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A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO COMPOSITION

DAVID CANTER

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts by Research

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ABSTRACT

Progress in utilising ideas from the study of narratives as an approach to composing is explored. The initial objective was to develop the technical skills for composing music drawing on different narrative forms. This investigated narrative as an innovative way of thinking about musical structure. As the compositions developed it became apparent how naïve that objective was. This thesis therefore explores the emergence of an understanding of the sequential structure that I find satisfying in my compositions.

Six pieces, for various instrumentation, are presented as stages in the development of these explorations. The successes and failures of each of these pieces elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of this narrative approach to contemporary music. In the early stages of these explorations the requirements of content ('character' in story telling) and form or structure ('plot' in narratives) emerge as fundamental challenges to the process of composing. These challenges are revealed in an early piece that attempts to reflect fundamental narrative themes. The extra-musical framework limits the success of the piece.

Subsequent compositions start from more clearly musical origins with increasing success. They include explorations of how the form of a composition can encompass variations in texture as well as development of thematic material. The Stravinsky paradox that the abstract nature of instrumental music means it cannot refer to anything outside of the music itself, whilst the power of much music often comes from such external references, emerges as the central dilemma that my composing processes seek to resolve.

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Acknowledgements

One of my motives for accepting a professorship in Psychology at Huddersfield University may be considered somewhat ulterior. The prestige of the Music department, especially its openness to new ideas and forms of music making, had led me to hope that being close to it would provide me with the opportunities to develop my very limited skills as a composer. The willingness of the department to accept my application for an MA by Research in composition was therefore greatly appreciated.

The seminars that formed part of the MA course were truly eye and ear opening. I am deeply grateful for the awareness they gave me of what is happening in 21st Century composition and am particularly appreciative for the way in which Aaron Cassidy and his colleagues organised these seminars around such fascinating themes across such a broad spectrum of musical ideas.

Having supervised well over 300 postgraduate dissertations in my overly long career as an academic psychologist, I am acutely aware of the demands that students can make on their supervisors and how the other challenges that present-day academics have to cope with can so readily reduce their commitment to supervising. I am consequently deeply grateful for the support and guidance that Bryn Harrison has given me, aware that I am the most needy of students. This thesis (as is so often the case in universities, but so rarely recognised) is as much a testament to his perseverance and insights as to my confronting my struggles.

I also wish to acknowledge my gratitude to the harpist Elen Davies and recorder player Eileen Silcocks for their guidance on composing for those fascinating instruments.

Compositions in Portfolio

	Approximate times
1. <i>Mythoi</i> clarinet solo(Contra – Bass – B flat)	8 minutes
2. <i>Autumn Song</i> string quintet	8 minutes
3. <i>Triller</i> recorder decet	10 minutes
4. <i>Windermere</i> flute, clarinet and harp	7 minutes
5. <i>Windermere Flows On</i> recorder quintet	7 minutes
6. <i>Keda</i> harp solo	8 minutes

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PREAMBLE: COMPOSING - A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

“The composer, expressing unconscious emotions in the inexplicit language of music, and often not fully realizing himself exactly what he is saying, does indeed give himself away.”

Cooke (1959) page 273, quoting Schoenberg

There is something magical about composing music. Dots on a page or other instructions can be read by someone other than the composer, many miles or years apart and interpreted to produce a musical experience. This experience will reflect something of the composer’s intentions. It will express some aspect of the emotions or thoughts, desires or searches that were at the heart of the composer’s ambitions for the composition. In the same way that a recipe can be followed to produce a gorgeous meal, or scientific experiment repeated to generate an expected result, a musical composition defies the limits of time and place to capture the composer’s ambitions.

A desire to explore this magical process has been with me as long as I can remember, but ability at mathematics in a school that regarded music as trivial, forced me on a scientific career that reduced the possibilities for a musical education. This did not stop me being fascinated by all facets of music from Webern’s *Konzert (opus 24)* to Miles Davis’ modal jazz in *Kind of Blue*, by way of Schubert’s *Octet* and the minor sevenths of The Beatles’ *She’s Leaving Home*. A fascination that had me attempting to compose whenever time allowed, without any musical background other than a primitive awareness of notation and passing Grade 5 Clarinet (the second time).

One of my earliest pieces for piano, from at least 30 years ago (Example 1), shows the limits of my awareness at that time of what composing is about.



Example 1 - Section from an Early Piano Piece

The lack of any obvious tonal centre, or recognisable cells or tone rows, I suppose shows the uninformed influence of all the atonal music I enjoyed, but I would be hard-pressed to describe this section, and the rest of the piece, as anything other than a musical doodle.

The opportunity to explore further the possibility of composing came when playing regularly in a clarinet quartet with friends. We realised that much of the music we found were arrangements of string quartets. They did not work well for clarinets, not least because the fast demi-semi quaver passages required levels of skill beyond us. I therefore set about composing pieces specifically for us. The group was remarkably tolerant of my attempts, enabling me to experience some of the demands of writing for an ensemble.

The most skilled player in the group even set up a small music publishing company and published a selection of my clarinet quartets under the title *City Reflections* (MATRA Publications, 1995). These pieces tried to capture particular moods, or develop a favourite folk tune, but were clumsy and lacking any real control. However, they were playable by amateurs and the publisher actually sold a few copies. But I still felt I had no right to compose because the only musical training I had was learning to play the clarinet to a limited standard.

It was from this experience that I became aware of an organisation devoted to contemporary music for all comers, whether they had any musical training or not, COMA. The courses provided through this organisation changed my perspective on composing and gave me the authority to pursue this interest. In particular one of the first courses with Michael Finnissy encouraged me to explore the freedoms that contemporary music allowed.

As a member of COMA I generated graphic scores, 'open' scores that could be played by any ensemble mix (within limits), and aleatory compositions. I was introduced to electronic music, sonic art and soundscapes. I had the privilege of being able to spend a few hours on composing courses with Diana Burrell, Philip Cashian, Joe Cutler, Diedre Gribben, Howard Skempton, Stephen Montague, Andrew Toovey, John Woolrich, and others, often before I realised the contributions these composers were making to contemporary music.

These sessions were brief events at Summer schools. They never engaged in detail with my compositions. I did learn, though, that every composer approaches teaching in a totally different way, so although this mixture of composers certainly gave me awareness of a range of composing techniques it was never extended enough to give shape to anything other than very short pieces.

Another crucial aspect of all this composing over a number of years was that it was generally within the context of a) being played by competent amateurs, or b) if it were to be played by a professional group it would be one with minimum rehearsal time, essentially sight reading the score. Even for amateur groups it was usually the case that the pieces would be rehearsed for half an hour or so and then played through. One consequence of these aspects of performance is that any complexity in the instructions for the music would take up valuable rehearsal time and would, in all probability, never be fully understood or acted on.

The challenge of complex instructions, combined with the lack of control that is typical of 'open' scores and aleatory music is, as Stephen Montague rather succinctly put it, 'composing as if painting with a big broad brush'. This has encouraged me to centre my attention, for the moment at least, on conventional notation that is as precisely specified as possible. I feel this is akin to learning to draw before wandering off into the delights of impressionism and abstraction.

The great advantage of these earlier experiences, though, was that it meant I had a portfolio of short compositions to offer as part of my application to Huddersfield University. They seemed to indicate enough promise to generate an offer to register for the MA by research in Composition.

Chapter 1 DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO COMPOSITION

As Kostka (2006) makes clear, or listening to *Late Junction* on Radio 3 amply illustrates, 21st Century 'art/classical' music is a 'maddening but fascinating collage of approaches and materials, a period without style' (page 316). A further illustration of this is John Adams' (1999) declaration that his music is 'promiscuous', and the defining position of current composers is not to be 'rigorously pure'. By this he means that composers typically no longer operate solely within the limits of one system or another, whether it is for example, neo-classicism, strict serialism or minimalism.

However, this does not imply that composing today is random or arbitrary. Instead, this freedom forces composing to be more personal than it has ever been, drawing on many different possibilities but seeking as Stravinsky (1942) puts it to find "freedom... in my moving about within the narrow frame I have assigned myself..." (page 65). Or as Kostka (2006) writes: "The task of the composer is to create a work that is consistent, that is stylistically unified within its own self-defined universe." (page 91).

The 'self-defined universe' or the 'narrow frame' assigned to the work by the composer raises questions about where this definition/frame comes from and how it can be articulated. Once the conventions of the common practice period, or other musical formulae, are no longer *de rigueur* a composer needs to find individual ways of giving shape to any piece of music. When composers are not required to rely on accepted forms of voice leading, harmonic progressions, patterns of motivic cells, matrices of tone sequences, sonata form or any of the other frameworks for composing that have emerged over the past five hundred years they have to invent new frameworks or choose from what is available that they find personally acceptable. This makes music more idiosyncratic in the strong sense of being unique to the composer. Stravinsky (1942) quotes Oscar Wilde in support of this view "that every author always paints his own portrait" (page 140).

The Narrative Perspective

The portrait analogy, however, is limited in the static impression it gives of a finished object. It undervalues the unfolding, change over time that marks music out from the static arts. Indeed Stravinsky (1942) sees it as necessary to emphasise this apparently self-evident aspect of music by coining a term to describe this quality " ... music is a

chronologic art." (page 28). Perhaps he sees the need to emphasise this because so much of musical analysis is concerned with the vertical, harmonic aspects of music and only drifts into any temporal explorations either in considering adjacent harmonies, which is so much of counterpoint analysis, or grand schemes such as sonata form.

Looking for ways of characterising the chronological form of this 'chronological art' a number of musicologists in recent years have recognised that in art, as in life, a powerful way of capturing temporal sequences is by storytelling. Since the discussions of Plutarch it has been recognised that narrative form reflects and shapes experience. Over the last half century the growing interest in narrative has generated considerable academic thought. The central idea in these considerations is that narrative consists of a protagonist moving through various episodes, resolving conflicts along the way until some sort of resolution is achieved. The analogies to sonata form, for instance, are obvious and often cited, with first and second subject being protagonists that change as they move through various sections of the piece eventually resolving any inherent conflicts in the final harmonies. However, by considering music from a narrative perspective a wide range of possible forms and structures become available, far beyond the conventions, for example, of rondo, sonata, or fugue.

One dominant aspect of the studies of narrative has been the consideration of the basic narrative forms. Booker (2004), for instance, claims there are seven basic plots, but a most influential viewpoint is that of Northrop Frye (1957). In a seminal work he argues that there are essentially four narrative forms that he calls; Romance, Tragedy, Comedy and Irony. Frye claims there is a fundamental inevitability to these built around the central bipolarity of Tragedy and Comedy. In the former the hero is overcome by the fates. In Comedy the hero overcomes the challenges the fates provide. Indeed, it can be argued that these four forms can relate to how any set of actions connect with the environment within which they operate. My own studies of how criminals understand their lives have found considerable value in the narrative perspective (Youngs and Canter, 2011). It is even possible to suggest that there are dominant narratives that criminals draw on; the adventure of the bank robbery, the tragedy of murder and the irony of drug taking. A starting point for considering one approach to music, then, is to explore the possibilities inherent in an understanding of narrative, its components and forms and how they may be applied to the process of composition.

Some Caveats

Any initial consideration of the utilisation of a narrative approach to composition raises some challenges. These can be expressed as two crucial caveats, both following critiques of musical theory expounded by Stravinsky and others. The first is the warning that music operates within its own realm and that discussing it in terms of other forms of art is inevitably misleading. As Stravinsky (1942) puts it "...music means nothing outside itself." (page 76). He goes even further to claim that: "...verbal dialectic is powerless to define musical dialectic in its totality." (page 123).

There is an interesting paradox in Stravinsky's criticism of extra-musical associations and explanations of music in non-musical terms. In his own music he nonetheless often has non-musical titles and references whether it is 'Fireworks', 'Elegy for J.F.K' or of course the programme for ballets such as the 'Rites of Spring'. It is clear these references are meant to indicate a musical essence the pieces may have been inspired by, or are reaching for; something beyond the music even though they are not intended to describe the composition in any detailed, programmed sense.

In other words, it may be possible to resolve the 'Stravinsky Paradox' by drawing on the forms and structures of narratives and the meanings and emotions associated with them and especially their central characters rather than explicit content. There are of course many examples of this throughout musical history, particularly in nineteenth century Romantic music, although those compositions often have a strong storyline too. The most obvious twentieth century example is Holst's *Planets Suite*. There is no distinct storyline but each movement captures the character of a planet's name as Holst sees it. A twenty-first century example of this approach is given by Adès's 2005 *Court Studies* in which he explores four characters from *The Tempest*. These pieces may be inspired by Shakespeare's portrayals but are certainly not anything that could be related in a literary sense to their roles in the play.

The second related error to be avoided is to impose any specific storyline on compositions. This requires staying away from any strict programme for compositions. Indeed the quest is to find how the extra-musical impetus for any composition is converted into something totally musical and in so doing to improve the quality of the

resulting music, taking on board Stravinsky's (1942) proposal that: "...a page in which music seeks to express nothing outside of itself better resists attempts at literary deformation." (page 125)

There is one further component in this argument that needs to be explicated. Although I believe any composition must reach out to a wider audience than the composer nevertheless, as Stravinsky puts it: "... the profound meaning of music and its essential aim, ..is to promote a communion, a union of man with his fellow-man and with the Supreme Being" (page 18). This essentially spiritual exploration is a fundamentally personal one, whether it is some notion of a 'supreme being' that is being reached for, or just a wider articulation of an individual's musical ambitions.

Chapter 2 NARRATIVE APPROACHES TO CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

My background in the psychology of narrative seemed to offer a basis for composing that made sense to me and generated music that I hoped would ‘promote a union of man with his fellow-man’. Reading in musicology revealed that I was not alone in realising the potential for a narrative approach to music. It became clear that once the fundamentally iconoclastic mission of twentieth century music subsided, and the compositions and writings of Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Pierre Boulez and others were absorbed into the mainstream of ‘classical/art’ music, as well as having their influence on ‘popular’ music through such innovators as Frank Zappa and Miles Davis, there was a growing school of thought that searched for narrative aspects of composing.

Maus (1991), in a widely quoted examination of what it means to consider narrative aspects of music, articulates the challenges and benefits of such an approach. He reviews the many occasions on which some cross-reference to aspects of story-telling have been used to help elucidate particular compositions. These include such obvious examples as Newcombe’s (1984) consideration of the implicit programme in Schumann’s Second Symphony, and rather surprising references to the ultimate harmonic analyst, Schenker, in his (1935) recognition of “a generalized plot structure for tonal music” (Maus, 1991, page 4). He quotes Schenker as writing that music has “obstacles, reverses, disappointments... Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events” (Schenker, translated 1979).

The search for narrative based explorations of music is perhaps most illuminating in Maus’s (1991) account when he draws directly on ideas from studies of commonalities across stories. In particular he explores Propp’s (1928) claims that folktales have a limited range of components that have special functions. The characters are somewhat interchangeable, but their functions remain the same. It could be an evil witch, or a step-mother, an ugly sister or the devil, but the role they play in the plot has a similar purpose.

This proposal of a cafeteria of functions has many resonances with more technical forms of musical analysis. For example, Cooke’s (1959) proposal that various harmonic forms carry distinct meanings reflects the idea that music has what he calls a ‘language’ which is consequently inevitably telling some sort of story. These harmonic sequences are tied to meanings, but still reflect Schoenberg’s (1954) ‘structural functions of harmony’. So

that both Cooke and Schoenberg in their different ways are offering an analogy to Propp's functions within fairytales.

However, the limitation of all these considerations, from Maus (1991), Cooke (1959) and paradoxically even from Schoenberg (1954), is that they assume the narrative aspects of music are inherent in common practice harmonic forms. Cooke (1959) epitomises this view when he claims “ that ‘major-minor ‘ equals ‘pleasure-pain’, that tempo expresses the level of animation, that volume expresses the degree of emphasis given to feeling...” (page 105). In very broad, general terms these tropes can be recognised in some music, especially nineteenth century Romantic symphonies, but they lose their generality in many other contexts, especially when tonal centres are avoided, wide ranges of durations are incorporated, and minimalist repetitions play havoc with underlying tempos.

Cooke (1959) does reveal the drawbacks of constraining the perspectives on musical meaning within what he characterises as the ‘tonal system’ when he writes that “the new non-tonal language ... [being]...unrelievedly chromatic by nature, it must be restricted to expressing...emotions of the most painful type” (page xiii). Admittedly this was written over half a century ago when, as he puts it, there was a “welter of aridly technical, not to say purely mathematic exegesis” (page xiii). But it still serves to show that equating tonal musical forms with emotional meanings and thereby onto narrative forms constrains the value of understanding the parallels between music and narrative.

These constraints have been broken in recent years by the explorations of a great variety of twentieth century music within a reborn narrative framework. Of particular interest are the writings of Almén (2008). He has directly taken the idea of different narrative forms, sometimes referred to as the ‘basic plots’ and considered how they are reflected in music as varied as Handel’s Suite number 6 and Schoenberg’s *Kleine Klavierstücke*. Almén (2008) follows the literary scholar Frye (1957), that I found of possible value for composing before reading Almén. Like me Almén suggests that the four broad archetypes, already mentioned, or *mythoi* - Adventure, Tragedy, Irony and Romance (these are my terms, relating to popular usage rather than Frye’s terminology), were reflected directly in various pieces of music.

So although Almén’s rather rigid application of narrative theory has been criticised (e.g. Reyland (2013), there is a growing literature that recognises the utility of narrative explorations of music. As Klein (2013) puts it for “music after 1900 ... one hopes to

find narrative strategies, old and new, heightening our experiences of this music” He goes on to declare that within this framework “subjectivity, plot, catastrophe, and triumph ... explain our deeply satisfying response to this music” (page 17).

From Exegesis to Composing

The scholarly study of narratives in general (e.g. in the very broad compilation edited by Rivkin and Ryan (1998) and more particularly the application of the narrative perspective to musical analysis is a burgeoning field. The very brief nod towards it in the previous pages was merely to show that it provides a rich set of concepts and examples that are applicable far beyond programme music or Cooke’s (1959) ‘tonal system’. However, these explorations are focussed on enriching our understanding, ‘heightening our experience’ of existing music. They rarely explore the implications that story-telling can have on the composing process.

A related deficiency is present in the fascinating books that explore music of the last hundred years. In their enthralling accounts Persichetti (1961), Whittall (1977), Griffiths (1995) and Kostka (2006), to take just major examples, give very limited consideration to the overall form of twentieth century music. Their concern is with technical details, especially aspect of harmony and processes for producing music. This provides some basis for composing but typically requires the sorts of command of harmony and musical technicalities that requires, appropriately, a life-time of study and mastery.

Books that give direct advice on composing are also embedded in harmonic and related technicalities. Neither Smith Brindle’s delightful (1986) guide, nor the more serious *Composer’s Handbook* (Cole, 1996) provide the sort of impetus to give momentum to the start of a composition that seem to be present in the exploration of narrative analogies for music. Neither of these books mentions narrative. It is only in the calculatingly popular *Music Composition for Dummies* (Jarrett and Day, 2008) that a brief reference can be found: “Your composition tells a story” (page 133). It then goes on to indicate how the story can be shaped by various musical devices. It is almost as if the serious analysis of music is a different world from assisting in the composing process and it is only when popularising composition that the analogy to story-telling is allowed.

In my case, with my limited composing skills and experience I need some framework that will get me started on the composing process. The narrative perspective seems to offer such a framework. The idea of a set of episodes, a plot trajectory, an emotional tone that may change through the piece, central characters that engage with their environment in different ways, all seem like helpful metaphors. They may only provide a flimsy prosthesis to eke out a musical form, but offer perhaps a freedom to move with the sort of self-generated, quasi-intuitive starting point that I find necessary.

With this in mind I now describe the unfolding storyline of my own composing adventures. As will become apparent, the pitfalls in taking extra-musical ideas as a starting point began to emerge early in my explorations. Just as in the most interesting stories my personal narrative of composing ended up in a rather different place from where I expected.

Chapter 3 PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS

From the range and variety of music composed during the course of study for this MA six pieces have been selected as illustrating the development in my study of composition, and which seem to be most successful in achieving their objectives, as well as being satisfying pieces of music. In what follows, each of the six is discussed in turn, although for reasons of succinctness, and because of the nature of the composing process, most detail is given for the earlier compositions.

MYTHOI – for B♭ Clarinets

The opportunity to compose for a virtuoso clarinetist, Carl Rosman, who delighted in playing a variety of clarinets, gave me the starting point. The chance this gave to write a piece for contrabass, Bb and bass clarinet was too good to miss. Yet, composing for a single line instrument has its own inherent challenges, especially of keeping the music interesting whilst finding some coherence within it. The contrabass in particular has its own sonorities that are rarely explored, but shown richly in the context of spectral music, notably Gérard Grisey's *Anubis, Nout*. Donald Martino's *Triple Concerto* also makes interesting use of all three of the clarinets that I wanted to compose for. However, Martino had the luxury of three players, but nonetheless pointed me to the way that the textures of the different instruments could be explored.

There are considerably more compositions for the solo Bb (Soprano) clarinet, although interestingly they are quite short. Germaine Tailleferre's *Sonata for Clarinet Solo* is noteworthy for employing a conventional tripartite (ternary) sonata form, *allegro tranquillo*, *andantino espressivo* and *allegro brioso*. She keeps the clarinet mostly within its middle clarion range avoiding its chalumeau register, with only an exploration of its altissimo register briefly in the *cadenza* towards the end. A contrasting clarinet solo by Bryn Harrison, his *Open 2*, favours the upper reaches of the B♭ clarinet range.

These compositions encouraged me to work with the textures and ranges of the three instruments I was writing for. I decided on a framework with the first section for Contrabass, the second for Bb and the third for Bass. The three sections follow each other with only the break needed to change instruments.

As a clarinet player myself, I was aware that certain sorts of trilling action lent itself well to the architecture of the instrument and provided a particular sort of interesting

colouration. However, from this starting point the challenge was how to get any further. That is where aspects of narrative form came to my assistance.

As mentioned earlier, and drawn on notably by Almén (2008), in his 1957 book *The Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye proposes that there are four basic archetypal forms of narrative or, as he calls them, *mythoi*. I therefore, rather naïvely as it turned out, attempted to draw on these archetypes in composing the piece for solo clarinets. To avoid the practical problem in performance of jumping between physically very different instruments I decided that each instrument was to play a separate section.

The first section is for Contrabass clarinet. This draws on the ‘Adventure’ narrative (or *Romance* in Frye’s terminology). This is the hero overcoming obstacles to emerge victorious. It starts at the lowest range of the instrument as shown in Example 2, moving up its register but battling against the tendency to be pulled back down to those original depths:



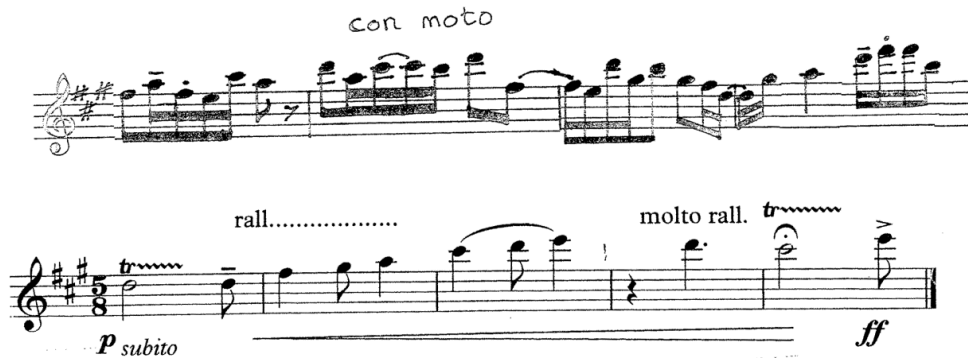
Example 2 Opening of Contrabass section , bars 1 -7

The trills and development of those in semi-quaver and demi-semi quaver passages move up through the instrument’s range as illustrated in Example 3:



Example 3 Development of Contrabass section, bars 34 - 39

This unfolds into a jolly scherzo at the top range of the contrabass, which ends the first section as in Example 4:

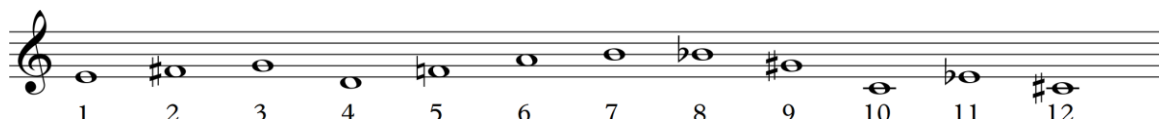


Example 4 Ending of Contrabass section – last 9 bars

The closing bars put the contrabass clarinet well within the range for the Bb clarinet so that the transition to the next section is as seamless as possible.

The second section for Bb (soprano) clarinet is derived from Frye's idea of a 'Comedy' (or Irony as he calls it). Frye's myth of Irony is one in which there are no clear rules and so the piece, although slow and essentially lyrical, gives the performer the opportunity to make of it whatever they think is amusing. It was also an opportunity to explore a freer way of developing the section. As a casual composer with little feedback on what I had been producing I was aware that I had many habits that were limiting what I could produce. In order to try to break away from them I determined to explore a procedure that I thought would take some crucial composing details out of my hands. I would avoid any obvious harmonic centre to the piece by drawing on the inventions of Schoenberg, Webern and Berg by using a twelve tone row. Further, once identified, this note row would free me of any decisions about note leading or other aspects of the note progression.

A meandering 12 tone row was selected that reflected the wave form I find so appealing in music as in Example 5.



Example 5 Twelve tone row used for the B \flat section of *Mythoi*

The next aspect of the process was to draw on aleatory ideas that had been given such impetus by John Cage, but which go back at least as far as Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel*. A set of random numbers were obtained. These were sourced from the web pages of the national lottery. They have the particular quality that although the numbers are generated at random they are printed in numerical sequence, giving an implicit structure to the numbers as illustrated in Example 6.

5 7 9 17 20 45 10
 7 30 32 36 40 41 45
 7 14 20 30 33 46 27
 1 10 19 36 47 48 11
 9 10 24 37 39 40 36

Example 6 First few rows of random numbers derived from the national lottery winning numbers. (The final column is the 'bonus ball')

There was then the need to develop a rule system that converted the numbers into a set of operations. The numbers were treated as integers between 0 and 9 and had to reflect the duration of notes as well as the tessitura within which they operated. Some possibility of enhancing the duration with the half duration dot (when a 5 emerged) was included as well as the possibility of triplets. Rests were also introduced as conversions of the note duration. Example 7 is the rule system developed.

Repeat last note

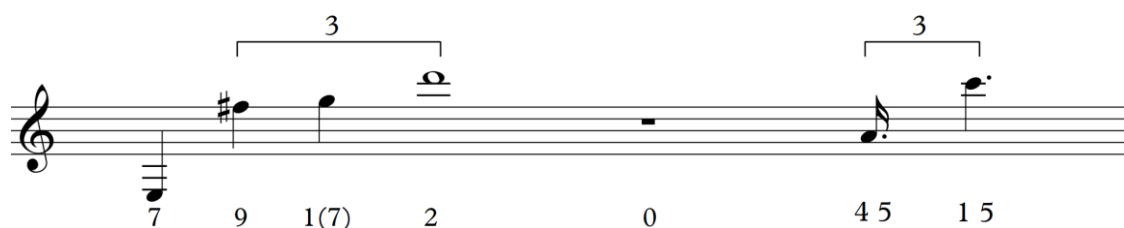
Range (tessitura)

If last three the same.

if 2 numbers the same follow each other the next is a rest

Example 7 Rule system applied to random numbers

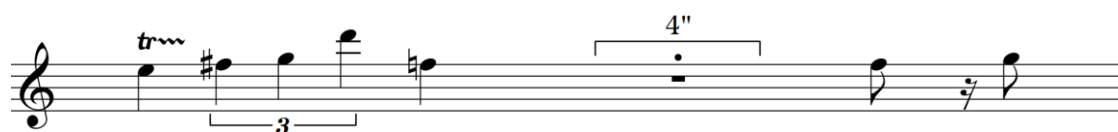
This system when followed slavishly as applied to the 12 tone row provided an extended composition of music as indicated in the generated example.



Example 8 Generated Example – opening notes of piece

(The numbers below the staff are derived from the random number list as described above and illustrated in Example 6)

It was realised that this generated music in some cases that was unplayable or did not follow conventional musical syntax. So the music was then rewritten to be more logical and, indeed, musical, the example above thus becoming the version in Example 9.



Example 9 Example 7 Converted to be more musical

This was developed further to provide dynamics and some shaping of phrases to create the central section of the piece, to be played on the Bb Clarinet. The opening of this section starts with Example 9 as derived above. The freedom of this section was encouraged by the absence of bar lines and the instruction *a piacere* to allow the performer to explore the possibilities on offer. The first three staves of this section are given in Example 10.

SECTION 2
Clarinet in B \flat

Accidentals only refer to the note following
as far as SECTION 3

Senza misura/a piacere
(♩ = 56)

Example 10 Opening of B \flat Clarinet section of *Mythoi*

From a narrative perspective the search was to find some equivalent to an ‘Ironic’ or comic mood that had little sense but still moved along in an engaging way. Yet, the remarkable discovery was that this process, involving a 12 tone row and random numbers, did indeed generate music unlike anything I had composed before. Even more remarkably it does actually sound like a piece of music rather than just random notes.

So for me there was a major breakthrough for my understanding of composition, by applying this process. This was that the various forms of inherent structure built into the stages in composition gave the music a form. These structures, of the note row sequence and the incremental pattern of sets of random numbers, tended to hold the section together and allow it to be experienced as something other than random notes.

That the tone row, although not adhered to with absolute rigidity, did provide an underlying framework, elucidated what it was the Berg and Schoenberg were doing when they wanted to find a way of composing that did not use common practice harmonic progressions. They needed an alternative that would allow the music to have a structure. Textbooks can present this without it ever making personal sense, but seeing and hearing it in my own composing was a revelation.

I think the use of lottery sequences also provided a subtle underlying structure, of course far less complex than the way Xenakis drew on abstruse physical formulae. Nonetheless, this simple aspect inherent in the number sequence served a similar purpose of giving the music an underlying structure that is far removed from Sonata form or other more conventional ways of organising notes across time. The selection of the actual sequence of the tones in the tone row and the rules for converting the number sequence into notes and durations were personal choices, implicitly informed by the search for musical possibilities. That they gave rise to an interesting, if far from perfect, piece of music was a real finding.

A further finding from the development of what was planned as the second section of *Mythoi*, using a tone row and random numbers was that some interesting musical shapes were generated, such as in Example 11.



Example 11 A musical shape generated by the tone row (C#, E, F#,) and the application of the random number formula, starting from the third note of the third stave in Example 10

A variety of these shapes were picked up and developed to be incorporated in different ways into the other sections of the piece. For instance, Example 12 shows a moment in the third section for Bass Clarinet, which although certainly different from the shape generated by random numbers in Example 11, was influenced by its musical qualities.



Example 12 Musical shape related to Example 11 in Bass Clarinet, 22nd bar of H

The process of incorporation was not carried out with any rigour or detailed understanding of its implications. This was certainly a weakness in the whole process.

The crucial point that emerged was that there is always an implicit framework in composing no matter how hard the attempt is made to break free from it. The composer's task is to generate a satisfying framework and pursue its implications.

The third section relates to Frye's 'Tragedy' for Bass clarinet. Broadly it is a mirror of the first section, starting high in the Bass clarinet range so that it picks up from where the Bb section finishes. This puts the Bass into a higher, lighter register, but still has the shadows of misfortune in the strained qualities and capriciousness in this range of the Bass clarinet.

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

grazioso

p cresc. poco a poco

ff p f mf mp

Example 13 Opening of Bass Clarinet section

The lyrical moving musical line from earlier sections keeps attempting to surface but eventually the music is dragged to the lower levels as shown in Example 14.

2 tempo

marcato

f p cresc. poco a poco

più mosso

legato

ff mp sub.

Example 14 Later part of Bass Clarinet Section, starting 9 bars before L

However, there is a cynically optimistic coda given in Example 14.

marcato

molto rit...

pp f p ff

Example 15 Closing of Bass Clarinet section

Throughout the three sections there are rapid changes of mood associated with changes in dynamics and tempo. The performer is encouraged to emphasise these differences in the spirit of the narrative in which it is embedded. However, the whole piece operates as one arching storyline with cross-references throughout to different motifs.

Discoveries from Composing Mythoi

The rather simple-minded idea of a general shape to the whole piece that was reflected in each section had some success. But there were many unsatisfactory aspects to the final composition. The trills and related semi and demi-semiquaver passages as illustrated in Example 14 mixed in with slower moments such as that in the second stave of Example 13 tended to break up the flow of the faster sections. This happens in a way that confuses the listener as to which is supposed to be the dominant ‘message’ of the section. Furthermore, the lack of a strong grip on the central musical themes, with an unplanned combination of textural motives and melodic ones, gives the whole a piece a somewhat amorphous feel that does not capture the narrative flow intended.

Perhaps paradoxically the most successful section is the central one, derived from a formal process. It has a distinct mood and, as already noted, the conscious structure gives it a coherence that carries that mood through with some reliability. There are some lessons from this. First, that any rule system, even one relying on random numbers, involves a great range of conscious and less conscious decisions. It reflects the ambitions of the composer. In this case for instance, as indicated in Example 7, the use of triplets and a process for repeating notes provides particular musical possibilities that reflect my composing predilections. I did not follow up the implications of this in subsequent pieces but it is a process I hope to revisit.

The second crucial lesson is that for a composition within the general framework used here the avoidance of clear musical content, whether it is a tune, a motif, a theme or even a chord sequence is a recipe for only limited results. To refer back to the nature of storytelling, as Aristotle makes clear in his *Poetics*, there always have to be both character and plot in any story. One or the other can dominate, but both must be present. In musical terms I see this as content and form. *Mythoi* does have some form to it in the overall arch of the piece and the framework for each section. But it lacks clear character other than the textures of the various clarinets. Subsequent compositions in the portfolio explore this insight and do have distinct characters as well as plots.

Autumn Song String Quintet

“In stories, characters are born, they live and they sometimes die. They do not gradually come or cease to be. A birth is as discontinuous an experience as death. A person springs forth on the scene. Similarly, a character enters a narrative all at once, as does for instance Prince Hamlet in act 1, scene 2 of Shakespeare’s play, or Moses in chapter 2, verse 2 of Exodus.” **Stories We Live By**, Dan P McAdams (1993) New York: William Morrow and Company Inc. Page 128

A course being run by Philip Cashian for string ensembles provided the impetus to write for a string quintet. Learning from studying and listening to various string quintets and early drafts my own work together with the lessons learnt from *Mythoi* a very different approach was taken to that for the clarinets piece. The difference in the instrumentation also generated a very different challenge.

The repertoire available for string ensembles, especially the quartet, when compared with pieces for solo clarinet, is worlds apart. It consequently takes some courage to start writing a piece for strings. However, the constraints of writing for competent amateurs, without any extended techniques, using immediately understandable notation provided the sorts of limitations that made tackling this string quintet possible.

A particular inspiration in this regard was Benjamin Britten’s *Simple Symphony* that is written for a conventional string quartet with an optional Double Bass. The material in this piece is drawn from works Britten wrote between the ages of nine and twelve, which probably accounts for the directness and essential simplicity of the music. His minimal use of double stopping also contributes to its simplicity, which seemed worth emulating. The four sections act as lessons in the essential styles that a string ensemble can explore from the opening ‘Boistrous Bourrée’ by way of the ‘Playful Pizzicato’ to the ‘Sentimental Saraband’ and the ‘Frolicsome Finale’.

It should also be mentioned that the work on this string quintet happened over twelve months after *Mythoi*. In the interim various other pieces were composed under supervision and much was learned from them, but it was only on reflection and intense examination that the quintet emerged in a form that was acceptable. The most significant change along the way was the move from extra-musical ideas, such as Frye’s archetypes to work more directly with musical content. In other words the character of the music was given much closer focus, although the overall shape, or form of the music still draws on ideas of narrative.


A musical line, or melody, was taken as the starting point. Imogen Holst in her enlightening 1962 book *Tune*, makes a clear distinction between tunes which are “clear-cut and compact and easily remembered: they are also self-sufficient” (page 11) and a melody which “is inclined to spread itself intangibly”. When considering nineteenth-century melody she also elaborates on the power it has over tune by quoting Berlioz saying that melody is ‘richer, more varied, more free from limitations, and – in its very vagueness – incomparably more powerful’ (page 151). It was the prospects that an ambiguous melody has for an unfolding character that set the path for this string quintet.

So although the idea of narrative archetypes still helps to give an impetus for this piece now it is more the experience of the central character, reflected in a melody which undergoes various mutations, that is the driving idea. It is the mood of the narrative rather than its form that is crucial. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1957) identifies autumn as the season that epitomises the character of tragedy that is central to my string quintet. Tragedy, Frye proposes, “is concentrated on a single individual” with “a predominantly sombre mood”. This central character is also typically ambiguous, having virtue mixed with fatal flaws.

In this quintet the central character is presented in the opening melody by the ‘cello and Double Bass. This was derived from a much earlier piece that I wrote setting to music, for ‘cello and soprano, a Philip Larkin poem (2003) page 295:

This is the first thing
I have understood:
Time is the echo of an axe
Within a wood.

This sombre reflection on life has the appropriately tragic feeling and provides the rhythm and the outline inflections for the focal melody.

Noblimente  **circa 90**

This is the - first thing I have - un der stood

The musical score consists of two staves: Violoncello and Double Bass. The Violoncello staff begins with a 6/4 time signature and a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Double Bass staff also begins with a 6/4 time signature and a forte (*f*) dynamic. Both staves feature a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, then a quarter note, and finally a half note. The time signature changes to 4/4 after the first bar. The dynamics shift to mezzo-piano (*mp*) in the second bar. The lyrics are placed above the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across bar lines.

Example 16 Theme for *Autumn Song*, first three bars (with original text from Larkin poem to indicate how the rhythm and melodic shape was influenced).

This is taken up by the viola in a slightly modified form. The violins pick this up further, as in Example 17, adding a more lyrical quality, which the viola reflects.

Example 17 Violins develop theme, of *Autumn Song* from bar 16.

The opening sections thus capture the not quite innocent quality of the central character, with hints of discord in the accompaniments. This culminates in the *tutti* bars 44, 45 and 46.

However at E, the challenge to what Frye argues is the initial success of the tragic hero, starts to be undermined by the pizzicato, in the violins, as shown in Example 18.

Example 18 Pizzicato section at E of *Autumn Song*

which provides an almost whimsical, or ironic, quality to the melody's change of state, enhanced by the modal thirds, eventually becoming a duet for the two bass instruments.

As irony can so easily drift into tragedy, the doleful section at G, with its crunchy harmonies, unfolds out of the earlier melodic line, Example 19.

85

sul pont.

p

sul pont.

p

sul pont.

p

Example 19 Adagio section G of *Autumn Song*

The re-emergence of aspects of the opening melody at L provides some respite but this leads to the sombre tremolos, aggravated by the brief pizzicatos in the second bass at K shown in Example 20.

rit..

f

pizz.

Example 20 Tremolo section K of *Autumn Song*

This picks up to a more energetic flavour at N that becomes almost frantic, hinting at the inherent tragedy of the hero. The fade at P to a sombre reprise in a variation on the opening melody brings the piece to a solemn close.



Example 21 Close of *Autumn Song*

This reprise as a modification of an opening melody, although relating to the formal framework of much classical music, is strongly influenced in a much more contemporary idiom by Milton Babbitt's (1978) aptly named *My Ends are My Beginnings*.

Discoveries from Composing Autumn Song

My personal struggle to find different unfolding perspectives on a central melodic character without the patchy, rather uncontrolled quality of *Mythoi* seems to me much more successful here. Although of course simpler and shorter than, for example, Stravinsky's *Octet*, or Martino's *Triple Concerto*, it was my study of how these composers establish musical ideas that offer many ways of being manipulated, as well, inevitably, as the often quoted opening four notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, which helped me to reach for this approach to composition.

This approach also emerged out of developing the confidence to work with the musical material as it emerged. Major composers can be daunting in their accounts of what composing is about. Hindemith (1952) for example, claims that a composer naturally has the whole of a piece of music in his head before he sets about writing it down. Composers of a lesser genius, such as John Adams (1999) make it much clearer that composing is a matter of interacting with the musical material as it emerges in the imagination:

"I often start with an image. It could be a very strong image, like the image of the ship taking off into space like a rocket.... At other times an idea just seems to slide in almost unannounced, a very simple, pulsing wavelike motive that gradually gives birth to a much larger image or set of images..... In both cases, the opening gesture leads to something else, which leads to something else, which leads to something else." (Page 66)

Adams' description is much closer to my own composing practice than to Hindemith's. Adams' approach to composition reflects the importance of the initial starting point and how the music develops through interacting with that. But it does not give a hint of how the overall shape of the piece, its form, emerges. That is where an exploration of a character moving through some changes of state that have an emotional relationship to each other is particularly helpful.

***Triller* Recorder Decet**

One particularly exciting discovery in the emergence of Autumn Song was that character and its development can also be reflected in textures, especially with instruments that have similar timbres. Put another way, there is a challenge to find a way of structuring material that has an unfolding quality that is not necessarily, obviously built around a melody. Where the content, or character, is more in the form of timbres and rhythms rather than a sequence of notes that have a particular harmonic relationship.

Of course the *Bolero* that Maurice Ravel brilliantly constructed is the dominant example of the power of repetitive rhythms to tell a story. Yet the innovations of John Adams, such as in his *Phrygian Gates* 1983, in which a rapid ostinato subtly unfolds takes this idea into new directions, in which the arching accelerando is less dominant and thus many other musical forms are released. This gives particular emphasis to dynamics and tempo, almost using these aspects of the music to replace the more conventional variations in harmony in order to give shape and maintain interest in the music. The overlapping rhythms and melodies of Conlon Nancarrow, especially in his studies for player piano, show how melodic textures can also be harnessed to provide a greater overarching structure.

A very powerful illustration of the use of ostinato textures, which gets closer to the experiments of Spectral composers, is Simon Bainbridge's (1983) *Concertante in moto perpetuo*. The concertante aspect of this piece, in that it features the oboe, is also a lesson in how different instrumental timbres and tessitura can be drawn on to enrich the musical conversation. The oboe becomes a dominant character in the music, giving it continuity and variety.

All of these influences provide a backdrop to the composing of *Triller*. The availability of a large recorder ensemble and the similarities in timbres of the instruments, as well as their facility in trilling all provided a starting point for this composition. My fascination with the textural qualities and variations possible with trills and their related semi-quaver and demi-semi quaver patterns had already been present in *Mythoi* for clarinets, but more care had to be taken in ensuring fluent trills and semi-quaver patterns were possible on the recorders because of the technicalities of jumping across 'the break'.

The very distinct qualities of the descant and sopranino recorders, both in timbre and tessitura provide the concertante qualities similar to the use of the oboe in *Concertante in*

moto perpetuo. But the shaping of the piece is dominated by the exploration of textures and simple cross-rhythms. The way these textures are developed to explore various moods and aspects of the central trilling/semi-quaver character.

The tongue in cheek opening short bursts of the semi-quaver patterns as shown in Example 22 are spread around the instruments as if they are calling to each other to join together.

Score Triller David Canter

Adagio poco giocoso 5 *Poco accel.*

(c) David Canter May 2014

Example 22 Opening of *Triller*

This builds up across the instruments with added trills and increasingly denser textures, emerging into the full ensemble playing together at rehearsal mark D. The emphasis of the soprano high notes and pizzicato in the bass instruments add to the overall energy as in Example 23.

45 **D** 9

Example 23 Tutti section of *Triller* at Bar 45

The semi-quaver pattern thins out allowing a quaver - rest pattern to dominate at I as in Example 24, where the cross-rhythm adds to the liveliness of the section.

Example 24 Quaver- Rest pattern around bar 90

This pattern builds up and is eventually taken over by a semi-quaver ostinato emerging from the first bass at K, with the sopranino giving a reminder of the earlier rhythms with a quaver - crotchet pattern. This provides a further set of opportunities for more melody-like aspects to develop generated mainly by semi-quavers tied to quavers, building up through the dotted quaver-rest pattern just after M, as illustrated in Example 25.

Example 25 Melodic shape in the upper instruments of *Triller* around bar 120

The piece then revisits many of the earlier textures including a semi-quaver *tutti* section around bar 195. The music winds down from this energetic section with retrograde versions of the opening material. The closing bars are thus a version of the reflection of the opening bars as shown in Example 26.

Example 26 The closing bars of *Triller*

Discoveries from Composing Triller

Even, or especially, simple instruments such as recorders need to be treated with respect when composing for them. Going through an early version of *Triller* with a professional recorder player and listening to a competent amateur recorder ensemble play the piece with little rehearsal, revealed the importance of many details. For example, the bottom notes on all the instruments, but particularly the trebles are almost inevitably weak so should not be placed in crucial parts of musical rhythms. Another aspect is that the different forms of tonguing have a big influence on the feel of a musical section, of crucial importance in a textural piece such as *Triller*.

The doubling in the composition of the trebles and tenors and the three basses and great bass, were deliberately orchestrated to modify the dynamics, given the limited dynamic range of single recorders. However, although the piece is written for ten instruments, it is often a recorder choir that will take it on. This leads to the further doubling of many parts, especially the lower ones. This means that there is more possibility for dynamic variation than with just one to a part. So it was appropriate to put plenty of dynamic indications in the score, even though that is less usual in recorder scores.

The greatest discovery was the potential for rhythm, or perhaps more accurately the textures generated by rhythm, to be the basis of a composition and the development and

exploration of rhythm as a vehicle to carry the music on from one episode to the next. With relatively little variation in rhythms the listening experience of all the sections being the same character from different perspectives is maintained. Some of the rhythmical developments that were discovered in composing this piece are brought together in example 27.



Example 27 Musical Patterns and their development within *Triller*

The basic semi-quaver pattern around thirds and fourths is shown at A. This has a simple almost folk tune, warbling quality. By adding the quaver as illustrated at B with the fourths interspersed with the thirds something more unsettling emerges which hints at a questioning quality. By extending the quaver across the bar line and on the off-beat before the third beat of the bar as in C, the questioning has some urgency. At D the larger jumps of a sixth with the staccato semi-quavers and quavers on the beat, turns the hesitancy of B and C into something more jaunty and confident.

The pattern that is derived from the inverse of D, illustrated at E. Giving it larger extremes (a full octave at E, rather than the sixth of D), converts the original semiquaver rhythm into a melody that questions in the first two beats with an answer on the third beat. This third beat also acts as a leading note with the expectation of the next note being the ‘tonic’ of the Phrygian E.

Slowing the pattern to incorporate crotchets and quavers, with fifths as well as thirds as at F, makes available yet another mood to work with. This mood that can be modified by simply setting this pattern against itself, but a crotchet later, so that the quavers are played against the crotchets as illustrated in Example 24. Taken together these examples illustrate the prospects for texture and related moods that can be derived from simple musical shapes.

I am aware that these are personal discoveries that came from the experience of composing. They are elementary against the sophisticated guidance that Schoenberg

gives in his *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, published in 1967. He, of course, emphasises the harmonic construction of melodies. As he writes:

“..some variations in the melody are involuntary results of changed harmonic construction..” (page 29)

In the musical patterns in Example 27 there are both harmonic changes as well as rhythmic ones. The developments illustrated there are in the context of a piece of music that essentially explores rhythms and the moods that can be generated with them in an ensemble. The harmonic variations were considered subsidiary. However subsequent compositions worked more directly with harmonies.

Windermere Trio (Flute, Clarinet and Harp)

The opportunity to compose for flute, clarinet and harp provided the impetus for *Windermere*. The awareness from previous compositions of the significance of the core material, the central character that energises the plot, gave rise to a careful selection of the four bar theme and its modal construction given in Example 28. This theme has much more of a quality of a ‘tune’, as Holst (1962) describes it. Its almost symmetrical shape gives it the flowing character that the piece is aimed at generating, with a slightly poignant mood from the Aeolian harmonies.

Clarinet in Bb

p *f* *p*

Example 28 Theme for Windermere (concert pitch) bars 5 - 8

The question implicit in the first two and half bars gets some sort of enigmatic answer in the remainder of this melody, which provides the two components that are explored throughout the piece. Whether this is the same character questioning itself or two people in close conversation is open to debate. Nonetheless the overall arch of the theme provides plenty of possibility for examination from different perspectives. It especially provides considerable opportunity for generating rich texture by playing different components of the musical shape against each other in a form of free counterpoint as in Example 29.

Fl. *f* *p* *mf* *f*

Cl. *f* *p* *mf*

Hp. *p subito* *mp*

Example 29 Example of ‘Counterpoint’ in Windermere around bar 35

The characters in this discussion become more vigorous in a section of overlapping semi-quaver runs as shown in Example 30. These are drawn from the original musical shape but they have now developed far enough to have a life of their own. Their relative musical simplicity also allows distant echoes of the sort of extended rhythmic forms associated with what is often referred to as the ‘minimalist’ music of Adams and Reich. However, here they operate more as an energetic climax at a crucial point about two thirds through the piece.

Example 30 Part of Energetic Section in *Windermere*, bars 85 and 86

Many composers, as well as novelists and dramatists, recognise the importance of heightened action and related emotion at a point past the centre of their creation. For example, possibly ending the second act in the conventional three act play. To take just one of myriad musical examples the very rapid demi-semi quaver section in Berio’s *Sequenza IX* after rehearsal mark D provides a turning point for the piece after which it never really looks back but becomes ever more extreme in its gestures.

The excited section in *Windermere* at D gives way to a more controlled and hesitant section; the calm after the storm, the central character exhausted by his endeavours. This then returns to the opening theme on the clarinet, but as in the best dramas the character although appearing the same has subtly changed as in Example 31.

Example 31 Closing Reprise of *Windermere*, bars 139 - 142

This is followed by a reflection of the opening chords on the harp as in Example 32.

The musical score for Harp (Hp.) shows the ending of Windermere. It is written in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The score consists of four measures. The first measure has a whole rest in the treble and a half note G2 in the bass. The second measure has a whole rest in the treble and a half note G2 in the bass. The third measure has a half note G2 in the treble and a half note G2 in the bass. The fourth measure has a whole rest in the treble and a whole note G2 in the bass. The piece ends with a double bar line and a fermata over the final G2. Dynamics include a forte (f) marking in the third measure.

Example 32 Ending of Windermere

Windermere Flows On –Recorder Quintet

The trio for *Windermere* had qualities that offered opportunities for different instrumentation, especially exploring the way the flowing line may be enhanced with instruments that had similar timbres. A recorder quintet that focussed on the lower instruments seemed worth exploring. However, the original was in two flats because of the clarinet so the piece was transposed up a tone to avoid any flats.

The rapid semi-quaver section at C was also less satisfactory for recorder players and broke the narrative flow in a way that was not as conspicuous when there was a harp to keep the coherence. This was therefore revised with quavers to keep a more continuous character. Throughout, the particular timbres of the recorders were drawn on, as well of course as their ranges, to make the piece even more of a pastorate study.

This revision of the trio as a recorder quintet does take the music on further away from a strictly narrative piece with clearly defined episodes. It comes closer to the idea of one personality that metamorphoses into slightly different states whilst still maintaining its defining features. The absence of the very distinct qualities of the harp makes this especially possible. Allowing the strong central theme to be drawn on, but not too obviously, just hinted at during the piece, only re-merging in full at the end.

Keda harp solo

In some ways this final piece brings together many of the discoveries from earlier explorations. A central character was identified called Keda. In Mervyn Peak's gothic novel, *Gormenghast*, Keda is the wet nurse of Titus, the central character. Her tragic life is destroyed by two lovers who both die fighting over her. Eventually she kills herself by leaping off a crag, after giving birth to a daughter. This tragic narrative is enshrined in the character of Keda, a hesitant undemonstrative person who does not understand the power of her own beauty. The harp is almost unique in its ability to capture this tragic beauty.

The 5/4 pulse chosen for this composition allows the possibility of varied rhythms within the same overall metre. Having learned from *Windermere* of the power of a musical shape that lends itself to two distinct components the theme created has a rising opening form, as in Example 33.

Lyrical
♩ circa 108



pp

Example 33 Opening of theme for *Keda*, bar 1

And a falling response as in Example 34



mf

Example 34 Closing of opening theme for *Keda* end of bar 1 and bar 2

These two components of the central musical theme together and individually provide the basis of the composition. They allow sections of canonical overlap and of sequences of chords. The solemn beauty of the central character is always there in the different forms the musical material takes. A doleful ending that, as in earlier compositions, revisits the opening theme brings the work to a close as in Example 35.

115 *rall.*

Musical score for measures 115-116. The piece is marked *rall.* (rallentando). Measure 115 features a treble clef with a dotted quarter note chord, followed by a quarter note melody. The bass clef has a dotted quarter note chord. Measure 116 continues the melody in the treble and has a dotted quarter note chord in the bass.

117

Musical score for measures 117-119. Measure 117 continues the melody in the treble and has a dotted quarter note chord in the bass. Measure 118 features a treble clef with a dotted quarter note chord, followed by a quarter note melody. The bass clef has a dotted quarter note chord. Measure 119 features a treble clef with a dotted quarter note chord, followed by a quarter note melody. The bass clef has a dotted quarter note chord. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 35 Ending of *Keda*

Chapter 4 Endnote

Student: *I try to plan my compositions, but I am struck by the military idea that “No campaign plan survives first contact with the enemy”*

Supervisor: *Don't think of your music as the enemy.*

Looking back on the narrative shape of my musical compositions, there is a sense of almost moving backwards in musical history. The initial experiment with a tone row and random numbers became part of an exploration of the clarinet that avoided strong musical themes or obvious harmonies. Subsequent compositions dealt more with character as a generator of musical forms. Whilst these were never treated as strong motifs in the sense of Beethoven's Classical phase, and certainly not as leitmotifs in the Wagnerian sense, or musical themes in the way they are used in Romantic music, they nonetheless provided a central personality to the compositions. This, perhaps paradoxically, enabled my composing practice to move away from extra-musical ideas.

An important piece in this new venture, took the musical form of the trill as the focus. This *Triller* was influenced by the muscular rhythmic qualities of music often thought of, probably misleadingly, as 'minimalist'. This influence enabled a step to be taken away from the formal processing and ideas of a simple narrative form that generated *Mythoi*. It explored the different episodes that can be derived from totally musical material and put them together in a way they enabled the character to be presented from different perspectives. Although the actual music in *Triller* and its composition is totally different from Webern's *Konzert opus 24*, the varieties of perspectives he obtains from his tone row to produce the most exquisite music provides an insight into what can be reached for with any musical material. He honours his tone row and its inherent musical offering. In a much, much humbler way I explored the possibilities of trills.

Triller was really a breakthrough because I appreciated the possibility that even semi-quaver patterns offered the prospect of different experiences or episodes. By examining closely what they consisted of and the developments they offered I began to feel my way towards a form of musical narrative that was totally couched in musical terms. If I had to pick one of Frye's archetypes as characteristic of the emergent music it would be the one of Adventure (interestingly what he calls 'Romance') in which the central character has many adventures until essentially his work is done and he returns home. This is exemplified most clearly in Homer's *Ulysses*. But the adventures can only vaguely be

expressed in non-musical terms. They are fundamentally musical explorations. As Stravinsky (1942) puts it when discussing the fugue, describing it as “a pure form in which the music means nothing outside itself” page 76.

Curiously in my own work studying offender’s narratives of their crimes (Youngs and Canter, 2009) the adventure narrative is often related to a feeling the criminal has of being a professional, going about his crimes in a workmanlike fashion, during which he is in control. Perhaps it is this ability to control the music, to take it on a musical journey that has an inherent logic to it that I have been searching for in my explorations of composing.

Steve Reich (1999) summarises the challenge that most composers face, whether amateur or professional:

“The hardest part is the blank page....Therefore what I try to do... following Stravinsky’s advice is ask myself, OK, what’s my instrumentation, what’s the length of this thing, how many movements am I going to work with... what key am I in, what tempo am I in...The more of those questions I can answer, the less difficult it will be.” (page 19)

Yet answering these questions does not give the whole form for any composition. What I now appreciate is that although they all help to give some basis to the piece they still leave out the overall character of it and how that character will develop during the piece. Whether other characters will intervene and how they will interplay in the unfolding shape, or narrative, of the music. However, none of these questions or thoughts can be answered without knowing the possibilities. There are parallels in scientific research. You cannot know what questions you can ask until you have some idea of the sorts of answers that are possible and the ways of going about getting those answers.

Selection of musical works studied

Milton Babbitt (1978) *My Ends are my Beginnings* for Bass Clarinet [adaptation by Rocco Parisi (1998)]

Ludwig Beethoven (1805) *Piano Sonata in B flat opus 22*

Luciano Berio (1980) *Sequenza IX* for Bass Clarinet

Benjamin Britten (1935) *Simple Symphony*

Benjamin Britten (1964) *Nocturnal, Opus 70, after John Dowland for Guitar*

Elliott Carter(1950) *8 Etudes and a Fantasy*

Claude Debussy (composed 1913, published 1927) *Syrinx for Solo Flute*

Gerard Grisey (1984) *Anubis* for Contrabass Clarinet

Bryn Harrison (2001) *Open 2* for Solo Bb Clarinet

György Ligeti (1985) *Etudes for piano*

Donald Martino (1978) *Triple Concerto (to Milton Babbitt at 60)* for Bb Clarinet, Bass Clarinet and Contrabass Clarinet, with wind ensemble, percussion, piano and celesta.

Franz Schubert (1820) *Octet*

Germain Tailleferre (1957) *Sonata for Clarinet Solo*

Edgar Varese (1936) *Density 21.5 for flute solo*

Anton Webern (1934) *Concerto , Opus 24* (for Arnold Schoenberg's 60th Birthday) for

Wind ensemble and piano.

Anton Webern (1935) *Orchestration of J.S. Bach Ricercata*

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