

Iwona Puchalska  
Jagiellonian University  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0681-7460

*Poetic Musicology* among Musical Discourses:  
The Poet as a Listener

1

“Some people like poetry,” wrote Wisława Szymborska (Szymborska: 325). The same can be said about music. But do these ‘some people’ who like music like poetry, too? And vice versa, do poetry lovers like music?

As we know, the relationship between musicological discourse and literature-specialist discourse can be a complex, even contentious, one. Now and again, this dispute is eased due to various concepts corresponding to the spirit of the times and the specific qualities of the artistic material – the idea of the correspondence of the arts, intersemiotic, interdisciplinary or intermedia research, or performative, communicative, cognitivist or rhetoric approaches (to name but a few). However, there is no denying that this dispute is genetic and derives from the very essence of SPEAKING about music. The special place occupied by literature results from the fact that the reception and interpretation of most artistic activities is brought to its own territory – the territory of the word. Like the visual arts, music’s non-verbal nature means that it is usually transcribed; this is clearly denoted by the fact that musicology as a science uses the written word rather than sound.

Of course, it is possible to comment on music through music. This possibility was signalled, among others, by George Steiner, who added that such

interpretations are the best ones. Steiner illustrated this thesis with an anecdote about Schumann, who, when asked to clarify a difficult etude, only played it once more; he also quoted the example of Liszt, whose arrangements were a specific commentary on the works of others (Steiner: 20–21). Peter Szendy referred to this second example, too, by presenting his own theory of arrangement as a strategy of immanent interpretation carried out within one semiotic system. But both Steiner and Szendy – and many others – made an implicit act of capitulation on that occasion, showing the communication limitations of intramusical discourse through the very fact of final reference to the word rather than music for the purpose of expressing their musical reflections (both Schumann and Liszt were the composers who liked speaking about music through words).

Obviously, the longing for alternative non-verbal means of musical expression recurs from time to time. In this spirit, Peter Kivy, for example, appreciates gesture or dance as a tool to express musical feelings (Kivy: 99–123). This, however, does not change a fact which even the most fervent follower of the thesis of the autonomy of music cannot ignore: that the basic ground for the exchange of reflections on music is language. In its historical origins, therefore, musicology was not an expression of rebellion against the hegemony of the word, but against its imprecision and entanglement in poeticalness. In this regard, it assumed a separation between verbality and literariness. The formalist revolt of Eduard Hanslick, which was a reaction against romantic, extremely subjective unbridled interpretations, resulted from a desire for the radical purification and autonomisation of musical discourse through a return to the somewhat “transparent” language of the professional “craftsman”. Although this project in its radical Hanslickian form has long been considered utopian, it still serves a purpose and is useful as a certain matrix of thinking about music in terms of objectivism. Such an interpretation is always associated with an attempt to separate the personal attitude to the work from its objective analysis and to depersonalise artistic comments; as Hanslick himself put it, “when getting drunk, do we recognise it as the same kind of wine that we wanted to examine?” (Hanslick: 23). Today, this argument is easily refuted with the statement that contact with wine is not only aimed at identifying its type. For this reason, when formulating his assumptions for the integral interpretation of a musical

work, Mieczysław Tomaszewski attached most importance to the postulate of “the choice of an engaged work for analysis and interpretation. A work that you admire, experience and learn about all at the same time. The danger of this kind of subjectivism in connection with a work of art seems to be no worse than the danger carried by so-called objectivism.” (Tomaszewski: 33).

Hanslick’s revolt was not in vain, however. Among other things, it led to the conscious separation of various ways of verbalising music, with particular emphasis on their diverse motivations. Most importantly, it resulted in the opening of discourses.

## 2

And I do not see any reason why, on condition of respecting methodological rules that guarantee correctness, a musicologist should not refer to the effectiveness of rhetoric, to the beauty of pictures or the inventiveness of metaphors, with the same success that a writer is able to achieve. Besides, a writer can sometimes speak about music as brilliantly as a musicologist does.

(Nattiez: 13)

So wrote Jean-Jacques Nattiez [my translation], proceeding from the ascertainment that “speaking about music has a bad press” and putting this situation down to its excessive specialisation and causticity. Today, musicologists generally seem to agree that, while the structure of a musical work is transcribable with specialist language, all other levels of its perception require referring to rhetorical concepts or metaphors. There are even opinions questioning the advisability of maintaining the specialist musical terminology: for example, Stephen Davies states that virtually all musical phenomena can be described with colloquial language or by using a metaphor (Davies: 150–165). However, the use of metaphor often arises out of necessity; while specialist terminology, even if regarded as unnecessary, is functional as a practical mental shortcut (according to the same principle that works in poetics where the use of “professional” terms spares descriptive explications and shortens the line of reasoning) in the case of musical works that can be recorded by means of the (more or less traditional) notation methods, it ceases to be effective with regard

to experimental works that employ unconventional sounds. As regards recordings of the reception and experience of music, the metaphor in its broad sense may seem particularly privileged and, in special cases, it may even be the only way to express them (Scruton, 1999: 2009). Irrespective of the functionality of the metaphor, its presence in musicology is certainly determined by this “respect for methodological rules that guarantee correctness” that Nattiez wrote about; they mark the border between the territory of musicological reflection and the territory explored by literary scholars that is often defined in the Polish humanistic tradition as *poetic “musicology”*.

This term was coined by Anna Barańczak; being fully aware of the different conditions and goals of writing about music in artistic and university environments, she made attempts to appreciate literary description by highlighting its potential for extracting meanings that academic musicologists (from the time when the text was written) did not want to or could not see and also its ability to refresh the perspective of music in spite of the numerous “errors and distortions” in this respect (The term “poetic” seems to be synonymous with “literary” in Barańczak’s text). Published at the beginning of the 1970s, Barańczak’s text is characterised by an approach that is, to some limited extent, confrontational because it forms a reaction to the hegemony of formalism prevailing in thinking about music at that time. At the same time, it was one of the more important steps towards overcoming it and extending and diversifying the proofs of musical reception. This line of thought was taken up by many Polish researchers, including Andrzej Hejmej, who characterised the assumptions of poetic “musicology” as follows:

Literature transforms and displays certain musical meanings, thereby becoming a non-conventional commentary to music; it may be extremely subjective at one time or more valid at another, extremely speculative on one occasion and strictly musicological on another.

(Hejmej: 242 [trans. I.P.]

In such an interpretation, poetic “musicology” constitutes a formula that validates a literary commentary in its entire unconventionality. However, if we approach the topic historically and panoramically, it will turn out that literary opinions on music clearly dominate over objectivising musicological commentary both in terms of quantity and the scope of impact. For this reason, they

have exerted a much stronger impact on the reception of the art of sounds than specialist opinions, marking the awareness of recipients and, consequently, the culture of musical reception with various variants of its “non-conventionality”. Besides, many earlier classic musicological works are far from neutral and contain many “extremely subjective” or “extremely speculative” elements. In the last few decades, as a result of the strong split of the paradigm of scholarship in the humanities and the suspension of the question about the objective “truth” of works of art, various ways of interpreting music have begun to multiply also within the scope of university musicology and the category of “typicality” has become visibly blurred, even though the dominance of formal analysis (which, I presume, constitutes those “strictly musicological” parts of literary speaking about literature mentioned by Hejmej) undoubtedly continues to distinguish the musicological interpretation from other ways of speaking about the art of sounds.

For this reason, while taking over the useful term of *poetic “musicology”* from Anna Barańczak, I will allow myself to modify it slightly (signalled by the use of inverted commas for both words, not just the second one) because, whilst acknowledging the correctness of the researcher’s view of the literary description of music, I perceive its function in the evolution of the cultural *universum* in a different manner. Namely, I do not treat poetic messages and musicological commentaries as two different, and to some extent competing, methods of reaching a certain “truth” about music, but as diverse ways of having contact with the art of sounds, which sometimes cross or overlap.

### 3

The issue of the method of receiving music according to pre-determined assumptions and needs is only one side of the coin; the other side is represented by those qualities of music which mean it cannot be regarded as a passive phenomenon, but as a thing that has the specific identity of a different performative nature (which Roman Ingarden tried to neutralise with such determination in the past) and, consequently, diversified ontology. This is because some compositions (e.g., sonoristic ones) essentially come into being outside – or rather over – the score, and some even cannot be recorded in the score (e.g., concrete

music works), whereas others are characterised by the precision of the notation or even dialogicality in cases when the score contains inscriptions that can be noticed only on the level of reading and not listening (such as the encryption of proper names or words with sounds designated by letters). The use of one method of analysis based on invariable assumptions towards such diversified material is not only simplifying, but it is virtually impossible in many cases. Essentially, however, all musical compositions are characterised by the fact that they are intended to be listened to. The fact that music fully exists only when it is being performed is a commonly recognised truth today; the ultimate argument for this was the intensive development of phonography, which ensures the durability of an artefact for the previously ephemeral nature of sound engineering. It is also important that this artefact is no longer considered in relation to the score in the logic of identity, but that its translation or adaptation is close to the interpretation of Wittgenstein, who used the picture of a phonograph record as an example of the logic of mapping (4.014–4.0141).

As a consequence of the possibility of recording sound, the strategies of musical description evolved substantially, and the front line dividing the work from its sonic modification was moved. Today, it is no longer situated between the permanent record of a score transcribable by musicological nomenclature and the variable form of “concretisation” – it has a more fluid character and is increasingly often expressed in the question about conditions (historical, social, cultural, environmental, etc.) rather than the adequacy of the specific way in which the work comes into being.

The clear pluralisation of positions within the scope of modern knowledge about music involves another factor – an intensely developing reflection on listening that introduces a new quality into the sphere of musicological thought. This is because formal analysis is connected with analysis of the notation; detailed performance based only on listening to it is virtually impossible, especially in the case of harmonically complex or experimental works. In his famous classification of types of listening, T.W. Adorno assigned such an ability to a very small group of music recipients, whom he defined as experts and among whom he ranked only outstanding professional musicians (Adorno, 1968). This kind of analysis is actually possible only with regard to the score as the distilled form of a musical work. Moreover, this type of description also

means the suspension of the temporal aspect of the composition because it is carried out within time structures that are different from the structures of the passage of the musical work, being actually suspended in time. On the other hand, the reflection on listening situates the musical passage in relation to external circumstances by arranging and correlating its timing with them and setting it in a specific time and space (Chion, 1998: 2010).

Like many expressions in the human sciences, the auditive breakthrough and the validation of the subjective approach to music assumes various degrees – from moderate degrees that integrate a new perspective of seeing with other people to other, more extreme degrees. One of the most radical representatives of the auditive approach to music is Antoine Hennion, who suggests that it should be regarded as an “uncertain result dependent on what the listener will do with it, not a certainty” (Hennion: 95 [trans. I.P.]) – in this way, originating from sociological positions, it assumes a neo-pragmatic position that is analogous to the position of Richard Rorty and others within the scope of philosophical thought. Focusing in particular on the meanders of the formation of musical tastes, or – more generally – aesthetic preferences and habits, Hennion presents the idea of a new analysis of reception where, as he states, music is not the point of departure, but the point of arrival (Hennion: 96). Expressing his opinion on the open form of each musical work, he energetically fights against all symptoms of what he calls the “graphomorphisation” of music related to primacy of the score. Engaging in practical research in the form of seminars and workshops, he focuses on working with amateurs of music and actually removes from his field of vision the phenomenon of reception marked by musicological knowledge, thereby trying to grasp the specific qualities of culturally and educationally unformatted acts of listening, with the sensitivity of the recipients as the only intermediate factor.

Hennion’s theses are a good illustration of how far the modern sociology of music can depart from the objectivising approach to a musical work. However, irrespective of whether we are inclined to agree with his assumptions or not, they are certainly not functional enough when it comes to examining the evidence of reception not controlled by the assumptions of a listening experiment – spontaneous but not necessarily amateurish evidence in the form of poems. More useful, though also under certain conditions, is the approach proposed by Peter

Szendy, one of the most active musicologists with philosophical tendencies in the field of acology, particularly his idea of appropriation as a receptive attitude that is elementary and necessary for the sake of authentic contact with music. Presenting an analytical rather than experimental approach, Szendy is interested mainly in individual acts of listening, particularly when they assume the form of a specific intramusical dialogue – the expression of reception through transcription or arrangement. But not only – he attaches equal importance to verbal records of listening, whether of an artistic, documentary or private nature.

Although Szendy's considerations focus on issues customarily connected with the semantic field of the word "interpretation", he avoids this concept, which seems to be too wide and methodologically too complicated for his conception – for example, it is excessively burdened with the hermeneutical tradition (Szendy: 15). Most importantly, it implies the existence of a stable paradigm of a musical work, which the researcher questions, making an attempt to "consider the concept of a musical work" (*interroger la notion d'oeuvre*) in strict connection with the categories of its rights and ownership; as he states, "Interpretation is also a form of appropriation of music [...]. But I think that interpretation *as such* rarely asks a question about the work *as such*" (Szendy: 25 [trans. I.P.]).

Thus, departing from thinking about music in terms of interpretation, Szendy replaces this concept with the term "listening", which encompasses the method of having contact with a work that is ascribed not only to the passive (traditional) listener, but also to the performer and the composer. It is important to note that his concept of "listening" includes also having contact with music only by means of the score, not through performance (Szendy: 22).

As we can see, the idea of interpretation is virtually absent in Szendy's conception – there are various methods of listening; the perspective he adopts equals not only the performer's and the recipient's instances, but also the creative instance, and the various effects of "listening" are defined by the common term of arrangement, synonyms of which include concepts such as adaptation and transcription (Szendy: 22). Szendy also treats arrangement in its musical sense as an attempt to tell others about our own individual reception – an attempt to draw other people's attention to how we listen to a given work on our own and what we hear in it (Szendy: 53–88).

Understood in both a strict musical sense and also in a broader metaphorical sense, arrangement is the expression of the privatisation of a work; here Szendy agrees with Adorno, but he evaluates this process in a completely different way. His conception of listening, although not as radical as Hennion's, also assumes alienation: in his view, a musical work has a spectral character by nature – it exists as the sum of listening acts and their evidence, not as an objective value. In this conception, the score is also only a shadow of the work (although Szendy admits that he definitely prefers working with scores to working with sound materials) – the same goes for music which exists only in the form of sound and which is devoid of notation (e.g. electroacoustic or electronic music), which is apparently more stable in ontological terms, but in fact it is also modified every time by the sonic environment and the context in which it exists.

This redefinition, or actually reversal, of traditional concepts has the features of a conceptual- linguistic game, but it is based on a significant observation that may not be absolutely new, but is presented suggestively: the thought about the absolute autonomy of a musical work and, at the same time, about its consternating dependence as an open work *par excellence*. Therefore, as a consequence of that, the question about music rights in their widest sense arises: “*Who has the right to music?... Who has the right to make it his own?... Who can make music be heard in the same way that he hears it?*” asks Szendy (21–23 [trans. I.P.]).

The answer to these questions may seem both obvious and cynical: everyone who will include it in an appropriately prominent discourse. Therefore, suggestive interpretations made within the scope of “poetic musicology”, irrespective of their verifiability and validity, have often met with better reception than objectivising interpretations. However, this does not mean that they can replace the latter. The essence of the matter actually lies not in the question about which verbal representations of music are “better” or more “accurate” or which ones will be more popular among the listeners, but how these acts of listening correspond to each other. In an age when the human sciences lead increasingly often to a confrontation of discourses and pay less and less attention to the confrontation of individual works, it seems justified to ask about the correspondence of methods of interpretation (or, in this case, it would be

more proper to say “methods of listening”) rather than arts. In music, this relationship seems to emerge in the most distinctive manner and has the most significant consequences, because the ontical form of a musical work that can be recorded by means of notation makes its reception an actually comparative activity: first the work existing in the notation is confronted with its sonic expression, i.e., with its “version”, its “translation” – or their multitude, their whole set! – and only this original act of comparing a “listening act” leads to the further stages of learning the musical work and expressing opinions on it. Further confrontations and successive placement of this work within the limits of various discourses, including musicological, literary, intermedia, psychological, legal and sociological ones, are the natural consequences of this primary act. Only musical works existing merely in sonic form that are intranscribable to the notation system (such as electronic or electroacoustic music) avoid this original comparative confrontation. However, they fail to avoid its successive stages and complications.

4

Although I am far from accepting all of Szendy’s ideas, the conception of a poetic contextualisation of musical works fits well with both the transposition of the conception of an open work into the musicological field and also with the idea of “appropriation”. These interpretations allow us to put “scientific” (objectivising) elaborations and poetic expressions in a complementary relation, which in turn makes it possible to create a multi-aspect view of poetic statements concerning music.

Replacing the concept of interpretation with the concept of listening is a step towards removing the border between “poetic musicology” and *tout court* musicology. However, I am unable to take this step – mainly because the majority of poets have faith in the certain ontological stability of music, sometimes even in its absolute stability, and traditional musicology has a strong influence on their way of having contact with the art of sounds. Besides, as Szendy’s analyses aptly show, the specificity of one’s own personal attitude towards music can be discovered and shown only towards its existing image, towards its more or less

illusory IDENTITY, which is the condition for identification of the “work as such” (*oeuvre comme telle*).

Generally speaking, the auditive breakthrough in music culture excellently corresponds with changes in the way that poets take on musical topics. Since poets do still write about music. Having gone through “childhood diseases” – the romantic “explanation of music” and the naivety of “the time of adolescence” – modernistic “vagueness” after the shock of frequently arrogant formalism, they write about it increasingly often, more diversely and more confidently – although we must admit that it does not happen everywhere. Polish poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is an unusual occurrence in comparison to the literature of other nations when it comes to the quality and richness of the musical motifs. Poets writing in other languages, who still seem to be embarrassed by the frequently curious excesses related to the “poeticalisation” of the art of sounds, are relatively reluctant to take on musical topics, or they do so cautiously. Polish poets – representing different generations, including the youngest ones, and different literary schools and traditions – write extensively about it and often in a concrete matter-of-fact fashion. They describe what, when, where and how they listen. Like many of us, they listen to live music less and less frequently. They prefer using recordings, radio and the Internet for that purpose; if they go to a concert, they do not yield to the illusion of having “direct” contact with music. They listen to very diverse music – not only that which is called “classical” – and they do not hesitate to put the various kinds together. They listen both in concentration and dispersion. Sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally. But they listen and write about it. They write without complexes. That is because they often assume the position of amateurs in their relationship with music, meaning those who – according to the etymology of the word – love music, but – according to the modern usage of this concept – are not professionals and are not “experts” on music. They do not build their career on it and lack the appropriate music ability and/or relevant education.

The concept of the amateur has been the subject of intense reflection, particularly in the last few years, in connection with the revision of many beliefs concerning the role of music in modern society, including in particular the issue of valuating associated with the realities of the music market (Leveratto,

2000). First of all, the indulgent connotation of this term is fading. Paul Tolila, who had been regarded as a sort of “good savage” and was treated in a friendly but also patronising manner only half a century ago, noticed that the amateur, as a result of changes in the music market, had become a significant figure as a “user” and purchaser of music (Tolila: 9). This role of a “new type of listener” had already been forecast by Glenn Gould, who wrote:

The emergence of this mid-twentieth-century phenomenon is the greatest achievement of the record industry. For this listener is no longer passively analytical; he is an associate whose tastes, preferences, and inclinations even now alter peripherally the experiences to which he gives his attention, and upon whose fuller participation the future of the art of music awaits.

He is also, of course, a threat, a potential usurper of power, an uninvited guest at the banquet of the arts, one whose presence threatens the familiar hierarchical setting of the musical establishment. Is it not, then, inopportune to venture that this participant public could emerge untutored from that servile posture with which it paid homage to the status structure of the concert world and, overnight, assume decision-making capacities which were specialists’ concerns heretofore?

(Gould: 347)

This new “history of the music amateur” would have to be based on new categories: not on factors of good or bad taste, but on analyses and descriptions of listening as a specific kind of activity, with the original assumption that it is not a passive, but a creative act. Thus, it would obviously not be history that would replace the traditional history of music, but rather something that complements it, both in the historical and modern perspective. In the history of music designed in this manner, poets’ testimonies may serve as an important segment.

Polish poets of the 20th century usually assume almost demonstratively the position of amateurs – for example, Adam Zagajewski, one of the most “musical” poets in Polish literature:

### **Piano lesson**

[I’m eight years old]

Piano lesson at the neighbors’, Mr. and Mrs. J.  
I’m in their apartment for the first time,  
which smells different from ours (ours has no smell,

or so I think). Everywhere carpets,  
thick Persian carpets. I know that they're Armenians,  
but don't know what that means. Armenians have carpets,

dust wanders through the air, imported  
from Lvov, medieval dust.

We don't have carpets or Middle Ages,  
We don't know who we are – maybe wanderers.  
Sometimes I think we don't exist. Only others are.  
The acoustics are great in our neighbors' apartment.

It's quiet in this apartment. A piano stands in the room  
like a lazy, tamed predator – and in it,  
as its very heart, dwells music's black ball.

Mrs. J. told me right after the first  
or second lesson that I should take up languages  
since I showed no talent for music.

I show no talent for music.  
I should take up languages instead.  
Music will always be elsewhere,  
inaccessible, in someone else's apartment.  
The black ball will be hidden elsewhere,  
but there may be other meetings, revelations.

I went home, hanging my head,  
a little saddened, a little glad – home,  
where there was no smell of Persia, only amateur paintings,  
watercolors, and I thought with bitterness and pleasure  
that I had only one language, only words, images,  
only the world.

(Zagajewski, 2012: 16)

There is a lot of real disillusionment in this poem. But, obviously, it contains much insincere humility as well. “Only the world” that comes in return for music is not so little, after all. It is a specific declaration of independence – admitting one's failure, but without excessive regret: the ironic “only” means removing music from its pedestal, but without contempt. It means reconstructing one's personal relationship with music in a similar way to building a friendly relationship with a person for whom love has not developed. A relaxed platonic relationship that is already based on other principles.

A surprisingly similar position to Zagajewski's was adopted by the recently deceased Yves Bonnefoy – one of those rare modern French poets writing about music and a poetry theoretician who speaks extensively about its relationship with the other arts. On the one hand, he says that music is impossible to understand if we do not know it on a practical level; on the other hand, this lack of understanding does not exclude another kind of understanding and, most importantly, it stimulates the imagination:

From the distance I dream of many more things; you can transfigure more from the distance than when relations become closer and when the real door opens. At the same time, I know also well that music and its history that I missed in various ways were actually half-open for me, which allows me to hope that I dreamt of them in a way that makes some sense, at least as a testimony to what you can imagine about it.

(Bonnefoy: 14 [trans. I.P.])

Indeed, as Bonnefoy states, the lack of musical education often leads both poets and ordinary listeners to assume a specific position towards the art of sounds, which is marked by the awareness of its distinctness and distance. But poets often take a step farther. Even if they have decent musical abilities, they assume the position of non-specialists in their works and keep a distance that is an identity distance: they contemplate music from the perspective of poetry as their own domain. They rarely limit their actions to “ordinary” listening. They use music for their own benefits – poetic benefits. However, they turn out to show solidarity towards other listeners. Scouring the world of music, they like to assume the position of “ordinary listeners” who have the right to make mistakes, to disturb the hierarchy of works, to follow only their own tastes and to like weaker compositions while ignoring masterpieces. They sometimes even present themselves as an *enfant terrible* among refined music fans. Thus, in a sense, they represent the broad audience, without which musical life would die out and become an infertile enclave of specialists. Acting as such representatives, they stand in the audience's defence, strengthening the right to have personal contact with music with their poetic authority, which is independent of the criteria of valuation imposed by others.

It is characteristic that two poetic texts written independently of each other which refer to these issues are both connected with Rachmaninoff. One of them was written by Adam Zagajewski:

**Rachmaninov**

When I listened to the Third Concerto then,  
I still didn't know that experts considered it  
too conservative (I hadn't realized yet  
that art holds not only art, but also hatreds, fanatical  
debates, curses worthy of religious wars),

I heard the promise of things to come,  
omens of complex happiness, love, sketches  
of landscapes I would later recognize,  
a glimpse of purgatory, heaven, wanderings, and at last,  
maybe even something like forgiveness.

As I listen now to Martha Argerich play  
the Third Concerto, I marvel at her mastery,  
her passion, her inspiration, while the boy  
I once was labors to understand  
what came to pass, and what's gone. What lives.

(Zagajewski, 2018: 25)

This idea of Rachmaninoff as a composer whose reputation is such that the public declaration of a fondness for his works would be treated automatically as a sign of musical inexperience by “connoisseurs” (Gołąb: 71–72) also appears in Julia Hartwig's text *A Warning* [*Ostrzeżenie*]:

I remember the warning gesture of his hand: “No, no!” When the praise of Rachmaninoff's concert fell out of my mouth like a frog.  
He held me back with this “No, no!” like a man falling down on a slippery road or sliding with incredible speed down the hill over which Telemann, Purcell, Pergolesi or Albinoni tower.

Did he do this to save me in the eyes of his friends, so unanimous in their high affections, or maybe he protected my own taste against hurting, always so reliable and appreciating mainly the beauty of the distance?

(Hartwig, 1992: 50 [trans. I.P.]

In both cases, the poets speak from the perspective of people with an established musical culture who are already initiated into a certain valuation code and are aware of its nuances. But they reject this initiation in the name of sincerity. Hartwig associates the fear of praising Rachmaninoff with weakness, opportunism, snobbism and the fear of being rejected. Writing about his dislike for the composer, Zagajewski does not ask what its source is (apart from the essentially neutral category of “conservatism”), but he characterises the approach of “connoisseurs” with the use of words that do not put them in the best light (“fanaticism”, “hatred”). Both Hartwig and Zagajewski assume the position of recipients remaining outside (or maybe also above) aesthetic disputes, who maintain that their right to make unrestrained individual choices and have preferences is the supreme right in contact with art. However, it is worth taking note of the various degrees of this anti-conformism – Hartwig speaks straightforwardly about praising Rachmaninoff, whereas Zagajewski is more inclined to tone down its positive reception; he presents a liking for Rachmaninoff as being something that corresponds to young age and immaturity. Listening to his concerto in D minor is justified in his poem mainly with sentimental reasons and the values of its interpretation by Argerich. The reception presented by Zagajewski is rather bilateral: on the one hand, he is already a refined and mature man marked with musical knowledge and sensitive to the subtleties of interpretations, and on the other hand, he wants to settle his childhood dreams.

The personal musical experience confronted with the critical attitude of other recipients ceases to be a private and aesthetic manner – in both texts, it becomes a social experience, mainly of a negative character. Music is presented not as a sphere of agreement and mutual joy, but as a reason for potential conflict, confrontation or even exclusion. It becomes entangled in unfair games of snobbism. The listener’s relationship with music becomes the model for their relationships with reality and with other people. The way we listen tells us much about ourselves. Also about our contacts with others.

However, in Hartwig’s and Zagajewski’s poems, the feeling of distinctness and the “naivety” of the listeners is not presented as a cause for concern, but as an opportunity to manifest one’s own individuality. Authenticity and non-conventionality have long been appreciated by poets. They present this courage to express unusual views also with regard to the art of sounds. Therefore,

one's approach to music can become an important element of self-cognition and a significant part of our life programme – for example, in Julia Hartwig's poem *Secrets [Sekrety]*, which can be seen as a kind of manifesto that perfectly fits the principles of "poetic musicology":

Don't we exist because of things that make us different  
and the courage of being different?  
Do not let others impress a stamp on you  
Listen to music separately – they play it for you  
and pray separately if you can.

(Hartwig, 2011; 22 [trans. I.P.]

### Works cited

- Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund. *Typen musikalischen Verhaltens*. Idem. *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1968.
- Bonnefoy, Yves. *L'Alliance de la poésie et de la musique*. Paris: Galilée, 2007.
- Chion, Michel. *Le Son*. Paris: Fayard, 1998.
- . *Le Son: Traité d'acoulogie*. Paris: A. Colin, 2010.
- Davies, Stephen. *Musical Meaning and Expression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Gołąb, Maciej. *Muzyczna moderna w XX wieku: Między kontynuacją, nowością a zmianą fonosystemu*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2011.
- Hanslick, Edouard. *O pięknie w muzyce*. Trans. Stanisław Niewiadomski. Warszawa: M. Arzt, 1903.
- Hartwig, Julia. *Czułość*. Kraków: Znak, 1992.
- . *Gorzkie żale*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2011.
- Hejmej Andrzej, *Muzyka w literaturze: Perspektywy komparatystyki interdyscyplinarnej*. Kraków: Universitas, 2008.
- Hennion, Antoine. "L'écoute à la question". *Revue de Musicologie* 1 (2002): 95–149.
- Imberty, Michel. "L'épistémologie du sens dans les recherches en psychologie de la musique". *De l'écoute à l'oeuvre: Études interdisciplinaires*. Ed. Michel Imberty. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001.

- Kivy, Peter. *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*. Ithaca–New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. *La musique est le discours: Apologie de la musicologie*. Anjou (Quebec): Editions Fides, 2010.
- Scruton, Roger. *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation*. London–New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.
- Steiner, George. *Rzeczywiste obecności [Real Presences]*. Trans. Ola Kubińska. Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 1997.
- Szendy, Peter. *Écoute, une histoire de nos oreilles*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 2001.
- Szyborska, Wisława. *Some People Like Poetry*. Eadem. *Nothing Twice: Selected Poems*. Trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997.
- The Glenn Gould Reader*. Part three: *The Prospects of Recording*. Ed. Tim Page. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Tolila, Paul. “Préface: L’amateur et le sociologue”. Antoine Hennion, Sophie Maison-neuve, Émilie Gomart. *Figures de l’amateur: Formes, objets, pratiques de l’amour de la musique aujourd’hui*. Paris: La Documentation Française, 2000.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego: Rekonesans*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej, 2000.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. Trans. Bogusław Wolniewicz. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997.
- Zagajewski, Adam. *Asymmetry: Poems*. Trans. Clare Cavanaugh. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- . *Unseen Hand: Poems*. Trans. Clare Cavanaugh. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

## *Poetic Musicology* among Musical Discourses: The Poet as a Listener

### Summary

This paper analyses selected examples of Polish poetry from the 20<sup>th</sup> century devoted to music (poems by Adam Zagajewski and Julia Hartwig), placing them in the context of the musicological discourses that exist today, particularly the auditive discourse. Poems devoted to music are treated as cultural statements – evidence of the reception of music. The concept of “poetic musicology” elaborated by Anna Barańczak in the 1970s, still one of the most valid and important strategies for speaking about music, has been updated and revitalised, placed in the space of culture, particularly in the area of Polish human sciences, where there is an exceptionally rich and diverse poetic output related to music.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, intermediality, Polish poetry in 20th century, Adam Zagajewski, Julia Hartwig, musicology, musical analysis, reception of music, transcription of music, aculogy

**Słowa kluczowe:** komparatystyka literacka, intermedialność, poezja polska XX wieku, Adam Zagajewski, Julia Hartwig, muzykologia, analiza muzyczna, recepcja muzyki, transkrypcja muzyki, akulogia