

Andrzej Hejmej

Music in Literature

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PETER LANG
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Introduction

The problem of “music in literature”, known for a long time to literary theorists as a matter of aesthetics, has for a few decades attracted the attention of comparatists particularly interested in interdisciplinary research¹. Despite this established interest, today it is impossible to bring clarity to the phenomena connected to music in literature – both due to the diversity of these phenomena occurring in different cultural realities, but also, and above all else, because of their different understandings. Divergent, disproportionate interpretations cause, in effect, the appearance that literary theorists’ proposals are exceptionally inconsistent. It is therefore necessary here to answer the most general questions possible, namely, what is meant by the phrase “music in literature”? This question is all the more justified when issues so varied in their essence appear. These are questions related to non-literary and musical influences, certain types of language formation, forms of thematising music, and interpretations of musical structures in literature or the existence of musical-literary intermedial constructs.

To immediately clarify the point of view adopted regarding the theoretical category “**music in literature**”², I take the view given by Steven Paul Scher (as have, likewise, most of today’s comparatists and literary theorists from Western Europe³). It defines a typology within musical and literary studies from one of the problem fields, which consists of three interdependent spheres of phenomena.

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- 1 The principal impulse for the development of this type of comparative research was Calvin S. Brown’s book, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* [1948], Athens–Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1963. A reprint of the book with a new introduction appeared in the 1980s during a moment of expansion in interdisciplinary comparative studies in Western Europe (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987).
 - 2 S. P. Scher, “Literature and Music,” in *Interrelations of Literature*, eds. J.-P. Barricelli, J. Gibaldi, New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1982, p. 237 (see also idem: “Notes Toward a Theory of Verbal Music,” in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 2 (1970): p. 151; “Literature and Music: Comparative or Interdisciplinary Study?,” in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 24 (1975): p. 38).
 - 3 See also: J.-L. Cupers, *Aldous Huxley et la musique: A la manière de Jean-Sébastien*, Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1985, p. 30; I. Piette, *Littérature et musique: Contribution à une orientation théorique (1970–1985)*, Namur: Presses Universitaires de Namur, 1987, p. 45; W. Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited. Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality,” in *Word and Music Studies. Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage*, eds. S. M. Lodato, S. Aspden, W. Bernhart, Amsterdam – New York: GA Rodopi, 2002, pp. 17 ff.

The first is combined with the sonic form of a literary text (in Scher's terms the "word music"), the second – with the widely understood constructionism of music in literature ("musical structures and techniques"), and the third – with all forms of literary systematising of music ("verbal music"). Thus, the same question of music in literature gains in the problematic sense of defined contours, and ceases to function in literary studies as an imprecise phenomenon commonly associated with intuitive or impressionist-metaphorical images⁴. The consequences of this are clear: resolution of the relations between specific literary texts and musical compositions, a musical-literary dependency, which becomes possible not only according to traditional categories such as inspiration, influence or analogies, but also in terms of intertextual studies – transposition, interference and coexistence.

Taking into account the perspective of interdisciplinary comparative studies and intertextual research, the moment of explaining various musical links, especially in the emerging modern literature, opens new possibilities of interpretation. Undoubtedly one of the most tantalising research tropes turns out to be confrontation of a literary text with the score (a musical work), which, in effect, will lead us to talk about the phenomenon of a **literary score**. Of course, the use of this term does not imply or attempt to introduce radical changes in the currently established terminology. Not does it mean that there will be a resignation from any of the problems of "music in literature". All throughout, the phenomena indicated by Steven P. Scher are constantly in the field vision. Grounds for deciding a research trope are purely pragmatic: as to interpret various literary texts in which the concept of a score plays an important role, it is perhaps easiest to show the evident realisation of "music in literature" (including intermedial constructs), as well as a realisation supported solely by conventionality and the author's rhetorical play with the interpreter.

I. Text – Score

The idea of "score", taken from the musicological dictionary, often appears in literary criticism discourse today despite the fact that, at first glance, it is difficult to identify with literature alone. In literary criticism, the word "score" is defined – on one side – as literary text. This definition is about a metaphor referring to a text and textuality placing it in the order of such concepts as "fabric", "network", "web" and similar. On the other hand, many specific literary realisations indicate their relationship with musical compositions or their musical nature in general.

4 See commentary by Stanisław Dąbrowski "«Muzyka w literaturze». (Próba przeglądu zagadnień)," in *Poezja*, 3 (1980): pp. 19–32.

The first case concerns purely theoretical proposals created by thinkers such as R. Barthes, P. Ricoeur, M. Butor.⁵ The question of the score *sensu largo* becomes a matter of interest in this book to the extent that it serves as an initial review of the issues and is useful to the arguments when analysing the chosen texts. I am interested in the second case, namely, the problem of intertextual relationships in literature occurring between a given literary text and a particular piece of music. In this way, there will be interpretative situations where the term “score” retains its proper musicological meaning in literary theory.

Very different problems appear when we try to see the results of the adoption of such a research perspective that is conditioned less through proposals (which within the field of traditionally defined aesthetics would be called studies in correspondence of arts) than by theories of intertextuality and intertextual models of interpretation in the field of reflection. The use of the term “score” in various interpretative contexts involves not only extraliterary and intersemiotic genological references and the existence of literary and musical palimpsest constructs⁶ (which represent a peripheral manifestation that gives way to Gérard Genette’s formula of “literature in the second degree”), but it also provokes many other views. Some of them being the graphic-phonetic or sound form of a given record (as in the case of texts with a connection to the avant-garde or neoavant-garde trends of the last century), the theoretical proposals defined by the author’s suggestions or comments, and the musical invention of the interpreter and their hypothetical musical interpretations. Undoubtedly today (at a time when the interest of literary critics in comparative literature, particularly musical-literary,

5 See, among others: R. Barthes, “La partition,” in idem, *S/Z*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1970, p. 35 (see English edition: R. Barthes, “The Full Score,” in idem, *S/Z: An Essay*, transl. R. Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, p. 28); P. Ricoeur, “Qu’est-ce qu’un texte?,” in idem, *Du texte à l’action. Essais d’herméneutique*, Vol. 2, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986, p. 153 (see English edition: P. Ricoeur, “What is a Text?,” in idem, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. K. Blamey, J. B. Thompson, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991, p. 119); M. Butor, “La partition,” in idem, *Improvisations sur Michel Butor. L’écriture en transformations*, Paris: Ed. La Différence, 1993, pp. 265–268 (see English edition: M. Butor, “Literature and Music,” in idem, *Improvisations on Butor: Transformation of Writing*, trans. E. S. Miller, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, pp. 172–189).

6 Here I am making reference to Genette’s famous palimpsest metaphor, mentioned by the intertextuality theorist for the first time in the essay “Proust palimpseste” (see G. Genette, *Figures I*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1966, pp. 39–67), later becoming the title of one of this author’s most significant publications: *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1982 (see English edition: G. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. C. Newman, C. Doubinsky, Lincoln – London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

is growing⁷) extensive commentary – because of the literary use of the term “score” – is equally tempting and attractive in the rhetorical sense, and in most cases, also raises certain suspicions, reasonable objections or, at best, a research scepticism⁸.

The consent found among literary scholars to sanction the existing state of affairs – to speak of the literary text as a “score” (thus to test the usefulness of the musicological description in literary studies) – is to some extent a result of authors’ intervention. There is no need to convince us that the contemporary artist that has the goal of strengthening (or legitimising) his justification of his views would willingly use the effect, as Friedrich Nietzsche would say, of the “tremendous paradox”⁹. Michel Butor, for example, referring to the tradition initiated in modern literature by Mallarmé and exposing the fact of a break with the conventions of the novel, does not hesitate at the turn of the XXI century to make the claim that: “The idea of text as a score leads to a new conception of literature”¹⁰ (the writer and theoretician of intertextuality indeed has some convincing arguments for such an original thesis). It is not difficult to predict the further consequences of this: Butor’s interpreters take his “dictionary” and comment on the author’s suggestions in the context of specific annotations (e.g. *6 810 000 litres d’eau*

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- 7 See, among others, the volume on French comparatists (*Littérature et musique dans la France contemporaine*, eds. J.-L. Backès, C. Coste, D. Pistone, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2001), and volumes published in the series “Word and Music Studies” (including *Word and Music Studies. Defining the Field*, eds. W. Bernhart, S. P. Scher, W. Wolf, Amsterdam – Atlanta: GA Rodopi, 1999; *Musico-Poetics in Perspective: Calvin S. Brown in Memoriam*, eds. J.-L. Cupers, U. Weisstein, Amsterdam – Atlanta: GA Rodopi, 2000; *Word and Music Studies. Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage*, op. cit.).
- 8 Moreover, this scepticism in research – as an integral feature of any comparative studies focused on musical and literary problems – results from the same understanding of “music in literature.” Characteristic doubts arise, among others, with Pierre Brunel: there is, on the one hand, the justifiable belief in the minimal possibilities of the use of music conventions in literature, on the other – the no less reasonable belief about certain manners of “writing music”. See P. Brunel, “Écrivains compositeurs,” in *Fascinations musicales. Musique, littérature et philosophie*, ed. C. Dumoulié, Paris: Les Editions Desjonquères, 2006, pp. 209–224.
- 9 Nietzsche said “One sometimes needs witty people so as to win them over to a proposition so that they may exhibit it only in the form of a tremendous paradox” (F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Vol. 1, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, par. 307, p. 164).
- 10 After the French “L’idée du texte comme partition aboutit à une conception nouvelle de la littérature” (M. Butor, *Improvisations sur Michel Butor. L’écriture en transformations*, op. cit., p. 267). See also English translation: *Improvisations on Butor: Transformation of Writing*, op. cit.

par seconde and *Réseau aérien*¹¹), and even try to formulate a general theory of text¹² in the taken optic. Examples of such behaviour in the case of contemporary literature are without doubt more numerous: reference of a written text to a musical score – this time with completely different reasons to those of the French writer – become a typical feature of the thinking of the sonorant poets (such as Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck and Michèle Métail) about a contemporary variant of oral literature: sound poetry. This fact, of course, provokes interpreters into a certain type of generalised opinions and not just in moments of interpreting sound text with such suggestive titles such as Bernard Heidsieck's *Poèmes-partitions*.

By indicating two characteristic behaviours of literary criticism provoked by Butor's theoretical concepts and the sonorant poets, bearing in mind the conditions of interpretation of some of Miron Białoszewski's writings (in particular *Imiesłów [Participle]*, a work from the Teatr Osobny¹³), I am not generalising or creating any interpretative rules; even more so, I am not overestimating the author's decisions. After all, the matter looks completely different in the situation, for example, of Bogusław Schaeffer, who takes a radically different position when compared with Michel Butor and the creators of sound poetry. It is well known that as a dramatist he shunned calling his own texts "theatrical scores"¹⁴ (no doubt in this matter the voice of the composer, music theorist, creator of graphic music scores overwhelms the voice of the dramatist) and that he criticises this interpretative practice. But it is also well known that this fact does not seem to trouble many commentators¹⁵, who name Schaeffer's writings as a "form of musical score", "theatrical score", "stage score", "dramaturgical score" ...

In such circumstances, I take into account the tension between *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*¹⁶ and proceed to the initial hypothesis;

11 See F. Rigal, *Butor: la pensée-musique. Précédé d'une lettre de Michel Butor*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, p. 244.

12 J.-C. Vareille, "Butor ou l'intertextualité généralisée," in *Le Plaisir de l'intertexte. Formes et fonctions de l'intertextualité: roman populaire, surréalisme, André Gide, Nouveau Roman*, eds. R. Theis, H. T. Siepe, Actes du colloque à l'Université de Duisburg, Frankfurt am Main – Bern – New York – Paris: Peter Lang, 1986, pp. 277–296.

13 Translator's note – Teatr Osobny can be translated in different ways; as 'Independent Theatre', 'Individual Theatre' and as 'Separate Theatre'. The original Polish name captures an aspect of all three and is used in the text hereafter.

14 "Nie mam elitarnych intencji," interview by Monika Kuc with Bogusław Schaeffer, in *Rzeczpospolita*, 277 (2004): p. 10.

15 See for example M. Karasińska, *Bogusława Schaeffera filozofia nowego teatru*, Poznan: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002, *passim*.

16 See U. Eco, "Overinterpreting Texts," in U. Eco, R. Rorty, J. Culler, Ch. Brooke-Rose, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. S. Collini, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 45–66. See also idem, "Between Author and Text," in *ibid.*, pp. 67–88.

interpretive ideas associated with “scores” *sensu largo* are usually an attempt to capture specificity of a given text and / or talk about textuality (inter alia by virtue of graphic, phonic or sound conditions, because of the nature of the avant-garde record, on account of postmodern bricolage). One of the interpretive ideas is spreading through the circles of contemporary literary criticism discourse with full approval of the authors (in the case of Butor); others – as revealed by even the most cursory insight into the reception of Schaeffer’s dramas – depart from the authors’ comments, become the result (if we could use such a phrase) of “private”, idiosyncratic interpretative practices. Undoubtedly it is impossible to resign from the context of various situations of literary criticism where the term “score” appears in the metaphorical, individually defined sense at the moment of here accomplishing certain theoretical judgments. However, in the perspective of intertextuality and other research possibilities, which are connected to *score sensu stricto*, there exists the least controversial use of the musicological term in literary studies. This is what I would like to pay special attention in the following chapters of the book.

Although this may be an obvious matter, the problem has been rarely noticed by our literary critics (also those involved with issues of intertextuality and intertextual phenomena). This problem being that a condition – or one of the conditions – of interpreting certain texts proves to be a score of a particular musical work. Interpretation of a text such as *Aria: Awaria*¹⁷ [*Aria: Failure/Emergency*] from the volume *Chirurgiczna precyzja* [*Surgical Precision*] by Stanisław Barańczak seems to be impossible without reaching for the score of *Don Giovanni*, without listening to and having familiarity with Mozart’s opera, particularly Donna Elvira’s aria, “Ah chi mi dice mai” (it is similar with interpreting Barańczak’s *Podróż zimowa* [*Winter Journey*]). Likewise, it cannot take place without Schubert’s *Winterreise*). Michel Butor’s reader *Dialogue avec 33 variations de Ludwig van Beethoven sur une valse de Diabelli* turns out to be somewhat hermetic without taking account of the structure of Beethoven’s *33 Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli*, Op. 120, and without drawing conclusions from the fact that the writer started his work with Beethoven’s score. Reading the work: *Tłumaczenia Szopena* [*Translations of Chopin*], which is called *Zakochana* (*Dzieło 7. Mazurek 2.*)¹⁸ [*In Love (Work 7. Mazurka 2.)*], in isolation from the *Mazurka in A minor* from Op. 7 happens today and is dangerous (axiological considerations decide this first and foremost). Perhaps it may even be impossible because without its context the “usefulness” of

17 Translator’s note – ‘Awaria’ means both ‘failure’ and ‘emergency’ in Polish, hence the title could be translated as ‘Aria: Failure/Emergency’. For the purpose of clarity the original title is used hereafter.

18 For ease of reading, the original Polish title will be used hereafter.

Chopin's compositions are obscured, as well as its particular meaning in a dialogue led by Kornel Ujejski with the Chopin interpreter – Leonia Wild. And so, the palimpsest character of the named literary texts determines the mode of reading, imposes an intertextual (intermedial) and also an intertextual model of interpretation. Choice of the intertextual perspective in the case of studying this kind of musical reference in literature may seem obvious, but nevertheless it involves that which should immediately be emphasised, along with its many dangers: the need for intrusion into the field of various intertextual phenomena and of the necessary revision of the theory of intertextuality.

II. “Classical” Theory of Intertextuality

The basic complications connected to the theories of intertextuality and even the usage of the term “intertextuality” are commonly known today¹⁹. To be as simple as possible, we may say that **intertextuality** is a category of thinking that is as much post-structuralist (J. Kristeva, R. Barthes), including deconstructive (J. Derrida) or deconstructionist (H. Bloom), as it is late structuralist (L. Jenny, G. Genette, M. Riffaterre, L. Dällenbach, R. Debray-Genette). Extremely individual ideas and definitions mean that we are unable in any way to reconcile the various research perspectives, which may be based on differing assumptions, into a single proposal. Some theorists have indeed consciously complicated our image of the matter, and even if we only mention Gérard Genette's deliberately unstable discourse, then his renaming of “intertextuality” to “architextuality” in *Introduction à l'architexte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979) and later to “transtextuality” in *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1982), and “paratextuality” (*Introduction à l'architexte*) to “hypertextuality” (*Palimpsestes*)²⁰, not to mention eccentric

19 In recent years several books have been released in which the authors attempt to organise the issues of intertextuality in various combinations, including: A.-C. Gignoux, *Initiation à l'intertextualité* (Paris: Ellipses, 2005); M. Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); T. Samoyault, *L'Intertextualité. Mémoire de la littérature* (Paris: Nathan Université, 2001); G. Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000).

20 Definitions of intertextual phenomena, repeatedly modified by Genette, raised criticism and sparked disputes. See, for example, Michał Głowiński's comments “O intertekstualności,” in *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 4 (1986): pp. 77–100 (also in *Nowe problemy metodologiczne literaturoznawstwa*, eds. H. Markiewicz, J. Sławiński, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1992, pp. 185–212; idem, *Prace wybrane*, Vol. 5: *Interekstualność, groteska, parabola: szkice ogólne i interpretacje*, ed. R. Nycz, Cracow: Universitas, 2000, pp. 5–33).