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Disability and “Late Style” in Music

JOSEPH N. STRAUS

“Late style” is a long-standing aesthetic category in the arts.¹ In music, Beethoven stands as the preeminent example of a composer whose final works are generally understood to define a distinctive style; and beyond Beethoven, the stylistic development of most major composers has been traced in similar terms, with a body of works written relatively late in life that bear distinguishing features of aesthetic “lateness.” Music in a late style is presumed to have certain internal qualities (such as fragmentation, intimacy, nostalgia, or concision) and to be associated with certain external factors (such as the age of the composer, his or her proximity to and foreknowledge of death, a sense of authorial belatedness with respect to significant predecessors, or a feeling of having lived too late within a historical period).

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Upon closer inspection, it appears that many of these external factors are unreliably correlated with a musical style that might be described as late. The age at which a composer may write late works varies considerably. Mozart began composing late works with the three symphonies of 1788, when he was thirty-three years old, Schubert (the two piano trios, the final piano sonatas, the string quintet) when he was only twenty-nine. Even composers who are thought of as having lived

¹ Pertaining to music, see Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), which draws extensively on Theodor Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven” (1937), in *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564–68. Said’s book has been a catalyst for recent discussion of late style. See, for example, Karen Painter and Thomas Crow, eds., *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006). Other significant recent contributions are enumerated in table 1.

into old age often initiated their distinctive late style when relatively young, at least by modern standards: Bach was only forty-five when a creative lull in 1730 led to his adoption of then-current Italian operatic and *galant* styles and still in his early sixties when he wrote the canonic masterpieces of his final years; Beethoven was only forty-eight when he wrote the “Hammerklavier” Sonata, Op. 106; and Brahms was only fifty when he wrote his Third Symphony, often described as the gateway to his late style.² Conversely, some composers live to a very old age, by any standard, without ever adopting a late style. Among living composers, Milton Babbitt and George Perle, for example, are still productive in their nineties, but while their music continues to develop in interesting ways, I am not aware that anyone has identified a distinctive late style for either of them.

Late style might seem to be more reliably, even tautologically, correlated with proximity to a composer’s death, late works being simply those written late in the composer’s life, however long. The idea here appears to be that proximity to death brings special knowledge that informs the music and leads to a distinctive late style.³ But this is problematic too—people can die suddenly, and music written late in life may be written in ignorance of death’s proximity. People at any age are generally unaware in advance that they are going to die: the closeness of death is known only in retrospect and only to outsiders. Some composers certainly had vivid foreknowledge of their imminent mortality as they were writing their last works (Schubert and Bartók come immediately to mind), but such cases are not common. And whereas composers may have intimations of mortality at various times in their lives, perhaps more often as they age, there is little reason to assume any connection between the style of their music and the awareness of approaching death.⁴

For some composers, late style is associated with a sense of authorial belatedness, a feeling of having been born too late, when everything

² On Bach, see Robert Marshall, “Bach the Progressive: Observations on His Later Works,” *Musical Quarterly* 62 (1976): 313–57; on Brahms, see Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ See for example Scott Burnham, “Late Styles,” presented at “‘New Paths’: Robert Schumann, 1848–1856” (McGill University, 2006): “The word ‘late’ names various relations to time and commands a range of connotations that begin and end in an awareness of death. This awareness figures heavily into how we construe lateness and late works.” Similarly, see John Updike, “Late Works,” *The New Yorker*, August 7, 2006: “Yet, at least for this aging reader, works written late in a writer’s life retain a fascination. They exist, as do last words, where life edges into death, and perhaps have something uncanny to tell us.”

⁴ As observed in Vera Micznik, “The Farewell Story of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony,” *19th-Century Music* 20 (1996): 144–66. “The equation between late style and death depends on mythologizing techniques rather than stylistic arguments” (163).

worth saying has already been said.⁵ Brahms, for example, felt that his works were written in the shadow of Beethoven's achievement, and certainly a sense of anxious belatedness is bound up with the nostalgic, autumnal qualities so often noted in his music. But while anxiety with respect to the towering accomplishment of one's predecessors seems to have affected writers back almost to the invention of the written word, it has come much later to composers. Indeed, one might argue that Brahms was the first major composer to experience an "anxiety of influence."⁶ Earlier composers—the paradigmatic case is Beethoven—were perfectly capable of writing late-style music without any sense of Bloomian belatedness. Authorial belatedness and late style would seem to have only a tenuous, nominal relationship.

In some cases, a musical late style seems to be bound up with a composer's position within a historical period, or with the quality of the period itself. For some composers, the creation of a late style is related to their sense of having outlived their era, of being old-fashioned, left behind by changes in musical style to which they are unable or unwilling to adapt. That would seem to be a factor in the late styles of Bach and Brahms, among others. Furthermore, the historical period itself may be understood as being late in some sense, as in a *fin-de-siècle* or end-of-an-era. Certainly this is true of Brahms, whose sense of lateness is related to the "twilight of Viennese liberalism," as the title of a recent book suggests, and perhaps even more true of Strauss, whose late works were written as the world he had known was crumbling around him.⁷ But, as with authorial belatedness, historical belatedness seems if not irrelevant then at least easily separated from a late style. In short, there are composers whose late-style works are innovative, not old-fashioned, and who compose their late-style works in a historical period that is in no sense late.

⁵ The work of Harold Bloom is the principal source for discussions of authorial belatedness. See *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); and *Kaballah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1983). For Bloom-inspired discussions of music, see Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), and Kevin Korsyn, "Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence," *Music Analysis* 10 (1991): 3–72.

⁶ See J. Peter Burkholder, "Museum Pieces," *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 115–34, and idem, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," *19th-Century Music* 8 (1984): 75–83.

⁷ Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). On Strauss, see Bryan Gilliam, "Between Resignation and Hope: The Late Works of Richard Strauss," in Painter and Crow, *Late Thoughts*, 167–82.

A contextual factor more consistently correlated with late style than chronological age, proximity to death, or authorial or historical belatedness is the physical and mental condition of the composer. Composers who write in what is recognized as a late style often have shared experiences of nonnormative bodily or mental function, of disability,⁸ or of impairments resulting from disease or other causes. Examples include Bach (blindness), Beethoven (deafness), Schubert (syphilis), Schumann (mental health issues), Tchaikovsky (various health problems), Mahler (heart condition), Debussy (rectal cancer), Bartók (leukemia), Schoenberg (heart condition and other health problems), Stravinsky (stroke), and Copland (dementia). In such cases, it may well be that the experience of living with a disability is a more potent impetus for late-style composition than age, foreknowledge of death, authorial belatedness, or a sense of historical lateness.

Late-style music is understood as having certain distinctive attributes, often including bodily features (fractured, fissured, compact, or immobilized) and certain mental or emotional states (introverted, detached, serene, or irascible). It may be that in writing music describable in such terms, composers are inscribing their shared experience of disability, of bodies and minds that are not functioning in the normal way. In a related vein, it may be that listeners and critics, knowing of the composer's disabilities, read nonnormative physical and mental states into the music.⁹

Either way, I would argue that in the end *there may be nothing late about late style* in the sense of chronological age, the approach of life's end, or authorial or historical belatedness. Rather, late style may in some cases be more richly understood as *disability style*: a perspective composers may adopt at any age, often in response to a personal experience of disability. To the extent that composers find ways of writing their nonnormative bodies or inscribing their disabilities in their music, late style may be less about anticipating death than living with a disability, less about the future hypothetical than the present reality.

⁸ Disability, as a category of cultural analysis comparable to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and nationality, was introduced into musicological discourse in Joseph Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59 (2006): 113–84, and Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus, eds., *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Both contain extensive references to the recent, interdisciplinary field of disability studies. Recent work in disability studies shifts our attention from biology to culture. The biology of bodily difference may be the proper study for science and medicine, but the meanings that we attach to bodily difference are the proper study of humanists, including musicologists. The goal of disability studies is to theorize and historicize disability.

⁹ The role of disability in shaping both compositional and critical narratives is a central theme of Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal."

I am not advocating a simple one-to-one substitution of disability style for late style. Rather, I wish to enrich and inflect discussions of late style by adding disability to the mix. In discussions of late-style music, and in the music itself, disability has been hiding in plain sight, and my goal is to call attention to it.¹⁰ It is important also to recognize the performative nature of disability (and of lateness). One can be disabled (or late in some sense) without writing in what I am calling disability style (or late style), and conversely one can engage a disability style (or a late style) without being disabled (or late in any sense).¹¹ There is no disability essentialism operating here—only a sense that our understanding of late-style music, and of late style as an aesthetic category, may be illuminated by taking into account an artist's experience of disability.

Just as composers may have different experiences of disability, and may respond to those experiences in different ways, critics have identified a variety of characteristics of what they call late style. Table 1, essentially a database of nouns and adjectives, comprises an alphabetical listing of late-style characteristics drawn from a variety of sources. To a large extent, the qualities enumerated in this list can be distilled into six reasonably distinct categories or clusters of adjectives (see table 2).¹²

A list of this kind is necessarily crude, for not only do the categories tend to overlap to some extent, but they also occasionally seem to contradict one another: music written in a late style is difficult and simple, expressionless and intimately communicative, ahead of its time and retrospective in character, diffuse and compressed. Given this circumstance, it might be useful to understand late style as descriptive of a group of works that share at least some of these characteristics, but not necessarily all of them. We might wish to speak of late styles (in the plural), with variation depending on the composer and the work and, to

¹⁰ A similar sense that disability, and representations of disability, are simultaneously pervasive in our culture and yet largely ignored is a persistent theme in disability studies: "While other identities such as race, sexuality, and ethnicity have pointed to the dearth of images produced about them in the dominant literature, disability has experienced a plethora of representations in visual and discursive works. Consequently, disabled people's marginalization has occurred in the midst of a perpetual circulation of their images. Curiously, a social erasure has been performed even as a representational repertoire has evolved." David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.

¹¹ On the performative nature of disability, see Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 2006). Like gender and sexuality, disability may be understood to a significant extent as a performance rather than a fixed, biologically based identity.

¹² For each cluster I have selected one adjective to name the category and stand for the rest.

TABLE 1

An alphabetical list of late-style characteristics

Characteristic	Source
Absence of striving for wordly success ... unconcern about pleasing their audience.	Margaret Notley, <i>Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
Abstract, compact, and difficult to comprehend.	Walter Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America," <i>Musical Quarterly</i> 37 (1951): 469–89.
Alienated from the contemporary context.	Notley, <i>Lateness and Brahms</i> .
Anachronism, attenuation, fragmentation, abstraction, concision.	Anthony Barone, "Richard Wagner's 'Parsifal' and the Theory of Late Style," <i>Cambridge Opera Journal</i> 7 (1995): 37–54.
Apartness, exile, and anachronism.	Edward Said, <i>On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain</i> (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006).
Austere and refined, more motivic and contrapuntal, more economical in the use of material and texturally less rich.	Cliff Eisen and Stanley Sadie, "Mozart," in <i>New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , 2nd ed. (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000).
Barer, simpler, more attenuated.	Alexander Goehr, "The Ages of Man as Composer: What's Left to Be Done?" <i>The Musical Times</i> 140 (1999): 19–28.
Brevity and melodic simplicity.	Dean Simonton, "The Swan-Song Phenomenon: Last-Works Effects for 172 Classical Composers," <i>Psychology and Aging</i> 4 (1989): 42–47.
Caesuras, sudden discontinuities, fragments.	Theodor Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven" (1937), in <i>Essays on Music</i> , trans. Susan H. Gillespie, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564–68.
Catastrophes.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Contradictory features, of which the most immediately remarkable are complexity of texture and simplicity of intention, archaism and innovation.	Martin Cooper, <i>Beethoven: The Last Decade, 1817–1827</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
Compressed, miniaturized, rarefied.	Joseph Straus, <i>Stravinsky's Late Music</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
Concentration, sparseness, and a tendency to sacrifice surface attractions to structural ideas.	Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, <i>Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents</i> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).
Condensed to the point of close juxtaposition and even simultaneity.	Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America."
Contradictory, alienated relationship with the established social order.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .

Characteristic	Source
Direct and intimate mode of communication.	Joseph Kerman, "Beethoven," in <i>New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , 2nd ed. (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000).
Direct temporal juxtaposition.	Scott Burnham, "Late Styles." Paper presented at "'New Paths': Robert Schumann, 1848–1856" (McGill University, 2006).
Distillation of perception, dispensing with ornament, unencumbered and rarified poesis of essentials, annihilation of subjectivity.	Georg Simmel, "Das Abendmahl Leonardo Da Vincis," in <i>Zur Philosophie der Kunst: philosophische und kunst philosophische Aufsätze</i> (Potsdam, 1922).
Economy and concentration.	Christoph Wolff, <i>Bach: Essays on His Life and Music</i> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
Emancipation from the general style of the time, either by experimental breakthrough or by procedures from the remote past.	Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller, "Spätstilaspekte," in <i>Festschrift Arno Forchert zum 60. Geburtstag am 29. Dezember 1985</i> , ed. Gerhard Allroggen and Detlef Altenburg (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1986): 175–83.
Enigmatically incomprehensible.	Theodor Adorno, "Alienated Masterpiece: <i>The Missa Solemnis</i> " (1959), in <i>Essays on Music</i> , trans. Susan H. Gillespie, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press), 569–83.
Episodic, fragmentary, riven with absences and silences.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Expressionless, cast off the appearance of art, like a cipher, a subjectivity turned to stone.	Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven."
Fragmentary material, fragmentary manner, medley of fragments, fragmentary utterances, fragmentary quality: to expose as illusory the aesthetic wholeness of the musical language that he inherited from his predecessors.	John Daverio, "Manner, Tone, and Tendency in Beethoven's Chamber Music for Strings," in <i>The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven</i> , ed. Glenn Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147–64.
Fragmentary and hard to follow.	Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America."
Furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny.	Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven."
Hidden technical complexities.	Notley, <i>Lateness in Brahms</i> .
Immobilized and socially resistant.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Introspective and intimate.	Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America."
Introversion, reflectiveness, expressive complexity.	Notley, <i>Lateness in Brahms</i> .

Table 1 (*continued*)

Characteristic	Source
Irascible.	Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven."
Ironic, restrained or serenely detached.	Eisen and Sadie, "Mozart."
Isolated in its antithesis to society.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Laconic in its formal concentration and utter simplicity.	Otto Gombosi, "Béla Bartók (1881–1945)," <i>Musical Quarterly</i> 32 (1946): 1–11.
Lucidity, extreme clarity, sometimes to the point of tenuousness. Extreme refinement of its idiom.	Halsey Stevens, <i>The Life and Music of Béla Bartók</i> , 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
Mannerism.	Notley, <i>Lateness in Brahms</i> .
Nonharmonious, nonserene tension.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Pared down.	Burnham, "Late Styles."
Parataxis undergirds the juxtapositional impulse, the refusal to resort to hypotactic narrative strategies.	Burnham, "Late Styles."
Pare away the sensuality and energy and move nearer to an imaginary state of anonymity, to an apparent involuntary renunciation of the right of authorial control and the consequent freedom from the need to communicate meaning by logical argument.	Goehr, "The Ages of Man."
A preoccupation with abstraction, or with utterances that seem impersonal.	Burnham, "Late Styles."
Pithy, aphoristic, loosely structured.	Alan Lessem, "The Emigré Experience: Schoenberg in America," in <i>Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture</i> , ed. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 58–70.
Private striving and instability.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Private statements. His postwar music seems more preoccupied with personal—one might say existential—issues of nature, death, love, and self-realization.	Howard Pollack, <i>Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man</i> (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999).
Renewed sense of the elemental.	Burnham, "Late Styles."
Serene nostalgic introspection.	Notley, <i>Lateness in Brahms</i> .
Serenity.	Tibor Tallián, "Bartók's Reception in America, 1940–1945," trans. Peter Laki, in <i>Bartók and His World</i> , ed. Peter Laki (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 101–18.
Severe, formidable, monumental.	Robert Marshall, "Bach the Progressive: Observations on His Later Works," <i>Musical Quarterly</i> 62 (1976): 313–57.

Characteristic	Source
Simplicity and sentimentality.	Laura Tunbridge, <i>Schumann's Late Style</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.
Simplification and economy of language, greater use of abstract techniques, experimentation with form, dissociative processes, increased generic heterogeneity and mixture.	Vera Micznik, "The Farewell Story of Mahler's Ninth Symphony," <i>19th-Century Music</i> 20 (1996): 144–66.
Spirituality, abstraction, lyricism, transcendence.	Notley, <i>Lateness in Brahms</i> .
Sublimation, attenuation, abstraction, and concealment.	Straus, <i>Stravinsky's Late Music</i> .
Syntactic complexity, an increase in the degree of interrupted continuity and even fragmentation, reflecting a greater ambition and power of concentration.	Goehr, "The Ages of Man."
Tears and fissures.	Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven."
Translucent thinness.	John Updike, "Late Works," <i>The New Yorker</i> , August 7, 2006.
Unintegrated, even breathtaking juxtapositions. Some of Beethoven's contrasts seem to find the very boundaries of subjectivity.	Burnham, "Late Styles."
Unreconciled, uncoopted by a higher synthesis.	Said, <i>On Late Style</i> .
Withdrawal from the present, through a fascination with the past, a reaching back to older styles to make something new.	Burnham, "Late Styles."

a significant degree, on the temperament and interests of the critic.¹³ It would be unlikely for any single work to exhibit all these characteristics, but a late-style work would necessarily have most of them. Or we might simply assume that late-style works may involve internal contradictions, so that inherent tensions among these different characteristics are themselves a marker of stylistic lateness.

Metaphors for late style largely involve ascriptions to musical works of bodily or mental states. More specifically, the traits associated with late style are largely evocative of disabled or impaired bodies or minds and their failure to function in a normal way. Many of the characteristics of late style suggest nonnormative physical, mental, or emotional

¹³ Scott Burnham, "Late Styles." Burnham argues for just this sort of critical pluralism, as suggested by the title of his paper.

TABLE 2

Six metaphorical clusters of late-style characteristics

Introspective. Alienated, apart, detached, estranged, exiled, intimate, introverted, isolated, personal, private, refined, reflective, uncommunicative, withdrawn.

Austere. Anonymous, bare, elemental, expressionless, immobilized, impersonal, laconic, objective, pared down, rarified, restrained, simple, spare, stripped down.

Difficult. Abstract, bitter, catastrophic, complex, contradictory, contrapuntal (canonic), enigmatic, experimental, formidable, incomprehensible, intransigent, irascible, mannerist, technically advanced, tense, severe, socially resistant, spiny, unconcerned about pleasing.

Compressed. Compact, concentrated, concise, condensed, dense, distilled, economical, miniaturized, pithy, unadorned, undecorated, unencumbered, unornamented.

Fragmentary. Attenuated, discontinuous, episodic, fissured, furrowed, heterogeneous, interrupted, juxtaposed, loosely structured, nonharmonious, paratactic, ravaged, riven, torn, unintegrated, unreconciled.

Retrospective. Anachronistic, archaic, fascinated with the past, lucid, lyrical, naïve, nostalgic, sentimental, serene, simplified, spiritual, translucent.

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states, and even specific “disorders” such as autism (detached, estranged from reality, isolated, socially resistant), depression (expressionless, laconic, immobilized), schizophrenia (torn, fissured, nonharmonious, fragmentary), senile dementia (backward-looking, simplified), mobility impairments (immobilized), and general physical disintegration (fractured, furrowed, fissured).

Although criticism that engages such a vocabulary might be dismissed as pathologizing a style, treating it as deviant and abnormal with respect to the mature style that precedes it and thus practicing criticism as a form of diagnosis, I would prefer to see a deeper truth in these metaphors: *late-style works are those that represent nonnormative mental and bodily states*. The disabilities of their composers are refracted into a general sense of nonnormative bodily or mental function and inscribed in their music. That inscription then gives rise to the aesthetic category of late style. Both the music and the discourse about it thus situate disability at the center of late style.

To illustrate this contention, I offer disability-inflected readings of four late-style works by four twentieth-century modernist composers: Stravinsky, *Requiem Canticles*; Schoenberg, String Trio; Bartók, Third Piano Concerto; and Copland, *Night Thoughts*. Biographical circumstances link all four works explicitly with deteriorating bodily conditions, and thus I would argue that the works themselves and the critical discourse that surrounds them may be understood at least partially in terms of the disabled physical and mental states of the composers. My

principal goal is not so much to show that the selected compositions are about disability as to show how the very aspects of these pieces that might otherwise be understood as manifestations of a late style can be better understood in relation to disability.

* * *

Requiem Canticles (1966) was Stravinsky's last major composition. Written at a time of deteriorating health, it is self-evidently a personal work, as Stravinsky's wife Vera has confirmed: "*He and we* knew he was writing it for himself."¹⁴ Robert Craft has suggested that it was designed as a memorial to friends recently deceased: "The sketch book of the *Requiem Canticles* is also a necrology of friends who died during its composition. The composer once referred to these pasted-in obituaries as a 'practical commentary.' Each movement seems to relate to an individual death, and though Stravinsky denies that it really does, the framing of his musical thoughts by the graves of friends (that touching cross for Giacometti) exposes an almost unbearably personal glimpse of his mind."¹⁵

The work is deeply engaged with all six metaphorical markers of late style. First, it is introspective and emotionally restrained. Its small instrumental forces, used often in chamber-music fashion, give it an intimate, private aspect, particularly in comparison with other requiem masses in the literature. Second, it is austere—as radically stripped down and emotionally undemonstrative as anything Stravinsky ever wrote. Third, it is difficult in its advanced musical language, which involves Stravinsky's own distinctive adaptation of the twelve-tone methods of Schoenberg, Webern, and Krenek. And despite many homophonic, chorale-like passages, the music is deeply contrapuntal and canonic, down to the basic construction of the "rotational arrays" on which it is based.¹⁶ Fourth, it is highly compressed, concise, and economical. There is no filler, no ornamentation—every detail seems to carry structural weight. The text is delivered without repetition, and the whole work, comprising nine brief movements, takes less than fifteen

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¹⁴ Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship 1948–1971*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 376–77.

¹⁵ Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship*, 309. See also Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky, The Second Exile: France and America, 1934–1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 523: "Like the *Intrositus*, but unlike his other memorial pieces, Stravinsky wrote [*Requiem Canticles*] in a specifically elegiac spirit, pasting into the sketchbook as he went along obituaries of friends who died during its composition—an extraordinary reversal of his habitual refusal to associate his work with current events or feelings."

¹⁶ For a description of Stravinsky's rotational arrays and other features of his late serial music, see Joseph Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

minutes to perform. Fifth, there is a pronounced sense of fragmentation, of a musical whole that has been blown into discrete bits, barely held together. Stravinsky's music, both early and late, often gives the impression of an assemblage of discrete units. It sounds, in many cases, as though separate textural blocks have been cut out and pasted together, and that is sometimes literally true.¹⁷ But the fragmentation is particularly intense in *Requiem Canticles*, and is reinforced by two other recurring characteristics of Stravinsky's style, particularly in his late music: extended silences and musical "stuttering," i.e., the oscillation between two melodic notes or two harmonies. Sixth, it has a distinctly retrospective character in several respects. As Taruskin notes, in its evocation of tolling bells, religious chorales, and Russian Orthodox liturgical music, "the piece fairly reeks with nostalgia."¹⁸ The narrative arc of the work, and its expressive impact, depend on the contrast between formations with and without traditional diatonic reference. Although the work is strictly twelve-tone in conception—every note, without exception, can be traced to underlying twelve-tone arrays—it nonetheless seems at times to recall a more traditionally consonant, diatonic state.

All six of these late-style characteristics may be identified with the increasingly difficult physical circumstances of Stravinsky's old age.¹⁹ The last two in particular—fragmentation and retrospection—bear a particularly important relationship to Stravinsky's bodily condition. The fragmented musical surface of *Requiem Canticles*, with its isolated textural blocks, may be heard as a metaphorical recreation of physical disintegration, of a body fracturing and losing its organic wholeness. The retrospective qualities of the music, particularly at the beginning and end, give a sense of a descent into a world of struggle, of physical obstacles, impediments, and impairments, and a partial and ambiguous attempt at recuperation through a return to a prior normal state.

¹⁷ Nicholas Nabokov, *Old Friends and New Music* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), 152. Nabokov quotes Stravinsky's account of using scissors and paste in composing *Orpheus*. This feature of Stravinsky's music has been widely acknowledged. See for example Pieter Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), where the phenomenon, termed "block juxtaposition," is identified as a "peculiarly Stravinskian conception of form" (454). Richard Taruskin, in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), calls this feature "Drobnost," defined as "splinteredness; the quality of being formally disunified, a sum-of-parts" (1677). Taruskin considers "Drobnost" one of Stravinsky's most basic style characteristics.

¹⁸ Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1650.

¹⁹ "Like other artists in their eighties who continue to create (and not just to produce), Stravinsky's sense of isolation increased, the ferocity of his impatience grew, and his *saeva indignatio* kindled more quickly. Like that of some others, too, his art of these years is marked by a greater concentration—spareness, severity—and by a tendency to sacrifice surface attractions to structural ideas." V. Stravinsky and Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 486.

EXAMPLE 1. Stravinsky, *Requiem Canticles*, Prelude, mm. 1–10: a self-contained block with a “stuttering” melody and a diatonic accompaniment. Reprinted by permission.

The musical score is for the Prelude of *Requiem Canticles*, measures 1–10. It is a self-contained block with a “stuttering” melody and a diatonic accompaniment. The score is for Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncelli, and Cello. The tempo is marked *non f ma ben marc.* and the dynamics are *f* and *ma ben marc.*. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes measures 1–7, and the second system includes measures 8–10. The score is annotated with “F”, “C-B”, and “A” below the first system, and “D” below the second system. The score is also annotated with “stutter” above measure 1, and “come sopra” above measure 9. The score is reprinted by permission.

Example 1 contains the opening measures of the Prelude to *Requiem Canticles*. The appearance of the score vividly represents the internal fragmentation of the musical discourse: instrumental parts are included only when they actually sound (in contrast to traditional score notation which provides measures of rest when an instrumental part is silent). The only exception is when all parts are silent, as in measure 8. Here Stravinsky notates a measure of rest in the cello, thus delimiting by silence this discrete textural block. The block is thus separated by

silence from what comes later, just as the individual lines within it are segregated and stratified by silences.

An accompanying chord in steady sixteenth notes is built up, one note at a time: F–C–B–A. The texture is then reduced to A alone, which moves to D at the end of the passage.²⁰ The five notes encompassed are obviously diatonic in character and might suggest a Phrygian scale on F. One of the things that *Requiem Canticles* is about is an attempt to re-attempt at the end the simple, open, white-note quality of this beginning.

The melody offers significant contrast, tracing six different notes grouped in pairs: A#–C, D–A, G–C#.²¹ The first of those pairs involves a three-fold repetition of the kind Stravinsky describes as a “stutter,” by which he means the alternation of two pitches either a semitone or a whole tone apart: “two reiterated notes [which] are a melodic-rhythmic stutter characteristic of my speech from *Les Noces* to the *Concerto in D*, and earlier and later as well—a lifelong affliction, in fact.”²² This melodic gesture is often associated with grief, or with a kind of somber muteness in the face of death.

Here it seems to convey a sense of self-enclosure, of inescapable circularity, of forced acquiescence to an incomprehensible fate. The melodic stutter, with its ascending whole tone, is reinforced by a similar harmonic stutter: the first harmony of the passage [B, C, F] is transposed up a whole tone to become the last harmony of the passage [C#, D, G]. The harmonic and melodic stutters reinforce the sense of this passage as a discrete block, a fragment separated by silence from other fragments.

In all of this, we have a sense of a physical body that is not functioning normally. The stutter in Stravinsky’s music, as in real life, suggests an inability to speak fluently.²³ That apparent disfluency renders the

²⁰ The first hexachord of the P-form of the series is F–C–B–A–A#–D. The accompanying chord thus “arpeggiates” this serial hexachord, with the A# omitted.

²¹ Stravinsky uses “rotational arrays” as the source of virtually all the pitch material in *Requiem Canticles*. Within those arrays, this melodic hexachord (A#–C–D–A–G–C#) is the second hexachord of the P-form of the series (C#–D#–G#–F#–E–G), rotated to start on its sixth note (G–C#–D#–G#–F#–E–G), transposed to start on C# (C#–G–A–D–C–A#), and played in retrograde.

²² Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 58. Stravinsky makes this observation with reference to the alternation of the notes D and E in the vocal line of *Elegy for J. F. K.* to set the words “The Heavens are silent.” Van den Toorn, *The Music of Stravinsky*, relates the “melodic-rhythmic stutter” to Stravinsky’s persistent predilection for musical oscillations of all kinds: “The ‘two reiterated notes’ are ultimately a form of back-and-forth oscillation; and in this respect they may indeed be found reaching into every crevice of melodic, rhythmic, formal, or pitch-relational matter” (440). Norbert Jers, *Igor Strawinskys späte Zwölftonwerke (1958–1966)* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1976), contains a useful list and discussion of melodic stutters in Stravinsky’s late music (167–69).

²³ For consideration of the musical implications of stuttering as a disability, see Daniel Goldmark, “Stuttering in American Popular Song, 1890–1930,” in *Sounding Off*:

melody static, fixed in place, and enhances the isolation of the musical fragment of which it is part. And the fragmentation, of lines within the textural block and of the textural block in relation to other blocks, also suggests an immobilized physical body that is falling to pieces. To some extent, the rest of *Requiem Canticles* can be understood to be about an effort, ultimately only partially successful, to return to the unimpaired diatonicism of this opening, transcend the pervasive fragmentation, and regain a sense of physical wholeness.

Example 2 reprints in its entirety the Postlude from *Requiem Canticles* in Stravinsky's draft score.²⁴ The movement consists of three distinct and separately evolving strands. The first involves three twelve-chord chorales, scored for celeste, campane, and vibraphone. The second places five widely spaced chords before, between, and after the chorales. These chords, scored for flutes, piano, harp, and French horn, have been dubbed "chords of death."²⁵ The third consists of long sustained notes in the French horn. The three strands are distinguished by texture and instrumentation, and they are usually separated by silences, the longest and most profoundly expressive Stravinsky ever wrote. As in the Prelude, the combination of textural stratification and isolation of textural blocks reinforced by silences creates a sense of extreme fragmentation. This is music that moves fitfully, haltingly.

The fitful, halting motions can be understood as moving in a particular direction, namely toward a state of relative clarity and diatonicity. This movement is particularly evident in the progression of the five so-called chords of death. The final chord of the progression has F as its bass, a note that simultaneously completes the F-minor arpeggiation in Horn 1 that spans the Postlude and harks back to the first note of the entire work (refer back to ex. 1). The final chord also embeds the dyad B $\flat$ –C, which recalls the first two melodic notes of *Requiem Canticles*, the A $\sharp$ –C in the solo violin.²⁶ The complete final chord, F–B $\flat$ –C–D $\flat$, is a diatonic subset (possibly suggesting F minor). One can thus

Theorizing Disability in Music, ed. Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus (New York: Routledge, 2006): 75–90, and Andrew Oster, "Melisma as Malady: Cavalli's *Il Giasone* (1649) and Opera's Earliest Stuttering Role," in *Sounding Off*, 157–72.

²⁴ Reprinted in Robert Craft, *A Stravinsky Scrapbook* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 132.

²⁵ The term "chord of death" comes from Craft, in his description of a performance of the *Requiem Canticles* at Stravinsky's own funeral. He describes the structure of the Postlude as "the chord of Death, followed by silence, the tolling of bells, and again silence, all thrice repeated, then the three final chords of Death alone" (Craft, *Chronicle of a Friendship*, 415).

²⁶ According to Craft, this pair of notes is a common mourning interval in Stravinsky's music: "On April 17 [1968], he began to compose an extra instrumental prelude to the *Requiem Canticles*, for a performance of the work in memory of Dr. Martin Luther

EXAMPLE 2. Stravinsky, *Requiem Canticles*, Postlude. Reprinted by permission.

imagine the progression of the five chords of death as leading from large, complex, chromatic chords of five, six, seven, or eight different notes, to this relatively simple diatonic conclusion—a process of gradual simplification and clarification. In its relative clarity, simplicity, and diatonicity, the end of the Postlude thus returns us to something like the beginning of the Prelude, thereby tracing a narrative trajectory that descends to a darkly rich chromatic night before emerging into a bright diatonic day.²⁷

King. He started with the first two notes of the violin solo in the *Canticles*, the interval that appears in so much of his mourning music and the same notes that he played on the piano when he touched the instrument for the first time after his illness. The prelude was abandoned when he saw that it could not be completed in time for the May 2 performance date.” Craft, *Chronicle of a Friendship*, 346. A#–C appears frequently in *Requiem Canticles* and *Elegy for J. F. K.* It is also a recurring segment in the serial charts for *Abraham and Isaac*, but it is not used as a melodic stutter or an obvious emblem of mourning in that work. It is unclear which other works Craft may have had in mind.

²⁷ This sense of an awakening into death recalls the scene from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* in which Prince Andrei is lying mortally wounded on his deathbed and dreams of his own death: “It comes in, and it is death. And Prince Andrei died. But in the same instant that he died, Prince Andrei remembered that he was asleep, and in the same instant

The final chord also represents a convergence of the three distinct textural strands in which all three instrumental groups contribute. There is a sense here, however brief, that the extreme fragmentation has been overcome and a long-lost feeling of wholeness has been restored. Like the move toward the diatonic, however, the impression of wholeness restored, of wounds closed and healed, is fleeting and ambiguous. If one imagines the extreme fragmentation of this music, reinforced by stuttering and silence, as emblematic of a physical body that is no longer functioning normally, then there can be little comfort in this ending. What we have here is not so much a cure narrative, so common in artistic representations of disability, but rather a narrative of ambivalent acceptance of a disabled condition. From this point of view, features of the music that might be recognized as markers of a late style can be understood instead as expressions of and responses to disability—to the breakdown of a physical body, of the composer's own body.

* * *

Schoenberg wrote his String Trio in the fall of 1946. At the time of its composition, Schoenberg was seventy-two years old, in increasingly poor health, living in somewhat straitened economic circumstances, and still an outsider in his adopted country. The work is commonly understood as typical of Schoenberg's late style, with characteristics that bring it into close conformity with late-style compositions generally.

First, the String Trio has a quality of intimacy and introspection. In part, this is due simply to the medium—chamber music almost inevitably entails a sense of private, personal utterance—but also to the vividness and directness of its rhetoric. The secondary literature on the work has emphasized its private, inner-directed quality as emblematic of Schoenberg's late style.²⁸ The literature also points frequently to other familiar

that he died, he made an effort with himself and woke up. 'Yes, that was death. I died—I woke up. Yes, death is an awakening.' Clarity suddenly came to his soul, and the curtain that until then had concealed the unknown was raised before his inner gaze. He felt the release of a force that previously had been as if bound in him and that strange lightness which from then on did not leave him." Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 985.

²⁸ Alan Lessem, "The Emigré Experience: Schoenberg in America," in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. Julianne Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67. "In late works such as the String Trio and the Fantasy for Violin with piano accompaniment, we find a retreat from the greater classicizing ambition of the first mature twelve-tone works and a return to the pithy, aphoristic, loosely structured manner of pre-World War I expressionism." Similarly, see Walter Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America," *Musical Quarterly* 37 (1951): 481–82. "The String Trio marks the beginning of Schoenberg's last phase, during which he wrote more introspectively and intimately than before. Whereas the *Ode to Napoleon* and the Variations for Band seem to have been dedicated to a more

late-style characteristics, including the difficulty of comprehension that arises from extreme compression.²⁹

Beyond its intimacy, compression, and difficulty, the String Trio has been widely noted for its retrospective character. Specifically, it overtly engages aspects of traditional tonality in ways that Schoenberg's mature style (the pre-late music) generally avoids.³⁰ In addition to its tonal reminiscences, the Trio is retrospective in another sense. It encompasses five parts, with three "Principal Sections" separated by two "Episodes," the last Principal Section a modified recapitulation of the first. Nearly literal recapitulations of this kind are virtually unknown in Schoenberg's music and, indeed, Schoenberg argued against them.³¹ The programmatic justification and significance of this anomaly will be discussed below.

general public, and have a more direct appeal, these last compositions are more abstract, compact, and difficult to comprehend. One looks in vain for the clear thematic construction of the earlier twelve-tone works—here the ideas are more fragmentary and hard to follow, owing to Schoenberg's emphasis upon brevity, requiring the condensation of ideas to the point of close juxtaposition and even simultaneity."

²⁹ Ethan Haimo, "The Late Twelve-Tone Compositions," in *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion*, ed. Walter Bailey (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 168–69. "The Trio has long been regarded as one of the most complicated of Schoenberg's twelve-tone works. To the listener, particularly the first-time listener, the surface of the Trio presents numerous challenges to easy comprehensibility. . . . At the same time, the Trio has challenged many theorists, who have found its twelve-tone structures difficult to follow."

³⁰ Haimo, "The Late Twelve-tone Compositions," 174–75. "Although its references to tonal elements are far more restrained than those of the Ode [to Napoleon], the Trio is by no means devoid of such references. And certainly by comparison with the twelve-tone works of the 1930s, where tonal references were studiously avoided, the Trio is quite obvious in its willingness to employ tonal elements. . . . Although the Trio is unique, it shares many essential characteristics with other of Schoenberg's late twelve-tone works: the treatment of the source hexachord as the fundamental building block of musical structure, the pervasive use of symmetrical relationships, both pitch and order number, and the unabashed willingness to try to interleave elements of tonal syntax into the context of a twelve-tone serial composition." Similarly, see Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Viking, 1975), 95. "Like many of his later works, [the Trio] is based on a series that permits the introduction of the perfect triads associated with tonality, although it avoids any implication of the harmonic function of tonality. Schoenberg uses these perfect triads for what might be called their latent aspects of sweetness and repose." See also Carl Dahlhaus, "Schoenberg's Late Works," in *Schoenberg and the New Music: Essays by Carl Dahlhaus*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 156–68. "The late works, which were written in the American period and which marked a partial return to tonality" (158).

³¹ See Walter Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 156, which offers a pertinent account by Leonard Stein, Schoenberg's longtime assistant. "Perhaps the most significant of Stein's reminiscences concerns the very unusual recapitulation section of the Trio. Part Three of the work is a nearly literal recapitulation of earlier portions of the composition, a procedure which Schoenberg had spoken out against in his writings and generally avoided in his own compositions. Stein recalls that Schoenberg had often pointed out the lack of an exact recapitulation in the Second Chamber Symphony to his students, citing as a reason the axiom that 'once you have lived your life you need not go back and live it again.'"

For now, it suffices to observe that the recapitulation enhances the retrospective quality of a work that is concerned with recalling not only older tonal prototypes but also part of itself.

The late-style characteristic most dramatically in evidence is that of fragmentation; and as Cherlin observes, extreme fragmentation is bound up with the work's compressed and retrospective qualities:

The Trio is extraordinary in the degree to which extreme contrasts and even apparent *non sequiturs* seem to fracture its surface. The music is full of abrupt and striking changes of texture and affect as musical ideas are broken off, interrupted by other ideas that are themselves interrupted in turn. But the discontinuities of the work's surface go beyond the juxtaposition of conflicting affects, disruptions, and *non sequiturs*. In surprising ways the Trio seems alternately to remember and then abandon the musical languages of its historical antecedents. Passages that employ harsh, strident dissonance give way to ones that evoke the sweetness of tonality, only to reemerge and begin the process again.³²

In all of these ways, then—introspection, compression, difficulty, retrospection, and fragmentation—the String Trio conforms to what is generally thought of as late style. One might imagine relating these traits to Schoenberg's life and circumstances—his advancing age, his sense of alienation in America, his nostalgia for the musical past—but a readier explanation lies close to hand. The String Trio is essentially a programmatic work, and the program it embodies involves the story of what Schoenberg referred to as his *Todesfall* (decease), his near-death experience on August 2, 1946, and subsequent recovery. The late-style characteristics serve to express this dramatic program.

In this sense, the music is not so much about lateness, in any sense, as it is about an experience of disability. Schoenberg not only represents disability programmatically in the music but also recreates musically the most common disability narrative, namely the cure narrative. In Western literature since the late eighteenth century, narratives that engage disability typically move from a state of health or normality, through a state of illness or abnormality, to a final state of health or

³² Michael Cherlin, "Memory and Rhetorical Trope in Schoenberg's String Trio," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 559. Cherlin brings Beethoven into the picture: "Its fractured rhetoric, halting broken phrases, and seeming inability to settle into an even relatively stable musical space do have a predecessor in Beethoven. . . . It is in his late works that this particular aspect of Beethovenian rhetoric becomes exaggerated. . . . And of course the association of these works with grave illness toward the end of the composer's life is well known" (581). As Cherlin suggests, the late styles of Beethoven and Schoenberg are associated with each other and with their shared experience of disability.

normality regained.³³ The narrative in Schoenberg's String Trio begins somewhere in the middle of this larger trajectory but strongly emphasizes the sense of restoration at its end.

The following is a chronological account of the Schoenberg's *Todesfall*.³⁴ On August 2, 1946, a Dr. Waitzfelder arrived at Schoenberg's house in Los Angeles late in the morning. He examined Schoenberg and prescribed a pill for Schoenberg's asthma, a new drug called Benzedrine, an amphetamine. During lunch, Schoenberg felt extremely tired, and his wife Gertrude put him to bed where he slept until 9:30 p.m. He then awoke suddenly "with an extremely unpleasant feeling, but without definite pain" and hurried to his armchair. He started to feel worse—"A very heavy pain started at once in my whole body, especially in the chest and around the heart"—and had his wife call Leonard Stein.³⁵ Stein arrived shortly thereafter with a Dr. Lloyd Jones. Jones determined that Schoenberg was not having a heart attack but nonetheless administered an injection of Dilaudid, a pain medication. In Schoenberg's words, "It worked very quickly. The pain went away. Then I must have lost consciousness. . . . After ten minutes I lost consciousness, had no heart beat or pulse and stopped breathing. In other words, I was practically dead."

Jones, Stein, and Schoenberg's wife carried him to bed where he lay unconscious for several hours. During the period of unconsciousness, Schoenberg was delirious. According to his wife's description, "We worked with adrenalin, oxygen and hot water bottles till five in the

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³³ Lennard Davis's description of the central role of disability in shaping the underlying plot of the novel is a propos here: "Plot, in the novel, is really more a device to turn what is perceived as the average, ordinary milieu into an abnormal one. Plot functions in the novel, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by temporarily deforming or disabling the fantasy of nation, social class, and gender behaviors that are constructed as norms. The *telos* of plot aims then to return the protagonists to this norm by the end of the novel. . . . In this sense, the identify of the novel revolves around a simple plot. The situation had been normal, it became abnormal, and by the end of the novel, the normality, or some variant of it, was restored. . . . The novel as a form relies on cure as a narrative technique. . . . The process of narrative, then, serves to wound identity—whether individual, bourgeois, national, gendered, racialized, or cultural. Readers read so that they can experience this wound vicariously, so they can imagine the dissolution of the norms under which they are expected to labor. . . . At the same time, the reader can rejoice in the inevitable return to the comfort of bourgeois norms. . . . The alterity presented by disability is shocking to the liberal, ableist sensibility, and so narratives involving disability always yearn toward the cure, the neutralizing of the disability." Lennard Davis, "Identity Politics, Disability, and Culture," in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. Gary Albrecht, Katherine Seelman, and Michael Bury (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 542.

³⁴ Schoenberg offered several different accounts of the experience, and additional details were provided by his wife and students. Relevant documents are reprinted in Joseph Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), and Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*.

³⁵ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader*, 348.

morning. In the early morning things had gone so far that he wanted to get up. He didn't know anything about his whole collapse. The cardiogram showed an irregular rhythm but no heart attack."³⁶

Schoenberg himself had no personal memory of the delirium or the efforts made on his behalf while he was unconscious. When he finally regained consciousness in the morning of the next day, he reported, "The first thing I remember was that a man with coal-black hair was bending over me and making every effort to feed me something. . . . It was Gene, the male nurse. An enormous person, a former boxer, who could pick me up and put me down again like a sofa cushion."

It took Schoenberg roughly three weeks to recover from this incident, during which time he stayed upstairs in his bedroom. Doctors attended him there, and among other treatments administered numerous injections of penicillin. During this period of convalescence, Schoenberg wrote the bulk of his String Trio. The final section, the modified recapitulation mentioned above, was completed when he finally felt well enough to return to his studio downstairs.

Schoenberg referred to the Trio as a " 'humorous' representation of my sickness"³⁷ and affirmed in conversations with students and friends that it embodied his experience of illness, near-death, and recovery. The best-known account of the link between the Trio and the *Todesfall* is Thomas Mann's:

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[Schoenberg] told me about the new trio he had just completed, and about the experiences he had secretly woven into the composition—experiences of which the work was a kind of fruit. He had, he said, represented his illness and medical treatment in the music, including even the male nurses and all the other oddities of American hospitals.³⁸

Schoenberg's students Hanns Eisler, Leonard Stein, and Adolf Weiss all reported that Schoenberg claimed to have represented aspects of his illness and recovery in the String Trio.³⁹ The precise nature of the relationship between the illness and the music, however, is a matter of considerable confusion and contradiction. The only programmatic elements on which there is general agreement is that certain loud chords

³⁶ It should be emphasized that here and throughout his accounts of the episode, Schoenberg affirms that whatever the source of his sudden illness, it was not a heart attack. The secondary literature nonetheless virtually always assumes a heart attack. It seems more likely that Schoenberg was in fact experiencing a strong reaction to the Dilaudid.

³⁷ Schoenberg, "My Fatality," quoted in Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 152.

³⁸ Mann's account is cited in Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 155.

³⁹ See Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 154–56, and Rubsamen, "Schoenberg in America."

represent injections of penicillin⁴⁰ and, much more important, that the fragmentary nature of the musical discourse reflects the agitated state of Schoenberg's mind, including his unconscious delirium:

According to Stein, Schoenberg explained the many juxtapositions of unlike material within the Trio as reflections of the delirium which the composer suffered during parts of his illness. Thus, the seemingly fragmentary nature of the Trio's material represents the experience of time and events as perceived from a semiconscious or highly sedated state. These unusual juxtapositions also represent, as reported by Rubsamen, the alternate phases of "pain and suffering" and "peace and repose" that Schoenberg experienced.⁴¹

The opening music of the Trio is highly agitated and fragmented (see ex. 3). I imagine this music representing the onset of Schoenberg's illness, the moment when he awakens suddenly after a long rest, realizes he is unwell, and staggers to his armchair amid growing confusion and alarm. The extreme fragmentation of the musical surface and the difficulties of parsing it coherently, those traditional markers of late style, may thus be understood in relation to Schoenberg's illness and the agitated, confused mental state it produces.

Toward the end of Part 1, the anguish seems to subside—the music becomes quieter and more continuous, and the twelve-tone structures are expressed with relative clarity. I imagine that this change of mood reflects the confidence and relative calm inspired by the arrival of Dr. Jones, who assures Schoenberg that he has not had a heart attack. At some point, possibly represented by the pizzicato chord in measure 51, the last measure of Part 1, Dr. Jones administers the injection of Dilaudid, and Schoenberg falls unconscious (see ex. 4).

This is a moment of unusual tranquility and sweetness, with an explicit reference to an A-major triad, and possibly to the key of A major.⁴² The sudden simplification of the musical texture and the tonal reminiscence, both traditional markers of late-style music, can be understood here in relation to the composer's mental state, which has moved from agitation and anguish to profound peace.

Indeed, one can trace a narrative journey across the Trio as a whole from catastrophic, incapacitating illness, through convalescence, to

⁴⁰ "Another subjective feature that Stein remembers is the presence of the penicillin injections, which are represented in the score by loud and striking passages which tend to interrupt calmer sections." Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 156–57.

⁴¹ Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 156–57.

⁴² Hans Keller, "Principles of Composition," *The Score* 26/27 (1960). Keller refers to this moment as "an outbreak of tonality," describing the passage in A major, and referring to the D# as "a leading-note to the dominant" (216–17). Cherlin, in "Memory and Rhetorical Trope," also talks about yearning quality of D# in this context.

EXAMPLE 3. Schoenberg, String Trio, opening. Reprinted by permission.

"On August 2, 1946, Dr. Waltzfelder examined me and prescribed a pill, something 'new' that had only just come out. I do not recall. I took one immediately, but soon afterward, while still at lunch, suddenly I became extremely sleepy, so that I had to put my head down. Trude put me to bed and I slept until 9:30. Then I awoke with a terrible pain in my chest. I sprang from the bed and sat down on my armchair. (I must correct this, for I just remember that it was different: I awoke with an extremely unpleasant feeling, but without a definite pain, but I hurried in spite of it (!) to my armchair.) I became continually worse."

Violin

Viola

Cello

1 $\text{♩} = 60$

quasi trill simile

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

poco a poco accel. e cresc. -

col legno battuto - - - [- - -] $\text{♩} = 90$

arco

[(arco!)]

col legno battuto - - - arco

(pp)

EXAMPLE 4. Schoenberg, String Trio, end of Part 1 and beginning of the First Episode. Reprinted by permission.

"We called doctors, but none was available. Thus I insisted that Leonard Stein be called so that he could provide a doctor. It was not long before he came himself with Dr. Lloyd Jones (who has treated me ever since). . . . I thought I had had a heart attack, but he did not find my heart to be the cause. He gave me an injection of Dilaudid, in order to ease my pain. This helped instantly; but after ten minutes I lost consciousness, had no heartbeat or pulse and stopped breathing. In other words, I was practically dead."

39

♩ : 120

41 *P* 42 43

3 4 *sf* *P* 1 2

26

♩ : 133

Poco meno mosso ♩ : 60

44 *P*

2 2 *ppp*

ponticello; *pizz*

pp *ppp* *pp* *(pp)*

1st EPISODE

52 56 57 58

P (arco) *p dolce* *mf* *Meno mosso* ♩ : 60

4 4 *mf*

p dolce *mf*

health restored. In twelve-tone terms, the journey is realized as a process of disambiguation—the twelve-tone structure is progressively clarified over the course of the work with one essential element, an unusual eighteen-note row, receiving unambiguous melodic presentation only at the very end.⁴³ In relation to Schoenberg's illness, the work thus exemplifies a cure narrative, a familiar trope in artistic representations of disability.

This narrative journey culminates in the modified recapitulation with which the work ends. Stein relates the recapitulation explicitly to the restoration of Schoenberg's health:

Part three of the work is a nearly literal recapitulation of earlier portions of the composition, a procedure which Schoenberg had spoken out against in his writings and generally avoided in his own compositions. . . . In the case of the Trio, after the tormented and confused depiction of the portion of his life found in the first section of the work, Schoenberg felt justified in going back and "reliving" that portion with the calmness and perspective of good health. Significantly enough, Schoenberg composed the bulk of the work while he was still too ill to leave his bedroom. It was not until he reached part three of the Trio, the recapitulation, that he was able to "come downstairs" to his regular workroom.⁴⁴

27

The Trio ends gently, with a final reminiscence of the A-C#-D# idea from the beginning of the first Episode (see ex. 5). In its sense of intimacy, heightened by the singing, cantabile style, its clarity and simplicity, and its recall of traditional tonal materials, this concluding music is emblematic of late style generally and of Schoenberg's late style specifically. In the context of the allusions to Schoenberg's illness, and the narrative trajectory of health lost and then restored, the concluding music may speak more of Schoenberg's bodily condition than of lateness in any sense.

* * *

As with Schoenberg, Bartók's late-period music was composed in exile in America amid financial insecurity and increasingly poor

⁴³ This is the central contention of Jack Boss, *The Music of Arnold Schoenberg* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Bailey, *Programmatic Elements*, 156–57. Similarly, see Arnold Whittall, "Schoenberg since 1951: Overlapping Opposites," *The Musical Times* 142 (2001): 16. "To constrain Part 3's progression to a 'death-rebirth' scenario would be crude in the extreme, yet the fact that the music stems from, and also represents, Schoenberg's being brought back to life after a heart attack, gives particularly intensity to the point at which the two types of material [turbulent vs. tranquil] are first 'confused.'"

EXAMPLE 5. Schoenberg, String Trio, end of the work. Reprinted by permission.

Stein: "After the tormented and confused depiction of the portion of his life found in the first section of the work, Schoenberg felt justified in going back and 'reliving' that portion with the calmness and perspective of good health. Significantly enough, Schoenberg composed the bulk of the work while he was still too ill to leave his bedroom. It was not until he reached part three of the Trio, the recapitulation, that he was able to 'come downstairs' to his regular workroom."

285 286

con sordini

pizz. arco (8) (4) (8) (4)

p cantabile

287

pizz. arco (8) (4) (8) (4) allarg. poco a poco -

con sordini

289 290

arco p dim. dim. p dim. (-)

291

con sordini

molto rit. e dim.

EMMENTHAL: W. R. B.

health.⁴⁵ Bartók settled in New York in October 1940, near the tail end of the influx of increasingly desperate émigrés and refugees from war-torn Europe. During his American years, cut short by his death in 1945 at the age of sixty-four, he supported himself primarily through ethnographical work at Columbia University and concert tours as a pianist or duo-pianist (with his wife). His financial situation was precarious and a source of constant anxiety.⁴⁶ More serious, Bartók's health began to deteriorate not long after his arrival. He was diagnosed with leukemia in April 1942 and the disease reached a critical stage in February 1943, when Bartók was hospitalized for a time.⁴⁷

During his difficult American years, Bartók composed only four works: Concerto for Orchestra (1943), Sonata for Solo Violin (1944), Piano Concerto No. 3 (1945), and Viola Concerto (1945). The Concerto for Orchestra was written in summer 1943 in a sanatorium at Saranac Lake, where Bartók was attempting to recuperate and was experiencing somewhat better health. The Sonata for Solo Violin was written in another sanatorium, this one in Asheville, North Carolina, again during a period of physical improvement. The Piano Concerto No. 3 and Viola Concerto were written simultaneously during a period of declining health, and the Viola Concerto was left unfinished at the composer's death.

⁴⁵ The following biographical sketch is based on Tibor Tallián, "Bartók's Reception in America, 1940–1945," trans. Peter Laki, in *Bartók and His World*, ed. Peter Laki (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 101–18; Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Malcom Gillies, "Bartók in America," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 190–201.

⁴⁶ There is debate in the literature about the extent of Bartók's financial need. According to Tallián, in "Bartók's Reception in America," "Bartók was traumatized by his new environment, so different from the one he had been accustomed to for sixty years. His position in relation to his environment was also different from what it had been, beyond comparison. . . . In America he had neither a job with retirement benefits nor a central place in cultural life as its greatest hero. As a result, he was forced literally to struggle for his existence. He found himself, at sixty, in a state of insecurity equal to or even greater than that during his greatest previous crisis, endured between 1904 and 1906, before his appointment to the Conservatory" (102). By contrast, Gillies observes: "With hindsight it is possible to say that the claims of poverty were exaggerated. Yet as life is lived forwards, rather than backwards, Bartók's anxieties—and with them, a widespread impression of destitution—are easily understandable" ("Bartók in America," 200).

⁴⁷ "By April 1942 his leukemia had been tentatively diagnosed, although the exact nature of the disease appears to have been held back from Bartók. His health only became critical in late February 1943, shortly after he had started presenting lectures at Harvard University. He was hospitalized—his weight had dropped to an alarming 40 kilograms—and intensive investigations of his condition were undertaken. Hence, through the mediation of Hungarian friends, ASCAP took over management of his case, and in the following two-and-a-half years reportedly spent about \$16,000 on his medical care and several periods of recuperation at Saranac Lake, New York, and Asheville, North Carolina. . . . What is now clear is that Bartók was ill during the entirety of his American years with progressive stages of blood disorders" (Gillies, "Bartók in America," 198).

All four works are described in the critical literature as sharing certain familiar late-style characteristics, notably those clustered in my sixth category: retrospection, anachronism, archaism, nostalgia, and simplification. These traits are particularly pronounced in the Third Piano Concerto, according to Halsey Stevens:

The serenity of the Third Piano Concerto is remarkable among Bartók's larger works. . . . His progressive trend toward both structural and tonal lucidity is exemplified through the Third Piano Concerto. In both texture and orchestration there is extreme clarity, sometimes to the point of tenuousness. . . . If the Third Piano Concerto is to be considered weaker than the first two, it must be because of the extreme refinement of its idiom. . . . Both the harmonic and the melodic elements of the Concerto represent a distillation of Bartók's maturest style: the tendency toward a more strongly affirmed tonality, lucid textures, plastic rhythms, is here intensified.⁴⁸

30 — The opening of the second movement of the Third Piano Concerto would seem to exemplify Bartók's late-style interest in simplicity and lucidity, not to mention another familiar late-style interest, imitative counterpoint (see ex. 6). In a series of imitative entries, the strings present motivic combinations of whole steps, minor thirds, and perfect fourths. The first phrase (m. 1 to the downbeat of m. 7) is restricted to the pentatonic collection [C, D, E, G, A]. In measure 7, G $\sharp$ is briefly introduced, implying harmonic motion toward A, but then abandoned as the prevailing pentatonic collection resumes control. In measure 15, the first section of the movement concludes with a distant, menacing intrusion of E $\flat$ –D $\flat$, the two lowest and softest notes heard thus far. Shockingly distant from the prevailing tonal and collectional orientation, these notes suggest a basic dichotomy between white-note music (especially oriented toward the white-note pentatonic collections, [C, D, E, G, A] and [F, G, A, C, D]) and black-note music (especially oriented toward the black-note pentatonic collection, [G $\flat$, A $\flat$, B $\flat$, D $\flat$, E $\flat$]). The strangely intrusive E $\flat$ and D $\flat$ of measure 15 prefigure the black-white dichotomy and set in motion a musical narrative in which the controlling white-note pentatonic is increasingly under challenge and almost overthrown. In principle, this series of events exemplifies the disability-related cure narrative, but in this instance the eventual restoration of health and bodily normality is ambiguous at best.

As part of its disability-related program, the music makes obvious reference to the slow movement of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 132,

⁴⁸ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Bartók*, 250, 252, 280.

EXAMPLE 6. Bartók, Third Piano Concerto, second movement, mm. 1–57. Reprinted by permission.

This section of the musical score covers measures 9 through 20. It begins with measure 9, where the Clarinet I part has a key signature change to B-flat major. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measures 10-11 show dynamics like pp and p. Measure 12 includes the instruction "muto in A". Measures 13-14 feature the Piano part with the marking "P molto espr., legato". Measures 15-16 show the Violin I part with a dynamic change to pp and a "div." marking. Measures 17-18 continue the string accompaniment. Measure 19 shows a forte (f) dynamic for the Piano. Measure 20 ends with a very soft (ppp) dynamic for the strings.

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EXAMPLE 6. (continued)

31

Pf.

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vie.

Vo.

cresc.

41

Pf.

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vie.

Vo.

dim.

meno f

50

Cor. I
in F

Pf.

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vie.

Vo.

p

EXAMPLE 7. Beethoven, String Quartet Op. 132, third movement,
Molto Adagio, mm. 1–35

Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart.
(*Cantona di ringraziamento offerta alla divinità da un guarito, in modo lidico.*)

1 Molto adagio.

13

26

Neue Kraft fühlend.
(*Sentendo nuova forza.*)
Andante. *tr.*

a resemblance that has been noted many times (see ex. 7).⁴⁹ The religious aura of Beethoven's "hymn" is enhanced by the deliberate archaism of the Lydian mode, and this is a distinctive aspect of his late style.⁵⁰ Bartók's music involves an intensification of late-style archaism, alluding both to Beethoven and, through him, to the much older precedents on which Beethoven draws. In the Beethoven, the phrases of a homophonic chorale are interspersed with imitative interludes; the Bartók unfolds the same way, with imitative passages in the strings interspersed with a homophonic chorale in the solo piano. Resemblances between the passages extend to their motives (both based on whole

⁴⁹ See for example Ferenc Bónis, "Quotations in Bartók's Music," *Studia Musicologica* 5 (1963): 355–82. The Beethoven-Bartók relationship is also discussed in Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 134–39.

⁵⁰ See Sieghard Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-Minor Quartet, Op. 132," in *Beethoven Studies*, vol. 3, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 161–92.

steps, minor thirds, and perfect fourths), rhythm (in $\frac{4}{4}$ with a regular quarter-note pulse), tempo, and character (the Bartók's *Adagio religioso* is $\text{♩} = 6g$; Beethoven's *Molto adagio* is often performed even more slowly than that).

There is also an important programmatic link between the works. Beethoven's is titled "Hymn of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to God, in the Lydian Mode." Bartók's has no title; but in adopting Beethoven's manner he simultaneously adopts Beethoven's matter as well, so that this movement may also be understood as a hymn of thanksgiving from a convalescent. The musical narrative unfolds somewhat differently in the two works, however. Beethoven's hymn alternates with a more vigorous contrasting section that Beethoven titles "Feeling new strength," and the hymn itself intensifies and deepens emotionally in each of its appearances. In the Bartók, the contrasting music gives little sense of new strength, and the final return of the opening hymn is ambiguous in its impact. If the Beethoven is a profoundly sincere offering of thanks from a convalescent who has fully recovered from illness, the Bartók is something more equivocal: the thanks are qualified, the recovery incomplete.

34

Programmatic ambiguity is felt most in the contrast between white-note and black-note diatonicism referred to above. In the first section, with its alternation of homophonic hymn in the piano and imitative interludes in the strings, the intrusive $E\flat$ - $D\flat$ of measure 14 signals a gradual move toward the flat side, and the music becomes increasingly clotted with chromaticism (see mm. 48–53). After a contrasting middle section that features explicit contrast and juxtaposition of white-note and black-note pentatonic formations, the opening hymn returns in measure 89 and reenacts the move toward the flat side. Now the homophonic hymn has moved to the strings, and the piano plays imitative elaborations. This time, however, the move to the flat side seems definitive, and the music appears to be ending on an $E\flat$ -minor triad within a black-note pentatonic environment, [$E\flat$ - $G\flat$ - $A\flat$ - $B\flat$ - $D\flat$], one that conspicuously features the problematic $E\flat$ and $D\flat$ from measure 13 (see ex. 8). Only a last-minute diversion prevents this apparent musical disaster from taking place. But far from a definitive return to the white-note opening, this ending sounds weak and equivocal at best.

Bartók's personal, physical circumstances are mirrored in this movement and especially in its ending. The Third Piano Concerto was written at a time when Bartók felt well enough to compose—an improvement over a slightly earlier period—but he still knew himself to be desperately ill. Beethoven's heartfelt hymn of thanksgiving is transmuted in the Bartók into something more like relief at the temporary cessation of pain, but with the relief only partial and with no expectation that it

EXAMPLE 8. Bartók, Third Piano Concerto, second movement, mm. 121–end. Reprinted by permission.

121

Ob.I II

Clar. I
in B $\flat$

Fag. I II

Pf.

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vie.

Ve.

Fl. I II

Ob. I II

Clar. I II
in B $\flat$

Fag. I II

LIII

Cor. in F
II

Pf.

Viol. I

Viol. II

Vie.

Ve.

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EXAMPLE 8. (continued)

127

Fl. I, II
Ob. I
Clar. I, II in B $\flat$
Fag. I
Cor. I, II in F
Tam-Tam
Pf.
(sust.)
(sust.)
(sust.)
poco f

132

Tam-Tam
Pf.
(sust.)
(sust.)
Viol. I
Viol. II
Vie.
Ve.
Cb.
pp
attacca

would be more than short-lived. This music may be taken as typical of Bartók's late style and of late style generally in its radical simplicity and deliberate archaism. But those same style characteristics may also be understood as Bartók's musical embodiment of his own physical circumstances.

* * *

Aaron Copland's *Night Thoughts* (1972) begins in a state of utter simplicity, with the simplest rhythmic values (half and whole notes arranged in a motivic short-short-long pattern), and with an assertion of G as a pitch center, GBD as an apparent tonic triad amid the [GABDE] pentatonic collection, and a sense of G–B as an inversional center with A between them and D and E flanking them (see ex. 9). Beginning in measure 4, however, this absolutely spare, balanced opening is occluded and overwhelmed by chromaticism. An important melodic motive begins this process of concealment, an ascending <+3> (here on B $\flat$ –C $\sharp$), and by the time this motive is balanced by F–A $\flat$ in measures 9–10, the chromatic aggregate has been completed and the simple, almost naive, tonal-sounding opening has been obliterated. The rest of the piece can be understood as an effort to recall this opening state, to remember it musically. A succession of musical gestures leads back toward it—we glimpse fragments of it, but it remains just out of reach. Finally, at the end of the work, the musical memory of the opening is restored, but only partially—the piece is ultimately incapable of fully remembering its opening.

Night Thoughts is highly fragmentary in its formal organization. It consists of a series of brief musical moments, none longer than eight measures, that are internally consistent but strangely cut off from what comes before and after. These brief moments generally involve a high degree of internal repetition, either direct or sequential. Example 10 shows a passage from the middle of the work that consists of five brief episodes (marked by vertical slashes). The first episode (mm. 15–19) is the beginning of a sequence. Using the motivic short-short-long rhythm, the music presents four harmonies and then transposes them down eight semitones (the transposition is not exact in all voices). The first four chords culminate on a melodic B, the transposed repetition on E $\flat$. If the pattern were to continue with a transposition down a further eight semitones, the motion would culminate on G. But when the sequence resumes in measure 25, after an interruption, the transposition falls short by a semitone: the music moves down only seven rather than eight semitones, and we arrive melodically on A $\flat$ instead of G.

A melodic G is achieved sequentially in the episode that follows (mm. 28–33), but the harmonic context is remote from the pentatonic

EXAMPLE 9. Copland, *Night Thoughts*, mm. 1–10. Reprinted by permission.

[G] as pitch center
[GB] as inversional center
[GBD] as G-major tonic
[GABDE] pentatonic

1 Slow ♩ = circa 72

PIANO

short - short - - long

Depress pedal after each tone (or chord) is struck (first 7 measures)

chromatic intrusion

<+3> Bb - C#

6

aggregate completed

<+3> F - Ab balances Bb - C#

opening of the work. The music seems to make another sequential effort to achieve a more definitive return to G (mm. 34–39), but the gesture is interrupted and contrasting material intervenes. It is as though the music were trying to recall something well known and deeply familiar, but can't quite get it right. The opening G and its harmonic environment are glimpsed in part but remain ultimately inaccessible. Each of the short episodes that comprise the work embodies a new effort to reach back toward the G, and each breaks off in disappointment and frustration.

As the end approaches, the opening music is repeated “as at first” and “as before” (see ex. 11). But the process of clouding over with chromaticism begins almost immediately and never lets up (note Copland’s admonition to “emphasize the left hand”). As in the opening, the <+3> on Bb–C# is introduced at the top of the texture (mm. 96–99) and then remains there over iterations of four slowly arpeggiated chords. These four chords all contain G and present a direct bass motion toward G, but they nonetheless persistently cloud the G with notes foreign to the opening pentatonic collection.

EXAMPLE 10. Copland, *Night Thoughts*, mm. 15–39. Reprinted by permission.

15 (♩ = 60) *poco rit.* - - - *a tempo* *poco rit.* - - - - - G (?)

20 Somewhat faster (♩ = 84) (r.h. sharp and clear, bell-like) (l.h. foggy and distant) *poco rit.* - - - - - NO!

24 as before ♩ = 72 *poco rit.* - - - - - NO!

28 (♩ = 72) C → D → E → F → G *press forward* *poco cresc.*

34 C Slower (♩ = 54) → Bb → A hold back → G (?) NO! *dim.*

The final two measures of the work are extraordinarily beautiful and evocative. The opening music is heard one last time—"very distant, but clear"—and rearranged to project, at this tonic level, a final statement of <+3>, this time as B–D. The memory of the opening is present, but at a distance, unattainable, almost concealed by the foreground chromaticism.

Like the other works discussed here, *Night Thoughts* can be understood in terms of a disability-related cure narrative, but one that is handled in an exceptional way. In Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*, the final phrase of the narrative—the regaining of an initial state of health and normative bodily function—is associated with a sense of transcendence

EXAMPLE 11. Copland, *Night Thoughts*, mm. 93–end. Reprinted by permission.

93 (as at first) *p* *mp* *mf* *rit.* (emphasize the l.h.)

100 Very slowly (dragging the tempo) ($\text{♩} = 48$) *pale, at a distance* *l.h.* *p*

mp *<+3>* A# → C# (etc.) *l.h.* *p*

**very slow grace notes to the end* **sost.*

102 *(sost.)* C# → B → A → G *l.h.* *sim.* *(very long)*

104 *very distant, but clear* *r.h.* *<+3>* B → D *l.h.* *sost.*

and spiritual awakening. In Schoenberg's String Trio, the final phase is expressive of the gratitude of a recovering convalescent. In Bartók's Third Piano Concerto, we hear again the voice of a convalescent, although in this case the recovery appears ambiguous, unsatisfactory, incomplete. In Copland's *Night Thoughts*, one experiences only the distant, unrealized hope of recovery—Stravinsky's sense of awakening into brightness becomes for Copland a painful experience of dissolution into darkness. All four works thus engage a disability narrative, but each is inflected in a distinctive, telling way.

Night Thoughts was virtually Copland's final original composition (only *Proclamation*, another short piano piece, came after).⁵¹ The work is so strange—repetitive to the point of obsession, fragmented in its form, lacking in any of the familiar Copland stylistic markers—that it has been largely overlooked in the Copland literature. Critics who have discussed it have tended to emphasize its characteristically late-style qualities—its private, intimate tone, its fragmentation, its obsessive repetitions, the willed simplicity of its opening, and the abrasive dissonance of much of the rest of it:

With its forlorn melodies set against the funereal sonorities, the piece creates a mood of deep melancholy. After John Kozar gave the work's European premiere in 1974, one review spoke of its "highly disturbing atmosphere." At the same time, at the very end, a lingering major triad, heard "very distant, but clear," suggests some repose.⁵²

Most critics of Copland's oeuvre do not believe his late work sustains the level of achievement of his middle-period music, particularly that of his ballets. Yet for many, the compositions Copland wrote after 1950, in spite of their flaws, confirm his vital musical imagination still at work. In *Night Thoughts*, for example, while a three-note motive does unify the work as a whole, the material does not support the kind of emotional energy Copland evidently believed the piece contained. Not much lyricism envelops the bare linear passage marked "simply singing"; nor does the passage marked "eloquently" support that wish either. Instead, obsessive reiterations of chords and piano figurations,

⁵¹ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 259–60. "*Night Thoughts* was composed for the Van Cliburn Competition (1972). It was to be played by each contestant in the 1973 Quadrennial Competition of Fort Worth, Texas. While not a virtuosic work, *Night Thoughts* presented certain difficulties for the three hundred entrants in the competition who were required to sight-read it: unusual chords, wide spacings, and some complicated pedaling. Copland said, 'My intention was to test the musicality and the ability of a performer to give coherence to a free musical form.' The subtitle, *Homage to Ives*, was added after the music was composed. According to Copland, 'This has not prevented performers and critics from finding Ivesian allusions in the music.' (A horn call question at the beginning of the piece has been pointed to as reminiscent of *The Unanswered Question*.)"

⁵² Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 514. Pollack compares *Night Thoughts* to *Inscape* in their shared sense of inwardness, a familiar late-style marker: "*Inscape* is quite literally the flip side of *Connotations*, as intimate and reflective a work as *Connotations* is public and tragic. If *Connotations* recalls the *Ode*, *Inscape* looks back to *Quiet City*, though the mostly slow twelve-minute movement has no real precedent among Copland's oeuvre. Although it traces the characteristic outlines of a dramatic opening, a bustling scherzo, and a dirge-like finale, followed by a coda that reprises the opening, such schematic contrast is softened by the brevity of the individual episodes as well as by nearly constant fluctuations of tempo, so that the work communicates greater stream-of-consciousness than perhaps any other piece by Copland—at least until *Night Thoughts* (1972), its pianistic equivalent" (505).

ranging over the extremes of the piano, are repeated over and over again. This suggests Copland's own inner preoccupations, perhaps with decline and death. Thus the piece projects a haunting atmosphere of private contemplative candor, as if clues to the beyond could be found in overtones; it is an old man's work . . . These late works [*Night Thoughts*, *Connotations*, *Inscape*] contain some of the most dissonant, abrasive chords he ever wrote. How often his ear gives us harmonies that speak John Donne's words: "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee."⁵³

For Pollack and for Tick, *Night Thoughts* is about mortality and death, "an old man's work" in contemplation of his own looming demise.

But in fact Copland was not particularly old when he wrote *Night Thoughts* and was physically in good health.⁵⁴ In 1972, Copland had a more pressing concern than his hypothetical and remote mortality: he was experiencing the memory loss associated with the early stages of dementia, presumably Alzheimer's disease.⁵⁵

Copland stopped composing around this time most likely because his mental condition made it difficult for him to continue. Noting that "aside from these few late piano pieces and some arrangements, Copland produced no new score in the last seventeen years of his life," Pollack asserts: "That the creative output of an elderly person—especially someone on the brink of senile dementia—should taper off hardly seems cause for surprise"⁵⁶

Although Pollack dates Copland's memory loss to the mid or late 1970s, there is evidence that it may have begun earlier, as suggested by a letter from Copland to Nadia Boulanger in November 1972, right around the time he was completing *Night Thoughts*:

⁵³ Judith Tick, "The Music of Aaron Copland," in *Aaron Copland's America: A Cultural Perspective*, by Gail Levin and Judith Tick (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2000), 162–63.

⁵⁴ According to actuarial tables, a seventy-two-year old white man in America in 1972 could expect to live another decade, and Copland actually lived another eighteen years.

⁵⁵ "Although the symptoms resembled those of Alzheimer's, his primary physician at the time, Arnold Salop, could not make a definitive diagnosis as to the kind of dementia he suffered from." Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 543.

⁵⁶ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 516. Similarly on p. 553: "Even before Copland completed his last compositions in the early 1970s, the press reported that he had stopped composing because of some supposed antipathy toward the times. It would seem, however, that such assertions had little foundation. Copland always balanced a sharply critical view of the world with a determination to go on and do one's best. Although some clearly presumed that Copland shared their bitterness and despair, he did not. He only admitted that he had difficulty, as he entered his seventies, getting new ideas and that he would rather not compose at all than merely repeat himself. Moreover, by the mid-1970s he was experiencing memory loss. So in fact, not much time transpired between his final compositions and the onset of the dementia that afflicted his final years."

I hope soon to get started on an autobiography, mostly in order to tell the story of the development of American music as I saw it in the years '20 to '50. How I wish my memory were better than it is! But I hope to write it for better or worse.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Copland had reason to take memory loss seriously as signaling a potentially serious disability. As Pollack points out, "His loss of memory scared him, because his father and his sister Laurine had both succumbed to dementia in their later years, a fate he hoped he would be spared. He consulted specialists—one doctor prescribed vitamins—but nothing really could be done."⁵⁸

Copland scholarship has generally shied away from discussions of his late-life dementia and has ignored the possibility that it may have played a role in the composition of his final works.⁵⁹ But the internal evidence of *Night Thoughts* suggests that already in 1972 Copland was thinking deeply and creatively about the loss of memory, and exploring the emotional world associated with it. *Night Thoughts* has been described as a late-style work, with such traits as fragmentation, resistance, willed simplicity combined with abrasive dissonance, and a private, introspective aura all seemingly pointing to the composer's contemplation of his own mortality. I would suggest, on the contrary, that this work is not so much about the relatively remote prospect of death as about the lived reality of an early stage of Alzheimer's disease. Copland's experience of memory loss and the emotions associated with it are thematized and embodied in the work. Its apparently late-style characteristics, including its introspection, austerity, difficulty, fragmentation, and, above all, its retrospective character, all result from Copland's creative attempt to express his mental condition musically.

* * *

In recent years, a considerable body of literature has emerged devoted to theorizing literary embodiment and to the possibility of "writing the body." But for the most part, the bodies in question have been somewhat idealized, and the disabled body has been virtually ignored. As Lennard Davis observes:

⁵⁷ Letter to Nadia Boulanger, November 26, 1972. Reprinted in *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland*, ed. Elizabeth B. Crist and Wayne Shirley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 246.

⁵⁸ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 543.

⁵⁹ Neil Lerner, review of *Copland Connotations*, ed. Peter Dickinson, *Music & Letters* 85 (2004): 335. Lerner speaks of "the still somewhat taboo topic of Copland's tragic later struggles with (presumably) Alzheimer's disease. . . . Perhaps just as it took time for Copland's sexual identity to be more honestly considered by the scholarly community, it will also take time for the topic of his physical and mental disabilities to be discussed openly."

In recent years, hundreds of texts have claimed to be rethinking the body; but the body they have been rethinking—female, black, queer—has rarely been rethought as disabled. Normalcy continues its hegemony even in progressive areas such as cultural studies—perhaps even more so in cultural studies since there the power and ability of “transgressive” bodies tend to be romanticized for complex reasons. Disabled bodies are not permitted to participate in the erotics of power, in the power of the erotic, in economies of transgression. There has been virtually no liberatory rhetoric—outside of the disability rights movement—tied to prostheses, wheelchairs, colostomy bags, canes, or leg braces.⁶⁰

The composers I have discussed here are engaged in *writing the disabled body*, inscribing in their music aspects of their experience of living with a disability. The manner in which they do so has generally been understood in light of the aesthetic category of the late style, and many of the stylistic elements in question have been interpreted as markers of lateness.

I have argued, however, that these works are not about age per se, nor about proximity to death, nor about authorial or historical belatedness, but rather about the vicissitudes of the human mind and body—in other words, disability. Disability has been so thoroughly stigmatized in our culture as to render it largely invisible in critical accounts. But it has been hiding in plain sight. We know that most major composers, like most human beings, have had profound experiences of disability (which I understand as any culturally stigmatized bodily difference). It should not surprise us, then, that like nationality, race, gender, and sexuality, disability may have a significant role in shaping art, including music.

What we find when we sweep away some of the romantic fantasy that has accreted around the concept of late style is that works we have become accustomed to thinking of as late are often better understood in relation to their composers' experience of disability. Indeed, lateness is a critical fiction we have too long imposed on a particular group of

⁶⁰ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), 158. Similarly, see David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, “Disability Studies and the Double Bind of Representation,” in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 1–34. “The current popularity of the body in critical discourse seeks to incorporate issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class while simultaneously neglecting disability. These studies share a penchant for detecting social differences as they are emblemized in corporeal aberrancies. Within this common critical methodology physical difference exemplifies the evidence of social deviance even as the constructed nature of *physicality itself* fades from view” (5).

musical works. It turns out that upon close inspection, these works are not late in any meaningful sense—not written when the composer was old, or near death, or in anticipation of death. We need to recognize the extent to which what we have been calling late style may be strongly inflected by disability, may in some sense be, instead, a disability style.

City University of New York

ABSTRACT

“Late style” is a longstanding aesthetic category in all the arts. Late-style music is presumed to have certain internal qualities (such as fragmentation, intimacy, nostalgia, or concision) and to be associated with certain external factors (such as the age of the composer, his or her proximity to and foreknowledge of death, lateness within a historical period, or a sense of authorial belatedness with respect to significant predecessors). Upon closer inspection, it appears that many of these external factors are unreliably correlated with a musical style that might be described as late. Late style is often better correlated with the bodily or mental condition of the composer: most composers who write in what is recognized as a late style have shared experiences of non-normative bodily or mental function, that is, of impairment and disability. Composers inscribe their disabilities in their music, and the result is often correlated with what is generally called late style. Close readings of four modernist works serve to illuminate the concept: Stravinsky, *Requiem Canticles*; Schoenberg, String Trio; Bartók, Third Piano Concerto; and Copland, *Night Thoughts*. In each case, I contend that the features of these works generally understood as markers of lateness are better understood in relation to the disabled bodies of their composers.

Keywords:

Bartók, Third Piano Concerto

Copland, *Night Thoughts*

disability

late style

Schoenberg, String Trio

Stravinsky, *Requiem Canticles*