

Introduction

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In view of the length and intimacy of the association between music and literature in the Western world, to devote a special issue of MOSAIC, an interdisciplinary journal, to the two arts is entirely appropriate. The relations among the Muses in ancient Greece already have the air of long-established cultural tradition, and musical instruments as far back as Sumer and the Old Kingdom are decorated with words or symbols. Most Western art music is "literary" in that it is texted; indeed, "absolute" music, organized untexted sound, is rare compared to such texted genres as church drama, chanson, villancico, madrigal, passion, cantata, *Lied*, oratorio, motet, opera.

Even absolute music tends to be invaded by words—thus Beethoven, who manages without words for eight symphonies, needs them for his last—and titles which seem to describe absolute music have attractions so powerful that they defeat mere opus numbers: "Appassionata Sonata" instead of "Opus 57." Verbal titles, whether they refer to programs, landscapes, texts, events, paintings, moods, implicitly or explicitly direct the listener and conjure up visual images: *Ma fin est mon commencement et mon commencement ma fin*, *Steel Foundry*, *Bahnfahrt*, *Le tableau de l'Opération de la taille*, *London Street Cries*, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, *Ecco la primavera*, and *Tobacco*. Moreover, even though a work simply entitled "sonata" creates only self-referential expectations pertaining to internal structures, and is not extra-referential except to preceding works in the same genre, once we are given verbal information past the generic level—such as subtitle, key and date—the "directions" about how to listen multiply. And sometimes, unfortunately, a critic imposes words in an attempt to give music meaning, as in the *locus*

classicus, Donald Tovey's 1935 commentary on Haydn's *Symphony No. 92* ("Oxford"): "a daddy-long-legs of a second subject sprawls affably into the discussion under pretence of satisfying orthodox theories."¹

Such sheer impressionism aside, much critical terminology of both music and literature is held in common: form, motif and theme, genre, structure, language, syntax, imagery, allusion, contrast, unity, convention, expectation, irony, texture, imitation, mood, ambiguity, myth, color, even numerology and the isms from primitivism to expressionism. Yet because such language varies from wholly literal to wholly metaphorical, the fact that the *terms* are identical can be misleading: "theme" in music may mean a structurally significant pattern of pitches and rhythms, self-contained and closed, while in literature it may mean a lesson which embodies and is designed to inculcate a system of *moral values*. Similarly, while in both arts theme arises from motif, in music motif is usually a germinal idea—whether rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, textural, etc.—upon which the composition is based; motif is the generating principle itself, and in certain composers such as Wagner it clearly takes on the task of unifying the composition since it embodies a principle of artistic structure. But in literature a motif normally takes the form of an image, repeated or reappearing in a work in order to produce a value judgment (the repetition of corruption and rot in *Hamlet*). These examples suggest that the levels of understanding music do not quite parallel those of understanding words.

Furthermore, when we speak of literacy we usually mean that ability to recognize what verbal signs denote, whereas the expression "reading music" has no accepted cut-off points in its spectrum of meaning; most literate people cannot read it but must hear it instead. Music in our society—except to the specialist—still exists in an aural, even oral, world of perception; this alliance with an older literary universe, one of oral delivery of epics, of plays performed on wagons, is perhaps the reason we are able to tolerate so much exact repetition in music of a kind we cannot bear in literature. In verbal art repetition is a trait of the oral, not the written, stage; since any passage may be reclaimed by going back to it, repetition is not needed to refresh the memory, as it is in a "heard" art like music.

Communal participation also differs in literature and music. Concerning the former, Walter J. Ong points out that "silent reading" used to be "exceptional but is the norm in our high technology cultures."² Yet if one notes that public readings are currently gaining every year over reading literature in isolation, one begins to see that in reclaiming the scop's, the bard's tradition, literature is again moving toward music in that in a performance the work of art becomes a mediator between the artist and the community. In music, "reading" rarely means silently and in isolation, but usually involves a public performance, a realization; the structure of English allows "I was reading *through*," i.e., playing, Chopin but does not allow "I was reading Chopin." Thus while trained musicians can read and mentally hear the notes on a page, we have no straightforward verb for this process; at the other extreme, few are embarrassed

to offer their opinions on music even though they cannot read it, for their feelings are generated by what they *hear*. Most listeners hear only colors, moods, textures, rhythms and sound complexes in the same way that a baby hears words or an adult a foreign language—as pure sound, without comprehension of formal or generic organizational structure. To the viscera, a bull-roarer evokes the same emotion as a scream. And while some music is easy to "read" (Purcell's descending bass line to outline "When I am laid in earth," the aria in *Dido and Aeneas*), the retrograde puzzle Machaut presents us with in *Ma fin est mon commencement* is not *aurally* apparent at all; the fascinating paradox is that while sometimes a critic may comprehend music without reading but only hearing it, in this piece the mirror imitation is *not* actually audible despite verbal clues in the text; we *must* "read" the score to "hear" the puzzle.

Another way to highlight differences is to consider the respective educational emphases and the professional expectations of musicology and literary criticism. It may be safely generalized that the outlook of the former tends to be international and source-oriented, whereas the latter tends to be linguistically defined and critical. To a certain extent, therefore, Comparative Literature studies are closer to musicology than general literary criticism. Yet even here one should note that whereas the musicologist has been taught that the heart of the profession involves working with manuscript and archival materials, the literary critic works largely with already-established texts. The musicologist's orientation holds whether the scholarship is in "classical" research (in, say, early Renaissance Ferrara) or whether it is in Fanny Mendelssohn or George Crumb. Thus while in Western European literatures there are few remaining important textual cruxes, at least not at the level of publishing an accessible text of a culturally important work, the musicologist is typically at the stage of the *Oxford English Dictionary* or of the *Early English Text Series*. The fact that in literature we can virtually assume the easy availability of a dependable text, and that in musicology many vital works have not yet been published—or, indeed, identified at all—explains the professions' differences. Musicologists are still digging at the mine, isolating, assaying, while literary critics need no longer remember where the mine is; while the former publish manuscript concordances vitally important to them (exemplified in this collection by Alejandro Planchart's essay), many literary scholars have to think back to graduate school to remember about *Stammbaumtheorie*, and might do poorly if asked what is known of the manuscripts of *An Essay on Criticism*, *Moby-Dick*, *Beowulf*, or *Surfacing*.

Although differences in world view must be admitted, a collection such as this one could not exist if criticism in music and literature could not function at a far deeper level than the one of reacting merely to surface. Here the slippery nature of our shared terminology actually becomes useful: just as instrumental and vocal colors in music are surface, so in literature is the local "color" of setting. In music the critic, delving beneath the surface, may dismiss the staging, costume and the like of an opera, and in literature may, though

to the chagrin of the mere “colorist” or nationalist, argue that a novel’s specific regionalism is a surface feature important only to a limited understanding of the text, serving to decorate the surface but masking deeper structural meanings. It is significant that Chomsky’s revolutionary analytical method as set forth in *Syntactic Structures* (1957) has influenced both musical and literary analysis.

The most familiar of the ways in which criticism has dealt with the two arts, however, has been through work on musical themes in literature, particularly, whether directly or indirectly, on the tendency of poets to speak of themselves as musicians. Scholarship connecting poetry and music arose from a well-established interdisciplinary field of study, the history of ideas; modern studies here begin with Bruce Pattison’s *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (1st ed. London, 1948), and peak with John Hollander’s influential and brilliant *The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton, 1961). The approach continues to flourish with works such as James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music* (New Haven, 1981), and Elisa Bickford Jorgens’ *The Well-Tun’d Word: Musical Interpretations of English Poetry 1597-1651* (Minneapolis, 1982).³

Robert K. Wallace’s *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (Athens, GA., 1983) has become a *cause célèbre*, calling forth two of the most telling recent illustrations of the different reactions of literary- and music-oriented critics to an interdisciplinary study which attempts to link the two artists via a common theme. In his review of the Wallace book in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*,⁴ Mortimer Frank, quoting “the orchestra... keeps watch over the errant solo much in the same way as Knightley watches over Emma,” thinks the book “a bit too neat and perhaps a bit too simplistic” but overall he judges Wallace’s work to be “a tonic delight.” (Such a critic does not object to the literal sense of one kind of watching and the wholly metaphoric sense of another; the example is wholly in the style of Donald Tovey.) Frank assumes that “some highly detailed musical analyses of melodic structure in K.595 may prove wearisome to the reader ungrounded in fundamentals of music,” a comment which serves as a reminder of the vagueness of what is meant by musical literacy, and also leads us to wonder why anyone “ungrounded in fundamentals of music” would try to read a book which is half about Mozart.

Lawrence Kramer, in *19th Century Music*, does not imply that the analyses are difficult, but writes instead of their radical simplifications: “When it comes to music, his exclusions are equally severe. Wallace approaches musical form almost exclusively in terms of its melodic surface. Harmony is relegated to supplementary roles, and... Wallace considers only the local, not the structural, use of harmony. Close consideration of Mozart’s management of harmonic tension, of the dynamics of sonata form, or of the structural interplay of melody, harmony, and rhythm—all are lacking. The comparisons that result tend to read like a combination of superior program notes with superior plot outlines.”⁵ In one of his parallels between Mozart and Austen, Wallace writes

of a theme “return[ing] in the home key” and of “the excursion to Meryton end[ing] with an equally emphatic return home to Longbourn” (in *Pride and Prejudice*). Kramer’s view of such approaches is to the point: “the innocent home-key metaphor loses its credibility as one of its terms is taken much too far—taken, that is, too literally. It is as if one were to respond to Burns’s ‘My love is like a red, red rose’ by asking what sort of soil and fertilizer she requires.”

Composers themselves become interdisciplinary “critics” when they link music and literature by “setting” a text—a metaphor not from gardening but from gems—and no more vividly than in the *Lied*, for the composer must become poetic interpreter when solving his or her preeminent problem: balancing the responsibilities to a text on one hand and to a musical structure on the other. And interdisciplinary illumination can become particularly brilliant where both composer and author are great artists: Schubert/Goethe, Schumann/Heine. Thus it is particularly disturbing to find a critic like Jack Stein accusing Schubert of mis-setting Goethe’s *Erlkönig*: “the most celebrated instance of a disparity between the poetic intention and the composer’s interpretation is perhaps Schubert’s *Erlkönig*. The spirit of Schubert’s setting is a far remove from the folk-song-like simplicity and naivete characteristic of the poem... and, in this sense, the song grossly distorted the effect originally intended.”⁶ Actually, what is really at fault here is Stein’s interpretation of Goethe’s poem. We recall that the poem, which records a father and son riding home at night, sets up the contrast between the father, who responds only rationalistically to the fog, the wind in the leaves and the old gray willow trees, and the son, who knows that the material world apprehended through his father’s senses is not real, who knows that the *Erlkönig* comes to kill him. The father, who “sees exactly”—as he puts it with unconscious irony—thus denies his son’s true vision of the King of another world, and “kills” his child via reason.

Stein to the contrary, therefore, the poem is neither simple nor naive, and the truth it expresses is profound: because the father’s reasonable interpretation of the manifestations of the spirit world is born of a repressed fear of facing its reality, his rationality is life-denying. True, the father’s view translated into criticism—that the poem undermines its own drama—has been that it is “only a ballad”; as recently as 1958 H. A. Korff could still write—as though any adult can tell reality from illusion—that “we know for certain: in truth there is no *Erlkönig* present, rather only fog patches hanging in the night.” He observes further that “we are wholly clear that it is only the natural world of evening.”⁷ But we realize that *Lieder* composers were more perceptive at “reading” their texts than may have been thought, and in recently remarking that “the child gives [the *Erlkönig*] a name; have they perhaps met before?” H. Schutz confirms Schubert’s intensely dramatic and emotionally powerful setting of Goethe’s poem.⁸ It is no accident of enraptured ignorance that the two best-known settings of Goethe’s poem, by Schubert and Carl Loewe, both make musical characterizations of the Spirit King himself; by giving his world musical existence, the composers show that they reject the rational

explanations of the father and identify with the intuitive understanding of the child, whose perception and sensitivity exist only to be rewarded by death.⁹

Two other instances of composers' brilliance in interpreting a text may stand for a multitude: how the moment in Schubert's setting of Heine's *Doppelgänger*—when the double recognizes himself—is expressed by what may be called bitonality, musically necessary to mirror the speaker's duality; and how Schumann's setting of Heine's *Ich grolle nicht* makes clear that he understands the irony in the poem: the bold, almost parodistic chords make the dramatic speaker's self-effacement pharisaical.

The essays collected here should appeal to readers specializing in either literature or music, for they all point to variously fruitful directions for interdisciplinary research without compromising the scholarship expected in either subject. They range from strongly musicological to highly literary—itself a rarity in collections—and they cover a span of many centuries without demanding a range of reading outside the scope of any but specialists. Flanking the collection are two essays of a theoretical nature. In "How Musical is Literature?" J. Russell Reaver explores one version of the human brain's reaction to the two arts, an exploration which should prove suggestive to researchers who pursue relations between the physiology of the brain and the artistic forms it has invented; Peter Rabinowitz on musical "reading" explores various ways of considering not only the concept "work of art" but particularly "audience" as these are inevitably contaminated by history.

Between these essays, the order is chronological, beginning with Alejandro Planchart's essay, which in the course of a seminal exploration of Italian tropes contributes insights to musical-national characteristics by identifying stylistic factors which the manuscripts show to be a thousand years old; Robert Maccubbin's essay on Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" illustrates the way that both literary criticism from decades of exegesis and archival materials may be combined to recapture ironic contexts of one of the most musical of all English poems. W. Gordon Marigold focuses on opera libretti, a major although usually neglected source, to demonstrate some surprising aspects of the cultural and social history of Hamburg. Related to this is the musical transformation of literature, Mary Hunter's subject, and her study details what happens to arguably the eighteenth century's most important novel, *Pamela*, when it becomes a source for librettists; the process is not merely one of radical simplification. The images of Mozart as he appears in the verbal arts are traced by Carol Wootton; Shaffer's *Amadeus* and the enormously popular film of the same title have, surely permanently, changed public awareness of Mozart from ignorance to an image remarkably like that scholars have held of him for decades. And who would ever have predicted that Salieri would be known to millions of people?

In our society, music like writing or cigarettes, is largely a "product": packaged, hyped, sold; once past the stage of the essentials of food, clothing and shelter, we humans next acquire some apparatus which reproduces music, and most of us spend far more time "listening" than we do reading. Patricia

Demers' essay shows not only how the adult world looked at what children ought to know about music, but also at how the commercial world was concerned to sell that education to parents. Rose Zak writes on Stravinsky and the text-music relations in *L'Histoire*; the primary interdisciplinary values she demonstrates are the similarities and differences between the processes of generating the text and the music for a unified work; Stravinsky often "wrote" as Pope composed poems, from fragments collected and assembled. As we have noted, in criticism music and literature have been related largely by manifestations of the former in the latter; George Reinhardt suggests a new approach when he resolves a number of crucial questions about *Doctor Faustus* by showing that it is structured according to Wagnerian principles of organization. A parallel to Mary Hunter's essay on "Pamela's children" is provided by Robert Bledsoe's "Chastity and Darkness in *Albert Herring*," which examines Britten's work as composer-critic and vindicates the integrity of theme and characterization in the opera. Last in the chronological series, preceding Peter Rabinowitz' essay which leads us as readers back to the problems of hearing and reading, is Garrett Stewart's "Singer Sung: Voice as Avowal in Streisand's *Yentl*." Here the ideal popularized by Wagner for music drama is developed into a model of interdisciplinary criticism; music, theme, character, plot and imaging technique are treated not in isolation but as parts of a whole.

NOTES

- 1/ Donald Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, I (London, 1935), p. 146. For an assessment of "personal" interpretation, see Owen Jander, "Romantic Form and Content in the Slow Movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto," *The Musical Quarterly*, 69, No. 2 (Spring 1983), 159-79.
- 2/ Walter J. Ong, s.j., "Writing and the Evolution of Consciousness," *MOSAIC*, 18, (Winter 1985), 7.
- 3/ Jorgens (pp. 283-88) provides a useful list of primary and secondary materials.
- 4/ See Mortimer H. Frank, "Review" in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 84 (July 1985), 445-48.
- 5/ Lawrence Kramer, "Review" in *19th Century Music*, 8 (Spring 1985), 277-79.
- 6/ Jack Stein, "Was Goethe Wrong about the Nineteenth-Century Lied? An Examination of the Relation of Poem and Music," *PMLA*, 77 (June 1962), 235.
- 7/ H. A. Korff, *Goethe im Bildwandel seiner Lyrik* (Hanau a/M, 1958), pp. 251-52; translation ours.
- 8/ H. Schutz, Paper presented to the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies meeting (Oct. 1985), Guelph, Ontario.
- 9/ For a brief but suggestive Deconstructive analysis of Schubert's setting, see Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 148-49.