

Article received on December 12th 2016

Article accepted on December 12th 2016

UDC: 821.111(71)-96

78:111.852

Geraldine Finn*

Department of Philosophy, Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

SETTING MUSIC TO POETRY AND PROSE

Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being

1. There's more than one way of skinning a cat . . .

If one wants to take the event named 'music' into account one must write, recount, demonstrate in another fashion, one must take the risk of a formal adventure

The most difficult thing is the invention of the tone, and with the tone, of the scene that can be staged, that you can let be staged, the pose that adopts you as much as you adopt it

Setting music to poetry and prose

Without mimeticism, but while incorporating in some way the other's signature.

With some luck, another text can begin to take shape, another event, irreducible to either the author or the work

About which nonetheless one should speak as faithfully as possible¹

2. About which . . .

All round from outside, as compass it *about*, he is *about* my path, beat *about* the bush

* Author contact information: finng@sympatico.ca

All round from a centre, as look or lay *about* you

Somewhere round, as lie *about*, hang *about*, the fields *about* Oxford, people or objects *about* us, have not a penny *about* me

Here and there, as small pox is *about*, move or order *about*, he put the tale *about*, I was much put *about* (distracted), dotted *about* the fields, man *about* town

Near in number, scale, degree, &c., as *about* half, *about* fifty, *about* right, *about* midnight, *about* my size

Facing round, as right *about*, *about* turn, the wrong way *about*, put *about* (the ship) or go *about*

Round a party, as take turns *about*, read verse *about*

Occupied with, as *about* my father's business, send *about* his business, what are you *about*, to go *about*, to do, am *about* to do

In connexion with, as quarrels *about*, *about* trade, something wrong *about* it

Circuitously, as he went a long way *about*, I brought it *about*, it came *about*²

Setting music to poetry and prose

No one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead³

3. Nonetheless one should speak as faithfully as possible . . .

Without mimeticism

While incorporating in some way

The other's signature

I cite

I para-cite

There's a certain Slant of light

Winter afternoons

That oppresses, like the Heft

*Of Cathedral Tunes*⁴

I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me⁵

There is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo⁶

Language is everything
Since it is the voice of no one
Since it is the very voice of the things
The waves and the forest⁷
Forgive me – for speaking – in broken music⁸
Setting music to poetry and prose

4. There's more than one way . . .

The word *set* has a multitude of meanings, and the Oxford English Dictionary records 58 noun uses, 126 verbal uses and 10 uses as a participial adjective. Some of the more common and colourful phrases with the word are given below

To *set* about someone – to attack them physically or verbally

To *set* eyes on – to see, to catch sight of. The phrase is often used negatively, as 'I'd never *set* eyes on her before'

To *set* off on the wrong foot – to make an inauspicious start. The opposite is 'to *set* off on the right foot'⁹

5. Now why would anyone want to do that . . .

Make an inauspicious start

Skin a cat

Set off on the wrong foot

A unit of a line of verse which contains a particular combination of stressed and unstressed syllables¹⁰

Setting music to poetry and prose

There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream

Diodorus wrote that in Egypt whoever killed a cat, even by accident, was punished by death¹¹

Setting off on the wrong foot

There's more than one way

Setting off on the right

There are more ways than one

*O where does the dancer dance –
the invisible center spin –
whose bright periphery holds
the world we wander in?*¹²

Behind the shift in tonality is concealed a leap of thinking¹³

*What do you read, my lord?
Words, words, words
What is the matter my lord?*

*Between who?
I mean, the matter that you read*¹⁴

Words, words, words

The whole landscape is overrun with words
As with an invasion¹⁵

*In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo*

*I grow old . . . I grow old. . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled*¹⁶

A poem should not mean
But be¹⁷

*A green Thought in a green Shade*¹⁸

The best words in the best order¹⁹

Very well, let's make a start!²⁰

6. Kafka definitely influenced my feeling . . .

Of how to begin a piece
Immediately in the atmosphere²¹

The essential thing is to set the song in motion as a *graft* – shoot or scion inserted in a slit of another stock from which it receives sap, piece of transplanted living tissue, process of grafting, place where graft is inserted, hard work – and not as a meaning, a work, or a spectacle²²

In René Char's words 'Weave their saps together'²³

With graft you have something non-mechanical, something which not only lives but gives birth to a new organization

In grafting you have something unpredictable, the future of the event is at stake. . . you will graft it but cannot program it²⁴

To be perfectly honest each work originates in a unique way²⁵

Very well, let's make a start! That is the great thing – so let's start with a horse²⁶

Or a cat

A cat has absolute emotional honesty: human beings, for one reason or another, may hide their feelings, but a cat does not²⁷

She sights a Bird – she chuckles –

She flattens – then she crawls –

She runs without the look of feet –

*Her eyes increase to Balls –*²⁸

As the work progresses there are a number of incidents that suggest provisional conclusions

Whatever may be said about the passage from the original intention, ision, intuition (even commission) to finished work, we must never forget that the field of invention is wider than is generally supposed²⁹

I dwell in Possibility –

A fairer house than Prose –

More numerous of Windows –

*Superior – for Doors –*³⁰

I cite I para-cite

I can no other

7. My definition of composition is . . .

The right note in the right place with the right instrument³¹

A composer's relationship to his idiom can never remain a constant. His fundamental concern – the exploration of new possibilities in every area of his field – will lead him to write a number of 'chaotic' works that are less confident, and may well be less polished, than others³²

And in Boulez's *Orientations* it is always *his* field, never *hers*: *his* idiom, *his* fundamental concern, *his* viewpoint, *his* vital inner sense, *his* other pieces, *his* changes in style, *his* motives and methods, *his* own purely musical path³³

*The ability to articulate sounds being a distinguishing feature of man as such*³⁴

Likewise, all other cultural references – to poetry, painting and prose – always and only invoke the names of men: Rousseau, Michaux, Novalis, Malraux, Miller, Claudel, Char, Pope John XXII...

*Like the archeologist with the fragment of amphora, so we too discover the essential picture of an age by picking up a handful of names*³⁵

*Debussy, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and so forth, who seem to us the perfect expression of their age*³⁶

*But what about prosody – that famous prosody about which everyone thinks he is righter than the next man?*³⁷

The objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life³⁸

And this too must change – the objects we direct our attention toward and the corresponding language of history, commentary, analysis and Critique – together with the language of music itself

Setting music to poetry and prose

There are indeed more ways

8. Orientations are about how we begin . . .

How we proceed from ‘here’ which affects how what is ‘there’ appears, how it appears, how it presents itself³⁹

Some orientations become socially given by being repeated over time⁴⁰

In the case of music, centuries of repetitions dedicated to the constitution of an explicitly and exclusively paternal line of cultural inheritance

The line that is drawn, for instance, from philosopher to philosopher . . . poet to poet, artist to artist, composer to composer, authority to authority⁴¹

Debussy, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Mallarmé, Rimbaud . . .

Who seem to us the perfect expression of their age

The line begins with the father and is followed by those who ‘can’ take his place

We know, I think, that not just ‘anybody’ can receive such an inheritance or can turn what they receive into a possession⁴²

9. Orientations are effects of work . . .⁴³

It takes a lot of work to shift one's orientation⁴⁴

To turn one's angle of hearing – it is possible to speak of an 'angle of hearing' as we speak of an angle of vision – away from the paternal line of authorized and authoritative sense and sound⁴⁵

Towards an horizon of possibilities as yet unseen unheard
Undreamt of in your philosophy Horatio

Listening . . .

We surmise that not 'musical meaning' but human *breathing* brought music into the world⁴⁶

In-hal-ation . . . ex-hal-ation
In-spir-ation . . . re-spir-ation

The rhythm and tone of tongue and teeth
And breath and blood and bone

Always in vibration with an other

I am not creating the music, it's already there, and I have this conversation with my materials⁴⁷

Sound that follows not by logic but by affinity⁴⁸

There's more than one way
There are more ways than one

Setting music to poetry and prose

Letting the sound, not the structure, of music show the way – set the rhythm and direction, the tempo and tone, the pitch, pace, and pulse of a verbal response – a most particular *résonance*

The guide is what rings true in the voice⁴⁹

Thinking and hearing do not so much place the subject in a fixed position vis-à-vis the world as they entangle it in ever-changing relationships to tonal resonance⁵⁰

Something to think 'with' as well as 'on'⁵¹

Listening . . .

As an orientation device
A dis-orientation re-orientation device

Setting music to poetry and prose

Like a step in the fog no-one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead⁵²

10. Let us forget . . .

The old distinction between Music and Letters – that has so exercised the paternal line of composition, commentary and critique – which is no more than a deliberate division of an original unity⁵³

The original unity of the *lalalangu*e – of the mother tongue

Disavowed discredited and dismissed by from
Within each and every discourse of the father

The originary play of *mousiké* – rhythm resonance
Reverberation melody pitch timbre temper tone

That calls us into being as one-and-other
At once unique and in relation always in vibration with an other

The original unity of sound and sense – that precedes exceeds and sustains
each and every discourse of the father(s)

The forgotten origin of truth – the truth of origins that requires no trans-
mutation or translation or transubstantiation

Of music in/to poetry and prose

It's already there

So, let's listen

Yes, let's listen

Lines written with an eye on Boulez's *Orientations* and an ear tuned to *Memory Forms* by Linda Catlin Smith (Artifact Music, Canada 2001).

NOTES

1. "If one wants . . . faithfully as possible". Para-cited (with omissions and the addition of *Setting music to poetry and prose*) from Jacques Derrida, "Heidegger, The Philosopher's Hell" in: Elisabeth Weber (Ed.), *Points . . . Interviews, 1974 – 1994*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Stanford University Press, 1995, 188.

2. “All round from outside . . . came about”. Para-cited from the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on “about”.
3. Para-cited from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Author’s Preface” to *Sense and Non-Sense*, translated by Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Northwestern University Press, 1964, 3.
4. Para-cited from Emily Dickinson, Poem # 258 in: Thomas H. Johnson (Ed.), *Final Harvest. Emily Dickinson’s Poems*. Little, Brown and Company, 1961, 36.
5. Para-cited from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Press, 1968, 11.
6. Op.cit., 144.
7. Op.cit., 155.
8. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, “The Future of Local Music” in: B. H. Friedman (Ed.), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street. Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Cambridge, MA, Exact Change, 2000, 161.
9. “The word *set* . . . right foot”. Para-cited from the entry on “set” in *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Seventeenth Edition, revised by John Ayton, London, England, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005, 1249.
10. “A unit . . . syllables”. Para-cited from the entry on “foot” in ‘Glossary: Poetic and Literary Terms’ in: Herbert Rosengarten and Amanda Goldrick-Jones (Eds.) *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry*. Peterborough, ON, Broadview Press, 1993, 914.
11. “Diodorus . . . death”. Para-cited from the entry on “cat” in *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, op.cit., 239.
12. Para-cited from Judith Wight, “Song”, in: *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry and Literature*, op.cit., 636.
13. Para-cited from Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1956, 53.
14. Para-cited from William Shakespear, *Hamlet*, Act II, sc.ii, l, 182–186.
15. Para-cited from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op.cit., 155.
16. Para-cited from T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, in: *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry and Literature*, op.cit., 475, 477.
17. Para-cited from *Ars Poetica* by Archibald MacLeish as cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Third Edition. Oxford University Press, 1980, 325.
18. Para-cited from Andrew Marvell, “The Garden”. *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry and Literature*, op. cit., 84.
19. Para-cited from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, 12 July 1827, as cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, op.cit., 157.
20. Para-cited from Henry Miller as cited by Pierre Boulez, “Putting the Phantoms to Flight” in: Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Ed.), *Orientations. Collected Writings*. Translated by Martin Cooper, London, Faber and Faber, 1986, 77.
21. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, “The Future of Local Music” in: *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op.cit., 163.
22. Para-cited from Philippe Sollers, *Numbers*, as cited by Jacques Derrida in: *Disseminations*, translated by Barbara Johnson, Chicago University Press, 1981, 355. Additional material – between the dashes – from the *The Oxford English Dictionary* entry on “graft”.

23. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, "Poetry – Centre and Absence – Music" in: *Orientations*, op.cit., 196.
24. Para-cited from Jacques Derrida in: "A Conversation with Jacques Derrida", *Precis*, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, 1987, Vol. 6, n/p.
25. "To be . . . unique way". Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, "Putting the Phantoms to Flight" in *Orientations*, op.cit., 76.
26. Para-cited from Henry Miller as cited by Pierre Boulez, *Orientations*, op.cit., 77.
27. Para-cited from Ernest Hemingway as cited by www.goodreads.com/quotes.
28. Para-cited from Emily Dickinson, Poem # 507 in: Thomas H. Johnson (Ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Boston MA, Little, Brown and Company, 1955.
29. "As the work . . . generally supposed". Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, "Putting the Phantoms to Flight" in *Orientations*, op.cit., 77–78.
30. Para-cited from Emily Dickinson, Poem # 657 in: Thomas H. Johnson (Ed.), *Final Harvest. Emily Dickinson's Poems*, Little, Brown and Company, 1961, 166.
31. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, 'The Future of the Local' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op.cit.: 160.
32. 'A composer's . . . than others'. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Putting the Phantoms to Flight' in *Orientations*, op. cit.: 78.
33. 'His field ... musical path'. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Putting the Phantoms to Flight' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 78 – 79.
34. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Poetry – Centre and Absence – Music' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 187.
35. 'Like the archeologist . . . names'. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Aesthetics and Fetishists' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 39.
36. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Aesthetics and Fetishists' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 38.
37. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Sound, Word, Synthesis' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 180.
38. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology. Orientation, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006: 32.
39. 'Orientations . . . presents itself'. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op.cit.: 8.
40. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op.cit.: 101.
41. 'The line . . . philosopher'. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op.cit.: 22.
42. 'The line begins . . . possession'. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op. cit.: 22.
43. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op.cit.: 86.
44. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, op.cit.: 101.
45. 'It is possible . . . vision'. Para-cited from Pierre Boulez, 'Sound, Word, Synthesis' in *Orientations*, op.cit.: 178.
46. 'Listening . . . the world'. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, 'Conversations with Stravinsky' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op.cit.: 61 – 62.
47. 'I am not . . . materials'. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, 'The Future of Local Music' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op.cit.: 157.
48. Para-cited from Morton Feldman, 'After Modernism' in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op.cit.: 74.

49. 'The guide . . . voice'. Para-cited from Dennis Lee, *Body Music*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998: 57.
50. 'Thinking . . . tonal resonance'. Para-cited from Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance. A History of Modern Aurality*. New York: Zone Books, 2010: 341 – 342.
51. Para-cited from Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology, op.cit.*: 63.
52. 'Like a step . . . lead'. Para-cited from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Author's Preface' to *Sense and Non-Sense, op.cit.*: 3.
53. 'Let us forget . . . unity'. Para-cited (with additions between the hyphens) from Mallarmé as cited by Pierre Boulez, 'Poetry – Centre and Absence – Music' in *Orientalisms, op.cit.*: 183.