From Myth to Music: Levi-Strauss's "Mythologiques" and Berio's "Sinfonia"
Author(s): David Osmond-Smith
Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 2, (Apr., 1981), pp. 230-260
Published by: Oxford University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/741994
Accessed: 27/07/2008 06:43

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=oup.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

From Myth to Music: Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* and Berio's *Sinfonia*

DAVID OSMOND-SMITH

WHEN Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* appeared in 1968-69,[1] two of its more radical features attracted immediate attention. The central movement of the work offered an elaborate commentary upon the third movement of Mahler's Second Symphony, while the outer movements pursued the seemingly unrelated task of setting fragments from Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Le Cru et le cuit*,[2] a structural analysis of South American Indian myths. The Mahler commentary was quickly recognized as speaking to the cultural dilemmas of the period and has consequently tended to occupy the foreground in subsequent discussions of the work;[3] the Lévi-Strauss settings seem on the contrary to have left critics somewhat bemused and have attracted more description than discussion. Yet these two movements encapsulate a decade of work on the human voice within which Berio, enlarging upon the experiments of Kagel and Schnebel, had strikingly revised traditional concepts of the relations between words and music.

Prior to the vocal experiments of the late fifties, any Western composer tempted by the resources of the human voice quickly found himself caught up in a battle between literary impact and musical coherence of so long a standing as to seem part of the natural order of things. That this tension should have been so deeply felt was no mere cultural accident. As Europe fixed its sights ever more firmly on a technological and imperialist vocation, so the cultivation of linear logic and of organic, internally coherent conceptual structures took on the status of a universal ideology governing not merely the manipulation of the environment, but also — particularly between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries — such intuitively based exemplars of sensibility as literature and music. But the norms of consequence and of "good form" that emerged within both media proved only partially compatible at best. The surface structures of prose and poetry derived their consistency by integrating a pleasingly varied succession of images through narrative logic or associative resonance, whereas prior to the epigrams of the Second Viennese School surface continuity in music depended strongly upon repetition and thematic development. Consequently, any genre attempting a more adventurous combination of the two media than the strophic song tended to be plagued with disputes over literary and musical priorities that constituted the virtual *raison d'être* of musical aesthetics prior to Kant and remained one of its central preoccupations thereafter.

---

[1] The last movement was added in the latter year.

[2] (Paris, 1964). Trans. J. and D. Weightman as *The Raw and the Cooked* (London, 1970). Since pagination does not correspond in the French and English versions, both references will be given where appropriate.

[3] Particularly in Peter Altmann, *Sinfonia von Luciano Berio: eine analytische Studie* (Vienna, 1977).

As long as teleological and organic priorities continued to dominate each medium, the tension between them — part fruitful, part destructive — was bound to subsist. But during the first three decades of this century, the more radical developments in literature and music began to place the authenticity of continuity in question. Music, being unencumbered by explicit semantic obligations, was free to explore this field more rapidly and extensively: Debussy, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky between them provided a rich variety of examples (although the more far-reaching experiments in discontinuity undertaken by Schoenberg and Webern in their preserial phase frequently supported themselves upon a comparatively linear sung text). But the fragmentation of poetry and poetic prose that flowed from Mallarmé through to Pound, Eliot, and Joyce showed the possibility of a mode of verbal expression whose semantic rhythms were congruent with the ebb and flow of a discontinuous musical language.

It was only after Europe had recovered from World War II that the possibilities opened up by this convergence began to be exploited. Their most direct fruit was such works as Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* (1954) or Berio's *Circles* (1960) — respectively settings of poems by René Char and e e cummings. Here the unfolding of poetic image and musical gesture, though by no means merely mapped onto each other, are able to maintain complementary rhythms, and complementary ranges of disparity and discontinuity. But a more radical step — and one that was to be crucial to Berio's development — lay implicit within Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* — amidst whose multilingual hurly-burly the dominance of semantic coherence is frequently subverted by the purely sonorous impact of the text. The possibility of thus effecting not merely a parallelism but a synthesis between text and music — a unified compositional medium within which the boundary between sense and nonsense constitutes a major parameter — was far too tempting to be long neglected. Schnebel's *dt 31,6* (1956-58) — the first part of *für stimmen für (. . . missa est)* — Kagel's *Anagrama* (1957-58), Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1956), and Berio's *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* (1958), established the idiom. The Schnebel and Kagel works are both for multiple voices, which in Schnebel's work articulate the fragmented remains of a text from the Torah in a bewildering variety of languages, and in Kagel's spew forth a surrealist jumble of anagrams in German, Italian, French, and Spanish derived from a medieval Latin palindrome.[4]

Although Berio was to take up the anarchic abundance of such pieces in his collaborations with Edoardo Sanguineti, and in *Sinfonia* itself,[5] *Thema* immediately established a more structured frame of reference for exploring the borderland between sound and sense — that of the phonetic and phonological models developed by postwar linguistics. Being a tape piece, *Thema* was able to enlarge upon acoustic features of its phonetic material — a passage from Joyce's *Ulysses* read by Cathy Berberian — and it was followed in 1961 by a further vocal tape piece, *Visage,* based upon fictitious phonological repertories employed by Cathy Berberian to present dramatic narrations in nonexistent languages. But it was the structural matrix provided by the typologies of articulatory phonetics that proved the greatest stimulus to Berio's imagination

---

[4] For a more detailed commentary, see Mario Bortolotto, *Fase Seconda* (Turin, 1969), p. 85; and Françoise Escal, "Paroles, voix, musique," *Degrés,* XVIII (Brussels, 1979), pp. 17-19.

[5] A progress paralleled by Schnebel's work on the two remaining sections of *für stimmen: AMN* (1958-67) and *:!* (1964-68), and his *Glossolalie* (1961); by Kagel's *Hallelujah* (1967); by Ligeti's *Aventures* (1962) and *Nouvelles Aventures* (1965); and by Stockhausen's *Momente* (1962).

— an approach briefly adumbrated in the central section of *Circles* and elevated to a major focus of compositional interest in *Sequenza III* (1965-66) and *O King* (1967) which, in a texturally richer form, became the second movement of *Sinfonia*.[6]

If the ability to generate compositional building blocks by dissolving a text into its phonetic components provided Berio with one of the essential features of the vocal style of *Sinfonia*, the other was established in the multivocal works *Passaggio* (1962) and *Laborintus II* (1965) in which Berio was able to project onto the vocal textures of Kagel and Schnebel the highly individual poetic style of his collaborator Sanguineti.[7] Sanguineti was the most radical of a group of Italian poets, *I Novissimi*, the publication of whose manifesto in 1961 unleashed considerable critical turmoil.[8] Although the group had no uniform poetic style, all were concerned to protect language from the parallel scleroses of media jargon and literary elevation — in Sanguineti's case by elaborating upon the discontinuities of Eliot and Pound's more radical adventures.

His first book of poems, *Laborintus* (Varese, 1956), immediately established the stylistic features in question: abolition of the "closed" sentence, a flux of tense and person, of literary and colloquial styles, indeed of different languages, creating an implied semantic counterpoint that is enhanced by the layout of the text on the page, and by a highly idiosyncratic use of punctuation.[9] These latter, combined with a typically exclamatory style — an energetic offspring of Pound's own pact with Walt Whitman — constantly evoke the rhythms and inflections of spoken language: and it is precisely because Sanguineti's style allows the "musical" elements of speech discussed above to break through the fragmented discourse and assume an autonomous existence that he has proved so apposite a collaborator for Berio.

Their first work together was the theater piece *Passaggio* (1962), built round the solitary figure of an imprisoned woman and incorporating material from Rosa Luxemburg's *Letters from Prison* and from Kafka's *Letters to Milena*. The disposition of its forces —

---

[6] For a detailed analysis of these processes, see the Introduction to my forthcoming analysis of *Sinfonia*.

[7] With whom he also produced *A-Ronne* (1974).

[8] A. Giulani, *I Novissimi* (Varese, 1961; reprinted Turin, 1965).

[9] Sanguineti's structural use of rhythm and punctuation is pertinently analyzed in Walter Siti, *Il realismo dell'avanguardia* (Turin, 1975), pp. 77-93.

solo soprano on stage, eight-part choir in the orchestra[10] and five speaking groups (Choir II) scattered around the auditorium — allows the implicit semantic counterpoints of Sanguineti's previous poetic work to contract into genuine synchronicity. But in so doing, they move into the borderland between phonetics and phonology characteristic of Berio's other vocal work. For before the listener can begin to pursue Sanguineti's game of syntactic and semantic congruities, he must extract from the babel of simultaneous speech coherent materials with which to begin his exploration — just as in *Thema* or *Sequenza III* he must struggle to catch at comprehensible words and phrases within the phonetic flux. Naturally enough, this process will be conditioned by the listener's linguistic abilities (Italian, Latin, French, English, and German are all used), his position relative to the various choirs, the vocal characteristics that most easily catch his attention, the acoustics of the hall, and so forth. Thus, although the "choral" solidarity of the audience, as represented by Choir II, is a consistent theme of *Passaggio,* its illusory nature is exposed by the materials of the works themselves, which cannot fail to produce a strongly differentiated impression from one listener to the next.

In *Passaggio,* Sanguineti had produced a text that deliberately elevated comparative semantic coherence to the status of a major compositional parameter — and one whose full range (with the female protagonist singing alone in coherent "poetic" Italian at one extreme and multilingual chaos at the other) was exploited by the authors with considerable resourcefulness. In their next work, *Laborintus II,* commissioned by the ORTF (French Radio) to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Dante's birth, the same techniques are applied to a wider range of preexistent texts, notably Dante's *La vita nuova* and the first eleven Cantos of the *Inferno,*[11] and Sanguineti's poem-sequences *Laborintus* and *Purgatorio dell'Inferno.*[12] These texts are reduced to a series of verbal fragments that will recall a salient development within the original to those well acquainted with the text in question, and will be appreciated purely for its own internal poetry by those who are not. We may take the comparatively simple case of the *Vita nuova* extracts, all of which (save two fragments to be mentioned below) are taken from the prose commentary that links the poems of that work, providing a stylized account of Dante's obsessive involvement, as much through dreams and visions as through real-life encounters, with Beatrice Portinari. Sanguineti's choice of fragments at first preserves the skeletal outline of the book, moving from the opening passage in which Dante recalls his first juvenile encounter with Beatrice at a May Day party, through the episode in which, lying on his sick-bed, he receives a visionary announcement of Beatrice's death and calls on death to visit him too, to the book's closing pages in which, having seen a vision of the dead and glorified Beatrice, he resolves to write nothing more about her until he can treat of her more worthily (a commission that he was to fulfill at the very end of his life in the *Paradiso*). The fragments then jump back to the disturbing vision that Dante receives after Beatrice has, for the first time, condescended to greet him in the street.

---

[10] An anticipation of the "orchestral" use of eight solo voices in *Sinfonia.*

[11] *La divina commedia* is composed of three books, each of thirty-three cantos, with one extra canto in the *Inferno* to make 100: here division replaces multiplication.

[12] Which, along with a third sequence, *Erotopaegnia,* were published as *Triperuno* (Milan, 1965).

This last set of fragments is worthy of closer attention. It provides a fine example of a technique which, like that of the "structural skeleton," was to be further developed in *Sinfonia* — that of juxtaposing fragments so as to produce an image that has a poetic cohesion of its own, irrespective of the often contradictory origins of the original components.[13] This is the passage in question:

> mi da orrore (uno soave sonno) ; ma allegro; ma con tanta letizia; ma
> una maravigliosa visione: e di pauroso aspetto (amore)
> piangendo, mangiando dubitosamente (una nebula di colore di fuoco);
> ego dominus, ego dominus tuus; (una figura); (uno segnore, amore);
> e la donna, in amarissimo pianto in grande angoscia, piangendo vide cor tuum;

The original account of Dante's vision may be summarized as follows: in a fiery cloud appears a lordly figure — love — whose appearance, although jubilant, inspires fear in Dante. In his arms he carries the naked, sleeping Beatrice, and in one hand a burning heart, which he announces to be Dante's. Waking Beatrice, he makes her eat the heart, whereupon his joy turns to grief, and he departs leaving Dante in anguish. The first sequence of fragments, analyzed in Example 2, creates an oppositional structure out of the contradictory aspects of the figure of love as described in the commentary and its subsequent sonnet, thereby creating a precedent for the far more complex oppositional structures used by Berio in the first movement of *Sinfonia* (cf. Ex. 6). The third sequence from "Ego dominus" to "uno segnore, amore" also amalgamates fragments pertaining to the figure of love. But the two remaining sequences, analyzed in Example 3, provide more startling juxtapositions. Each is set out in relation to its original reference, and with the original order of the fragments notated above. The first, which now reads as "weeping, dubiously eating a cloud the colour of fire" substitutes one fiery object in the original text for the other by reversing the order of events; the second amalgamates the grief of Dante and the lord and attributes them to Beatrice.

---

[13] Berio had already experimented with this procedure in *Sequenza III*.

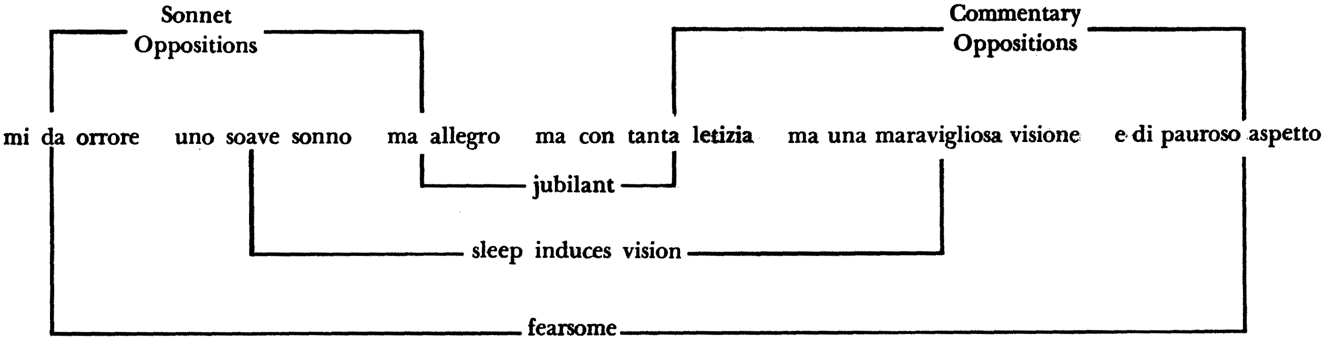
These precedents were crucial for *Sinfonia* — and particularly for the first and fifth movements of the work, where the fragmentary representation of a textual skeleton takes on a much more fundamental structural role. *Le Cru et le cuit* provides a particularly enticing starting point in this respect, for, as Lévi-Strauss has himself pointed out,[14] it was in the series of *Mythologiques* of which this work forms the first volume that his abiding involvement with music, and his frustration at not being able to compose it himself, first erupted into his professional work as an anthropologist. In this series, the problem of presenting an enormously complex universe of structural relations between the myths of different tribal groupings of South American Indians in easily comprehensible form is tackled by forging groups of those myths into structures analogous to those of Western Classical music. What at first seemed a purely intuitive necessity had, by book four of *Mythologiques, L'Homme nu,* clarified itself into the hypothesis that music and myth have played complementary roles in the history of humanity and that as the functions of myth fade away in post-Renaissance Europe, so their role is taken over by music. If this hypothesis is to be given any weight at all, then Berio's juxtaposition in *Sinfonia* of commentaries upon a set of South American myths and upon a late nineteenth-century symphonic structure is by no means the arbitrary gesture that it may at first appear.

The mythical universe that Lévi-Strauss sets out to explore is

---

[14] In Jean-Jacques Nattiez's Rencontre avec Lévi-Strauss," *Musique en jeu,* XII (Paris, 1973), 5-6.

Ex. 2


Sonnet Oppositions
Commentary Oppositions
mi da orrore
uno soave sonno
ma allegro
ma con tanta letizia
ma una maravigliosa visione
e di pauroso aspetto
jubilant
sleep induces vision
fearsome

Ex. 3

The Fiery Cloud				1 una nebula di colore di fuoco
Love	3 piangendo			
Beatrice		2 mangiando dubitosamente		
Dante			5 in grande angoscia	
Love		4 in amarissimo pianto		3 2 piangendo, vide cor tuum
Beatrice	1 e la donna			

Ex. 4

	M.	I	II	III
				feu
	124	Il y avait une fois un indien marié et père de plusiers fils adultes, à l'exception du dernier né qui s'appelait Asaré. Un jour que cet indien était à la chasse, les frères	←┐	feu eau sang ←┐
A				
				eau feu
				sang
		Quand l'océan s'était formé, les frères d'Asaré avait tout de suite voulu s'y baigner	←┐	pluie ←┐
B		Et encore aujourd'hui vers le fin de la saison des pluies on les voit apparaître dans le ciel, tout propres et rénovés sous l'apparence des sept étoiles des Pléiades	←┐	feu pluie voulu
		ce mythe nous retiendra longtemps		
C				
				/sa/ feu
D				/san/ feu vie

	M	I	II	III
E	(127) 9		Pluie douce appel bruyant	doux ←┐
F			doux bruyant } appel	←┐
				eau
				sang eau
	Opp		eau { céleste terrestre	sang ←┐
G	127		eau terrestre pluie { douce de la saison sèche orageuse de la saison des pluies	sang ←┐
	Opp		eau terrestre	←┐
H	(9) 125 + 2		eau céleste bois { dur pourri arbre résorbé sous l'eau un fils privé de { mère nourriture le héros héros { honteux furieux tuant tué musique rituelle	roc ←┐
I ⋮				
L				
				tuant tué
				tué

not centrifugal. Consequently as he himself is at pains to point out,[15] the myth that constitutes his point of departure is arbitrarily chosen. But Berio, in planning his own comparatively modest trajectory through the vast accumulation of interrelationships that Lévi-Strauss maps out, does not choose to start with this "mythe de reférénce" (or "key myth") — M.1, as Lévi-Strauss calls it. Instead, he starts the first movement with the myth that clinches Lévi-Strauss's demonstration of a coherently structured mythical universe by providing an inversion of the transformational procedures previously demonstrated between another myth from the same tribal grouping and the "mythe de référence." This myth opens the fourth part of the book, "L'astronomie bien tempérée" "Well-Tempered Astronomy"), from the first section of which, "Inventions à trois voix" ("Three-Part Inventions"), most of the material with which we shall be dealing comes. All of the myths analyzed in this section concern the origin of water, but at the end of it there is reference to the opening section of the third part of the book, "Fugue des cinq sens" ("Fugue of the Five Senses"), in which a fire myth is taken up and developed in relation to the theme of human mortality, "la vie brève" — thus providing Berio with a fundamental opposition between water and fire that is to underpin both this and the last movement.[16]

I shall examine in detail the substantial vocal section that comprises roughly the first two-thirds of the first movement of *Sinfonia* — though I shall be dealing only with manipulations of the text, and not with the accompanying phonetic material. Although I would recommend to those anxious to gain a full understanding of Berio's undertaking a prereading of the relevant portions of Lévi-Strauss's text, this is not essential for an appreciation of the principles involved. The fragments that Berio uses are set out in Example 4. The letters running down the left-hand side of the diagram correspond to those in the score. The figures in column M refer to the myths as numbered by Lévi-Strauss. Column I = continuous narrative; Column II = coherent word groupings; Column III = isolated words. Word groupings and individual words in Columns I and II bracketed by the sign ┌─┐ are repeated in isolation, their presence in Columns II and III being confirmed by the sign ←┐ , which refers the reader leftwards to the previous columns. Blocks of material in concurrent use are marked off by horizontal lines. Within any block, elements from Columns II and III may be repeated, and indeed usually are — though the distributional patterns thus created are not to be discussed here. Clearly, within a continuously evolving texture, such a means of notation would become impossibly elaborate, but since here Berio divides up his material in a fairly clear-cut manner, decisions as to what constitutes a change of material are rather less arbitrary than they would be in, say, the last movement.

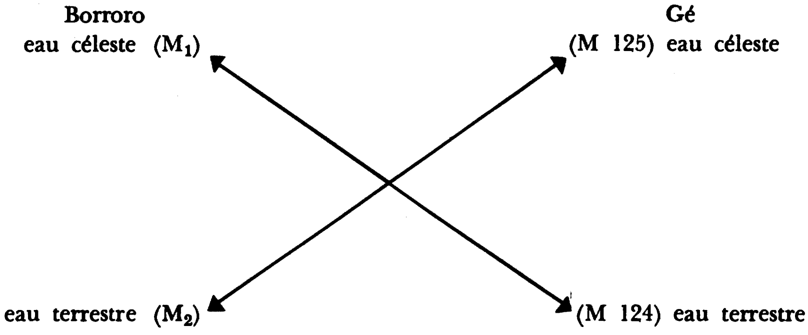
---

[15] *Op. cit.*, p. 10; Eng. trans., p. 2.

[16] And indeed constitutes one of the fundamental themes of *Le Cru et le cuit* (see pp. 195-202; Eng. trans,. pp. 188-95).

Let us examine the contents of Columns I and II in relation to the myths and myth commentaries from which they derive. Matters may be immediately simplified by comparing the contents of column M with Example 5, reproduced from Lévi-Strauss's text,[17] which shows how Bororo and Gé myths of the origins of earthly and heavenly water stand in transformational opposition to each other. Although, as noted above, M.1 is left in abeyance for the duration of this movement, M.124 is used to start the movement, and fragments from Lévi-Strauss's oppositional commentary on M.2 and M.125 finish off the main vocal section of the movement between H and I. M.124 is the only myth whose text is actually quoted — and even then only its beginning and end, since the speaker is interrupted by a taboo-imposing orchestra just as he is about to recount the group rape of a mother by her sons.[18] Once the orchestral tumult has subsided, Berio jumps straight to the last paragraph of the myth — unexplored by Lévi-Strauss — which functions as a speakable version of the unspeakable first paragraph: the sons

Ex. 5



---

[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 217; Eng. trans., p. 211.
[18] *Op. cit.*, p. 206; Eng. trans., p. 199.

now plunge themselves into the sea, and are, as a result, not vilified but purified.[19] Lévi-Strauss's comment "ce mythe nous retiendra longtemps" ("There is a great deal to be said about this myth") follows. Commentary upon Berio's selection of fragments from a table[20] opposing features from M.2 and M.125 may usefully be postponed until the other material in hand has been considered. However, the importance of the opposition "eau céleste/terreste" ("celestial/terrestrial water") which governs these myths is underlined by using it to punctuate the exposition of material from the other two myths to be considered: M.9 and M.127.

M.9 is an Apinaye myth concerning the origin of fire. It is linked to M.124 by the presence of homologous triads of objects that play a crucial role in the unraveling of the story.[21] In M.124 three types of alimentary detritus (which are therefore "anti-nourritures") are used by three beneficent animals in turn, in order to hide the hero from a pursuing crocodile. Corresponding to these in M.9 is another series of three inedible objects: rock, hard wood, and rotten wood, that cry out to the hero on his journey. (M.9 thereby acts as intermediary between M.124 and our missing myth, M.1, where the hero, with the aid of three beneficent animals, steals three musical instruments that must not be heard . . .).[22] The material that Berio utilizes to stand for M.9 is derived from an oppositional table in the "Fugue des cinq sens" that sets out parallel codes for hearing, taste, scent, and touch.[23] As well as briefly citing the triad of "anti-nourritures" after $\boxed{H}$, he also develops after $\boxed{E}$ the opposition "appel bruyant/douce appel" ("loud call/faint call"). In "L'astronomie bien tempérée" Lévi-Strauss proposes a further addition to this group of myths arising out of his commentary on M.127, a Bororo myth recounting the origin of gentle rain, which is a transformation of M.125, the Kayapo myth recounting the origin of stormy rain, that we first encountered in the previous paragraph. Each of the "anti-nourritures" in M.9 (rock, hard wood, and rotten wood) has been demonstrated to represent the opposite of a form of food[24] — respectively human flesh, animal flesh, and cultivated plants — and this gastronomic triad is then shown to correspond to three different types of water:[25] respectively the "pluie orageuse de la saison des pluies" ("rainstorms which occur during the rainy season"), "rivières et lacs" ("rivers and lakes"), and "pluie douce de la saison sèche" (gentle rain which occurs during the dry season"). Of these, Berio only uses the "pluie douce" and the "pluie orageuse," thereby emphasizing the opposition between M.127 and M.125.

---

[19] By pursuing transformational relationships within a single myth — whereas Lévi-Strauss is solely concerned with those between myths — Berio provides a methodological complement to the generation of new poetic images by unexpected juxtapositions discussed above.

[20] *Op. cit.*, p. 215; Eng. trans., p. 209.

[21] *Op. cit.*, p. 221; Eng. trans., p. 215.

[22] *Op. cit.*, pp. 212-13; Eng. trans., pp. 206-7.

[23] *Op. cit.*, p. 161; Eng. trans., p. 153.

Thus in broad outline we are dealing with two myth groupings, one opposing two transformationally related couples (M.1 + M.124 versus M.2 + M.125), and the other bound together by homologous triads (M.1, 9, 124, and 127). Suppressing M.1 in both groupings, Berio then starts from the remaining common factor, M.125, and proceeds through the second group to M.127 which, being a transformation of M.125, bridges the opposition between M.124 and M.2 + 125. These latter myths accordingly round off the process.

The simplicity of this underlying scheme, summarized in Example 6, is both blurred and enriched by allowing fleeting allusions to the triadically related myths M.9 and 127 to emerge at other points in the score, represented by myth numbers in brackets in Examples 4 and 6. Only one of these, however, complicates the basic oppositional pattern. This is the brief reference to the "anti-nourritures" triad from M.9 immediately before the entry of M.2 and 125, which brings into play an opposition whose existence Lévi-Strauss acknowledges elsewhere,[26] but does not choose to expand upon in relation to these myths: that between the beneficent "feu terrestre" ("terrestrial fire") of M.9 — the cooking fire — and the destructive "feu céleste" ("celestial fire") of M.125 — the thunderbolt which kills a large number of people. The reference to M.127 at $\boxed{E}$ will be discussed below when considering the impact of unexpected juxtapositions, but it is worth noting here that the repeated "tktktktk" after $\boxed{I}$, while ostensibly representing an inversion of the plosive consonants from "musique rituelle," also refers to the text of M.127 in which a young man summons "la pluie douce" from the sky by imitating the cry ("toka, toka, toka,

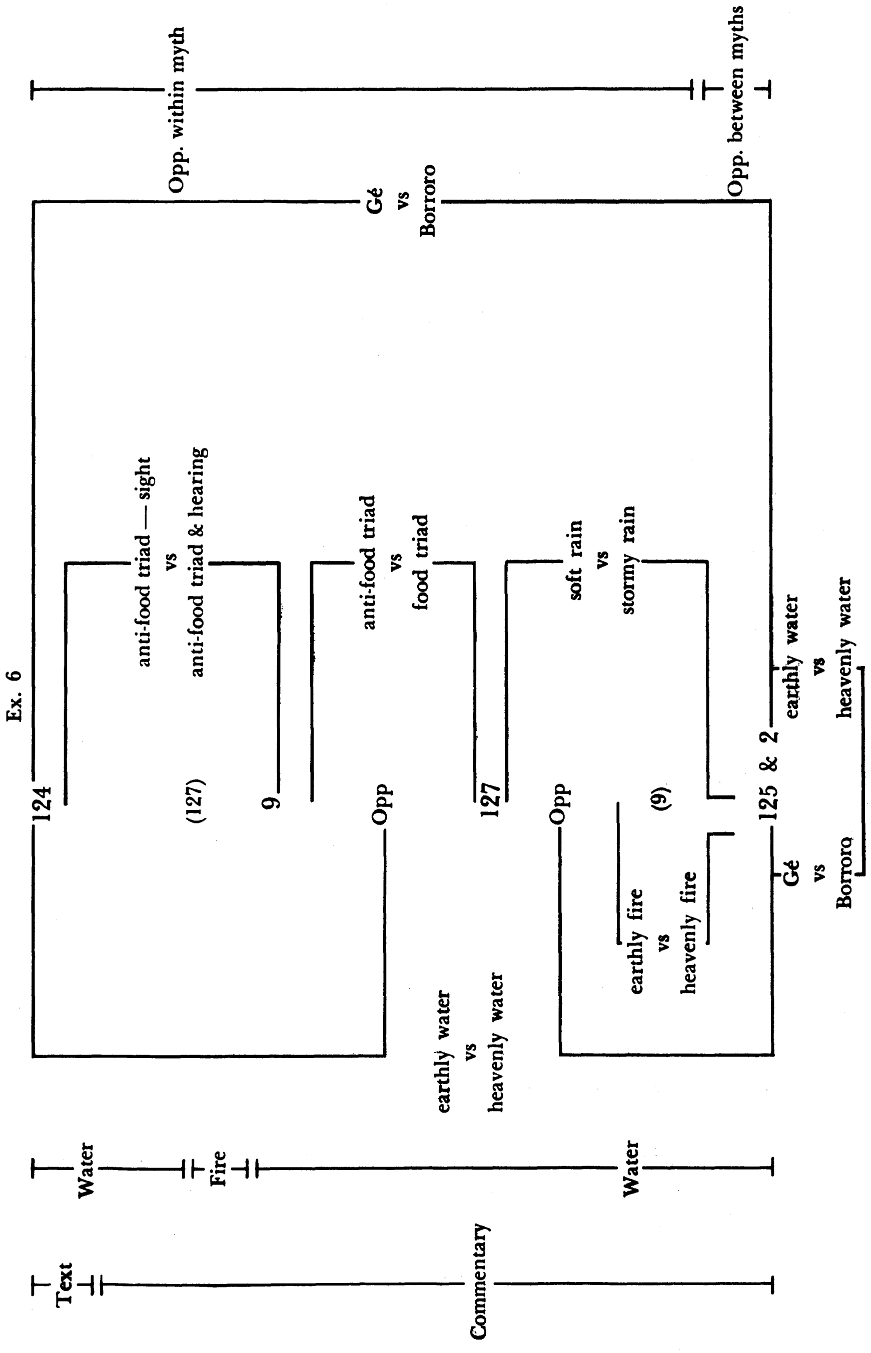
---

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Op. cit.*, p. 221; Eng. trans., p. 215.

[26] *Op. cit.*, pp. 297-302; Eng. trans., pp. 291-96.

Ex. 6


Text
Commentary
Water
Fire
Water
124
(127)
9
Opp
127
Opp
(9)
125 & 2
Gé vs Borroro
anti-food triad — sight vs anti-food triad & hearing
anti-food triad vs food triad
soft rain vs stormy rain
earthly water vs heavenly water
earthly fire vs heavenly fire
earthly water vs heavenly water
Gé vs Borroro
Opp. within myth
Opp. between myths

toka, ka, ka,") of the birds into which all the other male members of the clan have transformed themselves. (Here again we have a relationship that Lévi-Strauss does not choose to pursue: in M.124 Asaré, the youngest brother, has his thirst quenched by his elder brothers who strike the earth and bring forth water; in M.127 we once again have a "petit frère" whose thirst is quenched by his brothers — but this time from the sky.)

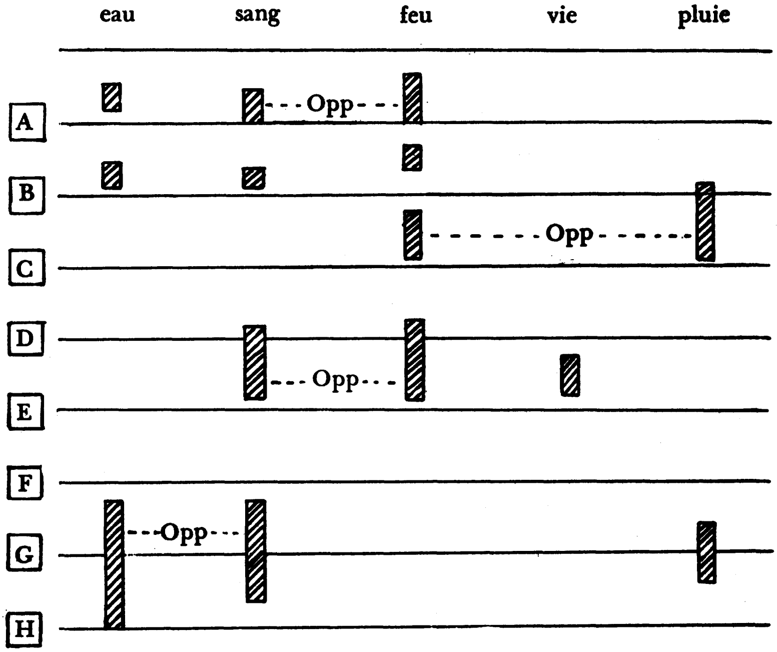
If we now refer to the table from which the material opposing M.125 and 2 is drawn,[27] we find that the opposite of the "musique rituelle" ("ritual music") of M.2 are "cris pareils à ceux du gibier" ("cries like those uttered by wild animals") in M.125. The transformational equivalents of these cries in M.127 are precisely the cries of the "xinadatau" bird noted above. Thus for a structural opposition at one remove between myths, Berio substitutes a phonetic inversion.

So far, in considering the structural significance of Berio's text in relation to Lévi-Strauss's original, we have limited ourselves to Columns I and II of Example 4. In order to complete this survey of the conceptual underpinning of the first movement, we must now examine the contents of Column III. As was noted above, this column contains a number of words deriving directly from Columns I and II, and associated with them. Two of these words, however, acquire a more independent existence: "pluie" ("rain") and "eau" ("water"). With these are associated three others: "sang" ("blood"), "feu" ("fire"), and "vie" ("life"). Their distribution is displayed in Example 7, and a brief comparison with Examples 4 and 6 will soon reveal the significance of this arrangement. With the exception of "sang," we are dealing with the basic subject matter of one of the myths in question, and each word is used to announce the advent of material relating to its own myth. This is most evident in the case of M.9, appearing at $\boxed{E}$, which accounts not only for the origin of fire, but also for the brevity of human life. "Feu" is much in evidence from the opening, and continues up to $\boxed{E}$ where it disappears. Likewise "vie" is strikingly introduced between $\boxed{D}$ and $\boxed{E}$, never to appear again. In accordance with the same principle "sang," although no more than an important feature of M.2 and 125, appears frequently throughout the movement until $\boxed{H}$, where it disappears, and the myths in ques-

---

[27] *Op. cit.*, p. 215; Eng. trans., p. 209.

Ex. 7



tion take over.[28] "Eau" is associated with the narration of fragments from M.124, concerning earthly water, disappears during the section devoted to the fire myth, and reappears as a prelude to the basic opposition at G, and the water myths that follow. "Pluie," on the other hand, only appears twice. Its second appearance is merely an extrapolation from Column II, and its first appearance is best examined in the light of the rapid alternation between pairs of words that are a feature of certain sections of this movement, and are marked in Example 7 as oppositions.

---

[28] The disproportionate emphasis given to this word, which plays no part in the other myths in question, may presumably be ascribed in part to Berio's ethnocentric attempt to arouse "primitive" associations. But for a further potential interpretation, see below.

Of the four opposition groupings, two juxtapose "sang" and "feu." These two elements are never brought into explicit opposition in the myths in question, but assume immediate coherence when taken as respective symbols of "le cru" ("the raw") and "le cuit" ("the cooked"): thus explaining their prefatory function before $\boxed{A}$, and their use in order to usher in M.9, in which myth the jaguar initiates a young Indian into the delights of cooked meat (of which mankind had previously been ignorant). Each of the two terms of this opposition also appears in juxtaposition to another element. Thus "feu/pluie" appears during the narration of M.124 as a solitary reminder of its missing opposite from Example 5, M.1, in which torrential rains extinguish all but one of the village fires. In similar fashion, the alternation of "eau" and "sang" between $\boxed{F}$ and $\boxed{G}$ announces M.125, where the action is precipitated by the hero's failure to wash the blood of a hunted animal from his hands.

The radical contrast in coherence between the underlying schema of Example 6 and the ostensible collage formed by allowing evocative verbal fragments to stand for the complex of myth and myth commentary of which each forms a part makes it well-nigh impossible to relate the latter to the former aurally. The most striking evidence of this is furnished by Lévi-Strauss himself who, in the conversation with Nattiez mentioned in footnote 14, observes that whereas René Leibowitz had once amused himself by writing a work based on the structure of the Toccata section from *Le Cru et le cuit,* "by contrast, although Berio's *Sinfonia* uses passages from *The Raw and the Cooked,* our author [Lévi-Strauss] has the impression that his text has been randomly selected, that it is in no way embodied in the work."[29] Despite a similarly ruthless fragmentation of the surface structure of Mahler's Scherzo in the third movement of *Sinfonia,* no listener acquainted with the original is likely to level similar accusations of random selection since the underlying metric and formal structure is preserved by Berio for the greater part of the movement — thus allowing the listener familiar with the original to pick up the shattered syntactic thread with relative ease. But if Mahler's structure is diachronic, Lévi-Strauss's is fundamentally synchronic, and can only be presented in linear fashion, as in the text of his book, by a lengthy process of cross-reference.

---

[29] Nattiez, *loc. cit.,* p. 6. The translation is mine.

So that although Berio pays equal respect to Lévi-Strauss's underlying structure — or rather to a constellation of structural relationships contained within it — the fragmentation and linear presentation of the verbal materials inevitably destroys its synchronic coherence. If Lévi-Strauss can propose that "this book on myths is itself a kind of myth,"[30] it is nonetheless a myth of a very different order, marking as it does the transition from the poetic ambiguities of the original narratives to the coherence of analytic exegesis. To create his own mythical morphology of the human spirit, Lévi-Strauss must "reduce apparently arbitrary data to some kind of order."[31] By fragmenting that order into a further set of apparently arbitrary data, Berio proposes to release the poetic potential of Lévi-Strauss's language, to restore ambiguity where coherence had supervened. (And the present attempt at exegesis offers a further swing of the pendulum.)

Apart from the individual resonance of each fragment in isolation, this poetic potential is realized via two Classical devices: the release of unexpected semantic affinities through the juxtaposition of ordinarily unrelated elements — a process already familiar from *Laborintus II* — and the exploitation of assonance and rhyme. For examples of the former, we may return to the passing references to M.9 and 127 discussed above. When, at $\boxed{E}$, the "pluie douce" ("gentle rain") of M.127 is juxtaposed with the "doux appel" ("faint call") of M.9, the listener might well suppose the latter to be a poetic attribute of the former. In fact, as we have already seen, the two are in direct opposition: the faint call emanates from the rotten wood, which is the antifood opposite of the cultivated plants with which the gentle rain is associated. And when the rotten wood — "bois pourri" — is finally named at $\boxed{H}$, it is associated with the "arbre résorbé sous l'eau" ("tree disappearing under water") of M.2. Again, the listener might well suppose that the latter consisted of the former. In fact, the tree beneath the water, far from rotting, is instead the bringer of life-giving water to the vegetable realm, while the rotten wood is the bringer of early death to human beings. Along with these oppositions thrown into ostensive alliance by the process of fragmentation, it might be well to mention the change that Berio makes in the text of the

---

[30] *Op. cit.*, p. 14; Eng. trans., p. 6.

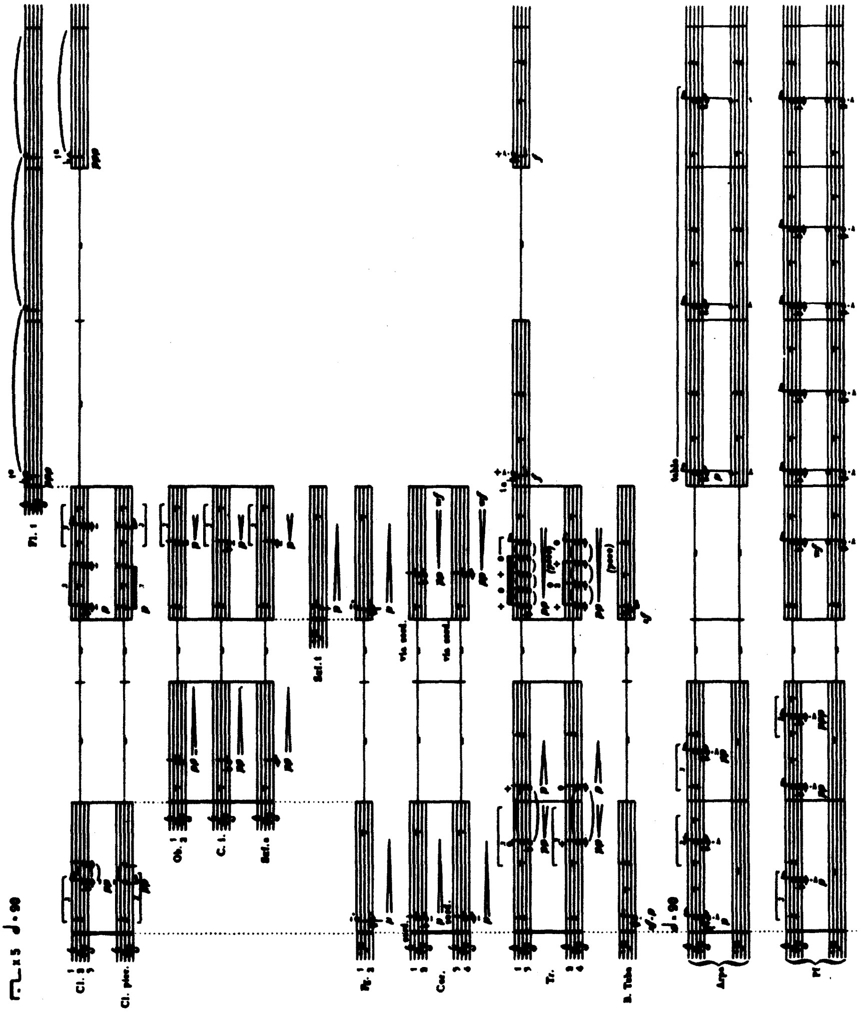
[31] *Op. cit.*, p. 18; Eng. trans., p. 16.

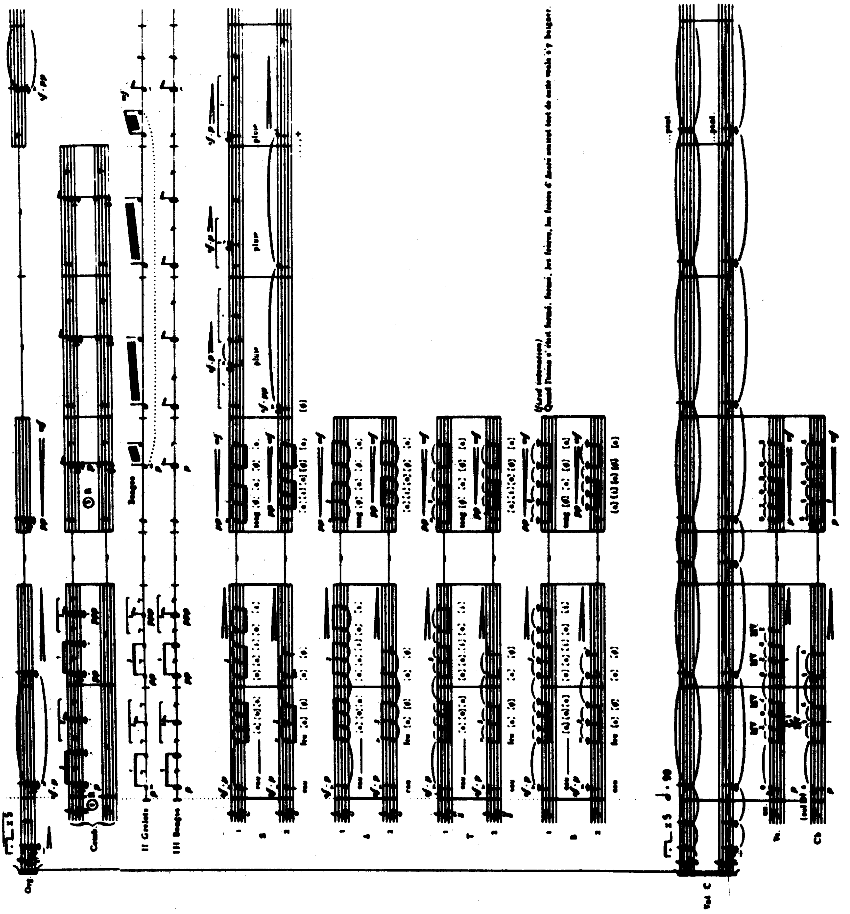
M.2/125 commentary altering Lévi-Strauss's "Indiens tuant/tué" ("Indians killing/killed") to "héros tuant/tué" ("heros killing/killed"). This text, recapitulated at the very end of the movement (and emphasizing "tué"), along with the juxtaposed "musique rituelle," anticipates the second movement's threnody for Martin Luther King.

As to the use of assonance and rhyme, the reader can explore these in detail for himself. Suffice it to say that in section $\boxed{A}$ to $\boxed{E}$ front-back versus back-front vowel alternations are emphasized (e.g. "Il y avait" versus "plusiers," or conversely "aujourd'hui" versus "vers le fin": there are several other examples); in section $\boxed{E}$ to $\boxed{F}$ this changes to vowel identity through the recurrent [i] of "vie," "pluie," etc.; in section $\boxed{F}$ to $\boxed{H}$ consonant identity takes over with recurrent r's and s's; and finally in $\boxed{H}$ to $\boxed{I}$ the recurrent consonant plus vowel "tu" resolves the process. In other words, we move from the semantic continuity and phonetic oppositions of the opening to the semantic fragmentation and phonetic continuity of the close.

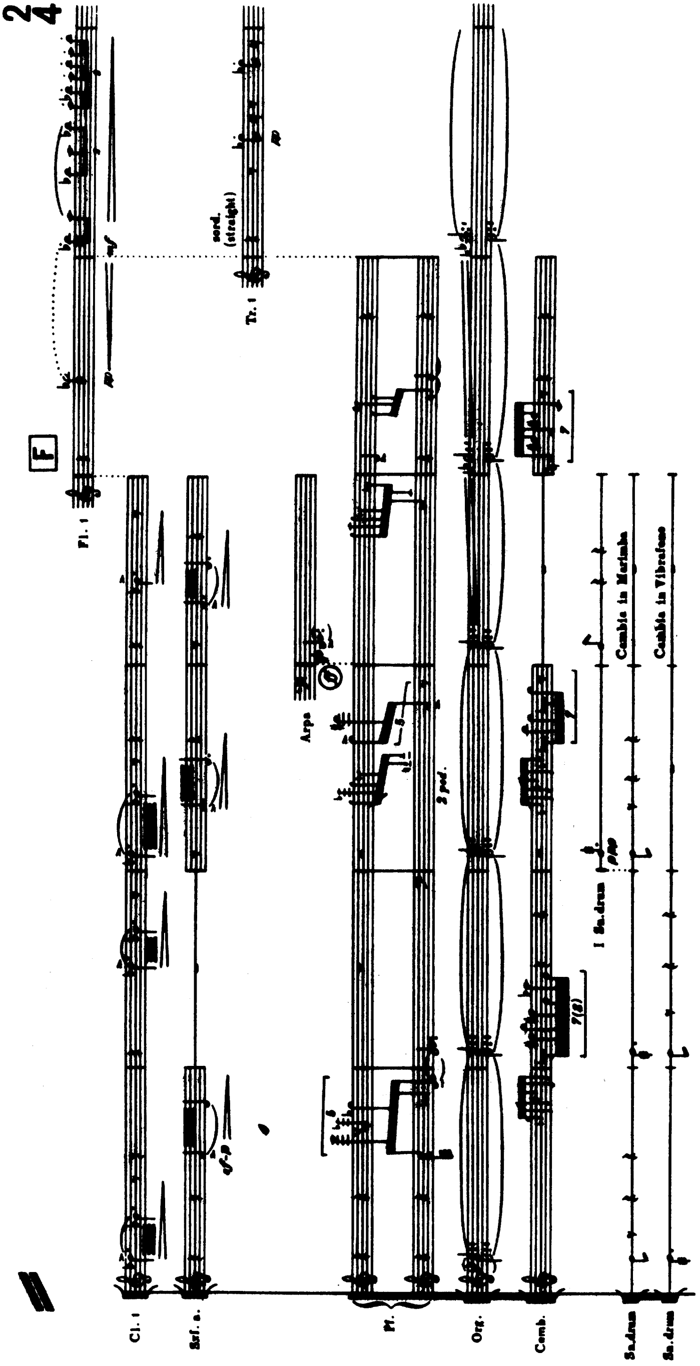
The basic Water-Fire-Water progression that underlies these various structural games also determines their musical substance. An example from each of the relevant sections should suffice to illustrate the outlines of the process. Example 8, from the first Water section, appears just before Figure B in the score. It is based upon a static, third-based chord (one of two, whose alternation underpins the whole of this section) articulated as a complex interplay of attacks. Sung words and phonetic fragments are followed by the unpitched speech of the myth narration, though elsewhere in this section approximately pitched speech is combined with the singing. By contrast, Example 9 from the Fire section shows slowly shifting third-based harmonies articulated by oscillations, rather than by repeated attacks. Over this, the harpsichord and piano project the first, rapid fragments of melody — later to become obsessional. The voices either sing or whisper. Example 10 comes from the second Water section. Third-based harmonies have now given way to a sustained cluster, characterized by the nervous interplay of attacks familiar from the first Water section. Against it saxophone, strings, piano, harp, and harpsichord articulate an ever more aggressive melodic line. Voices pit the unpitched speech of a solo line against alternating pitched speech and whispering from the rest.

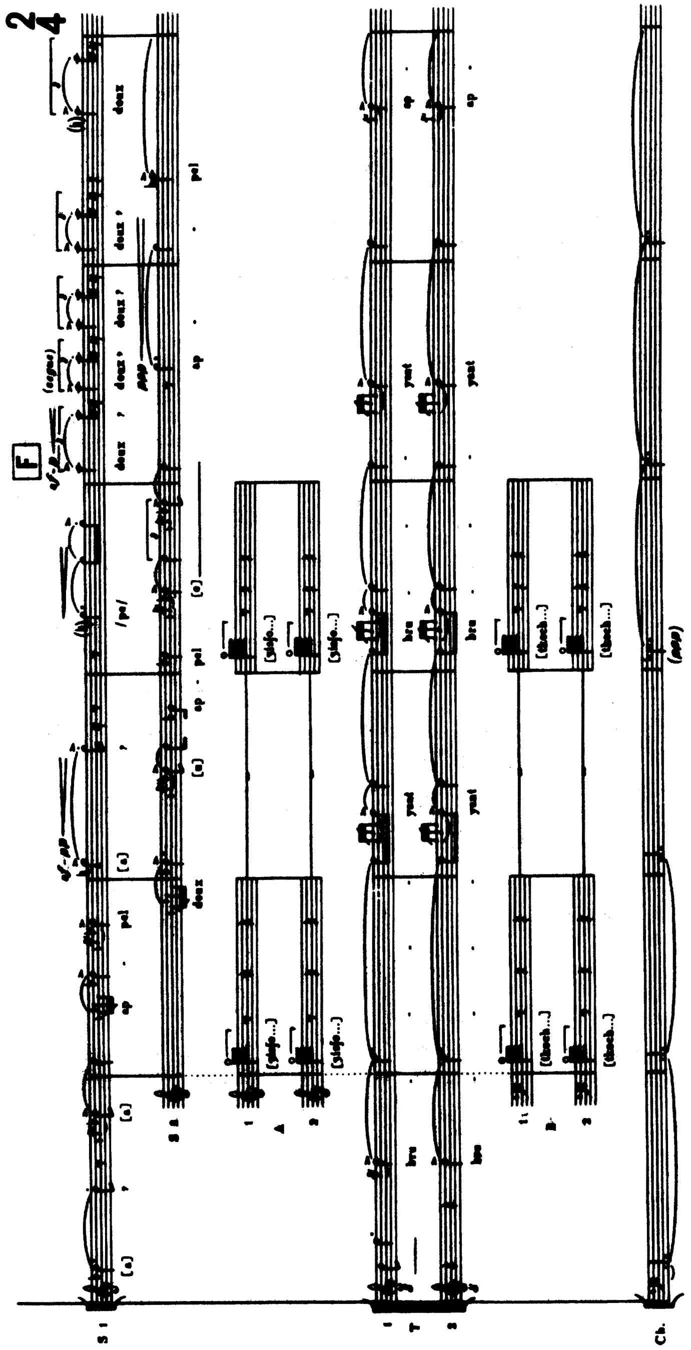
Ex. 8


x 5
♩ = 90
Fl. 1
Cl. 1 2 3
Cl. picc.
Ob. 1 2
C. i.
Fg. 1 2
Cor. 1 2 3 4
Tr. 1 2 3 4
B. Tuba
Arpa
Pf.
pp
p
mf
f
ppp
sord.

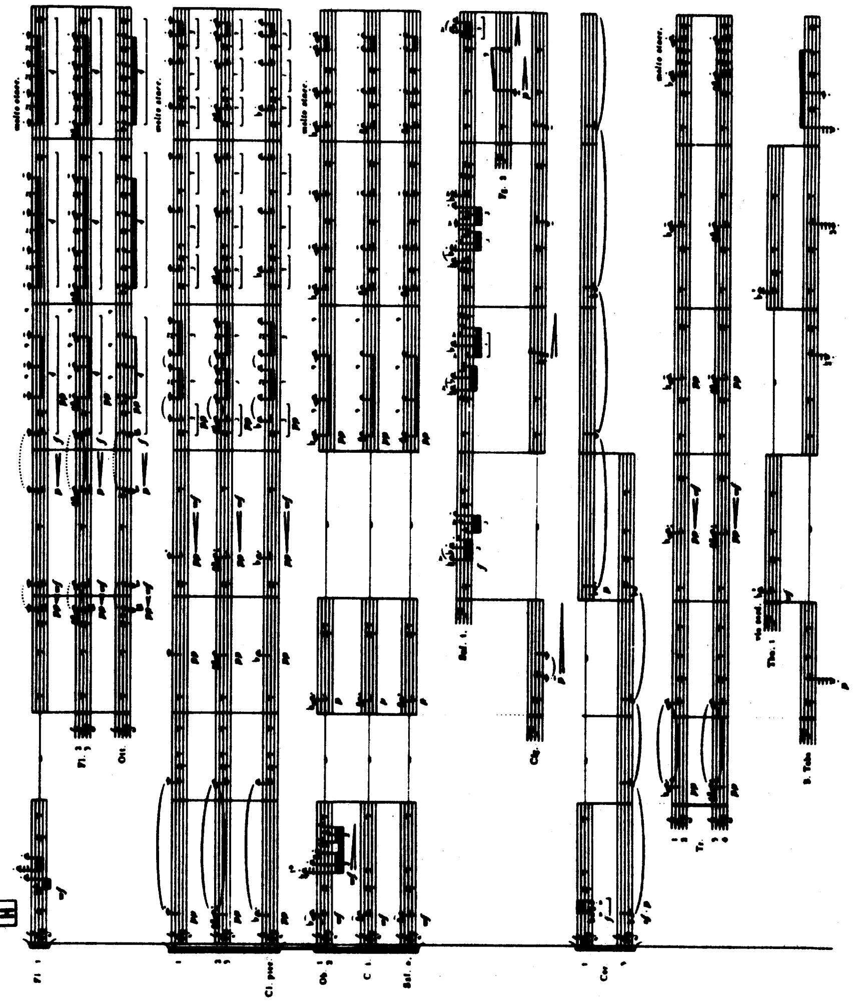

Org.
Camb.
Bongos
II Grelots
III Bongos
S
A
T
B
Vcl C
Vc.
Cb
plus
ped.

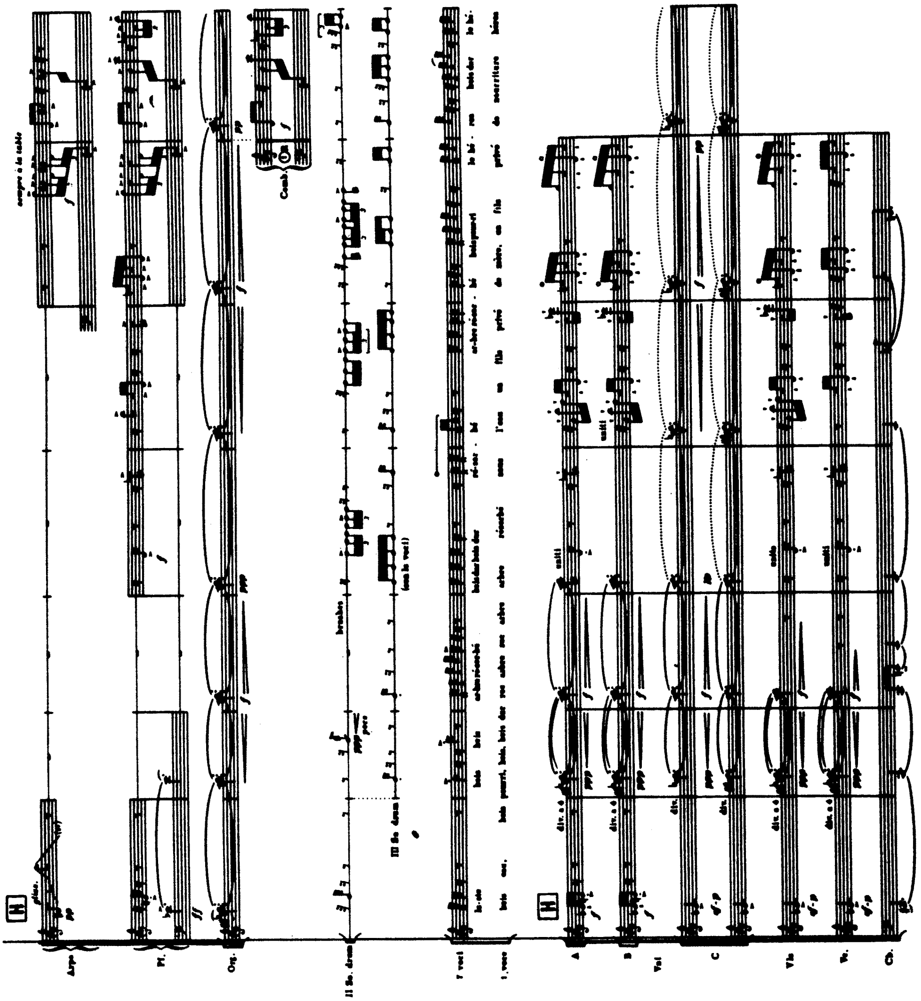
Ex. 9


F
2
4
Fl. 1
mf
pp
Tr. 1
sord. (straight)
pp
Cl. 1
Sxf. a.
sf-p
Arpa
Pf.
2 ped.
Org.
Cemb.
I Sn.drum
II Sn.drum
III Sn.drum
ppp
Cambia in Marimba
Cambia in Vibrafono


S 1
S 2
T 1
T 2
A 1
A 2
B 1
B 2
Ch.
F
2/4
[a]
ap - pel
doux
[o]
/pel/
doux
(aigue)
ap
pel
bru
yeut
[shfo...]
[theh...]
(pppp)

Ex. 10


H
Fl. 1
Fl. 2 3
Ott.
Cl. picc.
Ob.
Cor.
Tr.
Trb. 1
B. Tuba
molto stacc.
pp
f


Arpa
Fl.
Org.
Camp.
II Gr. drum
III Gr. drum
7 voci
1 voce
A
B
Vni
C
Vle
Vc.
Cb.
H

Ex. 11

	Singing	3rd-Based Harmony	Speech	Harmonic Movement	Whispering	Melody
Water	X	X	X			
Fire	X	X		X	X	X
Water			X		X	X

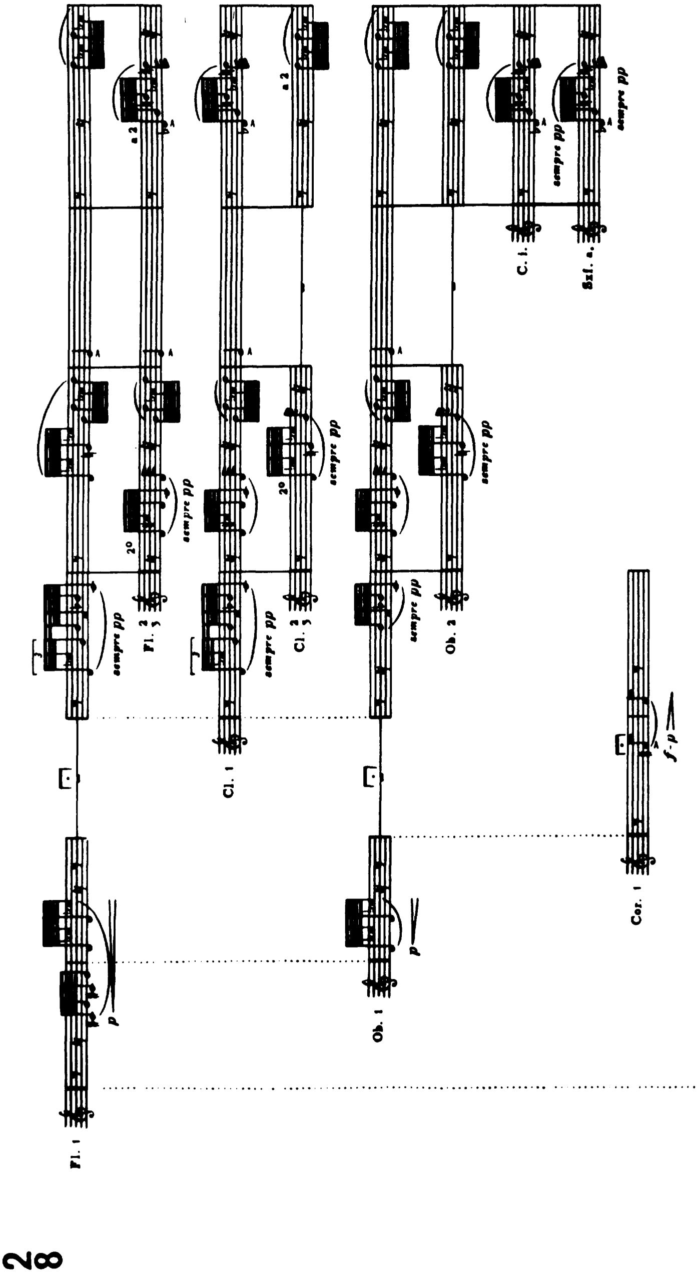
Example 11 summarizes these processes, which establish a progression that can only be completed by the purely instrumental section following on from them. Continuous narration, set against a predominantly sung phonetic background, has given way to fragments which are first sung, and then spoken against each other before dissolving into phonetic noise. In a parallel process of self-destruction, third-based harmonies first provide an anchor for the structure, begin to shift, and then aggregate into a cluster which, as the voices dissolve into noise, reaches chromatic saturation as a twelve-tone chord and disappears. But if during the narration there was no melody, as semantic continuity has broken down, so melodic fragments have asserted themselves more and more insistently, and it is these which now take over. The taut, nervous heterophony which results is illustrated in Example 12. As can be seen, it incorporates the oscillations characteristic of the Fire section, and, since at its explosive climax it resolves into a brief closing gesture that combines the musical materials of the first Water section with verbal materials from the second Water section, an underlying pattern of alternation between Water and Fire is established. This is to be taken up as the principal patterning device when Berio returns to Lévi-Strauss's text in the last movement of *Sinfonia*.

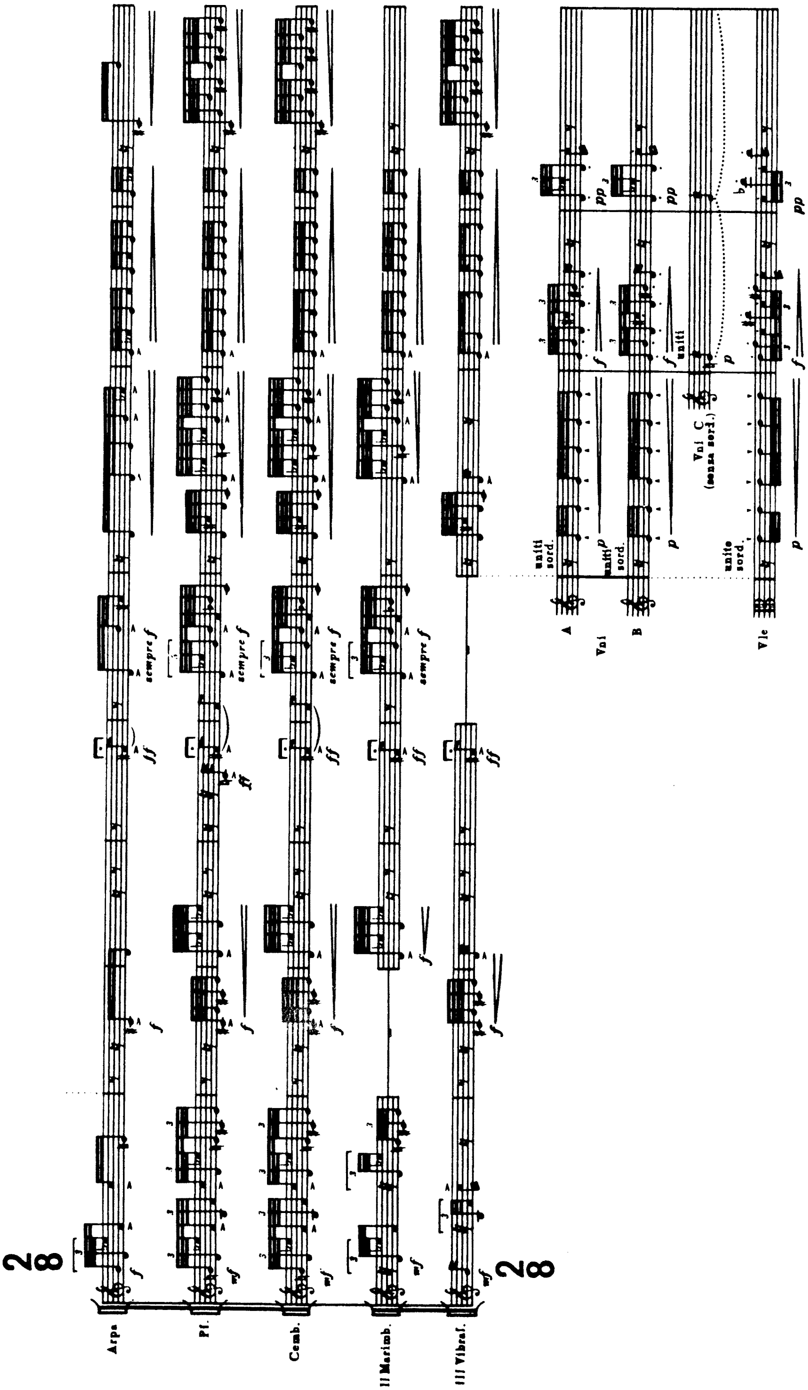
If one is willing to accept Lévi-Strauss's hypothesis concerning the paramusical status of his text, then the first movement of *Sinfonia* represents an extraordinary synthesis between the techniques of verbal manipulation that we have so far been considering and the commentary techniques that constitute another of Berio's most enduring compositional devices. Although these go back to *Allelujah II* (1957), an expansion of the materials of *Allelujah I* (1955), they show their most typical form in the series of *Chemins,* each of which is a simultaneous commentary, by a variety of instrumental forces, upon a *Sequenza* for solo instrument — and when that commentary partially obliterates the original, as in *Chemins II* and *III* (1968 and 1969), a reshaping of its large-scale structure. Once again it is *Sinfonia* that provides the most richly variegated exploration of this vein, with a first movement based upon a conceptual structure; a second movement that comments upon the chamber version of *O King* (preserved more or less intact within it) by the most subtle modifications of harmonic and textural nuance; a third movement that, on the contrary, progressively obliterates the Mahler "text" on which it is based; and, after a brief interlude, a final movement that obliges all the previous movements to comment on each other. On a musical level this is achieved mainly by exploring relationships between the first and second movements, with fragments from the third superimposed — a process whose detailed examination lies beyond the scope of this study. But the text itself consists of a further commentary upon the "paramusical" structure derived from Lévi-Strauss's text. The highly condensed structure of Example 6 is now expanded into a series of alternations, shown in outline in Example 13,[32] which resolve the conceptual "gap" underlying the first movement by presenting M.124 in simultaneous association with its missing transformational opposite, M.1 — although as usual, the oppositions and congruities emphasized in the text are partly Lévi-Strauss's, and partly Berio's own. As a result, M.1 and M.9 are now juxtaposed, so providing the crucial missing link in the chain of homologous triads discussed above; whereas M.9 depended upon a triad of "anti-nourritures ("anti-foods") compelling the hero to hear, in M.1 the hero must prevent the spirits from hearing a triad of musical instruments. Having exhausted this set of triadic relationships, Berio now proceeds to resolve the other relationship underlying the first movement: that between M. 1/124 and 2/125. A glance back to Example 5 will show that the oppositional game set out there has been completed by presenting the 2/125 relationship as a fragment of commentary,

---

[32] This diagram omits not only occasional interjections derived from the third movement but also, more pertinently, four strange misquotations from other portions of Lévi-Strauss's text, rewritten by Berio to reflect, albeit somewhat obscurely, both the textual manipulations discussed below and the musical processes at work within the movement.

Ex. 12


28
Fl. 1
Ob. 1
Cor. 1
Cl. 1
Fl. 2 3
Cl. 2 3
Ob. 2
C. i.
Sxf. s.
p
f-p
sempre pp
2°
a 2


Arpa
Fl.
Cemb.
II Marimb.
III Vibraf.
Vni A
Vni B
Vle
Vni C (senza sord.)
uniti sord.
unite sord.
uniti
2/8
f
mf
ff
sempre f
p
pp

Ex. 13

Text	Commentary				
	9	+ hearing			Fire
1/124		– hearing			Water
	9	+ hearing			Fire
1/124		– hearing			Water
	9	+ hearing	anti-food		Fire
	127		food		Water
	9		anti-food		Fire
	127		food	soft rain	Water
	2/125			stormy rain	↓
1/124					La vie brève
87					↓

and the 1/124 relationship as a series of juxtaposed textual quotations. In other words, the only element within that structure not already in opposition — the diagonal lines — has now been set in opposition. However, although the "fire" theme of M.9 has been resolved, the other theme of this myth, "la vie brève," remains at large — and indeed now takes on a life of its own, introducing new material that relates only to this theme as the music builds towards a final, brutal climax, and dies away to the words "péripétie: héros tué."[33]

---

[33] "Péripétie" first occurs at the start of the third movement, referring both to the quotation from Schoenberg's Opus 16 work of that title that opens the movement and to the assassination of Martin Luther King that originally provoked the writing of the second movement. It thus balances the function of the repeated "héros tué" at the end of the first movement — a connection here made explicit.

LABORINTUS: © Copyright 1976 by Universal Edition Milano
SINFONIA: © Copyright 1970 by Universal Edition (London) Ltd., London
USED BY PERMISSION