

**Literatuur en muziek**  
**Literature and Music**

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*Literature and Music*  
Inge Arteel & Bruno Forment (red.)

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**LITERATUUR EN MUZIEK**

**LITERATURE AND MUSIC**

Inge Arteel & Bruno Forment (red.)



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# INLEIDING

*Inge Arteel & Bruno Forment*

Vrije Universiteit Brussel / Hogeschool Gent, KASK School of Arts

Onder de noemers literatuur en muziek worden twee artistieke expressievormen samengebracht die al van oudsher verbanden aangaan, zij het niet altijd in harmonische eenheid.<sup>1</sup> In de geest van de *paragone*, de wedijver tussen verschillende kunstvormen, is in talrijke historische esthetica's en poëtica's eerder sprake van een concurrentiële verhouding tussen tekst en muziek, woord en klank (Kivy 2009). Veelal wordt hierbij een hiërarchie verondersteld. Zo onderscheidde men in het antieke Griekenland de muziek die zich op een evenwichtige manier laat combineren met stem, woord en dans tot een tragedie, van wilde, bacchantische of sensuele muziek die het rationele woord overstemt en volgens Plato zelfs de ideale staat ontwricht. In de aristotelische poëtica krijgt muziek een lagere rol toebedeeld dan plot (*mythos*), ethos, pathos en dictie; deze zienswijze leeft verder tot in het achttiende-eeuwse *dramma per musica* ('drama voor muziek'), waarvan de gepubliceerde libretto's werden gecanoniseerd en de partituren tot handgeschreven efemera gereduceerd. In bepaalde gevallen moet muziek volledig het onderpit delven, denk hierbij aan de door Friedrich Nietzsche (1872) geponeerde en door hem fel betreunde verdrijving van de 'dionysische' muziek uit het laat-renaisancistische theater.<sup>2</sup>

Door de geschiedenis heen is er echter veelvuldig geëxperimenteerd met muziekliteraire mengvormen die de verschillen tussen de beide kunsten productief inzetten. De artistieke praktijk, die vaak pluralistischer blijkt te zijn dan de (normatieve) theorie, ondermijnt een al te historisch-lineaire en categorisch-disciplinaire voorstelling van de verhouding tussen literatuur en muziek. Ook hier moeten we het voorbeeld noemen van het muziektheater, dat niet alleen de twee media tekst en muziek verbindt, maar deze multimedial uitbreidt, wat door de eeuwen heen voor tal van vernieuwingen heeft gezorgd in de verhouding tussen woord en klank. De recitatiefstijl of *recitar cantando* (letterlijk: 'zingende voordracht'), die aan de basis lag van de opera (oorspronkelijk bedoeld als emulatie van de oud-Griekse tragische declamatie en de orphische gezangen), vormt slechts het bekendste voorbeeld van een convergentie tussen muziek en woord, waarbij de disciplinaire grenzen worden afgetast en indien nodig verlegd. Andere experi-

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1. Het recente *Handbuch Literatur & Musik* (Gess & Honold 2017) biedt een schat aan historische en analytische informatie die deze inleiding mee heeft gevoed.
  2. Richard Wagner wordt steevast in een adem met Nietzsches theorie genoemd vanwege Wagners streven om in zijn *Musikdramen* het evenwicht tussen de diverse media, waaronder de (door hemzelf geconcipeerde) poëzie en muziek, te bewerkstelligen in één *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

menten zijn het melodrama (bijvoorbeeld *Pygmalion* van Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762) en *Sprechgesang* (*Pierrot Lunaire* van Arnold Schönberg, 1912).

Wordt het primaat van de dramatische poëzie als vanzelfsprekend beschouwd in bepaalde tijdperken, zoals bij het ontstaan van de opera, ten tijde van de midde-achttiende-eeuwse ‘Gluckiaanse’ hervorming, of in de *Literaturoper* (naar een a priori geschreven of gedichte tekst), dan klinkt het motto *prima la musica, poi le parole* beduidend luider in de traditie van onder meer het belcanto, waarin de verstaanbaarheid van de tekst wordt ondermijnd door vocale virtuositeit. In het actuele, ‘postdramatische’ muziektheater wordt de oude aristotelische hiërarchie al helemaal in vraag gesteld (Lehmann 1999; Salzman & Dézsy 2008). Door een totale gelijkberechtiging van woord, stem, muziek, beeld, lichaam en ruimte wordt de luisteraar polysemisch en multisensorieel gebombardeerd. Een markant voorbeeld van laatstgenoemde tendens is *Der Mann im Fahrstuhl* (1987) van Heiner Goebbels en Heiner Müller: een monoloog van Müller, simultaan gelezen met dansen van bizarre personages op luide rockmuziek.

Soortgelijke evenwichtsoefeningen tussen literatuur en muziek vindt men in de lyrische poëzie, gaande van de antieke dichtkunst over de middeleeuwse minnelijerik en de vocale muziek van de renaissance, met de onomatopeïsche chansons van Clément Janequin (ca. 1485-1558) en het madrigalisme als mijlpalen, over het romantische Lied, tot de avantgardistische klankpoëzie, rap en *poly-poetry*.

Voor prozagenres lijkt de verbinding met muziek op het eerste gezicht minder voor de hand te liggen, of zich in elk geval eerder op het thematisch-inhoudelijke niveau te situeren – de figuren van de componist en de muzikant, bijvoorbeeld – en niet zozeer op het formele. Niettemin blijkt verhalend proza een uitstekend medium te leveren voor reflecties over de verhouding tussen woord en muziek, denk aan mythen (over Echo of Orpheus bijvoorbeeld), sprookjes (zoals *De wonderlijke speelmannen* van de gebroeders Grimm) en verhalen (om er maar een te noemen: Heinrich von Kleists *Die heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik* uit 1810), maar evengoed aan vele moderne romans.<sup>3</sup> Prangende vragen die hierbij worden gesteld, betreffen de mogelijkheid of onmogelijkheid van de ekfrasis van een muziekstuk of een muzikale ervaring, de referentialiteit en fictionaliteit van muziek, cognitieve en affectieve dimensies van muziek maken en beluisteren, en het lezen als stil luisterproces. Deze reflecties vinden ook hun neerslag op het formele en narratieve niveau, zoals in polyfone vertelstemmen, contrapuntisch vertellen of structuren van herhaling en leidmotief.

Sinds de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw reikt de literatuurwetenschap begrippen aan om dat veelvoud aan mengvormen en intermediale praktijken te

3. De voorbeelden zijn legio. In de romans van Virginia Woolf spelen muziek, geluid en ritme en de poëtische vraag naar de mogelijkheid van hun schriftelijke transpositie een belangrijke rol; stemmen en klanken structureren het proza van Samuel Beckett; en als recentere voorbeelden kunnen we onder andere *White Noise* (1985) van Don DeLillo vermelden, *Jazz* (1992) van Toni Morrison en in het Nederlandse taalgebied werk van Anna Enquist en Jeroen Brouwers.



analyseren, vaak met een comparatistische en vandaag ook steeds meer met een intermediale invalshoek. De snelle technologische ontwikkelingen van de digitale media, die het veld van de akoestische literatuur nog danig hebben uitgebreid (met luisterboeken, hoorspelen, *podcasts*, *soundscape*s, geluidswandelingen, enzovoort), hebben daar mee toe aangezet. De disciplines van de *word and music studies* (Scher 1984, cf. infra) en de *sound studies* (Attali 1977; Schafer 1977) hebben zich intussen met succes gevestigd.

In 1948 formuleerde Calvin S. Brown zijn driedeling van literatuur *en* muziek, literatuur *in* muziek en muziek *in* literatuur (Brown 1948), die op invloedrijke wijze werd uitgewerkt door Steven Paul Scher (1984). In de eerste categorie situeert Scher combinaties van literatuur en muziek, een proces dat hij erg symbiotisch opvat en alleen met de vocale muziek illustreert (Gess & Honold 2017: 4). Arne Stollberg onderschrijft de bevinding dat van een fusie van tekst en muziek enkel sprake kan zijn wanneer geen zinvol onderscheid meer mogelijk is tussen een tekst en zijn toonzetting (Stollberg 2017: 73). Voor Schers categorie komen volgens Stollberg op zijn minst ook het melodrama en asemantische klankpoëzie in aanmerking (59-60). Combinaties van tekst en muziek blijven echter ook vaak als dusdanig zichtbaar en creëren precies door hun wederzijdse frictie extra betekenis, bijvoorbeeld in het episch theater van Bertolt Brecht, maar evengoed in het achttiende-eeuwse *Singspiel*, de negentiende-eeuwse *opéra-comique* of de vroeg-twintigste-eeuwse operette.

De categorieën ‘literatuur in muziek’ en ‘muziek in literatuur’ vormen het onderwerp van uitgesproken intermediaal onderzoek. Voor de verschijning of *showing* van muziek in literatuur plaatst Werner Wolf (2017: 98) het begrip van de mediale ‘wissel’, dat nog door Scher werd gebruikt, als te mechanisch en statisch aan de kant. Wolf ontwikkelt in plaats daarvan dynamischere begrippen en concentreert zich vooral op de ‘intermediale referentie’ – een begrip dat hij overneemt van Irina Rajewsky (2002) – in ‘gemusikaliseerde literatuur’. Daarin erkent hij drie categorieën: de (gedeeltelijke) reproductie van muziek (bijvoorbeeld een liedtekst) in de literaire tekst; de evocatie van een muzikale impressie aan de hand van tropen (wat overeenkomt met Schers *verbal music*); en de formele imitatie van muziek door structurele analogieën en *word music*. Wolfs kader is beslist inzetbaar voor andere kunstvormen dan de literatuur, hoewel hijzelf alleen literaire voorbeelden uitwerkt: ‘literarische Texte, die einen Teil ihres Sinngehaltes daraus beziehen, dass sie durch ihre Inhalte und/oder Form eine imaginäre Präsenz von Musik suggerieren’ (2017: 96).

Wolf had in zijn narratologische standaardwerk *The Musicalization of Fiction* (1999) al de tweedeling uitgewerkt tussen enerzijds *telling of thematization* van muziek in literatuur, en anderzijds *showing of mimetische imitation* van muzikale structuren of muzikale impressies in literatuur. Ook Emily Petermann (2014) concentreert zich op de muzikaliserings van literatuur in haar analyse van de transitie van muzikale micro- en macrostructuren in romans. Theodore Ziolkowski (2017) behandelt soortgelijke fenomenen maar voegt ook een hoofdstuk toe over

intermediaal werk van zogenaamde dubbelkunstenaars die een carrièreswitch maakten tussen componeren en schrijven, of zelf hun libretti schreven.

Nog vanuit de narratologie komen nieuwe impulsen onder de noemer van de audionarratologie. Precies om de blinde vlekken tegen te gaan die het, onder andere door Wolf gehanteerde, primaat van het (schriftelijke, visuele) woord creëert, vertrekt deze subdiscipline van geluid, muziek en het gesproken woord in relatie tot het narratieve en *world-making*: ‘Audionarratology analyses how sounds and noises contribute to the creation of real and imagined spaces and worlds.’ (Mildorf & Kinzel 19) Audionarratologie legt dan ook niet alleen interdisciplinaire verbanden met *word and music studies* maar ook met *sound studies* (Mildorf & Kinzel: 4 en 8). Aandacht voor de specifieke medialiteit (*mediacy*) van oraliteit/spreken en auraliteit/horen als semiotische systemen is daarbij van groot belang (in audiovisuele en digitale kunstvormen, in performance, lezing en uitvoering), net als de – gesuggereerde of reële – onmiddellijkheid (*immediacy*) van de auditive waarneming.

Intermediaal musicologisch onderzoek buigt zich over literatuur in muziek. Het verband tussen muziek en taal en hun onderlinge verschillen nemen hier een belangrijke plaats in. Gunnar Hindrichs onderscheidt de volgende ‘idealtypische Abgrenzungen’ (2017: 19): muziek als voortalig medium dat geen precieze talige articulatie biedt maar een intensief en expressief preverbaal klinken (*tönen*); muziek als boventalig medium dat méér kan zeggen dan de ontoereikende verbale taal; muziek als een niet-conceptuele taal die haar zeggingskracht uitsluitend uit muzikale regels ontwikkelt; maar ook: muziek als medium dat niets met taal te maken heeft maar tot de disciplines van de wiskunde en astronomie behoort. Muziek is in deze laatste, pythagoreïsche opvatting een zaak van louter numerieke verhoudingen tussen tonen en hun respectieve hoogte (frequenties en intervallen), duur (ritmische waarden en syntax), geluidsterkte (absolute en relatieve amplitude), timbre (frequentiespectrum) en andere kwantificeerbare parameters. De aanname van de niet-talige, auto-referentiële eigenheid van muziek, alsook van de verwerping van enige talige semantiek of semiotiek, ligt ten grondslag aan de idee van ‘absolute muziek’ (Adorno 1963; Dahlhaus 1978; Chua 1999; Bonds 2014), die een hoogtepunt beleefde in de Duitse romantiek en tot haar logische conclusie werd gebracht in formalistische strekkingen als het serialisme, spectralisme en de systematische muziekwetenschap.

Diametraal hiertegenover staat een strekking die de discursieve eigenschappen van muziek beklemtoont vanuit de premisse dat taal en muziek hoe dan ook van een en hetzelfde expressieve vermogen – *musilanguage* – afstammen (Brown 2000). Deze visie vertrekt vanuit onze dagdagelijkse, metaforische omgang met muziek ter benoeming van haar complexe verhouding tot de realiteit (Spitzer 2004), of vanuit de opvatting dat muziek an sich een taal vormt met een volwaardige, zij het niet-talige en subsymbolische, woordenschat en grammatica (Lerdahl & Jackendoff 1983; Lidov 2004). De semiotiek, het deconstructivisme en post-modernisme hebben aan deze traditie een rijk corpus aan analytische en herme-

neutische studies toegevoegd die elk op hun manier de allo-referentiële mogelijkheden van muziek exploreren. Thans worden betekenisvormende en narratieve structuren aangeduid in zowel vocale (Agawu 1991) als instrumentale composities (Cooke 1959; Agawu 1991 & 2009; Monelle 1992), naast retorische principes (Bonds 1991) en culturele topoi (Ratner 1980; Monelle 2006; Mirka 2014) die de zuiver sonore dimensie overstijgen. De zogenaamde *new musicology* (Kramer 1990) stelt dat muziek als cultureel discours niet minder betekenisdragend is dan andere discourses en verwijst daarom het concept van de absolute muziek als historische constructie naar de prullenmand.



De vijf bijdragen aan het thema van dit *Cahier* weerspiegelen de veelvormige artistieke relatie tussen literatuur en muziek en de methodologische diversiteit van het onderzoeksveld. In zijn opstel over het muziekgedicht vertrekt Carl De Strycker van de vaststelling dat er relatief weinig onderzoek is verricht naar muziek in moderne Nederlandstalige poëzie. Om een begin te maken met een systematisering van de diverse verschijningsvormen van muziek in poëzie en hun mogelijke functies onderzoekt hij een corpus van ongeveer zeshonderd gedichten, die alle dateren van na 1900 en expliciet refereren aan klassieke muziek. De Stryckers indeling volgt enerzijds inhoudelijke verschijningsvormen van muziek, anderzijds de compositorische verwerking van muziek, en beoogt een herziening van Werner Wolfs op proza gebaseerde onderscheid tussen *telling* en *showing* voor de poëzie. De Strycker stelt onder meer vast dat met name gedichten die een subjectieve muzikervaring beschrijven, zich niet zomaar in de tweedeling laten inpassen omdat ze zich ‘loszingen van het muziekstuk’ en een zekere autonomie bereiken: ‘De muziek vormt het vertrekpunt voor een lyrische uiting waarin muziek gethematiseerd noch geïmiteerd wordt.’ Volgens De Strycker ligt hier mogelijk een parallel met het muzikale genre van het Lied, dat zich historisch gezien geleidelijk aan losmaakte van het gedicht dat er de aanleiding voor vormde.

De bijdrage van Ivan Delazari brengt ons naar de *verbal music* in proza. Ook dat is in zekere zin een fenomeen dat zich losmaakt van reëel geluid. Delazari analyseert de fictionele muziek in de roman *Orfeo* van Richard Powers. Delazari gaat uit van het metafictionele verhaal ‘Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*’ van Jorge Luis Borges, waarin het hoofdpersoonage de roman van Cervantes letterlijk reproduceert als zijn eigen tekst. Delazari vraagt zich af wat de lectuur van Borges’ verhaal betekent voor onze inschatting van de ‘echte’ Don Quichote. Is het niet onvermijdelijk dat we die dan *ook* lezen als een verhaal van Menard? Een soortgelijke vraag naar de verhouding tussen fictionaliteit en realiteit vormt vervolgens de basis voor Delazari’s lectuur van de verbal music in *Orfeo*, waarin in extenso fictieve composities van het hoofdpersoonage Peter Els worden beschreven, onder andere diens cyclus *Borges Songs*. Maakt het voor de lezer een verschil wanneer in

een fictief verhaal reëel bestaande muziek beschreven wordt (die de lezer dus kan kennen en herkennen) dan wel puur fictieve muziek? Powers' beschrijving van de uitvoering van de fictieve liedcyclus combineert verscheidene narratieve elementen tot een multimodale en multisensoriële gebeurtenis: letterlijke en dus herkenbare Borges-citaten, gedetailleerde beschrijvingen van de muziek, de reacties van het publiek en de gedachten van de componist. Met verwijzingen naar cognitieve theorieën en Roger Scrutons *acousmatic space* toont Delazari aan hoe de taal van deze veelgelaagde beschrijving dusdanig immersief werkt dat de lezer de muziek ook zonder klank daadwerkelijk meent te horen. Deze bevinding heeft een metafictioneel pendant in de roman: Peter Els' betrachting om muziek te schrijven zonder klank, muziek dus die zelfs voor de componist fictioneel blijft.

Ook Emily Petermann buigt zich over tekstuele vormen van geluid, met name in de laat-negentiende en vroeg-twintigste-eeuwse nonsenspoëzie en nonsensverhalen van de Amerikaanse schrijvers James Riley en Carl Sandburg. Maar anders dan bij het corpus van de eerste twee artikelen zijn deze teksten wel degelijk ingebed in een context van reële oraliteit: ze zijn 'meant not only to be read silently, but are especially tailored toward either an oral performance by the poet on the stage (as in Riley's case) or a reading by parents to children (as with Sandburg).' Hun orale kwaliteit zet volgens Petermann een specifieke regionale Amerikaanse folk-literatuur voort die erg verschilt van bijvoorbeeld de Britse nonsensliteratuur. In een close reading van enkele exemplarische teksten onderzoekt Petermann de evocatie van oraliteit en vertelling en hoe de *sound* de *sense* onderuit haalt. Ook de wisselwerking tussen de geschreven tekst, traditionele genres zoals sprookjes, ballades en de zogenaamde *tall tale*, en de specifieke context van de orale performance zijn belangrijk voor de analyse.

In de bijdrage van Bart Eeckhout komt de intermediale transpositie van literatuur in muziek aan bod aan de hand van de cyclus *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens* van de Amerikaanse neo-romantische componist Ned Rorem. Stevens en Rorem behoren allebei tot de canon van hun respectieve artistieke veld maar vreemd genoeg, aldus Eeckhout, werd Rorems toonzetting van Stevens nog niet eerder onderzocht. Rorem werkte in de traditie van het kunstlied, een genre dat hij tegelijk ook transformeerde, wat volgens Eeckhout uitstekend past bij Stevens' lyrische poëtica die er eerder een is van transformatie dan van innovatie. Eeckhout onderzoekt de selectie en volgorde van de gedichten in de cyclus, en hoe de muziek de tijdelijkheid van de gedichten openrekt: de teksten duiken op en verdwijnen in een breder landschap van klanken. Bovendien zorgt de toonzetting voor een intensere zintuiglijke ervaring dan de tekstuele gedichten. Het performatieve aspect is met andere woorden veel duidelijker aanwezig in de liedcyclus dan in het stille leesproces.

Het opstel van Carolien Van Nerom ten slotte brengt ons bij de opera. Van Nerom onderzoekt narratieve kenmerken in de minimalistische opera *Les enfants terribles* van Philip Glass. Hoewel het minimalisme doorgaans niet met narrativiteit wordt geassocieerd, onderscheidt Van Nerom in deze opera enkele opvallende

narratieve strategieën. Deze worden vooral leesbaar in relatie tot de gelijknamige roman van Jean Cocteau, die aan de basis ligt van de opera. Van Nerom laat zien hoe de narrativiteit van de opera het verhaal van de roman niet zo maar overneemt maar het integendeel losmaakt van de autobiografie en privémythologie van Cocteau. Dat gebeurt door muzikale en dramaturgische elementen zoals de anticiperende muziek van de ouverture, het gebruik van een extradiegetische verteller, de ruimtelijke setting die in tegenstelling tot de roman meer ruimte laat voor de verbeelding, en muzikale motieven die een complexe karaktertekening ondersteunen.

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# HET NEDERLANDSTALIGE KLASSIEKE MUZIEKGEDICHT

## Een verkenning

Carl De Strycker

Poëziecentrum – Universiteit Gent

### Poëzie en muziek: een problematische relatie

In zijn essay ‘Muziek en literatuur’ tracht Simon Vestdijk, die behalve een toonaangevend schrijver ook een groot muziekkenner en belangrijk muziekcriticus was, de verhoudingen tussen beide kunstvormen te beschrijven. Hij noteert aan het einde:

[D]e beste verbinding van muziek en literatuur [is] waarschijnlijk het schrijven óver muziek, in prozavorm. Niet in gedichten, lijkt mij, want de dichter die muziek wil uitbeelden, vervalt te gemakkelijk in de goedkoop ‘hermeneutische’ associaties, zoals die in de muziekgeschiedenis een tijdlang gefloreerd hebben. In het gedichtje Grieg van Theun de Vries<sup>1</sup> leest men over Noordse scheren en berken en dansende kinderen, niet over Grieg zelf of zijn muziek. (Vestdijk 1966: 252)

Het doorsnee gedicht over klassieke muziek, zo observeert Vestdijk, zegt zelden iets over de componist of diens werk, maar blijft hangen in al te voor de hand liggende associaties. In het voorbeeld dat hij aanhaalt, trachten de typische clichévoorstellingen van zijn geboorteland de Noorse componist Edvard Grieg of diens muziek te evoceren, zonder succes evenwel, zo Vestdijk. Gedichten die muziek beschrijven? Vestdijk – overigens zelf de auteur van een beperkt aantal

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1. Vestdijk schrijft het essay naar aanleiding van de bloemlezing van Johan de Molenaar *Muziek en poëzie. Verzen over muziek*, waarin het genoemde gedicht opgenomen is op p. 167. Het stamt oorspronkelijk uit De Vries’ bundel *Aardgeest* (1934: 20) en luidt: ‘Lied, helder en klein als de middag / in een noorsch water bij zon, / scheren en berken schitteren / alsof de schepping begon. // Kinderen dansen, de weiden / vol sneeuw en licht liggen hoog, / blauwe visioenen / in bovenaarschen boog. // De dood legt de hand aan de lippen, / de stilte is heimlijk vervuld, / en onze droomen vergeten / hun onrust en ongeduld.’

muziekgedichten<sup>2</sup> – kent blijkbaar geen geslaagde voorbeelden. Over zijn eigen pogingen noteert hij:

Destijds [...] heb ik eens geprobeerd een gedicht te schrijven ‘op’ de Forlane uit *Le Tombeau de Couperin* van Ravel. Dit was zeker niet onmogelijk, en het bleek een hele tijd goed te gaan; maar ik kreeg toch meer en meer het gevoel mij aan een buitenissige rederijkersoefening te bezondigen, waarvan het resultaat mij, en wie niet, onbevredigd moest laten. (Vestdijk 1966: 248).

Ook gedichten die muziek proberen te imiteren, vinden geen genade in zijn oren: ‘Poëzie, die graag muziek zou willen zijn, – klankkunst, taalkunst, poësie pure, – is een twijfelachtig inhoudelijk vaak onbeduidend, moeizaam tot stand te brengen, aan allerlei toeval te ontwoekeren, en in de geschiedenis pas laat optredend fenomeen’, schrijft hij (Vestdijk 1966: 251). Literatuur en muziek schijnen in zijn visie niet heel erg goed samen te gaan, al maakt hij een uitzondering voor de romankunst:

Rest de roman over muziek, waarvan *Doctor Faustus* van Thomas Mann het magistrale voorbeeld is (overigens met sterk essayistische inslag). Hier eerst treden muziek en literatuur elkaar als gelijkwaardige deelgenoten tegemoet, zonder dat de een de ander dwingt zich te denatureren in een ‘dienende’ rol. (Vestdijk 1966: 252)

Het onderscheid dat Vestdijk tentatief maakt – poëzie over muziek enerzijds en poëzie die muziek wil zijn anderzijds – is vergelijkbaar met de tweedeling die Werner Wolf in zijn standaardwerk *The Musicalization of Fiction* zal invoeren tussen enerzijds de ‘thematization’ van muziek in literatuur (presentatie; literaire teksten over muziek; *telling*) en anderzijds de ‘imitation’ ervan (representatie; literaire teksten die specifiek muzikale elementen proberen te integreren of te imiteren; *showing*) (Wolf 1999, p. 51 e.v.). Maar ook het andere onderscheid dat Vestdijk

2. Te noemen vallen bijvoorbeeld ‘De wals van Glazounoff’ (Vestdijk 1987, dl. I: 31) uit zijn debuutbundel *Berijmd palet*, ‘La sérénade interrompue’ (Vestdijk 1987, dl. I: 97-87) uit *Vrouwendienst* of in *Thanatos aan banden* de gedichten ‘Barokcantate’ (Vestdijk 1987, dl. II: 420-421) en ‘Allegretto Innocente’ (Vestdijk 1987, dl. II: 422-423), of de nooit gebundelde kwatrijnen ‘Tsjajkovski’ en ‘Offenbach’ (Vestdijk 1987, dl. III: 346), waarover Rob Schouten opmerkt: ‘In de vier regels “Tsjajkovski” verbindt Vestdijk het oeuvre van die componist clichématig met onder andere “steppen”, “sneeuw” en een “troikaspoor”. Het gedicht over Offenbach is een fractie aardiger; diens werk wordt geassocieerd met “de bedwongen wellust onzer vaad’ren” en “circusbloed” in “tenor en heldenborst”. De al te zeer op uiterlijke gemeenplaatsen toegespitste beelden van Vestdijk krijgen een bijzondere bijmaak als men bedenkt dat beide kwatrijnen voor het eerst verschenen in Johan de Molenaars bloemlezing *Muziek en poëzie*, daar wellicht zelfs min of meer op bestelling voor werden geschreven. Ze doen me sterk denken aan het gedichtje “Grieg” van Theun de Vries, waarvan Vestdijk in “Muziek en literatuur” schreef dat het ging “over Noordse scheren en berken en dansende kinderen, niet over Grieg zelf of zijn muziek”. Zo gaan ook “Tsjajkovski” en “Offenbach” over Russische landschappen en Franse lichtzinnigheden, en in de verste verte niet over Tsjajkovski’s en Offenbachs muziek. Door juist dit soort gedichten voor De Molenaars bloemlezing te bestemmen antwoordde Vestdijk op de als het ware gestelde vraag “Muziek en poëzie”? met: Nee, dat kan niet!’ (Schouten 1988: 151). Tekenend voor zijn scepsis over het genre, is dat Vestdijk een aantal van zijn muziekgedichten zelf nooit bundelde: ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’, ‘Herinnering’ en ‘Forlane (Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*)’ (Vestdijk 1985: 7-9).



aanbrengt, namelijk tussen poëzie en proza, lijkt sterk op de werkwijze van Wolf. Diens studie is in het gedeelte met casestudies immers volledig gewijd aan de verwerking van muziek in romans, ondanks het feit dat Wolf aan het begin opmerkt over het onderwerp muziek: ‘[a]s far as literature is concerned, for the sake of elementary comparison, it should perhaps be primarily discussed with reference to the most genuinely “literary” genre: lyric poetry’ (Wolf 1999: 13). Maar dat doet hij dus niet, en ook de bekendste recente studies op het gebied van de musico-literaire relaties hebben prozateksten tot onderwerp. Veelzeggend in dit opzicht is dat het recente *Handbuch Literatur & Musik* (Gess en Honold 2017) wel meerdere artikelen over muziek in prozaliteratuur bevat, maar geen enkele bijdrage over muziekgedichten. Iets vergelijkbaars geldt voor de studie van klassieke muziek in de Nederlandse literatuur, waar met betrekking tot proza al redelijk uitgebreid onderzoek is verricht, maar de analyse van muziek in moderne poëzie eigenlijk beperkt blijft.

Die bevindingen met betrekking tot klassieke muziek en poëzie(studie) roepen een aantal vragen op, met als belangrijkste: is, zoals Vestdijk meent, proza inderdaad een beter geschikt genre voor de literaire verwerking van muziek dan poëzie? Dat is uiteraard een moeilijk te beslechten kwestie, die hier zeker geen antwoord zal krijgen. Wel moet het mogelijk zijn om een aantal eigenschappen van muziekgedichten in kaart te brengen die te koppelen zijn aan het in lyriek specifieke gebruik van muziek. De vraag luidt dan: welke soorten muziekgedichten bestaan er en wat zijn mogelijke functies? Om die vraag te beantwoorden, wil ik in wat volgt een aanzet geven voor een systematisering van de verschillende soorten muziekgedichten. Die onderneming roept vervolgens een theoretisch-methodologische vraag op, namelijk of het door Wolf voor romananalyse ontwikkelde en in de literatuurwetenschap gangbare instrumentarium<sup>3</sup> wel volledig toepasbaar is op poëzie. Is de tweedeling van Wolf (en Vestdijk) niet te grofmazig en moet er, rekening houdend met de specifieke genrekenmerken van lyrische poëzie, zoals de relatieve korthed van gedichten of de uitdrukking van een subjectieve gemoedstoestand, geen verfijning aangebracht worden waarmee een aantal muziekgedichten beschreven kan worden dat noch over muziek gaat noch muziek tracht te imiteren?

## Muziekgedichten: een voorstel tot systematisering

Om tot een systematisering te komen heb ik een vrij uitgebreid corpus twintigste- en eenentwintigste-eeuwse muziekgedichten bestudeerd met verzen die ik vond in volgende bloemlezingen van Nederlandstalige muziekgedichten: *Twee muzen*

3. In het *Handbuch Literatur und Musik* (Gess en Honold 2017) wordt de door hem ontwikkelde systematisering van de verschijningsvormen van muziek in literatuur als uitgangspunt genomen onder de kopjes ‘Musik in Literatur: *Telling*’ en ‘Musik in Literatur: *Showing*’.

(Engelman en Paap 1955), *Muziek en poëzie* (De Molenaar 1959), *De vier jaargetijden. Een keuze uit poëzie over klassieke muziek* (Overbeeke 1991b), *Meulenhoffs dagkalender 1997 Nederlandse poëzie. Thema: poëzie & muziek* (Warren 1996), *Het muzikaalste gedicht. De mooiste gedichten over muziek uit Nederland en Vlaanderen* (Anoniem 2006) en *Boem paukeslag! De mooiste muziekgedichten* (Van Zuiden 2011). Het gaat hier om bloemlezingen waarin expliciet aan muziek refererende gedichten zijn opgenomen en dus niet – zoals een titel als *Het muzikaalste gedicht* lijkt te suggereren – ook gedichten die zelf klankmatig muziek benaderen.<sup>4</sup> Dit corpus heb ik aangevuld met een aantal recente bundels die muziekgedichten bevatten, maar die de bloemlezingen vooralsnog niet gehaald hebben, en met een aantal bundels die volledig of grotendeels gewijd zijn aan klassieke muziek en waarvan niet alle gedichten in de genoemde bloemlezingen zijn opgenomen. In het totaal las ik om en bij de 600 muziekgedichten, waarbij ik mij beperkt heb tot gedichten van na 1900 die refereren aan klassieke muziek.<sup>5</sup> In deze bijdrage zullen natuurlijk maar een paar van die gedichten aangehaald worden en zal er slechts op enkele dieper ingegaan kunnen worden. Uiteraard bestaat er ook op jazz geïnspireerde poëzie en zijn er zelfs popmuziekgedichten. De concentratie op kunstmuziek is ingegeven vanuit een voorzichtigheid die rekening wil houden met de mogelijkheid dat andere muziekgenres eventueel anders functioneren in literatuur. Een vergelijking tussen klassieke muziekgedichten en andere muziekgedichten zal moeten uitmaken of de hier ontworpen systematisering mutatis mutandis ook geldig kan zijn voor de literaire verwerking van andere dan kunstmuziek.

Met de beperking tot poëzie na 1900 wordt de cesuur gelegd na Guido Gezelle en de dichters die behoorden tot de Beweging van Tachtig – dichters die een bijzondere fascinatie hadden voor de muzikaliteit van de poëzie. Die problematiek valt buiten de focus van dit onderzoek en verdient afzonderlijke studie. Hier wordt de aandacht gericht op moderne en hedendaagse poëzie die expliciet aan muziek refereert, waarbij ook geen onderscheid gemaakt wordt tussen poëzie die door dichtende musici (Anna Enquist, Rozalie Hirs, Samuel Vriezen, Peter Ghysaert, Jana Arns of dichters-musicologen zoals Vrouwkje Tuinman) is geschreven en dichters die geen muziekopleiding hebben genoten. Mogelijk zou een dergelijke vergelijking nuanceren in de hier voorgestelde systematisering kunnen aanbrengen.

Op basis van de bestaande theorievorming wil ik in eerste instantie twee assen onderscheiden en die vervolgens met elkaar combineren. Die vallen samen met het onderscheid tussen *telling* en *showing*, en ze beschrijven het thematische aspect van het gedicht enerzijds en het compositorische anderzijds. Ik ga daarvoor uit

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4. De Molenaar schrijft in zijn inleiding: 'Deze verzameling bevat intussen vrijwel uitsluitend verzen, waaruit een directe beïnvloeding der muziek blijkt, een onmiddellijke reflex dus op een bepaald muzikaal verschijnsel.' (De Molenaar 1959: 5) – dat selectie criterium geldt voor alle hier geraadpleegde bloemlezingen.
  5. *Twee muzen* en *Muziek en poëzie* bevatten ook veel gedichten van voor 1900 en in *Het muzikaalste gedicht* en in *Meulenhoffs dagkalender 1997 Nederlandse poëzie. Thema: poëzie & muziek* zijn ook veel gedichten over jazz- en popmuziek of -musici opgenomen, die ik dus buiten beschouwing heb gelaten.

van de wijze waarop Winfried Eckel het veld ‘lyriek en muziek’ in kaart heeft gebracht. Allereerst betreft hij de bekende driedeling die Steven Paul Scher aanbrengt (Scher 1984: 10 e.v.) in de verhouding tussen literatuur en muziek op poëzie. Ten eerste noemt hij ‘Musik in der Lyrik’ waaronder het onderzoek valt naar ‘liedhaften und instrumental-musikalischen Formen und Strukturen, von Wortmusik sowie Musikthematierungen’, vervolgens ‘Musik und Lyrik’ waaronder alle mogelijke combinaties van beide media vallen, zoals het Lied, maar ook opera, en ten slotte ‘Lyrik in der Musik’ waaronder programmamuziek valt, maar ook de ‘Verwendung von Lyrik als musikalisches Material’ (Eckel 2011: 184). Het is uiteraard de eerste relatie tussen muziek en poëzie die in deze bijdrage centraal staat. Bij Eckel vallen daaronder zowel thematisering als muzikale imitatie (in de vorm van woordmuziek of structuurparallellen). Die categorieën wil ik enerzijds uit elkaar trekken en anderzijds nauwkeuriger beschrijven.

In haar overzicht van de mogelijke verschijningsvormen van de thematisering van muziek in literatuur noemt Christine Lubkoll (Lubkoll 2017: 81-89) volgende mogelijkheden:

- ♦ musici in muziek, waarbij een onderscheid wordt gemaakt tussen a) componisten, en b) uitvoerders<sup>6</sup>
- ♦ ‘verbal music’: beschrijvingen van reële of fictieve muziekstukken
- ♦ het gebruik van notencitaten, en ik wil daaraan toevoegen: tekstcitaten uit beroemde vocale muziek

Het gebruik van muziek op het niveau van het onderwerp van het gedicht kan dus gaan van het noemen van een naam van een muzikant of muziekstuk, over de beschrijving en zelfs uitvoerige beschrijving ervan (ekphrasis) tot het aanwezig stellen van een muziekstuk door middel van een citaat. Je zou daar nog een categorie aan kunnen toevoegen: gedichten over muziekinstrumenten.<sup>7</sup> Lubkoll noemt ook nog ‘Ästhetische Reflexionen und poetologische Implikationen’ (Lubkoll 2017: 89-91), maar dat is naar mijn oordeel geen verschijningsvorm van muziek in literatuur, maar eerder een – niet onbelangrijke – mogelijke functie van de intermediale verwijzing.

Deze referenties aan muziek op het inhoudelijke vlak kunnen al dan niet gecombineerd worden met de mogelijke pogingen van literaire teksten om muziek te imiteren: het gedicht kan klinken als muziek (lyriek bezit immers de mogelijkheid ‘einer Annäherung an Musik durch gezielte Ausgestaltung ihrer eigenen akustischen Dimension, der Klangqualitäten des Sprachmaterials’ (Eckel 2011: 183)) of kan structuurparallellen vertonen met bepaalde muziekstukken:

6. Zij onderscheidt nog tussen instrumentalisten en zangers omdat zangers in romans typische eigenschappen krijgen toebedeeld (Lubkoll 2017: 83-84). Iets dergelijks heb ik met betrekking tot mijn corpus niet geobserveerd en om die reden houd ik dit onderscheid hier dan ook niet aan.

7. Overigens vreemd dat ze dat met betrekking tot proza niet doet. Er zijn ook voorbeelden van romans over instrumenten, zoals bijvoorbeeld *Mara* (2003) van Wolf Wondratschek, waarin een cello de verteller is en haar levensverhaal doet.

het gaat dan om de ‘Übernahme bestimmter instrumentalmusikalischer Form- und Strukturschemata wie z. B. Sonate, Fuge, Rondo, Variation’ (Eckel 2011: 183). Gess spreekt in zulke gevallen van ‘Medientransformation’: ‘der literarische Text konstruiert sich im Bezug auf das andere Medium, indem er dieses bzw. eines seiner zentralen Charakteristika oder Verfahren übernimmt und zugleich transformiert.’ (Gess 2010: 142-143). Die laatste categorie, gedichten waarin een bepaald muziekstuk naar poëzie wordt omgezet en dus een tekstversie krijgt in de vorm van een gedicht, zou je kunnen beschouwen als tegenhanger van het Lied (waarin een gedicht een muzikaal pendant krijgt).<sup>8</sup>

Dat levert volgend schema op:

Inhoudelijke verschijningsvorm van muziek in het gedicht	Compositorische verwerking van muziek in het gedicht
(1) Over componisten	(A) Klankimitatie
(2) Over uitvoerders	(B) Structuurparallellen
(3) Over muziekinstrumenten	
(4) Over muziekstukken	
(5) Citaten uit muziekstukken	

Van elk van deze categorieën zal ik een voorbeeld bespreken, en ook van een aantal mogelijke combinaties. De gedichten zijn geselecteerd als illustratiemateriaal voor de rubricering op basis van hun exemplarische karakter en met het oog op een zo helder mogelijke beschrijving van de systematisering die ik hier opstel, maar kunnen zonder twijfel vervangen worden door andere voorbeelden.

(1) Gedichten over componisten zijn talrijk in het corpus. Ze hebben vaak als titel de naam van de toondichter en gaan niet zelden in op diens biografie. Dat geldt bijvoorbeeld voor het door Vestdijk genoemde ‘Grieg’ van Theun de Vries, waarin verwezen wordt naar typische elementen uit het geboorteland van de beschreven componist, en voor de gedichten over Tsjajkovski en Offenbach van Vestdijk zelf (zie noot 2). Als voorbeeld haal ik ‘Dmitri Shostakovich’ van Peter Ghyssaert – zelf naast dichter ook een professioneel violist – uit diens bundel *Cameo* (Ghyssaert 1993, p. 18) aan:

8. Al gaat de vergelijking waarschijnlijk niet honderd procent op. Hoewel je prima kan betogen dat het Lied een omzetting van het gedicht naar muziek vormt, is er uiteraard geen sprake van een loutere transformatie, maar eerder van een mediacombinatie: tekst en muziek zijn in het Lied tegelijk aanwezig. Bij gedichten die een muziekstuk in tekst omzetten is de muziek als dusdanig afwezig en heb je wel te maken met een – in het vocabularium van Rajewski – mediatransfer of dus van een mediatransformatie (Gess). Dat is van belang voor het probleemcomplex van de iconiciteit van muziek, waarbij het in het Lied voor de hand ligt om de gebeurtenissen in de muziek te associëren met de inhoud van de tekst. In de omgekeerde richting, waarbij muziek een poëtisch pendant krijgt, is iconiciteit, of referentialiteit door de aard van het medium muziek (met name de grote abstractiegraad ervan) veel problematischer.

Dmitri Shostakovich

Wandelaar in overheidsgebouwen,  
 altijd naar de juiste deur op zoek  
 en naar een uitgang om de laatste hoek  
 maar altijd in verkeerde gangen, grauwe.  
 Door de kleine ramen schijnt het lauwe  
 licht en neemt de stofjes op zijn doek,  
 die doelloos zwerven naar een nieuwe hoek  
 maar vrij van angsten zijn en valt vertrouwen.  
 Ongestoord duurt stilte: een seizoen  
 waarin het licht zijn weg is kwijtgeraakt  
 en waar het waaien zich heeft neergelegd;  
 angst blijft één gedachte overdoen  
 als formuleren, telkens opgemaakt  
 en in een bodemloze bak gelegd.

Dit gedicht alludeert duidelijk op de problematische relatie die de Russische componist Sjostakovitsj had met de Sovjetoverheid. Het toont hem wanneer hij weer maar eens op het matje wordt geroepen en onderworpen wordt aan bureaucratische pesterijen. Het gedicht beschrijft hoe hij voortdurend vreest voor zijn leven. De bundel van Ghysaert bevat meerdere van dit soort componistengedichten (over Domenico Scarlatti, Joseph Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Ernest Chausson, Alexander Borodin, Jean Sibelius en Sergej Rachmaninov), net zoals de bundel *Achtendertig componisten* van Jozef Eyckmans die volledig uit ‘componistenportretten’ bestaat (Eyckmans 1980), maar er bestaan ook bundels die geheel gewijd zijn aan een bepaalde componist, zoals de bundels *Eine kleine Nachtmusik. Mozart poëtisch* (1991) en *Schubertiade. Franz Schubert poëtisch* (1997) van Hans Bouma, Herlinda Vekemans’ *Buiging*, over Sjostakovitsj, of haar *Kwartet voor het einde van de tijd*, waarin Olivier Messiaen het onderwerp vormt (Vekemans 2006 en 2015). In deze bundels speelt voornamelijk de biografie van de componisten een rol, maar ze bevatten ook gedichten die bepaalde muziekstukken als uitgangspunt nemen of trachten te evoceren en die dus onder een andere categorie dan (1) vallen.

(2) Naast de componist is ook meerdere keren een uitvoerder het onderwerp van muziekgedichten (met een opvallende voorliefde voor pianisten). In ‘Der Hirt auf den Felsen’ van Herman de Coninck (in Van Zuiden 2011: 145) gaat het over Alfred Brendel, ‘András Schiff’ heet een gedicht van Hans Bouma (Bouma 1997: 36), in zijn bundel *Zwembad de verbeelding* wijdt Tom Van de Voorde gedichten aan Vladimir Horowitz, Sviatoslav Richter, Tatiana Nikolayeva, Youri Egorov en Daniil Trifonov (Van de Voorde 2017). Frans Pointls ‘Ik heb Horowitz lief’ (in Van Zuiden 2011: 150-151) citeer ik hier volledig:

Ik heb Horowitz lief  
 hoe hij een feest aanricht  
 mij uit dit krot tilt  
 ik huil en lach  
 hoeft er zo weinig voor te doen  
 alleen een plaat  
 op mijn oude stereogrammofoon  
 en ik ben in de zaal op de hoes  
 Horowitz in Moscow  
 kijk, hier zit ik  
 het is zondag 20 april 1986  
 vier uur in de middag, Moskou-tijd

vanaf de hoes kijkt hij me aan  
 spottend beminnelijk bemoedigend  
 was hij maar mijn vader  
 als ik niet kan slapen  
 speelt hij mijn lievelingsetude  
 van Skriabin  
 als ik triest ben  
 Schuberts Marche Militaire  
 als ik kwaad ben  
 Schumanns Kinderszenen

als we uitgaan  
 mag ik vlinderdas en pochet  
 uit zijn kast kiezen  
 ik weer zijn bewonderaars af  
 mijn vader is moe  
 hij kan niet steeds  
 zijn handtekening zetten

In dit gedicht spreekt de ik-figuur zijn bewondering, ja zelfs zijn liefde uit voor de beroemde Russische pianist. Hem beluisteren is 'een feest', zijn spel op de opname heeft de kracht om je uit je omgeving weg te voeren en de illusie te wekken dat je op het moment zelf aanwezig bent bij de registratie van de uitvoering. In de tweede en derde strofe verbeeldt de ik zich dat Horowitz zijn vader is: met muziek weet die elke emotie van de ik te pareren; in ruil voor die emotionele betrokkenheid treedt de ik in de derde strofe op als een soort manager die al te opdringerige fans afhoudt. Het gedicht geeft daarmee zowel een indruk van het muzikale kunnen van Horowitz als van zijn populariteit.

(3) Over muziekinstrumenten wordt ook gedicht. Te denken valt aan 'De fluit' van Ida Gerhardt (in De Molenaar 1959: 161-162), 'Oud klavier' van Gerard den

Brabander (in De Molenaar 1959: 152) en vele gedichten over het orgel. Niet zelden leidt dit tot beschrijvingen van het instrument of zijn kracht zoals bijvoorbeeld in ‘Orgelkast’ van Gery Helderberg (in De Molenaar 1959: 117), waarvan de eerste strofe luidt: ‘Blaast uw bolle kaken vol, / engelen en bazuinen, / vult de pijpen, hoog en hol, / wiegt op kroon en kruinen!’. Hier worden de engeltjes die op bazuinen blazen, en die de typische versiering van het orgel vormen, toegesproken. Zij zijn een metafoor voor de klank van het orgel, en zo begrijpt de dichter hen ook: zij moeten goed blazen zodat de pijpen van het orgel, die zij uitbeelden, veel geluid kunnen voortbrengen.

(4) Gedichten die muziekstukken tot onderwerp hebben, zijn niet minder talrijk dan gedichten die over muzikanten gaan; alleen is ‘beschrijving van muziek’ waarschijnlijk niet altijd de meest adequate aanduiding voor wat er in dit soort muziekgedichten gebeurt. Muziek laat zich voornamelijk in technische termen beschrijven en dat is uiteraard niet wat dichters doen. Zij trachten het muziekstuk te vatten met behulp van metaforen en tropen. Zo beschrijft Martien J. G. de Jong Frédéric Chopins ‘Polonaise nr. 6’ (in Van Zuiden 2011: 122) in fruittermen, tracht Anne Schipper in ‘Mondschein-sonate’ deze beroemde pianosonate van Beethoven te vatten in nachtbeelden (in Van Zuiden 2011: 18-19), en is het gedicht ‘Canto Ostinato’ van Theo Olthuis (in Van Zuiden 2011: 156) de uitbeelding met behulp van ruimtelijke begrippen van het gelijknamige muziekstuk van Simeon ten Holt:

#### Canto Ostinato


Even lijkt het op  
gevangenis,  
maar meegevoerd langs  
wenteltrappen en  
smalle luistergangen,  
ligt daar een zee van  
tijd en ruimte,  
waarin niets echt  
hoeft en wellicht alles  
wat zou kunnen  
tussen vier klavieren  
op golfslag  
simpelweg gebeurt.

De compositie van Ten Holt wordt tot de minimal music gerekend, ‘muziek waarin korte motieven gedurende vaak lange tijd herhaald en geleidelijk gevarieerd worden in een simpel harmonisch idioom’ (Reichenfeld 2003: 209). Op de dichter komt ze in eerste instantie over als beklemmend (wat betrekking heeft op de steeds herhaalde motieven, maar ook op de grote lengte van de compositie),

maar gaandeweg ervaart hij via ‘wenteltrappen’ en ‘luistergangen’, beelden voor de wijze waarop de verschillende variaties van het motief in elkaar overlopen, precies het omgekeerde, namelijk een gevoel van grenzeloosheid (‘een zee van / tijd en ruimte, / waarin niets echt / hoeft’).

(5) Het overnemen van muzieknoden lijkt in proza vaker voor te komen dan in poëzie. Gess noemt Arthur Schitzlers *Fräulein Else*, Lubkoll bespreekt dergelijke passages uit *Malina* van Ingeborg Bachmann. In het door mij onderzochte corpus heb ik slechts drie voorbeelden gevonden van gedichten die muziek ‘citeren’. Willem van Toorn neemt een notenbalkje met het BACH-thema (si mol = B, la = A, do = C, si hersteld = H) uit *Die Kunst der Fuge* op in zijn gedicht ‘Johann Sebastian Bach, Die Kunst der Fuge’ (in Anoniem: 27):

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Niet afgekomen, uw laatste fuga. Net  
 nog wel uw eigen naam hier neergeschreven  
 als vierde thema: , bach.  
 Alsof u zeggen wou: maak zelf maar af  
 als je tot hieraan toe bent bijgebleven.

---

In zijn bundel *Wij zagen ons in een kleine groep mensen veranderen* reproduceert Tonnu Oosterhoff voorafgaand aan een lang gedicht de partituur van een inventie van Bach (BWV 733) met de instructie ‘(hoor dit eerst)’, wat mogelijk gemaakt wordt dankzij de bijgeleverde cd-rom die onder andere de muziek bevat. Dat gedicht volgt qua ritmiek grosso modo de inventie (wat dan weer een structuurparallel is, categorie B). In ‘Aan het reizen bij verdriet’ (in Van Zuiden 2011: 20) citeert Jane Leusink dan weer verzen uit Schuberts *Winterreise*. Strikt genomen is dit een vorm van intertekstualiteit met de gedichten van Wilhelm Müller waarop Schubert zijn liedcyclus schreef, maar uiteraard roept de tekst in dit geval – omdat hij beroemd geworden is dankzij de muziek – ook de muziek in gedachten.

Tot hiertoe heb ik gedichten behandeld die voornamelijk op het thematische vlak aan de slag gaan met muziek – ik sluit niet uit dat nadere beschouwing ook formele parallellen zou kunnen opleveren. In wat volgt, wil ik voorbeelden geven van gedichten die op compositorisch niveau muziek integreren, hetzij door (A) klanknabootsing hetzij via (B) het overnemen van muzikale vorm- of structuurkenmerken.

(A) Gedichten die louter klankimitaties van muziek zijn en er dus niet inhoudelijk naar verwijzen, zijn eerder zeldzaam. Het voorbeeld dat het dichtste in de buurt



komt – maar niet geheel zuiver is omdat er in de tekst muziekinstrumenten worden genoemd, wat een thematische verwijzing is – is ‘Boere-charleston’ van Paul van Ostaijen (in Engelman en Paap 1955: 45) waarin de herhalingen op woord- en klankniveau (alliteratie, assonantie en acconsonantie) (het blazen op) koperblazers evoceren: ‘Tulpebollen bolle tulpen tulpetuilen / rozetuilen / boererozen boerewangen boerelongen / boerelongen ballen wangen / wangen ballen bekkens / ballen bolle bekkens / bugel en basson – o hop!’ Van het beroemdste klankgedicht uit de Nederlandse literatuur, ‘Oote’ van Jan Hanlo, is niet duidelijk welke muziek het zou imiteren en het wordt dan ook in geen enkele van de geraadpleegde muziekbloemlezingen, die enkel poëzie selecteren die expliciet naar muziek verwijst, opgenomen. Dat moet tot de conclusie leiden dat deze categorie waarschijnlijk niet of slechts heel uitzonderlijk als op zichzelf staand voorkomt, maar voornamelijk te vinden is in combinatie met thematische verwijzingen.

(B) Het zoeken naar structuurparallellen tussen tekst en muziek wordt in het onderzoek naar muziek in prozateksten veelvuldig en vruchtbaar beoefend, maar er zijn ook gedichten die vormkenmerken van muziek overnemen, met als beroemdste voorbeeld de ‘Todesfuge’ van Paul Celan. Ook in de Nederlandse poëzie zijn er dergelijke gedichten, zoals het lange gedicht ‘Affirmaties’ van Mustafa Stitou, waarin de ik-figuur zich afzet tegen zijn roots. Hij probeert er zich van te overtuigen dat zijn (westerse) levenswijze niet slechter is dan deze die hem door zijn (islamitische) ouders en leraren werd voorgeschreven. Om dat verhaal te vertellen wordt gebruik gemaakt van een zelfde soort fugatisch principe als in Celans gedicht.<sup>9</sup> Of er is de reeks van vijf gedichten ‘Die Kunst der Fuge’ van Rutger Kopland, waarbij in de beschrijving van een natuurtafereel door herhaling en variatie van dezelfde woorden en motieven een fugatisch effect ontstaat (Kopland 2006: 273-277). Opvallend bij deze categorie is dat het telkens gaat om langere gedichten of een reeks van gedichten – het lijkt erop dat je voor het evoceren van muzikale principes toch wat meer tekst nodig hebt dan de lengte van het doorsnee lyrische gedicht. Gedichten die de opbouw van een muziekstuk of het structuurschema ervan reflecteren, komen dan ook weinig voor, al zijn er bepaalde muzikale genres – veelal deze die korte stukken benoemen: de berceuse, de nocturne, het scherzo – die ook wel eens dienst doen als titel van gedichten. Zo bijvoorbeeld ‘Nocturne’ van Gabriel Smit (in De Molenaar 1959: 170):

Nocturne

Chopin

Brekende bloesems in een stillen wind,  
vrede van dorpen in den avond, waar verlaten

9. Elders heb ik dit gedicht beschreven als een structurele imitatie van de ‘Todesfuge’ (zie De Strycker 2012: 139-140).

een zilveren fluit van God wil praten  
en met een glimlach van het bloed begint.

Ik kan niet langer achterblijven, zweven  
gaan nacht en duisternis om mij...  
muziek, muziek, een engel gaat voorbij,  
zijn vleugelslag beroert mijn voorhoofd even  
en wenkt... een licht... God, gaat ook dit voorbij?

De setting is een avondlijk dorp in de lente waar de nacht valt. De natuur maakt een soort muziek die de ik-figuur in aanraking brengt met God. Wat hier overgenomen wordt van de nocturne – die als muziekgenre gekenmerkt wordt door ‘een zangerige pianoklank, fluisterzachte pianissimi en een niet functioneel gebruik van akkoorden als klankkleur’ – is vooral de ‘belangstelling voor nachtelijke sferen, de droom en het onderbewuste’ (Reichenfeld 2003: 224). Iets soortgelijks valt te zeggen over de ‘Nocturne’ van Herman Van den Bergh of die van H. L. Prenen (in Engelman en Paap 1955: 47 resp. 62).

Uiteraard kunnen inhoudelijke en compositorische verwijzingen naar muziek gecombineerd worden. Zo is het bekende ‘Vera Janacopoulos’ van Jan Engelman (in Overbeeke 1991b: 79), dat als aanduiding ‘Cantilene’ (wat ‘zangerige melodie’ betekent) meekreeg, een gedicht over een beroemde sopraan (dus categorie (2)) in de vorm van een imitatie van muziek (categorie (A)). Dankzij klankeffecten wordt de zang geëvoceerd. Bovendien lijkt het er in dit gedicht op dat de tekst nog weinig referentiële betekenis heeft en voornamelijk door (klank-)associatie tot stand komt zodat de vorm primeert op de inhoud en er een vorm van poësie pure nagestreefd wordt. Het gedicht ‘wintersonate (zonder altviool en piano)’ van Ramsey Nasr beschrijft dan weer het levensverhaal van Sjostakovitsj aan de hand van de structuur van diens Altvioolsonate opus 147 (zie De Strycker 2016). In dit geval hebben we te maken met een combinatie van de categorieën 1 en B.

## Telling, showing en feeling

Met behulp van deze systematisering kunnen veel muziekgedichten uit het corpus ingedeeld worden, maar niet allemaal. Ik dien nog een thematische categorie toe te voegen die specifiek in poëzie vaker opduikt: de beschrijving van de concert- of muziekervaring. John Greening merkt in zijn bloemlezing muziekgedichten *Accompanied Voices* op, en dat is ook wat ik heb kunnen vaststellen, dat ‘many of the contemporary poems [about classical music] are responses to live concerts or private performances.’ (Greening 2015: xv). Dat geldt bijvoorbeeld voor ‘Moment musical’ van Hans Warren (in Van Zuiden 2011: 152-153), waarin een optreden van Horowitz wordt beschreven, of voor ‘Concert’ van Anton Ent (in Van Zuiden 2011: 154), dat de uitwerking van een vioolrecital op de ik-figuur

beschrijft. Ik wil deze categorie illustreren aan de hand van ‘Children’s Corner van Debussy’ van Hanny Michaelis (in Overbeeke 1991b: 73):

#### Children’s Corner van Debussy

Twee handen over de ivoeren  
toetsen scheppen hun eigen romantiek...  
Een tedere, meeslepende muziek  
wordt als een glimlach, als een droom geboren.  
In deze droom voel ik mijn hart ontwaken,  
verwonderd, door ontroering overmand.  
Voor ik het weet, heb ik mij laten schaken  
door Debussy. – Terug in kinderland,  
waar poppen serenades komen brengen,  
waar kleine herders slapen, bloemomkrans,  
en sneeuw verliefd voorbij de vensters danst,  
schijnt humor zich met weemoed te vermengen.  
Dan – met een slag – valt de piano dicht,  
en in het nuchtere namiddaglicht  
voel ik me onherroepelijk volwassen.

Je zou kunnen zeggen dat dit een gedicht is over een muziekstuk (categorie (4)) en dat is het getuige de titel ook, maar het is meer. Het beschrijft minder de muziek zelf dan de ervaring die deze oproept. Het gedicht vangt aan met de pianist die het stuk begint te spelen (vs. 1-2). Verzen 3 en 4 beschrijven het resultaat van het spel: ‘meeslepende muziek’, waarbij het adjectief al het effect van de muziek aanduidt en vooruitwijst naar wat in het vervolg van het gedicht zal gebeuren: de klanken nemen de ik-figuur letterlijk mee naar elders, naar vroeger. In de volgende twee verzen wordt de ik-figuur emotioneel gegrepen door de muziek en in het daaropvolgende anderhalve vers voert de muziek de ik mee naar de kindertijd. Vanaf het gedachtestreepje, dat hier de aanvang van een herinnering markeert, tot en met vers 11, ziet de ik taferelen uit zijn of haar jeugd die bepaald worden door de muziek. Vers 9 is een referentie aan het derde stukje uit het genoemde boek van Debussy, ‘Serenade of the Doll’; vers 11 verwijst naar het volgende stuk, ‘The Snow is Dancing’; vers 8a noemt ‘The Little Shepard’, het vijfde stuk uit Debussy’s reeks.<sup>10</sup> Wanneer de muziek stopt en de piano dichtvalt (het is dus ook een geluidseffect dat ervoor zorgt dat er een einde komt aan de dagdroom), ontwaakt de ik uit zijn of haar gedachten en is hij of zij opnieuw in het nu. Daarmee is dit een gedicht dat gaat over waar muziek toe in staat is: het opwekken van herinneringen en gevoelens. De muziek van Debussy, die in ‘Children’s Corner’ de uitdrukking wil zijn van kindertafereltjes, genereert bij de toehoorder inderdaad beelden uit de kindertijd, maar wel hele particuliere. Dit is

10. Je zou kunnen stellen dat het gedicht hier dus muziek ‘citeert’, zoals ik dat beschreven heb in categorie 5.

dus minder een gedicht over de muziek van Debussy waarnaar verwezen wordt dan een vers over de impact van de muziek op het subject.

Is het gedicht van Michaelis een beschrijving van het effect dat muziek kan hebben, dan hebben we in het gedicht ‘Zon’ uit de reeks ‘Schumaniana’ van Erik Menkveld (Menkveld 2016: 199) met nog wat anders te maken:

Zon

Zon

(wat een wemelen wat een wemelen)

valt in de kristallen botervloot

(wat een wemelen in de planten

blaadjes en schaduwen

wat een wemelen wat een wemelen)

op tafel in de serre vanmorgen

(wat een weelderig wemelen)

en één ogenblik lijkt de glans ook weer opgewekt

in vork, mes, eierdop – wat er gedekt is

voor wie van allemaal tot hier overbleef om dit

nu te zien: dit levendig licht van

(o wemelen wemelen)

porselein, kind nog zijn,

(niet zo kietelen)

(niet zo kietelen)

opstaan,

(niet zo kietelen)

zomer.

*(Exercises (Beethoven-Etüden) no. 1 in a)*

De muzikreferentie zet, samen met de typografie van het gedicht, die een soort ritme of muzikale structuur suggereert, de lezer op het spoor van een intermediale link. Dit leidt ertoe dat je in eerste instantie tracht om de tekst te koppelen aan de genoemde muziek, maar die poging moet hier gestaakt worden met de conclusie dat het gedicht weinig of geen inhoudelijke of formele overeenkomsten vertoont met het onder het gedicht genoemde stuk van Robert Schumann. Dat is de eerste van diens zogenaamde Beethoven-Etüden, variaties voor piano op het bekende ‘largo’ uit Beethovens zevende symfonie. In een boek waarin de auteur brieven schrijft aan literaire en muzikale helden gaat Menkveld in op zijn luisterervaring bij dit stuk. In zijn brief aan Schumann legt hij uit wat hij ‘zag’ toen hij deze muziek hoorde:

Weet je wat een serre is? Zo'n glazen uitbouw aan een deftig ouderwets huis. De serre die ik hoorde ligt aan de achterkant van een statige, oude villa. Het is er nog vroeg, de hele tuin baadt in een stralend, pril-zomers ochtendlicht. En het heeft net geregend – uit de daktogen

drupt het nog na. Alles glinstert: de twijgen en het frisse groen aan de bomen en struiken buiten, de druppels op de ruiten van de serre, de klimop, het halfvolle glas en de karaf met sinaasappelsap, de eierdop, het kristallen zoutvaatje, het bestek rond het ontbijt voor één persoon dat op tafel klaar staat. Wemelen is het woord, het licht wemelt, over het damast, in het kristal, op de wanden, in de blaadjes van de planten in en buiten de serre. Alsof het weerspiegeld wordt in rimpelend water, wat misschien wel zo is. Zie je het? Een schitterend wemelen! En plotseling rennen er langvervlogen kinderen door de serre die elkaar giechelend en gillend achterna zitten. Allemaal tegelijk proberen ze op die ene stoel bij het porseleinen eierlepelte te gaan zitten en elkaar weg te kietelen. Niet zo kietelen! Niet zo kietelen! En dan zijn ze weer verdwenen, en is er alleen nog het lichtgewemel in die fonkelende serre waar het ontbijt voor één persoon gedekt staat. (Menkveld 2006: 79-80)

Dit is de prozaversie van het gedicht 'Zon', dat met behulp van deze tekst nu geduid kan worden als de puur particuliere luisterervaring van de dichter; de muziekreferentie moet dan begrepen worden als de aanleiding voor het gedicht. Zich bewust van het feit dat zijn gedicht zich moeilijk laat betrekken op de genoemde muziek, schrijft Menkveld aan Schumann: 'Zoals u uw eigen pianostukje niet in mijn serre-verhaaltje kunt herkennen. Het heeft feitelijk niets met uw muziek te maken, al komt het er dan min of meer uit voort.' (Menkveld 2016: 81).

Uiteraard kunnen we slechts heel zelden beschikken over de neerslag van de luisterervaring van een dichter om die vervolgens met zijn muziekgedicht te vergelijken en dan vast te stellen dat het gedicht, zoals in het geval van Menkveld, de poëtische neerslag daarvan is. Er mag evenwel aangenomen worden dat het procedé, zoals dat bij Menkveld werkzaam is, veelvuldig aan te treffen is in muziekgedichten: een particuliere luisterervaring leidt tot de beschrijving van een tafereel dat door de lezer noch inhoudelijk noch formeel in verband gebracht kan worden met het muziekstuk of de componist waaraan gerefereerd wordt. De muziek vormt weliswaar de aanleiding voor het gedicht, en eventueel is er een overeenkomst vast te stellen in de sfeer – maar dat is uiteraard een erg subjectief begrip – van het gedicht en de muziek waarop het is gebaseerd, maar zo'n gedicht is voornamelijk de neerslag van een persoonlijke associatie, herinnering of muziekervaring naar aanleiding van het genoemde muziekstuk of de genoemde componist. Waar we hier eigenlijk mee te maken hebben, is een tendens tot subjectivering van de tekst in zijn verhouding tot de muziek. Natuurlijk zal de intermediale referentie de lezer altijd minstens uitnodigen tot het leggen van een verband, maar aangezien muziek niet noodzakelijk (allo)referentieel is, zal het moeilijk zijn om bijvoorbeeld de zon, de serre, het wemelen of het kietelen in Menkvelds gedicht aan te duiden in de partituur, al wil ik dat niet bij voorbaat uitsluiten.

Die observatie noopt tot het toevoegen van een manier waarop muziek een rol kan spelen in poëzie. Naast de thematisering op het vlak van de inhoud (*telling*) en de imitatie op het vlak van de vorm (*showing*), zou een categorie als *feeling* ingevoerd kunnen worden. Het gaat in dit geval dan niet om gedichten over

muziek of gedichten die muziek trachten te worden, maar om gedichten naar aanleiding van muziek. De muziek vormt het vertrekpunt voor een lyrische uiting waarin muziek gethematiseerd noch geïmiteerd wordt. Daarbij moet natuurlijk de vraag gesteld worden naar de hermeneutische kracht van dergelijke categorie. Het lijkt er misschien op dat het een restcategorie is waarin gedichten kunnen worden ondergebracht waarin de link van de muzikale verwijzing met de tekst niet duidelijk is. Dat zou een makkelijke manier zijn om interpretatieve problemen te neutraliseren: over een puur particuliere luisterervaring valt vervolgens immers weinig te zeggen. Dat zou natuurlijk oninteressant zijn. Ook kan de vraag opgeworpen worden of dit wel een aparte categorie is. Je zou ook kunnen beweren dat dit aspect aanwezig is in elk muziekgedicht en dat het een kwestie is van gradatie. In het gedicht is de ervaring extreem en lijkt ze losgezongen van de muziek, maar dat is slechts één positie op een continuüm. Als je het zo wilt bekijken heb je geen extra categorie nodig maar is ‘feeling’ een nuancering die aanduidt dat de graad van autonomisering (het loszingen van het muziekstuk) varieert.

## Muziekgedicht // Lied

De muziekreferentie in muziekgedichten kan een aantal functies hebben zoals, onder andere, een poëtische. Als Paul van Ostaijen zijn laatste bundel *Het eerste boek van Schmoll* wilde noemen naar een methode om piano te leren spelen en verschillende van de gedichten die hij voor die bundel bestemd had aangeduid worden met behulp van muziekgenres zoals de berceuse, de polonaise of het lied, dan wil hij daarmee tonen dat hij ernaar streeft dat zijn poëzie woordmuziek wordt. Bovendien refereert hij ook nog eens aan het beginnersaspect en omdat het études zijn ook aan het initieel technische aspect. Of wanneer de zogenaamde neorealisten uitvoerig naar Eric Satie verwijzen, getuige onder andere de Satiegedichten van Roland Jooris en J. Bernlef, blijkt het minimalisme van Saties muziek dienst te doen als een voorbeeld voor de literatuur (opvatting) van het neorealisme.<sup>11</sup>

Verwijzingen naar muziek kunnen daarnaast ook een strategische functie hebben bij het ontwerp van een *posture*, zoals Dorleijn laat zien in zijn artikel ‘De muzikale verwijzing als positioneringsmiddel’ (Dorleijn 2007). Verwijzen naar klassieke muziek geeft een aura van goede smaak; refereren aan de nieuwste muziek toont aan dat je als auteur op de hoogte bent van de hedendaagse evoluties van de kunst. In gedichten zoals dat van Menkveld, gedichten naar aanleiding van bepaalde muziek dus, heeft de muziekverwijzing een genetische functie. Ze geeft inzicht in de totstandkoming van de tekst. De muziek vormt in dit soort gedich-

11. Misschien wel hét voorbeeld voor de poëtische implicatie van muziek is Maurice Gilliams. Over de implicaties van zijn muzikale poëtica voor vorm en structuur van zijn werk, zie de studie van Katalin Balogh: *Muziek en woord* (2010).

ten het uitgangspunt voor een min of meer gelijklopende mediale transformatie, waardoor deze muziekgedichten begrepen kunnen worden als de literaire tegenhanger van het muziekgenre van het Lied.

In zijn inleiding tot *De vier jaargetijden. Een keuze uit poëzie over klassieke muziek*, waarin Emanuel Overbeeke voornamelijk twintigste-eeuwse componistengedichten opneemt, merkt hij op: ‘In de vorige eeuw overheersen de gedichten over, sinds Nijhoff de gedichten naar aanleiding van componisten’ (Overbeeke 1991b: 6). Dat is een prikkelende uitspraak die nader en systematisch onderzoek vergt, maar die tegelijk aanleiding geeft tot de hypothese dat de verhouding tussen tekst en muziek in de poëzie parallel loopt met de relatie tussen muziek en gedicht in het genre van het Lied. In dat muzikale genre valt een tendens tot autonomsing van de muziek waar te nemen (Bernhart 2008): waar aanvankelijk in de combinatie de tekst dominant is en muziek de tekst zowel ritmisch volgt als melodisch uitbeeldt (iconiciteit), maakt de muziek zich steeds meer los van de tekst tot het gedicht vanaf het modernisme nog slechts bijkomstig is en haast enkel nog functioneert als aanleiding voor een muzikale compositie. Vanaf dan ‘trifft man verstärkt auf freiere Formen der musikalischen Bezugnahme auf Lyrik, die den vorgegebenen Text teils bewusst verfremden, teils beschneiden oder zerstückeln, teils sogar ganz auf seine Anführung verzichten.’ (Eckel 2011: 190; zie ook Kramer 1999). Als het inderdaad klopt wat Overbeeke beweert, namelijk dat er, met de prototypische modernistische dichter Martinus Nijhoff als scharnierpunt, in de twintigste eeuw steeds meer gedichten naar aanleiding van – eerder dan over – muziek geschreven worden, dan lijkt dat in het genre van het muziekgedicht een tendens die eveneens opgevat kan worden als een proces van losmaking. Het gedicht volgt dan niet langer de compositie waarnaar het verwijst, noch laat het er zich inhoudelijk door bepalen, maar wordt sterker subjectief en sentimenteel. De muziek vormt enkel nog de trigger voor een gedicht en blijft voor de rest afwezig in de tekst.

## Besluit

Ondanks het feit dat Vestdijk het muziekgedicht een weinig geslaagd genre vindt, bestaan er in de Nederlandse literatuur relatief veel voorbeelden van. Wie die in ogenschouw neemt en tracht te systematiseren, stuit op een aantal gedichten die zich niet goed in de door Werner Wolf ingevoerde tweedeling *telling* (*thematization*) versus *showing* (*imitation*) laten inpassen. Ten eerste wordt duidelijk dat de *musicalization* van poëzie eerder zeldzaam is en voornamelijk voorkomt in langere gedichten of reeksen van samenhangende verzen. Het lijkt erop dat voor het uitbeelden van muzikale principes toch enige tekstomvang vereist is. In die zin is het overnemen van vorm- en structuurparallellen eerder het domein van de prozaliteratuur. Voor klankimitatie leent poëzie zich dan weer uitstekend, maar hoewel er veel lyriek bestaat die ernaar streeft muziek te worden en daartoe blijk geeft van

een zekere sonoriteit, zijn er haast geen gedichten te vinden die een specifiek muziekstuk of een bepaalde componist via klanken evoceren.

Een tweede conclusie is dat het vaak expressieve karakter van lyriek een sub-genre genereert dat in de bestaande modellen voor proza niet beschreven wordt: de poëtische beschrijving van de particuliere concert- of luisterervaring.<sup>12</sup> Het gaat daarbij om gedichten die noch over muziek gaan, noch de muziek trachten te imiteren, maar tot stand gekomen zijn naar aanleiding van muziek. Bij het gedicht van Erik Menkveld, dat via een epitekst begrepen kan worden als de neerslag van een dergelijke muzikale beleving, moet geconstateerd worden dat de link tussen de genoemde muziek en het gedicht zowel inhoudelijk als structureel eerder beperkt is en zich waarschijnlijk voornamelijk op het vlak van de tekstgenese situeert. De relatie tot de muziek wordt in dergelijke gedichten gereduceerd tot die van aanzet.

De observatie van Overbeek, ten slotte, dat er sinds Nijhoff meer gedichten naar aanleiding van dan over componisten worden geschreven, leidt dan weer tot de hypothese dat de evolutie van het genre muziekgedicht er een is van voortschrijdende losmaking van de muziek, een tendens die mutatis mutandis geconstateerd wordt in het muzikale genre van het Lied dat als parallelgenre van het muziekgedicht beschouwd kan worden. Dat is een stelling die door middel van diachroon onderzoek verder onderzocht dient te worden.

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12. Al bestaan er zeker voorbeelden in de prozaliteratuur van dit soort teksten – ik verwijs hierbij naar het werk van Jef Geeraerts, die meermaals uiting gegeven heeft aan de effecten die muziek op hem heeft gehad, zie daarvoor bijvoorbeeld *Muziek en emotie* (2009).



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## ‘GRADATIONS OF FICTIVITY’

# Borges and the Music of the Spheres in Richard Powers’s *Orfeo*

Ivan Delazari

Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg

### Borgesian Background

Like Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Richard Powers (b. 1957) ‘is fascinated by symmetries and numeric arrangements’ (Ickstadt 2012: 29). Citing Borges as a formative influence (Burn 2008: 169-171), Powers joins the line of American postmodern writers who regard the Argentine’s metafictional models for their own books. For instance, Borges’s one-page ‘Borges and I’ (1960) is seminal for the pseudo-autobiographical narration of Powers’s 1995 novel, *Galatea 2.2* (Burn & Dempsey 2008: 137). Another trademark Borges story, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*’ (1939), serves as a template for ‘The Seventh Event’ (Powers 2007), an elegiac obituary about a fictitious ecocritic authored by her friend, novelist ‘Richard Powers’, who overviews, analyses, and quotes her books and articles. To compare, Borges’s anonymous first-person narrator – apparently, the protagonist’s literary executor – summarises and evaluates the legacy of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century French symbolist, who is a hundred per cent Borges invention.

‘Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*’ opens with a full annotated bibliography of Menard’s ‘visible works’ (Borges 1993: 29). Although Menard is introduced to us as a *novelist*, not a single novel is listed, since Menard has published none. His only achievement in the genre is unseen and ‘inconclusive’ (31), yet it well outweighs the rest of his oeuvre. For years, Menard labours over a verbatim reproduction of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and succeeds in writing two and a half chapters before he dies. Having described the various sophisticated methods Menard employs along the way, the narrator demonstrates the radical dissimilitude between Cervantes’s and Menard’s *Don Quixotes* by quoting a short passage from both. Attributed to authors of *different* mother tongues and national cultures, historical epochs and biographical circumstances, philosophical mindsets and artistic statures, the ‘two’ identical texts fail to share a single meaning. The invisibility of Menard’s novel results from his problematic authorship – Borges’s harbinger of poststructuralist theories that would crystallise in the 1960s and 70s. But are Menard’s listed publications any more ‘visible’ than his unfinished *Don Quixote*?

In *Narratology: An Introduction*, Wolf Schmid considers ‘fictivity’ – a narrower version of ‘fictionality’ reducing it to the ontological absence of real-life referents for fictional entities – as a fundamental property of literary worlds. Schmid illustrates his point with Leo Tolstoy’s characters, who are often utilised by theorists to similar ends (cf. Doležel 1998: 18; McHale 1987: 87; Ryan 1991: 15): ‘In *War and Peace*, Napoleon and Kutuzov are no less fictive than Natasha Rostova and Pierre Bezukhov’ (Schmid 2010: 31), because the historical Napoleon and Kutuzov cannot have acted and thought exactly as they do in Tolstoy. Any fictional reality is entirely, not partially, fictive, and ‘all the thematic elements of the narrated world are therefore fictive: people, places, times, actions, speeches, thoughts, conflicts and so on’ (2010: 32). For Schmid, it is impossible to be more fictive or less fictive: either something *is* fictive, or it is not.

If Schmid is right, and ‘there are no gradations of fictivity’ (2010: 32), *any* fictional character’s writings are fictive. We cannot materially access them across the ontological border that separates the fictional world from the one we live in, unless they are directly cited. With the habitual suspension of disbelief, we may assume that Menard wrote what the story claims he did, but we cannot borrow his publications from a library. We can read the narrator’s summaries, while Menard’s complete texts remain literally invisible for us. Conversely, the character’s incomplete and ‘invisible’ novelistic enterprise is directly available, once we manage, taking Borges’s tip, to read Menard while reading Cervantes. In the course of such guided re-tuning of perception, our suspension of disbelief acquires some pleasurable self-awareness, as we are now empowered to switch authors like TV channels. We do suspect that Pierre Menard never existed, and that nobody would embark on a quixotic mission such as his. Yet deliberately suppressing this suspicion and going where Borges is taking us, we do not only enrich the original Cervantes, as the narrator suggests. By way of that little thought experiment, we discover a route to infinite postmodern play: what if Tolstoy was written by Vladimir Nabokov, and Borges by John Barth? Read and see.

Counter to Schmid, some fictional texts embedded in a fictional world are less fictive than others. Menard’s *Don Quixote* ends up being, paradoxically, more textually substantial and ‘real’ than his fictitious published works, which we can only know from the narrator’s annotations. Readers outside of Borges’s fictional world are enabled to *literally* read Menard by laying hands on a copy of Cervantes and retuning the mind.

A similar tour de force is performed in Powers’s 2014 novel *Orfeo*, which contains an elaborate variation of the Pierre Menard case, albeit less evidently than ‘The Seventh Event’. This time, the Borges model is complicated by a music-for-literature substitution. Peter Els, *Orfeo*’s main character, is neither a novelist nor literary critic but a composer. His life and music are narrated on two alternating temporal planes. On the one, there is a chronologically linear third-person account of Peter’s past, from his childhood till the narrated ‘now’. Episodes of that biographical narrative come after the regular updates of Els’s present, which

form the other narrative plane: presently, Els is a retired septuagenarian, who busies himself with genetic modification of bacterial DNA in his hobby home lab and accidentally finds himself in trouble with the US anti-terrorist forces. Alternation is between flashbacks to past experiences, which have made Els what he is, and returns to the suspense of the present, where what happens next is still unknown. The retrospect 'chases' and gradually 'catches up with' the narrative unfoldment of the most recent events.

Powers makes sure that both parts of his novelistic narrative are of equal importance, as in a contrapuntal music texture. The retrospective bits are no mere background for the principal plot: they are foregrounded in due course, so the figure/ground relation is constantly shifting. With Els's mind constantly screened by the third-person narrator's use of internal focalization, the entire novel is basically a *Bildungsroman*. Along with the rich Orphic intertexts from Greek mythology and Claudio Monteverdi, whose operatic use of the *ritornello* form in *L'Orfeo* (1607) is a clue to Powers's design (Reichel 2017: 88-95), there are recognizable Faustian overtones – from Thomas Mann rather than Goethe, given Powers's musical bias. The representation of Adrian Leverkühn's fictional compositions in *Doctor Faustus* (1947) is one among several aspects of Mann's novel that Powers expands on, but the nature of his expansion, as I would like to argue, has to do with Borges, not Mann.

Borges's paratextual alter ego in his preface to *The Garden of Forking Paths* regards novels as a 'laborious and impoverishing extravagance' and prefers 'to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a resumé, a commentary' (1993: 3). 'Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*' is precisely this kind of 'commentary': Borges summarises Menard's works as if they were real. Falling short of this idle ideal, Powers writes an entire novel, in which Els's opuses are not merely annotated, but portrayed at length. Passages of 'verbal music' – defined as 'any literary presentation ... of existing or fictitious musical compositions' by Steven Paul Scher (1970: 149) – permeate Powers's novel. Els's pieces are rendered alongside those by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Gustav Mahler, Olivier Messiaen, and Dmitri Shostakovich, to name just a few. This juxtaposition promptly illustrates Scher's refusal to discriminate between actual and non-existent sources of verbal music. It also confirms Schmid's 'no gradations' rule. Within this logical framework, we are supposed to hear the Mahler that Els listens to in *Orfeo* no better than the music Els composes himself. In terms of readerly *experience*, this statement is counterintuitive: we certainly associate Powers's fictional Mahler with the Mahler on CD. But is there a *logical* way to circumvent Schmid's logic? Can some fictional compositions be more fictive than others?

Through a narrative trick in the manner of 'Pierre Menard', Powers seems to suggest that they can. In Borges, Menard's 'visible' writings are *further* beyond our reach than Menard's 'inconclusive' *Don Quixote*, because we can access the latter by suspending our disbelief in Menard's authorship. In Powers, one of Els's compositions stands out as inaudible *within* as well as *outside* the storyworld, and since

it is *only* available to Powers's characters as well as readers *through words*, this composition paradoxically becomes *more* 'real' than all other musical works depicted in *Orfeo*.

The composition in question is a piece of biomusic. An earlier Powers protagonist, molecular biologist Stuart Ressler of *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), cracks the genetic code by listening to J. S. Bach. In *Orfeo*, Ressler's partially anagrammatic modification Els, conversely, materialises the Music of the Spheres by encoding bacterial DNA with a music score. In the rest of my article, I discuss Els's untitled biomusic in order to give extra scrutiny to 'gradations of fictivity'. I point out some variability in the way fictionality may be perceived and conceptualised with respect to how we access storyworld phenomena. In novels, such variability is maintained by words, so I lay special emphasis on the *verbal* component of *musical* experience, which Powers unobtrusively foregrounds. I argue that when words intersect with and/or substitute music in *Orfeo*, they do not necessarily bring programmatic clarity to the otherwise ineffable 'absolute' form, as they are reputed to in the stereotyped language/music binary. Instead, by infiltrating the musical work, words shape its functional equivalent, so that readers could vicariously experience this music. Scher's insight that the words of verbal music 'strive to suggest the experience or effects of music' (1970: 149), despite Werner Wolf's skepticism (1999: 59), is at least partially confirmed in Powers. To illustrate that, I address *Orfeo's* treatment of the *Borges Songs* – Els's early song cycle, which precedes his microbiological experimentation by several decades. The explicit presence of Borges's name in Powers's text suggests that my comparison of his work with 'Pierre Menard' is far from random.

## The *Borges Songs*

Peter Els's compositional techniques change over his lifetime, wavering 'between the key of hope and the atonal slash of nothingness' (Powers 2014: 69) – that is, between the articulateness of the diatonic language of the Western tonal tradition and its disintegration in the semiotic nihilism of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde. On the one hand, much of what Els writes is vocal music: apart from the *Borges Songs*, we read thorough descriptions of another song cycle, one more song, and a large-scale historical opera. Words are thus literally present in most of Els's music scores that the reader gets to know. On the other hand, the lyrics that Els uses are deliberately cryptic. The extracts from Borges are parabolic prose passages aspiring 'towards the condition of music' (Pater 1986: 86), not by virtue of their original rhythm and sound (Els uses English translations), but by virtue of the emotional aura that their brevity, formulaic wording, and syntactic structure connote to Powers's reader (and Els's listener) in combination with a cascade of interpretive options. In these scores, words do not semantically specify the music. Instead, they can stand *for* it, as metonymy *and* metaphor. Metonymically, the words are

adjacent (*set*) to Els's music, forming *part* of its sound. Metaphorically, they share that music's essential properties: indeterminacy and inconclusiveness. The lyrics are *like* the music, as though to reassure us that the text we read is sufficient to give us a clear sense of the whole piece. As the words quoted in Powers's verbal music passages are part of what the diegetic audience can hear, they are simultaneously metaphor and metonymy/synecdoche for the music. The lyrics sound as 'extraterrestrial' as Els's tonal setting, which works to produce an identical effect. As part of the auditory whole, the lyrics iconically signify that whole.

Madolyn Corr, the 'lone responder' to Els's college notice board search for a singer of his Borges cycle (Powers 2014: 127), importantly contributes to the composition and breaks Els's isolation both as a man and as an artist. The '*pretty eerie*' music is subject to 'so many corrections' to adapt it to Maddy's voice that sight-reading the score becomes 'like doing paleontology' (128). As the composition is first presented to the reader, the singer 'loop[s] through a little four-bar phrase' from the third song (128), which she keeps humming after the rehearsal. The lyric for the tune is from 'The Secret Miracle' (1944) – the story of a playwright, for whom God halts time so that he can complete his greatest drama. Like Borges's character, who 'did not work for posterity', the young Peter Els writes 'for forever and for no one' (Powers 2014: 128, Borges 1993: 120), but as soon as he hears Maddy's singing, his inner clock resumes ticking. The Byronic individualism of Els's formalistic composition practices is enlivened by human interaction; abstract words and music notes are transfigured by voicing and embodiment. With his love for Maddy, Els's art is profoundly linked to the sensory and emotional experience of everyday significance, which is Powers's main method for encouraging his reader to enact ('hear') the music (Delazari 2018: 234-235).

When it gets to the premiere, the *Borges Songs* gain yet another co-author. Els's new friend, choreographer Richard Bonner, effectively turns the piece 'into madcap theater' (151). Through the production process, Els's score acquires a distinct visual aspect. Concert performers are asked to wear weird costumes and make unconventional gestures. Bonner preaches to the musicians, '*You gonna sit with a broom up your sphincter, afraid to tap your feet? You've forgotten where music comes from. Why do you think they're called movements?*' (153). Powers thus urges the reader to appreciate the profoundly *multimodal* nature of a musical event, which is never confined to the aural, but inevitably engages verbal, visual, and kinaesthetic responses to musical form and sound. Watching how the composer and performers are infected with excitement over a difficult academic piece, Powers's reader is drawn to follow the author's imaginative track and mentally construct an auditory image. In an interview, Powers reports that the project of making Els's compositions tangible has to do with his own unrealised aspirations for becoming a composer: 'I was trying to find different kinds of vocabularies to describe them to laymen, as these musics unfold, and appeal to the reader. To treat these pieces – to almost compose them in my head and then to describe them as though I were listening to them for the first time' (Powers 2014: 377).

Evoking a work of vocal music by relating its only performance, Powers combines direct quoting of the scored words with technical description and visual imagery. The ‘stutter-step stall’ of the horn ‘picked up by the cello, and then the oboe’, blends the image of Maddy creeping ‘down the right aisle in a gray tunic’ (155). After the piano ‘blast[s] through’ the auditory scene, the sentence from Borges’s ‘Funes the Memorious’ (1941) opens the vocal part. The versified Borges quotation *shows*, rather than *tells*, the stammering in the instrumental parts previously referred to:

The truth is,  
 truth is,  
 truth is ...  
 The truth is that we live out our lives  
 putting off all that can be put off ...

(Powers 2014: 155, cf. Borges 1964: 64)

Technical details are accompanied by concise clarifications to steer Powers’s lay readership through these programme notes. For example, the term ‘Hypophrygian’ is supplied with the explanatory phrase, ‘an old church mode’, while the ‘tight stretti of dense materials’ is introduced with the verb ‘circled’ (Powers 2014: 155). Both church music and circular motion are suggestive experiential prompts for many readers. In the further unfolding of the instrumental parts and the Borges quotation in the vocal, the overall diegetic soundscape defined by expressive and intervallic characterizations of Els’s scored music is supplemented with Bonner’s directorial extras – screen-projected images and ‘a choir of antiphonal taped voices’ (156).

After a paragraph focusing on the puzzled and frustrated people in the scarce audience, the first song ends, and the musical setting of several sentences from Borges’s ‘A New Refutation of Time’ (1946) begins: ‘*Time is a river which carries me along*’ (Powers 2014: 158; Borges 1964: 234). Borges’s recurrent themes – paradoxes of memory and time as eternal return – are highlighted in Powers’s narrative as synonymous to music: Els’s tonal material that embeds and doubles Borges’s words turns music into a symbol and vessel of time, memory, and inner life. The internally focalized protagonist sits in the audience, so his aesthetic response is portrayed in close rapport with the music’s movement in (and out of) time: ‘Listening, Els heard the total lie. He wrote for the future’s love, and for the love of an ideal listener he could almost see. He saw how he might expand the music, make it stranger, stronger, colder, more huge and indifferent, just as soon as this concert was over’ (Powers 2014: 159).

Description of musical procedures embraces, and sometimes gives way to, accounts of diversified stimuli coming along and around the music, in the physical details of the performance. In that way, Powers recruits the reader to the Els and Bonner team. It is up to us to decide whether each instrumentalist’s prema-



ture leave of stage during the final song – an abridged sentence from Borges's 'The Divine Comedy' (Powers 2014: 159-161, Borges 1980: 10) – is due to their genuine failure to accompany the singer till the end or to their fulfilment of Bonner's secret instructions. Yet Maddy's manner of dealing with the situation is inspiring enough for Els to propose to her.

Our empathy with Els is long established through Powers's incessant use of internal focalization. Cognitive narrative theorist Marco Caracciolo considers internal focalization as *the* condition of 'consciousness-enactment' (2014: 41, 115-132), upon which the reader identifies with the character and *experiences* the narrated events from the first-person stance. Neither the musicians' abortion of the *Borges Songs* nor Els's matrimonial impulse is determined by the score, but this is how the 'movements' of the *Borges Songs* move Powers's characters. Observing the scene, which focuses on music but encompasses so much more, the reader is complexly affected as if by music itself. We enact this music by plucking the strings at our mind's disposal.

Factors of the 'reality effect' (Barthes 1989) and aesthetic illusion (Wolf 2004), which stand behind the feeling of fictional 'presence' (Kuzmičova 2012; Kukkonen 2014) have been known to literary practitioners for ages, but the additional immersive potential I detect in Powers's prose may well be grounded in the novelist's apparent knowledge of the latest neurology research (Burn & Dempsey 2008: 107). As an English professor, Powers also keeps up with narrative theory (Burn 2008: 174), which in the last two decades has cemented meaningful alliances with cognitive studies.

Brain scientists' discovery of the mirror neurons, which fire in response to observed actions in exactly the same way as when we perform those actions ourselves (Gallese 2003: 171), blurs the borderline between *perceiving* and *doing* something. Mental simulation, which functions by virtue of mirror neurons, is ubiquitous. In cognitive narratology, it is sometimes summoned to account for reading processes, where observation of actions is maintained through imagination and memory. *Perceptual* images – those that are caused by the physically presented stimuli – share the neural topography with *recalled* images of external actions and objects, which we invoke mentally in the absence of those actions and objects (Damasio 1994: 96-101). Our *embodied mind* – the inseparable union of the brain with the rest of the body – takes recalled images as no less 'real' than perceptual ones. Readers' enactive grasp of fictional events is determined by their mental simulation of those events through uncontrollable application of the mirror neuron system (Clay & Iacobini 2011, Caracciolo 2014: 21; Kukkonen 2014: 369). Similar neural processes characterise listeners' somatic response to music (Walsh 2011: 54; Meelberg 2013: 275; Hauer 2013-2014: 90-91).

In the *Borges Songs* sequence of *Orfeo*, citations from Borges are placed into an intensively multimodal context, which must prove neurologically stimulating for readers without their being aware. A cascade of diegetic sounds, pictures, words, and feelings is dynamically presented to trigger recalled images from our

‘experiential background’ (Caracciolo 2014: 5-8). In this cascade, the irreducible *verbal component of musical experience* (cf. Rabinowitz 1992: 39, Kramer 2002: 39, Benson 2006: 5) is foregrounded and concealed at the same time.

All layers of the *Borges Songs* as a diegetic artwork are presented to the reader in a single stream of words. Specific segments in that stream refer to several streams of diegetic data: visual, auditory, and conceptual. Description of each stream is interrupted to give way to a fragment from another stream. Stage actions, instrumental parts, and the protagonist’s thoughts take it in turns, predominantly mediated by Els’s responsive mind. Each of the diegetic streams becomes gapped whenever it goes out of textual focus for another stream’s sake, although we naturally assume that, in the storyworld, the multisensory event is complete. We try to mentally reassemble it from the verbal bits and pieces Powers has kaleidoscopically organised for us. Along the way, we are given the markedly verbal segments of the sung Borges lines and tricked to forget that the entire multimodal feast around them is *also* comprised of words. It is *not* the organised sound of musical instruments and female voice, and not the staged moves and the diegetic audience’s reactions that embed the Borges quotes. It is *all* the narrator’s ‘words, words, words’, to quote Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

The actual *Borges Songs* are not words set to music but words among other words on paper or screen, yet we are led to imagine that we can ‘hear’ and see something else. Furthermore, Powers’s handling of Els’s Borges is meant to be more successful in putting music across to the reader of *Orfeo* than Els’s performed score is – to diegetic entities. Members of Els’s fictional audience, and perhaps even the musicians walking out towards the end of the show, fail to understand what they hear – because they *lack* the reader’s multimodal perspective, which is framed by Powers’s choice and order of words. The concert audience in the novel is deprived of our *narratively acquired* knowledge of the composer’s past and future, of his immediate reactions and thoughts. Most importantly, the characters do not have the benefit of Powers’s smooth narratorial guidance through diverse sensory data surrounding the *Borges Songs* and, like actual art music concert audiences, must be missing much more than they are gaining via conscious perceptual channels. In short, for a successful musical experience, Els’s fictitious audience lacks *words* – the dynamic verbal narrative centring around the composer, the explanatory framework that enables us to ‘really hear’ that music in our embodied minds. In Powers, extramusical narratives do not distract us from musical experience, but take us straight into it. In *Orfeo*, Borges’s or someone else’s words are set to music insofar as the reader’s musical sensitivity is set to Powers’s words. This verbal music invites *us* to play it.

## 'A Massive, Secret Chorus'

The overall tendency for Els's music to reach no audiences is pushed to the limit in the composer's final work – his genetic manipulation of *Serratia* cells. Els encrypts music in the bacterial DNA using some coded notation. Except for several inarticulate hints, it is not clear what kind of score Els uses. That is not important. The ultimate target of the project does not depend on which notes Els 'writes'. It is the concept that matters.

Like the 'music of the spheres', with which Bonner associates Els's biomusical composition as soon as he learns about it (Powers 2014: 347), this piece is impossible to hear, although it is *materially* 'out there'. It is devoid of the acoustic dimension and exists in a material equivalent of Roger Scruton's 'acousmatic space' (1997: 79) – an abstract reality that is divorced from actual sounds originating from physical sources. According to Scruton, when we attend to music 'as music', we do not care about the aural: it is the mentally cognised tones, not sounds, that move there, obeying the self-contained logic of music emancipated from physical causality. The term 'acousmatic' was first applied to music by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995), who derived it from Pythagoras's characterization of his pupils 'as *akousmatikoi* – those willing to hear' (Scruton 1997: 2). Pythagoras, who was also responsible for the concept of the Music of the Spheres, taught his *akousmatikoi* from behind a screen, insisting that their attention should be drawn to the *ideas* he voiced, not his voicing body, as it was neither the body nor the voice that *caused* those ideas.

Like all metaphors, Scruton's acousmatic space is an *embodied* concept in the sense that we can picture and understand it in terms of our experience of physical space. Unimaginably large cosmic sizes and distances, as well as extremely small microbiological and subatomic entities, are not directly given to the senses, but our abstract understanding of those concepts rests upon metaphors stemming from our bodily experience (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999). In this respect, Scruton's acousmatic space of music philosophy is fundamentally akin to spaces of sciences – mathematics, physics, or genetics.

Els's music exists at the microbiological level of biochemical processes within the molecular structure of the cells. At the age of sixty-eight, he acquires amusia, which serves as a catalyst for his new compositional method. Now that a small brain lesion prevents him from empathizing with music, whose sound can no longer 'trick the body into thinking it had a soul' (Powers 2014: 330), biocomposing is a handy solution. Ever since Peter did college chemistry prior to switching to the music major, he has believed that the 'symmetries hidden in the columns of the periodic table had something of the [Mozart] *Jupiter* [Symphony]'s grandeur' (31). The overall panmusicalism of his everyday perception has always welcomed experiencing science as swarming in musical delights. At seventy, Peter feels that '[s]cience should have been the career, music just a hobby' (143), but the two are still interchangeable, because music is everywhere:

... music floated across the sky in cloud banks, and songs skittered in twigs down the staggered shingles of a nearby roof. All around him, a massive, secret chorus written in extended alternate notation lay ripe for transcribing. His own music had no corner on obscurity. Almost every tune that the world had to offer would forever be heard by almost no one. And that fact gladdened him more than anything he'd ever written (331).

The *Serratia* piece is up to this ideal.

Powers's real-life inspiration for a story of encoding music by means of genetic modification was bioartist Eduardo Kac's analogous 1999 project with words, while the US government's charges against another bioartist, Steve Kurtz, prompted the author to turn his protagonist into a fugitive (Vorda 2013). By adding a social and/or political agenda to Els's experiment, Powers overrules the fictional composer's hermetic formalism, which results in no public acclaim. Becoming 'Biohacker Bach' (Powers 2014: 65) earns Els a bigger audience than all his preceding fifty years of composing.

Until Bonner talks him into using Twitter for explaining what his original 'crime' was, Els is reluctant to speak about his laboratorial work, assuming no one would believe or be interested. Els's own understanding is that he was 'trying to take a strand of DNA, five thousand base pairs long ... and splice it into a bacterial plasmid' to find, 'in a single cell, astonishing synchronized sequences' (142). This project is hard to comprehend as a musical one, and Els holds firmly to an elitist aesthetic by refusing to provide any detailed explanations even to his friend Klaudia Kohlmann, let alone the police. To his knowledge, his musically modified 'nonsense string would live alongside the bacterium's historical repertoire, silently doing nothing. Like the best conceptual art, it would sit ignored by the millions of trades going on in the marketplace all around it' (142).

Even if the 'message' is replicated, Els's assumption is that it will never be heard. The ascetic modesty of an artist whom the public habitually ignores is mixed with enormous pride. Els has not only solved the problem of relieving music of its acoustic parameters and creating a purely acousmatic work, but also created a work that he believes to be unintelligible. The bacterial silence containing his music is more than John Cage's 4'33'' (1952) – an extravaganza for the concert pianist with a stop watch for timing the three movements of this notorious piece. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Els comes to realise that genomics, with its silent 'scores of indescribable beauty' (143), has cracked the code for the Music of the Spheres, which only he happens to perceive. The destiny of his work proves that his exclusiveness in this matter is not quite the case: with Twitter, he obtains followers.

The first two people to grasp Els's idea are his most significant others. Decades before embarking on his biomusical project, Peter happens to picture wife Madolyn Corr and his friend Richard Bonner as extra-terrestrial beings, as if they are somehow related to the Music of the Spheres. He thinks Maddy is 'unreal' and

'[f]rom another planet' (163). He tells Bonner, 'You're a damn alien, aren't you? ... *Outer space. Admit it*' (140).

Both Maddy and Richard have no problem understanding the artistic implications of Els's *Serratia* endeavour: he does not even need to explain. 'Was this some performance piece? Some kind of avant-garde stunt? Getting your revenge on the thankless public by scaring them shitless?' (299), his ex-wife asks when, like Orpheus, he comes to see her after many years of separation and divorce. To read Els's mind, her earthly experience of him is sufficient: 'You were composing. In DNA?' (300). When Els visits Bonner in the Alzheimer's drug-testing clinic, the old impresario is the first to ask, 'What's the piece?' and 'what does it sound like?' (344). After Bonner and Els look at the stars through a telescope, Els stops denying that '[i]here is a piece'. He begins to hear his own music in celestial silence, role-modelling for the reader.

Recommending that Els tweet, Bonner is once again in charge of a production and, thereby, co-author of 'the piece'. Els's 'music of the spheres', for which he finds a proper space in those replicating cells, comes into existence through the composer's Twitter narrative. It is concrete and literal in the sense that Els did modify bacterial genes in accordance with a music score. It remains a totally abstract '*proof of concept*' (143, 345), since no one, including Els himself, can ever retrieve, recompose, rewind, or replay it. Els's activity on Twitter is a performative utterance, in J. L. Austin's sense (1962): it *makes* music when he 'goes on *writing*, of music converted into a string of zeros and ones, then converted again into base four' the moment Els 'writes of *Serratia*'s chromosome ring, five million base pairs long' and 'tweets how he divided those two numbers to produce a short key' [emphasis added] (359).

The story itself duplicates Els's genetic composition: 'He presses a button and the message sets out into the biosphere, where it will live and copy itself for a while' (359). By letting his music emanate from a traceable electronic device and wittily naming his account '@Terrorchord' (350), the protagonist ensures that the 'tweets condemn him' (359). The moment Bonner suggests launching a Twitter-transmitted '*epidemic of invisible music*', Els is aware of the consequences: '*They'll kill me, you know*' (346). Public fear is Els's warrant for an audience, and his medium is exclusively verbal this time. Els *tweets verbal music* based on a composition that is *fictitious* even to himself. The composition is only finalized *in conversation* with Bonner:

Sounds everywhere, but still no piece. There'll be no piece forever.

Then there is.

Oh, he says. Oh. You're saying ... You mean ... (345)

The music is shaped by way of Els's verbal account: like Music of the Spheres, it can only be theorised, imagined, and told about, but not heard.

Els's selected tweets may puzzle the reader of *Orfeo* from the novel's outset, because they are digressively inserted into the narrative at irregular intervals, and their origins remain unidentified until the very end of the novel. To return to Borges's 'Pierre Menard': the tweets reproduce what Powers does to Els's other, more 'audible' pieces. They perform the music verbally. Like Richard Powers, Peter Els ends up *composing with words*. Like the text of *Don Quixote* in 'Pierre Menard', these words reach both the diegetic audience and the actual readership with equal efficiency: 'By midafternoon when he pulled into Barstow and tweeted again, he had almost eighty followers. The messages were spreading by themselves' (351). Next, Powers's readers follow Els too.

Driving across America, Els passes through Barstow, California. The eponymous song cycle by American hobo composer Harry Partch (1901-1974) is the theme of this stop, but the broader metaphorical implication is Partch's theory and practice of microtonality. Partch divided the octave into much more than the twelve well-tempered tones of the Western chromatic scale and tailored instruments for performing microtonal music. Every scale can be gradated. For Powers, nothing is solid and single. *Microdivision* – such as that in Borges's concept of a book with 'an infinite number of infinitely thin pages' (1964: 58) – is at stake in Els's science, music, and social networking. With Twitter, Els's biomusical project is to last: 'Two mathematicians debate how hard it would be to decode the base-four music and play it back. ... A young woman composer describes having heard the file that Peter Els spliced into the genome – a piece for small ensemble that's breakneck and free' (Powers 2014: 357). There will be those who claim to have heard the Music of the Spheres.

In *Orfeo*, 'gradations of fictivity' are shown *within* a set of presumably fictitious works by a fictional composer. From the early songs of the protagonist's youth to the seventy-year-old @Terrorchord's *Serratia* manipulation, those gradations are difficult to define. Paradoxically, the biomusic is less fictive than the *Borges Songs*, because its ultimately available material – words, words, words – is the same for real readers and fictional characters. At the same time, Powers's rendition of Els's vocal music feeds much more to our senses, and it may even be experientially richer for us than for diegetic audiences. Is it less fictive than Els's last experiment, then? Either way, these two types of verbal music do not seem to be *equally* fictive.

## Concluding Scales

For both Scher, who theorises verbal music, and Powers, who practices it, a paradigm case for prose passages rendering non-existent scores must be Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Like Leverkühn's, Els's music is predominantly vocal, and it is described as though someone could really hear it. In Mann, Serenus Zeitblom has seen manuscripts and witnessed performances, while Powers's narration is

closely focalised on Els himself, which, under Coleridge's suspension of disbelief clause and Caracciolo's 'consciousness-enactment' effect, provides readers with an even better position than Zeitblom's.

Fictitious music gives little of what Wolf calls 'intermedial transposition' (2002: 19), since there is nothing to transpose in the first place. At the same time, there *are* composers who back-translate Leverkühn's pieces by actually scoring them (Ziolkowski 2017: 199-220), as if a missing signified *could* materialise across media. Pushing Mann towards Borges, Powers makes sure that Els's biomusic is impossible to recreate except in words, since it acquires its ontological status *only* through verbalization, by way of being told. At the same time, this telling is materially available to the reader, which challenges the ontological fact/fiction divide.

Els's last music is texted in order to be heard. When Els pleads '[g]uilty as charged' (Powers 2014: 3, 350), he endorses the status change from bioart to bio-terrorism. Even inside the fictional world, his terrorism is fictive, but the aesthetic gesture of going public is necessary to make his art audible. Challenging national security secures an audience. Writing in silent nucleotides needs to be voiced *and* criminalised with words. This is how it *becomes* music. Not many would recognize it as such, but still fewer (namely, Peter, Madolyn, and Richard) would acknowledge it *without* words. We are directly *told* to do so. Like the Music of the Spheres – a Platonic ideal form, the Pythagorean mathematical prototype for all hearable harmonies – Els's genetic composition can only be talked about. Compared to his 'more audible' works such as the *Borges Songs*, the untitled biomusic is both more *and* less fictive. More – since it cannot even be *diegetically* performed. Less – because the words Els's Twitter followers and Powers's readers read are precisely what *makes* the artefact. As Menard's *Don Quixote* is inscribed on the surface of Cervantes's, Els's verbal music is accessible to Powers's readers if we retune our perception and suspend disbelief. We can alternately treat it as *more* and *less* fictional by a learnt attentional switch – such as the one involved in the 'rabbit-duck illusion'. Now there isn't a piece. Then there is.

Powers deconstructs the solid, non-gradated status of fictivity in a Borgesian manner by giving several examples of verbal music. He loosens our habitual reservations that novels cannot be like music. The old melocentric metaphor of the Music of the Spheres is delineated in the performative biomusical/verbal utterances of Powers's character – in fact, two characters, since collaborations with Bonner as stage director, impresario, choreographer, and librettist overtly equip Els's music with its otherwise latent multisensory dimensions. Music always occurs together with everything else.

The gradated scale that my approach to fictitious music highlights must host *more than two* points or regimes. It is not that Els's *Borges Songs* are fictive and Mahler's *Songs on the Death of Children* (1904), which Els listens to early in the novel, are not. However, they are not *equally* fictive either, leaving ontological security only to the Mahler on CD. To paraphrase Barthes, there is the reality

*affect*, and gaining perceptual images of the music playing right into your ear may prove experientially poorer than a verbal music passage relying on, and teasing the reader's repertoire of, recalled images – musical as well as others. Without verbal characterization, associations, and recall, actual music may prove ephemeral, and vice versa: a composition one has never heard, 'existing or fictitious' (Scher 1970: 149), may be described so vividly as to pour 'cascades of cognition' upon 'the embodied reader' (Kukkonen 2014). Next to Powers's Mahler, the *Borges Songs*, and the *Serratia* piece there are other manifestations of verbal music, each providing numerous 'microtonal' gradations of how far our disbelief is suspended. Suspension of disbelief, then, is not a two-position on/off selector (either we believe, or we do not). John Searle's (1975) logical treatment of the issue in terms of speech act theory might have embraced more flexibility, in the spirit of Searle's predecessor J. L. Austin. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin starts with a strict distinction between constative and performative utterances – ones that describe facts vs. others that act and make changes by the fact of being uttered – and finishes with a reflection on how constatives are performatives too.

In the approach I advocate here, fictivity as a signified's *constative relation* to real facts and disbelief as a *performative attitude* to signified facts can also be brought to a common denominator. From the point of view of readerly experience, they are the same thing.

Novels 'do things with words', or, to be more precise, their readers do. The two musical compositions from *Orfeo* that I have discussed in detail are *verbally performed*. The equal terms on which Els's biomusical material is accessible to characters and readers are no guarantee that the material will be accessed. Do many readers of Borges extend their familiarity with Menard's *Don Quixote* by reading Cervantes as Menard any further beyond the passage cited in the Borges story? With all his cult popularity among fellow literati, Borges's prose never enjoyed the success of his disciples – García Márquez's or Julio Cortázar's.

Without Bonner's imaginative interpretation of Els's last design as aimed at the Music of the Spheres, not as a product of the old man's loss of musical sensitivity inflicted by brain damage, neither we nor Els's audience in the book would have a chance to believe that such music can exist. Powers's clever narrative move, by which we read Els's tweets throughout *Orfeo* without knowing what they are, may also impress us and contribute to our 'hearing' of 'the piece'. In these scattered short paragraphs, we belatedly recognise Els's own voice, which may add to the 'consciousness-enactment' maintained by the internal focalisation and free indirect discourse of Powers's narration. Such perspectival and plot twists are literary devices that are all too well known. They also make some fictive phenomena less fictive than others.



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# SOUNDS LIKE NONSENSE

## Elements of Orality in American Nonsense Literature<sup>1</sup>

Emily Petermann  
University of Konstanz

Nonsense can be linked to music in the sense that nonsensical lyrics may occur in songs, most obviously in but not restricted to nonce refrains.<sup>2</sup> In another sense, the one explored in this paper, nonsense literature is often musical in that it is particularly invested in stimulating readers' ears as well as their eyes, by using sound patterns to a greater degree than many other literary modes and foregrounding form over content. This orality is evoked by prominently featuring acts of storytelling on both the levels of thematic material and of narrative structure, as well as by means of a diction and dialect typical of spoken rather than written or literary communication. We could call this a kind of figurative or metaphorical orality – orality 'as if', evoked by the text but not literally present. The improvised, playful feel of much nonsense is dependent upon the creation of a storyteller persona who seems to play with the sounds of language as he or she goes along, much as a jazz narrator in a jazz-inflected musical novel will imitate improvisation through the use of oral devices (see Petermann 2014).

The poetic personas used in James Whitcomb Riley's poetry and the many oral storytellers of Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* demonstrate this latter type of orality very clearly. The texts I will use as examples, poems from Riley's 1891 book *Rhymes of Childhood* (included in Riley 1993) and stories from Sandburg's first collection of short stories for children, *Rootabaga Stories* (first published in 1922; C. Sandburg 1990), reached most of their audience both historically and today through the medium of the printed book. This is less straightforward, however, than it might initially appear. For example, Sandburg apparently first told at least some of the *Rootabaga* stories to his daughters orally before he collected them in book form<sup>3</sup> and traces of that oral storytelling situation are evident throughout the tales.

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1. This research was supported by an Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship at the Lilly Library at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN, where I spent a week in March 2017 working with Riley's correspondence and manuscripts. I am very grateful to the staff of the Lilly Library for their assistance and financial support. I am also grateful to the staff of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the opportunity to work with their collection of Carl Sandburg's papers.
  2. See e.g. the lyrics of the American alternative rock band They Might Be Giants (see Petermann, forthcoming 2018).
  3. See Paula Sandburg's introduction to *The Sandburg Treasury*, in which she describes her late husband reading 'the stories to the girls at the midday meal, partly to find out whether they would enjoy this kind of tale' (P. Sandburg 1970: 7).

These two groups of texts in particular thus go a step further than merely evoking orality within the printed text to actually embed themselves in an oral context as multimedial performed works. Both Riley's poetry and Sandburg's stories are meant not only to be read silently, but are especially tailored toward either an oral performance by the poet on the stage (as in Riley's case<sup>4</sup>) or a reading by parents to children (as with Sandburg). At the same time, Riley and Sandburg employ local dialect and slang to further emphasize the spoken quality of these texts and create a strain of American nonsense that is specifically Midwestern and that celebrates a working-class, regional identity far from the perceived cerebral or intellectual quality of nineteenth-century English nonsense. I will argue in this article for the importance of orality in Riley's and Sandburg's nonsense in constructing and perpetuating an American folk sensibility that is not generally associated with nonsense literature or with literary modernism.<sup>5</sup>

Nonsense literature is generally traced back to the work of English writers Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll in the mid-nineteenth century and scholars have repeatedly argued for something distinctively English and/or Victorian about this mode, leading nonsense by other writers and especially from other countries to be largely ignored.<sup>6</sup> Nonsense *has* also been produced in other cultures, however, though it has until recently received little scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> There is to date no major study of American nonsense specifically. Michael Heyman recently published an article on Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* that raises the prospect of a distinct American tradition of nonsense with folk origins, in contrast to the more intellectual tradition of British nonsense, which is to date the only study considering what

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4. There is evidence that Sandburg, too, performed his nonsense work in readings and lectures before audiences. An advertising brochure for several of Sandburg's programs of lectures included in the Sandburg papers (Connemara accession) of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois describes the program 'American Folk Songs and Tall Tales' as follows: 'the tall tales and imaginative follies in Mr. Sandburg's books, 'Rootabaga Stories', 'Rootabaga Pigeons' and 'Potato Face', joined to the exploits of such living American folk-lore creations as Paul Bunyan, Pecos Pete, Steamboat Bill and Casey Jones' (Sandburg, Connemara 06-001-003: 67-1-4). A review of a Sandburg performance in the *Providence Evening Bulletin* from March 1, 1930 (Rare Book and Manuscript Library) would seem to describe just this program: 'After reading two of the earlier poems and two droll, uproariously funny fantasies from his book 'Potato Face,' a volume of stories for both adults and children, to be published next month, he sang a number of folk songs, strumming on his guitar'.
  5. While Sandburg's poetry (especially *Chicago Poems*) is generally regarded as modernist, his short stories have yet to be considered in this vein. They are certainly not characterized by the kind of formal experimentation or focus on interiority that is associated with high modernism; they do, however, engage with phenomena of the modern experience such as railroad travel and skyscrapers and reflect the modernist practice of taking a traditional form – in this case the fairy tale – and 'making it new'. They are also shaped by Sandburg's contemporary socialist beliefs in celebrating the working classes, such that they should indeed be regarded as a product of their time, the 1920s.
  6. For example, Klaus Reichert claims that nonsense literature is a phenomenon restricted not only nationally to England, but temporally to the Victorian era, beginning with Lear's *Book of Nonsense* in 1846 and ending with Carroll's death in 1898, leaving only a few forms and techniques, 'die bis heute im subkulturellen Bereich im Gebrauch geblieben sind' (Reichert 1974: 7).
  7. There is also a tradition of nonsense scholarship in Germany (see e.g. Köhler 1989), and scholars have recently begun such work in regard to nonsense in India (Heyman 2007), Scandinavia (Happonen 2017 on Finnish nonsense; Sundmark 2016 on Swedish nonsense), the Netherlands (de Bruijn 2015), Slovenia (Simoniti 2016), and Israel (Porat 2017).

might be American about nonsense literature produced in the United States (Heyman 2017). The present article aims to elaborate on his insights by comparing Sandburg with the earlier writer Riley and exploring how the orality of their texts, in particular, helps to root them in a specifically American regional context and to initiate a new strand of American nonsense that diverges from British models.

Before I discuss the concrete examples of oral features and contexts of Riley's and Sandburg's nonsense, I will begin with a brief theoretical overview of what it means for literature to imitate or evoke orality. Some of the most influential work on orality was done by Walter Ong (see e.g. *Orality and Literacy*, 1982), but he builds upon work by Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Jack Goody, Eric Havelock, and Marshall McLuhan (see Hurm 2003: 39). Such 'oralists' rightly draw attention to contexts of narration other than our familiar post-Gutenberg print practices, but they often overstate their case by drawing too sharp a line between orality and literacy. Gerd Hurm points out that this paradigm was problematic in the way it valorized oral narratives over written literature in a false essentialist dichotomy between orality and literacy. Oralist critics tend to hold up oral communication as primary, natural, and authentic, while writing is considered secondary, cultural, and derivative (Hurm 2003: 46). This sidesteps, however, the range of modes possible within both oral and written communication contexts; a written note may in fact be more informal, personal, and interactive than a spoken lecture before a large audience, while digital technologies allow for both spoken communication that traverses distances in time and place and written communication that is increasingly informal and immediate (see Finnegan 1988: 1-14 for a refutation of the essentialist argument).

In my analyses, I take the following approach to orality: first, the written text of course does not become oral, but evokes or imitates aspects of oral storytelling – just as a musical novel is not music itself, but a textual imitation of it (Petermann 2014: 3). Second, the text exhibits a complex interaction between the written and the oral – the written text evokes speech and oral storytelling, but these oral forms themselves have also been influenced by literature, while the written product may also be intended for both written and oral distribution, e.g., to be read aloud by a parent to a child or to be recited in a lecture series. Likewise, these different types of oral performances differ in characteristics such as degree of interaction, size of community, and other factors. Also, the use of oral techniques in these texts should not be mistaken for an uncritical reproduction of folk storytelling patterns or dialect speech, but these techniques have also been 'shaped by the discursive strategies and political bias of their professional writers', as Hurm puts it (2003: 90).

Another relevant theoretical context for examining these texts' use of oral forms is by considering them to be what Susan Stewart has labeled 'distressed genres'. According to Stewart, these are 'imitations of older forms', specifically 'the literary imitation of folklore forms', and which involves 'an attempt to recoup the voice of orality in all its presumed authenticity of context' (1991: 6, 7). She dis-

cusses the early modern genres of epic, fable, proverb, fairy tale and ballad as literary adaptations of oral forms and points out how the oral is held up as something natural, with the accompanying authority that implies, and how these textual imitations thus suffer 'from an inauthenticity of presentation' (1991: 7). Riley's and Sandburg's texts both share this belief in the naturalness and authenticity of the oral, of folklore, but their mediated status as literary texts leads to an ambivalence similar to what Stewart describes, as I will argue in more detail below.

## Nonsense and Orality: James Whitcomb Riley's Dialect Poetry in Performance

The status of the texts *as text* is complicated in Riley's case by the fact that he first gained fame as a performer of his poetry on the stage; from the late 1870s on he toured first his home state of Indiana and later all over the United States reciting his poetry as part of lecture tours alongside such famous writers and humorists as Mark Twain and Bill Nye. His major professional breakthrough occurred when the then-unknown Midwesterner astonished Eastern audiences by thoroughly overshadowing better-known colleagues such as Twain in a program of the American Copyright League in New York in November 1887. The major innovation of Riley's performance, and indeed of his poetry, was the embodiment of a rustic farmer persona, complete with the Hoosier dialect of Indiana, who charmed the audiences so thoroughly that they were consistently moved to tears of laughter or sympathy by the humor or pathos of his performances. Riley was a consummate actor who 'absorbed' his characters, to use a term derived from William Archer's theory of acting, published in 1888 (cited in Bush 1999: 40 and *passim*).

While Riley entertained hundreds of thousands of people with his live performances of his poetry on stage, his 46 books (counting only the first editions) reached an audience of millions more just in his own lifetime. Many readers of these books must therefore have encountered the poetry primarily as a written form, rather than as oral performance. Yet there are many reasons to view the published poems through the lens of orality as well. First, Riley made his reputation through oral performances, such that many readers would have an image in their minds of the poet and possibly of his voice, as they read the poems to themselves. Second, and more importantly, some of the most popular of Riley's poems were written in dialect, consciously imitating the spoken word in their typography, diction, and style. Many popular Riley poems, such as those that appeared in his first published collection, *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (1883), originally appeared in the *Indianapolis Journal* under a pseudonym. By posing as rustics such as the fictional 'Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone', Riley took on the persona of a country farmer with limited education. The irregular spellings and evocations of dialect served to produce a sense of authenticity, as if the semi-literate 'Johnson' had indeed written and submitted these poems to the newspaper himself.

More literate readers of the paper and later the published book could enjoy the disparity between Johnson's misspellings, with their suggestion of regional pronunciations, and their own knowledge of standard English spelling and usage. Of course, the tension between this pretense to rustic authenticity and readers' possible awareness of Riley's true authorship – an awareness that was shared by all once the poems were collected in book form under Riley's own name – could have led readers to view these poems as fraudulent, but at least as often led to admiration for the mastery of Riley's impersonation.

Riley rocketed to fame as the most popular poet of his day not solely through the strength of his acting and delivery on the stage, but also through the major innovation of combining the mode of lyric poetry with popular dialect-speaking personas (Gray 1981: 11). Riley's own statements about 'Dialect in Literature' (see his 1892 essay by that title, Riley 1916) are revealing here. Dialect for him was a source of authenticity, especially of emotion. It could 'convey to us a positive force of soul, truth, dignity, beauty, grace, purity and sweetness that may even touch us to the tenderness of tears' (Riley 1916: 2676). That this assessment accurately describes his listeners' response to his dialect use is well documented by contemporary reviews, which frequently – and positively – describe how his audience was moved to tears by a performance full of pathos (see Bush 1999: 42), as well as the raucous laughter inspired by his humorous pieces (on this, see especially Mark Twain's praise for Riley's performance style in 'How to Tell a Story'; Twain 1996).

In addition to rustic farmers like Johnson, Riley often ventriloquized children as the speakers of his poems, especially in those collected in the book *Rhymes of Childhood* (1891). One of the best-known examples of Riley's child-speaker can be found in the poem 'The Raggedy Man', first printed in 1890. Here is an excerpt from the beginning of the poem:

O The Raggedy Man! He works fer Pa;  
 An' he's the goodest man ever you saw!  
 He comes to our house every day,  
 An' waters the horses, an' feeds 'em hay;  
 An' he opens the shed – an' we all ist laugh  
 When he drives out our little old wobble-ly calf;  
 An' nen – ef our hired girl says he can –  
 He milks the cow fer 'Lizabuth Ann.—  
     Ain't he a' awful good Raggedy Man?  
     Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man

(Riley 1993: 462-463)

The poem's imitation of childish mistakes – 'goodest', 'a' awful good' – combined with dialect pronunciations – 'fer', 'ef', 'ist' for 'just' – allows the persona of the child to come to life in the reader's imagination, as he would for listeners hearing Riley perform the role of this Indiana child. Dialect usage is not restricted to pro-

nunciation or morphology, but is also visible in the syntactical structures that are more typical of spoken than of written language, as in the frequent coordinating conjunctions: ‘an’ waters [...] an’ opens [...] an’ we all ist laugh [...] an’ nen [...]’. Rather than the more varied syntactical patterns a writer, especially an educated adult writer, would typically use, we here have an accumulative structure of additional ideas, piled on top of one another by means of ‘and’ – a strategy, incidentally, also very prominent in Sandburg’s *Rootabaga Stories*.<sup>8</sup> This also creates a kind of breathlessness or excitement that is appropriate for the eager child speaker, which is reflected typographically in the many exclamation points of the poem – but note that this typographic reflection in fact emphasizes that the text is written rather than spoken. Even when read silently, the use of dialect encourages readers to imagine a speech act. As Nadia Nurhusein observes, ‘literary dialect [...] forces some degree of articulation (during the reading process), making what would be silent reading a performance’ (Nurhusein 2013: 31).

## Dialect Poetry and Nonsense: ‘The Rhyme o’ The Raggedy Man’s ‘at’s Best’

I have chosen ‘The Raggedy Man’ to illustrate these features of Riley’s dialect poetry not only because it was one of his most popular poems in dialect, but also because it offers an important link to the lesser-known nonsense examples. Later in the same poem, the boy speaker reveals that the Raggedy Man is much more than a hired man who entertains the children as he works, picks them apples, or makes them toys (‘makin’ a little bow-n-orry fer me’); he is also a skilled storyteller:

An’ The Raggedy Man, he knows most rhymes,  
 An’ tells ‘em, ef I be good, sometimes:  
 Knows ‘bout Giunts, an’ Griffuns, an’ Elves,  
 An’ the Squidgicum-Squees ‘at swallers the’rselves:  
 An’, wite by the pump in our pasture-lot,  
 He showed me the hole ‘at the Wunks is got,  
 ‘At lives way deep in the ground, an’ can  
 Turn into me, er ‘Lizabuth Ann!  
 Er Ma, er Pa, er The Raggedy Man!  
 Ain’t he a funny old Raggedy Man?  
 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

(Riley 1993: 463)

8. For example, see the conclusion of the first story in the collection, ‘How They Broke Away to Go to the Rootabaga Country’, in which each of the last five paragraphs begins with the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ (C. Sandburg 1990: 12-13).



Here, the nonsensical ‘squidgicum-squees ’at swallers the’rselves’ are grouped with more familiar fantasy creatures, like giants, griffins, and elves among the stories the Raggedy Man tells to his enthusiastic child listeners. Because this poem is primarily about the hired man and the boy speaker’s admiration for him (it ends with his insistence that he would rather grow up to be a ‘raggedy man’ than a prosperous merchant like his father), it does not elaborate on this fantasy or nonsense. Other poems, however, that do focus on nonsense, are ostensibly narrated by the Raggedy Man as well. I will discuss two examples, ‘The Lugubrious Whing-Whang’ and ‘The Man in the Moon’.

‘The Lugubrious Whing-Whang’ begins with two stanzas in the voice of what is presumably the same boy speaker who narrates the poem ‘The Raggedy Man’:

The rhyme o’ The Raggedy Man’s ’at’s best  
 Is Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs,  
 ’Cause that-un’s the strangest of all o’ the rest,  
 An’ the worst to learn, an’ the last one guessed,  
 An’ the funniest one, an’ the foolishhest.  
     Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

I don’t know what in the world it means –  
     Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs! –  
 An’ nen when I *tell* him I don’t, he leans  
 Like he was a-grindin’ on some machines  
 An’ says: Ef I *don’t*, w’y, I don’t know *beans!*  
     Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

(Riley 1993: 449-450)

The young speaker admits both to his listeners and to the Raggedy Man that he doesn’t understand the poem, in a classic description of literary nonsense reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s Alice, who states of ‘The Jabberwocky’ that ‘it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t exactly know what they are!’ (Carroll 1998: 134). In response, the Raggedy Man tells his young interlocutor that he should know ‘what in the world it means,’ or else he ‘don’t know *beans!*’ Clearly, this is the storyteller pulling his young listener’s leg, for the remaining three stanzas are a classic nonsense ballad reminiscent of the English nonsense poet Edward Lear:

Out in the margin of Moonshine Land,  
     Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs,  
 Out where the Whing-Whang loves to stand,  
 Writing his name with his tail in the sand,  
 And swiping it out with his oogerish hand;  
     Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

Is it the gibber of Gungs or Keeks?  
 Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!  
 Or what *is* the sound that the Whing-Whang seeks? –  
 Crouching low by the winding creeks,  
 And holding his breath for weeks and weeks!  
 Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

Aroint him the wraithest of wraithly things!  
 Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!  
 'Tis a fair Whing-Whangess, with phosphor rings,  
 And bridal-jewels of fangs and stings;  
 And she sits and as sadly and softly sings  
 As the mildewed whir of her own dead wings, –  
 Tickle me, Dear,  
 Tickle me here,  
 Tickle me, Love, in me Lonesome Ribs!

(‘The Lugubrious Whing-Whang,’ Riley 1993: 450)

There is a strong sense of incongruity between the initial stanzas, which frame the remainder as a tale told by the Raggedy Man, and that tale itself. First, the voice shifts from dialect to standard English, albeit peppered with fanciful neologisms. The only usage in the last three stanzas that could be considered nonstandard speech such as that typical of both the little boy and of the Raggedy Man (as seen in the previous poem) is the phrase ‘in *me* Lonesome Ribs’ (emphasis added) in the final line. Yet all participial forms retain their final ‘g’s, though this is unusual in Riley’s representation of Hoosier dialect, and the diction is rather stilted (‘Tis a fair...’) than familiar or colloquial. The tension between a formal poetic register and the less formal quality of most of the neologisms (‘Whing-Whang,’ ‘oogish,’ ‘Gungs,’ ‘Keeks’) is mirrored in the incongruity of sentences that are not completed (‘Out in the margin of Moonshine land [...] where the Whing-Whang loves to stand [...]’; ‘writing his name with his tail in the sand’; ‘holding his breath for weeks and weeks’; ‘mildewed whir of her own dead wings’). This particular poem echoes Edward Lear not only in the invention of nonsensical creatures in a fantastic place,<sup>9</sup> but especially in the slightly melancholy tone of the poem, evoked by the seeking and waiting of the Whing-Whang, and the sad, soft singing of the Whing-Whangess, with her ‘dead wings’. This is in line with Lear’s ‘Dong with the Luminous Nose’, who tragically searches for his lost Jumbly girl (Lear 2001: 225-228); in each case, nonsensical

9. For example, this ‘margin of Moonshine Land’ serves a similar function to Lear’s ‘Hills of the Chunkly Bore’ in the poems ‘The Jumblies’ and ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’, while the Whing-Whang and Whing-Whangess can be compared to Lear’s characters the Dong and the Jumbly girl in the latter poem (Lear 2001: 71-74, 225-228).

imagery disrupts the tale of loss and longing, or more precisely, creates an aesthetic distance to it.

Another nonsense poem attributed to the Raggedy Man operates somewhat differently. ‘The Man in the Moon’ begins with a line that establishes the character of the Raggedy Man as the speaker of what will follow: ‘Said The Raggedy Man, on a hot afternoon:’ (Riley 1993: 282). The remainder of the five-stanza poem is spoken by this character in the first person, addressing a listener<sup>10</sup> directly in dialect. He claims to have met the Man in the Moon and so is able to correct misconceptions about him made by ‘some little folks’, such as his child listener. He does not elaborate on these misconceptions, but he outlines ‘some *actual* facts’ instead, primarily relating to the Man in the Moon’s pitiable physical condition with ‘a crick in his back’, ‘a boil on his ear; and a corn on his chin’, and ‘a rheumatic knee’ (Riley 1993: 282-283). Yet the poem does more than just describe an idiosyncratic character or grotesque figure; in the third stanza the typical inversions of nonsense emerge. The Man in the Moon calls his ‘corn on his chin’ a ‘dimple’, but the Raggedy Man’s initial objection that ‘dimples stick in’ is quickly abandoned for a topsy-turvy kind of logic: ‘it might be a dimple turned over, you know!’ (Riley 1993: 283). The nonsense develops further in the fourth stanza:

And his toes have worked round where his heels ought to be. –  
 So whenever he wants to go North he goes South,  
 And comes back with porridge-crumbs all round his mouth,  
 And he brushes them off with a Japanese fan,  
 Whing!  
 Whann!  
 What a marvelous man!  
 What a very remarkably marvelous man!

(Riley 1993: 283)

Several typical nonsense features emerge in this passage: an incongruous or topsy-turvy detail – the mixed-up state of his feet – paradoxically has logical consequences, as situations are taken to their extreme. Given the impossible situation of toes being where heels should be, or feet being turned around backwards, it is a logical next step to suppose he would then walk backwards, going South when he wants to go North.<sup>11</sup> This topsy-turvy behavior is then augmented with incongruous details: the porridge-crumbs and the Japanese fan, neither of which are explained but serve primarily to add to the sense of incongruity in the larger image.

10. This listener is presumably the little boy from the other poems, referred to in the final stanza as ‘*Jimmy-cum-jim*’ (283), in other poems as ‘Jim,’ or a child-avator of Riley himself.

11. This is another echo of Lewis Carroll; in *Through the Looking Glass* Alice discovers that in Looking-Glass Land one must walk away from something (e.g. the garden) in order to approach it (see e.g. Carroll 1998: 135).

This is a technique also featured in the traditional American oral genre of the tall tale, to which this poem alludes indirectly.<sup>12</sup> The Raggedy Man as a folk storyteller is entertaining his audience by piling up impossibilities in a similar manner. In tall tales, this assemblage of lies can go on indefinitely, in an open-ended structure that John Kouwenhoven has claimed as typically American (along with other American cultural products like the skyscraper and jazz; Kouwenhoven 1998). The challenge in telling a tale in such an open-ended format is then to find an effective ending to a tale that could conceivably go on forever. Carolyn S. Brown identifies different types of closure to the tale, such as ‘end[ing] on their most impossible point’, repeated claims for authenticity of the tale, or deflating the tale’s exaggeration by means of understatement (Brown 1987: 20-21). The variants of closure are open because the tall tale is not defined by its formal structure (see e.g. 1987: 21). According to Brown, the defining characteristic of the genre is that it be a comic fictional narrative presented as if true, though it may or may not be believed by listeners, who may or may not pretend to believe it (1987: 11-12).

J. Russell Reaver, in examining tall tale conclusions, presents eight variants of the tall tale type ‘the wonderful hunt’ with distinctive opening and closing variants. In one of the closings he describes (closing six), the teller ‘flings a final challenge to his audience by saying, “You see that wasn’t hard to do at all”’ (Reaver 1972: 379). This is a typical instance of false modesty or understatement that actually serves to further emphasize the fantastic quality of the feats achieved, but it also serves to draw in the listeners. This is the only example Reaver includes of a direct address of the audience, but in fact such a gesture is constitutive of many oral storytelling situations and particularly of the tall tale with its construction of communities of insiders who get the joke as opposed to outsiders who would be taken in.<sup>13</sup>

The Raggedy Man’s story of the Man in the Moon also demonstrates this shift from the content of the tale to the relationship between teller and listener. The poem’s final stanza turns from the Man in the Moon’s physical problems to his emotional state as he ‘Gits! / So! / Sullonesome, you know, – / Up there by hisse’f sence creation began! –’ (Riley 1993: 283). This leads to the speaker’s assertion that he would gladly stay up there and keep him company, if it weren’t for the little boy who needs him down here on the ground:

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12. In her comprehensive study of the genre, Carolyn S. Brown defines a tall tale as “a fictional story which is told in the form of personal narrative or anecdote, which challenges the listener’s credulity with comic outlandishness, and which performs different social functions depending on whether it is heard as true or as fictional” (Brown 1987: 11).

13. For example, the frame narrative that dramatizes the storytelling situation is a typical device of written tall tales (Blair 1972: 186; Brown 1987: 63-73). See e.g. Thorpe’s ‘The Big Bear of Arkansas’ or Twain’s ‘The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County’ for two canonical examples of the frame narrative in literary tall tales.

He grabs me and holds me and begs me to stay, –  
 Till – *Well!* if it wasn't fer *Jimmy-cum-jim*,  
 Dadd!  
 Limb!  
 I'd go pardners with him –  
 Jes' jump my job here and be pardners with *him!*

(Riley 1993: 283; italics original)

The storyteller skillfully manages to both convey the desire to join that fantasy world as a realistic choice and to justify remaining in the real world by having the decision hinge on his real-world listener. It is not his job per se that is holding him on the farm, but the little boy who eagerly listens to his stories. The conclusion thus closes the frame around the tale of the Man in the Moon, a frame that consists of the conversation and indeed the relationship between the Raggedy Man and his child listener, Jim, an avatar for the poet. Frame narratives for tall tales are clearly not restricted to prose texts, but may also be used to good effect in narrative verse such as Riley's.

Reaver insists on a distinction between the tall tale and various forms of nonsense: 'nonsense tales are not tall tales' (Reaver 1972: 373). Though his conception of nonsense is a simplistic one based on common parlance rather than the literary genre, there nonetheless are significant differences: 'The Man in the Moon' is less a narrative with absurd plot developments than a character portrait; the subject of this anecdote is a fantastical figure rather than one of the typical frontier themes of the tall tale, like hunting exploits, pioneer hardships such as extreme weather, exaggerated fertility of the soil, and unusual animals; and the outlandish details do not involve exaggeration so much as a topsy-turvy incongruity. The similarities are nevertheless apparent: Like tall tales, the Raggedy Man's story of the Man in the Moon is an instance of oral storytelling, it serves as entertainment, it consists of incongruous or implausible episodes piled on top of one another in a cumulative manner, it produces a humorous effect, and it is important in cementing a relationship between teller and listener.<sup>14</sup> The return in the poem's conclusion to the emphasis on this relationship frames the nonsensical story as a playful interlude, a temporary escape from real-world obligations ('my job here').

## Strategies for Evoking Orality: Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*

Before turning to my second example of American regional nonsense literature, Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*, I would like to consider what exactly is

14. On the tall tale's relationship between teller and audience see Brown 1987: 31-38.

involved when a written text is said to imitate or evoke orality. There are particular features of oral narratives that are less typical in printed literature, which can be emphasized in order to evoke an oral storytelling context, whether for purposes of nostalgia, as part of an intermedial exploration of the borders between text and other media such as music, and so forth. As we have seen from these examples, in Riley's poems, the typical strategies that evoke orality are the use of a persona perceived as illiterate or semiliterate, whose diction is informal and may include dialect, and a frame for the story proper that dramatizes the oral storytelling situation by incorporating a diegetic storyteller and listener (or even multiple diegetic layers and storytellers). Riley's use of dialect and rustic personae can be seen as the pinnacle of this technique, widely praised by popular and critical audiences of his time. The other strategy, the use of a storytelling frame and the emphasis on storytelling as a theme as well as a vehicle, is one that is shared by Riley with the slightly later writer Carl Sandburg.

Though Sandburg did not often use nonsense in his verse, he did experiment with nonsense both for child and adult readers in prose form. His nonsense for adults was only published posthumously in a selection of short pieces collected by George Hendrick under the title *Fables, Foibles, and Fools* and apparently circulated during Sandburg's lifetime only among a small private audience of friends. I will thus focus here on the *Rootabaga Stories* that were published for a child audience in 1922. In the first two volumes of stories about Rootabaga Country (*Rootabaga Stories*, 1922; *Rootabaga Pigeons*, 1923) twenty-five out of forty-nine tales<sup>15</sup> involve an overt diegetic storyteller, an explicit narrator within the tale and a description of the storytelling situation, including an explicit narratee. There are several recurring storytelling characters, sometimes gathered together as groups of stories (e.g., 'Five Stories about the Potato Face Blind Man'), all featuring this character either as the storyteller or as an interlocutor, albeit with different characters as listeners). Though there are numerous cases in which an adult male storyteller like the Potato Face Blind Man narrates his tales for inquisitive child (almost always girl) listeners,<sup>16</sup> the situation is also sometimes reversed, as when the girl Wing Tip the Spick tells her four uncles about the idiosyncracies of the Village of Cream Puffs.

The storytelling situation is not only visible on the level of content, with a high number of diegetic storytellers who foreground the practice of storytelling as a theme, but also in the direct address of readers, who are drawn into a storytelling

15. *Rootabaga Stories* contains twenty-five short stories. Of these, roughly half (twelve) involve diegetic storytellers and listeners. In *Rootabaga Pigeons* the emphasis on diegetic storytelling is slightly stronger, with fifteen out of twenty-four stories involving diegetic storytellers and listeners.

16. It is interesting to observe how often the storytelling situation involves an adult male character and one or more girl characters in Sandburg's work. There are very few adult female or male child characters, a fact that may point to the autobiographical origins of these tales in a father telling stories to his daughters. This comes to the forefront in the second-to-last story in the first collection, 'How to Tell Corn Fairies If You See 'Em', when Sandburg introduces the actual nicknames of his daughters Margaret and Janet, Spink and Skaboorch, as the listeners of the story (C. Sandburg 1990: 158).

situation by a – usually unspecified – narrator. The very first story, ‘How They Broke Away to Go to the Rootabaga Country’, introduces readers not only to the vaguely Midwestern but more fantastic setting of the nonsense tales to follow but also to the style of narration that is typical of these tales. As the title suggests, the stories are presented as explanations for events or circumstances, placing them in the tradition of the folk tale format of the *pourquoi* tale (Lynn 1980: 121) or origin story (Heyman 2017: 64). As nonsense, however, these tales do not aim to explain actual phenomena, but rather bizarre and fantastic ones, such as a village as light as a cream puff that can blow away in the wind, a country characterized by a zig-zag-shaped railroad, pigs that wear bibs, and other such whimsical details. The supposed explanations are characterized by randomness and incompleteness, raising more questions than they answer. Indeed, the nonsense here evokes the spontaneity and improvisation of an oral storytelling situation. Imagine a storyteller asking a child, ‘and what shape should that railroad track be?’ ‘Zig-zagged!’ ‘OK, it’s a zigzag railroad. So people were wondering why it had that shape. Why do you think that might be?’<sup>17</sup> In support for this view of the *Rootabaga Stories*’ composition Kåreland cites Sandburg (in Harry Golden, *Carl Sandburg*, 221): ‘The children asked questions, and I answered them’ (qtd. in Kåreland 1999/2012: 226).

This first story uses the device of the direct address of the reader (‘you’) to evoke such an oral storytelling situation in which a folktale would be told to a listener not as a discrete aesthetic object, but as embedded in a social interaction. Oral tales may be modified to fit current circumstances, to emphasize their relevance for listeners, and to incorporate responses to the tale in the form of listeners’ questions. All these features are visible in the embedded storytelling interactions on the level of diegesis, in the many conversations between characters, but also in the stories’ frames and address of the reader as if she were a listener:

And so if you are going to the Rootabaga Country you will know when you get there because the railroad tracks change from straight to zigzag, the pigs have bibs on and it is the fathers and mothers who fix it.

And if you start to go to that country remember first you must sell everything you have, pigs, pastures, pepper picker, pitchforks, put the spot cash money in a ragbag and go to the railroad station and ask the ticket agent for a long slick yellow leather slab ticket with a blue sanch across it.

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17. The impression one gains when reading is almost like that of the classic surrealist party game *The Exquisite Corpse*, in which the writer unfolds a piece of paper to find a story element, or the next sentence, and has to incorporate or build upon that material, however odd the juxtaposition might be, before passing the paper on to the next player. With the surrealists, this was an attempt to circumvent the rational consciousness of the writer, to approach automatic writing. Though the circumstances here are quite different – in part because child-oriented – the effect is strikingly similar, with both approaches characterized by interaction between participants and by a spirit of play, particularly in the enforced arbitrary rules and uncertain outcome.

And you mustn't be surprised if the ticket agent wipes sleep from his eyes and asks, 'So far? So early? So soon?'

(C. Sandburg 1990: 12-13)

Furthermore, Sandburg's frequent use of repetitions and circularity serve as markers of an oral narrative (see Fleischman 1970 on features of performed stories). While Sandburg's stories make less overt use of dialect than Riley's Hoosier poems, their diction is nonetheless markedly oral, rather than literary. The *Rootabaga Stories* are peppered with regional slang from the period of their conception (early 1920s), which coordinates well with the objects and characters that people the Rootabaga Country. Though this is a fictional place that contrasts with the real Midwestern locations of a few of the tales, it is clearly a fairy-tale<sup>18</sup> version of Sandburg's native Midwestern region. Like Riley's Hoosier dialect that was not restricted to Indiana but could be taken as authentic for any of a number of down-home places, Sandburg's Midwest is here more inclusive than an actual portrait of Illinois would be, and indeed extends to references to Oklahoma, Nebraska, and other places. As for the characters, they tend to be working-class, poor but independent men (and confident, optimistic girls); they embody a concept of freedom and mobility that is quintessentially American; they embrace technology even when it is bizarre or incomprehensible; and fate – in contrast to more traditional fairy tales – is present but absurd. Even the refusal of his nonsense to suggest a clear interpretation, while by no means solely an American phenomenon, can perhaps be seen in this context as a democratization of interpretation. Instead of the moralizing tone of fairy tales that reward the good and punish the wicked, Sandburg's modern, American, nonsensical tales allow the reader to make sense of a nonsensical world for him or herself – full of wonder, but without any clear moral or judgement.

As Stewart took the fairy tale as one of her examples of distressed genres, it is worth looking more closely at how these stories relate to an earlier model and both make it new and self-reflexively evoke it as a source of authority. Stewart relates the movement of the fairy tale from the oral to the literary realm to three main developments: 'rising conceptions of the *vox populi* that linked the peasant with the child, to concepts contributing to the invention of "the folk" in the West, and to the collection and appropriation of the oral tradition by the leisure classes as part of a larger nostalgic reaction against industrialism' (Stewart 1991:

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18. Indeed, as Sandburg's widow states in her introduction to the *The Sandburg Treasury*, one of his intentions in writing these tales was to create an alternative to traditional fairy tales with their preponderance of kings, queens, princesses, and princes: 'Carl thought that American children should have something different, more suited to their ideals and surroundings. So his stories did not concern knights on white chargers, but simple people [...] or commonplace objects' (P. Sandburg 1970: 7). For a contemporary assessment of the Rootabaga stories as fairy tales, see also Edwin Seaver's review of *Rootabaga Pigeons* in *The Advance*, "Towards the Democratic Fairy Tale" (Rare Books Library, Connemara: 181:006: Rootabaga Pigeons – Reviews).



19). Though Sandburg's stories were written in another epoch altogether, these same forces would seem to be at work in the *Rootabaga Stories*, where a childlike wonder characterizes not only the children but also the adult working-class and poor characters and even the language of the narrative voice, where the Americanizing and regionalist impulse of the collection seems to advocate a celebration of an American 'folk', and where the modernist engagement with industrialization and mechanization is tempered by a return to a seemingly simpler rural landscape.

This last feature, however, needs further qualification. While Riley's poems make the life of the rustic poor accessible to middle-class and urban audiences by employing a sentimental, nostalgic tone, using a child perspective to revisit and contain a vanishing past<sup>19</sup>, Sandburg's stories cannot so simply be assigned to the realm of nostalgia. Instead, these tales are pervaded by an orientation toward the future, a belief in American progress and innovation, such that any nostalgia for the past is tempered by an insistence that the world presented is not actually past, but very much of the present and future, at least in the imagination.

## Conclusion

These few examples demonstrate that the oral storytelling model is evident on many levels of the texts. Both Riley's poems and Sandburg's stories are not merely printed on the page, but also had a parallel existence as performed stories, as embodied performances of characters and narratives that would be spoken and presented in interaction with a live audience, whether of thousands attending the lecture hall or a child on a parent's lap. Even as written texts, however, they also evoke features of oral forms. In the case of Riley's poems, this is most obvious in the dialect spellings that invite readers to sound them out aloud or at least in their minds, raising a tension between the written and the spoken. They are also commonly presented as dialogues or reported speech, emphasizing social interaction between a storyteller and a listener, such as the Raggedy Man and Little Orphant Annie, who are mediated for the audience by the child Jim. In Sandburg's stories, too, the content prominently features diegetic storytellers as characters and storytelling as an activity, the tales may address readers directly and so draw them into an imagined context as listeners of orally told tales, and the extensive use of repetition and circular structures imitates these features in oral tales, in which they served mnemonic functions for teller and listener, as well as contributing to a ritual quality of the telling as a performance and an event.

Both authors also draw on story formats that are traditionally oral, such as the similarities to the American folklore format of the tall tale, which informs both Riley's 'The Man in the Moon' and Sandburg's 'How They Broke Away to Go

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19. For a more nuanced discussion of nostalgia in Riley's portrayal of the poor, see Petermann, forthcoming 2019.

to the Rootabaga Country' (see Heyman 2017: 62-65). Additionally, the *Rootabaga Stories* are full of formulaic expressions and rhetorical devices drawn from folktale types such as the *pourquoi* tale and the fairy tale, which are not simply imitated, but translated for a new time and cultural context. Combine that with nonsense's own interest in foregrounding the sound of words, often at the expense of a nebulous 'sense', and it should be clear that these texts cannot be regarded merely as visual, verbal text but ask also to be heard and contextualized, to be shared between a teller and listener or listeners, even if only imagined.

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‘THINGS AS THEY ARE / ARE CHANGED UPON  
THE BLUE GUITAR’

Learning from Ned Rorem’s *Last Poems*  
of *Wallace Stevens*

*Bart Eeckhout*

Universiteit Antwerpen / Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities  
and Social Sciences

*They said, ‘You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.’*

*The man replied, ‘Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.’*

— Wallace Stevens, ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ (Stevens 1997: 135)

As my title and epigraph suggest, this contribution is intended to focus on the tension produced whenever a literary reality (here in the form of a handful of poetic texts) is converted into the language of music, and to do so, moreover, in a way that honours the dialogical exchange staged by Wallace Stevens at the outset of his long poem ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ (1937). To frame my investigation, let me propose two fairly general questions. First, how helpful is it, when considering musical settings of poetry, to return to the claim, made by Stevens and many others, that the foundational principle of all poetry is transformation? And second, could we go on to propose that the main value of intermedial transpositions lies in the way they manage to refresh and, at best, intensify such intrinsic transformative processes? These two questions serve only as a launching pad, however, for what is really an empirically grounded case study that wishes to extract applied insights rather than test prefabricated theories, or design new ones, about the interaction between literature and music. In developing my critical narrative, furthermore, I have tried to pay some attention to the triangulation between author, work, and audience. This will require that I include at least a minimal reflection on my own motivations and subject position as a researcher.

Here are the basic facts about my case: between December 1971 and February 1972, the American composer Ned Rorem set seven of Stevens’s lyrics from the period 1953-1955 to music. *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens* is a 25-minute song cycle for voice, cello and piano. My main research interest in approaching this material lies in the question what we might learn from analysing such a musical setting, not just about the original poetry and the subsequent music, but also

about the relationship between these two arts and the critical interest in returning to their historical confluence today.

The direction of my critical arrow should be clear: I come from the poetry to the music. My interest derives from years of immersing myself in the writings of the canonical modernist poet Wallace Stevens. Though Stevens's work may be little known by the general reader, its place within academia is assured as part of a poetic heritage worthy of continued attention. When we consider, in addition, that dozens of composers have set his poetry to music, there is nothing unusual about having a closer look at one such instance.

If such an attestation to Stevens's canonicity nevertheless sounds a little defensive, it is because, to the best of my knowledge, this kind of investigation has never been undertaken. Some academic canonizations seem to occur in parallel universes. In the world of Stevens criticism, the name of Ned Rorem barely registers, while in the realm of musical studies Rorem's canonical status is easily illustrated by pointing to his papers at the Library of Congress. The Ned Rorem Collection there consists of 210 feet of materials.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the decision to analyse how one canonical twentieth-century American artist responded to the work of another such artist appears to be both a straightforward and a strangely quixotic one. Even in the age of massive lip service to inter- and multidisciplinary, the narrowness of academic specializations is such that a chasm appears to separate the study of either figure. Musicologists may be wary of tackling Rorem's song cycle because of the intimidating status of Stevens as a writer better left to the specialists, while Stevensians seem unwilling to cross over into musicological terrain because of the intimidating status of musical analysis.

But before expanding upon the figure of Rorem, let us make a brief detour first. Because, as far as I can tell, Rorem never met Stevens personally, we might start with the experiences of a composer who did, the recently deceased John Gruen. In Peter Brazeau's oral biography of the poet, Gruen recollects how as a young man in 1953 he invited Stevens to his apartment in Greenwich Village because he was then turning 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' into a song cycle. His recollected expectations are interesting since, as we will see, they are similar to Rorem's take on Stevens. Gruen noted, 'I thought the man must be [...] so American; and yet he's so French at the same time. The whole sensibility seemed to be such an odd mixture' (Brazeau 1985: 205). What Gruen and his wife, the painter Jane Wilson, recalled from the conversation twenty years after the fact was how Stevens 'spoke very slowly', in a '[v]ery low voice', a 'kind of monotone and heaviness, which was his bearing in general' (207). *What* he told,

1. See <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.scdb.200033677/default.html>. In the European measurement system, this amounts to almost 65 metres of papers deemed worthy of holding on to as part of the United States' cultural heritage.

by contrast, was mystifying. Stevens talked 'about the experience of how it is to make a poem':

He told me that he didn't know what his poetry meant at times, that he really had to think hard as to what he meant by that image or that phrase or that word, even. He talked something about submersion, about words being submerged and then rising out, that they seemed to have been hidden and then revealed themselves [...] He then put the word down, and that revelation was then forgotten. (207)

Gruen and Wilson also recollected how one year later they attended a poetry reading by Stevens and were utterly disconcerted because his delivery was 'so boring'; he 'mumbled' and 'faltered [...], stumbl[ing] over words' so that it seemed 'ironic [...] that this man who wrote this extraordinary poetry would then be so unclear about yielding forth the words in his own voice' (209).

Let's retain a couple of things from these recollections that will be relevant to the rest of my critical narrative: the appeal of Stevens as a Franco-American poet; his explanation of the writing process as propelled by emerging words that reveal themselves and become opaque again; the measured monotone of his usual way of talking; and his ineffectiveness at publicly performing his verse in his own voice.

To turn to Ned Rorem now: the man was born in 1923 – coincidentally the year in which Stevens's first volume, *Harmonium*, appeared – and at the time of writing is still alive. He grew up in the Midwest, studied in Philadelphia and New York, and spent most of the 1950s in France as one of the *arrière-garde* of American artists who went into voluntary exile to Paris (and for some time Morocco). Since his return to the US, he has basically been a New Yorker. His official website describes him as 'one of America's most honored composers' who served a stint, moreover, as President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was ordained *Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 2004 ('About Ned' 2016). Although he's an all-round composer of symphonies, piano concertos, chamber music, operas, choral works, ballets and so forth, he is best known for his more than five hundred art songs, especially after *Time* magazine wrote him up in his early years as 'the world's best composer of art songs' – a description that, as Alex Ross wrote on the occasion of Rorem's eightieth birthday, 'has followed him around like a faithful puppy ever since' (Ross 2003). Besides this reputation as a gifted composer of art songs, another reason for conducting my case study is that Rorem has also made a career as a writer. He has published sixteen books, five of them diaries, and Yale University Press published a *Ned Rorem Reader* that to Ross is 'one of the wisest and wittiest composer books ever published' (Ross 2003). Throughout his life, Rorem may actually have reached a wider audience as a writer than as a composer, though in his own mind the hierarchy is unambiguous: 'I am a composer who also writes, not a writer who also composes' (qtd. in Ross 2003).

To flesh out the musical context, I should situate Rorem briefly within the history of twentieth-century art music. His website mentions how his life was ‘changed [...] forever’ when as a young boy he was introduced to the piano music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel (‘About Ned’ 2016). He has stuck to this love ever since, adding further French composers, such as Francis Poulenc, to his personal pantheon. For an understanding of his musical aesthetic, we can turn again to Ross, this time in his award-winning book *The Rest Is Noise*. There we can read how Rorem emerged at mid-century as ‘an American composer firmly committed to the “French” rather than the “German” politics of style’ (Ross 2008: 128). By the time he returned from Europe to the States, however, his traditional aesthetic had resolutely gone out of fashion. Twelve-tone atonality reigned supreme, especially in academic music departments, with Milton Babbitt and Elliott Carter – another Stevens lover who set various of his poems to music – setting the scene. During the Kennedy years, Rorem complained that everyone was ‘writing fat, Teutonic music again [...] as though our country, while smug in its sense of military superiority, was still too green to imagine itself as culturally autonomous’ (qtd. in Ross 2008: 436).

In the nearly sixty years he was active as a composer, Rorem saw his star go up and down, but he largely held on to his early tastes. According to Ross, his ‘austerely lyrical Franco-American style’ has recently come to sound ‘peculiarly fresh’ again now that the ‘high-powered modernists who dismissed him as irrelevant [have become] irrelevant themselves’ (Ross 2003). Still, because Rorem’s musical aesthetic and favourite genre of the art song are so steeped in tradition, he has suffered the fate of most backward-looking artists in the twentieth century: a fair share of condescension and neglect. As the musicologist Nicholas Cook notes, ‘academic writing on music almost invariably emphasizes the innovators, the creators of tradition, the Beethovens and Schoenbergs, at the expense of many more conservative composers who write within the framework of an established style’ (Cook 1998: 14). Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, adds an observation that shows up the irony of a broadly neo-Romantic composer such as Rorem getting but little critical attention. She argues that it is precisely ‘the (post-)Romantic valuing of the original creation and of the originating creative genius’ that is a major source of ‘the denigration of adapters and adaptations’ (Hutcheon 2006: 3-4). Rorem’s attachment to the European Romantic tradition and its idiomatic genres thus acts as a double boomerang, once for being derivative rather than avant-garde, once for turning to pre-existing literary texts to kindle musical inspiration.

To understand some of the conditions under which the rest of my analysis is able to proceed, I find it useful to return for a moment to Nicholas Cook. He takes a particular interest in how Romantic music historically shored up ‘the construction of bourgeois subjectivity’ (Cook 1998: 19) and how it came to be turned into an illusionary object of sorts that had ‘the power [...] to transcend boundaries of time and space’ (24). Such musical objects were ‘abstracted from



their original conditions of use and valorization' (30). Especially the reification of music thus preoccupies Cook, and his reflections on the matter elucidate several aspects of my case study – not just Rorem's music, but also his comments about writing music, and even, in a sort of retroactive projection, Stevens's own poetics. Referring to the philosopher Roger Scruton, Cook reminds us that 'when we say the music moves, we are treating it as an imaginary object' (70). The 'basic paradox of music' is that we 'experience it in time but in order to manipulate it, even to understand it, we pull it out of time and in that sense falsify it' (70-71). As a result, 'when we talk about music, we don't quite say what we mean, or mean what we say. Or to put it another way, whenever we try to talk about music, we seem to end up changing the subject' (71).

Note how relevant such comments may be also for the student of poetry, especially in the case of a post-Romantic modernist such as Stevens. One thing a musical setting is able to awaken in the listener is a palpable sense, in what we are nowadays used to calling a 'real-time' experience, of the extent to which poems, too, are imaginary objects that exist only temporally, contrary to what their spatial fixation on the page imposes as a primary perception. As with music, there is an important aesthetic trade-off to pulling poems out of time, even for the noble purpose of formulating coherent critical interpretations, and we are always at risk of not really talking about the poem – of not quite saying what we mean, or meaning what we say, and, in the end, of changing the subject. Let's recall here how Stevens tried to explain his compositional process to John Gruen by talking about submerged words emerging to acquire a revelatory quality that then disappeared again so he couldn't retrace the exact meanings that had shaped the writing process in the act of composition. It's easy to connect this to the premise with which Stevens's programmatic poem 'Of Modern Poetry' begins: 'The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice' (Stevens 1997: 218). This premise works just as well if you write, 'The music of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice.'

Not coincidentally, then, analogous ideas are to be found also in Rorem's accounts of his own compositional activities. In his diaries for late 1971 and early 1972, I couldn't find anything about the actual process of composing *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens*, but a few years earlier, in 1969, Rorem wrote a general eight-page essay entitled 'Poetry of Music', and for a 1983 recording of *Last Poems* he penned an album note; both are in a volume called *Settling the Score*. The general essay proposes that poems 'mirror music more singularly than any other human enterprise' – so much so that the two are often married, though he calls such marriages far from 'ideal' since they are 'all based on misunderstanding at best, at worst on total perversion' (Rorem 1969).<sup>2</sup> Rorem warns us that the notion of adaptation should be applied with circumspection to art songs, because the words

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2. All the remaining quotations in this paragraph are from the same unpagged source, Rorem's essay on 'Poetry and Music'.

of the poem are kept 'intact' and not really '*adapted*'. At the same time, he dismisses the authority of a 'poet declaiming his own verse' as 'no more definitive [...] than some composer's setting of that verse', and he recalls epistolary discussions with Elizabeth Bishop about setting some of her poems. Bishop muttered that 'the fast tempo' undercut the way 'the poem is observation, really, rather than participation', but we already saw in Stevens's case how dissatisfying and ineffectual the poet's own voicing during a reading may be. Composers have every right to present alternative ways of leading us to or through the poetic text, and they have an entire arsenal of technical tools at their disposal for building up the experience so that it exceeds the merely mumbling and muttering meditative poet. Rorem ends his essay by defining song epigrammatically as 'the reincarnation of a poem that was destroyed in order to live again in music.' He argues that the composer 'does not render a poem more *musical* (poetry isn't music, it's poetry); he weds it to sound, creating a third entity of different and sometimes greater magnitude than either parent.' About the resulting meaning, he hedges his bets as much as Stevens did in conversation with Gruen. 'When singers question me on the significance of the words to a song, I answer: They signify whatever the music tells you they signify.' 'As a musician', moreover, 'I "understand" poetry not during but only after the fact of setting.'

Although the present essay has no space for an extended investigation of Rorem's *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens*, it is at least possible to provide a sense of the possibilities for analysis. The composition consists of nine sections, starting with an instrumental prelude, followed by five poems, an instrumental interlude, and two more poems. The texts selected by Rorem hail either from *The Rock*, the final section in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (1954), or from a number of uncollected poems included in the Library of America edition of Stevens's *Collected Poetry and Prose* (1997) under the heading *Late Poems*. Rorem himself made the selection from an anthology compiled by the poet's daughter, Holly Stevens, under the title *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, which was published in 1971 – probably not coincidentally the year at the end of which Rorem embarked upon his composition. The appearance of Holly's selection is likely to have triggered Rorem to write the settings.

One thing that immediately strikes the Stevens scholar is the idiosyncratic sequencing of these brief lyrics, which are all between nine and eighteen lines long. Most conspicuously, the poem with which *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* ends, 'Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself', and which thus to readers has long had the effect of a concluding proclamation, is placed at the very beginning by Rorem. The two poems that immediately precede it in *The Collected Poems*, 'The Planet on the Table' and 'The River of Rivers in Connecticut', are in turn reversed as well as pulled apart. And the posthumously published 'Of Mere Being', which is usually regarded as the last poem Stevens wrote before his death in August 1955 (though it's really of uncertain date), is not placed in final but in penultimate position. In other words, Rorem breaks radically with schol-

arly reading habits, proposing his own overarching narrative that invites Stevens scholars to reconsider connections between these roughly contemporaneous lyrics.

In his album note to the 1983 recording, Rorem himself explains that he saw the 'unifying device of [his] piece' as 'the poet's personality' (Rorem 1983).<sup>3</sup> Probably to add to the unifying effect, he 'planned' the music 'to flow unbroken' between its different parts. The poems are strung together, then, to build one extended text (which places the composition historically in the tradition of Beethoven's six-part cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*), though the division between constituent parts remains fairly clear. Formally, Rorem describes the work as a suite, where it's worth noting that this is in origin a French form again – one that accommodates both structural freedom and relative brevity in its various parts. 'As to genre', he adds, 'it is simply a song cycle', but he qualifies it less conventionally as 'a cycle for three voices of which one is verbal and the others are not.' The choice of the cello to complement the female singer and the habitual piano becomes easy to comprehend in this light, since the association between this string instrument and a male singer is a longstanding one – remember Walt Whitman in 'Song of Myself' identifying the sound of the cello with 'the young man's heart's complaint' (canto 26). By contrast, as a keyboard instrument that in earlier classifications used to be included among percussion instruments, a piano is less naturally associated with a singing voice, and the score for it in this case includes many chords and leaps, as well as a wide range of octaves, that couldn't possibly be imitated by a human voice. Yet the piano score also makes frequent use of arpeggios that have a gliding effect more reminiscent of singing, and some of the time it uses drawn-out chords and pedal-sustained notes clearly intended to support the cantilenas of voice and cello.

The slight shift from the traditional accompaniment of a piano to a combination of cello and piano is further explained by Rorem in terms of the larger economic history of the art song. Writing in the early 1970s, Rorem comes at the very tail end of the genre's history, whose heyday is from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. In his album note, he reports that he was pushed into developing various chamber music variants of the genre simply because chamber ensembles became the only performers still commissioning works in the tradition (Rorem 1983). Thus, Rorem composed his song cycle tailor-made for the David Ensemble, which premiered the work in New York in November 1972. Yet somehow the tension between belatedness and the need for transformation of the genre is aesthetically fitting, I'd suggest. There is an underlying tension between the lateness of the verse selected from Stevens and the fact that Rorem chose to cast a backward glance at a dead poet and a dying musical tradition during the social upheaval of the early nineteen seventies. It is a tension that emerges most clearly

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3. All the remaining quotations in this paragraph are from the same unpagged source, Rorem's 1983 album note.

when we recall the essentially Romantic myth of a late style of writing and pit it against the characteristic Stevensian investment in an aesthetic of constant transformation.<sup>4</sup>

Even without being able to go into much detail, there are a few further avenues of investigation I can indicate. The first involves the selection principle. With a poet such as Stevens, whose work is famous for playing variations on recurrent motifs, any selection of contemporaneous poems instantly produces its own set of echoes and internal cross-references. In this case, Rorem's selection gives us a renewed sense of how heliotropic and photocentric much of Stevens's work is: five of the seven poems explicitly mention the sun and one implies it. In the selected texts, moreover, Stevens repeatedly falls back on sound imagery, whether in the guise of a bird's scrawny cry, a chorister and a choir, chords above an old man's bed, the howling of a dove, or a fantastic bird's singing in a palm tree. *Light* and *sound*, then, seem to provide the two major attractions to Rorem, which is hardly a surprise for a composer working in the French impressionist tradition. And as these two sense impressions suggest, Rorem proves less interested in the poetry's foreshadowing of death than in its affirmations of life. The dramaturgical organization of each poem's musical setting, in fact, enhances how all the final lines in Stevens's lyrics affirm life in imagery that resonates beyond the textual endings. A composer can take the time – or make the time – to let this resonance be heard, to create a fitting audible atmosphere. Thus, when Stevens hails, at the end of the first poem, the arrival of a 'new knowledge of reality' (Stevens 1997: 452), when he concludes with the 'vigor' of a 'river' in the second poem (451), imagines an 'emperor' who comes 'close enough to wake / The chords above your bed to-night' in the third (468), is satisfied with '[s]ome affluence [...] / Of the planet of which [his poems] are part' in the fourth (450), ponders upon a 'bubbling before the sun' in the fifth (461), loses himself in the satisfaction provided by the image of an imaginary 'bird's fire-fangled feathers' in the sixth (477), and finally affirms the 'invisible activity' and 'sense' of the here and now (475), the music never stops there. On all seven occasions, the textual endings don't coincide with the musical endings: always the poems are extended for a few more moments through the simultaneously abstract and sensuous form of embodied feeling that is inimitably the terrain of instrumental musical experience.

What Rorem's redistribution and flowing integration of the poems also manages to convey better than any silent reading of individual texts on the page is likely to achieve is how these seven lyrics are remarkably open-ended on either side: the music's propelling pulse and linearity may indeed deepen our sense of how these poems stretch out into both past and future, as if they were mere blossomings momentarily emerging and happy to be submerged again. 'Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself' offers the clearest example in this regard:

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4. For a nuanced reflection on the concept of lateness and the myth of a late style, see Utard 2017.

by putting it in first rather than last position, Rorem lets us hear how perfectly suitable it also is as an opening poem. Prefacing the poem by an extended prelude makes the effect very palpable: the instrumental music first sets a landscape of outer experience and inner feeling before the opening stanza allows the poem to emerge hesitantly out of precisely this combination of outer and inner: 'At the earliest ending of winter, / In March, a scrawny cry from outside / Seemed like a sound in his mind' (Stevens 1997: 451). As listeners, we have already experienced the ambiguity between outer cry and seemingly inner sound before it finds expression in words.

Rorem's song cycle invites a critical reflection on genre conventions as well. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon proposes that we draw a distinction between transmedial and transgeneric adaptations (Hutcheon 2006: ch. 2). If a novel is converted into a film, the genre often remains identical, and so there is usually no problem for the audience to digest the new cinematic version. Transgeneric adaptations, by contrast, tend to pose more of a challenge. Hutcheon's distinction is useful in this instance in that it allows me to qualify my case study as merely transmedial, not transgeneric: when we cross over from lyric poetry to art songs with chamber music, we basically stay in the same lyric genre. Questions of genre become productive, I would argue, only at a lower typological level. Concretely, Rorem's music lets us hear specific genre conventions that we don't always associate with a philosophically inclined 'high modernist' such as Stevens. For example, 'A Child Asleep in Its Own Life' is set by Rorem as an all-American lullaby in the tradition of Samuel Barber and Aaron Copland. (It's also the only song in D major.) The tradition of lullabies is never raised in Stevens scholarship and offers a refreshing perspective on the poem, which is not only exceptionally brief but includes nothing but simple vocabulary.

Finally, a more elaborate study of Rorem's composition would require an extensive look at the score. I've done this preliminarily for 'The River of Rivers in Connecticut', which stands out partly because of its speed: the tempo indication here is 'Rapid and surging' – an understandable choice for a poem about the flowing of a river, but a far cry from the way any reader is inclined to read this (or any other) poem by Stevens. There is additional interest in the fact that Rorem, whose songs are often 'informed by a sense of place' (Zeger 2000: 7), made his prize-winning debut in 1947 with 'The Lordly Hudson', about another river in the American Northeast, and that such compositions invite further comparison with Charles Ives's musical rendering of the Housatonic in Stockbridge (the third of his *Three Places in New England*). In Rorem's setting of 'The River of Rivers in Connecticut', the text is transformed into a quick series of acoustic waves by means of multiple crescendi and decrescendi, leapfrogging intervals, and an occasional glissando; the result is glittering without the opportunity to let the text sink in. As a result, the listener's attention is shifted to phonemic aspects of the text and individually emphasized syllables.

In Rorem's version, the combination of speed, pitch, dynamics, accents, and both length and number of notes per syllable leads to a whole new experience of the text. The poem morphs into a fleeting sensation that is marked by very physical peaks of intensity (like small electrical jolts) distributed over a number of key syllables. Phonemically, such syllables contain predominantly diphthongs and long vowels, with the major short vowels in '[f]lash' and 'sun' receiving very conscious emphasis by Rorem. Semantically, the syllables support simple words – 'great', 'side', '[f]lash', 'sun', 'force', 'light', 'shines', 'flows' – around which the visual and dynamic aspects of the description are organized (thereby pulling us away from the less usual and more arresting lexical items in the text, such as 'Sty-gia', 'commonness' and 'curriculum') (Stevens 1997: 451). Structurally, the highlighted words emphasize the role of repetition in Stevens's text – the fact that the poet composes his paean like a chant by repeating certain terms – a process that starts already in the very title, 'The River of Rivers'. (A quick count reveals there are fourteen significant repetitions of words or word stems in this short poem.) And once again, Rorem makes excellent use of the musical space beyond the final words. After the text has ended, a succinct coda by the piano imagines the first moments beyond the text as a tempestuous series of arpeggios, first descending, then ascending, then slowing down to allow the final arpeggiated chord to keep resonating. Thus, as a listener we are left with an immediate embodied experience of what the text has affirmed as 'A curriculum, a vigor, a local abstraction' (Stevens 1997: 451) – three provisional attempts at definition followed by three suspension points in the original text that precisely invite the reader and listener to prolong both the attempts and the experience they seek to define ...

I must leave my analysis at that and proceed toward a brief conclusion. What has my empirically based case study been able to show? In the most general terms, it has served as an illustration for the aptness of musical settings in the case of a poet such as Stevens whose work is so deeply rooted in an endlessly transformative aesthetic. Stevens's occasionally frustrating way of reading out his own poetry, moreover, reminds us that a technically skilled composer can ideally present an alternative sounding of the work that is more intense than the poet's own voicing. The movement of music across time may also dramatize Stevens's compositional sense of words as emerging momentarily and being submerged again, without their sedimenting into stable meanings. This helps us to consider, furthermore, the performative quality that poetry shares with music – how both art forms are ill-served by reifying considerations in which we treat them as objects in space rather than events in time. In both poetry (of the Stevensian kind) and music, we witness 'the mind' – inseparably, in this case, from the body – 'in the act of finding / What will suffice', where '[w]hat will suffice' can only ever be experienced during the act (the process) of searching, not as the finished outcome of that search (Stevens 1997: 218).

In the specific case of Rorem's *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens*, we saw that there was a ready match between genres (lyric poetry and art song) and styles (the

Franco-Americanism favoured by both artists). Rorem's setting is of interest to scholars of Stevens for the way it connects roughly contemporaneous poems into a single flowing composition that structurally builds a fresh narrative. That narrative highlights the poems' insistence on light and sound, their ultimately life-affirming proclamations, and their openness on either side to what comes before and after – to the past and future that feed into, and flow out of, the texts. Along the way, we may also come to wonder to what extent unsuspected genres, such as the lullaby, might be germane to some of Stevens's late poetry. And we may experience what it is like when a quietly meditative poem such as 'The River of Rivers in Connecticut' morphs into a quickly fleeting sensation marked by physical peaks of intensity – as if the experience was meant to embody the concluding lines of 'Esthétique du Mal':

out of what one sees and hears and out  
Of what one feels, who could have thought to make  
So many selves, so many sensuous worlds,  
As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming  
With the metaphysical changes that occur,  
Merely in living as and where we live. (Stevens 1997: 287)

Walt Whitman is supposed to have said that in order to have great poets, you need to have great readers. It's even better, I would add, if among these readers there are also great composers. They, in turn, demand great performers, of course, though these have had to stay out of the picture here. But when these performers take the trouble to master the composer's score through intensive study, and are so generous as to bring it to life before us, our ambition should really be, in the end, to become also great listeners.

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## FROM NOVEL TO OPERA: CHILD'S PLAY

# Setting, Narrator and Characters in Philip Glass's Operatic Adaptation of Cocteau's *Les enfants terribles*

Carolien Van Nerom  
FWO / Vrije Universiteit Brussel

As children grow up there is increasingly less time for playing games. Instead, adults become preoccupied with responsibilities, work, or money. Philip Glass's opera *Les enfants terribles – Children of the Game* (premiered in 1996) thematises the tension between the carefree playfulness of childhood and the responsibilities inherent to adult life. The opera portrays adults breaking away from reality by means of role play, theatre or manipulation. Although Glass composes in a minimalist style, which is often characterised as non-narrative, *Les enfants terribles* has an obvious narrative quality to it that is partly a result of the opera's origins: it is based on a novel by Jean Cocteau. The question then is how narrative elements are brought to the fore through Glass's minimalist music. Using narrative elements from Cocteau's novel as a starting point, I explore how Glass puts his own minimalistic spin on a novel that is all too often linked to Cocteau's personal life.

The opera tells the story of Paul, who is confined to his home because of an injury caused by a snowball thrown at him by Dargelos, one of his classmates at school. After Paul's mother dies, he is taken care of by his sister Élisabeth. The two orphans often withdraw from reality and society by escaping into an imagined realm they call *le jeu*. Despite efforts of their friends, Gérard and Agathe, to separate the duo and bring them back to reality, brother and sister ultimately both commit suicide in a final escapist game.

Glass's minimalist opera is based on the eponymous novel by Jean Cocteau,<sup>1</sup> first published in 1929. Slightly adapted, the libretto is very similar to the novel text and also delivered in French.<sup>2</sup> The audio recording provides a booklet with the translation of the dialogues in English and performances are usually accom-

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1. Cocteau also made the novel into a film, which was released in 1950. Moreover, he also created the drawing (amongst others) for the cover of the novel. It is unclear which of these (and other) artefacts figured in Glass's composition and adaptation process. He does mention the film in his memoir (Glass 2015), but only the novel in the booklet to the 1997 CD recording (Glass 1997b). In my analysis, only the novel is considered, as it is unclear whether Glass related to the film when composing the opera.
  2. Philip Glass's opera is thinly orchestrated for four singers, one narrator and three keyboards. However, the singers are joined on stage by dancers, who were choreographed by Susan Marshall in the first production. This set-up was mimicked in a recent staging of the opera under a different choreographer, Javier de Frutos (Mackrell 2017). The choreography is only minimally taken into account in this article, because no visual material of the 1996 production is available.

panied by surtitles in English. While the characters on stage always sing in French, Glass also employs a narrator, whose text is spoken in the language of the audience. The 1997 recording thus features an English-speaking narrator. The booklet to the recording offers both dialogues and narrator texts in both English and French.<sup>3</sup> Because of its makeup, *Les enfants terribles* is an interesting case study for exploring the narrative potential of music in an opera based on a novel. Indeed, some scholars consider opera as a medium closely affiliated with the novel in terms of narrativity (e.g. Halliwell 1999 and 2005). In particular, the following analysis will show which role minimalist music can play in constructing an operatic story.

Discussions of narrative traits of music usually describe music's commenting or narrating role (e.g. Halliwell 1999; Larner 2010; Maus 1991). However, this excludes several narrative aspects, such as characterisation, and spatial or temporal setting, from the analysis. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (2004), narrativity can be accomplished across different media, and her definition of narrative should also be understood intermedially. A 'narrative script' (Ryan 2004: 9) contains the following minimal elements:

1. A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects. [...]
2. The world referred to by the text must undergo changes of state [...]. These changes create a temporal dimension [...].
3. The text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretive [implicit] network [...] [that] gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot.

(Ryan 2004: 8-9)

Minimalist opera and narrativity are contested partners since minimalist music is mostly known for its rejection of any narrative development. American minimalism grew from the intentions of the Second Viennese School to de-hierarchise harmonic development. Typically, minimalists use short motifs and repetition in harmonic, rhythmic and melodic development rather than long musical lines and variation (e.g. theme and anti-theme). Because of an avoidance of traditional Western modes of musical tension, minimalist composers generally write music that is absolutely non-narrative. Indeed, minimalist music is often related to a sense of timelessness and a lack of content (Mertens 1980; Ashby 2005). Glass's operatic oeuvre is usually defined as minimalist only in his earliest works, such as the portrait trilogy, which consists of *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), *Satyagraha* (1980) and *Akhmaten* (1984) (see e.g. Ashby 2005; Frandsen 1997; Kozinn

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3. Therefore, I make a distinction here between the audio recording on the one hand and the booklet accompanying the CD on the other hand. The former is referred to as 'Glass 1997a', while the latter is referred to as 'Glass 1997b'.

1997). *Einstein on the Beach*, for example, is largely made up of solmisation syllables and numbers (Glass 2015).

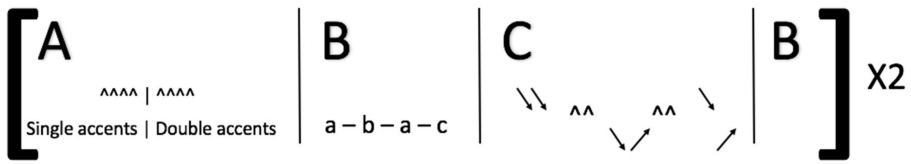
Although the minimalist influence is still palpable, it is true that Glass returned to the nineteenth-century operatic tradition in his later operas (Ashby 2005), mostly in terms of overall structure and libretto. With regard to the operatic narrative, too, later operas by Glass are more conventional than, for example, the portrait trilogy. Strikingly, in terms of libretto, a substantial number of later Glass operas is based on literary works (e.g. *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1987), based on Edgar Allan Poe's short story, or *Waiting for the Barbarians* (2005), based on J. M. Coetzee's novel). Although adaptation involves a shift in potential meaning because of the remediation it goes hand in hand with (see e.g. Hutcheon 2006), the narrative nature of the novels still informs the operatic adaptation. Incidentally, Glass always acknowledges his sources, for example as a subtitle on the CD booklet. The question that arises, then, is how Glass's minimalist style, which de-essentialises the sequential nature of stories by avoiding hierarchic harmonic and rhythmic development, can underscore an opera based on a narrative novel. Ryan's intermedial concept of narrative (2004; see above) fuels my analysis of the narrativity of the music in *Les enfants terribles*. Specifically, I consider the evocation of spatial setting, Glass's use of a narrator, characterisation of and focalisation by protagonists, and characterisation of minor characters (especially Dargelos and Agathe). The musical components used as examples here are regarded to contribute to one, or several, of Ryan's (2004) minimal elements that make up 'narrative'. Before going into these narrative elements, I want to consider the opening notes of the overture.

## Overture

Since the mid-eighteenth century, the overture to an opera is known to introduce, and usually even foreshadow the coming narrative. For example, major themes are already introduced (instrumentally) so that auditive snippets of the story prepare audiences for the upcoming action. In the case of *Les enfants terribles*, Glass's minimalist music does not introduce any themes, nor is the action fully foreshadowed. The overture ties in with the end of the opera, which makes for a loop effect that suggests a vagueness of both time and space. It seems as though the action might just as easily be picked up again where it left off. Additionally, the thematic material is a repetition of motifs rather than a string of melodic theme(s). The overture is made up of three distinct motivic parts, played as a sequence of A-B-C-B that is played twice. Most significantly, four single accents and four subsequent double accents can be heard in part A. These accents are dissonant, which makes for a nervous, daunting mood. They might also be seen as foreshadowing the number of main characters: Élisabeth, Paul, Gérard and Agathe. Incidentally, this is also the number of people representing Élisabeth and Paul, the protagon-

nists, in the 1996 premiere with Marshall as choreographer: here, the sibling singers were accompanied by three dancers each (Earnest 1998), that is, the two protagonists were each played by four performers. The fact that the accents are doubled the second time also hints at the layered quality of the protagonists' makeup.

Part B alternates a calmer motif (a) with a nervous-sounding, low-key motif (b). Again, one of the major themes is suggested here, namely the paradox between the characters' superficial, restrained and compliant persona, and their inner struggle with growing up and with a rising pressure to conform to societal norms. Élisabeth and Paul have an inappropriately close bond. Their craving to be entwined, both physically and mentally, is expressed in part C. A descending scale in the high register of the keyboard is repeated twice. This motif is then broken off by two accents, after which a descending and ascending scale in the lower register follow. If the equally descending scales represent Élisabeth and her ultimate demise, then the ascending and descending scales stand for Paul, who is more defiant towards the anti-societal pull. Indeed, Élisabeth is marked by a death-drive, a downward spiral, while the ascending scale in the low register leaves some hope for Paul still. After another two accents, however, it is clear that both registers, and the characters they represent, will mingle as one – an omen of the fatal ending. Schematically, then, the overture can be represented as follows:



*Figure 1. Overture: schematic overview of most striking musical elements.*

The density of the overture is not unsurprising since a medium change from novel to opera inevitably brings with it a reduction in material, though not necessarily a simplification. The remainder of the opera, too, features less dialogue and novelistic techniques. Still, as the overture might have shown, it is clear that other signs, such as the music, inform the operatic narrative in a medium-specific way.

## Spatial Setting

Settings in the opera are less specific than those in the novel. Although this is partly an outcome of the change of medium, this indeterminacy is also a means for Glass to highlight the story of the children, rather than Cocteau's poetics, expressed via specific markers in setting. For example, the novel situates the story in an existing village called Monthiers, which is rooted in Cocteau's own experi-

ence as a school boy at the lycée Condorcet (Hatte 2007: 69). In fact, criticism on *Les enfants terribles* often resorts to (partly) autobiographical readings (e.g. du Chambon 2001; Hatte 2007; Magnan 1979) because of the novel's references to Cocteau's own life, such as Monthiers, but also the character of Dargelos, or Paul's bisexuality. However, next to a nudge to his personal life, the settings, amongst other narrative elements, are usually also an indication of Cocteau's personal poetics. For example, the snow falling on the city in the novel's opening scenes stands for the realm of the unknown because it covers the underlying streets and houses. In a metonymical way, it also warns readers about the snowball that causes Paul's sickness. Additionally, the snow also refers to Cocteau himself as it stands for 'des aspects de la poésie et de la vie du poète: à la mort et à l'ange, au mensonge et à la vérité, à la vie antérieure et à la perte des souvenirs conscients' (Hatte 2007: 81). Contrarily, the opera does not focus on a specific village. Moreover, Glass leaves out those spatial signs that refer to Cocteau's life and poetics in favour of those that advance the general theme of imagination and dream. The city of Monthiers, for one, is not mentioned by the singers. The narrator's text in the libretto alludes to Cocteau's village, but it is clear that it is of little significance because of the incorrect spelling: 'Montier' (Glass 1997b: Scene 14b). Moreover, in the 1997 audio recording, the English-speaking narrator does not even mention the name of the village. In the first instance, adapting the narrator's language to the audience is a pragmatic choice to increase comprehension.<sup>4</sup> Still, it also has a muddling effect on the setting: while the libretto in French suggests France, the narrator's voice contradicts any singular setting.

Cocteau contrasts the exterior (e.g. the village, or school) with the interior (e.g. the siblings' room, or Élisabeth's mansion) by means of setting. A substantial number of important novel scenes is set in interior locations, outside of intruders' eyes, most importantly the place where Élisabeth and Paul play their theatrical games. Similar to exterior settings, many artefacts in this room are markers of Cocteau's poetics, or of what Hatte (2007) calls Cocteau's '*mythologie personnelle*' (63). In the bedroom, the siblings keep a drawer full of treasures – useless things that they have given a nearly sacred meaning by locking them away. A cap to a ballpoint pen, for example, stands for artistic inspiration since it is 'normalement l'outil principal du poète' (Hatte 2007: 42). Such references go largely unnoticed in the opera, partly because these particular signs are not highlighted or even incorporated into the libretto. Because the game setting takes on a more indefinite character in the opera, Glass furthermore shifts the focus from Cocteau's *mythologie personnelle* towards the characters' relation to the setting.

The parallel existence of both imagination and reality is a major theme in the novel. Settings are also a reflection of that theme: the exterior (such as the retreat

4. That a French libretto is difficult to understand for an English-speaking audience might be exemplified by a review of the show in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1997 in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*: the reviewer consistently refers to the opera as 'Les Enfantés Terribles' ([sic] Earnest 1998).

to the seaside) stands for reality, while the interior (such as the bedroom) is associated with imagination and the game. The opening words of the novel also create that parallel by means of a zooming effect from the outside to the inside. At first, the exterior, broad setting is described: ‘La cité Monthiers se trouve prise entre la rue d’Amsterdam et la rue de Clichy’ (Cocteau 2016: 7). Next, the theme of imagination takes the upper hand when the narrator starts to picture those who live in specific houses on these streets: ‘On les devine pleins d’armes, de brocarts, de toiles qui représentent des chats dans des corbeilles, des familles de ministres boliviens et le maître les habite, inconnu, illustre, accablé de commandes, de récompenses officielles, ...’ (7). The tension between material settings and imagination/dream settings is also present in the opera, but the lower degree of definition in settings means less markers of thematic content as well. Although the operatic settings also transmit the parallels, the opera makes the imagination a clearer focal point. For example, the bedroom of the siblings initially is an essential part of the game, but it gradually becomes clear that the space of the game is of lesser importance because the game can be moved. The opera narrator clarifies this as follows: ‘Prowling like a cat in the darkness, Paul found some abandoned screens and dragged them to the centre of the cavernous hall, where he built himself a kind of refuge’ (Glass 1997a: Scene 14b). In other instances, the music rather than the text points out that the game is what interests the children, not their environment. In Scene 7, for example, a repetitive motif similar to the three-notes taunts often used by children, combined with sporadic dissonant accents in a major tonality, reflects the jesting nature of Paul and Élisabeth’s dispute about separate rooms. Indeed, the children have no attention for anything but the game: this scene’s music ends abruptly when Élisabeth sings (without accompaniment), ‘Je crois que maman est morte’ (Glass 1997a: Scene 7). In a final taunt, the keyboard ends this scene with eight final chords, as if the game can never end.

## Narrator

Cocteau’s narrator is a latent presence, only visible in a limited number of situations where he seems to comment on the action, rather than take part in it. In the following instance, the narrator openly reminds readers of what he has said before about Élisabeth’s carefree character: ‘Nous avons parlé d’une aptitude à la richesse grâce à laquelle rien ne pouvait augmenter la richesse native de Paul et d’Élisabeth. L’héritage en fournit la preuve’ (Cocteau 2016: 85). Indeed, after her husband Michael dies, Élisabeth cannot be bothered by monetary issues – another sign that she would rather live in a *jeu* than live up to societal norms. The opera libretto exhibits a different strategy than a narrator to enlighten the audience, namely paraphrasing. Most of the dialogues are direct quotes of the novel dialogues, but sometimes the libretto features additional vocal lines that paraphrase information otherwise offered by the intrusion of Cocteau’s narrator:

'ELISABETH: C'est affreux d'être riche.  
 PAUL: C'est bien ce que je pense.  
 ELISABETH: Est-ce que j'ai l'air d'être riche?  
 PAUL: Toi? Oh non. Tu auras toujours l'air d'être sans le sou.  
 ELISABETH: Tant mieux. J'avais peur d'avoir l'air riche.'  
 (Glass 1997b: Scene 15)

Similar to Cocteau's repetitive narrator, the opera works with musical repetition, though in a much shorter time span than the novel. Common in Glass's minimalism is that motifs are repeated immediately, whereas Cocteau's narrator reminds readers of events that happened several chapters before. For example, in the scene quoted above, Élisabeth repeats the word 'riche' three times in a significant place, i.e. at the end of her verse, to emphasise her aloofness with regard to money. Still, words out of the mouth of a subjective opera character might be less believable than those of Cocteau's heterodiegetic narrator.<sup>5</sup> The music of these particular lines functions as a more objective, convincing focus that stresses the sincerity of her feelings. The first time Élisabeth sings 'riche', she hovers on the same low note as the word before. Given that she is a soprano, low notes here indicate her sad demeanour. Additionally, she takes a rather large interval drop in 'aff-reux', which supports the downcast meaning of the words she is singing. Indeed, it focuses the attention on her sense of loss after Michael's death, which makes the image of her as a gold-digger unimaginable. The second time, the rising musical line mimics the rising intonation that accompanies questions in speech, which increases the authenticity of Élisabeth's insecure feelings. The third time, the musical line descends and thus follows the accompaniment, where descending scales in a minor tonality can be heard in the middle register of the keyboard. Élisabeth speaks in earnest because her musical lines here follow the trio of keyboards. Breaking away from the accompanying music would imply the contrary, namely that her emotions disagree with the text she is singing. In short, Élisabeth makes it clear to Paul as well as the audience that she has no regard for material wealth. Whereas the narrator informs the novel's readers of the insignificance of wealth for Élisabeth, it is the dialogic structure of libretto and music in the opera that convinces audiences of Élisabeth's preoccupation with imagination, rather than with material goods. As with spatial setting, then, Glass focuses heavily on the significance of imagination and dreams, while the novel balances imagination with reality instead.

As the previous example shows, the music might at times be considered as performing functions similar to the ones of the novel's heterodiegetic narrator. However, Glass also employs an additional speaking narrator altogether different from Cocteau's. Although the speaking narrator's words in the libretto are quoted

5. According to Luc Herman & Bart Vervaeck (2009), a heterodiegetic narrator is one who has not experienced the story (88).

passages from Cocteau's novel in French, the recording shows that those are replaced with shortened texts, here translated into English. Moreover, Cocteau's sole narrator is heterodiegetic, whereas Gérard is an allodiegetic narrator of the opera.<sup>6</sup> He might thus be considered as the extradiegetic narrator<sup>7</sup> in the frame story, since he speaks in the past tense. The music in its narratorial role can be considered as the intradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator. As a consequence, the opera's viewpoint is limited to Gérard's during the narrator scenes, while Cocteau's narrator can always vary in focalisation, giving insight into several characters' mind-sets. Although Gérard the narrator is physically the same man as the singer, the distinction between the two is clear because the former speaks and the latter sings. The language difference in the 1997 recording creates an additional marker of a different engagement with the story. As a narrator, Gérard comments on the immediate action or fills in the gaps of the story that cannot be acted out easily. Compared to Cocteau's narrator, whose language is extremely metaphorical, Gérard's words are more direct. Take the following example of one of the later scenes, in which Paul is intrigued by a ball of poison, sent to him by Dargelos via Gérard:

<b>Novel: latent, heterodiegetic narrator</b>	<b>Opera recording: Gérard as extra-, allodiegetic narrator</b>
<p>'Tous se taisaient. Cette boule imposait le silence. Elle fascinait et répugnait à la manière d'un nœud de serpents qu'on croit formé d'un seul reptile et où l'on découvre plusieurs têtes.' (Cocteau 1959: 111; Glass 1997b: Scene 18)</p>	<p>'I wouldn't have dreamed of letting him keep Dargelos's gift, but Paul grabbed the small black ball of poison from my hand and held it to his breast.' (Glass 1997a: Scene 18)</p>

Not only is Gérard's text compressed in the opera, it is also less loaded than the equivalent in the novel. For example, the image of a 'nœud de serpents' refers to poison, but also to Élisabeth and Paul's relationship (Cocteau 1959: 111). They are 'plusieurs', while their goal is to be 'un seul' (111). In fact, Paul and Élisabeth would like to go back to a state similar to Adam and Eve before the fall, one without shame or genderedness. As Magnan (1979) puts it, 'le poète s'efforce de situer dans une zone confuse, indifférenciée, innocente, le sexe double, surnaturel de la beauté' (153). Indeed, the image of the serpent, the same animal that seduces Eve into biting the apple that causes a rift between her and Adam, is not ill-chosen

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6. According to Herman & Vervaeck (2009), an allodiegetic narrator – a concept based on analyses by Cok van der Voort – is one who witnesses the story, but who is not the main character of the story (89).
7. According to Herman & Vervaeck (2009), an extradiegetic narrator, in terms of hierarchy, is placed above an intradiegetic narrator (85). The latter is thus part of what is told by the extradiegetic narrator (85).



in that respect. Additionally, the 'nœud' reminds readers of the Gordian knot – another image that is suggestive of Élisabeth and Paul's close-knit relationship. In the opera, Gérard's words are less fraught with additional meaning. In essence, his role as narrator is mostly informative of the actions on or off stage, with an utmost effort to remain objective. By doing so, Glass removes Cocteau's commentating narrator and, as such, frees the narrative of Cocteau's ever-present poetics, or *mythologie personnelle* (Hatte 2007). Indeed, the concentration of the opera on dialogue and the use of a mostly objective eye-witness narrator result in a distancing from Cocteau's language and poetics.

## Protagonists and Focalisation

Paul and Élisabeth are the main characters in both opera and novel. After Paul falls ill and is housebound, Élisabeth takes care of her brother since their mother has passed away. The incestuous nature of their relationship is unacceptable to the outside world, which leads to the siblings' retreat from reality by playing games that are similar to trips induced by drugs. Even though both protagonists try to stop playing their spiralling games (e.g. Élisabeth gets a job and marries Michael, and Paul visits the bars outside their house), reality is ultimately too demanding on brother and sister. Paul eventually decides to leave reality permanently by swallowing poison, while Élisabeth does the same by means of a gunshot to the head. Both characters are flanked by their foils Gérard and Agathe, who eventually become pawns in the game. Gérard is Paul's childhood friend, but becomes infatuated with Élisabeth, while Agathe enters the siblings' life somewhat later via Élisabeth's job environment. Paul is enamoured by Agathe because of her likeness to Dargelos, the boy whom Paul never stopped loving even though his affections were always one-sided.

As was established before, Gérard's narratorship objectifies the story away from its creator, but also limits the focalisation to one character. However, varied focalisation (as in the novel) is achieved by means of Glass's minimalist music (amongst other signifiers<sup>8</sup>). For example, Élisabeth is a complex character whose inner workings are often expressed by the music (see above). In scene 15, the music convinces the audience of her sincerity by expressing a similar sensation as her words do. Contrarily, in scene 17, the audience is given insight into her discordant thoughts and deceitful nature through a dissociation between what the musical line implies on the one hand, and the meaning of the words she is singing on the other hand. When it becomes clear to Élisabeth that Paul is in love with Agathe and she lies to every involved party to ensure that Gérard and Agathe end up together, Paul believes Élisabeth's claim that they have both betrayed him.

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8. For example, the singers' facial expressions as well as the three dancers surrounding the singers on stage serve as indicators of the characters' true feelings and thoughts.

This particular scene is a succession of sung dialogues in an ABABA form. Sequence A is slow and rhythmical with accents on the upbeats rather than the downbeats, while sequence B is more lyrical and faster. When Gérard the narrator intervenes, he only speaks in between sequences. Élisabeth is the leading lady of this scene since she is present in every dialogue. A slight difference in register in the first sequence shows her emotional state. When Agathe reveals that she is in love with Paul, this comes as a shock to Élisabeth. Her shock is clear because of the initial high-pitched reaction in 'Ah, c'est confondant! Et voilà une surprise! C'est si drôle. Raconte vite!' (Glass 1997b: Scene 17). She starts high, but regains control over her emotions afterwards, which is clear from the register change. Moreover, the interval in the first sentence is larger than the rather stable musical lines afterwards. Still, the last sentence reveals her excitement: the first note is a high-pitched one and results in a downward, fast movement. Here, then, the words 'confondant' and 'raconte vite' imply the same feeling of shock as Élisabeth's musical signs do.

However, in the second sequence A, her singing does not match the intent of her words. Put differently, she is play-acting her concern with the situation on top of blatantly lying. Take the following exchange between Élisabeth and Paul:

ÉLISABETH: Te dire qu'Agathe m'avait parlé, mais pas de toi. Elle en aime un autre.

PAUL: Mais qui? Qui? Qui?

ÉLISABETH: Tiens toi bien: Gérard.

PAUL: Gérard?

ÉLISABETH: Sois raisonnable, mon chéri. Ils sont faits l'un pour l'autre. L'oncle de Gérard est vieux, Gérard sera riche, libre. Il faudra une famille bourgeoise. Il serait atroce, criminel, de se mettre en travers. Tu ne peux pas.'

(Glass 1997b: Scene 17)

When Élisabeth falsely reveals that Gérard is Agathe's love interest, her descending interval is in stark contrast with Paul's reaction in an ascending interval. Consequently, she is portrayed as a calm manipulator, while Paul's shock at Agathe's disinterest in him is genuine. Moreover, Élisabeth seems to enjoy playing this role because her last interjection in the previous quote is sung in an aria-like manner, where before she kept a more subdued voice. She follows the accompaniment in keyboards in e.g. the rising scale of 'L'oncle de Gérard est vieux' (Glass 1997b: Scene 17), which makes for a convincing argument. In fact, when she sings of Gérard and Agathe's future as a 'famille bourgeoise', she is speaking to Paul's own interests to win him into her camp (Scene 17). Indeed, the minor chord that is employed on these particular words shows Élisabeth's disdain for bourgeoisie and their societal norms, which should strike a chord in Paul. After all, the *jeu* of escaping the real world was a big part of the siblings' life before.

It is striking that Élisabeth sings less large intervals once both sequence A and B have been introduced once. The second time the audience hears sequence A (and B afterwards), she comes across as more stable musically, which implies her firm grasp on the situation. As the novel's description has it, she is like an automaton without a heartbeat (Cocteau 2016: 97 and 104). The repetitive nature of Scene 17 further testifies to Élisabeth's determination and perseverance because it mirrors her incessant lying. Additionally, the overall structure of the scene exposes how Élisabeth sees herself vis-à-vis the other characters:

*Table 1. Glass – Scene 17; Cocteau – Chapter 13: Structure of dialogues with Élisabeth*

Opera Sequence	A		B	A	B	A
Character	Agathe		Paul	Paul	Gérard	Agathe
Novel	Agathe	Gérard	Paul	Paul	Gérard	Agathe

Élisabeth's conversations with Agathe are limited to the rhythmical sequence A, which shows that Élisabeth always keeps her distance. Later in the opera, it becomes clear that she does not see Agathe as a worthy companion to Paul: 'Je déteste Agathe! Je n'admettais qu'elle veuille t'enlever de la maison' (Glass 1997: Scene 20). Furthermore, Agathe is on the outskirts of the conversations, while Paul is clearly the focal point of this particular scheme. Similarly, Cocteau's Agathe is more of a bystander to Paul and Élisabeth's jeu than even Gérard (Hatte 2007: 209). To Paul, Élisabeth shows all the facets of her personality, which can be deduced from their conversations taking place during both sequence A and the more lyrical B. Gérard, then, features during sequence B. Élisabeth knows all too well that Gérard is infatuated with her and, therefore, she uses a more emotional approach. Again, the music shows that Élisabeth's tactics work: in 'Et avoue que tu es l'homme le plus heureux du monde', her musical line rises, then falls (Glass 1997: Scene 17), while Gérard's answer ('Puis que tu me le demandes') imitates that motion in a tenor's tessitura. In Cocteau's (2016) words, Gérard is 'entraîné' and would do anything 'ce que commandait la jeune femme' (103).

## Minor Characters

The music not only plays an important role in amalgamating the protagonists' character and relationship to others, it also serves to shape supporting characters. Élisabeth and Paul's mother, for example, is not represented by a singer in the opera, but her death is heralded by a significantly placed minor chord. Dargelos, too, is only given one line in the opera, while he is more present in Cocteau's dialogues. Paul adores Dargelos, but his love is not reciprocated. In fact, after Paul is hit in the stomach by the snowball thrown by Dargelos, Paul's view of Dargelos

changes into an idealised image of the enchanting, popular boy. Operatic Dargelos is not only given close to no dialogue, he is also less defined by elaborate novelistic descriptions. While in the novel he is called ‘le coq du collège’ (Cocteau 2016: 11), is loved by the teaching staff and is very charismatic, the opera does little to highlight these aspects of his personality. In the novel, Dargelos functions as a foil to Paul’s *faiblesse*: ‘on a l’habitude d’associer [Dargelos] à la virilité et à la force. Par contre, Paul apparaît à Dargelos comme une *filie incapable*’ (Hatte 2007: 97). This aspect of Dargelos’s role is diminished in the opera. As a consequence, the opera moves to Paul’s imagined, idealised version of Dargelos quicker than the novel does. In fact, Dargelos is never even physically present in the opera. Glass has his role taken up by the same female singer who later personifies Agathe. Even in his brief appearance, then, Dargelos is firmly linked to Agathe. The androgyny that Glass accentuates by having a boy-character sung by a female singer is also present in Cocteau, though the latter presents a more layered version of Dargelos. As Magnan (1979) points out, Dargelos presents a balance between ‘l’élément mâle et l’élément femelle, à l’intérieur d’une même personne’ (153). By focusing the audience’s attention on this facet of Dargelos rather than on his awe-inspiring status, Glass again severs *Les enfants terribles* from its creator Cocteau. Indeed, Hatte (2007) mentions that Dargelos might be seen as Cocteau’s ideal poet or source of inspiration (97). Paul’s infatuation with Dargelos, then, is ultimately an echo of Cocteau’s search for angelic characteristics (97). However, Glass’s music and libretto shift the centre of attention to Dargelos’s feminine characteristics rather than to his exemplary status of cocky, self-secure schoolboy.

After linking Dargelos firmly to Agathe, Glass goes on to identify the snowball that hits Paul in the stomach with Dargelos in Scene 18, in which Gérard tells Paul about a coincidental meeting with Dargelos. In fact, Paul seems to have forgotten about Dargelos in favour of Agathe:

‘GERARD: Devine qui j’ai rencontré à Marseilles.

PAUL: Je ne devinerai (sic) pas.

GERARD: Dargelos.

PAUL: Non!

GERARD: Si, mon vieux. Un peu plus pâle. Comme toi. On jurerait un frère d’Agathe. Il est très, très aimable. Il m’a demandé si je fréquentais toujours Boule de Neige. C’est toi.’

([sic] Glass 1997b: Scene 18)

Paul’s reaction of ‘Non!’ is surprisingly unaffected: it is a portato note sung in a low register and without accent. His apparent disinterest focuses the audience’s attention on the fact that his health has deteriorated again rather than on his surprise at hearing about Dargelos. In fact, musically, his prior reaction to Agathe and Gérard’s arrival is more animated in ‘Je me lèverai’ (Glass 1997b: Scene 18). These examples suggest that Agathe and her supposed refusal are on Paul’s mind,

not Dargelos. Furthermore, a musical accent on 'Boule' in Gérard's last sentence objectifies Dargelos and Paul's relationship and reduces it to its reality: Dargelos is just a boy who hit Paul in the stomach with a snowball. After Paul loses his final interest in reality, he looks for a way to re-ignite a final *jeu*. He swallows the ball of poison given by Dargelos, but not before he notifies Agathe of what he is about to do. In the novel, Paul's thoughts return to Dargelos in those final moments: 'Il cherchait Dargelos. Lui seul il ne l'apercevait pas' (Cocteau 2016: 124). The orientation of the libretto is quite different, as Élisabeth's last lines draw the audience into the final *jeu* of death with the words: 'Ne lâche pas le fil. Avance. Avance. Je joue. Je te charme. Je t'hypnotise' (Glass 1997b: Scene 20). As before, e.g. in Scene 4, Élisabeth's flat-lined voicing also produces an auditive hypnotising effect. Thus, the opera's focal point is the game, rather than Paul's infatuation with Dargelos.

Whereas in the novel Paul's search for Dargelos can be said to equal Cocteau's search for (unattainable) poetic inspiration (e.g. du Chambon 2001; Hatte 2007), these poetics are less present in the opera. Moreover, listeners are left with Agathe's cry for help, 'Au secours' (Scene 4), which she sings on a compelling higher note than Élisabeth before her. Contrarily, Cocteau ends on a filmic note, with Agathe disappearing from view as if a camera zooms out on the scene: 'il ne reste de la chambre [...] qu'une petite dame sur un refuge, qui rapetisse, qui s'éloigne, qui disparaît' (Cocteau 2016: 124). Drawing in the audience as Glass does with the final notes helps to generalise the story, so that every person can become personally and emotionally involved in the story, whereas Cocteau at the end distances his readers from the story. Consequently, listeners of the opera might have an easier time to identify with the characters than readers of the novel would. Because the music of the keyboards that accompanies the final scene ties back in with the overture, it also seems as though the characters might just as well stand up and perform the whole opera again (see above).

## Escape from its Origins

Adapting a novel into an opera is never a one-on-one process; with the change of medium comes a complex modification of signs. The examples in this article show that certain narrative techniques cannot simply be copied into the opera. However, novelistic devices were not disregarded or simplified either, as Glass uses the narrative potential of musical and dramaturgical elements, amongst others, to counterbalance a loss of those devices in the opera. The overture, for example, already introduces certain characteristics of the narrative and the characters. Although both opera and novel feature a narrator, Glass's is a character who also participates in the action on stage, while Cocteau's is a bystander to the action. In fact, the narrator of the novel is often confused with Cocteau himself, whereas Glass reduces the expressions of Cocteau's personal poetics by having Gérard, a

character in the story, narrate in an extradiegetic narrative frame. With regard to setting as well, the more general nature of the opera's exterior and interior spaces loosens the autobiographical grip on the narrative, which in the novel is set in Cocteau's own childhood village. The music also functions as a commentator on the action. For example, Élisabeth sings in earnest when her musical line follows the same emotional weight as her text, whereas her deceitful nature is expressed by means of an unbalance between vocals on the one hand and instrumental accompaniment on the other hand. With regard to characters, then, the music (next to, e.g., the physical movements of the dancers on stage) elucidates certain aspects of their personalities. In the case of Dargelos, for example, his androgyny is demarcated because his character is played by a female singer.

In short, while the libretto text goes a long way in providing for the minimal elements that make up Ryan's (2004) concept of 'narrative' (i.e. (1) spatial setting and characters, (2) temporal setting, (3) implicit network of coherence), it is clear from the examples above that Glass's minimalist music provides other important elements that make up the operatic narrative. Glass employs a musical form (with clearly accented notes) that anticipates narrative action in the overture. Musically speaking, the overture also loops back to the ending of the opera, which results in a very minimalist temporal setting. Additionally, Glass uses referential motifs, interrupting the musical flow, that can be associated with the game setting. Furthermore, opera characters are typified by means of orchestration, interplay between libretto and music, motifs that refer to speech acts, as well as variations in operatic style.

A substantial number of Cocteau's narrative elements can be identified in the opera, though necessarily shaped within the opera medium. Glass's minimalist music deliberately highlights or frames textual markers, resulting in a composite story. Still, novelistic elements that were left out or altered often exemplify Glass's breaking away from the poetics of Cocteau. Specifically, Glass's opera lacks most of the elements that invite a reading in line with the private mythology of the author.

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# HET VELD



# LITERATUUR EN RADIO

*Birgit Van Puymbroeck*

FWO / Universiteit Gent

Sinds de jaren negentig van de vorige eeuw is een nieuw veld ontstaan dat de relaties tussen literatuur en radio onderzoekt. Beïnvloed door de groeiende aandacht voor media worden nieuwe perspectieven ontwikkeld op de politieke, culturele, esthetische en ethische implicaties van het medium voor de literatuur. Onderzoekers bestuderen niet alleen literatuur en literatuurkritiek op de radio, maar gaan ook na hoe radio deel uitmaakt van de literaire verbeelding en in verband staat met andere media zoals film en televisie. Deze bijdrage beschrijft de voornaamste tendensen in dit veld en legt daarbij de nadruk op de meest recente ontwikkelingen. Ze vertrekt vanuit een Angelsaksische context, maar besteedt ook aandacht aan andere taal- en cultuurgebieden.

## Ontstaan en evolutie van het veld

In 'Radio Studies and 20th-Century Literature: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Remediation' beschrijft Ian Whittington verschillende sleutelmomenten in de ontwikkeling van wat hij 'literary radio studies' noemt, een term die het kruispunt tussen 'traditional literary studies' en 'radio studies' aanduidt (2014: 645). Net zoals de mediahistoricus Hugh Chignell begint hij zijn overzicht met de vroege beoefenaars van radio die het medium mee vormgaven. Naast BBC Talks Director Hilda Mathesons *Broadcasting* (1933) en BBC producer Lance Sievekings *The Stuff of Radio* (1934), zijn Rudolf Arnheims *Radio* (1936) en Bertolt Brechts essays over film en radio (Brecht 2015) opmerkelijk voor hun vroege theorievorming over het medium. Ideeën over de specifieke eigenschappen van radio (bijvoorbeeld intimiteit, directheid en homogeniserende tendensen) kunnen in deze studies worden teruggevonden.

Vanaf de jaren veertig werd radio in een academische context bestudeerd. Paul Lazarsfeld en Hadley Cantril onderzochten radio uit een sociologisch oogpunt aan Princeton University, terwijl Theodor Adorno en Walter Benjamin, geassocieerd met de *Frankfurter Schule*, radio vanuit een cultureel, marxistisch perspectief benaderden. Zoals Whittington stelt, beïnvloedde de lokale context de perceptie van de radio: 'Whether theorists and commentators heard in radio the threat of fascist manipulation, the satisfaction of popular tastes, or an ethos of cultural paternalism indicates the density of connections between political regimes, institutional structures, and programming decisions' (2014: 636). De Duitse radio van de jaren veertig werd gekenmerkt door de invloed van een totalitair

regime. Commerciële radio tierde welig in de Verenigde Staten, terwijl de BBC in het Verenigd Koninkrijk het volk tot vervelens toe culturele en morele waarden probeerde bij te brengen.

Vanaf de jaren zestig werd radio vanuit een meer ontologisch perspectief onderzocht. Communicatiewetenschappers zoals Marshall McLuhan en Walter Ong vroegen zich af wat geluid kenmerkte en hoe media het menselijke handelen en denken beïnvloedden. Volgens hen leidden nieuwe media zoals de radio tot veranderende percepties en gedragingen. Hoewel hun werken nu vaak worden bekritiseerd voor hun mediadeterminisme, waarbij technologische ontwikkelingen maatschappelijke evoluties veroorzaken, blijven hun inzichten tot op vandaag erg invloedrijk en vormen ze een belangrijke stap in het erkennen van de cruciale rol van media in de maatschappij.

Na de studies van McLuhan en Ong was het nog even wachten op de eerste analyses van de interactie tussen radio en literatuur. In eerste instantie werd er aandacht besteed aan de werken van grote auteurs die ook voor de radio schreven. Hierbij werd het medium veeleer als toevallig dan als significant beschouwd. In de jaren zeventig verschenen bijvoorbeeld de eerste uitgaven en studies van de radiowerken van Ezra Pound en Samuel Beckett (Pound 1978, Ziliacus 1976). Ook werd er onderzoek gedaan naar bepaalde genres die met het medium werden geassocieerd, met name het hoorspel. Dit genre was vooral populair in de Verenigde Staten, Duitsland en het Verenigd Koninkrijk. Op een studie van het Nederlandse hoorspel was het wachten tot de jaren tachtig (Bulte 1984). Geïnspireerd door de huidige ervaring van luisterspelen, wordt er momenteel ook onderzoek verricht naar het hoorspel in Vlaanderen en Nederland (Bernaerts 2014, Bluijs & Verschueren 2018).

Sinds de jaren negentig wordt de relatie tussen literatuur en radio meer systematisch onderzocht. Chignell vermeldt de belangrijke rol die de cultuurwetenschappen in deze evolutie hebben gespeeld. Ook al besteedde de Birmingham School van Stuart Hall voornamelijk aandacht aan televisie, toch effende ze ook het pad voor de studie van de radio. Bovendien was de invloed van de cultuurwetenschappen ook merkbaar in studies van het modernisme en de avant-garde. Douglas Mao en Rebecca L. Walkowitz (2008) beschrijven hoe de modernisme studie in de jaren negentig een evolutie doormaakte en meer contextuele benaderingen van literatuur toeliet. Douglas Kahn en Gregory Whiteheads *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (1992) is een van de eerste studies die de relatie tussen de historische avant-garde en radio analyseert. Het boek combineert avant-garde teksten met literaire beschouwingen. Adalaide Morris breidt deze inzichten uit in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies* (1997) waarin de impact van verscheidene audiotechnologieën op literaire praktijken wordt nagegaan.

Het nieuwe millennium zag een uitbreiding van het veld met een groot aantal publicaties. In *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (2005) onderzoekt Timothy Campbell de invloed van de radio op de literaire verbeelding. In *Radio Modern-*

*ism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (2006) bespreekt Todd Avery hoe vroeg-twintigste-eeuwse auteurs omgingen met de ethische en esthetische implicaties van het medium. Cruciaal voor de consolidatie van literatuur en radio als onderzoeksveld was de essaybundel *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009), samengesteld door Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle en Jane A. Lewty, waarin verschillende invalshoeken bij elkaar werden gebracht. Radio werd als medium en metafoor besproken. Ook werd de invloed van de radio op een modernistische schrijfstijl aangetoond met aandacht voor innerlijkheid en simultaneïteit.

Een meer comparatistisch perspectief vinden we in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (2014), geredigeerd door Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning en Henry Mead, dat de rol van literaire auteurs op de Britse, Franse, Ierse, Duitse en Italiaanse radio bespreekt. Voor het Nederlandse taalgebied vermelden we de recente proefschriften van Jeroen Dera en Alex Rutten. Dera (2017) onderzoekt literatuurkritiek op de Nederlandse radio en televisie. Rutten (2018) wijdt zijn studie aan de criticus, journalist en schrijver Dr. P.H. Ritter Jr., die tijdens het interbellum iedere zondag voor de AVRO over literatuur sprak.

## Belangrijke tendensen en uitdagingen

In zijn overzicht van het veld onderscheidt Whittington drie belangrijke tendensen: de zogenaamde esthetische wending in radiostudies, onderzoek naar intermedialiteit en een toegenomen aandacht voor de luisteraar. Debra Rae Cohen en Michael Coyle duiden drie soortgelijke tendensen aan in hun inleiding op een recent themanummer van *Modernist Cultures*, 'Broadcast Traces/Tracing Broadcasting: Modernism and Radio' (2015). Volgens hen wordt onderzoek naar radio en literatuur gekenmerkt door een veelheid aan benaderingen, waarvan de focus op de luisteraar, intermedialiteit en de circulatie van literatuur via radio, met aandacht voor verschillende lokale contexten, de voornaamste zijn. Het fenomeen radio wordt, met andere woorden, niet langer als monolithisch maar als sterk afhankelijk van verscheidene factoren beschouwd. Dit wordt ook onderstreept door Martin Harries en Lecia Rosenthal in hun themanummer van *Cultural Critique* met als titel 'Comparative Radios' (2015), dat radio in de Verenigde Staten, West-Europa en Latijns-Amerika onderzoekt.

Vertegenwoordigers van de zogenaamde esthetische wending in radiostudies zijn Neil Verma en Shawn VanCour. In *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (2012) gaat Verma de evolutie van het Amerikaanse radiodrama in de twintigste eeuw na. Terwijl het vroege hoorspel bepaalde technieken gebruikte om een wereld op te roepen in de verbeelding van de luisteraar ('theater in the mind'), werden in het latere hoorspel cognitieve processen verbeeld ('theater of the mind'). VanCour bespreekt een moderne radio-esthetiek in *Making Radio: Early Radio Production and the Rise of Modern Sound Culture* (2018). Hij beschrijft hoe een bepaalde radio-esthetiek tot stand kwam

vanuit het standpunt van vroege radiomakers en toont aan hoe geluidstechnieken die oorspronkelijk voor de radio werden ontwikkeld ook een impact hadden op de film- en muziekindustrie. VanCour combineert met andere woorden een esthetische en een intermediale benadering. Ook Jarmila Mildorf en Till Kinzels *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative* (2016) is noemenswaardig in deze context. Hoewel de bundel verder gaat dan radio, is ze belangrijk voor de narratologische inzichten om audioverhalen te analyseren.

Onderzoek naar de vormelijke kenmerken en esthetische effecten van literatuur op de radio gaat vaak samen met onderzoek naar intermedialiteit. Niet alleen worden technieken tussen verschillende media uitgewisseld, ook worden verhalen in meerdere media vormgegeven. Aandacht voor intermedialiteit sluit ook geenszins een culturele en politieke invalshoek uit. Een goed voorbeeld van hoe deze perspectieven samengaan is Peter Jelavichs *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (2006). Aan de hand van drie media-instanties van Alfred Döblins beroemde verhaal – de roman, het hoorspel en de film – laat Jelavich zien hoe elk medium onderhevig is aan culturele en politieke druk. Zo werd het hoorspel van *Berlin Alexanderplatz* niet uitgezonden op de Duitse radio in september 1930 wegens gevreesd protest van nazi's, terwijl de film een jaar later wel in de zalen verscheen. Culturele en politieke normen zijn met andere woorden mediaspecifiek. Het boek van Jelavich is net zo goed een intermediale vergelijking als een geschiedenis van radio en film in het Duitsland van de jaren dertig.

Terwijl vroege radiostudies vaak een specifieke omroep, uitzending of auteur bespraken, wordt er nu steeds meer aandacht besteed aan de luisteraar. Dit gaat van verschillende doelpublieken tot wat Benedict Anderson *imagined communities* noemt (Anderson 1985). Zonder elkaar te kennen, voelen luisteraars zich met elkaar verbonden; zij maken deel uit van eenzelfde ingebeelde gemeenschap en horen zichzelf en hun wereld weerspiegeld op de radio. Recent onderzoek gaat na hoe radio cruciaal was om gestalte te geven aan jonge naties zoals Ierland (Keane 2014, Bloom 2016), hoe het medium werd gebruikt om het Britse rijk samen te houden én te ontmantelen (Potter 2012, Kalliney 2013), en hoe het werd ingezet in tijden van oorlog en crisis (Dinsman 2015, Whittington 2018). Radio roept ook ethische vragen op. Enerzijds wordt het medium geassocieerd met propaganda. Anderzijds wordt het gelinkt met intersubjectiviteit en empathie (Lacey 2013). De implicaties van de activiteit van het luisteren zullen de komende jaren verder duidelijk worden.

Een van de grootste uitdagingen voor onderzoek naar literatuur en radio op dit moment is de beschikbaarheid van bronnen. Vroege radiouitzendingen werden zelden bewaard. Meer recente opnames zijn enkel te beluisteren in gespecialiseerde archieven en bibliotheken. De digitalisering van deze bronnen werd recent ingezet met grote Europese projecten zoals Europeana Sounds en nationale initiatieven zoals LARM.fm in Denemarken en de digitalisering-initiatieven van het Institut National de l'Audiovisuel in Frankrijk, het Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid in Nederland en het 'Save Our Sounds' project van de British Library. De

verwachting is dat steeds meer bronnen beschikbaar zullen worden en dat dit een nieuwe impuls aan het onderzoek zal geven. Toch blijft het een illusie om te denken dat we het radiolandschap van het verleden voor een groot deel zullen kunnen reconstrueren. Slechts een kleine portie van het materiaal is bewaard en zal worden ontsloten. Radio is per definitie vluchtig; het is deze vluchtigheid die het medium karakteriseert.

Anno 2018 is radio niet langer een vergeten medium, zoals aan het begin van de jaren negentig het geval was. Toch blijven de uitdagingen vandaag bijzonder groot, niet alleen met betrekking tot de beschikbaarheid van bronnen maar ook met betrekking tot de ontwikkeling van gepaste methodologieën. Digital humanities kunnen helpen om grote corpora te doorzoeken, terwijl cognitieve wetenschappen inzicht kunnen bieden in de activiteit van het luisteren. Ook is er een belangrijke rol weggelegd voor historiciserend en vergelijkend onderzoek. Kennis met betrekking tot het radiolandschap in Europa en de rol van literaire auteurs hierin is nog steeds erg fragmentarisch, zeker wat betreft kleinere landen. Om te begrijpen hoe literatuur via audio circuleerde, moeten we eerst de actoren (auteurs, producers, literaire programma's etc.) voor de verschillende landen in kaart brengen. Tegelijkertijd moet verder onderzoek worden verricht naar audiotieve verteltechnieken en hoe deze aansluiten bij verschillende culturele tradities.

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# ECOKRITIEK / ECOCRITICISM

*Reuben Martens & Pieter Vermeulen*

KU Leuven

Het duurde tot de jaren negentig van de vorige eeuw vooraleer de academische studie van de relatie tussen mens, natuur en literatuur een prominente subdiscipline werd; buiten de universiteit was die relatie al sinds de publicatie in 1962 van Rachel Carsons *Silent Spring*, haar klassieke aanklacht tegen het ontsprende gebruik van pesticiden, een aandachtspunt in een almaar prominenter ecologische beweging. De in ons taalgebied gangbare term ‘ecokritiek’ is een letterlijke vertaling van *ecocriticism*, een term die vooral in de anglofone wereld in de afgelopen kwarteeuw courant is geworden. Sinds het toenemende besef van de bedreiging die de klimaatverandering en andere planetaire processen vormen die in het afgelopen decennium vaak onder de noemer van het *Antropoceen* gevat worden, is *ecocriticism* in de anglofone wereld stilaan een van de dominante literatuurwetenschappelijke paradigma’s geworden. Het verband met de Franstalige tegenhanger *écocritique* is veel minder zichtbaar, al was het maar omdat, zoals Stephanie Posthumus (2017) heeft aangetoond, Frans literatuuronderzoek de focus op het ecologische leven van teksten niet meteen verwelkomde (het werk van Pierre Schoentjes, en vooral zijn boek *Ce qui a lieu*, vormt een zeldzame uitzondering; de term *écocritique* is intussen ook geclaimd voor een variant van ecokritiek die oog heeft voor de ecologische impact van materiële media in, bijvoorbeeld, het werk van Sean Cubitt). Iets soortgelijks geldt voor het Duitse taalgebied, waar volgens Axel Goodbody (2007) de herinnering aan de ontsporingen van een *völkisch* natuurenthousiasme in de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw aanvankelijk tot heel wat scepsis tegenover de ecokritische terugkeer naar de natuur leidde. Maar ook in die taalgebieden merken we, net zoals in het literatuuronderzoek in de Lage Landen, een snel toenemende interesse in ecokritische thema’s.

## Ontwikkeling

De opkomst van de ecokritiek in de jaren negentig valt te begrijpen tegen de achtergrond van de toenmalige dominantie van poststructuralistische paradigma’s zoals deconstructie, new historicism en postkolonialisme. Die paradigma’s doen er alles aan om, gesterkt met filosofische en theoretische wapens, de machtsstructuren en discursieve kaders bloot te leggen waarin teksten en identiteiten tot stand komen en waarin etniciteit, gender en sekse vorm krijgen. Aan de ene kant deelt ecokritiek de aandacht voor verdrukte en veronachtzaamde entiteiten, maar aan de andere kant verwerpt het de poststructuralistische scepsis over het vermogen

van literaire teksten om op een betrouwbare manier te refereren aan een buitentekstuele realiteit. Voor vroege ecocritici miskende die scepsis de robuuste materialiteit van de natuurlijke werkelijkheid en onderschatte ze het mimetische vermogen van literaire teksten. Aanvankelijk celebreert het ecokritische veld dat vermogen en het ecologische bewustzijn dat het uitdrukt vooral in (vaak romantische) poëzie en non-fictie. In het Verenigd Koninkrijk is het werk van Jonathan Bate cruciaal, waarin hij vooral de poëzie van de romantische dichter William Wordsworth herwaardeert als de uitdrukking van een ‘groen’ bewustzijn; in de Verenigde Staten is het Lawrence Buell die de negentiende-eeuwse auteur Henry David Thoreau, de schrijver van *Walden*, maar ook ecologische auteurs en denkers als Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry en Edward Abbey voor het voetlicht brengt.

De verdere ontwikkeling van het veld wordt veelal verbeeld als een opeenvolging van golven, waarbij de nogal enge focus in *first-wave ecocriticism* rond het millennium wordt verbreed in een tweede golf. Ecokritiek overstijgt hier de geografische, historische en generische grenzen van de eerste golf en gaat ecologische dimensies ontdekken in klassieke en hedendaagse teksten, en in genres als de roman. Er is een verschuiving van de focus op ongerepte wildernis naar omgevingen die door menselijke activiteiten mee vorm krijgen, zoals de stad maar bijvoorbeeld ook de kolonie. De tweede golf brengt ook theoretische implicaties met zich mee: de natuur is niet langer de robuuste realiteit die zich aan semiotische processen onttrekt, maar een historisch variërende realiteit die door menselijke en niet-menselijke, door tekstuele en buitentekstuele krachten geconstrueerd wordt. Een schrijver als Charles Dickens wordt nu een even dankbaar object voor ecokritische analyse als pakweg een natuurdichter als John Clare. De verkenning van de contactzones tussen menselijke en niet-menselijke actoren maakt zelfs plaats binnen de ecokritiek voor de vermaledijde poststructuralistische theorie. Het werk van de ‘filosoof-profeet van het Antropoceen’ – aldus *The Guardian* – Timothy Morton biedt hiervan een (zelfs ietwat extreem) voorbeeld. In een idiosyncratische remix van (literaire) theorie en ecologisch impressionisme lanceert Morton noties zoals het ‘hyperobject’ en de ‘mesh’ om uitdrukking te geven aan de onderlinge verbondenheid van alle dingen, en aan een wereldbeeld waarin mensen, orkanen, gorilla’s, bacteriën en piepschuim op promiscue wijze met elkaar verknoopt zijn. In zijn boek *Ecology without Nature* staat het idee centraal dat binnen die rizomatische vertakkingen geen plaats meer is voor de al te statische en essentialistische (en romantische) notie ‘natuur’.

## Huidige staat van het veld

Het beeld van opeenvolgende golven van ecokritiek is nuttig omdat het erkent dat de evolutie van het veld niet lineair is of gekenmerkt wordt door radicale breuken, maar wel werkt door overlappingen en onvermoede continuïteiten. Een vaak activistische nadruk op het belang van natuurbescherming en een poging om de

muren tussen literaire en meer wetenschappelijke manieren van natuurbeschrijving te slopen, zijn twee zulke continuïteiten. Ze leven ook verder in wat ondertussen de derde en vierde ecokritische golven zijn gaan heten, hoewel die termen nog niet zo wijdverspreid zijn als die van een *first* en *second wave*. In de derde golf overstijgt ecokritiek de initiële focus op plaatsgebonden ecologische ervaring en wordt regionale verbondenheid dialectisch gelinkt aan een meer globaal perspectief, waarbij transnationaliteit en *translocality* cruciale noties worden. Het werk van Ursula K. Heise is hier exemplarisch. Haar boek *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) schetst de uitdagingen van het verbeelden van ‘ecokosmopolitische’ verbondenheid en onderzoekt literaire en culturele strategieën om de connecties tussen verschillende locaties vorm te geven. De urgentie van die verschuiving van plaats naar planeet is duidelijk: fenomenen als klimaatverandering vergen bij uitstek een supranationale aanpak en kapitalistische globalisering vormt de onvermijdelijke context waarbinnen alternatieve ecologische praktijken vorm kunnen krijgen. In het werk van Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin en anderen worden ecokritische aandachtspunten ook explicieter aan een postkoloniaal perspectief gelinkt, vanuit het besef dat het kolonialisme niet alleen bestond uit de exploitatie van subalterne lichamen, maar vaak ook uit de vernietiging van niet-westerse leefwerelden. Er is ook aandacht voor hoe de consumptiepatronen van de noordelijke hemisfeer invloed hebben op het globale zuiden. In Rob Nixons *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), bijvoorbeeld, ligt de focus op de manier waarop literaire en activistische stemmen in de *global South* ‘trage’ en onspectaculaire vormen van ecologisch geweld zichtbaar maken: de schade die klimaatverandering veroorzaakt, de toxiciteit van afval, ontbossing etc. De notie van *environmental justice* neemt een centrale plaats in deze derde golf in.

Overlappend met die derde golf ontwaart Scott Slovic (2012), oprichter van de Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) en huidig hoofdredacteur van het tijdschrift *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, een vierde golf. Die deelt de gerichtheid op de wereld van de derde golf, maar actualiseert ze door een focus op materialiteit – op de manier waarop lichamen participeren in ecologische processen bijvoorbeeld. De vierde golf deelt met de derde de aandacht voor verschillen, maar het zoekt die verschillen ook buiten de groep van *menselijke* actoren. Niet toevallig wordt het feminisme, waarin het lichaam altijd een centrale plaats krijgt, een centrale inspiratie. Een invloedrijk voorbeeld is het werk van Stacy Alaimo, die de notie *transcorporality* opwerpt om te onderstrepen dat het menselijk lichaam altijd *intermeshed* is met de meer-dan-menselijke wereld. Belangrijk is dat de actoren in de niet-menselijke wereld ook een vorm van *agency* wordt toegekend – wat op zijn beurt de vermeende autonomie van menselijke subjecten en het heersende antropocentrisme in de westerse filosofische traditie relativeert. In haar boek *Vibrant Matter* (2010) toont de politieke filosofe Jane Bennett dat materie niet zomaar dood, passief en instrumentalisierbar is, maar wel een eigen *thing-power* heeft die moet worden meegenomen in het beschrijven en analyseren van fenomenen zoals het Amerikaanse elektrici-

teitsnetwerk, wat Bennett aanduidt als een ‘assemblage’, ‘a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, beat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood’ (Bennett 2010: 25). Een meer strikt literatuurkritische studie is Heather Housers *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction* (2014): die toont aan dat het ecologische bewustzijn in de hedendaagse Amerikaanse literatuur vaak vorm krijgt door de blootstelling van menselijke lichamen aan de toxiciteit van hun omgeving.

## Antropoceen en *environmental humanities*

Zoals bovenstaand citaat uit Bennetts *Vibrant Matter* duidelijk maakt, ligt de nadruk in de vierde golf minder op de transformatieve vermogens en de verantwoordelijkheid van de mens dan op de gedeelde *agency* van menselijke, technologische, natuurlijke en andere niet-menselijke actoren. Die trend blijft zich ook voortzetten in nieuwe, meer theoretische discussies over wat ecokritiek hoort te doen, zoals in de essaybundel getiteld *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), geredigeerd door Serenella Iovino en Serpil Oppermann. Zij vertrekken van Bennetts ideeën, trekken die door naar de literaire wereld en stellen voor om niet-menselijke actoren of objecten een ‘storied matter’ toe te kennen: ‘a form of narrative transmitted through the interchanges of organic and inorganic matter, the continuity of human and nonhuman forces, and the interplay of bodily natures, all forming active composites’ (Iovino & Oppermann 2014: 21). Hiermee sluiten ze eveneens aan bij recente ontwikkelingen in de continentale filosofie die zich afzetten tegen een al te antropocentrische focus, zoals *object-oriented ontology*, *speculative realism* en andere kritieken van wat de Franse filosoof Quentin Meillassoux het kantiaanse ‘correlationisme’ noemt. Toch blijft de activistische ambitie een centrale plaats innemen: zo is er meer aandacht voor ecokritische pedagogie en is er een blijvende aandacht voor de kruisbestuiving tussen literaire en culturele studies enerzijds, en disciplines als geologie, ecologie en de biologie anderzijds. Ecokritiek wordt in toenemende mate een deel van het interdisciplinaire veld van de *environmental humanities*. Daar zijn goede intellectuele redenen voor: zoals we hebben aangetoond, stond de ecokritiek altijd in dialoog met verschillende artistieke en wetenschappelijke praktijken. Er is ook de meer prozaïsche reden dat literatuurstudie een almaar meer marginale plaats inneemt in universitaire onderzoeksgenda’s en curricula en dat inkapseling in interdisciplinaire onderzoeksprogramma’s (zie ook: de *medical humanities*, *memory studies*) de levenslijn van de discipline nog even kan verlengen.

Misschien kan de literatuurstudie een soort troost voor die krimpende levenslijn vinden in het besef dat alles binnenkort naar de haaien gaat. De dreiging van planetaire verdoemenis ligt vervat in het label van het Antropoceen, of het tijdperk van de mens. Dat idee, dat erg populair blijft binnen de *environmental huma-*

*nities*, drukt niet alleen uit dat het menselijke handelen de geologie van de planeet onherroepelijk heeft beïnvloed, maar ook dat de controle over die doorgedreven terraformatie ons voorgoed is ontglipt en dat processen als ontbossing, klimaatverandering en het uitsterven van fauna en flora het voortbestaan van de mens fundamenteel bedreigen. In zijn boek *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015) heeft Timothy Clark het Antropoceen geanalyseerd als een ‘drempelconcept’: in de onttoverde nieuwe wereld van het Antropoceen hebben traditionele denk- en verbeeldingskaders afgedaan en moeten ook de literatuur en de literatuurkritiek de mesoschaal van de mens verlaten om op micro- of macroschaal planetaire processen te gaan onderzoeken. Erin James’ *econarratology* is een poging om die inzichten te transporteren naar het gebied van de (cognitieve) narratologie. Welke types van ecologische verbeelding zijn gelinkt met bepaalde micro- en macro-narratieve structuren? Hoe kunnen verhalen verschillende schalen van tijd en ruimte, zoals geologische tijd of planetaire ruimte, verbeelden? De noodzaak van die schaalverschuiving zorgt ervoor dat de toekomstige relevantie van de ecokritiek misschien wel meer gegarandeerd is dan het voortbestaan van onze soort – ware het niet dat de *homo ecocriticus* de *homo sapiens* niet kan overleven. *So it goes.*

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# POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

*Nicolas Vandeviver*

Fulbright Visiting Scholar & Postdoctoral Fellow of the Belgian American Educational Foundation (B.A.E.F.), Columbia University  
/ Postdoctoral Researcher, Ghent University

Has postcolonial studies run out of steam? In the past decade, as it reached the height of its institutional consolidation, the field appears to have been plagued by a sense of exhaustion and impotence. According to Jennifer Wenzel, speaking at a roundtable discussion in 2006, there is a disjunction between ‘the state of the field and the state of the world’ (Agnani et al. 2007: 633). For all its achievement and promise, the field throws little light on today’s global problems of violence, domination, inequality, and injustice, and the reasons why millions of people in this world still live without things that most of those in the West take for granted (Agnani et al. 2007: 636).

In a similar vein in 2011, Neil Lazarus argued that as postcolonial studies embedded itself in the academy, its discourse became increasingly self-reflexive and revisionist (16-17). He believes the field to be out of sync with today’s world, because it has been unable to rethink some of its core assumptions in light of the violence that is enacted on Afghanistan and Iraq in response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 (Lazarus 2011: 15). In an article in the *Times Higher Education* written in the aftermath of the violence that visited Paris on 13 November 2015, Andrew Hussey similarly called on his colleagues to step out of ‘the comfort zone of literary theory and into the deeper, more complex world of real issues, real problems, and sometimes, real, raw violence’ (cited by Reisz 2016: 24). The terrorist attacks in Brussels, Istanbul, Nice, and Manchester, as well as the reduction of civil liberties in the name of security on the home front and what appears to be a never-ending global fight against terrorism that has spread to Syria, Israel/Palestine, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Mali, Cameroon, and Nigeria, reinforce the claim for a redirection of the field. Likewise, the daily deaths in the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean, or along the U.S.-Mexico border of immigrants and refugees who flee from war, economic deprivation, land deprivation, and political persecution, increase the pressure on the field to find new ways to critically address these global developments. Whether or not the assessment is true that postcolonial studies today has lost its interventionist power and is floating in the ether of high theory at the expense of being applied (compare Young 2012), no one can deny that it appears to be in crisis.

## Defining the Postcolonial

Framing *postcolonial studies* is by no means an easy task. Rather than simply standing for the academic study of the historical period which came *after colonialism*, the term generally refers to the epistemological position taken up by scholars whose works might be said to contribute to a common politico-philosophical project of liberation, but cannot further be defined by a shared method, theory, or even object of study. In its widest reaches, postcolonial studies implicates most of the humanities and social sciences – from anthropology and political science to philosophy, law, theology, geography, and even sociology. In the study of literature, it is taken to mean the analysis and critique of the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism on the production of literature and knowledge, both in the past and in the present.

On the eve of the First World War, imperial powers either directly or by various other means controlled nine-tenths of the world's territory (Young 2016: 2). Postcolonial literary studies matches that scope and covers texts from all over the world, written in the five hundred years or so between the beginning of the grand-scale European colonisation of the Americas and the present (Boehmer 2005: 1). However, as disciplines such as medieval studies and classics are becoming post-colonialised, so to speak, our definition of what constitutes a postcolonial text might still need to be widened (Hardwick and Gillespie 2007, Lampert-Weissig 2010). Generally speaking, postcolonial literary studies focuses on texts produced at a certain imperial moment written by both colonisers and colonised in the metropolis and in the rest of the empire, colonial and anti-colonial discourses, and the writings of people living in current and former colonies and of those who have migrated, by force or otherwise, or are living in diaspora (Boehmer 2005: 2-4). As such, it also examines some branches of literature produced in formerly colonising nations, such as black British literature, literature that is sometimes shelved under exilic writing, or literature that deals with these nations' histories of colonisation and migration, or with the problems of racism, multiculturalism, and globalisation in the present. By foregrounding the writings of the subaltern, the dispossessed, or other minorities, postcolonial literary studies 'starts from the premise that those in the west, both within and outside the academy, should take such other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as those of the west' (Young 2003: 20).

As a mode of analysis, postcolonial studies criticises so-called *universal* understandings of literature and culture in an attempt to unthink the Eurocentrism that continues to underpin them and to produce alternative knowledges that seek to change the conditions under which we all live. Knowledges – plural, indeed – because the postcolonial perspective resists all totalising forms of explanation. Against certain forms of thinking that flatten out complexity, introduce teleological accounts of globalisation, or reduce our understanding of the world to an ideologically charged binary opposition of *the West* versus *the rest*, postcolonial stud-

ies evinces – and sometimes even champions – cultural difference, complexity, and heterogeneity, while forcing us to recognise the unequal and uneven power relations that govern human existence in an increasingly globalised world (Bhabha 1994: 171-173). To many of its practitioners, the postcolonial is a fighting term which designates a form of literary criticism between cultural critique and political intervention, committed to the pursuits of emancipation and justice at home and in the world.

## A Shift from the Word ...

Largely ignored by the majority of Anglophone postcolonial scholars until the 1980s, the writings of Frantz Fanon now occupy a central place in the field (Young 2016: 276). Influenced by Marxism, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, and Aimé Césaire's politics of *négritude*, which links the affirmation of African cultural and political identity to the struggle for independence, Fanon argued that the problem of colonialism 'comporte ainsi non seulement l'intersection de conditions objectives et historiques, mais aussi l'attitude de l'homme à l'égard de ces conditions' (1952: 95). In *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952) Fanon describes colonial French Algeria as a racially divided Manichean world in which the estranged, black colonised subject pathologically tries to appropriate the culture of the white coloniser that is embellished with unquestioned superiority claims. His most famous work, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961), is a reworking of the Algerian colonial settlement into a general theory of colonialism and decolonisation, in which coloniser and colonised are placed at two irreconcilably opposed ends of a dialectic which neither can transcend (Young 2016: 283). Fanon illustrates how colonialism is not an abstract system but a reality that is embodied in the speech, thoughts, and actions of millions of individuals. His lasting influence on postcolonial studies is the field's culturalist tendency to reconcile an analysis of individual human experience with a critique of the objective, material, and historical processes that shape it (Young 2016: 275).

One of the most well-known works of postcolonial and arguably even literary criticism to date, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was foundational for the field. By grafting Michel Foucault's notion of *discourse* to Antonio Gramsci's writings on *hegemony*, *Orientalism* examines how, through various representations, institutions, and practices that reflect and reinforce its cultural and geopolitical dominance, Europe constructed an image of *the Orient* as its fundamental other and dominated the region and its peoples in the process of knowing them. Said's highly original decision to analyse colonialism simultaneously as a form of military rule and as a discourse in a Foucaultian sense initiated what came to be known as colonial discourse analysis, a whole array of studies that examines European representations of non-European cultures and peoples as implicated in relations of powers. Likewise – but also due to the influence of the Subaltern Studies

Group associated with Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s – the political theory of Gramsci became another important influence on the emerging field. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) invoked and at the same time deconstructed Gramsci's concept of *subalternity* to draw attention to hitherto obscured forms of agency of the colonised and the representational politics of visibility and invisibility associated with them.

In what seems to be a reduction of the analytical richness of the works of prominent critics like Said and Spivak that was quickened by the linguistic turn in literary theory, postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s developed along almost exclusively discourse-oriented and deconstructive lines to the extent that critics sometimes dismissed it as just another branch of poststructuralism (Parry 2004: 74). The seminal textbook *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) is exemplary of the textualist account of culture that characterises this first generation. For, by affording analytical priority to the formations of discourse and signifying processes, and defining the postcolonial as a reading strategy (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989: 176), the authors risk privileging the sign over the real – a domestication of the field's interventionist potential which Said was quick to warn against (1993: 366-367).

## ... to the World

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed numerous cross-disciplinary approaches that signalled a (re)turn to a more comprehensive understanding of the material conditions which constitute postcolonial subjectivity. While the worldwide independence of formerly colonised territories after the Second World War might have led some to believe that colonialism and imperialism were a thing of the past, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed in the wake of 9/11, as well as Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and its siege of Gaza, direct our attention to their transformation and continuing presence in the form of a global *war on terror* (Gregory 2004). Maintained by economic means and supplemented by military force if necessary, the dependency relations in the contemporary globalised world are, in many ways, more subtle and indirect versions of the old (Young 2016: 45-46).

At the same time, human-induced global warming and environmental issues have also been added to the postcolonial agenda. By infusing postcolonial studies with ecocriticism, Rob Nixon calls attention to what he labels the *slow violence* of (neo)colonialism and globalised capitalism, as gradually and often invisibly unfolding ecological crises such as deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution cause displacement, suicide, and other forms of human suffering in the Global South (2011: 7-8). Nixon demonstrates that environmental concerns are often collapsed with postcolonial ones, because the victims of this outsourced suffering are also the victims of dehumanising discourses like Orientalism that devalue

their culture, environment, and lives (2011: 150-151). The nascent field of post-colonial ecology illustrates that one cannot possibly hope to understand the workings of empire or colonialism without examining the socio-environmental dimensions of such enterprises.

In a related development of the last few decades, postcolonial studies has increasingly moved on to address concerns about biopolitics. By studying the relationship between biopolitical sovereignty, narratives of law and human rights, and the cultural stereotypes that underlie them, Stephen Morton (2013) not only demonstrates that international humanitarian law is put in the service of contemporary colonial power but that the postcolonial is as much a problem of biopolitics as it is of geopolitics. In today's world, stateless persons and refugees are stripped of their legal rights and the sovereignty over their bodies (Morton 2013: 199-200) and come to exemplify the condition of what Giorgio Agamben in a different context calls *bare life* (1998), the effect of which is that their lives are not only marginalised and silenced but – when these persons perish as a result of military interventions or on crossings in the pursuit of a better future – ultimately less grievable too. Studying the narratives of refugees, internally displaced persons, or asylum seekers, while not solving material problems, allows us to mourn their lives and deaths and to reflect on the conditions of possibility for justice in a way that the law cannot.

While historically postcolonial studies speaks English and French, today other languages can be heard too. Elleke Boehmer and Sarah De Mul (2012) have recently taken substantial steps to develop a Dutch-speaking postcolonial studies that contributes to larger attempts to change the academic situation in Europe in which postcolonial studies is decoupled from the national language and linked to foreign literatures. In the Low Countries, the field's predominantly Anglocentric, and to a lesser extent Francocentric, focus has prompted critics to write off post-colonial concepts as derivative or irrelevant to the local context, due to a false belief that the postcolonial emanates from without the mother country, not from within (Boehmer & De Mul 2012: 4-5). By introducing non-Anglophone contexts, histories, and literatures to the discussion of postcoloniality, Boehmer and De Mul seek to form a trans-linguistic postcolonial consciousness that rethinks some of the field's key assumptions which arose from Anglophone history and literatures (2012: 11).

Committed to bridging the gap between 'the state of the field and the state of the world', so many works are being produced that it is hard to locate any kind of centre of contemporary postcolonial thought. In addition to the developments outlined above, settler colonialism is now analysed as a form of colonialism distinct enough to deserve analysis as an entirely separate category (Veracini 2010), and *memory* has become a key category through which the colonial past and its multiple mediations in the present are productively reassessed (Rothberg 2009). While such developments provide only further evidence that the field is currently alive with activity and invention, for postcolonial studies to catch up on the pres-

ent, more needs to be done. It needs to push the discussion of Israel/Palestine forward.

Though in *Orientalism* Said openly and self-consciously indicates that his intellectual project is underpinned by his lived experience as a Palestinian in exile (1978: 27), postcolonial studies has only begun engaging in depth with Israel/Palestine in the last five years or so (Ball 2012; Bernard 2013). The colonisation of Palestine since 1948 presents us with a complex case of settler colonialism that challenges and troubles many of the assumptions of the field: first, because it took place in the same period when many states of the former colonised world gained independence, and, second, because it was carried out by a people with a historical counterclaim to indigeneity who considered their effort to restore their homeland parallel to later anticolonial movements (Young 2016: xiii, Moore-Gilbert 2016: 2). This gives rise to a highly volatile political situation that is apparently made irresolvable by the competing interests of two distinct but ethnically related groups with similar claims and demands split by two thousand years of history. Studies in related fields demonstrate that Israel's occupation is not limited to the exercise of military force, but entails the use of law as a weapon of war (Weizman 2012: 92), territorial sequestration and annexation (Ophir, Givoni, & Hanafi 2009), the biopolitical development of infrastructure as a means to regulate the population (Gordon 2008), and advanced forms of political ecology (Weizman 2007: 9-10). Little attention has been directed so far to the literary texts on both sides of the conflict and the ways in which they not only reflect but compete with these realities and the discourses of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism that underpin them (Moore-Gilbert 2016: 28-29). This is not to suggest that such texts offer a blueprint for an effective political solution. Only that coming to terms with Israel/Palestine is critical for the future of postcolonial studies, because it allows the field to rethink and diversify its vast array of theories and methods, and, in so doing, to shed light on the conditions of possibility for peace, security, and justice to the peoples involved.

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## PERSONALIA

**Inge Arteel** doceert Duitstalige Letterkunde aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Zij publiceert over Oostenrijkse literatuur (Jelinek, Mayröcker e.a.), neo-avantgarde, tekst en theatraliteit, en het hoorspel. Recente publicaties verschenen in *Modern Drama* en *Partial Answers*. Zij is medesamensteller van onder andere *In-Differenzen*. *Alterität im Schreiben Josef Winklers* (2016, met Stefan Krammer) en het special issue over de *Interrelation of Creativity and Captivity* van het tijdschrift *Life Writing* (2018, met Elisabeth Bekers en Eva Schandevyl). Zij is voorzitter van het VUB-onderzoekscentrum CLIC (*Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*) en samen met Katharina Pewny en Kornee Van der Haven van de VUB-UGent onderzoeksgroep THALIA.

**Ivan Delazari** is an associate professor of comparative literature and linguistics at National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg. He holds a PhD in Philology from St. Petersburg State University (2003) and a PhD in English from Hong Kong Baptist University (2018). He was Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of Mississippi (2009-2010) and a Hong Kong PhD Fellow (2014-2017). His recent publications include 'Voicing the Split Narrator' (in *Audionarratology*, 2016) and 'Overhearing Diegetic Music in Narrative Fiction' (in *Narrative* 26.2, May 2018). His current book project is on musical experience in contemporary American novels.

**Carl De Strycker** is directeur van Poëziecentrum vzw, hoofdredacteur van *Poëziekrant* en praktijkassistent moderne Nederlandse letterkunde aan de UGent. Hij promoveerde op de studie *Celan auseinandergeschrieben. Paul Celan in de Nederlandstalige poëzie* (Garant 2012). Met Yra van Dijk en Maarten De Pourcq maakte hij *Draden in het donker. Intertekstualiteit in theorie en praktijk* (2013), met Koen Rymenants stelde hij *Willem Elsschot. Dichter* (2017) samen, met Jeroen Dera was hij redacteur van *Bundels van het nieuwe millennium* (2018) en met Yves T'Sjoen redigeerde hij *Nolens handboek* (2018).

**Bart Eeckhout** is gewoon hoogleraar in de Engelstalige letterkunde aan de Universiteit Antwerpen. Hij studeerde in Gent en New York en doceerde onder andere aan New York University. Sinds 2011 is hij hoofdredacteur van *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Hij schreef *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing* (2002) en redigeerde *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic* (2008), *Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism* (2012), *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens* (2017) en *Wallace Stevens, Poetry, and France: "Au pays de la métaphore"* (2017). Hij is voorzitter van de VAL en van het Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA).

**Bruno Forment** is de auteur en redacteur van *(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancient Régime Opera* (2012), *Theatrical Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities* (2015) en *Zwanenzang van een illusie* (2016), alsook van artikels in onder meer *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Eighteenth-Century Music* en *Early Music*. Zijn werk werd bekroond door onder andere de Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft. Hij doceerde aan de Universiteit Gent, Vrije Universiteit Brussel en het Conservatorium van Brussel. Momenteel is hij verbonden aan Resonant-Expertisecentrum Muzikaal Erfgoed, bij het Labo XIX&XX aan het Conservatorium van Antwerpen en als docent aan het Conservatorium van Gent. Sinds 2017 is hij redactielid van *Eighteenth-Century Music*.

**Reuben Martens** behaalde opeenvolgende masters in de Taal- en Letterkunde (Nederlands-Engels, 2015), Literatuurwetenschappen (2016) en Vergelijkende moderne letterkunde (2017). Hij is sinds oktober 2017 als FWO-aspirant verbonden aan KU Leuven en Universiteit Gent. Zijn onderzoek op het vlak van de hedendaagse Engelstalige (sciencefiction) literatuur en cinema richt zich voornamelijk op de verbeelding van energietransities van onze huidige petro-cultuur naar duurzame, alternatieve energiesystemen en op de daarbij horende sociale, culturele en filosofische verschuivingen.

**Emily Petermann** earned her PhD in American literature at the University of Konstanz, Germany, in 2012 and has since taught at the Universities of Göttingen and Konstanz. Her book, *The Musical Novel: Imitation of Musical Structure, Performance, and Reception*, was published in 2014. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on musical fiction, the Gothic, Canadian literature, children's literature, nonsense, and the film musical. She is a founding member of the Word and Music Association Forum and on the board of the International Association of Word and Music Studies.

**Nicolas Vandeviver** is a Fulbright Visiting Scholar and Postdoctoral Fellow of the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF) at Columbia University and a Postdoctoral Researcher at Ghent University. He has a PhD in Literary Studies from Ghent University (2017). His main research interests are literary theory and postcolonial studies. He has published articles on Stephen Greenblatt's new historicism and the different intellectual strands that underpin Edward Said's *Orientalism*. His PhD, which he is currently reworking into a book, examined the way in which Said pioneered to turn literary criticism into a form of political intervention.

**Birgit Van Puymbroeck** is postdoctoraal onderzoeker van het FWO aan de Universiteit Gent. Haar onderzoeksinteresses omvatten modernisme, auteursnetwerken, literaire tijdschriften en radio. Ze publiceerde in verschillende wetenschappelijke tijdschriften, waaronder *PMLA*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*,

*Modern Language Review*, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, *Victorian Periodicals Review* en *Neophilologus*. Van 2015 tot 2018 was ze hoofdredacteur van het *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*. Sinds 2018 is ze lid van de Jonge Academie.

**Carolien Van Nerom** behaalde in 2015 haar Master of Arts in de Taal- & Letterkunde (Nederlands-Engels) aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel en in 2014 haar Master of Arts in de Muziek (orkestinstrument: klarinet) aan het Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel (KCB). Sinds oktober 2018 is zij als FWO-aspirant verbonden aan de VUB. Haar onderzoek richt zich op de narrativiteit van de minimalistische muziek van Philip Glass in opera's gebaseerd op romans.

**Pieter Vermeulen** is docent Amerikaanse literatuur aan de universiteit van Leuven. Hij is de auteur van *Romanticism after the Holocaust* (2010) en *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form* (2015), en co-editor van onder andere *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets* (2015, met Stefan Helgesson) en *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (2016, met Lucy Bond en Stef Craps). Momenteel werkt hij aan een dubbel special issue van *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* over 'Contemporary Literature and/as Archive' (met Tom Chadwick) en aan *Literature and the Anthropocene*, dat in Routledge's 'Literature and Critical Thought'-serie zal verschijnen.



## CLW

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