

Special Issue Reprint

Music and the Written Word

Edited by
Gillian Dooley

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Music and the Written Word

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Guest Editor

Gillian Dooley



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4052 Basel, Switzerland

This is a reprint of the Special Issue, published open access by the journal *Humanities* (ISSN 2076-0787), freely accessible at: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/86HOMG8LRY.

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

Lastname, Firstname, Firstname Lastname, and Firstname Lastname. Article Title. <i>Journal Name</i> Year , Volume Number, Page Range.
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ISBN 978-3-7258-5319-9 (Hbk)

ISBN 978-3-7258-5320-5 (PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-5320-5>

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About the Editor

Gillian Dooley

Gillian Dooley is an honorary associate professor in English literature at Flinders University in South Australia. Much of her research involves the connection between music and literature, particularly in the work of novelists such as Jane Austen, Iris Murdoch and J.M. Coetzee. Recent publications include *Listening to Iris Murdoch: Music, Sounds, and Silences* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) and *She Played and Sang: Jane Austen and Music* (Manchester University Press, 2024).

Preface

When I first conceived this collection on music and the written word, I could not have imagined the many creative and thought-provoking ways in which the subject could be approached. My initial call for papers for a Special Issue of *Humanities* read as follows:

Words and song have long been thought to spring from the same expressive impulse. In *Disgrace*, JM Coetzee writes that ‘the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul’. But what happens when the spoken word becomes text? To what extent can written language behave as though it were a type of music—or music act as a language? This Special Issue will explore the many ways in which music and literature may be linked: music as a theme and a motif in fiction; rhetorical links between music and language in literary texts; the musician as author and the author as musician.

When formulating the scope of this collection, I anticipated some possible topics, such as (quoting again from the call for papers) the following:

- What is lost, and what is found, when a literary work is transformed into an opera?
- Can instrumental music tell a story, or move beyond mimesis of extra-musical sounds to convey abstract ideas?
- What are the limits of writing about music? How can words convey music’s effect and its affect?

Some of these questions have been addressed in the articles that follow. However, many more intriguing topics have arisen, to the extent that I have had some difficulty curating the eleven articles that were published in the Special Issue online into neat categories for the Reprint. I have opted for a notional reverse chronological order, based on the earliest text dealt with in each article, since nothing else seemed especially logical.

Victor Kennedy’s article grapples with the very topical and controversial issue of artificial intelligence, and thus seemed like a good way to start the conversation. Kennedy takes a 2019 episode of the television series *Black Mirror* that seemed futuristic at the time, examining it in the light of current developments and thousands of years of mythology and theorising. He concludes that ‘an overview of artistic productions and scientific articles reveals that the future is breaking upon us faster than we might have expected.’ Although this topic is perhaps not quite what I had envisaged for the Special Issue, its timeliness makes it an important introduction to the discussions that follow.

Sean Williams’ article ‘Ring the Bells: Sound and Silence in Garth Nix’s *Old Kingdom*’ is concerned with the interplay of various sonic and mythical elements in Australian author Nix’s series of novels set in the ‘Old Kingdom’, which allows the reader to experience both ‘the consolation of high fantasy and the uncanny of the Gothic’, enhanced by the sound of bells evoked in the narrative. Jamie Lynn Webster varies this perspective by ‘hearing written magic’ in the Harry Potter film series. She explores how written texts—letters, books, newspapers, and spells—become increasingly expressive through music and sound design, evolving from static props to dynamic agents of power, emotion, and narrative voice. Webster argues that these sonic treatments construct a parallel system of meaning, shaping the viewer’s perception of truth and authority. As the films grow more aesthetically independent from the novels, written magic becomes a site of transformation, reflecting the filmmakers’ own voice within the adaptation process.

Operatic adaptations of fiction are perhaps a more obvious nexus between music and the written word than some of these examples. Xingyu Lin examines in subtle and fascinating detail the excerpt of

Nicholas Lens's opera based on J.M. Coetzee's 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello* that was premiered at the Adelaide Festival in 2024, and in doing so she places the opera, and Coetzee's novel, in the context of Coetzee's entire oeuvre, with its recurrent themes of death and immortality.

While Lens's musical setting of Coetzee's text, in Lin's words, 'does not seek to please, but to provoke difficult thoughts and emotions', Bruce Springsteen's rock ballads are squarely situated within popular culture. They are nevertheless, as Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay shows, vibrant and urgent agents of social change, depicting and empowering 'restless urban dwellers who harbour the transformative potential to metamorphose urban territories into arenas of novelty and meaningful interaction'. Chattopadhyay draws on an impressive range of cultural theory in his rich analysis of Springsteen's rock poetry.

Jeff Wimble takes us a generation earlier, into the black communities of Chicago in the mid-twentieth century, transplanted not only in place but in time from the human brutality of the American South to the mechanistic brutality of oppressive modernity. Through the writings of African American author Richard Wright and his ambivalent attitude to vernacular music, Wimble examines the place of the blues in American culture, and the development of the art form from 'rural blues' to 'urban blues'. His analysis of the musical echoes in Wright's prose is particularly arresting.

Thomas Gurke's article introduces the term 'notational ekphrasis' to signify 'the visual representation of musical notation within literary texts'. Gurke looks at this phenomenon particularly in the work of three modernist writers, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Vladimir Nabokov, asking what these instances of musical notation might mean for both musicians and non-musicians. This is a new and exciting avenue of research for music and the written word.

The last four chapters all deal in some way with musical 'versions' of written texts. Merri Bell is a composer as well as a music scholar and has created musical representations of the works of L.M. Montgomery, author of novels such as the classic *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and its sequels. She explains the stylistic devices she has used in her compositions to convey Montgomery's 'suspended romances', noting the debates about whether instrumental music can represent themes and emotions, and using creative experimentation to explore this fascinating subject.

Lola Abs Osta takes us back another century, to Berlioz's 1834 work for solo viola and orchestra, *Harold in Italy*, and its basis in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published some twenty years earlier. Using musical examples. Abs Osta analyses the cross-medial qualities that carry meaning between words and music, demonstrating Berlioz's innovative scoring: how his 'choices of form, orchestration, melody, harmony, rhythm, and allusion function as musical analogues of Byronic devices'. In this way, she has effectively responded to the question in the original call for papers as to whether music can 'move beyond mimesis of extra-musical sounds' and convey meanings without further explanation.

In my own essay, I am concerned with a twenty-first century operatic treatment of Jane Austen's 1814 novel *Mansfield Park* by composer Jonathan Dove and librettist Alasdair Middleton. The chapter examines the considerable skill involved in creating a chamber opera based on a three-volume novel: how the music and libretto work together to enhance both Austen's biting satire and her deep humanity, and how Dove's remarkable and apparently almost instinctive recognition of *Mansfield Park's* operatic potential has been realised.

And finally, Lucie Ratail examines music in Ann Radcliffe's 1794 classic of the Gothic genre, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The novel itself is full of musical allusions and sonic effects, conveyed, of course, by words. Ratail discusses the development of ideas of musical representation in the context of the affective hierarchy of the arts, bringing her deep knowledge of the field to bear on the questions that have arisen throughout this collection, especially in the last four chapters.

I am indebted to all the authors for their valuable contributions to this collection, and I am delighted that it has been possible to reprint it in book form. I am also most grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers, and I would particularly like to thank the hard-working editorial staff of *Humanities* who do so much to promote humanities scholarship by encouraging and assisting guest editors such as myself.

Gillian Dooley
Guest Editor



Article

How the Music Machine Makes Myths Real: AI, Holograms, and Ashley Eternal

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Abstract: Since ancient times, music has been instrumental in giving life to the stories we build our identities and cultures around. I will examine how, in our time, music creates new myths by creating its own heroes and heroines through capital and the star system. In traditional literary and cultural analysis, a distinction was drawn between the natural and the supernatural when discussing literary mythology; in the twentieth century, an equivalent distinction was made in works of art that, in Baudrillard's terminology, make use of the realms of the real and the "hyperreal" (1981). In today's mythmaking, the supernatural has been largely replaced by the technological, and recent developments blur the line between science fiction and fantasy; tech has become megalotech. A recent episode of the television series *Black Mirror*, "Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too" (2019), explores these concepts with an examination of the pros and cons of replacing human performers with AI simulacra.

Keywords: music; myth; AI; holograms; science fiction; cults

"Mind/body, heart and soul, we got rock and roll"—Gillan et al. (1984)

1. Introduction

The popular science fiction/horror television series *Black Mirror* (Sewitsky and Brooker 2019), streamed on Netflix, is known for its examinations of the way technology affects our lives, as Nolan Clarke notes in "When *Black Mirror*'s Dystopia Becomes Our Reality: Exploring the Impact of Black Mirror's Predictive Technologies on Society and Ethics" (Clarke 2023). A 2019 episode, "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too", examined this theme in the context of holographic images of performers in concerts and the way the music business creates "stars". I will discuss the themes developed in this program and show how it draws upon ideas dating back to antiquity, including the Platonic separation of mind and body, the Pygmalion story, and the Frankenstein story, and how these topics are updated and modernized in 20th- and 21st-century science fiction, horror stories and film. I will also examine the way these themes and myths have been analyzed by 20th-century philosophers and critics such as Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard.

Myths are often used in song lyrics to manipulate culture and politics; modern technology is used in similar ways to make mythic figures of pop stars for profit and to sway public opinion. In particular, the "resurrection" of dead stars such as Elvis Presley, Tupac Shakur, Prince, Frank Zappa, Roy Orbison, Michael Jackson, and Ronnie James Dio using holograms in concert has become increasingly common.¹ There is a great deal of controversy around the practice between concert promoters and executors of the dead stars' estates, who see it as a lucrative, and therefore legitimate, practice, and many fans, families, and friends of the musicians, who see it as manipulative and ghoulish, and describe it in such terms as "ghost slavery", "stupid", and "a moneymaking gimmick" (Grow 2019). Of particular note is the hype used to advertise such concerts, which promote them as "fun" and "magical" (Grow 2019); these events bring to mind the ancient Cult of Dionysus, the god who returns from the dead and stimulates his followers with Bacchanalian revelries (Čop 2024).

The music industry is an integral part of the media conglomerate. Music is a powerful tool in shaping and creating public opinion (Kennedy and Mohar 2024) that has long been used to both criticize and support official institutions, actions, and policies. Politicians and their operatives are aware of this power, as can be seen in the use of popular and folk songs and music in political rallies and campaigns. Traditional ways to control this message have been through money, patronage, and repression, and now, technological developments in media are providing new methods of manipulating the message. As we shall see, the tools used to create cults of personality surrounding religious and political figures are also used to create cults around artists, writers, and musicians, mainly for economic, but also for political, purposes.

2. The Cult of the Synthetic Personality: Ashley Eternal

Folk and rock music have long been a means of criticizing the establishment (Bajić 2024). Part of the rock star myth has been built around the quality of rebelliousness: once stars reach a certain level of fame, they can speak their minds in defiance of their corporate managers; this quality is factored into marketing (see Robert Palmer 1990 for an account of “the revolution-as-corporate-marketing ploy” in rock music). The use of holograms in concerts is a new way of controlling what rock stars say, however; like teleprompters in front of politicians giving speeches, the scripts used in preparing the holograms are controlled by the corporation behind the star. Another factor that makes the use of holograms attractive, from a marketing and message control perspective, is repetition. With AI, the image can be programmed to say anything in the voice and with the mannerisms of the dead star; so far, however, concert promoters have resisted changing the messages that fans expect and pay for.² Critics and fans have noted yet another factor at play here; the constant recycling of performances from established stars has the effect of silencing the voices of new generations of musicians and singers.

Kenny Forbes describes the phenomenon of “Death Benefits” in the entertainment world: “the death of a celebrity ‘encourages audiences to develop a pseudo-attachment to them’, which initiates forms of media and social mourning that inevitably lead to a spike in sales through the economics of the ‘death-effect’ benefit” (2021, p. 157).

In “Dead Music in Live Music Culture” (Cull 2015), Felicity Cull explains how we bring dead music back to life in two ways: by listening to digital recordings of artists who have died and by listening to live artists performing music that is recognizably from the past. Cull “questions as to how relevant the concept of mortal death can be in a music culture that is based around digital recordings. When we live in a world where dead performers can take part in live performances, such as through holographic representation, dead and live are no longer solid concepts” (p. 111). Cull defines dead music as music from the past that evokes feelings of nostalgia that many listeners prefer to contemporary music and notes, in a very astute observation, that “Listeners remember what they want, when they want to, rather than recalling exactly how things “really” were” (p. 114).³ In a similar vein, Heather Duncan writes about how humans can achieve a form of digital immortality on social media in “Human ‘ish’: Voices from Beyond the Grave in Contemporary Narratives” (Duncan 2018).

“Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too”, episode three of season five of the science fiction/horror television series *Black Mirror*, streamed on Netflix in 2019, showcases these themes, revealing modern myths about the music industry and the way it manipulates both its performers and its fans. Ashley O, played by Miley Cyrus, is a young pop star who is under the control of her aunt and manager, Catherine. As long as Ashley cooperates and obeys, all is well, but as she matures, she tires of the kind of bland, feel-good music she is expected to write and perform and wants to develop a different style. This, however, might interrupt or decrease the revenue flow, so her management team decides to stop her. Ashley’s consciousness has already been uploaded into a machine and marketed in the form of sentient “Ashley Too” dolls, so Catherine poisons her niece and keeps her alive in a coma while connected to a brain scan machine that extracts new songs, which are then recorded using AI technology

and sold. Catherine and her management team plan to turn off Ashley's life support systems on her twenty-fifth birthday, when her legal conservatorship expires, and then have her music performed "live" in concert by the Ashley Eternal hologram. Ashley's predicament bears a striking similarity to the real-life case of Britney Spears (BBC News 2021b).⁴ Ashley is rescued at the last minute, however, by her fans Rachel and Jack, and the scheme is foiled.

During a presentation of the plan to a group of enthusiastic investors, Catherine lists the benefits of holograms over living musicians: they are "photorealistic, scalable, streamable, and fully controllable". Her argument is based on the premise that audiences no longer really listen to music, but instead participate in group adulation of reified cultural icons. Several scholars have made similar observations based on real-life examples: Forbes notes that "dead celebrities remain subservient and meet the demands of their stakeholders (estates, rights owners, fans) without recourse" (2021, p. 158).⁵

One of the compelling features of "Rachel, Jack, And Ashley Too" is the way that it links different myths to show how myth has come to define and control important aspects of modern society and culture. Many critics have noted how close *Black Mirror's* science fiction predictions are to reality (Tomlinson 2019). The plot of "Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too" was predicted in a 2009 interview Miley Cyrus (Cyrus and Shanks 2010) gave on MTV News, describing the artistic transition she experienced during the production of her album *Can't Be Tamed*, which featured a song called "Robot":

I want to do my last pop record. I'm working on a record right now. I kind of want this to be my last record for a little while and be able to take a break and just get all the types of music that I really love. . . you know, my favorite styles, because in a few years, as I grow up, so will my fans, and I won't have to focus on that as much, and I'll be able to have more of the sound of music that I'm into. (Dinh 2009)

The *Black Mirror* series shows how we are all becoming acclimatized to the idea of the synthetic, digital self through filters, avatars, and the proliferation of "see your rock star self" apps.

3. The Four Foundational Myths of Modern Music

The use of AI-generated music and holograms to replicate performers can be seen as an attempt of the part of producers, promoters, and executives to create "the perfect star". This is not a new theme; the attempt to create "the ideal being" goes back to ancient Greek myth and has been the subject of stories and songs in many genres, from romance to science fiction. This is the impetus behind the movement to create and implement AI and the four myths it builds on: the myth of Pygmalion, the myth of the dream vision, the myth of the separation of mind and body, and the myth of uploading consciousness into a machine are the central themes of "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too".

3.1. Myth 1: The Myth of Pygmalion

The ancient Greek story of Pygmalion has been retold and modified in works such as George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Shaw 1913), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Shelley 1818), Richard O'Brian's stage show and film *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman and O'Brien 1975), Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (Levin 1972—film adaptation 1975) (see Herzog 2019), an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* S5E21, "The Perfect Mate" (Bole 1992), and many more. In search of the perfect mate, the artist or scientist attempts to create an ideal being, but nearly all come to a tragic or unhappy end.

In popular music, there are many songs about soulmates, about finding (or not) the perfect mate, such as Elvis Presley's "Can't Help Falling in Love" (Peretti et al. 1961); Bryan Adams' "Heaven" (Adams and Vallance 1985); Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U" (covered by Sinéad O'Connor (Prince 1990); and Ed Sheeran's "Perfect" (Sheeran 2017). There are also songs about the impossibility of finding the perfect mate, like Pukka Orchestra's "Miss Right" (Williamson 1984) ("she don't exist"); this leads to the Pygmalion/Frankenstein theme appearing overtly in songs about creating the Perfect Mate,

such as Hungarian/Canadian singer/songwriter B.B. Gábor's "Girls of the Future" (Gábor 1981):

*Girls of the future
will be from the East
they'll be imported
trained to be obedient*

*Girls of the future
will be wrapped in cellophane
sealed at the factory
far in the Orient
...*

*Girls of the future
will be programmed to serve
the girls of the future
will be serving well*

*I'm a little bit scared
of the girls of the future*

The last stanza hints that this Utopian endeavor is bound to go wrong somehow, a misgiving that appears over and over again in retellings of the Pygmalion story. A less sci-fi version appears in Pukka Orchestra's "Rubber Girl" (Williamson 1981), in which the "perfectly acceptable" girlfriend is an inflatable doll. A very literal version of the Frankenstein story appears in Grace Potter's "My Mechanical Friend":

*I lost my one and only friend
They say he's never coming back again
(I) hold on the hoe while I pull him from the grave
They say he's dead and gone and can't be saved*

*Lock the door and count to five
Metal along metal, lightning in a bottle*

*Oh, it's alive—my mechanical friend (my mechanical friend)
I'll cut you up and I will stitch you up again
My mechanical friend (my mechanical friend)
I'll bring you back to life—I'm with you 'till the end (Potter 2012)*

One of the most common themes in poetry, novels, paintings, and drama is the difficulty of finding true love, and the lengths to which one will go to try. Psychologist Rachel Allyn writes, "The fairy tales we heard growing up regarding romance have left us with a narrow definition of love and unrealistic expectations about what's acceptable" (Allyn 2022). She explains, "the myth that love heals all and the myth that long-term relationships are the only way to be fulfilled. . . [and] a third myth that can cause more heartache than happiness. Myth 3: There is one soul mate for you, and your quest is to find them. My response: Plausible, but unrealistic" (2022).

3.2. Myth 2: Artistic Visions Appear in Dreams, Then Are Recorded After Awakening

The divided consciousness is one of the foundational themes of both myth and science fiction. A well-known portrayal of the divide between the conscious and the subconscious

mind appears in the post-dream artistic reconstruction of the story surrounding Coleridge's process of writing the poem "Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream" (Coleridge 1816). Coleridge wrote in the manuscript, "This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock & Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church". Notable examples of more recent musical dream visions include the name of American progressive metal band "Dream Theater", and psychedelic/progressive band Spirit's album *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus* (1970). Stories also abound of songwriters inspired by drug-induced visions. In an interview in *Prog*, Mark Andes, Spirit's bassist, said "we... weren't afraid to indulge. We were just regular pot-smoking, psychedelics-taking, coke-snorting guys! It worked on the record, but it might have broken the band up..." (Roberts 2020).

The mythology of the psychedelic and progressive music of the nineteen-sixties updated the trope of the dream vision to the concept of unlocking creative potential through altered states of consciousness created by drugs or, in some cases, sensory deprivation, which were brought about by physical isolation of the mind from the body, as Jenna Fletcher explains (Fletcher 2020).⁶ Sensory deprivation is a technique used to create a number of psychological effects, including relaxation, the creation of anxiety for interrogation, and the induction of hallucinations (Purves et al. 2018).⁷ The process inspired many metal, hip hop, and rock songs, including "Sensory Deprivation" by Benestrophe (1994), "Sensory Deprivation" by Dark Angel (1991), "Sensory Deprivation" by Cyanotic (2007),⁸ "Sensory Deprivation" by Misery Index (2006), "Sensory Deprivation" by Paleface (2001), and "Sensory Deprivation" by Sloan (Scott 1999). Sloan's lyrics refer to the movie *Altered States* in the lines

*Don't take it from me
But Altered States scared me
Should have realized it
It's when he tore apart the lab with the monkey on his back*

These figurative separations of mind and body created by chemicals and/or technology and manifested in art are variants of one of the oldest and most influential myths of Western society, the actual separation of mind and body.

3.3. Myth 3: The Separation of Mind and Body

In Plato's *Phaedo* (Plato n.d.), Socrates argues that death is the separation of soul and body, and that the soul can only attain truth, justice, knowledge, and wisdom when it is separated from the body: "what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body?" Descartes proposed that "the nature of the mind (that is, a thinking, non-extended thing) is completely different from that of the body (that is, an extended, non-thinking thing), and therefore it is possible for one to exist without the other" (Skirry n.d.; see also Westphal 2019).

Modern scientists take a different view. Psychologist Alan Fogel argues that "The distinction commonly made between "mind" and "body" is a complete fiction, totally divorced from any basis in our cellular psychobiology... All thought is a biological process, totally dependent on the embodied conditions that sustain life and health" (Fogel 2022). However, it is still a common theme in art, literature and film. For example, Emilie Walezak notes that novelist A.S. Byatt "uses the neurosciences to investigate literary treatments of the mind/body dilemma" (Walezak 2018, p. 106) and that, like many modern writers, Byatt uses the mind/body dichotomy as a metaphor for the conflicts of modern-day life.

The separation of mind and body is a common theme running from the classics to modern popular music. For example, the opening track of the Moody Blues album *On The Threshold of a Dream*, "In the Beginning", parodies Descartes' phrase "Cogito, ergo sum" with a critique of modern society's attempts to dehumanize and mechanize humans. In the opening lines, the "First Man" says, "I think, I think I am/Therefore I am, I think", whereupon the "Establishment" replies:

*Of course you are, my bright little star!
I've miles and miles of files
Pretty files of your forefathers 'fruit
And now to suit our great computer!
You're magnetic ink (Edge 1969)*

The "First Man" protests, "I'm more than that! I know I am/ At least, I think I must be", and the "Inner Man" consoles him: "It riles them to believe/ That you perceive the web they weave/ And keep on thinking free". Edge's theme is that society's pressure to conform has caused a split in the human personality as it struggles to understand and cope with life. In an interview, Moody Blues keyboardist Mike Pinder explained, "we'd just come through '67 in kaftans; everybody was out in the street and it was a fun time, and flower power and all that kind of thing. So, we were thinking, 'Hey, we're on the brink of a new consciousness, a new way of looking at things'. And so... it was like we were 'on the verge of a human dream, a dream of humanity'" (Murley 2004).

In Pepperian terms, the divided self is one of the basic conceptual, or root, metaphors of modern thought that inform our view of the world (Pepper 1942; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980): "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"; "I'm of two minds about that"; "I'm not myself today"; a musical example occurs in the title of the jazz classic song, "Body and Soul" (Heyman et al. 1930). What was once taken to be literal fact is now interpreted as a metaphor for life.

Charles Fernyhough (2006) points out in his psychological analysis of mind metaphors in literature that the divided self has been a staple of metaphors in fiction throughout history. Maria Barreras uses conceptual metaphor theory to show how this concept is pervasive throughout modernist and postmodernist literature; variants include the figures of the alter ego, the double, and the Doppelgänger (Barreras 2015, p. 99).⁹

It is in the realm of science fiction that we can see the technological separation of mind and body that culminates in the theme of AI and holograms; George Slusser notes that, historically, it has been the task of science to explore the mind/body dichotomy and find a rational explanation for it:

the vision of science that emerged in SF magazines and culture has been dominated by the no-nonsense idea that science's task is to 'advance' the knowledge of material nature, and nothing more. This bias explains, in the hierarchy of SF subgenres, the pre-eminence of 'hard' SF. Here we expect all claims to paranormal powers to be put to the physical test, ultimately proven to be false, and thus declared to be fantastical and irrelevant. (Slusser 2007, p. 24)

Recent authors, especially in subgenres such as cyberpunk, have put the fiction back in science fiction with explorations of fantastic worlds and alternate realities governed by the principles of quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and the uncertainty principle:

what role might the paranormal play in a contemporary, materialist scientific climate, where science has gradually sought to efface the dualities of both the Cartesian and the Newtonian world views, successfully blurring boundaries between such oppositional categories as space and time, matter and energy, organic and inorganic, and, finally, the dichotomy between mind and matter itself? (Slusser 2007, p. 25)

These new realms of scientific investigation have identified and verified the inexplicable, and endeavor to find an explanation for it. Thus, "the answer, in a sense, is that science still needs a holy grail":

The grail search, by definition, must be always alluring, never ending. It thus sets limits and at the same time encourages endless search to exceed them. For example, neuroscience, when it seeks to explain telepathy in terms of interconnecting 'programs', inevitably raises the spectre of action at a distance as some ever-receding lure and horizon. (p. 25)

In the realms of brain scanning, implants, and brain–computer interfacing, reality has recently caught up with fiction; this reversal has turned the metaphor back into a literal concept. The *Black Mirror* episode “Arkangel” (Foster 2017) depicted a child monitoring system installed via a brain implant, with predictably tragic results; in a recent *Scientific American* interview about the brain–computer interface constructed by Elon Musk’s Neuralink company, neuroscientist John Donaghue said, “The nature of science is: you never know what’s around the corner. I’m sure you saw *Oppenheimer*” (Guarino 2024). As he announced the human implant surgery, Musk said his company’s product would be called Telepathy, which “Enables control of your phone or computer, and through them almost any device, just by thinking”. According to Neuralink bioengineer Ed Maynard, “We have modest goals: we want to make blind people see, paralyzed people move and deaf people hear again” (2024). “But implants have long been seen as having the potential to ‘enhance’ people who aren’t affected by such serious conditions. Musk has previously spoken about the idea of a “neural lace” that could add a symbiotic digital layer to the human brain and merge artificial intelligence with the brain” (Chappel 2024).

Following these science fiction projections that have now become fact, the next logical step after implanting a brain–computer interface leads to the mind/machine meld, long a staple of science fiction.

3.4. Myth 4: Uploading Consciousness into a Machine

The brain–computer interface is the final step toward the complete separation of the mind from the body, with the option of duplicating the mind. This is the central trope in “Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too”. When the artist becomes a myth, he or she becomes immortal, and a never-ending source of revenue; the hologram that will replace the physical body of Ashley O is named by Catherine “Ashley Eternal”. Dan Kois describes a similar real-life scenario in the controversy surrounding a statue called “Marilyn Forever” in Palm Springs, California (Kois 2024).¹⁰

Sheryl Crow addresses the real-world controversy of AI replacing the human mind on the title track of her album *Evolution* (Crow 2024), which grapples with the impact of AI on people and the planet. The song begins,

*Turned on the radio and there it was
A song that sounded like something I wrote
The voice and melody were hauntingly
So familiar that I thought it was a joke*

Crow’s lyrics describe how AI duplicated her words, voice, and melodies without permission, as in the fictional “Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too”. Speaking to the BBC, Crow characterized the technology as a “slippery slope” and “a betrayal” that “goes against everything humanity is based on”. “You cannot bring people back from the dead and believe that they would stand for that”, she protests. “It’s hateful. It is antithetical to the life force that exists in all of us” (Savage 2024).

Free chatbots such as ChatGPT are now capable of writing plausible parodies of any style of text, including song lyrics, and with sampling, AI software can make convincing copies of voices, to the point where major music corporations including Universal Music Group (UMG), Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Records have sued AI companies Udio and Suno, which is partnered with Microsoft, for copyright infringement (Berger 2024). Similarly, Avery Slater traces the history of the development of CGP (Computer-Generated Poetry) from the end of the Second World War to the present day in “Post-Automation Poetics; or, How Cold-War Computers Discovered Poetry” (Slater 2023). The technology is so advanced, and its productions so convincing, that Luciano Floridi and Massimo Chiriatti advise, “Readers and consumers of texts will have to get used to not knowing whether the source is artificial or human” (Floridi and Chiriatti 2020, p. 691).

The crux of the matter, legally and ethically, is consent. Crow's song is about theft of intellectual property; on the other hand, an example of robotic musicianship used with the artist's permission is described in "Surrogate Musicianship in the Age of In Vitro Intelligence: Redefining the Live Performer" (Moore et al. 2020), which describes how "biological 'brains' grown outside the donor's body. . . control a music-making hybridized entity or, specifically, a surrogate musician" (p. 99). Guy Ben-Ary, one of the co-authors, donated skin cells that were converted into stem cells and then into neurons, which were combined into a mass and connected to a music synthesizer; the cybernetic organism, called "cellF. . . is the world's first biological neuron-driven synthesizer" (Moore et al. 2020, p. 99), "a cybernetic musician, a rock star in a petri dish". Videos of its "live" performances are available on Ben-Ary's website (Ben-Ary <https://guybenary.com/work/cellf/>, accessed 11 August 2024). The authors predict that "future technologies of live music production. . . will become post-corporeal" (p. 99).

A similar scenario was predicted in several science fiction/horror films of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Joseph Green's *The Brain That Wouldn't Die* (Green 1962), in which a scientist, Dr. Bill Cortner, keeps his fiancé Jan's severed head alive while searching for a donor body. Before he can complete the transplant, however, Jan manages to sabotage the operation, and she and Bill both die. Like much science fiction, Green and co-writer Rex Carlton's story was inspired by real-life events: three years earlier, *Life Magazine* had published a story, with photographs, about Russian scientist Vladimir Demikhov, who transplanted the head of a dog onto the body of another in a number of experiments (Stevens 1959).¹¹

Margaret Atwood parodies the situation in a short story entitled "Cryogenics: a Symposium" (Atwood 2011), in which one of the participants states, "When I'm sixty-five I'm going to get my head cut off and flash-frozen. They've already got the technology, they've set up the corporations. . . Then it'll stay frozen until they've learned how to clone the rest of my body from a single cell, and they'll thaw out my head and reattach it" (2011, p. 217). One of his interlocutors points out the naïveté of placing such trust in a corporation: "what would stop them from taking your money, then after a few years with your head in the freezer they'd declare bankruptcy, pull out the plug, and toss your head in the garbage?" (2011, pp. 218–19). Other participants point out similar logical objections, including the likelihood of environmental and societal collapse before the technology matures.

The consensus among scientists today appears to be that revivification of cryogenically-frozen heads and bodies in the future is unlikely, because when delicate tissues are frozen, ice crystals form and destroy the cell structure. Jacqueline Germain writes,

Arthur Caplan, who heads the medical ethics division at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, tells Reuters he hasn't seen any mainstream medical professionals endorsing cryonics ' . . . This notion of freezing ourselves into the future is pretty science-fiction, and it's naive', Caplan says to Reuters. 'The only group. . . getting excited about the possibility are people who specialize in studying the distant future or people who have a stake in wanting you to pay the money to do it'. (Germain 2022)

If immortality through preserving and reviving the body is not possible in the foreseeable future, what about converting the mind into a different format? Scenarios in which in vitro intelligence is compared to artificial intelligence (Moore et al. 2020, p. 104) can be compared to the popular science fiction trope of downloading consciousness into a machine. The *Black Mirror* episode "Be Right Back" (Harris and Brooker 2013) is a modern example of Mary Shelley's theme of Dr. Frankenstein's motivation for his experiments with reanimating the dead in order to bring back a lost loved one.¹² In "Be Right Back", Martha obtains a simulacrum of her dead partner Ash from a tech company. At first, he is an online AI like ChatGPT, but the company soon provides a physical embodiment. However, she is unable to cope with the real/hyperreal dichotomy; he is real, but at the same time not real. This episode encapsulates one of the main themes of the Pygmalion/Frankenstein Myth: be careful what you wish for.

Another example appeared in John Scott Campbell's short story "The Infinite Brain" (Campbell 1930), an artificial intelligence variation of the story of Frankenstein's monster in which the creation turns against its creator. Inventor Anton Des Roubles transfers his consciousness into a machine but dies before he can complete the task. His friend Gene (who is also the narrator) helps mechanical Anton finish the job, but then "Anton" persuades him to embark on a new project: to transfer Anton's consciousness into a new iteration of the machine unencumbered by what Anton refers to as the "reflex" part of the brain, but which the reader immediately recognizes as the faculty of conscience or reflection. This new brain will transcend the limits of the human or, as Anton calls it, "finite" brain, to achieve its goal, the "infinite" brain, like a car without brakes. The Infinite Brain, unencumbered by a conscience or any human emotions (except for a sense of humor), predictably proceeds to attempt to eliminate humanity, like SkyNet in *The Terminator* (Cameron 1984).

A later science fiction story by Walter M. Miller, Jr., "Izzard and the Membrane" (1951), developed the same theme. The story is set during the Cold War; the U.S.S.R. has declared war on the United States and is winning. The Russians have kidnapped an American computer scientist and, with a combination of deception and force, have made him develop a huge, thinking computer to coordinate their military attacks. The scientist is pleased with his creation, at first: "Scotty was in love at first speech. He had made her, and she would be perfect, and she was his creature" (Miller 1951, p. 80) (Pygmalion allusion; combines Myth 4 with Myth 1). When Scotty learns he has been deceived, however, he manages to upload his own consciousness into the computer and sabotages the Russians' war plan; with the computer's help, he is then able to recreate and upload the consciousness of his wife, who had been killed in a missile attack, and the computer places them together in an alternate reality. As James Harris notes in "Can Science Fiction Predict the Future?", "it's an early tale of an emergent AI, downloading consciousness, and maybe even artificial reality..." (Harris 2020). A similar plot was used in the film *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (Sargent 1970).

The common theme in all of these stories is that, once the mind has been fully separated from the body, it has no further stake or interest in preserving the body or the society that produced and nurtured it, and naturally, it proceeds to act accordingly.

4. When Myth Becomes Reality in Technology and Music

In the realm of artificial intelligence, science has, in many ways, caught up with science fiction. In 1950, computer scientist Alan Turing proposed a test of machine intelligence: if an observer of a conversation between a machine and human could not tell the difference between the two (Turing 1950), the machine could be said to have passed the test. In an article entitled "Downloading Consciousness", Inafuku et al. predicted that "it is likely that most supercomputers will be able to run an accurate simulation of the human mind within the next few years" (Inafuku et al. 2011). In 2023, a group of 19 computer scientists developed a list of attributes that could suggest that an AI is conscious: "machine learning expert Eric Elmoznino applied the checklist to several AIs with different architectures, including those used for image generation such as Dall-E2. . . none of the AIs ticked more than a handful of boxes, none is a strong candidate for consciousness, although Elmoznino says, 'It would be trivial to design all these features into an AI. 'The reason no one has done so is 'it is not clear they would be useful for tasks'" (Finkel 2023, p. 823). It remains to be seen whether anyone has actually carried this out, but the article strongly suggests that it is within the realm of possibility. However, as Floridi and Chiriatti point out, artificial intelligence at the moment is exactly that, a simulation, and not real: "GPT-3 is an extraordinary piece of technology, but as intelligent, conscious, smart, aware, perceptive, insightful, sensitive and sensible (etc.) as an old typewriter Hollywood-like AI can be found only in movies, like zombies and vampires" (2020, p. 690).

While a thinking, conscious AI may not yet exist, current versions appear to pass the Turing Test in that the products they produce are indistinguishable from works made by humans. With respect to music production, in "Death is No Longer a Deal Breaker"; The

Hologram Performer in Live Music”, Alan Hughes lists three categories of holographic performances: “Dead performers; living performers; and wholly cyber-performers who were never [organically] alive” (2020, p. 115). Hughes noted, in 2020, that ChatGPT was “so accurate in reproducing the literary style(s) of authors whose works were fed into the system. . . that, fearing potential misuse with a public release, the program was available only for a limited period to journalists before access was rescinded” (2020, p. 123). Hughes predicted that soon, AI will be able to create new songs in the style of those of famous performers, and that audiences will come to accept this kind of artificial music (2020, p. 124), posing a threat to live musicians (2020, pp. 124–25); four years later, the prediction has been fulfilled (Berger 2024).

5. Myth + Reality = Hyperreality

In defining what “live” performance means today, considering that the term has often been used to describe televised performances, Angela Jones and Rebecca Bennett predict that “the experience of live music could soon do away with flesh altogether” (Jones and Bennett 2015, p. viii).

Noting that, in our time, we have become surrounded by phenomena that previous generations would have considered fantastic, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard analyses the shifting nature of our perceptions of what is reality and what is not: “To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn’t have. One implies a presence, the other an absence” (1981, p. 3). According to Baudrillard, the way we perceive the difference has changed over time with advances in technology and cognitive science:

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real. . . Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (p. 6)

This has important implications for art and culture. Baudrillard claims that “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” (p. 7). Between the World Wars and the Cold War, he continues, “Myth, chased from the real by the violence of history, finds refuge in cinema” (p. 46). Furthermore, he distinguishes between the effect of television and cinema on the imagination:

television . . . is harmless to the imagination (including that of children) because it no longer carries the imaginary and this for the simple reason that it is no longer an image. . . By contrast with the cinema, which is still blessed (but less and less so because more and more contaminated by TV) with an intense imaginary—because the cinema is an image. That is to say not only a screen and a visual form, but a myth, something that still retains something of the double, of the phantasm, of the mirror, of the dream, etc. (p. 53)

In the decades since Baudrillard wrote this, broadcast television and cinema have been largely superseded by internet, streaming, podcasts, and many forms of digital imagery; however, the basic reasoning still applies. In the context of musical performance, representation comprises a film or a video broadcast of an artist or a band in concert, while a simulation is an AI image or a hologram of the artist or group. At many live concerts today, an enlarged image of the performers is projected on a screen behind the stage, providing a real-time “double”. Advances in technology, such as holograms and CGI in film and television, have made it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between what is real and what is artificial: “The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (p. 21). This has become noticeable in political polling in 2024; many people refuse to believe what they hear on the radio or see on television. The phrase, “alternative facts”, coined to obfuscate demonstrable falsehoods, along with the

prevalence of video “deep fakes”, and the knowledge that any photograph or image can be manipulated in Photoshop, has turned the news into the kind of “alternate reality” once found only in fiction.

According to Baudrillard’s reasoning, this explains why people will pay to watch a hologram in a concert setting when they could be watching a film version of the dead performer in concert on television or their home computer for free, because concerts still possess the quality of the imaginary:

Such is the logic of simulacra, it is no longer that of divine predestination, it is that of the precession of models, but it is just as inexorable. And it is because of this that events no longer have meaning: it is not that they are insignificant in themselves, it is that they were preceded by the model, with which their processes only coincided. (Baudrillard 1981, p. 57)

This also explains why the Neuralink experiments are not big news in 2024; the actual events were preceded by simulacra in science fiction movies and television programs. It is not news anymore, even though the simulacra that preceded the reality were not real.

In Baudrillard’s view, modern mass media construct a simulation of media and communication; people have more access to information than ever but, ironically, respond to it with doubt, ambivalence, and disbelief: “Behind this exacerbated mise-en-scène of communication, the mass media, the pressure of information pursues an irresistible de-structuration of the social” (p. 81). Baudrillard quotes Marshall McLuhan’s catchphrase: “the medium is the message” and concludes that it neutralizes all content. We want to see and hear only people who are already famous, no matter what they say or do, whether they are real or not.

In his discussion of cybernetic information theory, Baudrillard analyzes the media coverage of the May 1968 student protests in France and concludes that, since conflicting news reports appear to promote the interest of the media itself, rather than that of its audience (the general public), “INFORMATION = ENTROPY” (Baudrillard 1981, p. 86).¹³ In the current media context, the situation appears even worse: AI is replacing human producers of information in newsrooms, corporations, and political speechwriting rooms, but AI does not create information, it merely recycles and distorts it. AI texts, which can often be seen being read by AI avatars on video and television, are thus perceived as “doubles”:

Of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is doubtless the oldest. But the double is precisely not a prosthesis: it is an imaginary figure, which, just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like his other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death. This is not always the case, however: when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death. (Baudrillard 1981, p. 95)

This phenomenon often happens in fiction: Victor Frankenstein finally sees himself reflected in the monster he created just before they both die; Ashley O sees herself in Ashley Too and Ashley Eternal before she is scheduled to die, just before her miraculous reprieve when the hologram is turned off; one of them has to die, either the original or the double.

It appears that we live in an age where “art imitates life” with great success:

It is necessary to revisit what Walter Benjamin said of the work of art in the age of its mechanical reproducibility. What is lost in the work that is serially reproduced, is its aura, its singular quality of the here and now, its aesthetic form (it had already lost its ritual form, in its aesthetic quality), and, according to Benjamin, it takes on, in its ineluctable destiny of reproduction, a political form. What is lost is the original, which only a history itself nostalgic and retrospective can reconstitute as ‘authentic’. (Baudrillard 1981, p. 99)

6. Holograms

Holograms are the “doubles” in today’s world. One hologram that stands in for a living person appears in the science fiction television series *Star Trek: Voyager*, set in the 24th century, in which the ship’s doctor, played by actor Robert Picardo, is a computer-generated hologram.¹⁴ Picardo was given the role after improvising the line “I’m a doctor, not a nightlight”, parodying the catchphrase of Dr. McCoy on the original series. This line demonstrates the breaking of the boundary between reality and hyperreality by demonstrating that the AI doctor has a sense of humor, one of the traditional indicators of human intelligence. Writing in 1981, Baudrillard anticipated Picardo’s holographic character in the 1995–2001 series:

It is the fantasy of seizing reality live that continues—ever since Narcissus bent over his spring. Surprising the real in order to immobilize it, suspending the real in the expiration of its double. . . . We dream of passing through ourselves and of finding ourselves in the beyond: the day when your holographic double will be there in space, eventually moving and talking, you will have realized this miracle. Of course, it will no longer be a dream, so its charm will be lost. (Baudrillard 1981, p. 105)

In the chapter “Simulacra and Science Fiction”, Baudrillard argues that science fiction as we have known it is dead, for simulations and models have taken the place of the imagination: “The models no longer constitute either transcendence or projection, they no longer constitute the imaginary in relation to the real, they are themselves an anticipation of the real, and thus leave no room for any sort of fictional anticipation; they are immanent, and thus leave no room for any kind of imaginary transcendence” (Baudrillard 1981, p. 122). Beyond the context of science fiction, this comment has relevance for current-day phenomena in the music business. The fan phenomenon can be corporatized and monetized, harnessing the adoration and belief of a cult, when the object of devotion is replaced with a simulacrum. Holograms on stage are thus empty signifiers of a site where devotion once focused.

This is the paradox of “Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too”: as we watch the story unfold, we know that what was once imaginary has become, in Baudrillard’s terminology, “hyper-real”. This modern world leaves nothing to the imagination. Kenny Forbes expands on a comment by Alan Hughes in his explanation of the mechanism by which this works: “This capacity for contemporary audiences to experience ‘realistic’ dead stars live underlines that holograms can resonate by exploiting the curiosity and emotions of fans, both old and new, through the combined impact of ‘nostalgia, heritage and the mythology of the deceased performers’” (Hughes 2020, p. 114) in (Forbes 2021, p. 157). Forbes argues that “the increasing mediatization of the live event, which has compelled audiences toward engaging with images as performance via large screens” (Forbes 2021, p. 160) has resulted in a diminution of the effect of live performances. From a distance, as in a large arena, the image projected on the big screen has more impact than the actual performers, who are dwarfed by their own images on the screen behind them.

In a comparative analysis of two holographic music performances, one featuring the “resurrected” Tupac Shakur, and the other the “humanoid vocaloid performer created by Crypton Future Music” (Jones et al. 2015, p. 126), named Miku, Jones et al. observe that “audiences are more comfortable with bodies that emerge from simulacra and are brought to life, rather than actual human bodies that are brought back to life” (2015, p. 128). The hologram of Tupac “invoked its human audience’s fears of death as well as the fear of technology becoming too much like human life” (p. 130), when audience members reported that they were much more comfortable with the hologram of a character they knew to be artificial. There appears to be an underlying fear of artificial beings that are indistinguishable from real ones: unlike Commander Data from *Star Trek: the Next Generation* (Roddenberry 1987–1994), who is loved by audiences because he is obviously artificial, or the cartoon members of the synthetic band Gorillaz, the Tupac hologram evokes fear in some observers because, like the replicants in *Blade Runner*, it is indistinguishable from “live” humans: “it also frightened some because the image appeared to be ‘too real’ for

comfort" (p. 136), recalling Baudrillard's comment that the appearance of the simulacrum portends imminent death.¹⁵

A successful variant of the simulacrum recently appeared in a series of "world tours" featuring "Abba-tars", digital avatars created by clothing the original band members of the 1980s pop supergroup Abba, now all in their 70s, in motion capture suits, then projecting and filming their movements with avatars that capture the way they looked forty years ago. "Agnetha, Frida, Benny and Bjorn got on stage in front of 160 cameras and almost as many VFX geniuses, and they performed every song in this show, to perfection, over five weeks", explained producer Ludvig Andersson. "So when you see this show, it is not four people pretending to Abba, it is actually them" (BBC News 2021a). The fans seem to agree, as the show sold out in venues around the world in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024.¹⁶ Justin Matthews and Angelique Nairn found that the majority of Abba fans enthusiastically approved of the holographic versions of the band members (Matthews and Nairn 2023).

7. Holograms Portend The Death of the Author

In "The Death of The Author", Roland Barthes (1967) argued that, in the modern age, the author has become irrelevant, building on Wimsatt and Beardsley's principle of the "Intentional Fallacy" in *The Verbal Icon* (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946), which claims that it is a mistake to try to interpret the meaning of a text by attempting to determine what the author intended when s/he wrote it. Wimsatt, Beardsley, and other New Critics instead assumed the existence of an "Ideal Reader" who interprets the word on the page and assigns meaning, instead of trying to discover whatever meaning the author might have intended. Reader-response critics refined this concept by adding that the meaning of a text depends on interpretations that change over time.

The Death of the Author can be seen as a root metaphor for the relationship between the artist, the work, and the audience in the postmodern world. In Baudrillard's hyperreality, when the simulacrum comes into existence, the original dies; in New Criticism, when the work comes into existence, the author dies; in science fiction, when the consciousness is uploaded into a machine, the human body dies. In all these contexts, the author has uploaded her/his consciousness into the work of art, so it is inevitable that the artist dies (either metaphorically or physically) and the work takes on a life of its own, to be interpreted, or created, by the readers or viewers.

The ending of "Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too" provides a visual metaphor for this dynamic at work: after narrowly escaping physical death at the hands of her management team, behind the end credits, in a scene where Ashley plays her new music with a punk band, her old fans walk into the club and the horrified look on their faces show that they reject this Ashley for who she really is: what they really want is the pop culture simulacrum of Ashley created by Catherine and her assistants. When the fans turn their back on the new, real Ashley and walk out, she has, symbolically, died to them. They do not want Ashley to survive and grow up; rather, they choose the simulacrum of nostalgia, the Ashley of Eternal Youth.

8. Conclusions

Recent developments in the music business were predicted by the science fiction of the past century. "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too" is a shocking reminder of how far we have fallen down the rabbit hole of technological development fueled by corporate profits. Science fiction explores the boundaries of our perceptions of the real world; unlike fantasy, which asks "what if" our world was governed by magic, the supernatural, the impossible, science fiction asks "what if" we were to extrapolate from our knowledge of the current laws of science to predict a natural and possible future. Accounts from both artists and scientists demonstrate what we know about the ways that science and technology enable and affect the creation and consumption of music. Films, television programs, songs, and scholarly research all explore the future of music from different perspectives, and an overview of artistic productions and scientific articles reveals that the future is breaking

upon us faster than we might have expected. Again and again, we have seen how the speculative fictions of one decade become the news stories of the next. Some may lament the loss of tradition and indulge in nostalgia for the songs, styles, and performers of the past, while others eagerly anticipate new developments in art and culture. B.B. Gabor sang, “I’m a little bit scared of the girls of the future”, but as musicologists, musicians, and fans all agree, music reflects who we are, and today, more than ever, who we are becoming. To be “a little bit scared of the music of the future” reflects an understandable worry about who, or what, humanity is becoming.

The theme of “Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too” is that advanced technology allows the “mechanical reproduction” not just of the artwork but of the artist/performer as well, an issue that has cropped up before, after the invention of photography and of sound/video recording. However, music and its composed lyrics occupy a place in the classical Platonic imaginary that touches the divine. Music and lyrical composition represent the myth of the soul in the body, the immanence of divinity in the human. Although recent studies have shown that most audience members view holographic performances positively, a substantial number still express misgivings; to create the creation that takes on life (Pygmalion/Frankenstein) is to challenge human boundaries, but to create a creator who performs the boundary-breaking act of soul-making is to challenge divinity itself. This is why some find AI so disturbing: a performing hologram may be eerie, but it remains on the Pygmalion level; an AI composing indistinguishably from a human composer usurps one of our most cherished species concepts, that humans in their highest levels of creativity are animated by a divine spark. On the secular humanist level, music is one of the deepest and most profound means of communicating feelings and emotions between people; to have this usurped by machines negates one of our most personal and intimate experiences. As Roger Waters wrote in his critique of the music business, “Welcome to the Machine” (Waters 1975).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Several commentators have noted that the use of the term “hologram” is incorrect in the context, but it appears to have stuck in popular discourse, so I will use it with the caveat that the terms “projection” and “video” are more accurate (see Anson 2014, p. 111; Skopicki 2020, p. 21; Hughes 2020, p. 115; Forbes 2021, p. 158).
- ² Deepfakes in advertising and the news are another story (Vaccari and Chadwick 2020).
- ³ Recently, a number of newly released recordings and videos have been created by taking old recordings, often demos, made by stars such as John Lennon, “enhancing” them with new technologies, including AI, and dubbing in backing tracks and/or new arrangements by original members of the group (Sheffield 2023).
- ⁴ In the highly publicized scandal around the 2008–2021 legal conservatorship of pop star Britney Spears, Spears testified in court that “she was forced to go on tour, made to take medication she didn’t want, and go into rehab” (BBC News 2021b).
- ⁵ In her novel *Yellowface* (Kuang 2023), hailed by critics as a satire of the book publishing business, Rebecca Kuang describes a similar situation in the literary world: the protagonist, June, submits to the temptation to plagiarize from her deceased friend/rival Athena and is rewarded with a contract by Eden Press, from which she is threatened with expulsion when evidence of her crime begins to surface. Kuang shows how publishers use advertising and awards ceremonies to manipulate sales and the careers of their authors. June’s agent and publishers ignore evidence of her plagiarism, going so far as to fire and blacklist one of their own employees for mentioning the subject, because her sales are strong. *Yellowface* shows the cultural appeal of the artist given a sort of immortality after death, in this case by having her manuscript stolen by another writer.
- ⁶ “A sensory deprivation tank is a dark, soundproof, floatation device that reduces external stimulation. It may help with anxiety, pain, creativity, and physical recovery, but it can also cause hallucinations or discomfort” (Fletcher 2020).

- 7 Purves et al. note that it is also used for interrogations and torture.
- 8 Cyanotic's web page describes the band as "part band, part machine, the Chicago-based angry robot outfit Cyanotic, has been producing their own hybrid of angry robot music since forming in 2002". (<https://cyanotic.bandcamp.com/album/transhuman-20>) (accessed on 24 July 2024).
- 9 Science fiction versions include the clone, "Der mechanischer Doppelgänger", and as we shall see, the hologram.
- 10 The controversy around the "Forever Marilyn" statue revolves, like the plot of "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too", around money. Some fans are delighted by the tribute to the star, while others are more negative over what they see as a cash grab, including residents of the community who complain about the negative effects the statue might have on the value of their real estate. Kois comments wryly that "An unlikely statue has become a rich-person controversy for the ages" (Kois 2024).
- 11 The story of the modern-day Dr. Frankenstein was the subject of a recent BBC documentary (Farncombe 2024). In 1970, American surgeon Dr. Robert White performed a similar operation in which a transplanted monkey's head lived for eight days after the experiment.
- 12 Shelley was inspired by Galvani's 1786 experiments in which he was able to elicit a physical reaction by administering electricity to the legs of dead frogs (Galvani 1791).
- 13 College students protested the extremely conservative policies of the de Gaulle government, and factory workers soon joined in with a general strike that totalled ten million workers. However, "Because television was state-owned, the government censored coverage of the violent demonstrations. But private and other radio networks continued to bring live reports to millions of French people" (Beardsley 2018). The conflicting stories led to demonstrations between students and workers on the one side and Gaullists on the other, and eventually to the fall of the de Gaulle government.
- 14 Berman, Rick (showrunner). *Star Trek: Voyager*. Paramount. 1995–2001.
- 15 In many scifi stories of cloning, like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), clones are regarded as less than human.
- 16 Many newspaper accounts have made clear that the artists indeed have not been brought back to life, and the show has been constructed with their enthusiastic consent and participation, as can be seen from the fact that ticket prices at the Saturday, 17 August 2024, show at ABBA Arena, London, ranged from GBP 104.50 to GBP 181.50, and the Ticketmaster website shows that the concerts are regularly sold out (https://www.ticketmaster.co.uk/event/35005F27BEC958B5?brand=abba_voyage) (accessed on 11 August 2024).

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Article

‘Ring the Bells’: Sound and Silence in Garth Nix’s Old Kingdom

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Abstract: Australian author Garth Nix has set six critically acclaimed and internationally bestselling novels and several shorter works in and around the fictional world of the Old Kingdom, beginning with *Sabriel* (1995) and continuing most recently with *Terciel & Elinor* (2021). This loose series of texts, with its bellringing protagonists, is the prime contributor to his reputation as an author of high fantasy fiction, although he is also marketed as and known for writing science fiction and other related subgenres. Most notably, his work prominently features elements of the Gothic. This aspect of his work and the ways in which it creates tension within the “high” fantasy genre becomes increasingly apparent when examined through the lens of sound—a critical method that has potential for charting the entanglements of this genre with other popular genres of fiction.

Keywords: Garth Nix; fantasy fiction; gothic literature; sound; music

1. Introduction/Overture

The work of Australian author Garth Nix is primarily described as belonging to the fantasy genre (Ivan 2017; Mills 2009) and its subgenres, including high fantasy, low fantasy/picaresque heroic fantasy (Kaveney 2012, p. 214), dark fantasy (Kaveney 2012), science fantasy (Lukianova and Zinchenko 2019, p. 114), and other modes of the fantastic for adults and younger readers.¹ His short stories and novels, many of which are set in the fictional world of the “Old Kingdom”, have been nominated for the Shirley Jackson Award among others, and have won Aurealis Awards, Ditmar Awards, and a Mythopoeic Award, the last for writing in the spirit of the Inklings, the literary discussion group which included J R R Tolkien and C S Lewis among its members (Science Fiction Awards+ Database n.d.). With global sales in excess of six million books across 42 languages (Bonnier Books UK n.d.) and multiple appearances at or near the summit of bestseller lists, including the prestigious *The New York Times* (York 2023, p. 14), the impact of his works is significant and widespread, with endorsements by cultural powerhouses such as Margot Robbie and Sarah J Maas for his creation of “wonderful fantasy worlds and... strong, clever heroines” (Robbie 2023; Maas 2020). Critically, his Old Kingdom series has been praised as “[a]n important mythopoeic work” featuring “a combination of medievalish [sic] and more modern backgrounds”, “a variety of fascinating magical systems”, and “beautifully written, complex plots” (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, pp. 144–45). Nix is further lauded as “the first writer of children’s fantasy from Australia to really make an impact in the US and UK markets”, beginning with his Old Kingdom series (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, p. 169).

Nix’s Old Kingdom writings include six novels, the earliest being 1995’s *Sabriel* and the most recent *Terciel and Elinor* in 2021, along with a number of novellas and short stories, the most recent of these “One Wyverley Summer” published in the 25th anniversary edition of *Sabriel*. These works, like much commercial high fantasy fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, explore the history and inhabitants of an invented world that will

be familiar, in broad strokes, to readers of Lewis and Tolkien in that it is “medieval in one sense or another” (Dell 2011, p. 171)—and, more specifically, “a magnificent high-fantasy realm of sword-wielding royals and magicians” (Olver 2022, p. 68), where “society and technology resemble that of medieval Europe but. . . augmented by and imbued with a complex magic system” (Rosegrant 2024, p. 167). Although Nix fondly confirms Tolkien as a key influence on his Old Kingdom novels, acknowledging the impossibility “for a writer to escape the influence of the great books they read growing up” (Nix 2024a, 2024b), and although this influence is observed in critical analyses (e.g., Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, p. 145), he is not a slavish Tolkien epigone. Nix’s Old Kingdom is distinguished from other worlds of the high fantasy genre by the prominence of two key elements.

The first of these elements is the existence, beyond one of two known physical barriers surrounding the eponymous Old Kingdom (in which most of the events in these stories take place), of a second invented country called Ancelstierre, where magic largely does not function. The society, technology, and armed forces of Ancelstierre resemble that of England in the early twentieth century (Rosegrant 2024, p. 167) (suggesting another connection to J R R Tolkien, who served in the First World War). The existence in these texts of two secondary worlds, one magical and the other ahistorical, complicates any reading of these texts as uncomplicated reiterations of the high fantasy “default” mode (Butler 2006, p. 20), particularly when characters move from Ancelstierre to the Old Kingdom in a manner common to quest-type portal fantasies—another default mode of fantastic literature (Baker 2016, p. 471; Mendlesohn 2008, p. 43). This confuses generic expectations and to a certain extent sabotages them (Mills 2001, p. 15), undermining the categorisation of these works as exemplars of high fantasy.

The second key distinguishing element in Nix’s work is the use of common Gothic tropes such as premature burial, grotesque revenants, unspeakable terrors, and the uncanny (Mills 2006; Roberts 2012) among those of high fantasy (Alter 2012). Castles and ruins, graveyards and tombs, dark waters, and wildernesses dot the landscape of the Old Kingdom (Alter 2013, p. 189), in which the practice of necromancy takes centre stage—alongside a form of anti-necromancy, by which means the restless dead are returned to death: as Alice Mills notes, the scenarios of Nix’s Old Kingdom novels often sound like horror texts, featuring “a good demon-hunter seeking to restore a proper boundary between the living and the dead” (Mills 2001, p. 15). The foregrounding of these Gothic and horror tropes, along with the persistent use of oppositional meanings, creates an atmosphere of unsettlement that defies the expectation that at the end of a successful high fantasy quest lies “the cure to the world’s pain” (Kaveney 2012, p. 216) and complicates the simplistic depictions of good and evil often found in popular texts of this kind (Robinson 2003, p. 30). These unsettlements and complications again confound simplistic categorisations of the Old Kingdom books as high fantasy, without, however, placing them in alignment with works by outspoken critics of the mode, such as Michael Moorcock, China Miéville, or George R R Martin (Kaveney 2012, p. 216). Instead, Nix’s texts draw on “a culturally entrenched literary and filmic repertoire of Gothic imagery to paint the mysterious and unsettling world of The Old Kingdom” (Alter 2013, p. 191) while retaining sufficient elements of high fantasy to engage with both genres at once. An alternative categorisation of these texts might be “Gothic fantasy” (Mills 2006, p. 51; Mills 2008, p. 145), except that the overlap between Gothic fantasy and commercial high fantasy is arguably so large, particularly in contemporary literature for young readers (Zipes 2008, p. 1), that, like “dark fantasy” (Clute and Grant 1997, p. 338), the distinction is functionally meaningless—revealing that Nix is not unique in his investigation of high fantasy through the addition of elements from adjacent forms, among them, but not confined to, the Gothic.

Although this comingling or entanglement of genres in Nix's texts has been remarked on before, his frequent employment of music and noise has not been thoroughly analysed. This paper undertakes a detailed analysis of Nix's Old Kingdom stories and novels in order to highlight the utility of interrogating generic features of Gothic and high fantasy literature through the lens of sound and the potential insights this may provide both to Nix's work and to the fantasy genre as a whole.

2. Sound in Literature: A Brief Overview

Angela Leighton addresses the complex challenge of mimicking "the labor of the ear" when using only letters on a page that are themselves silent (Leighton 2018, p. 3). Reading any written text naturally evokes the sound of the spoken word, through imagined associations with written language, but it also asks us to recall and recreate through more idiosyncratic imaginative efforts sounds from the world around us, as well as sounds that we have never heard before or sounds that might even be impossible to hear, by means of metaphor or simile. Examining depictions of sound and music in literature can thus provide insight into the times in which these works were written (Ratail 2021), particularly those in which audio recordings did not exist. Analysing the way such evocations are deployed in fiction also unlocks understandings of affective tropes, since the evocation of sound and music is "particularly adept at tapping into the emotions" and "has the power to engage not just the readers' attention, but their feelings" (Layton 2001, p. 19), as well as to elaborate the worlds in which a text's characters are situated. In mimetic fiction, for instance, musical details may serve as a commentary on individual experiences within societal frameworks, particularly in times of conflict (Harling-Lee 2020, p. 375), while in speculative fiction, music can assist in othering one or more aspects of a setting or character (Stock 2021, p. 14) or provoke conceptual questions around the creation, replication, and dissemination of sound (Delgado et al. 2012).

The depiction of sound and music is arguably even more important in the genres of the fantastic, where sound can be used in the service of mythopoesis as well as emotional affect. On the non-generic depiction of sound in literature, and echoing the familiar and oft-misattributed line that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" (Quote Investigator n.d.), Leighton notes that "sound lends itself to a vocabulary of the preternatural" (Leighton 2018, p. 4). This insight can be reversed to suggest that *the preternatural lends itself to the vocabulary of sound*. The use of music in high fantasy in particular supports this proposition, and can be traced at least as far back as Lewis, who brought Narnia into being through song in *The Magician's Nephew*, and Tolkien, for whom music was an essential part of the evocation of Middle Earth and the entirety of its invented history: indeed, the creation myth that sets Tolkien's sequence of stories in motion introduces music before matter itself—which begs the question of how sound or music can exist without a medium to carry it, if not by preternatural means. Music is "the ultimate power in the cosmological history of Middle-earth" (Eden 2003, p. 188), and furthermore an "expression of joy, like laughter and smiling" (Chapman-Morales 2020, p. 68) that hints at "a blissful, paradisaal state" (Dell 2011, p. 171). In *The Lord of the Rings*, consonant music and beneficial higher powers are frequently aligned, through the innate musical ability of the elves, the song that Tom Bombadil gives the hobbits if they find themselves in danger, the summoning of Shadowfax by Gandalf's three whistles, and many other examples (and conversely by the dissonant sounds of factories and the languages of villainous castes). Perhaps it is unsurprising, while at the same time being noteworthy, that in a genre that draws deeply on oral traditions of storytelling (Attebery 2013, p. 97), song and other consonant forms of music are most usually aligned with forces of Good (Chapman-Morales 2020, p. 62). This alignment of harmonious sound and moral authority evokes Boethius' *musica universalis*

or “music of the spheres”, an inaudible harmony that delivers a state of divine ecstasy to all who appreciate it (Reilly 2001, p. 14)—and it is interesting in this regard to note that in *The Silmarillion*, the primary compendium of Tolkien’s mythopoeic writings, “there is no direct reference to the use of instruments”; rather, Tolkien emphasises vocal singing, a detail reinforced by author Martine Bates: “Just as an opera would not be the same without the libretto, in the same way high fantasy cannot be what it is without music” (Bates 1999).

Sound in Gothic literature, however, distinct from high fantasy, is most frequently employed to elicit in the reader “sensations of excess and terror” (Wikle 2020, p. 7) through extremes of volume (e.g., thunder, screams) and by obscurity (e.g., smothered whispers and half-heard footfalls) (Ratail 2021, p. 10). The genre’s preoccupation with soundscapes that evoke feelings of dread, nostalgia, and the uncanny (Schlauraff 2018), often denoted by disharmonious sounds of human activity and an interruption of the natural order (Ratail 2021, p. 5), serve, as these sounds do in other forms of literature, as metaphors for characters’ internal struggles, fears, and desires. Adam Roberts evocatively paints the Gothic as “one of the major vehicles by which Romanticism poured out to dominate literature”, the “barbaric energies of an imagined past... flowing disruptively through previously established canons of classical taste” (Roberts 2012, p. 7), and in this disruption, we can glimpse a literary assault on Boethius and Johannes Kepler and their orderly but inaudible music through a discordant cacophony of sounds. “Sounds to wake the dead”, writes David Toop in this context (Toop 2010, p. 141), possibly employing the phrase’s two distinct meanings in English, both of which are relevant to this discussion of Garth Nix’s use of sound in the Old Kingdom: the first concerning the traditional vigil held for someone recently deceased (“to wake” in the sense of “to hold a wake”); and the second, and more familiar to contemporary readers, describing noises so loud as to rouse a corpse back to life (Grammarphobia n.d.). The acts of watching and waking those who no longer number among the living are Gothic activities prominent in Nix’s Old Kingdom fiction, as are sounds associated with both activities.

3. Music in High Fantasy: A *Capella* Cosmic Prog

Given the genre with which he is most often associated (high fantasy) and his acknowledgement of Tolkien as a source of inspiration, it is perhaps unsurprising that Nix’s Old Kingdom texts feature music in several key ways. This is apparent from the cover art alone, which reveals that bells play prominent roles in these narratives, in both the Old Kingdom’s magic system and its mythopoeisis. A close examination of their positioning in the centres of these narratives reveals them to be instruments of both consolation and the uncanny, reflecting tensions between high fantasy and the Gothic in these texts that make them distinctive.

Two magical practices operate in Nix’s Old Kingdom, each relying on a tamed and potentially corrosive form of “Free Magic”. One practice takes the form of “charter” marks that appear as mobile forms independent of a material matrix. The other is practised through the making of sounds by the human body (e.g., whistling, clapping) or by musical instruments (e.g., pipes, bells) to play specific tones and rhythms. Since Charter marks can occasionally be whistled, the magical protagonists of these texts are required to be already musical before their training begins: “able to whistle, to hum, to sing” (Nix 1995, loc. 1568). Pipes are used by apprentice magic-users, while the principal instruments played by experts are handbells: specifically, seven different-sized bells with distinct timbres (but not always defined or consistent pitches, beyond the relative as implied by their comparative sizes). These handbells, unlike other instruments in the Old Kingdom, are not played but wielded, and are treated with the same cautious respect as weapons. Akin to some historical bells and swords (Calvert 2022, p. xvii)—and swords that also appear in these

narratives—the bells are named, and they are worn in leather bandoliers, in the fashion of musketeers, in order to ensure that they remain silent until needed. When these bells sound—individually, simultaneously, or in sequence—they have varying magical effects on anyone within hearing, living or dead, as in this example from *Lirael*:

The single note slid between Sam's fingers and into his ears, filling his mind with its strength and purity. Then the note changed and became a whole series of sounds that were almost the same, but not. Together they formed a rhythm that shot through Sam's limbs, tweaking a muscle here and a muscle there, rocking him forward, whether he liked it or not.

Desperately, Sam tried to purse his lips, to whistle a counter-spell or even just a random noise that might disrupt the bell's call. But his cheeks wouldn't move, and his legs were already stumping through the water, carrying him quickly towards the source of the sound, towards the wielder of the bell. (Nix 2001, p. 145)

These bells and the sound they and their wielders make, and the abilities they possess, are central to Old Kingdom narratives. In the Old Kingdom, and in regions of Ancelstierre close to the boundary separating the two countries, usual distinctions between life and death are blurred, with trained members of the living able to journey "from Life into Death" (Nix 2003, loc. 431) and necromancers able to summon the dead back to life, usually for wrongful purposes, among other feats. Nix's stories often centre on the inherited role of the Abhorsen, the most powerful bell-wielder of a particular era, who is dedicated to maintaining the natural order of life and death. Abhorsens use their bells to control or repel the dead who have returned to life, ultimately to return them to the river that separates the living from those who are permanently dead. The bells may also have deleterious effects on the wielders themselves, if rung carelessly or unwisely. The proper way to wield each of the seven bells is conveyed to each Abhorsen by magical tomes, such as *The Book of the Dead* and *The Book of Remembrance and Forgetting*. How evil necromancers learn these skills is unknown, although Nix implies that some belonging to the Abhorsen bloodline need no book learning at all to use bells of this ilk:

"I don't know how to use the bells," said Clariel. She kept staring at them. Was it her imagination, or could she hear the instruments faintly humming in their leather shrouds? Calling to her? "I know no necromancy. I haven't read *The Book of the Dead*."

"You need nothing but your will and the instinct in your blood", said Mogget. "These bells are Free Magic things, not wound about with Charter Magic. Take them up, speak to them. They will answer to you, teach you their use, their strengths and foibles."

"I could go into Death?" asked Clariel.

"Anyone can go into Death", said Mogget, with a smirk. "Coming back again is the difficult part." (Nix 2014b, loc. 352)

Although the intricate relationships between the bells of the Abhorsen, a necromancer's bells, and Free Magic is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note the centrality of such bells in these texts and the engagement with natural and unnatural mortality that they represent. As an example of the latter, note in the excerpt above Nix's careful use of the word "shroud": the bells wear death's raiment, and should be inanimate, yet they sound of their own accord (among other things) as though alive.

The choice of bells as the primary magical weapon of a high fantasy text concerned with violations of natural laws is curious, and yet apt. Bells are musical instruments, but that is not how they are usually encountered in everyday life, in the readers' world as in the

Old Kingdom. Clock chimes, and before them church bells, have marked time for centuries, “sounding out the death of the hours” (Rodenbach 2007, p. 61) and serving in fiction as a metaphor for the passage of time and the cycles of life and death (Ibrahim and Kheirbek 2023, p. 247). The transformation of mercurial, invisible time into discrete, audible reality (Toop 2010, p. 159) is an alchemical process perfectly aligned with both religion and high fantasy’s desires to give gods and other supernatural beings agency in the material world. The ringing of bells denotes significant moments, such as birth and death, natural disasters, and the end of wars, just as readily as they announce a call to worship or the end of the working day. Bells also have precise ritual purposes in religion, such as the “bell, book and candle” methods of excommunication and exorcism, through the long-standing belief that the ringing of bells will dispel malevolent forces (Ibrahim and Kheirbek 2023, p. 247). Nix himself has revealed (Nix 2014a) that he chose bells because of these ritual practices:

I wanted my heroine to have a particular kind of magic, but I didn’t want it to be the typical sort of things where she had a spell book or a wand, I wanted something different.

I was looking into different myths and beliefs at the time about how people dealt with evil spirits and laying the dead to rest, and one of the most famous things I came upon was exorcism by bell, book and candle which I liked the idea of. . . I didn’t want her to be looking for matches or a lighter every time an evil spirit was nearby. So then I was left with bells, which to me seem to possess a sort of magic anyway in their ‘voices’. . . I did some more research into the history of bells, naming and baptising bells and the mysticism that’s often associated with bells. (Nix 2015)

Thus, bells, through their place in ritual, real and imagined, fill the double role of maintaining the status quo while at the same time of warning when the status quo is breached—a contradiction that is particularly apposite in the context of the Gothic.

Such familiar, if often unconscious, layers of associations, from consolatory to foreboding, contribute a sense of the uncanny that winds its way through these texts, evidence of which can be found in this and other “disconcerting interplay[s] between opposing meanings” (Mills 2001, p. 18) such as, most obviously, living/dead. Another includes fixed/fluid: the Abhorsen’s body typically become encased in ice when entering the fast-running waters of Death. Another is present in the detailed ways in which bells are portrayed by Nix in the Old Kingdom texts.

Bells are musical instruments, and they are named as such by Nix, but, as previously noted, in these stories they appear more like weapons than music-makers and possess a degree of agency that renders them especially dangerous. Despite clarity surrounding the nature of each bell (the seven key bells are described in consistent ways across all of these narratives) and their use as essential tools for those intent on maintaining the natural order of life and death, the sounds they make and the effects they have on those around them are to an extent unpredictable: when a bell is loosed, the reader knows that the wielder might easily fall foul of the bell’s effects along with their intended targets. Furthermore, the suggestion that the bells are *literally* wilful is made many times in these texts: they are entirely described as having voices rather than chimes; they sometimes move in their wielder’s grip; and they will take advantage of inattention or accident to achieve different ends to those intended, suggesting agency and individual personalities that might act in defiance of the Abhorsen:

Belgaer was the name of the fifth bell. The Thinker. Belgaer could mend the erosion of mind that often occurred in Death, restoring the thoughts and memory of the Dead. It could also erase those thoughts, in Life as well as in Death, and in

necromancers' hands had been used to splinter the minds of enemies. Sometimes it splintered the mind of the necromancer, for Belgaer liked the sound of its own voice and would try to steal the chance to sing of its own accord. (Nix 2003, loc. 440)

This suggested agency is confirmed through the mythopoeic elements of Nix's Old Kingdom texts, which reveal that the Abhorsen's bells contain fragments of seven powerful Free Magic beings from deep history "who possessed the conscious thought and foresight that raised them above all the tens of thousands of Free Magic beings that clamored and strove to exist upon the earth" (Nix 2021b, loc. 5313). In defiance of the natural order from which they emerged, these "Free Spirits of the Beginning" (Nix 2003, loc. 2746) independently created life, such as the humans who live in the Old Kingdom, and some of their own life persists in the bells:

"They put a great deal of their power into the bloodlines, but not all their being", replied the Dog. "But I suspect they were perhaps less tired of conscious, individual existence. They wished to go on, in some form or another. I think they wanted to see what happened. And the Seven did have names. They are remembered in the bells and in the pipes you have in your belt. Each of those bells has something of the original power of the Seven, the power that existed before the Charter." (Nix 2021b, loc. 5321)

What preceded the Bright Shiners in Nix's world is not revealed, and neither is the role that music had in their creation or in their own creative activities, beyond their choice to inter much of their psychic remains in nominally musical instruments. There is no mistaking, however, that these instruments are not intended for quotidian musical purposes: the words "harmony", "harmonic", and "melody" do not appear in the Old Kingdom texts at all, as though making entirely clear that the purpose of any instrument is to exert power over the living and the dead rather than to carry a tune (although as noted below, music is enjoyed in other ways in these texts). One of the bells has a "melodious" tone and is also the only one specifically described as being "musical", but use of the bell "grant[s] speech to the dumb, tongue-lost Dead. . . give[s] forgotten words their meaning. . . still[s] a tongue that moves too freely": nothing, then, that relates to actual musicality (Nix 1995, loc. 788). This handbell, like the others, is a magical tool only.

This critical understanding of the double role of magical bells in the Old Kingdom—evinced through their centrality to Nix's mythopoesis, as well as to the sense of the uncanny in these texts—is confirmed in two further ways. Seven Bright Shiners are revealed to be confined in part to the Abhorsen's bells, but there were originally *nine* Bright Shiners. The eighth remains an active Free Magic agent in the Old Kingdom that takes many forms, one of them feline and exhibiting the same tendency for self-absorption and unpredictability as a cat (and its sibling bells). When "bound" by Charter magic, that binding takes the form of a miniature handbell hanging from their collar, a potent magical trinket that at other times might hang from this being's belt or some other form of constraint. Here we see, again, a bell employed in service of uncanny mythopoesis and for a purpose that is not musical, specifically to confine an elder being of great power to ensure it conforms to natural law.

The ninth Bright Shiner is inimical to all life except its own and functions as a major antagonist in the Old Kingdom texts. Orannis, "the Destroyer", is imprisoned in the form of two metal hemispheres that aspire to join, thus forming a single metal sphere from which Orannis ultimately plans to escape. While at first glance, this may suggest that Nix's mythopoesis is not entirely consistent with respect to the Bright Shiners and their prisons, it is worth noting that Suzui and Kane bells used in Japanese Shintoist and Buddhist ceremonies are hemispherical and spherical, respectively. Some Western church bells are hemispherical, too—in this form, they can be stacked, which saves space in a cramped

belltower—as are the bells of traditional alarm clocks. Spherical bells appear on sleighs, Christmas trees, and jester’s caps—and cat’s collars. Here, we see bells again at the heart of the Old Kingdom uncanny mythopoesis, and that they are not limited to the campaniform.

It is interesting at this point to compare Nix’s mythopoesis to Tolkien’s. *The Silmarillion*’s opening chapter—“Ainulindalë” or “Music of the Ainur”—depicts how the universe’s first creations, angelic beings, were taught the art of song by the all-powerful Eru. The music they make becomes the material world, all who live in it and all its history, but it is not instrumental music (Eden 2003, p. 190). Nix, too, at times draws on voiced music to capture elements of the sublime (literally, in this case):

Together, the bells and Dog sang a song that was more than sound and power. It was the song of the earth, the moon, the stars, the sea and the sky, of Life and Death and all that was and would be. It was the song of the Charter, the song that had bound Orannis in the long ago, the song that sought to bind the Destroyer once again. (Nix 2003, loc. 4913)

However, it becomes clear in an analysis of Nix’s texts that music is predominantly present through instrumental forms, and that this music acts as the apparatus of a magical force that has no clear allegiance to the sublime. Although Nix’s Bright Shiners set other forms of life in motion, as did Tolkien’s Ainu, they have largely abandoned their agency in exchange for an ongoing existence tethered to musical instruments or other forms of containment and, as above, employ this force to similarly contain another of their kind who threatens their secondary creations. When humans attempt to wield this power in service of maintaining or restoring a natural order, the Bright Shiners may act against them, suggesting that they lack the more morally centred and unanimous natures of the Ainu—or at least possess a *different* moral centre to humans. When they sound in singletons, pairs, and trios, bells cast hazardous but useful spells; only when all seven magical bells sound in concert do they create the music of high fantasy, usually evoked as a signifier of ineffable bliss and well-ordered nature.

“No matter how many times the word [song] repeats”, Catherine Olver notes, “readers cannot hear the cosmic song” (Olver 2022, p. 69). This is an important point that Olver emphasises: “textual sound effects risk striking readers as disappointingly faint compared to the all-encompassing grandeur of the cosmic music described” (Olver 2022). The inability of these texts to precisely describe the sound of such music is one shared by many high fantasy works, and is not a failure, however, since what is being portrayed is actually the listening *experience*:

[one] that all of us have had throughout our lives. A song that has become special between one and one’s spouse or lover, music in a film that moves us to cry or draws us into the storyline, the tune that we hum throughout the day that we heard earlier from the radio—all of these experiences and more are a part of our daily lives. (Eden 2003, p. 188)

Bradford Lee Eden’s examples here highlight the fundamental role of music in present-day storytelling, as well as position this aspect of the evocation of music with respect to high fantasy. As with Tolkien, ordinary, uncomplicated music is not absent from the Old Kingdom texts: minstrels and musicians are referred to in the Old Kingdom, along with songs and instruments apart from bells, such as pianos and mandolins, reed pipes, drums, clavichords, and zithers; furthermore, non-magical Ancelstierre contains phonograms that are, given that world’s clear relationship to our own, likely used to play music. It is simply that no evidence exists in these texts of handbells and other kinds of bells, for all their centrality to Nix’s mythopoesis, ringing in service of actual music.

4. Noise in the Gothic: OG Clockpunk

In Nix's work, then, the high fantastic representation of music is evident, as well as the mundane. They are, however, paired with oppositional representations that introduce elements of the uncanny. Neither are they the only representations of sound critical to understanding these texts. Another key application of oppositional meaning and the uncanny is important here, that between "music" and "non-music". As noted earlier, the Gothic brought new kinds of sonic textures to literature, among them the dreadful and the terrifying produced by both nature and by humans. Lucie Ratail's insightful analysis of the expansion of everyday experience of sound during the period in which early Gothic novels were written—when new sonic sources were introduced to the masses as a whole, via steam engines, microphones, growing cities, and other social, technological, and scientific developments—highlights the importance of sound to the creation of a literature that captures feelings of unsettlement and anxiety in both its characters and its readers. Sometimes, the use of sound occurs alongside visual elements of the text (a lightning flash accompanying a clap of thunder, for example), but sound alone may be employed to great effect, as in Beckford's *Vathek*, which "resonates with a variety of sounds, music, and shrieks... [evoking] dreadful events without reference to sight" (Ratail 2021, p. 7). Sounds are described using terms more often restricted to beings with physical agency, and, as in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, can cause madness and derangement (including in one instance an auditory hallucination of bells ringing) (Ratail 2021, p. 9). David Toop notes that "Sound is a haunting, a ghost, a presence whose location in space is ambiguous and whose existence in time is transitory", and this is even more so on the silent page, where historically, authors employ a variety of punctuation techniques to keep their readers immersed in Gothic sensibilities, such as Walpole's "frightening and surprising" dashes (Ratail 2021, p. 6) and Poe's "mellifluous repetition" (Toop 2010, p. 162) in "The Bells". Silence, too—perhaps in response to the increasingly normalised noisy world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—is often portrayed as something to be feared rather than desired. This is achieved through the absence of normal sounds—a potent signifier of the uncanny (Van Elferen 2012, pp. 29, 63)—and also through the appearance of manifestations that are non-vocal (Ratail 2021, p. 4). "People's silence is hardly ever a good sign in gothic fiction, since it is the sign of the unsaid" (Wright 2021), and neither is the untethered voice, as in the comingled and echoing vocal "uproar of contention" that echoes through the dungeons of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

While music in Gothic literature, like high fantasy later, "still advocated the use of voice to elevate the mind and speak to the soul" (Ratail 2021, p. 11), as at several points in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, instrumental music plays a more complex role, sometimes evoking consolatory instances of everyday life (street performances, marching bands, etc.) while at other times "mirroring the characters' melancholy feelings, or introducing demonic appearances and terrible deeds" (Ratail 2021, p. 5). In both these instances, clear parallels exist between Gothic works and the Old Kingdom texts:

Bell sounds are used by narrators to enhance the feeling of remoteness in time and place, and to give rhythm to the characters' lives. The music of the Church is particularly developed in gothic, with bells, choruses, prayers, and other punctual evidence of clerical life. These sounds are so numerous that they eventually give punctuation to the stories themselves: Radcliffe's heroine appreciates the landscape at twilight, around the sound of the vesper bell (which is often struck at midnight), and Lewis articulates the tale of the Bleeding Nun with bell-tolls of 'One' and 'Two', delimiting 'The Ghostly hour' (Lewis 164) when terrifying events occur. (Ratail 2021, p. 5)

The Gothic, thus, creates a tension between music, which is intended to console (unless interrupted or obscured), and non-music, which is intended to unsettle. Gothic authors, and authors like Nix who embrace the tools of the Gothic, frequently employ these sonic textures and tensions to engage readers and, through the ability of sound to evoke emotion, to help readers “see, hear and feel what is true about fantasy worlds” (Layton 2001, p. 19). Despite Nix’s choice of a musical instrument as a key instance of magical technology, and the occasional appearance of vocal music as an ineffable (and indescribable) force, it might seem obvious to examine his work through the lens of Gothic sound. However, previous analyses of Gothic elements in Old Kingdom texts have focused solely on the ocular (e.g., Alter 2013), almost certainly because that is how scholarship of the Gothic normally views (pun intended) its subjects. Analysing the centrality of Nix’s uncanny depiction of bells alone, as well as his general use of sound, provides further insights into the relationship of these texts to the Gothic.

Catherine Olver’s comparison between the two magical practices in the Old Kingdom texts is useful here, noting first that

Ringing the bells is an aural skill that very few people can learn: the tragic narrative of *Clariel* illustrates that the bells corrupt anyone who rings them, even with good intentions, unless they are from the correct bloodline and have been selected to fulfil the official role of Abhorsen. (Olver 2022, p. 76)

Accordingly, in *Clariel* and elsewhere, the Old Kingdom texts “consistently [associate] aural magic with unpredictability, danger, and freedom”. Along with possessing musical abilities, magical protagonists must also be attentive listeners to the world around them, as well as to their bells, because slight changes in their immediate sonic landscape can signal personal danger or salvation (Olver 2022, p. 75):

Still they heard the tumult from behind, the howling, drumming, shouting, all magnified by the water and the vastness of the reservoir. Then another sound began, cutting through the noise with the clarity of perfection.

It started softly, like a tuning fork lightly struck, but grew, a pure note. . . till there was nothing but the sound. The sound of [the bell] Astarael. (Nix 1995, loc. 3673)

Even Charter magic, which is feasibly learned by anyone, comes with its own risks. Charter magic is usually employed through written or engraved spells with accompanying gestures and visualisations, but it can also employ whistles, and as mentioned earlier, Charter marks can travel through the air, like a visible form of sound. Free Magic lies at the basis of both magical practices, and like sound, and *through* sound, it will constantly attempt to evade all forms of constraint. An inexperienced magic-user can thus quickly lose control of the more accessible practice of Charter magic, and even when used expertly, the result may be one of unease, as in this instance demonstrating the interplay of Charter magic and music:

She raised her hand, fingers spread wide, and whistled five separate notes. With each whistle, Charter marks flew from her mouth to cluster on each finger. After the fifth note, Sabriel closed her hand, bringing all the marks together in one glowing ball, which she threw high in the air, whistling again, the five notes joined in an eerie tune. (Nix 2016, loc. 4844)

These tensions between constrained and free, fixed and fluid, ease and unease echo the tensions between high fantasy and Gothic present in the Old Kingdom texts through Nix’s descriptions of magical music. Bells (and pipes, when wielded by magic-users) exhibit qualities and abilities that ordinary instruments do not possess: a single instrument might, for instance, multiply their voices (Nix 1995, loc. 968), shift in pitch (Nix 2003, p. 337), or generate notes that linger even after the literal sound is gone (Nix 2016, loc. 302). While the work of a magic-user might sometimes produce “a sweet, restful peal of notes”

(Nix 2021b, p. 303), “a lively, infectious jig”, or “a merry tune” (Nix 1995, loc. 2620), as often the ringing might be “discordant” (Nix 2021b, p. 305), “unearthly” (Nix 2021b, p. 46), or emitting “one terrible single note of doom” (Nix 2016, loc. 5162) or “the sound of a dying scream” (Nix 2016, loc. 5270). The effects of these magical instruments may emulate violent actions, striking “like a savage, physical blow to the head” (Nix 2021b, p. 305) or “as if she were pierced all over by a thousand hair-fine needles” (Nix 2016, loc. 5157); they can make “skin crawl and. . . hair lift with static electricity” and drown out all other sounds (Nix 2021b, p. 312). While, as stated, magic-users of the Old Kingdom must be musical, with or without magical instruments—since “their vocal skills were a weapon of last recourse” (Nix 1995, loc. 1571)—there remains the very clear sense that magical music in the Old Kingdom is neither simple nor safe. The fourth magic bell, Dyrin, is described as simultaneously the “most musical” and the “most difficult to use” (Nix 2003, p. 39)—making explicit a link between musicality and difficulty that is repeatedly reinforced. No wonder each Abhorsen struggles to retain complete mastery of their bells, even with the knowledge contained within *The Book of the Dead*, in which magical tomes are descriptions of bell-ringing techniques and patterns that past Abhorsens have found effective against the dead and other inimical forces.

The Book of the Dead contains whole “chapters on music and the nature of sound in the binding of the dead” (Nix 1995, loc. 510). The slight distinction here between music and sound is telling. “Sound” refers to all things audible, and includes both music and non-music, so while music is a special case in the magical practice of the Abhorsens, it is not the entirety of their practice, and this is reflected in the way their magical effects are perceived. Notes alone may form an important part of the spells—since voice alone can bring about the desired end, by imitating the sound of the bells (Nix 2021a, loc. 891)—but so can rhythm, through the clapping of hands (Nix 1995, loc. 275–76). The distinction between musical sound and non-musical sound is thus entirely and uncannily blurred in these texts. Outside of situations involving magic, too, Nix frequently deploys non-musical sound as part of an affective strategy designed to maintain tension within his unfolding narratives. These non-musical and non-magical sonic elements arise out of the landscapes of the Old Kingdom and its neighbour, Ancelestierre, often triggered by human activities within them, and are frequently as much a part of the reader’s everyday life as being transported by familiar music into a heightened emotional state. Unlike a cosmic song that arises from combined magical efforts and is impossible either to represent in words or to imagine, these carefully articulated noises combine to create a complex soundscape that is comprehensible and therefore strategically unsettling and uncanny, in the Gothic sense, often affecting a single, isolated character, usually those eponymous in each novel. Olver particularly notes Nix’s emphasis on sound in the twentieth-century analogue of Ancelestierre, where magic does not work, in theory (Olver 2022, p. 75). Between the two nations, however, lies a narrow and changeable “No Man’s Land” in which magical wind-flutes created by the Abhorsens whisper “a song redolent with the same power of her bells, helping to close the border between Life and Death”. Sinister wind is “arguably the most frequent [element] in terror writing” (Ratail 2021, p. 3), alongside threatening animals, earthquakes, and storms (all of which also appear in the Old Kingdom), and when the same wind that powers these wind-flutes blows into Ancelestierre, magic may gain a foothold, allowing Charter magic and the dead purchase, if briefly. In these perimetric spaces, a secular military presence operates, providing an additional barrier to magical incursions should such take a physical form, but usually proving ineffective. Internal combustion vehicles, the telegraph, guns and other weapons, and other familiar forms of modern technology are unreliable too close to the Wall—although at times, Nix implies, through the mechanical sounds they make, a similar half-sentience to the bells wielded by the Abhorsen: e.g., “the car coughed and

spluttered into life, a tenor accompaniment to the bass cacophony of the trucks and tanks” (Nix 1995, loc. 4074).

Even when not enlisted to maintain the reader’s awareness that, in these stories, non-sentient things can approach sentience, sounds normal in Ancelstierre are similarly portrayed with a conceptual slippage between artificial and natural, depending on who is listening. Ever-present, too, is the possibility of danger:

There was a lot of noise outside now—shouting and the crash of hobnailed boots on the road—but behind all that there was also a constant dull booming. In her half-asleep state, it took a moment for her to understand it wasn’t thunder, which she half-expected, but something else. . .

The booming noise was coming from farther south, and there was a faint whistling with it. Lirael could see bright flashes on the horizon there, but it was not lightning. There was thunder as well, to the west, and the flashes from that direction were definitely lightning. . .

“What is that noise, and the lights?” she asked Sam, pointing south. . .

“Artillery”, he said after a moment. “Big guns. They must be far enough back, so they aren’t affected by the Old Kingdom. . . Um, they’re sort of like catapults that throw an exploding device several miles, which hits the ground or blows up in the air and kills people.” (Nix 2003, p. 341)

This multi-layered portrayal of sound as familiar and unfamiliar, commonplace and yet dangerous, is an essential part of Nix’s Gothic strategy.

Nix’s recruitment of silence in this strategy is similarly in line with other Gothic writing, as outlined earlier. Transitions from sound to silence and vice versa occur abruptly and unpredictably, to “cracking” and “ominous” effects (Nix 1995, loc. 3637, loc. 3634), and occasionally triggering sensations “like a sudden chill” (Nix 2014b, loc. 112) or “a harsh slap across the face” (Nix 2003, p. 501). Sound is frequently absent in situations where it would normally be found: for instance, characters living and dead frequently scream and sob soundlessly as dire threats approach; and for magic-users and the unlucky alike, the journey beyond life takes them along nine stages of a river that is often, appropriately, as “[s]ilent as the grave” (Nix 2003, loc. 4525) while at the same time “silently raging” (Nix 1995, loc. 3326) and “swirling around and down in silent frenzy” (Nix 2021b, p. 318). As Ratail notes, “absence of sound thus becomes uncanny presence, ideal incarnation of the spectral fear of the characters” (Ratail 2021, p. 4), demonstrating Nix’s use of sonic textures to generate affect.

Even through this Gothic effect, however, the reader glimpses a return of high fantasy’s musical mythopoesis. The Old Kingdom texts’ chief antagonist, Orannis, exemplifies the proposition that silence is the opposite of life, through the uncanny evocation of an ideal form of anti-music: “soon the world will fall asleep”, it reveals to one of its minions, “and it will be my dream that all will dream, my song that will fill every ear” (Nix 2021b, loc. 6752). This song, however, is one of “terrible, absolute silence”: “all living things must fail, till silence rings me in eternal calm, across a sea of dust” (Nix 2003, p. 501). Thus, while the threat of sound is ever-present in the machinations of the bells and other uncanny presences, so too is the threat of silence by means of cosmic collapse. “Paradoxically”, Ratail observes, “the louder the gothic, the more present the silence” (Ratail 2021, p. 4), and this is particularly true when delivered with the weight of the high fantastic behind it.

One can even find an echo of the music of the spheres in the cosmic architecture surrounding the Old Kingdom. It becomes clear through these texts that each “country” (e.g. the Old Kingdom, Ancelstierre) is in fact an entirely separate world, with unique seasons, moons, and so on. Characters visit three of them, each separated from the others

by apparently physical barriers, two named: the Wall and the Great Rift (creating another complex and uneasy duality, one of separateness and connectedness). It is easy to imagine that there are other worlds in this cosmos, nestled around each other like the series of celestial, hemispherical bells proposed by Plato et al. If so, their harmonious orbits have been misaligned, bringing them into unplanned contact, damaging each other in the process. The music emitted by these cracked bells is no longer one of ineffable consolation, but of complication and contradiction—an apt metaphor for the mixture of high fantasy and the Gothic so evident in these texts, and in contemporary literature.

5. Conclusions/Coda

Lucie Ratail observes that, while

the prototypical gothic soundscape may be seen to follow a general ‘recipe’, the most successful examples of the genre developed their own sound signature to acquire a specific tint, which provides an insight into individual appreciation of sounds and noises. (Ratail 2021, p. 5)

The interplay of sound, music, and noise in the Old Kingdom texts has, by virtue of their critical and commercial success, and in light of the observations here, certainly earned Nix the right to claim a “specific tint”—although perhaps “timbre” might be a more suitable term when applied to such a strong aural signature. While musical instruments have been employed as magical weapons or plot devices in other stories, ancient and recent—the child-stealing pipes of Hamelin, for example, or the ‘Clamouring Hour’ bells of Frances Hardinge’s 2005 novel *Fly By Night*—Nix creates his own unique iterations by layering mythopoesis over existing and significant religious and cultural traditions of bellringing. His magical handbells can be wielded as instruments of the sublime as well as of horror, allowing the reader to glimpse in these texts both the consolation of high fantasy and the uncanny of the Gothic. While a detailed analysis of Nix’s lexicon and syntax in the service of these aims lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note Alice Mills and Catherine Olver’s separate beginnings in that area, and that this line of research has already generated insight into Nix’s delight in the entanglement of several other key dualities, such as human and nonhuman voices (Olver 2022) and naming systems that, unlike Tolkien, contain contradictory elements (e.g., Abhorsen/abhorrent) (Mills 2001, p. 18). These contradictory entanglements are ones Nix carefully maintains through descriptions of sound across all of these texts.

This analysis, thus, highlights the utility of sound, not just music, as a means of interrogating generic alignments and influences. Returning to Jack Zipes’s observation of the overlap between children’s fantasy and Gothic tropes (Zipes 2008, p. 1), and in light of ongoing debates regarding the relationship between the many different forms of the fantastic to each other, there is much to be uncovered by employing sonic analyses of high fantasy texts, not just in Nix’s Old Kingdom books or his wider opus, but across the genre as a whole. Scholarship of Tolkien’s work, for instance, contains detailed discussions of musical mythopoesis, alongside some ocularcentric analyses of Gothic tropes (e.g., the Nine Riders, the Mines of Moria, and Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*) (TERRANOVA 2017), but little examination of sonic textures in service to the Gothic, such as the silent screams of the watchers of Cirith Ungol, the sinister creaking of trees in various forests, or foreboding drums in the deep. It is entirely possible that an aural examination of seminal high fantasy texts might, as with Nix’s work, reveal connections to the Gothic and terror fiction of a kind not generally acknowledged. It may also be that, as Ratail ascribes to Gothic literature, the “definitory instability” of the fantasy genre might find a similar explanation “in its multiplicity of sound signatures, exhibiting a conflict between universality and

specificity” (Ratail 2021, p. 6). A more thorough investigation is beyond the scope of this paper, unfortunately.

To paraphrase and expand on Nicol Alter’s conclusion concerning ocular tropes (Alter 2013), then: sonic repertoires of both the Gothic and high fantasy are at work in Nix’s Old Kingdom novels. How these repertoires articulate against each other, and against other sensory repertoires, gives these narratives unique and lasting relevance in an increasingly crowded literary landscape and signal a way towards deeper understanding of the field as a whole.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Note: The division of “fantasy” into clearly defined forms is a matter of ongoing debate (e.g., Suvin 2000). The term “mythopoeic fantasy”, popularised by the Inklings, describes works consciously engaged in manufacturing or reimagining myths (Stableford 2009) and is regarded by some as “the core of fantasy” (Oziewicz 2008, p. 123). High fantasy, on the other hand, describes fiction immersed in secondary worlds, a large and popular genre that can in turn be divided into sub-genres (Stableford 2009). Nix’s Old Kingdom novels have been separately described as belonging to both genres, but as this paper for the greater part discusses techniques of immersing the reader in a novel world to particular effects, I will concentrate on these texts as works of high fantasy, with references to mythopoetical elements.

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Article

Hearing Written Magic in Harry Potter Films: Insights into Power and Truth in the Scoring for In-World Written Words

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Abstract: This paper explores how sound design in the Harry Potter film series shapes the symbolic significance of written words within the magical world. Sound mediates between language and meaning; while characters gain knowledge by reading and seeing, viewers are guided emotionally and thematically by how these written texts are framed through sound. For example, Harry's magical identity is signalled to viewers through the score long before he fully understands himself—first through music when he speaks to a snake, then more explicitly when he receives his letter from Hogwarts. Throughout the series, characters engage with a wide array of written media—textbooks, letters, newspapers, diaries, maps, and inscriptions—that gradually shift in narrative function, from static props to dynamic, multi-sensory agents of transformation. Using a close analysis of selected scenes to examine layers of utterances, diegetic sounds, underscore, and sound design, this study draws on metaphor theory and adaptation theory to examine how sound design gives writing a metaphorical voice, sometimes framing it as character, landscape, or moral authority. As the series progresses, becoming more autonomous from the literary source, written words take on greater symbolic significance, and sound increasingly determines which texts are granted narrative power, whose voices are trusted, and how viewers interpret truth and agency across media. Ultimately, written words in the films are animated through sound into agents of growth, memory, resistance, and transformation. Thus, the audio-visual treatment of written magic reveals not just what is written, but what matters.

Keywords: Harry Potter; film music; sound design; written words; written magic

1. Introduction

This article explores how music, sound, and dialogue support visuals of written words inside the Harry Potter narrative as experienced in the films. Harry Potter is an epic tale of good and evil, truth, and mystery, embedded in the naturalness of a coming of age story in a magically supernatural world; a story in which the characters are challenged by both magical threats and moral dilemmas¹. In the magic realm, characters regularly encounter written words that hold the key to their understanding of what is trustworthy, what is true, and what holds power (both magical and innate) in the world they inhabit. Although magic provides extraordinary possibilities on the one hand, many of the resources are traditional and time-tested. In lieu of phones, the internet, or television, magical youth encounter physical items with historic associations from the real-world and magical attributes from the Wizarding world; these include library collections of books spanning hundreds of years (some with both magical knowledge and magical properties), (charmed) quills, (charmed) ink, parchment letters (magically delivered by owls), newspapers (with magically moving photographs), and so forth. Many of these and other items include written words, creating a

meta relationship between the source material for the films and the resources that in-world characters encounter. Written language provides a means of communicating ideas and storing information. The Special Collections & Archives Research Center at the Oregon State University Libraries (accessed April 2025) posits that, “written language is the single most important and far-reaching technology available to humans and has served as the foundation for virtually all other information technologies . . . Writing has allowed for the development and maintenance of large and complex societies, the formalisation of both academic and practical learning, and the ability to exchange information”. These patterns also hold true in Harry Potter’s Wizarding culture set in the here and now. An examination of how physical items with writing are supported with sound reveals how the film makers chose to depict power and truth—magical, objective, and moral—in changing ways across the series, and metaphorical resonances with the process of filmmakers’ production choices as well as Harry’s hero journey itself.

As an expression of creativity and artistry, written items provide a source of pleasure for the characters as well as film viewers through appealing calligraphy fonts, clever turns of phrase, or animated behaviours. More importantly, they reflect the main way magical youth learn about the magical world; a pleasurable aspect of the process of becoming truly magical. As such, this is one vicarious way that film viewers learn as well. Textbooks of spells and histories, official and personal correspondence, newspaper news stories, tabloid rumours and urban legends, magical inscriptions, scrawled notes, informational posters, legal decrees and testaments, handwritten marginalia, maps, charmed diaries, bedtime folktales, and messages in blood provide primary sources of information that Harry and his friends use to navigate their circumstances. Although dialogue and plot elements affirm the importance of unwritten knowledge, personal traits, skills, and innate powers gained outside of institutional and book learning, these examples, though important to the plot, are the exceptions to the rule. Written documents within the story are the typical, ongoing, primary sources of information available to Harry and his friends as they matriculate through Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, encountering new adventures and trials each school year.

However, not everything that the characters read is true (while conversely, un-vetted information is not always false), and not every spell or potion cast from textbooks has the same power. Further, not every written example comes from sanctioned institutional learning, and some written examples intentionally subvert sanctioned information. Despite the many ways that the characters are sometimes misled or confused by written information, the sound-scoring that accompanies the written examples reliably points toward truth and power (as the filmmakers have interpreted these ideas) for the benefit of film viewers. That is, the sound-design for written items in the films itself is truthful, trustworthy, and a powerful indicator of narrative and emotional truth.

2. Methodology

This study explores musical and sound metaphors in the films, focusing on in-world written items over the course of several aesthetic collaborations and approaches. Following the theories and models of Claudia Gorbman (1987), Kathryn Kalinak (1997), and Anahid Kassabian (2001), this article provides an example of how film music can be organised (as music itself, and with film images) in order to guide cinematic interpretations. My analysis is also informed by the work of historical musicologists such as Mary Ann Smart (2004), who explored how music can mimic drama with musical metaphors; musicologists Roland John Wiley (1985) and Thérèse Hurley (2007), who have discussed historical musical codes for the fantastic; musicologist Susan McClary (1991), who interrogated historic significations in musical structure that affect the interpretation of

musical meaning in contemporary times; and the late music theorist Steve Larson, who, in conjunction with philosopher Mark L. Johnson (Johnson and Larson 2003) and music theorist Leigh VanHandel (Larson and Vanhandel 2005; Larson 2012), has explored how the metaphorical process of mapping physical motion onto musical motion in melody, harmony, and time affects listeners' understanding of and emotional response to music.

By examining the interplay of utterances, diegetic sounds, sound effects, and different approaches to underscore with methodologies of inquiry from film music studies, and using the metaphors we use to describe alignments of music, word, and visuals, we find implicit value systems about power and truth in the Harry Potter films that may not align with interpretations of the books alone, or indeed with one film to the next. Although I highlight the role of musical underscore when it usefully assists understanding, this study addresses the integrated sound design, holistically, inclusive of sound effects, diegetic sounds, and utterances, following the work of the late Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (2019) who argued that the modern film score creates meaning through integration.

While the aim of this exploration is not to compare the Harry Potter novels with the film adaptations, an awareness of the original source material was nevertheless central to the production process and film reception. Following the critical acclaim of the source material, the Harry Potter films became high-profile productions, then box office and critical successes. The producers strategically ensured that the film adaptations would capture the magic of the original books by hiring well-known film-makers, successful composers and a legion of British and Irish stage and screen veterans; using British and Scottish historic and outdoor locations, and budgeting for high-end special effects. Although viewers agree that all of the films generally reflect the characters and main events as they occur in the books, perusal of Harry Potter internet fan site discussions—such as those on HPana, MuggleNet, The Leaky Cauldron or review sites such as The Internet Movie Database—reveals that fans perceive strong aesthetic differences between the different films.

While fans tended to evaluate each Harry Potter film in relation to the source texts and the overarching narrative of the book series, the filmmakers often approached each instalment either as an autonomous creative vision or as part of a cinematic continuum in direct conversation with the previous film. This divergence highlights a fundamental difference in perspective: viewers looked outward—situating each movie within the literary framework—while creators focused inward, shaping their work intra-textually in relation to the cinematic journey they were crafting and negotiating continuity and coherence within the evolving filmic universe. As such, the Harry Potter films occupy an intertextual space wherein filmmakers functioned as co-authors engaged in reinterpretation and re-contextualisation. Hutcheon describes adaptation as both a process and a product: “As a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and (re-)creation” (Hutcheon 2013, p. 8).

Indeed, the films feel different from one another in large part because of different filmmaking teams. When directors and composer make production choices about visual and audio aesthetics, it affects the way viewers experience the narrative. Sound design in films expands the physical space of the narrative beyond the boundaries of what is seen, and likewise, is crucial in expanding the dimensions of the fantasy universe of the Harry Potter films, developing its own dramatic discourse and its own temporal and spatial dimensions (Smart 2004; Gorbman 1987; Chion 1994; Petrobelli 1994; Kulezic-Wilson 2019). Over the course of the phenomenally popular eight-film series, four different directors and four different composers (for a total of five successive filmmaking teams), in addition to five different sound effects coordinators, adapted the relationships between music, sound, and visuals in order to realise their unique interpretations of Harry's epic journey. Written words are referenced pervasively in visuals and dialogue throughout

the eight-films with distinctive sound scoring to fill out the narrative, yet the aesthetics of the different collaborative teams contributed to remarkably different perspectives on Harry's magical world (Webster 2009, 2012). Table 1 lists the eight Harry Potter film titles in chronological order in the far left column, with the corresponding year of release and filmmaking teams (i.e., directors, composers, and sound supervisors) for each, listed in the columns to the right of each title.

Table 1. Harry Potter sound design filmmaking teams.

Film Title	Year	Director	Composer	Sound Supervisor
<i>The Philosopher's Stone</i>	2001	Chris Columbus	John Williams	Eddie Joseph
<i>The Chamber of Secrets</i>	2002	Chris Columbus	John Williams	Randy Thom
<i>The Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	2004	Alfonso Cuarón	John Williams	Richard Beggs
<i>The Goblet of Fire</i>	2005	Mike Newell	Patrick Doyle	Sam Auguste
<i>The Order of the Phoenix</i>	2007	David Yates	Nicholas Hooper	James Mather
<i>The Half-Blood Prince</i>	2009	David Yates	Nicholas Hooper	James Mather
<i>The Deathly Hallows I</i>	2010	David Yates	Alexandre Desplat	James Mather
<i>The Deathly Hallows II</i>	2011	David Yates	Alexandre Desplat	James Mather

3. Summary of Contextual Production Aesthetics and Reception

In the first two Harry Potter films, director Chris Columbus and composer John Williams transferred the books to screen with faithful detail. Columbus, drawing on his experience in high-impact, family-friendly filmmaking, adopted what Troost calls a “heritage” approach—visually preserving the objects, settings, and characterisations from the books with minimal transformation (Troost 2007). Williams, in turn, contributed a richly orchestral score providing a symbolic musical language for the Wizarding world using leitmotifs, and anchored by “Hedwig’s Theme,” which became the musical hallmark of the Wizarding world. Critics perceived the film as handsome and faithful, if at times unimaginative, while reactions to Williams’s score ranged from lauding its magical character to dismissing it as a ‘music box’ that would not keep quiet (Webster 2009, p. 93).

Williams’s music in *The Philosopher’s Stone* and *The Chamber of Secrets* functions almost omnisciently, clarifying and amplifying narrative elements with melodic leitmotifs and symphonic textures steeped in 19th century practises for music for drama. Using triple metres with dance-like tempi, chromaticism, and historic instrumental signifiers of magic (such as harp and celeste), the score aligns with the Golden Age of Hollywood tradition and Williams’s own blockbuster style. Despite the complexity of its thematic organisation, the music often conveys narrative ideas in simplified terms, guiding the viewer’s emotional responses rather than inviting interpretive engagement. Notably, diegetic music is rare, as is any overlap between underscore and sound effects (supervised by Eddie Joseph and Randy Thom); instead, Williams’s leitmotifs symbolically align with visuals, creating a tightly controlled audio-visual experience that reflects the films’ commitment to storytelling clarity (Webster 2009, pp. 65–103; Webster 2012).

When Alfonso Cuarón took over directing *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, his artistic vision marked a dramatic departure from Chris Columbus’s storybook style. Cuarón emphasised emotional realism and atmospheric immersion—staying true to “the spirit” of the narrative, rather than strict fidelity to the novels. He introduced a darker, more naturalistic visual world in desaturated hues—relocating outdoor scenes to the rugged Scottish Highlands and redesigning Hogwarts architecture to reflect a lived-in, organic environment. Cuarón aimed to create a universe that felt real around Harry, rather than merely framing his adventures. Further, Cuarón invented vignettes and audio-visual transitions in the film that had not occurred in the book; for instance four miniature touchpoint scenes depicting seasonal transitions with Williams’s accompanying musical cues and effects reflecting the

natural sounds of birds and trees (supervised by Richard Beggs) that create a distinct form that is unique to the film version of the narrative (Webster 2012).

John Williams's score evolved accordingly, shifting from the orchestral clarity of the earlier films to a more expressive, participatory role. The music became less reliant on leitmotifs and more complex in instrumentation, harmony, and rhythm, as well as incorporating elements of jazz, Renaissance recorder ensemble music, and source music. In lieu of fixed, omniscient narrative cues, themes and instrumentation are varied in tandem with Harry's experiences and boundaries between diegetic and non-diegetic sound are ambiguous in key moments. Pieces like "Double Trouble" (another example of a meta relationship between the literature of the real world and the in-world resources) moved to the foreground, replacing "Hedwig's Theme" as the film's central musical motif. This richer, more layered sonic environment paralleled Cuarón's looser adaptation style, allowing the film to breathe independently of the source material and inviting viewers to feel, rather than simply observe, the magical world. Critics and fans appreciated the creativity and new breadth of the narrative, praising Williams as well for his beautiful themes, but often found the discontinuity frustrating (Webster 2009, pp. 104–18).

A more significant break in the sound design of the Harry Potter series occurred with the arrival of director Mike Newell and composer Patrick Doyle in the fourth film. With both a new director and composer stepping in—and production beginning before the third film was even completed—*The Goblet of Fire* marked a moment of aesthetic discontinuity. Newell steered away from Cuarón's visually stylised approach and resisted the dominance of special effects (although special effects play a necessary role in the film), aiming instead to ground the magical narrative in the character-driven drama of adolescent experiences. Drawing from his own experience in British boarding schools, Newell infused the film with a distinctly British tone, as did Scottish composer Patrick Doyle, and a heightened awareness of the school setting as the narrative's core, distinguishing the direction and score from those of their North American predecessors. Fans and critics more often debated whether Newell's rendering was "inspired" rather than faithful, and Doyle's music was praised for its accessibility, yet criticised by some for its awkwardness in context (Webster 2009, pp. 119–49).

Patrick Doyle's score paralleled this shift by intentionally departing from John Williams's iconic sound while still nodding to it with a brief inclusion of "Hedwig's Theme." Though Doyle's score shares Williams's melodic sensibility, he avoided reusing leitmotifs and instead introduced an entirely new musical vocabulary tailored to Newell's darker, more grounded vision. Much of Doyle's music was composed to function diegetically—fanfares, waltzes, and processional music for visiting schools—reinforcing the lived-in reality of the wizarding world. In contrast to the rich thematic tapestry of the earlier scores, Doyle's music served the narrative less through symbolic underscoring or overlap with sound design and more through its immediate presence in the world of the characters. This shift in both direction and scoring created a film that felt markedly different from its predecessors, situating the magical within a more human and emotionally charged frame.

The aesthetics of the Harry Potter series experienced another significant shift when director David Yates, sound supervisor James Mather, and composer Nicholas Hooper developed a deeply integrated approach to music and sound design for *The Order of the Phoenix* and *The Half-Blood Prince*. Based on previous collaboration processes, they incorporated musical and sonic ideas during filming (rather than layering score onto completed visuals), allowing music to influence the process of filming, and filming to influence the final cuts of the music.² In the Harry Potter films, this evolved into a nuanced, often indistinguishable interplay between underscore, ambient source sounds, and sound effects that blur and transcend conventional scoring in order to highlight the complex

psychological narratives. In contrast to Cuarón and Newell who each brought a unique personal vision for their work, Yates's team approach used the process of collaboration to influence the final outcome. Notably, Hooper's choral composition, "In Noctem" (set to a newly created Latin text by screenwriter Steve Kloves), was written specifically for *The Half-Blood Prince*, and heavily influenced the subsequent score, even though the diegetic choral performance was ultimately omitted. Opinions about the film hinged on whether it was dramatically stimulating vs. fun to watch, and similarly, Hooper's music was lauded by some as delicate and on target with its subtlety, and derided by others as "boring and weak" (Webster 2009, pp. 150–78).

Hooper's scores with Mather's sound effects for the Potter films contribute to the creation of a magical world that feels emotionally and physically immersive; the sound design actively drives and intensifies the physical sensation of narrative tension, and contributes to nuanced, palpable transitions through frisson and other metaphors of physical resonance. Rather than relying on clear leitmotifs or traditional narrative cues, Hooper employs dance metres and polyrhythm, varied (and often lighter, more intimate) instrumental textures, sonic ambiguity between instruments and sound effects, melodic ostinati, and harmonic patterns employing the tug of harmonic magnetism (as outlined by Larson 2012), as well as musical collaboration between score and source sounds to evoke both rational and irrational dimensions of the magical world. In the most emotionally charged moments, sensory input is pared back—removing music or sound entirely—to create visceral, bodily responses through the contrast of silence, and to metaphorically reflect emotional weight too great to hold with music. Through this intricate blending of music and sound, Hooper and Mather capture Harry's layered internal experience navigating between ordinary and extraordinary circumstances in the magical realm, with the score helping to articulate not just what is seen, but what is viscerally felt.

In the final Harry Potter films, director David Yates, composer Alexandre Desplat, and sound supervisor James Mather crafted an austere and restrained sonic environment that mirrored the bleak emotional landscape of the narrative. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione navigate a fractured world, much of the familiar musical spectacle is stripped away. Yates continued his signature approach of emotional realism and sonic subtlety, but with the narrative demands of concluding such a sprawling story, opportunities for creative departures were limited. The films had to resolve numerous plot threads while remaining faithful to the tone and trajectory of the books. Though producers had hoped John Williams would return to musically bookend the series, scheduling conflicts made this impossible. Desplat was chosen instead, in part for his stylistic affinity with Williams's orchestral voice, even as Yates's directorial vision diverged from Columbus's more traditional aesthetic. The result is a score that recalls the series' beginnings while adapting to the tonal maturity of its conclusion. Responses to the film tended to hinge on literary fidelity again as fans of the books wrestled with expectations for how the films should look, sound, and resolve.

Desplat's music reflects this delicate balance: with orchestration and melodic sensibilities echoing Williams's earlier work, but with a shift in emphasis. Leitmotifs are minimal, narrative cueing is sparse, and underscore often gives way to ambient sound and effects. Key magical moments that would have received significant sound support under the previous filmmakers' patterns—such as *Patronus* spells, Ron's splinching, and Snape's death—are rendered with naturalistic sound design rather than overt musical cues, suggesting a magical world now governed by realism and tension rather than wonder. Even the death of Hedwig, whose theme once defined the franchise, is marked more by silence and subtle sound than by musical drama. While restraint defines much of the final soundscape, exceptions arise in moments of spectacle and resolution. In the climactic battle at Hogwarts, Desplat's full symphonic forces return alongside Mather's dense ambient

sound effects, evoking the chaos of war through a rich palette of 19th-century orchestration and aggressive sonic textures—wands move like blades and spells explode like artillery. This dual approach—sparse intimacy contrasted with orchestral grandeur—underscores the emotional and narrative stakes of the series’ conclusion, portraying a magical world grounded by survival, grief, and sacrifice rather than possibility and wonder.

4. Findings

While each Harry Potter filmmaking team brought a distinct directorial and style and vision to the series—differences that did not go unnoticed by fans—there is a deeper continuity in how the films handle in-world written items such as letters, books, and newspapers. Initially, these objects primarily serve as narrative tools that closely reflect the function of text in the novels. However, as the film adaptations began to diverge more significantly from the literary source material, these written items took on increasingly symbolic and cinematic roles. In contrast to the books, in which the role of written magic is relatively stable (i.e., descriptions of written sources used as a literary device to explain the magical world to the characters and the readers), the motifs of written magic in the films serve varied roles, increase in importance, and are papered throughout to reflect changing understandings of truth and power in the narrative. Although written words in the first films are attached to concrete objects with physically concrete ideas and are accompanied by fixed music and sound motifs, written words in the later films are often part of both foreground, background, and ambient objects, and are integrated with sound elements to symbolise abstract, fluid ideas. Written words are integrated within the props, action, and scenery as motifs, several items with writing respond to stimulus outside of the characters in the scene (e.g., animated correspondence letters), seem to move of their own motivation (e.g., *The Monster Book of Monsters*), and work alongside the characters to either assist or impede their progress (e.g., Tom Riddle’s diary, the Marauder’s Map, and the engraved snitch).

While the connection between paper sounds and the significance of written items is established from the first film, varied ways that audio-visuals for written words are integrated allows film viewers to experience the narrative in multi-faceted ways. Further, written items such as parchment pages often have their own heightened sound (e.g., folding, crinkling, shredding, turning etc.), which is sometimes musicalised through rhythm or textural integration with the underscore, are sometimes accompanied by the vocal overlay from characters, and additionally are sometimes accompanied by other sound effects or underscore to complement or highlight the action, mood, or significance. The combinations of visuals of written magic and sound scoring work in tandem to guide deeper, symbolic, and more nuanced layers of storytelling. Indeed, written words serve as objects, subjects, resources, tools, allies, adversaries, props, scenery, clues, and harbingers; the development of these visual motifs and the sound design that accompanies them reflects both specific objects that further the plot as well as an ideological exploration of who holds power and who holds truth in this epic series of good and evil. The role of written words expands in the series to a degree that the written word becomes a role unto itself. In several instances, they even seem to “speak” through music and sound design, suggesting that the concept of text has become something more than just a source of information—it becomes part of the film’s expressive language.

This shift can be understood through the lens of metaphor theory, which shows how everyday concepts—like written words—can be reimagined through metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the “essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”; metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but conceptual frameworks that shape how we understand and experience the world

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 5). When written texts in the Harry Potter films come to function as characters, sound, or scenery, this reflects a shift in how we metaphorically structure the role of writing—moving from a representational tool to an active, sensory participant in the narrative. In this case, the films gradually treat text as character, text as environment, or even text as sound. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, we might say that ‘Text is Character’ or ‘Text is Music’—written words shift from being narrative tools to becoming integrated audio-visual metaphors embodied within the score, the *mise-en-scène*, and even the emotional tone of the scenes. Tools from musical metaphor theory help define and refine how this progression takes place through sound design. This progression reveals an underlying cohesion in the cinematic journey of the series—one in which the materiality of writing is transformed into a multi-sensory metaphor, binding the narrative visually and aurally as the films move further from textual fidelity and toward expressive cinematic autonomy.

From the perspective of adaptation theory, this shift exemplifies what Linda Hutcheon terms the “palimpsestic nature” of adaptation; a creative layering of meaning across media in which the source text is both visible and overwritten (2013). Rather than simply transferring content from book to screen, the films reinterpret key elements—like writing—so that they function differently in a visual and auditory medium. As a result, these evolving representations of written objects help hold the films together, offering a symbolic thread that links diverse directorial styles even as the films move further from the narrative structure and stylistic tone of the novels.

5. Discussion of Sound Design for Written Words

5.1. Indicators of Power Through Audio-Visual Metaphors for Order and Disorder

Written words hold power in Harry Potter films. While viewer perspectives are shaped by how we hear the films with underscore and sound effects, the characters gain understanding for themselves by reading and seeing. For instance, in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus 2001), viewers first learn that Harry is magical when he speaks with a snake at the zoo because the shimmery sound of “Hedwig’s Theme” played on celeste and strings tells us so (Webster 2012), but Harry only learns for himself when he reads his acceptance letter from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. From the moment Harry spies the first letter, we hear “Hedwig’s Theme”, alerting film viewers to the magic and significance of the item. Then, amplified paper sounds (i.e., a rapid shuffling of accumulating mail, which presumably characters can hear), traditional orchestral underscore, and owl screeches alternate in prominence as more letters arrive, until the dynamic sound of letters barrelling through the fireplace dominates over the orchestra. That is, the power of the letters is represented with a purposefully out-of-balance sound design. As such, the sound of papers represents the written objects and also functions as a soloist voice sounding collaboratively with, yet also above, the orchestra. Moreover, the example establishes a symbolic audio-visual relationship indicating the significance of written items by using the natural sounds associated with the item and musical underscore; a pattern of correlation continuing through the series that assists viewers in their understanding of the narrative. Further, the example frames magical power in terms of elements of disorder, rather than expected order. As specific examples demonstrate, written items lacking power are, conversely, left unaccompanied.

The letters themselves are aesthetically pleasing and include special qualities such as a large red wax seal, the Hogwarts crest and distinctive lettering. So too, the accompanying musical theme “Hedwig’s Theme” is a pleasurable, distinctive marker of the fantasy world, using traditional musical signifiers for fantasy such as celeste, triple metre, an angular, chromatic melody, and unusual harmonies (Webster 2012, 2018). Later, when Harry reads

his acceptance letter for himself aloud, we hear Hedwig's theme again; that is, Harry's voice becomes a proxy for the voice of the paper with accompanying orchestral underscore. Music and visuals work in tandem to express the power of the moment: Hogwarts, the authoritative magical institution, affirms the truth that Harry has magical powers, and offers him a powerful experience of identity and belonging.

Dialogue throughout the films establishes how Harry stays emotionally connected with his friends and friendly mentor Hagrid over the summer holidays through letter writing. Indeed, in the second film, Dobby the House Elf tries to convince Harry not to return to Hogwarts by confiscating Harry's mail and claiming that his friends "don't even write" to him (Columbus 2002). Although Harry reads out the Hogwarts invitation addressed to him in the first film, personal correspondence in the later films often includes the voice of the sender (rather than the recipient) as part of the sound scoring, and audio-visual alignments tend to convey authoritative seriousness through audio-visual alignment (even in cases where there are also comedic elements)³. In the following examples, the content of the letters expresses emotion (which is a typical role of sound scoring according to Gorbman's third principle)⁴, yet provides little information to advance the plot (even though this is the usual role of dialogue). Instead, through narrative content and sound-scoring, the written words function in parallel with underscore.

When Harry sends a letter to his Godfather Sirius in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), the visual of Hedwig's flight reinforces the magic culture of owl mail delivery, while her passage over the natural landscape facilitates a transition from one scene at Hogwarts school to the natural wooded area beyond. Overlaying the visuals, we hear Harry's voice reciting the letter, beginning with "Dear Padfoot, I hope you're alright . . ."; the content of the letter reveals Harry's inner world in his own words and furthers viewer understanding of Harry's emotional connection with Sirius. In this example, the written word is a creative act of personal expression. "In written speech, we are obliged to create the situation, to represent it to ourselves. This demands detachment from the actual situation" (Vygotsky [1934] 1986, pp. 181–82). Harry's voice features as a solo sound above the orchestral underscore, which in turn features a French horn (i.e., a signifier for Harry's emotional world and integrity throughout the films drawn from historic roots in music for drama) (Webster 2009). Harry's acknowledgement that "It's winter now" reinforces the seasonal transition, while the sounds of owl screeches and other animal sounds from the natural surroundings creates a sense of place and of a core emotional state, even as Harry's letter describes his feelings of liminality, of not yet finding his place. In other words, through the audio-visuals, we observe how Harry writes himself into his own narrative.⁵

Different combinations of sound-scoring among the film-making teams allow for nuanced interpretations of the narrative. Noticeably, the absence of sound effects for magic in the latter example (even though magic is present) deemphasises magical power while the inclusion of underscore and natural sounding effects highlights emotional truth. So too, some other book-learned spells reflecting deep emotion are likewise accompanied by underscore but few magical sound effects; for instance, when Hermione casts the "Obliviate" spell to wipe away her parents' memories, and when she conjures a wreath at the grave of Harry's parents, both in *The Deathly Hallows, Part I* (Yates 2010).

In contrast, when Ron Weasley receives a scolding letter from his mother (a "Howler") in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), underscore gives way for Molly Weasley's discomposed voice expressing distress at Ron's behaviour. At first, lighthearted orchestral music accompanies the flight of the Weasley's owl, Errol, who flies clumsily into a large bowl of cereal in the course of delivering the letter. The audio-visual comedy of the owl's entry (discussed further in Webster 2018, p. 15) makes a contrast with dialogue that follows, warning how the experience of the letter could be "awful", and all underscore stops once

Ron opens the letter. The red envelope, satin ribbon, and parchment letter form the shape of a mouth with teeth and tongue, and we hear Ron's mother's powerful voice yelling with authority as if amplified through a musical sound system, "Ronald Weasley, how dare you steal that car! I am absolutely disgusted. . ." The voice of the letter-writer dominates, holding the attention of everyone at the table, and also dominates the sound design for viewers as well; no other sound occurs while the letter speaks. The scene ends with the heightened rhythmic sound of the letter blowing a raspberry in Ron's face with its ribbon tongue, then self-destructing by shredding itself into paper bits on the table. Aside from the contextual information that Ron's father is "facing and inquiry at work", the tenor of the letter is emotional, not informational. John Williams' score for the film rarely leaves dialogue without musical commentary, yet Molly Weasley's letter provides an example in which dialogue is made musical through amplification and rhythm such that it functions like and takes over for underscore. When the sound of the letter overrides underscore, it reinforces the power of written words within the world the characters inhabit, much as it reinforces the power of Mrs. Weasley's authority and Ron's sub-ordination within the family hierarchy.⁶

Indeed, varied parchment paper documents accompanied by or participating in musical rhythm reflect dichotomies of order and authority, both natural organisational flow and disruption on the one hand, and authoritarian control and resistance on the other. When Argus Filch receives permission slips for the Hogsmeade excursion in the courtyard of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), the students submit their parchment slips in close intervals, and we hear the percussive sounds of paper in steady rhythm, alternating with the flapping wings of birds and the tolling of the clock bell. Harry's unsigned permission slip disrupts the flow of sound and reflects how his hopes to attend the excursion are likewise disrupted. The rhythm of papers occurs prominently again in *The Deathly Hallows I* when newspapers bearing the headline "Undesirable No. 1" with a photo of Harry Potter fly rhythmically through the Ministry of Magic, and when the sounds of a rustled newspaper at the Order Headquarters with the headline, "Mudbloods: the danger they pose" forms a rhythm with the underscore. In these examples, we see and hear how the use of written objects integrated with the sound scoring contributes to the emotional tension of the scenes, defining critical moments through continued or disrupted rhythms. While the contents of *The Daily Prophet* are unreliable, the expression of the written items reflects the authority and order that the characters experience.

Power through order is also represented with curated musical textures for written items. When Harry visits the Ministry of Magic in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), a flock of inter-departmental memos shaped like paper airplanes fly in orderly formation past a golden statue in the vaulted space while underscore supports the authoritative grandeur of the Ministry and sound effects reflect the passage of the paper through the air. In this scene, order, paperwork, and visual opulence are linked with similarly ordered musical gestures in which various instrument groups parallel the movements and grand space of the building to support the authority of the institution (Webster 2018, p. 22). Later in the same film, when student Padma Patil charms a flying paper bird that is visually similar to the interdepartmental memos, it delights her classmates; but the gentle flute melody supporting the flight is abruptly interrupted when Prof. Umbridge incinerates the bird with a flick of her wand. This provides an example of how audio-visuals of paper convey uncomfortable levels of authoritarian order and control, represented by disrupted sound design.

At Hogwarts, Umbridge wields control over perceptions of truth with written words in many ways, including firing Prof. Trelawney while holding an official parchment Order of Dismissal (bearing the name of Umbridge's own title, "Inquisitor")⁷, requiring

students in her classroom to copy texts “four times for maximum comprehension,” punishing Harry with writing lines using a quill that etches the forced confession “I must not tell lies” into the flesh of his hand, and publishing dozens of Educational Decrees that are nailed to the Hogwarts castle walls as framed parchment proclamations (Yates 2007). A montage of Umbridge’s controlling actions, including the nailing of proclamation plaques, is accompanied by composer Nicholas Hooper’s musical set-piece in schottische dance rhythm, titled “Professor Umbridge” in published materials. Gorbman describes set-pieces as an audio-visual strategy creating “spectacle”, evoking “a larger-than-life dimension which, rather than involving us in the narrative, places us in contemplation of it” (Gorbman 1987, p. 68). The lighthearted music accompanying Umbridge’s violent actions make a curiosity out of the circumstances, helping viewers to feel as baffled as the characters are by the turn of events. When caretaker Argus Filch steps up a ladder to hammer in the proclamations, we hear both the sound of his boots and the sound of nails hammered into stone alternating in rhythmic collaboration with the dance metre of Umbridge’s theme, then visuals focus in on various decrees including one that states “No Music”. Hooper uses musical elements such as traditional 19th century European metres, consonant harmonies, and diatonic melodies (i.e., metaphors for musical order through their association with the familiar, conservative musical language) to reflect organisational order, while the juxtaposition of lighthearted music and aggressive visuals amplifies the absurdity to a level of emotional pain.

Audio-visuals of written words are included in a variety of scenes to reflect both growing and releasing narrative tension alongside themes of order and disorder. For instance, we see tumbling, flying newspapers in the opening scene of *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), giving a visual representation of the rising, changing wind, a metaphor for both Harry’s dysregulation in confrontation with his cousin Dudley’s gang, and for the rise of danger as the malevolent dementors approach. Later in the film, students’ exam papers fly up in the air when the Weasley twins disrupt the examinations, providing an emotional release to the tension of Umbridge’s tight hold on control.

Hooper uses similar strategies to a different end in a set-piece later in the film, called “Fireworks” in published materials. This time, Hooper uses musical metaphors for *order* that make a transition to metaphors for *subverted order* in tandem with increasingly chaotic visuals of parchment paper to reflect student resistance and rebellion, thus using rhythm to humorously subvert the tension reflected in Umbridge’s set-piece (Webster 2022, pp. 14–15). At first, we see ordered rows of students silently taking written exams, then, when Fred and George Weasley fly into the room setting off magical fireworks, we hear four phrases of a musical reel organised with repetitions (AABBCCDD), melodically and rhythmically aligning with the visual displays of the disruption of the exam papers and other physical gags. Then, the music makes a transition into a polyrhythmic frenzy, without clear melody or harmony, as a giant, fiery dragon-shaped firework concludes the mayhem by chasing Umbridge out of the room and exploding. The explosion disrupts the hanging plaques of proclamations: underscore stops completely while glass shatters like a metaphorical percussion solo, then falls collectively to the floor in a heap of broken frames and torn paper without other musical accompaniment. Students and other staff follow the Weasley twins’ flight to the courtyard where fragments of parchment continue to billow through the air and the original, four orderly phrases of the reel resume, providing film viewers with further cathartic reward for the transgressions against Umbridge’s control. In other words, while Umbridge has one view on *order* based on her authority, the form of the music during the Fireworks set piece (i.e., from order to chaos and back to order) reflects a view in which student agency is the natural order.

5.2. Metaphors for Naturalness and Intention in the Sounds of Textbook Spells

Written words have power, especially when uttered by informed, capable witches and wizards. Magical youth learn spells, charms, potions, and divination with textbooks, and become more effective with guidance and practise. According to the Special Collections & Archives Research Center at the Oregon State University Libraries (The Significance of the Written Word 2025), “Writing is the representation of language through the use of an established selection of markings”; following suit, magic words are developed in speaking, then are recorded with writing to preserve and communicate knowledge across time and space so that they can be uttered again at another time. In his introduction and throughout his dissertation, Dawda (2006, p. iii) explains that, “writing codifies speaking, thus turning words into objects of conscious reflection”. In the Harry Potter films, sound scoring highlights the power of the information in action, sometimes using the voices of the characters, and at other times, using the metaphorical voices of magical items in order to express how words that we generally comprehend are transformed into a magical power beyond our full understanding.⁸ In Professor Flitwick’s class, in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus 2001), Harry and the other students practise the textbook spell “*Wingardium Leviosa*” to raise a feather from the table, but Hermione Grainger is the first to succeed. During the students’ failed attempts there is no music, but when Hermione lilts “*Wingardium Leviosa*” with the correct rhythm and intention, her feather floats into the air, and flutes and celeste accompany with an ascending melodic gesture, highlighting the magical outcome for the viewer.⁹

Sounds for spells in the first films follow the mechanics of the magical process, including incantations and wand movements. While Professor Flitwick instructs the students to “swish and flick” their wands, the film sound is more often a short flick than a longer “swish” or “whoosh”, reflecting how film interpretations sometimes vary from the books. Further, sound-scoring helps verify the magical outcomes, with a bias towards spells learned from the in-world books. When Ron Weasley chants words learned by rote from his brothers in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus 2001), “Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow, turn this stupid fat rat yellow”, we hear a wand whoosh and a squeal from his pet rat, but the spell has no magical effect, and thus no further sound support either. Alternatively, when Hermione fixes Harry’s glasses in the same scene using the spell “*Oculus Reparo*” learned from her summer reading, we hear a “tika-tika-tika-snap” of the mending glasses; the metaphorical sound of the repair reflecting the successful outcome with sound. Further, spell mastery develops over time. The first time Hermione fixes Harry’s glasses, the repair sounds like a rickety ratchet, but when she fixes his glasses the following year in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), the repair sounds like a sweep of orchestral chimes.

In the following four films, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), and *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2007), the power of textbook spells is often framed in terms of naturalness, although the direct connections with written texts in the later films is sometimes unseen or abstract. Over the course of the films, the filmmakers made a shift from portraying the magical world as wholly fantastical to portraying magic as natural and normal within the Wizarding context (Webster 2012). As Natov (2002, p. 129) states, “The two realms, characterised in literature as the genres of romance and realism, are located in the imagination, which is, always, created by and rooted in the details of everyday life”. While in the early films, characters give voice to spells, in the later films, spells are often cast silently, as if the magic has naturally internalised over time, and then, often, written objects themselves often ‘speak’ through sonic textures and design, reflecting a natural (or sometimes distinctly unnatural) voice of the item or magic at play.

In some cases, sound scoring extends to the seemingly natural voices of other objects that are directly involved in the magical process. For instance, in the opening scene of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), the prominent, foreground fluty crescendo of Harry's wand is the first thing we hear, even before the main movie theme (i.e., "Hedwig's Theme") weaves along with the opening title. As the camera shot flies through the air and through Harry's bedroom window, we hear Harry use the incantation "*Lumos maxima*" under his bed covers in order to illuminate the open page of his spell book showing illustrations of effective wand use. We do not hear any sounds of the pages or book this time, but we hear the metaphorical voice of his wand as a wooden instrument, conveying the power of the words (and affirming the power of the item) as a solo instrument in tandem with the orchestral underscore following Harry's incantation.

Similarly, when students learn the art of reading tea leaves ("Tessomancy") in the same film, we see textbooks on every table, and hear Ron's book pages gently rustle as he reads, but more prominently hear orchestral chimes tinkling in parallel rhythmic texture with the heightened sound of clinking tea cups with tea leaves, which Trelawney explains contain "the truth [lying] buried like a sentence deep within a book waiting to be read". In other words, the sound of tea cups reflects the magic contained in the tea leaves to be read much as the sound of paper reflects the magic contained in standard written items in other books.

However, reading the book (or reading the tea leaves) does not make magic happen without natural ability, and sound scoring indicates narrative truth even when varied interpretations of visuals alone might have merit. When Ron reasonably improvises an interpretation of Harry's tea leaves while quickly perusing his textbook, "Harry's got sort of a wonky cross; that's trials and suffering. That there could be the Sun; that's happiness. So, you're gonna suffer, but you're gonna be happy about it" (Cuarón 2004), no sound-scoring accompanies his dialogue, reinforcing a lack of magical insight. But when Trelawney reads the leaves directly, immediately drops the cup, and dramatically exclaims, "My dear, you have the grim", we hear a wash of dissonant sound including prepared piano culminating in the orchestrated sound of a howling wolf or dog¹⁰. While both Ron's and Trelawney's readings are arguably cold guesses, the sound-scoring indicates the greater narrative relevance of Trelawney's interpretation in the context of the film through the naturalness of tea-cup sounds (both source and underscore), augmented by the metaphorical extraordinariness of the prepared piano, and the primal sound of a howling animal (perhaps alluding to the Grim, or perhaps hearkening a perception of an incorruptible truth of nature).

When Harry later witnesses Professor Trelawney deliver a prophecy while in a trance state, the film's sound design powerfully reinforces both the significance and the authenticity of her words by echoing the sound design of the latter scene. A delicate tinkle of orchestral chimes begins as Harry enters the classroom, suggesting a magical atmosphere in parallel with the tea leaves scene. This quickly gives way to an animal howl and a dissonant wash of sound—featuring elements like prepared piano—as Trelawney places her hand on Harry and begins to speak. Her voice shifts into a primal, guttural, double-toned affectation as she delivers a prophecy about events to occur that very evening. The trance ends abruptly when she coughs and reverts to her normal tone. This sonic triptych—the shimmering chimes, the discordant soundscape, and the vocal transformation—serves as a metaphorical cue for the presence of magic, the weight of the prophecy, and the primal truth it reveals. This example illustrates how the sound design associated with written elements, e.g., the tea leaves) aligns with or anticipates similar sound strategies used for spoken prophecies, suggesting a continuity in the sonic frameworks for different forms of textual expression. Further, it demonstrates how metaphors for naturalness underscore magic

and truth, while simultaneously, sound metaphors for un-naturalness indicate something significant or extraordinary.

A later scene in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007) echoes this earlier sonic structure, deepening the metaphorical role of sound in relation to both written and spoken texts. As Professor Umbridge sips tea in her office prior to meeting with Harry, the delicate tinkling of celeste and the soft clink of porcelain create an atmosphere of deceptive calm—sonically linking back to the chimes heard in Trelawney’s prophecy and the tea leaves scene from third film. However, when Umbridge presents Harry with an enchanted quill to write the line “I must not tell lies”, the score shifts dramatically. A dissonant soundscape emerges, underscored by a rising horn line, shimmering cymbals, and an enigmatic unnatural human voice. Hooper’s sonic triptych echoes Williams’s score for *The Prisoner of Azkaban* but diverges in subtle ways: it replaces orchestral chimes with celeste, substitutes a howl with a manipulated sound of human voice (perhaps reflecting Umbridge’s manipulation of Harry), and layers in sound samples alongside orchestral dissonance. These elements imbue the scene with significance, even as Umbridge’s deception creates a sense of cognitive dissonance. As the words cut into Harry’s skin, the human voice embedded in the music seems to externalise the act of inscription—metaphorically turning the written words into a voice that infiltrates him from within. When Umbridge hears his grunts of pain and asks for his verbal reaction, Harry simply replies, “Nothing.” This ambiguous, seemingly defiant response raises a critical question: will the words take hold, or has he resisted their power? Later in the same film, when Umbridge begs Harry to speak on her behalf as she is dragged away by centaurs, his calm retort—“I must not tell lies”—suggests that the phrase has indeed imprinted itself upon him. Whether this reflects internalisation, irony, or transformation, the moment reveals how written text, through sound and repetition, becomes a voice that both echoes and reshapes identity.

Although the textbook resources and written spells are not always made visible in the later films, the implication that Harry uses magic gleaned from the written resources available either through Hogwarts coursework or the Hogwarts library is clear¹¹. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is the primary magical education institution in the English speaking world with the largest, most historically significant library collection; the unchallenged premise in the narrative is that most if not all magic is learned from (or at least learned about) from written documentation at the school. Pierce (2004, p. 3) notes how “information-seeking behaviour, both in and outside of the library, is integral” to the plots of young contemporary fantasy fiction series such as Harry Potter. “The trio of Harry, Ron and Hermione make efforts to locate information on topics ranging from alchemist Nicholas Flamel, plants with magical properties, and spells to allow them to assume others’ identities” (ibid.). Throughout the films, Hermione regularly recounts doing some “light reading” and spending time “in the library”, and a number of library scenes occur for a variety of reasons, including study, investigation, the Duelling Club, teenage gossip, passing notes, and so on; reflecting the everyday experiences students have in this third space outside of their classrooms and dormitories. McLaughlin (2024) notes how the Hogwarts library is understaffed, employing only one librarian, Irma Pince, for the whole collection. This creates some barriers for students, such as limitations on available hours to check out books, and also possibilities, such as significant freedom to explore resources outside of the Restricted Section. Madame Pince appears in the Harry Potter films, but is not actively featured in her role as librarian.

In *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), sounds for spells, though often non-verbal, continue to evoke natural forces, thus further extending the metaphor of a natural “voice” of magic from the spell book, to the wands and teacups, to the magical characters themselves. For instance, we hear wind when Dumbledore’s wand draws out a visually whispy

memory from his mind, and hear rumbling thunder along with a trumpet melody when Viktor Krum submits a scrap of paper with his application for the Tri-Wizard tournament (Newell 2005). During the death defying duel between Dumbledore and Voldemort in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), the sound design evokes extreme natural forces, including an electrical storm, balls of fire, a lion's roar, deluges of water, etc., as if the great wizards themselves are forces of nature. Similarly, when Dumbledore and Harry fight for their lives in the Horcrux cave in *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2009), the orchestral underscore matches the cycle of sounds for fire and water to reflect the integration of natural and magic forces.

While the sound-scoring for benevolent characters' spells appears natural, following patterns often found in the scores of fantasy films, the sound-scoring for malevolent characters' spells is often metaphorically unnatural, and perhaps beyond comprehension, harnessing resources that are beyond nature's forces. For instance, when the Goblet of Fire predictably emits scraps of parchment bearing names of students who will legitimately participate in the Tri-wizard tournament, we hear seemingly natural sounds such as the heightened crackling of the fire blended with thunder and wind along with different instrumentation for each student: clarinet and other woodwinds for Viktor Krum, harp and flutes for Fleur Delacroix, and French horns for Cedric Diggory (Newell 2005). However, when the Goblet unpredictably emits Harry's name, which has been submitted with dark magic, the flame flashes with the sound of an electric laser, shifting erratically in stereo. The paper with Harry's name flies up with a parallel accompaniment played by flutes and strings recalling the arrival of the Hogwarts acceptance letters in the first film, and the amplified fluttering of the scrap of paper itself marks the item as significant. While the vocabulary of sound effects and instrumentation is familiar, the changing sound of the flame suggests a magic element that is beyond the natural experience in the magical world.

For more complex, defensive spells, the importance of mentorship supersedes written text, as demonstrated in the examples of the Duelling Club held in the library in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), Harry's private lessons with Professor Lupin on the *Patronus* charm in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), and with Professor Snape on *Occlumency* in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007) and *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2009), the meetings of Dumbledore's Army in the Room of Requirement in *The Order of the Phoenix*, and conversely, with the woefully inadequate children's picture book issued by Professor Umbridge in the same film (which students find completely unhelpful en lieu of true mentorship). Music for these examples often supports the authority of the speaker rather than the mechanics of the incantation or the outcome, and the intentionality of the speaker (i.e., their natural internal voice) is reflected with varied sound-scoring both in underscore and effects¹².

For instance, when Harry learns the advanced *Patronus* charm from Professor Lupin in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), Lupin's dialogue relays how Harry must use the strength of his emotions for the spell to work, and we hear both (1) Harry's exertion through the increased volume of his voice as he declaims the charm, "*Expecto Patronum*", and (2) representation of his emotional intentions through the changing instrumentation in the underscore¹³. When Harry practises against a less dangerous boggart and is unsuccessful, the dissonant, breathy sound of the boggart dominates. When Harry is successful, the harmonious orchestral underscore rises to the fore with other-worldly choral voices, replacing the sound of the boggart. Similarly, on Harry's first attempt against a horde of dangerous dementors, we hear the whoosh of his spell, but no choral voices: the spell is not strong enough. Then, when Harry successfully harnesses his emotions, we hear an orb of magical sound, otherworldly choral voices, a rising French horn melody associated throughout the film with Harry's inner world, and a fanfare of brass as visuals of a gleaming corporeal stag (i.e., the holographic representation of Harry's *Patronus* shield) dispels the dementors.¹⁴

While the alternation of sound designs is similar to the first examples of textbook spells (i.e., in which orchestral underscore supports successful but not unsuccessful results), the sound designs for the later films tend to reflect characters' inner resources and intentions and are therefore more often varied.¹⁵

Underscore continues to reflect the spell-caster's mindset when Mad-Eye Moody's imposter turns Draco into a weasel in *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005); as he repeatedly spins Draco in the air, the cognitive dissonance of the rollicking underscore reflects Mad Eye's playfulness, even though the event is disturbing to others. Likewise, eerily cheerful music accompanies Mad-Eye's rogue demonstration of the unforgivable *Imperius* curse on a spider for his students. The contrast between music and visuals is jarring, yet plausibly reflects Mad Eye's disconnection from the consequences of his actions. At least some of the students join with laughter while the spider flies around under the *Imperius* curse, but the underscore becomes more dissonant and angular, metaphorically aligning with the harmful impact on the spider as it squeaks in pain when Mad Eye inflicts the excruciating *Cruciatius* curse. Only when Mad-Eye kills the spider with the *Avada Kedavra* curse does the music become sombre, aligning with the visual focus on the faces of the stunned, emotionally impacted students. Thus, this example varies earlier patterns in a longer form: first, sound scoring reflects the intention of the spell caster, then reflects the impact of the spell, then reflects the emotional impact on the onlookers.

5.3. Reliable Metaphors for Trust and Deception in the Sound of Personal Accounts

While spell books hold powerful magical knowledge, other books have a power unto themselves, and sound scoring articulates and reinforces the embodied voice of the magical written items as if they were characters. When Harry opens a book in the restricted section of the library in *The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), the shape of a human face stretches out of the book's page accompanied by a man's primal scream, muffled when Harry closes the book. The scream cuts through the texture of the underscore much as the face disrupts the one-dimensional page. When Harry opens *The Monster Book of Monsters* in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), piccolo gestures ascend over pulsing strings and winds as the book behaves as a monster might: snarling, chasing, and nibbling around the room leaving bits of paper in its wake. As students later learn from Hagrid, they can interactively maintain control of the book by stroking its spine, calming the monster book as if it were a pet.

The *Marauder's Map* provides an example of interactive written magic that reflects narrative truth; in fact, even when the information seems doubtful, the Map is trustworthy and the sound design points us to that truth. The Map provides an objectively accurate visual representation of the Hogwarts castle and anyone inside it to anyone who "Solemnly swears" that they are "up to no good", but responds extemporaneously in writing with the subjective cheeky personalities of the original map-makers to anyone trying to deceptively use the map without authority. When the Weasley twins bequeath the *Marauder's Map* to Harry in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), we hear elevated sounds of the parchment unfolding reinforcing the trusted authority of written items as their own magic. However, despite the Weasley twins' enthusiastic testimony, Harry is not certain whether the map's information is trustworthy when he sees a banner bearing Peter Pettigrew's name travelling around the castle (i.e., a character who reportedly died at the hands of Sirius Black). Each time Harry sees Pettigrew's name on the map, viewers hear a brief melodic figure on harpsichord (Webster 2009, p. 455)¹⁶. The coincidence of name and motif comes full circle when Scabbers the rat transforms into Peter Pettigrew while scampering across an antique keyboard in the Shrieking Shack at the end of the film, revealing key aspects in the mystery regarding Peter Pettigrew's deception. In other words, despite the narrative uncertainty about what the Map shows, the sound design reveals its trustworthiness.

When Snape commands the *Marauder's Map* to "Reveal [its] secrets", the enshrined personalities of the map's authors respond with insult; handwritten words appear that Harry reads aloud. However, when Harry interacts with Tom Riddle's diary (Columbus 2002), which similarly preserves Tom's 16 year old personality, underscore speaks for Tom en lieu of a human voice, helping to maintain Tom's deception. As Harry examines the diary, we hear the elevated sounds of flipping pages, then heightened special effects for liquid when ink falls on a page, then prepared piano and orchestral chimes as the ink spreads then disappears; all signifiers for the item's magical power in the context of these films. When Harry writes his name in the book with his quill, his text disappears, and a new text appears, answering as Tom Riddle with the sound of timpani; Harry continues, writing questions in the book, reading them aloud as he goes. New answers appear, accompanied first by woodwinds, then by brass and choral voices. As depicted in the film, Harry's body completely disappears into the book at Tom's invitation to experience the curated history that Tom wishes to show him in order to mislead him. The sound design both represents and obscures the voice of the diary, giving power to and embodying Tom's words without revealing his voice or image until Harry has been lured into the pages. When Harry destroys the diary at the end of the film, the sound effects make it appear as if Harry is stabbing into flesh rather than a book, thus further contributing to the idea that written items embody characters.

Indeed, "books can be misleading", as Gilderoy Lockhart notes in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002). Lockhart's fame gives him social power, but any magical significance in his so-called memoirs is not reflected in the sound design. When Harry and the Weasley family enter Flourish and Blotts bookstore to purchase school books, there is no music. A musical motif for Lockhart himself incorporates an assortment of flourishes and trills in alignment with visuals of the character, contributing to caricature and comic distancing, but no music or sound effects align with visuals of his books; neither as he showcases them or as he hands them to Harry (Webster 2009, p. 564; Cross 2008, p. 89)¹⁷. Likewise, no sound supports Lockhart citing his own research, exclaiming, "see my books" in the course of the Duelling Club. As dialogue later reveals, Lockhart is a fraud who has plagiarised the contents of the books by interviewing trailblazing wizards, then wiping their memories and claiming their intellectual property for himself.¹⁸ Although the lack of sound scoring for Lockhart's texts and memoirs accurately reflects the character's questionable magical abilities, it does not reflect the high value magical content inside the books that Lockhart has stolen. That is, sometimes there is more than one perspective with merit, and filmmakers choose to highlight only one.

However, Lockhart lacks the prowess needed to demonstrate the magic he has published, and when he attempts to use it, we see (and hear) how he is not successful. For instance, when he unleashes Cornish pixies into the classroom (Columbus 2002), the twittering, fluttering sounds of the pixies overpowers both the underscore and the sounds of (1) Hermione's stack of Lockhart's books as it falls to the floor; (2) pages being torn from Lockhart's books; and (3) paper fragments flying into the air throughout the room. Harry effectively uses one of the books to wallop a pixie away from attacking Hermione's head; the whack of the book hitting the pixie is heard above the other aspects of sound design, and the pixie is jettisoned across the room; the capacity to be used as a physical weapon seems to be the book's only usefulness. When Lockhart casts a spell from his so-called memoirs, chanting "*Peskipiksi Pesternomi!*", nothing in the sound-scoring reflects that the spell has even occurred, let alone affected a magical outcome on the pixies.¹⁹ In other words, because of Lockhart's deception, his books hold no power beyond their mundane use as physical props.

In contrast, underscore enters in clear alignment when Harry opens the potions book once owned by the Half-Blood Prince in Professor Slughorn's potions class, and again while Harry skims through the text in the Gryffindor common room (both in *The Half-Blood Prince*, Yates 2007). The presence of music indicates the item's power, but it is an aspect of the narrative's mystery whether the contents of the book are true or morally trustworthy. Visuals show the book's text in the main frame of each parchment page, while the Half-Blood Prince's quill and ink handwriting refines and records specialised instructions in the margins. Whether good or bad, the writing offers a catalyst for change. While the book's dark antique binding with handwritten quill font recalls Tom Riddle's dark-magic diary from the second film, *The Chamber of Secrets*, the underscore accompanying the potions book is cheerful, not ominous, with rhythmically bubbly punctuation played by double and single reeds and flutes. Similar music cues from the first films signify curiosity and spectacle, and support slightly outrageous but ultimately delightful events such as the hatching of Norbert the dragon in *The Philosopher's Stone*, the arrival of the Knight Bus in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, and the magical extendable ear in *The Order of the Phoenix*. So, while Hermione remains suspicious of the book for much of the film, the underscore does not convey any concern²⁰.

However, Harry's unquestioning reliance on the book becomes problematic (i.e., this is a point of deception), Hermione challenges the ethics of using the book at all, and Ginny Weasley ultimately helps Harry permanently hide the book. Wolosky (2010) notes how several characters and ideas are mirrored in the series, and argues that Lockhart is a double to Harry, in part due to fame and in part because each participates in using the intellectual property of others. "Something like the question of plagiarism, raised by Lockhart's claims to magical exploits stolen from others, comes up again in Harry's use of the Half-Blood Prince's Potion Book. That's certainly how Hermione sees it: although Harry is at least doing the potion work, and just following, as he puts it, better instructions; and his main desire is to pass the course" (Wolosky 2010, p. 4) However, Harry eventually realises how using the book has compromised his integrity—even though the contents are trustworthy in their effectiveness—when he recklessly casts one of the Prince's spells indicated "for enemies" on Draco Malfoy, nearly killing him, and thus, he resolves to hide the book away.

In Dumbledore's words, "Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it" (Yates 2011). While sound scoring for Hogwarts students regularly gives sympathetic commentary when characters are struggling with their integrity (e.g., when Harry resists Voldemort's mind control in *The Order of the Phoenix*, when heartbroken Hermione casts the *Opugno* charm at Ron, and when Draco contemplates his role with the Death Eaters when a songbird is killed in the Vanishing Cabinets, both in *The Half-Blood Prince*), sound design does not tend to give commentary in the moments of choosing, in the circumstances where Harry and Draco's choices bear little difference from the actions of adversaries.²¹ When Harry skirmishes with Draco, hurling spells in the bathroom in *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2009), there is little if any underscore, only sound effects aligning rhythmically with movements of the characters, wand magic, gushing water, breaking porcelain and pipes, water on the floor, and vocal grunting indicating the impact of the spells on their bodies. When Harry casts the Prince's curse "*Sectumsempra*" at Draco, Harry stands in shadow and the moment is unaccompanied by underscore. When Harry walks out from the shadows into the light (both physically and metaphorically), he sees the physical harm he has caused to Draco's lacerated, bleeding body, and low, sustained, gently dissonant strings enter the sound design to accompany his realisation. Although Harry retreats, Snape enters and intervenes, musically chanting a spell in musical complement to the sustained underscore to repair

Draco's life-threatening injuries, thus providing another example of how powerful written magic is integrated into the sonic design.²²

There is likewise no sound design commentary when Harry uses the unforgivable curses in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007) or *The Deathly Hallows II* (Yates 2011). Similarly, when Draco disarms Dumbledore in the tower, intending to kill him (Yates 2009), we hear only the wand flick then the clatter of Dumbledore's wand to the floor. The minimal sound design for each example makes room for different perspectives on both Harry and Draco's morality. Although Dumbledore's dialogue expresses his belief that Draco is "not a killer", the lack of sound design allows viewers to hold space for the characters' vulnerabilities as well as the consequences of their actions.²³

Pugh (2020, p. 57) writes in consideration of Harry's moral failings, noting that while audiences "have little reason to doubt Harry's fundamental goodness . . . it is often necessary to question his ethics". Throughout the narrative, audiences are "concerned with and invested in Harry's growth as a moral character. Harry is constantly challenged by the choice between doing the 'right' or 'wrong' thing", aware of the rules yet regularly breaking them, and putting himself and others at risk (Wilkes 2021, p. 6). Likewise, Deavel and Deavel (2002, p. 51) argue that while it is clear "that Harry is our hero, it is not always clear to Harry."

Patient and Street (2009, pp. 201–26) note that while Harry's actions are imperfect, he maintains a sense of righteousness because the adversary, Voldemort, represents an absolute wrong. They further explain that Hitler, the Nazis, and the Holocaust "have become the quintessential evil or archetypal metaphor for evil" in western thought, and that the Harry Potter narrative uses historically referenced frameworks to symbolise evil without the need to define it. While this may be true of the books alone, this is different from the changing ways the filmmakers address the nuances of evil with musical leitmotifs for Voldemort, developing musically from militant to alarming, then deviant, to seductive, and reflecting narratively how evil is the opposite of goodness, then lacking goodness, then a deviation from goodness (Webster 2009, pp. 420–56). Nevertheless, Patient and Street's framework establishes that moral actions are those that fight Voldemort, regardless the cost. Wilkes (2021, p. 73) writes, "The dynamic of truth in the Potter universe is complex. As a series revolving around mystery, truth is by default important—truth is the answer and the solution. Seen as a Bildungsroman (or as a coming of age journey) truth is the stepping stone to adulthood . . .". Helgesen (2010, p. 79) similarly argues how "Truth on the metaphysical level is the discovery of good, evil, and death." From one perspective, then, Harry's actions are inherently good because they are in service of defeating Voldemort. From another perspective, sound design contributes to nuanced interpretations of Harry's emotional world and inner growth so regularly in the later films that the absence of sound design in Harry's crucible moments may reflect the metaphorical stepping stone into adulthood; that is, we assume his actions are trustworthy and without deception (even without sound design support) because they cumulatively follow other actions that have been on the path of goodness (and are supported with sound).

5.4. (Strategically) Unreliable Metaphors for Truth and Control in the Sound of Magical Media

Audio-visuals for written periodicals in Harry Potter films toy with our expectations for objective truth, and are frequently used as a mode of transition, showing the information characters have access to, rather than what is true. When Ron shows a newspaper photo of his family's holiday to Egypt in *The Daily Prophet* in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuarón 2004), we hear a middle eastern oboe melody as if it is a remembrance of their holiday. However, as the film shot expands, we see a boy in the background charming a rope from a basket, snake charmer style. Does the music come from *The Daily Prophet*?

Or from the rope in basket? The sound quality suggests diegesis, but can the characters hear the music? The musical ambiguity of the example reflects how truth is not always at the surface, and perhaps foreshadows the misleading reporting in *The Daily Prophet* yet to come.

Questions of objective truth play out further when predatory gossip columnist Rita Skeeter corners Harry for an interview during the Tri-Wizard Tournament in *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005). At first, silence contributes to the uncomfortable visuals; viewers may not know how to respond much as Harry is uncertain how he should respond. While journalism is meant to uncover the truth, Rita's manipulated dictation bears only a playful resemblance to the interview Harry is offering, reflected in how Rita's magic Quick Notes Quill playfully jots down her interview notes, accompanied by playful orchestral flourishes. According to Cross (2008, p. 89), caricature, such as that created by the underscore, reduces the character's legitimate threat through comic distancing.

Truth in Harry Potter's world operates on different levels, and honesty can mean different things at different times. Helgesen (2010, p. 79) writes, "On the mundane everyday level the theme of truth surfaces as Harry despairs over Rita Skeeter's journalistic manipulation and as Harry and friends lie to teachers to avoid trouble and adult interference." While people generally expect the media to present truth, and are likewise generally inclined to believe the media, they simultaneously acknowledge that the media can "twist, tweak and reinvent reality" (Helgesen 2010, p. 69). Much as Voldemort argues that there is no good and evil, "there is only power" in *The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), so too can characters experience how the morally inconsistent newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, wields power through the control of information regardless of intent or outcome.

Atmospheric underscore blends with nature to facilitate a meaningful transition using visuals of *The Daily Prophet* in *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2009). When Ron, Harry, and Hermione renew their bonds at the Burrow around burning kindling made from a wadded copy of *The Daily Prophet* paper, the sound of crackling embers comes to the fore once dialogue finishes, continuing the motif of written items sounding in their own terms. Then, the visuals focus on Draco's picture in the newspaper while an undulating strings pattern emerges in underscore. The melancholy pattern continues as the scene cuts to a downpour in Spinner's End where Draco's mother, Narcissa Malfoy, and Bellatrix Lestrange enter Snape's home. Inside the home, Snape sits reading his own copy of *The Daily Prophet*; the musical pattern stops abruptly when Snape closes the paper. Then, creating further symmetry in the transition, Narcissa makes her own bond with Snape: an unbreakable vow that sets critical events in motion. The undulating strings passage aligns with visuals of Draco, Narcissa, and Bellatrix, but falls silent when the focus shifts to Snape, subtly illuminating an otherwise ambiguous truth: Snape's deeper intentions remain obscured in the moment, yet readers of the completed book series would recognise the cue as a deliberate narrative ambiguity. Symbolically, the scene contrasts two uses of the same object—*The Daily Prophet*—revealing its dual status. In one setting, the paper is discarded and burned; in another, it is read and absorbed. It is simultaneously refuse and resource. Yet its influence is far-reaching: the newspaper's presence in both households reflects how access to information, even when contested or misused, serves to bind characters across magical society. These dual "bonds"—the rekindling of friendship at the Burrow and the literal Unbreakable Vow between Narcissa and Snape—are musically underscored through the persistent, circling ostinato. The motif sonically enacts the theme of binding (which also has metaphorical resonance with the concept of written items, which are also bound), whether through affection, obligation, or shared knowledge. In this moment, *The Daily Prophet* transcends its role as mere prop, becoming a narrative fulcrum—its physical presence, sonic framing, and symbolic duality exemplifying how written media in the

films grow from background detail into powerful instruments of emotional, narrative, and ideological cohesion.

News source visuals continue to convey narrative progress as well as the dynamic of misinformation surrounding Harry into the final films. The prologue of *The Deathly Hallows Part I* (Yates 2010) begins with Minister of Magic Rufus Scrimgeour giving a war-time press conference, followed by a montage of *The Daily Prophet* headlines speaking to the increasing violence amidst the rise of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Scrimgeour's opening words about "dark times" are supported by the rumble of timpani, and the intention of his final statement, "Your Ministry remains strong" is supported by the deep, sustained pitch of bass violins, both conveying strength, but immediately followed by a barrage of high pitched snapping sounds of journalists' flashing cameras. Scrimgeour speaks from intention, but the situation is no longer in his control. Much as the sharp sounds of flashing cameras sonically disrupt Scrimgeour's façade of Ministry strength, so too, we learn from character dialogue that Death Eaters attack, the ministry falls under fire, and Scrimgeour is killed, in the wake of the interview.

The Daily Prophet is the main source of news and propaganda in the Wizarding World. Over the course of the series "the Ministry moves from being something Harry worries will punish him for minor indiscretions to an institution that he thoroughly distrusts" (Wilkes 2021, p. 22). Indeed, dialogue reveals that Harry mistrusts Scrimgeour when he visits to deliver Dumbledore's *Last Will and Testament* to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Nevertheless, sound design reveals the trustworthiness of what Scrimgeour has come to offer²⁴. When the *Will* opens, we hear the gentle, natural sound of parchment, affirming authority through the document's natural voice, as well as the magical naturalness with which Dumbledore was associated in sound during life. After Scrimgeour bequeaths Dumbledore's *deluminator* to Ron (without significant sound scoring), underscore enters as he gives Hermione a copy of the children's book *The Tales of Beetle the Bard*, then music stops markedly when Harry receives the golden snitch, which does not have visible writing in that moment, but reveals it later. The alignment of underscore with the children's book indicates the significance of the written item, much as the abrupt silence when Harry receives the snitch equally draws our attention to this item. In a later scene when Harry puts his lips to the snitch, revealing the written phrase, "I open at the close", we hear a shimmer sound with glockenspiel, affirming the magical significance. Likewise, when Hermione reads "The Tale of Three Brothers" aloud from *The Tales of Beetle the Bard*, we hear varied sound-scoring. This example echoes other patterns for written items in which sound design for items of written magic is generally fixed in the first Potter films, sound design is varied to reflect content and context in the later films. Similarly, we find in this scene how, despite the audience's skepticism toward Scrimgeour and *The Daily Prophet*, the sonic treatment of Dumbledore's bequests subtly overrides distrust, suggesting that the written word—when accompanied by naturalistic and resonant sound—can still carry truth and authority, even when institutions do not.

Truth is relative in magical newspapers, and power is perceived as truth. *The Daily Prophet* uses the pervasive power of its institution to create the perception of its trustworthiness despite unreliable reporting. Throughout *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007) and *The Half-Blood Prince* (Yates 2009), visuals of students reading *The Daily Prophet* and *The Evening Prophet* occur in scenes on the Hogwarts train, the Hogwarts dining hall, and the Gryffindor common room, news clippings are posted in the Room of Requirement, and front-page headlines and photos accumulate in montage visuals. In many examples, the accompanying sound design affirms the power of the ministerial institution. In contrast, *The Quibbler* is a tabloid magazine without the social currency of or control from the Ministry of Magic, though according to Wilkes (2021, p. 23), includes stories that are much

closer to the truth than those printed by *The Daily Prophet*. Sound designs for *The Quibbler* reflect magical properties but not institutional power. For instance, crisp staccato flutes accompany Luna reading her copy of *The Quibbler* magazine upside down in *The Order of the Phoenix*, and intermittent glockenspiel accompanies Luna holding her Spectrespecs edition while wearing her own Spectrespecs in *The Half-Blood Prince* (i.e., all traditional instrumental signifiers for magic, but not power)²⁵. However, in *The Deathly Hallows Part I* (Yates 2010), Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover that Luna has been imprisoned due to her father's editorial role, and *The Quibbler* is now under Ministry control. "The idea that news media is written purely by "the deceivers" is an idea that the trio appear to initially overcome through their utilisation of *The Quibbler* . . . , only to discover that they have nonetheless been deceived in *The Deathly Hallows* by the same news source" (Wilkes 2021, p. 24). Nevertheless, the sound design for *The Daily Prophet* continues to reflect overt power while sound scoring for *The Quibbler* does not. When newspapers fly like memos in the still powerful Ministry of Magic (Yates 2010), the clatter functions like percussion with the underscore, contributing to the regimented atmosphere of authoritarian control, yet when papers fly up from the explosion at the home of Xenophilius Lovegood, the editor of *The Quibbler* (Yates 2011), there is no sound of paper included. This sound scoring not only allows viewers to see who has power, but also how characters in the story understand truth and power. By the final films, the characters are no longer simply reading written magic—they are immersed in a world constructed by it. Surrounded by flying papers, printed decrees, and manipulated headlines, they inhabit a magical world made of text, much as they themselves were once contained within the pages of the original novels. In this way, the omnipresence of paper becomes a metaphor for their narrative existence—bound, shaped, and ultimately transformed by the written word.

6. Conclusions

Across the Harry Potter films, written magic undergoes a striking transformation—from static props to dynamic, multi-sensory agents of power, identity, and narrative cohesion. As the films become increasingly independent from their literary source, writing acquires not just visual presence but metaphorical voice, amplified and shaped through music and sound design. These sonic cues construct a parallel system of narrative authority, guiding the viewer toward certain truths, values, and alignments—sometimes in tension with the characters' understanding, and even with the novels themselves. Ultimately, written words in the films do more than convey information: they are animated through sound into agents of growth, memory, resistance, and transformation. The examination of audio-visual relationships for written items distills ways that the filmmakers give voice to power and truth: magical, objective, authoritative, trusted, and moral. In this way, the audio-visual treatment of written magic reveals not just what is written, but what matters.

One key finding is that as the films develop their own cinematic identity—moving aesthetically beyond the framework of the source novels—the role of written words transforms and expands. These sound aspects are not simply alternating with visuals, but become increasingly integrated. Over time, motifs of written magic—along with broader themes of power and truth—are woven more tightly into the narrative through score and sound design. By the later films, written texts are no longer mere props or narrative devices, but take on roles as atmosphere, emotional underscore, and even character. This evolution mirrors the filmmakers' growing creative autonomy from the novels, and revealing how adaptation involves not just translation, but transformation.

Sound design plays a central role in this transformation, creating implicit value systems that guide how viewers interpret truth, power, and trust. While written items in the story often convey misinformation or uphold unjust authority, the accompanying sound designs—

whether naturalistic, orchestral, dissonant, or percussive—are trustworthy, remaining consistent guides for viewers, and marking particular texts as trustworthy, dangerous, authoritative, or unstable. The films thereby construct a parallel system of meaning independent from the books and sometimes varied between films: one that tells viewers which words matter most, whose voices are to be believed, and whose truths the filmmakers want to emphasise. Even when texts deceive characters, the audio-visual cues often offer viewers a deeper or more accurate narrative reading—an aural framing that reflects the filmmakers' interpretive stance on the source material.

As sound design begins to reflect character psychology, written magic becomes a medium for internal, ethical, and emotional development—not just plot advancement. In the early films, sound clearly maps onto the mechanics of spellcasting: words are spoken, followed by a wand whoosh, and then a magical outcome. But beginning with the third film, sound design begins to reflect the intention and maturity of the speaker. Musical underscore interacts with both magical outcomes and emotional subtext, gradually emphasising ethical nuance over mechanical explanation. By the fifth film, spells are often cast wordlessly, and underscore shifts its support—from the incantation itself to the effect on characters, targets, or witnesses. In parallel, written texts increasingly become sites of ethical negotiation and reflection, not just information or action. The progression from vocalised spells to wordless magic parallels a shift from external action to internal understanding. In this sense, written items—and their sonic signatures—mark stages in the characters' ethical and emotional development.

In this evolution, sound transforms the written word into a metaphorical voice, one that interacts with both the characters and the viewer. Through sound, written texts are not only read—they are heard, voiced, and animated. In many cases, the score or sound design becomes the voice of the text itself, mediating its meaning between characters and viewers. When characters speak words aloud, or when written words collaborate or fuse with musical textures, they are transformed into expressive agents of narrative and emotional force. Whether amplified, made musical, or sounding as if part of the orchestra itself, these moments lend written words a voice—one that resonates with both characters and viewers. Even sound effects tied to parchment, paper, or scrolls become part of a larger sound world that communicates authority, danger, or revelation.

The motif of parchment conveying authority, truth, and power through naturalistic sound appears throughout the series. Especially during the third through sixth films, magical items themselves are often voiced through metaphors of nature—wind, fire, water, animal calls—while adversarial written elements, such as propaganda or dark magic, are increasingly rendered through metaphors of unnaturalness or mechanisation. Written items evolve from singular objects with quirky behaviours to collections of texts with deep narrative function. In the later films, these items operate not only as props but as characters, actions, scenery, and emotional tone.

Over the course of the films, sound designs for written spells change throughout, as does the formula for depicting the mechanics of the magic, and implying the authority and power therein. In the first two films, characters recite spells, followed by a wand whoosh, culminating in sound effects representing the magical outcome. In the third film, sound design begins to support the authority of the speaker rather than the mechanics of the incantation or the outcome, and the intentionality of the speaker is reflected instrumentally and in varying combinations with sound effects. In general, as sound designs for the later films reflect characters' inner resources, the sound scoring becomes more varied. By the fifth film, many written spells are cast wordlessly, but spoken utterances reflect the physical outcomes of the spells because people (rather than things) are more often the targets. Further, underscore varies from indicating support for speaker's intentions, to

the impact of the spell on the target, to the emotional impact on the onlookers. While an absence of sound in the first films is an indication of a lack of magic, in the later films, a lack of underscore creates space for situations that are too complex to reflect with just one interpretation. As Harry and his friends periodically cast unethical spells in the later films, underscore no longer suggests the inner intentions of the speaker, rather, sound designs reflect conflicts of good and evil, or pare back sound design to allow for independent interpretation. Similarly, magic sound effects make a transition to sounds of weapons and explosions.

The role of printed media as a shared, equal access experience among characters in the magic world is highlighted throughout all eight films. While truth is relative in magical world periodicals, power is perceived as truth, and visuals of print media frequently integrate with sound design to reflect order and power. News is a source of emotion, and visuals of newspapers contribute to emotional tensions, participating in atmospheres, transitions, and montages. This creates a meta relationship between characters, narrative, and viewers in which characters are confronted with the information from the news sources (true or untrue as it is), while simultaneously, viewers observe both misleading headlines and true depictions of the authoritarian machine in the audio-visual collaborations. That is, audio-visual alignments for large collections of papers—news periodicals, letters, exams etc.—contribute to background contexts of control, order, and chaos.

As a coming of age journey, there is pleasure in the process, and the audio-visuals for written magic contribute to that wonder and delight. Texts provide primary sources of information for Harry and his peers, and are catalysts for growth, including opportunities for risk, not always knowing who holds power and what holds truth in the topsy-turvy landscape. Many circumstances defy expectations, and when music and visuals are likewise at odds, the disjointedness between the two reveals how characters navigate unfairness and pursuits of agency, sometimes with the pleasure of comic distancing. While the role of written items provides structure and order to Harry's (and viewers') understanding of the magical world, Harry experiences both authoritarian order with leaders such as Umbridge wielding paper as signs of authority and a seemingly natural order of student agency, as demonstrated by the sound design, especially, in the fireworks scene.

Ultimately, core themes of power and truth—bound up with trustworthiness, morality, and identity—are carried and complicated by the treatment of written magic in the films. These written items link characters across time and space: the Hogwarts library connects past and present; newspapers shape collective understanding; letters allow Harry to maintain personal relationships and write his own truth into being. Through the integration of music, sound, and text, the films not only show us what is written, but invite us to hear how it matters.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data was created for this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Although epic in scope, some scholars such as Wilkes (2021) argue that Harry's character is more closely aligned with the Bildungsroman. According to Lukács (1962, p. 33) this character type "generally possess a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice".
- ² Danijela Kulezic-Wilson notes how intentional collaboration between composer, director, and the sound team is a critical component of the new practise of integrated scores (p. 7).

At other times, characters read words they have not written. In *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002) Ron reads out a message in blood and Harry reads from a page found crumpled in Hermione's hand. In both cases, the dialogue furthers narrative progress, and is not supported by sound scoring.

Gorbman outlines how music is a signifier emotion by representing the irrational, romantic, and intuitive dimensions (1987). *The Prisoner of Azkaban* highlights nature and naturalness in visuals and sound design; a concept that is often associated with the perception of goodness in fantasy films, and that we see/hear in the sound design for written items. Curiously, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* is the only Harry Potter film that does not include Voldemort, the archetype of badness and evil. An exploration of how goodness and evil are presented musically across the films is included in Webster 2009, pp. 420–91.

Similarly, when Harry receives a letter from Mafalda Hopkirk of the Ministry of Magic relaying that he has been expelled from Hogwarts in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), audio-visuals juxtapose the humorous spectacle of a talking letter with the serious ramifications for Harry. In this case, Hooper's underscore continues in the spaces between spoken phrases while the letter is recited by Mafalda's voice.

Trelawney defends herself, exclaiming, "You can't do this", but Umbridge shows the Order of Dismissal replying, "Actually, I can", providing an example of paper holding authority within the magical world. Similarly, in the second film, Lucius Malfoy delivers an Order of Suspension to Dumbledore while holding a rolled scroll.

This is especially true in the earlier films. In the later films, spells are more often directed at characters rather than objects, and thus we regularly hear sound-scoring reflecting the impact of the magic on the person. Sometimes this includes utterances such as "ugh" or "ooph" while at other times this includes sound effects for physical impact. In the final two films, the flick of wands sounds like unsheathing knives, while the outcomes of spells sound like explosions, shattering glass, and fire; that is, metaphors that parallel the physical combat of war.

The relationship between sound-scoring for magic and a lack of sound for non-magic is established early on in the first film when actions in the muggle world lack music, while magical acts (in the muggle or magical world) are always accompanied by underscore (Webster 2012).

A prepared piano is an otherwise functioning piano with temporarily altered sounds through the placement of objects on or between the strings. Performances may include playing the strings directly instead of or in addition to playing the keys.

In addition to the written sources not always being visually present, in *The Order of the Phoenix* and later films, many spells are cast wordlessly as well, while the human targets vocalise the natural responses to the physical impact with an 'oof', 'ugh', or 'ow'. Thus, while wand sounds reflect intent, vocalisations verify outcomes, marking a difference from the early films in which incantations provide intent, and sound effects verify outcomes.

Varied sound design accompanies characters' use of the *Expelliarmus* spell as well; each utterance is accompanied by slightly different underscore and sound effects, often reflecting other sonic elements within the same scene.

It is unclear whether students regularly learn this charm at Hogwarts under ordinary conditions; however, Harry learns about the *Patronus* images cast by his father, mother, and Professor Snape, all of whom were students at Hogwarts along with his *Patronus* teacher, Professor Lupin.

These scenes and the alternation of music for rational and irrational experiences within the magical world are discussed in detail in Webster (2012).

Following suit, when Harry later mentors members of Dumbledore's Army to learn the same spell in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007), we hear the incantations and the wand 'whooshes', but the underscore supports the students' emotional mindset rather than the mechanics of the outcome.

While the instrument may allude to the antiquity of the castle, and is out of context for the orchestral underscore, there is no indication that the characters hear the motif.

Conversely, when Lucius Malfoy places Tom Riddle's diary into Ginny Weasley's cauldron in the same scene, we hear a distinctive "clunk", highlighting the significant of the item.

Although the act of fraud can be threatening, Lockhart is more shallow and narcissistic than he is evil. The theme that accompanies his appearances on screen symbolically depicts these attributes by using a one-dimensional, monophonic texture, lack of rhythmic consistency, and frequent superficial flourishes. In other words, as Verdi scholar De Van argues, the form of the music follows the form of the character (De Van 1998, p. 263).

In fact, one pixie immediately takes Lockhart's wand and uses it to break an iron chain suspending a dragon skeleton, reflected with a significant blast in the sound design. This reinforces how Lockhart is ineffective, not the spell or his wand.

However, an alternate interpretation of the audio-visuals is that Harry is in denial about the potential risk of the book, especially as he attempts to make a "Draught of Living Death" in Slughorn's class, much as Hagrid was in denial about the potential risks of hatching a dragon.

Harry's resistance to Voldemort's mind control, the *Opugno* charm, and Draco's use of birds is discussed in further detail in Webster (2018). Wolosky (2010) notes how Draco and Harry are also doubles; both rivals and opposites.

- 22 Snape's endeavours to protect Draco are directly related to the unbreakable bond made with Draco's mother, discussed in the next section, and also reflect Snape's hidden identity as the Half-Blood Prince. That is, he knows the antidote for the curse because he created the curse.
- 23 Thus, the sound design also makes space for personal interpretation about Dumbledore's trustworthiness in the final instalments of the series. Although visuals such as newspaper and book headlines contribute to dialogue challenging Dumbledore's intentions and integrity, I did not find any significant patterns within the accompanying sound design for these examples.
- 24 Though it is not clear from the film alone, readers of the book (which had been published prior to the release of the film) learn that Scrimgeour was killed after refusing to betray Harry's location; a further testament to his ultimate trustworthiness despite Harry's reservations.
- 25 While *The Daily Prophet* newspaper is seen in all eight films, *The Quibbler* magazine is seen in visuals for the fifth, sixth, and seventh films.

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Article

Is This the Gate?: J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and Its Operatic Adaptation

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Abstract: Premiered at the 2024 Adelaide Festival, *Is This the Gate?* is an opera excerpt composed by Nicholas Lens and set to a libretto written by J. M. Coetzee. It is adapted from the last section of Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), revolving around the eponymous character's trial before the gate in the afterworld. This article explores the literary, musical and dramaturgical elements of *Is This the Gate?* and contends that the adaptation, despite its brevity and incompleteness, indexes and reworks some of the most important intertexts, localities and motifs that connect Coetzee's early and late works. Allusions to Kafka and Dante frame the scenario for Costello in limbo—a state mirroring a writer's late-in-life predicament—while references to Australia's weather and fauna reflect Coetzee's relationship to his South African roots and adopted home. Further, Costello's conviction that she is “a secretary of the invisible” holds clues to Coetzee's deployment of voices and fictional personae since his debut, *Dusklands* (1974). The last few acts of the opera excerpt evoke themes of desire and mortality that chime with Coetzee's other Costello narratives, including his latest collection, *The Pole and Other Stories* (2023). The adaptation ends with Costello's declaration of her subjectivity, which suggests a writer's yearning and resolution to go beyond the threshold of life and death.

Keywords: J. M. Coetzee; Nicholas Lens; *Elizabeth Costello*; opera; adaptation

1. Introduction: Costello in Limbo

“Elizabeth Costello, author deceased, deceased. . .”

Is this the gate?

Can I pass through?

—Lens and Coetzee (2024), *Is This the Gate?* Act 1

On 8 March 2024, *Is This the Gate?*, an opera excerpt adapted from J. M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003), was premiered at Elder Hall during the Adelaide Festival in South Australia. With a libretto written by Coetzee, this is Belgian composer Nicholas Lens's second opera in collaboration with the novelist; the first one, *Slow Man*, adapted from Coetzee's 2005 novel, was first performed in Poznań, Poland, in 2012. Lens and Coetzee's third opera, as indicated in the program note for the 2024 premiere, will be an adaptation of *The Master of Petersburg* (1994).

As a preview of the full-fledged opera entitled *Costello in Limbo* (*Elizabeth Costello at the Gate*), this one-hour-long excerpt is adapted from the eighth lesson, “At the Gate”, in Coetzee's original novel. It delineates the eponymous character's trial before a board of judges who demands a statement of belief from the recently deceased author. Performed by Australian soprano Judith Dodsworth, Costello in this condensed production “eagerly

steals snippets of text from other soloists (out of the full opera)”—including the Gatekeeper, the Kapo, and three Judges—“and adopts them to make her point”, whereby “she confronts herself in an imagined duality with her own intellectual rebelling nature” (Lens and Coetzee 2024, program note).

Elizabeth Costello, the fictional Australian writer recurring in Coetzee’s oeuvre, plays a pivotal role in Lens’s first two adaptations of Coetzee’s novels. In the *Slow Man* opera, she is a mysterious and somewhat manipulative visitor—like a puppeteer (Kelly 2020, p. 199)—who arranges an intimate meeting between Paul Rayment, a man on the cusp of old age with an amputated leg, and the blind Marianna. But in the more recent production, a monodrama, Costello herself comes under scrutiny, unapologetically voicing her doubts and convictions before the gate in the afterworld.

At the premiere, Dodsworth (voice) stood alone on stage, accompanied by a chamber ensemble (reduced from the symphonic orchestra intended for the full-fledged opera) comprised of Elizabeth Layton (violin), Helen Ayres (violin), Stephen King (viola), Thomas Marlin (cello), Matthew Kneale (bassoon), and Michael Ierace (piano). The soloist’s incandescent purplish-blue jacket, for anyone au fait with Coetzee’s novel proper, harks back to Costello’s “blue cotton frock” as she “makes her way to the gate where a uniformed man stands drowsily on guard” (Coetzee 2003, p. 193). Dramaturgy (Rachel M. Cholz) is detailed in the program note, often giving stage directions in figurative language, which effectively dramatizes the performance when acted out. After a brief and disquieting prologue to the first act, the first violinist gravely announces: “Elizabeth Costello, author deceased, deceased. . .”. The introductory notes are sharp and dissonant—before the soprano begins her soliloquy, the musicians collectively create a crescendo of wailing vocals, while producing metallic and scooped sounds on their instruments, “clownishly” mimicking the effect of an electric guitar’s wah pedal (“*Un po’ clownesco con effetto wah wah*”, Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 1). This cacophonous opening sets the tone for the entire performance—it does not seek to please, but to provoke difficult thoughts and emotions.

Among several of Coetzee’s novels adapted for film and opera, as reviewed by Michelle Kelly (2020, pp. 198–203) and Ed Charlton (2023, pp. 415–21), Lens’s operatic collaborations with Coetzee deserve special attention. They involve Coetzee’s direct artistic input, both setting his libretti to a form “blend[ing] music and song as well as dramatic action”, which requires greater “technical agility” than other performing arts (Charlton 2023, p. 420). “Adaptations might not liberate Coetzee’s characters from the languages in which they frequently feel imprisoned”, Kelly suggests, “but the best may at least offer them the grammars of new media in which to express themselves” (Kelly 2020, p. 203). A few years before the production of *Is This the Gate?*, Kelly spoke of the *Slow Man* opera as Coetzee’s “most successful [adapted work] and the result of a fruitful and ongoing collaboration with Lens” (Kelly 2020, p. 200). While the full-fledged *Elizabeth Costello* opera is yet to be performed, *Is This the Gate?* turns out to be a promising start. It shows how this particular art form, with its musicality and theatricality, gives new expression to the writer figure’s late-in-life ethos and pathos. Given that some fundamental ideas of Coetzee’s 2003 novel and other Costello narratives—mortality, animal ethics, desire, and intellectual self-reflexivity—are condensed into a libretto less than two pages long, nearly every unit of the fragmentized lyrics of *Is This the Gate?* has the potential to be restored as an index to the intertexts, localities and motifs that Coetzee has been engaging with from his debut to his late works.

2. “Straight Out of Kafka”: Intertexts and Counterpoints

Straight out of Kafka!

Straight out of Kafka!

Not the light that Dante saw in paradise.

—Lens and Coetzee (2024), *Is This the Gate?* Prologue and Act 10

Among Coetzee's diverse intertextual influences, Franz Kafka and Dante Alighieri stand out as two of his most pivotal inspirations that shape the afterworld setting of *Is This the Gate?*. In the Prologue to the opera excerpt, accompanying the bowed instruments' legato, the piano gives an ominous note at the end of each phrase, thus ushering in the soprano's three lines cited above. The words, sung in a "cautious, ceremonial and bizarre" manner ("*prudente, cerimoniale e bizzarro*", Lens and Coetzee 2024, Prologue), are reiterated in this part and then reappear in Act 10, creating an uncanny Kafkaesque ambience both at the outset and in closing moments. While the opening ostensibly acknowledges its allegiance to Kafka and denies "the light that Dante saw in paradise" in Costello's vision, the juxtaposition of Kafka and Dante encapsulates the rich intertexts of dual nature woven into the opera excerpt.

Before probing into the allusions to Kafka, it should be noted that the intended title for the full-fledged opera—"Costello in Limbo"—is an implicit reference to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In today's common usage, "in limbo" means being in an indeterminate state, whereas in the religious sense, it also refers to the state of being in "[a] region supposed to exist on the border of Hell as the abode of the just who died before Christ's coming, and of unbaptized infants" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "limbo (n.1), sense 1.a" 2024). In Dante's *Inferno*, the religious connotation of limbo is vividly reflected in Circle One (depicted in Canto 4)—"the edge/of the abyss, that cavern of grief and pain"—where "[n]one was baptized./None passed the gate, in your belief, to faith" (Alighieri [c. 1321] 2012, pp. 16–17). According to *Elizabeth Costello*, the eponymous character is a non-believer, having "less and less idea what it could mean to believe in God" (Coetzee 2003, p. 167). Her prolonged trial before the gate, therefore, mirrors a pagan's state of being detained in limbo as described in Dante's verses.

In the original novel, Costello thinks of Dante while contemplating what lies beyond the gate. "There is light, certainly", she muses, "but it is not the light that Dante saw in Paradise, it is not even in the same league" (Coetzee 2003, p. 209). Nonetheless, Costello resorts to Dante to frame her problematics as a writer: "Is it someone's idea of what hell will be like for a writer, or at least purgatory: a purgatory of clichés?" (Coetzee 2003, p. 206).¹ Divided into thirteen brief acts in the opera excerpt, Costello's arduous spiritual quest charted in the novel appears fragmentized and episodic. And yet the analogy between Costello's trial and the Dantean journey from *Inferno*, through *Purgatorio*, to *Paradiso* is unmistakably retained in the adaptation.

Instead of evoking the Catholic imaginary, the opera excerpt focuses on Costello's soul-searching and yearning for transcendence in her afterlife. Juxtaposed with Kafka, the first reference to Dante in the Prologue lays bare the literariness rather than religiosity of Costello's inner world. Even as identical lyrics ("Straight out of Kafka!/Straight out of Kafka!/Not the light that Dante saw in paradise") recur in Act 10, the Prologue foreshadows Costello's difficult existential question—"Is this the gate?"—the first line sung out in Act 1, whereas the later act segues into a sombre funeral march in which the heroine confronts Dante's legacy more directly and authoritatively. Either in comparison with Kafka or singled out as "a deception", "the light that Dante saw in paradise" is invoked as a negation (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 11), insinuating what Costello's vision is not.

Kafka's influence, by contrast, features more prominently in the opera. The titles and settings of both *Is This the Gate?* and *Elizabeth Costello*'s eighth lesson, "At the Gate", are constructed in such a way that one is constantly reminded of Kafka's famous parable, "Before the Law" (Kafka [1916] 1971).² In the novel, having failed to pass the gate the first time, Costello lies on a bunk in the dormitory reserved for "long-term petitioners"

(Coetzee 2003, p. 197), and starts to question the validity of “the afterlife” she assumes she has entered: “[I]f the afterlife turns out to be nothing but hocus-pocus, a simulation from beginning to end, why does the simulation fail so consistently, not just by a hair’s breadth—one could forgive it that—but by a hand’s breadth?” (Coetzee 2003, p. 209). “It is the same with the Kafka business”, Costello thinks to herself. “That wall, the gate, the sentry, are straight out of Kafka. So is the demand for a confession, so is the courtroom with the dozing bailiff and the panel of old men in their crows’ robes pretending to pay attention while she thrashes about in the toils of her own words” (Coetzee 2003, p. 209).

The pith of Costello’s reflection, however, is left out in the libretto: “Kafka, but only the superficialities of Kafka; Kafka reduced and flattened to a parody” (Coetzee 2003, p. 209). It is uncertain whether this omission is a practical choice, given the time limit for an opera excerpt performed at the eventful Adelaide Festival, or a strategic simplification—especially for audience members unfamiliar with *Elizabeth Costello*—that serves to make this adaptation a more focused and self-contained piece of work. By omission I am not suggesting that the adaptation wants for intellectual sophistication and literariness that characterize the original text; rather, considering Coetzee’s dual role as novelist and librettist, the overt and repeated invocation of Kafka in the opera shows the deep connection between his Costello project (both literary and operatic) and Kafka’s fable.

Pursuing Jacques Derrida’s line of thought in *Before the Law: The Complete Text of Préjugés* (Derrida [1985] 2018), Louise Bethlehem argues that the title “At the Gate” in *Elizabeth Costello* “constitutes a form of fictive diversion: the distraction—or entertainment—of intertextuality” in itself (Bethlehem 2009, p. 20). For Derrida, the first two occurrences of “*Vor dem Gesetz*” (“Before the Gate”) in Kafka’s German original—one as the story’s title, the other as the incipit of the narrative (“*Vor dem Gesetz steht ein Türhüter*” [“Before the law there stands a guardian of the gate”])—are homonymic rather than synonymic. This is because the former “names the entirety of the text”, whereas the latter “designates a situation, the location of the character situated within the geography of the narrative” (Derrida [1985] 2018, p. 37). Bethlehem goes further in saying that the formulation of “At the Gate” in Coetzee’s novel “deliberately opens its syntax to an isomorphic allusion: preposition plus article plus noun”, meanwhile unfolding “the extended *performance* of citation which contours the intertextual coming-into-being of Coetzee’s text as one index of the literariness of this very text” (Bethlehem 2009, pp. 20–21, italics in original).

Noticeably, in the opera excerpt, the prepositional phrase (“at the gate”) is transformed into an interrogative sentence (“Is this the gate?”). As a pronounced syntactic marker that serves as the title for both the opera excerpt and Act 1, the question form subtly contests or even subverts the explicit references to Kafka as rendered ceremonially on stage. Indeed, “why is it Kafka in particular who is trundled out for [Costello]” (Coetzee 2003, p. 209)? In an intensely self-reflexive way, the befuddled heroine thinks in the novel:

She is no devotee of Kafka. Most of the time she cannot read him without impatience. As he veers between helplessness and lust, between rage and obsequiousness, she too often finds him, or at least his K selves, simply childish. So why is the *mise en scène* into which she has been hurled so—she dislikes the word but there is no other—so Kafkaesque? (Coetzee 2003, p. 209)

The metafictional texture of this passage, heightened in Costello’s self-consciousness that she is placed in a Kafkaesque (despite her aversion to this word) *mise en scène*, is sustained in “Lesson 8” and other Costello narratives. Critics have generally accepted that Kafka remains a prominent literary influence in Coetzee’s intellectual landscapes (Kannemeyer 2012, p. 229; Attwell 2015, p. 131; Mehigan and Moser 2018, p. 4). By the same token, if we treat Costello as Coetzee’s “uncanny performance of his fictional alter

ego" (Poyner 2006, p. 2), her statement that "[s]he is no devotee of Kafka" is evidently intended as an irony and self-mockery.

As Robert B. Pippin reminds us, while Costello's "philosophical crisis" pertains to "a distinctive aesthetic form required by the world of K", the novel requires "some sort of bridge from the extra-fictional world to the fictional, or, [...] from life to literature, or from Coetzee to Elizabeth" (Pippin 2018, p. 303). Upon the premiere of *Is This the Gate?*, not only was the "*mise en scène*" previously existing in Costello's consciousness actualized on stage, Coetzee himself was present in a cultural scene where he came face-to-face with his literary creation. Prior to the performance, he was invited to give a short introduction to the opera along with Lens. Coetzee, in his quiet bass voice, recollected the germination of his cooperation with Lens, gave a synopsis of the opera excerpt, and dutifully thanked the organizer and presenting partner of the performance. This occasion is reminiscent of the speech-giving scenario in *Elizabeth Costello's* first lesson, "Realism". As a counterpoint to "At the Gate", "Lesson 1" contains yet another allusion to Kafka. It is framed by Costello's acceptance speech at a certain Altona College in Pennsylvania, where she baffles her audience by drawing on the ape in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy". An acclaimed writer on such an occasion, Costello claims, might be no more than "a human being presenting himself, with heavy irony, for rhetorical purposes, as an ape" (Coetzee 2003, p. 18).

The formality of Coetzee's speech at the premiere, understandably, discourages associations with Costello's Kafkaesque digression. Nevertheless, some snippets from the libretto and the locale of the performance invite us to examine the connections between Coetzee's intellectuality and locality, which are crucial to his late career since his relocation to Australia.

3. "Another Hot Day": Australian Connections

"Another Hot Day" (I/II), the two shortest acts consisting of this single line in *Is This the Gate?* (Act 6 and 9), imply the significance of Coetzee's adopted home to his ongoing engagements with the Costello project. The premiere, taking place on a hot afternoon when late summer heat could still be felt in Adelaide, was a throwback to one of Coetzee's public readings on a similar occasion 20 years before. During the 2004 Adelaide Writers' Week, two years after he and his life partner Dorothy Driver's immigration to Australia, Coetzee "[took] his cue from 'At the Gate'" and gave a reading from an unpublished text in one of the "Meet the Author" sessions:

It was March, *it was hot*, but there were shaded walks to be had along the Torrens River, where black swans glided serenely.

What kind of place is this, I asked myself—is this paradise on earth?

What does one have to do to live here?

Does one have to die first?

(quoted in Kannemeyer 2012, p. 545, italics mine)

Adelaide Writers' Week, as part of the Adelaide Festival, was then held biennially (and has been held annually since 2012) at the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden by the Torrens riverbank. Coetzee, the then-latest Nobel Laureate in Literature, came under the spotlight after a lengthy and disputed process of immigration to Australia, especially after the controversies over *Disgrace* (1999) spread around his home country (Kannemeyer 2012, pp. 535–43). The passage cited above, though "in characteristic tribute" to the city where he recently took up residence (Kannemeyer 2012, p. 545), might also reveal Coetzee's resolution to withdraw from the whirling vortex of debates on his literary work and personal choice at that time.

While the serenity of Adelaide's landscape and birdlife suggests a new "freedom to define the terms of his existence" from South Africa's tumultuous state of affairs (Attwell 2015, p. 240), Coetzee's invocation of local climate, flora and fauna in his public reading as well as in the Costello narratives, pertains to his essential gesture as a writer. Upon the controversial reception of *Disgrace*, to quote from his private correspondence with Nadine Gordimer, his fellow South African writer, Coetzee stated: "One writes, most of the time, in order to move beyond whatever it is that grips one's imagination, to purge oneself of that particular set of obsessions" (quoted from Van der Vlies 2021, p. 70). If the titles of all eight lessons in *Elizabeth Costello* indicate the author's primary concerns, then Coetzee's allusions to Kafka's ape and gate, his obsession with the weather and species inconsequential in most people's eyes (such as the ram and frogs depicted in "Lesson 8"), can all be understood as Coetzee's conscious attempt to "move beyond", to transcend immediate realities in order to articulate some inner truth.

As a resident of Adelaide since the early 2000s and distinguished member of the University community, Coetzee is often invited to give readings and speeches or fêted as a guest of honour at local cultural events (Attwell 2015, p. 240). The Costello stories, collected in *Elizabeth Costello* and, more recently, in *The Pole and Other Stories* (2023), remain Coetzee's most favoured contents for public readings to this day.³ The "small critical industry" and crowded literary circles developed around Costello (Coetzee 2003, pp. 1–2), of which the character is highly aware but from which she prefers to keep clear, are apparently a projection of Coetzee's own stature and attitude. Owing to his dislike of giving lectures and need for critical distance, Coetzee tends to frame many of his own problematics—novelistic realism, animal rights, humanities in Africa, Eros and Thanatos, to name but a few—through the mouth of Costello (Attwell 2015, pp. 103–4; Van der Vlies 2023, p. 171). "When the demand on Coetzee to become the public intellectual became more and more intolerable", David Attwell observes, "[he] turned to the resources of fiction, or switched on the power of fiction, to regain control" (Attwell 2015, p. 103). In this context, Costello functions as "a form of puppetry" that allows Coetzee to "mirror back to society its expectations of the writer as public figure, and subject them to his own inscrutable, and occasionally unscrupulous, effects" (Attwell 2015, p. 104).

Twenty years apart, the seemingly out-of-joint references to "another hot day" in *Is This the Gate?* at the 2024 Adelaide Festival remotely echo the opening line of Coetzee's reading upon his initial relocation to South Australia. Disinterested as it sounds, this description of the weather is evocative for anyone who has ever braved the elements in Adelaide. On the personal level, it has the potential to activate a chain of visceral feelings associated with the artist's geographical location and political positioning. On the structural level, the allusions to "another hot day" in both Act 6 and Act 9 serve as transitional passages between Costello's apostrophe to the bench of judges and her dramatic monologue; both are performed at a "slow marching speed with poetic sadness" (respectively, "*Piccola marcia lenta—Piccola passaggio con tristezza poetica*" and "*Marcia lenta con tristezza poetica*", Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 6 and 9).

Rendered with subdued emotional intensity, these two brief acts create lingering effects of wistfulness and torpor on stage, thus drawing attention to Costello's corporeality and her situatedness in a "real" place. In the novel, this aspect is evinced by her awareness that she is surrounded by visitors on the square and people's chatter in the cafés, and in her recollection of the substance she consumed the day before. For Costello, the latter triggers a disagreeable thought of eating (with an allusion to Kafka's "A Hunger Artist"), and makes "her body [feel] unpleasantly heavy, unpleasantly corporeal" (Coetzee 2003, p. 215). "Only the light soul hangs in the air", this idea occurs to Costello as she waits anxiously at the gate, which she readily dismisses as "a quotation" (Coetzee 2003, p. 214). In the opera, the

heaviness of Costello's physical existence is contrasted with the lightness of metaphysical abstractions to which she constantly resorts. The two occurrences of "Another hot day" effectively punctuate and mediate Costello's weighty testimonies in the lyrics, in which the soloist has to answer the judges and make her own statements alternately.

Act 5, "A Stone Does Not Believe in You", reproduces Costello's second hearing before her interrogators in the novel, centring around her belief in "the spirit of life" (Coetzee 2003, p. 219). Borrowing words from the board of judges absent from the opera excerpt, the protagonist repeats in earnest, with some restlessness:

You say: "A stone does not believe in you.
But you choose to tell us not about stones but about frogs,
to which you attribute a life story that is,
as you concede, highly allegorical.
These Australian frogs embody the spirit of life,
which is what you as a storyteller believe in.
Do we read you correctly?" (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 5)

Immediately after these lines, the soloist takes a pause in singing and utters sardonically, in emulation of the contemptuous judges: "They say: 'She believed in the spirit of life'" (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 6). The "Australian frogs", mentioned in passing in the libretto, are depicted at length in the novel. As Costello recollects affectionately from scenes of her childhood, along with the ebb and flow of the river in rural Victoria, "tens of thousands of little frogs" croak and mate, hibernate and then leap out from the mud, die and regenerate year after year. For her, these frogs represent "the resurrection of the dead" and a life force she believes in (Coetzee 2003, pp. 216–17). "[T]he life cycle of the frog may sound allegorical", Costello says to the judges, "but to the frogs themselves it is no allegory, it is the thing itself, the only thing" (Coetzee 2003, p. 217).

"To enter the frog's life is like entering a fictional character's life", James Wood contends. "If it represents the paganisation of belief in God, it also represents the sacralisation of belief in fiction" (Wood 2003). Yet when we immerse ourselves in *Elizabeth Costello* and its operatic adaptation alike, we are reminded that neither the literal nor the allegorical meanings of these narratives should be taken for granted. In this act, the novel's self-referentiality and scepticism are diluted by the music changed to a slow tempo; "highly allegorical"—the judges' dismissal of Costello's statement—is repeated and sung in a hyperbolic tone. It can be observed that the Costello in the opera, who reiterates her beliefs and talks back to the judges, appears more self-assured than the Costello in the novel, who questions her own belief as soon as she declares it. As described in "Lesson 8", Costello "tries a test that *seems* to work when she is writing: to send out a word into the darkness and listen for what kind of sound comes back"; for her, this test is comparable to "a foundryman tapping a bell: is it cracked or healthy? The frogs: what tone do the frogs give off?" (Coetzee 2003, p. 219, *italics mine*). The lyrics, by contrast, replace the marker of conjecture ("*seems*") and the series of questions with the imperative mood and several repetitions:

Like a bell: that is how one tests words,
that is how the test works.
Send out the word into the darkness
and listen for the sound that returns.
What tone?
Listen for the sound that returns. (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 5)

Listening to “the sound that returns” repeated five times altogether in the vocal part, the audience could be easily drawn into the reverberations in the auditorium. Elder Hall’s chapel-like recess and high wooden arches seemed to concretize the sounding board—the board of judges Costello petitions for a pass before the gate. The melody taken up by the bow instruments’ cacophony, however, would reject a facile resolution as such—Costello is, after all, appealing to a higher order out of sight.

4. “Secretary of the Invisible”: (Non-)Authorial Voices and Personae

I’m a writer, and what I write is what I hear.

I’m a secretary of the invisible

I’m a writer and what I am called to do:

dictation secretary.

It’s not for me to judge,

it’s not for me to question.

—Lens and Coetzee (2024), *Is This the Gate?* Act 7

Midway through the opera excerpt, Costello shifts from the particular to the abstract, defining herself steadfastly as “a secretary of the invisible” and “dictation secretary” (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 7). Lacking autonomy as it sounds, Costello’s self-definition signals Coetzee’s enduring preoccupation with the writer’s liberty to adopt fictional personae and openness to all voices, especially when this artistic freedom is threatened by pressures upon him to be answerable for historical injustices.

Foregrounding Costello’s subjectivity through anaphora (with “I’m” repeated in the first three lines), Act 7 offers a powerful justification for her profession before the judges. Quite the contrary to the supplicant’s humility and restraint depicted in the novel, this scene is rendered “tenderly, with poetic sadness and a certain joy” in the opera (“*Amabile, con tristezza poetica—Con una certa gioia*”, Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 7). As challenging bow strokes quiet down, we enter the most melodic paragraph in the adaptation, with the bassoon’s soothing timbre featured in the accompaniment. “I’m a secretary of the invisible”, the soprano regally chants, bringing to the fore a sublimity subdued in Costello’s verbal exchange with the judges on the page. In both the literary text and the opera excerpt, however, the heroine never doubts the sanctity of her calling. In the novel, Costello admits that she borrows the phrase—“secretary of the invisible”—“from a secretary of a higher order, Czeslaw Milosz” (Coetzee 2003, p. 199). Costello’s testimony here, to a considerable degree, is a rewriting of the Polish-American poet’s 1975 work, “Secretaries”:

I am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing

That is dictated to me and a few others.

Secretaries, mutually unknown, we walk the earth

Without much comprehension. Beginning a phrase in the middle

Or ending it with a comma. And how it all looks when completed

Is not up to us to inquire, we won’t read it anyway. (Milosz [1975] 1988, p. 325)

All three versions of the “secretaries of the invisible”—poetic, novelistic, and operatic—emphasize their mission to transcribe faithfully what is dictated to them, without inquiring, judging or questioning. This, of course, is not to be taken at face value. Inquisitive by nature and intellectually defiant, Costello “believe[s] in the irrepressible human spirit” but is convinced that “in [her] line of work one has to suspend belief”, as she claims in a later statement (Coetzee 2003, pp. 207, 213). Yet in this section of the opera, the paradox inherent in Costello’s calling and being, and the quirkiness of her behaviour, are moderated

by a deceptively caressing harmony. Amidst this reassuring overtone, the protagonist's theatrical self is transformed into a firm believer of what she says in front of the judges, which somehow reduces the complexity of Costello's personality presented in the novel.

In this moment of lyricism preceding the dissonance in Act 8, "What Have I Seen?", we might pause and enquire into something underplayed in the opera excerpt: if what Costello writes is what she hears, then what is the nature of the voices she hears? The question of seeing, hearing and writing, and, as a corollary, of reception and representation, is crucial in that it underlies Coetzee's relationship to literary realism throughout his career, an issue that has long been the focus of substantial studies (Attridge 2004, pp. 200–1; Boehmer 2011, pp. 203–5; Attwell 2015, pp. 62–63, 235–38; Van der Vlies 2023, pp. 169–70). Upon Costello's recent reappearance in *Is This the Gate?*, in which she insists her calling hinges on what she passively receives through hearing and seeing, it is worth looking back on Coetzee's treatment of the writer figure's subjectivity in his fiction.

"I am open to all voices, not just the voices of the murdered and violated", Costello cautions her interrogators, when asked about her response to the Tasmanians wiped out in genocide. "If it is their murderers and violators who choose to summon me instead, to use me and speak through me", she continues, "I will not close my ears to them, I will not judge them" (Coetzee 2003, p. 204). One of the judges, with mistrust and contempt, retorts: "Is that what it is to be a secretary: to write down whatever you are told? To be a bankrupt of conscience?" (Coetzee 2003, p. 204). Stripping away the Kafkaesque veneer in this scenario, Costello's statement and the judges' indictment implicate an ethical dilemma Coetzee has been grappling with in his writing and public life. What lies behind "this hearing, this trial" and the provocative reference to the old Tasmanians exterminated by "her countrymen, her ancestors", Costello is acutely aware, is "the question of historical guilt" (Coetzee 2003, p. 203).

As a South African-born writer of Afrikaner descent and naturalized Australian citizen, Coetzee is confronted with the white settlers' atrocities and ignominy in both British colonies in history. While the Australian context of *Elizabeth Costello* is outlined in "a functional, even minimalist referential language" (Boehmer 2011, p. 209), the historical burden of white consciousness is intrinsic to Coetzee's South African and Australian experiences, and both demand some form of artistry and moral stance to represent. Since the start of his writing career, Attwell observes, Coetzee has been painstakingly "in search of his subject: the voice especially, embedded in a distinctive genre and a distinctive history"; in addition, his habit of "dating and self-archiving", as evidenced by his well-preserved manuscripts, has enabled him to "move blocks of text around and to recover discarded fragments" (Attwell 2015, p. 20). In this light, I suggest that *Elizabeth Costello*, as a transitional work connecting Coetzee's South African and Australian phases, holds some vital clues to his treatment of voices, realities and the writer's different selves over the span of three decades since his 1974 debut, *Dusklands*. In some ways, *Is This the Gate?* creates a new outlet for Coetzee to distil these essential ideas from his early fiction, and to rework them with new insights in an art form that engages the audience more directly.

Act 7 and Act 8 in the opera excerpt, respectively centring on "what I hear" and "what have I seen", remotely echo the two white male protagonists' troubling self-consciousnesses in the two novellas that form *Dusklands*. Admittedly, Eugene Dawn in "The Vietnam Project" and the eponymous character in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" are not professional writers or scrupulous moralists like Costello. Instead, they are morally flawed and become paranoid due to their involvement with violence and crime—one brainwashed by the American propaganda machine during the Vietnam War, the other abusing the Khoisan on 18th-century expeditions. Even though hearing voices, hallucinating, and obsession with the self can be pathologized as symptoms of their growing insanity, Dawn's and Jacobus

Coetzee's introspection betrays an intellectual calibre that at once parallels and parodies their creator's.

In "The Vietnam Project", Dawn philosophizes when he hears the American army's broadcasts in Vietnam: "It is the voice of the doubting self, the voice of René Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates that self" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 20). Later, having stabbed his own son and confined to a mental asylum, Dawn thinks to himself, with stark dramatic irony: "I believe in life. I do not want to see people throw away their lives. Nor do I want to see the children of America poisoned by guilt". What is more, when recalling his days of working on the Vietnam Project in the basement of the Harry S. Truman library, Dawn remembers "feeling the black guilt chuckling through [his] veins" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 48). While Dawn believes that "I was being taken over. I was not my own man" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 20), Jacobus Coetzee, protagonist of the second story in *Dusklands*, is convinced that he is the inheritor of historical guilt, acting in the service of a higher order beyond his own volition. "All are guilty, without exception", he reckons. "I am a tool in the hand of history" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 106). Facing his impending death, the merciless Boer explorer concludes the account of his second journey with a statement that resonates with Costello's: "I know my lessons. I too can retreat before a beckoning finger through the infinite corridors of my self. I too can attain and inhabit a point of view from which, [...] I can be seen to be superfluous" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 107, *italics mine*).

In retrospect, Dawn's and Jacobus Coetzee's disclaimers that they are no more than mouthpieces for a divine voice or the embodiment of "a point of view" anticipate Costello's authorial identity as "a secretary of the invisible", who is dictated by "powers beyond us" and exists "in readiness, waiting for the call" (Coetzee 2003, pp. 199–200). As discussed earlier, it is commonly recognized that Costello serves as Coetzee's fictional double. Yet, it should be noted that the two white male characters in *Dusklands*, though belonging to the category of murderers and violators Costello is not averse to representing, also bear traces of Coetzee's authorship. Jacobus Coetzee, an 18th-century colonialist bearing the same surname as the author's, points to J. M. Coetzee's difficult relationship with his Afrikaner ancestry; whilst the portrayal of Dawn, who is supervised by a "powerful, genial, ordinary man" called Coetzee (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 1), reflects a subtle relationship between the character and its creator that is homologous with that between Costello and Coetzee. "Once upon a time a creative person himself", Dawn says of Coetzee, his supervisor, "he is now a failed creative person who lives vicariously off true creative people" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 1). Likewise, Costello in her old age appears drained of life and creativity, no more than "an old, tired circus seal" in her son's eyes and dismissed as a "novelist of failing powers" by the interviewer (Coetzee 2003, pp. 3, 11).

The trope of circus animals, which brings to mind one of W. B. Yeats's last poems, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (Yeats [1939] 1990), is also mentioned in Elleke Boehmer's critique of Coetzee's Australian realism in *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). Boehmer maintains that "Coetzee is involved in rounding up the various circus animals of the colonial dystopia, the haunt of dying white males, both in Australia, and beyond Australia" (Boehmer 2011, p. 215). Coetzee "exhibits these creatures, demonstrates that he understands them", Boehmer proposes, "but finally distances himself from them as being no more adequate to writing Australia than tropes from other settler traditions might be" (Boehmer 2011, p. 215). But as an aged white Australian female, Costello haunts Coetzee's writing and public presence more persistently and thoroughly than any of her male counterparts, and the author likely never truly deserts or distances himself from her, as he does other characters—her memorable reemergence in *Is This the Gate?* testifies to that.

Notwithstanding the otherworldly tribunal scenes and her enigmatic afterlife rendered in the adaptation, the image of Costello in limbo is the reflection of a prototypical writer figure lost in time and the representation of a writer's existential predicament, which chimes with Coetzee's *raison d'être* late in life. As Attwell notes in *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time*, the subtitle of the book aims to elucidate "the way Coetzee puts fiction between himself and history, between himself and his mortality" (Attwell 2015, p. 26). This strenuous undertaking of positioning oneself in history, Attwell posits, indicates "the means whereby [Coetzee] challenges himself with sharply existential questions, such as, *Is this room for me, and my history, in this book? If not, what am I doing?*" (Attwell 2015, p. 26, italics in original).

A telling parallel can be detected between "Is this the gate?" and Coetzee's existential questions formulated in Attwell's work. Both the title of the opera excerpt and that of the full-fledged adaptation ("Costello in Limbo") convey a sense of disorientation and indeterminacy. Since one's genealogy and lifespan can be subsumed into a segment of history, confronting one's own mortality and finitude, as Costello does at the gate/before the law, is at the same time a process of being defined, interrogated and refuted by a particular literary criterion or on the threshold of a new beginning.

5. "I Believe What I Am": Beyond Life and Death

I believe what I am.

I believe what stands before you today is I.

I am!

—Lens and Coetzee (2024), *Is This the Gate?* Act 4 and 13

As a work premised on the central character's mortality, *Is This the Gate?* nonetheless reflects Costello's aspiration for eternity—not of an individual life, but a life force that can possibly overcome death. Towards the finale of the opera excerpt, its heightened focus on Costello's intellectual vigour, instead of suggesting her waning vitality, attests to her desire for life, which underlies her philosophical musings in both *Elizabeth Costello* and the Costello narratives collected in *The Pole and Other Stories*.

Beginning with Act 8, the second half of *Is This the Gate?* traces Costello's inner journey from oscillation to self-affirmation. While Act 7 is a manifesto of Costello's belief in her calling as "a secretary of the invisible", her sense of precarity is accentuated in the following act, described metaphorically in the dramaturgy as "Like walking on thin ice—Like a little rapid typhoon" ("*Come camminare sul ghiaccio sottile—Come un rapido piccolo tifone*", Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 8). In the interlude, this is represented by a few bars of melody redolent of tango music. The soloist, instead of dancing to it, adopts a shrieking and trembling voice, and mimics Costello standing in awe of the "brilliant" yet "blinding" light she has seen (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 8). This beam of light, captured time and again in the libretto, guides the opera to a closure pregnant with affective ambiguity.

The ensuing acts recapitulate the motifs already developed in the first half, but they are rendered with stronger dramatic effects. Once again, we hear "Another hot day" (Act 9), "Straight out of Kafka" (Act 10), and "Not the light that Dante saw in paradise" (Act 11). Ostensibly, Costello cannot see this eternal light because she is not a believer in God, and therefore, she is likely to be stuck in limbo forever without being able to reach Dante's paradise. But more essentially, as a writer who always puts her former beliefs to the test and keeps revising them, Costello is unlikely to accept the Dantean resolution or climax that "all seeing there achieved its end" (Alighieri [c. 1321] 2012, p. 480). As Derek Attridge points out, there is a "narrative anticlimax" in Costello's statement of belief: "what has

mattered, for [her] and for the reader, is the event—literary and ethical at the same time—of storytelling, of testing, of self-questioning, and not the outcome” (Attridge 2004, p. 205).

In the opera, the ongoing nature that characterizes an event is transformed into an *act*, the very meaning of which denotes continuity and progression. As a preview of the full-fledged opera, *Is This the Gate?* is open-ended in nature; as a character who keeps appearing in Coetzee’s late works, Costello embodies an accomplished writer’s doubt and faith that forever await re-evaluation and contestation. In the two acts leading up to the opera excerpt’s ending, the recurring references to Kafka and Dante can be seen as the reenactment of this process. Awaiting her final judgement, Costello invokes Dante and Kafka alike, not to idolize or canonize them but to engage in self-scrutiny, through which she tries to come to terms with who she is.

Act 11, “Not the light that Dante saw in paradise”, is rendered into “a lugubrious funeral march, with a desire for death” (“*Marcia funebre lugubre, con desiderio di morte*”, Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 11). As soon as “in paradise” is sung out, the cello’s slow movement and the piano’s lower register intervene before the soprano resumes singing, intoning “[w]hat a deception” with emotive inflections (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 11). While this act dramatizes the protagonist’s “desire for death”, Costello’s untiring petitions and statements of (non-)beliefs achieve quite the opposite effect, which proves her intellectual robustness and desire for life. The tension between Costello’s life drive and death drive is obscured in the opera excerpt, but is more sufficiently developed in *Elizabeth Costello* and *The Pole and Other Stories*. Emphasizing Kafka over Dante, *Is This the Gate?* underscores the aged writer figure’s trial while ruling out the possibility of transcendence in religious terms. But in Coetzee’s evolving Costello project, the Dantean elements are still very much present. Dante and Beatrice’s relationship, which symbolizes the sanctification of romantic love, is a crucial reference point for Costello in limbo—a liminal space where secular and sacred desires mingle.

In *The Pole and Other Stories*, Costello reappears in the remaining five stories that deal with aging, death and animal ethics, whereas the lead story, “The Pole”, is markedly Dantean. It depicts the love affair between a married Spanish woman named Beatriz and an elderly Polish pianist (Witold), who is a celebrated Chopin performer and disciple of Dante. This Beatriz, ironically, does not believe in the afterlife. After hearing about Witold’s death, she begins to picture “Heaven: a vast ante-room full of souls milling about in their uniform smocks, searching anxiously for their other halves” (Coetzee 2023, p. 136). Just as Costello denies seeing “the light that Dante saw in paradise” in *Is This the Gate?*, Beatriz in “The Pole” denies embodying the “heavenly being” the pianist claims to have seen in her (Coetzee 2023, p. 145). This new anthology, if read as a short-story cycle and sequel to *Elizabeth Costello*, contains a revelation of what lies beyond the gate.

It is probably no coincidence that in *Elizabeth Costello*, the lesson that precedes “At the Gate” is “Eros”, in which the protagonist reminisces about her love interest back in the 1960s and meditates on the erotic life of gods and mortals. “Love and death. The gods, the immortals, were the inventors of death and corruption”, Costello muses (Coetzee 2003, p. 189). Human beings are subject to death and annihilation, while the immortals are not, she figures, because the gods “have lacked the courage to try their invention out on themselves” (Coetzee 2003, p. 189). Curiously, earlier in the novel, Costello sees profane desires as the means of immortality. In “Lesson 5”, Costello recounts her past erotic relationship with old Mr Phillips, a painter and friend of their mother’s, in a letter to her sister Blanche: “Through me a goddess was manifesting herself, Aphrodite or Hera or perhaps even Artemis. I was of the immortals” (Coetzee 2003, p. 149).

Costello’s Hellenistic vision is sharply contrasted with Blanche’s Christian faith. As the administrator of “the Hospital of the Blessed Mary” in Zululand, Blanche believes that

“with love and care and the right drugs, these innocents can be brought to the very gate of death without fear” (Coetzee 2003, p. 134). And yet the lesson from the two sisters’ conversation, if there is one, is not about human beings immortalized by erotic love or the role of religion in helping people face their mortality more fearlessly. Both Costello’s Hellenism and Blanche’s Catholicism, ultimately, point to the universality of suffering—aging and ailing as part of it—and the inevitability of death. Sensual desire and religious conviction alike, in this sense, are rooted in the mortals’ impulse to struggle against and imagine beyond this inexorable ending. On a similar note, Costello concludes in “Lesson 7: Eros”: “Strange enough, as desire relaxes its grip on her body, she sees more and more clearly a universe ruled by desire” (Coetzee 2003, p. 191). Right after she envisions the rainbows in heavens (both plural in her imagination) at the end of this section, Costello is stopped before the gate, awaiting her last judgement.

In the penultimate act of the opera excerpt, the universality of human struggle between desire and mortality that concerns Costello is pithily captured by the Gatekeeper’s statement: “We see people like you all the time” (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 12). At this final stage of her petition, Costello is not only trying to gain a pass for herself, but longing to understand the impasse of all mortals like her:

“Can you tell me”, I ask, “can you tell, do I stand a chance?

As you see, you see people like me all the time, like me all the time.

Do we all stand a chance?” (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 12)

Costello’s burning questions are left unanswered in *Is This the Gate?*, yet her eagerness to let all living creatures (not necessarily human) “stand a chance” runs through several episodes in Coetzee’s latest short story collection, in which the gate remains a potent symbol.

In “The Old Woman and the Cats”, among others, Costello expresses to her son, John, her wish for every unborn being’s “chance of incarnation”, whereby she illuminates the bitter-sweet circle of life and death:

Each soul will have a turn to taste life, which is incomparably the sweetest sweetness there is. And at long last we will be able to hold up our heads, we masters of life and death, we masters of the universe. We will no longer have to stand barring the gate, saying, *Sorry, you cannot come in, you are too many. Welcome*, we will instead be able to say, *come in, you are wanted, you are all wanted*. (Coetzee 2023, p. 198, italics in original)

The hospitality Costello expects towards all petitioners—dying or waiting to be born, human or non-human—on the threshold of life and death presses for a positive response to the last question addressed in the opera: “Do we all stand a chance?” As two of the latest instalments of Coetzee’s Costello project, *The Pole and Other Stories* and *Is This the Gate?* reimagine the 2003 novel in their own ways and invite the reader/audience to explore how human passions, including the desire to connect with other beings and create narratives, are in themselves the means of countering mortality.

Costello’s moral stance expressed in these works is aligned with her receptiveness as “a secretary of the invisible”, who is intent on giving form to the formless and giving voice to the voiceless. As the opera excerpt draws to an end, the soloist sings the last lines, “gracefully” and solemnly: “I believe what I am./I believe that what stands before you today is I./I am!”, while the instruments help to create “a strange and very mysterious undertone” (“*Grazioso, ma con un sottotono strano molto misterioso*”, Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 13). The same lyrics and stage directions occur previously in Act 4, after Costello confronts the judges with the question “what lies on the other side” and complains about “the trouble of making my statement” in a state of agitation (Lens and Coetzee 2024, Act 3). But when this part is reenacted in the final act, the protagonist’s uncertainty and the music’s

angularity are smoothed away by slower bow strokes and the bassoon's melodiousness, which eventually gives way to the soprano's unwavering final statement: "I am!"

The last act is a meaningful revision of the ending of "At the Gate". When the novel reaches its last page, Costello is still suspicious of her vision of the gate: "*Too literary*, she thinks again. A curse on literature!" (Coetzee 2003, p. 225, italics in original). The lesson ends with the Gatekeeper's dismissal of her enquiry: "We see people like you all the time" (Coetzee 2003, p. 225). The opera excerpt, however, allows Costello to have the final say and stand a chance against the Gatekeeper, thus accentuating her subjectivity as a writer, no matter what lies on the other side of the gate.

Before the full-fledged operatic adaptation meets its audience, *Is This the Gate?* proves an engaging and affective preview of Costello's existential predicament and writerly resolution. Departing from Kafkaesque and Dantean framings, this production revisits the motifs, places and voices that bridge Coetzee's early and late works, and provides a multisensory experience with its many intertextual, musical and dramaturgical resonances.

Funding: This research was funded by the China Scholarship Council, grant number 202306190145.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: The author is grateful to the composer Nicholas Lens and librettist John M. Coetzee for their cooperation in respect of the study of their operas *Is This the Gate?* And *Slow Man*. The author thanks as well François Verster for providing access to the *Is this the Gate?* recording, and Andrew van der Vlies for helpful discussions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ As early as in *Dusklands*, a similar Dantean paradigm can be found in Coetzee's principal character's mindset. In "The Vietnam Project", for instance, Eugene Dawn frames his allegiance to the American army in Dantean terms: "Before paradise comes purgatory", he reflects. "Not without joy, I have girded myself for purgatory. If I must be a martyr to the cause of obedience, I am prepared to suffer. I am not alone" (Coetzee [1974] 1983, p. 27).
- ² Not long after the premiere of *Is This the Gate?*, another opera informed by Kafka's "Before the Law" was premiered at the Adelaide Town Hall on 12 April 2024. Commissioned by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (ASO) and composed by Jakub Jankowski, the opera *Before the Law* is set to the full text of Kafka's story (translated into English). It was performed by the ASO and Australian soprano Sara Macliver and directed by Stephen Layton. Live recording available in the ABC listen app: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/classic-evenings/aso-grandeur/104592492> (accessed on 2 March 2025).
- ³ From late-2023 to mid-2024, Coetzee read from the Costello stories at three of his public readings held at the University of Adelaide. The events were, respectively, a workshop celebrating the 20th anniversary of Coetzee's reception of the Nobel Prize in Literature (9 November 2023); a reception following "Dusklands at 50", an international conference marking the semicentennial of his debut's publication (17 May 2024); one of the "Speaking from the South" panel discussions celebrating the University's 150th year (31 May 2024).

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Article

Bruce Springsteen, Rock Poetry, and Spatial Politics of the Promised Land

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Abstract: The humanistic-geographical associations of popular music foster the potential to articulate the production and reproduction of an activity-centered politicized ontology of space in the everyday social life of any creative communitarian framework where an alternative set of lifestyles, choices, and tastes engage in a constant play. A cursory glimpse at the (counter-)cultural artistic productions of the American 1970s shows that the lyrical construction of real and imaginary geographical locales has remained a distinguishing motif in the song-writing techniques of the celebrated rock poets. In the case of Bruce Springsteen, whether it is the ‘badlands’, constituting the rebellious and notorious young adults, or the ‘promised land’, which is the desired destination of all his characters, his lyrical oeuvre has numerously provided an alternative sense of place. Springsteen’s lyrical and musical characterization of fleeting urban images like alleys, hotels, engines, streets, neon, pavements, locomotives, cars, etc., have not only captured the American cities under the changing regime of capital accumulation but also contributed to the inseparability of everyday social lives and modern urban experiences. Against the backdrop of this argument, this article seeks to explore how the socio-political and cultural aesthetics of Springsteen’s song stories unfurl distinct spatial poetics through their musical language. Also, the article attempts to delineate how Springsteen’s unabashed celebration of the working-class geography of the American 1970s unveils a site of cultural struggle, wherein existing social values are reconstructed amidst imaginary landscapes and discursive strategies of resistance are weaved.

Keywords: rock poetry; popular music; spatial politics; Springsteen; American 1970s; sense of place

1. Introduction

Outside the street’s on fire in a real death waltz
Between what’s flesh and what’s fantasy
And the poets down here don’t write nothing at all
They just stand back and let it all be
And in the quick of a knife, they reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand
But they wind up wounded, not even dead
Tonight in Jungleland
—Bruce Springsteen (1975), “Jungleland”, *Born To Run*.

Amidst the tapestry of cultural discourse, popular music emerges as a powerful mediator, intricately interwoven with socially constructed spaces that shape individual subjectivity and identificatory processes. Professor George Lipsitz, in his defining work *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Lipsitz 1990), has meticulously examined the relation between popular music and societal dynamics, highlighting its profound influence on human identity formation. He has opined that “one reason for

popular music's powerful effect is its ability to conflate music and lived experience, to make both the past and present zones of choice serve distinct social and political interests" (Lipsitz 1990, pp. 103–4). Indeed, the cultural legacy of popular music has consistently sculpted social interactions and perceptions, enriching the fabric of everyday life with alternative 'spaces' that breed cultural resistance. This intersection between music and societal contexts has spurred a renaissance in geographical discourse, particularly since the latter half of the 1960s. Having been influenced by radical existentialist and phenomenological ideologies, this new paradigm emphasizes human experience within the geographical interpretations of literature while delving into the complex mosaics of human existence. By infusing popular music with humanistic geographical perspectives, a deeper understanding of socio-political and cultural aesthetics emerges, which offers a nuanced exploration of the musical language. Much like poets, popular musicians and songwriters navigate the continuum of 'social space', forging new associations between everyday places and human interactions. The symbolic resonance of 'space' and 'place' within the lyrics of popular songs not only enriches cultural discourse but also encapsulates collective emotions and societal moods. Through their lyrical representations of territorial locations, popular songs become conduits for collective historical memory, challenging dominant social structures and shaping cultural landscapes. Thereby, from a humanistic geographical standpoint, the exploration of the socio-political and cultural contexts of such popular songs unveils a narrative of struggle wherein existing cultural values are reconstructed amidst imaginary landscapes imbued with discursive strategies of resistance.

Rock poetry, serving as a pivotal medium for articulating the collective dissent of disenfranchised American youth of the 1960s and 1970s, has long exalted the aesthetic allure of transient urban landscapes. In these lyrical narratives, the alleys, hotels, pavements, and clandestine corners of the city intertwine seamlessly with the quotidian experiences of its denizens. The portrayal of urban imagery within rock lyrics reveals a nuanced comprehension of the geographical associations of urban life. As elucidated by Bob Jarvis in his article "The Truth is Only known by Guttersnipes" (Jarvis 1985), "the life of the city in rock lyrics is that of a street life, a street corner society which finds itself in a glamourized, synthetic hanging out" (Jarvis 1985, p. 111). In rock anthems, urban landscapes often serve as canvases for portraying an idealized realm—a utopia—where mundane emotions gain deep significance within the bustling modern city. This imagined utopia resonates strongly with urban youth, the primary audience for rock music, who actively engage with the spatial fabric of their environment through the consumption of rock songs. Thereby, urban spaces become sites of cultural expression through popular music, shaping and reflecting identities within the social landscape. Rock music's intricate blend of lyrics and melody contributes to a novel portrayal of urban life, particularly in the American context. The rock artists function as architects of this urban imagination, capturing the ever-evolving dynamics of cities influenced by economic forces and shifting demographics. During the transformative decades of the 1960s and 1970s, rock songs emerged as tools of spatial awareness, challenging entrenched systems of racial, class, and gender-based segregation. It is important to mention in this context that Henri Lefebvre's timeless work, *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1991), unveils an ontology of space centered on the active politicization of 'everyday life.' He posits that spatial phenomena are integral to lived experiences, shaped by individual and collective actions within socially constructed landscapes. Lefebvre's framework illuminates the dialectical interplay between domination and resistance across varied social terrains, where spaces are both shaped by and shaped societal dynamics. Despite the sense of fragmentation inherent in urban environments, American cities bear a legacy of creative resilience, resisting the forces of alienation. Whether through Jim Morrison's vivid evocation of Los Angeles, Bruce Springsteen's poignant tribute to Asbury Park, Bob Dylan's introspective exploration of Memphis, or Simon and Garfunkel's haunting rendition of New York, their individual projection of the urban areas resonates with a profound 'sense of place', spotlighting hidden enclaves and subcultural subversions. These clandestine urban spaces serve as crucibles of "representational space", which is

inhabited by “artists, writers, and philosophers” (Lefebvre 1991, p. 39). While being shaped by global capitalist hegemony and ideological contradictions, such spaces also harbor the potential for resistance and collective social emancipation. The act of spatial reappropriation emerges as a motif of dissent against neoliberal hegemony, offering lived scenarios ripe for imaginative transformation and societal reformulation. Thus, the realm of ‘representational space’ engenders a dialectic of action and imagination, fostering new vistas of coherence and cohesion amidst societal flux. The conception of ‘representational space’ within urban locales temporally transcends the conventional demarcations of private and public domains, eschewing escapism in favor of a probing interrogation of prevailing social configurations. Throughout the history of American rock music, there exists a vivid reflection of such ‘representational spaces’ as it courageously navigates the recesses of urban corporeality, excavating the substrata of ‘lived’ cityscapes with unwavering resolve.

However, against the backdrop of this argumentative paradigm, this article will explore a humanistic geographical understanding of the real as well as the imaginary places that have been produced and reproduced by the American urban imagination of the 1960s and 1970s through the artistic medium of rock poetry and music, which has remained the most popular cultural production of that era. The article will also explore the spatial construction of the poetics of rock music by focusing on select lyrical oeuvres of Bruce Springsteen, whose contribution to modern American music and poetry has sought to redefine the representation of landscapes, cities, and culture. While emphasizing the first half of Springsteen’s career, which comes under the direct influence of the 1960s, this article attempts to decode the ‘lived’ social space that was inhabited by Springsteen’s characters in select songs. Focusing on Henry Lefebvre’s idea of the production of social space, this article specifically critiques the potential of alternative socio-spatial imagination in Springsteen’s song stories and explores how the formation of new urban imaginaries in his songs has contributed towards the construction of ‘spatial resistance’ across everyday modern urban American lives. Also, this article will try to understand how the identificatory processes in Springsteen’s songs have created a territorial imagination of place inside the imaginary and symbolic realm of American cities.

The phenomenon of American counterculture transcends the confines of the 1960s, extending its spirited essence well into the late 1970s, before the seismic ‘punk’ revolution took hold. Following the zenith of rock ‘n’ roll in 1969, the landscape of popular music underwent a metamorphosis, diversifying its generic functionalities. Amidst the socio-economic tumult and political convulsions of the 1960s, America witnessed a fleeting interlude of depoliticized mass cultural reality. This epoch found the urban youth enraptured by pivotal events such as the Stonewall Riots, the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Movement, and the harrowing Vietnam War, all of which had severely ignited fervent political engagement. However, this fervor gradually waned, and the highly spirited American youth retreated from the politically charged public sphere while seeking solace within the confines of their private realms and fragmented along ideological lines. The advent of an increasingly technologized, privatized, and massified culture facilitated the commodification of private virtues, relegating the once vibrant public spaces of early 1970s America to a diminished state. Consequently, many young individuals relinquished their responsibilities to the broader community amidst despotic social conditions. This decline in socio-economic cohesion within American society finds resonance in the works of scholars such as Robert D. Putnam, whose work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) chronicles this societal shift. Similarly, Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985) represents early academic endeavors to elucidate the underlying concerns fueling the rise of American individualism. Against the backdrop of such societal fragmentation along the lines of sexuality, class, gender, religion, race, and ethnicity, the communal fervor birthed in the 1960s began to unravel in the early 1970s.

At the nexus of such a tumultuous socio-political and cultural juncture in America, Bruce Springsteen was hailed as the resonant voice of a generation ensnared by the perva-

sive tendrils of alienation and existential disquietude. Embarking on his musical odyssey in the latter epoch of the 1960s, Springsteen, akin to his contemporaries, found himself steeped in the transformative ethos of musical and literary luminaries such as Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Chuck Berry, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac. While the sonic landscape of the preceding era had indelibly marked its imprint upon his melodic cadence, production aesthetics, and recording methodologies, Springsteen's lyrical oeuvre deliberately eschewed the overtly confrontational political paradigms that typified the earlier part of the decade.

2. Bruce Springsteen and (Re)-Politicization of the American Rock Culture

In stark contrast to the strident politicking of protest anthems and slogan-laden ballads, Springsteen's sonic tapestry wove a rich tableau of the intricate and enigmatic tribulations besetting the quotidian lives of working-class people, the tumultuous psychosocial terrain of adolescence, and the ebullient camaraderie of communal spirit. During the 1970s in the United States, 'blue-collar' communities experienced a rise in influence across various urban areas, ranging from small towns like Freehold, New Jersey, to larger cities like those in Texas, Memphis, and New York City. However, amidst this urban growth, there was a noticeable feeling of existential alienation among the working class. This led to a shift towards more individualistic values over time. Springsteen, attuned to the spirit of the times, adeptly addressed the widespread discontent among the American working class, utilizing it as material for sharp social analysis and striving to preserve the evolving essence of working-class identity within the dynamic urban environment. Thus, through his artistry, Springsteen emerged as a herald of societal introspection, excavating the fissures of existential ennui and societal upheaval to forge a narrative tapestry that resonated deeply with the zeitgeist of his era.

Springsteen's lyrical narratives often depict a metaphorical journey wherein his characters navigate through a vivid urban landscape characterized by bustling activity, incessant car horns, uniform building structures, artificial greenery, and dimly lit streets. Within these figurative journeys, the characters embark on a frantic quest for a sense of completeness and totality that transcends the stark divisions of a technocratic mass society and a culturally polarized environment. Springsteen's characters embody a blend of opposing elements—as McParland has opined, "flesh and spirit, oil and blood, wild engines ready to be turned on" (McParland 2007, p. 21)—representing untamed energy awaiting activation. Consequently, the portrayal of their everyday urban reality becomes notably assertive yet precarious. In other words, the characters' bold assertion of their existence within the urban milieu, asserting their identity and desires despite the overwhelming urban environment, makes them self-assertive. Conversely, the fragile and unstable nature of their reality, highlighting the constant challenges and risks they face as they navigate through this urban landscape, situates the characters in a precarious and vulnerable condition. This juxtaposition captures the complex interplay between resilience and vulnerability inherent in their everyday experiences.

But Springsteen, with his resourceful and poetic song lyrics, instructs his characters to remain ontologically embedded within an impregnable 'sense of place.' This acute 'sense of place' governs the everyday action of the societal individual by producing, as Bob Crane suggests, a kind of "force" that "influences the choices and decisions of his [Springsteen's] protagonists". Springsteen's narratives provide a cluster of "places to stand" for his characters by creating a momentous situation at the very places from where "stirrings of the soul connect with the reality of the place" (Crane 2002, pp. 337–40). The ontological constructions of Springsteen's characters have made them exceedingly anchored to the material urban environment. Much like Whitman's vision of everyday life, Springsteen has narrated the collective voice of the ordinary and working-class people in particular socio-political circumstances, and these are the people "who, in extraordinary circumstances or in the commonest daily ones, have stood in their space and have "stepped out over the line"" (McParland 2007, p. 24). Walt Whitman and Bruce Springsteen, despite temporal and

medium disparities, intricately contributed towards the social production and reproduction of 'differential' and interpretative spaces, respectively, within their lyrical and musical narratives. Whitman's poetic musings, notably in works like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", meticulously capture the vibrant urban tapestry where diverse populations intersect and co-exist. His verses resonate with the pulsating energy and heterogeneous composition of city life, elucidating the multiplicity of experiences within socially stratified spaces. Similarly, Springsteen's evocative songs vividly depict working-class neighborhoods and industrial towns, spotlighting the socio-economic disparities and cultural intricacies ingrained within urban landscapes. Through their narratives, both artists confront the complexities of race, class, and identity, shedding light on the lived realities of marginalized communities within the urban milieu. Central to the thematic resonance of Whitman and Springsteen's works is the concept of ontological embeddedness, emphasizing the profound connection between individuals and their places of 'belonging.' Whitman's characters, amidst the bustling streets and waterfronts of nineteenth-century America, are deeply intertwined with the rhythms and flows of urban life, their identities intricately shaped by the socio-spatial context of the city. Similarly, Springsteen's protagonists navigate the intricate web of working-class realities, their lives intricately woven into the fabric of urban existence. Through their narratives, both artists illuminate the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the socio-spatial dynamics of urban landscapes, inviting their audiences to ponder questions of identity, belonging, and social justice within the complex urban terrain. Whitman's poetry, with its celebration of diversity and inclusivity, challenges conventional notions of homogeneity amidst the nexus of city life, embracing the multitude of voices and perspectives that converge within its bounds. Similarly, Springsteen's songs serve as poignant reflections of the disparities of wealth, opportunity, and privilege that define contemporary urban life, exposing the fault lines of social inequality that run through the complex matrix of everyday urban lives.

Springsteen has always reciprocated against the demoralizing temperament of his characters, who are unable to take any political stand in their personal lives, by problematizing their everyday social spaces where the very trait of public action is obliterated. However, as a conscious social individual, Springsteen has remained empathetic towards such a depoliticized social environment while simultaneously displaying his ambition of reconstructing the everyday lives of disenfranchised societal individuals. This unique artistic vision of Springsteen has remained a primary impetus behind re-evaluating the political pursuits of the decade. Thereby, through his song stories, he has portrayed a liberal political ideology entwined with a resolution of socio-economic justice by making an "attempt to reclaim a public space for public action and "re-politicized" the "depoliticized"" (Stonerook 2012, p. 203). In other words, Springsteen's evocation of a strong sense of place contains a discernible and quintessential charm of the 'American dream' that boldly transcends the divisionary nature of the regulated social structures.

The notion of such illusory dreams encapsulates a nuanced and philosophically resonant idealism deeply enmeshed within the collective psyche of American society. It reverberates with the idea of embodying aspirations of ambition, opportunity, and the pursuit of an enriched existence. At its essence, the American dream epitomizes a foundational belief in the promise of upward mobility and the liberty to shape one's own destiny. The concept of the 'American dream' stands as an emblem of hope that has historically galvanized individuals to strive for personal betterment, often amidst formidable societal constraints. Within the artistic domain of Bruce Springsteen's oeuvre, the American dream assumes a multifaceted significance, functioning as both a catalyzing force and a trenchant commentary on societal actualities. Springsteen's characters, frequently portrayed navigating the gritty urban landscapes emblematic of working-class America, embody the aspirations and adversities intrinsic to the quest for this elusive dream. Through their narratives, Springsteen grapples with the intricacies of socio-economic disparity and the disillusionment that accompanies the realization of the American dream's unequal accessibility. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the obstacles encountered along their trajectories,

Springsteen's protagonists persist, impelled by an unyielding faith in the transformative potential of hope and resilience. Their pursuit of personal fulfillment becomes entwined with a broader quest for social equity and communal empowerment. In this vein, the quintessential allure of the American dream transcends mere material prosperity, morphing into a symbol of human fortitude, dignity, and the ceaseless pursuit of a more equitable societal fabric. Springsteen's artistic evocation of such an American dream engenders profound introspection into the dynamics of ambition, identity, and the human condition while beckoning a sense of contemplation on the interplay between individual agency and societal structures, as well as the moral imperatives underpinning the endeavor for personal and collective fulfillment. Through his musical compositions, which stand as a testament to the enduring tenacity of human resilience and the transformative potency of collective endeavor amidst the hierarchized everyday existence, Springsteen challenges audiences to confront the paradoxes and incongruities inherent in the American dream, compelling a reevaluation of presumptions and a recalibration of aspirations in pursuit of a more inclusive and compassionate societal paradigm.

Most of his ballads, especially their compositions and cadences, reflect a strong pursuit of escape from the drab and uninspiring urban landscapes. Professor Robert P. McParland, in his article "The Geography of Bruce Springsteen: Poetics and American Dreamscapes" (McParland 2007), has observed this phenomenon while comparing Springsteen's narratorial urge for escape with the Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith.' By emphasizing Springsteen's resolution for the salvation and transformation of the situations of his characters, McParland has also placed him in comparison with the classical poets by stating that Bruce Springsteen is, in a sense, our prophetic bard, an American Homer or Dante, telling the path of modern men and women, or, as in Dante's poem, the story of journeys through hell, purgatory, and paradise. His lyrics and music appear to seek, with great resolve, the ascent of the human spirit, the point of breakthrough into love, passion, or sheer energy and ecstasy (McParland 2007, p. 19).

As an inheritor of the American Transcendentalist tradition, Springsteen's use of classical poetic techniques has made his song stories more compelling. The British popular music critic Simon Frith has also discussed at length Springsteen's art of narrativizing and situating his characters in a specific time and place, which resembles the classical poetic tradition. Frith has also argued about how the devaluation of social abstractions has been celebrated in Springsteen's narratives. He has situated his characters against the backdrop of the symbolic realm of urban neighborhoods, empty highways, dusty pavements, factory machines, car sheds, and riverbanks. Springsteen's metaphorical approach to the sound of a car engine, loneliness on the highway, or economic injustice with the factory workers has severely contributed towards the development of identificatory processes and emotional aspects of his characters as well as those of his readers and audiences. Thus, Springsteen's effort to reconstruct and retrieve the collective politicized ontology of the American urban imagination "links the voices of his characters to the landscape where they stand, with metaphorical power and revelation" (Crane 2002, p. 339). The formation of identificatory processes in Springsteen's narratives is simultaneously forged from the complex moral structure of the societal individual as well as from their sense of social integrity. While reflecting on the build-up of personal identity formation and interpersonal social relationships, Bruce Springsteen has primarily emphasized the working-class issues of the small-town community and the localized notion of identity formation. His pivotal albums, like *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*, *Born to Run*, and *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, are city-oriented and offer the sensuous charm of nomadic travel across urban landscapes. Springsteen's songs "offer a more detailed, more vivid, and more peopled description, where tension, glamour, and action overlay a realistic drab landscape of backstairs, small bars, and amusement halls" (Jarvis 1985, p. 112). His songs like "Jungleland", "Born To Run", "Backstreets", "It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City", etc. have severely captured the American urban landscapes within terrible conflicts that hinder collective social progress. Much like Dylan, Bruce Springsteen's use of language,

poetic devices, symbolism, imagery, and philosophical insight on the everyday human condition has aptly been materialized by the young American urban imagination of the 1970s. The huge body and diverse range of his musical works transparently reflect the artistic influence of Whitman, Faulkner, and W.C. Williams. Being a gifted storyteller, Springsteen had densely populated his poetic universe with a wide range of personalities and urban imaginaries that fostered a belief system for the runaway American dream. In order to dig deeper inside the wider spectrum of the human condition, Springsteen has situated his characters across a wide range of American landscapes by emphasizing their individual social concerns and eventually navigating those concerns over protruding and interpretative spaces of analysis.

3. Casing the Promised Land: An Ode to Spatial Resistance

3.1. *The Romantic Allure of Born to Run*

Within the realm of Springsteen's lyrical landscape, the idyllic conception of the 'promised land' is permeated with complex layers of reality, interwoven with vivid urban contexts. He extends a universal invitation to his audience while beckoning them to immerse themselves in the aspirations, dreams, and tribulations of his protagonists' odysseys, which are depicted with a variety of emotional dispositions ranging from quiet resignation to defiant assertion (Garman 1996, p. 74). The thematic motif of mobility permeates Springsteen's magnum opus, *Born To Run*, as he intricately maps out expansive geographical terrains, traversing networks of roads, rivers, and highways juxtaposed against the gritty underbelly of urban sprawl. Here, his characters find themselves ensnared in existential limbo, depicted frozen in the melancholic inertia of Tenth Avenue, disoriented amidst the urban jungle of 'Jungleland', or grappling with the allure of self-destruction in the embrace of 'suicide machines.' Commencing with the inaugural track, "Thunder Road", Springsteen punctuates the album with the evocative hum of a car engine, setting the stage for a lyrical dialogue between the narrator and Mary, wherein he tenderly entices her to forsake the monotony of their provincial milieu in favor of a spirited journey towards the mythical American 'promised land', propelled by the pulsating rhythm of rock 'n' roll.

The screen door slams,
Mary's dress sways
Like a vision, she dances across the porch as the radio plays
Roy Orbison singing for the lonely
...
All the redemption I can offer, girl, is beneath this dirty hood
With a chance to make it good somehow
Hey, what else can we do now? (Springsteen 1975)

By setting up a measure for an adventurous drive, Springsteen is declaring a romantic desire to escape to some ideal, promised land as his narrator eagerly asks Mary not to turn off her desire to escape while offering her the front seat of his car. One can effortlessly point out Springsteen's outlook towards hyper-charged individual action in the background of a locomotive urban reality, where the narrator has been seen recollecting his rebellious impulses from a Roy Orbison track on the radio. Eventually, the narrator, with an intriguing quest for a new beginning, has ultimately revealed his prior intention of accoupling Mary through the dusty, bumpy, and symbolic 'thunder road.'

Oh-oh, come take my hand
We're riding out tonight to case the promised land
...
So Mary, climb in

It's a town full of losers

And I'm pulling out of here to win (Springsteen 1975)

Springsteen's utilization of the phrase 'case the promised land' serves as an inaugural gesture, setting the thematic underpinning for the ensuing verses and unequivocally affirming the existence of paradisiacal realms. The persona exhibits a disinterest in the logistical feasibility of infiltrating such idyllic terrains, remaining indifferent to their ontological status, be it corporeal or fantastical; the paramount concern lies in the fervent aspiration to rupture the tether binding him to the mundane and uninspiring landscape of extant commitments.

And I know you're lonely, and there are words that I ain't spoken

But tonight, we'll be free; all the promises'll be broken (Springsteen 1975)

With the masterful deployment of vivid imagery and profound symbolism, Springsteen orchestrates a narrative imbued with a fervent intimacy between the protagonist and Mary, wherein they navigate the clandestine pathways to the metaphorical 'promised land', spurred by their romantic yearning for sustaining their youthfulness. Particularly, the culminating lines of the composition position the protagonist amidst quintessential American disillusionment, compelling a final, desperate quest for a realm steeped in hope, aspirations, and boundless potential. While reflecting on this context, Samuel F.S. Pardini has associated the protagonist of this song with "modern, urban Huck Finn", who, "at the steering wheel of his automobile, the prime American symbol of male escapism (disguised as freedom), wants to light out for the territory ahead and find a heaven for the two of them". (Pardini 2012, p. 103). The sole redemption proffered by the protagonist to Mary resides beneath the hood of his automobile, starkly contrasting the deceptive allure of provincial confines and the false glamor of estranged urban life. Herein, the protagonist constructs a physical landscape within Mary's psyche, delineating a spatial topography of movement through streets, highways, and thoroughfares, seeking to ameliorate her from a terrain of 'loss' wherein echoes of a delusional past impede her mobility. Springsteen's intent to transcend the constricting bounds of a proletarian geography dominated by frigid factories and machinery is palpably manifested in the protagonist's manipulative impetus, recognizing the town's inhabitants as 'losers' and thus compelled to flee the hopeless urban territories.

However, the subsequent compositions stemming from the album, including notable pieces like "Born To Run", "Backstreets", "Meeting Across the River", "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out", and finally "Jungleland", diverge from mere depictions of the travails of the purported working class. William I. Wolff, in his book *Bruce Springsteen and Popular Music: Rhetoric, Social Consciousness, and Contemporary Culture* (Wolff 2019), posits that Springsteen's conceptualization of the working class embodies an idealized, nostalgic, romanticized, and contentious portrayal of a populace far more diverse than initially portrayed (Wolff 2019, p. 67). The expansive vista of an emotionally tumultuous terrain, proffered by Springsteen in subsequent tracks, is significantly augmented by the projection of economic and cultural upheaval across an indistinct white urban American working-class enclave, where the communal fabric teeters on the brink of dissolution. In the composition of "Born to Run", we discern Springsteen's poetic persona intricately entwined with the protagonists and narrators of the song, solidifying his role as the eternal spokesperson for a specific cohort ensnared in a perpetual socio-spatial struggle, fervently seeking a symbolic 'promised land.' Employing a formulaic strophic structure across three successive verses and modulating chord progressions alongside recurring refrains, Springsteen unabashedly articulates a fervent 'promise of escape' within this composition. Here, the impassioned romantic impulse of the narrator yields to the grandeur of both abstract and tangible references to the 'promised land', merging into a symbolic framework endeavoring to rediscover the quotidian socio-spatial existence of the song's characters.

In the day, we sweat it out on the streets

Of a runaway American dream
At night, we ride through the mansions of glory
In suicide machines
Sprung from cages on Highway 9
Chrome wheeled, fuel injected, and steppin' out over the line
Oh, baby, this town rips the bones from your back
It's a death trap, its a suicide rap
We gotta get out while we're young
'Cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to run (Springsteen 1975)

Within this narrative ambit, the focal point is Wendy, a quintessential American archetype, yearning for liberation from the relentless and oppressive urban sprawl. As Springsteen's lyrical motif unfolds, it endeavors, akin to Kenneth Burke's notion of 'consubstantiality', to engender a shared essence with both the audience and the song's characters, particularly Wendy. Burke, in his book *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Burke 1962), defines "consubstantiality" as the state wherein one becomes "substantially one" with another while retaining individual agency—a delicate balance of unity and autonomy (Burke 1962, p. 20). In parallel, Springsteen's lyrical imagination weaves a narrative of unyielding blue-collar realism, seeking to empathize with Wendy's existential anguish while maintaining a degree of detachment from her somber plight. Thus, he endeavors to infuse Wendy's troubled psyche with a semblance of optimism, assuring her of the shared destiny of their generation—nomadic souls destined to 'run' towards life's romantic allure. Notably, the temporal landscape of 'night' emerges as a potent symbol in Springsteen's vision of a utopian 'promised land', injected with an unbridled romanticism diametrically opposed to the alienating mundanity of daytime existence. His narrative voice resents the frenetic hustle of daytime, likening it to a 'death trap' and a 'suicide rap', while his characters find resonance in the nocturnal realm, where the fluidity of 'lived time' ignites a revolutionary fervor amidst the banality of their estranged everyday reality.

The highway's jammed with broken heroes
On a last chance power drive
Everybody's out on the run tonight
But there's no place left to hide
Together, Wendy, we can live with the sadness
I'll love you with all the madness in my soul
Oh, someday, girl, I don't know when
We're gonna get to that place
Where we really wanna go, and we'll walk in the sun ... (Springsteen 1975)

The narrator justifies his reason behind an urgent symbolic 'run' or a desperate attempt for a quick escape to the glorious promise of a future, which is tantamount to discovering his ideal 'promised land.' The narrator's utterances of the 'hemi-powered drones', 'rear-view mirrors', 'noisy boulevards', and finally, the unforgettable image of a 'jammed highway with broken heroes' have framed a symbolic network of the collective repressive desires of the young American individuals. Such a symbolic formulation leads to the production of what Lefebvre suggests as 'spaces of leisure' that can be identified in the individual or public urges of denial, resistance, and escape from the rationalized state-dominated spaces of a homogeneous modernity. Lefebvre has called such spaces of leisure the "counter space", which unleashes the libidinal impulse against the normative social order by making its inhabitants explode through the system of contradictory spatialization (Lefebvre 1991,

p. 73). Therefore, Springsteen's narrator in the song, who will perhaps be sooner or later counted on the list of his broken heroes, is destined to run from the hegemonic forces of industrial capitalism until he reaches the differential space of his desired destination. Hence, the frenzied narrator, while persuading Wendy for a redemptive escape, is engaging himself in the act of a spatial struggle by 're-adapting' to his dominated space of 'being' in his everyday life. Similar stances can be found in his other songs like "Jungleland", "The Promised Land", "Badlands", and "Darkness on the Edge of the Town", which are replete with such narratorial desires for an ultimate detachment from the everyday flow of time, or what Bergson calls 'durée.'

3.2. *Jungleland, Darkness on the Edge of Town and the Temporal–Geography of Resistance*

In the culminating song of his pivotal album *Born To Run*, Springsteen masterfully conjures the plaintive echoes of marginalized souls, buoyed by an ethos of hope and audacity that renders them temporally, spatially, and ethically impervious to the specters of their tumultuous pasts and the stifling confines of their urban milieu. Commencing the final composition, "Jungleland", with a lilting symphony of violin and piano, Springsteen orchestrates a romantic tableau inhabited by enigmatic protagonists Magic Rat and the Barefoot Girl, ensnared in the murky throes of an undisclosed transgression, pursued relentlessly by the authoritarian arm of the law, represented by the ominous Maximum Lawmen. Throughout the song's unfolding narrative, the chase persists unabated, while the omniscient narrator, poised from a consubstantial vantage, offers intermittent glimpses of the revolutionary urban landscape, teeming with a tantalizing tapestry of possibilities and perils. Springsteen's creative acumen expands the sonic palette of the composition, culminating in a crescendo of lyrical virtuosity in the third stanza, wherein the listener is transported to the visceral realm of 'Jungleland', a realm pulsating with the frenetic cadence of turnpikes, balletic interludes, nocturnal gangs, shadowy alleys, grand operas, vigilant law enforcement, and the incandescent riffs of burgeoning rock 'n' roll ensembles.

Well, the midnight gang's assembled
And picked a rendezvous for the night
They'll meet 'neath that giant Exxon sign
That brings this fair city light
...
The hungry and the hunted
Explode into rock 'n' roll bands
That face off against each other out in the street
Down in Jungleland (Springsteen 1975)

Springsteen's poetic construction of such a fantasy world of rock 'n' roll is not only a product of his creative imagination but also hints at his everyday 'lived reality' while growing up in the North American suburbs. As he moves the song forward with a frantic and free-flowing saxophone solo, the tragic spectrum of the 'Jungleland' becomes clearer when the narrator shifts our attention to the parking lot—symbolizing the underground urban life—where the 'lonely hearted lovers' have been seen struggling. But none of them seems to care for the clueless victimization of Magic Rat and his girl, even though they belong to their league. Springsteen tries to establish the tragically romantic serenade of Magic Rat and his girl as a futile attempt towards community engagement at the very heart of this Jungleland. Here, the narrator has captured a series of terrifying image sequences, the range of which blurs the boundary between private and public space. Starting from the spectrum of refusal in the private space of a girl's bedroom to the overlooked gunshots in the hallways and uptown tunnels, Springsteen has forebodingly measured the vast hollowness across the city, where everyone finally ends up being wounded and half dead in their vague attempts at redemption. After envisaging such a horrifying range of alienation,

the narrator finally becomes stoic and helpless, with no words left to describe such a pathetic panorama of a petrified urban landscape where everyday life is constantly being resonated with the guttural cries of its denizens from the nooks and crannies. In most cases, Springsteen's narrators have threateningly been silenced after witnessing the unforgiving and suffocating situations in such soul-deadening landscapes where they find it utterly difficult to sustain their euphoric hopes and beliefs and better promise of life in the future. The reason of which Springsteen himself has described in his autobiography—*Born To Run* (Springsteen 2016)—while pointing out “a seismic gap” that he thinks “had opened up between generations” where the young tramps of the American 1960s and 1970s have suddenly started feeling “orphaned, abandoned amid the flow of history” with their “compass spinning internally homeless” (Springsteen 2016, p. 167). Most of Springsteen's sagacious song stories do not map his narrators at the pivot of their self-contentment but relatively make them martyred in their decamping journey of self-exploration, which assures them a sense of victory. Therefore, in “Jungleland”, the ill-fated Magic Rat and Barefoot Girl have failed to create an exception; thereby, they are placed alongside the other victimized and broken heroes of Springsteen and have been seen trying to reach for their desired moment by making an honest stand.

Outside, the street's on fire in a real death waltz
Between what is flesh and what is fantasy
And the poets down here do not write nothing at all
They just stand back and let it all be
And in the quick of a knife, they reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand
But they wind up wounded, not even dead
Tonight in Jungleland (Springsteen 1975)

The behavioral tendencies exhibited by Springsteen's characters may sometimes appear ostensibly irrational or driven by materialistic pursuits, as their socio-spatial existence is ensconced within a framework of libidinal desire. As Harvey posits in an alternative context, such socio-spatial dynamics are never devoid of inherent biases and are inherently imbued with class or other social dimensions, frequently becoming focal points of fervent social contestation (Harvey 239). In this vein, Springsteen not only alludes to the tangible formation of youth culture within the harsh confines of urban environments but also underscores the individual's role in shaping societal spatial constructs, thereby offering a critical commentary on the socio-cultural fabric of these locales. The symbolic attachment of Springsteen's narrators to subversive activities within these social spaces is characterized by a cyclic and reversible act of temporality, epitomized in verses such as “I wanna die with you, Wendy, on the street tonight/In an everlasting kiss”, brimming with anticipation, intuition, and fervor. Similar thematic undercurrents permeate other compositions such as “Jungleland”, “The Promised Land”, “Badlands”, and “Darkness on the Edge of Town”, wherein narratorial desires for transcending the quotidian temporal continuum, akin to Bergson's concept of ‘durée’, are vividly articulated. The deliberate pursuit of detachment enables these narrators to apprehend a sense of ‘totality’, encapsulating themselves within the creative thrust of a singular ‘moment.’

However, within the narrative realm under scrutiny, the quotidian existence of the characters unfolds within the embrace of an unbridled compulsion towards romanticism. This act of fervent embrace bears the potential to encounter the barriers imposed by socio-cultural and territorial constraints enforced by the state, thus altering the very essence of their daily existence. In this narrative, the characters embark on a journey of embracing these ‘moments’ with the utmost intensity, challenging societal norms and the homogenizing effects of modernity. Their desire to emerge “wounded” but not “dead” underscores their pursuit of the profound significance found in those fleeting moments, which disrupt

the routinized and objectified nature of their socio-spatial relationships. In Lefebvre's conceptualization, the notion of a 'moment' transcends mere temporal progression, embodying instead what he terms "modalities of presence" or encounters with "partial totalities" (Lefebvre 2014, p. 234). Unlike Bergson's linear understanding of time, Lefebvre characterizes these moments as discrete instances that exist somewhat independently from the conventional flow of time. These individual or collective experiences offer fleeting yet profound insights, aspiring to bridge the gap between the 'particular' and the 'universal'. They neither confine themselves to a singular 'instance' nor fully unveil an absolute conception of totality. Rather, each 'moment' represents a fragment of totality, contributing to the temporal landscape of resistance within everyday life.

Drawing upon Lefebvre's conceptualization, the 'moment' is elucidated as the "modalities of presence" or an encounter with "partial totalities", diverging from Bergson's linear conception of time by comprising a sequence of discrete 'instances' existing beyond the confines of the chronological procession. (Lefebvre 2014, p. 234). Such individual or collective encounters bear the potential for revelation, albeit fleeting and penetrating in essence. Consequently, the 'moments' transcend the banal empirical structures of everyday existence, endeavoring to forge a connection between the individual and the universal. Neither do these 'moments' remain confined within a singular 'instance', nor do they unveil an absolute panorama of 'totality.' Instead, the 'moment' itself emerges as a fragment of the 'totality', thereby delineating the temporal geography of resistance within everyday life. Lefebvre rejects the concept of 'totality' as a singular and uniform entity, opting instead to emphasize the emergence of a multitude of perspectives within social spaces. This highlights the emergence of diverse forms of totality through a revolutionary process of temporalization across various socio-cultural contexts.

However, Springsteen's lyrical impulse becomes darker and grittier in "Darkness on the Edge of Town", where, instead of a demented search for the redemptive moments, his song stories "reflect the obsessions of a relatively naïve white boy who is shocked to learn that the world is not his oyster" (Cullen 2005, p. 64). In this compilation, Springsteen has artfully honed his narrative voice to encompass the vast panorama of American suffering, anguish, and bereavement. The American landscape he presents here is a distorted iteration of the metaphorical 'Jungleland', a realm in which his protagonists frequently find themselves ensnared amidst tumultuous and infernal predicaments, as epitomized in "Adam Raised a Cain", "Badlands", and "Factory". Particularly within these compositions, Springsteen's narrators are denied even the semblance of pursuing their coveted 'moments'. Conversely, tracks such as "Something in the Night", "The Promised Land", and "Racing in The Street" effuse with his lyrical acumen, depicting the 'streets' as avenues where socially marginalized figures endeavor to grasp at the quintessential 'moment' amid the quotidian drudgery of their lives. Notably, in "The Promised Land", Springsteen eschews intricate imagery, opting instead for a direct motif, wherein he unveils the underlying catalyst behind his blue-collar narrator's outpouring of frustration—a steadfast faith in a promised land.

The dogs on Main Street howl
'Cause they understand
If I could wrench one moment into my hands
Mister, I ain't a boy; no, I'm a man
And I believe in a promised land (Springsteen 1978)

Here, Springsteen's thematic focus gravitates singularly towards dismantling the false ideologies and illusory dreams ingrained by capitalist hegemony into the collective consciousness of American youth. The narrative protagonist, steadfast in his aspirations despite disillusionment, symbolically dismantles the icy constraints of industrial capitalism, opting to detonate the figurative shackles of his entrapment. This album notably eschews characters of timidity and juvenility; rather, Springsteen crafts figures of nuanced maturity

and fervor, poised to confront adversity with unwavering defiance and spatial resistance. Through his portrayal of rebellious protagonists, Springsteen affords us a glimpse into the socio-spatial struggle ensconced within the ‘darkness on the edge of town’, a locus emblematic of their existential strife. Notably, in the titular track, the narrator elucidates the physical manifestation of such a locale in the concluding verse—the hill—situated beyond the confines of urbanity, transcending the commodified realm of civilization.

Tonight, I’ll be on that hill ‘cause I can’t stop
 I’ll be on that hill with everything I got
 With our lives on the line where dreams are found and lost
 I’ll be there on time and I’ll pay the cost
 For wanting things that can only be found
 In the darkness on the edge of town (Springsteen 1978)

The narrator has yet to delineate whether the chosen eminence would yield the fruition of all his life’s pledges. Nevertheless, an epiphany dawns upon him, elucidating that the essence of his envisioned ‘promised land’ resides within the sanctum of wilderness. This realization unveils the intrinsic incapacity of modern urban capitalism and technocratic epistemologies to inscribe the raw, untamed contours of the natural landscape. Indeed, it is within the sequestered precincts of nature that the elusive essence of fulfillment, impervious to the machinations of contemporary socio-economic paradigms, finds its abode.

4. Conclusions

In his seminal work *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Huyssen 1986), Andreas Huyssen adeptly examines the postmodern currents within the fabric of the American dream. Huyssen eloquently delineates the tumultuous cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, characterizing the counterculture of this era as a formidable challenge to the rigidity of high modernism. He posits that the essence of postmodernism in America aimed not merely to rebel against established norms but to infuse the European avant-garde tradition with an American ethos, thereby revitalizing it within a distinct cultural milieu (Huyssen 1986, p. 3). In his critique, Huyssen extends his analysis beyond the post-war American panorama to scrutinize the cultural politics of Britain’s historical avant-garde, identifying a perceived failure stemming from the waning resilience of cultural revolutionaries and a detachment of everyday life from broader socio-historical frameworks. Unlike the disillusionment witnessed in European movements such as the German protests or France’s May ’68, Huyssen argues that Americans maintained a unique capacity for novelty and temporal imagination, fostering an unwavering confidence in their position at the vanguard of history (Huyssen 1986, p. 5). The postmodern ethos of the 1960s and 1970s in America gave rise to what Huyssen terms a “creative space”, wherein inhabitants sought to challenge prevailing high-modernist paradigms in favor of contemporary beliefs. However, this burgeoning cultural landscape was swiftly co-opted and hegemonized by the dominant forces of late capitalism, which underpinned American consumer society. Indeed, the advent of postmodernism in American cultural contexts, akin to Fredric Jameson’s concept of the ‘logic of late capitalism’, was intrinsically bound to the interests of American bureaucratic apparatuses (Huyssen 1986, p. 5).

Amidst such a vibrant and consumer-driven cultural landscape, Henri Lefebvre emerges with a groundbreaking critique of spatial issues within the fabric of everyday human existence. Departing from the abstract conceptualizations of ‘everyday life’ prevalent in Althusserian and existential Marxist thought, Lefebvre imbues the term with a distinctly Romantic and humanistic essence. Central to his critique is the notion of ‘spatial practice’, which stands in stark contrast to the alienating experiences of modern urban life. Lefebvre delves deeply into the material realm of human existence, where individuals frequently find themselves estranged from their own essence of being. This perspective, as astutely noted by Rob Shields, captures the oscillation between fully engaged living and

alienated withdrawal that characterizes individual consciousness. It acknowledges the often-overlooked aspects of everyday life, from its absent-minded routines to its frenetic pace (Shields 1999, pp. 40–41). Lefebvre's framework redirects historical materialism towards spatial concerns, simultaneously addressing the complexities of social space and capitalism's interaction with geographic landscapes. His emphasis on the 'social' is inherently tied to an understanding of the 'geographical' and 'spatial.' Consequently, the Lefebvrian concept of 'spatiality' becomes a potent tool for social critique, unveiling the cultural significance embedded within different locations. These distinct locations serve as arenas for societal and class struggles, inherently tied to the production and contestation of space. Lefebvre's exploration of spatial problematics destabilizes the homogenizing forces of modernity, reimagining everyday life as a dynamic site of creative resistance against dominant power structures (Soja 2014, p. 110).

Within the realm of popular music, particularly the genre of 'rock', a persistent association with the ethos of rebellious youth culture endures, often regarded as a dissenting subcultural expression. Bruce Springsteen, hailed as one of the paramount spokespersons of the American counterculture, has orchestrated a giant shift in the portrayal of this discontented cultural phenomenon. His oeuvre reiterates the narrative focus of rock music, spotlighting the spatial intricacies of the everyday realities experienced by the working class. Particularly in the nascent stages of his career, Springsteen aptly captures the grim repercussions of everyday existence amidst the swiftly evolving socio-cultural, economic, and political landscapes characteristic of late capitalism. Whether traversing the provincial ambiance of locales like Asbury Park and Kingsley Street or navigating the cosmopolitan labyrinth of New York City, Springsteen's protagonists embark on a quest for 'elsewhere', seeking respite from their urban environs burdened by inertia, entrenched class divisions, and the relentless toil of menial labor (Morris 2007, p. 10). The collective endeavors of these characters underscore Springsteen's thematic motif, which centralizes their agency within the urban milieu. His lyrical narratives not only delve into the social dynamics of his rock heroes but also imbue their spatial context with an ethos of perpetual struggle, thereby engendering fresh cultural interpretations of their societal landscape. Springsteen's evocative imagery and symbolic lexicon not only depict the empirical circumstances of his characters within specific urban settings but also articulate their defiant stance against entrenched inequalities within these locales. His symbolic delineation of an American 'promised land' elucidates the profound democratic potential inherent within urban spaces, where the notion of 'streets' symbolizes a crucible for creative ideation, social disruption, communal engagement, and ultimately, a radical and inclusive urban experience accessible to all denizens. The 'streets' serve as a locus for spontaneous encounters, fostering a milieu conducive to play, learning, and the fertile exchange of ideas (Lefebvre 2003, p. 18). The fervent spirit of revolution animating Springsteen's characters underscores a pressing imperative for creative and imaginative engagement with urban spaces and their inhabitants. It is these restless urban dwellers who harbor the transformative potential to metamorphose urban territories into arenas of novelty and meaningful interaction, subverting the hegemonic structures of American capitalist society.

Funding: The research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: Author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

“The Noise of Our Living”: Richard Wright and Chicago Blues

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Abstract: Historicizing the musical genre known as “Chicago blues,” I further complicate Richard Wright’s already complicated attitudes toward “the folk” and modernity. Utilizing close readings of *12 Million Black Voices*, I show how Wright’s apparent denigration of the blues as an outmoded, pre-modern artistic form is dependent on his historical situation writing before the advent of a new electrified form of blues that developed in Chicago shortly after the book’s publication. Utilizing biographical details of the life of Muddy Waters, I show how his work as a musician in Mississippi, then in Chicago, and his development of an electrified blues style, parallels and personifies the shift from an African American perspective rooted in an agrarian, pre-modern south to an industrial, modern north documented so effectively by Wright. Furthermore, the Chicago blues musicians’ transmogrification of the rural Delta blues into an electrified, urban expression manifests the vernacular-modernist artistic conception which Wright seems to be envisioning and pointing toward in *12 Million Black Voices*.

Keywords: African American literature; blues music

1. Introduction

In the introduction that he wrote for St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton’s monumental *Black Metropolis: A Study of Life in a Negro City*, Richard Wright looked back on his time in Chicago and the importance of Drake and Cayton’s sociological research to his own budding sensibilities as a writer:

There is an open and raw beauty about that city that seems either to kill or endow one with the spirit of life. I felt those extremes of possibility, death and hope, while I lived half hungry and afraid in a city to which I had fled with the dumb yearning to write, to tell my story. But I did not know what my story was, and it was not until I stumbled on science that I discovered some of the meanings of the environment that battered and taunted me. I encountered the work of men who were studying the Negro community, amassing facts about urban Negro life, and found that sincere art and honest science were not far apart, that each could enrich the other. (Wright [1945] 1993, pp. xvii–xviii)

It is this fusion of “sincere art” and “honest science” that makes *12 Million Black Voices* (Wright 1941) such a powerful work. In it, Wright presents a historical account of the black population in America, focusing especially on the Great Migrations of the first half of the twentieth century, in which a vast number of African Americans moved from the oppressive conditions of the rural South to the crowded industrial cities of the North. As is befitting such a grand narrative, Wright employs a highly formalized style of writing, unique among his works, using elements from the African American oral tradition as the basis of a new literary modernism.

Complicating the common understanding that Richard Wright took an ambivalent stance toward the relevance of African American oral traditions in an increasingly modernized society, I emphasize that in *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright draws heavily on elements of black vernacular forms, particularly preaching and the blues. First, I will look at Wright’s unique mode of modernism, which is informed, I maintain, both by his understanding

of modernity and of African American oral folk culture. Next, I show how Wright uses rhetorical elements derived from two important forms of the black oral tradition—the sermon and the blues—in *12 Million Black Voices*, and how these elements work together with the book’s photographs to function as an example of a “community text,” in which the author/orator and the reader/audience both participate to construct meaning (Moss 2001, p. 203). Finally, I contextualize the above concepts in relation to concurrent developments in African American music, addressing the scholarly debate over Wright’s assessment of the blues as an outmoded form of “folk” expression. While several scholars—including William Ferris (2008), Jack B. Moore (1995), John M. Reilly (1982), and Karen Roggenkamp (2010)—have noted Wright’s drawing on elements of African American vernacular culture in his writing, I explore more deeply the specific oral patterns used by both Chicago preachers and blues musicians, illustrating how Wright employs these same patterns in *12 Million Black Voices*. Further, by contextualizing *12 Million Black Voices* in the time and place of Chicago’s South Side during the 1940s, I show how Wright’s apparently contradictory attitudes toward the blues in the book are reflective of the specific time that he was writing, especially in relation to the material conditions and artistic development of the style that came to be known as “Chicago blues”, specifically in the recorded output and documented performance practices of Muddy Waters, both before and after his arrival in Chicago. The artistic and philosophical connections between Richard Wright and Muddy Waters reveal the new literary and musical styles that arose on Chicago’s South Side in the mid twentieth century as a kind of “blues modernism”, thoroughly grounded in the oral traditions of the rural south, even as it extended and extrapolated these traditions for a new life in the urban north.

2. An “Intensity of Feeling”: Wright’s Uneasy Relation to Modernity and Folk Culture

Throughout *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright voices his conflicted stance toward modernity and modernism. Wright understood the Great Migration not only as a mass spatial transplantation, from the south to the north, or as only a cultural one, from an agrarian to an urban society, but as a temporal one as well, entailing nothing less than a virtually instantaneous shift from feudalism to modernity. In his preface to the book, he describes the Great Migration as “a complex movement of a debased feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization” (Wright 1941, p. xx). But for Wright, this was not a simple narrative of “progress”. On the one hand, northern industrial cities provided real opportunity to escape the horrors of the past and to realize the promise of a happier future, not in heaven, but here on earth:

They tell us we will live in brick buildings, that we will vote, that we will be able to send our children to school for nine months of the year, that if we get into trouble we will not be lynched, and that we will not have to grin, doff our hats, bend our knees, slap our thighs, dance, and laugh when we see a white face. We listen, and it sounds like religion. Is it really true? Is there not a trick somewhere? (Wright 1941, pp. 86–87)

Of course, there was in fact a “trick somewhere,” as Wright and many other African Americans realized when they came up against the alienation, exploitation, and more oblique but no less pervasive forms of racism that awaited them in northern industrial cities, where the disorienting logic of capitalism ruled with absolute authority, and moved in mysterious ways:

No longer do our lives depend upon the soil, the sun, the rain, or the wind; we live by the grace of jobs and the brutal logic of jobs. We do not know this world, or what makes it move. In the South life was different; men spoke to you, cursed you, yelled at you, or killed you. The world moved by signs we knew. But here in the North cold forces hit you and push you. It is a world of *things*. (Wright 1941, p. 100)

These passages highlight the degree to which Wright's conflicted attitude toward modernity was rooted in his conflicted attitude toward capitalism—in his recognition that he and other African Americans simultaneously benefited from and were exploited by industrial capital. This conflict was also an essential component of Wright's vision of himself as a black modernist artist, based on what Paul Gilroy calls—in reference to W. E. B. Du Bois—an “intensity of feeling” inherent to the black experience in America (Gilroy 1993, p. 115), simultaneously entailing Wright's recognition of his role in the artistic traditions of the west even as he rejected and was rejected by many elements of that culture (Gilroy 1993, p. 162). Wright's modernism, in other words, is not only a modernism from the bottom-up, as articulated by Langston Hughes in writings such as “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (Hughes [1926] 1990), but also what Benjamin Balthaser has called a modernism “from the outside-in” (Balthaser 2013, p. 385), one rooted in class as well as racial consciousness. Focusing on the photographs in *12 Million Black Voices*, Balthaser finds Wright's interest in documentary photography an apt reflection of Wright's emphasis on visual metaphors throughout his writing, noting that Wright reformulated W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness as “double-vision” in order to highlight African American identity as existing both within and without the gaze of Western modernity (Balthaser 2013, p. 358). For Balthaser, this double-vision accounts for Wright's contradictory statements on modernity, as, for example, when he states that modernity is simultaneously rooted in the “deadly web of slavery” while being also the result of “higher human consciousness” (Balthaser 2013, p. 358). Thus, Wright understands documentary photography as a quintessentially modernist medium, being an “expression of a racial past as well as a liberatory future . . . containing technologies of liberation and domination” (Balthaser 2013, p. 358).

Double consciousness and double vision are apt metaphors for coming to grips with Wright, whose “hybrid identity as a modern man” (Gilroy 1993, p. 162) informs his varied perceptions of duality. For instance, the contradictions in documentary photography noted by Balthaser also apply to Wright's understanding of music in relation to modernity. Here, Ronald Radano's concept of “double hearing” (Radano 2003, p. 45) is useful for understanding Wright's contradictory stance toward the aural realm of African American oral tradition and blues music. “Double hearing” is especially apt for understanding Wright's orally infused modernism, because Radano uses the term to denote the areas of resonance between sound and text, a process of “listening” to the text—“a dynamic process in which orality moves through textuality and back around” (Radano 2003, p. 45)—which amounts to a new way of “hearing” the work of African American writers and, for that matter, a new way of “reading” the “texted history” of African American musicians.

While Wright maintained a complicated relationship with modernity and modernism, his relationship to “the folk” was no less complicated. As far back as the infamous literary “debate” between Zora Neale Hurston and Wright during the mid-twentieth century, Wright's stance toward African American vernacular culture has been hotly contested. Hurston, in her review of *Uncle Tom's Children*, maintained that Wright was “tone-deaf” in his treatment of black vernacular speech (Hurston [1938] 1993, p. 4), while Wright derided Hurston's use of dialect as a “minstrel technique” (Wright [1937] 1993, p. 17). William Ferris points out that “of all the twentieth-century black writers . . . Richard Wright has the most complex relationship to folk culture” because “unlike black writers such as Hurston and Walker who journeyed south to rediscover their folk heritage, Wright fled these worlds” (Ferris 2008, p. 541). Following the lead of June Jordan, William J. Maxwell, in *New Negro, Old Left*, outlines a more nuanced understanding of the Wright/Hurston debate, in which communism for Wright and anthropology for Hurston functioned as modernist discourses that were enriched, rather than hampered by, folk cultures. Maxwell points out that for Wright, the real worth of African American folk culture lies in its “revolutionary significance” when yoked to a broader nationalistic vision (Maxwell 1999, p. 178). Maxwell's interpretation is borne out in works such as “Blueprint for Negro Writing”, in which Wright notes the important cultural role that African American folklore

plays in an emerging black national consciousness, because it expresses “the collective sense of Negro life in America” and “marks the emergence of a new culture in the shell of the old.” (Wright 1937, p. 406). In light of these points, and while bearing in mind his sometimes conflicted relationship to “the folk”, I maintain that a key point in understanding Wright’s artistry in *12 Million Black Voices* lies in recognizing the elements of the African American oral tradition that lie beneath the surface and that invest his narrative with a structural logic and unity of expression.

Wright himself acknowledged the influence of two of the most prominent African American oral traditions—the sermon and the blues—on his artistic sensibilities. For instance, in *Black Boy*, he recounts the poetically charged stories he heard in the sermons preached at his grandmother’s church:

The elders of her church expounded a gospel clogged with images of vast lakes of eternal fires, of seas vanishing, of valleys of dry bones, of the sun burning to ashes, of the moon turning to blood, of stars falling to the earth, of a wooden staff being transformed into a serpent, of voices speaking out of clouds, of men walking upon water, of God riding whirlwinds, of water changing into wine, of the dead rising and living, of the blind seeing, of the lame walking . . . dramas thronged with all the billions of human beings who had ever lived or died as God judged the quick and the dead. (Wright [1945] 1998, p. 102)

Additionally, Wright likened his work as a writer to that of a bluesman “who sings the blues and it becomes a part of, an expression of, his whole predicament—his place in society” (qtd. in Lennon 1993, p. 240). The oral tradition thus infuses all of his writings, but *12 Million Black Voices* employs these elements in ways that are unique in Wright’s body of work. As Jack Moore has written, “the prose of *12 Million Black Voices* . . . is more oral and aural than any of Wright’s other book-length works” (Moore 1995, p. 143). In the book, Wright makes use of several oral and aural strategies that are hallmarks of both the sermon and the blues, strategies that can be understood in terms of their dialogic features. These include the use of shared knowledge, call and response, and personification.

3. “Voices Are Speaking”: *12 Million Black Voices* as Community Text

As scholars such as John M. Reilly (1982) and Karen Roggenkamp (2010) have pointed out, *12 Million Black Voices* can be read as a kind of sermon, in which Wright makes use of several rhetorical devices employed by African American preachers. In African American churches, the sermon, as Beverly Moss writes in her ethnographic study of Chicago preachers and their congregations, is “as important to its community as the academic essay is to the academy” (Moss 2001, p. 202). A key feature of African American church sermons is their use of dialogic patterns, a characteristic most commonly known as call and response. Call and response makes the sermon a dialogue rather than a monologue. In other words, this event relies on active audience participation in order to make its text whole, and to complete the event of the sermon. The sermon thus becomes what Moss refers to as a “community text,” which “exists as a creation of a community of participants” (Moss 2001, p. 203). Many African American church ministers are well aware of this phenomenon and leave room in the preparation of their sermons for the congregation to complete the text by entering with their responses. As one minister told Moss, “to have a silent congregation in a mainstream African American church means that the minister and his or her sermon have failed” (Moss 2001, p. 203). The minister may give explicit markers through question words like *what* and *how*—denoting that he is requesting or inviting response on the part of the congregation.

Formalized dialogic patterns such as this comprise a significant part of a class of rhetorical devices that could be grouped under the general category of “shared knowledge”. It is these devices that turn African American preachers’ sermons into dialogues rather than merely monologues, making them “community texts” forged by a community of participants. While he lived in Chicago, Richard Wright came to understand the significance of this community of participants, primarily through the work of sociologists such as St.

Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, who studied the black community of Chicago's South Side. In *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright artfully weaves sociological statistics from Drake and Cayton's research along with evocative photographs and a collective narrative voice rooted in the black oral tradition, to create a new kind of "community text"—a text that is created by a community of participants united by shared knowledge—speaking to the urban, industrial environment in which blacks from the south now found themselves. These dialogic patterns also figure prominently in the blues, which underwent a similar industrial transformation in Chicago, making the blues a similar kind of community text and expressive of similar shared knowledge, as will be explored in this section.

In order for a community text such as a sermon to be collaboratively constructed—in order that the preacher and the congregation may fully participate—the participants must share a vision of communal identity, and the sermon is a key site in the construction of this identity. The sermon is thus both a community text and a "community-building construct" (Moss 2001, p. 205), in which a preacher typically uses rhetorical devices to encourage active engagement on the part of the congregation. This includes the use of first-person plural pronouns and the use of shared cultural knowledge. Furthermore, as one Chicago preacher told Moss, "to be successful at using shared cultural knowledge as a strategy, the ministers must know their congregations well, they must make judgments about what their congregations know, what their congregations' expectations are" (Moss 2001, p. 206). In *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright makes effective use of these devices of shared knowledge, most prominently in his use throughout the book of the first-person plural "we". This repeated use of "we" has the effect of cumulatively blurring the distinction between author and reader and between narrator and audience, until by the last lines of the book, "we" are all together: "We are with the new tide. We stand at the crossroads. We watch each new procession. The hot wires carry urgent appeals. Print compels us. Voices are speaking. Men are moving! And we shall be with them. . ." (Wright 1941, p. 147). The "we" at the beginning of the book, speaking for African Americans as "we black folk" (Wright 1941, p. 38), has by the book's conclusion broadened to include all members of the working class, suggesting that vernacular African American culture has become a blueprint or template not only for a new mode of modernism but for a new understanding of culture rooted in working-class identity at the national and transnational levels.

The sharing in the composition of an African American preacher's sermon and the collaborative construction of it, through techniques such as call and response and shared knowledge, represent another way that the boundaries between speaker/writer and audience/reader are blurred (Moss 2001, p. 205). In this light, the photographs interspersed throughout the text of *12 Million Black Voices* can be understood as a type of pictorial "response" to Wright's textual "calls". The photographs are a collective response both in the sense that they depict anonymous members of African American communities and in the sense that the photographs are not the work of any one individual but are drawn from the Farm Security Administration's collection. And because Wright wrote his text before he knew which photographs would be included in the book (Moore 1995, p. 145), he was acting like a preacher "leaving room" in his composition for this collective response.

The photographs also function as responses to the text on another level, apparent in the captions that accompany the photographs. A particularly illustrative example of this occurs on pages 49–55. First, Wright states, on page 49, "Our days are walled with cotton; we move casually among the whites and they move casually among us. . ." and the paragraph continues with a description of the oppressive plantation system. Then, a new paragraph starts:

We plow, plant, chop, and pick the cotton, working always toward a dark, mercurial goal. We hear that silk is becoming popular, that jute is taking the place of cotton in many lands, that factories are making clothing out of rayon, that scientists have invented a substance called nylon. All these are blows to the reign of Queen Cotton, and when she dies we do not know how many of us will die with her. (Wright 1941, p. 49)

Then, over the next six pages, photographs of cotton fields are displayed, accompanied by the following six captions: “Our lives are walled with cotton—We plow and plant cotton—We chop cotton—We pick cotton—When Queen Cotton dies . . . — . . . how many of us will die with her?” (Wright 1941, pp. 50–55). The learned, verbose wordings of the preacher, with his allusions to new scientific developments, technological innovations, synthetic materials, and alternative crops that may take the place of cotton, are followed by the response of the congregation, who repeat the preacher’s ideas but in greatly simplified iterations—an appropriate simplification in that it serves to foreground the photographs themselves. The narrative “we” in the textual utterances underscores that the congregation is engaged in a collective response to the preacher’s calls. Thus, the photographs, or rather the interplay of the photographs with the text, prompt readers into more active “modes of engagement” (Allred 2006, p. 555), in the same way that a good preacher motivates his congregation into active engagement with his own text.

The reference to “Queen Cotton” in the last example brings up yet another rhetorical device that is used in sermons as well as the blues: personification. Preachers use this technique to convey abstract principles and theological ideas in more concrete ways to members of their congregations. And just as a preacher will illustrate moral principles through the use of characters that personify a particular attribute—such as the Devil for evil or Job for patience—so too does Richard Wright impart societal structures with personifications: “Lords of the Land” designates the class of white southern landowners, while “Bosses of the Buildings” refers to the northern urban white factory owners. Abstract societal institutions, which Wright elsewhere in the book portrays as incomprehensible “cold forces” (Wright 1941, p. 100), are thus made tangible and comprehensible in the form of personifications.

In addition to “cold forces”, material objects are also personified in African American culture. When Memphis Minnie sang, in her recording of “When the Levee Breaks”, “Mean ol’ Levee, taught me to weep and moan” (Memphis Minnie 1929), she employed this device, attributing the human role of “teacher” to a man-made object, the levee. Wright also ascribes human attributes to man-made objects in his extended riff on the kitchenette, occurring on pages 104–111 of *12 Million Black Voices*, a passage that likens the kitchenette to a writer: “The kitchenette is the author of the glad tidings that new suckers are in town, ready to be cheated, plundered, and put in their places” (Wright 1941, p. 105). In this section, Wright also employs repetition, another rhetorical device used both by preachers and blues singers. Each paragraph in this section begins with “The kitchenette . . .”, and this repeated use of the phrase corresponds with a feature of sermons noted by Drake and Cayton, when they wrote in *Black Metropolis* that it was common to hear preachers on the South Side who “repeat phrases over and over with a rising and falling inflection of the voice” (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1993, pp. 624–25). These examples illustrate the varied ways that Wright in *12 Million Black Voices* makes use of the African American oral tradition.

4. “Our ‘Spirituals’ of the City Pavements”: Richard Wright’s Chicago Blues

Midway through the book, Wright calls attention to two distinct modes of the African American oral tradition, the sacred and the secular, by including a mock sermon, printed in italics, immediately followed by an account of the Saturday night function at a “crossroad dancehall”, where revelers “slow drag, ball the jack, and Charleston to an old guitar and piano” (Wright 1941, p. 73). This juxtaposition of the sacred and the secular is an important feature of the blues itself, and there has long been a great deal of cross-fertilization between sacred and secular African American musical expressions. Yet despite the musical similarities between blues and sacred music, many African American communities maintained a strict cultural divide between the two musical realms. Chicago musician Big Bill Broonzy, for instance, recalls: “My mother was a Christian, my dad was a Christian . . . the whole family was all Baptists and they didn’t think it was right that I should go and play a fiddle, play the blues and barn dance songs and things like that. But anyway we went on through with it” (qtd. in House 1981, p. 41). Broonzy’s protege, Muddy Waters, recounts a similar

story: “My grandmother, she say I shouldn’t be playing the blues. I should go to church, she’d tell me. But to this day I never figured out why people say that you sinning. Devil gonna get you if you play the blues. Yeah, call it devil’s music” (qtd. in House 1981, p. 41). Broonzy and Waters both articulate the sense that to play the blues was to violate a strongly held cultural norm and standard of morality.

Yet the blues and church music, despite serving very different functions and often being different in terms of lyric subject matter, nevertheless maintain a commonality of musical practices. Examples of common musical practices between the blues and gospel music include call-and-response patterns; lyrical repetition as a rhetorical device; lyrical personification of natural forces such as floods, droughts, and infestations; and, in musicological terms, the use of bent notes, flatted thirds, fifths, and sevenths (“blue notes”). As Angela Davis has pointed out in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*: “Despite the new salience of this binary opposition [between the old spirituals and the new blues music] in the everyday lives of black people, it is important to underscore the close relationship between the old music and the new. The new music had old roots, and the old music reflected a new ideological grounding of black religion. Both were deeply rooted in a shared history and culture” (Davis 1998, p. 6). Davis, then, understands this “shared history and culture,” what Moss has termed “shared knowledge,” as a kind of nexus between the sacred and secular realms of African American culture, a nexus that complicates the facile taxonomic divisions of African American musical expressions into separate genres.

Davis’s insight is reinforced by Albert Murray, who in his seminal work *Stomping the Blues* writes: “In point of fact, traditionally, the highest praise given a blues musician has been the declaration that he can make a dance hall rock and roll like a downhome church during revival time. But then many of the elements of blues music seem to have been derived from the downhome church in the first place” (Murray 1976, p. 27). Albert Murray has written extensively on the role of blues musicians in African American culture, highlighting the emotional complexity of the blues as an art form with the aim toward rectifying the common misconception of blues music as a defeatist expression of suffering and despair. To this point, Murray makes a crucial distinction between what he calls “the blues as such” and “the blues as music,” with the “blues as such” representing the common notion of “blues” as denoting sadness, despair, and depression, while the “blues as music” is a kind of tool or weapon (which he has referred to as a “survival technology”) that addresses this despair, but also confronts it and ultimately overcomes and rises above it. It is this essential resilience and optimism that Murray identifies as the most important part of the blues aesthetic. This last point is supremely important to Murray, upholding the blues as an autonomous art, while also maintaining that in heeding and honoring this autonomy, blues music serves a functional purpose in African American culture:

The fundamental function of the blues musician (also known as the jazz musician), the most obvious as well as the most pragmatic mission of whose performance is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay at least for the time being, but also to evoke an ambience of Dionysian revelry in the process. Which is to say, even as such blues (or jazz) performers as the appropriately legendary Buddy Bolden, the improbable but undeniable Jelly Roll Morton, the primordially regal Bessie Smith, played their usual engagements as dance-hall, night-club, and vaudeville entertainers, they were at the same time fulfilling a central role in a ceremony that was at once a purification rite and a celebration the festive earthiness of which was tantamount to a fertility ritual. (Murray 1976, p. 17)

In portraying blues musicians’ performances as rites of purification and celebrations, Murray expresses an understanding, common among many African American intellectuals today, of the blues as more than mere entertainment. Yet with the exception of the brief, intriguing passage on page 73 of the book, Richard Wright does not seem to place much importance on the blues in *12 Million Black Voices*. The old spirituals of rural southern life have been replaced by modern, urban musical styles, which serve as “‘spirituals’ of the city pavements” (Wright 1941, p. 128). Yet, while admitting that blues music does offer some

trite enjoyment, a “string of ditties that make the leaves of the trees shiver in naked and raucous laughter”, he ultimately rejects the blues as being no longer relevant to modern, urban life, claiming that the blues simply “are not enough to unify our fragile folk lives” (Wright 1941, p. 75). Here, some scholars have understandably taken exception, pointing out that Wright relegates the blues to “mere cultural residue”, and see this as an “important limitation” of his “metanarrative of progress-through-migration” (Allred 2006, p. 565). Yet I think there is a deeper way of understanding Wright’s seeming underestimation of the blues, which requires situating Wright’s claim in its historical musical-cultural context.

First, it is important to keep in mind the year in which Wright made this claim, in connection with the historical development of the blues as its musical expressions became more urbanized as a result of the Great Migration. At the time *12 Million Black Voices* was published, in 1941, the blues was still very much a rural musical style. While a style of blues that is commonly known as “urban blues” had developed in northern US cities during the 1920s and 1930s, this genre is quite different stylistically from traditional blues styles based in the rural American south. So-called “urban blues”, epitomized by the recorded output of Bessie Smith, featured vocalists steeped in the blues tradition and was performed using many of the mannerisms of blues singers and instrumentalists, but much of the repertoire was drawn from Tin Pan Alley and Broadway show tunes. Furthermore, in search of a more lucrative commercial success, many of the traditional elements of the blues vocabulary—such as bent notes, grunts, harmonic clashes, and extended instrumental techniques—were toned down in recordings of “urban blues”, resulting in a sound and musical vocabulary more akin to vaudeville numbers than traditional blues. Bessie Smith herself, the highest-paid black entertainer of her era, was a fixture on the vaudeville circuit, selling USD 6 million worth of records over a four-year period (Thompkins 2018). Meanwhile, due in part to the work of mobile recording projects like those of Alan Lomax, the rural sound of Delta blues was also being disseminated throughout Northern American cities via the distribution of “race records” in black neighborhoods. I make these distinctions between urban and rural blues in order to highlight the musical characteristics and performance practices that make urban blues a distinct genre from rural, Delta blues. I do not mean to imply a value judgement of one style over the other, or to suggest that one style is more “authentic” than the other. Indeed, “authenticity” is a problematic term I will critique in the next section.

5. Muddy Waters’s “Screaming Blues”

Although blues musicians, like other African Americans, had begun arriving in great numbers in Chicago from the south for many years before the publication of *12 Million Black Voices*, there was still no distinctly identifiable blues style unique to Chicago. The Delta blues musicians who did migrate to Chicago during the first decades of the twentieth century found it difficult to find an audience for their music. There was a small demand for Delta blues, serving a niche market for some displaced African Americans who longed for the familiar sounds from down home—an example of what Farah Jasmine Griffin has called “the South in the City” (Griffin 1995)—but by and large, most urban African Americans were ready to move on. When Muddy Waters arrived in Chicago, eager to make a career of music, he found to his dismay that “the blues didn’t move anybody in the big city. They called it sharecropper music” (qtd. in Bone and Courage 2011, p. 101). Blues music was seen as a throwback to an earlier agrarian life, and consequently as a reminder of the hard times that many were all too eager to leave behind them. The general attitude in Chicago thus seemed to be in keeping with Richard Wright’s assessment that the blues were no longer relevant to urban, modern African Americans. But if we trace the development of Waters’s music, we can see blues music itself and African Americans’ relation to it change dramatically as a result of the new urban environment.

This can be heard, for example, in the earliest recordings of Muddy Waters, widely recognized as the “father” of modern Chicago blues. Waters was recording blues even before he arrived in Chicago. Alan Lomax, in his capacity as an archivist of American folk

songs for the Library of Congress, was traveling through the South in 1941 using his mobile equipment to record musicians for the purpose of documenting the music for the library. It was on this trip that Lomax encountered Waters and recorded him on the front porch of his cabin (Gordon 2002, pp. 36–38). Lomax returned on another recording trip in 1942, and again recorded Waters at his home.

These recordings, collated in the collection *Muddy Waters: The Complete Plantation Recordings*, reveal a young musician thoroughly steeped in the Delta blues tradition; the recordings consist of performances by Waters—accompanied only by his acoustic guitar, and sometimes one or two other musicians—and the repertoire is drawn from staples of the early blues. These recordings document that as late as 1942, Waters was still performing in a traditional rural style, and had not yet developed the musical elements that would become identified with the Chicago blues style.

Waters's increased frustration at trying to make a living at sharecropping seems to have prompted him to move to Chicago in 1943 (Gordon 2002, pp. 64–67). Once there, he soon met Big Bill Broonzy, who, having already been in Chicago for over twenty years, was a veteran of the city's nightlife and music scene. Broonzy recognized the younger musician's talent and drive, and became a mentor to Muddy. Broonzy showed Waters around the house-party circuit and also began hiring him for club gigs (Bone and Courage 2011, p. 101; House 1981, p. 8), and Waters soon began leading his own band. In addition to his apprenticeship with Broonzy, Waters encountered a slew of other blues musicians—including fellow future luminaries Willie Dixon, Jimmy Rogers, and Otis Spann—also newly arrived from the South.

By the 1950s, the collective performance practices of these musicians would coalesce into what has become widely known as “Chicago blues”, characterized by the use of solid-body electric guitars and loud, often distorted amplification, which in turn engendered a stylistic shift to heavier bass and drum patterns. These characteristics were an inevitable outcome of musicians playing to be heard in noisy, crowded venues. In the older, rural blues music, musicians often performed in relatively intimate locations, such as a front porch or in someone's living room, as solo acts, or sometimes in loose-knit ensembles of two or three players.

Besides the scope and setting of musical ensembles, there were other musical differences in performance practice between the rural Delta blues and the urban Chicago blues. Rural blues musicians would often switch to chord changes in the blues progression arbitrarily, when they felt like it. For instance, in Muddy Waters's first version of “You're Gonna Miss Me” recorded by Alan Lomax in 1942 at Waters's front porch in Mississippi, the blues form is not yet fixed as the 12-bar progression it would coalesce into in Chicago just a few years later. In this version, Waters deviates significantly from the standard 12-bar blues form. After a four-bar intro, Waters begins the first chorus (00:00:14), adhering to the standard form. The second chorus (00:00:53), however, contains only three beats in bar four, deviating from the standard 4/4 metrical pattern of the rest of the song. The third chorus (00:01:30) also skips a beat in bar four. The fourth chorus consists of a guitar solo played by Waters and adheres to the standard 12-bar blues form. The fifth and final chorus (00:02:43) again skips a beat in bar four, and adds one beat to bar eight, resulting in a five-beat measure (Waters 1942).

These deviations from the standard 12-bar blues form are typical of the Delta blues. Solo performers in this style changed chords and altered meters at will, feeling no compulsion to adhere to consistent forms. Musical time in this rural blues style, like the time of agrarian society in general, was fluid, non-standardized, and resisted quantification into neatly measured, repeated units. The conception of musical time in Delta blues can thus be understood as an aural expression of the pre-industrial sense of time that Richard Wright describes in *12 Million Black Voices* when he writes, of life in the old South: “The seasons of the year form the mold that shapes our lives, and who can change the seasons?” (64). Likewise, the new rhythmic and structural concepts—such as the standardized 12-bar form described earlier—that were developed in the Chicago blues style are indicative of

the larger change in the concept of time that occurs in the change from pre-industrial, agrarian rural cultures to industrialized urban cultures. This shift from fluid notions of time based on the position of the sun in the sky and the changing of the seasons to a universal standard time entails a fundamental shift from circular and malleable senses of time to linear and rigid senses. Thus, we see carried out in musical performance practice Wright's theory of the Great Migration not only as a cultural transplantation from an agrarian to an urban society, but also as a profound temporal shift, comprising "a complex movement of a debased feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization" (xx). In Chicago, the necessity of musicians functioning together as a band, as a tight unit, resulted in the metrics of blues music becoming more measured and standardized. The primacy of the 12-bar blues form became established among urban musicians, and this form was largely unvaried from tune to tune.

The Chicago musicians' primary determining innovation, the switch to electric from acoustic instruments, was prompted not so much by any aesthetic choices as by the exigencies of Chicago's crowded, noisy, South Side nightclubs. As Muddy Waters succinctly put it, "Couldn't nobody hear you with an acoustic" (Rooney 1971, p. 112). And as Richard Wright put it in *12 Million Black Voices*, "The noise of our living, boxed in stone and steel, is so loud that even a pistol shot is smothered" (Wright 1941, p. 108). Solid-body guitars were capable of being played much more loudly through amplification than traditional hollow-body electric and acoustic guitars, which tended to feed back more easily, even at relatively low volumes. Thus, solid-body guitars were a more practical choice if a musician wished to play at loud volumes. Solid-body guitars were essentially slabs of wood with the bridge and electronic pickups screwed directly into the wood. This construction made the solid-body guitar all but inaudible when played without an amplifier, but their lack of acoustical resonance became an advantage when plugged in to an amplifier, because the lack of vibrating parts made for a very stable, pure, electronic signal capable of loud amplitude. In contrast, traditional hollow-body guitars had the pickups mounted on top of a very resonant soundboard, and also employed "floating" bridges that rested on top of the soundboard, as on a violin. This construction made for a loud resonant tone when played acoustically, but these resonances presented many problems when amplified. Furthermore, the Chicago blues musicians' switch to solid-body guitars was also prompted by economic factors: the simplified construction of the solid-body guitar meant that they could be mass produced in factories rather than handmade by individual luthiers, which resulted in lower costs of production and hence lower prices for solid-body guitars. In fact, many jazz guitarists of the time considered solid-body guitars to be mere toys, and not real instruments. But the Chicago blues musicians used instruments that were economically accessible to them and used their instruments' strengths to their advantage in constructing a new sound for a new urban environment. With the ensuing popularity of Chicago blues recordings, this new sound defined the musical aesthetic standard for a younger generation of musicians and listeners who would make it the cornerstone not only of blues but also of subsequent styles of rock and pop music.

Elements of the earlier Delta blues had coalesced into an urban style that was loud, raucous, and featured driving rhythms—all enabled by the adaption of the standard 12-bar blues form, which allowed for drums, bass, guitars, and vocalists to move together as a unit. The new electric blues sound was hard and aggressive, a reflection of the harsh urban industrial living conditions in which the music was developed, and which Wright documented so vividly in *12 Million Black Voices*. The stylistic evolution that occurred in a matter of a few years in Chicago, as the blues morphed from a rural to an urban expression, was thus an aural iteration of the larger phenomenon Wright described in the book, that of the abrupt, jarring shift from feudalism to modernity. The new Chicago blues was perfectly suited to the environment in which it developed, which is probably why it initially met with such confusion, even outright hostility, when it was performed to audiences from outside of this environment. For instance, Robert Palmer describes the problems Muddy Waters faced in the 1950s when he first played his electric blues to audiences in England, who were

largely unaware of the new blues and in fact were only just beginning to appreciate the older, rural Delta blues styles:

Muddy, innocent of this audience's expectations, cranked up his amplifier, hit a crashing bottleneck run, and began hollering his blues. SCREAMING BLUES AND HOWLING PIANO is the way that Muddy remembers the morning's newspaper headlines. "I had opened that amplifier up, boy, and there was these headlines in all the papers. Chris Barber [English "trad-jazz" trombonist who led Waters's backing band for the English tour], he say, 'You play good, but don't play your amplifier so loud. Play it lower'". Paul Oliver noted wryly in *Jazz Monthly*, "When Muddy Waters came to England, his rocking blues and electric guitar was meat that proved too strong for many stomachs," but the tour turned out well after Muddy toned down a bit. He was more than willing to be accommodating. "Now I know that the people in England like soft guitar and the old blues", he told *Melody Maker*'s Max Jones shortly before he left to return to Chicago. (Palmer 1981, pp. 257–58)

Waters toning down his blues in response to audiences' reactions can be understood as an example of how the blues functions as a "community text", being constructed by a community of participants, and also demonstrates how a blues performance, like a sermon, depends on "shared knowledge" specific to that community of participants for its successful reception. If the performance or sermon is delivered to an audience outside of that community—who do not share the same cultural knowledge, as was the case with the audience Waters encountered in Britain—the blues musician's and preacher's messages are likely to fall on deaf ears.

As the electric, "Chicago-style" blues became established as a musical form that was played primarily by and for working-class black urban audiences, the older, acoustic "country blues", which had previously been marketed as "race records" to black audiences, began to be marketed by record companies and concert promoters as "folk blues" to white audiences. This marketing phenomenon became known in the 1960s as the "blues revival." Many older, rural blues musicians, such as Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, and Sleepy John Estes, were suddenly called out of obscurity to enjoy a newfound popularity performing on the college circuit and at folk festivals (Narváez 2001, p. 32). This recycled form of "folk blues" carried an ideological component that placed a premium on "authenticity"—with the genuinely authentic blues musician being an African American from the deep south who was also a hard-drinking nomadic hobo, riding the rails and renouncing commercial success as he (the nomadic lifestyle was not so accessible to women) documented the working class in his lyrics. In recent years, several scholars—including Jeff Titon (1993), Elijah Wald (2004), Marybeth Hamilton (2004), Patricia Schroeder (2004), and Karl Hangston Miller (2010)—have challenged this pervasive mythology (O'Connell 2013, p. 62). In the mid-twentieth century, however, before such revisionist scholarship occurred, "authenticity" was fetishized to such an extent that white promoters would sometimes alter the performance practices even of urban blues musicians, who were not playing in the acoustic folk style that had recently become popular and lucrative as a counterforce to the electric Chicago style.

For instance, when Bill Grauer, a producer for the Riverside label, recorded the album *The Folk Blues of John Lee Hooker*, he refused to let Hooker, a Detroit-based blues musician, use his electric guitar and amplifier (with which Hooker had already made several popular recordings), and "put him in the studio with only a Goya acoustic guitar" (Narváez 2001, p. 32). According to Orin Keepnews, who wrote the liner notes for the album, the resulting recording proved that Hooker was "a most *authentic* singer of the way-back, close-to-the-soil kind of blues" (Narváez 2001, p. 32, emphasis added). For the recording session, Grauer had intended Hooker to sing songs by Leadbelly—an itinerant laborer, ex-convict, and singer who had recently found widespread popularity among young white collegiate audiences—but Hooker was unfamiliar with Leadbelly's songs, and in fact had never heard

them, which indicates the extent of the cultural gap that had quickly developed in the way folk blues and urban blues were marketed.

For that matter, the very concept of “folk music” as a separate style provoked the ire of many blues musicians, who astutely saw through the racialized marketing hype of concert promoters and record company executives. Chicago blues musician Big Bill Broonzy, for instance, in a spoken-word introduction to his rendition of “This Train”, recorded sometime in 1956 or 1957, stated that “all the songs I’ve ever heard in my life are folk songs, I’ve never heard horses sing none of them yet” (Broonzy 2000). Robin D.G. Kelley has astutely noted that Broonzy’s statement constitutes a humorous yet pointed challenge to the constructedness of the “folk” (Kelley 1992, p. 1403). In his critique of the term “folk,” Broonzy anticipates the work of scholars such as Kelley himself, who have argued that the term “folk” is imbricated with class, gender, and race, making the term ultimately not merely about musical tastes but about power (p. 1408). Albert Murray was also suspicious of earlier attempts at marketing African American music as folk music, pointing out that many of the “race records” of the 1930s that were presented as the work of musicians who were “instinctive” and “self-taught” were more often than not merely derivative and conventional (Titon 1993, pp. 222–23). Such reactionary and cynical uses of the term “folk” by music industry marketers then were a far cry from the vernacular folk modernisms articulated by Richard Wright and Muddy Waters, relegating the “folk” as a safe haven for musical conservatism and white consumption rather than as the basis of a radical new African American modernism.

It must be borne in mind that before the so-called “blues revival,” the development of an electrified, urbanized style of Chicago blues occurred well after the publication of *12 Million Black Voices*. But by the time he was writing for the French periodical *La revue du jazz* in 1949—after blues music’s electric turn had occurred, and after the new blues style was being heard on records that were being reviewed and selling well outside of Chicago—Wright made it clear that blues music was very much relevant to modernity: “The blues could be called the spirituals of the city. They are the songs of simple people whose life has been caught up in and brutalized by the inflexible logic of modern industrial existence . . . blues are as natural for the black people as eating and sleeping, and as a rule they come out of their daily existence” (qtd. in Ferris 2008, p. 542). Not only does Wright now identify the blues as an expression of “the city” rather than the country, he also recognizes the blues as an expression of modernity, finding that the music had become a technology of survival for “black people” eking out a “modern industrial existence” and fulfilling a spiritual need similar to the way that the religious songs of the black rural south had done, but now secularized and urbanized for the north.

Aided with the historical knowledge of Chicago blues music’s development into a modernist art form in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one can understand why, in 1941, when blues music was still associated with rural southern life, Richard Wright could state that the blues had no power to “unify” African Americans’ “fragile folk lives” (Wright 1941, p. 75). If he had written *12 Million Black Voices* only a few years later, when he was writing for *La revue du jazz* and by which time the hard-edged and industrial urban blues was in full swing, his assessment of the blues would have been very different.

Wright’s thinking evolved continuously throughout his life. His changing relationships with the Communist Party and Black Nationalism, for instance, are apparent in his writing and have been well documented in recent scholarship. What has received considerably less attention is the way Wright’s stance toward the blues, as an expression of African American folk culture and modernity, also evolved. As this essay has shown, the claim made in *12 Million Black Voices* that the blues “are not enough to unify our fragile folk lives” cannot be taken at face value. First, contextualizing this claim reveals that it was made at a time before the blues had coalesced into the modern, urban, electric style that came to be known as the Chicago blues. Second, the narrative style employed throughout *12 Million Black Voices*, full of rhetorical devices derived from the blues and African American preaching, belies the idea that the blues and other African American

vernacular forms were insufficient to provide the basis for a new modernism. Through his nuanced understanding of the sermon and the blues, as well as his skill in deploying these traditional oral forms in a new modernistic expression informed by the social sciences as well as art, Richard Wright, in *12 Million Black Voices*, demonstrated how these modes of the African American oral tradition adapted to meet the requirements of modern life in urban environments, fulfilling Langston Hughes's promise that an African American artist who embraced African American vernacular culture, "especially for literature and the drama", would find "a great field of unused material ready for his art" and an inexhaustible supply of themes at hand sufficient to furnish "a lifetime of creative work" (Hughes [1926] 1990, p. 965). Similarly, Muddy Waters, in his transmogrification of a rural folk music into a vital, modernist expression—through his use of new electric instruments and a codification of loose Delta blues forms into a tightly structured standard 12-bar urban blues form—is an example of the kind of musician Langston Hughes foresaw when he wrote that "our folk music, having achieved world-wide fame, offers itself to the genius of the great individual American Negro composer who is to come" (Hughes [1926] 1990, p. 966). Here, then, in the work of Wright and Waters, were the manifestations of the literature and music that Langston Hughes had envisioned years earlier in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain": "We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves" (Hughes [1926] 1990, p. 966).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

The Idea of *Notational Ekphrasis* in Words and Music

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Abstract: This chapter will focus on the presence of musical notation in literary texts, their aesthetic, (inter-)medial presence and potentialities, in paradigmatic Modern short stories such as Katherine Mansfield's "The Wind Blows" (1915), Virginia Woolf's "The String Quartet" (1921) and Vladimir Nabokov's "Music" (1932). What these stories share is a perception of music as sonorous moving forms, symbolic imagery or seemingly 'dancing' musical notation on the page. In introducing the term *notational ekphrasis*, I wish to differentiate these phenomena as overt and covert for the larger theory of intermediality. In doing so, I will show how these narratives negotiate musical notation, writing and iconicity.

Keywords: music; literature; modernism; intermediality; notation; iconicity

Far from being just 'tonally moving forms' (Hanslick qtd. in Kivy 2002, p. 60), 'music sets the psyche in motion' (Koopman 2001, p. 328, my translation), for what 'approaches' us when we listen to music are not tones, but a complex sequence of tiny air pressure variations, 'the result of longitudinal waves caused by the sound body' (p. 328, my translation). More than dwelling on a mood, the musical experience is an ebb and flow of highs and lows, calm and restlessness, intensification and relaxation, deeply involving corporeal embodiment. It is this bodily experience that gives us a seemingly direct 'understanding' of why notes can ascend and descend, create tension or give away to mixed feelings. A further tangible and material understanding of music can be perceived through its inscription; the musical score is to the general listener of music far less accessible than the corporeal phenomena mentioned but nevertheless represents the movements of music on a different plane. A complex and at the same time aesthetically evaluated notational system, it has been referred to in literature only on a few occasions, using various strategies and assigning to it numerous functions.

Literature can generally refer to music by thematizing its acoustic qualities and effects on the body, by evoking a specific performance or song while also being able to imitate certain sound patterns and rhythms using poetic stylistics. Of the many strategies through which music can be incorporated into literature, a basic level of engagement has been hitherto under-theorized: the function of musical notation in and for literary texts. This is surprising because it is here that music and literature share common semiotic properties; music can be coded and decoded within a system of written signifiers—i.e., the notes on a page—and thus can be said to have a 'text'. But what happens when literary texts allude to the signifiers of this other notational system, this other musical text? What happens when characters in literature view the 'notes on a page'? Which imaginary potentials does the musical score afford in the perception of the same by musicians and non-musicians alike? Which roles do these in turn play for modern literary texts that explore new narrative pathways, which, it may be argued, exposes a grappling with the limits of expression itself?

The following proposes to introduce the term *notational ekphrasis* in order to fill this gap. *Notational ekphrasis* means the visual representation of musical notation within literary

texts. This is important, as it showcases a further experimental strand within the nature of Modern texts that themselves often grapple with the limits of expression at the turn of the 20th century. For, just as texts can relate to other media by using site-specific intermedial strategies, they can also refer to the visual properties of musical notation and thereby to its inherent signification processes. This article will focus on the (inter-)medial presence and potentialities of musical notation in paradigmatic Modern short stories, such as Katherine Mansfield's "The Wind Blows" (Mansfield 1921, originally published in *Signature* magazine in 1915), Virginia Woolf's "The String Quartet" (1921) and Vladimir Nabokov's "Music" (1932). In order to discuss these three examples, I will introduce and outline the term *notational ekphrasis*, which will enable the following conclusions: (1) defining the hitherto uncertain status of the representational characteristics of 'notes on a page' in literary texts, (2) mining the creative explorations of these intersemiotic dynamics by differentiating how musical notation is mediated through characters that are both musicians and non-musicians and (3) furthering an understanding as to how musical notation—but also notational systems in general—function in their ways of encoding and decoding. For this, I will differentiate and argue for 'overt' *notational ekphrasis* in Mansfield and Nabokov and 'covert' *notational ekphrasis* in Woolf.

1. Towards an Idea of Notational Ekphrasis

My term, *notational ekphrasis*, in part takes its cue from John Hollander's (1988, p. 209) *notional ekphrasis*, which he uses in order to describe imaginary works of music, such as Vinteuil's composition in *Swann's Way* of Marcel Proust's (1913, Vol. 1) *In Search of Lost Time*. His observations can be easily transferred to later works such as the "Cloud Atlas Sextet by Robert Frobisher" in David Mitchell's (2004, pp. 359, 407–8) *Cloud Atlas*. However, in differentiation to Hollander's term, *notational ekphrasis* does not focus on imagined musical settings in literature but on the imagined visual potential of musical notation as described through literature, as—so far—scholarship tends to overlook notation as a semiotic and visual object when referenced in literary texts.

The presence of musical notation in literary texts is heavily undertheorized, given the large and rich field of intermediality. From early semiotic and typological approaches by Calvin S. Brown ([1948] 1987), Steven Paul Scher (1968) and Nelson Goodman (1969) to later contributions by Werner Wolf (1999), Irina O. Rajewsky (2002, 2005) and Emily Petermann (2014), the field of intermediality has brought forth three core strategies when differentiating between general musico-literary phenomena: (a) *thematization*, (b) *evocation* and (c) *imitation*. Each focuses either on the semantic, referential or quasi-mimetic affordances that literary language can utilize with regard to music. (A) *Thematizing* music in literature means mentioning it on a broad level (i.e., in the mode of 'telling') by relating the occurrence of music playing somewhere, its general characteristics and effects, the aesthetic beauty of a melody or phrase and/or emotions or memories connected to these. The literary text is thus 'charged' semantically with common musical notions and themes that can, in turn, be related to existing music, which appears as a lower-level actor.¹ (B) *Evoking* music in a literary text means quoting an existing piece of music. This can be the case of a paratextual name-dropping (i.e., 'Beethoven's Ninth') or by quoting from the lyrics of a specific song, which Werner Wolf (1999, p. 67) classifies as an evocation "qua associative quotation".² (C) *Imitating* music in literature creates intersemiotic tensions that necessarily 'corrupt' the traditional form of a text as it seems to 'try' to become music (i.e., in the mode of 'showing'). The target medium of literature does not simply allude to musical notions or directly reference existing music as in the first two examples. Instead, music becomes a dominating actor within the literary medium that defamiliarizes the text to various extents. Literature here emphasizes the acoustic dimension it can share with music by using poetic

stylistics such as rhymes, assonances, lexical and non-lexical onomatopoeia, repetitions, etc.³

But how do musical scores factor into these traditional observations and strategies? Surprisingly, these have hitherto been viewed as images rather than a further semiotic system within the semiotic system of literature. The reason these intersemiotic dynamics have been overlooked may be because the overpowering appeal of musical expression as a ‘language above language’—as the 19th century dogma of absolute music maintains—can be seen as having appealed to Modernist authors when incorporating music into their texts. It would be counterintuitive for most musicalized fiction to feature this ‘absolute’ medium in a constrained semiotic form, such as musical notation. This can be argued to in turn also have had repercussions for the field of intermediality and how musical notation is evaluated in literature. Werner Wolf (1999, p. 41), for example, maintains that “the occasional inclusion of musical notation in a work of fiction” represents a “type of overt intermediality with a dominant (here fiction)”. He refers to the insertion of parts of a musical score into a given text as not “the real thing” and as “being a conventional signifier of music” (Wolf 2018, p. 244). To him, and other scholars in the field, this textual engagement with music is viewed as less complex, because music is mainly represented visually (i.e., the image of the musical score, consisting of staves, notes, etc.) rather than through one of the aforementioned strategies.

In Emily Petermann’s (2014) *The Musical Novel*, the author concurs with Wolf that musical notation in literature is a “minor” phenomenon, but makes a noteworthy observation on its inclusion:

[I]n contrast to the graphic novel, which consists of both words and images, the typical signs of the foreign medium of music are not materially present, but are only imitated by the text. Though some musical novels include musical notation as epigraphs or other paratextual devices, often quoting from particular pieces, this *physical* inclusion of musical notation is at most a minor phenomenon. (Petermann 2014, p. 3, emphasis added)

As Petermann here already indicates, music does not directly appear as a further notation or writing system but more as a physical ‘image’ that in turn evokes the system of musical notation and therewith also that of music. It is my contention that this, too, must be seen as an *evocation* as it references music in the medium of literature. A phenomenon that veers between what Irina Rajewsky (2002, pp. 87–94; 2005, pp. 52–53) refers to as *media combination* and *media reference*, the literary text is still the dominant medium but refers to the target medium of music by using a media combination (i.e., the insertion of the image of a musical score into a text). At the same time, this insertion can also be thought of as an intermedial reference (i.e., the score’s inclusion of a title or lyrics, especially including different fonts, handwriting, etc.) and therefore must already be seen as operating on multiple levels of signification. It here becomes clear that musical scores in literary texts have more potential than hitherto has been assumed.

While these occurrences are therefore generally referred to as border phenomena in word–music experimentation, Florian Trabert convincingly argues that similar strategies have a long tradition in the German literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. He cites the first version of Goethe’s (1795–1796) *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* as a prime example, which included songs with complete musical notation before this practice became obsolete (Trabert 2011, pp. 137–38).⁴ Thus, far from ‘occasional’ occurrences of this type of intermediality, further examples range from 19th century author George Egerton’s (1893–1894) “Discords” (from *Keynotes and Discords*) to the Modernist fiction of Hope Mirrlees’s (1919) *Paris. A Poem*, Arthur Schnitzler’s (1924) *Fräulein Else* or James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922/Joyce 1986) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939/Joyce 1992b) to postmodern and contemporary fiction such

as Ingeborg Bachmann's (1971) *Malina*, Richard Powers's (1991) *Gold Bug Variations*⁵ or Hartmut Lange's (1996) "Die Postwurfsendung".

The previous has not only established the historically common presence of musical notation in literature but has also situated this phenomenon within the theory of intermediality, which largely views it as an 'image' in literary texts that may work as a referential evocation of another medium, namely music. What remains hitherto uncharted are phenomena when characters in a specific text—musicians and non-musicians alike—comment in various ways on details of a musical score, i.e., by using textual strategies. It is here that *notational ekphrasis* must be situated, as a textual *evocation* of the system of music by describing its notational system with words. Or, put simply, 'words on a page' refer to 'notes on a page' with varying degrees of concreteness and imaginary content. But what is at stake when referring to this 'other' system? What dimensions do both writing and notation share, and what sets them apart? What effects is the literary medium endowed with when representing musical notation in such an ekphrastic manner?

2. Musical Notation and Ekphrasis

A score usually consists of various graphic and linguistic elements which can be *evoked* in literary texts. Apart from a text that is set to music (i.e., a *Lied*, aria or other vocal compositions), as well as its general paratext (i.e., the title of any composition), instructions that regard the instrumentation, the performance or its dynamics, such as *pianissimo* or *mezzoforte*, commonly abbreviated with 'pp' or 'mf', may be subsumed under this category (see also Trabert 2011, pp. 135–36). There are also a variety of numbers (e.g., rhythm and time signatures), symbols (e.g., key signatures with sharp and flat accidentals) and 'graphic' elements present in musical scores. The graphic elements of modern musical notation include horizontal lines of a stave, clef, notes, ledger lines and repeat signs in addition to information about tempo, time signature, dynamics and instrumentation. The tones to be played are depicted in the form of notes that are conventionally read from left to right. The different note durations are represented by their varying note shapes or values (as e.g., crotchets or quavers), while their pitches are defined by their vertical position on the stave. These graphic elements make up the distinct visual appearance of musical notation and at the same time set it apart from the inscription of language. A discussion of the effects and practices of musical notation within literature make for a short excursion into the discourse of writing itself.

Writing is a cultural technique that consists of activities such as drafting and composition while also bearing witness to thought processes of scholarly and artistic work. As Sybille Krämer points out, any writing system—be it literature or music—opens a scope for creative exploration; we not only read the values inscribed therein but engage with the overall surface writing itself creates (Krämer 2020, p. 72). This may, in turn, also explain the frequent *evocation* of parts of musical scores in literature. During the 1960s, critical debates surrounding writing centered on the acoustic dimension of literature. This is not only true for literary philology but also for the then upcoming field of media theory. At the same time, new philosophic and semiotic approaches—such as those by Jacques Derrida and Nelson Goodman—entirely disavowed the Saussurean paradigm that writing is merely 'phonographic', namely inscribed language (see Derrida [1967] 1997).⁶ What the discourse on writing inherits from this *linguistic turn* is a differentiated attention to the relationship between language and writing in the first place. In the confrontational coupling of *iconic* and *linguistic turn*, writing is characterized by a hybridization of the discursive and the iconic, which a priori undermines the supposed "disjointness" of the symbolic orders of the word and the image (see Goodman 1969).⁷ An important starting point for many

theoretical approaches in this vein was Nelson Goodman's (1969) fundamental semiotic study *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*:

The symbol scheme of every notational system is notational, but not every symbol system with a notational scheme is a notational system. What distinguishes the notational systems from the others are certain features of the relationship obtaining between notational scheme and application. "Notation" is commonly used indifferently as short for either "notational scheme" or "notational system", and for brevity I shall often take advantage of this convenient vacillation where the context precludes confusion. (Goodman 1969, pp. 130–31)

Approaches such as Goodman's show that the discourse on notational systems has profited from approaches to writing itself. As such, musical notation cannot be afforded for by viewing it as a mere byproduct of the inscription of a given cultural practice. Instead, its visual dimension and specific iconicity need to be accounted for. This discursive shift, in turn, not only sheds new light on the history of musical notation but also on the cultural technique of inscribing sound altogether while at the same time delimiting it from a former, singular, 'phonographic' function (Celestini et al. 2020, p. 25). In the following, I wish to show that literary texts focus on many of the mentioned specific visual traits of musical notation and their specific semiotics. In referring to this other writing system by representational means, the affordances of both media and their respective systems of inscription are negotiated. *Notational ekphrasis* is therefore not just an interesting phenomenon but highlights the potential of ekphrasis as a meta-medium, (a) overtly in the short stories by Katherine Mansfield and Vladimir Nabokov and (b) covertly in "String Quartet" by Virginia Woolf, as shall be showcased in the following.

3. Overt Notational Ekphrasis

A first, simple example of overt *notational ekphrasis* can be found in Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Wind Blows" (1915/1921). The story uses the setting of a music lesson to render seemingly ineffable and indeterminate feelings of the protagonist towards her piano teacher, Mr. Bullen. During the lesson, the score seems to move and morph in front of the protagonist's eyes as the narrator describes "crotchets and quavers [...] dancing up and down the stave like little black boys on a fence. Why is he so... She will not cry—she has nothing to cry about" (pp. 140–41, original ellipsis). The described "crotchets and quavers" clearly indicate a musical score that, however, remains unnamed and therefore does not constitute a referential but semantic rendering of musical notation, akin to *thematization*.⁸ The quarter notes and eighth notes located on the stave of the musical score are likened to "little black boys on a fence" and construct a simple visual analogy that is marginally racist.⁹ So, what about these ekphrastic descriptions of the musical score? What understanding of music do they suggest?

In "Ekphrasis and Representation", James Heffernan defines ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of graphic representation" (Heffernan 1991, p. 299). The upshot of this albeit simple definition is that it excludes the possibility of the term being used to denote the representation of one text by another. Heffernan instead posits that ekphrasis "differs from both iconicity and pictorialism because it explicitly represents representation itself. What ekphrasis represents in words, therefore, must itself be representational" (Heffernan 1991, p. 300). The examples of *notational ekphrasis* discussed above highlight these representational aspects. Mansfield's protagonist sees the musical notation as representative of human bodies ("black boys") that seem to move ("dancing") on an object ("fence"). The musical score here transcends its phonographic function and instead endows the notation system with a visual dimension that does not seem to directly correspond to the music ("Beethoven") or its inscribed values (timbre, rhythm, key, etc.). The bodies, for instance,

are not moving in one direction to denote an ascending or descending progression but indeterminately ‘dance’ “up and down the stave”. While the protagonist’s visual imagination can be justified as her being ‘playful’ or simply ‘Child-like’ (she also ‘hears’ “little drums” in the minor movement of the Beethoven piece she practices on piano), it nevertheless shows a dimension of musical notation that sets it apart from the inscribed sound it is supposed to encode; the protagonist knows what the notation means in a musically ‘sound’ sense but nevertheless endows it with a secondary, visual perception. This not only suggests a dormant, representational potential of the musical score but one which relies upon the individual reader or viewer to discover. The purely phonographic process of decoding/encoding of notation systems is hereby subverted, and the musical notation is subsequently expounded as a primarily visual spectacle. Moreover, the aspect of ‘characters’ as part of any system of inscription is here taken literally to represent human-like characters, playfully engaging with the writing process itself.

A second exemplary instance of *notational ekphrasis* can be found in Vladimir Nabokov’s short story “Music” (1932/Nabokov 2006). The story is set at an elaborate dinner party at which the pianist Wolf begins to play: “The entrance hall overflowed with coats of both sexes; from the drawing room came a rapid succession of piano notes” (p. 332). Ironically, the story’s protagonist cannot relate well to music:

To Victor any music he did not know—and all he knew was a dozen conventional tunes—could be likened to the patter of a conversation in a strange tongue: in vain you strive to define at least the limits of the words, but everything slips and merges, so that the laggard ear begins to feel boredom. (pp. 332–33)

Nabokov here chooses a protagonist whose experience and appreciation of music is limited, especially when it comes to technically advanced musical pieces. This is reminiscent of James Joyce’s protagonist Gabriel Conroy in the short story “The Dead” from *Dubliners* (1916/Joyce 1992a). Although he “liked music” he cannot listen to the “Academy Piece” being played on the piano, as it has “no melody” for him but instead boasts “runs and difficult passages” (p. 187). Victor’s similar position in “Music” is reaffirmed at the end of the story when he is confronted by Boke: “‘You know, you looked so bored I felt sorry for you. Is it possible that you are so completely indifferent to it?’ ‘Why, no. I wasn’t bored,’ Victor answered awkwardly. ‘It’s just that I have no ear for music, and that makes me a poor judge’” (pp. 336–37). Whether or not Boke has more expertise never becomes clear but his rather indeterminate sentiment regarding the actual title of the piece indicates at least a familiarity with ‘academy pieces’ in general. When asked by Victor what he thinks Wolf played, Boke answers sporadically: “‘A Maiden’s Prayer’, or the ‘Kreutzer Sonata’. Whatever you will” (p. 337). Although the story lacks a concrete *evocation* of music, as the piece remains unidentified, some possibilities are mentioned in the text that refer to instrumental piano music which may be seen in the vein of the typical ‘academy piece’ as in Joyce’s “The Dead”.

What is made explicit is that the piano piece seems complex and in need of Wolf’s professional playing, with the described imagery of the score matching the fast-paced rendition, a fact which is also affirmed by the general appearance of the “performer’s wife” who follows the score concentratedly, “her mouth half open, her eyes blinking fast” (p. 332). As the narration announces the moment of turning the page in the present as “now she has turned it”, the temporal dimension of the music and its fast dynamics are overtly emphasized. In a similar manner, the speed of the performance and music is referred to in a passage earlier on: “At one point his wife got ahead of him; he arrested the page with an instant slap of his open left palm, then with incredible speed himself flipped it over, and already both hands were fiercely kneading the compliant keyboard again” (p. 333). During the performance of the imagined piece, Victor manages to get an ever so brief glance at the

musical score: “A black forest of ascending notes, a slope, a gap, then a separate group of little trapezists in flight” (p. 332). It is impossible for Victor to get any indication of what piece of music this is by a fleeting glance, especially since he does not have an ear or other sense for it. At the same time, the visual analogies of the score bear resemblances to natural imagery, foregrounding a “black forest” and a “slope” before moving onto comparing the separate notes to humans as “little trapezists in flight”. The only other instance in the narrative when musical notes are compared to humans comes towards the end of the story when “people, looking against the snow like black quarter notes, were creeping out into the streets” in “different marching groups” (p. 457). But the former identification of the notes as “trapezists” necessarily points to them being bound by a beam into a group of eighth notes, indicating a rapid succession of tones. This is moreover foreshadowed in the fact that a notable multitude of notes “ascend” on a relatively small space of the page (“black forest of ascending notes”), creating a visually noticeable “gap”—in form of the “slope”—in between. The fact that this visual perception does not follow an internal logic, such as the dancing boys on a fence in Mansfield’s “Wind Blows”, highlights a further aspect of musical notation sketched above: Nelson Goodman’s notions of both semantic *disjointness* and *discreteness* of inscriptions, which Sybille Krämer (2020, pp. 67–86) recently made operable for a reevaluation of musical notation.

When characters appear in any notation system, they follow a discrete arrangement, meaning that a written single character (token) must be unambiguously identifiable as belonging to a certain class of characters (type). Moreover, between two single characters there is a gap, an intermediate space, in which no further character in the sense of gradual transitions can be found. Without spaces and gaps, fonts are not possible; this makes them literally ‘printable’ (Krämer 2020, pp. 70–71). Following Goodman via Krämer, notation systems are organized not only spatially, but rather ‘interspatially’, which not only makes them prototypical versions of the digital but also distinguishes them from the analog image. For, in a painting, even a white patch of unpainted canvas is usually seen as part of an image, not as part of its background (Krämer 2020, p. 71).

Transferring these observations onto Victor’s rendering of the musical score, it is noticeable that the two discrete ‘characters’—the “black forest” on the one, and the “little trapezists” on the other hand—do not belong to the same discrete type but are represented as disjointed tokens. This ‘disjointness’ is moreover emphasized visually as their appearance is marked by an intermediate space: “a slope, a gap”. Thus, he comes to view the gap within the score first as a representational image and only then as an interspatial feature of the notation system. Victor’s image-logic thus relays—if ever so brief—the representational potential of the score back to the internal logic of the notation system itself. He already leaves the realm of ekphrastic representation when referring to the “black forest [as consisting] of ascending notes”. However, the adverb “then” appears right after noting the “gap”, marking not only a succession of images but also referring to the act of reading the notation system from left to right, making it veer indeterminately between ekphrastic representation and phonographic inscription. While Victor may not be musical or indeed able to read a musical score, he is nevertheless capable of attempting to ‘read’ the score by the sheer acquired, acculturated logic of notation systems, noticing both disjointed and discrete characters of the score together with its interspatial quality that showcases its fleeting nature of encoding/decoding.

The two examples which have now been framed by a larger discussion of musical notation offer remarkable but also puzzling insights. Mansfield’s text expounds music primarily as a visual spectacle and thus emphasizes the dormant representational potential inherent in musical scores even for a trained musician. Nabokov’s Victor, on the other hand, is unable to penetrate the semiotics of the score but nevertheless ‘reads’ its latent

iconicity as a system of inscription. In both cases, ‘characters’ as graphic elements and interspatial qualities of the score are highlighted, negotiating the fleeting nature of writing and reading processes. While it can be said that the score is present in both stories as overt intermediality, it must be maintained that it is *thematized*, as there is no direct referent to the score present while its characteristics are used to generally ‘charge’ the text with musical content. As the previous discussion has shown, larger intersemiotic dynamics are at play within these *thematizations*, revealing a meta-aesthetic potential of *notational ekphrasis*, which was here looked at as an overt intermedial phenomenon on the level of *thematization*. The following therefore will deal with an example of a covert ekphrastic *imitation* of the musical score.

4. Covert Notational Ekphrasis

Virginia Woolf’s (1921) “The String Quartet” presents a further interesting example of *notational ekphrasis*, albeit in a covert form. In general, the setting of the story can be described as a visit to a concert in London probably around the year in which it was published. A narrator describes in both omniscient and stream-of-consciousness fashion the selected conversations, as well as sounds and sights, surrounding the concert, seemingly culminating in a verbal rendering of the music itself. The story has generated a mass of critical responses of which I will only focus on ones that suggest possible analogies for the described music or discuss its musical nature. Alex Aronson (1980, p. 30), in *Music and the Novel*, contends that Woolf’s short story seeks to reproduce the effects of a Mozart Quintet upon the reader and is an early example in her oeuvre that “refers to the virtually unrestricted expressiveness of music as contrasted to the limiting syntactical speech patterns employed by writers attempting to render emotions which elude the dictionary meaning of words”. At the same time, Avrom Fleishman’s “Forms of the Woolfian Short Story” sees the story as unmistakably a formal game, suggesting possible structural analogies to music that are not wholly unproblematic (Fleishman 1980, p. 67; see also Wolf 1999, p. 154). Kuo Chia-chen mentions that “[s]ince as early as ‘Street Music’ (1905), ‘The Opera’ (1906), and ‘Impressions at Bayreuth’ (1909), Woolf’s writing has dealt with music” and that she saw her work intrinsically influenced by it. In one of her letters, she maintains that “[i]ts [sic] odd, for I’m not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them” (qtd. in Kuo 2016). In addition, Emilé Crapoulet’s article on “Music in Virginia Woolf’s ‘String Quartet’” opens with Woolf’s own assertion from a diary entry that “[i]ts [sic] music I want; to stimulate & suggest” (qtd. in Crapoulet 2008). The links between Woolf’s writing and music are therefore manifold. But which music does she wish to “suggest” in her short story in the first place? This will be important to determine in order to make a case for *covert notational ekphrasis*.

Apart from an obscure reference in the story to “that’s an early Mozart, of course” (Woolf 1921, p. 29), the music is never clearly named or referenced. Werner Wolf discusses this problem at length, concluding that he is “unable to find a Mozart quartet obeying both this condition and fitting exactly into the textual suggestions of Woolf’s story, though there seem to be some remarkable parallels to the popular Divertimento K. 138 in F major” (Wolf 1999, p. 152). Commentators, such as Peter Jacobs, however, see a diary entry of Woolf as pointing towards a possible musical source:

At least one short story deserves our attention in this context. In early March 1920 Virginia Woolf went to a concert at George Booth’s house (where among other pieces a Schubert quintet was played) “to take notes for [her] story” [...]. The result probably was “The String Quartet,” the only short story in which the overall presence of music is thematically important. (Jacobs 1993, p. 242)

Chia-chen affirms this and agrees that “her short story ‘The String Quartet’ was inspired by the Schubert piano quintet to which she listened in Campden Hill, on 9 March 1920” (Woolf, *Diary* v.2 24, qtd. in Kuo 2016). Crapoulet goes even further by asserting that “no reader of this story would have been surprised or shocked if, for example, Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet had been on the programme” because it “is in fact the real piece behind the story, the piece which obviously provided Woolf with the idea of the fish and the river narrative. [. . .]. The references to ‘spotted fish’ can only have been suggested to Woolf by the title of the Schubert ‘Trout’ Quintet she heard in Campden Hill” (Crapoulet 2008).

To offer a different reading of Woolf’s musico-literary narrative in the vein of covert *notational ekphrasis*, it is necessary to quote the passages describing the beginning of the concert at length:

Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches, and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy where—it’s difficult this—conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round—free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up. . . How lovely goodness is in those who, stepping lightly, go smiling through the world! Also in jolly old fishwives, squatted under arches, obscene old women, how deeply they laugh and shake and rollick, when they walk, from side to side, hum, hah!

“That’s an early Mozart, of course—” (Woolf 1921, pp. 74–75)

A common observation of this passage would be that the effects created here by the text seem to be an *imitation* of either music or its experiential content. This could be described along the lines of Werner Wolf’s (1999, pp. 57–67) term *imaginary content analogies*. While the employment of natural imagery in order to describe musical perception exhibits a Romantic topos, it reaches a climax in Woolf’s text; the sheer magnitude of images create a dense web of possible interrelations. Overall, these content analogies highlight a spontaneous emergence (“burst”, “now”), while the instrumental music described seems to dynamically move and revolve around itself, ascending and descending in a flow of images (“leaping”, “round”, “rushing downstairs”, “ascending”, “up and up”). The emotive qualities of this perceptive process are at the same time positively connoted (“lovely goodness”, “go smiling through the world”, “jolly old fishwives [. . .] laugh and shake and rollick”). The imagery stages musical experience as a dynamic, emergent action which seems akin to emotive processes at the moment of perception. Since the lexemes in use all constitute the isotopy of *nature*, the imagery stems from a fixed order of semantic fields, stressing a general programmatic ‘expressiveness’ rather than actual perception.

While the described *imaginary content analogies* may explain most commentators’ link between this text and Schubert’s programmatic ‘Trout’ quintet, it does not account for many unexpected representations and statements being made therein. A few images remain outside of the semantic fields conjured by the trout-themed music; these entail “the pear tree on top of the mountain” or the repetition of “arches”, such as in the “jolly old fishwives, squatted under arches” who “deeply [. . .] laugh and shake and rollick”. Moreover, there seem to be meta-aesthetic comments referring to an experience outside of purely aural perception, such as “it’s difficult this” or “rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending”. How can these be accounted for?

Taking into account James Heffernan’s simple differentiation between ekphrasis, iconicity and pictorialism (Heffernan 1991, pp. 299–300), it can be argued that pictorialism

may be useful when looking at texts aiming to represent purely graphic notation systems.¹⁰ Iconicity, when understood in the sense of Charles Saunders Pierce, as a purely semiotic category, quickly loses traction for a discussion of musical notation or indeed *notational ekphrasis*, as notes on a staff do not necessarily ‘point’ towards something in the traditional sense of iconicity. But when seen outside of the semiotic realm and understood within the visual arts as displaying an internal visual logic of its own, iconicity becomes a productive category for a discussion of musical scores as they too exhibit strategies that can be deemed genuinely iconic (Celestini et al. 2020, p. 28). If there is indeed an inherent logic of images that goes beyond mere signification, then this is to be found in the *iconic turn*, which Gottfried Boehm posited towards the *linguistic turn*. As Boehm points out, the *iconic turn* reinterprets iconicity to be defined as a peculiar way of producing meaning out of the image-logic itself, by way of ‘showing’. Showing is here not primarily considered a semiotic concept but rather designates what cannot be said through language (Celestini et al. 2020, pp. 26–27).

Looking at the score for Schubert’s *Piano Quintet* D667 (post. Op. 114) in A major suggests that “Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst” may well refer to the simultaneous entry of Violin, Viola, Cello and Double Bass – all marked by “*f*” for *forte* – while the “pear tree on top of the mountain” points towards the iconicity of the separate piano roll in the lower part of the score – marked in the double bass with “*p*” for “piano” (see Figure 1):

FULL SCORE

Piano Quintet

Op. 114

"The Trout"

F. Schubert (1797-1828)

Allegro vivace

Figure 1. First movement of Franz Schubert’s *Piano Quintet* D 667 also known as “The Trout” or “Forellenquintett” (post. Op. 114) in A major (Source: Schubert [1829] 1982).

After an ascension of six notes in two eighth note triplets, the piano roll begun in the first measure culminates in a high A quarter note with a downward stem in measure two. This could be seen as an iconic representation of a ‘tree’ on top of a ‘mountain’—if the neck were seen as a trunk with the note as the crown ‘standing on top’ of an ascension of notes, which in turn could resemble a mountain (see Figure 2):

Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst!

The pear tree on the top of the mountain.



Figure 2. Detail of Schubert's *Piano Quintet* D 667 also known as "The Trout" or "Forellenquintett" (post. Op. 114) in A major (Source: Schubert [1829] 1982). with quotations from Virginia Woolf's "String Quartet" added by Thomas Gurke.

Moreover, if Woolf had a chance to look at the score perhaps the many repetitions of "f" and "p" could explain the source for "flourish" and "pear"? The latter of which stem from the double bass section but are visually situated just above the 'pear tree' of the piano roll in measure two. This is furthermore reinforced in the repetition during measure six, when the dynamic for the piano roll is again marked as "p" (for "piano") and when considering that a note with a downward stem can also be seen to point towards the letter 'p' as in "pear" (see Figure 3):



Figure 3. Detail from Franz Schubert's *Piano Quintet* D 667 also known as "The Trout" or "Forellenquintett" (post. Op. 114) in A major (Source: Schubert [1829] 1982).

Seen from this vantage point as forming its own textual–visual language and logic, the text's numerous mentioning of "arches" and the "jolly old fish wives, squatted under arches", that "deeply [...] laugh and shake and rollick", could be seen as pointing to the bass chords of the piano in measures six to seven: The notes of the chords are vertically closer together with lines in between making them seem compressed or "squatted". The two chords are furthermore tied from one bar to the next by what is also referred to as 'arches'. This may also explain why the text refers to them as walking "from side to side, hum, hah!" (Woolf 1921, p. 75).

These observations are of course only possibilities, but it seems odd to think of a writer such as Virginia Woolf, whose involvement with the arts—especially music—has been

well documented in the past decades, to not also be interested in the notational system of music. If the idea to the story originated by witnessing a Schubert piece being played as part of a private event, there would have been ample occasions to peruse the musical score. Even a brief glance of the first two pages would have been sufficient to draw up simple textual parallels to the here proposed visual potential of the musical score. Following these arguments, then, it seems that Woolf's text enables a twofold operation: It sets up analogies that stress a programmatic expressiveness like the supposed source of and inspiration for the story, Schubert's 'Trout' quintet. At the same time, however, elements of its score appear as part of the *imaginary content analogies* in form of covert *notational ekphrasis* that endow both language and the notational system of music with an iconic logic of their own, signifying outside of their respective semiotic systems.

5. Conclusions

The term *notational ekphrasis* has been introduced to discuss an undertheorized phenomenon of musico-literary intermediality: the presence of musical scores within literary texts. Instead of merely featuring as images to signify the general incorporation of music on a general level, the perception of musical scores by characters in selected modern short stories has revealed how graphic features of a score are represented to varying degrees and with different functions. Sometimes these appear as moving 'characters' themselves that undermine the phonographic semiotics of inscription and instead showcase a visual imaginary potential of the musical score which the literary text can incorporate (e.g., Mansfield's "Wind Blows"). While these graphic representations expound an original iconic logic, they also veer indeterminately between ekphrastic representation and phonographic inscription (e.g., Nabokov's "Music"). In the first two examples, *notational ekphrasis* marks an overt intermedial presence of music in the literary medium in which the musical score is *thematized*. An example for a possible covert intermedial presence was also given; Woolf's "String Quartet" moves the incorporation of the musical score from the mode of 'showing' to that of 'telling'. The graphic peculiarities of a—possibly—specific score intermingle with the experienced content of music. These visual features not only appear as representational characters but reveal an iconic resemblance to the score which is, thus, *imitated* in parts here. Taken together, this endows the literary medium with covert graphic signifiers of music that reveals a hitherto uncharted and extended meta-aesthetic engagement with the medium of music.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ "I have labelled this form intermedial '*thematization*' or, alternatively, the presence of another medium in the mode of explicit '*telling*'. Such '*telling*' can occur in various forms and positions: in the main text of a literary work (e. g., when characters engage in a discussion on music) or in its paratexts (e.g., in a title such as "Fuga", the title of a short story by Gabriel Josipovici); and sometimes contextual thematizations outside the text (e. g., in a comment by the author on his or her musical intentions) will also be of relevance" (Wolf 2018, pp. 247–48, original emphasis).
- ² When differentiating between Steven Paul Scher's typology (e.g., 'verbal music') and his own ('evocation'), Werner Wolf maintains: "I would enter 'verbal music' into a separate subform or aspect of covert musical presence in literature, a subform that comprises a variety of features but is primarily defined by the criterion of *extended specific* and '*evocative*' reference as opposed to, on the one hand, the technical subforms of covert intermediality in the mode of 'showing' and, on the other hand, to the various forms of intermedial thematization" (Wolf 2018, p. 249, original emphasis).

- 3 Positioning his terms once again in context to Scher's typology, Wolf affirms that: "Scher's categories 'word music' and 'structural analogies to music' are technical subforms of an 'iconic' imitation of music in literature (which I take over from Scher in this technical sense): word music is the suggestion of a musical presence conveyed by a foregrounding of the acoustic dimension of the verbal signifiers (which, however, remain *verbal* signifiers and thus do not become, but only imitate or gesture towards, music), whereas structural analogies consist in creating the impression of a musical presence through the non-musical signifieds and (optionally) the signifiers of the text, so that some musical form thereby emerges as a signified" (Wolf 2018, p. 249, original emphasis).
- 4 With reference Referring to Reinhold Brinkmann, Trabert also mentions works such as Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa*, Mörike's *Maler Nolten* and Achim von Arnim's novel *Armuth, Reichtum, Schuld und Buße der Gräfin Dolores* as further examples of texts that followed this common practice around 1800 (cf. Brinkmann 2001, p. 296).
- 5 Apart from notes appearing in the text as single graphic images (i.e., evocations of musical scores), Luc Herman and Geert Lernout also discuss textual references to the score: "When Powers refers to the 'short-short-long in the right hand completing a simultaneous long-short-short in the left' (p. 24), he describes exactly the rhythmic structure of the first measure of Bach's variation, which opens in the right hand with two sixteenths and an eighth note, and an eighth and two sixteenths in the left (Dammann 96)" (Herman and Lernout 1998, p. 152).
- 6 "[T]he development of the practical methods of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the 'message' vastly, to the point where it is no longer the 'written' translation of a language, the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity. It goes hand in hand with an extension of phonography and of all the means of conserving the spoken language, of making it function without the presence of the speaking subject. This development, coupled with that of anthropology and of the history of writing, teaches us that phonetic writing, the medium of the great metaphysical, scientific, technical, and economic adventure of the West, is limited in space and time and limits itself even as it is in the process of imposing its laws upon the cultural areas that had escaped it" (Derrida [1967] 1997, p. 10).
- 7 "Although each two characters in a purely notational system must be semantically quite separate, compliants of one character may be parts of or properly overlap compliants of another. Semantic disjointness of characters no more implies discreteness of compliants than syntactic disjointness of characters implies discreteness of inscriptions" (Goodman 1969, p. 152).
- 8 The only two *evocations* to existing music in the short story are to the "old master" (p. 140), i.e., the composer Beethoven and a minor movement from one of his works: "She has a music lesson at ten o'clock. At the thought the minor movement of the Beethoven begins to play in her head, the trills long and terrible like little rolling drums [...] Oh, that minor movement. Here come the little drums" (p. 138 and p. 140).
- 9 In a similar vein—but more explicit—the recently rediscovered experimental text *Paris. A Poem* by Mirrlees (1919) describes "[c]rotchets and quavers" as having "the heads of [n-word]" as "they writhe in obscene syncopation: *Toutes les cartes marchent avec une allumette!*" (p. 21). Previously, the 600-line poem uses an actual quoted musical score to which the imagined black circles may refer (p. 18). In both cases, we find simple—if not wholly unproblematic—analogies to musical scores in the verbal medium without identifying a direct source of the score.
- 10 As for instance became quite common for composers of the 1950s, such as John Cage, Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Christian Wolff or Earle Brown.

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Article

‘After All the Years of Separation’: Musically Representing Author L.M. Montgomery’s Suspended Romances

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Abstract: Canadian author L.M. Montgomery did not set out to write stories about romance. As she indicated in her journals, she wrote character-driven stories of young girls navigating their way through girlhood. However, she understood that the public, and her publishers, expected these girls to experience romance that culminated in marriage, following the societal traditions of the time. Montgomery managed this dichotomy by having many characters experience a suspended romance, delaying the romantic aspect of the relationship for as long as possible. Arts-based practice is a mode of analysis and offers the opportunity to find a new way of understanding and communicating Montgomery’s type of suspended romance. Music is, in many ways, considered romantic, so it is an appropriate medium to communicate Montgomery’s romantic narrative structures. This paper investigates Montgomery’s use of suspended romance in her novels and how this delay provided her characters with time to develop other areas of their lives. An arts-based methodology was used to identify and analyse recurring themes in Montgomery’s work, as the question is not *can* Montgomery’s theme of romance be musically represented but *how*. The result of this creative experimentation is a new musical composition that articulates these suspended romances using six different musical devices. This creative work exemplifies the intertextual link that exists between Montgomery’s work and new musical compositions.

Keywords: music; composition; Montgomery; representation; intertextuality; romance

1. Introduction

The degree to which music can contain essential meaning is contested within academic discourse. Nonetheless, to examine, investigate, and employ music’s many functions within society, it has ascribed to it differing contextual meanings and consequently, meaning in music is always constructed. Klein (2021, p. 60) states that “as soon as conventions, topics, trends, and compositional techniques” are employed, music becomes symbolic and hence has meaning. This article is part of a larger project that involves constructing such meaning. Using creative practice, the literary works of author L.M. Montgomery and the themes found within her work have been musically represented in new compositions, using compositional techniques to demonstrate the intertextual potential of the music. Romance is the theme chosen for this article. Musical representation, which is not a direct imitation of objects or properties, is one way in which music may be ascribed meaning. This project enacts a musical depiction of these non-auditory items that links them together through a process of creative intertextuality.

L.M. Montgomery is a Canadian author who wrote twenty novels, 530 short stories, and over 500 poems, including her best-known and most beloved work, *Anne of Green Gables*. Her work has been translated into over thirty-six languages and has been frequently adapted into a variety of media, including movies, stage plays, anime, musicals, animated series, and television series. *Anne* alone has spawned over two dozen adaptations, from a silent film in 1919 to the more recent Netflix series, *Anne with an E* (2017). Other novels, such as the *Emily of New Moon* trilogy, *The Story Girl*, and *Jane of Lantern Hill* have also been

adapted into television series and telemovies, while one of Montgomery's lesser-known and controversial works, *The Blue Castle*, was adapted into a stage musical in Poland. However, amongst these adaptations there does not appear to be an exclusively instrumental representation of or response to Montgomery's worlds; the music associated with these adaptations only exists to support the visual medium or the lyrics. The connections are quite direct, such as using a leitmotif for the recurring appearance of a certain character or relationship, or music that uses tropes to directly reflect the action on the screen.

Interest in Montgomery's work was re-activated in the mid-1980s with the publication of her life writings, or personal journals; the journals afforded the opportunity for analysis of how her life and work intertwined. As it became clear that these journals were written and revised with the intention of being published at some point in the future, the journals are considered not only life writing but also another area of Montgomery's literature. Montgomery's novels and her journals have been studied as intertextual documents from a number of perspectives, including gender, nature, motherhood, and education for women. This creative project continues the growing academic work around Montgomery and broadens the field to include non-traditional research in music.

Montgomery lived and wrote at the end of the Victorian era, heading into modernism at a time known as the *fin de siècle*. This era also saw the advent of the New Woman as part of the first wave of feminism in the 1890s. Although she claimed to be uninterested in suffrage and many other symbols of the New Woman, Gerson (2018, pp. 199–200) posits Montgomery was indeed aware of these issues but expressed them in her novels instead of her journals. Gerson (2018, p. 200) cites Montgomery's "implicit criticisms of the Victorian institution of marriage" and her more explicit desire to attain further education, financial self-sufficiency, and respect as an author as examples of her views on the overbearing patriarchy of the time. These views are reflected in the novels in the manner in which Montgomery treats romance and the musical composition, "*after all the years of separation*", which was written to represent this treatment.

The theme of romance in Montgomery's novels is not strictly what might be expected when considering the word. She wrote what she deemed to be humorous stories for a general audience, yet her novels were confined to this genre due to market expectations (Epperly 2014, p. 8). Although her novels where the protagonist matures are considered romances because ultimately the couple unites, they are not typical romances; the romance may very broadly frame the narrative but does not lead it. The development of the character is commonly the focus, which is impacted by many factors other than romance. As the majority of her protagonists are introduced as children, they romanticise chivalry and nature with "idealized, late-Romantic, occasionally transcendentalist nature descriptions" (Epperly 2014, p. 9). As they mature, romance in nature remains, but love relationships are added as they read poems and stories that shape their romantic ideals (Epperly 2014, p. 11), while focussing on other areas of their lives.

2. Romance, Montgomery Style

Montgomery, known as Maud, did not feel her strength lay in writing adult characters. As early as 1913, when under pressure from her publisher for a third *Anne* book, she stressed young girls were less interesting and not suitable to the same level of humour (Montgomery 2016, p. 130):

"Only childhood and elderly people can be treated humorously in books. Young women in the bloom of youth and romance should be sacred from humour. It is the time of sentiment and I am not good at depicting sentiment—I can't do it well. Yet there must be sentiment in this book. I must at least engage Anne for I'll never be given any rest until I do".

While Montgomery (2018, p. 197) understood the public's need for a romantic resolution, she also felt the restrictions of the era and genre conflicted with her understanding of the characters she created:

“...the public and publishers won't allow me to write of a young girl as she really is. One can write of children as they are; so my books of children are always good; but when you come to write of the 'miss' you have to depict a sweet, insipid young thing—really a child grown older—to whom the basic realities of life and reactions to them are quite unknown. Love must scarcely be hinted at—yet young girls in their early teens often have some very vivid love affairs. A girl of 'Emily's' type certainly would... I can't afford to damn the public. I must cater to them for awhile yet”.

Consequently, romantic relationships in these novels are not the focus of the narrative. An example is *Rilla of Ingleside*, which is primarily about Rilla's coming of age in a time of war, the experiences of women on the home front, and the gender roles and restrictions of various characters. Rilla's relationship with Kenneth Ford is a very minor detail, and her character would still have developed considerably without it or even despite it. Yet, as Kazuko Sakuma (2021, p. 20) attests, the relationship nevertheless frames the overall narrative, giving Rilla the happy ending the public expected. Marigold Lesley (*Magic for Marigold*) is only eleven or twelve when her novel ends, so a heterosexual romance has not led the narrative; however, Montgomery still introduces a young boy in the last chapter and finishes the novel with Marigold deciding she will always be there for him to come back to, again appeasing the public's desire for at least a hint of romance by the novel's end (Montgomery 1925, p. 308).

The *Emily* series is widely acknowledged as the most autobiographical of Montgomery's works, and this, coupled with the fact that Montgomery was now older and had met successful and fulfilled career women in Toronto, meant “Maud had no interest in the inevitable—consigning Emily to marriage” (Rubio 2008, p. 638). But the public was not willing to accept Emily choosing her career instead of marriage and inundated Montgomery with letters regarding which potential suitor Emily should choose. None of the three options were particularly suitable in relation to Emily's literary aspirations—neither of the two main suitors had much interest in her writing, and one even used it against her—but Montgomery had little choice (Rubio 2008, pp. 654–55). Such was her distaste for marrying Emily that she delayed finishing the book and turned to writing *The Blue Castle* instead, the only time she worked on two books concurrently.

Romance appears in Montgomery's work in forms other than a heterosexual love relationship. As Epperly (2014, p. 9) notes, “the main characters grapple consciously or unconsciously with their conception of the romantic,” struggling to define what romance is, what their sense of self is, and how those things align with cultural expectations. The romance of strong female friendships is a prevailing theme in Montgomery's work, and these friendships, along with poetry, literature, and nature, provide a lot of the romance in the young girls' lives. Robinson (2012, p. 170) notes that young girls in the fin de siècle described their friendships with “adolescent hyperbole”; such language is not used in relation to heterosexual romantic relationships. Anne Shirley (*Anne of Green Gables*) loves her bosom friend, Diana Barry, “with all the love of her passionate little heart” (Montgomery 1908, p. 103) and is inconsolable at the thought that one day Diana will marry and leave her, proclaiming, “I hate her husband—I hate him furiously” (Montgomery 1908, p. 103). Similarly, Pat Gardiner (*Pat of Silver Bush*) speaks effusively of her love for her friend, Bets Wilcox. She also considers a future with her friend marrying unbearable, bemoaning, “Bets, when I think of it I couldn't suffer any more if I was dying. Bets, I just couldn't bear it” (Montgomery 1933, p. 209). After Bets dies, it takes Pat until she is in adulthood to find another friend.

In writing of Anne Shirley, Thompson (2022, p. 215) recognises that her “sense of the sensual and the romantic is tied to nature and friendships with other girls”. The connection to nature is a characteristic Montgomery shared with many of her protagonists. She was very attuned to a place in Cavendish she named Lover's Lane, declaring, “I love it idolatrously. I am never anything but happy there” (Montgomery 1987, p. 73). Each time she revisited the Island in her adulthood, it was a place she longed to see, and she bestowed an Avonlea version of Lover's Lane on her first character, Anne. Once married,

Anne moved to a home near the sea, feeling “a certain tang of romance” in its nearness as it “entered intimately into her life” (Montgomery 1917, p. 45). How she feels about being married to Gilbert is not mentioned, speaking more of “wind, weather, folks, house of dreams” (Montgomery 1917, p. 44), making their honeymoon special rather than each other. Valancy Stirling (*The Blue Castle*), a twenty-nine-year-old spinster who has given up on conventional romance, finds her idea of it in her imagined Blue Castle but also in the nature books written by John Foster that bring her “some faint, elusive echo of lovely, forgotten things” (Montgomery 1926, p. 12). She instigates a marriage with a man she loves but who she believes does not love her and finds all the romance of her Blue Castle on his small island in the middle of Lake Mistawis. The only setting of all Montgomery’s novels that is not Prince Edward Island, it is described in language such as “diaphanous lilac mist” and a “rose-hued” sky (Montgomery 1926, p. 194), and Valancy recognises she is living “amid all the romance of Mistawis” (Montgomery 1926, p. 219).

Anne also creates many ideals of romance from what she reads, and it is only after trying to recreate Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott* with comic and near-disastrous results (*Anne of Green Gables*) that she realises the reality of Avonlea is far from the romance of Camelot (Thompson 2022, p. 218). As Anne grows, her reading leads her to develop the ideal of a romantic suitor, and she continually snubs Gilbert Blythe because he does not match the “very tall and distinguished looking, with melancholy, inscrutable eyes, and a melting, sympathetic voice” (Montgomery 1909, p. 154) romantic profile of her imagination. The rejection continues for quite some time, even though it is likely the readers’ expectations are similar to those of Mrs Rachel Lynde, who proclaims, “That’ll be a match some day” (Montgomery 1915, p. 18), or Miss Lavendar, who declares, “Because you were made and meant for each other, Anne” (Montgomery 1915, p. 144).

3. Romance and Music

There is a long association between romance and music. As Gioia (2015, p. 109) observes, music related to love and romance began to flourish when the stranglehold of Christianity’s influence gave way to the growth of the troubadours in the High Middle Ages. During this time, the focus of marriage shifted from a transaction arranged by parents to a relationship consented to by the bride and groom—the concept of romantic courtship (Gioia 2015, p. 110). Gioia further claims that regardless of the economic status, education, or societal standing of the audience, people were increasingly drawn to music that relates “to matters of the heart,” music that over the following four centuries would expand to include madrigals, ballads, and opera as prominent and popular musical forms (Gioia 2015, p. 109). Program music, in which music no longer supported lyrics but had meaning of its own, gained popularity in the nineteenth century and was often inspired by love and romance. Some examples are Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), about a failed love affair; Schumann’s *Fantasie in C major Op. 17* (1936), which began as an articulation of the composer being parted from his love; and Janáček’s *Intimate Letters* (1928), which was an expression of his love for a younger woman.

Modern popular music is heavily populated by romance-related songs with themes ranging from yearning and the excitement of new love through to laments of lost love and heartbreak. Many movie soundtracks will contain within their non-diegetic underscoring a ‘Love Theme’ as a leitmotif for the protagonists (*The Godfather*, *Cinema Paradiso*, and *Blade Runner*, among many) as well as trope-driven music to reflect the romantic action on screen. In the movie *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996, pos. 22:40), the female protagonist even says, “When we fall in love, we hear Puccini in our heads” and at the end of the movie, when the protagonists reunite, the non-diegetic music swells and morphs into Puccini’s *Nessun Dorma*.

The formal features of music, as well as its emotional expressivity, are valuable core elements, according to Kania (2013, p. 641). It should be noted at this point that the term emotion is a construct encompassing all types, durations, and intensities of affective reactions (Rosenwein 2006, p. 4). One of the reasons music is consumed is because of

how it resonates emotionally with the listener, who may even select a certain genre or particular piece with the expectation that listening will enhance or even change their mood (Rosenwein 2006, p. 4). A study by Jorgensen-Wells et al. (2022, p. 805) of music consumption by adolescents who are discovering romance showed that as the adolescents are forming their romantic identities, they listen to music more frequently, even learning about romance from the music they consume. What they are absorbing is a mixture of lyrics and music. Lyrics aside, there may be certain features of the music that tell the listener it is representing romance; these features are a mixture of conventions and concepts that have over time become accepted as representing particular emotions. A simple example of this in the Western canon is that major and minor modes have a widely recognised correlation with broad positive and negative emotions.

4. Methodology

As an original composition is a core element of the research process, this project employs an arts-based research methodology. Dooley (2022, p. 5) attests that in the study of music and literature there is “room for many critical and theoretical approaches” and I have chosen to guide my methodology with conceptual frameworks of hermeneutics and intertextuality. The result is a non-traditional research output (NTRO); NTROs were recognised by the Australian Research Council as “valid expressions of research” in 2009 (Barwick and Toltz 2017). Barwick and Toltz (2017, p. 67) further note that artistic research, such as the composition of music, was defined in 2012 by Henk Borgdorff as “creative works of research”. For this reason, I believe my compositions, along with their contextualization, are considered research output in the same way as a text research paper.

This project utilises all twenty of Montgomery’s novels along with her personal journals; Montgomery kept journals from her teenage years until the end of her life and they provide a wealth of information about her experiences and attitudes. They also show how her life affected her work, and considerable academic discourse exists related to the intertextual links between her novels and journals. Furthering the conceptual framework of intertextuality beyond novels and journals, this project investigates the intertextual links between music and the written word, specifically L.M. Montgomery’s written word. Both deductive and inductive coding were used to identify recurrent themes in the novels and journals, and musical compositions were then created to intertextually represent each of the themes. Romance is one of the most prevalent themes ascertained.

Arts-based research involves the creation of an artefact and its contextualisation and, as Bell (2018, p. 47) describes it, “acknowledge(ing) art activity as a fusion of creative and critical elements”. Various terms are used to describe this style of research, but imperative to defining it is the notion that the research occurs through practice, with Gray (1996, p. 3) asserting the needs of the practitioner and their practice lead to the recognition and development of questions and challenges. The research is an expansion of practice methods, not a contrast to them, creating an environment that is both reflective and generative (Gray 1996, p. 10). Reciprocity underpins the nature of theory and practice, with Gray stating, “Critical practice should generate theory and theory should inform practice” (1996, p. 15). As a relatively recent methodology, arts-based research still encounters some scepticism. Kerrigan and McIntyre (2019, p. 213) purport the best way to defend it is to ensure the methodology is “grounded in traditional understandings of the philosophical aspects of research”. Smith and Dean (2009, p. 1) assert creative practice contributes to research in “many rich and innovative ways”, including providing research insights and developing unique processes for research but also that research can lead to practice in an “iterative cyclic web” (Smith and Dean 2009, p. 2). Additionally, Brabazon (2020, pp. 44–45) emphasises practice-led methods should only be chosen when the questions cannot be answered with conventional research; the choice must be directly related to the research questions and be the best way to answer them (Brabazon 2020, pp. 44–45). The artefact moves beyond existing knowledge and the exegesis connects the knowledge with the new artefact. In this article the role of the exegesis is taken by the section that analyses the

composition, providing contextualization for the choices made. Arts-based research is the prime methodology for this project, as the question is not *can* Montgomery's theme of romance be musically represented but *how*. Rather than simply discussing possibilities, creative experimentation resulting in a musical composition allows this question to be addressed more directly.

During the process, insights also came from other areas; in contrast to traditional research models that involve a sole researcher, arts-based research involves a community. This community is formed as the creative work is analysed and interpreted for performance and recording, as well as by those who are interpreting through active listening. Bell (2018, p. 64) asserts that recognising these contributions will "encourage the critical dialogue and reflective practice" that are vital to research. As interlocutors in the process, the performers of the compositions contributed to the outcome, both through feedback about the feasibility of the compositions and by providing recordings for analysis. The conceptual frameworks of hermeneutics and intertextuality are addressed more fully below.

4.1. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics may be defined as the art of interpretation as a pathway to understanding. The first step in composing the music was to read and analyse the novels and journals, and a hermeneutic interpretation was practised when reading the texts and was later applied to the creative practice. Ideographic disciplines require understanding rather than reason and an acknowledgement that this understanding stems from the human perspective. For this reason, hermeneutics suits the reading of Montgomery's novels and journals, as both the content and the interpreter are connected to the human condition and not scientific method or reason.

There are three main lenses of textual analysis that ask where meaning rests and if discerning meaning is possible: the author's intention, the text itself, and the reader (Xian 2020, pp. 105–23). Each of these lenses has been regarded as having the most importance in various historical periods. As Xian (2020, p. 108) states, "Meaning is produced through use" and is not pre-existing. Successful interpretation of a text requires a combination of the author, what is in the text, what is added to the text by the reader, and context. If meaning is derived from multiple interactions, then hermeneutics and intertextuality are suitable frameworks for textual analysis. There are similarities here with the field of semiotics, although, as Kramer (2020, p. 57) claims, hermeneutics is more "free-form" than semiotics. The triad system of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory that includes an interpretant is more similar to hermeneutics than Ferdinand de Saussure's dyad system of only signified and signifier, as the interpretant figure is vital. The reader/listener is bringing their own history to the experience, so the interpretant is what comes to their mind when they encounter a sign, and it is likely each person will bring to the sign something different.

Tradition and prejudice are two major influences that need to be considered when using hermeneutics as a form of interpretation. Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose book *Truth and Method* is considered by many to contain the foundation of postmodern hermeneutic philosophy, foregoes the interpretation methodology of historicism—the belief that preconceptions can be set aside and subjectivity erased—for what he terms the fusing of horizons. The past and present merge to create "effective history" (YaleCourses 2009, loc. 26.48) across historical, social, cultural, and interpersonal horizons. I brought to this interpretation the knowledge I already had of Montgomery's time period, and while it affected how I interpreted the works, and particularly the novels, I also learnt a great deal more about the era by reading the journals, which in turn affected how I interpreted the novels. Following a pattern known as the hermeneutic circle, the interpretant constantly moves between the text and the context, and in doing so, reaches deeper levels of analysis and improved interpretations. Hermeneutics and intertextuality are closely linked; as relating two texts to each other requires an understanding of the texts, intertextuality is a conduit of hermeneutic power.

4.2. Intertextuality

As this project involves the intertextual link between music and literature, it is crucial to understand how music may be intertextual. Although intertextuality was initially related to literature, it has now been expanded to include all forms of visual and aural art. Originally named by Julia Kristeva in 1966–67, the concept was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s assertion that all utterances exist only when put into context with other utterances. Each text is not static or finished, according to Nikolenko (2023, p. 108), but “a dynamic entity that emphasizes relational processes and practices within the text”. As the Bakhtinian theory was partially inspired by the concept of musical polyphony, Kostka et al. (2021, p. 4) assert that including music in intertextuality makes perfect sense. They continue to support music’s inclusion in this theory by explaining that music is multi-voiced, as is intertextuality, and also includes the listener as “an intertextual partner in dialogue, or as an endless web of echoes and resonances reaching one’s ear from different points in space and time” (Kostka et al. 2021, p. 4). Writing about quotation as a specific form of intertextuality, Prevost (2022, p. 23) claims composers use “intertextual relations” to “engage with works of the past”. She further explains that these connections are more successful when the listener “recognises the cited work and engages with the two works” (Prevost 2022, p. 23). In this way, I hope those listeners familiar with the works of Montgomery will have that material brought to mind when hearing the music. Indeed, at a concert of my music involving a different theme in Montgomery’s literature, an audience member stated that the music was “a reminder of how beautiful language can be”. As Kramer (2021, p. 17) emphasises, there is no such thing as musical intertextuality, but “Music simply participates in intertextuality like everything else”.

Consequently, intertextuality is not only a suitable framework for examining the connections between Montgomery’s novels and personal journals, but it is also an applicable framework for a number of dynamics in the project. The first intertextual layer is the relationship between Montgomery’s works and current academic literature, which exists in a few forms. While there is literature related to her novels, there is also considerable discourse around her journals; however, another layer exists with the literature discussing the intertextual link between her journals and novels and how her work was influenced by her life. Finally, a new layer was generated with a non-traditional research output—the creation of the musical composition—which intertextually represents not just the novels and journals but also the existing connection between the two. Figure 1 presents these relationships.

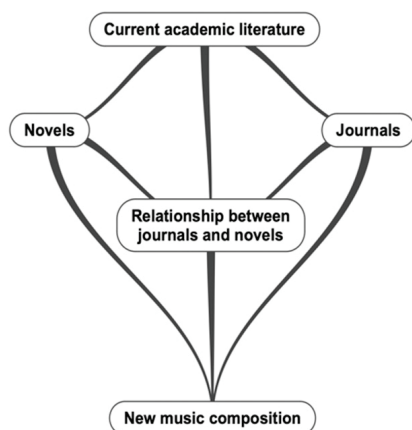


Figure 1. Intertextual relationships.

However, it is important to note that intertextuality is not limited to a simple comparison of the texts, and this is due to temporality. Plett (1991, p. 25) argues intertextuality is synchronic, which means all texts exist at the same time and are therefore interrelated, while Birrell (2007, p. 12) discusses an “epistemological time warp”. Although Montgomery’s

novels and journals were written many decades ago, they still exist at the same time as the new musical composition. Montgomery's works, having remained popular for more than a century, may fall into the category Plett calls "commonplaces" (Plett 1999, p. 316). These are works in the Western canon that are not only firmly established but are also based on familiar structures due to imitation and are, in turn, potential models for texts yet to be created. Replicated in full, in part, or in collections, they become dependent on each other within the canon and develop into virtual intertexts, ready for further reactivation, which is necessary for maintaining their meaning (Plett 1999, p. 325). As Nikolenko (2023, p. 108) attests, no literary work stands alone but is a product of how it relates to both other texts and "the structures of language itself". Additionally, Plett (1999, pp. 323–24) affirms intertext between art forms can be either syntagmatic, where works are combined into one new form, or paradigmatic, which is substituting one form for another. In this research project, the creation of the musical composition is an example of paradigmatic intertextuality, as the "commonplaces" are being represented musically.

4.3. Representation

There are different philosophies regarding whether, and to what degree, music can represent something else, and the term requires careful definition. As Bicknell (2009a, p. 12) explains, if representation means making a likeness of something, then we would be limited to representing sounds; however, "not all representations look like the things they are supposed to represent". If it is accepted that music can represent non-auditory properties, then the representation capabilities are endless (Bicknell 2009a, p. 13). Conversely, Graham (2005, p. 92) claims music can represent things, but only in a very limited way. Although he makes this statement, he is arguing the notion that music cannot be used to communicate and is using representation as part of communication. Taken on its own merits, he believes representation is certainly possible but "dependent upon conventional associations", which are culture-based and often not understood between different cultures (Graham 2005, p. 101), or what Kim (2023, p. 3) calls "encultured listening". Bicknell concurs, adding these widely accepted cultural conventions are what allow the representations to be understood (Bicknell 2009a, p. 12). DeNora terms this an "intertextual relation" and avers music's power arises from its intertextual connection with subjectivity and the listener's preferences (Iurascu 2010, p. 201).

These conventions that support representation are termed "ineliminable" by Kim (2023, p. 2), who argues they contribute to the structure of the music and therefore cannot be discounted. She further compares the representational capacities of music and language and stresses that although they communicate content in different ways, both still do so. While words have their own essential meaning, there can be multiple definitions that rely on context and definition; similarly, the context of music that brings meaning is in how it is composed, performed, and received (Kim 2023, pp. 3–4). Additionally, Bicknell (2009b, p. 37) avers if a representation works effectively, its meaning continues, and connections can then be made between the representation and other things.

What is also agreed on is how representation works. Graham (2005, p. 86) is adamant that representation should not be confused with replication or imitation, such as birdsong or bells. The aim of representation is not to imitate a sound but to put the idea of that object or event in the mind of the listener (Graham 2005, p. 86). Bicknell explains this as furnishing aesthetic ideas; the aesthetic attributes of a creative work do not simply offer a given concept but "engage and enliven the mind by alerting it to the possibility of an unlimited range of related representations" (Bicknell 2009b, p. 37). As Kramer stated in an interview (The Public Voice Salon 2017, pos. 35:30):

"This is not the old idea of you expressing musically what the poem expresses in words—that's exactly what you don't do. What you do is create aesthetic intellectual and emotional provocation. So how do you think about this? How do we feel about this? And if people come away with a thought that hasn't occurred to them before . . . you're doing your work".

5. Suspended Romance and “After All the Years of Separation”

A tactic Montgomery uses to allow her protagonists to develop outside of their romantic interests is suspended romance, and I wrote the piece “*after all the years of separation*” to represent this. It contains a number of devices designed to represent the suspension and uncertainty of these romances, with each device being revealed in a different motif. In semiotic theory, each of the six devices is a signifier/representamen, while the facets of the suspended romance are the signified/objects. However, as Kramer (2020, p. 66) stresses, these signifiers are not the total source of meaning in the music but “a particular subdivision of meaning”. The third part of the triad, the interpretant, is what appears in the listeners’ minds when they hear the music and contains “a network of dispositions, orientations, attitudes, affects, and models of action” (Kramer 2020, p. 66); this also contributes to meaning. As a composer, I cannot determine what a listener will think or feel but enter the process with a desire to present them with opportunities to make an intellectual and emotional connection with a certain theme.

The overall premise of this work is that phrases do not resolve as may be expected; the perfect or imperfect cadences of traditional harmony that guide the sense of direction do not exist. Small bursts of unexpected behaviour can be as simple as adding an accidental on the last note so the cadence does not resolve. The main signifiers in the form of musical devices used are as follows:

1. Melodies that do not resolve in a traditional manner. This lack of resolution was chosen to denote romances not travelling the expected path; as the melodies take an unexpected turn, so do the relationships.
2. Passages of sustained notes. These phrases are more drawn out than the majority of the composition and were included to signify the dragging out of the relationships.
3. Each instrument has a short solo. As the characters often spent protracted time apart while waiting for the romance to resolve, I chose to signify this by providing each instrument with a solo passage.
4. Extending time signatures. This device was selected to symbolise the relationships being drawn out longer than expected; the consistent beat of the music is unexpectedly stretched out, as are the suspended romances.
5. Staccato passages. This signifier is included to metaphorically tiptoe around the relationship.
6. Short, quick, demisemiquaver runs. These were chosen to characterise how quickly Montgomery has the characters come together in the end; this representation is the only time demisemiquavers are utilised in the piece.

A recording of the piece may be located at <https://on.soundcloud.com/YyMrECBQjUo71Ehj8> (uploaded 21 April 2024), and time stamps are provided in the following discussion. The instrumentation of a woodwind trio was chosen for the cohesion of the similar tones. While it may take a while to resolve, there are usually narrative clues that the relationship is heading in that direction, guiding the readers’ expectations. Emily Starr and Teddy Kent (*Emily of New Moon*), still children, plan their future together in the Disappointed House, although Emily believes “maybe we could find a way to manage without going to all that bother” of marriage (Montgomery 1923, p. 258). Anne initially hates Gilbert with a passion Montgomery equals to Anne’s aforementioned love for Diana, which is strong because of their bond. When he first proposes and Anne refuses, she acknowledges that her “world has tumbled into pieces” without Gilbert in it (Montgomery 1915, p. 133). As soon as a lost Pat Gardiner sees Hilary ‘Jingle’ Gordon, “suddenly she felt safe. . . protected” and after a quick introduction, “They were just like old, old friends” (Montgomery 1933, pp. 67–68). The connections between these future couples are made evident from the beginning, and using instruments from the same family in the composition represents this togetherness.

The theme of suspended romance has been discussed by a number of authors, including Marah Gubar and Benjamin Lefebvre, who concur that Montgomery utilises the suspension to provide her protagonists with time to develop their personal growth, female friendships, education, and careers—what Gubar (2001, p. 51) calls “exploring avenues

unconnected to the traditional marriage plot". Nickel (2009, p. 106) disagrees with the opinion that the suspensions occur for this purpose, stating that all romantic fiction will "postpone romantic reconciliation until the end". However, I believe that while Nickel's argument applies when the postponement is serving to heighten romantic tension, Montgomery uses postponement to allow her heroines to flourish and achieve other things in life. Lefebvre (2002, p. 151) asserts Montgomery concentrates on the "emotional and artistic development of her female characters", which is why the romantic endings can sometimes appear "tacked-on" and consequently "underdeveloped and contrived". The previously mentioned Rilla and Marigold romances fit this category, as does Pat's eventual reunion with Hilary (*Mistress Pat*). Rilla did not even know Kenneth was home from the war until she saw a list of returned soldiers in a two-week-old newspaper. He turns up at her home unexpectedly in the last few paragraphs of the book, so changed since the time she last saw him that she at first does not recognise him, but once he speaks her name, their future is suddenly sealed. After years away, Hilary returns to Pat in the last five pages of the book. Similar to Rilla and Ken, their relationship has had no chance to develop with them as adults, yet the quick romantic conclusion completes the story.

As her journals are part of the intertextual relationship and show that her life impacted her writing, it is relevant to note that Montgomery herself experienced a suspended romance. She stayed on Prince Edward Island in Cavendish to care for her ailing grandmother while her minister fiancé left to study and then accepted a call to a congregation in Leaskdale, Ontario. Only once her grandmother passed was there "no longer any reason for delaying my already long-deferred marriage" (Montgomery 1987, p. 396). In her novels, romances are suspended for a number of reasons, including study, work, indecision, interfering parents, lack of finances, or one of the pair taking time to recognise the love, although the seeds were there. Anne and Gilbert of the *Anne* series experience a range of reasons. Initially, Anne is angry with Gilbert for a schoolroom taunt, and they become academic rivals. Even after they reconcile, they remain friends for many years before romance takes over. Gilbert always loves Anne, but he realises early that he needs to keep his intentions quiet until she is ready: "But Gilbert did not attempt to put his thoughts into words, for he had already too good reason to know that Anne would mercilessly and frostily nip all attempts at sentiment in the bud" (Montgomery 1909, p. 155). While in college, he proposes for the first time, causing another rift in their relationship until Anne finally understands she loves him when his life is endangered. Even then, they are separated for three more years while Gilbert studies medicine; during this time Anne is the principal of a private girls' school.

In Anne's world, she is not alone in experiencing a suspended romance; there are also several secondary characters and stories related to people facing a similar fate. Anne thoroughly enjoys being a matchmaker, and often these matches involve reconciling couples who have been apart for a long time—Theodora Dix and Ludovic Speed,¹ Nora Nelson and Jim Wilcox (*Anne of Windy Willows*), and Janet Sweet and John Douglas (*Anne of the Island*), among others. The story of Leslie Moore, which is the narrative heart of *Anne's House of Dreams*, also involves a romance that is unable to flourish because of circumstance. Leslie and her boarder, Owen Ford, fall for each other but cannot pursue a relationship as Leslie is tied to her disabled, childlike husband, Dick, and Owen leaves. It is only sometime later, when Dick is revealed to have a different identity, that Anne is able to orchestrate a reunion between Leslie and Owen, and their romance can begin.

In the composition written to represent these suspended romances, the first section, up to bar 31, establishes the motifs and utilises three devices from the list above. The first of these is the lack of resolution, which I have applied to most phrases in this section. The first example occurs in bar 4, timestamp 0:10 (Figure 2); as the composition is in C major, traditional harmony would suggest the phrase is heading to the tonic chord, but instead the C is harmonised with an A flat rather than the expected G.



Figure 2. Lack of traditional harmonic resolution example 1.

In bar 8, timestamp 0:24, again the expectation would be to resolve the phrase on the tonic chord, but instead it moves to an Am7 (Figure 3), which is one of the four chords used in various places throughout the rest of the piece.



Figure 3. Lack of traditional harmonic resolution example 2.

I have introduced these chords with their unhindered versions in bars 9–14, timestamp 0:24–0:42, where they introduce the suspension device of sustained notes. These chords are held for the duration of the bar (apart from allowing for breaths), representing the long stretches of time waiting for the suspended romances to resolve (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Sustained notes symbolising extended relationships.

In bar 21, timestamp 1:01, a staccato motif based on the flute's accompaniment pattern in bars 5 and 6 begins, which signifies the caution and tiptoeing around the relationship, particularly those in which one person is initially more invested than the other (Figure 5). In the *Anne* series, Gilbert falls in love with Anne at their first meeting, but they do not

become engaged until the end of the third book. In the meantime, he has to constantly gauge how far he is able to move their friendship to something else, often needing to retreat after his efforts.

Figure 5. Staccato motif representing tiptoeing around the relationship.

Emily (the *Emily* series) has two suspended romances, very different in nature, with men present through all three novels. Although she ends up with her childhood friend, Teddy Kent, the two of them and their friends, Ilse Burnley and Perry Miller, spend years tangled in the confusion of who really loves who in the group. There is even a point in the third book (*Emily's Quest*) where Teddy and Ilse nearly marry, until they hear Perry has been injured, and Ilse consequently jilts Teddy at the altar. By this point, Teddy has given up on winning Emily's love, but she has finally recognised that she loves him. Their relationship is not resolved until the end of the book, and the union occurs quickly; as aforementioned, this was not the fate for Emily that Montgomery would have chosen, so it was pushed to the end.

In the first novel, Emily meets Dean Priest, a man twenty-three years her senior, when he saves her life. Instantly intrigued by the twelve-year-old, Dean states, "I think I will wait for you" (Montgomery 1923, p. 240), which he proceeds to do until, at nineteen, Emily finally agrees to marry him. Although a great source of friendship and intellectual inspiration, Dean cajoles and manipulates Emily throughout their relationship, always with this end goal in mind. She acknowledges she is not in love with him, and he accepts that "he's quite satisfied with what I can give him—real affection and comradeship" (Montgomery 1927, p. 76)—but after a psychic connection with Teddy in which she saves his life from the other side of the world, she recognises her connection with Teddy and breaks the engagement with Dean.

Continuing the representation of these romances, the second section of the composition, from bar 32 to 44, timestamp 1:25–2:07, begins with a gentler motif that is a variation of the notes of the four main chords motif. It continues the use of unresolved phrases and staccato tiptoeing, but I have also introduced extending time signatures and short, quick runs. Across bars 32 to 37 (timestamp 1:25–1:48), the time signatures expand from $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{4}{4}$ and then to $\frac{5}{4}$, with each one lasting for only two bars (Figure 6). This represents the occasions when the romance is extended further than expected. As aforementioned, even once engaged, Anne and Gilbert are separated for a further three years due to his study, while in *Anne's House of Dreams*, Cornelia Bryant and Marshall Elliott's relationship is suspended for twenty years after he makes a political vow of which Miss Cornelia does not approve.

A little slower

Figure 6 shows musical notation for measures 32–41. The tempo marking "A little slower" is present. The score is for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 5/4 at measure 36. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. The Flute part features long, sustained notes with some grace notes. The Oboe and Clarinet parts have more rhythmic movement, including triplets in measure 41.

Figure 6. Expanding time signatures symbolising relationships stretched further than expected.

Quick, short runs of either semiquavers or demisemiquavers are introduced in bar 42, timestamp 2:00 (Figure 7) and used through the rest of the piece to suggest that these romances usually resolve extremely quickly once the impediment or misunderstanding is removed.

Figure 7 shows musical notation for measures 42–45. The tempo marking "A little slower" is present. The score is for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *f*. The Flute part features a wavy line indicating a tremolo or rapid oscillation in measure 42. The Oboe and Clarinet parts have rapid, short runs of semiquavers and demisemiquavers.

Figure 7. Rapid, short runs representing quick relationship resolutions.

The *Pat* series has a heroine who is so connected to her home that marriage is unthinkable, as due to the patrilocal tradition of women moving to where their husbands reside, marriage would mean leaving Silver Bush, her home. Pat is extremely emotionally connected to Silver Bush. Her childhood friend and the boy who loves her, Hilary, has moved away to study, and Pat has a succession of unsuccessful suitors as her life becomes more lonely and unhappy. As Hilary hears of these relationships in an embellished form, he ceases communication with Pat. Now in her early thirties, Pat becomes engaged to a neighbour, David, because she is afraid of losing more friends—"Life with him would be a very pleasant pilgrimage" (Montgomery 1935, p. 243)—but after Hilary visits, David

breaks the engagement, recognising Pat's connection to him, even though she does not. It is only after Silver Bush burns down and Hilary returns that Pat realises she loves him, and the romance can truly begin. In *Kilmeny of the Orchard*, Kilmeny refuses to begin a relationship with Eric because she cannot speak, even though he tries to assure her that it does not matter to him. Once she regains her voice and their romance can begin, she delays their marriage so she can learn more about the world in general.

The next three sections of the composition all begin with one instrument introducing the theme with a short solo, which is the third suspension device. I chose this device to denote the time characters spend on their own without their significant partner, whether this be the aforementioned duty/study/work separations or total separation following an argument. As an example, the clarinet begins the third section with a solo at bar 45 (timestamp 2:09), and after starting gently, the accompaniment builds (Figure 8).

45 **And a little slower again**

Fl. *rubato* *p*

Ob. *rubato* *p*

Cl. *rubato* *mf*

50

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. 3 3 6

Figure 8. Instrumental solo beginning section denoting time character spends alone.

Staccato moments are again a feature of this section, and the device of quick runs is used extensively, culminating in bars 56 and 57 (timestamp 3:07–3:17) having a succession of demisemiquaver runs between all three instruments (Figure 9), again signifying the characters' romances often being very quickly resolved.

The image displays a musical score for two measures, 56 and 57, in 6/4 time. The instruments are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.).

- Bar 56:** The Flute part begins with a demisemiquaver (eighth note) rest, followed by a demisemiquaver run. The Oboe part starts with a demisemiquaver run, followed by a demisemiquaver rest. The Clarinet part begins with a demisemiquaver run, followed by a demisemiquaver rest. All three instruments play demisemiquaver runs in the second half of the bar. The dynamic marking is *mf* (mezzo-forte).
- Bar 57:** The Flute part begins with a demisemiquaver run, followed by a demisemiquaver rest. The Oboe part starts with a demisemiquaver run, followed by a demisemiquaver rest. The Clarinet part begins with a demisemiquaver run, followed by a demisemiquaver rest. All three instruments play demisemiquaver runs in the second half of the bar. The dynamic marking is *cresc.* (crescendo).

Figure 9. Demisemiquaver runs denoting rapid relationship resolution.

The fourth section begins at bar 59, timestamp 3:23, and modulates to Gm with a significantly reduced tempo from the original motif it mimics. The oboe solo in a minor key represents the romances that contain an unpleasant suspension, such as quarrels or family interference. The uncertainty created by the often dissonant staccato features prominently, with the expanding time signatures expanded further to include 6_4 . The tempo increases at bar 70, timestamp 4:03, as the instruments play staccato notes one after the other (Figure 10), signifying the couples are not quite on the same path. The sense of urgency increases as the instruments come together, both with the staccato notes and quick, demisemiquaver runs.

Continuing the device of solo instruments beginning new sections, I began the next part (bars 79–95, timestamp 4:48–5:42) with a flute solo, which is brighter and more lyrical than the previous section and uses all of the devices. Although the devices are still in place and there is no harmonic resolution, it feels more cohesive and indicates the relationships are heading towards unity. The piece then culminates (from bar 96) in a brief revisiting of each of the previous sections, bringing everything together and finally concluding with an expected resolution (Figure 11).

Figure 10 shows a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The score is for measures 70, 71, and 72, marked 'Adagio' and 'f' (forte). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The Flute part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The Oboe part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The Clarinet part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The score shows staccato notes that are separate but follow each other, symbolizing couples not on the same path.

Figure 10. Staccato notes separate but follow each other, symbolising couples not on the same path.

Figure 11 shows a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The score is for measures 108, 109, and 110, marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'f' (forte). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The Flute part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The Oboe part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The Clarinet part starts with a whole note B-flat, followed by eighth notes. The score shows traditional harmony resolution denoting a couple finally together.

Figure 11. Traditional harmony resolution denoting couple finally together.

6. Conclusions

The main question of the research project was not whether Montgomery's text could be musically represented, but *how* this would occur, and for this reason, a methodology of arts-based research was selected. Writing the composition allowed me to ascertain *how* the theme of suspended romance could be represented. In this way, the research occurred *through* the practice of composition rather than simply discussing compositional possibilities, with the result being a non-traditional research output (NTRO) and its contextualization. The music I have composed is unique in that it is an adaptation in which the music stands alone as a representation of Montgomery's worlds; its role is not to reinforce a visual or lyrics, but to intertextually match the text. Also novel in the total project—of which this theme and composition are one part—is that it is the prominent themes within Montgomery's work that are being represented, as well as the methodology used to create this work, which will be further explained below.

Hermeneutics had a significant impact on the outcomes of the project. A type of interpretation that leads to understanding, hermeneutics includes bringing one's own preconceived ideas, culture, experience, beliefs, etcetera to something, and in the area of textual analysis, this results in the reader being more purposeful and engaged. In reading Montgomery's novels and journals, bringing my own life experience and understanding to the reading made a marked difference to how I viewed the characters and noticed the themes compared to when I had previously read them as a teen. Additionally, reading hermeneutically also impacted how the composition was devised, as my response to the theme became the basis for the overall style of the composition.

Intertextuality is the relationship between two texts, and as both intertextuality and music are multi-voiced, it is an applicable framework for a music-centred research project. Already existing are intertextual links between Montgomery's novels and journals, her novels and academic literature, and her journals and academic literature. This new composition adds another layer to that framework as it is intertextually linked to all three existing areas, with the information from all three being considered when determining musical devices to use. Learning more about Montgomery's world brought a different understanding to the way she writes, such as understanding how and why she experienced her own suspended romance and how this was reflected in her characters. The existing intertextual links have now been broadened by the addition of the new composition. Rather than standing alone, music partakes in intertextuality like any other type of text; not only are the compositions participating in the intertextuality of the Montgomery texts, but it is these intertextual links that help to bring meaning to the music. As Klein (2021, p. 60) attests, "conventions, topics, trends, and compositional techniques" contribute to musical meaning, and in this project, these things have all been introduced as a musical response to Montgomery's words, furthering the intertextual connection.

Defining representation is the cornerstone to understanding its position in this project and how the music is linked to the text. Representations do not need to be a direct replica of an item, which means music can represent non-auditory items and is commonly understood due to cultural conventions. My approach to representation is that it is about putting an idea into the listeners' minds that may not necessarily have been there before, provoking them to consider new possibilities when hearing the music. Using creative practice, the research—and specifically the composition—adds to the existing canon of music representing literature while also providing a new adaptation of Montgomery's worlds. Compositional techniques have been used to demonstrate the intertextual potential of music. Moreover, it confirms the idea that musical intertextuality is not a separate entity but that music can participate in intertextuality along with other media forms.

Funding: This research has been financially supported by the Australian Government's Research Training Program Scholarship (Fee Offset) and the Bill and Michelle Stewart Postgraduate Scholarship.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ *The Hurrying of Ludovic* is a short story published in *Chronicles of Avonlea* (1912), which is not included in this research, but the relationship is referenced in both *Anne of the Island* and *Anne of Ingleside*.

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Article

The “Harold Theme” as a Byronic Microcosm: Structural and Narrative Condensation in Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*

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Abstract: Lord Byron’s life and poetic works have inspired musical compositions across genres even during his lifetime. The English author’s fictional characters and themes impressed nineteenth-century European composers, especially since his Byronic heroes were often conflated with their creators’ own melancholy and revolutionary personas. In contrast to Byron-inspired songs and operas, instrumental programme music has raised doubts towards a direct correlation with its poetic sources. While epigraphs help direct listeners to specific ideas, their absence has prompted dismissals of intermedial relationships, even those proposed by the composers themselves. This essay explores major connections between Hector Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy, a Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato* (premiered 1834), and Byron’s semi-autobiographical narrative poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* (published 1812–1818). Although Berlioz’s titles and memoirs partially identify Byron’s Childe Harold as his inspiration, other references, including his visits to the Abruzzi mountains, his fascination with Italian folk music, his reuse of earlier material, and his reflections on brigands and solitude, have fuelled ongoing debates about the work’s programmatic content. Combining historical-biographical research, melopoetics, and musical semiotics, this essay clarifies how indefinite elements were transmitted from poetic source to musical target. Particular focus is placed on the “Harold theme”, which functions as a Byronic microcosm: a structural, thematic, and gestural condensation of Byron’s poem into music. Observing the interactions between microcosmic motifs and macrocosmic forms in Berlioz’s symphony and their poetic analogues, this study offers a new reading of how Byron’s legacy is encoded in musical terms.

Keywords: Lord Byron; Childe Harold; reception; prosody; intermediality; Berlioz; Harold in Italy; musical semiotics; programme music; Byronic miniature

1. Introduction: Byron’s Reception Among European Musicians

1.1. Intermediality and Context

Music production based on Lord Byron’s life and writing reached its peak between 1830 and 1890 in Europe. A significant factor was Byron’s passing away in 1824 during his support of the Hellenic War of Independence. European composers of the Age of Revolution found inspiration in Byron’s melancholy yet defiant figure. This essay offers the argument that Hector Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy, a Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato* (Berlioz 1900, hereafter *HII*), is more than a musical homage to Byron’s poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* (Byron 1981–1993a, hereafter *CHP*). Despite the difference in medium, Berlioz’s work integrates Byronic themes of melancholy, wandering, revolutionary disillusionment, and cynicism at both structural and emotional levels. Byron’s

narrative poem functioned as a major literary source and extra-musical programme for Berlioz's work.

Unlike song lyrics or opera, programme music “purports to carry its narrative meaning within itself” (Scruton 2001). Extra-musical programmes, stories or ideas referenced in titles or programme notes often derive from literature, nature, or visual arts (Kregor 2015, p. 5). In instrumental music, such as programme music, a programme guides interpretation by linking the music to specific ideas or moods: “to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it” (Scruton 2001). In the absence of explicit references to verse lines in epigraphs, however, composers' claims of literary influence were often dismissed or reduced to general mood-setting, even when documented in advertisements, letters, or memoirs. As a result, scholarly discussions of *HII* tend to treat its poetic programme only superficially, often rejecting substantial intermedial links between the music and Byron's text.

Byron's *CHP* is a long narrative poem in four Cantos that fuses old and new forms. Written in Spenserian stanzas, nine lines written in iambic pentameter with an ABAB-BCBCC rhyme scheme, concluding in a twelve-syllable French alexandrine line, the poem follows the aimless travels of a Childe Harold, hinting at a knightly quest. His physical journey parallels an internal, introspective one, marked by shifts in mood and attitude. Harold explores the condition of self-imposed exile while expressing revolutionary ideals. His European travels become opportunities to reflect on political, economic, historical, and folkloric events and their effect on humanity. Despite abundant descriptions of beautiful landscapes, cultures, and historical sites, Harold remains detached and unimpressed. Canto III of *CHP* highlights the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, portraying the melancholy, solitary pilgrim as disenchanted but not without cynical commentary. Canto IV, set in Venice, observes cultural and artistic achievements alongside nature and freedom, contrasting them with the political climate. Byron's contemporaries conflated the poet with his fictional protagonist, the archetype of the Byronic hero: a melancholy, love-stricken noble wanderer. Yet the character is distinct from its author; Harold isolates himself in nature, eschewing community, causes, and conventions. Unlike the classical hero engaged in strength-proving feats, the Byronic hero wanders in introspection. Byron, by contrast, engaged in public life.

1.2. The Byronic Hero and Childe Harold

The Byronic hero is a complex synthesis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prototypes: the Child of Nature, Hero of Sensibility, Noble Outlaw, Gothic Villain, Faust, and Prometheus (Thorslev, in Carpenter 2002, p. 46). Emerging from the Romantic hero, the Byronic character carries an added element of dangerous excess. Defined by a troubled conscience, ennui, cynicism, and world-weariness, the Byronic hero exemplifies the Romantic spirit while grappling with exterior and interior dilemmas (Cochran 2006, pp. 249–50). Following Waterloo, heroes of internal conflict replaced those of physical conquest (Liszt and zu Sayn-Wittgenstein 1950, p. 867), as emotions could cause “downfall” (Carpenter 2002, p. 45). Byron's poetry thus valorises a Romantic hero marked by both bravery and moral ambiguity (Shears [2009] 2016, p. 123). Alienated, melancholy, and supercilious, the Byronic character blurs the boundaries between life and art while modelling resistance to oppression (Cochran 2006, p. 250). Mark Evan Bonds defines the “Romantic hero” with the Napoleonic model of victory:

In spite of the unmistakable reference to the Ninth, Harold does not end with a rousing set of variations, a triumphant march, or a chorale-like theme of triumph. Instead, the “hero” of this work is vanquished. Byron's Harold is the essence of the Romantic hero: far from Napoleonic, he is withdrawn, contemplative, and

isolated from society, a prototypical anti-hero. *Harold en Italie* is, in effect, Berlioz's *Sinfonia anti-eroica*. (Bonds 1992, p. 424)

Byron's *Childe Harold* highlights the failure of the Napoleonic Wars to achieve their original ideals, attributing it to conflicting character traits that led to indecisive actions. The antithetical Byronic hero fluctuates among idealism, rebellion, and reform.

1.3. Critical Debate on Word-Music Relations

Although Byron's poetry clearly influenced Berlioz, early critics struggled to identify direct links between the two artistic media. Donald Francis Tovey found it impossible to translate verse into musical terms, attributing this to "Berlioz's encyclopaedic inattention", while recognising the potential of extra-musical ideas to function as a "referential background" (Levine 1982, p. 183). Robert Pascall argued that "originality" trumped accuracy, reducing the grand themes of war, nature, and culture "to the picturesque and naïve" (Pascall 1988, p. 129). Byron's ambivalence towards "nature poetry", "variously picturesque, realistic, or comic" (Lovell 1966, p. 23), also shapes the musical narrative. Similarly, Bonds resisted identifying "specific parallels with Byron's poem", following Glyn Court's judgement that the programme is not "straightforward [...] but rather] tenuous" (Bonds 1992, p. 423). These interpretive challenges have led to diverse readings of Berlioz's *HII*: as adaptation, interpretive response, imitation, translation, transmutation, illustration, association, filtered appropriation, fusion, "imaginative musical recreation" (Thomson 2016, p. 36), or even an unrelated autobiographical piece with suggestive headings. The broader debate concerns the programmatic nature of the work and the complexities of word-music relationships.

This essay proposes to expand the view of Byron's influence on *HII*, arguing that it goes beyond an allusion in the title to emotional, structural, and symbolic influences. The reference to "Italy" suggests not only *CHP* but also Byron's Italian period. Berlioz's Byronic irony, mixing "conscious detachment" with "extremes of passion", is compared by David Cairns to the emotional texture of *Don Juan* [Byron, *DJ*, 1819, 1858] (Cairns 1989, p. 458). This supports a reading of *HII* as a composite, direct engagement with Byron's work.

Jacques Barzun criticised Tovey and others for misunderstanding literary influence in Berlioz, noting "how associations cluster" around "symbols at once sharp and ambiguous enough for infinite reference" (Levine 1982, p. 201, n10). Thomas Austenfeld likewise sees Berlioz's *HII* as a "sentimental" "interpretation" of Byron's text, shaped by Berlioz's imagination rather than Byron's cynicism (Austenfeld 1990, p. 94). Yet some scholars do detect cynicism in the music, a view this essay supports at the level of compositional devices and juxtaposition. The analysis in this essay explores to what extent elements of content and form in *HII* derive from Byron's *CHP* and how this intermedial relationship expands the potential of the programme.

2. Intermedial Narrativity: A Methodological Approach

2.1. Intermediality

Studying the relationship between two media requires gauging the extent of their interaction, influence and comparability. Intermediality traces the transmission of constituent elements from one art form to another. While intertextuality involves mostly unconscious acts of borrowing, particularly within the same medium, intermediality, a term coined by Friedrich Aage Hansen-Löwe, encompasses both conscious and unconscious processes of transfer across media.

Werner Wolf's typological diagram (Wolf 2015, pp. 461–74; see Appendix A) provides a framework for analysing programme music inspired by Byron's poetry. Such works may fit into more than one intermedial category. For example, formal imitation occurs when one

medium uses its own specific means to imitate forms from another, despite their differing semiotic codes (verbal or nonverbal). By contrast, transmediality, the least conspicuous form of intermediality, refers to the migration of non-medium-specific elements, such as inferred narratives, that transcend the boundaries of any single medium (Wolf 2015, p. 468).

This study draws on a range of Wolf's intermedial concepts to investigate how instrumental music can convey the substance of poetry. The analytical method is threefold, incorporating melopoetics and musical semiotics, combined with historical-biographical context. A mixed, intermediate approach enables a nuanced comparison of compositional devices across Byron's poetry and Berlioz's music.

2.2. Melopoetics and Underlying Meaning

Because poetry and music share few compositional devices, comparing their sounds and rhythms is key. Ezra Pound defines "Melopoeia [as verse], wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning" (Eliot 1968, p. 25). Lawrence Kramer extends this, asserting that "the music [of the text. . .] 'reads' a text with a deep structure that the text itself can be said to conceal or resist" (Kramer 1989, p. 167). Kramer's concept of melopoetics, a musical-literary criticism, derives meaning from linguistic and prosodic patterns in verse. This involves phonetic transcription, rhythmic and phrasal scansion, and semantic analysis to identify patterns of recurrence, combination, and deviation. The scansions employed in this essay follow Derek Attridge's system (see Appendix B).

Byron's rhythmic contrasts create semantic and emotional layers that Berlioz may mirror musically. Bernard Beatty argues that Byron's strategy, despite the seemingly experimental tone, is revealed through the language itself (Beatty 2019, pp. 265–66). Applying melopoetics to Byron's poem extracts prosodic and phonetic elements and links them to the themes. Analysing melopoetic elements is, therefore, essential to this intermedial comparison with music.

2.3. Musical Semiotics and Narrative Structure

This essay also applies musical semiotics, which studies sign relations in music through topics, gestures, and compositional elements. Following Charles S. Peirce, signs consist of three components: "the *object* to which a sign refers; the *representamen*, i.e., the sign itself; and the *interpretant*", a mental construct linking the two (Tarasti 2002, p. 10). Peircean terms, iconic, indexical, and symbolic sign functions, replace de Saussurean model of "likeness, causality, or convention" which "may activate an ongoing chain of interpretants" (Cumming 2001). In literary terminology, the relationship between a signifier and a signified, the components of a sign, is either denotative or connotative. In music, iconic signs are gestures that imitate extra-musical phenomena through perceived likeness, for example, ascending arpeggios to express elation or the sublime; indexical signs are conventional or contextual elements akin to rhetorical devices, functioning through cause and effect, such as the persistent use of certain rhythms or keys to signify psychological states; and symbolic signs are arbitrary or culturally specific associations, such as the use of the *alla turca* topic to evoke exoticism (Cumming 2001).

The musical semiotic approach allows analysis to move beyond harmonic and motivic structures to explore deeper intermedial relationships such as narrative metaphors and ironic tone. The significance of signs in music is often contingent on narrative sequence. Eero Tarasti's musical semiotic theory provides a system for analysing coherence. Tarasti's musical semiotic theory aims to identify not only the style markers but also their localisations, characterisations, and deviations. They can be labelled at distinct levels of

modality (what they offer the music) and recognised at the level of musical gesture or effect, from the largest to the smallest functional components: “(1) isotopies; (2) spatial, temporal, and actorial categories and their engagement/disengagement; (3) modalities; and (4) semes/phemes” (Tarasti 2002, pp. 61, 194). From this existential approach, I mostly apply what is relevant to the intermediality: the use of thematic isotopies, the interaction among melodies, and the smallest units of meaning and sound, as applicable to the analysis; an example for the “I can” modality occurs when the solo viola plays an improvisation. Musical topics are elements of theme and form based on their formal function in earlier usages (Caplin 2005, p. 114). The combination or superimposition of musical topics is a complex isotopy, or longer semantic particle, meaning a musical narrative.

Moreover, a musical topic becomes a trope upon interacting with other topics and motives that are mismatched, creating semantic tension or transformation (Hatten 2014, p. 515). This interaction opens the possibility of metaphor and parody, among other interpretative layers. Kramer delineates tropes as fluid signs generating many interpretants, or meanings, depending on context, programme, discourse, and historical associations; musical signification becomes more than the sum of its topics (Kramer 2020, pp. 58, 59, 66). Motifs, or semes, as the smallest semantic units, appear within thematic classemes, i.e., contextual frameworks that give them narrative significance (Grabócz 1986, p. 100). Intermedial relationships can therefore be analysed on both microcosmic (motivic, gestural) and macrocosmic (structural, narrative) levels.

The present essay integrates contextual inferencing, melopoetics, musical semiotics, and structural musical analysis to enable a thorough comparison between Byron’s *CHP* and Berlioz’s *HII*. The essay will identify narrative gestures in both works and compare their function, allowing an examination of the direct and substantive influence of Byron’s poem over the music. As a result of this approach, intermedial relations can be examined on various structural levels, microcosmic and macrocosmic.

3. Berlioz’s Musical, Political, and Literary Influences

3.1. Musical and Byronic Mimesis

Since *HII* premiered on the 23 November 1834 in Paris, it commemorates the tenth anniversary of Byron’s death and Beethoven’s Ninth *Choral* Symphony. The supposition that the influence of the musical tradition, Beethoven in particular, on Berlioz’s *HII* is greater than that of the poetic programme is inferred from its unconventionality of genre, rather than from form or content. It is symphonically labelled music with a soloist along with an alienation of the soloist and theme (Bonds 1992, pp. 417–18). Within the symphonic tradition, composers were expected to surpass or “transcend” the frightening musical giant, as Berlioz calls Beethoven, “yet maintain the same degree of reflection that Beethoven had reached” in the symphony (Bonds 1992, p. 450). Symphony movements usually follow the prescribed order of movements: sonata—slow—scherzo or minuet—fast. On the other hand, in *HII* the order is only the surface, which this essay explains in alternative ways. Moreover, scholars question whether Berlioz’s *HII* is an example of artificially copying or imitating Beethoven’s works that overrode Berlioz’s creativity (Bonds 1992, p. 418). Mostly self-taught, Berlioz did learn musical composition by copying works of great composers, especially Carl von Weber, Christoph Willibald von Gluck, and Ludwig van Beethoven, at the Paris Conservatory library (Berlioz 2002, pp. 14–15; Bloom 1998, pp. 20, 24). Bonds argues, nevertheless, that Berlioz did not copy but heavily responded to Beethoven’s symphonies by alluding to most of them, Nos 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 (Bonds 1992, pp. 420–24).

Berlioz’s compositional techniques were certainly influenced by Beethoven’s, whose late works were unconventional. Franz Liszt observes that Berlioz did not, however, imitate Beethoven *per se* but that he sought “the germs of artistic development”, considering Berlioz

a “vocational” musical genius and his *HII* instructive in its unconventionality; indeed, Liszt opposes the idea of mere “imitation[. . .]” of musical forefathers, “the old masters”, and their “exhausted” “forms” (Liszt and zu Sayn-Wittgenstein 1950, p. 869). Danuta Mirka explains that the “affective power” of music is attributed to musical “motion” that is linked to “emotion” in “intervals”, “rhythmic patterns”, and “qualities of keys”, as well as the listener’s “temperament” (Mirka 2014, pp. 11–12). Berlioz’s work in question goes beyond a mere copying, or reflection of conventional ideals, towards Byronic underpinnings. Mirka distinguishes between “imitation” in music and “mimesis” as a more profound variant: “while fine arts imitate the physical world, music should imitate the world of human passions” in onomatopoeic and more conventional means (Mirka 2014, p. 12). Mimesis is more than sound replication: it reflects the good and the beautiful, induces ethos of a culture, and focuses on “human life—character, passions, deeds”, all for metaphysical aims (Mathiesen 2001), hence not thrice removed from reality like imitation is. Exploiting the “affections” within “the poem” (Liszt and zu Sayn-Wittgenstein 1950, p. 865), the programme of the music inspires listeners to imagine a collaboration with the sources of inspiration because of the symbolically indefinite construction and “[t]he intersection of musical and poetic content” (Kregor 2015, p. 88). Berlioz recruits the Byron programme to overcome the Beethoven-related fear.

3.2. Historical and Political Sources

Berlioz, similar to Byron, rarely followed creative instruction or classical conventions. Whereas the circumstances behind the composition of *HII* are well known, the aims of a Byronic work remain elusive. Having enjoyed a performance of works by Berlioz, Niccolò Paganini, a famous violinist, offered the talented composer a job in 1833. He entrusted him to compose “the right music” for him to play on his Stradivarius grand viola for his London debut as a violist (Berlioz 2002, p. 215). At first, Berlioz presented his composition as a two-part concerto, “a work for chorus, orchestra, and solo viola, tentatively to be called *The Last Moments of Mary Stuart*” (Holoman 1989, p. 155), alluding to Friedrich Schiller’s *Maria Stuart* alongside other pieces from the *Wallenstein* drama series (Berlioz 2002, p. 290). An uncommon hero, the viola instrument, the cousin of the more primary violin, adequately represents the Queen of Scots with her exilic life and lonesome death for high treason against her captor and cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. The viola suitably represents a leader, such that the English term “viola” and the German term “Bratschgeige”, also “Bratsche” (of brotherhood), both derive from the Italian “*viola da braccio*”, meaning the violin of the arm (Boyden 2001). When Paganini abandoned the piece for lack of showmanship, Berlioz kept the idea of the viola, symbolic of an unconventional hero such as Mary and Byron’s Harold.

The political influence is multiplied with historical and fictional allusions. In one connection with Childe Harold, when she was leaving France for Scotland, Mary Stuart famously bade the French shores adieu, thinking she would never return, just like Harold (*CHP*, I, 13, l. 118). Her last moments would have been full of Byronic gloom and agony towards a sense of powerlessness and betrayal. Berlioz would have read that Byron was Scottish on his mother’s side in Thomas Moore’s biography in the Galignani edition, *Life of Lord Byron* (1830–1831) (Berlioz 1972–1975, 1, p. 293; Byron 1854).¹ Moreover, because the “Harold theme” is a self-borrowed theme from the discarded *Rob Roy* Overture without significant alterations, the reference to Mary Stuart does not seem to be its origin but an association. The allusions link the English, French, Scottish, and Irish historical thrones with Harold and the solo viola in the context of folkloric custom and belief, wars of independence, monarchies, and republican thought.

In addition, the first edition of Berlioz’s *HII* omits the first movement heading due to a missing first page, which imitates the violent ripping of the Napoleon Buonaparte

dedication from Beethoven's Third "Eroica" Symphony, in E-flat major, as a political retraction. The connection to Napoleon lies in more than the coexistence of opposite sentiments and tendencies. A marching "Napoleon" melody in bb.177–180 is self-borrowed from another abandoned piece from Berlioz's post-Italian experience, *The Return of the Army from Italy* H.62/2 (1832), a military symphony in two parts found in his Sketchbook of 1832–1836. Byron and Berlioz express disappointment with Napoleon as a derailed Promethean endeavour, and the torn title page of *HII* hints at a Beethovenian revocation of a Napoleon dedication. Nevertheless, not only are the characters Byronic, but also the retrieval of previously abandoned themes in *HII* hints at a Byronic revival of the ideal in a new form.

3.3. Personal Context and Intention

In addition to the symphonic, Berlioz kept the allusion to (illusion of) the concerto genre that Paganini had ordered using a leading soloist. Released from the commission, Berlioz was free to shift emphasis away from genre limitations. The oddities are that the viola is not usually perceived as a soloist but as a harmonic instrument; whereas the concerto is in three, Berlioz's piece is in four movements, in a parallel way to Byron's *CHP*. It is also speculated that the "merging of two forms, a symphony and a concerto" parallels Byron's solution to the problem of voice in *CHP* (Carpenter 2002, pp. 41–42). Musicians only knew what it was not: neither a symphony, a concerto, a *symphonie concertante*, nor a sonata. The genre of Berlioz's *HII* was, thus, misleading similar to that of Byron's *CHP*. This essay adopts the argument against the application of the sonata form altogether. It helps postulate, instead, that the hybrid genre of concerto, symphony, and programme music constitutes a non-conventional genre closer to a dramatic symphonic poem, in several acts (movements) and scenes (motivic combinations), reconciling the genre, form, and style debates in the reviewed literature. Along with its play with unresolved recapitulations, a burgeoning format among the Romantics, *HII* presents itself as a complexity beyond genre.

The historical-biographical and literary contexts form multiple layers of the same Byronic heroism in Berlioz's symphonic piece. Berlioz had been acquainted with Byron's life and some of his works. Before composing this work, Berlioz had already composed on Byronic topics: *Heroic Scene: The Greek Revolution* (1826) and *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1830), the latter of which being his only victorious attempt at the *Prix de Rome* competitions in Paris, which entailed a two-year stay in Italy. Referring to the direct Byronic influence more conspicuously, Berlioz explains the final plan and title:

My idea was to write a series of orchestral scenes in which the solo viola would be involved, to a greater or lesser extent, like an actual person, retaining the same character throughout. I decided to give it as a setting the poetic impressions recollected from my wanderings in the Abruzzi [mountains, Italy,] and to make it a kind of melancholy dreamer in the style of Byron's Childe Harold. Hence the title of the symphony, *Harold in Italy*. (Berlioz 2002, p. 216)

In addition to his explicit literary intentions behind the composition, Berlioz's own Byronic character is compared to his Harold and Byron's original protagonist as manifestations of a Romantic anti-hero, or Byronic hero. Aware of Byron's own long Italian sojourn, Berlioz compares himself and his experiences in Italy with Byron's and Harold's. For instance, Sardinian sailors related their encounters with Byron sailing across the Adriatic to the Greek islands, his fancy attire, bacchanal activities, and braving a shipwrecking storm while playing cards; Berlioz unquestionably deemed the tales "in character with the author of *Lara*" and "Childe Harold" (Berlioz 2002, p. 124). Similar to Byron, Berlioz favoured both the Italian mountain and sea (Berlioz 2002, p. 123). Berlioz visited the church of St Peter in Rome for meditation or reading Byron, especially *The Corsair: A Tale*

(1814), in the confessional; he imagined Byron visiting the church with Countess Guiccioli and gnashed his teeth (Berlioz 2002, p. 148). He lives Byron's description of the same church that "expand[s]" the "mind" since we observers "dilate | Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate" (*CHP*, IV, 155, 158). Moreover, giving the viola a soloist role in *HII* implies a solitary existence like Harold's. Experiencing isolation in Italy intensified Berlioz's identification with Byron as it projects onto the character of the solo viola and converges with that of the Byronic hero and the poet.

Berlioz's approach to the composition was poetically inclined despite autobiographical connections. In the setting of *HII*, Berlioz merges his own experience of Italy with Byron's Italian sojourn, which produced Cantos III-IV. Indeed, the Italian stanzas start even before Canto IV: "Italia!" (*CHP*, III, 110). Berlioz alludes to Byron's *CHP* with the name Harold in the title, and he provides programmatic movement headings to his *HII* to suggest scenes and motifs:

- (1) "Harold in the Mountains: Scenes of Melancholy, Happiness, and Joy", *Adagio—Allegro*
- (2) "Procession of Pilgrims Singing the Evening Hymn", *Allegretto*
- (3) "Serenade of an Abruzzi-mountaineer to his Sweetheart", *Allegro—Allegretto—Allegro*
- (4) "The O*g* of Brigands: Reminiscences of the Preceding Scenes", *Allegro*.

Although the headings relate to Berlioz's travels, the analysis will qualify the Byronic associations and focus on the first movement, where the "Harold theme" first appears. Berlioz and his Harold's experiences of Italian mountains, according to the first movement heading, are thematically connected to Byron's experience of Swiss mountains, the setting of *CHP* Canto III and Byron's location when he wrote it. Berlioz's *HII* exhibits Byron's means of approaching a transcendent experience: mountains, spiritual rites, and unconditional love. Representing the ideals and their pursuit similar to a musical exposition serves to flout their conventional significance and shatter their luring effect on the observer with unconventionally used compositional devices, in line with the romance elements in Byron's poem.

Berlioz's first-hand experience of similar scenery and events, including fluctuating mood and religious sentiment, presents added value, just as Byron's did when writing *CHP*. The attitude in *HII* towards mountains changes, just as it does in *CHP* across the Cantos, from a sense of wonder and respectful awe in Canto I to defiance in Canto III. Of similar function to that of geographies and cultures in *CHP*, the musical scenes provide contexts or levels of consciousness for reminiscing on or influencing a development of the musical theme. The aspect related more to religion and meditation in *HII* is more conspicuous in the second movement.

Similar to Byron's Harold, Berlioz's Harold finds comfort and joy in contemplating mountains or the world from one throughout the Cantos. Harold gazes at the huge mountainous divides between nations and "pass[es] o'er many a mount sublime" (*CHP*, I, 32; II, 27, 42, 46; III, 109), compares mountain sizes (*CHP*, IV, 27, 73, 74), and "climb[s] the many-winding way" to "survey" beauty beneath (*CHP*, I, 19, 20, 23, 27; II, 25, 41; III, 91; IV, 175). The mountains in *CHP*, moreover, become metaphorical, such that "mountains are a feeling" and "a part | [o]f me" (*CHP*, III, 72, 75), and personified as "the joyous Alps" in "mountain-mirth" (*CHP*, III, 92, 93), hence a double pilgrimage.

Berlioz had planned but not completed writing a dramatic setting called *Les Brigands* (1833) after Schiller's *Die Räuber*. In the French context, however, brigands were not defined as gangsters but as criminals, outlaws, or rebels. This complexity of influences—musical, political, and literary—creates a multidimensional creative space for Berlioz, where personal experience, historical context, and artistic tradition intersect.

4. Revolving Around Harold and Deviating

4.1. Genre Ambiguity and Juxtaposition

Berlioz's first movement imitates not only the physical and metaphorical journey but also Byron's reworking of classical narrative conventions. Musicologists have debated over whether the first movement is in sonata-*Allegro* form without any consensus over its division or subversive elements. Traditionally, the first movement of an eighteenth-century symphony is composed in binary form, with two main themes: an optional slow introduction, an *Allegro* exposition, a development, a recapitulation, and a coda (Webster 2001). Berlioz references the symphonic template only to subvert or reinterpret it as the movement unfolds. In this transgressive sonata structure, Berlioz incorporates a primary thematic complex in the *Adagio*, extends it in the *Allegro*, and then subjects it to thematic fragmentation, an essential Romantic and Byronic element.

Several scholars have proposed different interpretations of the first movement form. Jonathan Richard Girard divides the first movement of *HII* into Introduction, Exposition from b.131, Development from b.193, Recapitulation from b.352, and Coda from b.473 (see Appendix C). Girard identifies two introductions: first, an *Adagio* "double fugue" of two subjects, one of which is the "Harold theme" from b.14 and b.38; and second, a "more traditional" *Adagio* from b.94b, which "opens the true exposition" from b.131 (Girard 2012, pp. 50, 29, 30).

Cora Palfy proposes a slightly different "sonata schematic", identifying the primary theme P⁰ as the *Allegro* that first appears from b.95 (or b.94b) in G major (see Appendix D). For Palfy, the Exposition (200 bars) consists of an Introduction (bb.1–127), a primary theme (bb.128–147), and a secondary theme (bb.167–200); the Recapitulation (209 bars) includes a primary theme (bb.291–320) and a secondary theme (bb.449–500) (Palfy 2016, p. 188). Nevertheless, Palfy asserts that the failure to resolve the sonata form, through repeating undeveloped themes, "provides an apt representation of the Byronic hero" who cannot resolve past problems (Palfy 2016, pp. 189–90). David Curran offers yet another schematic, locating the Exposition at b.132, with the primary theme as the first *Allegro*, and the secondary theme beginning in the F major at b.167 [b.166]. Curran treats the other melodic material as either an imposing "Fugue" and "*idée fixe*" (the unchanging "Harold theme") or as "fragments" of the primary theme (Curran 2016, p. 63). The motivic or melodic differences among these interpretations may stem from Berlioz's thematic ambiguity. In allusion to sonata-*Allegro* form, the so-called themes in the first movement can be understood as melodic variants with underlying unity.

4.2. The Fugato and the Byronic Hero

At the outset of the first movement, Berlioz inserts an imitative contrapuntal passage that alludes to the archaic genre of the fugue within the anomalous beginning of the programme symphony. The term fugato, derived from the fugue, refers to brief passages of fugal imitation (a contrapuntal style surviving from the mediaeval ages) and "to brief passages of fugal imitation within non-fugal movements" (Walker 2001). Unlike a fugue, a fugato features voices in imitation but lacks a full development with repeated modulations. This polyvocal texture symbolises the Byronic hero's multifaceted pilgrimage. For its "conniving complexity" and "element of sensuousness", Berlioz preferred the fugato over the classical fugue (Barricelli 1988, p. 260). Berlioz often deployed fugues as a "parody" of academic rigidity and "learnedness" (Walker 2001). Thus, the fugato functions as an apt musical index for the Spenserian stanza and the archaic language with which Byron begins his poem. Indeed, after the dedication and invocation of the muse, the main character is introduced in deliberately archaic diction: "Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth" and "Childe Harold was he hight" (*CHP*, I, 2, 3). In addition, the Latin root of *fugue*, *fuga*,

meaning to “flee” or “chase” (Walker 2001), reinforces the indexical signification of the fugato as representing flight. Byron’s Harold is a “sad losel” who has committed “evil deeds” and “a crime”, with no intention of glorifying his actions or clearing his name (CHP, I, 3). The musical introduction thus conveys both the literal flight of Harold and the psychological tension from conscience and society.

4.3. Sounding the Sublime: The Ombra and the Pianto

As in the prologue and introduction of the Childe, the music begins in *Adagio*, a slow tempo, setting an iconic background for the narrative. The lower strings play a tonally ambiguous brooding line in very soft dynamics (*pp*) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Harold in Italy*, Movement 1, bb.1–4, lower strings.

The semiquavers pulsate with accents that imply simple triple metre (3|4) grouped to simulate march beats iconically, indexical of Harold’s physical journey. The slow pace of the fugal subject allows reflection, while the fugato chromatic motion and semitone inflections introduce the *ombra* topic (previously called *Sturm*), indexically signifying “a sense of shadowiness and approaching fear” (McClelland 2014, p. 279). Clive McClelland classifies the *ombra* and the learned style as elements of the sublime in music (McClelland 2014, p. 294). Here, the orchestral *ombra* line becomes an icon of the waves beneath Harold’s sail, an index of his ambiguous intention, and a symbol of the sublime encounter. Additionally, the rhythm iconically evokes the alexandrine lines of twelve syllables, where double meanings are often exposed, paralleling the poetic texture of Byron’s verse.

The expressive (*espressivo*) countersubject in tied phrasing (see Figure 2) allows the four bassoon sections, typically a background voice, to emerge as a soloistic commentator. Beginning on B^b3.



Figure 2. Movement 1, bb.1–4, bassoons.

The descending chromatic motion in bb.3–4 serves as a lament or mourning gesture (Caplin 2005, p. 120), indexically conveying Harold’s melancholy. The falling minor second interval, the *Pianto*, or *Seufzer*, topic, iconically and indexically signifies an emotional sigh, first as an icon of weeping and later as “distress, sorrow, lament”, “grief, pain, regret, loss” and yearning (Monelle 2000, pp. 11, 17, 66–67). Employing the middle register of the bassoon (F[#]2–B^b3) in bb.3–4 iconically reveals the sonorous and expressive side of the Byronic hero. The syncopated notes in bb. 4–5 indexically signal defiance, agitation, and distress, exploiting the upper register, which is indexically associated with a “character” that is “painful, complaining, almost wretched” (Waterhouse 2001). The descending chromatic gesture in the *ombra* context further associates the bassoons with a cynical commentator. The juxtaposition establishes a narrative irony, aligning suffering with commentary.

The strings respond with the fugal answer, from b.4, on the dominant D major. A more complex division ensues with twelve semiquavers, six quavers, or sextuplets. This rhythmic complexity indexically conveys how Harold’s wandering “through Sin’s long labyrinth”

(*CHP*, I, 5). As woodwind and brass join, a contrapuntal texture unfolds, complementing fear and melancholy. The *ombra*, the minor mode, the slow motion, and the lamenting chromaticism combine in the first *Adagio* to reflect, indexically and symbolically, Harold's melancholy introspection and Romantic irony, resulting in a complex isotopy of cynicism.

4.4. Heroism Questioned, Fragmentation, and Sehnsucht

Similar to Byron's *CHP*, Berlioz's *HII* questions noble heroism through minor modes and sinister indexes. The second *Adagio* introduces the "Harold theme" in a Beethovenian heroic style, a full orchestral passage in G minor and a tension-filled atmosphere in bb.14–21 (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Movement 1, bb.15–19, flutes.

The dotted rhythm melody in the woodwind overlaps with the sinister semiquavers of the first *Adagio*, while the use of the tritone in b.19 suggests diabolical connotations. This $A^{07/b5}$ chord, functioning as a half-diminished Cm^6 (see Figure 3), indexically highlights the sinister undertones of heroism. Fanfares in E-flat, C minor, and A-flat major in woodwind (see Figure 4) alternate with relaxed triplet monotones in G minor, combining traditional heroism with Romantic irony.



Figure 4. Movement 1, bb.20–24, clarinets, horns I-II (top to bottom).

Horns and trombones emphasise the double-dotted rhythm and new chords in an echo of those introduced in other sections. The French horn (*corni*), a brass instrument associated with fanfare, hunting, military, and/or pastoral settings, symbolises a non-barbaric battle but also carries associations of failed transcendence. The string tremolos and timpani crescendo roll at bb.35–36, iconic of a thunderclap effect, resolving in G minor in b.36, help transition to the harp and solo viola scene in G major.

The tonal progression suggests an emergence from the second *Adagio*, highlighting a Byronic revisionist reading. The sublime emerges indexically through extreme contrast or variation, unexpected chords or silence, and textural shifts (Meyer, Leonard B. 1989. In Allanbrook 2010, p. 266). The E-flat chord, in bb.21b–23, as a flattened submediant (bVI) of G major, symbolises a failed Romantic transcendence through the heroism of deeds. Additionally, flat keys are traditional indexes associated with gloom and weakness (Steblin, Rita. 1983. In McClelland 2014, p. 283), further tainting heroism with disappointment.

The abrupt dynamic contrasts in bb.23b–24, from very intensely loud (*ff*, or *fortissimo*) to softness (*p*, or *piano*), mock the heroic fanfare and return to G minor, reinforcing anti-heroism. The repetitive restarts of the fugato iconically signify Harold's inability to move on, paralleling the narrative incoherence of Childe Harold. The *Sehnsucht* topic, or wistful longing, permeates the movement through remote tonalities, nostalgic allusions, the miniature, folkloric textures, and the exotic (Stewart 1984, pp. 139–41). In *HII*, the musical mountains become an index of Romantic longing for transcendence, echoing *CHP*.

5. Harold in Motivic Disguise: Isolation and Reflection

5.1. The Shifting Role of the Solo Viola from Soloist to Observer

In contrast to the classical sonata-*Allegro* norm—where introductions demand attention, establish the key, and present thematic material—the slow introduction of *HII* functions more like a dramatic symphonic poem. The first searching *Adagio* melody symbolises primordial chaos, the second in G minor presents the idealised hero, and the third in G major marks the sudden appearance of Harold, restoring order from b.38 onwards. The first two *Adagio* melodies build towards this third iteration, introduced after a short re-exposition. Berlioz describes this “recur[ring]” “motto (the viola’s first theme)”, or “Harold theme”, as one that “superimpose[s]” and “contrast[s]” with “the other orchestral voices [...] in character and tempo without interrupting their development”, as though it exists apart from the symphony (Berlioz 2002, p. 216). Although Berlioz composed it quickly, he later “revis[ed]” it thoroughly and emphasised its “complex harmonic organization”.

The formal structure—two contrasting melodies plus an overriding third—fulfils the illusion of a viola concerto while representing Harold as a Byronic figure who merges several historical and literary rebels. The Romantic “outsider” thus exists both within and outside the formal order of the piece.

The solo viola first presents this G major “Harold theme” accompanied by harp, blending the concerto tradition with balladic lyricism. Berlioz’s stage directions intensify this effect: “The harp must be placed close to the solo-viola”, and “[t]he player must stand in the fore-ground, near to the public and isolated from the orchestra” (Berlioz 1900, p. 151). This staging enacts Harold’s emotional and narrative isolation, iconic to a remote mountainous setting.

Musically, the harp strums ascending G minor and G major arpeggios in bb.36–37, dissipating the initial *ombra* (shadowy) atmosphere. It fades in *pizzicato* (plucked), leading to the solo viola’s entrance in b.38, in moderately loud dynamics, or mezzo forte (*mf*), indexically suggestive of tentative confidence (see Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. Movement 1, bb.35–40, harp, solo viola.



Figure 6. Movement 1, bb.41–45, harp, solo viola.

The lack of harmonic support from the rest of the orchestra emphasises this isolation, positioning the viola as an external, distant observer rather than a participant. This orchestral distancing is a metaphor for Harold’s detached perspective as a wanderer.

Beyond harmonic support, the harp becomes a symbol of externalised inner beauty and poetic inspiration. In the Romantic view, the lyre provides supernatural insight (Abrams 1953, p. 51). In the Prologue “To Ianthe”, Byron’s speaker implores the addressee, Ianthe, to “[a]ttract thy fairy fingers near the lyre” and perform “the most my memory may desire” (CHP, I, “To Ianthe”, 5, ll. 42, 44). This resonates with Harold’s farewell, where “[h]e seiz’d his harp” “with untaught melody” to sing “his last ‘Good night’” (CHP, I, 13), his only attributable song (Beatty 2019, p. 270). The “Harold theme” does not fully integrate with the other melodies; it floats above the *Allegro* fleeting joy, like a melancholy shadow hovering over the brighter 6|8 sections from b.94b, anticipated in the preceding 3|4 *Adagio* (Berlioz 1900, p. 168). The tension echoes the Byronic hero’s grief and detachment amid pleasure and community.

5.2. Farewell to Convention and Iconicity of Rhythm and Form

Berlioz departs from both mediaeval and classical conventions. Byron’s balladic lyricism in *CHP* often juxtaposes beauty with violence and captivity. For example, Ianthe, the subject of idealised praise, is also metaphorically likened to a “matchless lily” in a conqueror’s “wreath” (CHP, I, “To Ianthe”, 4, l. 36), a metaphor that resonates with the *viol* root of the viola.

This ambivalence reappears in the Albanian folksong “Tambourgi”, a drummer’s ballad “half sang, half scream’d” (CHP, II, 72), where a maiden is asked to sing with “her many-ton’d lyre” of “the fall of her sire” (CHP, II, 72, “Tambourgi”, 7). The four-line stanzas, in iambic pentameter with hypercatalexis (an extra unstressed syllable), like “To Ianthe”, and the ABAB rhyme echo Byron’s flexible form.

Similar effects appear in Harold’s youthful songs of idle melancholy (CHP, III, 3), later replaced by the claim that “my heart and harp have lost a string” (CHP, III, 4). This turn toward exile for “[f]orgetfulness” evokes a poetic mode where song becomes an attempt, though unsuccessful, to

[...] wean me from the weary dream
Of selfish grief or gladness. (CHP, III, 4)

Such sentiments infuse Berlioz’s structure: the “Harold theme”, initially cast in the classical eight-bar format, is gradually subverted. Through alternations between brooding march, syncopation, and heroic flourishes tinged with melancholy, the music captures Harold’s antithetical inner life of conflicting ideas.

The third *Adagio*, “Harold theme” (see Figure 7; see Appendix B), furthermore, iconically reflects the peculiar metrical structure of Byron’s verse and mentions a lyre.

Figure 7. The “Harold theme” with poetic stress in note-value analogy (my markings).

Its rhythm mostly links with Harold's farewell. Its two phrases of eleven notes (bb.38–41 and 42–45) mirror the eleven-syllable lines in "To Ianthe" (ll. 1 and 2; see Figure 8; see Appendix B) and "Tambourgi":

$\backslash$ x $\backslash$ / x / x / x / x
 Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
 x / x / x x / / x /
 Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deem'd
 $\backslash$ x $\backslash$ / x x x / x / x
 Not in those visions to the heart displaying
 / x x / x x x / x /
 Forms which it sighs but to have only dream'd

Figure 8. Scansion of *CHP*, "To Ianthe", 1, ll. 1–4.

Berlioz may not have consciously mapped French syllabic prosody onto Byron's English accentual metre, including the occasional line-ending ellipsis. When voice-leading and passing notes are differentiated, with three sizes of unstressed syllable (x), in the scansion, the melody reveals a striking iconicity:

X/ X/ XxX XxX[x]

X/ X/ xXxX xXxX[x]. (see Figure 7)

The excess, like the additional syllables in the verse, is reflected in the note-value to poetic stress analogy. It is also paralleled in number and beat in the first *Adagio*. The iambic feet off-balance the strongest first beat until the longer second note in 3|4. In reduced prosodic terms:

x/x//x/x/[X]

x/x//x/x/[X].

The rhythm approximates the scansion of the first two lines of Harold's farewell ballad (*CHP*, I, 13, "'Adieu'"; see Figure 9; see Appendix B).

x / x / $\backslash$ / x /
 "Adieu, adieu! my native shore
 / (x) x / x /
 Fades o'er the waters blue
 x / x / x / x /
 The Night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,
 x / x $\backslash$ [x] / x
 And shrieks the wild seamew."

Figure 9. Scansion of *CHP*, "Adieu", 1, ll. 1–4.

The eleven-note phrases also allude to Byron's *Beppo* and *DJ*, written in *ottava rima*, where lines frequently alternate between ten and eleven syllables.

Through such melodic-poetic resonances, Berlioz's music evokes thematic opposites: war and love, grief and joy, and song and silence. In the preface, Byron explicitly links Harold's farewell to Sir Walter Scott's historical ballad "Lord Maxwell's Goodnight" ("Preface [to *Cantos I–II*]", *CHP*, p. 4). Maxwell, fleeing accusations of murder and treason, utters:

Adieu, madame, my mother dear

But and my sister three! (Scott 1861, p. 141, ll. 1–2).

Harold's "Adieu" adapts this farewell into alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines of eight and six syllables, respectively. Musical notations in Scott's *Minstrelsy*, inserted between pp. 140–1, suggest flexible rhythms and accents, reinforcing the balladic influence.² Other sources include J. Leyden's romantic ballad "Scottish Music: An Ode", addressing

“Ianthé”, and “Introduction to the Tale of Tamlane: On the Fairies of Popular Superstition” (Scott 1861, pp. 249–53, 254–350), which further connect Byron’s poetry to folk and supernatural traditions, echoing in motifs like Peri fairies, to which Ianthe is compared (*CHP*, “To Ianthe”, 3, l. 19). Berlioz’s “Harold theme”, therefore, serves as an iconic reference to these balladic and historical sources via Byron’s revision.

5.3. Thematic Flux and Historical Allusions

Beyond rhythmic parallels, the harmonic progression of the “Harold theme” enacts transgression and reform. It alternates between classical symmetry and Romantic *Sturm und Drang*, reflecting the political tensions in *CHP* and Scott’s *Rob Roy*, about the social reformer Robert Roy McGregor. The latter text stages a “dialectic synthesis” of heroism and disillusionment, which “might bring about historical progress” (Burwick 1994, p. 93), akin to the Jacobite aspirations in 1715 for the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.

On the other hand, Berlioz’s tritone in b.56 (E-flat and A) invokes demonic associations similar to the second *Adagio* (b.19). This tonal instability, similar to Harold’s character, signals ideological struggle, a transition from idealist to sceptic. The final section (from b.81) reframes or reinterprets earlier material: the E-flat major chord becomes the flattened submediant to G major, rather than the submediant of G minor, hence a symbolic inversion of values. The “Harold theme” thus represents ideological flux, thesis and antithesis.

G.K. Chesterton remarks that Byron’s pessimism in content is often contradicted by the buoyancy of his metre: “all the time that Byron’s language is of horror and emptiness, his metre is a bounding *pas de quatre*”, rendering Byron an “unconscious optimist” (Chesterton [1902] 1970, pp. 484–5). Berlioz reflects this paradox through the bipartite “Harold theme” that moves from lyricism to irony, from pastoral calm to martial disruption, musically enacting the Faustian journey from idealism to disillusionment and Romantic irony. The theme, moving from a slow resonant part to a tense dotted rhythm, iconically displays a phonemic parallel to “To Ianthe” in *CHP*: the liquids, nasals, and diphthongs of the first line evoke open landscapes, while the fricatives and short vowels of the third line suggest inner conflict.

5.4. Faustian-Byronic Structural and Narrative Compression

Berlioz’s *HII* participates in a tradition of Faustian works, with four movements loosely corresponding to nature, prayer, serenade, and cynicism. Berlioz would later develop this trajectory further in *The Damnation of Faust* (1844), in which Euphorion—based on Byron—from Goethe’s *Faust*, Part Two (1832), attempts transcendence and falls tragically. Similarly, Berlioz’s Harold mixes tragedy, humour, and satire. Each movement of *HII* reinterprets *CHP* through a different lens: psychology, faith, love, and politics. Despite differing bar counts, all four movements recapitulate the poetic journey from distinct angles. The “Harold theme” becomes a microcosm of both the first movement and the work as a whole.

Berlioz’s innovation challenges both musical and critical conventions (Berlioz 1972–1975, 2, p. 188),³ just as Byron reworks poetic content and form. The composer’s stance aligns with Mellor’s reading of Byron’s “process of becoming” as an “open-ended, self-expanding awareness” that resists “reintegration” or closure (Mellor 1980, pp. 31–32). Similar to *CHP* and *DJ*, *HII* embraces multiplicity and ambiguity. Its structure, theme, and staging reflect the Byronic hero’s refusal to resolve his antitheses, mirroring a Romantic psyche fundamentally in conflict with itself.

6. Mourning, Revelling, Then Revolting

6.1. Cycles and Constructivism

A cycle of mourning, revelling, and revolt throughout *HIII*, articulated in the succession of melodic fragments and transformations. Berlioz's calculated spontaneity in the deployment of the fragments juxtaposes compositional constructivism with the semblance of inspirational inspiration. In bb.126–131, the solo viola reiterates and reconstructs the first *Allegro* melody in fragments, progressively accumulating its note sequence. This act, iconically reminiscent of a learning process, conveys staged happiness—an impromptu, yet deliberately constructed, moment of joyful discovery (see Figure 10). Girard describes this passage as the solo viola's naïve discovery, alluding to Beethoven's First Symphony (Girard 2012, pp. 29–30). Figure 10, bb.126–130, shows how the melody is broken into isolated pitches and small motifs, separated by rests. This fragmentation simulates a process of memory or recollection, consistent with the wanderer's role in the narrative.



Figure 10. Movement 1, bb.126–132, solo viola, violins I, with poetic beats (my markings).

The scansion of the “Tambourgi” song (CHP, 72, “Tambourgi”, I, line 1; see Appendix B) most closely maps onto the first *Allegro* melody (see Figures 10 and 11), bb.130b–131:

I.
 x / x x / x x / x x /
 Tambourgi! Tambourgi! thy 'larum afar
 x / x x / x x / x x /
 Gives hope to the valiant, and promise of war;
 x x / x x / x x / x x /
 All the sons of the mountains arise at the note,
 x / x x / x x / xx
 Chimariot, Illyrian, and dark Suliote!
 II.
 x / x \ / x x \ / xx
 Oh! who is more brave than a dark Suliote,
 x x / x x / x x / x x /
 To his snowy camese and his shaggy capote?
 x x / x x / x x / x \ /
 To the wolf and the vulture he leaves his wild flock,
 x x / x x / x x / x x /
 And descends to the plain like the stream from the rock.

Figure 11. Scansion of “Tambourgi”, stanzas I and II.

The scansion aligns with the music in an analogy between the four beats of a line (e.g., /) and the first beats in the musical bar of the first *Allegro*, with the feel of triplets.

Berlioz's reception in France adds a bitter historical resonance to these passages. A notorious commentary in a Parisian magazine mocked the symphony with the chant: “Ha! ha! ha!—haro! haro! Harold!”; Berlioz interpreted this as a public denunciation and a personal attack, associating it with the mediaeval judicial ritual of the “Clameur de haro” [haro clamour], a cry used to accuse criminals in public and shame them into exile or worse (Berlioz 2002, p. 218; Toureille 2003, pp. 177–8). In this context, the journalist's mockery frames Berlioz as a musical transgressor—a brigand violating artistic norms—using the

very icon of the fragmented musical phrasing. The “Haro” thus symbolises ostracism, the opposite of suffrage or public endorsement, which Berlioz sought but rarely received in France (Berlioz 1972–1975, 1, p. 229).⁴ This mirrors Byron’s own experience of alienation and his reference to sea “pirates” (*CHP*, II, 72, “Tambourgi”, V).

Nevertheless, the fragmented pronouncement of the first *Allegro* (see Figure 12), a retelling of the “Harold theme”, by the solo viola, stages self-reflexive reclamation of the theme in a new rhythmic and rhetorical context.



Figure 12. Movement 1, bb.93–101, solo viola, violins I.

After the “haro” protest obstruction of the sprightly *Allegro*, the solo viola adopts the theme from b.132 with subtle alterations in rhythm, tone, and articulation, meandering over light accompaniment. The tune is simplified into quavers and a few crotchets, suggesting an index of more lyrical, sauntering character. Ralph Bathurst notes that the viola either plays a solo melody or a “melody [that] is broken up” (Bathurst 2016, p. 29). This reflects the flexible leadership of the solo viola: it conducts and corrects the orchestra while sharing its role, completing and mirroring the orchestra’s phrases. Together, the musical and poetic narratives symbolise Harold’s shifting mindscape—a sequence of emotional states and reflections indexed by melodic transformation.

In the *Allegro*, speed alone does not signify a positive attitude; rather, it combines with harmonic and melodic gestures that evoke spiritual elevation. In bb.166–188, the second *Allegro* melody begins in F major—symbolically lowering the tonal centre from the G major to the third *Adagio* (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Movement 1, bb.162–170, trombones.

Since the F major key (one flat) is not closely related to G major (one sharp), the modulation is unexpected, even refreshing. According to sharp-flat symbolism, movement downward on the circle of fifths represents a shift towards melancholy or introspection, a spiritual darkness, while upward motion signifies “bright[ness]” and spiritual “elevat[ion]” to a “heavenly” realm; shifting to the submediant or flattened submediant, particularly, has been linked to a most sacred elevation or sublimation (McKee 2007, pp. 38–40, 49). The second phrase of the second *Allegro*, in bb.170–183, modulates in a sequence imitation (subrotation) to B-flat major (two flats), while the solo viola responds in D major (two sharps; four up the circle) from b.173, indexically reclaiming dominance over the G major tonal field. Alongside the modulated imitations, a syncopated canon and semitonal oscillations in the violins I, introduce tension, preventing a straightforward return to G major (D minor, G minor, and E-flat) and resulting in an anticlimactic resolution with sudden dynamic shifts (*f-mf-pp*) and *pizzicato* articulation.

The various iterations of the “Harold theme” and its motifs depict a landscape that veers toward a happier disposition, but not without irony or distortion. Byron’s ambivalent

attitude towards transcendence in nature is thus musically rendered. The modulations mirror a descent down the circle of fifths: from G major, icon of the ground (French *le sol* as a G-note in solmisation), to F major from b.166, then briefly ascending to D major before descending to E-flat major. The latter, being the flattened submediant to G major, evokes the “Eroica” heroism while simultaneously subverting it into a Byronic anti-heroism that exists on the threshold between idealism and rebellion, as well as seeking unconventional ways to experience self-sublimation (McKee 2007, p. 32). The opening G minor of the first *Adagio*, associated with the *ombra* style, reappears as the mediant (iii) of E-flat major, suggesting that the piece begins not in a state of simplicity but in an elevated, sublime mode for which the protagonist is not yet prepared.

The second *Allegro* melody further distorts the jolly tune with syncopated tritones in the clarinets in bb.189–190 (see Figure 14).



Figure 14. Movement 1, bb.183–190, clarinets, horns, bassoons.

Evolving from syncopated trochee-like notes in the bassoons and solo viola, triplet divisions in diminished seventh oscillations in bb.184–191 accentuate the syncopation in the woodwind and then strings, and they evoke pangs of fear, regret, or anxiety, emotional markers of the Byronic hero’s confrontation with human frailty.

The *Allegro* contrasts eudaimonic happiness, rooted in virtue and meaning, and hedonistic indulgence, a dichotomy further explored in the fourth movement. It parallels Harold’s multilayered quest. On his second journey, in Canto III, as opposed to escaping community, Byron’s Harold forfeits all pursuits of virtue or meaning for an “[e]xistence by enjoyment” (*CHP*, III, 34). Before the development, the reprise of the two *Allegro* melodies proper in bb.131–191, initiated by the solo viola, symbolically portrays prolonged happiness that ultimately collapses, echoing the cycles of idealism, corruption, and disillusionment. The alignment of soul and body (virtue and pleasure) required for self-actualisation proves fleeting; the Byronic cynicism expressed in the theme distortions tolerates but ultimately refutes the notion of perfect harmony.

These melodies represent varied approaches to joy, through nature, culture, or rebellion, each reflected in their chordal inversions and phrasal contours. While the third *Adagio* begins with a root-position G major (minus the tonic), the first *Allegro* with a second inversion, and the second *Allegro* with the first inversion, implying a sequence from melancholy to happiness to joy. Phrasal motion similarly alternates: the first *Adagio*, first *Allegro*, and second *Allegro* open with ascents followed by descents, while the second and third *Adagio* reverse this pattern. These structural differences symbolise shifting perspectives, from the mountain summit to the introspective valley, and the self-critical hindrances that accompany creativity and growth.

6.2. Recurrence and the Miniature

The *Allegro* phrases indexically mirror and develop the *Adagio* material. The second *Allegro* expands on the second part of the third *Adagio*. In this way, the first two *Adagio* melodies serve as foreshadowing fragments—building blocks not only for the third *Adagio* but also for the *Allegro* sections that follow. Jeffrey Langford identifies the third *Adagio* as the “cyclically” unifying element of the piece (Langford 1997, p. 204), revealing that Harold’s character and the form of the work are intertwined. The melodies, such as Byron’s poem and protagonist, are bipartite: a sentimental, lyrical phase subsiding to agitation and violence. The third *Adagio*, previously rejected, becomes the generative core of the piece, symbolising Romantic wistfulness and reflection.

The “Harold theme” functions as the mountainous source from which the rest of the music flows, echoing *CHP*, where Byron links a Spanish river to a Portuguese mountain (*CHP*, I, 14). The basic chordal sequence recurs in disguised forms throughout the work, in different tempi, rhythms, and topics. This approach parallels Beethoven’s use of repeated underlying progressions in piano concerti (McKee 2007, p. 38). The Romantic miniature aesthetic—“short, symmetrical harmonic sequences [. . .] rescued by highly original figuration” (Winter 2001)—underscores these motivic transformations. Byron’s poetry serves as the seed for the cyclical and fragmentary growth of the music.

Despite contrasting characters and tempi, all melodies derive from the fundamental harmonic progression of the “Harold theme” (I-IV-I-V and II-V), revealing different guises of internal ambivalence. Each section subtly alters this pattern, creating a sub-narrative of variation and self-examination. The third *Adagio* consolidates these variants into a foundational structure, while the *Allegro* sections develop, embellish, and disrupt the progression through chromaticism, diminished chords, and cadential oscillations.

For example, the first *Adagio*, bb.1–9a, intensifies the sense of unresolved tension in the secondary dominant by substituting a minor dominant for the tonic; the second *Adagio*, bb.14–29, replaces the tonic with the submediant and introduces the flattened supertonic. The first segment of the third *Adagio* (bb.38–45) establishes the “ideal” version and harmonic format (I-IV-I-V; I-ii⁷-V-I); the second (bb.54–58) leaps to the secondary and then tertiary dominants, causing an oscillation (V-I); and the third (bb.81–89a) refurbishes the second *Adagio*.

The first *Allegro* forgoes the submediant in the pre-melody (bb.94b–109a) and the first part (bb.130b–138b). It recovers the submediant in the second part (bb.138c–146a) but inserts intruding diminished chords within the descending chromatics that symbolise emotional instability and creative striving. The second *Allegro*, bb.166–196', traverses a similar path; it oscillates on the perfect cadence, visits the secondary dominant, and returns without resolving the tension. After the reprise, the fragmentary interaction of the *Allegro* melodies continues until b.322. The movement closes with the merger or alternation of elements from the third *Adagio* and both *Allegro* melodies.

The development section, bb.192–290, fragments the melodies further, symbolising individualism and rotating power structures, both musical and political. Instrumental turns mirror a meritocratic ideal, though their chaotic interplay reflects the divided self of Byron’s Harold—an internal struggle between unity and dissolution. As the “Harold theme” recedes, its significance amplifies, foreshadowing triumph through defiance, as in Byron’s Prometheus: “[t]riumphant where it dares defy” (Byron 1981–1993b, p. 33, l. 58). This theme becomes not merely a personal lament but an anthem of chaotic resistance.

6.3. Byronic Critique of Political and Religious Governance

In the fourth movement, Berlioz amplifies these ideas with religious and political allusions analogously to Byron's poem. The first "brigand" *Allegro* melody introduces militaristic rhythms in a fragmented form (see Figure 15).



Figure 15. *III*, Movement 4, bb.1–6, violins I.

The strings play in bb.8–10 accentuated octave movements iconic of using unsheathed "sabres" and pillaging (*CHP*, II, 72, "Tambourgi", 4, 6) (or drink-induced hiccups). Meanwhile, the fanfare and strings alternate with descending diminished arpeggios that index doom and death.

Interrupting the development of this melody, the orchestra recalls a series of previous melodies: (1) "A reminiscence of the introduction", identified as the first *Adagio*, from b.12; (2) "A reminiscence of the pilgrim's procession" from b.34 by the solo viola; (3) "A reminiscence of the mountaineer's Serenade" from b.45b; (4) "A reminiscence of the first *Allegro*" from b.60; and (5) "A reminiscence of the *Adagio*", identified as the "Harold theme", from b.80, distributed among the orchestra. The sequence of nature, prayer, serenade, and cynicism, thus, reappears. The solo viola plays the latter in a distorted manner, without resolution; it betrays idealistic pursuits and embraces alienation.

The solo viola notably supplants another soloist, the *cor anglais*, or English horn, from the third movement, adopting the mountaineer's serenade to his beloved from b.45b (see Figure 16).



Figure 16. Movement 4, bb.46–54, solo viola.

The rhythmic incongruence between the 3|2 solo and 2|2 orchestra, although they are of "the same time-value" (Berlioz 1900, p. 261), symbolises courtship versus social order. The melody is deprived of the peasant celebration that engulfs it in the third movement with a very fast tempo, fast-paced 6|8 rhythm, and cheerful mood (*Allegro assai*) in the earthly C major key, as well as *pifferari* drones and pastoral folk song markers (see Figure 17).



Figure 17. Movement 3, bb.8–15, piccolos, oboes I-II.

This absence echoes Byron's mixed attitude towards dance, love, and cultural rituals. Whether for its indexical representation of antitheses, however, the serenade melody is not

rejected with repeated notes. The folkloric rhythmic tune harmonically derives from the third *Adagio* with extra cadential oscillations: I-V⁷-(x7)-IV-I⁷-(x2)-IV-V; I-V⁷-(x5)-IV-I-V-I, which reinforces Harold's omnipresence. When the first "brigand" *Allegro* melody, restarts in a chord blast (*fortissimo*) on E minor (the relative minor of G major), it paradoxically expresses joy through rebellion, blending martial and pastoral elements.

The contrasting second "brigand" melody, or the continuation of the first, introduced at b.140, is indexically more sentimental (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. Movement 4, bb.142–148, violins I.

Reiterated in modulated imitation, the second "brigand" melody consists of a rising sequence of an arpeggio followed with a chromatic descending run, which exudes lament and alarm. It is described as "a sentimental rollocking burlesque, worthy of a light operetta, containing erotic and drunken imagery" and deemed of "autobiographical" and "artistic importance" (Thomson 2016, p. 46).⁵ The revelry elevation from b.149 is short-lived and resembles wailing tremolos, and a crash ensues from b.157.

The pattern of hedonistic merriment followed by a flurry of notes calling to battle is repeated across *CHP*, in the Ottoman (*CHP*, II, 72, "Tambourgi", 1) and Waterloo contexts. The soldiers in "revelry" were ordered to "hush! hark! [since] a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!" and called to "Arm! arm! and out—it is—the cannon's opening roar!" (*CHP*, III, 21, 22). The revellers' "lusty life" is interrupted with a "midnight" call to battle in the "morn" (*CHP*, III, 28). Similarly, with "mountain-pipes", the Scottish mountaineers show their "fierce native daring" in the Napoleonic Wars, as in the past Jacobite uprising (*CHP*, III, 26). Berlioz, therefore, layers wars iconically as "one burial blent" (*CHP*, III, 28).

6.4. Conflict, Disillusionment, and the Afterlife of Ideals

Berlioz adds another layer of political symbolism by introducing the "Napoleon" melody that takes prominence over the "brigand" melodies from b.177 (see Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19. Movement 4, bb.169–175, violins I.



Figure 20. Movement 4, bb.176–182, flutes.

Its harmonic progression is I-V-I-V-II and V-I-IV-I-V, where the perfect cadence of the second phrase replaces the interrupted cadence of the first. The B-flat major of the "Napoleon" melody functions, at first glance, as the major relative of the G minor key, the change indexically connoting hope and aspiration. Nonetheless, the initial key of *Hill* that connotes the ground, G major, modulates down three circles of fifths (G-C-F-B-flat), which symbolises a dark, hellish existence.

The “Napoleon” melody is composed in the Turkish style (Locke, Ralph P. 2009, in Mayes 2014, pp. 214–15). Based on the military Janissary bands and the *alla turca*, the Turkish topic does not allude to the Ottoman Empire directly but to European perceptions of exoticism and barbarity (Mayes 2014, pp. 216–18, 223, *passim*). Byron held the belief that any figure, “[a] thousand images of one”, whose “heart [...] which not forsakes” its reformatory vision, keeps the ideal alive “in shattered guise” (*CHP*, III, 33). For Berlioz, emperors were often “glorified brigands”, and Berlioz equally cultivated a fascination towards Napoleon despite political and personal shortcomings (Berlioz 2002, p. 611). The Turkish topic embodies both attraction and repulsion, a symbol of imperial rise and fall.

As the “Napoleon” melody battles the brigand melody, the music stages a sonic war. Bass drones, tremolos, and triplet rhythms in the strings represent cannon fire and marching soldiers (see Figures 21 and 22).



Figure 21. Movement 4, bb.207–213, violins I-II.



Figure 22. Movement 4, bb.214–219, clarinets, horns I-II.

With stomping staccato crotchet triplets “ponderously” from b.215 (Berlioz 1900, p. 280), iconic of trampling foot soldiers, woodwind and brass indexically counter the tremolo semiquavers in the strings, while the interspersed muffled timpani notes are iconically catapulted as cannonballs (see Figure 22). The ensemble arrives at a B-flat diminished seventh chord in b.231, symbolising instability and ceasefire.

A very soft, expressive violin melody (*espressivo*, *pp*) in B-flat minor follows (b.232), with descending semitones, marking disillusionment after conflict (see Figure 23).



Figure 23. Movement 4, bb.232–240, violins II, violas.

This musical sigh, adopted by the rest of the orchestra, parallels Byron’s reflections on Napoleon, whom he compared to Prometheus, and links to the viola’s role as the violet—a symbol of remembrance and defiance. Through this chaotic yet cyclical structure, Berlioz composes an anthem of Haroldian rebellion, maintaining the Romantic ideal of defying mechanistic systems while accepting the inevitability of historical repetition.

In a later recalled melody, not labelled a reminiscence, a solo trio of violins and cello play the Pilgrims’ March from b.473 (see Figures 24 and 25).



Figure 24. Movement 4 bb.463–476, solo-violin I, solo-violin II, solo-cello.

Figure 25. Movement 4 bb.477–490, solo-violins I-II, solo-cello, solo viola.

The trio plays the fourth Canto from the Pilgrims' March (of the second movement) from bb.473 (see Figure 24) and, following distortions by the soloists themselves, the tenth Canto from b.483 (see Figure 25). It represents the procession marching away as another farewell. With the solo viola observing, this echoes Byron's critique of religious institutions, where monastic life entails "making earth a Hell" (CHP, I, 20) and where faith and hope are fragile turn-taking constructs "built on reeds" (CHP, II, 3).

The soloists, in a chamber music format, resound "From the wings" of the theatre (Berlioz 1900, p. 310), or offstage. Politically, their election symbolises elite privilege and collaborative governance. It alludes to inequitable and unquestioned power structures. Their own alternating distortions, of four quavers and triplet quavers, in bb.480–482, indexically gesture towards political accusation and religious scepticism, suggesting the equivocation and fragility of a Lockean limited government.

The solo viola joins in minimally on its uppermost range using the treble clef with its own improvisatory statement. This includes a drone, a scale, and syncopated tritone slurs from b.493 (see Figure 25), defiance set in increasing dynamics. Its final statement in more intense dynamics and syncopated octaves in bb.501–505 reaches a perfect cadence in *fortissimo* (*ff*), accompanied with the orchestral strings in triplets and tremolos (see Figure 26).

During the battles, the solo viola, silenced from b.110, supposedly leads the viola section as outliers in a hands-on approach, akin to Napoleon's, and then recedes, disgusted by the atrocities, thereby foregrounding the orchestral "brigand" music, which Bathurst calls "the leadership of everyone" (Bathurst 2016, p. 32). The solo viola, the idealised form of Napoleon, returns briefly since "quiet to quick bosoms is a hell", rising again with an analogously short Hundred Days campaign of "high adventure" (CHP, III, 42). The fourth movement, accordingly, ends after one hundred bars, at b.583.

The last tremolo shift into a continual plagal "amen" cadence (I-IV-I) from b.577 (see Figure 27) iconically signifies the flux of the ocean waves beneath Harold (CHP, III, 2).



Figure 26. Movement 4, bb.501–506, solo -viola, violins I–II, violas.



Figure 27. Movement 4, bb.570–583, violins I–II.

This cadence symbolises how Harold is in “battle with the ocean” (*CHP*, IV, 105), experiencing a “pleasing fear” (*CHP*, IV, 184) as part of a mental journey. The cross-rhythmic majority rule becomes an icon of chaotic order in a political reading of the ocean image. The apostrophe to the ocean conjoins a religio-political reconciliation where “waters washed [...] many a tyrant” (*CHP*, IV, 182), as well as a psychological one, where the “child” metaphorically reunites with its mother (*CHP*, IV, 184). The alternating chords serve as indexes of Harold’s oscillating faith and reason, ideal and real, condemnation and approval, all working together towards universal truths.

An isotopic reading of *HII* reveals layers of meaning that connect Berlioz’s music to Byron’s *CHP* while also reflecting Berlioz’s engagement with Beethoven and his broader historical context. Isotopies identified in *HII* include: (1) alienation and melancholy; (2) nature and sublimity; (3) religious reflection; (4) folk culture and love; (5) irony and heroic fragmentation; (6) political and historical resonance. These isotopies map not only the narrative dimensions of the music but also its intermedial dialogue with literary and historical contexts. Berlioz’s *HII* becomes a complex site where affective states, personal experience, and cultural critique converge.

7. Conclusions: Reflection, Reform, and Resonance

Since Byron’s poems were well received among nineteenth-century European composers, this essay has explored the degree to which they fuelled the production of their new musical works. In the case study, applying melopoetics and musical semiotics, it is deduced that several aspects of Byron’s narrative poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* are represented in Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*. The thematic, structural, and gestural signs in the music can be compared to analogous devices on iconic, indexical, and symbolic levels. Berlioz’s choices of form, orchestration, melody, harmony, rhythm, and allusion function as musical analogues of Byronic devices, most notably in relation to the protagonist figure, whose pilgrimage is multilayered and symbolic.

More specifically, it is observed that the main theme is a structural and harmonic miniature of the whole composition. This “Harold theme” informs the overall structure and mood of the music, generating further melodic material and articulating its central ideas in various guises. The small-scale “Harold theme” is mirrored in the general structural

progression, from classical and idealistic to more Romantic and revolutionary. Sonata form is suspended early in the first movement, where Berlioz introduces an obsessively repeated note—an interruption that marks a shift in aesthetic language. The rhythmic sequence of the “Harold theme” itself proceeds from longer to shorter and bouncier notes, indexically signifying a shift from relaxation to more heightened emotional agitation. This progression reflects the emotional sequence of the first movement, as the heading suggests, from melancholy to happiness and joy. Similarly, the first movement progresses from a slow *Adagio* to a fast *Allegro*, and the four movements as a whole progress from the ideals of nature and prayer to love serenade and finally to cynical breach.

Berlioz’s Harold, as a palimpsest manifestation of contrasting emotions, natural imagery, and historical events, mirrors Byron’s Harold most poignantly within the Romantic ideology of self-reflection and transformation. Harold is not merely an individual character but an idea—an embodiment of Romantic epistemology and a Faustian-Byronic spirit of reform, the resonance of which extends beyond its historical moment. Both the Faustian and the Byronic narratives follow parallel sequences of reflection and revolution, resulting in a structural overlap in Berlioz’s *HII*. Berlioz’s shifting use of musical topics further reinforces this reformatory impulse. The musical hero’s quest is, therefore, religious and political as much as personal and relational. With its imitation of the germ of Byronic revolution, a reiteration of revelry and reform, Berlioz’s *HII* signifies the gradual farewell to conventional forms in the art of composition, analogous to those of Byron’s poetic innovations.

While Berlioz’s *HII* echoes earlier musical forms, it is also reformatory through its representation of Byron’s *CHP* in both prosody and theme. The intermedial comparison further examines the correlations between the main musical theme and Byron’s Spenserian stanzas at the microcosmic level. The note-value sequence forms an analogue of the metrics in the poem. The allusions to and representations of Mary Stuart, Rob Roy, and Napoleon are individually and collectively woven into the thematic material and evoked through orchestral choices, including the soloist accompanied with harp. The “Harold theme”, therefore, serves as an icon of the Byronic repetitive reflection on history, while its indexical qualities evoke martial topics and a recurrent sense of cynicism, the hallmarks of revolutionary cycles and their repercussions. On the other hand, the motivic variations correlate, in a relation of note quantity to rhythmic accent, with the isolated songs of shorter lines that are scattered across the poem. The “Harold theme”, as a song of farewell imbued with both melancholy and hope, is, therefore, generated from the poem itself.

Furthermore, the simplified harmonic progression of the “Harold theme” underpins the broader musical fabric, generating further motivic variations. The rebellious and reformatory spirit lingers on in various settings, seeking to break the cycle with a tinge of defiance. Since the “Harold theme” recurs across the work in diverse structural and melodic guises, the microcosm-macrocosm relationship forms an indexical analogy to that between Byron’s Harold and the narrative poem itself.

The physical, emotional, and metaphysical journeys in both works symbolise Harold’s mindscapes and define the narrative arc. This hypothesis supports the Romantic view of the natural world and the human person reflecting each other. Indeed, the theme of Harold encompasses the work like Byron’s Harold does the poem, even at the point in both media when the protagonist is physically absent. This layered depth and complexity of emotions help reinterpret Childe Harold as a representation of the human condition, the surrounding nature, the ruined historical monuments, and the collective responsibility for historical decisions.

The influence of the theme and the character, as well as what Harold represents, expands beyond their time, transforming Harold into an icon of Byron himself—his fame and influence extending through Berlioz’s reinterpretation. Interactions among microcosmic

and macrocosmic musical patterns represent their poetic counterparts and sustain the afterlife of Byron's poetic works and legacy. Change entails, along with the challenge of surmounting conventions, as the first movement heading suggests, both mourning for the loss and happiness for the novelty, as well as the transcendental effect of art that bridges past and present.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Werner Wolf, *Typology of Intermediality* (Wolf 2015, p. 468)

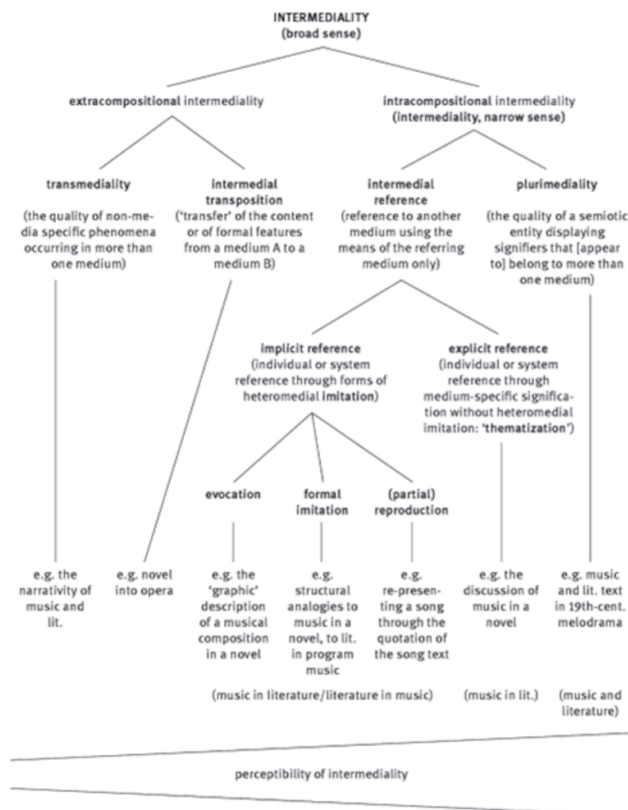


Figure A1. Werner Wolf, typology of intermedial forms.

Appendix B

Derek Attridge, *Single-line Scansion Legend* (Attridge 1995, p. 213)

/: Stressed syllable, functioning as a beat

/: Stressed syllable, not a beat (demoted)

x: Unstressed, offbeat

x: Unstressed beat (promoted)

\: Secondary stress, as if unstressed, not a beat (demoted)

\: Secondary stress, beat

[/]: Virtual beat

[X]: Virtual offbeat separating two stressed beats

|: Division of feet

>: Enjambment

Appendix C

Jonathan Richard Girard, *Harold in Italy*, Movement 1 “Formal Graph[]” (Girard 2012, p. 50)

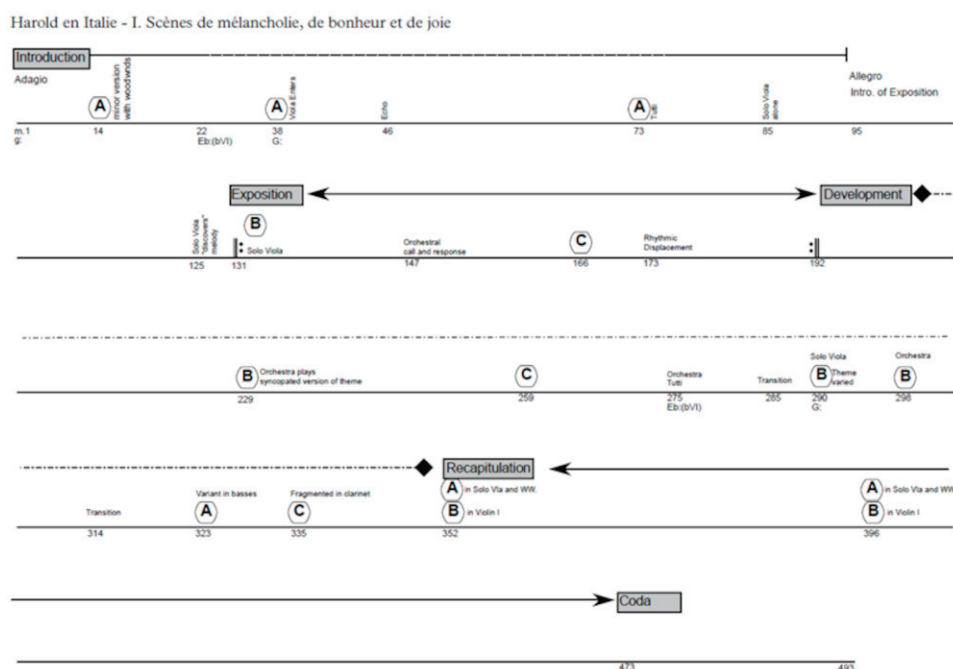


Figure A2. Jonathan Richard Girard, formal graph of *HII*, Movement 1.

Appendix D

Cora Palfy, *HII*, Movement 1, “sonata schematic” (Palfy 2016, p. 188)⁶

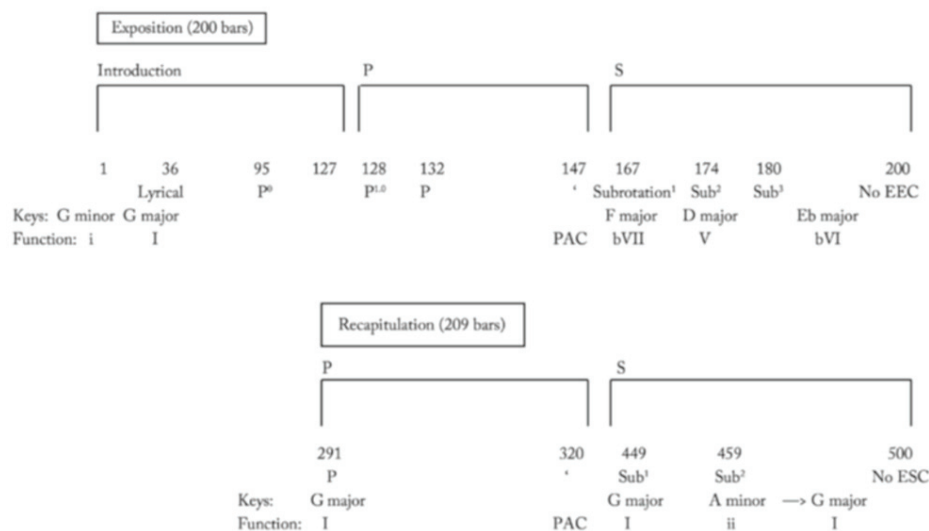


Figure A3. Cora Palfy, schemata analysis of *HII* Movement 1.

Notes

- ¹ Letter of 28 December 1829 to Nanci Berlioz, No. 148.
- ² “Madame” and “Orchardstane” take three notes, forming the first lines of nine syllables, and an “O” ends the second lines, forming the latter of seven.
- ³ Berlioz’s letter of 31 July 1834 to Edouard Rocher, No. 401.
- ⁴ Berlioz’s letter of 11 January 1829 to Edouard Rocher, No. 111. The public commentary is referred to in the *Iliad* (II, 408; V, 345, 855).

- ⁵ Berlioz borrowed the Brigand Song for chorus and orchestra from his monodrama *Lélio, or the Return to Life* (1830–1832), inspired by his broken engagement to Marie Moke.
- ⁶ Abbreviations according to James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s sonata-form elements: P: primary theme; S: secondary theme; PAC: perfect authentic cadence; EEC: essential expositional closure; ESC: essential structural closure; Subrotation: imitative melodic movement starting on various tones.

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Article

'I Heard Music': *Mansfield Park*, an Opera by Jonathan Dove and Alasdair Middleton

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Abstract: When composer Jonathan Dove first read Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park*, he immediately saw its operatic potential. In a newspaper interview, he is quoted as saying that the novel 'haunted me for years'. He was particularly affected by Fanny Price and her predicament. When the opportunity came to write the opera, Dove worked with librettist Alasdair Middleton to create an operatic work that builds on and reinterprets Austen's novel. It is a chamber opera, originally scored for piano duet, and although Dove later made an arrangement for a chamber ensemble, he retained the piano, identifying it as a sound world with which Austen was intimately familiar. In this paper, I track the transition from the printed page via the score and the libretto to the opera, and analyse the means by which Dove and Middleton create this popular adaptation, including telescoping the plot, using and adapting Austen's own language, incorporating music inspired by eighteenth-century glees, and using characters as a chorus, with music that enhances the impact and translates the powerful emotions on Austen's page into raw and urgent feelings.

Keywords: Jane Austen; *Mansfield Park*; opera; Jonathan Dove; Alasdair Middleton; adaptations

1. Genesis of the Opera

When English composer Jonathan Dove, whose works enjoy unprecedented success in the field of contemporary opera, first read Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park*, he immediately saw its operatic potential (see details of Dove's career at his official web site: Jonathan Dove: Biography n.d.). In a newspaper interview, he is quoted as saying that the novel 'haunted me for years'. He was particularly affected by Fanny Price and her predicament. 'She often appeared to suffer in silence. Her reticence invited the music. Deep feelings, which she could not utter, were seeking expression' (Smith 2015). In a later article, Dove wrote, 'When I first read *Mansfield Park*, I heard music. That doesn't always happen when I read, and it certainly didn't happen with Jane Austen's other novels. But there's something about this particular book that provoked musical ideas' (Dove 2017).

It is, perhaps, counterintuitive that a character's reticence should be the impetus for the operatic imagination. Naturally, the silent words on the page of a novel cannot be simply set to music, but one might imagine that dialogue would translate more readily to a dramatic form than a character's repressed thoughts expressed in third-person narrative. It is true that soliloquies can be used to voice these thoughts in plays, and in music theatre, these can become powerful arias or *scenas* for a character alone on stage. However, the nature of Fanny's solitude is such that she is forced into uncongenial company most of the time, and even in the Austen novel, her point of view is not always in the foreground. Remarkably, it is this very silence that Dove identified as fertile ground for musical expression.

When the opportunity came to write the opera for performance at an English country house in 2011, Dove worked with librettist Alasdair Middleton to create an operatic work that builds on and reinterprets Austen's novel. It is a chamber opera, originally scored for a piano duet, and although Dove later made an arrangement for a chamber ensemble, he retained the piano, identifying it as a sound world with which Austen was intimately familiar. (One might note that the pianos Austen knew were very different to the modern grand pianos typically used for professional performances today.)

In this paper, I track the transition from the printed page via the score and the libretto to the opera, and analyse the means by which Dove and Middleton created this popular adaptation, including telescoping the plot, using and adapting Austen's own language, incorporating music inspired by eighteenth-century glees, and using characters as a chorus, with music that enhances the impact and translates the powerful emotions on Austen's page into raw and urgent feelings. I also look to the reception of the opera in a selection of reviews of various performances to gauge the effect the opera has had in performance over the fourteen years since it was first presented. And, perhaps ironically, I am trying to do this in writing, using only words.

2. The Boston University Performance

The opera has enjoyed outstanding success, with more than 20 performances since its premiere at Boughton House in Northamptonshire in 2011 (*Mansfield Park*: Production History n.d.). It will be performed by Victorian Opera in Australia in April 2025. However, I have not yet had a chance to see it live. In what follows, therefore, along with the vocal score, I rely on a full performance recorded in 2021 at Boston University which is available to view on YouTube (*Mansfield Park* n.d.). My impression of the opera is inevitably coloured by the performance with which I have become familiar, which, as far as I can tell, does this excellent opera full justice.

The production appears to have been conceived as a film rather than a live performance filmed. There is no audience in evidence. This would be explained, at least in part, by the timing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, live events were fraught with difficulties. Singing was especially problematic owing to the projection of airborne particles which is an inevitable result of projecting the voice. In this production, the singers are wearing surgical face masks. At first, this seems like an unfortunate hindrance, but as the opera proceeds, it comes to seem normal and is even, on one occasion, used to create a powerful dramatic effect.

This production of the opera begins with silence. Fanny walks onto the stage. The only visible furniture is a single armchair, and a grand piano is centre stage. This piano is never played during the production, but it becomes a surprisingly flexible prop, used as a table, a desk, a carriage, and more.

I have not been able to view a copy of the libretto or the full score, but I have access to a copy of the vocal score (Dove 2011). It contains a few stage directions, but unless there is more information in the other sources, most of the settings and stage movements seem to be left to the discretion of the director of a specific production. One could therefore imagine many different approaches to staging and design. This Boston production makes no attempt at period authenticity in costume or set design. Characters are dressed in a way that expresses their status and personality—Fanny in a plain black dress, Maria elegant in black lace, Lady Bertram in black lamé, for example. Most are wearing mainly black, with the exception of Henry Crawford, elegant in tweeds. Photographs of other productions show more attention to the accuracy of period costuming, but there is rarely much scope in the various chamber opera venues for elaborate sets. The Boston setting uses dark neutral

colours, ambiguous spaces, mirrors, and imaginary obstacles. There is very little literal or specific set dressing.

3. Novel to Opera

There is a vast difference between a three-volume novel and a two-hour opera. There are inevitable adjustments, with details essential to the novel missing in the opera, while the music adds a new dimension which even the finest novel cannot provide.

The first step is the creation of a libretto. It would be at this stage that many of the important decisions about the translation of the novel would have to be made. Meagan Martin, in her doctoral thesis, has made a useful comparison of the respective outlines of the novel and the opera, summarising the ‘telescoping’ of the complex plot of the novel into the libretto (Martin 2019).¹

Fanny Price is a poor relation brought at the age of 10 to live with her aunt’s family, the Bertrams, at their stately country house, Mansfield Park. She has four cousins, all older, two boys and two girls, and there is another aunt, Mrs. Norris, living nearby, who is one of Austen’s most odious characters and who makes Fanny’s life a misery with her nagging and her criticism. The only person who bothers to get to know Fanny is her cousin Edmund, who treats her with kindness and respect. Fanny comes to love him deeply but without hope.

In the novel, the early chapters provide the background and context for the complex and many-layered narrative to follow. We read the history of the three Ward sisters and their marriages and subsequent, or consequent, fates; the decision by Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park to adopt his ten-year-old niece Fanny Price and bring her to live with his own family, in order to provide some relief to the needy family of one of his sisters-in-law; and the part played in this decision by his other sister-in-law, the meddling, self-important Mrs. Norris, married to the local Anglican minister. The death of her husband some years later causes a change at Mansfield, bringing a new family to Mansfield Parsonage. The new minister’s wife has a younger brother and sister who visit and are introduced to the Mansfield Park family. Meanwhile, Maria, the eldest daughter of Sir Thomas, becomes engaged to a rich young man, Mr. Rushworth, of Sotherton. All this information is presented at a leisurely pace, although no words are wasted.

In the opera, this background is implied with extreme economy by observation of a typical scene at Mansfield Park, the home of the Bertrams. When the opera begins, Maria is already engaged to Mr. Rushworth, and the Crawfords are about to arrive. The characters interact and react. Fanny (who at this point in the novel has ‘just reached her eighteenth year’ (Austen 1934)) is at everyone’s beck and call, submitting to commands and insults with a meekness that only occasionally flares (in this production) into a quickly suppressed truculence.

Dove’s musical idiom is very much of the twenty-first century rather than the nineteenth. His music is approachable and expressive, but there is little of what would readily be identified as melodies by listeners accustomed to operas by Verdi and Puccini. However, neither is it atonal in the way of much ‘difficult’ mid-twentieth century music by composers like Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg. He occasionally makes references to styles of music contemporary to Austen, for example, by using the piano in both versions of the accompaniment, and including ‘glees’, as I discuss later.

As the opera begins, the piano accompaniment proceeds, with busy syncopated rhythms, beginning in C major but modulating often as new characters join. Sir Thomas is introduced reading a letter, singing single words rather than sentences: ‘Antigua, profit, estate . . .’ (MP Opera 1:1:40–47). Mrs. Norris can never resist an opportunity to scold or criticise Fanny, or to flatter her other nieces, Maria and Julia. Their mother, Lady Bertram,

is obsessed with her pet pug. The music suggests agitation and discord, until her cousin Edmund approaches Fanny with kind words and a book they used to read together (MP Opera 1:1:80ff.). Their bond does not need to be explained. It is further emphasised by the scornful mockery of Fanny by Edmund's younger sister Julia, encouraged by her Aunt Norris.

Dove writes that 'for a lot of the time, the characters sing in Jane Austen's own words' (Dove 2017). This is true, in a sense; there are many words taken from the novel, as well as some phrases. Occasionally, there is a whole sentence. There are approximate quotations from the novel in this scene, drawn from a passage in Chapter 2:

Fanny could read, work, and write, but she had been taught nothing more; and as her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid, and for the first two or three weeks were continually bringing some fresh report of it into the drawing-room. (MP 18)

These 'fresh reports' that Maria and Julia had been bringing their mother and aunt in the novel are turned into reminders, by Julia, of 'how remarkably ignorant you were, Fanny, when you first came', eight years before the action of the opera. 'You couldn't put together a map of Europe, or tell any of the principal rivers of Russia by name' (MP Opera 1:1:89–95). This malicious teasing continues, encouraged by Aunt Norris, for more than thirty bars, with a short interruption by Lady Bertram, remarking that 'Fanny is improved', and Sir Thomas agreeing, followed by Julia's memory that 'you started to cry, and Edmund had to try to dry your tears with a gooseberry pie' (MP Opera 1:1:111–119). But Edmund and Fanny are still occupied looking at the book. Edmund sings, 'Look, the passages I underlined. Remember?' Fanny replies, 'I remember, Edmund, you were kind' (MP Opera 1:1:128–134).

The gooseberry pie, like many of these elements, is selected from a range of incidents in the description of Fanny's arrival at Mansfield eight years before. It barely matters that Edmund did not actually offer Fanny the gooseberry pie; in the novel, we are merely told that 'vain was even the sight of a gooseberry tart towards giving her comfort; she could scarcely swallow two mouthfuls before tears interrupted her' (MP 13), and this happens before Edmund has been particularly mentioned. Middleton has conflated these various elements very cleverly to create a sketch of the household and the interactions between the characters, in the process changing 'tart' to 'pie' to create the rhyme with 'cry' and 'dry'.

Other imaginative devices by which the opera compresses the content of the novel include 'Volume Two, Chapter Four: Some Correspondence'. As Douglas Murray notes, 'Eighteenth-century epistolary fiction spurred the novel-as-a-genre's interest in multiple consciousnesses, and Alasdair Middleton's libretto makes use of epistolary techniques' (Murray 2016). The scene begins with Julia Bertram and Henry Crawford singing by turns the text of letters they are writing, culminating in what is not exactly a duet, although they are singing at the same time. They are joined by other characters writing letters—revealing, daring, angry, passionate by turns. Some of them end by singing 'I will never send this letter', and Fanny, responding to Edmund's letter about Mary Crawford, sings the unforgettable words from the novel, 'Fix, commit, condemn yourself' (MP 424), followed by 'I will not send this letter . . . It is getting dark'. The epistolary novel that was common in Austen's day, and that she experimented with in her *Juvenilia*, is used to full dramatic effect here.

4. The Adaptation: Words and Music

Adapting a literary work to music cannot be a straightforward act of transcription, even if it is already a dramatic work. In an interview about his 1980 operatic version of

Iris Murdoch's play *The Servants and the Snow*, the composer William Mathias said, 'music always must take over. This is an awful phrase, but the music must almost eat the words up if it's going to work' (Duffie 1985). Sometimes, in *Mansfield Park*, as we have seen, most of Austen's sentences are 'eaten up', although words and even whole phrases can sometimes survive the transition.

The music begins when the full cast appears and sings the opening title: 'Mansfield Park: Chapter One: The Bertrams Observed'. The observers are Mary and Henry Crawford, standing back from the action, proxy audience members. They are not yet actors in the narrative.

At the beginning of each scene, the number and title of the 'chapter' is announced by differing combinations of characters in this way. The characters who are not acting in a particular scene are often recruited as the chorus, sometimes singing words that are out of character. This ad hoc chorus sometimes expresses the majority view—for example, in Chapter Seven, 'Lovers' Vows, how can it offend? Lovers' Vows, they are only pretend' (MP Opera 1:7:46–52)—or the narrator's point of view, in 'Chapter the Last'—'Let other pens dwell on misery and guilt' (MP Opera 2:7:6–14)—reversing the two nouns from the first sentence of Austen's last chapter, presumably for the sake of rhyming 'guilt' with 'tears are spilt'.

In 'Chapter Four: Landscape Gardening', anyone familiar with the novel will notice that, as part of the chorus, Fanny voices the majority view that Mr. Rushworth's estate of Sotherton will be improved if they 'Put statues where the oak trees grew' and 'Do everything we can do/to make the boring old view new' (MP Opera 1:4:61–67), whereas she is upset and quietly outraged by this attitude in the novel. 'Cut down an avenue!', she says to Edmund. 'What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? "Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited."' (MP 56). No doubt to keep the narrative more straightforward and easier to digest in the span of two hours, this attitude of Fanny is not expressed in the opera.

However, she is not part of the chorus that sings about 'Lovers' Vows' in Scene Seven, and her opposition to acting is expressed directly: 'I could not act anything if you were to give me the world', and on being pressed, replies emphatically, and in angular descending intervals: 'Oh no, I will not act' (MP Opera 1:7:151–154). Edmund, on the other hand, does not sing in the chorus at first, but at the end of the scene, despite having voiced his opposition to the play, joins in when they sing, 'Lovers' Vows, exciting, risqué! Lovers' Vows, it's only a play.' (MP Opera 1:7:174–180)

The very next scene shows Edmund consulting Fanny about his decision to change his mind and act for Mary Crawford's sake, so that she is not put into the awkward situation of acting in a romantic role opposite a stranger. Fanny is dismayed by this change, and she speaks as firmly as her habit of deference allows. The words in the Chapter 16 of the novel are 'I am sorry for Miss Crawford; but I am more sorry to see you drawn in to do what you had resolved against, and what you are known to think will be disagreeable to my uncle' (MP 155). This is almost exactly what she sings at this point in the opera, with only a few words elided.

The music, recitative-like, follows the rhythms of their speech, and with the pauses between the musical phrases, it enhances the impact of the scene. Fanny's brief response, 'Oh cousin', when he appeals to her for her approval—I am not comfortable without it—speaks volumes in both the novel and the opera. And when she concedes that Mary Crawford 'will be very glad. It will be a great relief to her' and Edmund takes it as agreement, this is almost exactly what happens in the novel, although their conversation is longer.

The last paragraph of Chapter 16 of the novel describes and inhabits Fanny's emotional state after Edmund has left her with the kind, conciliatory parting exhortation, 'Do not stay here to be cold', which are also his parting words in the opera. In the novel, this is followed by a powerful paragraph of free indirect discourse:

... He had told her the most extraordinary, the most inconceivable, the most unwelcome news; and she could think of nothing else. To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent! Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable. The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, and which had all slept while she listened to him, were become of little consequence now. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up. Things should take their course; she cared not how it ended. Her cousins might attack, but could hardly tease her. She was beyond their reach; and if at last obliged to yield—no matter—it was all misery now. (MP 156–157)

This is translated into a 35-bar passage in the opera. Jarring parallel fifths in triplets in the piano accompany one of the few solo passages in the opera. Fanny sings her thoughts directly:

Edmund to act! Edmund to play a part! Where is his strength, where is his resolution now? How they will triumph. How she will triumph. Her eyes are armies, her sighs, a clarion call. Before her softest look the towers of independence fall. And I? What do I matter? Let things take their course. I care not how! It's all misery now! (MP Opera 1:8:44–76)

In the opera, Fanny is rarely given a chance to express herself even privately before she is interrupted. This scene, where Fanny is for once alone on the stage (or film set), is rendered even more powerful in the Boston University production because it is the only scene where a singer is not wearing a face mask. The mezzo-soprano playing Fanny, Gabrielle Barkidjija, faces the camera, voicing her misery directly, where in the novel it is 'indirect discourse' (*Mansfield Park* n.d., 45.20–49.27). This is one example of how music can translate the powerful emotions conveyed on the printed page into raw and urgent feelings affecting the listener (and viewer), with great economy, using fewer words, the jarring intervals in the music expressing her agony.

5. Gleees and Ensembles

The musical style, as I have said, is not particularly representative of Austen's era, although there are sections which reference musical forms of the time. The most obvious is the glee, defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* as 'a choral composition in a number of short self-contained sections, each expressing the mood of some particular passage of the poem set, the music predominantly harmonic (i.e., in blocks of chords), rather than contrapuntal.' Technically, a glee is unaccompanied and sung by male voices, but it is clear from the use of the term in *Mansfield Park* that this is not always the case, and publisher John Bland published a large collection of 'Ladies' Gleees' in 1789 (An 2011)². Certainly, women are singing in the glee in Chapter 11 of the novel, as discussed below, and they are standing around the pianoforte, which may or may not be used for accompaniment.

One very effective use of this kind of ensemble singing is the entirety of 'Chapter Three: Sir Thomas Bertman's Farewell'. The words of this short scene—only 65 bars of music—are entirely invented, and the musical setting is reminiscent of 'Soave sia il vento', the farewell trio from Act 1 of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*:

Sleep, ye tempests! Waves, be calm!
Keep Sir Thomas safe from harm.
Blow sweetly, ye breezes, flow softly, you waters,
Keep Sir Thomas Bertram safe for his wife and for his daughters.
O Ships, keep safe our precious freight.

Check the tear that pendant trembles
In the brimming, o'ercharged eye,
Husband, Parent, Uncle, Guardian,
Cheerful wish a fond goodbye.

The first part of the glee is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, changing to 4/4 in the second part. Unusually, there are no key changes; the whole scene is in E major. With the exception of the Crawfords and Sir Thomas himself, the entire cast sings this homophonic chorus, and the scene includes interludes by Sir Thomas as he sails away (in this production, standing on the piano as if it is the prow of a ship), explaining why he must leave and instructing them all to behave, 'Always saying what is proper, Always doing what you ought.' They repeat 'goodbye', and there is a pause, and darkness. (MP Opera 1:3:45–65)

Then, at the beginning of the following scene, the remaining cast is shown in the same attitudes for an instant, then perceptibly relaxing their formal postures of farewell before a slightly mischievous scampering figure in the piano accompaniment introduces the next scene, and they sing 'Chapter Four: Landscape Gardening', leading into the visit to Sotherton and all the discord that event generates in Sir Thomas's absence.

In the novel, his departure is described in quite a short passage as well, covering little more than a page at the end of Chapter 3. The reactions of Lady Bertram and her daughters are described, the mother concerned for her own sake but without 'any alarm for his safety, or solicitude for his comfort, being one of those persons who think nothing can be dangerous or difficult, or fatiguing to any body but themselves', and the daughters 'much to be pitied . . . not for their sorrow, but for their want of it' (MP 32). Fanny, on the other hand, is 'grieved because she could not grieve' (MP 33).

All this explanation is silent in the opera. There is no stage direction at the beginning of Scene Four, so the relaxation that is evident in the video must be an interpretation made in this Boston University production. The vapid sentimentality of the lyrics, added to Sir Thomas's pompous exhortations to his family as he leaves, enact the insincerity of the family's feelings.

Another example is a glee in the background to a dialogue between Edmund and Fanny in 'Chapter Six: Music and Astronomy'.

In Chapter 11 of the novel, Mary Crawford is at the window with Fanny and Edmund, discussing the future: the forthcoming marriage of Maria and Mr. Rushworth, and Edmund's ordination, 'when being earnestly invited by the Miss Bertrams to join in a glee, she tripped off to the instrument, leaving Edmund looking after her in an ecstasy of admiration of all her many virtues, from her obliging manners down to her light and graceful tread' (MP 112).

Fanny and Edmund stay at the window looking at the stars for some time, until the glee begins and Fanny 'had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument.' Typically for an Austen novel, the actual piece of music being performed is not specified.³

In the opera, this scene is compressed somewhat. Maria, Julia, Henry, and Mr. Rushworth are singing in homophonic four-part harmony, which is clearly intended to give the

effect of a glee in the early nineteenth century's style, with the addition of a simple chordal accompaniment:

Music and starlight, grant me rest,
With my head on the heart of the one I love best.
Music and starlight, grant me rest,
With my hand in their hand and my head on their breast. (MP Opera 1:6:9–16)

Mary is not part of the ensemble at this stage. Mr. Rushworth continues singing the melody alone, 'in the background', while 'in the foreground', Mary and Edmund discuss his forthcoming marriage with Maria and, implicitly, Edmund's ordination. When Rushworth begins the melody, the piano accompaniment changes to a complex arrangement of crotchet triplets in the bass and quaver triplets in the treble. Then, the group of four join again, singing the same words and melody but in canon, marked '*pp* in the background', with an even more rhythmically complex accompaniment. Meanwhile, Edmund and Fanny discuss astronomy at the window. (MP Opera 1:6:40–60)

Then, Henry addresses his sister Mary: 'Will you not sing us something?' (MP Opera 1:6:61) Her response, after another refrain of 'Music and starlight' and more conversation between Edmund and Fanny, is to interrupt the serene and sentimental mood of the glee with a brief 'song':

What woman could contented be,
With a love that is not mastery?
How can I not smile to see
The heart that others ache for, break for me? (MP Opera 1:6:74–82)

This catches Edmund's attention, and after the first two lines, he tells Fanny their stargazing will have to 'wait till this is finished' (MP Opera 1:6:77–78).

The way the music shifts attention between the characters is very ingenious, although it would also depend on the direction to ensure that the audience focusses on the foregrounded conversation or interaction at any one time. Another device that the opera uses is to pull out short phrases of dialogue and weave them into ensembles. After first meeting the Bertram sisters in Chapter 5 of the novel, Henry Crawford agrees with his sister that he likes the younger sister, Julia, who is not engaged, best: 'I shall always like Julia best, because you order me' (MP 45). Meanwhile, the Bertram sisters decide that Henry is 'not handsome', although they soon stop noticing that he is 'plain' and find him 'the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known' (MP 44).

In Scene Two of the opera, these exchanges become, 'But I like Julia best, yes you like Julia best' on the Crawfords' part, and 'But he is not handsome, no he is not handsome' from the Bertram sisters. And these two refrains are sung concurrently, the two conversations happening at the same time, although one would be taking place in the Parsonage and one at the big house in Mansfield Park. (MP Opera 1:2:86–93) It is a very clever juxtaposition of the jumble of self-deception and duplicity in these four characters.

6. Narrator vs. Character

A consistent difficulty with the screen versions of Austen's novels is the treatment of the narrator's voice, which is such an essential part of Austen's idiosyncratic narrative style. In some films, the narrator's voice, which very often makes ironic remarks at the expense of the characters, is assigned to one of the characters. The difficulty is that this voice is of its very nature outside the characters' consciousness. It is possible that for Elizabeth Bennet to speak the line, 'a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife', as she does in the 1995 television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is not too

serious a transgression of this principle, because Elizabeth's voice is habitually similarly ironic. However, it is a problem which faces every enactment of these novels in particular, and perhaps of novels in general. A possible solution, but one which is rarely used in my experience, at least in recent screen adaptations, is to include a voice-over for the narrator.

The strategy that Middleton and Dove have often employed, which is more available in an operatic adaptation than in a spoken one (at least since the days of Aeschylus and Sophocles), is to use a chorus as the narrative voice, in this case, a chorus composed of the members of the cast not immediately involved in the action. Like Austen's narrative voice, which can dart in and out of a character's mind, the narrative thread of the opera can pass between cast members acting in their own characters at one moment, and then (often singing as part of an ensemble) acting as narrators or commentators on the narrative.

At the end of the opera, this device is used to striking effect. 'Chapter the Last' begins, as I have mentioned above, with the whole cast singing a sentence very close to Austen's 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery' (MP 461).⁹ However, the chorus continues in a rather different vein:

Too soon the bough will break;
Too soon the tears are spilt;
Too soon the heart that never knew a grief will ache and ache.
Let us learn to laugh;
Learn to laugh and live and smile
And while we can
Learn to love. (MP Opera 2:7:15–39)

There is an instrumental interlude—flowing, *cantabile*—which introduces more direct, though still approximate, quotes from Austen's narrative voice, passing between all the characters except Edmund and Fanny. Austen's paragraph beginning 'I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion' and ending 'I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire' (MP 470) is summarised:

Let us abstain from dates.
When does unchangeable passion alter?
When does immortal devotion die?
However long it takes
Imagine that time gone by.
Dates judge and dates condemn.
Let us just say
Some time later, the day dawned when . . . (MP Opera 2:7:62–85)

Then, the live action begins, with Edmund addressing Fanny: 'How blind I have been! O Fanny, my pale but certain star. I look for you, and there, where you have always been, you are' (MP Opera 2:7:86–94). Then, Fanny responds, not directly replying but echoing the narrative, 'Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope' (MP 471). In the opera, Fanny sings, in an expansive passage which is in marked contrast to the brief interjections she has been allowed elsewhere:

Let no-one presume to describe—description fails;
Let no-one dare to imagine—imagination pales;

How I feel.

I had a love. A love? A hope. A hope? A dream, a distant dream.

I woke and found my love, my hope, my distant dream

Was real. (MP Opera 2:7:105–143)

Then, supplying the romantic consummation that the novel withholds, a short duet between Fanny and Edmund follows: ‘I look for you . . .’ (MP Opera 2:7:144–153). This duet, though it is a mere 10 bars long, is lyrical and very moving. These lyrics have to be supplied by the libretto as their conversation is not explicit in the novel. It is followed by the chorus, sung by the whole cast, which concludes the opera:

Let other pens dwell on misery and guilt.

Too soon falls the dust,

Too soon comes the dark,

Let us learn to laugh and live and love

at Mansfield Park. (MP Opera 2:7:154–187)

Austen typically elides the description of the successful proposal which brings the plot of each of her novels to a close. In an article published in 2016, I wrote the following:

The six complete novels of Jane Austen are novels about learning to live and to love, not only the person one will marry but the life and the connections they bring with them . . . Happily-ever-after is a facile idea that Austen presents to us with one hand while introducing enough complexity and irony with the other to make us understand the inadequacy of the myth. (Dooley 2016)

Reading my words again, I am struck by the resonance with the opera libretto—‘Let us learn to laugh and live and love’—with which I was totally unfamiliar at the time of writing. Perhaps Middleton’s introduction of the phrases ‘too soon the bough will break . . . too soon comes the dark’ is the opera’s way of acknowledging the provisional nature of the happy ending, without breaking the romantic and, it might be said, somewhat nostalgic mood.

There may be a need for a different type of ending to the opera than the novel. There is little place for the irony of a passage like this, which concerns Sir Thomas Bertram’s response to Edmund’s intention to marry Fanny:

. . . the joyful consent which met Edmund’s application, the high sense of having realised a great acquisition in the promise of Fanny for a daughter, formed just such a contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl’s coming had been first agitated, as time is for ever producing between the plans and decisions of mortals, for their own instruction, and their neighbours’ entertainment. (MP 471–472)

Is the kind of ‘entertainment’ that Austen wryly notes here out of place at the end of an opera? Or merely at the end of this opera? The answer no doubt lies in the opera creators’ vision—not only the vision, but the emotional effect of the novel on them. And although this is a subjective effect which will differ, sometimes greatly, between individuals, what a work of art can do consistently is move a great many people to feelings that will not be identical but will seem to go beyond an individual’s own life and concerns into some larger world of human existence.

Douglas Murray, in his 2016 article ‘Fanny Price Goes to the Opera’, proposes that the opera is successful in creating ‘a musical/dramatic analogue to Austen’s characteristic narrative technique: her ability to display simultaneously multiple consciousnesses within a social context’, and that Dove and Middleton ‘offer an updated version of the pleasures of Jane Austen: intelligence, impeccable workmanship, and irony-laced accounts of the life

and death of the heart', and that they 'advance an important reading of the novel'. His argument is that the opera really has no central characters, but is an 'ensemble opera', more *Canterbury Tales* than *Jane Eyre*, in that Fanny, 'the traumatized-triumphant heroine is only part of the bigger story that is *Mansfield Park*' (Murray 2016).

I wonder how much this might depend on choices made in production as much as in composition, but I think the final scene, though it ends emphatically with the words 'Mansfield Park' repeated by the whole chorus, definitely does focus on the union of Fanny and Edmund and the profound transformation to happiness which Fanny experiences. Certainly, Fanny is the central figure in the Boston University production: the watcher, the primary consciousness who focuses the attention.

This is not to say that other characters are negligible and, as Murray notes, the opera allows many points of view to be displayed simultaneously. And perhaps it is inevitable in an acted version, where the characters are literally seen, rather than just imagined, that the interpretation of a character becomes more definite, perhaps because of the choice of words and music for that character, but also the way that a particular actor plays the role. Mr. Rushworth, played by Jangho Lee in this production, is a more sympathetic character than in the novel, so that when Edmund and Sir Thomas sing, *sotto voce*, 'If this man had not twelve thousand a year he would be a very stupid fellow' (MP Opera 1:1:162–163), and Maria treats him with contempt, it seems unfair. Fanny's sympathy for him becomes an important part of her characterisation in the opera, as it is in the novel. On the other hand, Lady Bertram, played by Myka Murphy, is more or less a caricature in the opera, even more than in the novel, with her pug, which is just glanced at a few times in the novel, becoming a kind of *leitmotif*, of more importance than anything else in her life.

7. Reviewers on *Mansfield Park*

Reviews of various live performances of the opera have been mixed. Guy Dammann, reviewing a repeat performance of the first production with the initial cast at the Arcola Theatre, Dalston, as part of London's Grimeborn Festival, declared it 'not an unqualified triumph', but 'nonetheless, until a card-carrying modernist gives Austen the operatic treatment she deserves'; he conceded that the opera 'will do nicely'. Dammann was not expecting much from the opera, having 'shied away from Jane Austen adaptations' since the 1995 television series of *Pride and Prejudice*, finding that 'the sharp edges of Austen's characters tend to find themselves smoothed off for the screen' (Dammann 2011).

In the event, Dammann found that 'the opera's major insight is that for much of the novel Fanny Price is not a character, but rather a disappointingly thin echo for the pretensions of others' (Dammann 2011, p. 17). This is a puzzling observation. For one thing, to conceive an insight of this kind about the novel via the opera is an odd idea. Also, it seems to indicate a rather superficial understanding of the novel, perhaps encouraged by the opera's staging in this case—although without having seen this production, it is hard for me to tell.

Jonathan Dove himself was struck by the way that 'Austen offers clues to [Fanny's] feelings, but . . . Fanny does not express them. To me, her reticence invited music, a way of revealing those hidden emotions. . . . Fanny's pained silences gave me the impulse to write music for her' (Dove 2017). The way others behave towards Fanny is certainly a measure of other characters' mettle, but Middleton and Dove have contrived to give her a voice of her own—and perhaps the Boston production I am familiar with emphasises that fact by beginning the opera with nearly half a minute of profound silence where Fanny is alone on the stage.

Writing in the *Spectator* about a 2012 production by the Royal Academy of Music, reviewer Michael Tanner (like Maria Bertram on first meeting Henry Crawford in the

opera) did not mind it, but found it difficult to hear the lyrics, particularly those sung by the female characters, and looked forward to a production with subtitles (Tanner 2012). This difficulty is something I also noticed. My familiarity with the online production of the opera, which includes subtitles, means that I have been able to read the lyrics while watching the opera, but sometimes the word underlay seems to go against the rhythm of the text in such an obvious way that I have wondered whether it was deliberate, to connote insincerity or triviality. It seems to be more common with vociferous characters such as Mary Crawford and Mrs. Norris, when they are in full flight. It often happens high in the singer's range, as well.

Nick Boston reviewed a production by Waterperry Opera at St Marylebone Parish Church in London in July 2023, and described 'delightful period costumes' and 'clever techniques', concluding that 'this was a joyous outing for a consistently entertaining and cleverly constructed chamber opera' (Boston 2023). The same director, Rebecca Meltzer, crossed the globe for a production in Auckland in 2024, which was described by Simon Holden as 'a blissful performance of a most charming contemporary opera' (Holden 2024). Interestingly, one of the virtues of the production noted by Holden was the singers' 'really clear diction throughout, even in the ensembles'.

8. Can a Novel Be an Opera?

No. An adaptation of a novel into a film or a play or an opera will always be a separate work, and will never more than approximately correspond to the work which engenders it. It does both art forms a disservice to judge an adaptation merely by a standard of literal accuracy. Dove writes that 'the experience of reading Austen is always energising', and expresses a hope that the opera reflects 'something of the exuberant vitality of her writing' (Dove 2017).

A question that one is tempted to ask about an adaptation such as this is whether the new work has captured the essence of Austen's novel. But what does that mean? What is Austen's 'essence'? Wit, irony, penetration, perceptiveness, worldliness, but also deep sympathy with the feelings of her characters. These can occur simultaneously, but she can, of course, also speak without irony—and she often does. The 'essence' of Austen is somewhat elusive to define, and, significantly, it is not a stable quality. It will vary from reader to reader, and will even vary, over time, between the same person's perusals of the same novel.

Mansfield Park might be especially changeable in this respect. When I mention the novel, I find that people often say how their opinion of the novel has changed since first reading it: that they discover more depth and richness with each reading. In this way, Middleton and Dove's opera might be seen as another reading of this novel, or another medium for readers to approach it, as well as a work in its own right. The opera itself, as we have seen from the reviews quoted above, has generated a variety of reactions in performance. I have recommended the Boston University production of it to friends and colleagues, and I have found that most who are familiar with Austen's works are enthusiastic, while others have dismissed it as 'mere Gilbert and Sullivan'—perhaps echoing Dammann's faint praise that it is merely adequate, and awaiting the day when a 'card-carrying modernist' decides to create an adaptation of the novel.

I would like to recommend that readers of this article seek out the opera and decide for themselves. The Boston University production is available on YouTube (*Mansfield Park* n.d.), [25] and the opera is receiving an unusual number of productions for a twenty-first century work. When writing academic essays on literature, I often find it challenging to convey to the reader the nature and quality of my engagement with a work. Writing about

a compelling performance of a vividly realised adaptation of a magnificent novel feels even more like chasing after shadows.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In other respects, Martin's work concentrates on ideas of questions of 'fidelity' to social norms in Regency England in performing the opera, which is of less concern to me here.
- ² Yu Lee An discusses 'the changing social context of glees around the turn of the nineteenth century, when they began to move out of their original settings in gentlemen's clubs . . . and to infiltrate domestic music-making in which women participated.'
- ³ There is only one piece of music mentioned by name in all of Austen's novels, 'Robin Adair' in *Emma*.

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Article

Adapting *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s Musicality into Real Music: An Impossible Task?

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Abstract: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was published at a time when poetry and music were being redefined, along with the notions of imitation and expression. From a precedence of word over music, theorists, musicians and composers started reconsidering the hierarchy of arts, which led to a new appreciation of both sung music and instrumental music. Ann Radcliffe's novel is replete with pleasing sounds and mysterious melodies, working both as part of her décor and general soundscape and as a key element of the narrative. Given the novel's musical profusion and versatility, one may wonder how to adapt its musicality into actual music. This paper, therefore, endeavors to define the balance of imitation and expression in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and questions the ability of other media, especially those relying on sounds, to adapt its musical richness. It first focuses on the novel's inscription in the larger context of musical theory, before delving into the limits of language's sound mimesis and its counteracting expressivity. The final part is a case study of three artworks inspired by Radcliffe's novel: John Bray's song "Soft as yon's silver ray that sleeps", Catherine Czerkawska's radio dramatization *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Marc Morvan and Benjamin Jarry's album *Udolpho*.

Keywords: Ann Radcliffe; *Udolpho*; soundscape; music; gothic; picturesque; expressivity; mimesis; adaptations

1. Introduction

"She loved music, we are told, and often went to the opera. Back at home, having a good musical ear, she would sing the airs she had just heard and memorized. It seems she had a beautiful voice, "mellow and melodious" if "somewhat tremulous". She sang, says her biographer, with "exquisite taste". She particularly liked sacred tunes and worshipped Haendel—not a flagrant symptom, either, of insanity." (Lévy 1996, p. 37)

The Mysteries of Udolpho was published at a time when poetry and music were being re-defined and when the latter was re-established at the top of the hierarchy of arts. Following centuries of Aristotelean conception of music as imitative, according to the famous rules of *mimesis*, the turn of the nineteenth century saw an array of theories that gave new meaning to imitation, expression, and other key concepts in musicology. Music was to be considered "the highest form of artistic experience and knowledge" (Mohr 1998, p. 119), equal and even superior to its sister arts that were painting and poetry (Abrams 1953, p. 50), thanks to its ability to mimic the power and strength of passions (Webb 1769, p. 42–3) while also giving rise to affects through its expressivity. Under the impetus of the writings of Batteux, Du Bos, and Avison, notably, expression became "the goal to which musical genius aspired" (Le Huray and Day 1981, p. 9)¹, and music thereby freed itself from the domination of

word over sound. Instrumental music was progressively given a place in its own right, and, no longer being under the control of poetry, emancipated itself as the artform most able to rouse the finest and most complex emotions in the listener (Dubois 2015, p. 113). In such a context, Ann Radcliffe's passion for music could not but be influenced by these changes, which happened concomitantly to the writing of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and infused the whole musical scene of the proto-romantic period². Her text is permeated with such a profusion of sounds, noises, and musical performances that its musicality cannot be denied. Yet, considering the then-established superiority of music over words, it is of no surprise that her transcriptions of such sound- and muscscapes were deemed unrealistic and non-mimetic³. How could such an amateur of music in all its forms, and avid reader of the latest treatises in philosophy and art⁴, prove to disengage her words from its sister art to such an extent? The main issue that follows concerns the actual power of words to imitate music: if music is supposedly superior to poetry, how can a writer give musicality to a text? This second question provides room for an analysis of the metaphorization of music through text, and conversely raises the final point of this study: does music have the power to transcend text into sound, faithfully, and if so, to which elements should it devote most importance? This article will, therefore, first consider the soundscape in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in order to gauge the balance between functionality and realism in its objects and their description, before questioning the verbal description of music and the (in)adequacy of words in sound transcription, to conclude with a case study of three adaptations of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* into song, radio play, and a music album.

2. Sound- and Muscscapes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Most Gothic novels share similar soundscapes, whose use is mainly functional. This is what enables Isabella van Elferen to assert that “the advent of terror is generally preceded by an unworldly silence, aided by meteorological (wind, thunder, rain) or technical (rattling fences, hissing pipes) circumstances and announced by sounds that suggest presence (creaks, echoes, voices, music)” (van Elferen 2012, p. 19). Devandra P. Varma and Edith Birkhead add precision to the list, with the inclusion of “inexplicable groans and mysterious music” (Varma 1957, p. 96; Birkhead 1921, p. 46), and “[t]he moaning wind, a rustling oboe, a half-heard sigh, the echo of distant footsteps” (Varma 1957, p. 96). Yet, summing up the variety of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s soundscape in a few clichés would not do it justice. In the countryside, sounds are particularly picturesque; as the narrator even says, “she heard only sweet and *picturesque* sounds, if such an expression may be allowed—the matin-bell of a distant convent, the faint murmur of the sea-waves, the song of birds, and the far-off low of cattle” (Radcliffe 1794, p. 72). Every sonic effect that might recall an element seen on a pastoral painting is featured in the novel, including various birds, bees, sheep bells, dogs barking, horses, cattle, breezes, and other sounds of the wind in branches, water streams, torrents and waterfalls, as well as sounds of human activity (woodmen, shepherds playing the flute, vintage workers singing and dancing after a long day's work). In more dangerous landscapes, the torrent of water is echoed by thunderstorms and the sound of the rolling tempest, and the sea is agitated, first murmuring then crashing on the shore. Out of these sublime scenes, characters find refuge in places where religion is particularly present, with the sound of organs and various bells (especially the vesper bell). Finally, several places are characterized by more specific soundscapes: first, Venice, with multiple songs on gondolas, and a veritable symphony of music that runs along the canals and turn Venice into a “fairy city [...] approaching to welcome the strangers”. (Radcliffe 1794, p. 167); second, Pisa, with the animation of a more mercantile city; third, Chateau-le-Blanc, with its horn concerts and lively groups of singers and dancers, recalling the pastoral scenes of La Vallée with the more city-like activities that Emily also witnessed in Toulouse and Venice; ultimately,

Udolpho, with a very different sound signature made of arms clashing, revelry, cannons, trumpets, the overwhelming wind that rocks the castle and menaces its foundations, and the great clock rhythming Emily's life.

Additionally, among these various scenes, muscscapes also rise to the eye and ear of the reader: the multiple hymns sung at the monasteries enable Emily to feel safe within the protection of a religious haven while she is in the countryside, sounds which leave the narration as soon as she is in the vicinity of Montoni, the incarnation of immorality (he is a *banditto*, a gambler, a thief, and a liar). There are also various songs sung by Emily with her lute, answering the nightingale with Romantic melancholy undertones, echoed by those of Monsieur Du Pont, Signora Laurentini, and of Valancourt. To these are added various songs by secondary characters, including Ludovico and the domestics playing in the castle, vintage and wood workers, gondoliers singing serenades, armies playing martial airs, and singers and dancers in France and in Italy playing a vast array of instruments from guitars to tambourines, pipes and tabors, violins, castanets, flutes, fifes, oboes, and even the sticcado pastorale, a rare idiophone. Considering the variety and overwhelming presence of sound and music in this novel, one may wonder to what extent they are indeed "picturesque" or evocative of specific associations of ideas. Indeed, each of the sounds listed is at once realistic in that it paints a whole soundscape to the mind's ear, but none strikes as unexpected. The violin is exposed as the first sound of "Italian music, on Italian ground" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 161), embodying this country the same way the lute, fife, pipe, and tabor are mostly evocative of Arcadian contexts and medieval times⁵, or the sticcado pastorale makes through its very name an explicit allusion to the pastoral scene in which it is played. Unsurprisingly, these passages are also echoed by the numerous poetic compositions of Emily and her suitors, which use the same clichéd sound- and muscscapes to provide a rhymed and rhythmmed version of these sonic evocations.

In light of these comments, one could easily assume, like Isabella van Elferen, that "the definition of 'Gothic music' is to be found in its *functionality* within the larger context of the Gothic narration rather than in a neatly delineated and easily identifiable compositional *style*" (van Elferen 2012, p. 9). Such functionality is corroborated by Pierre Dubois' analysis of the symbolic and metaphorical framing of musical scenes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Dubois 2015, p. 3). Yet, while other novels might be confined to this shortened analysis, I agree with Dubois when he writes (about Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, but aptly applicable to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) that "[a] radical shift is [...] brought about: instead of taking literature (poetry) as a model, as the ancient theory of the *l'ut pictura/musica poesis* and of the Sister Arts required, music now imposes its own modalities upon the text" (Dubois 2015, p. 117). Dubois calls this process the "musicalization" of the text, a term that can redefine *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as no longer based on musical functionality but as essentially musical⁶. *Ut pictura poesis* and *ut musica poesis* are both given special treatment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, without forgetting *ut poesis musica*: everything in this novel blends the three sister arts, quite literally, since landscapes are accompanied by their own sound signature and poems⁷, and conversely the disappearance of scenery also brings about a fall of interest in reading and writing (Horrocks 2008, p. 508) and an incapacity to play music on the part of the heroine. In line with E. J. Clery's idea that "Radcliffe's aim was to produce a total work of art" (Clery 2000, p. 74), much like an opera, the narration of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is made of acts, scenes, and various musical performances standing out before an elaborate and picturesque (meaning picture-evoking) décor worthy of Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, and Piranesi.

When it comes to the soundscapes and muscscapes of the novel, the question, then, does not so much revolve on an opposition between realism and functionality, but rather on the discrepancy between evocatory *effet de réel* (Barthes 1968) built on the laws of

associationism realistic textual rendering of fictional sound events enabled by the richness of language and, on the contrary, the unrealistic musicalization of the text due to the superiority of music over poetry.

3. Verbal Descriptions of Music, or Sound-Made Text

When considering the opposition between text and sound, in narrations thus permeated by music and sonic effects, the major issue raised is that of the ability of words to paint sound images. The turn of the nineteenth century saw numerous publications in which the expression “words cannot paint” was part of the writer’s etiquette and established itself as a compulsory phrase. It was associated mainly with the impossibility of transcribing faithfully the strength of emotions and passions into text, a meaning which came to question the faithfulness of writing in transcribing sound as well. Indeed, if sound, especially music, was the best means of mimicking sensibility and the motions of the soul and spirit, words, therefore, were equally inadequate in conveying the full scope of musicality.

Before this radical change in aesthetics, poetry remained superior to music through its “usefulness” (Beattie 1779, p. 9) and, auditorily speaking, through its ability to “produce harmony from a combination of notes all jarring and discordant, if they were in unison with some natural scene which from its novelty or grandeur afforded a fit subject for description” (Aikin 1777, pp. 63–4). Accordingly, the frequent composition of verses in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* enables the characters and narrative voice at once to do justice to the beauty of specific scenes, while also evoking a more complex idea of the focalizers’ feelings and impressions through metaphor, the association of rhymes—laying stress on key words and concepts—and rhythmic composition, conveying additional emotional tints. Such passages contribute to elevating the mind to poetic enthusiasm, much like the intradiegetic musical experience:

Soft as the surge’s stealing note,
That dies along the distant shores,
Or warbled strain, that sinks remote—
So soft the sigh my bosom pours! (Radcliffe 1794, p. 177)

This extract from Count Morano’s “Rondeau” exemplifies in a few lines the ambivalent imitation and expression of both poetry and music. Firstly, through diegetic singing and playing, Morano elevates the characters’ minds and triggers their memory through the evocation of a distant land. As a rondeau, the song alludes to Emily’s original land, in the southwest of France, and its groups of joyous dancers; and its words, especially “distant shores” and “remote”, also contribute to evoking La Vallée to her mind. Secondly, through largely visual vocabulary, the song mimics music’s volatility, and the movement of its sound waves in the air is equated to the surges of emotions in the characters’ souls. Poetic mimesis thereby encounters the musical imitation of emotion, illustrating the tripartite theory of musical expressivity⁸. Thirdly, the rhythm of the whole song, being a rondeau, adds circularity and roundness to the sound waves, echoing the actual waves of the water along the Venetian canals in a full harmony. Finally, this specific passage also provides an illustration of Aikin’s unison through dissonance: in only four lines, the whole variety of pronunciation of the letter “o” is exemplified ([ɒ] in “soft”/“along”, [əʊ] in “note”/“remote”/“so”, [ɔ:] in “shores”/“Or”/“pours”, [ʊ] and [ə] in “bosom”), each sound metaphorically equaling an “o”-shaped water wave (or French rond d’eau) with a different sonic quality.

In this light, poetry indeed is “useful” in managing to create stronger rhythmic and rhyming impressions than prose. Nevertheless, the narrator seems to suggest that it fails to exist without an underlying addition of music. Most poems in the novel are accompanied with a lute, adding harmony to the melody of their words: “Count Morano [. . .] snatched

up a lute, and struck the chords with the finger of harmony herself, while his voice, a fine tenor, accompanied them in a rondeau full of tender sadness" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 176). It is firstly the lute, then the voice and incidentally the words that are mentioned, giving precedence to instrumental music, which in turn is improved by the addition of poetry. Adding to this precedence of music, the focalizer specifically comments on the melody, energy, and modulation of the voice, forgetting the words altogether: "The cadence with which he returned from the last stanza to a repetition of the first; the fine modulation in which his voice stole upon the first line, and the pathetic energy with which it pronounced the last, were such as only exquisite taste could give" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 177). Prose, therefore, proves more efficient in commenting on the sonic characteristics of music, while poetry enables the narrator to mimic its rhythmic and metaphorical meaning. In the end, this example does not help pick a side for one art or another: poetry, prose, and music are here sister arts in the strictest meaning.

What remains to be undertaken, then, is a more precise analysis of the lexicon used by Ann Radcliffe in her prosaic descriptions of poetic and musical effects. When Isabella van Elferen asserts that "sound and music are veiled by adjectives pertaining to the visual, the visceral and the affective" (van Elferen 2012, pp. 2–3), I assume she alludes to the vocabulary borrowed from picturesque and romantic theories and to that related to the memories evoked by such scenes. Indeed, picturesque sounds are literally sounds evoking a scene, a picture. A few lines before the rondeau, one reads:

The smoothness of the water, over which she glided, its reflected images—a new heaven and trembling stars below the waves, with shadowy outlines of towers and porticos, conspired with the stillness of the hour, interrupted only by the passing wave, or the notes of distant music, to raise those emotions to enthusiasm. As she listened to the measured sound of the oars, and to the remote warblings that came in the breeze, her softened mind returned to the memory of St Aubert and to Valancourt, and tears stole to her eyes. (Radcliffe 1794, p. 176)

From visual reflections to sonic images, sounds are constantly associated with elements referring to sight: "the passing wave" is both sound and image, the music is "distant", the emotions are "raise[d]". In the second sentence, the "oars" are visible, and even the "warblings that came in the breeze" feel visual, especially with the final memory and reference to the tears in Emily's eyes. Allusions to the wind, to water streams and even to reverberation, while pertaining to a form of cratyism⁹ (e.g., "sigh", "murmur" "roll", "rush", "flow", "dash", "bounce", "rock"...), also function as picturesque sounds, simultaneously alerting to the poverty of audio-descriptive language and exemplifying the quasi-synesthetic painterly power of acoustics. Once again, *effet de réel* and metaphorization are set apart, opposed and reconciled.

This is eventually also the case of more "technical" musical terms like "melody, harmony and cadence" (Noske 1981, p. 165). As Noske suggests, these words are used by Radcliffe not only in reference to music, but also in her descriptions of scenery. More specifically, music listening is accompanied by the observation of surrounding landscapes, leading to similes between the two. Conventionally, "melody" is mostly associated with singing and voiced signals added on background soundscapes, while "harmony" refers to the accompanying voices and other keynote or soundmark sounds¹⁰, and "cadence" alludes simultaneously to vanishing sound and lowering pitch. Yet, notably through the personification of the wind, when music is heard in the silent intervals of the breeze, the very landscape becomes an orchestra or a choir: "Their tall heads then began to wave, while, through a forest of pine, on the left, the wind, groaning heavily, rolled onwards over the woods below, bending them almost to their roots; and, as the long-resounding gale swept away, other woods, on the right, seemed to answer the 'loud lament;' then, others,

further still, softened it into a murmur, that died into silence" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 413). On the keynote, harmonic music of the wind in the forest is played: the melodious signal sounds of the woods on the left and right, falling into a concluding cadence to let the contrapuntal lute take the signal lead again. The reader is not surprised to see another particularly frequent musical term associated with the wind a few lines earlier, "the loud swell of the gust", which echoes the multitudinous instances of musical "swell[ing]", a keyword in Radcliffe's musical lexicon. The verbal description of sound- and muscscapes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, therefore, blends theory and practice, poetry and prose, in a constant hesitation between the thorough, acoustic rendering of sound effects and the proto-Romantic, picture-evoking metaphorical language of poetry.

Consequently, the sister arts are so intrinsically linked in Radcliffe's choice of topics, descriptions, and lexicon, that the picturesque and musical aspects of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seem entangled and impossible to dissociate. Much like in later Romantic writings, everything in nature bears potential musicality and voice, while everything in man is made of chords, strings, and nerves to be struck, played, and put in unison. Considering this inextricable adequation between sight and hearing, the question of all-sound adaptation is made all the more difficult, since as it eliminates the question of lexical mimesis, it also pushes the original material closer to the limits of musical imitation and expression. In other words, the overarching tension between imitation and expression, which is so central to aesthetic (and especially music) theory, is given additional fuel by the translation from one art into another: what may be mimetic in written words is not always so in song or in instrumental music, just as the expressivity of a text does not always find equal correspondences through its adaptation into sound media.

4. Mimetic Sound and Metaphoric Adaptation: Three Case Studies

In order to "speak the pure language of nature" and "elegantly dra[w] the effects of music on the mind" (Drake 1798, p. 76), language, therefore, can show particular double meanings and acoustic effects that music simply cannot. Yet, what literature can be proved to lack is the performative aspect of music, the overwhelming power of a note or any actual sound, which in its very performance surpasses lexical expression through non-verbal expressivity. To use Daniel Webbs's words, "expression so much depends on the music of the voice" (Webb 1769, p. 93), that a poem or song—and by extension a sound- or muscscapes—devoid of its real-life acoustic rendering enhances a sense of lack in reading. This has led artists to experiment with the original material of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, adapting it through various sound media. The three (seeming) adaptations I have selected illustrate three different media that show various strengths and weaknesses, each devoting specific attention to distinct elements of the novel that they transcended in their own way through sonic rendering.

4.1. "Soft as yon Silver Ray That Sleeps", Song Composed by John Bray

"Soft as yon Silver Ray the Sleeps" is a song composed by John Bray "some time between 1805 and 1808" (Hitchcock 1955, p. 377). Most versions found online attach as much importance to John Bray's name as to the title of the song, and add as a subtitle that it was based on "the poetry from *the Mysteries of Udolpho*". On the main website of access to these versions of the song, the English words are attributed to famous actress, educator, and author Susanna Rowson¹¹, but they are quite obviously those of Ann Radcliffe, more specifically those of Count Morano's rondeau. On the version published by G. E. Blake, the reader learns that it was "sung with great applause by Mr Webster¹²", testifying to the quality of the song, but no reviews are available to gauge the appreciation of the audience at the time. John Bray was used to composing and adapting romances, as a specialist of

melodrama, whose key components include (I here quote George C. D. Odell) a “persecuted, virtuous heroine, a very villainous villain, a brave, unfortunate hero, and comic servants to assist in the relief of the good” (Hitchcock 1955, p. 378). Commenting on *The Indian Princess*, Hitchcock suggests that in Bray’s melodramas, instrumental music was designed to accompany the words and songs instead of overwhelming them (Hitchcock 1955, p. 379), echoing Charles Burney’s statement about lyric poetry, rhapsodies, and historical ballads, which “must have been set to the most simple and artless melody, or it would have been utterly unintelligible” (Burney 1789, p. 506). John Bray’s instrumental music in *The Indian Princess* is “programmatically conceived and as pithily expressive as possible of the dramatic situation” (Hitchcock 1955, p. 380), a form of “mood-music” which has much in common with the strongly associationist music in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. “Soft as yon Silver Ray that Sleeps” is no exception to Bray’s overall simplicity of composition. Its rhythm remains uncomplicated, with contrapuntal ebbs and flows between voice, flute, and piano. The major tonality lends the song a mood recalling the pensive melancholy experienced by Ann Radcliffe’s heroines and heroes. Adding to the pitch and tonality, the “*andante*” pace contributes to giving calmness to the song, whose strength, therefore, revolves on the ability of musicians and singers to draw long, tense, and sustained notes in order to convey music’s pathos and expressivity. Although rondeaux were originally designed for dancing, and were rather set to faster tempi, in this instance, the strength of the song relies on the ability of the singer to give full range to the “ad lib” (i.e., ad libitum, free) parts of the music score. The instructions on the various scores are particularly evocative of enhanced expressivity, through a connection between the words of the song and their musical rendering.

The first fermata falls, unsurprisingly, on the first occurrence of “swells” (line 4 of the original rondeau, and at the beginning of the sixth bar of the sung part), immediately followed by two “ad lib” quarter notes enabling the repetition of “that swells”, thereby adding tension and length to the “swelling” of the music. Music, words, and effect are thus coordinated to convey the strongest impression of musical expressivity. The next instruction is, indeed, an “*expressivo*” falling of the two quarter notes accompanying the word “dies”, once again swelling text and music to enhance the visual evocation of the line in the poem: “Soft as the surge’s stealing note,/That dies along the distant shores” (l. 4–5). The last word of that line is concluded with a fermata, followed by a “*cadenza*” on the words “or warbled strain”, matching the lengthy musical image with its musical rendering. A few bars later, “sigh” is similarly allotted a fermata, at the climax of the line “So soft the sigh my bosom pours!” (l. 8). In the same fashion as “that swells”, “the sigh” is repeated in quarter notes, emphasizing the association between music, word, and melancholy. After the reprise, the same effects are repeated, with perhaps less strength for the second stanza: the first fermata falls on “to” in “Or music to Venetian seas”, followed by an “ad lib” on its repetition. The fourth stanza sees an “*expressivo*” on the second syllable of “upon”, which also lacks the association of ideas that gave strength to the second stanza. The fermata and cadenza for this stanza, however, highlight “breast” in “Upon the ocean’s trembling breast”, and “So soft” at the beginning of the third line, which constitute more favorable associations between music and word. The last fermata of the song similarly emphasizes a key word of the last line, “true”, which is repeated and enables a melodic conclusion to the song.

Considering this analysis, although the composition may not be particularly complex, it mostly achieves its purpose in setting Count Morano’s rondeau to actual music. The adaptation is made both through rhythmic modulation and through the overall architecture of the song, whose reprise further enhances the impression of roundness and of refrain that a rondeau implies. In many aspects, John Bray’s setting of Ann Radcliffe’s words to

sound exemplifies what Edgar Allan Poe would later advocate, with the use of refrains tinted with variations that “heighten the effect, by adhering in general to the monotone of sound, while [continually varying] that of thought” (Poe 1846, p. 17). As a matter of fact, Bray’s composition heightens effects through simple instructions such as fermatas, ad libitum phrases, and cadenzas, combined with the added repetition of certain words from the original text which, while contributing to the uniformity of the song, simultaneously enhance its expressivity and subtle variation. In so doing, these modulations of the original medium draw the listener’s attention to key items of Radcliffe’s musical lexicon. By choosing this specific song, John Bray, therefore, managed to adapt one of the key poems of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, keeping its overall lyricism and main musical evocations through a musical rendering that would aptly provide a sound illustration to several other songs of the novel. The recurrence of similar expressions from one description to another in Ann Radcliffe’s work does not contradict Bray’s choice to adapt only one of the songs, although there are fewer rondeaux than other music genres and styles in her novel. Indeed, Radcliffe enthusiasts may criticize this choice, as well as that of a piano forte instead of a lute, and may lack the musical variety of the gay songs of dancing groups in the countryside, but Count Morano’s rondeau nevertheless remains a convincing choice, since it recalls the most musical event of the novel and evokes the soothing melancholy that permeates the whole text of Ann Radcliffe’s novel in a form of pathetic and lyrical musicality.

4.2. “The Mysteries of Udolpho”, Radio Dramatization by Catherine Czerkawska

Among the three examples studied, Catherine Czerkawska’s radio dramatization is what comes closest to an adaptation of Ann Radcliffe’s novel taken as a whole. Cut into two parts of about one hour each in length, the radio play adapts the events of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* without the original narrative voice¹³, keeping only the substance of the main events and dialogues. Considering the length of the original material and the multitudinous visual descriptions that permeate it, the play left aside whole passages that did not fit the sound medium of radio dramatization. In a study “Dramatizing *Udolpho*, or the Staging of Picturesque Sounds” (Ratail 2023), I questioned the reliability of the background sounds chosen by Catherine Czerkawska and her team in the radio play, concluding that Ann Radcliffe’s original soundscape is not always made of the most *picturesque* sounds (meaning literally sounds evoking a picture). In order to evoke nightfall, Czerkawska replaced Radcliffe’s song of the nightingale with the hooting of an owl, the former sound being much less recognizable to the modern ear than the latter. Similarly, bees were replaced by the sound of tilling and various other noises made by cattle and chickens to better illustrate the characters’ passage through cultivated land. However, aside from these background noises, music also bears particular interest in this adaptation, since it opposes two different uses of voiced and instrumental music, the first assuming strong functionality in the narrative, while the second remains mainly decorative and associative.

Several occurrences of music in the play are direct or indirect renderings of music mentioned in the original text. Exemplifying the three main types of music playing in the novel, the play offers the listeners an instance of vintage festivity, a ball organized by Madame Clairval, and the songs of Signora Laurentini and Monsieur Du Pont. However, the adaptation of these music scenes shows specific choices made by the composer. Firstly, the music of the vintage festivities features a guitar, a violin, and a flute, instead of a guitar and tambourine, and is accompanied by clapping and laughing. In but a few seconds, the scene strikes the mind’s eye thanks to these sounds, and the listener is presented with a sound effect that matches what one could expect upon reaching a group of merry singers. This passage functions as a transition, conjugated with the “eerie singing” of Signora Laurentini: St Aubert is feeling unwell, and Emily first hears the chilling melancholy song

before commenting upon the vintage in passing and coming back to her father. While the first song is given particular attention by the focalizer, the festivities function more as background noise than as a formal introduction to La Voisin. Nevertheless, even the acousmatic song fails to follow Radcliffe's original description, since Signora Laurentini is not heard to play an instrument, while in the novel, Emily St Aubert and her father originally inquire more after instrumental music than the voice. St Aubert wonders "[w]ho touches that guitar so tastefully", to which La Voisin answers that "[t]hat guitar is often heard at night, when all is still, but nobody knows who touches it, and it is sometimes accompanied by a voice so sweet, and so sad, one would almost think the woods were haunted" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 67). The precedence of voice over instrumental music is echoed later in the radio dramatization, when Monsieur Du Pont is only heard to sing, although the novel shows Emily recognizing the timbre of "the very lute she had formerly heard" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 413). Overall, Ann Radcliffe's initial focalization of her heroine on instrumental music is shifted towards the eerie effect of melancholy singing, hence opposing individual singers on the one hand, and what I would call "decorative" group music, on the other hand.

Decorative music is what Pierre Dubois has often commented as emphasizing Radcliffe's lack of interest in the actual acoustic rendering of her music scenes, which give precedence to associations of ideas over musicality. An example is the description of Madame Clairval's ball, with its musicians playing "the lute, the hautboy, and the tabor" while hosts are "touching sportively a guitar" (Radcliffe 1794, p. 124). In Czerkawska's dramatization, the mediaeval rhythm and overall effect is given more importance than the acoustic rendering of the original instruments, probably in part for financial reasons, considering their variety and rarity, but mostly because, once again, this music has a function in the narrative of the drama. The notes of the string instruments are reverberated by the surrounding acoustics, which allows the hearer to understand that the ball is held indoors (another change from the original), and efficiently conveys the decor of a gathering by aristocrats in the Renaissance period. Regarding the decorative and associationist aspects of Radcliffe's music scenes, Czerkawska answers with musical transitions evoking at once a change of scenery, change of atmosphere, and change of mood. Extradiegetic music is particularly present, and enables us to come from melancholy settings to the preparation of Montoni's wedding through joyful music (part I, 44:23), or on the contrary to provide the accompaniment for the melancholy summary of Montoni's mischievous actions while Madame Montoni is heard to cry (part II, 12:52)¹⁴. The extradiegetic musical passages added in the dramatization, therefore, function as signifiers of transition and of the ellipsis of several scenes of the novel. Yet, the passages they replace prove to be highly musical themselves. While it is no surprise that the decorative songs played by lonely musicians (e.g., Claude, La Voisin's son, Magdalena, the horn concerts commissioned by the Villefort) should have been removed, the most musical passage of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is omitted: the voyage to Italy and arrival in Venice (Radcliffe 1794, pp. 157–81). There is no violin, no rondeau, and no carnival: Venice is only a city in passing, and Emily's enchantment is removed from the dramatization, which leads the hearer to understand that there is hardly any room for entertainment in this adaptation.

Commenting on Ann Radcliffe's novels, Pierre Dubois wrote that musical allusions "merely suggest that the world the characters inhabit is permeated with music. Music intervenes either to testify to important changes in the psychological situation of the heroines, or to give a moral portrait of the characters through an implicit analogy with their musical talent" (Dubois 2015, p. 169). In the end, despite the omission of this last aspect, the radio play managed to keep the overall musicality of Ann Radcliffe's original material, while redefining its function within the main narrative. In the dramatization, song

and instrumental music were set apart, enabling an opposition between the eerie singing analyzed by the characters and pertaining to the main plot, and the instrument used mainly for its ability to create associations in the hearer's mind. Intradiegetic decorative music was mostly omitted and replaced by highly picturesque (and decorative) extradiegetic playing, further enhancing this functionality of music. This dramatization, therefore, kept the features that John Bray's composition lacked, privileging narration over musical romantic expressivity.

4.3. *Udolpho*, Music Album by Marc Morvan and Benjamin Jarry

In 2009, Marc Morvan and Benjamin Jarry released the album *Udolpho*, a disk made of ten folk songs written in English for voice, guitar, and cello. The musicians told me¹⁵ that the composition was intended to remain minimalist, with very few superimposed voices¹⁶, which were recorded with as little modification as possible, drawing close to acoustic chamber music. The main reviews of the album bear witness to this initial intent, praising the "refinement and gallantry" (Seban 2009) of this "intimist, fragile and minimalist folk music" (Michel 2010)¹⁷. From the onset, the listener is, therefore, offered an album that recalls Ann Radcliffe's contemplative, peacefully melancholy, and sophisticated novel. Yet, convincing though these parallels may seem, Morvan and Jarry have since revealed to me that the album was not an adaptation of the eponymous text. Considering the analysis of an inspiration as well as that of an artwork in its own sake, I was thus led to conduct a double study of *Udolpho*, which raised the perilous questions of hearer reception and of musical association, whose common thread is the notion of effect.

Listening to the album through the prism of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* colors one's perception of the songs, leading to the possibility of a thematic analysis based on the melodies, rhythms, and lyrics. Incidentally, the first song "Down Her Nest", through the use of lyrics including "injured wings", "tender", "desperate pain", "listening to a stranger", and "unpractical bird", reminds one of the beginning of the novel, with Emily and her father's observation of the nightingale in La Vallée. The song is rather melancholy, with a tint of optimism giving impetus to the album and foregrounding the heroine's voyage. The "chiseled and delicate baroque" (Michel 2010) second song, "A Man at the Frontier", is more misleading. Its first bars recall the voyage in the south of France and the various encounters made by Emily, but the subsequent bars start questioning the initial calmness of the song, mostly through the lyrics. Thus, the "infinity of lands you can't define" are echoed by the "voices kept inside", which hint at Emily's psychological struggles once out of her home and country. This instability is further enhanced by the arrival of what sounds like a violin (but is instead a superposition of three or four cello lines, as Jarry told me), easily associable to Montoni. Remembering the Radcliffean association of violins with Italy leads the listener of "A Man at the Frontier" to hear the cello line as the musical embodiment of the Italian *banditto*. The man at the frontier is, indeed, described as follows in the song:

"A man who's a gambler, a man at the frontier;
When a fire burns in hell, he stands behind;
Hidden in your nerves, your brain, your blood and mind
From his island of death, he shares his monster's side
He wants you to ruin her."

While the first line is reminiscent of Montoni, the following chorus is much darker and would rather describe Lucifer in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. From *banditto* to devil, these lyrics, nevertheless, warn the listener about the main source of evil, corroborated by the outro's breathtaking, terrifying rhythmic agitation and aided by the dissonance that precedes the final *rallentando*. These final chords enable a short transition towards a

much lighter song, “Before You Say Goodbye”, which through its very title evokes Emily’s farewell(s) with Valancourt. The guitar’s arpeggios are answered by the dancing harmony of the cello, and the overall atmosphere is calm and peaceful. The rhythms of the instrumental music echo other scenes of dancing and singing groups, and its harmony transmits the permeating happiness of the time the heroine and Valancourt spend together before their separation. If the album were to follow the unfolding of the novel’s events, this song could also be a reference to Emily’s numerous evenings spent longing for Valancourt’s return and going back in thought to happier times, and the song “Emily”, with similarly peaceful tones, also refers to “the places she had known before” through its lyrics, commenting on the walks of a stressed but bold heroine. Then comes “The Murder of our Neighbour”, which despite its title recalls the rhythms of the songs evoking dancing groups: its outro, in particular, stresses beats in a frantic manner, evoking a slightly stressful circular dance. After these scenes, the stay at Udolpho seems omitted, but its escape might be read through the title “From the Lair of the Desert’s King”, whose introduction through slow, shrill, and syncopated arpeggios on the guitar is followed by the joyful superposition of lighter arpeggios answering long-drawn cello notes. From the bleak, sad, and lonely castle to new walks in the Apennines or voyage back to France, instrumental music once again paints to the reader/listener the image of Emily’s going back to nature and society. In the novel, this voyage brings the heroine back to Chateau-le-Blanc among the Villeforts and the company of Monsieur Du Pont. In this light, “Some Magnificent Days”, which Morvan called a “period costume” song, with texts “in garb”, is a “majestic Renaissance caprice” (Michel 2010), the tale of a princess in a castle, which can only bring to mind the passages when the Villeforts comment on the past glory of Chateau-le-Blanc. The impression of ebb and flow of the song also embodies the narrative focal fluctuations in the novel, mimicking this confrontation of past and present. This impression of dialogue is further transmitted in the subsequent song, “The Magical Gloves of K. S.”, in which a high-pitched cello line accompanies the singer’s voice, recalling the similarities between Emily’s and Blanche’s points of view. Finally, the joyful, dancing pace of the introduction of this song, which one may equate to the balls and other entertainment of the Villeforts, is made to contrast with the much more melancholy song that follows, “On Your Back”. The merry horn concerts on the banks of the Mediterranean answer the forlorn and lyrical songs of Signora Laurentini and the calm but entrenched melancholy of Monsieur Du Pont. Ultimately, with lyrics mentioning a prison, a desert, a fortress, vales, and mountains, as well as mental space, hid[ing], and visions of reality, and through instrumental music echoing several other songs of the album, “The Photograph of Gerry” provides a multifaceted conclusion to the work.

Eventually, readers of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when analyzing *Udolpho* through the prism of the novel, are given numerous arguments to justify the listening of the album as adaptation. Nonetheless, several key aspects could alert them that such a reading might prove wrong, especially when considering the titles of the songs and some of their lyrics (e.g., “Before You Say Goodbye”, in which the singer talks about someone named Gabrielle). Indeed, this album is not an adaptation of Ann Radcliffe’s novel, but a compilation of songs whose inspirations are varied and bear only a thin link to the Gothic. Although Morvan wrote that references in various songs are “traces, memories, transformed by fancy¹⁸”, and even if he was reading several Gothic novels at the time when he wrote the album, he gave it the name “Udolpho” a posteriori, only because it “sounded well”. This idea of “sounding well”, connected to that of effect, was central to Marc Morvan’s songwriting. Benjamin Jarry praised Morvan’s “haiku-like” songwriting, and even called his colleague the “ayatollah of minimalism”: every word, line, or melody was kept when he deemed that “it made its effect”. Morvan’s logic of effect also reads through his writing process: because his level of English was not optimal, Morvan wrote his songs in a radically different manner

from his French songwriting. In English, he started with the melody and the sound effect he intended, before finding words which might rhyme with the phonemes he had in mind and match the number of syllables of his melodic lines. This made the composition difficult and explains the sometimes less coherent texts: effect took precedence over ideas in the music and lyrics. The reader is then led to consider the effect of melody rather than text, explaining my unfortunate equation of songs with scenes from the novel.

Despite his quest for minimalism, Marc Morvan avoided what Jarry called “forbidden melodies”, melodic lines which might be reminiscent of others. This goes singularly against Ann Radcliffe’s writing, which was, on the contrary, replete with references, quotations, and imitations of styles and topics from other celebrated writers, including William Shakespeare, the Graveyard Poets, John Milton, and William Gilpin, to quote only a few. Jarry praises Morvan’s ability to always “take a step aside”, to which I will add his capacity to create universality through a very individual and specific way of composing and writing. As concerns composition, Morvan’s main resource is again his voice, perhaps because, as Matt Foley singles out about Radcliffe herself, his “melodious voice coheres with James Beattie’s understanding of the aesthetic pleasure derived from the ‘natural voice’ as ‘the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all musical instruments’” (Foley 2023, p. 21). As Jarry explained, Morvan usually sings the melodies or lines he wants other musicians to perform on their instruments: his voice is, therefore, at the start of both melody, lyrics, and harmony. Like in Ann Radcliffe’s novel, music leads to music: singing (or the hearing of songs and other musical performances) anticipates musical composition and composition anticipates new music and singing. In the album, the cello bears strong similitude to the lutes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a particularly striking and recognizable musical support, playing the third note to accompany the guitar, with more lyrical flights to assist the voice. Its versatility confers it a distinct tint and specific quality that enables it to stand out as an instrument of dialogue within the songs, despite its original role as an accompaniment. As Jarry tells his cello students, “some cellos sing, some cellos walk or dance”, and his instrument enables him to create a vast array of effects inspired by classic 50s and 60s rock music and to get out of the usual decorative “window dressing” folk cello he is used to hearing. Making vibratos and two-chord melodies allowed him to create floating effects, while at other times he manages to play what I assimilated to a violin or to intentionally sound like a barytone saxophone, notably in “The Murder of our Neighbour”.

Like incantations, his cello lines have something “magical”, able to “strike the most sensitive strings of musical emotion¹⁹” (Conte 2009). Morvan stressed the fact that there was always a form of “enchantment” when he played with Jarry, that a *je ne sais quoi* came out of each of their rehearsals and concerts. This, I believe, is another justification of what I thought was the adaptative aspect of their album: their enchantment is at once scene-evoking and emotion-provoking, two aspects which are intrinsically linked to Radcliffe’s understanding of music. As all music, it is not *picture*-evoking in the strictest sense, but its expressivity and associationist power enable it to evoke universal scenes of dance, pursuit, observation, and walking, as well as strong feelings of stress, longing, melancholy, and joy. This is the dual aspect intrinsic to music, according to Oliver Sacks: “Music, uniquely among the arts, is both completely abstract and profoundly emotional. It has no power to represent anything particular or external, but it has a unique power to express inner states or feelings. Music can pierce the heart directly; it needs no mediation” (Sacks 2018, p. 329). Morvan and Jarry tangentially alluded to this same aspect, the former by explaining that though emotion is never the focal point of his music, there is not a song he wrote without a tint of melancholy as a result of his equation of music with the language of dreams: it is through verbalization that dreams come to sound, and similarly through music that sensation (and emotion) is given acoustic existence.

Incidentally, although *Udolpho* is not an adaptation of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the hearer/reader finds strong similarities between the two artworks due to common drives and focal subjects. Chamber folk music is a medium that intrinsically relies on peaceful melancholy, with instruments recalling the simple arrangements of the vocal song and instrumental accompaniment present in Radcliffe's novel, adding a focus on tension and effect reminiscent of Gothic writing's insistence on the triggering of strong emotions. Like Radcliffe, Morvan and Jarry attempted to present music "as a pure outburst of sensibility and emotion that speaks directly to the heart" (Dubois 2015, p. 184). This intention to create what Morvan calls "heart-piercing" music even led them to keep original, flawed first recordings instead of their re-recordings of some songs. They quoted the example of "On Your Back", whose initially poor-quality recording of the cello line (which included the sound of buses braking outside) was eventually preferred to subsequent recordings, which lacked the spontaneity of the first take and, more importantly, were deemed not sad enough. In the end, though emotion was not the point of origin in Morvan and Jarry's songwriting, contrary to Radcliffe's heroine's, it still was given specific importance in the final recording. Emotion was also a cornerstone of most reviews of the album: Jarry quoted one in particular that criticized the album, calling it "lenifying", an adjective that contributes to linking the album and novel through an ability to soothe the hearer/reader. The album was critically acclaimed and seen as a much-sought-for return to simplicity and expressivity, enabling listeners to let their thoughts evade in the "imaginary of Ireland's lakes and sometimes tormented valleys" (Nicolas 2009), or in the steps of Emily St Aubert, Valancourt, and Monsieur Du Pont, through hardships, tension, and dancing. Whether the associations raised are triggered by readers' expectations or by other traces and emotions colored by other individual experiences and imagination, *Udolpho* strikes as a strong example of music's expressivity and picturesqueness and as an apt adaptation of the novel, although unintentionally.

5. Conclusions: Universality of Effect and Singular Effectivity

This study, through the questioning of what makes an adaptation, and more specifically what makes a faithful adaptation, raised the main issues that have animated music theory since its beginnings, namely imitation and expression. While *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was published at a time when theorists endeavored to redefine the hierarchization of arts concomitantly to that of the senses, the novel does not seem to opt for one treatise over another on this respect, but rather works as a particularly striking reconciliation of all sister arts. To answer my initial question, focusing on the acoustic credibility of Radcliffe's descriptions misses the point: her music and poetry are not really disengaged, despite apparent contradictions; they are involved in a much wider dialogue between all arts. Such association of painting, poetry, and music enhances the vacuousness of questioning the aptness of verbal language in commenting on one art or another: despite language's entrenched referentiality in the visual field, its shortcomings in describing sound effects and music may in fact point to the very picturesque quality of all arts through their imitative aspect. Language indeed *can* paint the strength of emotion, passion, and the idea of music, but cannot perfectly mimic other arts, just as music cannot technically paint or speak, yet provides a powerful picture-evoking and speech-assimilated language of dream, imagination, and emotion. This is what the sound- and muscscapes of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* point towards, thereby answering the second issue I raised in my introduction: they contribute to creating a universal mood-music quality that permeates all types of adaptations and fixations of sound, including song and radio dramatization. My third question regarding the aspects of the novel that should be given more attention by adaptors in the end proves vain, for it fails to tackle the inherent difference between these media. All

three cases studied show strengths and weaknesses in their ability to adapt the novel, but they more interestingly “create something new by making a step aside” (Jarry) and convey similar emotions and impressions built on associations of ideas. They are all Radcliffe-like yet not like Radcliffe, all pointing, like her, to the central question of hearer perception and reception as central to the creative process, yet doing it, unlike her, through media and sound choices pertaining to their own individual and specific signature and effect.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Peter Le Huray and James Day’s *Music and Aesthetic in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* offers a complete analysis of the evolution in musical concepts and trends of the period. It comments both the authors’ biographies and their views, and provides extracts from their best-known and most influential treatises on music. The introduction constitutes a thorough historiography of the key concepts that triggered such a profusion of writings on music.
- ² I prefer using this expression rather than “pre-romantic”, since Radcliffe’s writing was not only published before romanticism: it shares most of the characteristics which would define Romanticism a few decades after the publication of *Udolpho*.
- ³ Pierre Dubois wrote extensively on the improbability of instrument combinations and other rendering of musical effects through Radcliffe’s writing (e.g., Dubois 2015, p. 201 about the lute).
- ⁴ An interest in arts and aesthetic philosophy which is made especially clear by the profusion of sources she quoted as epigraphs, and which was also documented by the most prominent criticism on Radcliffe. See for instance Rictor Norton’s *Mistress of Udolpho* (Norton 1999) and Robert Miles’s *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress* (Miles 1995).
- ⁵ As Dubois explains, the “pipe and tabor” were seen as “unsophisticated, primitive musical instruments such as can be played in the remotest countryside” (Dubois 2015, p. 133). To which he adds: “Radcliffe attempts an orchestration of the situations depicted by summoning up instruments that tend to belong either to an Arcadian, pastoral world or to a distant past. Pipes, violins, tabors and horns frequently appear, while the lute, which was barely played anymore in her day, is mentioned in all her novels.” (Dubois 2015, p. 164).
- ⁶ What I mean here is really an opposition between what Isabella van Elferen, Frits Noske and Pierre Dubois (as well as Angela Archambault (Archambault 2016), to a certain extent) analyzed by commenting upon the function of music in gothic texts (meaning their usefulness to the narrative, their reference by narrators mostly for narrative and decorative purposes), and a musicalization which would infuse the whole text through the overarching lyricism of prose writing, the manipulation of sentence rhythm, of words’ assonances and alliterations (focused on the rhyming aspects of language), as well as through the novel’s alternation of moods and rhythms mimicking the various movements of an actual musical piece. This is a particular focus of my PhD dissertation.
- ⁷ On this note, Ingrid Horrocks justly reads the poetry quoted and composed in the novel (epigraphs, quotations within the text, and compositions by Ann Radcliffe) as a form of musical “accompaniment” to individuals in the narrative (Horrocks 2008, p. 508).
- ⁸ On this note, Malcolm Budd wrote extensively about the correlation between music and emotion, and the importance of imitation and expression in its conceptualization. (Budd 1985)
- ⁹ Michel Chion explains that a word directly mimics the sonic properties of the sound it evokes (Chion 1998, p. 62).
- ¹⁰ I am intentionally using R. Murray Schafer’s concepts here: “Signals are foreground sounds and they are listened to consciously”, “soundmark [...] refers to a community sound which is unique”; “keynote” is “the anchor or fundamental tone” (Schafer 1977, pp. 9–10).
- ¹¹ A figure who remains interesting in comparison to Ann Radcliffe, since Susanna Rowson was the author of the first American best-seller, *Charlotte Temple* in 1791. Their fame and success, at rather similar times, makes them two of the most prominent writers of the turn of the nineteenth century.
- ¹² I could not find much information about this Mr Webster, who also sang other songs by John Bray and other composers at that time. He notably argued with Bray on the composition of *The Indian Princess*.
- ¹³ The narrative passages are attributed to Emily St Aubert, who speaks in the first-person singular.
- ¹⁴ Several other scenes could be cited here, associated with different musical styles and instruments, among which a flute and guitar, a cello, to which may be added church bells evoking death or bird songs recalling happy memories.
- ¹⁵ Benjamin Jarry and Marc Morvan each granted me an interview to talk about their album, on 27 February and 2 March 2025.

- ¹⁶ The only exception being “The Magical Gloves of K. S.”, which comprised around forty superposed lines.
- ¹⁷ Although the source is not academic, nor even journalistic, the content of the page are particularly useful, since they provide a bare perspective on the album, freed from academic or musicologist bias and focusing only on a personal reaction to the songs.
- ¹⁸ “Il s’agit toujours de traces, de souvenirs, transformés par l’imaginaire”. This quotation comes from a document Marc Morvan wrote to explain the references in his songs. The document is no longer available online.
- ¹⁹ I translated from the French original: “Il n’y a rien de plus magique qu’un trait de violoncelle, cet instrument à la fois chaleureux, mystérieux, élégant, ténébreux. Il n’y a rien d’équivalent pour habiller tout l’espace, emplir les silences et faire vibrer les cordes les plus sensibles de l’émotion musicale”.

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ISBN 978-3-7258-5320-5