Literary Music

Stephen Benson

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Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction

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Contents

List of Music Examples *vi*
Acknowledgements *vii*

Introduction: Music for Reading 1

1 'Something familiar': Reading Elgar 13

2 Voicing the Libretto: David Malouf and Michael Berkeley 41

3 Quasi Parlando I: Polyphony and Musical Value in Bakhtin and Kundera 69

4 Quasi Parlando II: Blanchot and the Silent Narrative 89

5 Contemporary Fiction and the Music Itself 105
The Final Score: *Art & Lies* 106
Performing the Canon: *An Equal Music* 117
Representing the Composer: *Grace Notes*, *Amsterdam* and *Disgrace* 129

6 Words Without Song: Kafka and *The Unconsoled* 141

Bibliography *161*
Index *175*

List of Music Examples

1.1	Elgar, Symphony No. 1 Op. 55, i, bars 1–25.	18
2.1	Michael Berkeley, *Baa Baa Black Sheep: A Jungle Tale*. First motif. (Piano reduction by Susan Bradshaw. © OUP 1993 and 1996. Extract reproduced by permission.)	61
2.2	Michael Berkeley, *Baa Baa Black Sheep: A Jungle Tale*. Second motif. (Piano reduction by Susan Bradshaw. © OUP 1993 and 1996. Extract reproduced by permission.)	62

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Earlier versions of material from Chapter 2 appeared as 'Kipling's Singing Voice: Setting *The Jungle Book*s', *Critical Survey* 13.3 (2001): 40–60; and as 'David Malouf's *Moments Musicaux*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 38.8 (2003): 5–21 (reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd (©Sage Publications Ltd, 2003)).

An earlier version of Chapter 3 appeared as 'For Want of a Better Term? Polyphony and the Value of Music in Bakhtin and Kundera', *Narrative* 11.3 (2003): 292–311.

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Introduction

Music for Reading

This book is concerned with music and writing, in particular with the age-old question of how to represent the musical experience in words.[1] The desire to do so stems from the value placed on that experience, and so on music itself. Music is at once the most direct and esoteric of the arts. Our daily lives are criss-crossed with musical experiences and modes of listening, from the ambient sounds of radio and muzak, and the personalized environments of the portable music player, to the sonic immersion of the latest digital technology. We listen without thinking, and yet asked to explain the sounds themselves – to describe what we hear – many of us flounder. We pass thereby from the felt immediacy of the musical experience to the seeming inadequacy of our ability to put that experience into words. This gap, if there is such a thing, has given rise to an entire discourse on music, not to say of aesthetics itself, one by-product of which has been a querying of the sense of attempting verbally to write music. Such writing abounds, however, not least in the fiction and theory which forms the focus of the present study. Consider the following examples:

> Take out your music manuscript where everything will be laid bare. Your life will be stripped down to those moments of uncertainty and longing; the burden of human frailty will pass from one hesitant note to the next. The solo violin reduced to its elemental utterance as, part by part, the other instruments of the orchestra fall away, leaving it in isolation. (Butlin 87–8)

> *In the Style of a Legend*, he had written. It was how it began. And it was music anyone would call mystical, strange. The thick chord clusters, suspensions pedalled over shimmers of running semiquavers, gave it something of the timeless. But Clara had only a Parisian piano. Rather than butcher the piece with it, she chose only to practise the march, the coda. So many leaps! And this perfect melody, its handfuls of spread chords! ... It made her run hot and cold at once to play it, even to see it on the page. (Galloway 170–71)

> But to this day when Caroline can be persuaded to play *Carnaval* the music at once brings back an intense memory of faces sliding one behind the other … Our yearnings, it seems, express us more memorably than do our compromised equanimities. The piece called 'Chopin' has a particular effect on Caroline. She once described it as claiming an unfair intimacy, like being made love to in public by a perfect stranger. (Hamilton-Paterson, *The Music* 16)

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1 My subtitle, Music for Reading, is taken from a lecture delivered at Darmstadt by Karlheinz Stockhausen, concerning 'the emancipation of the graphic from the acoustic element' in music (see Griffiths 137). I use it here to very different ends.

> Schumann's music goes much farther than the ear; it goes into the body, into the muscles by the beats of its rhythm, and somehow into the viscera by the voluptuous pleasure of its *melos*: as if on each occasion the piece was written only for one person, the one who plays it; the true Schumannian pianist – *c'est moi*. (Barthes, *Responsibility of Forms* 295)

> 'Yes,' said Mrs Formby, her face lighting up. 'Schubert! When I was young we used to have Schubert evenings. A friend of mine tried to infiltrate some Schumann. I didn't allow it. I called him the wrong Schu!' (Seth 86)

Each of these extracts concerns the nineteenth-century composer Robert Schumann. Music certainly is described, if only indirectly. It is a singular music, at once strange and strikingly intimate; a private music, or at least a music of private communication. The aesthetics of the time of composition are still clearly present in these late records of reception, in the idea of music as fraught self-expression, an almost irrational by-passing of conscious filters; a suspension, even a transcending, of everyday discourse. The desirable secrecy of the music is also potentially a mark of excess, of something not quite right: the wrong Schu.

Each piece of writing has an angle of approach on musical sound, whether it be the composer's wife or the activities of local amateur musicians. For this very reason, we might feel the writing is not in fact about the music at all, but rather about all those activities and persons attendant upon it, including its performers. Musical sound undoubtedly is difficult to describe, but the feeling of a shortfall between musical experience and its conscious verbalization is in part the result of a belief in a proper language of music, via which the sound can be characterized correctly. This is the language of analysis, a language for music almost wholly absent from the Schumann fictions cited above (chord clusters, pedals and semiquavers apart). Our sense of the adequacy or otherwise of such fictions will depend in part on the status we accord the language of analysis; certainly, deference to the latter, coupled with ignorance of its workings, can give rise to feelings of inadequacy about the very music itself. This is true even in those contemporary theoretical discourses most suspicious of traces of metaphysical pretension. Having acknowledged a reading of music as signifying 'the sublime access … to a pure presentation of sense', Jean-Luc Nancy admits that the answer to the question of why music has occupied this site 'exceeds [his] competencies' (84–5). Jacques Derrida speaks similarly: 'music is the object of my strongest desire, and yet at the same time it remains completely forbidden. I don't have the competence, I don't have any truly presentable musical culture. Thus my desire remains completely paralyzed. I am even more afraid of speaking nonsense in this area than in any other' (Brunette and Wills 21).[2] Although more willing to confront the object, Jean-François Lyotard also guiltily admits to working on music 'from a height, without real competence … but

2 Derrida speaks here of a number of fields in which he feels 'incompetent', but music is singled out for particular attention. He goes on to discuss the possibility of 'a nondiscursive sonority', adding however: 'I don't know whether I would call it musical' (21).

as a hasty amateur' ('Obedience' 168). Required to account for music, there is an impulse to admit amateurish incompetence, and therein lies the rub. The fumbling attempts of the everyday listener are defined against the proper language of the professional. The gap between the two is expressive not only of the undue deference of the monolingual faced with that language he or she cannot speak, but also of a surprisingly conventional faith in a neutral analytic discourse – faith which is little different from the everyday deference to music as that which rightly evades verbal description.

Such professions of inadequacy, deference and faith are precisely what the present study sets out to work against, or at least to unpack. The book is concerned with the representation of music, Western art music in particular, in contemporary narrative fiction and theory. Rather than separate such representations from those of musicology or music analysis, I argue that each set of verbal fixings of music forms part of a complex discourse by and according to which music is made, received, circulated and valued. While the various discourses of music analysis continue to flourish, the texts with which I am concerned are contemporaneous with a major shift in the theory and practice of musicology, a shift originally labelled as New Musicology, but now more commonly viewed as encompassing a variety of essentially culturalist approaches. The story of this shift is well known.[3] At the risk of reducing what was a complex disciplinary affair, the central debate concerned the need for music, that music corroborated by the academy in particular, to be wrested from the dominating grasp of formalist analysis and conventional historiography. Music needed to be put back into the world in which it is made, performed, received and evaluated; a world of conflicting ideologies, of manifest differences and, indeed, of increasing indifference to the self-justifying claims of music history. A world of words, certainly, but more particularly of words acknowledged for their constitutive role in the life of music; and a life newly expanded, music having been appreciated as a working force far beyond the scope of formal paradigms and idealized performances. One aspect of this wide-ranging shift in critical approaches has involved questioning the neutrality of those discourses, analytic or otherwise, attendant upon music: 'any attempt to separate writing about music from *music itself* is futile, because interpretative writing on a given work becomes in some sense *part* of that work as it travels through history' (Abbate 17). The implications for readings of music in fiction are clear. Lawrence Kramer develops the point:

> [T]he ascriptive process becomes indispensable to music making and musical communication. It consists in the way we really talk about music in the pragmatics of performance and social exchange and the closer bonds of shared experience, even

3 For summary accounts of shifts in musicology over the past twenty years, see Kramer (*Classical Music*, Chapters 1 and 2) and McClary (Chapter 1). A good starting point is provided by Cook (*Music: A Very Short Introduction*; see especially Chapter 6). These choices of course reflect my own inclinations, as will be apparent from the work that follows. For a range of views on the theory and practice of musicology today, see the collections edited by Cook and Everist, and by Clayton, Herbert and Middleton.

> when that experience is nominally solitary. Part of the meaning of any work of music is constituted by the history – a history still largely unwritten – of the ascriptions it receives and ways it returns them. In everyday practice, backed by the habitus, explicit ascription plays a large role in determining how we hear the music we share and what we 'hear it as', whatever its formal features may be. (*Musical Meaning* 163)

Fictional representations of music are promoted under the new dispensation, from the status of historical detritus to that of primary evidence. The reading of such evidential acts becomes part of an empowered interdisciplinary practice – musico-literary studies, as it has been called – according to which musicology is newly attentive to literature and literary studies is newly cognizant of musicology. While some would argue for both to be subsumed into the realm of a broader cultural critique, historicist or otherwise, there is much to be said for the practice of strategic interdisciplinarity, whereby attention can be paid specifically to the nature of the interaction between two cultural forms.

The term I have used for the fictions considered here is *literary music*. This does not mean that my primary interest is in programme music or texted music, although opera and song certainly fall within the remit of the book. Rather, literary music refers in the first instance to the self-evident fact that such music is by definition literary, a music made by the narrative in which it occurs, regardless of whether or not it exists outside the text (as it does, in the majority of cases). The central point about such music is not the success or otherwise of the evocation, but the nature of the performance: the question of how and why music is staged, and to what desired end. Reading music in the novel allows us to see, literally and literarily, how music is received *as music*; more so, given that fictional representation dictates that the musical experience is variously dismantled, to see how and why music continues to be valued so highly, a valuation which is often normalized or mythicized beyond the reach of explication.[4] Fiction serves as earwitness to the role of music in everyday life, a record of why, where and how music is made, heard and received.[5] The cultural study of music has involved paying close attention to the real presences of music performed, as opposed, for instance, to the silent and objectified music of the score.

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4 There may be something a little circular about this argument. Those novelists who choose to write about art music are by and large in the same ethnic, cultural and socio-economic position as are those who buy recordings, attend performances, play, teach and even write the music. The resultant novels represent a culture speaking to itself about itself, although the same can be said in general of the contemporary literary novel. What is revealing about music in the novel, however, is its relative distance from certain strains of academic musicology (in figurative, if not conceptual, terms) and its relative proximity to the language according to which music is spoken of in everyday discourse.

5 I have borrowed the idea of an earwitness from R. Murray Schafer's influential 1977 study, *The Tuning of the World* (see Schafer, *The Soundscape*). One critical context for such readings, besides cultural musicology, is the developing field of auditory culture, in which sound, in all its aspects, is the object of study. As Schafer predicted, literature is particularly valuable as a source of readings of sound and soundscapes, and of acts of hearing and listening. For an example of literary-oriented work in the field, see Picker.

Within this critical context, fictional representations serve as one more performance, one more instance of music making (in both senses of the term). Returning to the fictional Schumanns, it is noticeable again that music is represented as an intensely private matter; or rather, the experience of listening is conveyed as one of intimacy and immediacy, a speaking directly to the self without the mediation of word or person. The idealism of such writing is clear, as is often the case in literary music. And yet the paradox is that these represented experiences are embedded in the social discourse of the fictional narrative (or the personal testimony, in the case of Barthes). The construction of such private moments, and the valuation of music as offering the experience of intimate self-revelation, cannot but be woven into the representation. Just as music is *read* in its fictional listening, so too is the listening itself.

The second point about literary music concerns the evaluative gap between the writing of music in works of music history or musical analysis and the writing of music elsewhere, especially in fiction. As will be apparent, underpinning the work presented here is a strong belief that there is no such gap, that all writing about music seeks to make music known and so becomes part of that music's means and mode of existence; indeed, the belief that music has no existence apart from those acts by which it is identified, however fleeting, even unconscious they may be. Literary music thus also signifies the irreducible status of music as always and everywhere *written*, according to the numerous criteria and codes of practice via which such performative representations take place.

Having introduced the idea of literary music, it will perhaps be best to state outright what this book is not. Most obviously, it is not a study of any of the ways in which narrative literature has sought to model itself after music, or on particular musical properties.[6] Musico-literary studies has until relatively recently been somewhat preoccupied with such an approach, predicated as it is on the establishment of a means by which the perceived musical aspect of a literary text, whatever that might be, can be corroborated.[7] As this suggests, the predominant method here is unapologetically formalist, leading to an unnecessary preoccupation with the question of verification: exactly how do we establish that such-and-such a text is musical and how might this allow us to evade the ever-present danger of the impressionistic metaphor? The resultant typologies, most extensively displayed in the work of Werner Wolf, have been impressive, but, to my mind, severely limiting – and not a little ironic, given the shift away from, or at least increased self-consciousness towards, positivist methods in much contemporary musicology. As Eric Prieto comments, in the course of a work indicative of a shift away from the strictly formalist approach to the question of

6 Even more obviously, it is not a study of the interrelation of poetry and music. I mention this solely to acknowledge that the theory and practice of this relation self-evidently forms by far the main instance of the engagement of verbal and musical arts, but one almost wholly separate from the present study.

7 The founding text here is Calvin S. Brown's *Music and Literature*, a wide-ranging study the central section of which is devoted to 'the influence of music on literature and the attempts of writers to model their work on musical composition' (xi).

musical influence in narrative literature: 'The test of a good musical metaphor should never be one of "appropriateness", defined as the degree to which it approaches literality, but the same test that applies for any other kind of metaphor: the quantity and quality of information imparted, the extent to which the metaphor affords new ways of seeing' (23). I would go even further and suggest that metaphor operates in much the same way as ideology: it is precisely where it appears most bland, even devoid of content, that it is most potent. A tired musical metaphor may not excite us as we read, but it may have significant cognitive value, indicative of the valuation of certain types and forms of musical practice, to say nothing of the construction of music in language.

It is thus not strictly true to say that the present study has no interest in the modelling of literature after music, just not in this modelling conceived in terms of formal or structural analogies (except in the case of Bakhtin and Kundera, as discussed below). If a novel draws on music, the question is not how, in the technical sense, but why: what idea of music is represented, to what end, and how does this relate to other discourses of music, including those of musicology? How is what a novel has to say about music caught up in questions of representation, of aesthetics and ethics? In one sense, the current study is thematic in orientation, seeking to make the conventional gains of the single-minded reading of literature preoccupied with the workings of a particular element. It is common for such studies to lay claim to the singular status and importance of the object, be it food, blushing or conversation. Yet is music not the most singular of singular fictional elements? Literature is constituted by its status as representation, its separation from a world which may itself be no less fictional, but there are few worldly objects or experiences as unlike the novel as music. The commonly remarked act of translation required to express a musical experience – a translation from music to language – is certainly less clear-cut once music is conceived as the product of acts of ascription. Nevertheless, the feeling of this experience, whether visceral and physical or transformative and otherworldly (not to mention noisy and annoying), seems resolutely non- or pre-verbal. Music is, after all, the pre-eminent art of affect. The singularity of these experiences, even just their sheer immediacy, often lies at the heart of acts of literary music, and yet it is precisely this felt experience which is most difficult for the literary text to grasp. It is thus in those yearning attempts verbally to fix that most valued attribute of music that literary music is most valuable. As Hamilton-Paterson says in relation to the felt experience of Schumann, 'Our yearnings, it seems, express us more memorably than do our compromised equanimities'. Each of the Schumann fictions concerns the singularity of the musical experience as a felt moment of near-invasive intimacy: *c'est moi*, my body, running hot and cold (again, for some, a too close-fitting Schu). The music is covered in the listening subject, but it is in this narration that the means and ends of the musical moment are unpacked, even if only ever partially. Literary music offers the promise of an open privacy.

The other method from which the current book diverges is cultural history.[8] One obvious reason for this is the absence of any synchronicity between literary and musical texts. As will be apparent, the Western art music which is of interest to the contemporary novelist (as opposed, say, to popular music) is by and large Classical and Romantic, the music of the common period. The textless instrumental and orchestral music of these periods gave rise to the idea of music as an abstract and formal art of sound, the value of which lay in part in its supposed lack of representational content, and thereby in its otherworldliness. It is this music in particular, together with its attendant discourse, that recent musicology has sought to situate as an active participant within its various social and cultural contexts, both historical and contemporary. For all its allegedly declining role in our cultural life, Classical and Romantic music continues to influence, even to dictate ideas and definitions of what music is and of how it functions (or might function). The writing of such music in contemporary fiction is not only a matter of reception history; it serves also as one arena in which we can witness the cultural work to which music is put.

My aim in what follows has not been to seek out singular examples of musical material in contemporary writing – although the texts offer rich pickings in this regard – but rather to select paradigmatic instances of the ways in which such writing has sought an encounter with music. The nature of these encounters is the real subject of the book, as much as the individual texts. Each chapter thus revolves around the particular musical or musicological element that forms the ground for the meeting: melody, form, voice, libretto, polyphony, performance, the canon and the score. Again, given that the interest shown in art music by contemporary writing is almost exclusively Classical and Romantic in origin or inclination, the musical genres in question are resolutely conventional: symphony, sonata, opera, song and string quartet.[9] The selection is unashamedly wedded to the canon, but the object of real interest is the manner in which individual works or genres come to exemplify a particular construction of music. How this comes about and the precise nature of what is being valued – and what necessarily devalued or excluded – are two of the insights literature affords on music and its cultures.

The book begins with a pair of chapters intended as complementary. First, a contemporary novelistic engagement with an early twentieth-century composer: James Hamilton-Paterson's *Gerontius* and Elgar, an encounter staged here around the musical figure of melody. This is followed by a chapter devoted to a contemporary musical (operatic) engagement with early twentieth-century literature: Michael Berkeley and David Malouf's *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and Kipling, an encounter figured

8 A particularly popular area of inquiry in recent years has been the cultural history of music making as represented in nineteenth-century fiction. See in particular Weliver, and Fuller and Losseff.

9 My method remains unashamedly wedded to the work-concept – to discrete works and their makers – for the simple reason that so do the majority of my texts. For a wide-ranging reading of the life and times of the work-concept in music history, see Goehr.

in the troubled genre of the libretto. Elgar and Kipling are of course well suited as a pair, a connection clearly spotted by their contemporaries. Ideologically wedded to their particular historical moment, they both suffered the fate of timeliness, roundly falling from favour not long after a peak of popularity. Having been well and truly excluded from the Modernist canon, it is via the widening, indeed the questioning, of this canon that both composer and writer have come back into view, as the producers of work less straightforwardly conventional, in aesthetic terms, and, in ideological terms, more interestingly of its time. This critical recuperation has taken place in both the academic and the public sphere, and each of the works chosen here stands as an instance of interpretative retrospection of a piece with contemporaneous revisionist scholarship. In terms of contemporary fiction, James Hamilton-Paterson and David Malouf have each shown a sustained concern for music. Malouf is particularly interesting for his own reflections on his work as librettist and on the peculiar literary artefact of the libretto. Given that libretto texts tend to be predicated on a prior understanding of the condition of music, to which they are of course destined, I have approached his work on the libretto via examples of literary music from his own writing.

Chapter 1 is organized around the figure of melody, namely the motto-theme from Elgar's First Symphony. The intention, as throughout the bulk of the book, is to face up to existing music, to musical sounds with a real-life presence (the sonic referent, we might say), as opposed to the wholly fictional music more conventionally considered by the literary camp of musico-literary studies. The complementary element in Chapter 2 is the libretto, a particularly fitting partner for melody. Where the latter offers perhaps *the* experience of the seemingly irreducible immediacy of music, its unmediated and undifferentiating presence, the former has tended to be conceived as the below-stairs facilitator of the real musical life of the composite work of opera; a text to be heard but not in any way noticed, properly in thrall to the visceral ebb and flow of the musical substance. Where melody is the idea of pure music, the libretto is a literary genre whose terms of reference are constituted by such an idea. Yet just as melodies are always more contentful than they would have us believe, so is the libretto ripe for reconceptualization in all its silent singularity.

The next section of the book is devoted to narrative theory, a branch of theoretical inquiry which was particularly influential in the early works of the New Musicology. I touch on this work when considering approaches to Elgar's First Symphony, in part because it was a renewed interest in narrative-based readings of sonata-oriented music that first opened up the field. The problem with all such readings, however fruitful, is the necessary acceptance of a particular conception of narrative, together with the unquestioning deployment of a textual-theoretical paradigm as a means of reading a work of music. What is very rarely asked is whether or not music is itself already implicated in the theory in question: whether narrative theory has needed to perform its own idea of music as a means of setting out its credentials as a tool of application. This is true of two of the most influential theorizations, each representative of different conceptual paradigms: Bakhtin's notion of polyphony and

Blanchot's analogizing of narrative voice as a form of absent song.[10] The trace of music at work in Bakhtin and Blanchot thus comes in the figure of the voice, that most problematic but tenacious constituent of narrative theory. Put simply, to think in any way of literary narrative as requiring, or involving, or as predicated upon, voice, phantasmically or otherwise, involves the imagination of sound, of the *sound* of a voice. However metaphoric, this sound permeates Bakhtin's valorization of the novel as a multi-voiced genre. The reason for the turn to music is that, divorced from sense, sound has been most readily and productively thought of in relation to music, particularly the sound of the voice in song. Yet sound is precisely what the literary text lacks, hence the question of why we need the metaphor of voice at all, given that it comes heavily burdened with significance. Sound is never transparent, but rather always and everywhere coded, whether in the distinction between the mutually dependent sounds of music and noise, or in the valuation of the presence of sound as a sign of both literal and symbolic proximity: the sound of the voice as a sign of a clearly present self, for example, felt most keenly in the performance of song. Such a self is never far from the novel as conceived by Bakhtin, a mark of his essentially humanist perspective. If narrative theory cannot, or should not, do without the metaphor of voice, it may be because the idea of a voiceless text coming from nowhere and no-one, however correct in conceptual or ethical terms, simply fails to live up to the felt experience of reading a novel (the question of whether or not to accept or defer to that experience is another matter). Blanchot has attempted to think this idea with real force, but even here the musical trace still figures, if only in negative, as an absence. The sound of music may be precisely what literature lacks, but it is a felt absence nevertheless; indeed, as demonstrated by the fictions in my final chapter, the semantically marked absence of music from the written text has its own peculiar effect.

Chapter 3 pairs Bakhtin with Milan Kundera, whose conception of the novel is closely related to that of the theorist, but who is far more willing to allow the idea of a musical influence on the form and content of the novelistic narrative. Kundera is perhaps the most consistently musically-interested contemporary novelist, just as he is one of the few consistently to theorize his own practice. He values music highly and so must make a literary music that is able to bear the necessary semantic weight. Continuing with evaluation, the three parts of Chapter 5 are concerned with that discourse according to which the real and true merit of music categorically is not a matter of worldly meaning, but rather of the extra-semantic *music itself*. This rather tautological construction served as the conceptual branch of nineteenth-century instrumental music and, for a period, as a paradigm for aesthetics. It is a composite discourse and I have thus selected four closely interrelated facets, pairing each with a novelistic exposition: the canon and its performance, as eulogized in

10 I have allowed the inclusion of Bakhtin not only because of his wide-ranging influence on contemporary literary-critical studies, but also because the work in question did not begin its passage into English until the early 1960s, following its rediscovery in Moscow in the 1950s.

Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*; the score, deployed with all its esoteric weight in Jeanette Winterson's *Art & Lies*; and the practice of composition, as explored in Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam*, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Bernard Mac Laverty's *Grace Notes*. These novels make a variety of different musics, but the tendency is towards the corroboration of an idea of music as valuable for its abstracting separateness – from the world, from the everyday and above all, from language. Yet it is in their very condition as novels that such deferential attempts to place the sounds of music out of reach are compromised. The novel is that genre in which music's worldliness is laid bare, regardless of which construction of music any particular narrative seeks to recommend. I thus concentrate here not only on the nature of the individual performances of literary music, but also on how the stated representation can be seen to be disturbed or contradicted by conflicting formal or ideological elements.

What unites the majority of these literary texts is not just an interest in music as part of the content of the narrative, even less so the possibility of a form modelled in one way or another after music. Rather, it is a case of the singular value of music and of how that value is performed in and by narrative. This can of course be achieved in any number of ways: through straightforward statements of belief, whereby music is incorporated into the surface content of the novel; in the formal placing of music, most forcefully as a terminus towards which the narrative moves as towards its summation; and in the appropriation of an idea of music as an organizing metaphor, the kernel of the text's own ethical intent. The music of the novel is in each case a music made, performed or staged in the course of the narration, a music which the narrative works to make present, never more so than in those cases where music is valued precisely for its resistance to representation. Bearing this in mind, my final chapter concerns narrative fiction in which the representational act of literary music is itself problematized, even withheld. Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* offers perhaps the most far-reaching valuation of music in recent fiction, but the narrative is predicated on the deferral of a much-anticipated musical terminus, and it is thus no surprise that Ishiguro's novel should be so clearly influenced by Kafka, a writer for whom music was always and everywhere a problem, in both its self-evident seductiveness and its resistance to definition. A narrative which itself stages a resistance to the presenting of music – a gesture introduced in Chapter 4, with reference to Blanchot – is perhaps the most rigorous acknowledgement of music's influence, and it serves to bring the book full circle, back to the singularity of the musical experience as the germ of literary music.

The incorporation of music into the narrative text is everywhere a matter of tropes and figures: of voice, song, silence, absence. Close reading of the language of literary music is thus a necessity, however much such critical practice has fallen out of favour. I borrow my justification here from D.A. Miller, who writes of close reading as the result in part of 'an almost infantile desire to be *close*, period, as close as one can get, without literal plagiarism, to merging with the mother-text' (58). Several of the fictions in the present study yearn to be just this close to their music (gender specifics aside, perhaps), a yearning which requires corresponding attention on the part of the reader. The sheer attractiveness of music and the consequent