

**Towards a Psychoanalytical Music Analysis of  
Hector Berlioz's Song Cycle *Les Nuits d'Été***

by

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### Summary:

This dissertation explores what it is that makes *Les nuits d'été* such an effective musical composition. This is done by analysing the song cycle according to Terry Eagleton's four categories of psychoanalytical literary criticism. The death of Berlioz's mother, with whom he had an unresolved conflict at the time of her death, is proposed as the emotional trigger that led to the composition of these songs. The content and form of the music to which he set them reveals a narrative that closely corresponds to Freud's description of the Oedipal conflict and its successful resolution. Using the psychoanalytical theories of Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva and others, the subliminal catharsis of Berlioz's song cycle, in the way that it is transposed to the listener through the mediation of the music, is proposed as the reason why *Les nuits d'été* is such an effective musical composition.

### Key terms:

Hector Berlioz; Theophile Gautier; Psychoanalysis; Music analysis; *Les nuits d'été*; Listening subjects; Critical theory; Nineteenth century music; Romantic music; Song cycles

### Declaration:

I declare that *Towards a Psychoanalytical Music Analysis of Hector Berlioz's Song Cycle Les Nuits d'Été* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*“The myriad nuances of these inner realities [of Les nuits d’été] transcribed by Berlioz do not come from words nor do they submit to identification in words. The magic is tangible, imperishable, yet defies analysis. So precise in Berlioz’s melos are the modifications of pitch and time that paradoxically the virtue may not fully strike us if we merely hear; we must heed.”*

- Jacques Barzun

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## Chapter 1: Introduction.

Berlioz's song cycle *Les nuits d'été* Op.7 is the work that he had the least to say about in his autobiography *Mémoires* (Macdonald 1982: 38). There is also very little about it to be found in his otherwise copious correspondence (Macdonald 1995), and the letters he did write in which he mentions *Les nuits d'été* are concerned with details of their publication and not with their genesis.

In contrast to his reticence about *Les nuits d'été*, Berlioz left a very clear paper trail explaining the motivations and inspirations of most of his other works, which were, for example, some emotional impulse, such as his obsession with Harriet Smithson that led to the *Symphonie Fantastique*; or the various commissions he hoped to obtain for state occasions; or even the badgering by Franz Liszt and his mistress, Princess Carolyn von Sayn-Witgenstein, to compose a large scale opera that resulted in *Les Troyens*.

Berlioz, who was lampooned for his extravagant use of orchestral and vocal forces, suddenly became coy and shy in his composition of *Les nuits d'été*, which is one of his most beautiful, haunting, and highly effective works. It is also perhaps his most enigmatic work.

The aim of this dissertation is, then, to explore what makes *Les nuits d'été* such an effective musical composition. To do this we will

attempt an application of psychoanalytic literary criticism to music, using Terry Eagleton's four categories of psychoanalytic literary criticism as a baseline. Eagleton's four categories are: criticism that "can attend to the *author* of the work; to the work's *contents*; to its *formal construction*; or to the *reader*" (Eagleton 1996: 155). Eagleton reaches the conclusion that psychoanalytical literary criticism can be approached from these four categories, firstly by examining Freud's theory of the development of the unconscious through the Oedipus complex, and then by discussing Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud in terms of language.

Underlying the main objective of this dissertation is the assumption that literary theory in general, and psychoanalytic literary criticism in particular, can indeed be used to analyse musical works. A second assumption is that there is indeed a discoverable psychological motive that can explain why Berlioz chose to set to music these specific six poems that make up *Les nuits de d'été*. Another assumption is that most listeners do find *Les nuits d'été* an effective and compelling composition that is haunting and enigmatic, and finally, there is the assumption that there is a discernable link between listeners finding the work to be haunting and compelling and Berlioz's psychological motive for creating the work.



Central to the argument of this dissertation is the assumption that psychoanalytical musical analysis can offer valuable insights into the music as well as the collective psyche of both the society that produced it and our own. And more specifically, that psychoanalytical musical analysis reveals a narrative in *Les nuits d'été* that closely corresponds to the Oedipal conflict and its resolution as described by Freud, and that it is the depiction of this conflict and its resolution in both the words and the music that makes the work such an effective composition.

Before discussing psychoanalysis as literary theory more fully, it might be useful to introduce here the other important theoretical concepts that underpin this dissertation: these are literary theory, critical theory, ideology, and psychoanalysis; after which will follow a discussion of psychoanalysis as literary theory and the relationship between music and literary theory.

### 1.1 Literary Theory.

Eagleton (1996: 1-46) gives a thorough description of the origins of literary theory in the early twentieth century, as nineteenth century empirical positivism took hold of academia and subjects that did not produce results that were scientifically measurable were threatened with extinction. After the First World War, as social structures and class privileges in Britain crumbled, departments of (English)

Literature at the ancient universities of Cambridge and Oxford faced new challenges.

The first was the democratization of the student population, which meant that students from the lower middle class and working class were able to attend these universities. By bringing with them their own educational backgrounds, tastes and worldviews they called into question the conservative canon of literature as it was taught at these institutions.

The second challenge was that women were admitted to these universities for the first time. This required another reorientation of the subject to include the silent other fifty percent of the population, making it obvious that the discourse could no longer be dominated by an exclusively male worldview.

Defending the discipline of English Literature from being abolished completely during the great depression was the third and perhaps the most far-reaching challenge. The professors of English had to be able to prove that Literature as a subject was a worthwhile (if not to say necessary) scientific endeavour. Their solution, in keeping with the positivist tenets of nineteenth century objective scientific inquiry, was to develop a theory of literature which could pinpoint just what it is that makes some writing "literature" and others not.

Pinpointing the literariness of novels, plays and especially poetry became the main task of English departments in Britain and later also in the United States. The technique for this was a close reading of the text; the theory behind the technique was called Literary Theory.

### 1.2 Critical Theory.

Critical Theory evolved from social studies in Europe in the 1930s at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. The technique of Critical Theory, a term coined by Max Horkheimer in 1937, has its roots in the eighteenth century with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and was heavily influenced by Karl Marx's critique of Capitalism. The social researchers in Frankfurt at the end of the 1930s were looking for a social theory that incorporated economics, politics and culture in a way that not only described contemporary society, but also offered solutions to social ills (Eagleton 1996: 191-192).

It is interesting that both critical theory and literary theory evolved in response to the social and economic pressures of the Great Depression, but with very different objectives: literary theory evolved as a form of self preservation, while critical theory was an altruistic attempt to explain and improve the lot of mankind (Culler 1997: 3-4). Another aspect that literary theory and critical theory have in common is that they both drew inspiration from the ideas of the

linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who suggested that words only have meaning within a pre-defined language structure. Literary theorists saw this structuralist approach as an endorsement of their technique of close reading, while Marxist social critics saw structuralism as a way of explaining meaning as something unique to individuals or groups within specific social contexts (Eagleton 1996: 94-109).

The terms literary theory and critical theory are used almost interchangeably today, as is evidenced by the title of Lois Tyson's book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (Tyson 1999), which deals exclusively with literary theory.

Just as the terms literary theory and critical theory are used (almost) interchangeably, so too the term cultural theory is often used instead of critical theory. The term cultural theory was a product of 1960s British leftist thinking, most notably that of Raymond Williams (Eagleton 1996: 198-199). As a method of critique it was strongly influenced by critical theory, but with a decidedly sociological bent because it was more concerned with the role of society in the production and reception of culture, than with aesthetics or literature, thus bringing cultural theory much more in line with the Marxist critique of ideology.

### 1.3 Ideology.

Ideology, in the Marxist sense of the word, describes as “false consciousness” the beliefs and practices present in social groups, with the ultimate goal being the preservation of the status quo by which the ruling class maintains its dominant position – at the expense of one or more subordinate classes. One of the more insidious aspects of ruling class ideology is the perpetuation of the belief that there is a natural order to the way the world (i.e. society) is constituted; another is that there is such a thing as “common sense” (Culler 1997: 4). Alastair Williams explains that “it is only when people are able to understand the forces that shape their lives on a conscious level that they will possess the means, and will, to change them” (Williams 2001: 9).

For cultural studies in Capitalist societies this has meant that art works are perceived as somehow organic, ineffable, transcendent creations, existing almost without human intervention; given birth to by geniuses who act merely as some sort of conduit.

Aesthetic theory based on Marxian ideology critique calls into question this perception, using Marx’s theory of base and superstructure. Marx saw society as having an (occulted) economic base that is determined by the means of production, and a social superstructure that governs the relations between individuals and

between individuals and the state. Ideology, being the set of ideas and beliefs shared by the members of a society, belongs in this superstructure, as do all cultural manifestations, including art and music. It is also the function of the superstructure to make sure that the economic base remains inscrutable (Easthope 2004: 33). When a theory is thus able to reflect on its own place within the ideology that produces it, it is referred to as critical theory.

#### 1.4 Psychoanalysis.

Of all the schools of critical theory, however, Marxism and Freudianism (and perhaps Phenomenology) are theories that are not only descriptive, but are also inherently self-critical. Theory that lacks this is doomed to repeat the same mistake made by the early literary theorists: that of believing that the descriptions they offer are impartial and objective, albeit partisan. That is, they believe that the world as they see it and describe it is true. Marxism and Freudianism share the common belief that nothing is what it seems and that surface description can be deceptive.

The social researchers at the Frankfurt Institute used Marx's model of base and superstructure to develop a critique of the society they lived in, but Whitebook (1995: 78) has pointed out the parallel with Freud's model of the human mind. For Freud the mind consisted not only of a conscious part (a parallel to the superstructure), but also of

an unconscious part (a parallel to the base) in which nothing is what is seems and everything is open to interpretation. It is this combination of Marxism and Freudianism that made critical theory such an appealing new method of social and cultural analysis (Whitebook 1995: 1-2; Eagleton 1996: 167).

### 1.5 Psychoanalysis as Literary Theory.

According to Milton, Polmear and Fabricius (2006: 132-133) the relationship between psychoanalysis and the arts is dynamic and each can inform the other. Freud's original thought was that the content of works of art represent repressed infantile wishes, and he linked artistic production to day-dream. He had not worked out a psychoanalytic theory of aesthetics and his early studies are considered limited by many artists and literary critics. However, Freud does show that he understands something about the relation between the apprehension of beauty and the capacity to mourn.

Jacques Lacan extends Freud's theories to the idea that language creates structures and limits our being. His work expands into a new psychoanalytic structural approach in literary theory, which centres on the psychic process embedded in the text. The text is then itself subject to scrutiny, as is the reader. Psychoanalytic theory can be discussed as critical political discourse (a reflection of society), and

psychoanalysis can be a critical discussion of the repressed and unconscious, of society, individual or art work.

However, for this dissertation, Eagleton's four categories have been chosen as a baseline because his broad approach lends itself most adequately to application outside literary theory. That is not to say that the other approaches consulted do not also consider psychoanalytical literary criticism from all of these viewpoints, but they offer insights into each area more specifically.

One such approach is that of Lois Tyson, whose aim in her chapter on psychoanalytic criticism in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (Tyson 1999), is to introduce the main ideas and basic principles of psychoanalysis, but particularly as they are represented in literary works: that is, psychoanalysis of the characters. She justifies this on two grounds, firstly that literary characters represent the psychological experience of human beings in general, and secondly that psychoanalysis of the behaviour of literary characters is just as legitimate an analysis as any other critical analysis that analyses literary representations as illustrations of real-life issues. She does however concede that there are other questions that can be asked, those regarding the psychoanalysis of the author, and the role of the reader in "creating" (her inverted commas) the text that they are reading by projecting their own desires and conflicts onto



the work (Tyson 1999: 29). Her approach is most useful to our analysis of the content and form of *Les nuits d'été*, which is the subject of chapter 5. Another approach is that of Maud Ellmann, the editor of *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (1994). She introduces the topic and then leaves the specific applications to other contributors. Her introduction, however, offers a concise overview of the basics of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's theories. She pays special attention to the centrality of the Oedipus complex in psychoanalysis and consequently in psychoanalytic literary criticism, which in turn is important in our interpretation of the content of *Les nuits d'été*.

Finally, Elizabeth Wright in *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* offers a three-fold scheme:

[F]irst, I see psychoanalytic criticism as investigating the text for the workings of a rhetoric seen as analogous to the mechanisms of the psyche; second, I argue that any such criticism must be grounded in a theory which takes into account the relations between author and text, and between reader and text; and third, I argue that these relations should be seen as part of a more general problem to do with the constitution of the subject in the social as history proceeds (Wright 1998: 5).

Wright's approach is the most informative when considering Eagleton's fourth category, that of the reader, but is also useful for our discussion of the form and content of the song cycle.

The application of literary theory in the early twentieth century involved a close reading of a text (usually poetry), which once it had

taken root across the ocean in the United States became known as “New Criticism”. This idea of a literary text being something self-contained and autonomous was a typically Anglo-Saxon trait, which was also evident at the time in the analysis of musical works.

Music theory offered an excellent tool for the close reading of music, making the technique of close reading the *modus operandi* of much music analysis that formed musicological research at the time. Donald Francis Tovey is perhaps the music critic who most fully exemplifies the Anglo Saxon penchant for close reading, “which did much to establish the empirical climate of British musical analysis during that period [the first half of the twentieth century]” (Cook 1987: 11). His approach was to work through the score of a piece of music, describing each musical event as he came across it, and relating it to other similar or different musical events within the same piece, “always [. . .] on the point of pressing his affective language into a dangerous semi-poetic analogue of the music itself” (Kerman 1985: 151).

Tovey was writing at a time when the academic study of music was still very much a performance oriented discipline, with the close study of scores as a necessary counterpart, and as such did not need to meet any extraneous objective “scientific” criteria of measurability; talent and skill spoke for itself. Musicology was restricted to historic

musicology (historiography), while all other areas were referred to as “systematic” musicology, which included music theory and aesthetics, all of which met the requirements of nineteenth century empirical positivism while at the same time idealising the autonomous, disembodied composition and wrapping its creator in the mystical cloak of genius.

### 1.6 Music and Literary Theory.

The broader study of music, as a social phenomenon, began with Theodor Adorno who concerned himself with the study of music and its potential as a means of ideology critique. Many of the current debates in musicology have arisen from the work of Adorno, who “sought to extend Marxian ideology critique beyond the confines of economics to areas such as psychoanalysis and, [. . .] cultural analysis” (Williams 2001: 7). One of Adorno’s chief interests was the way in which music, as a social medium, is “encrypted subjectivity, even as a carrier of ideology” (Williams 2001: 14). Fundamental to Adorno’s musical criticism is his social criticism. He believes that an art work is intimately related to the social conditions of its production, and is therefore “symptomatic” of the society in which it is produced (Adorno 1978: 129).

Traditionally musicology has been divided into three main categories: historical, systematic and ethnomusicology. Historical musicology

formed the core of musicological studies from the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. This style of musicology drew heavily on Art History for its methods and techniques and it is also at this time that music historiography became more well defined, with the publication of annotated editions of the complete works of long deceased composers.

These annotations are very similar to the Anglo-Saxon style of close reading used in literary theory, but with less interpretive inclination. Even Tovey, who is mentioned above, did no more than describe what he heard and saw in the score, with no qualitative judgment (or so he thought). It seemed as though musicologists, historical or otherwise, had no need of any interpretative theory.

In the late 1960s, once literary theory had embraced critical theory in what might generally be described as post-structuralism, the studies of the humanities underwent a major reorientation with the various schools of critical theory playing an increasingly important role. Because of its inherent self-reflection, one of critical theory's great contributions to scientific inquiry is to explode the myth that there can be any such thing as purely objective description, as every individual researcher will refract what she or he considers to be objective information through a particular prism, be it by virtue of class, gender, race, sexual preference or whatsoever.

Despite the efforts of a few radical musicologists in the 1960s and early 1970s, in musicological research this reorientation only occurred in the late 1980s. In this respect, Susan McClary (2000: 185) is perfectly accurate in her view that the discipline of music “lags behind the other arts; it picks up ideas from other media just when they have become outmoded.” The change from purely “objective”, positivist, descriptive musicology to the acceptance of some inherent, unavoidable, unconscious ideological interference came first from the so-called ethnomusicologists, those musicologists who were studying music outside the European Art-Music tradition. These musicologists, closely allied to anthropologists, were more in touch with developments in social theory in the humanities than their counterparts in the music departments and music archives of ancient libraries.

The third style of musicology, systematic, is the oldest style, dating back to ancient Greece, covering all academic study of music that is not historical or ethnomusicological; and includes the cognitive psychology of music, the sociology of music, and the philosophy and aesthetics of music. It is from this hotchpotch, however, that musicology grew into a mature academic discipline.

Starting with aesthetic theory, musicology gravitated towards critical theory as Marxists and Feminists scrutinized the cultural artefact that

is music for evidence of its co-option or otherwise into the dominant ideology of Capitalism and its concomitant elevation of patriarchal society as some kind of logical, organic system. This kind of academic investigation into music, referred to as “new musicology” in the 1980s, has become increasingly more mainstream, being joined by post-colonialist musicologists and musicologists who make use of “queer” theory.

Where post-structuralism lends support to such arguments is by offering a generalized theory of language, discourse, subjectivity and ideology that effectively dissolves the musical work, like the literary text, into its various circumambient cultural codes or its relationship to other kinds of signifying practice (Norris 2007).

Christopher Norris, in *Grove Music Online*, further suggests that Post-Structuralist or Post-Modern cultural critique that tries to avoid engagement with real social issues may contain “radical rhetoric [but] conceals an absence of genuine critical-emancipatory force” (Norris 2007). It is precisely this potential for emancipation, for freedom from self-deception and false consciousness, that makes psychoanalysis such a powerful tool of cultural critique and illustrates the importance of taking both the social situation of the production of music and its reception into account.

### 1.7 The Hypotheses.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore what makes *Les nuits d'été* such an effective musical composition.

The central thesis proposed to explain this is that the songs in the cycle represent an emotional outpouring prompted by the death of the composer's mother, which leads in this case to a mourning that is cast in the setting to music of romantic love poems with strong erotic overtones. It is this latent Oedipal desire for the real mother in the music that this study proposes is what makes the work so effective.

The method used to investigate this thesis is taken from a combination of literary theory and critical theory: from literary theory comes the method of psychoanalytical analysis and from critical theory the Marxist tenets of dialectical influences between the individual artist and society.

*Les nuits d'été* offers a broad spectrum for psychoanalytical music analysis because it is a song cycle, thus offering the possibility to analyse the form and content of both the words and the music. At the same time, a Marxist approach offers the possibility of studying the psyche of the composer in his social situation. It is this possibility of combining psychoanalysis and Marxism that makes it possible to investigate our contemporary reception of the work.

A significant hypothesis of this dissertation is to demonstrate that music when studied as a human, cultural phenomenon saturated with the cultural values, or ideology, of the society that produced it,

can offer valuable insights into the music as well as the collective psyche of both the society that produced it and our own.

### 1.8 An Overview of the Chapters.

The second chapter of this dissertation presents a review of the literature consulted. The literature falls into four main categories: firstly, general studies of literary and/or critical theory, secondly, works that deal with psychoanalysis as literary theory, thirdly, writings that offer useful models of psychoanalytic music analysis, and fourthly, literature that is concerned with the life and works of Hector Berlioz.

The third chapter will set out the research design and the methodology employed in this dissertation. The research is designed around Eagleton's (1996: 155) four categories of psychoanalytical literary criticism, while the methodology is drawn from literary theory and critical theory.

Chapter four will look more closely at descriptions of Berlioz's life and the traumatic elements therein in an attempt to find clues as to his mental state at the time of writing *Les nuits d'été* (1840-1841) and at the time of his orchestration of the song cycle some fifteen years later, in 1856.



Chapter five considers the content and form of the song cycle, in particular the textual content of the poems that Berlioz selected and the formal elements of the music that he composed for their setting, while also attending to the musical “content” of these settings.

Chapter six considers Eagleton’s last category, the reader, who in this dissertation is necessarily transformed into the listener. The reception of the song cycle by the listening subject will be the concern of this chapter, and it is this subjectivity and subjective interpretation that will form the central discussion in this chapter.

Chapter seven, the final chapter, will present a short summary of the findings and a discussion of some of the problems with attempting a psychoanalytical musical analysis. Finally, the conclusions that can be deduced regarding why *Les nuits d’été* is such an effective musical composition will be discussed, with some suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review.

This chapter will review the literature according to the issues raised in this dissertation, and an attempt will be made to situate this particular study within the literature already published on the subject.

### 2.1 Issues Discussed in this Dissertation.

The first issue raised in this dissertation concerns psychoanalysis as literary theory. This is followed by a discussion of the role of literary theory in what is called “new” musicology. These discussions are followed by a review of the current state of research into the life and work of Hector Berlioz and finally a review of recent research and analysis of the song cycle *Les nuits d'été*.

#### 2.1.1 Literature Concerning Psychoanalysis as Literary Theory.

This section is divided into three parts, firstly general studies of literary theory, secondly psychoanalysis as literary theory, and thirdly models of psychoanalytic music analysis.

#### 2.1.2 General Studies of Literary Theory.

The following works offer a general introduction to the subject of literary theory and serve as a background to the dissertation: *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Culler 1997) offers complete and concise information in a nutshell. The great advantage of this short

introduction is that Culler manages to cover the entire ambit of the field, while at the same time managing to set out all the relevant theories side-by-side in a way that highlights their similarities and differences. This work together with *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Eagleton 1996) is the starting point for literature on literary theory as social critique.

Eagleton, who is renowned for his Marxist approach to the study of literature, manages in this work to present a more impartial overview of the rise of the subject known as literary theory, but without losing the essential message that try as we may, it remains a part of the political and ideological history of our epoch (1996: 169). Other useful works are *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (Easthope and McGowan 2004), *Contested Knowledge: A Guide to Critical Theory* (Phillips 2000), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Rivkin and Ryan 2004) and *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 2005). These works, general as they are, fill in the gaps left between Culler's concise introduction and Eagleton's history of the subject.

The work of Bakhtin / Medvedev, while in no sense a general study, but also not specifically musicological or psychoanalytical, has however, offered significant insights into the area of intersection between literary theory and social critique, especially *The Formal*

*Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (first published in 1929 and in translation in 1985). Fredric Jameson (Roberts 2000) and *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction* (Finlayson 2005) explain the connection between critical social theory and psychoanalysis and the value of subjective experience. The idea that subjective experience is somehow influenced by society links in with the more general Marxist approach to aesthetics adopted for this dissertation.

### 2.1.3 Psychoanalysis as Literary Theory.

The most thorough introduction devoted specifically to psychoanalysis as literary theory is *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (Wright 1998). Wright also devotes a small sub-chapter to psychoanalysis and music, in which she offers a model of musical criticism that demystifies aesthetics that attribute an organic structure to music. Her model is based on the corporeal experience of listening to music, mapped onto psychoanalytic principles. It is this understanding that music is a corporeal experience, which has influenced the main thrust of this dissertation in its attempt to understand the nature of the effect that *Les nuits d'été* has on its hearers. In *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory*, Bowie (1993) presents an accessible model for using psychoanalysis as literary theory, especially as he is not afraid to use musical examples. He does not reduce his application of psychoanalytic concepts to a

formula and he avoids the trap of psychoanalysing the plot at the expense of the music, but attempts to illustrate how the two work together to create the underlying meaning in the art work. Bowie (1993: 122) believes that music can help to perceive clearly the scope and the limitations of “the unconscious” as a critical idea and to check its recent slide into imprecise and indulgent usage. It is indicative of Bowie’s incisive thinking on the subject of psychoanalysis that he considers the unconscious to be a critical idea.

Anthony Elliott has written two books on psychoanalytic theory. The first one, *Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition: Self and Society from Freud to Kristeva* (Elliott 1992) is uncannily close to the topic of this dissertation in that Elliott approaches psychoanalysis as a social theory which not only studies the psyche of the individual, but also that of the society in which the individual operates. While Elliott is entirely unconcerned with music, his approach is useful for the extrapolations made in this dissertation. His second book, *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction* (1994) concludes with the suggestion “that psychoanalytic theory is an inherently critical, political discourse [. . .] that what is at issue in psychoanalysis is the interlocking of repressed desire and power-relations, of unconscious passion and cultural reproduction” (Elliott 1994: 166). It is this idea that psychoanalytical analysis of art works reveals something greater

than the psyche of the individual artist that is one of the central concerns of this dissertation. Also of interest is “Psychoanalysis and Marxism: From Capitalist-All to Communist Non-All” in *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* (Özselçuk and Madra 2005), and “On the Uses and Abuses of Psychoanalysis in Cultural Research” in *Free Associations* (Wolfenstein 1991), and his monograph *Psychology-Marxism: Groundwork* (1993). These works discuss the integration of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

The connection between the Frankfurt School’s analysis of society and Freud’s analysis of the individual is emphasized in *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Whitebook 1995), in which Whitebook draws the link between psychoanalysis and the Frankfurt School. He also makes useful comments about the corporeal aspect of psychoanalysis and the de-corporealisation in capitalist ideology (Whitebook 1995: 92), and by relating sublimation to the historical materialist model of base and superstructure he opens the way for a psychoanalytic approach to art works that goes beyond the individual artist or art work, looking at art as a social product; a product of ideology. In *Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature* (Rabaté 2001) Rabaté clears the path for this dissertation by providing insight into Lacan’s thinking on the subjective experience of Art by the receiver.

#### 2.1.4 Models of Psychoanalytical Music Analysis.

The literature concerning music and psychoanalysis displays two distinct styles of scholarship. Most is what can be called applied psychoanalysis, with distinctly fewer studies of what can be called critical psychoanalytic theory.

To clarify the concepts: clinical psychoanalysis refers to the treatment of mental disorders using psychoanalysis. Applying this method outside the clinical setting, to music or literature for example, is referred to as applied psychoanalysis. For literature this can be a reading of the text that psychoanalyses the characters, but it could also be an analysis of the author. Applied to music, this approach remains restricted to the people involved in the musical process: the composer, the performer and the listener. This is because clinical psychoanalysis is an analysis of the logo-centric narrative.

However, when used as a critical theory, psychoanalysis can be used as a way of investigating the subject at hand to get to its true meaning: allowing the investigation to go beyond the confines imposed by positivist methodology to include the area beyond the text.

#### 2.1.4.1 Music and Applied Psychoanalysis.

*Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music* (Feder (et al. eds) 1990), deals respectively with: the psychoanalytic psychology of music – how the musical experience is conceptualised and what music represents from a psychoanalytic perspective; the roots of musicality and the influences on musical development, examined both theoretically and through a psychoanalytic “reconstructive” methodology; the composer’s world as the object of further theoretical and biographical exploration, and biographical studies of a selected group of classical composers.

All these sections of the book are covered by the discipline known as the psychology of music, which according to Diana Deutsch (et al.) in *Grove Music Online* is “the discipline that studies individual human musical thought and behaviour from a scientific perspective. Activities that have been studied using the tools of psychology include sensation and perception, listening, performing, creating, memorizing, analysing, learning and teaching.”

In September 1991, a seminar was held in The Netherlands that was sponsored by the Stichting Psychoanalyse en Cultuur [Foundation for Psychoanalysis and Culture]. The theme was Psychoanalysis and Music and the papers presented at this seminar were published in 1992 (Baneke 1992).



Of them two are biographical, or “pathographical” (Baneke 1992: x) and two are analyses of the same musical work - *Moses and Aron* by Arnold Schoenberg. As interesting as these papers are, it seems that they are still firmly rooted in the psychology of music and hardly expand the scope of the discussion on psychoanalysis and music. The remaining papers, however, do.

“De Relatie Tussen Muziek en Psychoanalyse” [The Relationship Between Music and Psychoanalysis] by Christa Widlund (1992: 1), deals briefly but incisively with the subject. She sees psychoanalysis as “een wijze van kijken naar menselijk gedrag en menselijke uitingen. Muziek is één van die uitingen.” [a way of looking at human behaviour and human forms of expression. Music is one of these forms of expression.] She also explains the psychoanalytic terms “primary and secondary process” and reiterates the common ground between dream-work and music by illustrating how the same words used by Freud to explain dream-work (such as inversion, condensation, and transposition) are commonplace musical concepts.

Ludwig Haesler’s paper entitled “Music as Transitional Object”, although more theoretically oriented than the others, still falls within the category of applied psychoanalysis. This is because Haesler attempts not so much to explain the theoretical potential of the

concept, based on Donald W. Winnicott's theory from the 1950s, but concentrates more on finding a practical application for it with regard to music. Winnicott's theory, formulated in his article "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" from 1953, is that a transitional object is an object used by an infant to "stand-in" for the absent mother. It is an expansion of Freud's observation that the infant learns to accept the absence of the mother by playing a game. Haesler (in Baneke 1992: 38-42) successfully extrapolates this theory to apply it to music. He illustrates his argument with examples that range from the individual and literary, to the collective. He also touches on many issues important to the further development of both applied psychoanalysis and music (in the realm of the origins of creativity for example), and critical psychoanalytic theory.

In 1993, a year after the seminar was held in The Netherlands, Feder (et al. eds) published a second series of *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music*. This volume continues in much the same vein as the previous one, but the subject areas have been expanded to include the more philosophic discussion of meaning and communication in music. Its central concern is still that of applied psychoanalysis and the discovery of a method for its application to music, but there is a little more attention paid to psychoanalytic theory.

Much of this theoretical thinking is contained in the second section “On Affect in Music”. The most interesting chapter from a theoretical perspective is “How Music Conveys Emotion” by Pinchas Noy (in Feder (et al. eds) 1993: 48). Noy’s mapping of the organizational activity of the mind onto models of representation offers a way out of the reductionism of psychobiography of the composer, by looking at absolute music itself to find meaning.

The other chapters in this book tend to rehash old ideas from the discipline of the psychology of music, and the psychobiographers have stuck to the well-known and often analysed composers, such as Robert Schumann, Richard Wagner and W. A. Mozart.

In this series there is a slight shift, however subtle, from the “what?” or “who?” of music, to the “how?”, but despite the editors’ anticipation of future issues of this serial publication (albeit aperiodic), none have since been forthcoming. Perhaps that is because the field of applied psychoanalysis has not proved to be as fertile as it must at first have seemed to be.

In *The Psychoanalytic Review* of June 1996, Faber wrote an article entitled “The Pleasure of Music: A Psychoanalytic Note”. Faber, like Feder (et al. eds), seems unaware of the existence of critical psychoanalytic theory as it might be applied to music. Faber, like

Haesler before him, suggests that music can act as a transitional-object. However, Faber sticks more closely to the clinical application of this theory and describes how music can be comforting in infancy by creating a link between the infant with the absent mother, thus creating a dual-unity.

Alexander Stein's (1999) "Well-Tempered Bagatelles: A Meditation on Listening in Psychoanalysis & Music" is a long, all encompassing article. The starting point is the fact that listening to music and the emotional responses evoked by music are crucial to both psychoanalytic work and music. Stein gives concise explanations of both psychoanalytic and musical techniques. His main point is that although Freud was not too concerned with music, there were other psychoanalysts, contemporary with Freud, who were, one of these was Heinz Kohut.

Kohut put forward a theory of listening to music that empowered the listener. According to Stein (1999: 5) Kohut's proposition departed from the prevailing views of the time by considering the listener, rather than the artistic message, to be the active agent in listening. Stein therefore pleads for a re-reading of Kohut, who seems to have been forgotten as one of the leading psychoanalysts who devoted much research to the relationship between psychoanalysis and music.

Stein also considers signal moments of the early part of the twentieth century and the coincidental emergence of psychoanalytic thought and the onset of fundamental alterations in music. He gives an historical overview of thought on applied psychoanalysis and a coherent account of the way tonality has come to dominate Western music. He explains why Western listeners feel uncomfortable and even anxious when confronted with music that does not conform to this tonality.

Frank M. Lachmann (2001) also devoted his paper “Words and Music” to the work of Heinz Kohut. He (2001: 3-4) introduces four concepts in psychoanalysis and music originally espoused by Kohut: linking the function of music to the function of the analyst; discussing the central role of repetitions and rhythm in musical composition; likening music to “play”, thereby departing from the anxiety-tension-reduction model of musical enjoyment; and finally, comparing music and poetry in which Kohut pointed towards a broader, more complex artistic organization comprised of surface structures and deeper structures.

#### 2.1.4.2 Music and Critical Psychoanalysis.

Applying the method of literary theory to music requires the listener to take the place of the reader (as “receiver” in Rabaté’s terms). It is only in *The Pleasure of the Text and Image – Music – Text* (Barthes

1975 and 1977) that the possibility for the reader to make way for the listener is really opened up. However it is *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva 1984) that links Barthes to Bakhtin and a wider tradition of critical theory hitherto unknown in the West, and pleads for a re-interpretation of “text” to include all cultural manifestations. Kristeva also manages to re-unite Marxist literary theory with psychoanalysis through her reading of Jacques Lacan.

*The Kristeva Reader* (Kristeva 1986) edited by Toril Moi, and *Julia Kristeva* (McAfee 2004) have helped to create a deeper understanding of Kristeva’s philosophy, just as Lacan’s *Écrits: A Selection* (2002) as translated by Bruce Fink, and *Jacques Lacan* (Lemaire 1977) have helped in understanding Lacan’s theories. *Intertextuality* (Allen 2000) has also provided insights, necessary for this dissertation, into the understanding and misunderstanding of the term coined by Julia Kristeva.

The abovementioned works are important to this dissertation because they establish psychoanalysis as critical social theory. However, what this dissertation hopes to achieve is to illustrate the less obvious relationship between psychoanalysis as social theory and music, especially in the evaluation of the subjective experience of listening to music, which will be investigated by the drawing together of literary theory, psychoanalysis and musicology.

Important literature here deals with aesthetics, subjectivity, the various applications of psychoanalysis to music, and ways of listening and includes *Subjectivity* (Robbins 2005), *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (Bowie 2003), and *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Steinberg 2004).

A recurring concept in psychoanalytic theory is that of the “oceanic”. It is a term coined by Romain Rolland to describe what he saw as the core of religious experience. This was then explained by Freud in “A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis” (SE XXII) as regression to a primary developmental state where ego boundaries are not yet established, reminiscent of, if not exactly the same as, the earliest infantile state that was governed by primary thought-process: Lacan’s real. Oceanic, for Widlund however, is a sense of timelessness and that occurs when listening to music (in Baneke 1992: 9). Lacan’s real is a state which once passed cannot ever be recovered – our lives are spent yearning for this lost real state. For Widlund (following Rolland and Freud) there are times at which we can recall this lost state, and listening to music (immersing ourselves in the sounds) is one of these times.

This concept of the oceanic feeling is especially important to this dissertation as it concerns the subjectivity of experience.

For this purpose the work of Masson (1980) and Parsons (1999) has been invaluable, although, as mentioned above, this dissertation attempts to link the concept of the oceanic feeling to the theories of subjective experience as described by Lacan, Barthes and Kristeva, thus establishing it as a moment of rupture of the subconscious into the conscious mind. At the same time, this dissertation proposes that it is this kind of rupture that listeners experience while listening to *Les nuits d'été* that makes it such an effective musical composition, rather than anything that can be positively identified in the actual music.

This search for an alternative to the positivist approach was led by *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Schwarz 1997), Schwarz outlines a theory of listening subjectivity for music. He considers the middle ground between pieces of music as texts and the psychic structures upon which their perception depends. Central to Schwarz's (1993: 26) theory is the *acoustic mirror* as described by Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Silverman 1988). Martin Scherzinger's critique of Schwarz in *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004) offers an important comment on the use of texted music in psychoanalytic music analysis. Other useful literature has been "Post-mortem on Isolde" in *New German Critique* (Deathridge 1996) and "On Freud's view of the



infant-mother relationship and the oceanic feeling – some subjective influences” in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (Harrison 1979).

## 2.2 Literature on the Role of Literary Theory in “New” Musicology.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, critical musicology (or “new” musicology) really came about through *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Kerman 1985) in which Kerman extols musicologists to become critical, although of course Adorno was already at that time becoming better known through translations into English of his work. Nicholas Cook in *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (1998) suggests that what Kerman meant was that musicologists should critically engage with their knowledge about music “to reach an understanding of the music of the past both for its own sake (that is to say, aesthetically) and for what it might contribute to and understanding of the social and historical context from which it came” (Cook 1998: 90). However, Cook continues, it was the ethnomusicologists and their broader critical and especially their self-critical approach that really led the way forward for critical musicology (Cook 1998: 101), so in *Rethinking Music* (Cook and Everist (eds) 2001) he presents an anthology of some of the most recent critical trends in musicology. Among these trends are concerns about the nature of music, what it means and how it conveys that meaning, as well as the role of the performer and the performance in creating the music.

While this present study certainly attempts to offer a critical appraisal (critical in the sense that Kerman uses the word) of *Les nuits d'été*, it also hopes to be broad enough to incorporate this appraisal into the new paradigm for musicological research suggested by Rose Rosengard Subotnik in her "Afterword" to the book *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004), in which she opens up a paradigm for musicological research focused on listening to music. Other works that have pointed the way forward in musicological research are *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (Beard and Gloag 2005), a useful and up-to-date survey of the field of musicology, which offers an outline of the current trends in critical musicological thinking. In their entry on critical musicology they underline the centrality of subjectivity in critical musicology and the ways in which music is used both socially and individually (Beard and Gloag 2005: 39).

Also thought provoking are *Music/Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic* (Krimms 1998), *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* together with *Conventional Wisdom* (McClary 1991 and 2000), *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Goehner 1992), and *The Spheres of Music: A Gathering of Essays* (Meyer 2000). These works have all contributed to the discussion about what music is, what it can mean, and how it can convey that meaning to the listener.

### 2.3 Literature on the Life and Work of Hector Berlioz.

For a long time the life and music of Berlioz was of relatively little interest to musicologists, but with the publication by Bärenreiter of the *New Berlioz Edition* (1967 – 2006), and the Berlioz bicentennial celebration in 2003, there has been a revival of Berlioz studies. One of the lone voices of the period before this revival is Jacques Barzun, who published *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* in 1951. Hugh Macdonald is one of the more contemporary advocates of Berlioz's music with his very useful one-volume biography *Berlioz* for the Master Musicians series, published in 1982, and his editing of *Berlioz: Selected Letters* (1995), translated by Roger Nichols. Other Berlioz biographers include D. K. Holoman (1989) *Berlioz*, and David Cairns's magnificent two-volume work *Berlioz* (1999).

This dissertation relies on these works for factual data in order to establish the time and place of the composition of *Les nuits d'été* and to provide biographical background on Berlioz.

### 2.4 Recent Research on *Les Nuits d'Été*.

Literature dealing specifically with the music of Berlioz is still somewhat under-represented, but *The Musical Language of Berlioz* and *The Music of Berlioz* (Rushton 1983 and 2001) offer a thorough introduction to the musical idiom that Berlioz created. Rushton also contributed to *Berlioz Studies* the compendium edited by Peter

Bloom (1992) and to the same editor's *Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* (2000), as well as to Bloom's most recent publication *Berlioz: Scenes from the Life and Work* (2008). Bloom has certainly come forward as one of the most tireless contemporary supporters of Berlioz.

These works, however thorough, do not offer any specific analysis of *Les nuits d'été* and any discussion of the work concerns either its genesis and history, or is a purely musical analysis of it. This dissertation hopes to provide a specific analysis of *Les nuits d'été* that avoids a purely positivist account of the music and by doing so offers an alternative interpretation of this song cycle. By a purely positivist account we mean a detailed musical analysis of the composition techniques, without which of course there would be no musical work to discuss. The starting point for this dissertation is not so much the composer putting pen to paper, but the listener who only hears and is affected by the end product. The alternative interpretation that this dissertation hopes to offer will necessarily involve the genesis and history of the work, but comes to a very different conclusion from those works mentioned above.

## Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology.

### 3.1 Research Design.

The design of this dissertation is built around Eagleton's (1996: 155) four categories of psychoanalytical literary criticism, which are used as a baseline in an analysis of Berlioz's song cycle *Les nuits d'été*. The results of this application of psychoanalytical literary theory to music will hopefully provide an understanding of the song cycle that explores why it is such an effective and affective musical composition. The reason for designing the research around Eagleton's four categories is because his description of psychoanalytical literary criticism is well grounded in the practical analysis of literary works, while at the same time having a thorough theoretical underpinning in historical materialism. It is this theoretical basis that makes it possible to apply the four categories to all art works and not just to literature.

As mentioned in the introduction, Eagleton reaches the conclusion that psychoanalytical literary criticism can be divided into four categories (author, content, form and reader), as a result of his examination of Freud's theories and Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud in terms of language.

Eagleton suggests that central to Freud's theory is the creation of the unconscious by the sublimation of repressed desires through the Oedipus complex. This results in the men and women that we are and with it the civilization we produce. This offers Eagleton a starting point for his first two categories – psychoanalytic criticism of the author and of the content of the artwork.

Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's socialization of the child through the Oedipus complex in terms of language allows for a further distinction between *what* is being said and *how* something is being said; or between the content and the form of an utterance or art work.

Because language is a pre-eminently social activity, Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud also allows us to explore the unconscious as an effect of our relations with one another. In other words, Lacan suggests that the unconscious exists between us, as our relationships do. This makes possible Eagleton's fourth category, psychoanalytic criticism of the reader, or in our case the listener.

A preliminary conclusion of this dissertation is that the psychoanalytical literary theory of form suggests that art works, like dreams, are created in the primary thought processes of the unconscious; or in Freud's terms, art works are the "manifest

content” of “dream-work”. As Eagleton points out, the essence of the dream for Freud is the “practice” of dream-work itself. He continues:

Like the dream, the work takes certain ‘raw materials’ – language, other literary texts, ways of perceiving the world – and transforms them by certain techniques into a product (Eagleton 1996: 156 - 157).

In this case, the material form of this product of dream-work is *Les nuits d’été*, which we can analyse to see not what it says, but how it works (Eagleton 1996: 158). The primary material is Gautier’s poetry, the reworking of which in Berlioz’s psyche produces a song cycle that unconsciously, but accurately, expresses the Oedipal conflict and its resolution, and perhaps at the same time expresses Berlioz’s unconscious social values, values derived from the dominant ideology of his time.

That is not to suggest that the music and the text should be separated, but that for the purposes of this dissertation they will be analysed independently.

### 3.2 Methodology.

The primary material used for this dissertation is the printed score of *Les nuits d’été* (Berlioz 2003) together with a recording of the orchestral version of these songs performed by Anne Sofie von Otter with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by James Levine, recorded in 1988 (Berlioz 1994). Secondary material, in the form of

commentaries by other scholars on Berlioz's musical style and his life, was also consulted. In order to form an opinion as to why *Les nuits d'été* is such an effective musical composition, works on literary theory were used. It then became apparent that psychoanalytical literary theory would offer the most satisfying explanation, and so that avenue was further pursued. Along the way it also became apparent that Marxist literary theory would also be useful as a tool to explain some of the aesthetic qualities of the song cycle.

The first category of analysis concerns the author of the work and can be described as applied psychoanalysis; that is, using the method of clinical psychoanalysis and applying it outside the clinical setting. Psychoanalytic music analysis has generally resulted in an analysis based on the (posthumous) biographies of composers and performers (see Feder (et al. eds) 1990 and 1993). My discussion of this category will centre on the life of Berlioz taken from recent biographies by Macdonald (1982), Holoman (1989), Cairns (1999) and Bloom (2008).

The category that concerns the work's contents can also be described as applied psychoanalysis. In music analysis this has generally tended to concentrate on an analysis of the texts of songs and *libretti* of operas (see Feder (et al. eds) 1990 and 1993, Faber 1996, and Bowie 1993). The main problem with this approach is that



it tends to concentrate solely on the words, while ignoring the music (the actual musical notes) to which these words are set. Analysis of the music can in itself also be contentious because that then tends to ignore the problematic around just what the music actually is: “new musicology” and critical theory tend to describe the music as that which is heard (its reception/interpretation), rather than that which is printed.

The third and fourth categories, psychoanalytical literary criticism of the work’s formal construction, and of the reader, may, by replacing “text” with “music” and the “reader” with the “listener”, offer a way of understanding music as a cultural phenomenon saturated with the cultural values, or ideology of the society that produced it. Thus establishing music as a cultural product that is socially embodied within the dominant ideology of the time of its composition, as well as situating it within our own contemporary society. It is in these categories, by following Bakhtin / Medvedev’s (1985) discussion on the formal method in literary scholarship and linking this to the literary theory of the post-structuralists Barthes (1975 and 1977) and Kristeva (1984), that the greatest potential lies for a truly critical psychoanalytic discussion of *Les nuits d’été*.

Analysis of the narrative content of *Les nuits d’été* tells us not only the story, but also reveals unconscious aspects of the life history of

the composer. In this respect the first two of Eagleton's categories are quite similar; both use an evident narrative to explain something that is not immediately apparent.

The analysis of the formal construction of the song cycle looks beyond the narratives mentioned above, in an attempt to describe what Freud referred to as the "'latent content' or unconscious drives, which have gone into its making" (Eagleton 1996: 158). This leads us on to the last of Eagleton's four categories, namely an analysis of the reader (listener). This is the most interesting category because unlike the objects of analysis of the other categories, the subject of this category is not fixed. The ensuing tension between individual and group sets up a dialectic, which itself becomes the object of analysis.

### 3.3 Limitations.

This research design is limited in that psychoanalysis has its own methodology and vocabulary, which is an entire field of study in its own right. Any application of these methods and vocabulary by a novice will undoubtedly have gaps. The point is not to attempt to do the psychoanalyst's job, but to identify psychoanalytic techniques that can be used to uncover information about the way *Les nuits d'été* works as a musical composition.

The strength of this approach, however, is that it can be tested against existing psychoanalytic literary theory, for example by comparing it against other models of psychoanalytical literary criticism and by comparing the baseline (Eagleton's categories) with the theories of Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes and others such as Silverman and Schwarz. It also leaves room for a discussion of the social values inherent in the work of art itself, as will be discussed later.

One of the weaknesses of this research design is that the arguments presented are highly theoretical and convoluted, in that the analysis covers not only the composer, the songs, and the listeners in both the past and the present, but also attempts to broaden the analysis to include the socio-political ideologies both at the time of the composition of the songs and in our own time. However, it does become clear that the songs in *Les nuits d'été* do reveal a complete narrative and offer a comprehensive model for critique, which may be subjected to psychoanalytical interpretation

A further limitation, presented as a warning, comes from Adorno in "On the Social Situation of Music" (1978). Adorno warns that while it is probable that there is a discoverable psychological mechanism at work behind music (especially popular songs), the psychological analysis must not allow the analyst to become blind to the "more

dangerous significance behind the psychoanalytical individual meaning: i.e., the social significance of the song” (Adorno 1978: 163). Adorno is making the point that it is important not to lose sight of the ideological dialectic that exists between society and the individual, a dialectic in which the psychoanalytical individual meaning of songs is co-opted into obscuring the larger social significance, which is to preserve the status quo in favour of the ruling ideology.

#### 3.4 Delimitations.

This dissertation has deliberately set out to avoid a close reading analysis of the music, opting instead to attempt to analyse how the music affects its listeners. It is the mood that is set in each song, and the cumulative effect of the songs set together as a cycle that is central to this discussion. The analysis of the musical content will be restricted to compositional techniques in so far as they reinforce interpretation of the text, rather than attempting to find meaning as such in the notes.

This dissertation is also not intended to be a psychoanalysis of Berlioz’s life, but rather uses the method of psychoanalytical literary criticism to discover Berlioz’s motivation to compose *Les nuits d’été*. The form and content of this song cycle is only analysed for so far as it is useful to understand this, perhaps unconscious, motivation.

Therefore the content of the poems has also not been subjected to a close reading analysis. Instead the main themes and images in each poem are highlighted in an attempt to describe the mood presented in each song.

The discussion limits itself to Eagleton's four categories of psychoanalytical literary criticism because these four categories provide a solid framework for the discussion, and allows a discussion of both the individual dimension (composer, art work, listener) and the larger socio-political (ideological) dimension of psychoanalysis as critical theory.

The arguments presented in this dissertation are not intended to be an exhaustive review of psychoanalytical techniques and theories, but rather focus on those concepts and theorists that are useful to explain the way in which *Les nuits d'été* is a product both of the ideology of the time and Berlioz's unconscious, and to explain how this is transferred to the listener.

#### Chapter 4: Berlioz's Life.

Following Eagleton's first category, this chapter will study the various biographies of Berlioz for clues as to his mental state at the time of writing *Les nuits d'été* (1840-1841), and at the time of his loving orchestration of them some fifteen years later, in 1856. As Eagleton has pointed out, "psychoanalysing the author is a speculative business" (Eagleton 1996: 155). That is not to say that this kind of speculation is entirely without merit: Christa Widlund (1992: 4) suggests that this kind of analysis of the personality of the musician is useful because it can tell us something about "de *pathografie*, de beschrijving van de levensgeschiedenis (en de traumatische elementen daarin) van de kunstenaar en hoe die herkenbaar is in zijn kunstprodukten." [the *pathography*, the description of the life-history (and the traumatic elements therein) of the artist and how they are recognisable in his art works.]

Stuart Feder, commenting on the work of Max Graf, an early twentieth-century psychoanalyst who was closely connected to Freud in Vienna, suggests that biography "permits the hypothesis to be formulated that a powerful impetus may exist for the artist-composer to continually create new artistically based representational worlds. [. . .] to express in highly artistic-creative form, personalized needs, conflicts, and solutions in fantasy" (Feder 1990: x-xi).

The central hypothesis of this chapter is that Berlioz's emotional life generally formed the inspirational germ for his musical compositions. This chapter will therefore look at what event (or events) could possibly have been what Macdonald (1982: 2) has called the "emotional trigger" for composing *Les nuits d'été*.

#### 4.1 The "Emotional Trigger".

The emotional trigger of *Les nuits d'été* was quite possibly the death of Berlioz's mother, rather than an intense love affair, as was the case with many of his other compositions.

Evidence to support this hypothesis is that many of Berlioz's most well known compositions very often had a distinct foundation in his emotional attachments at the time of their composition. His most famous work before the composition of *Les nuits d'été* was the highly autobiographical *Symphonie Fantastique*, a work that was inspired by his obsession with Harriet Smithson, and its sequel *Lélio* that came from his relationship with Camille Moke. It is, therefore, not unfounded to also look for a biographical explanation as the genesis for *Les nuits d'été*.

The poems that Berlioz chose to set to music for *Les nuits d'été* come from the collection *La comédie de la mort* [The Comedy of Death] by Théophile Gautier. It is, however, uncertain when Berlioz

first read the poems as Gautier, a friend and fellow artist, lived not far from Berlioz in Paris, so it is highly probable, as Keith Anderson has suggested in the notes for the Naxos recording of *Les nuits d'été*, that Berlioz was privy to the poems in manuscript before their publication in 1838. It is also probable that Berlioz had worked on his settings of the poems for some time before their publication 1841 (see sleeve notes in Chausson 2005).

The period between 1837 and 1841 must have been a period of sustained emotional turmoil for Berlioz: his beloved composition teacher, Le Sueur, died in October 1837; his mother died in February 1838; his younger brother, Prosper, died a year later in January 1839; also the relationship with his wife, Harriet Smithson, deteriorated to such an extent that by June 1841, Berlioz had all but left her and moved in with his mistress, Marie Récio.

It has sometimes been suggested (as Anegret Fauser points out in Bloom 2000: 119) that the breakdown of his marriage to Harriet Smithson was Berlioz's inspiration for *Les nuits d'été*, but this begs the question why he suddenly became so shy about announcing the fact. Another explanation is that his mistress Marie Récio was his muse at the time; this clandestine affair might offer a more plausible explanation for his reticence to reveal the genesis of the song cycle.



This theory is, however, flawed because the song cycle was essentially completed before Berlioz began his liaison with Récio.

#### 4.2 Berlioz's Relationship to the Women in his Life.

Berlioz was greatly attached to his younger brother, and while there is little extant evidence to support it, it might be supposed that the sudden demise of a dear sibling would have deeply affected someone with such a Romantic, artistic sensibility as Berlioz had. Bloom supports this idea: "The death of Berlioz's mother, and for that matter the death at nineteen of his younger brother, must have affected the mature composer, but the former is mentioned only in passing in the *Mémoires*, the latter is mentioned nowhere" (Bloom 2008: 202). However, it is Berlioz's relationship to the women in his life that provides the most interesting insights into his psyche, and into the genesis of *Les nuits d'été*. Although, "[o]f the four women who meant a great deal to him, only one is here [in the *Mémoires*] depicted as she actually was: Estelle Dubœuf" (Citron in Bloom 2000: 130). According to Citron the rest are distortions, or are glossed over, as are the most important friendships, family feuds, and events.

The obsessive nature, or "constant enthusiasms" as Macdonald describes it, of Berlioz's personality, "manifested itself early: first (according to the *Mémoires*) it was a short-lived religious devotion,

and then, [. . .] the mystical equivalence of music and religious ecstasy; then he discovered books of travel [. . .] [t]hen Virgil” (Macdonald 1982: 2).

#### 4.2.1 Estelle Dubœuf.

This obsessive nature also dominated his emotional attachments to women. Firstly, when as a teenager he worshiped Estelle Dubœuf, a girl six years his senior who lived in a nearby village.

As was to happen many times again in later life, the emotional experience triggered his creativity; he at once wished to express his response in music (Macdonald 1982: 2).

The result of Berlioz’s first love was a sextet on Italian airs, for horn, flute and string quartet. His attachment to Estelle was more than a mere infatuation; it verged on the obsessive and lasted for five years until 1821, when he moved to Paris to study medicine. This obsessive attachment to Estelle was still undiminished at the end of his life when he renewed the acquaintance.

#### 4.2.2 Harriet Smithson.

Harriet Smithson was the next object of his obsessive attachment. This Irish actress, who by all accounts was both beautiful and talented (Macdonald 1982: 12), appeared in Paris in 1827 playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. For Berlioz the combination of seeing Shakespeare brought to life and the physical

beauty of Harriet stirred a fire in his heart and a fever in his brain (Macdonald 1982: 12). The next three years of his life were dominated by his obsession for this unattainable woman (she spurned his advances and ignored his letters). The torment of this obsession with a woman whom Berlioz idolized, but hardly knew, resulted in 1830 in the *Symphonie Fantastique*, which bears the subtitle *Episode de la vie d'une artiste*, and its most fitting musical motif the *idée fixe*. It is the most dramatic expression of the emotional and perhaps even physical torment that Berlioz obviously felt in his obsession with Harriet. The notion of an *idée fixe* matches, musically, Berlioz's own *idée fixe*, which was his idealization of a woman he had only seen on the stage.

For Berlioz, Harriet was quite literally the embodiment of Ophelia and Juliet. He seems almost incapable of having been able to distinguish the actress playing a part from the woman who was Harriet Smithson. As she ignored his advances, his obsession grew (Macdonald 1982: 13).

#### 4.2.3 Camille Moke.

Then, in 1830, with revolution in the air, Berlioz was finally distracted from Harriet by Camille Moke, a Belgian pianist whose mother it seems was set on finding her a famous (and preferably wealthy) husband. Berlioz seems to have welcomed the distraction, but at the

same time he was desperate to win the *Prix de Rome* and travel to Italy. The brief liaison with Camille (she became engaged to someone else while Berlioz was in Italy) resulted in, *Le retour à la vie (Lélio)*, the sequel to *Symphonie Fantastique*.

#### 4.2.4 Marie Récio.

On his return to Paris at the end of 1832, Berlioz was finally introduced to Harriet and within a year they were married. Another year later in 1834, their only child, Louis, was born. There followed what by all accounts (Cairns 1999; Bloom 2008; Holoman 1989) was a fairly happy if impecunious period in Berlioz's life. However, by 1841, it seems that the domestic idyll was over and Berlioz found comfort in the arms of a singer at the Paris Opera, Marie Récio, who was ten years his junior.

Marie does not figure prominently in Berlioz's own *Mémoires*, which he began in 1848; the *Mémoires* cover his life up to the eve of his marriage to Marie Récio in 1854, just six months after the death of Harriet. Not only does Marie not figure in his *Mémoires*, but it is unlikely that she was ever the cause of "the emotional experience [that] triggered his creativity" (Macdonald 1982: 2), which as Macdonald has suggested, happened many times over in Berlioz's life and to which he generally freely admitted in his *Mémoires*. Bloom has argued convincingly that it is almost certain that Marie was not in

any sense the “muse” that inspired *Les nuits d’été* (Berlioz probably had the voice of Rosine Stolz in mind) (Bloom 2008: 207).

#### 4.2.5 Berlioz’s Mother.

Besides Berlioz’s romantic attachments, there are of course the women in his family. As is evidenced by his letters, Berlioz seems to have had a fond affection for his two sisters, Nanci and Adèle, but his relationship with his mother was a lot more troubled. The conflict with his mother was manifestly over his decision to defy his parents and give up studying medicine in order to devote himself wholly to music.

His mother, a strict Catholic and a somewhat cold person, stands in stark contrast to his father who, as a man of science was much more liberal minded. While his father had his own reasons for wanting Hector, his eldest son, to continue in his footsteps, he seems not to have resisted his son’s decision to become a composer as vehemently as his wife did. If the *Mémoires* are to be believed, the great rift between Berlioz and his mother was during a visit to his family in Côte-St-André, probably in 1823 (Heidlberger in Bloom 2008: 40). Berlioz himself places this confrontation in 1824, but as David Cairns has pointed out (in Bloom 2008: 226), it must have taken place in the spring of 1823. The dramatic argument between Berlioz and his mother, which ended with his mother disowning him and cursing him, is described in chapter X of the *Mémoires*.

Part of the conflict between Berlioz and his mother might also have had something to do with the fact that after his initial religious fervour, he lapsed as a Catholic. This, together with her provincial view of the life of a musician or artist (as ill befitting a gentleman), must have made her consider his choice to live in Paris as an artist/musician, a certain road to perdition. One might even speculate that she harboured an inverted Oedipus complex and was (subconsciously) jealous of her son's amicable relationship with his father.

Berlioz returned to Côte-St-André in 1832, and it appears that relations between him and his mother were cordial at this time, but he never saw her again after that. Madame Berlioz never heard any of Berlioz's music and she never met his wife (who was both penniless and perhaps worse in her view, a Protestant), nor did she ever meet her grandson Louis (Holoman 1989: 158).

It is almost unfathomable that Berlioz, who was always intensely affected by his attachments to the people around him, should be so completely silent on the death of his mother in 1838. It is also a strange coincidence that while the *Mémoires* are full of details of the genesis of his compositions: the commissions; the love-inspirations, he is silent on the genesis of *Les nuits d'été*. Perhaps this work was

meant to stand in the place of words: to speak the unspeakable and stand as a monument to his deceased mother.

What we do know is that Berlioz had finished setting the first song of what was to become *Les nuits d'été* by March 1840, almost exactly two years after the death of his mother. The songs were finally published in September 1841, just months after he began his liaison with Marie Récio, and while a performance of one or more of them was announced, no public performances are recorded. Besides these announcements in the newspapers, Berlioz had nothing to say about these songs.

Berlioz was shy to the point of silence about one of his most beautiful works (Macdonald 1982: 8).

At the time of the composition of *Les nuits d'été*, Berlioz had not known Marie long enough for her to be the “emotional trigger”. But the deep conflict that Berlioz must have felt by the unresolved relationship with his mother, which was caused by her obvious disapproval of his choice of career, of his rejection of the Catholic Church, and of his marriage to a Protestant actress, must have left him with some psychological scars – altogether making a strong case for the death of his mother to be “the emotional experience [that] triggered his creativity” (Macdonald 1982: 2).

These intensely personal songs express the combined emotions of release and guilt (at the death of his mother), which together with the mental juggling that he must have felt was necessary to avoid the disintegration of his psyche, compounded by the concealment from his wife of his extra-marital affair, and the deaths within two years of his teacher and his younger brother, could go far to explain his reticence about the songs. It might also offer an explanation for the mood of melancholy, which after an initial mood of fond nostalgia, pervades the settings of the four central songs, which Berlioz framed with a release of energy in an optimistically upbeat tempo again in the last song.

#### 4.2.6 Marie's Mother.

Berlioz's marital arrangement was not unique in the nineteenth century, as it was not uncommon in France for a married man to keep a mistress. What was perhaps a little out of the ordinary was that he and Marie lived with her mother. Marie's mother (Sotera de Villas) was Spanish, who had Marie by a French soldier (Major Martin) during the peninsular war. Almost certainly Catholic, Marie's mother was the antithesis of Berlioz's own mother. Where Madame Berlioz was reserved and judgemental, Marie's mother seems to have been warm, caring and genuinely fond of Berlioz, making a "welcome fuss" (Carins 1999: 234) of him. Holoman (1989: 505) also



comments on the special relationship between Berlioz and Marie's mother.

What little is known of Marie herself (her real name was Marie-Geneviève Martin) is that she was scheming and rude. Having no particular talent as a singer, she was generally considered to be a millstone around Berlioz's neck. The difference though between Berlioz's own mother and Marie's mother, who was to become his mother-in-law, may have been compensation enough for Berlioz to put up with Marie. For many years the song *Absence*, the central song of *Les nuits d'été* was a vehicle for Marie as they toured Europe together. Even though at some point Berlioz had to make her agree to stop performing at his concerts, because, as he once said, she "sings like a cat" (Holoman 1989: 293).

#### 4.3 The Orchestration of *Les Nuits d'Été*.

*Absence* was the first song that Berlioz orchestrated (1843) and dedicated to Marie, although as Rushton has persuasively pointed out "*Erigone* [composed some time between 1835 and 1838] includes a lyrical section clearly designed for the music that became *Absence*" and that the 1843 orchestration was perhaps a reworking of that (Rushton 2001: 46 and 53). When, in 1856, the orchestral version of the complete cycle was published, the dedication of this song in the published version was reserved for Madame Nottès,

Königlich Hannover'scher Kammersängerin. No doubt much to the chagrin of Marie.

The other songs were orchestrated between 1852 and 1856, which is when the cycle was published. This was a time when Berlioz's star was rising, especially in Germany and England. His father had died in 1848, and his wife Harriet had died in 1854; thus perhaps for the first time in his life, Berlioz was a truly free agent, free in the sense of not having to feel guilty about his choices. Where the original impulse in the piano settings of *Les nuits d'été* may have been the combined emotions of guilt and release at the death of his mother, by 1856 Berlioz could express exuberance and freedom, with just a hint of nostalgia, as is evidenced in the orchestral version of these songs. In a letter to Baron Wilhelm von Donop, dated 2 October 1856, Berlioz indicates his own preference for the orchestral version of *Les nuits d'été*: "I'm delighted to learn that you like *Les nuits d'été*, especially if you mean the full score and not the edition with piano" (Macdonald 1995: 370).

#### 4.4 Conclusion.

Pierre Citron has pointed out (in Bloom 2000: 137) that Berlioz's own account of his life in his *Mémoires* was "composed", more like "a work of Art (rather than a photograph)." It is this contrived nature of the *Mémoires* that Citron finds important, because he believes that

the *Mémoires* are important as much for what they write about as for what they leave out; making matters worse is the fact that nowhere in his letters or in his *Mémoires* did Berlioz discuss his reasons for composing *Les nuits d'été*. Some authors have pointed to the possibility that Marie Récio was the muse; one such is the anonymous author of the blurb on the back cover of the Dover edition of the score: "Inspired by the dark-eyed mezzo-soprano singer who eventually became his wife", but others, like Cairns (1999: 246) suggest that "[i]f the setting of Gautier's poems was prompted by anything specific in the composer's life it must have been the end of an old love, not the start of a new one."

Cairns's surmise is perhaps more based on the morbid nature of the central songs of the cycle, rather than the more optimistic first and last songs. Cairns does, however, clarify: "for reasons that are both undefined and unmistakable, the need [to compose *Les nuits d'été*] was exceptionally strong" (Cairns 1999: 246).

Berlioz's relationship with his mother was often stressful and conflicted and at the time of her death unresolved. It makes perfect sense therefore to suggest that her death (in some ways the "end of an old love" as Cairns (1999: 246) has suggested) was the "exceptionally strong need" (Cairns 1999: 246), or the "emotional trigger" (Macdonald 1982: 2) to compose *Les nuits d'été*.

## Chapter 5: The Content and Form of *Les Nuits d'Été*.

Content and Form, the second and third of Eagleton's four kinds of psychoanalytic criticism, is the subject of this chapter: "commenting on the unconscious motivations of characters, or on the psychoanalytical significance of objects or events in the text" (Eagleton 1996: 155). Eagleton continues with a warning of the limited value of this kind of psychoanalysis, which he finds "too often reductive." This chapter will study the content (textual and musical) of the songs, "what is said rather than how it is said" (Eagleton 1996: 53) as well as the form of the song cycle, the "'materiality' of the artefact itself, its specific formal constitution" (Eagleton 1996: 56), to see if it is possible to make a psychoanalytic connection between the loss that Berlioz was experiencing at this time in his life with the song cycle *Les nuits d'été*.

### 5.1 The Content of the Songs.

The texts that Berlioz used are six short poems from Gautier's *La comédie de la mort* [The Comedy of Death]. These poems were published in 1838, although, as we have seen, Berlioz might have been privy to them in manuscript before publication. The two parts of *La comédie de la mort: La vie dans la mort* and *La mort dans la vie* form a relatively small section of the collection. The rest of the

publication is devoted to more or less independent poems and it is from these that Berlioz selected six to set to music.

The Gautier poems published together with *La comédie de la mort* do not seem to have any specific sequence, and Berlioz did not choose six consecutive poems, but rather selected a bouquet to fit his own purposes. Berlioz freely adapted the titles of Gautier's poems and in some cases reduced the number of strophes, or repeated strophes for his own musical and narrative purposes. The translations used are by Peggie Cochrane © 1964 The Decca Record Company Ltd., as used in the Deutsche Grammophon recording (1990). The Cochrane translation is closer to the original French than and the translation by Percy Pinkerton in the Dover score, which has been used for the musical examples.

The title *Les nuits d'été* is also Berlioz's own invention, but again, he has left no record of how he came to this title; the somewhat morbid theme of it is certainly unexpected in a cycle with this name. Where Berlioz made changes in Gautier's original text, the original is given in brackets in the discussion of the songs that follows.

### 5.1.1 Villanelle.

The first of the poems that Berlioz set to music is *Villanelle Rhythmique*, which Berlioz called *Villanelle*, a nostalgic reference to an old rustic musical form. The text expresses the joys of spring in the country with a hint of erotic love and perhaps even deflowering.

#### VILLANELLE

[Villanelle rythmique]

Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,  
Quand auront disparu les froids,  
Tous les deux nous irons, ma belle,  
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois.

Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles  
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,  
Nous irons écouter les merles  
Siffler.

Le printemps est venu, ma belle,  
C'est le mois des amants béni,  
Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,  
Dit ses [des] vers au rebord du nid.  
Oh! viens donc, sur ce [le] banc de mousse  
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,  
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:  
"Toujours!"

Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,  
Faisant [Faisons] fuir le lapin caché,  
Et le daim au miroir des sources  
Admirant son grand bois penché;  
Puis, chex nous tout heureux [joyeux], tout aises,  
En panier enlaçant nos doigts,  
Revenons rapportant des fraises  
Des bois.

#### VILLANELLE

[Rhythmic Villanelle]

When the new season comes  
and the cold weather has gone,  
the pair of us will go, my pretty one,  
to gather lilies-of-the-valley in the woods.

Shaking free beneath our feet the dewdrops  
that one sees a-tremble in the early morn,  
we will go to hear the blackbirds  
sing.

Spring has come, my pretty one,  
it is the month that lovers bless,  
and the birds, preening their wings,  
sing verses from the rim of their nest.  
Oh! come then to this mossy bank  
to discourse of our sweet loves,  
and say to me in that gentle voice of yours  
"For ever!"

Straying far, very far, from our way,  
startling the timid rabbit from its hiding place  
and the deer at the mirroring spring,  
admiring its great lowered antlers;  
all filled with content and happiness, then,  
entwining our fingers basket-like,  
homewards we will go, bringing  
wild strawberries.

The images in this poem are: spring, pairing, blossoms, contentment, and the beauty of nature. More specifically erotic are the images of the timid rabbit, the deer admiring its great antlers, and the plucking of wild flowers and wild strawberries. This romantic adventure into the woods is accompanied musically by an insistent, almost compulsive staccato rhythm, only intermittently broken at the end of the strophes, as is illustrated in example 1.

8 Villanelle

Ex. 1

gust aux bois. Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles Que l'on  
*pp* / *ff* / *cbes* / *wisy* au une Par les son Tâou un six - gen, ôis der  
 buds of May. Un der foot all the sil - ver dew - drops Gleam like

*pp*  
*ppizz.*  
*pp*

1

*p*

voit au ma - tin trem - bler. Nous i - rons é - cou - ter les mer - les,  
 Tag je dem Hades ôs - schint, soll uns die Am - sal frôh - lich eis - gen,  
 jew - els our path a - long. While ev'ry glad - some bird is sing - ing

*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*  
*ppizz.*  
*ppizz.*  
*ppizz.*  
*ppizz.*

Ex. 2

1

Ex. 1 and Ex. 2 from Villanelle

The brightness of the staccato rhythms and the flowery language is darkened every now and then by the merest hint in the cellos of a descending figure (see example 2 above), rather like a cloud passing in front of the sun, giving just the slightest hint of melancholy. This figure is also doubled at the upper octave in the second clarinet, thus strengthening its prominence in the general texture.

The similarity between this figure and the descending tetrachord (here it is a fifth) of the archetypal *lamento* bass of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Rosand 1979) is striking, although it is unlikely that Berlioz would have been consciously aware of this. The above illustrations show how the musical content, in the repetitive accompanying material, adds a sense of urgency to the song; a feeling of “making hay while the sun shines” because life is short.



### 5.1.2 Le Spectre de la Rose.

The “deflowered” bud returns in the second poem [The spectre of the rose], but in a poetic twist it is the dirge of a rose that has died (*la petite mort*) on the bosom of a young girl.

#### LE SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

Soulève ta paupière close  
Qu’effleure un songe virginal;  
Je suis le spectre d’une rose  
Que tu portais hier au bal.  
Tu me pris encore emperlée  
Des pleurs d’argent de l’arrosoir.  
Et parmi la fête étoilée  
Tu me promenas tout le soir.

Ô toi qui de ma mort fus cause  
Sans que tu puisses le chaser,  
Toutes le nuits [Tout la nuit] mon spectre rose  
A ton chevet veindra danser.  
Mais ne crain rien, je ne réclame  
Ni messe ni *De profundis*;  
Ce léger parfum est mon âme,  
Et j’arrive du paradis.

Mon destin fut digne d’envie,  
Et pour [Pour] avoir un sort [trépas] si beau,  
Plus d’un aurait donné sa vie,  
Car sur ton sein j’ai mon tombeau,  
[Car j’ai ta gorge pour tombeau,]  
Et sur l’albâtre où je repose  
Un poète avec un basier  
Écrivit: “Ci-gît une rose  
Que tous les rois vont jalouser.”

#### THE SPECTRE OF THE ROSE

Open your closed lids  
that a virginal dream lightly brushes.  
I am the spectre of a rose  
you wore at the ball last eve.  
You took me still pearly  
with the watering-pot’s silvery tears  
and about the starry gathering  
carried me all the night.

Oh, you, who caused my death,  
powerless to banish it,  
my rosy spirit every night  
will come to dance by your bedside.  
But do not be afraid – I demand  
neither mass nor *De profundis*.  
This fragile perfume is my soul  
and I come from paradise.

My lot was to be envied,  
and to have so beautiful a fate  
many a one would have rendered up his life –  
for my grave is on your breast

and on the alabaster where I lie at rest  
with a kiss a poet  
has written; “Here lies a rose  
that every king will envy.”

In *Le spectre de la rose* the images of the closed eyelids of a virgin, a rose with pearly droplets on its stem, nightly visitations by a spectre, and the enviable “petite mort” on the breast of a young lady carry the erotic symbolism further.

The music supports this scarcely veiled eroticism with a sensuously undulating motif in the strings, with chromatic intensification (example 3):

The image displays a musical score for 'Le Spectre de la Rose'. It consists of six staves. The top two staves are for a vocal line, and the bottom four are for a piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first system shows a vocal line with a melodic phrase and a piano accompaniment with sustained chords. The second system is highlighted with a red box and labeled 'Ex 3'. It features a prominent trill in the vocal line, which is mirrored in the piano accompaniment. The trill is a rapid oscillation between two notes, creating a vibrating effect. The piano accompaniment consists of sustained chords that provide a harmonic backdrop for the trill.

Ex. 3 from *Le spectre de la rose*

This eroticism is unveiled and intensified by the titillating vibration of the trills, which imitates sexual stimulation, as is illustrated in example 4; it is also evident in the tremolo climax in example 5, below.

1

*dolce assai e placido*

Sou.lè. .ve ta pau.piè.re clo. .se Qu'effleure un son. .ge vir. gi.  
 Blick' auf; die du in Traumes Schoo. .sse die seid'. ne Wim. .per nie. der.  
 A. wakel fairmaid, and here be. hold me The wraith of yest. .er . ev. en's

Ex. 4

*ppp*

unis.

Velli. *pp*  
 tutti div. con sordini.

C.B. *pp* pizz.

*pp*

1

Ex. 4 from *Le spectre de la rose*

30 *Le Spectre de la Rose* Ex. 5

Tempo I. 5

Tempo I.

dis. \_\_\_\_\_ Mon des . tin fut di . . . gne d'en . vi . e, Et, pour a  
 her. \_\_\_\_\_ Süß war, wie mein Le . . . ben, mein Schöi . den; für solch' ei  
 me. \_\_\_\_\_ Thus my fate all mor . . . tals must en . vy And deem m

Tempo I. 5

Ex. 5 from *Le spectre de la rose*

### 5.1.3 Sur les Lagunes.

The image of death and loss is carried over to *Lamento: La Chanson du Pêcheur* [Song of the fisherman], which Berlioz evocatively called *On the lagoons*: the desolate lament of a man for his dearest love. The images that dominate *Sur les lagunes* are those of death, graves, autumn (nature in mourning), and being forsaken, while the lagoon itself can also symbolize the unconscious mind. The emotions they portray are all, however, selfish; the mourner feels particularly sorry for himself.

SUR LES LAGUNES: Lamento  
[Lamento: La chanson du pêcheur]  
Ma belle aime est morte:  
Je pleurerai toujours;  
Sous la tombe elle emporte  
Mon âme et mes amours.  
Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre,  
Elle s'en retourna;  
L'ange qui l'emmena  
Ne voulut pas me pendre.  
Que mon sort est amer!  
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

La blanche créature  
Est couchée au cerceuil.  
Comme dans la nature  
Tout me paraît en deuil!  
La colombe oubliée  
Pleure et songe à l'absent;  
Mon âme pleure et sent  
Qu'elle est dépareillée.  
Que mon sort est amer!  
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

Sur moi la nuit immense  
S'étend comme un linceul;  
Je chante ma romance  
Que le ciel entend seul.  
Ah! comme elle était belle  
Et comme je l'aimais!  
Je n'aimerai jamais  
Une femme autant qu'elle.  
Que mon sort est amer!  
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

ON THE LAGOONS: Lamento  
[Lamento: The Song of the Fisherman]  
My dearest love is dead:  
I shall weep for ever more.  
Into the grave she takes with her  
my soul and all my love.  
She returned to heaven  
without waiting for me –  
the angel that took her  
would not take me too.  
How bitter is my fate!  
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

The pure white being  
is lying in her grave.  
Oh, how everything in nature  
seems to me to be in mourning!  
The forsaken dove  
weeps and dreams of its absent mate.  
My soul weeps and feels  
itself to be incomplete.  
How bitter is my fate!  
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

Above the immensity of night  
spreads like a shroud.  
I chant my lay,  
which is heard by heaven alone.  
Oh, how beautiful she was  
and how I loved her!  
I shall never love another woman  
as I do her.  
How bitter is my fate!  
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

The most interesting musical image in this, the only song of the cycle in a minor key, is the (repetitive) sad cooing of a dove, which Berlioz

paints beautifully in the music. This cooing motif consists of a pair of falling semi-tones followed by a rising semitone and a rising minor third (example 6):

46 *Sur les Lagunes* Ex. 6

The image shows a page of a musical score for 'Sur les Lagunes' (Example 6). It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a piano accompaniment with four staves (treble and bass clefs) and a vocal line. The second system includes the same piano accompaniment and a vocal line with lyrics in three languages: French, German, and English. The tempo and mood markings 'pochissimo animato' and 'appassionato' are placed above the piano and vocal staves respectively. Dynamics like 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo) are indicated throughout. A red box highlights the first few measures of the piano accompaniment in the first system, which correspond to the 'cooing motif' mentioned in the text.

**pochissimo animato** **appassionato**

*p* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

**pochissimo animato** **appassionato**

*p* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

*pizz.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

**pochissimo animato** **appassionato**

*p* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

Pleu . . . re, pleu . re et son - ge à l'ab - sent; Mon à . me pleu . .  
 woi . . . noi, weint mit kla - gen dem Hauch; mein Herz, es wei . .  
 Wail . . ing, wail . ing - mourns for its mate, My heart thus ev . .

Ex. 6 from *Sur les lagunes*

This cooing motif is anticipated in a condensed form (example 7) right from the beginning of the song.

## Auf den Lagunen.

Deutsche Übersetzung von P. Cornelius.\*  
(Aus Sommerfächte, Op. 7 N<sup>o</sup> 8.)

### Sur les Lagunes.

Poésie de Th. Gautier.  
(Nuits d'été, Op. 7 N<sup>o</sup> 8.)

### On the Lagoons.

English Translation by Percy Pinkerton.  
(Summer Nights, Op. 7 N<sup>o</sup> 8.)

Herrn Milde, Grossherzoglich Weimar'schem Kammersänger, gewidmet.

H. Berlioz.

Composé 1834, instrumenté 1856.

Andantino. (♩ = 128.)

Flauti.

Harinetti in B (Si<sup>b</sup>).

Corno I in C (Ut).

Corno II in F (Fa).  
(à pistons)

Fagotti.

Baritono,  
ossia Alto o  
Mezzo Soprano.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncelli I.

2 Violoncelli II e  
Contrabassi.

Ma belle a - mi - o est mur - - te, Je —  
Mir ist mein Lieb - ge - stor - - ben, Thät -  
Ahl she is dead, my dear - - est, Ev -

Ex. 7

Andantino. (♩ = 128.)

\* Mit Genehmigung von J. Rieter-Biedermann in Leipzig.

Ex.7 from Sur les lagunes

#### 5.1.4 Absence.

The abjection caused by irretrievable loss is the subject of *Absence*, which is in many ways the central poem of Berlioz's arrangement.

The gender of the speaker is indeterminate, but it is a poem of immense yearning for a departed love:

##### ABSENCE

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée!  
Comme une fleur loin du soleil.  
La fleur de ma vie est fermée  
Loin de ton sourire vermeil.

Entre nos cœurs quelle [tant de] distance!  
Tant d'espace entre nos baisers!  
Ô sort amer! ô dure absence!  
Ô grand désirs inapaisés!

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! *etc.*

D'ici là-bas, que de campagnes,  
Que de villes et de hameaux,  
Que de vallons et de montagnes,  
A lasser le pied des chevaux!

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! *etc.*

##### ABSENCE

Come back, come back, my best beloved!  
Like a flower far from the sun  
my life's flower is fast shut  
far from your rosy smile.

What a distance there is between our hearts!  
So much space between our kisses!  
Oh, bitter fate! Oh, cruel absence!  
Oh, frantic desires unappeased!

Come back, come back, my best beloved! *etc.*

From here thither, so many plains,  
So many town and hamlets,  
So many valleys and mountains –  
Enough to tire the horses' feet!

Come back, come back, my best beloved! *etc.*

In *Absence*, the shortest song of the cycle, the imagery moves from singular loss to a desire for the return of the dead beloved, even though this is accepted as impossible. Distance and travel are the main images and the remote key of F sharp major increases this feeling of insurmountable distance.



### 5.1.5 Au Cimetière: Claire de Lune.

*Absence* is followed by another *Lamento*, the title of which Berlioz changed to *Au Cimetière: Claire de Lune* [In the cemetery: Moonlight].

#### AU CIMETIÈRE

Clair de lune  
[Lamento]  
Connaissez-vous la blanche tombe  
Où flotte avec un son plaintif  
L'ombre d'un if?  
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,  
Triste et seule, au soleil couchant,  
Chante son chant;

Un air maladivement tendre,  
A la fois charmant et fatal,  
Qui vous fait mal,  
Et qu'on voudrait toujours entendre;  
Un air, comme en soupier aux cieux  
L'ange amoureux.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée  
Pluere sous terre à l'unisson  
De la chanson,  
Et du malheur d'être oubliée  
Se plaint dans un roucoulement  
Bien doucement.

Sur les ailes de la musique  
On sent lentement revenir  
Un souvenir;  
Une ombre, une [de] forme angélique  
Passe dans un rayon tremblant,  
En voile blanc.

Les belles de nuit, demi-close,  
Jettent leur parfum faible et doux  
Autour de vous,  
Et le fantôme aux molles poses  
Murmure en vous tendant les bras:  
"Tu reviendras?"

Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe  
Je n'rai, quand descend de soir  
Au manteau noir,  
Écouter la pâle colombe  
Chanter sur la pointe [branche] de l'if  
Son chant plaintif!

#### IN THE CEMETERY

Moonlight  
[Lamento]  
Do you know the white tomb  
where, with plaintive moan,  
the shadow of a yew tree floats?  
On that yew a pale dove,  
sad and solitary, at sundown  
sings its lay;

A refrain sickly-tender,  
at once both delightful and deadly,  
that hurts,  
which yet one would fain listen to for ever –  
an air like the amorous angel might sing  
in the heavens.

One would say the soul awakened  
is weeping beneath the sod  
in unison with the song,  
and in a gentle cooing  
complaining of the misery  
of being forgot.

On the music's wing  
one feels a memory  
slowly return –  
a shadow, an angelic form,  
passes in a tremulous beam,  
shrouded in a white veil.

Night-scented blossoms, half-open,  
Exhale their scent mild and sweet  
about you,  
and the phantom with its sluggish gestures  
whispers as it extends to you its arms:  
"You will return?"

Oh! never again will I go near that tomb,  
when the sombre cloak  
of night descends,  
to listen to the pale dove  
from the summit of the yew tree sing  
its plaintive song!

This is an interesting lament because the text suggests the end of grieving and a healing of the wound of loss that comes with time. The process of healing that began with acceptance in *Absence* continues

in *Au cimetière*. The images used in this poem are those of the solitary dove (again), a yew tree, the soul as an angelic phantom and night-scented blossoms (sickly sweet and reminiscent of putrefaction). This time it is the ghost of the departed love that is yearning not to be forgotten, a yearning that is exquisitely depicted in the music by (again) the cooing of a dove.

Examples 8 and 8a, below, illustrate how similar the cooing motif in *Au cimetière* is to that found in *Sur les lagunes* (the falling then rising pattern) but now melodically expanded.

Ex. 8

le an so. leil couchant, Chante son chant: Un air ma. la. di. vement teu. dre,  
 lein dan Grab. ge. sang, weifend und bang. Sie löst zart und trüb. die. es. Wei. se,  
 her. mourn. ful lay: Ah! well. a. duy! Oh, sad is the song. she is sing. ing,

1

Ex. 8a

A la fois char. mant et fa. tal, Qui. vous fait mal Et qu'on vou. drait tou. jours en. teu. dre,  
 dringt voll Lust und voll. bit. von Schmerz tief. in dein Herz, das. net dich fast in Zou. ber. her. se;  
 With a note of pass. io. uate woe, Fond. lov. ers know. Deep in each heart is it ring. ing;

1

Ex.8 and 8a from Au cimetière

### 5.1.6 L'île Inconnue.

The final poem *Barcarolle* becomes *L'île Inconnue* [The unknown isle] in Berlioz's setting of it, representing a place reached only once the psyche is healed; a place that cannot be known until it is reached. After the gloom of the laments and the abyss of absence, the mood of this song is like walking out into the bright sunshine after spending time in a cold, dark tomb. The text is full of hope and it is addressed to a new love, a pretty young maid, with promises of putting the world at her feet, but all she wants is the promise of enduring love.

L'ÎLE INCONNUE  
[Barcarolle]  
Dites, la jeune belle,  
Où voulez-vous aller?  
La voile enfle [ouvre] son aile,  
La brise va souffler!

L'aviron est d'ivoire,  
Le pavillon de moire,  
Le gouvernail d'or fin;  
J'ai pour lest une orange,  
Pour voile une aile d'ange,  
Pour mousse en séraphin.

Dites, la jeune belle, etc.

Est-ce dans la Baltique,  
Dans la mer Pacifique.  
Dans l'île de Java?  
Où bien est-ce en [dans la] Norvège,  
Cueillir la fleur de neige,  
Où la fleur d'Angsoka?

Dites, la jeune belle,  
Où voulez-vous aller?

Menez-moi, dit la belle,  
A la rive fidèle  
Où l'on aime toujours.  
- Cette rive, ma chère,  
On ne la connaît guère  
Au pays des amours.

Où voulez-vous aller?  
La brise va souffler!

THE UNKNOWN ISLE  
[Barcarolle]  
Tell me, pretty young maid,  
where would you like to go?  
The sail bellies like a wing,  
the breeze is about to blow.

The oar is ivory,  
The flag of watered silk,  
The rudder of fine gold;  
For ballast I have an orange,  
For sail, an angel's wing,  
For ship's boy, a seraph.

Tell me, pretty young maid, etc.

Would it be to the Baltic,  
or to the Pacific,  
or to the isle of Java?  
Or else would it be to Norway,  
to pluck the snow flower  
or the flower of Angsoka?

Tell me, pretty young maid,  
where would you like to go?

Take me, said the pretty young maid  
to the faithful shore,  
where love endures for ever.  
That shore, my dear,  
is scarce known  
in the realm of love.

Where would you like to go?  
The breeze is about to blow.

This final song represents the final stage of the acceptance of the death of a loved one. The lover is now able to move on and search for happiness with another. The imagery, however, is mixed: the lover entertains fanciful dreams of escape to far-away places, while the new love wants commitment and promises of everlasting love. Musically, the rising sweep of semiquavers in the bassoons and cellos, alternated with a similar undulating motif (see example 9), gives this song a Barcarolle-like feel, suggesting a pleasant journey to sunny shores.

Ex. 9

12 *L'île Inconnue*  
poco rit. - a tempo

mous - - - se un sé - ra - phin. Di - tes,  
Dienst - - - ein Et - fe thut. Sag' wo -  
cher - - - ub my pi - lot bold. Tell me,

poco rit. - a tempo

pizz. arco  
pp pizz. arco  
pp pizz. arco  
pp pizz. arco  
pp pizz. arco  
pp pizz. arco

Ex.9 from *L'île Inconnue*

This Barcarolle-like feel together with the lilting 6/8 rhythm and allegro tempo make this the brightest and most effusive song since the slightly more nostalgic *Villanelle* at the beginning of the cycle and gives the whole work a sense of having reached its destination.

### 5.2 Narrative in *Les Nuits d'Été*.

Berlioz's selection of Gautier's poems includes many of the great Romantic themes (death the great riddle of life; fantasies of the orient; all consuming love; appreciation of nature; night; moonlight; nostalgia; melancholy; yearning), themes that resonate with what Berlioz may have been feeling at the time. These resonances with the subject matter of the poems certainly make it worthwhile to consider his motives (albeit unconscious ones) for selecting these six poems and arranging them in the sequence that he did.

The hypothesis presented in this dissertation is that perhaps they represent an emotional outpouring caused by the death of his mother, which leads in this case to a mourning that is cast in the setting to music of romantic love poems with strong erotic overtones.

It is this fact - of an unpercieved motivation behind the song cycle - which contributes towards it being such an effective work, "haunting" the listener. As Berlioz did not leave any clues in his letters or autobiography as to his motives for writing *Les nuits d'été*, we must

search for motives in what we do have, that is by interpreting the songs themselves, and the formal connections between the songs, as well as the sequence of his settings of the poems and the general structure of the song cycle, all of which contributes to the effectiveness of the song cycle as a whole.

If *Les nuits d'été* was indeed intended as a monument by the mourning Berlioz to his mother, one hypothesis to explain why he chose these highly eroticised love poems for that purpose is that, in Freudian psychoanalytic terms, the narrative Berlioz creates from Gautier's poems displays a classical Oedipal conflict and its resolution. The nostalgic *Villanelle* represents a desire for the return to an older, more perfect state: the unity of the infant with its mother. The phallic imagery in *Le spectre de la rose* represents the law of the father that immediately punishes (by fear of castration) this desire as it becomes more distinctly sexual. The punishment is the removal of the love object (depicted in the loneliness of *Sur les lagunes*) and the infant experiences this as a sense of "fort" or gone, part of the "fort-da" game that Freud observed infants playing as they tried to exert control over their environment (Freud SE XVIII: 14-15; Eagleton 1996: 160).

This loss results in abjection (*Absence*) and the realization that what has been lost can never be recovered, but that realization is also the

first step in the healing process. In *Au cimetière*, the ability to see, if not quite to call up, the ghost of the departed love is the “da”, or “here”, part of the “fort-da” game, thus giving the subject a sense of control over his own destiny. The final resolution of the Oedipus complex is the acceptance of the law of the father and the ability to successfully fix the sexual desire onto another love object (*l’île inconnue*).

While it is perfectly acceptable to submit the narrative in *Les nuits d’été* to a Freudian analysis in terms of the Oedipus conflict and its resolution, it is essentially the mood of the music in each song that gives us insight into Berlioz’s state of mind. In her section on ways of listening, Widlund (in Baneke 1992: 8-9) discusses Freud’s famous *third ear* – a way of listening not so much to what is being said as to how it is being said, and what emotional effect the sounds have on the analyst. She believes that the psychoanalytic therapist can learn ways of listening emotionally from listening to classical music. It is this sense of allowing the sounds to flow over you and affect you emotionally that we mean by the mood of each song. The cumulative effect of all the moods and mood changes is, I would argue, what makes *Les nuits d’été* such an effective musical composition - even if it is debatable whether Berlioz meant his settings of the Gautier poems to be considered as a cycle, or whether as Macdonald



suggests “he thought of the songs [. . .] more as individual pieces than as a cycle” (1982: 38).

Macdonald seems to be swayed by the fact the Berlioz was quite content to have individual songs from the cycle sung at concerts, especially *Absence*, which became a vehicle for Marie Récio. However, Berlioz’s careful selection of the six poems and his rearrangement of their texts to reveal a story of love, loss and loving again, makes it hard to believe that he did not intend a cyclical narrative in the songs. It is this element of narrative, rather than any specifically musical devices that unifies the songs of *Les nuits d’été* into a cyclical form.

### 5.3 The Form of the Song Cycle.

The formal arrangement of the songs into a cycle does not prevent Macdonald from warning “that Berlioz presents a gruesome trap for unwary formalists who seek to explain too much” (1982: 199). This might imply that Berlioz had an idiosyncratic musical style that did not fit into textbook rules of musical form. It is true that before Berlioz song cycles did generally have some sort of musical as well a literary unity, but more often than not it was the narrative that created the cyclical unity (Rushton in Bloom 1992: 113).

It is important to bear in mind that while the songs can of course be considered as individual pieces, their combined symbolism reveals a distinct narrative, albeit a dream-like one, in which the associations are often vague and may seem disjointed.

While musically the form of *Les nuits d'été* may not necessarily present an apparent unity, its parallel with Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus story does lend it a distinct literary form, thus allowing the work to be considered a song cycle. However, there is very little that Berlioz composed that is not based on a text (or at least inspired by one). Shakespeare and Virgil were great inspirations to him, as were many contemporary novelists and poets, and any formal analysis of his musical works must, therefore, closely consider the literary narrative on which they are based, together, as we have seen, with Berlioz's own biography and especially his attachments to the women in his life.

## Chapter 6: Listening.

The last category of psychoanalytic literary criticism that Eagleton (1996: 155) suggests deals with the reader, which in our case must become the listener. Having discovered the essential content and material form of the songs and the song cycle, a discussion of the reception of these songs by the listener, or more precisely by the listening subject, is now in order.

The central thrust of this chapter will be to briefly explain the various psychoanalytical theories that have been developed from Freud's initial theory of the unconscious and how it is that music can sometimes afford its listeners a means to access that unconscious region of our psyches. This involves a necessary shift from a psychoanalytic interpretation that focuses on the artistic object, or its creator, to an analysis of the listener.

This chapter will first discuss the ways in which *Les nuits d'été* can be analysed as a cultural artefact that is a product of the collective unconscious of the time of its production. Then, using the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva and others, there will follow a discussion of how *Les nuits d'été* can be interpreted in terms of our contemporary individual listening subjectivity.

Because each listener or even group of listeners is not a constant entity, and because each social group has its own ideological framework from which its members make meaning of the music, defining just who the listener is, is complex. Describing the work of Raymond Williams, Eagleton explains the culture of any group of people as an integral part of this ideological framework, which as such can be studied “less as a set of isolated artistic monuments than as a material formation, complete with its own modes of production, power-effects, social relations, identifiable audiences, historically conditioned thought-forms” (Eagleton 1996: 198). Over time, as social conditions change, so do these historically conditioned thought-forms, or collective unconscious, which means that listeners in the twenty-first century experience *Les nuits d’été* in a very different way from the listeners in the mid nineteenth century.

### 6.1 The Social Situation of *Les Nuits d’Été*.

The original version of *Les nuits d’été*, for voice and piano was composed during a time of relative political and economic stability in France. In 1841, the year of the completion of the cycle, Louis-Philippe, the Duc d’Orleans was on the throne of France in the third period of the Bourbon Restoration, which followed the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. Under Louis-Philippe, France came the closest that it would ever come to a constitutional monarchy. It was still

however, a time of reaction against the revolutionary ideals of the French Revolution and the striving for a classless society.

Berlioz, however, seems to have been unconcerned with the political situation of his time. While not exactly wealthy, Berlioz did come from a fairly affluent and landed middle class family, which meant that he could afford to busy himself exclusively with finding funds to present concerts and with the politics of the Parisian musical and theatrical world. Berlioz's music is, however, decidedly non-conformist; this might in part be ascribed to his lack of formal musical training, but it perhaps also indicates a subconscious dissatisfaction with the status quo, despite his seeming indifference to the social and political turmoil around him.

It is perhaps this non-conformist aspect of Berlioz's music that is most revolutionary, and which the conservative petite-bourgeoisie in France found unappealing. It is important to remember that at this time the petite-bourgeoisie were struggling to establish the hegemony of their ideology, which was the ideology of capitalist expansion. So it is a curious paradox that while Berlioz's music in general exhibits an expansionist drive that would seem perfectly to match the spirit of the times, in France at any rate this was not the case. This in contrast to the princely German courts in their nascent nationalism, and Great Britain whose imperialist expansion was

unrivalled: both the Germans and the English were wildly enthusiastic about Berlioz's music, as is evidenced by his frequent and successful concert tours to both countries.

This paradox may perhaps be partially explained by the fact that the fledgling hegemony of the petite-bourgeoisie in France felt that it needed to conserve what it considered to be its cultural inheritance, without realising that in order to survive it would need to expand along with its economic base. This might then explain why the only works of Berlioz that were popular in France during his lifetime were those works composed especially for state occasions, works intended to demonstrate the glory of the growing French empire.

With the Requiem [. . .] Berlioz [. . .] earned for himself the nation's laurels as its preeminent composer of ceremonial music, and it was doubtless the Requiem's success that led to the commission for the *Symphonie funèbre* and eventually the Te Deum. [. . .] To that tally we should probably add *L'Impériale*, the cantata for Napoleon III which, [. . .] was played in his presence during the closing ceremony of the 1855 Exhibition (Holoman 1989: 255).

On a sociological level then, the appeal of much of Berlioz's music (also in France) lay in its avant-garde expansionist message. Berlioz was at the forefront of the nineteenth century penchant for extremely large works, which culminated in the operas of Wagner and the huge symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler. This expansionist drive is evident even in Berlioz's most intimate works, a drive that perhaps prompted the orchestration (which must be considered as a kind of

expansion of the musical setting) of the song cycle *Les nuits d'été*, completed just four years into Louis Napoleon's Second Empire (1852-1870), a period in which France joined the scramble for colonies, particularly in Africa, but also in the Americas and Asia.

That is not to say that Berlioz deliberately set out to embody the spirit of the times in his music, just as he did not deliberately set out to expose his psyche; these were latent things that he unconsciously made manifest through his art, thereby reflecting the ideology current in France at the time, and in a psychoanalytical sense working it through in his own psyche.

## 6.2 The Oceanic Feeling.

This subliminal working through of events is very close to what Freud in 1900 described as dream-work in *Interpretation of Dreams* (as summarized in Eagleton 1996: 156), a condition in which the subconscious deals with experiences, hopes, fears and wishes that are not (or cannot be) properly articulated and dealt with during the waking hours.

The 'raw materials' of a dream, what Freud calls its 'latent content', are unconscious wishes, bodily stimuli while sleeping, images reaped from the previous day's experiences; but the dream itself is the product of an intensive transformation of these materials, known as the 'dream-work'. The mechanisms of the dream work [. . .] are the unconscious's techniques of condensing and displacing its materials, together with finding intelligible ways of representing it. The dream which is produced by this labour,

the dream we actually remember, is termed by Freud the 'manifest content' (Eagleton 1996: 156).

However, in artistic creation the dream-work happens during consciousness by directly accessing the repressed subconscious, resulting in a momentary loss of the self; a sensation of "derealization" or "depersonalisation" [*Entfremdungsgefühl*] a sort of estrangement from oneself that Freud described in "A disturbance of memory on the Acropolis" as a daydream, *déjà vu*, or even an oceanic experience (Freud SE XXII: 244).

It is this sensation of derealization or oceanic feeling that can affect the listener to music in a very similar way, even if only momentarily. Not that this state of derealization is transferred to the listener as such, but that the actual music mediates between the emotive state of the composer and the listener, allowing the listener to experience a type of oceanic feeling, or as Wright describes it:

the psychic processes which mediate the relationship between self and world [. . .] What goes on between the artist and his medium, the critic and his art-object [. . .] What happens between one psyche and another (Wright 1998: 71).

With reference to music, an oceanic experience can be used to describe the sense of losing oneself beneath the "waves" of sound. Romain Rolland coined the term oceanic feeling in a letter to Sigmund Freud dated 5 December 1927 (Masson 1980: 34), in which



he describes what he considered to be the core of religious experience or religious ecstasy.

### 6.3 Jacques Lacan.

Building on the theories of Freud, Lacan described the mind as being structured into three parts, with each part superseding and replacing the other throughout the development of the infant, but each leaving behind a residue.

The first stage is what Lacan calls the Real, a state that is intractable and insubstantial; it represents states that cannot be imagined, symbolized or known directly. For Lacan this stage corresponds with the earliest experiences of the infant, the dyad of the infant and the mother, a state of nature that is broken up by what Lacan calls the Imaginary, which occurs once the infant begins to recognise itself as “self” and different from “other”. One effect of this is what is called the “mirror stage”. Lacan’s premise, however, is that this recognition is in fact a *misrecognition*, as the image mirrored in the mother’s face is only an image – it is not the true self. This Imaginary stage is a necessary construct in order to take one’s place in the final stage, which is the order of language and discourse and which Lacan called the Symbolic Order, and is represented by the father. It is this lingual entry into the world of symbols that allows culture to be formed. Important in Lacan’s description of the structure of the psyche is that

once the Real has been superseded by the Imaginary there is no way of returning to it, thus creating a lack of the Real and a constant desire for its return (Klages 2001).

The writers whom we shall discuss below have all attempted to describe how this lack and the psyche's desire for its return sets up a conflict which Art is sometimes able to resolve by allowing a kind of mediated access to this unconsciously remembered, but otherwise inaccessible realm.

#### 6.4 Roland Barthes.

In 1967, building on the theories of Lacan, Barthes proclaimed *The Death of the Author* thereby establishing a mode of literary criticism that did not have as its final objective a definitive understanding of the author's intentions, but one that remained open to interpretation by successive readers of the work, with each new reader or generation of readers finding their own interpretation and perhaps differing widely from that of the previous generation. Barthes later (in *The Pleasure of the Text*, first published in French in 1971) introduced a theory whereby a text (or any artistic object) can produce a state in which he believes, essentially, that it is possible to lose oneself, to be afforded the merest glimpse of the "Real".

This is a complex theory that requires careful reading, but the gist of it is that there are two kinds of texts: the “text of bliss” (*jouissance*) and the “text of pleasure” (*plaisir*).

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language (Barthes 1975: 14).

Allen (2000: 88) suggests that the point of Barthes’s method of analysing a text is not to find out what the text means or signifies, but that it is to find “traces [of] the explosion of *signifiance* [the points where the narrative and the reader come together; where the readers] find themselves lost, overwhelmed, able merely to mark the points at which the intertextual explodes and disseminates.”

This theory holds that texts that are merely pleasurable do not challenge the status quo, while those that (unconsciously) challenge the comfortable assumptions of the reader and unsettle her or him, induce a state of bliss (Barthes uses the sexually charged word *jouissance*). It is in this moment of *jouissance*, of losing oneself, that the Real is “glimpsed”, resulting in what Barthes terms “*signifiance*”, a kind of instinctive, primal understanding or meaning. Barthes implies that this it is not something an author can strive for; it must be

the unconscious effect of his or her text on the reader (or in our case the listener).

Everyone can testify that the pleasure of the text is not certain: nothing says that this same text will please us a second time; it is a friable pleasure, split by mood, habit, circumstance, a precarious pleasure (Barthes 1975: 52).

### 6.5 Julia Kristeva.

Kristeva developed from Freud the idea of the individual subject being split into a conscious and an unconscious part, which she describes as the symbolic and the semiotic fields respectively (Allen 2000: 50). She also introduces two new terms: the *phenotext* and the *genotext*. The phenotext, which is used by the conscious mind (symbolic field), is that part of a text which we understand as language and communication, while the “genotext”, which is used or generated by the unconscious (semiotic field), is only recognisable by the conscious in “terms of ‘phonematic devices’ such as rhythm and intonation, melody, repetition” (Kristeva 1984: 86). It will be clear that music, depending so much on rhythm, intonation, melody and repetition, lends itself easily to interpretation in terms of Kristeva’s genotext.

The genotext disturbs, ruptures and undercuts the phenotext and thus articulates the drives and desires of a pre-linguistic subjectivity. [...] It is significant to note that Kristeva’s semanalytical practice extends beyond the literary text and includes other art forms, such as music, painting and dance (Allen 2000: 51).

In Kristeva's distinction between the *phenotext* of the conscious mind, and the *genotext* of the unconscious, it is the *phenotext* which is a concrete manifestation, the actual act of communication, while the *genotext* is that which derives from the *chora*, the place of genesis, or production.

The theories of Barthes and Kristeva both accept the Freudian/Lacanian notion of a repressed unconscious/pre-symbolic period, which can at times "rupture" into consciousness. For them it is at these points of rupture (*signifiance* for Barthes, and "intertextuality" for Kristeva) that the reader and the text come together and create meaning.

To explain intertextuality Kristeva introduces the historical materialist theories of Bakhtin / Medvedev by discussing the way the unconscious is formed and reflects, in complex ways, the values and ideologies of the society in which it is created. As Bakhtin / Medvedev put it "the individual, isolated person does not create ideologies [. . .] ideological creation and its comprehension only take place in the process of social intercourse" (1985: 7). Thus while it might seem as though each individual listener is becoming a unique listening subject, this perception is underpinned by shared and "complex material relations which interpenetrate this reality" (1985: 8).

By building on Bakhtin's concept of complex material relations that interpenetrate, Kristeva coined the term intertextual in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

The term *inter-textual* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources", we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of thethetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated (Kristeva 1984: 59).

Kristeva's intertextuality can be expanded to encompass not only the idea of transposition between signifying systems, the way in which the pre-symbolic can break through into the symbolic, but also to include the concept derived from the Russian formalists that a text has a wider social meaning beyond itself.

Kristeva's contribution to the discourse has been to link the concept of a material basis for ideology with psychoanalysis, which produced a new look at the way the speaking subject develops: that is by being able to signify before speaking, while still in the semiotic *chora*, which, very roughly, could be compared with Lacan's Real. For Kristeva, these early significations are still able to make themselves felt (inter-textually) later, in the *phenotext*, but only indirectly.

## 6.6 Kaja Silverman and David Schwarz.

While Kristeva accepts that “text” should mean all cultural manifestations, it is Silverman (1988) who suggests that the earliest experiences of the infant are aural, and that the (pre-symbolic, *chora*) unconscious is closely connected to music. Silverman calls this the *acoustic mirror*, paraphrased from Lacan’s mirror stage. Silverman’s adaptation holds that the infant can hear before it can see and that it perceives the mother’s voice as a primal, sonorous envelope within which the child feels itself enclosed in an oceanic sense of union, plenitude and bliss (Silverman 1988: 84). This brief period is over once we learn language, with all its cultural embodiments (ideology). We then lose the connection with the pre-symbolic, but music, at certain moments, can reconnect us to this pre-symbolic, oceanic feeling.

Schwarz (1993) believes that there are moments in music that allow access to psychological events that are presymbolic, that is, from that phase in human development before the mastery of language, which produces listening subjects. The crux of Schwarz’s theory is that music is a cultural “text” in the Lacanian sense, which means that the “text” requires the reader to take up a position in relation to it, in other words, to become a “subject” by considering the middle ground between pieces of music as texts, and the psychic structures upon which their perception depends.

Schwarz's listening subject, like the linguistic subject that is described by Allen as "lost" in the text, [. . . ] it is always split, determined (posited, constructed, structured) by the *signifying system* within which it speaks" (Allen 2000: 52). This "lost" subject is, Allen believes, the repressed pre-symbolic subject, which breaks through in poetic language (for Kristeva) and dream (for Freud) (Allen 2000: 52-3). It is also what Allen calls "intertextuality" (Allen 2000: 52).

Music, at certain moments, can reconnect us to this presymbolic, oceanic period. Schwarz avoids attempting to show what music means, but rather attempts to outline the way in which musical structures represent the sonorous envelope and the rupture of that envelope by the symbolic world of language. He also advises that "what remains to be explored is more explicitly external ideology – links between psychic and musical structures, on the one hand, and culture, on the other" (Schwarz 1993: 47).

Schwarz's approach to the listening subject challenges the privileged status of music as art outside ideology, in that by hearing music as listening subjects, our focus is qualitatively shifted away from hearing the music as an absolute and self-contained whole, to hearing music as an embodiment of listening processes (1993: 25).



While Schwarz's theory is very interesting, his description of its application has been criticized. In "The Return of the Aesthetic" in *Beyond Structural Hearing?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004), Martin Scherzinger points out that Schwarz "[i]nstead of figuring the terrain of the absolutely musical as analogous to the movements of the unconscious per se, his musical analyses, which for the most part are beholden to texted music, usually take the argumentative form of some or other musical "representation" of a Lacanian process" (in Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004: 268).

The problem as Scherzinger sees it is that post-Freudian psychoanalysis in recent literary theory understands creative works as "forms of production that effect [sic] a way of perceiving the world" (in Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004: 269). He continues:

A second problem with the "representational" stance is the way the analyses often uphold a passive view of the psychodynamics at work. If musical processes *represent* psychoanalytic ones, they cannot move beyond them, mark *their* limits, or offer a space for radical contingency. This is troubling, if only because the work of art for Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva [. . .] is endowed with just this rupturing potential (Scherzinger in Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004: 272).

While it may be true that there is actually nothing inherent in music that can cause this "rupture", music can, through the listening subject's experience, bring about *jouissance* by allowing a

momentary glimpse (or a once-off, brief, rupturing of the limits between conscious and subconscious) into the presymbolic state. Music is most adequately suited to cause this rupturing because unlike literature, it does not need the mediation of language.

Now, to return to the effect that *Les nuits d'été* has on its listeners we can conclude that because, as Wright (1998: 4) points out, all cultural activity is corporeal, something done by the human body and which affects the human body, the extent of the rupture of the presymbolic into the consciousness depends on the psychic structures of the individual listener. These ruptures of the unconscious into conscious thought may then also have something of a cathartic effect, something akin to confronting long repressed fears and through repetition, of dispelling them: "repetition itself creates bliss" (Barthes 1975: 41). However, because of the intensely subjective nature of the listening response, intermeshed as it is between the social ideology and the personal psychology, it is difficult to pinpoint moments that might be described as intertextual, or which might produce *jouissance* and thus create listening subjects in the song cycle *Les nuits d'été*. Although in the light of the discussion above, it seems probable that Berlioz's use of repetitive musical motifs, together with the resonances created by the archetypal Oedipal triangle and its resolution in *Les nuits d'été* does make the work particularly haunting and unsettling. Taken together, these

considerations combine to make it a highly effective musical composition.

Berlioz, by neither deliberately striving to particularly represent the spirit of his times, nor to deliberately express the unresolved relationship with his mother, has in *Les nuits d'été* created a work that both unsettles and excites its hearers in a way that, like Barthes's "bliss", is otherwise indefinable. The poetry itself is rather run-of-the-mill Romantic verse, and Berlioz does not employ any particularly dramatic or unusual musical techniques to create this effect, which however, still enables the listener a glimpse of the Real: that long forgotten realm of bliss.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion.

This concluding chapter will present a short summary of the findings, a discussion of some problems with attempting a psychoanalytical musical analysis, and the conclusions that can be deduced regarding what it is that makes *Les nuits d'été* such an effective musical composition. It will end with some recommendations for further research.

### 7.1 Summary of Findings.

Berlioz, who was generally extraordinarily forthcoming about the sources of inspiration for his compositions, was decidedly reticent about what inspired him to compose *Les nuits d'été*. However, by drawing on the kinds of things that inspired him to compose other works, we can surmise that some emotional event in his life was the trigger for this composition.

One hypothesis that can explain what that emotional trigger was, which also corresponds to the time-period in which he would have been mulling over the project, was the death of his mother. Even though he left no clues to this in fact being the emotional trigger, except of course the song cycle itself.

The texts that Berlioz chose and the mood of the music of the songs in the cycle reveal an erotically charged narrative of nostalgia, loss, abjection, coming to terms with loss, and finally, finding new love. All of which, in the light of the above hypothesis, suggests a Freudian Oedipal conflict and its successful resolution.

This musical journey through the Oedipal conflict, it has been argued, had a cathartic effect on Berlioz, whose relationship with his mother at the time of her death was conflicted. It is this catharsis, subliminally evident in the music, particularly in the later orchestral version, which is transposed to the listener, making it a particularly effective and affective musical work.

## 7.2 Discussion of Problems.

This psychoanalytical musical analysis relies heavily on Eagleton's discussion of psychoanalytical literary criticism, with its attendant emphasis on text and narrative. While attempting to maintain the integrity of the songs (text and music as one unit) in this dissertation, the texts of the poems that Berlioz chose for *Les nuits d'été* and the biographical details of Berlioz's life have formed the basis for further analysis of the effectiveness of the music. Ideally the musical techniques used in the music to evoke a particular mood, or the kinds of repetitions, conflicts and resolutions inherent in the musical notes could be more thoroughly analysed. However, while this study

has not ignored these aspects, it is more particularly concerned with the changes in mood of the music and its effect on the listener, rather than with a detailed search for the actual musical techniques used to create those moods.

Another, related problem, is that literary criticism has its own particular body of theory, some of which is based on psychoanalysis, which again has its own particular vocabulary. It was the deliberate intention of this study to use the vocabulary of psychoanalytical literary criticism because it is the most suited to describing subliminal motives, and the subliminal transposition from the music to the listener. It has, however, sometimes proved problematic to present these often convoluted theories in a brief, but to the point manner, while at the same time linking them to the actual subject of this dissertation, which is the effectiveness of the song cycle *Les nuits d'été*.

### 7.3 Conclusions.

The central question that this dissertation has attempted to answer is whether psychoanalytical music analysis can explain what it is that makes *Les nuits d'été* such an effective musical composition. But the reason why this question arose in the first place is from an attempt to understand the nature of the effect that this work has on its hearers; the bodily reaction to the nostalgia, despair, and joy in the music

formed the basis for further investigation. The kind of subjective self-reflection that leads to these questions needs a theory of subjectivity to answer them. The theory chosen was psychoanalysis, because “psychoanalysis is an indispensable vehicle of cultural knowing [. . .] [it] is the deepest and most far-reaching *theory of subjectivity* available to us” (Wolfenstein 1991: 521). Or as Wright puts it:

What psychoanalysis has to offer [. . .] is a theory of interpretation which calls into question the commonsense facts of consciousness, which it maintains can only be grasped after the event. To this degree psychoanalysis is a theory of knowledge in which the notion of a plain objectivity susceptible to a true-false analysis is open to question (Wright 1998: 2).

To employ psychoanalysis to this end, Eagleton’s four categories (author, content, form, and reader) of psychoanalysis as literary theory were used as a model from which to work.

While Berlioz himself never discussed his reasons for composing *Les nuits d’été*, the events in his life at the time of its composition can lead us to the hypothesis that the death of his mother may have been the emotional trigger that led to the composition of this song cycle. Furthermore, the content and form of the cycle suggests not only an Oedipal conflict, but also its cathartic resolution, rather like the “working-through” of events in dream-work as described by Freud. Berlioz would have needed to resolve this conflict subliminally in his

music, as the death of his mother had made it impossible to do so in real life.

Eagleton's fourth category, that of the reader (in our case the listener), finally allows us to link these findings back to the original question of why *Les nuits d'été* is such an effective musical composition. The reason, it is suggested in this dissertation, is because a psychic transference or transposition takes place between the composer and the listener, a transposition that is mediated by the music. By employing the psychoanalytical theories of Lacan, Barthes and Kristeva, the conclusion is reached that the cathartic effect on Berlioz of composing *Les nuits d'été*, is (depending on the psyche of listener) "carried over" to the listener, making the work particularly effective and affective through its ability to "unsettle" its hearers.

#### 7.4 Suggestions for Further Research.

Further investigation into subjective listening responses based on live concerts and recordings of *Les nuits d'été* would be desirable, and in line with recent developments in musicological research. There are two areas of research that it would seem are logical extensions of this study: firstly the shift of emphasis of music analysis from the score to the performance, or performer, and secondly the analysis of music through the experience of listening, either to a live performance or, as is more often the case, to recordings.



In the “Afterword” to *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, Rose Rosengard Subotnik (in Dell’Antonio (ed.) 2004: 285) presents what she calls “the next paradigm” of musical scholarship. Her response is really a summary of arguments presented by the various authors whose essays are published in this book, but she draws two conclusions from these about the future of writing about music. The first one, following Dell’Antonio, is that the analysis of music will become a deconstruction of listening (p.288), and the second one, “the distrust and rejection of mastery as a goal, or even as a virtue” (p.289), with a concomitant turn toward scholarly self-reflexiveness (p.289), taking “performance (as opposed to the score) [. . .] as the fundamental condition of music” (p.290). This shift in paradigm is, she suggests, “[t]he ongoing shift [. . .] from foundationalist principles to aesthetic sensibilities” (p.291).

This shift towards a musicology based on the experience of listening is evident in research published in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (2009) edited by Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink, which examines how developments in recording have transformed musical culture, and *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture, and Technology* (2010), edited by Amanda Bayley, which considers the attitudes of performers alongside developments in technology and changing listening practices and social contexts.

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