The Heroic in Music

Edited by Beate Kutschke and Katherine Butler

THE BOYDELL PRESS

5

Design Principles for the Musical Heroic

Lawrence M. Zbikowski

The topography of the history of Western music set out by Donald Jay Grout in 1960 was one divided into a sequence of eras, with the Renaissance succeeded by the Baroque, the Baroque by the Classical, and the Classical by the Romantic. Yet what to do with Ludwig van Beethoven? On the one hand, Beethoven owed a considerable debt to the musical heritage of the Classical era, and in particular to Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. On the other hand, Beethoven's works clearly moved well beyond the practices and perspectives he had inherited from his predecessors. In an effort to capture Beethoven's place in the grand sequence of music history, Grout summoned a memorable image:

> Through external circumstances and the force of his own genius he transformed this heritage and became the source of much that was characteristic of the Romantic period. But he himself is neither Classic nor Romantic; he is Beethoven, and his figure towers like a colossus astride the two centuries.[1]

From this perspective, the coming of Beethoven represented a singular moment in the history of Western music, one that put the succession of eras in a new light. While there were certainly musicians of earlier times whose innovations contributed to the transformation of one era into another, conventional wisdom had it that there was none who was able to effect this change single-handedly. None, that is, until Beethoven, who was able to move beyond the bewigged proprieties of the eighteenth century by breathing into being music worthy of the liberated citizenry of a new era. According to this narrative these individuals, in their self-actualization, their struggles against impossible odds, their triumphs in the face of adversity, were heroes like none before, and their music – Beethoven's music – enacted, commemorated, indeed *motivated* their heroism.

There are, of course, any number of reasons why one might want to challenge this picture, not the least of which is its overwhelming emphasis on Vienna and German-speaking musicians. And yet, as Scott Burnham has shown, it can be very difficult to find alternatives: the compositional strategies evident in Beethoven's music – that is, in his heroic music – became a standard by which musicologists judged works of music, and explanations for why this should be so led inevitably back to the image of the colossus astride the centuries. Burnham, for his part, sought to discover the

[1] Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York, 1960), pp. 471–2.

phenomenological basis for musicologists' preoccupation with Beethoven's heroic style which, as he saw it, involved 'taking note of our reactions to the music and finding out how the music makes such reactions possible, how it nurtures and sustains them even to the point of making them seem inevitable'.[2] The scope of inquiry I undertake in this chapter is both narrower and broader. It is narrower in that I want to explore a rather specific set of reactions, which are those that allow us to forge a connection between collections of musical materials and notions about the heroic. My assumption is that connections of this sort are guided by humans' capacity for analogical thought, which makes possible the correlation of such disparate domains as those occupied by sequences of musical sound and ideas about heroism. My scope is broader in that I would like to explore musical representations of the heroic at three different moments in music history (as well as three different geographical locations), the better to understand how ideas about the heroic are constructed through music. The first of these centres around the court of Louis XIV, the second around the period when George Frideric Handel produced his most memorable oratorios, and the third around the time when Beethoven composed his third symphony: the 'Eroica'. By adopting this approach, I hope to set out, if in a provisional way, the design principles for the musical heroic: that is, the compositional strategies through which musicians have arranged their sonic materials to project a sense of the heroic.

My point of departure is the prologue to Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Alceste*, which had its premiere in 1674. In addition to providing entertainment for Louis XIV and his court, Lully's *tragédie en musique* brought to life his patron's larger-than-life status through musical representations of the heroic that were directly connected to the king. This example immediately raises the question of how music can 'represent' an idea like the heroic, one I shall attempt to answer – with a bit of help from a highly effective musical storm from the early eighteenth century – by making recourse to research on analogy. With this perspective in hand I shall turn to an hero's aria from Handel's 1739 oratorio *Saul*, the better to understand how historical and cultural context shape notions of the heroic and the ways these notions can be represented through sequences of musical sound. This will prepare the ground for a consideration of Beethoven's musical heroic as it is manifested in the first movement of his Piano Sonata in F minor op. 57, the so-called 'Appassionata' sonata. Although Beethoven's heroic style is most strongly identified with his symphonic works, his chamber works – and the piano sonatas in particular – provide an ideal laboratory within which to study the means through which the heroic might be represented. My premise throughout is that it is indeed possible to design musical utterances in such a way that they are easily – although not, perhaps, inevitably – correlated with ideas like 'the heroic'. As shall become clear, ideas like 'the heroic' are subject to change: the hero of Lully's era is not the hero of Handel's or of Beethoven's. In consequence, the representation of such ideas through musical means must also change: the design principles for the musical heroic are not invariant, although those of different eras may share certain family resemblances. Given the perspective that the

[2] Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, 1995), p. xvii.

representation of an idea like 'the heroic' is possible because of correlations between sequences of musical sound and key aspects of such ideas, the way such sequences are designed can shed light on just what counts as 'the heroic' at a given historical and cultural moment.

The Musical Heroic in the Prologue to Lully's *Alceste*

The Prologue to *Alceste* is set in the gardens of the Tuileries Palace which, as made clear by the opening aria sung by the Nymph of the Seine, have lost their lustre: no birds sing, no flowers blossom, the fresh shoots of grass wither and die. The reason for the decline of the garden and the languor of its inhabitants is the absence of the hero, without whom no living thing has its purpose. Although the hero is nominally Hercules (for *Alceste* is, in the end, the story of his triumph), the original libretto made it quite clear that the true hero was none other than Louis XIV. The text and translation for the first aria and recitative, adopting the typography of the libretto published for the premiere of the opera, are given below. As a reflection of the true identity of the central character, each appearance of 'heros' is set in capital letters (as is the later mention of 'nostre AUGUSTE MAÎTRE'). Indeed, as Georgia Cowart has observed, the *tragédies en musique* were designed by Lully and his librettist Philippe Quinault to balance the pleasures of theatrical entertainment with praise of the king.[3] In the Prologue to *Alceste* a portion of that praise is indirect, summoned by the image of the desolation caused by his absence. Another portion is more direct, and it comes in the form of the warlike sounds that answer the nymph's pleading, and largely rhetorical, question about when the hero will return. The contrast between the two can be seen in Ex. 5.1, which provides a piano-vocal score for the opening of the prologue. Lully answers the reprise of the plaint with instrumental music designated as 'Bruit de Guerre' (bars 39–50 of Ex. 5.1). Instead of offering his listeners an elaborate imitation of the clamour of battle, however, Lully presents music of the sort that would have been used for the various festivals that celebrated Louis XIV's military triumphs.[4] The evocation of the hero is thus, in the first instance, a portrayal not of his character but of the musical commemoration of his deeds.

Aria:

Le HÉROS que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?	The hero I await, will he never return?
Serai-je toujours languissante	Must I always be languishing
Dans une si cruelle attente?	And spend this cruel time alone?
Le HÉROS que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?	The hero I await, will he never return?

[3] Georgia J. Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago, 2008), p. 121.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

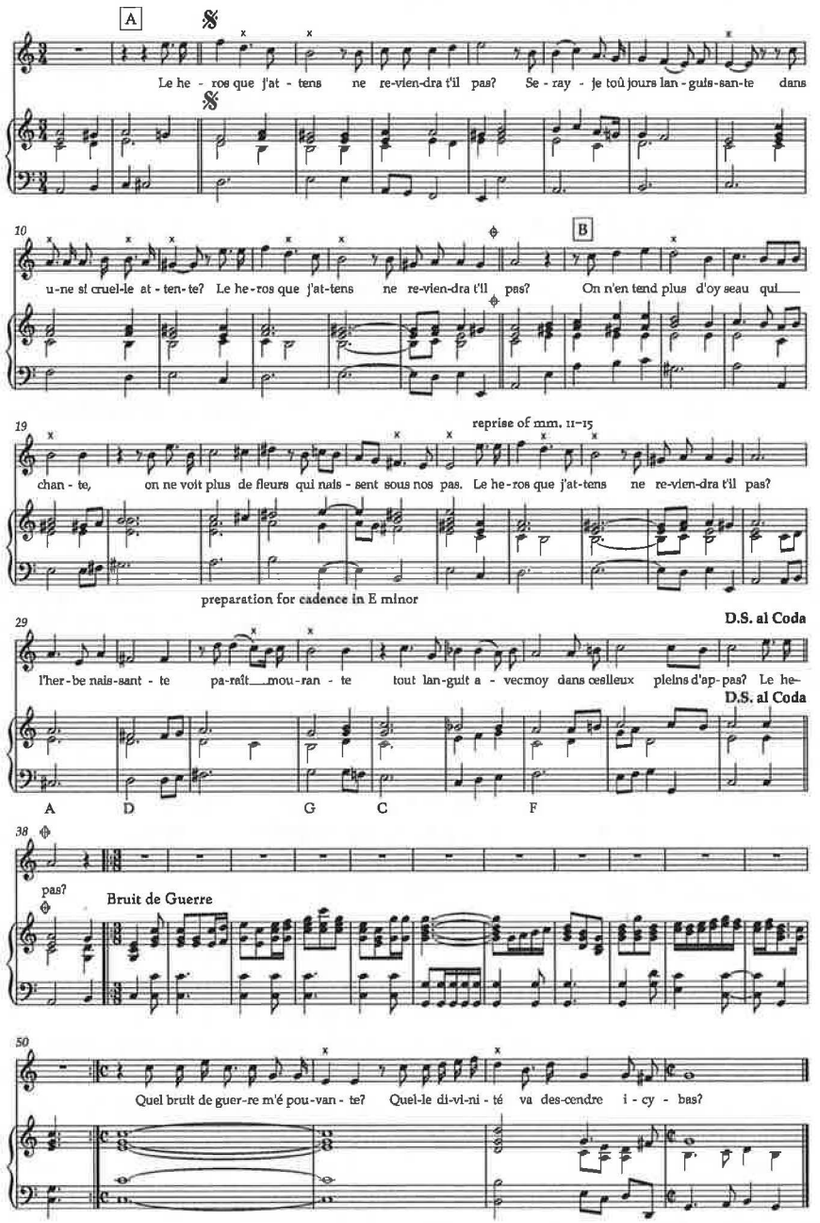
On n'entend plus d'oiseau qui chante;	No longer does one hear birds sing;
On ne voit plus de fleurs qui naissent sous nos pas,	No longer does one find flowers at every step.
Le HÉROS que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?	The hero I await, will he never return?
L'herbe naissante	Grass barely born
Paraît mourante;	Seems to be dying;
Tout languit avec moi dans ces lieux pleins d'appas.	Things languish here with me in this beautiful place.
Le HÉROS que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?	The hero I await, will he never return?
Serai-je toujours languissante	Must I always be languishing
Dans une si cruelle attente?	And spend this cruel time alone?
Le HÉROS que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?	The hero I await, will he never return?
Bruit de Guerre	
Recitative:	
Quel bruit de guerre m'épouvante?	What warlike noise makes me tremble?
Quelle Divinité va descendre ici bas?[5]	What kind of godlike being is descending to earth?

Let me pause here to consider some of the key ideas that circulate around the concept of a hero, beginning with the definition offered in the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The first three entries are as follows:

1. A name given (as in Homer) to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; at a later time regarded as intermediate between gods and men, and immortal.
2. A man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior.
3. A man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connection with any

[5] Text for the opening of the Prologue of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault's *Alceste* from the facsimile of the libretto provided in the booklet for *Alceste*, conducted by Jean-Claude Malgoire (Paris: Disques Montaigne, 1992), CD 782012.

Example 5.1. Jean-Baptiste Lully, Prologue from *Alceste*, bars 1–54



> pursuit, work, or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities.[6]

Although the attributes of superhuman courage or ability, recognition of distinction gained on the field of valour, and exceptional firmness, fortitude, and greatness of soul were all, at one time or another, part of the myth of Louis XIV, the characteristics of a hero that were perhaps uppermost in the minds of the audience of *Alceste* were those associated with military exploits. The absence of the hero that had led to the desolation of the Tuileries gardens and the nymph's plaint was thus understood to be the absence of Louis XIV occasioned by the Franco-Dutch war, begun in 1672; the martial music that ended her song made reference to the triumphal music that signalled his return from the fields of battle. I would like to argue, however, that the evocation of the hero affected by this triumphal music goes beyond the simple association of the notion of a hero with music appropriate for military festivals (and derivative of the music used to train soldiers). Let me begin with a closer look at the nymph's aria, the better to understand the change that is wrought by the 'Bruit de Guerre'.

The aria as a whole has an ABA structure, evident in the D.S. al Coda. Each A section is itself arranged around a reprise of material, but with modifications: although the text of bars 2–6 returns unaltered in bars 11–15, midway through the phrase the music changes course: where it ends on E5 and the dominant in bar 6, it ends on A4 and the tonic in bar 15. The result of this strategy is to suggest that nymph and garden are in thrall to a magical spell that cannot be broken: the first statement of 'Le héros que j'attends ne reviendra-t-il pas?' is perfectly comprehensible as a question (given the incompleteness of the arrival in bar 6 on the dominant) but the second statement makes clear that this question will not be answered even through an arrival on the tonic. The impression is strengthened by a reprise of the words and music of bars 11–15 in bars 24–8 in the midst of the B section, a rhetorical gesture that not only links the absence of the hero to the desolation of the garden but also enacts the force of the maleficent enchantment. This gesture is prepared by the music of bars 16–24, which gradually strays away from A minor as the nymph reviews the bleakness of the scene, moving toward a cadence in E minor in bars 22–3. This cadence is immediately undercut by the return of the nymph's pleading query and the key of A minor in bars 24–8, both of which serve to bring the aria back to the matter at hand: the absence of the hero and the longing for his return. The force of the enchantment that has descended with his absence is felt all the more with the return of the complete A section with the D.S. al Coda, for the music of bars 29–37 is even more digressive than that of bars 16–24, comprising a transit through the better part of a circle of fifths (from A in bar 30 to F in bar 35). Despite the dynamic promise of this transit, which not only draws the listener onward with each stage in the harmonic sequence but also brings her to a charmed place whose beauty is affirmed by a cadence on C major, with the reprise of the A section the listener is once again returned to A minor and to the nymph's longing for the return of the hero.

[6] These entries were drawn from Oxford English Dictionary, 'hero, n.', *OED Online* 2nd edn (1989) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/86297> [accessed 3 Sep. 2019].

The magical spell is finally broken by the 'Bruit de Guerre', and when we next hear the nymph (in the brief recitative of bars 51–4) she has adopted the trumpet-call arpeggios of the military music, which suggests that the warlike sounds – and their evocation of the hero and his deeds – have brought a profound change to the garden. It bears emphasis that this change is not simply in terms of pitch material or orchestral resources, but also the sense of energy summoned by the running arpeggios, brisk rhythms, and simplified harmonies of the military music. Put another way, the musical sounds linked to the hero – that is, to Louis XIV – provide a vivid sketch of action and determination, and offer an example of the way his presence changes the very environment he occupies.

Attempts to explain how it is that music can represent notions like the heroic have often been framed relative to ideas about the role of the arts developed during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. According to these ideas, the arts were successful to the extent they imitated nature. The goal of good painting was thus to capture visual images and the goal of good music was to capture sonic images. In a treatise on poetry, painting, and music first published in 1719, the Abbé Dubos wrote: 'Wherefore as the painter imitates the strokes and colours of nature, in like manner the musician imitates the tones, accents, sighs, and inflexions of the voice; and in short all those sounds, by which nature herself expresses her sentiments and passions.'[7] Dubos was, of course, aware that music could go beyond imitating the human voice, especially when used for dramatic ends. The most typical case occurred when a composer needed to depict the forces or power of nature through purely instrumental means: what Dubos called 'symphonies'. If such imitations were to be successful, however, the correlation between the musical and natural sounds – both in terms of the actual sonic materials and their context – had to be as exact as possible:

> The truth of the imitation in symphonies consists in their resemblance with the sounds they are intended to imitate. There is truth in a symphony composed for the imitation of a tempest, when the modulation, harmony, and rhythmus, convey to our ear a sound like the blustering of the waves, which dash impetuous against one another, or break against the rocks. Such is the symphony which imitates a tempest in the opera of Alcione by Monsieur Marais.[8]

The tempest in Marais's 1706 opera *Alcyone* is indeed a remarkable example of musical depiction, but I believe its efficacy lies not in the accuracy with which it mimics nature but in the way it provides an analogue in sound for the distinctive features of a tempest. In what follows, I would like to take a closer look at Marais's musical tempest and at humans' capacity for analogy with the aim of understanding how music can represent not only relatively concrete natural phenomena but also more abstract ideas such as those associated with the heroic.

[7] Abbé (Jean-Baptiste) Dubos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music: With an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Theatrical Entertainments of the Ancients*, trans. Thomas Nugent (from 5th French edn), 3 vols, (London, 1748), vol. 1, pp. 360–1.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 363–4.

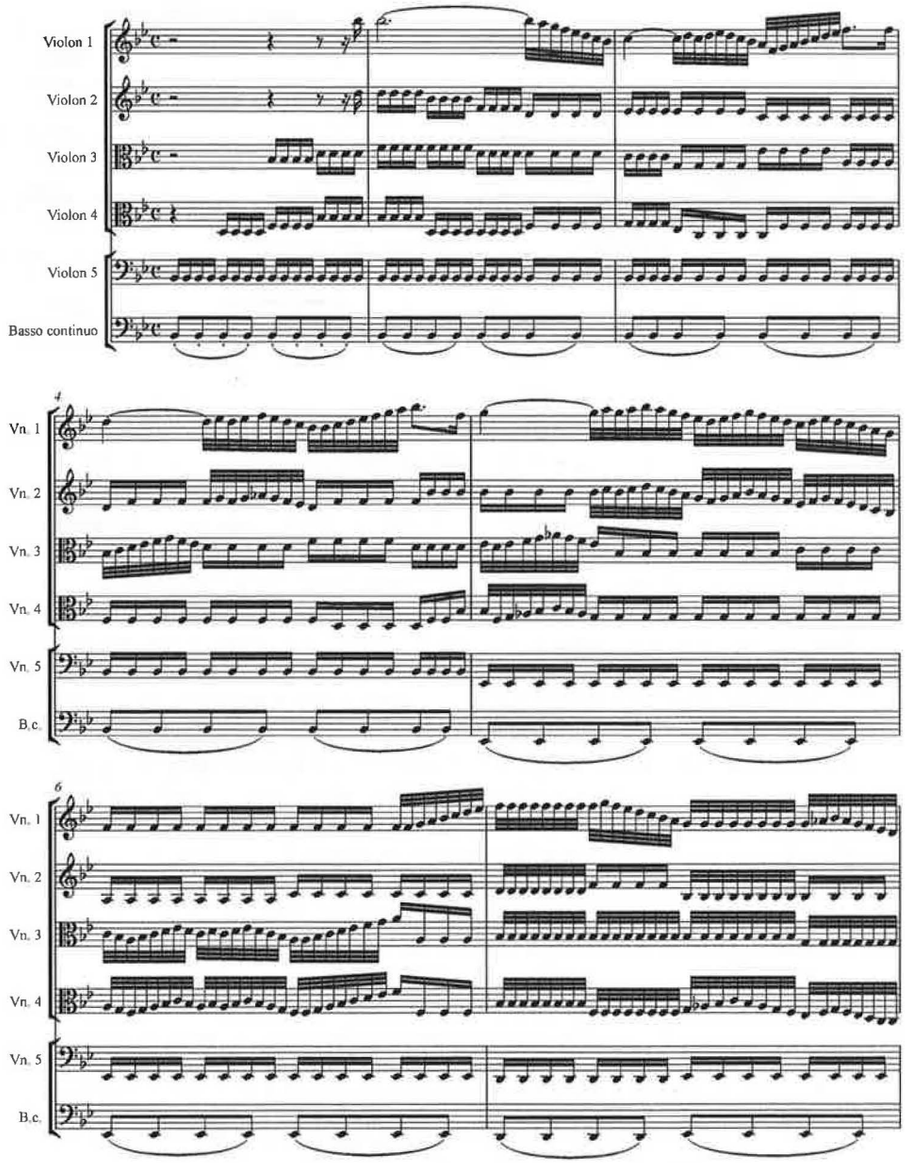
Analogy and Sonic Analogues for Dynamic Processes

The scene to which Dubos refers occurs in Act IV of Marais's opera, and is meant to evoke the storm that will drown the hero Morpheus and his companions in full view of his wife Alcyone. The first nine bars of the scene (which spans twenty-three bars) are given in Ex. 5.2. Although Marais's harmonic vocabulary is quite straightforward, it is enriched by tensions between the bass parts and the upper voices. In bar 3 these tensions are a consequence of the contrast between the pedal B-flat2 and the supertonic and dominant harmonies in the upper strings; a similar effect is created by the persistent E-flat2 of bars 5–6, which functions first as a consonant member of the pre-dominant harmonies of bar 5 and then as the dissonant chordal seventh of the dominant of bar 6. With the resolution of this dissonance in bar 7 the bass becomes more active, leading to the cadence on tonic in bar 9 and then participating in the rising sequence that follows. This variegated harmonic surface is matched with rhythmic figuration that, over the course of bars 1–8, grows in density until thirty-second notes predominate, a saturation of the instrumental texture momentarily relieved when attention shifts to the first violins' ascending sequence in bar 9. The rhythmic figuration is in turn given shape by the contrast between repeated notes in the lower strings (such as those that build over the course of bars 1 and 2) and the more ostentatiously rhetorical figures of the first violins, which alternate held notes with stepwise passages that at times traverse an octave in little more than a beat (as in bar 2) or that describe elaborate turns (such as in bars 2 and 3). Beginning in bar 3 these turning figures are taken up by the other strings and gradually accumulate to create the dense texture that precedes the arrival on the tonic in bar 9.

Although Abbé Dubos was clearly convinced that the blustering of the waves could be heard in Marais's music, in truth the tempest from *Alcyone*, artful as it is, does not produce sounds that would make a sailor judge the distance to the shore or consider the set of his sails. This disparity between the actual sound of a tempest and the way it is evoked musically makes the ease with which we accept Marais's depiction all the more remarkable: even though the sounds that populate his scene are not those of a storm, they provide an almost palpable image of the force and fury of a tempest terrible enough to drown a hero. On the best evidence currently available, it appears that humans are the only species able to appreciate this aural sleight of hand, something they are able to do because of unique capacities to draw analogical connections between disparate domains.

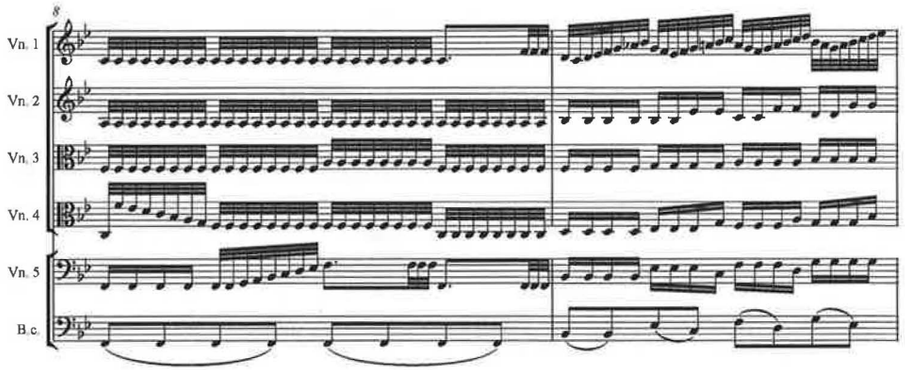
Most discussions of analogy begin with similarity, since it is the similarity of one thing to another that is the point of departure for any analogy. For instance, a pen and a pencil are similar to each other both in appearance and in function, although the kind of marks these tools make on a writing surface (permanent or impermanent; of relatively consistent coloration or subject to gradation) are different. Analogy takes as its point of departure similarity judgements of a more abstract sort. For instance, a finger is analogous to a pen in that it is an approximately cylindrical structure that ends in a point; unlike a pen or pencil, however, the finger leaves no discernible marks on the writing surface and its 'cylinder' is firmly attached to the larger structure of the hand. Making the analogy between a pen and a finger, then, involves drawing structural correlations between the two: the cylindrical shape of

Example 5.2. Marin Marais, *Alcyone* (1706), Act IV Scene 4, bars 1–9



—(*continued*)

Example 5.2—*concluded*



the pen maps on to the shape of the digits of the finger, and the point of the pen maps on to the tip of the finger. With the analogy in place, we can imagine using a finger to 'write', or a pen as an extension of our hand. More generally, analogies involve mapping systematic structural relationships between a source domain (such as that which includes writing instruments) and a target domain (such as that which includes bodily appendages) for the purpose of extending knowledge from the source to the target, and – in at least some instances – from the target back to the source.[9]

It bears emphasis that analogy is not simply about correlating elements from one domain with elements in another domain but about mapping relationships between these domains. It is thus often described as concerned with relations among relations (or 'second-order' relations): in the analogy between a pen and a finger, for instance, the relationship between *pen* and *finely tapered device for delivering ink* (by which I mean the business-end of the implement) is correlated with the relationship between *finger* and *tapered appendage for guiding communication*.[10] So, while other species are able to make some very sophisticated similarity judgments – there is research suggesting that chimpanzees can understand the second-order relations

9 Dedre Gentner, 'Structure-Mapping: A Theoretical Framework for Analogy', *Cognitive Science*, 7 (1983), 155–70; Dedre Gentner and Kenneth J. Kurtz, 'Relations, Objects, and the Composition of Analogies', *Cognitive Science*, 30 (2006), 609–42; Keith J. Holyoak and Paul Thagard, *Mental Leaps: Analogy in Creative Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), chap. 2; Keith J. Holyoak, 'Analogy', in Keith Holyoak and Robert G. Morrison (eds) *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 117–42.

10 The notion that fingers provide a 'tapered end for guiding communication' reflects work by Michael Tomasello and others on the role of pointing – most typically, with individual fingers – in human communication. See Tomasello 'Why Don't Apes Point?' in N. J. Enfield and Stephen C. Levinson (eds), *Roots of Human Sociality: Culture, Cognition and Interaction* (New York, 2006), pp. 506–24, and *Origins of Human Communication*, The Jean Nicod Lectures (Cambridge, 2008).

basic to analogy (especially for spatial reasoning) and that bottlenose dolphins can perform sophisticated body-mapping analogies – current evidence indicates that no other species comes close to making or using analogies with the facility and speed of humans.[11] Of equal importance for human communication and reasoning, this capacity appears to be available from a very early age: children as young as ten months are able to solve problems by analogy, and by the age of three years analogical abilities are quite robust.[12]

We hear a storm in Marais's music not by chance, then, but because of our ability to draw analogies between disparate domains. To create a sonic analogue for a tempest Marais carefully organized his musical materials to provide correlates for some of the distinctive features of furious storms, including the way they momentarily abate or change course in the midst of their growing intensity (as in bar 9), the way they seem to obliterate all else (as in the textural saturation of bars 7–8), and the multivariate processes they embrace (as in the way the different voices combine to create the effect of the whole). Marais's sonic analogue is thus a product of a network of correlations that combine to create a memorable musical image. It should also be noted that this image is not of a thing or property – darkness, waves, or craggy rocks – but of the dynamic processes associated with a terrible storm. This points to one of the most important resources music offers for analogical mappings: because music involves sequences of sound events that unfold over time it is not very good at capturing static images; it is without equal, however, in providing sonic analogues for dynamic processes.[13]

11 Josep Call and Michael Tomasello, 'Reasoning and Thinking in Nonhuman Primates', in Keith Holyoak and Robert G. Morrison (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 607–32; Dedre Gentner, 'Why We're So Smart', in Dedre Gentner and Susan Goldin-Meadow (eds), *Language in Mind: Advances in the Study of Language and Thought* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 195–235; Louis M. Herman, 'Exploring the Cognitive World of the Bottlenose Dolphin', in Marc Bekoff, Colin Allen, and Gordon M. Burghardt (eds), *The Cognitive Animal: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives on Animal Cognition* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 275–83; Holyoak and Thagard, *Mental Leaps*, chap. 3; David L. Oden, Roger K. R. Thompson, and David Premack, 'Can an Ape Reason Analogically?: Comprehension and Production of Analogical Problems by Sarah, a Chimpanzee (*Pan Troglodytes*)', in Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak, and Boicho N. Kokinov (eds), *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 471–97.

12 Usha Goswami, *Analogical Reasoning in Children*, Essays in Developmental Psychology (Hillsdale, 1992); Usha Goswami, 'Analogical Reasoning in Children', in Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak, and Boicho N. Kokinov (eds) *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 437–70; Gentner, 'Why We're So Smart'.

13 Two other resources used by humans to create analogues for dynamic processes are prosody, and the spontaneous gestures that accompany speech. On the former, see Hadas Shintel, Howard C. Nusbaum, and Arika Okrent, 'Analog Acoustic Expression in Speech Communication', *Journal of Memory and Language*, 55 (2006), 167–77; Hadas Shintel and Howard C. Nusbaum, 'The Sound of Motion in Spoken Language: Visual Information Conveyed by Acoustic Properties of Speech', *Cognition*, 105 (2007), 681–90; and Stephen C. Hedger, Howard C. Nusbaum, and Berthold Hoeckner, 'Conveying Movement in Music and Prosody', *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 10 (2013), e76744 <doi:10.1371/

Although the idea of musical mimesis behind Abbé Dubos's account of Marais's tempest is one with a long history, what is missed in most accounts of mimesis is the centrality of dynamic processes to musical depictions, through which a coherent sequence of phenomena distributed over time and typified by parametric modulation or change is correlated with a sequence of musical events. Put another way (and returning to my first example), what Lully accomplished with his warlike sounds and the nymph's response to these was not a simple, static depiction of a hero but a sonic analogue for the dynamic process consequent to a powerful agent taking quick and decisive action, whereby Nature herself was transformed. Through this correlation Lully's music provides evidence for the conception of the heroic at the time of Louis XIV: heroes were not simply associated with military exploits but with the capacity to transform situations, to change the course of events, and to do so in ways that exceed the abilities of other humans.

One further point must be made about analogical mappings that involve music and concerns the relationship between context and structure. On the one hand, a listener who did not know the context for the scene from Marais's *Alcyone* might not make a connection between the music and a storm at sea; on the other hand, the structural features of a given sequence of musical events constrain the analogical mappings that the sequence will support. That is, although the listener might not imagine a storm at sea, she would be able to connect Marais's music with dynamic processes that have a similar profile. In a like fashion, a listener who did not know the context for Lully's opera and who did not understand French might not make any connection between the transformation of the nymph's song effected by the military music and notions of heroism, but he would almost certainly note that *something* had changed in a dramatic way and might well wonder what sort of agent or force could be responsible for this transformation.

The example provided by the excerpt from Marais's *Alcyone* provides a basic sketch of how musical materials were arranged in the early eighteenth century to provide a sonic analogue for a tempest. Among the important features are an unrelenting succession of rapid stepwise passages, a growing accumulation of instrumental resources, variegated rhythmic movement, and a saturation of the musical texture (which typically yields an increase in dynamics). Added to this is an ebb and flow of musical intensity (correlating with changes in intensity – the momentary abatement of the wind, for instance – that typify storms). The introduction of the 'Bruit de Guerre' in the Prologue to Lully's *Alceste*, by contrast, provides an outline of the basic design principles for the musical heroic in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These principles include: a sudden contrast in musical style or rhetoric, which correlates with a transformation brought about by a powerful agent; the use of compositional strategies to bring certain musical materials to the fore, which correlates with the status of the hero as a singular individual; the use of all available musical resources to create a sonic plenum, which correlates with the extraordinary powers of the hero; and the use of rhythmic patterns that provide sonic support for

journal.pone.0076744>. On the latter, see David McNeill, *Gesture and Thought* (Chicago, 2005).

the process of bodily entrainment – that is, moving to music – which in turn yields a kind of embodied engagement that correlates with the effective energy of the hero.

As I suggested in my opening comments, the design of musical materials can give us a sense of the conception of the heroic within a given historic and cultural context. It can equally give us a sense of how this conception changed over time, something made evident in Handel's interpretation of the character of David in his 1739 oratorio *Saul*.

Handel's Musical Heroic

As Jonathan Lee notes in his contribution to this volume, owing to a variety of historical and cultural factors the heroic was, at the very least, a conflicted category in Handel's England. As a consequence, figures that would have been presented as heroes in other milieus were rendered in more equivocal terms in the literature and music of eighteenth-century England. It is thus not surprising that David – slayer of Goliath – is sketched with a light hand in Handel's *Saul*. Indeed, over the course of the first two hours of the oratorio David's most memorable aria – 'O Lord, whose Mercies numberless', which is among the loveliest of Handelian caresses – is one in which David would master the rampant King Saul not through strength of arms but through soothing song. There is, however, a brief aria toward the end of the oratorio in which David, with the help of Handel's music, reacts to the news of Saul's death with a heroic ardour that would not have been unfamiliar to Lully. The aria, (no. 76, which occurs in Act III Scene 4) begins with David furiously condemning the Amalekite who slew Saul, the words 'Impious wretch' set with a descending arpeggio that anticipates the opening of the orchestra's *ritornello*.[14] David's melody, when it is taken up in earnest in bar 7 of the aria, is a model of rhythmic direction: in bars 8–10 each phrase spans a bar and ends on a downbeat; in bars 10–14 the phrases span two bars, each again ending on a downbeat; the last phrase, which concludes in the fermata of bar 18, spans four bars and begins with two subphrases that transform the downbeats of bars 15 and 16 into springboards that launch the final two-bar subphrase. This accumulation of musical thought is matched by a growing athleticism of the voice, marked first by the octave leap and descending passage of bar 7, then by the disjunct melody of bars 10–14, and finally by the command of bars 16–18, when David seems to grab control of the orchestra's strings with his leaps down to E4 and then pulls them bodily toward the D-sharp4 that spells doom for the Amalekite. Through this arrangement of materials, and the harmonic directness of the whole, Handel offers his listener sonic analogues for the action and determination that

[14] Friedrich Chrysander's 1862 edition of the aria can be found in the copy of the full score, beginning on p. 205, available through IMSLP: <https://imslp.org/wiki/Saul,_HWV_53_(Handel,_George_Frideric)> [accessed 23 Jan. 2021]. In the following, bar numbers refer to Percy Marshall Young's edition (Kassel, 1962) in which the aria is on p. 258. It bears mention that the decision to begin the aria with the shout of 'Impious wretch' shown in Young's edition appears to have been that of Charles Jennens; for a discussion, see Anthony Hicks, 'Handel, Jennens, and *Saul*: Aspects of a Collaboration', in Nigel Fortune (ed.), *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 211–15. My thanks to Jonathan Lee for bringing Jennens' change to my attention.

mark David's heroic character. Yet this is a hero who also knows the sadness of the powerless: the Amalekite having been slain by David's attendants, David begins to reflect on the ignoble deed that condemned the unhappy messenger to death and, as Handel makes clear, is almost immediately overcome by the enormity of Saul's death. This is first indicated by a move toward the subdominant in bars 24–6, a softening initially rejected (with the clear return to D major in bars 28–9) but which then returns with the parallel § chords that lead toward the dominant of A (which is itself, of course, the dominant of D) in bar 30. As David repeats the words set by this passage – 'By thee the Lord's Anointed dy'd' – they seem first to turn to gall in his mouth (as his B-flat4 in bar 32 clashes with the A3 of the bass) and then dissolve into something close to a keening cry (with the sagging line that slowly descends from D5 to D4 over the course of bars 33–7). Having turned toward D minor with the B-flat of bar 32, the music remains there, and although there are brave gestures toward the relative major (with the C dominant seventh of bar 36 and the momentary cadence on F in bars 42–3) there is no recovery from the gloom that has set in, something the carefully worked cadence of bars 43–6 confirms. By this means Handel imparts a sense of vulnerability to David's character: a moment earlier he was a hero filled with righteous and terrible rage, but now he is near collapse, undone by the injustice and finality of Saul's death. David is thus transformed from a hero at whose accomplishments the audience can only marvel into a character with whom they might personally identify.

Heroes did not disappear from the theatrical entertainments of England in the early eighteenth century, but cultural and historical circumstances pushed them from the centre of the stage to the side. In Handel and Jennens' *Saul* this was manifested in the decision to place David's most heroic exploits – his triumph over Goliath, and his victory over the Philistines – outside the main frame of the drama and to focus instead on his relationships with Saul, Jonathan, Michal, and Merab. As a result, the momentary emergence of attributes that set David apart from mere mortals are almost an aberration – a flash of wrath from an angry man responding to an injustice rather than the assured, masterful strokes of a hero guiding the course of destiny – the infelicity of which is resolved by his subsequent surrender to grief. In his representation of the heroic side of David's character Handel makes recourse to compositional strategies that would have been familiar to Lully: a sudden contrast in musical rhetoric (enacted by the orchestra's music, but supported by David's sudden 'Impious wretch!'); a strong sense of forward motion (created by the successively expanding phrases of bars 7–18); and a vocal part with a commanding profile (both in its athleticism and the way it directs the course of bars 16–18). And it is just these strategies that are gradually abandoned as David's heroic stance dissolves: while there is a change in musical rhetoric that starts in bar 24, it is gradual rather than sudden (the abrupt dissonance of bar 32 notwithstanding); beginning in bar 32 forward motion gives way to something closer to aimless drift; and after bar 29 the largest leap the voice can summon is an ascending fourth (in bars 33 and 37), proceeding in the main through a sequence of slowly descending steps. On the one hand, these changes give a dimensionality to David's heroic character, showing that he is capable not only of swift action but also deep feeling. On the other hand (and especially in the context of mid-eighteenth-century England) these changes suggest

that the notion of what counts as heroic is itself undergoing change, yielding a conception of the hero grounded in the actions and reactions of all-too human individuals. It would be too much to claim that Handel's music for *Saul* provides definitive evidence that ideas about the heroic had been substantially transformed as early as 1739. What *Saul* does show is the viability of a more individualized and personal model of the heroic, one that would not be lost on the early nineteenth century.

Beethoven's Musical Heroic

A case could be made that the changes to the notion of the heroic (or to the role of heroes) witnessed by England were in large part anomalous, reflecting as they did historical and cultural circumstances unique to that country. The same could not be said for the changes that gripped Europe subsequent to the revolutions in America and France, one of the consequences of which was the incorporation of ideas about civic duty and self-sacrifice into the notion of the heroic.[15] These ideas combined with what Burnham has characterized as the ennobling and all-embracing concept of self that was fundamental to the worldview of the *Goethezeit*. The resulting amalgam was not, however, a stable one, for it produced manifestations of the heroic that were ultimately in conflict with one another: on the one hand, the Romantic hero felt the urge to be subsumed into a greater organic whole; on the other hand, the hero also felt the urge to be passionately individual and self-assertive. Yet the tension between these urges proved an opportunity for Beethoven's compositional genius: as Burnham observed:

> In Beethoven's heroic style, both urges are satisfied: the passionately individual is made to sound as a larger organic universality. This is because the passionately individual self, which is heard to be projected by the music, is all there is: one does not hear a world order against which a hero defines himself – one hears only a hero, the self, fighting against its own element.[16]

The question, of course, is how Beethoven's heroic style accomplished this feat. Richard Wagner, for instance, proposed that Beethoven's heroic style was one in which the entire musical texture assumed the forward flow of a melodic line.[17] Burnham took this insight as a point of departure for an exploration of Beethoven's middle-period music that yielded a compact description of the compositional strategies basic to the heroic style:

> These include thematic development as a way of making ever-greater stretches of music coherent and plastic (often resulting in action-reaction cycles), the captivating presence of nonregular periodic structures, monolithic treatment of harmony, overall teleological motion, extreme and underdetermined closure, and the monumentalization of underlying formal articulations. The resultant line is of course not melodic in the everyday sense of a prominent and foregrounded voice

15 Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, p. 251.

16 Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, p. 121.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

> set against a background accompaniment. Instead, the entire texture is heard to participate in the fundamental illusion of melody, that of motion through time, and thus to partake of melody's sense of unfolding presence.[18]

As Burnham, Michael Broyles, and others have made clear, these strategies are most apparent in Beethoven's orchestral works, and in particular the third and fifth symphonies. As a way of bringing these ideas into sharper focus, however, I would like to consider how they are manifested in the relatively intimate confines of the opening of the first movement of Beethoven's 'Appassionata' sonata.

Sketch evidence suggests that Beethoven began work on the 'Appassionata' in 1804 (around the time he was completing *Fidelio*), although the sonata was not sent to Breitkopf und Härtel until the autumn of 1806.[19] The first twenty-three bars of the work set out F minor through an exploration of registral and dynamic extremes.[20] Having arrived on the dominant of F minor (in first inversion) in bar 20 of the first movement, harmonic progress momentarily halts until, in bar 23, the dominant dissolves into an E-flat major harmony. This harmony is prolonged, through various stratagems, until the arrival of A-flat major in bar 35 reveals its role as the dominant of the second key area. A-flat major itself dissolves into uncertain territory in bar 42, an uncertainty resolved by the entrance of new thematic material in the parallel minor in bar 51. As even a brief acquaintance with the score makes evident, almost all of the elements that Burnham described as distinctive of Beethoven's heroic style are present in this exposition: enormously productive thematic development, irregular periodic structures (especially evident in the counterstatement of the opening theme in bars 17 through 23), monolithic treatment of harmony, propulsive goal-directed motion, and – even in this brief span – the monumentalization of formal articulations. What I would like to focus on, however, are the means through which Beethoven makes the heroic immediate and personal. Perhaps most important in this respect are the materials of the first theme and the way Beethoven uses these to construct a musical narrative. The sonata opens with an expansive gesture which, over the course of bars 1–2, establishes the basic tonal space for the movement and its basic metric frame. The response in bars 3–4 is, by contrast, somewhat subdued, spanning only two octaves at its greatest extent and with its melodic motion restricted to an embellishment of scale step 5. Were we to think of the dynamic processes for which these materials could serve as sonic analogues, two things are immediately apparent: first, that two contrasting processes are involved, one concerned with a large, slightly ominous gesture (bars 1–2), the other with a response (in bars 3–4) that is positive in valence but that relaxes inward, seeming to be poised for the next movement. Second, that these are, at best, only the barest hints of a narrative, the first stirrings of a colossus who might spring to action or who might relax back into sleep. Beethoven emphasizes the importance of the materials through their

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[19] Michael Broyles, *Beethoven: The Emergence and Evolution of Beethoven's Heroic Style* (New York, 1987), p. 100.

[20] The score for the sonata is available through IMSLP: <https://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Sonata_No.23%2C_Op.57_(Beethoven%2C_Ludwig_van)> [accessed 23 Jan. 2021]

immediate repetition, but now assayed in a new key diatonically remote from the first, an indication that these materials should indeed be taken seriously. With the return to the dominant of F minor in bar 9 Beethoven returns to the question of further action, and with the rhythmic motif introduced in bar 10 – three quavers moving to a crotchet, a motto borrowed from French Revolutionary music – he suggests that the determination to action is very real indeed.[21]

The way Beethoven confirms this is, given the compositional strategies in circulation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, typical enough: bars 11 through 16 expand the dominant (extended with a leading-tone diminished seventh chord) to fill to overflowing the entire tonal and rhythmic space set out in bars 1 and 2. The counterstatement of the opening theme (begun in bar 17), with its thunderous block chords and fragmented references to the material of bars 1–4, seems to indicate that the true narrative has begun. We are no sooner convinced of this, however, when Beethoven changes the game again, turning away from the opening material in bar 23 to explore further ground. On the one hand, the pedal point on E-flat introduced at this point is a compositional strategy often used to build tension even as it retards harmonic progress; on the other hand, the break with the material of the opening twenty-three bars is more or less complete, and we are left waiting for the next stage in Beethoven's narrative. When that stage commences in bar 36, we are offered a theme whose highly normative syntax momentarily releases us from the firm guidance of Beethoven's hand. At bar 41, however, that hand picks up the reins and we are once more at the mercy of the composer's thought as it takes shape through each succeeding bar or, in the case of the long, deliberately bland scalar passage of bars 47–50, as it is carried inexorably onward toward an unknown goal. As listeners we are, in some sense, always at the mercy of any composer's thought, but Beethoven here foregrounds that reliance through his use of musical materials that serve as the raw stuff out of which musical narrative is fashioned.

As should be clear, many of the compositional strategies used by earlier composers to depict the heroic – or, more accurately, the dynamic processes that correlate with certain aspects of the heroic – are present in the opening bars of the 'Appassionata' sonata. There are sharp contrasts of musical style or rhetoric (as in the sudden dissolution of A-flat major that begins in bar 42); the sense that we are witnessing the actions of a single commanding persona (supported, for instance, by the bare octaves of the opening and by the pedal E-flat of bars 24–34); the creation of a sonic plenum (here provided by the forceful interjections of bars 17 and 20); and relentless rhythmic energy (most evident in the sense of purposeful animation that begins in bar 24 and culminates in the theme introduced in bar 51). What is also apparent is the sense that this music is being willed into being: at few points are there predictable harmonic progressions, and instead direction comes from the aural vision of the composer. While wilful changes to or redirections of harmonic progress are strategies familiar from genres such as the fantasia, Beethoven gives them shape here through his handling of large-scale rhythm (as can be heard in the play among thematic elements in the first four bars) and through the rhythmic

[21] On the use of the rhythmic motto of three quavers moving to a crotchet and the influence of French Revolutionary music on Beethoven, see Broyles, *Beethoven*, pp. 120–6.

drive that commences in bar 24 and that pulls the listener ineluctably forward. To a certain extent, in passages like this the immediate import of musical materials as sonic analogues for dynamic processes recedes into the background and the syntactic processes through which these materials are shaped into more comprehensive analogues comes to the fore.[22] Such a view provides a way to explain how Beethoven satisfies the warring images of the Romantic hero: in Burnham's words, 'one does not hear a world order against which a hero defines himself – one hears only a hero, the self, fighting against its own element.'[23] That battle is one Beethoven re-enacts in the opening pages of the 'Appassionata' sonata as he shapes the raw materials for depicting heroic characters into a vivid and relentlessly dynamic image of the hero's struggle for becoming and, in so doing, becomes music's hero.

Conclusion

The force of Beethoven's compositional voice is one not easily ignored: compelling within the relatively intimate confines of the 'Appassionata' sonata, it can become overwhelming when realized through the resources gathered for his third or fifth symphonies. Indeed, confronted by an aural vision of such indomitable strength, many musicologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found it difficult to imagine music going any other way: this was the voice of a figure who towered like a colossus astride the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, limning music for the ages.

We are now rightly sceptical of such a perspective: not only does it misrepresent musical culture and musical discourse of the early nineteenth century, it also misrepresents Beethoven, obscuring our understanding of the man by placing before us the image of a hero who could summon compelling music into existence and thereby transform the course of history. As I have endeavoured to show here, such a perspective also distorts our view of the musical heroic. Ideas about what counted as heroic within Western European culture changed in significant ways over the course of the 130 years between *Alceste* and the 'Appassionata'. At the time of Lully, the hero was a singular figure destined to rule over others; sixty-five years later, in Handel's England, the possibility of a rather more human species of hero emerged; and another sixty-five years later, at the height of the *Goethezeit*, the notion of a hero became associated with the urge both to be passionately individual and to be subsumed into a larger whole.

[22] I have discussed the relationship between sonic analogues for dynamic processes and syntactic processes in somewhat more detail in my discussion of the last movement of Joseph Haydn's String Quartet op. 76 no. 4 in Zbikowski, 'Dance Topoi, Sonic Analogues, and Musical Grammar: Communicating with Music in the Eighteenth Century', in V. Kofi Agawu and Danuta Mirka (eds), *Communication in Eighteenth Century Music* (New York, 2008), pp. 299–305. I revisit this discussion in my *Foundations of Musical Grammar* (New York, 2017), pp. 212–15; chapter 2 of that book provides a fuller account of sonic analogues for dynamic processes, and the notion of such analogues is developed further throughout the book.

[23] Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, p. 121.

Of equal importance to our understanding of historical ideas about 'the heroic' were the means through which these ideas were projected through sequences of musical sound: what I have called the design principles for the musical heroic. To be sure, there are certain commonalities between the ways Lully, Handel, and Beethoven arranged their materials to summon the heroic. These include the employment of sudden contrasts in musical style or rhetoric, which correlate with transformations brought about by a powerful agent; the use of various strategies to bring certain musical materials to the fore, summoning the idea of the hero as a singular individual; the use of all available musical resources to create a sonic plenum and thereby represent the extraordinary powers of the hero; and the arrangement of musical materials to support physical entrainment and thus an embodied engagement that correlates with the effective energy of a hero. But given the different conceptions of the hero with which they dealt, each composer employed these resources to create a dynamic representation of 'the heroic' appropriate for his cultural and historical moment. For Lully, the power of the hero was such that it could affect an instantaneous and irrevocable change; for Handel, the power of the hero was equally real, but it was mixed with a very human vulnerability to the cruelties of fate; and for Beethoven, the hero was overwhelming but also mercurial, a force stretching the boundaries of what was possible or imaginable.

As I noted in my discussion of humans' capacity for analogical thought, the interpretation of any analogical representation will depend on context. That said, in cases where correlations between musical materials and ideas about the heroic are many rather than few – that is, where the implementation of the design principles for the musical heroic is particularly robust – the vision of the heroic provided through music can be deeply compelling. In this way, careful attention to the ways in which composers have represented the heroic through music, as well as to the organization of musical passages or works that listeners have come to identify with the heroic, can not only help us to understand the design principles for the musical heroic, but also to gain insight into cultural constructions of heroes and the heroic over the course of history.