

Traces of Metre and Prosody in Instrumental Music

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*Durch alle Töne tönet
Im bunten Erdentraum
Ein leiser Ton gezogen
Für den, der heimlich lauschet.*

Friedrich Schlegel

REGULAR METRICAL PATTERNS AS A MUSICAL SIGN

Listening to the first instrumental music of the 17th century, two different regular patterns come to the surface. Both are of rhythmical nature, but one of them appears on the accompaniment, the other one on the melody. The first one, on the ground, points to the dance genres of the time. It has received generous attention. The latter, regular rhythmic patterns on the melody, is the one that we are concerned with here. Instrumental motifs or themes can be related to poetic metres, and this can provide some valuable information about the expressive meaning of that music.

Surprisingly enough, this source of meaning has been so far neglected, to my knowledge¹. Just as dance genres do, however, poetic metres can signal “low” or “high” styles. That helps to confirm or nuance the character of a piece of music, or of a passage in it. Not only regarding its aesthetic intentions, more or less lofty, but also its structural texture, what Schönberg calls *fest / locker* (*tight / loose knit*). Closely related to Schönberg’s dichotomy, in an analysis that

includes rhetorical aspects, a third structural opposition can become apparent: between a represented ‘preestablished’ or ‘spontaneous’ singing. Such observations become often relevant for the performance of such melodies. They are in fact vocal music in an instrumental translation.

Searching for covert prosodic patterns can help also to reveal what the score does not manifest, in other words the “presence of an absence” that can be so significant in any analysis.² Prosody might have been the main trigger of Constantin Floros’s uncovering of a link between Brahms’s songs *Nachklang* and *Regenlied* and his own violins sonatas.³

I would like to share and comment upon some of the most interesting case studies I have found in my prosodic analyses, on music from early baroque up to Mahler. In analysis, the different case studies of this “virtual singing” show several basic possibilities, with many variations. The most obvious is when composers make explicit the text on which they based their instrumental music, whether they indicate or not a direct literary link. Opposite to that possibility, sometimes

¹ After closing this article the work of Harry Goldschmidt on prosody of instrumental music by Beethoven came to my hands, too late to include its precious results: see Goldschmidt 1974, 1999.

² J. Hepokoski, W. Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, New York 2006, p. 609.

³ C. Floros, *Johannes Brahms. “Frei, aber einsam”*, Hamburg 1997, p. 167ff.

there is no evidence of any relationship to a definite text, but the piece seems to imply a steady poetic metre. Between these two extreme cases, the composer has oftentimes tacitly used an existing poem, one that the analyst may be able to retrieve. Finally, in some cases the gist of vocal music can be clearly perceived, but there is no trace of a metric regularity: see Table no. 3 at the end of this paper.

CASE STUDY NO. 1: CORELLI IN *SETTENARI*

The *Sonata da chiesa* op. 1 No. 1 by Arcangelo Corelli (1681) has four movements. Imitative counterpoint dominates the second movement of this sonata (*Allegro*), whereas topical references to ‘Sarabande’ and to ‘Corrente’ provide the pace for the third (*Adagio*) and fourth (*Allegro*), respectively. Neither polyphony nor dance, however, seem the correct approach for its first movement, marked *Grave*. Counting syllables, however, by observing the articulation bowings, verse patterns emerge, as well as trochaic rhythms: see ex. 1.

Two different, interrelated clauses appear. The first one (**a**), repeated in four different variants, apparently opposes the second (**b**) in regular turns. The metre seems to emphasize a rhetorical dialogue between both clauses. In both of them the melodic design points downwards, giving the whole a resigned attitude, framed by the serene, pastoral related F major. The first one (**a**) drives melodically from the 5th degree to the tonic, where it belongs harmonically. On the contrary, **b** tends to the dominant, both harmonically and melodically. In Schönberg’s terms, **b** is *locker* (*loose knit*) while **a** is *fest* (*tight knit*). Moreover, **a** presents a fairly regular pattern of seven syllables, whereas **b** suggests a freer four-syllable pattern. Rhetorically, this is the main reason why the **b** clause sounds adversative in the face of tonic-based **a**. That is, if the first clause implies a statement, the second one seems to nuance it starting with “On the other hand...”.

Whether they were verse lines in Corelli’s imagination or not, two different metres predominate here, the *settenario* and the *quinario*. The *settenario*, in Italian metre, is a verse where the main stress falls on its sixth syllable. Therefore, if the last word is a paroxytone – with its stress on the penultimate

Example 1: Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonata da chiesa a tre* in F, op. 1 No. 1. First movement: *Grave*.

syllable, the most frequent case in Italian – it will have seven syllables, hence its name. In a *quinario* the main stress of the verse falls on its fourth syllable. Here, the *settenari* can be heard quite clearly, whereas the *quinari* present a less regular appearance. For all these reasons, the rhetorical value of **b** can be heard as adversative, in the face of tonic-based, affirmative **a**: see Table 1.

Table 1: Results of the analysis of Corelli, *Sonata da chiesa a tre* in F, op. 1 No. 1. First movement: *Grave*.

	Melodic range	Harmony	Structure	Syllables	Rhetorical character
a	5̂-1̂	Tonic	Firm	6-8: settenario	Affirmative
b	-7̂	Dominant	Loose	4-5: quinario	Adversative

The results of our metric analysis seem to moderate the apparent seriousness of the music. Both *quinario* and *settenario* were and remain the most common metres in Italian poetry. In opposition to the *endecasillabo*, proper to the great lyric constructions, e.g. Dante’s *Commedia*, and to the Classical Latin hexameter, those shorter metres indicate closeness to the popular genres. Despite the piece’s *gravitas*, as expected from a church *Sonata*, its vernacular prosody can be heard as a sign of modernity, as a vindication, possibly unintentional, of a profane lyricism.

In general, but especially in Neo-Latin languages, a short verse with four, five or six syllables points to

Table 2: Basic meaning of poetic metres, in Romance and many other languages.

Low Art	(Neutral)	High Art
Shorter metres: tetrasyllable, pentasyllable.	Octosyllable	Larger metres: decasyllable, alexandrine.

Low Art, close to folk poetry, whereas longer lines, decasyllable, alexandrine etc. are rather signs of a High Art, and thus of greater prestige and aesthetic ambition: see Table 2. The octosyllable (*settenari* if counted in the Italian way) is the most frequent metre in Romance poetry. It can be considered a semiotically neutral verse, because virtually anything finds place in it.

CASE STUDY NO. 2: BEETHOVEN OP. 109/II RECONSTRUCTED

A variation theme in general lends itself to a prosodic analysis. Here, as often elsewhere, the indications *Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung* (‘*Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*’, translates the composer, as if the *Innigkeit* – ‘Intimacy, inwardness’ – could be taken for granted) help to realise an ‘inner song’ is being represented, performed *mezza voce*, i.e., in a murmur. Relying on Beethoven’s liability when it comes to using metrical patterns in his lyrical instrumental themes, a hypothetical *settenario* (‘octosyllable’) could be reconstructed: see ex. 2.

Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung
Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo
mezza voce

The image shows a musical score for the initial theme of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 109/III. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line has syllable counts: 1 2 3 4, 5 6 7; 1 2 3 4, 5 6 7. The piano accompaniment has markings for *mezza voce*, *cresc.*, and *p*. The bottom system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has syllable counts: 1 2 3 4, 5 6 7; 1 2 3 4, 5 6 7. The piano accompaniment has markings for *cresc.*, *sf*, and *mezza voce*.

Example 2: Beethoven, *Sonata* op. 109/III, initial theme (prosodic reconstruction).

Most analyses of the theme observe the regular, approximately periodic pattern of the bar groups.⁴ The usual pattern of the Neo-Latin octosyllable tends to present an emblematic accent on the fourth syllable, as here in Beethoven's virtual verses. Ex. 2 displays, in place of a text, a plausible reconstruction as to how the four lines of an Italian couplet could be distributed onto this textless 'song'. In Italian, octosyllabic verses can measure only seven syllables, as in this case, when the last syllable is accented. Not only in Romance languages, the octosyllable is considered the threshold between 'minor' and 'major' art.⁵ Specifically in Italian, as we saw in our first case study, the *settenario* is one of the most frequent metres in opera libretti, especially for those *cantabile* moments of the *belcanto* period. The famous cavatina by Felice Romano and Vincenzo Bellini *Casta diva* (*Norma*, 1831) is but one out of many examples.⁶

In this case, counting syllables allows for a distinction between the reconstructed 'accompaniment' and the actual 'melody'. In bars 4, 6, and 12, for instance, one can conceive that both voices might have taken each their own, different way in an imagined original setting for voice and strings.

Typically, the 'Sarabande' reference and the 'Choral' texture both point to a dignified semantic field. Rather than a figured bass accompaniment, Beethoven provides a full-fledged setting (*Tonsatz*) in 3 to 4 real voices, as in a string trio or quartet. This and the key of E major help to enhance a topical sense of high aesthetic ambitions, of a transcendent, non-religious scenario.⁷ The represented 'singing' can thus be heard as twice indirect. First, a virtual couplet in Italian could have been adapted to a string chamber ensemble. Second, this adaptation is set into a piano sonata, as a sign of *Innerlichkeit*.

Rhetorically, the whole theme and especially its first segment have an affirmative character. The slightly varied repetition of the first four syllables points to an *anaphora*. Two notes exit the middle range of the melody: the *B* in bar 5, the *E* in bar 11. They can be interpreted as spontaneous *exclamations*. Finally, in analogy with what happened in our precedent example, the second part of the theme seems to have an adversative character, as if starting the second part of the stanza with a particle like 'However...'

CASE STUDY NO. 3: SCHUMANN, QUOTING JEITTELES

In Schumann's *Fantasie* op. 17 two different cases of prosodic instrumental music come together. Although the composer never admitted it, musicology has shown that the initial phrase, in its rhetorical, expressive power, quotes Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98 (1816). The response of Beethoven's song cycle to the human dilemma of love in the distance is epitomized in the formula "a loving heart will reach / what a loving heart has uttered", words that seem to have appealed to Schumann in his relationship to his beloved Clara.

Ex. 3a and 3b show the two consoling phrases in Beethoven's work:



Example 3a: Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98, first song, b. 48f.



Example 3b: Beethoven, *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98, last song, b. 266f.

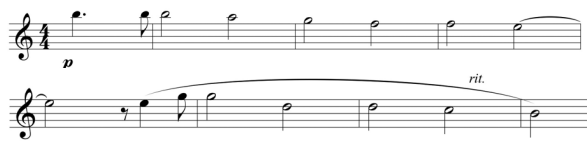
Ex. 4 presents Schumann's synthesis of both answers, the words withdrawn to a virtual, inward singing:

⁴ J. Uhde, *Beethovens Klaviermusik III. Sonaten 16-32*, Stuttgart 1980, and Ch. Rosen, *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. A Short Companion*, New Haven-London 2002 do not even analyse the theme at all. R. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2004, p. 310 discusses some interesting issues about the articulation of these first measures.

⁵ M. Aritzeta, *Diccionari de termes literaris*, Barcelona 1997, p. 33.

⁶ L. Storti, Website <http://www.metrica-italiana.it> 2014 (access: 12.2022).

⁷ W. Kinderman, *Beethoven*, New York 2009, p. 163.



Example 4: Schumann, *Fantasia* op. 17, b. 10–17.

To this synthetic, intertextual response of a loving heart reached by distant love songs, Schumann creates his own ‘question’ using the same metre, one which will preside over the whole first movement of his *Fantasia*: see ex. 5.



Example 5: Schumann, *Fantasia* op. 17, beginning.

In the new-composed question (cf. ex. 5), note the phrase closing upwards, on a dissonant dominant-seventh harmony, in a re-enactment of the old rhetoric figure of the *Interrogatio*. The ‘answer’ based on Beethoven is heard immediately after (cf. ex. 4), just once, and from there on there is the question alone, ‘asking’ for the rest of the movement, until the very epilogue.

CASE STUDY NO. 4: SCHUMANN AND SOME MEDIEVAL LEGEND

Still in Schumann’s *Fantasia* op. 17, the central section of the piece, *Im Legendenton*, presents a peculiar legendary narration without words: see ex. 6. This time we face only a virtual quote, because there is no evidence at all that Schumann thought about any particular poem, other than the metric regularity of its melody. This makes it a more interesting example for our purpose to examine the boundaries of prosodic analysis.



Example 6: Schumann, *Fantasia* op. 17, mm. 128–131. ‘w’ stands for ‘weak syllable’, ‘S’ for ‘Strong (stressed) syllable’.

The indication ‘In the spirit of a legend’ is the only text, or rather paratext, we have – except the regular metrics, namely anapaestic tetrameters, a metre typical of Lord Byron’s epic narrative. In *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, e.g., an epic narrative poem published in 1815 within Byron’s *Hebrew Melodies*, the same rhythm as in Schumann’s legend is predominant:

*The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

Clive McClelland describes dactylic and anapaestic metres in Italian opera libretti as indexes of oracles or sacred invocations, i.e., as part of the opera seria topos of *Ombra*.⁸ However, it is not easy to find other German or English examples of poetry in this metre, whether in Byron’s narrative poems or anywhere else. In *Manfred* e.g. (1816–1817), one of Schumann’s favourite readings, to which he composed his own *Dramatic Poem with Music in Three Parts* (1852), Lord Byron uses mainly the iambic pentameter, the most frequent metre in English and German poetry.⁹

CASE STUDY NO. 5: LISZT AND LAMARTINE’S ALEXANDRINES (I)

Franz Liszt was inspired by Alphonse de Lamartine’s poem *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*, included in *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (1830), to write his own piano piece in 1834 with the same title.¹⁰ Liszt even borrowed Lamartine’s title to name the whole collection of ten piano works written in Woronińce, at Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein’s country house: *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. In this case the poem on which the music grounds is stated explicitly by the composer. Moreover, the lyrical tone of the piano music, suggesting a male singer, should make

⁸ C. McClelland, *Ombra. Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century*, Lanham 2012, pp. 113f., 151.

⁹ For the literary terminology, cf. Ch. Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford 2008.

¹⁰ Liszt completed a definitive version of the whole collection between 1845–1852.

it an obvious move to look for some direct prosodic link to the original text. However, to my knowledge, no one had done this so far.

Lamartine chose the alexandrine for his rather large poem. The alexandrine is the metre proper to classical French literature of the 17th century, but many great later poets, such as Baudelaire or Paul Éluard, have adopted it. It projects a prestigious, somewhat flamboyant image, as it is associated with the loftiest authors and subjects, whether tragic, or epic. Lamartine builds his text according to classical rhetorical rules, to account for an ideal daytime, occupied in agricultural labour, away from the sinful city. Twenty-four hours God could put on the good plate of the scales, every minute of them, on the last judgement day. A new *Beatus ille* in Christian terms, the text proposes a basic, simple faith, far away from intellectualism and sophistication. Pastoralism finds its traditional place, both in the poem and the music. For the nineteenth century, sometimes the boundaries between Arcadia and the transcendent are not so strict.¹¹

The rhetorical style, however, seems quite spontaneous in its metric variations. The stanzas change between 4, 6 and 8 lines, in syntactic and semantic units of unpredictable length. This balance between

a solid frame structure and a free performance matches exactly Liszt's musical reaction to Lamartine's text. It is another manifestation of Romantic subjectivism.

Another point Liszt takes over is the poem's intimate tone, suggesting an inner reading, rather than aloud. As it was shown in our case study No. 2 by Beethoven, the 'song without words' is one of the answers of the romantic composers to the question of music as language.¹² To be sure, this one does have the words, albeit in a virtual form that only prosodic analysis can retrieve. The initial phrase, on the baritone register, bears the mark of the original poem's alexandrine. Its prosodic profile matches the first 2 lines,

Doù me vient, ô mon Dieu ! cette paix qui m'inonde ?
Doù me vient cette foi dont mon cœur surabonde ?

Whence, oh my Lord! comes this peace that overwhelms me?
Whence comes this faith of which my heart is overabundant?

Our underlining of the first syllable in both lines marks the only melisma in Liszt's melody: a long grace note on the sixth degree of the scale, in its turn leading to the fifth, that serves as an upbeat: see ex. 7a.

L'accompagnamento sempre piano e armonioso

Moderato.

The musical score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked 'Moderato.' and 'mf cantando sempre'. It features a melisma on the sixth degree of the scale, indicated by a long grace note. The second system continues the accompaniment with similar melismatic passages. The score includes fingerings, dynamics, and performance instructions such as 'una corda' and 'ped.'.

Example 7a: Liszt, *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*, begin.

¹¹ R. Monelle, *The Musical Topic*, Indianapolis 2006, p. 198f.

¹² C. Floros, *Gustav Mahler. The Symphonies*, Portland 1993, p. 172.

Anyone acquainted with vocal music knows the opening note of this song would not get a syllable for itself. On the contrary, the *e*-sharp is an expressive *appoggiatura* to the immediately following *d*-sharp. The rhetorical implication is that such an embellishment would be improvised, in a spontaneous performance. Ex. 7b is a prosodic reconstruction of the virtual singing implied in Liszt's rendering of the poem's initial line:

Moderato *mf una corda cantando sempre*

D'où me vient, ô mon Dieu! cet -
te paix qui m'i - non - - - de?

Example 7b: Liszt, *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*, prosodic reconstruction.

The coincidence between both prosodic rhythms is striking. Liszt continues his virtual vocal setting varying and developing freely this initial model. The starting phrase, however, is clearly based on the prosody of the poem's first line. The indication 'una corda' seems to reinforce the sense of an 'inner voice' being represented.¹³

CASE STUDY NO. 6: LISZT AND LAMARTINE'S ALEXANDRINES (II)

The central part of the same piece (*Andante*, $\frac{3}{4}$, D-major) offers a distinct contrast to the main section. Instead of the dashing passion of the initial F#-major, the central D-major section goes for a serene and restrained attitude. In fact, its structure – a period, with antecedent and consequent – and its melodic topical gestures, close to a classical minuet, suggest once more the plain rendering of a pre-existing material. If the first theme is of a vocal nature, here the whole body is implied, in some genuine dancing gestures. Remarkably,

¹³ Traditionally, the transposition of a vocal line into an instrumental one has been interpreted as the internalisation of this voice, as if it would come from the subject's innermost region: see *infra* our case study No. 11 on R. Strauss.

despite this notorious contrast, the prosody holds to both original metrical patterns: alexandrine and anapaest. The two characteristic hemistichs and the caesura are all there as well, provided one observes the articulation of the two last bowings: see ex. 8.

Andante *p*

Tam ta - Tam, tam ta - Tam; tam ta - ta - ra - ta - a Ta - a; Tam ta -
Tam, tam ta - Tam, tam ta - ra - ra Ta - ram.

Example 8: Liszt, *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*, central section in the alexandrine metre.

The dashed brackets mark the two imaginary alexandrines, and the capital initial letters (*Tam*) signal a stressed syllable, according to the phrasing of the melody. In this case, none of the 195 lines of Lamartine's poem would fit into the prosody of Liszt's 'minuet' – if it is by Liszt.

A third episode in this *Bénédiction*, following immediately the 'Minuet' section and preceding the Reprise of the main theme, brings another represented singing full of yearning, on a treble register. It is marked *Più sostenuto, quasi Preludio*. And indeed, the virtual 'soprano' seems to improvise an intimate 'Serenade', accompanied by some plucked strings, and joined later by a baritone¹⁴. This suggests a new topical reference, a 'Love Duet' of which there is no mention at all in Lamartine's poem. Interestingly, this is the only section in the piece leaving the metre of the alexandrine behind, in its spontaneous, irregular character. However, the fact that this extemporaneous brief duet is revived in the coda seems an index of its importance, within Liszt's expressive plan.¹⁵

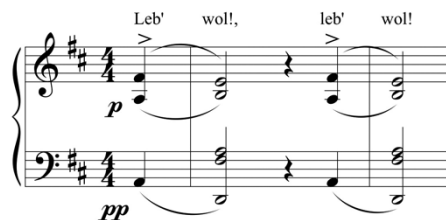
¹⁴ On 'plucked strings' as a marker of lyrical topoi such as the 'Serenade', see J. Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, Cham 2020: chapter 6, *Lyricism and Pastoral*.

¹⁵ Another example of Liszt using some text – albeit in prose – to build up a melody is to be heard in the opening melody of *Vallée d'Obermann* (*Années de pèlerinage*, No. 6), also in the baritone register. The virtual singing seems to suggest the prosodic shape of the question heading the score as a motto: *Que veux-je? Que sais-je...?*, from the 4th letter in *Isabelle*, published in 1834 by Eugène-Pivert de Senancourt. I am indebted to Márta Grabócz for this observation.

A similar example is reported by Constantin Floros.¹⁶ The *finale* of Brahms's Sonata op. 1, Floros found, might be based on a German translation of Robert Burns's poem *My Heart's in the Highlands* (*Mein Herz ist im Hochland*). Although Floros does not make this explicit, it must have been the translation by Adolf Wilhelm Ernst von Winterfeld, that presents this characteristic galloping metre, and was published in Berlin in 1860 as *Lieder und Balladen* by Burns.¹⁷

CASE STUDY NO. 7, 8: BEETHOVEN, BY ONE NOTE LONGER THAN MAHLER

In Gustav Mahler's Ninth symphony (1909/10), a prosodic game with the main motif is displayed, all along the first movement. The work has been interpreted, ever since its premiere, as a singing farewell to life. In a rich intertextual allusion, the composer himself notes on the autograph score words like *Leb' wol!* (*recte: wohl*), i.e. 'Farewell!', matching the interval of a descendent major second: see ex. 9a.



Example 9a: Mahler, Symphony n° 9, first movement, begin.

The figure corresponds to the madrigalism of *pian-to*. As Raymond Monelle has shown, the figure has been often called, since mid-nineteenth century, the 'Sigh' topos.¹⁸ *Lebewohl*, in German, implies a final farewell. Beethoven sets one more syllable to express

the same thing, on the main theme of his piano Sonata op. 81a *Les adieux*, composed exactly 100 years earlier than Mahler's Ninth (1809/10). The first syllable (cf. ex. 9b) correlates to the third melodic degree ($\hat{3}$) of E-flat major, the second syllable to $\hat{2}$, and the third one to the $\hat{1}$, albeit harmonized as a broken cadence to the *vi* degree.



Example 9b: Beginning of Beethoven's piano Sonata op. 81a *Les adieux*, with the original prosodic indication.

We do not know whether Mahler, a fervent admirer of Beethoven's, wanted to offer him a conscious homage, celebrating the sonata's centenary with another farewell, in a more transcendent spirit.¹⁹ The so-called 'Horn-motion' topos, derived from the possibilities of the natural horn, resounds in Mahler's version too. Both valedictions, however, differ by one syllable: Beethoven's has three (*Lebe wohl*), whereas Mahler shortens the first word down to *Leb'*, thus integrating the phrase to a colloquial register. This is a realistic trait, proper to the romantic tradition, by adapting a literary formula to its vernacular form, as in German common speech.

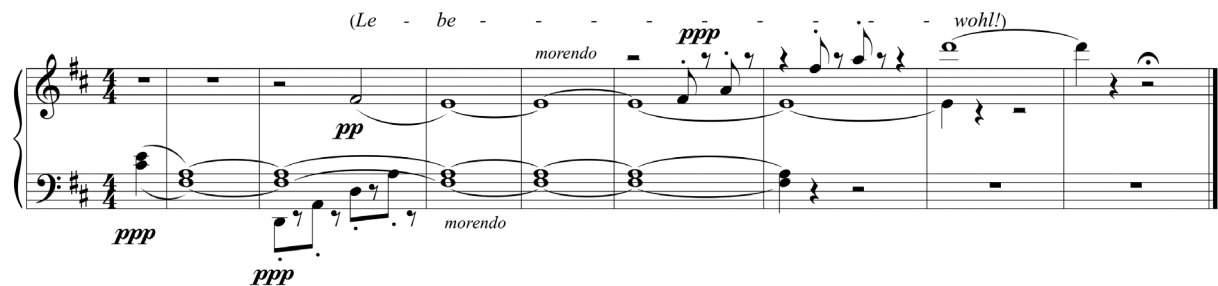
Musically, moreover, the alternating of two and three syllables encourages symbolic interpretation. Mahler postpones the third missing note, the tonic, to the end of the movement, where it appears transposed to the treble, in an instrumentation (strings and harp in flageolet, flute) suggesting a transcendental resolution of all the laments (*pianti*) displayed in the piece, albeit in another world: see ex. 9c.

¹⁶ C. Floros, *Die Werke für Klavier*, [in:] *Johannes Brahms. Klavierwerke*, Berlin 1996, p. 54.

¹⁷ [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Mein_Herz_ist_im_Hochland_\(Burns\)](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Mein_Herz_ist_im_Hochland_(Burns))

¹⁸ R. Monelle, *The Sense of Music. Semiotic Essays*, Princeton 2000, pp. 68f., 73ff.

¹⁹ Already Constantin Floros showed the link between both works. Cf. C. Floros, *Gustav Mahler. The Symphonies*, Portland 1993, p. 277.



Example 9c: Last bars of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, 1st movement, with a reconstructed prosody.

CASE STUDY NO. 9: MAHLER'S ADAGIETTO

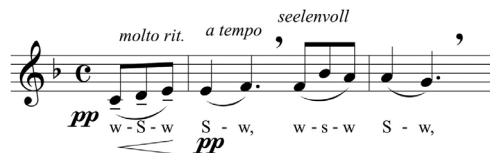
Mahler's Fifth symphony's *Adagietto* features a regular pentasyllabic pattern, all through its first part, up to m. 38. In Anglo-Germanic prosody, as in the old Classical tradition, the implied virtual verses would be trochaic dimeters (*zweifüßige Trochäen*) with an upbeat. The upbeats show they are not tetrameters, but shorter verses, typical of folk poetry, and of some church songs and hymns. The central section of the piece (bars 39–71) becomes unstable, both harmonically and metrically, as if the imaginary poem were left apart for a rhetorical digression. But the whole main theme shows a prosodic regularity that enticed somebody to actually text this “wordless song”: see ex. 10. The poem was found on Willem Mengelberg's score of the Fifth symphony, along with the claim that

This *Adagietto* was Gustav Mahler's declaration of love for Alma! Instead of a letter, he sent her this manuscript without further explanation. She understood and wrote back that he should come!!! Both have told me this.²⁰

The poem reads

Wie ich dich liebe,	How [much] I love you,
Du meine Sonne,	You, my sun,
Ich kann mit Worten	I cannot find the words
Dir's nicht sagen;	To tell you;

Nur meine Sehnsucht	Only my longing
Kann ich Dir klagen,	Can I lament to you,
Und meine Liebe,	And my love,
Meine Wonne!	You my delight!



Example 10: Beginning of Mahler's *Adagietto*, the 4th movement of his Fifth Symphony. ‘w’ stands for ‘weak syllable’, ‘S’ for ‘Strong (stressed) syllable’.

No matter whether the information is trustworthy or not, the fact that somebody could and would fit some verses onto the music is a clear index of its prosodic qualities. In Mengelberg's comment, on a lower margin of the same page of the score: *If music is a language, then this is proof. He tells her everything in tones and sounds, in music.*²¹

Paul Bekker instead points to two more textual connections with the *Adagietto*.²² Both present the same prosodic patterns: the introduction to No. 2 of the *Kindertotenlieder*, *Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen*, ex. 11, and *Ich bin der Welt abhandengekommen*, also in F-major, especially in its final statement, ex. 12.

²⁰ Facsimile of Mengelberg's score in R. Stephan, B. Walter, *Gustav Mahler. Werk und Interpretation...*, Köln 1979, ill. 38, 39.

²¹ C. Floros, *Gustav Mahler. The Symphonies*, Portland 1993, pp. 154f.

²² P. Bekker, *Gustav Mahlers Sinfonien*, Berlin 1921, p. 192f.

Example 11: Beginning of *Nun seh' ich wohl*, No. 2 of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*.

Example 12: Mahler, *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, b. 43–48.

CASE STUDY NO. 10: A RHETORICAL UTTERANCE

Interestingly, the same trochaic dimeters can be counted on the *Finale*'s secondary theme in Beethoven's Sonata op. 27 No. 2, *Presto agitato*, where the first note could be heard as an *exclamatio* (–“Ach!”), and the other *d*-sharps in the melody, marked by hairpins, as reissues of this expressive exclamation: see ex. 13a.

Example 13a: Beethoven, *Finale* of the Sonata op. 27 No. 2, b. 21–25. ‘w’ stands for ‘weak syllable’, ‘S’ for ‘Strong (stressed) syllable’.

Some performers, despite the bowing, do not consider the unstressed quality of the double sharp-*F*. Harmonically, it is the leading note, but it carries no prosodic weight. Significant for Beethoven's aesthetics is the immediate withdrawal to an abstract, neatly instrumental version of the theme, away from

its first appearance, more realistically vocal: see ex. 13b.

Example 13b: Beethoven, *Finale* of the Sonata op. 27 No. 2, b. 25–27.

CASE STUDY NO. 11: A ROMANTIC ‘INNER VOICE’

In our last example, out of an art song by Richard Strauss, the piano seems to represent an ‘inner voice’, one that has not yet found an articulate, rational expression, but carries nevertheless the affective contents of its message. The semiotic procedure is the same as the one Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy displayed in their *Lieder ohne Worte*, ‘Songs without words’ (1829–1845). The power of a wordless song as coming from the innermost layer of the musical subject is staged in a radical way in one of R. Strauss's most beloved songs, *Morgen!* (‘Tomorrow!’) op. 27 No. 4 (1894). In an interesting table-turning, the singer appears to be commenting in recitative form the actual ‘singing’, that is left exclusively to the piano part. The text by John H. Mackay, picturing a blissful love meeting in the next future, seems to be the clue to this ‘inner singing’ solo, while the ‘outer voice’, the singer, can only offer a report about circumstances of the literally unspeakable experience that is being prefigured. In opera, a narrating recitative located in the present is usually followed by a lyrical aria developing the affects derived from the events just narrated. Here, following Schubert's and Schumann's footsteps, Strauss is using an imaginative inversion of this sequence to match the poem's contents. He sets the lyrical anticipation of the events on the piano, the reporting recitative on the singing part: see ex. 14.

Example 14: R. Strauss, *Morgen!* op. 27 No. 4, b. 14–19.

INTERTEXTUALITY

All the examples in this paper could be considered under the intertextual perspective, as a special kind of quotation of a more or less explicit, more or less implicit text. Table 3 tries to systematise the degree of interconnection between an instrumental fragment and a text, from a maximum (1) to a minimum (4). The highest degree of connection between text and instrumental music is not on the table, because it is too obvious: imagine the orchestra anticipating the melody in the prelude to an aria. More interesting to us are examples where this connection leaves vocal music behind, as a reference. Our case study No. 3, the first movement of Schumann's *Fantasia* op. 17, quoting Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* cycle, exemplifies a subtle example in instrumental music of the highest closeness to an explicit text. The *Leb' wohl / Lebewohl* formulas on Beethoven's Sonata *Les adieux* and on Mahler's Symphony No. 9 fit this group as well. Liszt's fitting of the prosodic patterns of Lamartine's first line of his *Bénédiction* would also belong to this category, although it had not been described so far, to my knowledge. Next, Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's *Songs without Words* suggest a secret text that gave rise to a melody. The melody, according to Romantic aesthetics, crystallises all the affective power of that implicit text and translates it into the musical language, which according to Mendelssohn is capable of more precision than words. From these piano pieces, many more interesting case studies could be made, looking for regular metric patterns in the melodies.

Finally, Mahler's Adagietto from his Symphony No. 5 exemplifies some vocal references, without any metrical regular patterns. This didn't stop Mengelberg, as explained earlier, setting a new text to this "wordless song".

Table 3. Degrees of interconnection text-music in instrumental themes, from most to least.

	Relationship Text-Instrumental Music	Metric regularity	Case studies
1.	Quote of an explicit text	Yes	3, 5, 7, 8
2.	Allusion to an implicit, unknown text	Yes	1, 2, 4, 6, 11
3.	Metrical patterns, no line	Yes	10
4.	Vocal reference, no metrical patterns	No	9

CONCLUSIONS

The epigraph heading both this paper and Schumann's *Fantasia*, by Friedrich Schlegel, alludes to a "faint long-drawn sound", "resounding through all notes [...] for the one who listens in secret". And indeed, most of the charm of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instrumental music lies in its symbolic capacity to suggest without words. If the Logos, as human speech, is always inevitably symbolic, in its merging with music an additional layer of signification is attained. The music's spell cannot be marred, it remains unaccountable for the analyst, especially within a romantic aesthetic frame. However, particularly in those musical themes where no literary connection could be established, a prosodic analysis does provide some information, often confirming, sometimes clarifying the meaning of other musical parameters, such as musical topoi. Moreover, it can help performers to support their intuitions regarding instrumental music with a strong vocal character, particularly on articulation matters.

The prejudice of 'absolute music' in the twentieth century and its insistence on music's autonomy helps to explain how such simple prosodic observations had not been published until now. For somebody in the nineteenth century, they would be too obvious. For us, recovering traditions that connect music and its many symbolic meanings through intertextual, rhetorical, topical, and narrative issues can be a plausible way to deal with our musical heritage. May these reflections bring about critical, lively, expressive performances.

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SUMMARY

Joan Grimalt

Traces of Metre and Prosody in Instrumental Music

This paper explores the possibilities of prosody in instrumental music as an analytical tool. Examining some lyrical themes for orchestra or piano from Corelli to Mahler, the information which metre and prosody reveal about a virtual singing and a virtual text is researched. Topic theory and musical rhetoric are taken as indispensable complements to this intertextual research, to confirm or nuance the findings. The author has been recollecting examples for years now. Surprisingly, not even new musicology, sensitive to such intersections, had gone into this field yet.

Keywords

prosody, intertextuality, musical signification, musical rhetoric, topic theory