PART II

Principal compositions

3 Genre in Berlioz

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Titles, cycles, collections

On the face of it, Berlioz is a composer for whom genre was a secondary issue. Working within a genre creates definite expectations, but Berlioz – unlike Monpou and Niedermeyer in their *romances*, Haydn and even Beethoven in their symphonies, Auber and Meyerbeer in their operas – seems to have preferred not to operate in this way. Berlioz's overtures, among his most popular and readily understood works, do adhere to expected outlines, but his symphonies evoke the theatre, his operas pay only nominal tribute to established categories, and his liturgical compositions (the *Messe solennelle*, *Requiem*, and *Te Deum*) present generically conventional surfaces which prove, on closer examination, to be deceptive.

Berlioz implicitly acknowledged a difficulty by providing generic subtitles for otherwise purely descriptive titles. At the time of their composition, the *Épisode de la vie d'un artiste*, *Harold en Italie*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *La Damnation de Faust*, and *L'Enfance du Christ* were the sole occupants of their generic categories – respectively Fantastic Symphony (*Symphonie fantastique en cinq parties*), Symphony in Four Movements with a Solo Viola (*Symphonie en quatre parties avec un alto principal*), Dramatic Symphony (*Symphonie dramatique*), Dramatic Legend *(Légende dramatique)*,[1] and Sacred Trilogy (*Trilogie sacrée*). Despite such specificity, however, Berlioz could not always avoid misunderstanding. If the subtitle for *Harold en Italie* tells us that in this symphony there is more than a trace of the concerto, terms such as "dramatic legend" convey little about genre: some contemporaries mistakenly alluded to the *Damnation* as a symphony, for example, but Berlioz would not accept the designation "Symphonic legend."[2] And yet he was prepared to include *Le Retour à la vie* (generically, a *mélologue*) among his symphonies.[3] Even his song sets have suggestive titles (*Irlande*, *Les Nuits d'été*, *Fleurs des landes*) which effectively disguise whether they should be interpreted as coherent cycles or as collections of individual items.[4] The collection *Tristia* groups three works (chorus, song, orchestral march) with no regard for generic consistency. Despite the unity of subject-matter, the same is true of *Huit Scènes de Faust*, which includes choruses and solo songs with instrumentation varying from a full orchestra to a single guitar.

In offering idiosyncratic designations of genre, Berlioz may have been attempting to clarify public expectation and assist enjoyment and comprehension of his works. If so, he was to some extent working against genre rather than with it, by applying the rhetorical device of paradox. Genre is an aspect of rhetoric, a tool by which creative artists manipulate responses to their work. With Berlioz, then, there may be tension between his "romantic" desire to be original and his natural desire to be understood and appreciated.

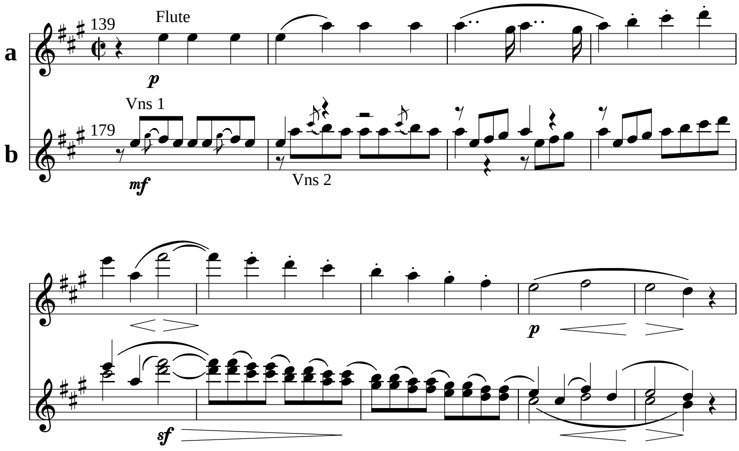
The title *Symphonie fantastique*, for example, paradoxically combines the order implied by symphony with the disorder implied by fantasy. It may seem perverse to suggest that the *Fantastique* is Berlioz's most conventional work, but it is indeed perhaps less strange than a symphony with solo viola (*Harold*) or a symphony with seven movements (*Roméo et Juliette*). His symphonic design retains only enough of precedent to permit the dramatic, even operatic, elements he required to realize his parallel programmatic intentions. In what follows, I propose to discuss selected passages and works in order to suggest that Berlioz took risks with his audience precisely because he relished the potential conflict between generic expectation and musical reality.

The vocal versus the instrumental: thoughts from an early overture

Not least among Berlioz's risks with generic expectation is his blending of the idioms of vocal and instrumental music. While the same might be said of a generically conventional composer like Mozart, who combined the prevalent eighteenth-century forms of aria and concerto, Berlioz challenged expectations in the forms of individual movements and sections, and also of works as a whole. In this, from the point of view of his audiences, he may have gone too far.

The *Grande Ouverture de Waverley* was published as Op. 1 in 1839 but was composed some twelve years before. The second theme of its sonata allegro conforms to a generic lyrical type: a range of only a tenth, a single instrumental "voice" (wind in double octaves), a simple string accompaniment, and symmetrical phrasing (see Ex. 3.1a). When it is repeated, however, wind and strings exchange roles, and the melody is figured to suit the latter: its upbeat is tossed from one side of the orchestra to the other – in Berlioz's time first and second violins sat on opposite sides of the platform – and the descent, doubled in thirds, is bowed in eighth-notes across the beat (see Ex. 3.1b). A quasi-vocal idea thus becomes idiomatically instrumental.[5]

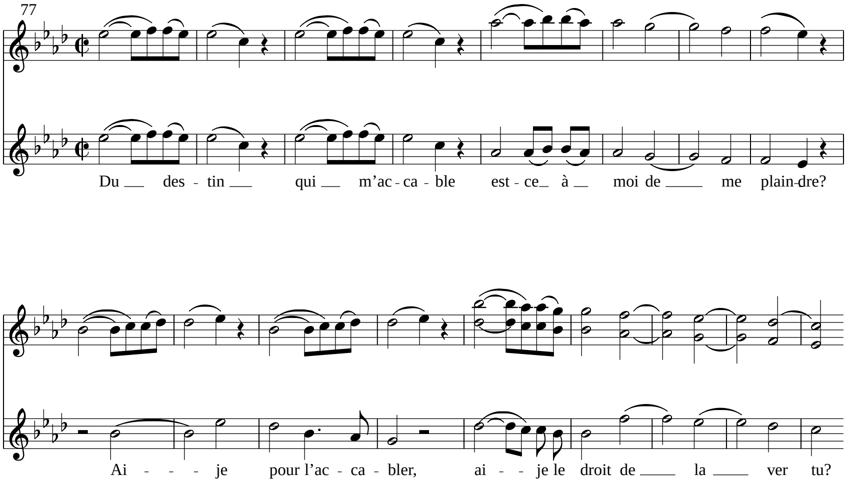
Example 3.1 Berlioz, *Waverley* Overture
(a) bars 139–147
(b) bars 179–187



In this early overture, Berlioz shows learned or intuitive understanding of the genre in which he worked, paying tribute to the overtures of predecessors he admired, among them Weber and Beethoven, primarily, and, secondarily, Gluck, Méhul, Cherubini, and Rossini. The slow introduction and sonata allegro was a formal model he continued to develop and stretch until his last opera, *Béatrice et Bénédict.* Genre is a "class, type, or category, sanctioned by convention."[6] It is not academicism; it is a means to attain comprehensibility, to communicate with an audience. Working within a genre does not preclude originality. For example: had any overture before *Waverley* attracted attention by opening with a single note from the second oboe? Had many transformed the secondary material in the manner of Example 3.1 (which is by no means all that Berlioz does with it)? *Waverley*, sometimes considered immature or not wholly characteristic, stands on the cusp that separates imitation from marked individuality; the technique of combining themes (after the recapitulation of the second theme, at bar 294, the first theme joins in, at bar 304) and the inspired build-up to the coda, which involves playing Example 3.1a at double speed, are pointers to the way the later Berlioz handles convention.

There is no reason to suppose that the theme in Example 3.1a originated in a vocal piece. Nevertheless, translation from vocal to instrumental genres, and the resulting instrumentalization of vocal melodies, is common practice with Berlioz, particularly in the earlier years in which his habit of self-borrowing was most pronounced.[7] The most common

Example 3.2
(A) The Allegro that follows the *Méditation* in *Cléopâtre*, bars 77–93.


77
Du __ des - tin __ qui __ m'ac - ca - ble est - ce_ à __ moi de ____ me plain-dre?
Ai - - - je pour l'ac - ca - bler, ai - - je le droit de ____ la ____ ver tu?

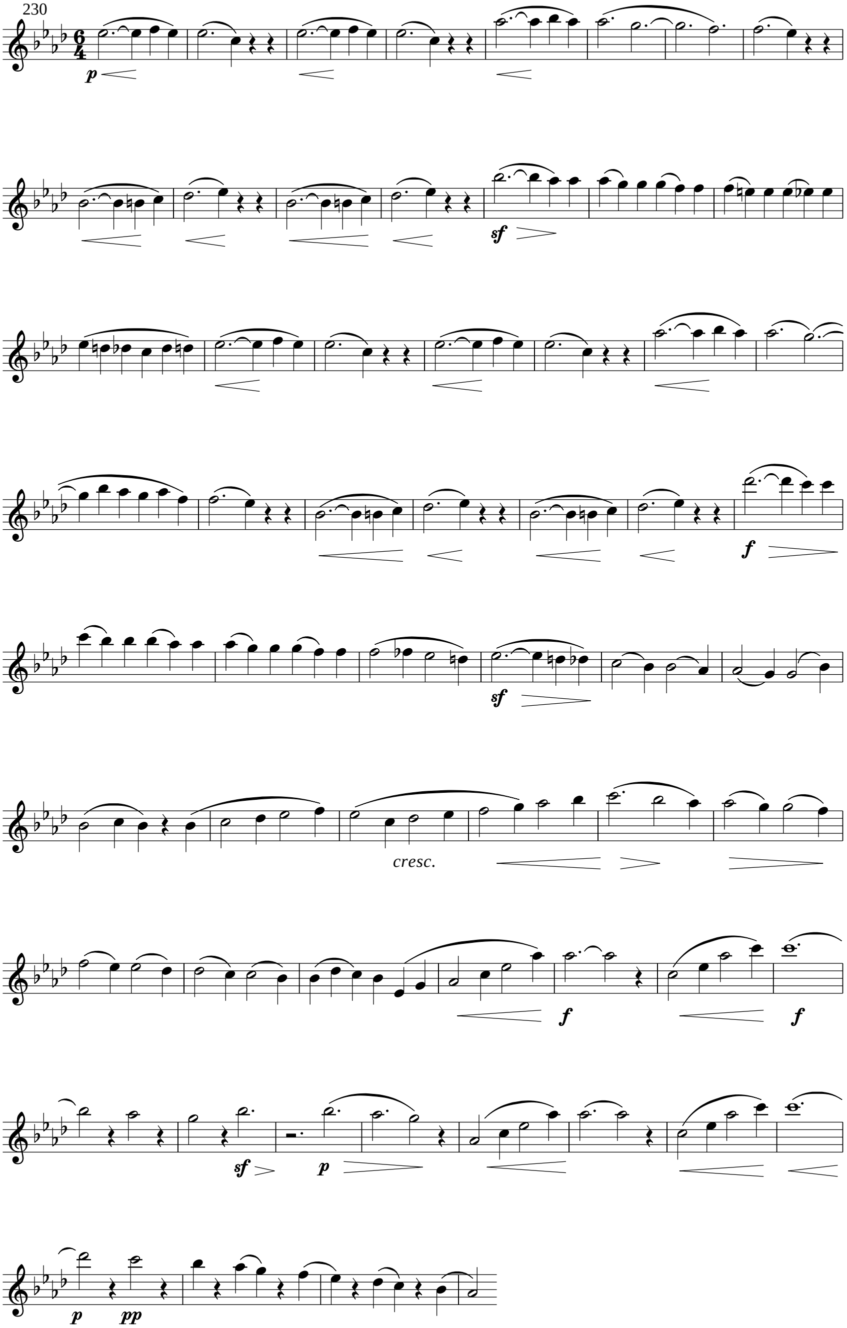
such generic translations occur when vocal themes turn up in opera overtures, as they do in Beethoven and Weber; we hear the overture first, of course, but the themes were conceived vocally, the overture being written last. This happens in the *Benvenuto Cellini* and the *Carnaval romain* overtures as well as in the overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*.[8]

More remote and thus more interesting instances arise when Berlioz recycles material from his despised Rome Prize cantatas. Once we become aware of the source of a melody, can we escape possible generic, and hence signifying, resonance from its earlier incarnation? If we can, it is because of Berlioz's professional awareness of the idiomatic distinction between vocal and instrumental music. When a melody from *Cléopâtre* ("Du destin qui m'accable"; see Ex. 3.2a) appears instrumentally in the *Fantaisie sur La Tempête*, the words ("Is it for me to complain of the destiny that overwhelms me?") bear no obvious relation to the new context, and the melody, eventually set to the Italian text in which the island spirits invoke Miranda, is enormously extended (see Ex. 3.2b) in an instrumental idiom rich in appoggiaturas and touches of chromaticism.

In this and similar instances, a melody is extracted as an independent unit and placed in a context which is instrumentally and poetically distinct from its original. The same cannot be said of the elegant *Rêverie et Caprice* for solo violin and orchestra, based on an aria rejected from *Benvenuto Cellini*.[9] Despite transposition up a fifth, the *Rêverie et Caprice* retains all the essentials – formal, thematic, and melodic – of the aria.

Example 3.2 (*cont.*)

(B) *Fantaisie sur La Tempête*, bars 230–289.


230
p
sf
f
sf
cresc.
f
f
sf
p
p
pp

Nevertheless, from the outset, Berlioz reconceived the music rather than merely transcribing it. Where the aria has an eight-bar orchestral ritornello and one bar of "till ready" accompaniment before the voice enters, the *Rêverie et Caprice* has the soloist appear dramatically, in the fourth bar, with a trill that signals the character of the violin before it soars up an octave to play the tune.

As a master of instrumental composition, Berlioz was always sensitive to those aspects of genre which are concerned with the fitness of musical ideas to their presentation. He thus appropriated thematic materials from discarded works as much for dramatic as for formal purposes. Of the *Symphonie fantastique*, for example, Berlioz acknowledged that the opening idea was taken from an early song whose text ("I must leave forever my fair country, my sweet beloved") is appropriate in mood, if not in detail, to the program.[10] The entire *idée fixe* had already appeared in an aria in the Rome Prize cantata *Herminie*; now it ranges more widely, and is twice transformed into a dance (in the second movement, a waltz, and in the finale, at the grotesque apparition of the beloved as a witch). The main theme of the third movement came from the *Gratias agimus* of the *Messe solennelle* – a song of thanksgiving used, in the symphony, to signify pastoral repose. In the finale, the *Dies irae* plainchant would traditionally have been sung, of course; here it is first severely exposed by the bass instruments used in church to accompany singing, and it is then grossly parodied by trombones and woodwind in a purely instrumental style.[11]

When a song-theme of whatever origin is transferred to an instrumental context, then something closed, such as a strophic *mélodie*, is transformed into something open: a symphonic theme. The generic problem of incorporating lyrical themes into instrumental music is widespread in nineteenth-century music, and is resolved by different composers in different ways. (It continues to be perceived as problematical, for example, in Brahms and Mahler as well.) For Berlioz, the desire to expand what are naturally closed forms also enlivens his purely vocal genres. He wrote a number of strophic *romances* whose publication – on a single page in a periodical – guaranteed simplicity: the music was written out with the words of the first stanza, and the remaining poetry appeared without music. In a *romance* of 1834, *Les Champs*, thirty-nine bars of music apply identically to seven identically structured stanzas. When *Les Champs* reappeared as No. 2 of the *Feuillets d'album* of 1850, the poem was reduced to four stanzas, but the music was now through-composed in one hundred and forty-six bars, with an abundance of variation in both melody and accompaniment. Attention to detail led to similar alterations in the later published versions of *Irlande.* By such means, Berlioz turned the *romance* into the *mélodie.*[12] The various versions of his popular melody *La Captive* represent the extreme case of this type of generic transformation. Tom Wotton was even led to suggest that in its final incarnation *La Captive* approaches the status of a symphonic poem.[13] This process of elaborating a strophic outline sometimes preceded performance or publication: the sketches for *Les Troyens*, for instance, reveal that Iopas's song (No. 34) was originally planned as strophic, but was eventually reworked into a kind of rondo.[14]

At this point we may draw some preliminary conclusions. First, strophic elaboration was one of Berlioz's lifelong preoccupations, and could affect his composition in any genre. Second, vocal and instrumental genres were for him closely entwined: understanding of the latter may well be enhanced by reference to the former. Third, Berlioz disliked repeating himself: even when his works were successful, he tried other formulae in later compositions. These conclusions appear most obviously consistent with the programmatic and dramatic nature of Berlioz's instrumental works. The trajectory of his career, after early concentration on vocal works, led him to present his most original designs in orchestral forms. Then, after 1840, nearly all his works again become vocal. All told, Berlioz's symphonic music, including his overtures, remains the smaller part of his œuvre. It may seem unnecessary to problematize shorter works such as songs, although generic tension is by no means excluded there. But it is in large-scale works that Berlioz's willingness to lure the listener into a set of expectations, and then to challenge them, is most apparent. In the survey of his output that follows, I shall suggest that Berlioz and genre are slippery bedfellows even in opera and choral music, where the broader conception (comic opera, Requiem Mass) appears most conventional.

Sacred, symphonic, and operatic works

Berlioz's first surviving large-scale endeavor is a setting of the Ordinary of the Mass, which he undertook, one must suppose, to please his teacher, Jean-François Lesueur.[15] While hardly a job for an apprentice, Mass setting might seem an invitation to play safe; the church, after all, had a history of rejecting ambitious music. But Lesueur's own Mass settings, unlike those of Cherubini, provided an unorthodox model, and Berlioz's *Messe solennelle* is hardly decorous either. Cavalier treatment of a sacred text, possibly derived from Lesueur's practice, is taken much farther in the *Grande Messe des morts*, where Berlioz omits, transposes, and even confuses the texts of the different sections, bringing words from the Offertory ("Domine Jesu") into the *Rex tremendae* of the *Dies irae*.[16] The *Requiem* was never intended for strict liturgical use, and Berlioz subjugated the text to the interests of the musical plan, which concludes with a complex recapitulation of earlier numbers.[17] The *Te Deum* is still more free: Berlioz selected text from the canticle to suit a design of six grand choral movements and a concluding march, forming a sort of pageant. Traditionally used for military triumphs, the *Te Deum*, in Berlioz's hands, becomes both a celebration and an elegy for Imperial France.

Berlioz's conception of the symphony is no more orthodox. Whatever the element of disguise and possible confusion with elements taken from literature, the *Symphonie fantastique* is about Berlioz and his frustrated, distorted attraction to Harriet Smithson. Previous programmatic music was either constructed upon a conventional topic, like Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony (with its mildly autobiographical tincture), or upon traditional, mythical stories, like Dittersdorf's symphonies after Ovid (which were surely unknown to Berlioz). Yet Berlioz contrived to remain within the expected form of a symphony: the lyrical preface to the Allegro, the dance-movement, the Adagio, the complex finale – these are hardly unexpected. The musical consequences of the program modify the pattern by the device of musical interconnection (the *idée fixe*, transformed throughout the five movements) and, more decisively, by details: the alternate repose and dynamism of the first and third movements, the displacement of the minuet or scherzo by the waltz of the second; the insertion of a savage march as the fourth, and the extensive introduction of the finale (atmospheric prelude, arrival of the beloved as a witch, parody of the *Dies irae*), which provides nearly half the movement before the Round Dance (bar 241) gets underway.

The sequel to the *Fantastique*, called *Le Retour à la vie* (characterized as a *mélologue*) and later *Lélio* (characterized as a *monodrame lyrique*), is certainly no symphony, and its awkwardness for listeners is intimately connected with genre, or lack thereof. A monologue for an actor of an overtly autobiographical nature is used for the cunning but to many critics essentially arbitrary motivation of six musical numbers framed, in the definitive version, by touching reminiscences of the symphony's *idée fixe*. The *Fantastique*, whose last two movements are hallucinatory in the original program (the rest, as it were, being "real"), is now represented in its entirety as a dream. The first musical number of the sequel is presented as the last music heard by the protagonist before he falls into a drug-induced sleep. It is another strophic song expanded into a *mélodie* whose text, after Goethe, has a fisherman lured to his doom by a siren: the association with the artist's beloved is made explicit by a citation of the *idée fixe*.

While the monologue covers many subjects that preoccupied Berlioz at the time of its composition, its progress is determined by his musical selections. The protagonist's mind turns to Shakespeare and Hamlet; he conceives a chorus of shades, which we then hear.[18] He thinks of escape to the life of a brigand; an appropriate musical number follows. His mind turning to Arcadian happiness, he hears his own *Chant de bonheur* and its sequel, *La Harpe éolienne* (the work's only instrumental movement, a reminiscence of the previous song, both borrowed from the 1827 Rome Prize cantata, *La Mort d'Orphée*). Finally, he gets back to work and rehearses his new orchestral composition, the *Fantaisie dramatique sur La Tempête*, a rich hybrid of overture and cantata which generically anticipates the Lisztian symphonic poem. Performed with commitment, then, *Lélio* is more than a revealing text for Berlioz's life and aesthetic, and more than a collection of musical numbers from his portfolio. But it is easier to say what it is not than what it is.

Harold en Italie is more readily located on the generic spectrum. If we overlook the solo viola, it is clearly a four-movement orchestral composition with the hint of a program, its titles aligning it with the nineteenth-century genre of the picturesque symphony, along with Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony, which was conceived at about the same time. The device of *idée fixe* is applied to three movements and then takes cover in the finale (as does the *idée fixe* in the *Fantastique* following the grotesque apparition of the beloved). The design of two moderate-tempo middle movements (also used by Mendelssohn) anticipates Brahms, while the thematic reminiscences at the start of the finale look back to Beethoven's Ninth.[19] Here Berlioz is clearly playing generic games; in the context of a work of vivid melodic and rhythmic life, and of only covert autobiographical significance, the relatively low intensity and high entertainment value are persuasive.

Berlioz's next symphony, *Roméo et Juliette*, while based on an existing drama, has intense autobiographical significance. For this Berlioz created the genre of the "dramatic symphony," also applying the designation "symphonie avec chœurs" – "choral symphony." The traditional symphony is buried within *Roméo et Juliette's* vaster frame: the lyrical slow section and the Allegro appear as the second movement of seven, after an instrumental overture and a vocal prologue; these are followed by an Adagio (the love scene) and a scherzo ("Queen Mab"). A march is then interpolated for the funeral procession of Juliet. Preceding the choral finale (in the form of an operatic scene, and thus quite unlike Beethoven's Ninth) is a frankly programmatic tomb scene. Generic coherence is threatened and perhaps only sustained through tracing the dramatic line as a covert opera.[20] Berlioz himself perceived his last symphony, the *Funèbre et triomphale*, as generically closer to his sacred works because of its architectural qualities, as he notes in the Postscript of the *Mémoires*, and its element of ritual, which replaces a program. A solo instrument, reciting as it were a speech from *Les Francs-Juges*, appears in the slow movement to link eulogy with opera. But by this date (1840), Berlioz had had his first brush with operatic production.

Benvenuto Cellini is certainly not a symphonic opera in Wagner's sense, for most of it is clearly divided into numbers. The 1838 version, rather than the simpler version made for Weimar in the eighteen-fifties, nevertheless shows Berlioz reaching imaginatively towards the symphony. There is extensive use of motivic tags (the visiting-card type of leitmotif) and there is a forging scene massively structured in a symphonic vein.[21] Still, generically, *Benvenuto Cellini* is one of Berlioz's more straightforward works. The massive volumes of the new edition notwithstanding, it is not a grand but a *petit opéra*, designed to form the larger part of an evening's entertainment completed by a ballet. The boldness of the musical language, I think, more than its genre or blend of romance and comedy, was fatal to its chance of success. From what survives of Berlioz's next opera, *La Nonne sanglante*, one might guess that despite its gothic subject-matter, a generically decorous work, one quite assimilable into the repertory, was in store. Berlioz's exclusion from the opera house following the failure of *Benvenuto Cellini* thus deprived us of more such pieces and led, instead, to the even more unconventional *Roméo et Juliette*, *La Damnation de Faust*, and *L'Enfance du Christ*.

Faust, as already mentioned, really is a concert opera, with markedly fewer symphonic elements than *Roméo* or, indeed, *Benvenuto*. Like many nineteenth-century operas, it is replete with genre pieces – songs, a march, dances, and choruses of worshippers, drunkards, demons, and angels – as well as arias, and a linked duet and trio. This last, ending Part III, is the most egregiously operatic scene, yet it follows a most unstageable conception, for we must suppose that Mephistopheles sings his serenade in the street simultaneously with the love duet of Faust and Marguerite. To make the point, Berlioz follows the serenade with an echo of Marguerite's ballad, and brings Mephistopheles on to start the trio with a reference to the serenade. Thus, paradoxically, an operatic system of cross-references is used to distance the concert opera from its theatrical model.

L'Enfance du Christ was once identified, rather too optimistically, as the first oratorio by a "Musician of the Future."[22] Like *Roméo* and *Faust*, it, too, has had few if any imitators to sanction its genre by convention; most nineteenth-century oratorios (including Liszt's *Christus*, a true "Zukunftsoratorium," also of richly mixed genre) either follow the model of Handel's Old Testament works or engage more consistently with theological issues. (Mendelssohn provides examples of both types in *Elijah* and *Saint Paul.*) *L'Enfance* is one of Berlioz's least demanding works; it takes familiar scenes and decorates them with extraordinary sensitivity, distancing the events in time by a narrative framework, and commending the events, in the prologue and epilogue, to the meditative prayers of Christendom. The form may be related to the concert opera, with genre pieces (nocturnal march, soothsayers' dance, pastoral chorus), Herod's aria, the duets of Mary and Joseph, and the dramatic scene interlarded by chamber music, when the holy family finds refuge in Saïs. Furthermore, as in *Faust*, Berlioz includes stage directions in the score. But the symphonic device of transformation, used sparingly in overtly operatic works, invades Part III of the oratorio: the opening narrative is a full reprise and transformation of the delicate fugal overture to Part II, and the recitative of the Father is haunted by reminiscences of Mary and Joseph's pleas for succor. Equally bold is the silencing of the orchestra for the epilogue, so that a work for full chorus and orchestra, having dismissed the louder instruments at the end of Part I, attains the paradisiacal beauty possible only with unaccompanied voices.

The device of simultaneity, by which musics of contradictory feeling are combined, is broached in the early overtures to *Les Francs-Juges* and *Waverley*; it reaches uproar in the combined songs of the soldiers and students at the end of Part II of *Faust*, and recurs with serious intent in *Les Troyens*, not only in the raw combination of the *Air et Duo* of Narbal and Anna (No. 31), but in the conventional lament of the descending semitone, heard earlier from the oboe and representing Cassandra, while Chorœbus repeats his tender arioso "Reviens à toi" (No. 3, from bar 186). This is not the only sense in which *Les Troyens* is the culminating work of Berlioz's career. (The opera is normally associated with "grand opera," a genre about which Berlioz had mixed feelings.) Certainly the five-act form, the organization of grand and intimate scenes, and the private tragedies of the female protagonists played out against the male-dominated march of history are all pointers to the Scribe–Meyerbeer tradition. The recurrent Trojan March in Acts I, III, and V is more architectural and symbolic, that is, "operatic," than it is symphonic.[23]

Nevertheless, scratch the surface of this vast work and among its genre pieces, ballets, choruses, ensembles, songs, and arias, less conventional elements appear. In the moving pantomime of Act I (No. 6), Andromache differs from the character who is her obvious model, the mute heroine of Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, in that she is silent by choice. Moreover, she is a character developed purely for her symbolic significance in this one scene, as she never reappears. The astonishing *Chasse royale* that opens Act IV may be claimed for the French tradition of picturesque operatic *symphonie*, but generic references include fugue, at the opening; folksong, in the gentle melody that follows (bar 30); hunting fanfare (bar 45) almost vocal in style, and recurring, perhaps ironically, at the end; and imitative music (rain, wind, thunder, and lightning). This is not interlude, it is rather accompaniment to action: Dido and Aeneas are seen to enter a cave where their love is consummated. In most operatic traditions, such an action would follow, rather than precede, the love duet, and the music itself would reflect their love. But Berlioz's music displays a Breughelesque indifference to the lovers *as* lovers. Grand opera can show no parallel to these features, which create, in *Les Troyens*, an epic design peculiar to Berlioz.

It remains to mention *Béatrice et Bénédict*, ostensibly the lightest of opéras comiques, and a swan-song as unexpected as Verdi's *Falstaff*. Genre pieces, arias, and duets are all present, together with features less traditional, such as the *Épithalame grotesque* that adds yet another twist to Berlioz's lifelong and ambivalent preoccupation with fugue. But what most separates this enchanting opera from generic convention is the virtual absence of plot. For example, one of the most musically developed characters is Hero, yet nothing happens to her in the Berlioz because the Hero-Claudio story that is predominant in the Shakespearean source, *Much Ado about Nothing*, is entirely omitted.

If we take a broad view of Berlioz's career, we may identify a peak of generic complexity and ambiguity in the decade that stretches from *Roméo et Juliette*, via *La Damnation de Faust*, to the *Te Deum*. Challenging as they are, earlier and later works (the *Fantastique*, *Les Troyens*) fall into a clear, if oblique, relationship to existing conventions. Of course, this exposition of generic complexity – in the comedy, the epic, the earlier symphonies, and the works that appear *sui generis* – should not suggest generic confusion. For many people it is precisely these middle-period works that are the most highly esteemed. But whatever his œuvre's relation to the sanctioned class, type, or category, Berlioz may be seen to have constantly exercised his imagination and skill in manipulating genre to broader artistic ends – whether rhetorical, dramatic, or musical.