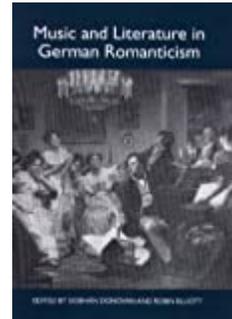




**Siobh  n Donovan, Robin Elliott, eds.** *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*. Rochester: Camden House, 2004. xxix + 233 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57113-258-1.



**Reviewed by** Estelle Joubert (Faculty of Music, University of Oxford)

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## **Capturing the Ineffable: Music, Literature, and the Aesthetics of Romanticism**

The mysterious ability of music to articulate that which is beyond the expression of language figures prominently in nineteenth-century German literature. Whether viewed as a language of the emotions, the metaphysical, the irrational, or of the unconscious, the conviction of music's ability to convey meaning, rather than to imitate or represent an external phenomenon as was generally accepted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, lies at the heart of German Romantic aesthetics. This theme forms the central subject of discourse in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*, a selection of thirteen articles from an international conference of the same title held at University College, Dublin in December 2000. The strength of the collection lies in that it contains short, succinct, well-crafted articles from experts in German literature, aesthetics, musicology, and performance studies; the topic is most fruitfully explored in the intersections between early nineteenth-century literature, music, and aesthetic writings, and by its nature requires an interdisciplinary investigation. At the same time, the depth of each inquiry makes the book more suitable to a specialized audience: one that is interested in and familiar with the discourse and subject matter. The

collection is well organized, is divided under five main themes, and includes a substantial introduction covering the major scholarship relevant to the topic; this format results in a remarkable sense of overarching unity while maintaining the diversity of the individual articles, a quality that is rare in multi-author publications resulting from conferences.

The collection begins with great scholarly flair. Under the first theme, "German Romantic Music Aesthetics," Richard Littlejohns's article "Iniquitous Innocence: The Ambiguity of Music in the *Phantasien  ber die Kunst* (1799)" examines vivid images of music in a collection of writings by Wackenroder and Tieck. After clarifying questions of authorship (pp. 2-3), he demonstrates that music, while portrayed as ineffable, is simultaneously both redemptive and daemonic, a perspective that differs from the generally accepted positive view of music. The second article relating to aesthetics, James Hodgkinson's "The Cosmic-Symphonic: Novalis, Music, and Universal Discourse" aims to explore Novalis's complex theoretical understanding of music within his own philosophical-aesthetic system (p. 13). Hodgkinson offers a unique

interpretation of Novalis's concept of *Poesie* as involving the cultivation of polyphony; the musical metaphor demonstrates issues of intersubjectivity and of the self, as it relates to a multitude of other voices. Of particular interest is the approach's potential to include traditionally marginalized female and non-Christian voices. The author successfully demonstrates this concept of polyphonic discursive exchange first in the novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Saß*, and subsequently as it is more fully realized in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

In his "Das Hören ist ein Sehen von und durch innen: Johann Wilhelm Ritter and the Aesthetics of Music," Thomas Strässle provides an assessment of the writings of J. W. Ritter, a lesser known figure active as a Romantic scientist (*Naturphilosoph*). While scholars in the history of science have documented his contributions, which include the founding of electrochemistry, significant contributions to the phenomenon of *galvanism*, and proof of the existence of the ultraviolet spectrum, scholars in the humanities have shown much less interest, in part, due to the fact that his writings on aesthetics are scattered throughout his *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers*. The most notable exception is Walter Benjamin, who acknowledges considerable debt to Ritter in his aesthetic thought. Thus, the importance of this article lies not just in examining a lesser known figure but also in his contribution to Benjamin's thought: this is a connection that is well worth exploring further. The final article concerning Romantic musical aesthetics, Jeanne Riou's "Music and Non-Verbal Reason in E. T. A. Hoffmann," investigates the less well understood role of sound in Hoffmann's narration of aesthetic subjectivity. The highlight of this contribution is a nuanced discussion of "how sound is intrinsic to identity without being translated into linguistic reason" (p. 53) in Hoffmann's well-known *Ritter Gluck* (1809), a tale featuring the ghost of the eighteenth-century composer playing from an empty score at the piano (pp. 51-53).

The second thematic section, entitled "Responses to Goethe," begins with Lorraine Byrne's contribution, "Perceptions of Goethe and Schubert," in which she dispels the generally accepted notions of Goethe lacking musicality and more importantly of his rejection of the Schubertian *lied*. Byrne convincingly argues that Schubert's *lied* is very much rooted in the often overlooked genre of the *geselliges Lied*, with which Goethe had found great affinity. David Hill, in his "Goethe's *Egmont*, Beethoven's *Egmont*," brings together two disparate views of the Victory Symphony ending Goethe's play and Beethoven's incidental music. Historically, the Victory Symphony

has received numerous varying interpretations due to the fact that Goethe's play contains the events leading to the defeat and death of Egmont while the music, in contrast, signals a victory. Hill's analysis stresses that these two endings are not necessary incompatible. Rather, while the stage play presents the "real" events—death and defeat—the music "intervenes to present the case for the principals for which Egmont stands" (p. 80): particularly the ideal of freedom. Although the author does not make reference to a broader scholarly tradition, this "double-reading" of a play ending with music, in which music communicates meaning beyond that which occurs on stage, is reminiscent of current approaches used in nineteenth-century opera studies. In effect, Hill's article presents a well-researched account of the reception of Goethe and Beethoven's *Egmont*, and his analysis of the Victory Symphony is a convincing new interpretation of the work.

David Larkin's "A Tale of Two *Fausts*: An Examination of Reciprocal Influence in the Responses of Liszt and Wagner to Goethe's *Faust*" aims to demonstrate the mutual influence of the two composers' responses to one of the most widely used poetic texts during the nineteenth century. The author begins by providing possible connections between the two composers regarding a musical realization of the Faust myth—the most apparent connection being that "the final three movement design of Liszt's symphony stems in all likelihood from Wagner" (p. 88). Readers should be aware of two points regarding the section entitled "Musical Quotation in Liszt's *Faust* Symphony": first, the author quotes a definition of musical quotation from prominent musicologist Charles Rosen as the "thematic allusion to a previous work" (p. 91), a definition which unfortunately does not appear in the cited source. Second, the "borrowed" musical examples between the two *Fausts* are perhaps better described as resemblances. The final section, discussing Wagner's alterations corresponding to Liszt's suggestions for revision, is a valuable contribution. Finally, Stefani Bach's "Musical Gypsies and Anti-Classical Aesthetics: The Romantic Reception of Goethe's *Mignon* Character in Bretano's *Die mehreren Wehmüller und ungarische Nationalgesichter*" is an excellent study demonstrating that Mitidika and Michaly, the musical gypsies in Bretano's novella, are a criticism of another musical gypsy, Goethe's *Mignon* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (p. 105). Her discussion artfully displays various notions of musicality in Bretano's gypsies, in which the intuitive and sensual experience of music is affirmed. This affirmation ultimately forms a counter argument against

Goethe's *Mignon*: though embodying the Romantic ideal of intuition, inspiration, and genius, she dies as a result of her inability to give form to her feelings.

The third thematic section, "Sounds of Hoffmann," begins with a splendid article by Andrea Häbener, entitled "Stages of Imagination in Music and Literature: E. T. A. Hoffmann and Hector Berlioz." Häbener asserts that Berlioz's compositions "can be regarded as a varied series of musico-dramatic answers to the questions of music and language Hoffmann had raised in his literary works" (p. 124). She carefully negotiates interpretive tensions resulting from combining music and language in Berlioz's *Huit scènes*, *Symphonie Fantastique*, and *Lelio*. Of notable value is her interpretation's involvement of the audience, who are meant to "discover the advantages of the inner stages of their imagination" (p. 135). Continuing the discussion on Hoffmann's view of music, Werner Keil's "The Voice Hereafter: E. T. A. Hoffmann's Ideal of Sound and Its Realization in Early Twentieth-Century Electronic Music," is a fascinating study on the nature and quality of Hoffmann's desired sound: one that is artificial, strange, outer-worldly, and disturbing. The author documents the eventual realization of this sound in the theremin—an instrument invented by Lev Sergeyevich Termen during the early twentieth century. The sound of this mysterious instrument—used among other contexts in Hollywood thrillers—was closest to that of a synthesized human voice, one that Romantic composers attempted in vain to realize.

The fourth and penultimate thematic section contains two articles, contrasting in approach, devoted to *Lieder*. In his "My song the midnight raven has outwing'd": Schubert's 'Der Wanderer' D. 649," James Parsons provides an intricate reading of a Schlegel poem set to music by Franz Schubert. Particularly valuable is the author's discussion of Romantic conceptions of twilight and night time, a theme that features prominently in the *Lied* and indeed within the larger Romantic tradition. Parsons' approach is hermeneutic, forming part of a larger discourse [2] to which he alludes (p. 179). He finishes with the important and fascinating question of whether or not Schubert merely rephrases Schlegel's questions, or whether Schubert might be raising his own questions thereby leaving clues about his own subjectivity in his

music (p. 179). In contrast, Natasha Loges provides an analysis from the perspective of a scholar-performer in her "The Notion of Personae in Brahms's 'Bitteres zu sagen denkst du,' op. 32, no. 7: A Literary Key to Musical Performance." Central to her argument is the notion of various non-verbal voices: that of the composer, poet, performer, accompaniment, poetic voices within the text, and so forth. This approach not only opens up new ground for the interpretation of *Lieder*, but also is particularly valuable in rendering characterizations on stage (p. 196).

The collection concludes with a single article under the theme "Romantic overtones in contemporary German literature": Jürgen Barkhoff's "Robert Schneider's *Schlafes Bruder*—A Neo-Romantic *Musikernovelle*?" This neo-Romantic novel takes on the tone of a nineteenth-century chronicle, telling the tale of the musical genius Elias Alder. Barkhoff successfully highlights the intertextual dimensions of the novel and draws attention to the collage of styles, playful allusions, shifting attitudes, and kitsch. Finally, the author attributes the tremendous success of this novel to its neo-Romantic character manifested in a contemporary postmodern fashion: "the text invites different readers to pick up different facets of this [Romantic] tradition" (p. 213).

Overall, this book makes an important contribution presenting current approaches from diverse perspectives related to a unified theme. Its presence both signals and responds to a wide-ranging interest in aspects of music, literature, and Romantic aesthetics. The fascination of capturing the ineffable—the unspeakable to which music gives utterance—promises to continue intriguing scholars, performers, and novelists alike.

#### Notes

[1]. See Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[2]. On Musical Hermeneutics see Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley and Oxford: California University Press, 1990); and in relation to Schubert, see his *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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