

The research interest of studies specifically occupied with the relationship between word and music has recently shifted from a formalist to a text-based cultural studies approach. Claus-Ulrich Viol’s and Pascal Ohlmann’s doctoral dissertations are perfect examples for this shift, since both of them try to illuminate the functions of music in narrative and drama from a larger cultural perspective rather than exclusively focusing on formal and structural similarities between the two arts. While Ohlmann is interested in a critical re-reading of the musical sections in Shakespeare’s romances with regard to the ambiguities and discontinuities in Shakespeare’s use of music, Viol’s study of the forms and functions of popular music in popular British fiction attempts no less than a revision of the academic field of word-and-music studies.

Maintaining that traditional accounts of the relationship between text and music have almost exclusively focused on the interrelations between classical music and highbrow literature, the aim of Viol’s thesis is twofold. First, he seeks for new analytical models that are suitable for grasping the occurrence of pop music in recent British novels such as Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity*, Hanif Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia* and Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Second, he asks how pop music is constructed and represented within the narrated worlds of these novels.

The first two chapters, in which Viol summarises the findings of word-and-music studies and sketches the main characteristics of popular music, provide the theoretical framework for the literary analysis in the following two chapters. Viol’s main criticism of word-and-music scholars is that they have been preoccupied with structural and metaphorical imitations of music in literature, thereby not only showing a certain ‘aesthetic elitism’ but also neglecting sociocultural, communicative and interactive functions of music in the narrative. Hence, their analytic models are hardly applicable to the analysis of music in popular British fiction of the last two decades, which makes thematic rather than just structural references to music.

According to Viol, novels like *The Buddha of Suburbia* use music like a soundtrack in film. References to pop songs, albums, concerts, etc. form a communicative matrix between author and reader that provides information about characters, setting and mood and makes identification possible. Moreover, through direct lyrical quotes from pop songs the novels gain a certain transmediality, meaning that readers who know the quoted songs will perform them in their heads while reading and thereby extend the narrative toward the musical. Viol demonstrates this process of ‘musicalisation’ convincingly in his close reading of Barry Hines’s novel *Elvis over England*. The following analysis of structural and formal analogies between music and fiction in punk and club
narratives shows that attempts to translate musical forms into literary structures can not only be found in highbrow literature but also in contemporary popular fiction.

One of the most valuable features of Viol's study is that he also considers extraliterary aspects of word-music interrelations in popular fiction. Providing a book with a soundtrack CD or advertising it in a 'litpop' nightclub event is certainly an even more significant change pop music has brought into contemporary literature than the thematic and formal impact it has had on the narrative — a fact that Viol acknowledges in his detailed exploration of the ways in which recent pop literature is marketed and consumed.

What makes Viol's study a generally convincing and pleasant reading experience is that, despite of working in the field of popular culture and certainly showing enthusiasm for it, he is far from exhibiting the kind of uncritical idealisation of pop-/sub-cultural phenomena that can be felt in many studies on this subject. Rather than interpreting any kind of pop-cultural expression one-dimensionally as a liberating, empowering or even subversive experience, Viol brings out its multifaceted nature in his theoretical reflection as well as in his analysis of the literary representations of pop music. Yet, it would have been enlightening to discuss gender-, ethnicity- or class-specific aspects of pop-cultural phenomena like fandom and stardom more thoroughly, since they certainly play a significant role in the novels of Kureishi, Rushdie, Hornby and the like.

Moreover, Viol's poignant reproach of 'aesthetic elitism' against the research area of word-and-music studies, though clearly aimed at the pioneering works within this field by Calvin S. Brown, Stephen Paul Scher and Werner Wolf, neglects more recent attempts (partly by the pioneers themselves) to extend the limited scope of a formalist approach, e.g. by viewing literature and music from the aspect of their cultural history (e.g. Lawrence Kramer) or by including genres such as blues and jazz (e.g. Saadi Simawe). However, while a consideration of these developments would have been rewarding, Viol's study nevertheless represents both a valuable contribution to text-based cultural studies and a solid introduction to word-music intersections in contemporary British fiction.

The aim of Pascal Ohlmann's study — reading the musical sections in Shakespeare's romances as mirrors of the ambivalent and polysemous nature of musical theory and practice in Renaissance England — is more modest but proves to be nonetheless successful. Ohlmann deliberately does without any initial theoretical construct but his project is clearly influenced by New Historicism and its chief practitioner Stephen Greenblatt.

At the centre of the first part of the study are the numerous musical discourses that were circulating in Renaissance England. As Ohlmann convincingly shows, musical treatises of the Renaissance were areas of political combat and deeply informed by patriarchal, puritanical, magic, humanistic and juridical discourses. On the basis of these historical observations Ohlmann argues in his second part that the musical sections in Shakespeare's romances are far from being mere markers of positive turns in the dramatic action. Although they still heavily draw upon Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic concepts of world harmony that were widely popular in Shakespeare's time, they nevertheless signal — by virtue of some strangely dissonant elements — that this harmony can neither be upheld in real life nor in drama. He shows that even the — superficially — harmonious endings of the romances represent the ambivalent, often contradictory features of Renaissance concepts of music.
Ohlmann is at his best when he considers the cultural conditions that 'made' Shakespeare's plays. Among many other points, he manages to show that Shakespeare partly exploited music in order to position himself favourably on the early modern cultural marketplace. Moreover, the scope of the historical research that Ohlmann conducts in order to unfold the extremely rich and heterogeneous nature of early modern musical forms is remarkable. An impressive range of writers, pamphlets and historical documents is drawn upon to bring out the presence of ancient Greek music philosophy, the intermingling of scientific concepts with theories of music, the association of music with magic, and the social distribution of music in Renaissance England.

Thus, both Ohlmann's and Viol's studies amount to a stimulating reading of literary history as cultural history that illuminates larger cultural developments by means of a detailed analysis of fiction and drama. In both cases, the cultural studies approach to word and music relations proves to be a valuable instrument for showing that the significance of speaking about and practising music exceeds the purely aesthetical sphere by far – be it in Shakespeare's time or today.

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