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Anna Opiela, *La Musique dans la pensée et dans l'œuvre de Stendhal et de Nerval*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015. 332 pp. €60.00 (cl). ISBN 978-2-7453-2869-4.

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The field of music and literature studies has developed significantly, in line with the major critical advances in cultural studies, since the *l'homme-et-l'œuvre* survey approach adopted by Léon Guichard in his landmark monographs *La Musique et les lettres au temps du romantisme* (Paris: PUF, 1955) and *La Musique et les lettres en France au temps du wagnérisme* (Paris: PUF, 1963). Following some significant attempts at linking the thematics of music to close textual analysis, such as Suzanne Bernard's *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1959) and Joycelyne Loncke's *Baudelaire et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1975), it was David Hillery's *Music and Poetry in France from Baudelaire to Mallarmé* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1980) which heralded a new way of reading nineteenth-century French writers' interest in music. Hillery's approach was more circumspect, less reverential, than that of his predecessors, and contributed to our understanding of post-Romantic French poetry not as a fixed, stable entity but rather, as an unstable, artificial construct that played with an equally unstable, shifting notion of music in its process of self-analysis and precarious self-definition.

This mode of reading blossomed in the 1980s thanks to the pioneering work of Lawrence Kramer, author of *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), which harnessed the deconstructive potential of new critical theories, and a bold interdisciplinary agenda owing as much to musicology as to literary analysis. This inspired further excellent studies in which the relationship between literature and music emerges as a productive source of hesitations over the very meaning and function of both, such as Margaret Miner's *Resonant Gaps: Between Baudelaire and Wagner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), Mary Breatnach's *Boulez and Mallarmé: A Study in Poetic Influence* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), Peter Dayan's *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), Joseph Acquisto's *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and Helen Abbott's *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé: Voice, Conversation and Music* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2009). These readings, which thrived in the comparative critical tradition of the U.S. and the U.K., have done much to make music and literature studies an exciting, ambitious and theoretically diverse field in which the questions raised by textual difficulties go far beyond speculation about an author's musical knowledge and tastes, and their possible influence on the writing process.

The present study, based on a doctoral thesis awarded by the University of Warsaw in 2011, joins Paul Bénichou's *Nerval et la chanson folklorique* (Paris: José Corti, 1970) and François Brunet's *Théophile Gautier et la musique* (Paris: Champion, 2006) in the long line of studies in French devoted to nineteenth-century writers and music, and it benefits from critical engagement with U.S., French, and Polish traditions. Anna Opiela proposes to explore how the musico-literary ideas of Stendhal and Nerval evolve in the first half of the century, the ways in which they articulate some of the central ideas of

Romanticism, and the influence of their passion for music on their literary and non-fictional writing (p. 9).

Opiela begins her opening three chapters on theory and methodology with a useful overview of eighteenth-century meta-artistic discourse in France and Germany on music and how, during the nineteenth century, it came to occupy its privileged position in the hierarchy of the arts. With reference to Rousseau, Dubos, Condillac, Chabanon and Diderot, she identifies the process by which instrumental music was valorised precisely for an absence of language and images, and its incapacity for explicit reference: “la musique semble [...] dépasser la peinture car, au lieu de représenter les objets, elle traduit leur essence même dans le langage des sentiments” (p. 19). In Germany, thanks to Herder, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Hoffmann, music moved away from a mimetic model, in which imitative harmony aimed to reproduce the sounds of nature, towards that favourite theme of Romanticism, the desire to “traduire l’indicible” (p. 21). As such, music was conceptualized in Stendhal’s and Nerval’s time as a pure essence with a transcendent, metaphysical dimension, mixing the sentimental and the spiritual, *jouissance* and *volupté*, and playing a central role in the vogue for identifying mysterious correspondences between the arts.

Chapter two explores twentieth-century musico-literary theory in France and the U.S., beginning with two seminal texts: Etienne Souriau’s *La Correspondance des arts: éléments d’esthétique comparée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1947) and Calvin Brown’s *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948). This comparison highlights one of the many tensions at the heart of the field, between Souriau’s valorisation of music’s representational vagueness and resistance to interpretation, and Brown’s call for greater terminological rigour, and fewer woolly metaphors, in the analysis of music’s presence in literature. This tension underpins Opiela’s study, as she confronts the difficulty of applying analytically rigorous, quasi-scientific frameworks to diverse manifestations of music that, in the literary works themselves, often feature for their elusive qualities. After an overview of attempts by U.S. critics Steven Paul Scher and Walter Moser to grapple with this methodological problem, Opiela takes her critical framework from Polish scholar Andrzej Hejmej, who proposes three broad categories of the musical in literature, in increasing order of sophistication and complexity: I (sound patterns in the text), II (the presence of music as a theme) and III (the use of musical forms and techniques in the structure of the text).

It is a significant feature of Opiela’s study that she offers an overview of musico-literary research across several generations of Polish criticism from the 1930s to the present, introducing us to names unknown to most readers, such as Tadeusz Szulc who dismissed any potential analogies between music and literature, arguing for the musical lens to be removed from literary analysis altogether (p. 78). While this material is refreshingly unfamiliar, Polish critics’ thinking evolves along lines similar to those of their Western counterparts, moving from a focus in the 1950s on musical themes in literature towards analysis, in the 1980s, of quasi-musical forms and structures in the text, as they grapple along the way with rather abstract questions of terminology. Indeed, given the sophistication of some of the thinking, it is a shame to see poetic musicality reduced to sound patterns, or what Hejmej calls level I: “Comme remarquent la plupart des chercheurs, l’essentiel de la musicalité poétique réside dans les effets phoniques qui reproduisent, en quelque sorte, les éléments constitutifs de la musique” (p. 87). On the whole, however, Opiela’s method is a healthy and stimulating mixture of the scientific and the impressionistic, and she argues convincingly that the application of musical metaphors to literature, while an imprecise science, is nonetheless a necessary evil (p. 109). Hejmej’s level III is her preferred approach, and she closes her opening section with his notion of a “partition littéraire” (p. 111) that she identifies in texts such as Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés” or novels by Michel Butor and George Sand. Here, though, Opiela cannot avoid the familiar pitfalls of musico-literary analysis, namely vague parallels which are difficult to prove objectively, and observations on structure, composition or inspiration whose contribution to the literary interpretation is slightly unclear, as in these three examples: “la structure du texte rappelle celle d’une composition musicale” (p. 116); *Consuelo* constitutes

“le roman musical par excellence” since “tout le roman pourrait être considéré comme un opéra” (p. 116); and “il serait difficile de repérer les modèles musicaux dont s’est inspirée George Sand pour composer son roman, tant ils paraissent nombreux” (p. 117). The carefully imprecise verbs (“rappelle”, “pourrait”, “s’est inspirée”) skirt around the difficulty of identifying the relationship between musical metaphor and literary text with any precision, a problem that cuts to the heart of such readings and asks awkward questions of their *raison d’être*.

Part two is devoted to Stendhal, the musical dilettante who wrote biographies of Haydn, Rossini and Mozart, loved vocal music and *bel canto* especially, and wrote of the intense physical *jouissance* which music gave him. Opiela attempts to identify aspects of Stendhal’s writing which might be ascribed to different musical influences, suggesting that from Mozart he takes inspiration for the “bouleversement romantique” of his *Racine et Shakespeare* (p. 135), from Cimarosa a blend of comedy and tenderness—“la transposition de l’opéra bouffé sur le terrain de la littérature était le moyen de réaliser son rêve musical” (p. 140)—and from Rossini a joyful energy: “Il semble que le romancier ait essayé d’appliquer à l’organisation temporelle de ses textes le rythme des opéras rossiniens” (p. 145). A real strength of this study is the wide variety of close readings of key passages from literary, non-fictional and autobiographical texts, and the skilful interpretation of textual detail, as Opiela argues that music plays several key roles in Stendhal’s writing, from structure, theme and setting to characterisation and plot. Yet despite the scientific, structured approach to the analysis, which is carefully prepared in the first third of the book, the final result tends sometimes towards the impressionistic. If, as Opiela suggests, *La Chartreuse de Parme* is “le roman par lequel Stendhal réalise son rêve musical” (p. 153), how far can such an idea take us towards a deeper understanding of the text as literature? How far can it be proven through analysis? And in a nineteenth-century context where terms such as “literature” and “music” undergo constant redefinition, is it possible to ascribe to the term “musical” a stable value? Does it denote formal structures, an analysis of music’s effect on the characters, a deconstruction of referentiality, or all or none of these? Such interpretative impressionism is one of the major dangers of this kind of interdisciplinary work, and finding precise, convincing readings, as Opiela frequently does, constitutes one of the field’s most rewarding challenges.

Similarly, when Opiela suggests that “Stendhal cherche à créer un certain rythme intérieur dans ce paysage pour ensuite y faire résonner la musique” (p. 153), we might want to analyse that process in more detail, and yet the terms in which it is expressed are necessarily vague. If music is transposed into the novel in the characters’ voices, in the rhythms and intonations of their conversations, in the sounds of nature, or in descriptions of musical performances, what might that add to our understanding of textual mechanisms beyond “différents effets sonores qui créent le charme des scènes particulières” (p. 177)? Indeed, musical analogies can risk seeming rather arbitrary when applied to techniques which literary analysis already has the critical vocabulary to discuss on its own terms, as when Opiela writes of *Lucien Leuwen*, “Grâce à l’harmonie parfaite des propos, cet échange imaginaire entre les personnages s’apparente à un air répétitif chanté en duo”, and claims that “une tendance à faire répéter les mots ou les phrases [...] crée un effet théâtral ou plutôt opératique” (p. 195), or “Stendhal travaille en improvisateur et c’est pourquoi son style abonde en ellipses et en litotes” (p. 196). Yet this is no fault of Opiela’s, since as she demonstrates, Stendhal himself liberally applies musical analogies to his own writing, and we see Nerval, in *Angélique*, comparing his storytelling to a symphony (p. 302). As such, we are left with the problem of reading into these texts a typically Romantic notion of music, linked to picturesque ideas of grandeur and the sublime, of *l’ineffable* and *l’idéal*, which no longer sits comfortably within the post-structural interdisciplinary framework of contemporary music and literature studies. Thus, Opiela is forced into a rather limited conclusion: that Stendhal appeals to a musical knowledge on his readers’ part that is indispensable to the aesthetic pleasure of appreciating the musico-narrative palimpsests of his literary texts (p. 209).

Part three deals with Nerval, whose critical writings on music deal with comic opera as well as Mozart, Rossini and Beethoven. Central to Opiela’s analysis is the way in which memories—both real and

illusory—are evoked by music, especially popular song, “cet emblème du pays maternel” (p. 248). Opiela suggests that, since Nerval’s mother died when he was young, song functions as “un ‘outil’ indispensable dans le mécanisme de la remémoration” (p. 245), making of his writing a kind of Orphic quest where the lost voice of the absent mother is recreated through a series of enchanting female voices. This maternal dimension, Opiela argues, also occurs in Stendhal who, thanks to “l’image maternelle inhérente à la musique” (p. 9), attempts to resurrect his own lost mother, of Italian origin, via his love of Italian music: “l’amour de la musique vocale traduit celui de la mère, aussi bien dans l’aspect du plaisir physique car l’effet de la voix pourrait être comparé à une caresse” (p. 127). This biographical approach seems curiously old-fashioned after the theoretical rigour of the opening chapters, but Opiela is on safer ground with her readings of the role played by music, song and the voice in transfiguring the experience of time and space in Nerval’s texts. The analysis of his “prose musicale” (p. 290), however, in texts such as *Promenades et souvenirs*, *Les Filles du feu* and *Aurélia*, relies perhaps too heavily on sound patterns, which are, after all, not only a musical device but also a literary one. Indeed, when Opiela suggests “les phrases dont la construction étonne par sa simplicité, font penser à la composition d’une ballade”, or when she identifies “des dialogues qui, par les reprises des mots et le rythme des phrases, se transforment en une sorte de chanson” (p. 291), she settles for a loose parallelism which she is careful to avoid elsewhere. There is surely a difference between Nerval’s quoting fragments of popular song within the narrative, which is a clearly identifiable and measurable technique—“les airs anciens s’imposent de façon à envahir le flux de la narration” (p. 298)—and the suggestion that he writes his prose as if it were a different genre altogether: “[Nerval] arrive à construire son œuvre à la manière d’une chanson populaire” (p. 297).

After such a wide-ranging exploration of the numerous ways in which it is possible to read literature musically, and of the significant challenges involved in identifying sufficiently rigorous questions to ask of the texts, it is perhaps inevitable that Opiela’s conclusion should gravitate towards the general in her appraisal of both authors: “la modernité de leur pensée musicale dépass[e] même celle de l’époque”, since they offer “une attitude très moderne en ce qui concerne la conception de la littérature” (pp. 305-6). Whereas, in her analysis, Stendhal performs “une transposition parfaite des sensations musicales à tous les niveaux de la structure romanesque”, Nerval appears as “un auditeur attentif chez qui les émotions musicales sont inséparables de la création poétique et la quête du soi” (p. 305). On the methodological level, Opiela’s contribution is to have identified uses of music in these texts which mostly correspond to Hejmej’s level II (musical subject matter), as well as some examples of level III (form and structure), which was the challenge she set herself: “Bien qu’il semble difficile voire impossible de recréer une partition musicale avec les moyens littéraires, cette idée apparaît comme un défi car elle fait élever les aspirations musicales de la littérature au plus haut degré” (p. 117). The fact that this notion of a “partition littéraire” remains so elusive and difficult to analyse proves the value of this stimulating and thorough study, which constitutes an energetic engagement with the field, and demonstrates both the risks and the potential gains of musico-literary analysis.

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