

Literature and Music: Junctions, Intersections, Misconceptions (Introduction)

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This set of thematic articles, entitled *Literature and Music*, continues the investigation of the inner ties that connect literature with other arts. In this manner, it seeks to respond to contemporary trends in the arts, characterized by the fusion of individual artistic practices and extension into the spheres of science, politics, and economics. Because the mutual links between literature and music appear particularly strong, we sought to shed light on these junctions and intersections from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining musicological and comparative analysis.

Arguably, the most typical examples of combining these two art forms in music are the various forms of musical theater (opera, musical drama, instrumental theatre, and scenic compositions), Lieder, symphonic poems, and various vocal-instrumental genres. On the other hand, musical elements enter literature most obviously in attempts to musicalize poetry as well as in concrete and sound poetry. Furthermore, the field of mutual influences and inspiration is also broad; there are numerous instances of musical inspiration for literary writing and vice versa. In general, it is possible to address such problems in two ways: by working out theoretical parallels between the two arts, and by examining existing outstanding amalgams of literature and music.

From the phenomenological perspective, literature and music are two types of art that differ in the material they use as well as in the way they treat this material. Nevertheless, there are strong commonalities between literature and music both at the level of the material itself and at the level of its treatment: sound is not only a basic element of music, but also a very important part of the literary sign (i.e., a sound image viewed as a signifier since Saussure), and the musical part of literature also penetrates the semantic level through intonation. Something similar can also be seen in formal structures: musical-analytical units such as the phrase, period, or caesura show a clear resemblance to (literary) rhetoric, and the three most prominent levels of language (i.e., phonetic, syntactic, and semantic) could easily be translated into discussions on music. However, these parallels already reveal a basic difference. The semantic level is crucial for

literature, whereas in music it is hardly possible to grasp and describe it in verbal terms. The musical-semantic level is extremely elusive, and so it is very difficult to ascribe any primary, fixed meanings to music. In contrast, even in its most radical formal experiments, literature is irreducible to its phonetic dimension. Hence, the types of linguistic and musical signs, as well as the quality of their meanings, are basically incongruent. Music can influence literary authors and even motivate them—just like the literary impulse can trigger the creation of a musical work. However, the search for a joint mechanism that can translate between the two arts often turns into epistemological impressionism—which, however, does not mean that this type of discrepancy cannot lead to numerous, often successful and innovative, works of art.

This collection of articles on literature and music is introduced by a survey of various contacts between literature and music, which are labeled “collisions.” In this survey, Gregor Pompe concludes that parallels do not actually run between literature and music, but rather between music as art and language as a material substratum of literature. In his analysis of the art of the troubadours, one of the earliest amalgams of literature and music, Boris A. Novak points out that such a connection must be understood with the addition of a third art: dance. The logic of dance gave the poetry of the troubadours its formal framework. Novak continues by analyzing the perfect isomorphism between the stanza and the melody.

Such early amalgams between both art forms were forgotten in the nineteenth century, which was marked by the two very opposite *Zeitgeist* streams: on the one hand, the development of the sciences (especially Darwin’s theory of evolution) was bringing empiricism to the fore, and on the other hand the pronounced cult of the arts was gaining distinct metaphysical features. Darwin, for example, was an important source for Wilhelm Tappert’s conception of “roaming melodies” (*wandernde Melodien*). With the help of this concept, John Neubauer demonstrates that the melodies of early nineteenth-century folk songs have no fixed identities—they are, in Tappert’s words, “roaming tourists,” ceaselessly changing and adapting to new circumstances. Matjaž Barbo, however, examines the legacy of the nineteenth-century metaphysical tradition: in the opus of Robert Schumann, music acquires new meaning and becomes a carrier of an elevated artistic mission. According to Schumann, this hidden dimension, which opens up the transcendental vastness of the artistic meta-world, can only be revealed to a very sensitive listener.

Strong ties between literature and music can be further exemplified with the alleged influence of Mallarmé's utopian project *Le Livre* on the development of the strictly serial compositional technique, typical of, for example, the opus of Pierre Boulez after the Second World War. However, with the help of Hans Zeller's article, Nikša Gligo reveals the evasive side of this connection: it turns out that many elements in Mallarmé's concept are not as close to serialism as they are to aleatoric compositional concepts, based on chance operation (typical of Boulez's *Third Piano Sonata*). A similar paradox is addressed by Andraž Jež, who rejects a common belief about the rejection of the mimetic concept within twentieth-century modernism—as an argument for his thesis, he analyzes photorealism and *musique concrète*.

Marijan Dović establishes parallels between two highly developed improvisatory traditions: the poetry of Basque bertsolaris and jazz music. Dović reveals several common points as well as a number of important differences, maintaining that both forms of improvisation are not primarily a matter of elusive inspiration, but should instead be understood as art in terms of Aristotelian skill (*techné*). Irena Novak Popov presents a segment of Slovenian culture in Venetian Slovenia and analyses the annual local Venetian Slovenia Song Festival. This festival has stimulated the development of both musical and literary expression within an oppressed community that lacked its own educated elite.

More specific relationships between literature and music are revealed by Miryana Yanakieva, Radu Vancu, and Gašper Troha. Yanakieva suggests that music is often condemned by the authors that love it the most. She exemplifies her thesis with works by Robert Musil and Pascal Quinard. Although the lives of both writers were closely linked to music, both have also accused it of grave moral sins. For both of them, musical topics serve as a kind of a (musical) instrument for discussing and analyzing literary issues. Vancu examines the works of two important confessional poets: John Berryman with his deep interest in Bach, and Mircea Ivănescu with his lifelong obsession with Chopin. He reveals an interesting paradox: both poets were enthusiastic about the music of the pre-modern composers, which means that harmonic, "Apollonian" sound structures obviously influenced the disharmonic, Dionysian psychology and poetics of confessional poets. Troha examines Andrej Hieng's radio play *The Return of Cortes*, which was adapted into an opera libretto seven years later by the composer Pavel Šivic. **Comparing both texts, Troha notices important changes that can be interpreted as influences of the opera genre on dramatic text.** Although Hieng's play can be interpreted as an existentialist drama that builds on the awareness of metaphysical nihilism, Šivic is

much more concerned with preservation of the religious system of values. It seems that the form of musical theatre somehow rejects the possibility of presenting the metaphysical nihilism that is typical of modernistic texts of the twentieth century. This observation sheds interesting light on the relationship between literature and music, and also testifies once again that one should remain attentive not only to the junctions between the two arts, but also to the essential differences between them.