Berlioz in Time

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Epilogue

Berlioz and the Bs—
Boschot, Barzun, and Beyond

Adieu, mes amis! Je suis souffrant; laissez-moi seul!
—Berlioz, Lélio ou Le Retour à la vie

It goes without saying, as many have said, that the personality of the biographer of the painter, of the writer, of the musician, has always colored the portrait of the artist. Because of the natural tendency to extend one’s own way of thinking to the thinking of others, “any biography,” in the words of the Shakespeare scholar Paul Murray Kendall, “uneasily shelters an autobiography within it.” Furthermore, since the dawn of the Romantic era, the archetypical trajectory of the life-narrative of the artist has been, not that of a titan laid low or of a rookie raised high, but that of a “genius” who has suffered—for reasons, variously, of health, finance, family, philistinism, misunderstanding, social or political disapprobation. One thinks of Mozart’s indebtedness, Beethoven’s deafness, Schubert’s poverty, Chopin’s tuberculosis, Schumann’s madness, Tchaikovsky’s homosexuality, Mahler’s oppressive jealousy, Schoenberg’s burdensome Jewishness, Shostakovich’s Stalin-inspired anxiety. And one thinks, obviously, of Berlioz’s ill-fortune and illness that have caused some to see his life, too, as an Iliad—a series of disasters. Franz Liszt confided to Richard Pohl that Berlioz tended to exaggerate the martyrdom of his existence, yet Pohl took Berlioz to be an exemplar of the tragic hero. Berlioz’s acute awareness of his own mortality did indeed tinge with tragedy his portrait of himself as well as his portrait of those around him. What separates Berlioz from the usual suspects, however, is his indomitable humor, which found a way to flash or flicker, even in the darkest of times. “Je suis mort,” he wrote to a friend on finishing one or another of his grand
projects, “I am dead”; “mais ça commence à aller”—“but things are beginning to look up”!³

In music, the genre of the scientific biography, as opposed to the anecdotal account, took root in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the works on Handel, Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven by such biographers as Friedrich Chrysander, Otto Jahn, Philipp Spitta, and Alexander Wheelock Thayer, who constructed their edifices on foundations of original documents and who constituted something of a golden age. When Adolphe Boschot decided to pick up his pen in defense of Berlioz, he had already witnessed the performance of the two halves of Les Troyens, in 1891–1892, and the extended Berlioz Cycle undertaken by Édouard Colonne, in 1894–1895, and he had observed the appearance of Edmond Hippeau’s conscientious Berlioz intime in 1883 (not by design, the title of the book you are reading, with one fewer space, would be indistinguishable from Hippeau’s), the grandly illustrated volume by Adolphe Jullien in 1888, and, in 1904, the monographs by Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme and Julien Tiersot, the immediate predecessors of what became his own trilogy, L’Histoire d’un Romantique.⁴ In France, where it was sometimes said that from the death of Rameau up to about 1870, “French music ceased to exist,”⁵ Boschot’s biography became the quasi-official work of reference for nearly a century, unquestioned in part because Berlioz left no direct descendants to keep the torch accurate and alive. In this epilogue, I shall speak briefly of the project of Boschot, the industrious begetter of a Berlioz pro-and-contra, and of the work of Jacques Barzun, the unrelenting mastermind of modern Berlioz scholarship. Barzun determined, not only to explicate the life and times of a beloved subject, but also to correct what he took to be the misimpressions transmitted by that same Boschot. I shall conclude with a word about the present state of Berlioz studies.

But before turning to the celebrated Bs among the Berlioz biographers, I should like to mention a more recent A, Jean-Pierre Angremy, a member of the Académie Française, who, under his nom de plume of Pierre-Jean Rémy, completed well over fifty volumes (novels, poems, biographies), and who, as president of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, presided over the Comité International Hector Berlioz that promulgated most of the international celebrations of the two-hundredth anniversary of the composer’s birth, in 2003, which I mentioned in the Prologue. Angremy’s biography is the work of a novelist whose interests circle inevitably around love. It draws the outlines of the life based on the standard secondary sources, and enhances the narrative with the fictionalizing flair of a connoisseur. For example, of Berlioz’s flight
to the woods of Vincennes, with Camille Moke, on June 6, 1830—the date is derived from Berlioz’s letter of May 6, 1831, where, with uncommon precision, he mentions putting an end to an abstinence endured since that very day, eleven months earlier—we really know nothing at all.\textsuperscript{6} Angremy, however, sees “Camille, in her sheer cotton nightgown, standing before Berlioz, who is imagining the experience of her thinly disguised figure. Oh, that figure, those breasts, those thighs…”\textsuperscript{7} The prurient biographer would surely have gone further had he known of the note about Mademoiselle Putifar, which I mentioned in chapter 13, and which suggests that the devilry in Vincennes was preceded by dalliance in town.

Biographies of this sort, which fill the historical vacuum with invented detail, are of course nothing new. In the \textit{Mémoires}, Berlioz himself employs the technique: to love scenes, in that book, he only alludes. But elsewhere he gives what a naïve reader might accept as literal transcriptions of his conversations with, among others, Cherubini and Fétis, the Viscount de La Rochefoucauld and the King of Prussia. These conversations represent one of the most effective weapons in Berlioz’s literary arsenal. They are not mathematical equations! They are poems in prose; they quite literally bring the narration to life. So convincing do they seem that some of yesterday’s blinkered observers were boondoggled into believing that they were reading the author’s sworn testimony in a court of law—and thus into considering him guilty of a felony, when the facts turned out to be fictitious.

\begin{flushright}
Adolphe Boschot
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By dint of his own rather peculiar version of lively narration, Adolphe Boschot, more than any other turn-of-the-century biographer, was responsible for inscribing Berlioz into the annals of French history. He was born into the post-Darwinian world of 1871, into the disorder of the fledgling Third Republic, into the revanchist atmosphere that prevailed after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, into an ironically Wagnerian environment stimulated by such admirers of the Meister as Charles Baudelaire, Charles Lamoureux, Ernest Reyer, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Joris-Karl Huysmans, and into a world soon to be brutally polarized by the Dreyfus Affair, which broke out in 1898, when Boschot was twenty-seven years old, and which blunted much of what was \textit{belle} in the so-called \textit{belle époque}. The reason for his enterprise, Boschot tells us in his introduction, is this: “Berlioz seems to us to be a perfect subject for a lively biography: he was the most
accomplished of the romantic heroes. Musset and Vigny merely experienced crises of passion; Delacroix and Hugo were methodical artists whose productions were as routinely systematic as those of a bureaucrat. Only Berlioz had a true crater in his heart; only Berlioz was truly volcanic. And, to boot, his volcanism was intentional."

Did Adolphe Boschot, amateur pianist and violinist, journalist, cofounder in 1901 of the Société Mozart, actually revere the music of Berlioz? This is not certain. Indeed, despite his silly remark about Delacroix, it seems, according to his daughter, that, for some time, Boschot hesitated between Berlioz and Delacroix as subjects for his biography, because for both artists the archives were rich with documentary material. Indeed, the fact that for Berlioz he disposed of “at least one document per week,” for the more than two thousand weeks that created history between 1822 and 1864, was by no means “the least important reason” that he undertook, “with Berlioz as hero,” his Histoire d’un Romantique. This seems a bit cold, does it not? But have no fear: I was also told that when he reached the end of the third volume of his opus maximum, his apparent disinterest had been transformed into devotion. Again, according to his daughter, Boschot returned from his study to the salon, weeping, to say that he had just recounted Berlioz’s demise. In the book, we read of the funeral that took place at the Église de la Trinité on March 11, 1869, and of the “radiant and ultimate farewell” played by the organist: “the shadowy and nostalgic adagio from Harold en Italie.” The phrase—“le crépusculaire et nostalgique adagio”—is touching. But the Marche de pèlerins—which is what was played by the organist, Charles-Alexis Chauvet, seated at the keyboard of La Trinité’s spanking new Cavaillé-Coll—is marked allegretto: the march is perhaps introspective; it is hardly crepuscular.

Boschot’s peculiar style, especially as displayed in La Jeunesse d’un Romantique, was well analyzed by the then director of the Conservatoire, Théodore Dubois, who won the Rome Prize in 1861, when Berlioz was a member of the jury, and who, now an academician, reported on the book to his colleagues at the Institut de France:

This volume is obviously quite interesting, and even endearing. It has the advantage of situating the reader smack in the middle of the quite singular romanticism of 1830. The author studies Berlioz in this atmosphere, and I have to say that he leads us to see Berlioz in a light different from the one in which he is usually cast, namely, as a Berlioz who is not at all likeable, a Berlioz who is very much a social climber, highly idiosyncratic, and highly egotistical. Does this represent the celebrated composer’s true character? We are certainly led to
think so on reading the documents upon which the author has depended. The humorous and ironic tone he has adopted, and his anecdotal style, render his work highly attractive and seductive. But, on further reflection, one begins to question his motives for writing this book. Did he wish to glorify Berlioz, to cause us to like and admire him as an artist and as a man? Or, on the contrary, by emphasizing his weaknesses, did he rather wish to belittle him, to diminish him, or indeed to subject him to ridicule? On this subject, we are not quite sure what to believe.\textsuperscript{12}

Théodore Dubois is not the only person to have reacted to Boschot in this way. Listen to the well-known critic Émile Vuillermoz, known as a champion of Fauré and Ravel, who, after reading Boschot’s first volume, wrote to the author on January 18, 1906:

I am proud to be one of the musicians whom your work has most profoundly enchanted, more, even, than you might have wished. It happens that I was preparing a series of articles on the very subject that you have now magnificently illuminated, and, despite the bitterness I might have felt at your annihilation of my project, I was rather delighted, after reading your volume, to tear up my notes. For many years I have dreamed of dismantling the web of preposterous legends that Berlioz so cleverly wove around his life and work with truly abusive pretention, because the Berliozians who accept blindly the truth of the letters and the \textit{Mémoires} of their god have long caused me hours of impotent exasperation. I was therefore going to attempt to raze this monument of untruth. But now I find that you have totally pulverized it. You will thus understand my glee and the ease with which I now renounce undertaking a task whose purpose, today, has been entirely achieved.

Because—and here I must admit, at the risk of finding myself deprived of your sympathy—I do not like this musical braggart, neither as an artist nor as a man, and this will surely spoil any expression of understanding on your part, because, despite your extensive research, you have nonetheless remained a \textit{Berlioziste}. I find it honestly troubling to see your persistent and even heroic faith... which is hardly the faith of a simple coal merchant! How have you managed to remain so indulgent and respectful of a man so difficult to indulge and respect? But let us not tarry, for I wish not at all to proselytize for my point of view. Besides, I am perfectly convinced that the time has now come for musicians to see that the volcanic Hector is the great imposter of the century, that he has blessed the art of music with nothing new and nothing more than the clumsy writing of an ignorant amateur, even as concerns his famous orchestration, which appears to me to become more and more tiresome, despite the composer’s pretentions to the terrifying and the sublime.\textsuperscript{13}
Citing Vuillermoz, whose later sympathies for Adolf Hitler are disconcerting, to say the least, gives me no pleasure.\textsuperscript{14} Doing so demonstrates what even Boschot was up against, and underlines the respect he deserves for his labors, apparent from the copious notes and thousands of manuscript pages that have been preserved.\textsuperscript{15} Boschot wrote on only one side of his large sheets, leaving the other for subsequent additions and revisions. I did not study the differences between the autograph and the edition (I would have done so had Boschot been Berlioz), but some things became obvious. For example, when recounting Berlioz’s contemplation of suicide, which he did on learning of his fiancée’s marriage to another man, Boschot spoke ironically of a “faux suicide”—“a phony suicide on the part of a fashionably Byronic jilted lover,” citing the letter that Berlioz wrote on April 18, 1831, to Horace Vernet, director of the Villa Medici and master of the students on scholarship there as winners of the Prix de Rome: “I continue to struggle between life and death, but I shall remain standing, of that, on my honor, you may be certain.”\textsuperscript{16} Thinking he might have gone too far, Boschot removed the sarcastic words “byronien” and “fashionable” (we have seen in chapter 6 that the English word was fashionable in French), but not the expression “faux suicide.” We conclude that he read the crucial sentence in Berlioz’s letter to Vernet—“at Genoa, in a moment of giddiness, I gave in to childish despair. An inconceivable weakness got the better of my will. But my sole punishment was to swallow a lot of salt water and be yanked out like a fish” (“à Gênes, un instant de vertige, la plus inconcevable faiblesse a brisé ma volonté, je me suis abandonné au désespoir d’un enfant; mais enfin j’en ai été quitte pour boire l’eau salée, être harponné comme un saumon”\textsuperscript{17})—as calculatedly implying that an attempt at suicide had taken place, that once again Berlioz was gilding the lily. D. Kern Holoman’s comment on the matter—as “a possibly fanciful explanation concocted for Horace Vernet”\textsuperscript{18}—is not entirely different from Boschot’s. For David Cairns, Berlioz simply “felt himself slipping; and, suddenly without will to resist, fell into the sea.”\textsuperscript{19} For Jacques Barzun, however, whose translation I use here, and with whose view I concur, what took place was indeed a “clumsily attempted suicide.”\textsuperscript{20} When we read the whole story of Berlioz’s project of revenge, we smile at its comic mastery, even knowing, as we do, that revenge, “vengeance,” was as dear to Berlioz as liberty, love, and lucre.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, Boschot to the contrary notwithstanding, suicide is no laughing matter. As to the vituperativeness of Vuillermoz, who goes so far as to criticize Boschot for insufficient skepticism, let it remind the reader of what Jacques Barzun and the new Berliozians were attempting to assuage.
It was perhaps out of some kind of revenge (of whose raison d’être we are ignorant) that Boschot, in collaboration with Charles Malherbe (co-editor with Felix Weingartner of the first monumental edition of Berlioz’s complete works), waged a campaign against Julien Tiersot on the subject of the Marche au supplice of the Symphonie fantastique. Tiersot, never having seen the autograph, was wrongly certain that there was no link between the march in the symphony and the Marche des gardes of Berlioz’s opera Les Francs-Juges. Could he have been one of those benighted souls who, unaware that it was the practice of some of the greatest of the greats, sees a composer’s borrowing of earlier material as some kind of compositional weakness? Be this as it may, the title page, which Boschot and Malherbe actually possessed, makes it clear for all to see that the march was originally a part of Berlioz’s first finished opera.22

As his three volumes took shape, and as they began to circulate, Boschot became the oracle of “la pensée berliozienne.” It is for this reason that, in 1921, when a production of Les Troyens in its entirety was for the first time in rehearsal at the Paris Opéra, the then director, Jacques Rouché, wrote to Boschot, on January 16 of that year, to ask for “les coupures à faire,” taking it for granted that even a theoretically complete performance would have to bear cuts sufficient to perform the work in one evening, and to have the evening end at the customary hour. To his credit, Rouché had earlier consulted Camille Saint-Saëns, who urged a return to the original score but with certain notes altered (because “Berlioz understood nothing of the mechanism of the voice”), with the prologue that Berlioz had added to Les Troyens à Carthage when it became clear, in 1863, that only acts 3–5 of the opera were going to be performed, and without the Anna-Narbal duet, the Danse des esclaves, and the Chant d’Iopas from act 4.23 In June 1921, one week before the opening, Rouché told Boschot that he had indeed made the cuts that the critic had suggested: “I wished to do nothing without being entirely in agreement with you, who have so fully understood Hector Berlioz’s intentions.”24 Rouché may be credited with bringing to the attention of the public Berlioz’s unitary five-act French grand opera, thus dismissing the two-headed monster of 1863 that Berlioz had created with reluctance and regret. Nonetheless, to hear a properly complete execution of Les Troyens (and passing over my promotion, in chapter 10, of the original ending), the world had to wait until Covent Garden put it on properly, on November 17, 1969, some eight months and one hundred years after the composer’s death.

Adolphe Boschot was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, seventy years after Berlioz, in 1926. In 1939, he was furthermore elected Secrétaire
Perpétuel, the honored post for which Berlioz, too, had been a candidate, in 1862, after the death of the incumbent, Fromental Halévy, on March 17 of that year. For Berlioz, such a post would have been “far too official and far too academic”; it would have “flattened his mane of revolutionary hair” and “dissolved his halo of despondency,” as Boschot puts it, revving up his ridicule as he arrives near the end of his road.\textsuperscript{25} The composer would have enjoyed free lodgings in the Palais de l’Institut and avoided “vegetating, in his fourth-floor flat in the rue de Calais, for which he paid rent of eleven hundred francs per month.”\textsuperscript{26} While Boschot’s account of the matter is based on a close reading of the archives of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, his explanation of the reason for Berlioz’s failure to be elected—the “deplorable” behavior of his wife, Marie Recio—remains, as always, without evidence. “This bitter woman, who darkened his gloom, led Berlioz to his true destiny—the destiny of woe.”\textsuperscript{27} To which I say (in this chapter on the Bs): bunkum and balderdash!

Jacques Barzun

When he was a small boy, Jacques Barzun made the acquaintance of Adolphe Boschot. He later remembered him as a thickly bespectacled fellow who walked very slowly and played the piano with little aplomb.\textsuperscript{28} Having later spent two decades correcting the eighteen hundred pages of Boschot’s \textit{Histoire d’un Romantique}, Barzun continued to hear the voice of “la pensée berliozienne” with jaundiced ears. In fact, Boschot’s biography served beneficially as a “counter-source” for many subsequent works on Berlioz, and not only Barzun’s. I borrow the term from Béatrice Didier, who, using it in a positive sense, takes the \textit{Confessions} of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a “counter-source” for the autobiographical works of such luminaries as Chateaubriand, George Sand, and Berlioz himself.\textsuperscript{29} It is now far too late, but the fact that Jacques Barzun’s \textit{Berlioz and the Romantic Century} was not translated into French shortly after its first appearance, in 1950, or after its second appearance, in 1969, is, in the Berlioz world, a crying shame. Barzun’s book inspired a generation of scholars in the English-speaking world, and might have done so in the French-speaking world as well. The author did send the English book to Calmann-Lévy, Berlioz’s Paris publishers, to inquire about a translation, but received no response. It thus transpired that, until recently, Boschot’s elaborate three volumes remained, in France, the more or less official biography.
Who was Jacques Barzun, other than the author of some forty books on history, European and American literature, Romanticism, the English language, French poetry, the science of education, mystery stories, and more, and the translator into English of works by Beaumarchais, Berlioz, Courteline, Diderot, Flaubert, Musset, and others who wrote in German, Spanish, Italian, and Latin—as we know from Pleasures of Music, his great anthology of writings on music from Benvenuto Cellini to George Bernard Shaw? He was a genius, for reasons I shall mention. He was professor, dean, provost, and architect of the twentieth-century curriculum at Columbia University. And for some decades, with his Columbia University colleague Lionel Trilling, he was one of New York City’s celebrated public intellectuals. On the personal level, he was modest, even shy, and, like Berlioz, possessed of a fine sense of humor and a touching gift for friendship. In those Pleasures of Music, Barzun does not take credit for the translations: he admitted to their authorship only on being queried. In my copy, he wrote “to Peter Bloom, whose writings would be represented here if he had lived earlier”—one of the many marks I have of the man’s affectionate wit. In fact, wit and mirth, joined to unsurpassed learning, are the hallmarks of his style. When I spoke to Barzun of my productive encounters with Jean-Pierre Angremy, author of the romanticized biography I mentioned at the top of this epilogue, and president of the sparkling new Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Barzun quipped: “Angremy sounds better than his building looks.” The form of this witticism was almost a trademark. In answer to my query about his childhood experience of Debussy, Barzun recalled sitting through a performance of Pelléas et Mélisande: “Though cut, it still felt as long as her hair.”

Jacques Barzun was born in Créteil, a village just southeast of Paris, on November 30, 1907, into a prosperous family that traced its eighteenth-century origins to the commune of Barzun, near Lourdes, in the southwest region of France. As landowners there, the family had the right to use the surname “de Barzun”: “Come the revolution in 1789, one of the sons, Jacques, the younger, as is assumed on probability, shared the advanced ideas and broke with his family, was bought out of his inheritance, went to Montpellier and became a physician. […] During the proscriptions by Napoléon III against intellectuals, the carrier of the name was still a republican plotting in an underground cell. He dropped the name so as not to be deported. It was resumed by my grandfather.” Barzun’s father, Henri-Louis-Martin Barzun, who did at times style himself simply “Henri-Martin,” to the confusion of his son’s biographers, began his journalistic career at Le Soir, in 1905, signing “H. L. Barzun.” Later, in L’Aurore, Le Soir, L’Action, and other
newspapers published before and during World War I, we find “H. Martin-Barzun” and “H. M. Barzun.” Barzun père was notably associated with a short-lived artists’ colony known as the Abbaye de Créteil, a Bohemian gathering that included the experimental poets René Arcos and Charles Vildrac, the physician-novelist Georges Duhamel, and the early cubist painter Albert Gleizes, author of the handsome portrait of Jacques Barzun’s mother that now hangs in the McNay Art Museum, in San Antonio, Texas. By the time of the infant Jacques’s first birthday, the Abbaye de Créteil had come to an end. But the boy would come to know well a circle of avant-garde artists who included the portraitist of his mother, the painter Marie Laurencin, the professor of rhetoric (and teacher of Arthur Rimbaud) Georges Izambard, the art critic Olivier Hourcade, and the poet Guillaume Apollinaire—the “five adult friends of my childhood” to whom the mature scholar would dedicate his Essay on French Verse for Readers of English Poetry.

It is important to record that Henri-Martin Barzun, born in Grenoble in 1881, was himself a devoted admirer of the composer of the Symphonie fantastique, so much so that he created, in 1908, a Fondation Hector Berlioz, now largely forgotten, but at the time worthy of regular coverage in the press. To bolster his enterprise, the senior Barzun succeeded in bringing together a distinguished group of writers and musicians, among them Alfred Bruneau, Édouard Colonne, Maurice Faure, Vincent d’Indy, Adolphe Jullien, Charles Malherbe, Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme, and Romain Rolland. From Toulouse, on November 18, 1908, Camille Saint-Saëns wrote to Barzun to say: “It is with the greatest pleasure that I accept the title of Président d’honneur de la Fondation Berlioz.” And from Garmisch, on December 23, 1908, Richard Strauss wrote to accept (as had earlier his countrymen Felix Mottl and Felix Weingartner) the offer of honorary membership:

I should like very cordially to thank you for your gracious letter, and for the great distinction you wish to bestow upon me. Your idea, to establish a society in honor of that magnificent genius who was Berlioz, who, in France, was never appreciated as he ought to have been, is exceedingly felicitous. I hope with the greatest sincerity that your Foundation will flourish and prosper. And I am delighted to be able to call myself “membre d’honneur de la Fondation Hector Berlioz.”

One of the pillars of the Fondation was, of course, Adolphe Boschot. Of the many things Jacques Barzun remembered about Boschot, a conversation that author of the Histoire d’un Romantique had with his father stood out. “Mon cher ami,” said Boschot to Henri-Martin Barzun, “[Berlioz] était un
homme comme nous”—“Berlioz was a fellow just like us.” To which Barzun père replied: “Il était peut-être un homme comme vous, il n’était sûrement pas un homme comme moi” (“He was perhaps a fellow like you; he was certainly not a fellow like me”). This encapsulated something of Boschot’s bumptiousness and Barzun senior’s wry wit and respect.

Henri-Martin Barzun became an administrator in the Clémenceau governments and in particular a functionary in the department of labor. During the First World War, as head of the French Press Commission, in New York City, in 1917, he participated in the “advertising campaign” that encouraged continuing American support. After carrying out that mission, he determined to settle his family in the United States, in 1919, nonetheless keeping up his work as a reporter and, among other things, as an experimental poet, which kept his name in the newspapers. In L’Intransigeant of August 29, 1923, we even find an article noting that “the son of the poet Barzun, who has been living in America for several years, obtained First Honors at the Technical High School in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania].” Indeed, his high school yearbook correctly predicted that “Jack” (“Frenchie”) Barzun would immediately challenge the wherewithal of the professors he was about to encounter, in college, at Columbia University in the City of New York.

Jacques Barzun had begun his musical education “in the manner that Montaigne reports of his own infancy,” that is to say, by being one day awakened by his father’s playing of a flute, thus rendering music forever a part of his universe. His Berliozian recollections included hearing, at age three, the Marche de pèlerins—played at the Saturday afternoon children’s concerts by the Orchestre Lamoureux—and henceforth feeling ever-drawn to the French composer. When Felix Weingartner came to Paris in 1912, young Jacques heard a performance of the Requiem, at the Trocadero, on April 26. The following year, on April 3, 1913, he was present (as was the President of the French Republic, Raymond Pointcarré) when Benvenuto Cellini inaugurated the sparkling new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, whose architect, Auguste Perret, was a friend of the family. (Eight weeks later, that new theater was the scene of the riotous première of Le Sacre du printemps.) What is abnormal in all of this is the absence of… Wagner! Most of the modernist poets writing in the aftermath of Baudelaire, the instigator in France of wagnérisme, were Wagnerians of one stripe or another. But that other friend of the family who was Guillaume Apollinaire may have cast lasting aspersions upon the Meister: in his manifesto, “Futurist Antitradition,” of June 29, 1913, using a scatological expletive, he consigned Wagner and Bayreuth
(along with Beethoven, Poe, Whitman, Baudelaire, teachers, professors, and Shakespeare!) to the dustbin of history.39

After studies at the Lycée Janson de Sailly and, in the United States, at that high school in Harrisburg, Barzun entered Columbia University, in 1923. Upon graduation, in 1927, when he was not yet twenty, his alma mater immediately offered him a teaching post in the department of history. There, during his nearly fifty years of professorial life, he defended the cause of “the great books” and the grand principles of a classical education. As an administrator, he managed, among other things, to have academic processions accompanied by the Marche troyenne! His educational philosophy is manifest in all of his writing: that history is a branch of literature; that enlightenment is the result of debate; that prejudice—directed not at women or Jews or Belgians or Blacks, but at any group whatsoever—is intolerable; that mechanical thinking is to be challenged; that received ideas are to be resisted. It is not for nothing that he was the translator of Flaubert’s Dictionnaire des idées reçues. As Dominique Catteau has put it, with regard to Berlioz, to fix a place for him is to lessen his importance; “to classify him is to belittle him.”40 That is what Barzun came to understand during the two decades of research that preceded the publication in 1950 of his two-volume summa—a work that shuns hagiography while remaining admiring of its subject, and that offers the cultural history of a century. “Admiration,” Barzun wrote in 1990, “makes one want to amend careless posterity and draw fresh attention to the forgotten or misknown.”41

The “misknown” included Berlioz according to Boschot. Barzun’s second volume devotes eight pithy pages to Boschot’s errors and inadequacies, large and small.42 Of the latter: In a letter of January 1, 1832, Berlioz refers amicably to Hiller as a “gros scélérat,” a “big scoundrel”; Boschot picked up the expression and ran with it each time he mentioned Hiller, thus falsely implying that Berlioz had employed it, behind the fellow’s back, as a kind of personal insult, and, worse, that Berlioz was not immune to that kind of backbiting, that he could be an unworthy friend. This stuck in Barzun’s craw. Far more problematical was Boschot’s treatment of the documents of Berlioz’s life—the articles, the letters, and especially the Mémoires—as though they were “Euclidian theorems” subject to rational proof. Such a false assumption allowed Boschot to take pleasure, or so it seemed, in tracing Berlioz’s own misrememberings, misstatements, and mistakes. Boschot, in Barzun’s ultimately devastating assessment, found it necessary to “belittle his subject in order to bring it within his grasp.”43 That Boschot’s overall style troubled Barzun is not surprising. Barzun became a master of not only
French, accomplished early on by reading the classics and, he told me, by doing themes in a French lycée, but of English, too, by learned application and native intelligence. In the United States, Barzun came to be seen as the embodiment of an American Robert, Larousse, and Grévisse. In 1966, he published Modern American Usage, a guide left incomplete by its author, Wilson Follett, and edited and completed by Barzun. In 1975, he published a rhetoric for writers, Simple & Direct, defending Cartesian clarity of expression, and the sanctity of the sentence and the word. For thirty years, the author of the “On Language” column in the New York Times, William Safire, would, for lexical clarification in extremis, turn to Jacques Barzun. Gifted like Berlioz with an astonishing memory, Barzun, at age ninety-three—writing at home, and without a library—was able to complete his ultimate masterpiece, From Dawn to Decadence, 1500 to the Present—500 Years of Western Cultural Life, a volume of almost nine hundred pages that in America became an unlikely best seller.

My purpose in outlining these qualities is to underline the good fortune, for Berlioz, that such a man as Barzun should have interested himself in the French composer’s life and work, amassed at Columbia University a collection of primary documents that now comprise a major Berlioz archive, and produced an authoritative book based on a bibliography of some fifteen hundred items and a lifetime of learning and research. Barzun himself recalled the accomplishments of his efforts in one of his last essays on the composer, reiterating that Berlioz’s “handling of melody, harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, and instrumentation was original and coherent”; that “he possessed not only genius but cool and conscious mastery of his craft.”

The latter notion, contested well into the twentieth century, is now, I believe, not contested at all. This is not to say that Barzun’s Berlioz itself was not contested after its initial appearance in 1950, as has been lately demonstrated in a thorough review of its genesis and reception by Paul Watt. Most amusing, to me (having explicitly determined to eschew them here), is the occasional denunciation of the book for its lack of musical examples! Readers of Barzun’s appendix on the old German edition of the complete works, to say nothing of his admittedly descriptive analyses, will know that the man knew his way around an orchestral score. Furthermore, musical examples in themselves do not prove an author’s bona fides: a printed example that stops at a bar line (as most
do), rather than at the end of a musical phrase, is to me rather proof of the author’s tin ear.

Jacques Barzun followed closely the efforts made by members of the Comité International Hector Berlioz, in the run-up to the 2003 anniversary, to have Berlioz honored with a berth in the Panthéon. Unbeknownst to most members of the committee, Barzun, in his great book of 1950, had urged, with the hint of a smile, that if you wish to celebrate Berlioz, “there is a spacious public building in Paris upon whose pediment is written ‘aux grands hommes, la patrie reconnaissante’; “exhume Berlioz and place him in the Panthéon with his peers.” When, for the political reasons I have outlined in the Prologue, the decision was made to forgo the panthéonisation of the composer of the Fantastique, Barzun’s reaction was cheerful disappointment: “France has lost its way; Berlioz ought to have better chosen the country of his birth.”

Now

It is a commonplace to say that every generation needs its own biography of the crucial figures of the past. The Berlioz biography for the first half of the twenty-first century is the great two-volume work by David Cairns, a journalist and not an academic, as he was at pains to say in the brilliant reflections on the Symphonie fantastique he offered at Smith College in 1982. Cairns’s magnum opus, a detailed and insightful reading of the life and times of the artist with sensitive accounts of the scores marked by the author’s experience as a critic and conductor, has had the advantage of a fine French translation, which means that it has had an impact, as Barzun’s did not, in the nation that perhaps needed it the most.

Cairns’s admiration of Barzun comes through, but his vision of Berlioz is of course not the same as that of the earlier master. On the Fantastique, for example, in those reflections I mentioned, Cairns rightfully wondered about the piece that we know as it was set down and heard on December 5, 1830, and how it differed when it was played again, after the Italian sojourn, on December 9, 1832, and in subsequent years. Did Berlioz have bells for the finale? Those bells are responsible for some of the astonishment we feel from the symphony as a whole. Should bells not be available, Berlioz provided a part for pianos: the effect, with pianos, I assure you, is startling. I do not know if the composer had bells in 1830 or 1832, but I do know that bells were used at his concert of December 13, 1840, because in the
performance dossier for that concert preserved in the Macnutt Collection, now at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, there lies, I was pleased to discover, a ten-franc receipt from Nicolas Hildebrand “for the transportation of bells.” Hildebrand was a bell founder in the rue Saint-Martin; for his work in the eighteen-twenties he twice received medals of honor. The enormous bells that he placed on exhibit in 1827 weighed approximately 450 kilograms (992 pounds) and 600 kilograms (1,322 pounds). We may never know if they sounded the notes C and G. But the existence of the 1840 receipt does suggest that bells were indeed available for Berlioz’s Paris performances of the symphony. I dwell on this because, if much of Wagner has become more famous than much of Berlioz, the bells of the Fantastique may yet outring the bells of Parsifal (which, in the beginning, were not really bells at all).

One of Barzun’s overmastering concerns was an “objective” reading of the Symphonie fantastique as a coherent work of art independent of any literary “program”: he emphasized what Berlioz wrote in a footnote to the printed programs for concerts in 1836 and 1838, that the composer “knows perfectly well that music can replace neither words nor the visual arts”; that “he never once had the absurd idea of expressing ‘abstractions’ or ‘moral qualities,’ but only feelings and emotions.” Cairns, who seems to “know” Berlioz’s family and friends almost as well as the composer, concludes that “Berlioz himself saw the symphony in autobiographical terms.” These are differing, not opposite points of view. “Program music” and the “meaning of music” are subjects of infinite discussion and dispute. Berlioz insists that they remain in the curriculum.

After the outpouring Berlioz scholarship that accompanied the two-hundredth anniversary of the composer’s birth, in and around 2003 (I list the principal works in the note), and after the appearance of two further collective efforts in anticipation of the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of his death, you may fairly ask if there is anything more to say, if enough is now enough. But for enthusiasts, such as I, questions remain. Where, for example, are the autograph manuscripts of Sardanapale, the arrangement of La Marseillaise, and Le Carnaval romain? Are they forever lost? What might they tell us? Or: How did Berlioz speak to the members of his orchestras? Was he a strict disciplinarian, as I would suppose? Was he rather warm and fuzzy, as was the great Leonard Bernstein? And was he as brilliant as I suggest he was, in my edition of the Mémoires, after observing his remarkable recall of literature far and wide? Or did his “erudition not equal his genius,” as Camille Saint-Saëns rather uncharitably put it in a letter to the musicologist Henri Expert?
After his twentieth birthday, Berlioz was by royal edict required to participate in the draft lottery for military service. The drawing would have taken place in La Côte-Saint-André, would have opened in mid-January in 1823, and would have continued until early March, at which time those marked for conscription could, if finances allowed, find stand-ins. As the intrepid Berlioz explorer Pascal Beyls has discovered, Berlioz drew a low number and was thus obliged to report for duty. He was able to avoid the army by purchasing the services of a proxy, a practice that was common at the time for those from moneyed families, and, in times of peace, potentially advantageous even to those who chose to serve. Berlioz’s replacement, one François Charreton, born in the same year as the future composer, was a textile worker who hailed from the village of Vourey, twenty-five kilometers southeast of La Côte-Saint-André. We know nothing more about him other than that he died, in a military hospital, on July 18, 1829. Berlioz’s family is unlikely to have employed a substitute for their prodigal son solely in order that he pursue music. In early 1823, Berlioz must have been convincingly able to demonstrate, or grudgingly put forth, a continuing interest in medical study.

To what was Berlioz referring when he spoke to Camille Moke, his erstwhile fiancée, of a “chagrin affreux,” the terrible affliction that David Cairns believes might be the reason behind their broken engagement? Who was the mysterious “Amélie” who, near the end of his life, and hers, encountered and enchanted Berlioz in the cemetery of Montmartre? To whom was Berlioz referring, in a letter, when he suggests that his son might have had more than one child? We know only of little Clémentine, born to Zélie Mallet and Louis Berlioz, in Marseille, on April 2, 1861. And who is that fellow who called himself Berlioz’s “fils naturel,” that is, Berlioz’s illegitimate son, when he appeared on December 15, 1912, as the members of Henri-Martin Barzun’s Fondation Hector Berlioz made a pilgrimage to the house in Montmartre to celebrate what would have been, four days earlier, the composer’s one-hundred-ninth birthday? On film and in photographs, this gentleman, called “Charles Berlioz” in L’Événement and other newspapers printed on December 17, appears to converse with Barzun and others who knew a thing or two about Berlioz, including J.-G. Prod’homme, Adolphe Boschot, and Victor Chapot, the archeologist, library administrator, and member of the Institut de France, who was present at the ceremony in his capacity as a direct descendent of Berlioz’s sister Adèle. Chapot and the others would surely have protested had they believed this fellow was an imposter! Pascal Beyls and I have hypothesized that he might have been the unrecognized child of Berlioz and Marie Recio. Were
he to have been born in 1842, he would have been seventy in 1912, as in the
tales he appears to be. I add that the actor Jacques Berlioz (1889–1969)
claimed, in a letter printed in Comœdia on February 4, 1927, that his father,
the amateur painter Charles Berlioz, bore an “extraordinary” resemblance
to Hector Berlioz, and was in fact the grandson of the composer’s uncle.62

Caveat lector: not everyone named Berlioz is related to the one we know.

Future biographers may wish to treat these small queries as they paint
large canvases of their own. What we can do, now, is to make the fundamen-
tal source materials accessible to all who might wish to capture Berlioz in one
guise or another. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France continues to upload
the scores and the images to Gallica.bnf.fr. RetroNews.fr makes the news-
papers and magazines for which Berlioz wrote ever more readily available.
Monir Tayeb and Michel Austin faithfully render service to Berliozians every-
where by publishing on HBerlioz.com quantities of primary and secondary
materials in both French and English. And now, a substantial grant from the
city of Paris, funded in 2021, has enabled a small team of which I am a part
to embark upon an online edition of Berlioz’s correspondence based on new
readings of the autograph manuscripts, with links to facsimiles, explanatory
documents, and extensive annotations unrestrained by publishers’ page limi-
tations. The physical book will never die, but the future of scholarly research
is online. It will not be long before we will be able to search the text of every
document ever penned by or about Berlioz. The new availability will broaden
horizons and bear new fruit. But “artificial intelligence,” so to speak, will not
tell us what is the definitive version of the work of art or how, definitively, it
is to be performed. It will not take the place of articulate speech, command-
ing discourse, aesthetic acumen, scholarly judgment, humor, or hubris.

Berlioz’s music—music “that thinks,” as it was labeled by a journalist at
the funeral63—will, one hopes, find its place in the work of those musical
scholars in Europe and the United States who, now more than ever, justly
debate the roles in the making of music history of race, ethnicity, class, and
gender; who rightly insist upon the importance of hearing from the colo-
nized, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Berlioz’s music will, I should
like to believe, continue to be variously defended and depreciated, as is nor-
mal for vital works that remain in the repertory. But it will no longer be
demeaned, I think, as somehow deficient in technique. That is a battle that
has been won. The analyses of scholars active today, those by Julian Rushton
and Jean-Pierre Bartoli in particular, have demonstrated with conspicuous
clarity that Berlioz’s melodic and symphonic forms are not lesser versions of
classic and contemporary models, as the sceptics used to say, but carefully
premeditated structures with an inner drama and logic of their own.\textsuperscript{64}

Let me conclude, therefore, with a response to the cogent critique of an
anthology I had something to do with, the \textit{Cambridge Companion to Berlioz},
which, the ever-vigilant Mark Everist observed, “gives the impression that
Berlioz is the sole representative of French music” in the middle years of
his century.\textsuperscript{65} That is certainly not the impression I intended to give in the
\textit{Companion}, nor is it the impression I intend to give here. It is perhaps worth
mentioning that the author of the opening essay in the \textit{Companion}, also the
author of \textit{Berlioz and the Romantic Century}, was a founding father of modern
cultural history, to which discipline my eminent colleague would seem to
pay homage, and a scholar more alert than most to the particularities of the
environment in which his chosen subject lived and worked. Janet Johnson’s
subsequent essay, on “the musical environment in France,” goes so far as to
identify the elephant in the room: “Berlioz in the Age of Rossini.” Everist’s
remark may simply result from the enthusiasm of the Berliozians, Jacques
Barzun among them, who may have felt that their fellow had been under-
represented, or rather “misunderestimated,” to use a wonderful word coined
by the forty-third president of the United States. (In 2002, that president,
George W. Bush, awarded America’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential
Medal of Freedom, to Jacques Barzun.) Berlioz’s French contemporaries—
Fromental Halévy, Adolphe Adam, Louise Farrenc, Louise Bertin, Félicien
David, Ambroise Thomas, Charles-Valentin Alkan, Charles Gounod, Jacques
Offenbach, and Camille Saint-Saëns, to mention only those born between
1799 and 1835—deserve, have had, and will continue to enjoy their days in
court. Berlioz interacted with all of these fine souls, as he did with the non-
French composers—Rossini, Meyerbeer, Wagner, and Verdi—who of course
became major players on the French musical scene. These same souls find a
place in the \textit{Dictionnaire Berlioz}, of which I was an editor, and whose mis-
sion was more broad than that of the \textit{Companion}. Could it be, if Berlioz con-
tinues to kick his way to the fore, that his understanding of “the intellectual
glamour of gloom,” to quote a phrase from Martin Amis’s 2020 novel \textit{Inside
Story}, gives him a leg up? Or that, despite our erudition, we still don’t know
what to do with him?

For Bruno Messina, and those of an ethnomusicological bent, what
remains to be reconstituted, for the better understanding of musical imagina-
tion of the composer of the \textit{Fantastique}, is the sonic landscape, the “paysage
sonore,” of Berlioz’s homeland, the Dauphiné, that “green and golden plain”
lovingly traversed in the opening chapter of David Cairns’s great biography.\textsuperscript{66}
For those who understand how the writing of history itself has been molded by men, the absent voices of Harriet Smithson and Marie Recio in particular (the sounds of which in both cases are said to have had an agreeable ring) would resound, if we could hear them, with special resonance. And for those for whom Rezeptionsgeschichte is the way of the future, the volume that remains to be written would be the Berliozian equivalent of the one that most resonated in musical circles during the gestation of the present book. Alex Ross’s Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music is a highly unusual compendium, a tour de force of recollections and reflections, intimations and inspirations, confrontations and exploitations of a kind uniquely generated—in music and art, in literature and philosophy, in politics and popular culture—by the life and work of Richard Wagner. Though far less fateful and fought about than the composer of Tristan and The Ring, Berlioz was no less of a genius than he. An admirer willing to look everywhere and read everything, as Ross did for Wagner, might find the material, not for a book of Berliozism—the expression is infelicitous—but for a broad-based investigation of Berlioz Beyond the Grave. In Berlioz in Time, my more limited purpose has been to revisit the precincts of its great subject, to relight rooms gone dim, to invite readers in.