

DAS SONETT UND DIE MUSIK: POETIKEN, KONJUNKTUREN,  
TRANSFORMATIONEN, REFLEXIONEN, EDS. SARA SPRINGFELD, NORBERT  
GREINER, AND SILKE LEOPOLD

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In 2016, the Universitätsverlag Winter published the collection of essays *Das Sonett und die Musik: Poetiken, Konjunkturen, Transformationen, Reflexionen*, edited by Sara Springfeld, Norbert Greiner and Silke Leopold. As highlighted on the title page, the volume contains contributions that were born as papers delivered to an interdisciplinary symposium held in Heidelberg in September 2012. Fortunately, the interdisciplinary approach is not just an eye-catcher, but is consistently pursued in the book. The three editors (two musicologists and a literary scholar) collected fourteen essays, seven of which display a strong musicological approach, while the others are closer to literary studies. The two disciplines find common ground, partly thanks to clusters of essays that address similar issues from different perspectives, as I will show below.

As the editors explain in the Introduction ('Einleitung'), the sonnet constitutes an optimal research area for a fruitful encounter between musical and literary disciplines. Although literary scholars might not always be aware of it, the sonnet plays a central role in the history of Western music, in genres ranging from the madrigal to popular music, from opera to instrumental music. Additionally, the musicality of the sonnet is often evoked in discussion of its strictly literary features, and this aspect constitutes one of the leitmotifs of the book.

The first essay ("In rime sparse il suono": Das Sonett und seine musikalische Geschichte', pp. 1–22), by Silke Leopold, has the proemial character suggested by the Petrarchan quotation in the title. This contribution introduces some of the topics with which the following essays deal more specifically, including the 'musicality' of the sonnet (p. 4), its peculiar strophic structure (pp. 5–6) and its varying fortunes among composers (p. 13). Leopold exemplifies different issues on the basis of settings by Bartolomeo Tromboncino, Claudio Monteverdi, Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt and Arnold Schönberg. A historical musicologist might turn up his nose at this bold overview (400 years of music history in twenty pages), but a footnote on p. 1 advises that Leopold's contribution was devised as public opening lecture, not an academic paper. Be that as it may, it perfectly succeeds in setting the tone for the following essays.

Rüdiger Görner's essay ('Das Verhalten am Ohr: Sonettklänge', pp. 23–36) constitutes a pendant to Leopold's opening contribution. The author explores the musicality of the sonnet from a poetological perspective, trying to uncover what lies behind the generic label. Interestingly, this 'musicality' was not always perceived as a positive feature (pp. 23–25).

Felix Sprang's essay ('Die Beständigkeit des Wandels: Die volta im italienischen und

englischen Sonett', pp. 37–56) is devoted to the *volta*, the rhetorical shift that usually occurs between the octet and the sestet, or before the final couplet in the Shakespearean sonnet. This focus allows Sprang to address concepts such as form and content, showing that the binary contrast of the two is counterproductive, because it obscures their interwoven relations (pp. 38–44). Sprang analyses the formal and rhetorical role of the *volta* in the early Italian tradition (Giacomo da Lentino, Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca), and its function in the early modern English sonnet (Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, William Shakespeare), but also takes account of its reception in the twentieth century, with an example by Carol Ann Duffy.

Christine Faist's contribution, 'Musikalische (Inter)Text- und Formreflexionen im Spannungsfeld von Tradition und Innovation: Tres Sonetos von José Luis Turina (\*1952)' (pp. 57–98), was not delivered to the 2012 conference, but it perfectly fits the theme of the volume. Faist proposes an analysis of *Tres Sonetos*, José Luis Turina's setting of poems by Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo and (attributively) Luis de Góngora. Besides conventional observations concerning the relationship between text and music, Faist also discusses more fascinating and unexpected features of these settings. For example, the possibility of the composer altering the rhetorical structure of the sonnet, disclosing the 'meaning' of the poem before it becomes really evident in the text (p. 70), or the relationship between the sonnet and instrumental music, with the composer developing a polyphonic section from five different sonnets, but erasing the text afterwards and turning the voices into instrumental parts (pp. 79–82).

One of the merits of this volume is to take the interdisciplinary approach seriously, bringing in scholars from different fields to work on the same topic. Thus the essays by Marc Föcking ('Vanitas im italienischen Sonett von Petrarca bis zum Barock', pp. 99–124) and Joachim Steinheuer ('"Vane

speranze e il van dolore" Zu Vertonung von Vanitas-Sonetten im italienischen Repertoire zwischen 1550 und 1650', pp. 125–168) constitute a cluster devoted to the early modern *vanitas* sonnet. Föcking discusses the rhetorical strategies deployed in *vanitas* sonnets, highlighting a tendency toward the suspension of time and an absence of narration (pp. 100–103). Additionally, he sees a relationship between the disintegration of the *canzoniere* as the macrotext of the sonnet and the establishment of the *vanitas* sonnet as a recognisable genre. Unfortunately, all of this is not really mirrored in the musicological contribution by Steinheuer, who analyses parallel settings of *vanitas* sonnets, the same poems discussed in the preceding essay (Petrarch's 'Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono', Castiglione's 'Superbi colli e voi sacre ruine', Tansillo's 'Valli nemiche al sol, superbe rupi' and the anonymous 'Io vi rifiuto ormai lettere e armi'). Although the analyses are convincing and add an important layer to our understanding of sonnet-music relations, the issues discussed could be observed in any sonnet setting, not necessarily related to *vanitas*. Thus the link between the two essays is more apparent than real.

Thomas Borgstedt offers a very useful survey of sonnet theories from the origins up to the twentieth century ('Das Sonett als liedhafte Form in der Geschichte der Sonetttheorie', pp. 169–184), discussing authors such as Philipp von Zensen, Johann Christoph Gottsched, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Heinz Mitlacher. Interestingly, the seventeenth-century theorist Philipp von Zensen identified the *Liedhaftigkeit* of the sonnet as problematic, and he related it to the imperfect strophic structure of the sonnet (p. 175). This aspect is further discussed in Sara Springfeld's contribution, 'Sangbar, aber kaum gesungen – Das deutschsprachige Sonett und die Musik im 17. Jahrhundert' (pp. 185–202). Springfeld starts her contribution by discussing a setting of another example of the *vanitas* sonnet, 'Ich armer

*Madensack*. Interestingly, this is one of the four surviving settings of sonnets from seventeenth-century Germany. Springfield addresses a musicological riddle, namely the almost complete absence of sonnet settings in seventeenth-century Germany, notwithstanding the contemporary success of the literary genre. Resorting to theoretical literature, Springfield connects the divorce between the sonnet and music to the German predilection for strophic songs, which made the sonnet an imperfect candidate for musical settings.

With the contribution of Henriette Stahl ('Die Römische Sonette: Der Zyklus als Stationenweg bei Wjatscheslaw Iwanow und Alexander Gretschaninow', pp. 203–226), we move to another main thematic area of this volume, namely the musical and literary reception of the sonnet in Russia. Stahl's essay is devoted to a setting by Alexander Gretchaninow (1864–1956) of a cycle of sonnets by the symbolist poet Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949). This essay shows another layer of interaction between music and poetry, namely the formation or alteration of a cycle. The composer restructured Ivanov's original series of sonnets, thus deeply altering its meaning (pp. 216–221).

Stefan Weiss's essay ('William Shakespeares Sonette und die russische Musik. Traditionslinien – Grenzüberschreitungen – Formstrategien', pp. 227–254) looks at the musical reception of Shakespeare's sonnets in twentieth-century Russia, analysing art songs as well as popular music. The tables given in this contribution are particularly useful, as they show clearly how different composers dealt with the formal features of the sonnet. The inclusion of examples from popular music is also commendable, although the author sometimes has a judgemental tone that does not help the reader to understand the phenomena analysed (see, for example, p. 228 and p. 232).

The essays by Norbert Greiner and Dorothea Redepenning focus on Shakespeare's Sonnet 66 ('Tired with all these for restful

death I cry'). Greiner's fascinating contribution ('Die übersetzerische Rezeption von Shakespeare Sonett 66', pp. 255–274) discusses nine different German translations of this sonnet, from Karl Lachmann (1793–1851) up to Volker Braun (b. 1939). Greiner highlights the social and aesthetical energy of Shakespeare's sonnet, clarifying how its translation history can be read as *Kulturgeschichte*, creating ever-changing relations with new social and historical contexts. The historical contingencies are evident also behind Boris Pasternak's decision to translate Sonnet 66 into Russian, as Redepenning clarifies in her essay 'Boris Pasternak, Dmitrij Schostakowitsch und William Shakespeare Sonett Nr. 66' (pp. 275–294). This translation was set to music by Shostakovich as part of his *Six Romances on Verse by English Poets* (1942), in a style that Redepenning reads as simplicity and respect for the word (p. 290).

Sonja Fielitz (English studies) deals with Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* ("If music be the food of love": Das Sonett in Verdis Shakespeare-Oper Falstaff, p. 295–312). This contribution opens the last section of the volume, devoted to the role of sonnets in opera. The chance to discuss Verdi's *Falstaff* is offered by the presence of the sonnet *Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola*, sung by the lovers Fenton and Nanetta. Fielitz decides to include many introductory remarks ('Shakespeare and the sonnet in England', pp. 295–298; *libretto* and opera', pp. 298–300; 'Verdi's *Falstaff*', pp. 300–304), so that the contribution has a generic tone, mostly summarising existing secondary literature.

Hartmut Schick's essay, 'Musik und Dichtung im Widerstreit: Das Sonett in Richard Strauss' letzter Oper *Capriccio*' (pp. 313–340), forms the perfect closure to the volume. In Richard Strauss's meta-opera *Capriccio*, two characters, a composer and a poet, seek the love of a countess, allegorising the troublesome question of the primacy between music and poetry. The whole plot rotates around a sonnet and its musical setting.

Schick highlights the aesthetical and compositional implications of Strauss's work, relying not only on analysis of the opera, but also on other historical sources, such as Strauss's correspondence, which illuminates the composer's understanding of his own work.

Generally speaking, *Das Sonett und die Musik* manages to have an interdisciplinary slant which is more than the mere juxtaposition of chapters by authors from different disciplines. As I highlighted above, the dialogue between essays covering similar thematic areas is not always entirely successful, but after reading the book one has a clear image of the different issues discussed, thus confirming the unitary character of the volume. This constitutes an undeniable quality of the conference proceedings, which most likely derives from the clever organisation of the conference in 2012.

The volume shows the tendency of the sonnet and its musical counterpart to deal constantly with its own history, resulting in a circular type of historicity. This is surely related to the contribution made to the genre by paradigmatic authors such as Petrarch and Shakespeare, whose influence crosses linguistic, national, social and generic boundaries. From a musicological perspective, it is praiseworthy that this book deals with repertoires whose relationship with the sonnet is rarely discussed. Usually, the early modern tradition of the Italian madrigal is the main focus in this respect. The madrigal is present in the book, but that presence is not overwhelming, and other musical traditions are addressed as well, such as art songs from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, opera and popular music.

Somehow problematic is the varying tone of the essays: some of them are fairly complex and detailed, while others offer rather superficial and general surveys. The authors probably took different approaches to meeting the needs of an interdisciplinary symposium.

Another disappointing feature concerns the theoretical discussion of the relations between text and music. Reading the mu-

sicological essays, we repeatedly encounter expressions that describe a musical setting as 'respecting the text'. The idea that music could/should respect (or even serve) words has a very long tradition in Western theoretical discussion. Famously, the primacy of the text over the 'rules' of musical composition constituted the core of the *querelle* that opposed the composer Claudio Monteverdi and the theorist Giovanni Maria Artusi. Monteverdi's position was effectively summarised in 1607 by his brother Giulio Cesare with the now famous aphorism 'l'oratione sia padrona dell'armonia e non serva' ('the words should be the master of the harmony and not its servant'). Such an understanding of the relations between music and poetry was circulating well before Monteverdi, and it constitutes a central feature of Western musical aesthetics. Hence this and related concepts played (and still play) a primary role in directing composers' decisions. From an historical point of view, their value cannot be overestimated. However, in a theoretical discussion, it would have been useful to have problematised their usage. A transmedial operation such as setting words to music involves conflict, change and adaptation. There is no 'respectful' way as such to intone a text, but a very wide array of possibilities that depend on different aesthetical and compositional premises and criteria. Nevertheless, the volume *Das Sonett und die Musik* constitutes an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between music and poetry, offering a wide survey that deals with different epochs, regions and genres.

The book is beautifully produced. There are some typos, but nothing that harms the joy of reading. Given the wealth of sonnets and musical settings discussed, an index of text incipits would have been extremely helpful, while the volume includes just a list of names.

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