar would undoubtedly have called [Variation V] an interlude.”\textsuperscript{56} Strauss’s programmatic notes for this variation read, “Don Quixote on the weapons-watch. Sighs, pleas, and declarations to Dulcinea.”\textsuperscript{57} The weapons-watch was a gentleman’s private nocturnal vigil over his armor prior to knighting;\textsuperscript{58} the programmatic reference therefore establishes a standard of isolation by association. Indeed, the degree of instrumental isolation is unprecedented in the rest of the tone poem. For the majority of the forty-measure variation, the solo ‘cello (connected by association with Don Quixote) ruminates on motives from Don Quixote’s melodies, accompanied only by static harmonies in the ‘cellos and occasionally the trombones and tuba. There is obsessive

\textsuperscript{55} Werbeck, \textit{Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss}, 543.

\textsuperscript{56} Kennedy, \textit{Strauss Tone Poems}, 39.

\textsuperscript{57} Werbeck, \textit{Die Tondichtungen von Richard Strauss}, 544.

motivic development rather than meaningful representational transformation; the occasional entry of Dulcinea’s music (mm. 433–34, 449–52, 458–59, 469–70) indicates not her fictional physical presence but her general influence as the object of said obsession. The lengthy harmonic stasis (D pedals from 432–44 and 462–71) and minimal harmonic progression parallels the stasis of the setting and the inward, non-kinetic nature of reflection prevalent during the weapons-watch. Only the clear representation of wind in m. 452 revives any external sense of event-progression in the fictional world; the rest of the variation looks inward not only fictionally (i.e., in the persona of Don Quixote and his reflections) but also musically (i.e., by development, rather than programmatic transformation of motives, and by temporary stasis).

Contextually, then, breaks in Don Quixote’s suspension of disbelief tend to mirror those of Till Eulenspiegel and Eine Alpensinfonie in that they occur during moments of programmatic stasis (i.e., reflection or self-commentary rather than event-progression) or as strictly musical development or formal purpose. Some trends are therefore evident between the tone poems regarding the suspension of disbelief and the breaking thereof.

**Trends**

In terms of worldmaking and the subsequent establishment of suspensions of disbelief, the three tone poems are clearly similar. The musical medium’s equivalent of proper names or individual visual appearances is the distinction of notable musical elements, most prominently melodies, rhythms, and key areas. The perception of these structural characteristics enables entity-differentiation both musically and programmatically, where extramusical text or other evidence gives reasonable cause for representational interpretation. Music’s ability to refer to past musical events also enables commentary, development, and the supplementation or deletion of information regarding previously established entities. Given the nature of musical
representation, however, extramusical text of some kind is a necessity as a framing and disambiguating device, though it is still the musical medium that describes, progresses, and enacts the text. The composer’s selection of musical entities to correspond to certain programmatic entities reflects a weighting of sorts regarding the propositions of the fictional world—that is, which propositions will be most relevant for the establishment thereof and progression therein.

Nevertheless, music’s purpose is not to “tell a story,” and it is for that reason that absolute music flourishes and that purely musical norms of notation, systems, syntax, content, materials, and form exist. Indeed, breaks in the suspension of disbelief for programmatic instrumental works often exist at the intersection of the representational and musical dimensions. Program music, after all, is a hybrid art, and requires more or less equal effort from both represented content and representing medium.

In the three tone poems analyzed in this thesis, both extramusical text and musical materials establish fictional worlds, but when the delicate balance between the musical medium and represented content becomes skewed, a break in the suspension of disbelief (necessary for the conceptual admittance of these worlds) occurs. Such cases often involve one or more of several characteristics. These breaks may occur within the programmatic text itself, by virtue of a halt in the event-progression of representations, as is evident in the Alpensinfonie’s reflective Vision or in the Variation V soliloquy of Don Quixote. An accompanying simplicity or stasis in musical materials often parallels this, as the motivic simplicity/obsessiveness of the “Paradise” in Don Quixote’s Variation III and the pedal tones of its Variation V illustrate. Such stasis often seems to involve redundancy of some sort, whether through harmonic means or through melodic/transformational means; the resulting lack of representational potential from such
recurrant entities results in stasis. Contextual markedness, however, may occur to the opposite extreme in isolating a musical passage from the narrative flow, as the consistent development, chromaticism, and polyphony of the *Alpensinfonie’s Vision* and *Don Quixote’s* Introduction demonstrate. Finally, when the balance of musical and representational function tips in favor of musical function, breaks in the suspension of disbelief result because of excessive concentration on the medium rather than a simultaneous concentration with the represented content. Such examples are prevalent in the reprise and epilogue of *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* and in the transitory passage in *Eine Alpensinfonie’s Eintritt in der Wald*.

Fictional worlds and the suspension of disbelief, then, are delicate balancing acts, as was evident from their definitions in Chapter One (most often applied to the dramatic and literary arts). Programmatic instrumental music is no exception despite its distinctive material. The knowledge that one contemplates a work of art and reacts to it as if it were real is the ultimate aesthetic Scylla and Charybdis. That quandary does not reduce, even at the level of musical form versus musical representation, and so the suspension of disbelief in programmatic instrumental works is no less real a challenge than it is in any other art form.

**Conclusions**

Don Quixote’s confusion upon attacking the wooden characters of a puppet show, though absurd, is explicable given the vagaries of the suspension of disbelief. Our plainly palpable emotions in reaction to plainly fictional situations is a contradiction of human nature, a contradiction over which Don Quixote has far less practical control than most people. Belief dossiers exist both for the separation of reality and fiction and for the enjoyment of the latter. In reality, one disbelieves sensory propositions that run contrary to real knowledge, such as the idea that it is the fourteenth century when it is clearly the twenty-first; but the suspension of disbelief
allows the admittance of fictional worlds and their accompanying belief dossiers so that representational works of art do not become mere fodder to the literal, incisive critic and/or realist.

Music might not seem to even approach this problem but for the relatively small percentage of musical works that claim reference to some sort of extramusical meaning, that is, some sort of represented content besides its own *musical* content. That music might claim to represent a cuckoo, an ass, or a locomotive just as easily as a set of colored brushstrokes might requires some justification; yet music’s easy adaptation to structural metaphor and its phenomenological sounds-like capabilities certainly give it the potential to refer to and represent phenomena outside of its own medium, despite the sonic medium’s lack of perceptual certainty when compared to vision or touch. Indeed, music requires extramusical text of some kind for representation, yet this text does not complete the act of representation despite its disambiguation of music’s myriad representational possibilities; rather, music describes and enacts the text’s framed possibilities of representation.

A programmatic musical work’s fictional world, then, reflects the hybridity of its status as both text and music. Both text and music contribute to the representation of propositional information specific to the fictional world; in a similarity that aligns it more with the literary arts than with the dramatic ones, program music is perceptual in medium but conceptualized in content. That is, the appreciator directly perceives the medium of representation (notes and sounds) while not directly perceiving the details of represented content (specifically, visually disambiguated characters, objects, events, and settings). Though all fictional worlds are inherently incomplete, the worlds of program music necessarily face proportionally greater incompleteness of propositional details because of music’s temporal nature; the establishment of
meaning over time, using large swaths of material, limits the practicality of greater expansion on a world’s details. For that reason, program music’s fictional worlds tend to represent the simple aspects of character-entity-differentiation, narrative event-progression, and description.

The three tone poems chosen for this thesis illustrate the variety of worldmaking techniques used by one composer of programmatic music, Richard Strauss, over a period of twenty years. They correspond to worldmaking techniques of other art forms in the broad categories of composition/decomposition, weighting, ordering/deriving, deletion/supplementation, and deformation, but in ways specific to the musical medium. Such techniques include not only the usual melodic and tonal entity-assignations and thematic transformations, but also more subtle techniques such as the formal articulation of episodic segments (Don Quixote) and the retrospective use of melodic entities for setting-orientation (Eine Alpensinfonie).

Finally, each tone poem contains at least one example of the breaking of the suspension of disbelief, in which the belief dossier relevant to the fictional world is forcibly retracted by a reminder that the work does not, in fact, present reality. In other arts, direct address of the appreciator (e.g., dramatic asides), excessive emphasis on the medium of representation rather than represented content (e.g., lengthy textual descriptions or gratuitous language), or self-commentary (e.g., footnotes in a fictional novel) accomplish such effects. Music lacks an object or objects of address, so there is no analogous musical phenomenon to direct address, but programmatic music may contain “music for the sake of music” rather than music for the sake of both music and representation. Such emphasis on form over content (as is evident in a large portion of Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche) reminds the appreciator solely of the nature of the medium and disrupts the simultaneity of medium and represented content. Similarly, lengthy
passages of music containing entities of redundant meaning—that is, passages that contribute no further representational meaning—have a disruptive effect in programmatic music, in which difference-marked entities on the musical plane consistently appear as the impetus behind progression of the narrative plane.

The suspension of disbelief, and the breaking thereof, is therefore relevant to works of programmatic instrumental music. It allows for both appreciation of the musical medium and consumption of propositional information represented by that medium. The application of this principle to the programmatic musical art form emphasizes that the lines between fiction and reality, perception and conception, are fluid. Don Quixote’s absurd actions—in both textual and musical manifestations—can, at least in that sense, be understood.
Bibliography


