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MAPPING MUSICAL DRAMATURGY: TOWARDS A THEORY OF RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE

Dedicated to Eero Tarasti, in gratitude

PRESENTATION

A theory of rhetorical performance implies a theory of musical agency and dramaturgy, and vice versa. The question "Who is delivering the musical discourse?" cannot be separated from "What is being represented?" In the recent years, narratological studies applied to music have experienced a notable increase, both in quality and quantity. The main references considered here are Cone (1974), Almén (2008), Grabócz (2009), Monahan (2013), Klein (2015), Pawłowska (2015), and Hatten (2018). However, since it is arguably very difficult to establish a genuinely *narrative* act in instrumental music, and since it is generally acknowledged that eighteenth-century music derives topically from theatre, rather than narrative, I use the term musical *dramaturgy* instead of "narrative", to designate phenomena derived from a sequential point of view.

The theory of musical dramaturgy proposed here does not arise from literary studies, e.g., as a starting point, but from musical hermeneutics. It responds to a way of listening and performing, rather than thinking in an abstract way. One can expect such a theory to be useful to performers. In fact, it has been for me as a performer, and it has found its theoretical formulation in teaching practical "Analysis Workshop" to young performers.

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This paper starts with an analysis of an early piece by W. A. Mozart, his Symphony K. 19 (London 1765). Next, it exposes a theory on musical dramaturgy, which includes issues on agency and rhetorical performance. It is a great pleasure and honour to be part of this miscellanea to celebrate forty years of the project Musical Signification, that was started by Eero Tarasti in Paris, in 1984. This article is dedicated to him, as a sign of gratitude and admiration. *Vivat!*

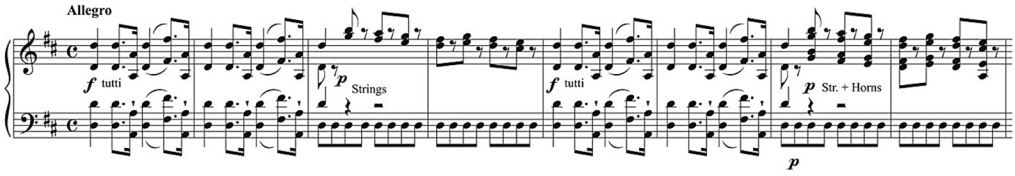
YOUNG MOZART IN LONDON: INTERNAL, EXTERNAL IRRUPTIONS

Both performers and musicologists have paid much more attention to Mozart's mature works than to his youthful output. However, these early pieces are an ideal terrain to look for current conventions and also for the composer's collisions with them: Where does the youthful artist follow the expectations of his age? Where does he break them?

Imagine a virtual landscape on which the musical discourse would develop along conventional paths: there are two main different, complementary ways to alter this conventional course. On one hand, the modern subject manifests itself—by its own nature, it seeks communication. The modern subject's typical intervention into conventional forms tends to manifest itself in 'internal' manipulations of the discourse, to make it appear spontaneous.[1] Thus, for instance, regular metrical groupings become irregularly prolonged or shortened. On the other hand, the pre-modern world can also crash onto the beaten path of conventional expectations. It tends to manifest itself in 'external' irruptions, such as 'blows', or 'earthquakes'. Both irruptions, modern and pre-modern, imply some agency, but in the latter case it can be attributed to some represented 'god', whether *ex machina* or not, maybe as a symbol of the almighty power of Ancien Régime authorities.

The Symphony K. 19 in D major (1765), composed in London when Mozart was nine years old, is scored like most of Haydn's middle-period symphonies, for oboes, horns, and strings. It has three movements: *Allegro, Andante, Presto*. Let us focus on the initial one.

[1] Single quotation marks are used throughout the article to mark what is being represented.



Example 1. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: beginning

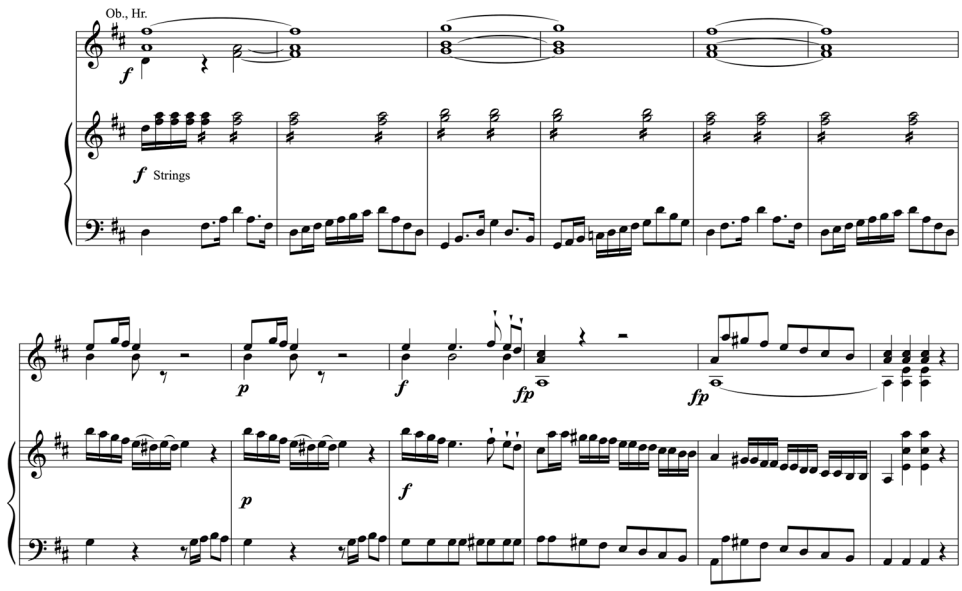
The main theme is exposed without any introduction (see example 1). Remarkably, it features an emblem of mature Mozart's dramaturgy. As in the main theme of the first movement of the *Jupiter* symphony, the blatant topical opposition between martial, unison, *forte* and lyrical, harmonic, *piano* is displayed within the shortest of spaces. Note the ironic use of the rhetorical figure of the *suspiratio*, in b. 3, 4, 7 and 8: it parodies the rests a couple of 'distressed sopranos' would produce, not being able to sing the whole value of their crotchets. From the performer's point of view, conveying the contrast in all its stamina requires time. Taking the *Allegro* in four with no rush renders transparent the parodic tone of both the 'martial' and the 'lyrical'.[2] The sheer closeness of both incompatible references makes it impossible for the listener to take seriously either of them.

This emblematic *dramateme* (minimal dramaturgic unit) combining the martial and the pastoral has an interesting literary filiation in the medieval genre of the *pastourelle.* In it, a knight is confronted with a shepherd girl. Whether he brags and pounds or rather begs and murmurs is a matter of taste and variant. The opposition, in any case, "goes back to the early Provençal poets", and "was remarkably long-lived" (Auerbach 2013, 350ff.).

Otherwise, the metrical regularity and the slightly varied repetition of the four sharply contrasting measures seem to follow convention, at least initially. In a similar way, the transition to the secondary-key area starting at b. 9 keeps the periodic grouping of 4+4 bars. However, the topical landscape seems to drift first to some descriptive stormy scene as in an *opera seria* (b. 9–14), then the 'singing' resurfaces, in a rhetorical reduplication to create a *forte/piano/forte* sequence, only to fall back into the semantic field of *opera seria* and its 'menacing unison' topos (b. 15–20; see example 2).[3]

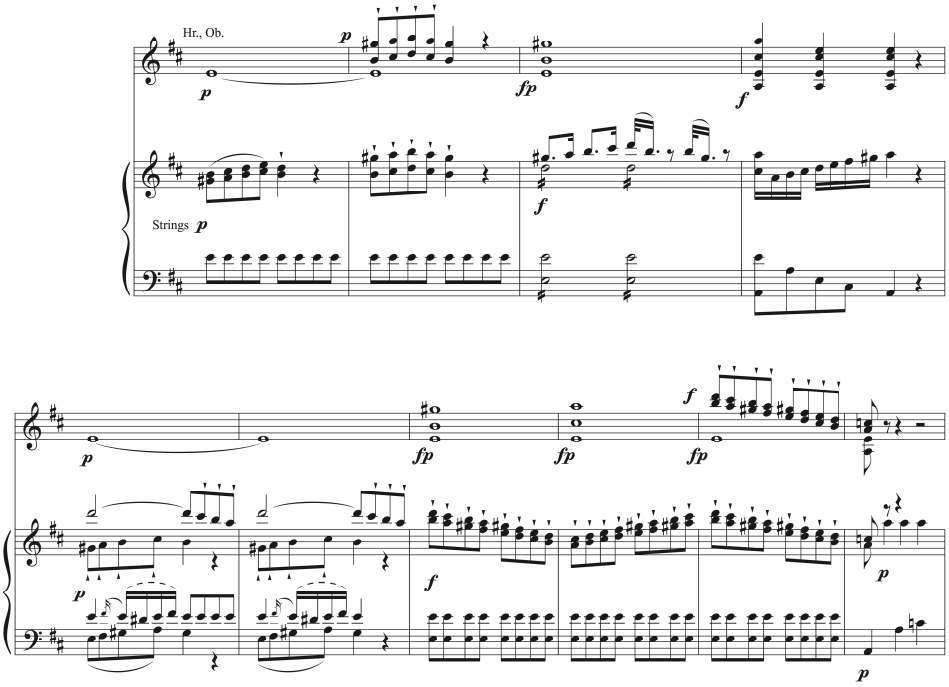
[2] Please look for Trevor Pinnock's (1993) recording. There is no recording, to my knowledge, with a tempo slow enough to savour the quaver rests as rhetorical, parodic *suspirationes*.

[3] More about the *seria* topos of the 'Menacing Unison' in Levy (1982), Sisman (2014), or Grimalt (2020, 344ff.).



Example 2. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: b. 9–20

The secondary-key theme features another one of mature Mozart's emblems. Behind a harmless 4+4+1 metric structure, a subject-inflected, improvisatory-like elaboration generates three different variants of a simple, comedic figure (b. 21) and its resolution. The fact that the new theme starts on the dominant of the dominant instead of the expected A major adds to the gentle convention-break (see example 3). The question-and-answer gag, *piano/forte*, is also a typical feature of Italian musical comedy.



Example 3. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: b. 21–30

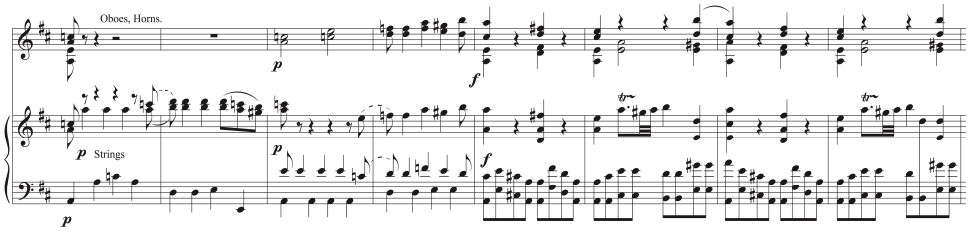
The varied repetition of the four-bar segment (b. 25–29) displays a sophisticated polyphony that stands out incongruously against the 'low-brow' tone of the secondary-key area. Bar 29 *forte* seemed to enlarge to six bars what was meant to be another 4-bar group. A new irruption in b. 30, however, cuts the amplification short to 5 bars (25–29). Topically, it can be grasped as 'tragic opera' intruding as if from the outside into the 'comic discourse' that seemed to have transformed the expressive atmosphere for good. The effect is rather shocking, considering that the elongated segment finishes in b. 29 with a musical 'laughter', and this leads right into the *minore*, barren texture of b. 30 without any warning or transition.[4]

From b. 30 to 33, the *minore* episode consists of two consecutive two-bar cadential segments that begin the closing section of the Exposition with this dark surprise (see table 1: *Tragic Irruption 1/2*). Besides the minor mode and the *piano* dynamics, the stripped texture and the *agitato* tone contrast so

[4] For a description and many examples of the musical topos of 'Laughter', see Grimalt (2014).

sharply with the immediately preceding 'laughter' that the shift becomes rather hard to assimilate, especially since the framing, fundamental tone has been established as that of 'comedy'. Then again, the listener might be reminded that tragedy in a parodic tone is a fixture of most comedies since ancient Greek and Roman times. And that the *Allegro* refers to crotchets (4/4), not to minims (2/2).

Next to this first set of conclusive, short cadences, is a second set, b. 34–37 (see example 4). It is also built up as a reduplication 2+2, and it sounds also parodic in tone, this time within the 'martial' semantic field. Whether these four cadential measures would qualify as 'elevated style' is surely questionable. There is no definite answer to that question: it depends on interpretation. We can imagine both a literal and an ironic listening to the passage. They would both be sustainable and coherent with what we know about aesthetic attitudes in the late eighteenth century, and with what can be found in an analysis like this here, attentive to the breaking—or not—of conventions. For this author, however, the sharp contrasts' immediacy points to an ironic-parodic effect, both back then and today, provided the performers are aware of them. In fact, the very transfer of topoi from tragic and comic theatre, from the military and the hunt, into instrumental music is intrinsically an ironic gesture.



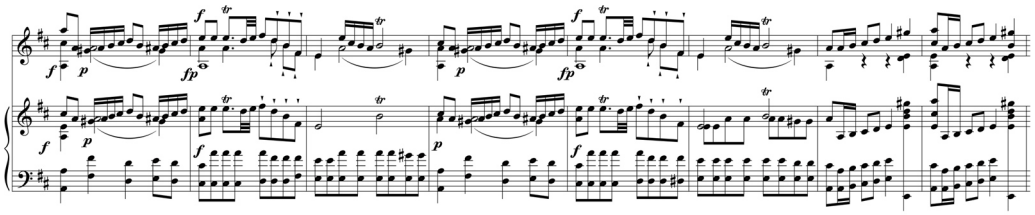
Example 4. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: b. 30–37

It is also easy to imagine both the young Wolfgang having fun and mature Leopold supervising his child's production. As an example of the former, see the octave leap in the viola part in b. 37, a playful variant of b. 35 that the junior violist could have improvised himself. As for the father's control, one needs only to notice the practical absence of mistakes in *Tonsatz*, compositional technique.[5] Or would a nine-year old boy be so accurate as to resolve

[5] There are parallel octaves between bass and soprano between b. 39 and 40. The bass staying on D would solve the school-like 'mistake'. The reduplication of the passage finds a chromatic solution to this, b. 42–43. However, the corresponding spot in the Reprise (b. 71) repeats the 'mistake', which indicates the Mozarts did not see it as such.

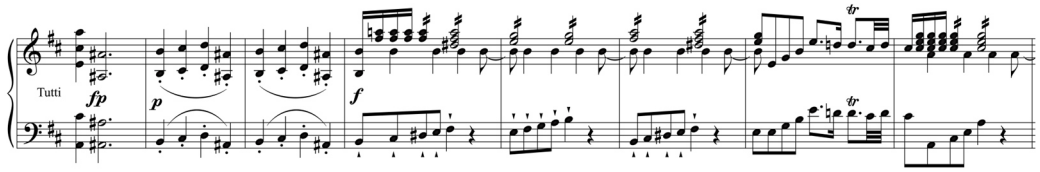
correctly and spontaneously both leading notes in b. 34 and 36, despite the violas going in octaves with the bass line?

After these two cadential formulas, another two follow. This can be heard as an ironic excess, since there is no functional need for so many consecutive closing procedures. Cadence n. 3, b. 38–43, combines the irregularity of its three-bar unit with the regularity of another reduplication (3+3). It also joins together the old-school *stile legato* (*gebundener Stil*, b. 38, 40, 41, 43) with a comedic tone, especially the startling *fortepiano* (horns) and *forte* after one only *piano* measure. Cadence n. 4, b. 44–45, goes back to the initial, conventional 'martial', elevated style (see example 5).



Example 5. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: b. 38–45

Despite the *opera seria* elements (arguably meant in a parodic tone), the whole cadential complex closes the Exposition in a 'comic' tone. Its whimsical play with rhetorical reduplications and their subtle variants seems to arise from a represented 'persona' issuing a relatively 'spontaneous discourse'. This is turned around in bar 46 (see example 6).



Example 6. W. A. Mozart, Symphony K. 19/I: b. 46–53

The unison on A# in b. 46 is the longest note in the whole piece. It has a disruptive rhetorical value. Formally, the 'blow' marks the start of what Leonard Ratner calls the X-section, i.e., the Development in conventional music theory (see Ratner 1949; Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, chapter 10, call it *Development* or *Developmental space*.). It seems to represent the irruption of some element

from outside the discourse. The subjective reaction to such a rupture, *piano*, reminds us of the *commedia dell'arte*, specifically of Zanni's 'sly pace', when he does not want to be seen or heard, in this case going away from 'violence'.[6] However, the minor mode and the dissonant diminished fourth locate this brief 'pacing' episode within the topos of *Ombra*, where graveyard scenes and such took place in 18th-century tragic opera.

In a new shocking contrast, *forte subito tutti*, a derivation of the secondary-key motif (b. 21ff.) presents itself in the topical form of *Tempesta*, including tremolo and *agitato* syncopations on violas.[7] This connects this early section of the Development with the transition, b. 9ff. Again, the implacable juxtaposition of contrasting moods and topoi, even if the music stays mostly within the semantic field of *opera seria*, leaves the listener with no choice but an ironic interpretation. Gustav Mahler would later call this apparent incoherence "reckless polyphony".[8] The expression applies to his own works, but here in young Mozart's first symphonic attempts, some hundred years earlier, the same procedure already gives the tone to the discourse. It can also be traced back to C. P. Emanuel Bach, who has been credited with transposing the 'improvisatory' style from chamber to symphonic music, and to Josef Haydn, following in Bach's footsteps (Goldschmidt 1974, 25, 40).

The Reprise dispenses with the first theme, as if corroborating that the brief developmental section was based on it. The literal transposition of the whole second-key section, now on the tonic, satisfies the expectations of the listener, even or especially when it comes to repeating gags such as the second theme starting on the dominant, or the different set of cadences, here abridged to the last two of them, but also transcribed with no changes.

The last word seems to stay on the side of convention and its expectations, despite all the 'subjective' interventions that have been intruding into them along the way (see diagram below).

[6] More about the Zanni in Mathew (2022, 130). Very close to this stock character is the comedic topos of *Imbroglio*, described e.g. by Grimalt (2020): 322ff. More about the *commedia dell'arte* stock characters in Allanbrook (1983, 155ff., 165, 243), as well as in Duchartre (1966).

[7] Clive McClelland has published splendid monographs on each of both operatic topoi, *Ombra* and *Tempesta*. See McClelland (2012, 2017).

[8] "*Rücksichtslose Polyphonie*", in Mahler's own comment to Natalie Bauer-Lechner on the *Bruder Martin* funeral march in his First Symphony, see Killian (1984, 174). Constantin Floros relates such mercurial shifts to Mahler's personal character, see Floros (1998, 80ff).

Table 1. Analytical overview of K. 19/I

BARS	SECTIONS	REFERENCES	RUPTURE OF CONVENTIONS
1–8	**A: a**	Dichotomy *f/p*, martial/lyric operatic	Conventional, periodic 4+4
9–14	Transition	Opera *seria* descriptive (‘*Tempesta’*)	
15–20		Comedic, b. 18 opera *seria*	Subjective repeats *f/p/f*
21–24	**B: b** [antecedent +	*Legato/staccato*/dotted; *Piano/forte*	Subjective alterations and repeats
25–29	consequent enlarged]	Parodic counterpoint, ‘Laughter’	
30–33	Episode! Cad. 1	*Minore*! *agitato piano*	**Tragic irruption** (1/2)
34–37	Cadence 2	*Maggiore forte,* opera *seria*	Conventional, periodic 2+2
38-43	Cadence 3	*p/f* Comedy	3+3! Altered
44–46	Cadence 4!	Opera *seria*	1+1 Conventional
46		Surprise A# *fp*!	**Tragic irruption** (2/2)
47–48	**DV**: Introduction	*p Ombra*, ‘sly pace’	*Seria* conventional: 1+1, 4+4+2
49–59	Sequence	*Agitato forte ‘Tempesta’*	
60–63	**B: b** [antecedent +	*Legato/staccato*/dotted; *Piano/forte*	Expected literal transposition of subjective alterations
64–69	consequent enlarged]	Parodic counterpoint, ‘Laughter’	
70–75	Cadence 3	*p/f* Comedy	
76–78	Cadence 4	Opera *seria*	1+1 Conventional

MUSICAL AGENCY, DRAMATURGY, REPRESENTATION

To begin, I would like to focus on chamber music, because it seems to be fundamental for the rest of classical genres. Despite the aforementioned transposition of the chamber-like discourse to symphonic genres in C. P. E. Bach’s music, there are specific historical and topical conditions for the symphony that will have to be elucidated later.[9]

[9] There are two genealogical traces of the symphony that are less suitable to a rhetorical approach: the theatrical *Simfonia* (overture) and the martial, baroque display of royal/aristocratic

After our analysis, we can return to our initial, fundamental questions: Who is issuing the musical discourse? What is represented? In the model I propose, musical agency can be imagined as a set of matryoshka dolls. I will attempt a performative answer to both questions in four steps, where each is contained by the former.[10]

1) On the surface, we firstly see and hear a performer playing a sonata as a '**discourse**'. The musical message presented can be divided into two different styles: one that appears to be 'preestablished', and then another one commenting upon it 'spontaneously'. The listener can feel a 'spontaneous' tone because the flow stops suddenly, maybe letting some new idea irrupt; or, maybe, it reaches new musical gestures through a transition where the musical persona seems to be considering how to put it, where to go. The message thus represents 'a discourse being improvised'. As an instance out of many, here is a brief excerpt from C. P. E. Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753) that documents how close improvisation and composition were in eighteenth-century praxis:

> We mentioned earlier that a keyboardist (*Clavieriste*) has a unique advantage over the other musicians when it comes to the speaking, the swift, surprising shifts from one affect to another, especially through improvisations (*Fantasien*) that do not consist of memorised passages or stolen ideas, but that come from a good musical soul.[11]

2) A musical improvised discourse can thus be established as the first generic frame. Rather than interlocutors, however, listeners appear to be spectators of a virtual re-presentation. Now, what is being represented within our spontaneous musical discourse? In the case of a Sonata, that would be a second generic frame: an '**edited improvisation**'. From a performer point of view, in most eighteenth-century instrumental music, the only difference between an improvisation and a composition—a Sonata, a Trio, a Quartet—is that the

power. These aspects have been described by Elaine Sisman as "grand style", see Sisman (1993, 9–11), Sisman (2007, 290).

[10] In a *performative* utterance, the intention is not to state truth or falsehood, but rather to have something performed. Here, the theory aims to encourage a performance of music from the 18th and 19th centuries in a more rhetorical, articulated spirit. See Michael Klein (2015, 126) quoting Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan.

[11] *Wir haben oben angeführt, daß ein Clavieriste besonders durch Fantasien, welche nicht in auswendig gelernten Passagien oder gestohlnen Gedancken bestehen, sondern aus einer guten musikalischen Seele herkommen müssen, das Sprechende, das hurtig Überraschende von einem Affekte zum andern, alleine vorzüglich vor den übrigen Ton-Künstlern ausüben kann….* C.P. E. Bach, *Versuch*, chapter 3 § 15 (p. 123ff. in the first ed.), translation from Barth (1992, 4).

musician has had the opportunity to edit their spontaneous ideas. Until the World Wars of the twentieth century, an average musician was usually performer, improviser, and composer—all in one. Thanks to the opportunity to revise and compose their ideas, these three personas are found linked together in composition. Resisting random arbitrariness, the result of composition can be seen as construed coherence based on free creativity.

3) Third, the edited improvisation represents the theatrical world through the prism of a 'subject' who is improvising their 'discourse'. Normally, comedy is the favourite theatrical frame of the Viennese Classics (Rosen 1997; Allanbrook 1983). That includes a parody of 'tragedy', or at least its ironic inclusion, as it was already the case in the ancient Greco-Latin comedy. The sequence of often incompatible theatrical events invites a **dramaturgical** listening, where senses emerge on a temporal line, typically as processes of transformation from an initial to a final state. For instance, in the dramaturgical archetype of 'Changeover'.[12] Thus, the musical discourse does not only incorporate from the theatre 'situations' and 'characters', but also a 'dramaturgy': a certain narrative, sequential sense.

4) Finally, these theatrical elements are conveyed through **topical references**. On the virtual stage of the represented 'improvisation', martial and hunting 'calls' follow religious and civil 'hymns', courtly or rustic 'dances', intimate 'songs' accompanied by 'plucked strings', scenes of *Ombra* or *Tempesta*, 'love duets'. To be sure, all these references ask for a symbolic interpretation, not a literal or iconic one. For instance, the so-called "Horn Motion" transforms itself through the decades. Initially, horns are related to an aristocratic, playful morning activity, as in Haydn's symphony *Le matin* (Monelle 2006, 3). Mozart's "Hunt" quartet K. 458 seems to start distancing itself from the iconic reference in favour of a reflective, ironic stylization. In Beethoven's "Farewell" Sonata op. 81a, the same 'horns' can be linked to 'absence' and 'memory' (Rosen 1997, 117), whereas by crossing Brahms's 'woods' (as in his Quintet in F minor or his Trio in E-flat), the 'horns' seem to have been transformed into icons of modernity, in a dysphoric pursuit of unknown romantic phantoms.

[12] This dramaturgical archetype, typical of the Viennese Classics' music, where Ancien Régime symbols are replaced by enlightened, revolutionary values, has been described and termed 'Changeover' in Grimalt (2018, 2022). It has also been often reported in Beethoven studies as the 'Overcoming' archetype. See for instance Eggebrecht (1994), Burnham (1995), Pederson (2000).

Graphically, the four agency matryoshkas could be represented thus (figure 1): the classical chamber music discourse *represents the improvisation of a dramaturgy of topical references*.

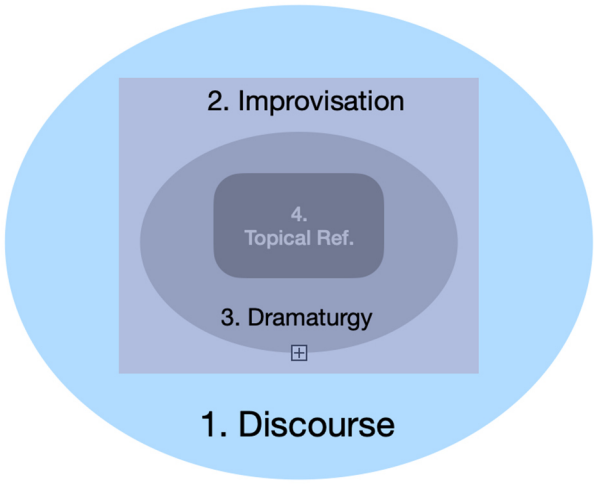


Figure 1. Represented agencies in a Classic Sonata

Going a bit more into detail, in theatrical references two basic types of agents can be discerned. As shown in the analysis of the young Mozart's symphony, the agent derived from comedy could be qualified as internal or subjective. The listener identifies with it spontaneously, as they would with the characters of a comedy. The agent originating in tragedy (*opera seria*) instead appears as external, or objective. It interferes in the subject's trajectory in the form of a lightning bolt, a storm, or an earthquake. The reaction to these outer interferences is again subjective and close to comedy, which, as was stated before, is the predominant generic frame in the music of the Viennese Classics.

In the previously examined Mozart's Symphony n. 4 K. 19, for instance, the unison on an A# in b. 46 has a disruptive rhetorical value. It seems to represent the irruption of some element from outside the discourse. The subjective reaction to such a rupture reminds us of a 'sly pace', as in the *commedia dell'arte*, albeit in an *'Ombra'* context.

Besides the four generic frames that contain each other, then, we also have a pair of opposites, the tragic rhetorical 'irruption' and the comic 'reaction' to it. Both share a disruptive character within the stylistic conventions or expectations. To this pair, a corresponding dichotomy could be added, one that follows

convention, instead of irrupting into the discourse. Its musical manifestation would be a regular metrical grouping in 4+4 measures, especially in the music of the eighteenth century. This set of oppositions and affinities could be represented in a semiotic square (see figure 2).

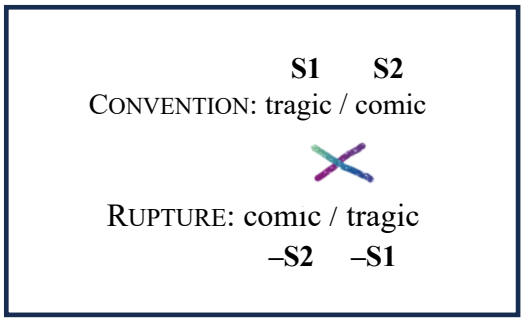


Figure 2. A Semiotic Square of Convention
and Rupture in 18th-century musical discourse

In this semiotic square, S1 (a tragic, collective abstract entity) is the contrary to S2 (comic, individual) and contradictory of the tragic as a rupture of convention (–S1). In their turn, –S2 is the comic rupture of conventions, and thus contradictory of the conventional comic S2.

CONCLUSIONS

Sometimes, performers' relationship to music theory in general reminds us of that famous caveat by George Berkeley. In the Introduction to his main work, Berkeley notes that instead of helping to understand the great questions of human life, philosophical thinking has occasionally made things more difficult. And so he writes: "We have first raised a dust, and then we complain that we can't see" (Berkeley [1710] 2017, introduction, section 3).

In the seventeenth century, rhetoric is often associated with the *Figurenlehre* that was probably more important to theorists than to musicians. In the next century, the term 'rhetoric' shifts away from this highly mannered catalogue of figures to the idea of a 'natural discourse', one that imitates closely the prosody and the voice tone of a gentleman.[13] C. P. E. Bach's idea of a 'speaking' music will hold through most of the nineteenth century, despite the progressive

[13] See a lot more about the history of rhetoric in Bonds (1991).

discredit of the classical rhetorical tradition. Paradoxically, whereas the term 'rhetoric' becomes more and more derogative, music radically enhances its rhetorical sense to move its audiences by mimicking the inflections of a represented, psychologically distressed speaker/singer. This musical 'persona' can be seen as a figure of the modern subject.

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MAPPING MUSICAL DRAMATURGY. TOWARDS A THEORY OF RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE

Summary

The article explores a musical dramaturgy of topical and rhetorical references from the point of view of a performer. Using an early Mozart symphony, K. 19 (London, 1765), the profound links between improvisation and composition in the eighteenth century are manifested. For Enlightenment aesthetics, as well as for the early romantics, spontaneity is a token of genuineness, and the best key to beauty and truth. The term 'rhetoric' is used in a more radical sense as it is usual in musical analysis, to include gestures that not always classify as 'figures'. Also, dramaturgy is the term proposed instead of musical 'narrative'. Finally, a model of musical agency in five self-contained steps is proposed. It is based on a hermeneutic approach, and also on historical theoretical texts.

Keywords: musical dramaturgy; rhetoric; topoi; agency; Mozart