

Death and Resurrection Motifs in Narratives of Berlioz's and Liszt's Lives: D'Ortigue, Ramann, and Berlioz's *Mémoires*

In Autumn 1828, several French newspapers incorrectly reported the tragic news that the remarkably gifted pianist, Franz Liszt, was dead. At just 17 years of age, his obituary was published in *Le Corsaire*. These reports had circulated as a result of Liszt's long retreat from the public eye following the death of his father, his disappointed love affair with Caroline Saint-Cricq (daughter of Charles X's minister of commerce), and a prolonged illness. Friends rebutted the rumours with their own press notices and gradually Liszt returned to Paris's musical life. Biographers have placed considerable significance on this seemingly inconsequential misunderstanding, even though the period was hardly productive for Liszt: he did not compose anything substantial during this time, nor did he teach, perform, or even practise much. Nonetheless, authors have treated his "death" as a quasi-religious, revelatory experience.¹ In Liszt biographies, this "death" is followed by a glorious "resurrection" following which he composed his earliest significant works: the *Revolutionary Symphony*, later revised as the symphonic poem, *Héroïde funèbre*, and the experimental *Apparitions* and *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*.

Motifs of "death" and "resurrection" are not unique to Liszt biographies. Berlioz, in his *Mémoires*, described a similar episode, which occurred after watching Harriet Smithson's performances in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1827. This was a revelatory experience for the composer, both in terms of encountering Shakespeare and seeing Smithson, by whom he famously became obsessed and later married. In the *Mémoires*, Berlioz recalled entering a 'death-like sleep brought on by physical exhaustion.'² His "resurrection" formed a watershed between the works of his youth and his new outlook as a mature, dramatic artist. He suggested that some of his most major works came about as a direct result: namely, *Symphonie Fantastique*, *Lélio*, and *Roméo et Juliette*.³ In both cases, the timing of these "deaths" and "resurrections" is crucial: "resurrection" precedes the composition of the subjects' first important works. In this way, "resurrection" motifs take on a structural role within their associated biographical narrative, marking the beginning of a new period in the composer's life and output. Their melodramatic nature, and the connotations they evoke,

¹ This is certainly true of the biographies by d'Ortigue and Ramann discussed here. A more recent example includes Alan Walker's account of Liszt's breakdown and illness following separation from Saint-Cricq in *Franz Liszt Vol. 1: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 132–44. There are similar suggestions of the importance of the episode and the positioning of the July 1830 Revolution as the 'cure' in Oliver Hilmes, *Franz Liszt: Musician, Celebrity, Superstar* trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 31–32.

² See David Cairns (ed.), *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), 96.

³ See Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 97.

means that they also have a mythologizing role, and it is this function that will be the focus of exploratory study within this chapter.

The ways in which biographers mythologize their subjects' lives (and the ways they mythologize their own lives, in the Berlioz example) have long been a topic of research.⁴ Several musicologists have identified mythologizing 'motifs'.⁵ However, scholars are yet to examine the mythologizing function of "death" and "resurrection" motifs in particular. This chapter examines the function and meaning of such motifs in biographies of Liszt and Berlioz written during their lifetimes. It begins by examining the earliest biographies of the composers, written by a friend: the music critic, Joseph d'Ortigue. It then considers how the meanings of these episodes had changed when they appeared in auto/biographies written towards the end of their lives: Berlioz's *Mémoires*⁶ and Lina Ramann's *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* (the first "official" biography of Liszt, written partly under his guidance).⁷ In both cases, "resurrection" is associated with the broader social regeneration taking place in Paris in the wake of the July Revolution of 1830, thereby magnifying the composers' importance. The ability to understand and conquer death is also positioned as part of the composers' apprenticeships, further inflating and mythologizing their status as artists.

Meanings of death and resurrection in the nineteenth century

Resurrection stories have been recorded from the Middle Ages until today, and encompass mythology, religion, literature, and 'real life' accounts. They have generated a variety of meanings, reflecting changing attitudes to death.⁸ Religious readings tend to

⁴ An excellent introduction to mythologizing motifs in biographies of artists is Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

⁵ For example, see Christopher Wiley, 'Mythological Motifs in the Biographical Accounts of Haydn's Later Life' in *The Land of Opportunity: Joseph Haydn in Britain* ed. Richard Chesser and David Wyn Jones (London: The British Library, 2013), 195–211 or K. M. Knittel, 'The Construction of Beethoven,' in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118–150.

⁶ See Pierre Citron, 'The *Mémoires*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125–145 for a discussion of the motivations behind the *Mémoires*, the sources used, and the veracity of the account.

⁷ Lina Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vols. 1 and 2 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880–94).

⁸ For an overview of some of these meanings see Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experiences in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a discussion of how Western attitudes towards death have changed, see Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). For discussions of the meaning of resurrection in Christianity and Judaism see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) and Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

associate the resurrection of individuals with purification and the promise of eternal life in paradise. In Christianity and Judaism, the resurrection of individuals is often related to broader social regeneration. Resurrection in Judaism was linked to 'the expectation of the dawning new age, to the belief that God was about to make a new creation and to vindicate his loyal people.'⁹ Similarly, Jesus' resurrection was interpreted by early Christians as a sign that a new age was imminent that would see the restoration of Israel and the judgement of sinners.¹⁰

The concept of social regeneration was naturally popular in the Paris of the 1830s in which Liszt and Berlioz lived, and which had witnessed substantial political upheaval. The French Revolution from 1789–99 had sent shockwaves across Europe, and with the overthrowing of the monarchy, the concept of the violent death of the old order followed by a new hopeful regime had become a reality. However, the Revolution had been followed by the French Revolutionary Wars, during which France attempted to expand her borders under the military leadership of Napoleon, who became Emperor of the French from 1804. Following Napoleon's abdication in 1814, France was in a state of disarray. The Congress of Vienna saw France return to its 1791 borders, and the House of Bourbon took back the throne. Charles X inherited the throne in 1824. However, his conservative policies, including curbing the freedom of the press and compensating aristocrats for what they had lost in the Revolution, proved extremely unpopular. The ensuing unrest culminated in an uprising in Paris in 1830, known as the July Revolution. This revolution was seemingly successful: Charles X was forced to abdicate. The provisional government placed Louis Philippe of the House of Orléans on the throne instead as a constitutional monarch. Though the July Monarchy was overthrown in 1848, the July Revolution initially produced optimism and sparked similar uprisings elsewhere in Europe.¹¹ Again, there was the sense of a new beginning in which society would experience greater freedom, democracy and equality.

Alongside this political turmoil, the nineteenth century saw a revival of Catholicism, which offered consolation for the suffering caused by the revolutions, and which turned the religion almost into a social movement in itself through the influence of writers and thinkers such as Chateaubriand and Lamennais.¹² Life after death stories, which had waned after the Reformation, became prominent again in connection with the popularity of spiritual

⁹ Madigan and Levenson, *Resurrection*, 6.

¹⁰ Madigan and Levenson, *Resurrection*, 21.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the French Revolution and the July Revolution see Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell, *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (London: Routledge, 2016) and H.A.C. Collingham, *The July Monarchy: a Political History of France 1830–1848* (London: Longman, 1988).

¹² Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 12–14.

movements.¹³ Poets, such as Victor Hugo, associated death with social renewal (such as the equality promised by the revolutions) and redemption.¹⁴ Many theologians began to struggle with the concept of another world existing after death. Instead, they felt that,

Somehow or other eternal life has to be seen to be lived here and now, eternity itself to be a dimension of the present order of things, the basic Christian values rooted in this world, Jesus Christ to be the man in whom all men may see their own idealized reflection.¹⁵

The shifting of emphasis from the hope of a paradise after death, to a paradise on earth, resonated with those trying to make sense of the violence and turmoil of revolution.

The idea that the conflict and destruction of the revolutions was necessary to the dawning of a new, harmonious age was a popular one that was taken up by the religious and social thinker, Pierre Ballanche, in his unfinished *Essais de Palingénésie Sociale* and by the Saint-Simonians, the most influential social movement of the time, founded in 1825 by disciples of the deceased philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon.¹⁶ Their ideas had a significant influence on d'Ortigue and coloured his discussion of Liszt's and Berlioz's "resurrections", so it is necessary to consider them briefly.

The idea of social and artistic regeneration, with strong connotations of a general resurrection, was central to the Saint-Simonians and to Ballanche. The Saint-Simonians viewed history as the alternation of 'organic ages' and 'critical ages.' In organic ages, 'a common set of values, embodied in religion, war, etc., binds society together and gives meaning to individual lives.'¹⁷ However, eventually these ages disintegrate and are replaced by critical ages 'in which reason and irony destroy the dearest values of the preceding age and sever individual lives from transcendent meaning.'¹⁸ Once these values have been destroyed, the critical age is followed by another organic age and the cycle of destruction and regeneration continues. Critical ages are characterised by 'antagonism' or violence, and organic ages by 'association' or harmony. The Saint-Simonians did not believe in purposeless, never-ending alternations: as the cycle progresses, antagonism decreases and

¹³ Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, 5.

¹⁴ Jonathan Strauss, *Human Remains: Medicine, Death and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 13.

¹⁵ Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism*, 10–11.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of Ballanche's thinking see Arthur McCalla, *A Romantic Historiosophy: The Philosophy of History of Pierre-Simon Ballanche* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). For further information on the movement's history, beliefs, and the role of music within it, including the relationships of contemporary musicians (such as Liszt, Berlioz, and Mendelssohn) with the Saint-Simonians, see Ralph Locke, *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹⁷ Arthur McCalla, 'Liszt Bricoleur: Poetics and Providentialism in Early July Monarchy France,' *History of European Ideas* 24 (1998), 71–92; 72.

¹⁸ McCalla, 'Liszt Bricoleur,' 72.

harmony increases, and with each cycle society moves closer to total harmony. Following the critical age of the Enlightenment and the 'antagonism' of the French Revolution, the Saint-Simonians believed they were on the cusp of a new organic age, which would see society united by the values of Saint-Simonism itself. They believed that art was central to uniting humanity and guiding them to this new era.

Ballanche's ideas had much in common with Saint-Simonism.¹⁹ Ballanche saw the progression of history as a means of man's rehabilitation from the Fall described in Genesis. As in Saint-Simonian doctrine, Ballanche argued that society progresses through a series of different social orders in which humankind's tendency to destruction is gradually repressed and replaced at each stage by greater social harmony. With each cycle, a greater proportion of humanity therefore understands the spiritual, redemptive nature of society. Ballanche referred to these enlightened people as 'patricians,' and to the remainder as 'plebeians.' For Ballanche, a new social order would occur when 'a group of plebeians, who, through suffering endured, merit accession into the rights and privileges of society, are initiated into the social order by patricians.'²⁰ Eventually, everyone would be initiated and humanity would have achieved its earthly phase of rehabilitation. According to Ballanche, the transition between each social order is traumatic, incurring violence and chaos. Again, echoes of Saint-Simonism are apparent in Ballanche's belief that at the birth of a new age, 'the values of the old order are destroyed before those of the new order are established.'²¹ Much of Ballanche's theory exercised the language of death and resurrection: he referred to the concept as a whole as 'palingenesis,' or spiritual rebirth.

The concepts of death and resurrection were particularly evocative for those living in the heady environment of 1830s Paris when the first biographies of Liszt and Berlioz were written, to which we now turn.

D'Ortigue on Berlioz and Liszt

Joseph d'Ortigue arrived in Paris as a lawyer in 1827, but soon switched careers to that of music critic, publishing his first brochure, *De la guerre des dilettanti* in 1829. D'Ortigue was a fervent Catholic who was interested in the volatile political landscape of his time. His personal religious philosophy was imbued with Ballanche's ideas and the beliefs of Saint-Simonism. He argued that music should be connected to contemporary social

¹⁹ However, there were some important differences between Ballanche's ideas and those of the Saint-Simonians, particularly concerning the role of Catholicism, which was central to Ballanche's theories, but which the Saint-Simonians considered obsolete. Instead, the Saint-Simonians thought that the new industrial age required a new religion, which, of course, was Saint-Simonism itself. See McCalla, 'Liszt Bricoleur,' 77 for details.

²⁰ McCalla, 'Liszt Bricoleur,' 76.

²¹ McCalla, 'Liszt Bricoleur,' 76.

developments, and saw this as a means of achieving a new spiritual regeneration for music. Borrowing Ballanche's term, he even published an article entitled 'Palingénésie Musicale' in 1833, in which he divided the history of music into periods along the lines of palingenesis.²²

D'Ortigue believed that at each stage, musical developments corresponded to the social conditions of the time and music altered and renewed itself in line with the necessary broader regeneration. As in Ballanche's theory, d'Ortigue held that some eras were destructive and others productive, arguing that certain musical developments needed to languish and die in order to make way for new ones. He traced the development of music beginning with the organ music of the Middle Ages, during which time both music and civilisation were in harmony with the values of Christianity. He argued that music later became divorced from Christianity and developed in two different directions: keyboard and orchestral music. He predicted the dawning of a new age, beginning with the school of Beethoven (as opposed to Rossini). In this new school, music and religion would once again be united, as would keyboard and orchestral music as composers applied orchestral effects to music for the piano.²³ The concepts of death and regeneration were central to d'Ortigue's understanding of both the development of society, and the (entwined) progression of music history.

D'Ortigue was a close friend of Berlioz, promoting his music throughout his life. His short biographical sketch of the composer appeared in the *Revue de Paris* on 23 December 1832. It was mostly written by d'Ortigue, but Berlioz also supplied a few paragraphs, which are differentiated in bold type in Sylvia L'Écuyer's modern edition of the article.²⁴ D'Ortigue's unique access to his subject might be considered a strength of the biography, but we must also recognize that Berlioz's role in its formulation offered the composer a unique opportunity to construct and control his public image.

L'Écuyer's edition reveals that Berlioz supplied most of the material about his love for Harriet Smithson and his experience of her performances of Shakespeare. The melodramatic account is instructive as an example of the mythologizing strategies used in nineteenth-century biography. Berlioz's narrative, as mediated through d'Ortigue's sketch, tells us that during the third year of his 'inconceivable' passion, the composer received a terrible 'slander' from a friend about Smithson. In reaction, he disappeared from Paris for two days. His friends searched everywhere for him, even the morgue. Walking aimlessly, he ended up

²² See Joseph d'Ortigue, 'Palingénésie musicale,' *L'Artiste* VI/19–20 (1833), 221–224 and 235–240.

²³ Joseph d'Ortigue, 'The First Biography: Joseph d'Ortigue on Franz Liszt at Age 23,' introduced and edited by Benjamin Walton, translated by Vincent Giroud in *Liszt and his World* ed. Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton University Press, 2006), 328–9.

²⁴ See Joseph d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique 1827–1846*, ed. Sylvia L'Écuyer (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2003), 277–290.

spending the night in a field, lying on some bales of wheat. The next day he continued to wander without eating anything. Finally, exhausted from starvation and fatigue, he fell down in a ditch, in which he slept deeply. He returned to Paris in the middle of the following night to the great surprise of his friends, who had assumed he was dead.²⁵ Berlioz's deep sleep appeared similar to a vegetative, trance-like state. The account ends with the simple sentence: 'Six months later, *Symphonie Fantastique* had been written.'²⁶ Berlioz had significantly compressed the time between seeing Smithson in *Hamlet* and the composition of *Symphonie Fantastique*, a period of some three years, creating the impression that the symphony was a direct consequence of this experience. Something comparable to death is implied in Berlioz's absence and deep sleep, and the *Symphonie Fantastique* correspondingly symbolises a musical rebirth.

Motifs of death and resurrection are not yet explicitly included in this account; that would come in the later version in the *Mémoires*. Nonetheless, Berlioz's biographical anecdote seemed to speak to d'Ortigue. From this point onwards, d'Ortigue took over the narrative. He began by arguing that this episode in the composer's life was indispensable for understanding Berlioz's music. He asserted that it was imperative that the listener understand the circumstances in which Berlioz wrote his music, and how he felt at the time.²⁷ D'Ortigue placed his criticism of the music against the backdrop of Berlioz's experience of awakening from a death-like state to write the *Symphonie Fantastique*, arguing for a close connection between Berlioz's near-death experience and his music.

It is natural that d'Ortigue would make this connection, given the programme of *Symphonie Fantastique*, in which 'the artist' (widely believed at the time to refer to Berlioz himself) famously experiences an opium-induced dream in which he witnesses his own execution. Then, in the 'Witches' Sabbath' movement, he is terrified by a gathering of ghosts and ghouls who have come to attend his funeral. However, d'Ortigue went further than the particular content of *Symphonie Fantastique*. He discussed Berlioz's contribution to music explicitly in terms of regeneration, alluding to the dawning of a new age for society and music. His language brimming with the fervour of revolution, he declared that 'there are volcanic periods when human intelligence, concealing new elements, becomes isolated, smoulders, kindles an unknown fire and produces a tremendous explosion'.²⁸ He described

²⁵ This overview is based on the account that appears in d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique 1827–1846*, 283.

²⁶ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 283.

²⁷ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 284.

²⁸ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 284. All translations are my own. The original reads: Se doutent-ils qu'il est des époques volcaniques où l'intelligence humaine, recelant des éléments nouveaux, s'isole, fermente, couve un feu inconnu et produit une explosion formidable?

those who did not understand Berlioz's music as being 'washed up on the banks of our century by the tide of the last'. Such people were obstacles to progress: 'they stand motionless as they watch the crowd moving forward with an air of astonishment and they ask them "Where are you going? Turn back."'29

This section recalls Ballanche's divide between "plebeians" and "patricians," and his idea that in each epoch a greater proportion of people understand the spiritual nature of society, become civilised, and attain freedom. D'Ortigue's hyperbolic language presented Berlioz's music as part of a new stage in the historical progression of music: 'We believe we can see in Berlioz's symphony the prelude to a revolution in instrumental music and a new dramatic development.'³⁰ It is clear that d'Ortigue saw Berlioz as the harbinger of a new age. Although it was not the finished product, Berlioz's music represented 'one more step towards this age of musical regeneration at which we will arrive through the progress of instrumentation.'³¹ D'Ortigue followed Berlioz's own description of his awakening from a death-like state with a discussion of the composer's role in musical and social rebirth. He did not directly link the specific biographical episode to the musical discussion, but the concept of an end and a new beginning, of casting off the old to enable regeneration, is central to both.

As d'Ortigue developed his ideas on musical palingenesis, he would make more direct links between the motifs of "death" and "resurrection" and the unfolding of a composer's life in his biographical essay on Liszt, published in the *Gazette musicale de Paris* on 14 June 1835. By this point, d'Ortigue's ideas on musical and social regeneration were more advanced. D'Ortigue positioned Liszt's "resurrections" as central to his development as an artist. He described two symbolic "resurrections." According to d'Ortigue, Liszt's first "death" occurred after the passing of his father, which he treated as revelatory because it represented Liszt's first encounter with the mysteries of death:

Like a wilted stem bending gradually towards the ground, young Liszt was imperceptibly expiring, bending toward the earth that carried within it the remains of his father, when his eyes moved away from the past, where a tomb was all he could still see, to look at the future. Then, his life appeared to him divided into two parts: on the one side, he saw that his career of obedience had spent itself; on the other side, he glimpsed a career of freedom to be fulfilled. Proudly raising

²⁹ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 284. Déposés aux bords de notre siècle par le flot du siècle passé, ils regardent, immobiles et d'un air étonné, la foule qui marche en avant, et lui disant: « Où allez-vous? Retournez donc arrière. »

³⁰ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 287. 'Nous croyons voir dans la symphonie de Berlioz le prélude d'une révolution dans la musique instrumentale et un nouveau développement dramatique.'

³¹ d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la Musique*, 288. Oui, c'est là un pas de plus vers cette époque de régénération musicale à laquelle nous arriverons par les progrès de l'instrumentation.

his lowered head, still enveloped in the shadows of death, he resolved to walk straight toward the light that shone in the distance.³²

D'Ortigue described an out-of-body experience, during which Liszt almost died, but determined to live. D'Ortigue believed that Liszt learned an important lesson about how his work should progress in future. His "resurrection" created a dividing line between a past career in which he was obedient to others, namely his father and the whims of the public, and the future in which he would have freedom to forge his own independent path as a mature artist. The result, d'Ortigue suggested, was that Liszt purged his playing technique of mannerisms, concessions, and the influences of others.

In d'Ortigue's sketch, Liszt's second "resurrection" followed soon after his first. D'Ortigue delicately alluded to Liszt's affair with Saint-Cricq, which had been forbidden by her father. He reported that this prompted a spiritual separation, in which Liszt removed himself from earthly distractions to contemplate the divine.³³ For the first time the reader hears of Liszt as a composer, rather than a performer, and more specifically, of his plans to compose religious music. The language used by d'Ortigue suggested that Liszt again became detached from the world. For d'Ortigue, Liszt's music 'depicted the world as he glimpsed it in his lofty detachment from earthly things.'³⁴ D'Ortigue did not mention death, but suggested an out-of-body experience during which Liszt 'contemplated the divine' and 'supernatural life'. D'Ortigue's language suggested a visionary, transformational experience. However, Liszt's body could not cope with the soaring of his soul in such ethereal realms; d'Ortigue reported that he was then plunged into the illness that caused premature notices of his death to appear in the press:

When a soul gets the taste of the supernatural life with such plenitude and superabundance, it is usually at the expense of the life of the body. Liszt fell ill; his vital faculties soon wore themselves out in the prodigious activity of his intelligence and sensitivity. A decline that lasted six months, the progress of which was terrifying, persuaded some that he was dying.³⁵

D'Ortigue structured the rest of Liszt's life around relapses and regenerations. These episodes were prompted by a dichotomy that d'Ortigue (and many others) noted in Liszt's character: the spiritual and the sensual. D'Ortigue interpreted these episodes as spiritual experiences, during which Liszt disconnected from everyday life and afterwards composed religious music. In many cases, d'Ortigue wrote that these experiences were followed by destructive periods, during which Liszt became cynical, mocked religion, was distracted by sensuous Italian music, and became caught up in the rational literature of his age rather than

³² d'Ortigue, 'The First Biography,' 318.

³³ d'Ortigue, 'The First Biography,' 320.

³⁴ d'Ortigue, 'The First Biography,' 320.

³⁵ d'Ortigue, 'The First Biography,' 320.

spiritual texts. These relapses and regenerations echoed the Saint-Simonians' organic ages of religious harmony, and critical ages in which reason destroyed commonly held values and life became severed from transcendent meaning. D'Ortigue's writing of Liszt's life in this way also complemented his own personal theory of the dialectical development of music history as a series of regenerations. Liszt's spiritual regenerations corresponded with d'Ortigue's view of the role of art as intimately connected to society, and the role of music in civilising and uniting society. For d'Ortigue, Liszt's "resurrections" enabled him to compose the religious music that would achieve these broader goals.

"Death and "Resurrection" in Later Auto/biographies of Berlioz and Liszt

The "death" and "resurrection" motifs found in d'Ortigue's early biographies of Berlioz and Liszt also appeared in auto/biographies published towards the end of their lives. In both cases, the presentation and meaning of these motifs changed slightly. In d'Ortigue's biographies, "death" and "resurrection" motifs are mythologizing to a degree: they certainly contribute to the impression that both composers were producing work of profound importance. Nonetheless, their main function was to illustrate the socio-religious role of music within d'Ortigue's personal philosophy. In d'Ortigue's biographies, "death" is metaphorical. The composers' deaths are akin to entering a different mental state, whether a deep sleep, as in the Berlioz biography, or a spiritual, out-of-body experience, as in Liszt's. In later life-writing, the motifs are exaggerated and the composers' deaths appear more real and physical. This creates the impression that the composers have learned to conquer death, and accordingly, the motifs assume a mythologizing role.

Throughout his career as a critic, Berlioz had published autobiographical fragments, recounting episodes from his life.³⁶ In March 1848, he decided that the time had come to write his *Mémoires*. Although some of the material of the *Mémoires* (not including the episode concerning Harriet Smithson) was based on earlier articles, which Berlioz revised and shaped into a coherent account, he composed the majority of the book in the final months of 1848.³⁷

Berlioz' description in his *Mémoires* of the experience of seeing Smithson in *Hamlet* reveals some differences from the one related by d'Ortigue in 1832. Intriguingly, he emphasized the

³⁶ See Citron, 'The *Mémoires*', 129–30 for details of these fragments. Berlioz's music criticism could also be considered autobiographical to a certain extent, since he regularly refers to himself within it. For a comprehensive discussion of Berlioz's music criticism see Katherine Kolb Reeve, 'The Poetics of the Orchestra in the Writings of Hector Berlioz' (PhD. diss., Yale University, 1978) and Kerry Murphy, *Hector Berlioz and the Development of French Music Criticism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988).

³⁷ See Citron, 'The *Mémoires*', 128–30 for details of chronology. See Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 613–614 for details of the sources for each chapter.

aspects of the narrative that concern the “death”. He shortened the time between attending the Shakespeare performance and feeling physical pain, which, in the account in his *Mémoires*, begins immediately. He also provided greater detail concerning his trancelike wanderings. Instead of merely recalling that his friends believed him dead because they could not find him, he introduced waiters into the story, who mistook his seemingly lifeless body for a corpse. We also learn that every further encounter with Smithson brought on similar symptoms, pushing Berlioz to the brink of death:

I had been lying since the previous evening crushed, moribund on my bed, when at three in the afternoon I got up mechanically to the window and looked out...I saw Miss Smithson get into her carriage...It is difficult to put into words what I suffered – the longing that seemed to be tearing my heart out by the roots, the dreadful sense of being alone in an empty universe, the agonies that thrilled through me as if the blood were running ice-cold in my veins, the disgust with living, the impossibility of dying.³⁸

Berlioz’s language is melodramatic, playing up the importance of his experiences of “death”. He amplified his description, lengthening it, and emphasizing his physical symptoms. The reader learns that after watching Smithson in *Hamlet*, he was ‘hardly able to breathe – as though an iron hand gripped me by the heart – I knew that I was lost.’³⁹ This is not the vegetative state or spiritual out-of-body experience described by d’Ortigue. The death-like symptoms depicted here are physical: constricting the airways, causing pain, and chilling the blood.⁴⁰ The reader is left with the impression that to overcome this experience would not merely mean waking from a deep sleep or coming out of a trance, but fighting back against death itself.

Christopher Wiley has examined the motivations behind autobiographical revisionism in the case of Ethel Smyth, arguing that differences in her discussions of other female composers were motivated by her desire to position herself as a lone female pioneer in the masculine world of music composition.⁴¹ Berlioz’s revisions seem to be motivated by a similar desire to refashion his own image for posterity. In his later version, the “resurrection” motifs are part of a romanticizing, mythologizing process, creating the impression that Berlioz had somehow succeeded in mastering death.

³⁸ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 120.

³⁹ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 97.

⁴⁰ Berlioz’s focus on the physicality of death may have been influenced by his medical background. Indeed, in the *Mémoires* he included graphic descriptions of the dissections he carried out during his studies. See Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 46. His writing on the subject may also have been influenced by contemporary science, as Parisian scientists and medics of the time were particularly interested in trying to understand death and liminal states. For a full discussion of this trend see Strauss, *Human Remains*.

⁴¹ Wiley also places Smyth’s life-writing within the context of women’s and lesbian auto/biography and her friendship with Virginia Woolf. See Christopher Wiley, ‘Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and “The First Woman to Write an Opera,”’ *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–95.

Indeed, Berlioz's *Mémoires* incorporated further experiences with death in addition to this episode. His writing suggested that, during his formative years in Paris and his time in Italy as winner of the Prix de Rome, not only did he frequently encounter death, but his experiences formed an important part of his musical apprenticeship. For example, he juxtaposed his studies of death as a medical student with his influential first experiences of the Opéra. The two become intertwined: 'I sang Danaüs' aria "The kindly strokes of destiny" as I sawed my "subject's" skull.'⁴² Other anecdotes throughout his Italian years contributed to this apprenticeship in death. He examined tombs;⁴³ amidst an outbreak of influenza, he followed cartloads of dead bodies to a church, observing the organic forces of putrefaction;⁴⁴ and he paid to enter a church so that he could view the corpse of a beautiful young woman before she was interred.⁴⁵ He also tested his mortality by climbing dangerous precipices and allowing himself to be soaked to the skin, retrospectively commenting that 'I did things then that would kill me now.'⁴⁶

All of these anecdotes create the impression that Berlioz's apprenticeship in Italy involved him learning about death from medical, spiritual, and artistic perspectives. They suggest that understanding and conquering death were necessary to Berlioz's becoming a mature composer. Significantly, from the time he returned to Paris in 1832 to resume his career, there are substantially fewer references to death in the *Mémoires*; Berlioz employed death and resurrection motifs principally to dramatize and mythologize the period of his transition to maturity as an artist.⁴⁷

As a sensationally famous, charismatic figure, fantastic stories swirled in biographies of Liszt throughout his lifetime. He often grumbled about this in private, but the fact that he chose not to set the record straight suggests that he may have enjoyed the myth-making surrounding his life story.⁴⁸ The closest we have to a memoir is Lina Ramann's *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, which was written in consultation with Liszt, using questionnaires, interviews, and his correspondence.⁴⁹ Liszt had the opportunity to read and annotate the

⁴² Wiley, 'Music and Literature,' 47.

⁴³ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 171.

⁴⁴ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 203.

⁴⁵ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 206-7.

⁴⁶ Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, 173.

⁴⁷ Citron calls Berlioz's depiction of his time in Italy the most 'fictionalised' and 'literary' part of the *Mémoires*. See Citron, 'The *Mémoires*', 130.

⁴⁸ Alexander Rehding has discussed Liszt's motivations for not writing an autobiography. See Alexander Rehding, 'Inventing Liszt's Life: Early Biography and Autobiography,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt* ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14-27 (particularly 16-19).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of Ramann's methods and her portrayal of Liszt, see James Deaville, 'Writing Liszt: Lina Ramann, Marie Lipsius, and Early Musicology,' *Journal of Musicological Research*, 21, 1-2 (2002), 73-97.

majority of the book before publication. Therefore, once again, we must consider the subject's role in fashioning his own image.⁵⁰ The book was commissioned in 1874 and the two volumes appeared in three parts in 1880, 1887 and 1894. Liszt died in 1886. Ramann was, therefore, in a better position than d'Ortigue to determine how to integrate Liszt's "resurrection(s)" within the narrative of his life as a whole, and how that life might be mapped onto broader developments in nineteenth-century society and culture. Ramann described two "resurrections" – one in childhood, and the other following the separation from Saint-Cricq – which she saw as related to each other. D'Ortigue also mentioned the first of these incidents, but did not ascribe to it the importance that Ramann did, and did not couple the "death" with a symbolic resurrection in this case. Ramann, conversely, reported that the young Liszt became so engrossed in music and his study of the piano that,

Now all at once, his inner life experienced such an intensification, beyond his own limits, that his physical existence began to suffer from it. A change became noticeable. His whole nervous system seemed shaken, and was completely under the influence of the musical sounds he so passionately loved and sought. His body appeared to be ailing, and his strength to decline. He grew feverish, without any particular illness being pronounced with certainty.⁵¹

Like Berlioz in the *Mémoires*, Liszt had experienced an artistic shock that caused his decline. Ramann also focused on the physical symptoms of Liszt's "death" in a similar way to the *Mémoires*, although her description is not as graphic. She described a fever, the collapse of Liszt's nervous system, and a declining of his strength that caused him to lose the ability to walk.⁵² Much as Berlioz had introduced waiters into his story, Ramann also included witnesses in her account, contributing to the impression that it really did seem that Liszt had died. She reported that Liszt's parents lost hope and the village carpenter began to build his coffin.

However, as in the regenerations in d'Ortigue's biographical sketch, Liszt returned to life transformed. Ramann did not describe what brought about Liszt's recovery, thereby adding to the mystery of the episode; instead, she moved straight on to its consequences.

⁵⁰ For the most part, Liszt appears to have played a minimal role in the biography. His partner, Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, did attempt to influence Ramann. However, Ramann's notes show that she resisted the Princess's interference on several occasions. See Lina Ramann, *Lisztiana: Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt in Tagebuchblättern, Briefen und Dokumenten aus den Jahren 1873–1886/87*, eds. Arthur Seidl and Friedrich Schnapp (Mainz: Schott, 1983).

⁵¹ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 1, 20. Nun auf einmal sein inneres Leben eine solche über alle Grenzen hinausgehende Steigerung seiner selbst erfuhr, daß sein körperliches Leben darunter zu leiden anfing. Ein Umschwung machte sich hier bemerkbar. Sein ganzes Nervensystem schien erschüttert und nur unter dem Einfluß der Klänge zu stehen, die er so leidenschaftlich liebte und suchte.

Sein Körper schien siechen zu wollen und seine Kräfte nahmen ab. Fieber trat ein, ohne daß eine Krankheit mit Bestimmtheit sich aussprach.

⁵² Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 1, 20.

According to her, Liszt emerged a better pianist, a more spiritual person, stronger in his identity and convictions, and, significantly, beginning to compose for the first time:

On the whole, after his illness, his musical and other qualities became fixed and more decided – he played by ear, he transposed into other keys. He still sought his *Klängen*, as he called his self-composed harmonies and modulations; also he began to indulge in free fantasias on certain melodies. He varied them, and played a wonderful game with them, now like a child who practices sleights of hand with his ball, and now like a grown man pouring out his overflowing heart.

His general characteristics also appeared more and more decisive. In the first place there was a strongly pronounced love of truth. He did not apologize for or deny his childish follies. He was fearless in his confessions.⁵³

Ramann attached similar meanings to d'Ortigue's to this "resurrection," suggesting that it prompted a spiritual and musical regeneration for Liszt.

As in d'Ortigue's biography, the second "resurrection" described by Ramann occurred after Saint-Cricq's father forbade her relationship with Liszt. Ramann indicated that Liszt suffered greatly and sought isolation and religious consolation. She suggested that the composer entered a trancelike state. As in d'Ortigue's account, music offered a means for him to journey to a higher, spiritual state: "the youth soared up in the streams of harmony to the realm of the supernatural."⁵⁴ Equally, we also learn of the effect of the experience on Liszt's body:

A nervous exhaustion came on which became very serious. All the vital powers appeared to have run out, and mind and body broke down, refusing all activity. A similar condition to that in his childhood seized him. [...] Gradually his strength declined, until he could no longer leave the house.⁵⁵

Ramann reported that eventually Liszt's death was assumed and reported in *l'Étoile*, which his mother interpreted as a fatal omen.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 1, 21–22. Überhaupt traten nach seiner Erkrankung seine musikalischen und allgemeinen Eigenschaften immer entschiedener und fester hervor. Er spielte nach dem Gehör, er transponirte in andere Tonarten, er suchte nach wie vor nach seinen "Klängen," wie er die selbsterfundnen Harmonien und Modulationen nannte, auch fing er an über Melodien in freien Phantasien sich zu ergehen. Er variirte sie und trieb ein wunderliches Spiel mit ihnen, bald wie ein Kind, das Kunststücke mit seinem Fangball übt, bald wie ein erwachsener Mensch, der sein übervolls Herz ausschüttet.

Seine allgemeinen Charaktereigenschaften traten ebenfalls immer mehr mit größerer Entschiedenheit auf. Eine stark ausgesprochene Wahrheitsliebe stand in erster Linie. Seine kindlicher Thorheiten entschuldigt und versteckte er nicht. Er war muthig in Bekennen.

⁵⁴ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 2, 123. so schwang der Jüngling im Strom der Harmonien sich hinauf in das Reich der Überirdischen.

⁵⁵ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 2, 129. Es trat eine Nervenabspannung ein, die sehr bedenklich wurde. Alle Lebenskräfte schienen sich erschöpfen und Geist und Körper alle Thätigkeit versagen zu wollen. Ein ähnlicher Zustand, wie in seinen Kinderjahren, bemächtigte sich seiner. [...] Allmählich nahmen seine Kräfte so ab, daß er das Haus gar nicht mehr verließ.

⁵⁶ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 2, 129. According to Walker, Liszt's death was also reported in *Le Corsaire*. See Walker, *Franz Liszt* Vol. 1, 134.

According to Ramann, Liszt lingered in this death-like state until the July Revolution of 1830. Whereas d'Ortigue had only hinted at a connection between Liszt's "resurrections" and broader political events, Ramann positioned the Revolution as a vital catalyst for his return to health: "C'est le canon qui l'a guéri", [The guns cured him] his mother used to say when, in later years, she related these events.⁵⁷ As in d'Ortigue's account, Liszt returned regenerated. However, this regeneration was less spiritual than in d'Ortigue's reading. Ramann suggested that Liszt was physically and mentally stronger than before, and was now ready to assume a practical role within society:

From the moment of the July Revolution, Liszt's nature became quite changed. He showed an increased resilience. Physical indisposition, associated with his previous illness, no longer overpowered him – "C'est le canon qui l'a guéri!" His sympathies and antipathies were decisive in all directions, and what was hitherto vague and fermenting in him, was now more clearly expressed. He no longer retreated to his religious exercises and reflections: he entered into life and placed himself, with his thirst for knowledge and his awakening zest for action, in the ground of issues of our time – a blazing and dangerous ground!⁵⁸

Ramann did not share d'Ortigue's agenda of using Liszt's biography as an outlet for philosophical ideas about social reform. Even so, she similarly placed Liszt's "death" and "resurrection" against broader changes in society and art. Ramann used language associated with resurrection, describing developments in terms of endings and new beginnings, and conflated the dawning of a new political age with the dawning of a new artistic one:

The hot July days, with the play of military bands, were not only the splendid finale of the Restoration epoch, they were at the same time a significant prelude to new intellectual currents which, on the artistic side, produced the type of Romantic who, while not free from distorting disguises, could not hide the mind which was working seriously and seeking a higher truth.⁵⁹

Ramann was excited about the future of music and determinedly devoted to the agenda of the New German School, of which Liszt was a figurehead. The motif of resurrection plays an

⁵⁷ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. 1, Book 2, 144. "C'est le canon qui l'a guéri" – pflegte seine Mutter zu sagen, wenn sie in späteren Jahren dieses Ereignisses erzählend gedachte.

⁵⁸ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* Vol. 1, Book 2, 148. Von dem Moment der Julirevolution an war Liszt's Wesen ein anderes. Es zeigte eine erhöhte Spannkraft. Physische Indispositionen, noch von seiner Krankheit her, übermannten ihn nicht mehr. "C'est le canon qui l'a guéri!" Seine Sympathien und Antipathien wurden nach allen Richtungen hin entschieden und, was bisher mehr unbestimmt und gährend in ihm gelegen, kam deutlicher zum Ausdruck. Er lebte nicht mehr zurückgezogen seinen religiösen Übungen und Betrachtungen: er trat hinein in das Leben und stellte sich mit seinem Wissensdurst und seinem erwachenden Thatendrang auf den Boden der Zeit – ein glühender und gefährlicher Boden!

⁵⁹ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. 1, Book 2, 150. Die heißen Julitage mit ihrem klingenden Spiel waren nicht nur das glänzenden Finale der Restaurationsepoche, sie waren auch zugleich ein bedeutungsvolles Präambulum neuer Geistesströmungen, die nach künstlerischer Seite, den Typus des Romantischen trugen, der auf seiner Oberfläche nicht frei, vom Fratzenhaften doch nicht den ernst arbeitenden und nach höherer Wahrheit suchenden Gedanken verdecken konnte.

important role in Ramann's biography, as it does in d'Ortigue's, but she shifted its meaning. Like d'Ortigue, she suggested that Liszt's experience of "death" and "resurrection" enabled him to become a greater artist and man. However, at the same time, she saw a broader resurrection in the dawning of Romanticism, specifically the arrival of the New German School, rather than a new Ballanchian harmonious social age. Having experienced the failed 1848 revolutions, Ramann may also have been sceptical as to whether a new age of social harmony would ever arrive. Either way, her main focus was Liszt's music rather than political philosophy. Resurrection motifs are, therefore, an important part of Ramann's canonizing strategy, ensuring the position of the New German School within the history and future of music.

Like Berlioz, Ramann focussed on the physical details of Liszt's death. Again, this created the impression that Liszt's "deaths" were not merely symbolic or spiritual, as they were for d'Ortigue. Instead, Liszt was portrayed as having overcome something physically. She also added to the mystery of the two "resurrections." In the first she provided neither the cause for, nor the antidote to, Liszt's decline (she merely suggested that he became too engrossed in music). She also observed that these were the only times that Liszt was ever ill.⁶⁰ Having only met Liszt towards the end of the composer's life, she would have known first-hand that this was not accurate, and therefore embellished the facts to make her subject appear superhuman.⁶¹ Ramann's emphasis of these anecdotes, and the details she inserted, helped to mythologize her subject, presenting him as an exceptional individual who had conquered death.

Conclusions

The biographies examined in this chapter employ resurrection motifs for similar purposes: to mythologize the subject, making them appear superhuman, and to make their music seem profoundly important. Nonetheless, the meanings of resurrection inevitably changed in response to the cultural, religious, and political factors of the time in which the biographies were written as well as to the particular motivations of the authors. This chapter has highlighted some of these differences. It has demonstrated that, in employing these motifs, biographers engaged with contemporary attitudes. D'Ortigue placed the "resurrections" of Liszt and Berlioz within his own philosophy of historical and musical progression. The composers regenerated as mature artists who were able to compose

⁶⁰ Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. 1, Book 1, 30.

⁶¹ Ramann would have known Liszt during a time when he suffered from depression, weakening eyesight, leg ulcers, and tooth decay. He also suffered a fall in 1881 from which it took several months to recover. For details of some of these illnesses, see Dolores Pesce, *Liszt's Final Decade* (Rochester New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014), particularly 149, 151, 160, 165 and 166.

music that was in harmony with religion and society. Their advent marked the dawn of a new age for music, just as the Revolution marked the dawn of a new social era. Equally, resurrection motifs are an important part of Ramann's project to canonize Liszt and to promote the agenda of the New German School.

There has only been space in this chapter to examine a limited number of biographies. Nonetheless, the texts discussed have had an important influence on later ones, suggesting that the mythologizing role of death and resurrection motifs may have wider reach than the specific biographies mentioned here. Berlioz, as we have seen, embellished part of d'Ortigue's biographical sketch in his widely-read *Mémoires*. Several of the anecdotes in d'Ortigue's sketch of Liszt, such as the famous 'Weihekuß' allegedly bestowed on Liszt by Beethoven, have appeared in numerous later biographies.⁶² The way Ramann structured and interpreted Liszt's life has provided an influential model that was followed by many others, including Alan Walker, author of the most extensive English-language Liszt biography to date. Walker's chapters dealing with Liszt's "resurrection" following the Saint-Cricq affair are particularly indebted to Ramann.⁶³ Similarly, David Cairns included all of the references to death and "resurrection" examined in this chapter in his landmark biography of Berlioz. He based these episodes on the accounts given in the *Mémoires* and included extensive quotations. Given the considerable influence that early biographies of Berlioz and Liszt continue to exert on life-writing on these composers, it is vital to understand the mythologizing strategies they employ, including the place and meaning of "resurrection" motifs.

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⁶² For discussions of this biographical episode, including its authenticity, see Rehding, 'Inventing Liszt's Life,' 22 and Michael Saffle, 'Lingering Legends: Liszt after Walker' in *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms* ed. Jolanta T. Pekacz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 89–110.

⁶³ These chapters include Walker, *Franz Liszt* Vol. 1, 'Obscurity in Paris,' 129–39 and 'After the July Revolution,' 143–160.

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Resurrection Motifs in Composer Biographies

The ways in which biographers mythologize their subjects' lives (and the way they mythologize their own lives, in the case of Berlioz) have long been a topic of research in life-writing. Several musicologists have identified mythologizing 'motifs.' However, the mythologizing function of "death" and "resurrection" motifs itself remains under-theorized in relation to musical biography. This chapter examines the function and meaning of such motifs in biographies of Berlioz and Liszt that appeared during their lifetimes. It begins by examining the earliest biographies of the composers, written by a friend, the music critic Joseph d'Ortigue. It then considers how the meanings of these episodes changed when they appeared in auto/biographies written towards the end of their lives: Berlioz's *Mémoires* and Lina Ramann's *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch* (the first "official" biography of Liszt, written partly under his guidance). In both of d'Ortigue's biographical sketches, "resurrection" is associated with the broader social regeneration taking place in Paris in the wake of the July 1830 Revolution, thereby magnifying the composers' importance. The ability to understand and conquer death is also positioned as an integral part of the composers' apprenticeships, further inflating and mythologizing their status as artists.

Biography

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