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This book of fourteen essays – united here not by a common ideology but by the common subject matter, music and text – demonstrates how musical and literary scholarship can combine forces effectively on the common ground of contemporary literary theory and interpretive practice. Brought together for the first time in this volume, noted musicologists and literary critics explore diverse topics of shared concern such as literary theory as a model for music criticism, genre theories in literature and music, the criticism and analysis of texted music, and the role of aesthetic, historical, and cultural understanding in concepts of text–music convergence. The concluding essay by interdisciplinary historian Hayden White offers a magisterial, non-biased assessment of the individual contributions. By generalizing the critical issues raised, White locates this ambitious enterprise of contemplating “music and text” in the larger context of intellectual history.

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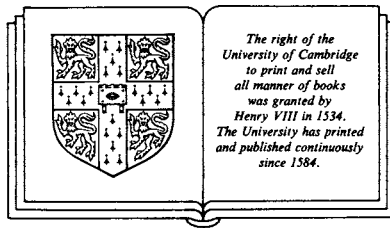
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Preface



Steven Paul Scher

In recent decades, interdisciplinarity has had a profound impact upon humanistic studies and has occasioned exciting and innovative critical developments. As a result, more and more scholars and critics today are willing to probe the validity of traditional disciplinary premises, to reconceive the scope, aims, and interpretive trends of their own disciplines in relation to other fields, and to cross disciplinary boundaries while pursuing discrete research interests.

Methods that have emerged in literary criticism and theory since World War II have been particularly influential in charting the course of interdisciplinary inquiry. Since the early sixties, when New Criticism had lost its persuasiveness, there has been an unprecedented proliferation of theoretical approaches. Poststructuralism, hermeneutics, semiotics, reception aesthetics, and deconstruction, as well as Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, and reader-response criticism, and more recently New Historicism, are prominent examples. Diverse and disparate as these theories may be, their practitioners are generally willing to transcend disciplinary confines and apply insights and perspectives of other disciplines and media. Indeed, “the whole of what the French call the human sciences is being more or less rapidly transformed into something called theory, which encompasses not only literary criticism but also philosophy, history, art history, musicology, architecture, psychology, and social and political theory as well.”¹ The notion of interdisciplinarity thus appears to be ubiquitous and compelling.

But while ample scholarly attention has been devoted to the interrelations of literature and the visual arts, not nearly as much effort has been expended on the reciprocal illumination of litera-

¹ Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes, eds., *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London, 1988), p. 6.

ture and music. In part this is because musicology itself commands such a formidable technical apparatus for analysis; in part, its nonrepresentationality makes music more difficult to view as an analogue to literature than painting. Nevertheless, “melopoetics” seems to fare well in the critical climate of postmodernism; during the last decade or so, musico-literary study has become a respected and increasingly popular field of interdisciplinary research. While it is true that “extended comparative studies of musical and literary works are still rare [and] good ones are downright scarce,”² substantial progress has been made in the last few years by musically sophisticated literary critics who have written on the multifarious relations between music and text.³

On the musical side the rate of progress has been slower: until recently, of all humanistic disciplines, the study of music has been perhaps least receptive to novel critical approaches. Lately, however, the potential interpretive, critical, and analytical benefits of melopoetics as a rewarding area of cross-disciplinary research have been recognized by a growing number of literary-minded musical scholars of diverse persuasions and specialities.

That attitudes in musical scholarship concerning the function and value of interdisciplinary critical strategies have indeed changed significantly in recent years is a conviction shared by the scholars writing in this volume. Taken together, the essays in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* demonstrate how musical and literary studies can combine forces effectively on the common ground of contemporary critical theory and interpretive practice. For the first time in a broadly conceived framework devoted entirely to scrutiny of the interactions between music and text, noted musico-logists and literary critics explore here specific affinities and shared

² Lawrence Kramer, “Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism,” *19th-Century Music* 13 (1989), 159. The term “melopoetics,” suggested here by Kramer to designate the comparative discipline of “musico-literary study,” is felicitous and should gain wide currency among its practitioners.

³ See especially Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley, 1984); Steven Paul Scher, ed., *Literatur und Musik. Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes* (Berlin, 1984); Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca and London, 1984); Margaret M. Stoljar, *Poetry and Song in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany* (London, 1985); Jean-Louis Cupers, *Aldous Huxley et la musique. A la manière de Jean-Sebastian* (Brussels, 1985); John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven and London, 1986); David M. Hertz, *The Tuning of the Word: The Musico-Literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement* (Carbondale, Ill., 1987); Robert Spaethling, *Music and Mozart in the Life of Goethe* (Columbia, S. C., 1987); Jean-Louis Cupers, *Euterpe et Harpocrate ou le défi littéraire de la musique. Aspects méthodologiques de l'approche musico-littéraire* (Brussels, 1988); and Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley, 1990).

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concerns. They do so by focusing on diverse topics such as literary theory as a model for musical criticism, genre theories in literature and music, the criticism and analysis of texted music, and the role of aesthetic, historical, and cultural understanding in concepts of text-music convergence. This list of salient topics, while indicative of areas and orientations of general concern in the individual essays, is by no means exhaustive. What is more, readers of these essays may well discern two ways to conceptualize specific issues: first, the conjunction of cultural and historical approaches which aim to interpret musical and literary works through the construction of the cultural contexts from which they arose and second, the refinement of interpretation by drawing from outside the work's immediate discipline on the many theoretical and critical methods that have emerged in recent years in both literary and musical studies. That these two modes of approach are not mutually exclusive but actually complement each other reinforces the relevance of such a critical enterprise.

Diversity and interdisciplinary breadth, as well as an overarching coherence of purpose, were the chief criteria for assembling these essays, presented originally as papers at a conference at Dartmouth College in 1988 and revised for the present volume. *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* thus offers a wide range of innovative methodologies, critical directions, and new perspectives on familiar and more recent musical and literary works. Most importantly, the essays that follow are unified not by common ideology but by the common subject matter – music and text.⁴ The rather generally formulated section headings are not meant to be prescriptive for the essays subsumed under them; they serve merely to highlight certain theoretical, critical, analytical, historical, thematic, rhetorical, or genre-oriented preoccupations and concerns shared by two or more of the authors.

An integral part of this book is the concluding essay by Hayden White in which he traces, with consummate skill, just how and to what extent the diverse preoccupations and concerns that determine the contributors' premises and interpretive strategies nevertheless cohere in presenting a musico-literary panorama consonant with contemporary theory and critical/historical praxis. As a prac-

⁴ Throughout this book, the conjunction of "music and text" is used in its broadest sense which includes, but is not restricted to, matters of texted music such as musical settings of texts in opera and song. For example, the issue of *Contemporary Music Review* entitled *Music and Text* (vol. 5, 1989) focuses exclusively on problems of word-setting.

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ticing interdisciplinary critic himself, the historian White offers a circumspect and non-biased opinion on the state of affairs in musical and literary scholarship. He reviews the individual essays in searching analytical detail and discusses them polemically in relation to each other, uncovers fundamental alliances that group them together, identifies specific trends and directions in both disciplines that are likely to lead to further scholarly exchange based on a more refined and viable musical–literary discourse; and finally, by generalizing the critical issues raised throughout, he locates the ambitious enterprise of contemplating “music and text” in the larger context of intellectual history.

It is our hope that this book will stimulate similar collaborative efforts that will strengthen the prospects of melopoetics as a comparative discipline: “What [this] still-incipient discipline might have to offer is not drastic innovation but greater explicitness, resources of enrichment, wider interpretive adventure.”⁵

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⁵ Kramer, “Dangerous Liaisons,” p. 167.

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