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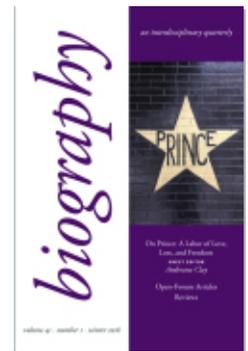
*Musical Biographies: The Music of Memory in Post-1945 German Literature* by Michal Ben-Horin (review)

Simon Trevor Walsh

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*The Private Jefferson* is indebted to the Coolidges and is a testament to the role of heirs and owners of historic collections and the value they give to all of us when they place collections in an accessible repository such as MHS. How such a significant collection of Jefferson's papers came to MHS reflects the geographical movement of American families across generations. The location of this very Virginian collection within a bastion of New England culture where Jefferson resides with John and Abigail Adams, unites these founders in epistolary perpetuity and invites us to continue their long discourse on what the United States will be.

Biographers of Jefferson are always challenged with how to frame a narrative in which the genius of liberty wrote the founding documents of a nation at the same time as he drew one of the most famous houses in America and chose plant varieties for his orchard and garden, while passing the burden of what to do about slavery to his biological and political heirs. This catalog makes clear that the collection at MHS represents only part of the vast Jefferson archive spread across repositories, from logical places like the Library of Congress and the University of Virginia to less obvious collections, such as MHS, the Huntington Library in California, or Washington University in St. Louis. The cross section of documents in this collection provokes wonder at the range and capabilities of Jefferson's pen and Jefferson's mind. If this book is all we had to frame a biography of Jefferson, this collection would be rich indeed. As such, this text whets the appetite and reminds the reader of other drawings or writings wherein Jefferson grapples with ways to observe, reason, and debate his place—and ours—in the world.

*Susan Kern*

Michal Ben-Horin. *Musical Biographies: The Music of Memory in Post-1945 German Literature*. De Gruyter, 2016, 173 pp. ISBN 978-3110460933, €79.95.

This book investigates musically mediated responses to the “catastrophe of the Second World War and the Nazi past” in German literature (1). The primary texts, whose respective publication dates span almost fifty years, are treated roughly chronologically. Although a number of authors and texts are discussed throughout this study, its core consists of four full chapters, each

devoted to a single author: Thomas Mann, Günter Grass, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Thomas Bernhard. With the exception of the Bernhard chapter, where two texts are examined in depth, each chapter revolves around a single work.

In his introduction, and in search of a theoretical framework for the individual readings, Ben-Horin briefly reviews lines of musical thought from Friedrich Nietzsche, Theodor Adorno, and Julia Kristeva. Important for this study is Adorno's belief that music acts as an "acoustic seismograph that reverberates with reality" (4). According to the account that unfolds in the introduction, Adorno validates and systematizes Nietzsche's insight expressed in *The Birth of Tragedy* that music, particularly dissonant music, contains significant potential for documenting cultural memory. In his 1949 *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno considers the twelve-tone music of Arnold Schoenberg emblematic for a musical aesthetic that, in refusing to truck with antiquated musical forms, instead exhibits a willingness to register and reflect the shattered and traumatized present. Here, Ben-Horin touches on Kristeva's insight that music can form a repository of psychic mechanisms, including those related to traumatic experiences.

Ben-Horin places himself within the broad field of musical-literary relations associated with Steven Paul Scher's enterprising but somewhat dated interventions. With a commitment to tracing the traffic between music and politics, Ben-Horin proposes focusing on both thematic and structural manifestations of music in literature. Thematic manifestations refer to passages where authors discuss certain composers or pieces, which can function as musical subtexts that recall historical and political contexts. And in respect to structural manifestations—which actually form the main focus of the study—Ben-Horin makes a further distinction between structural analogies and tonal imitations: the former documents instances of sentences, paragraphs, or chapters imitating concrete musical forms, whereas the latter describes how language rhythms, generated for example in the repetition of certain sounds, can reach outside of themselves to create meanings that nonetheless resist linguistic conceptualization.

By the strict letter of this study's subtitle, Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* does not belong. Mann is not reflecting on wartime Germany after the fact but rather fashioning a contemporaneous account of it. Ben-Horin nevertheless starts with this novel since he views it as a foundational example of how the musical biography of German literature came to critically engage National Socialism after 1945. According to the narrative emerging in this chapter, Mann is at heart a musical traditionalist who is sympathetic to Wagner's views on his own music dramas, namely that they develop and extend a Romantic aesthetic present in Beethoven's final symphony. However, Mann is

also deeply aware of the aesthetic and political shortcomings of Wagner's all-encompassing project and recognizes, via Adorno, the legitimacy of Schoenberg's attempt to shape an alternative musical poetics that, by eschewing harmony and tonality, is paradoxically in tune with a fragmented present. Of course the question central to *Dr. Faustus* and often considered in the secondary literature is whether Schoenberg, fictionalized in the novel as the composer Adrian Leverkühn, ends up unwittingly creating a "dangerous, dogmatic system" (31) that mirrors National Socialist ideology. Ben-Horin is less interested in answering the question than he is in showing how Mann skillfully works these two discursive exchanges, Wagner on Beethoven and Adorno on Schoenberg, into the tissue of the novel.

In his chapter on Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Ben-Horin's focus is not on dissonance revealed through a particular work but rather through "rhythmic patterns of language" and "disturbing sound images" (52). We are offered readings of passages in the novel where existing consonances are rendered dissonant. For example, he argues that Oskar Matzarath's capacity for glass-breaking singing, a destabilizing sound image that rubs up against "aesthetic conventions and canonical repertoire" (52), manifests itself in Oskar's language, which, in certain repetitive instances, renders the sound of words more important than their meaning. Pitching his case in even broader terms, Ben-Horin leans on Mikhail Bakhtin in arguing that Grass creates a carnivalesque, polyphonic texture that challenges narrative convention and presents an alternative ethics. Grass, Ben-Horin argues at the close of the chapter, was ultimately more successful than Mann at generating a poetics that could "respond to the historical disaster and reverberate with the trauma of the Second World War" (37).

Trauma is a central analytic concept for the last two chapters on Bachmann and Bernhard. Bachmann writes about individual and collective trauma, such as when she filters postwar Berlin through the image of a violent and war-ridden no-place or "kein Ort"; or when she famously (and apparently erroneously) recalls the march of Hitler's troops into her childhood Klagenfurt. A traumatic register is likewise said to be found in Bernhard's autobiographical works concerning the wartime period and its immediate aftermath. Ben-Horin argues that both authors readily transfer this register thematically and structurally into their literary works. In the case of Bernhard, trauma is said to be reflected in the "musical" repetition of his prose, the compulsive return in and across passages to certain words or turns of phrase that enact a repression of and failure to recall the past while also exposing "that which collective memory conceals" (119). Trauma is also reflected in the admission of *Concrete's* narrator that the sentences he needs for his failed study on Mendelssohn occur to him either too early or too late. The Bachmann chapter

focuses on her notoriously difficult novel *Malina*, which is set in 1960s Vienna. Bachmann calls upon music as a way of accessing and working through the Austrian past—though the success of this task for the narrator turns out to be limited. Ben-Horin argues that *Malina* assigns the music of Mozart and Schoenberg, reflected in the former's *Exultate, Jubilate*, and the latter's *Pierrot Lunaire*, to separate “semantic spaces” (104). The Mozart motet is associated with a wonderful book that gestures toward a state of prewar harmony that the narrator is tellingly unable to write. The suggestion here is that the narrator relinquishes the harmonic Mozart in favor of Schoenberg's dissonant and estranging song cycle, drawing on bits of text from the last song in her attempt not so much to confront her trauma but to lend expression to it.

Ben-Horin ably demonstrates that Bachmann, like no other author considered in this study, is preoccupied with the respective and oftentimes contrasting communicative potential of music and language. Under the heading “When Music Interferes with Language” he discusses the fractured and semi-coherent dialogue in the novel between the narrator and the various male protagonists, each dialogue an apparent example of how Bachmann intertwines narrative with musical form. For example, in documenting her nightmare encounters with the abusive (and “Nazified”) father figure, the narrator repeatedly uses the phonetic patter, “dadim-dadam” from an Offenbach operetta. For Ben-Horin, this patter portrays an idealized but lost musical experience and contributes to the narrator's “fragmented, disharmonious” (103) speech patterns, which otherwise trace an escape from the symbolic to the semiotic. In another example from the novel, Ben-Horin notes how Italian musical terminology punctuates conversational dialogue, thereby demonstrating the fragile psychic condition of the narrator and underscoring the sonic rather than the semantic value of her words. Ben-Horin argues that these moments of dialogue show Bachmann crafting a polyphonic text in which disparate voices undermine the move to assert a homogenous master narrative.

Ben-Horin's examination of musical subtexts is strongest in his Bernhard chapter. He reads the narrator's admiration of Mendelssohn in *Concrete* as an attempt to “correct” the Jewish composer's nullification under the National Socialists, who hitched their critique onto earlier pronouncements by Wagner. For Ben-Horin, this musical intertext points (as do references to Haydn in *Extinction*) to ways in which postwar Austria has manipulated music to willfully forget the past. In the last part of the chapter, an examination of *Extinction*, Ben-Horin draws on Adorno's distinction between dissonance and cacophony. Whereas the former, as we have seen, represents a productive attempt at aesthetic and social engagement, the latter describes an anachronistic tonality that Ben-Horin here associates with the shrieking voices of Murau's

antagonistic family at their estate. In the circumstances of the novel, such cacophony is a sign of “standard fluency,” which Bernhard is said to set against Murau’s acoustically dissonant “jargon” consisting of “rhythmic and tonal repetitions, and carnivalistic manifestations such as curses, wordplay and illogic” (137). For Ben-Horin this jargon is evidence that “Bernhard’s poetics,” by offering a literary response to Schoenberg’s call to emancipate dissonance, “may challenge historiography and the collective poetics of denial” (138).

As should be obvious from the above, Ben-Horin is constantly on the lookout in his chosen novels for instances of literary engagement with musical dissonance, whether at the narrative or thematic level. Ben-Horin’s marshaling of musical dissonance as his central category certainly has much potential. But it seems equally clear to me that moving swiftly from Mann’s detailed descriptions of Leverkühn’s (Schoenberg’s) dissonant pieces to an analysis of a scene from *The Tin Drum* in which the sporadic sounds of a drum machine are said to deliver an “asymmetrical” and therefore dissonant commentary on the optical “symmetry” of a character’s suicide on the same machine, constitutes a broad conceptual leap. A dissonance that is concretely aesthetic has become loosely metaphorical, and it is on this more removed level that Ben-Horin largely remains after the first chapter.

It seems to me that the study largely stands or falls not only on the extent to which readers find Ben-Horin’s “dissonant” instances plausible but also the extent to which they accept what Ben-Horin says they represent. Part of the problem in assessing this second question is that the initial discussion of musical dissonance is rather sketchy: instead of discussing the relevant passages from *Birth of Tragedy*, for example, Ben-Horin effectively asks us to take him at his word that Nietzsche was deeply interested in the documentary potential of dissonant music. This omission signals an unwanted trend in the book. Important analytic categories—dissonance, trauma, the polylogue, biography, and others—are often introduced without the necessary theoretical ado. In the case of the polylogue, Ben-Horin glosses Bakhtin as if his carnivalesque theory pertained to the modern novel in general. In deploying the “polylogue” as a form of musically mediated narrative dissonance, therefore, it is by no means clear whether the above authors can be said to engage in a practice that distinguishes them from other postwar writers.

Ultimately, Ben-Horin argues that the dissonance in these works leverages a critique against conventional aesthetic forms that constitute the false harmony of postwar German society. Ben-Horin operationalizes this dissonance in a variety of ways: as that which “is excluded,” “has been silenced” (84), or “collective memory conceals” (120); as the “repressed, silenced content” of culture (59); as “rational, coherent traditions of representation that deny the

disaster” (91); or, finally, as a “master narrative of the past that excludes and silences different, marginal narratives” (104). In all of this, the reader wants to know more about the official and hegemonic narratives that are being critiqued. Ben-Horin does little to specify their content or to peg them to an underlying historiography. Whatever these narratives were, however, they surely did not remain constant over the five decades traversed by this study. And just as important, they were not the same in West Germany and Austria, the two postwar countries into which Ben-Horin’s four main authors evenly divide. We are given important details, above all in the Bachmann chapter, of the unique narrative that emerged in Austria after 1945, but, overall, Ben-Horin’s impulse is to conflate the two countries.

Some doubts might also be raised about the book’s structure. The headings that divide the main chapters into sections are often loosely descriptive rather than precisely analytical, a circumstance that initially masks the repetition that characterizes some of Ben-Horin’s argument. More important, Ben-Horin does not offer criteria for why four authors are assigned full-length chapters whereas four others—Wolfgang Koeppen, Heinrich Böll, Elfriede Jelinek, and Hans-Ulrich Treichel—are only given brief subchapters that add up to a single full-length chapter. At their strongest, as with the account of Jelinek’s *The Pianist*, they contain promising lines of argument that by necessity are left undeveloped. At their weakest, as with the closing consideration of Treichel’s *The Tristan Chord*, they come across as curiously ad hoc (in this case it appears mostly a matter of closing the study with a gesture toward a contemporary text). In naming these subchapters “interludes” and in using the titles “overture” and “coda” in place of “introduction” and “conclusion,” Ben-Horin hopes his book will resonate with its subject matter. The gesture is a rather thin one, however, and the conventionality of the musical designations is at odds with the book’s overarching focus on dissonance.

This brings me to Ben-Horin’s claim, reflected in the prominence with which the phrase is given on the book’s cover, to be writing about musical biographies. *Dr. Faustus* is, of course, an emblematic example of a literary musical biography, and *The Tin Drum* possibly represents a skillfully argued extension of the genre. But the respective protagonists of *Malina*, *Concrete*, and *Extinction*, while clearly invested in music, are not themselves musicians, nor do we have access to the span of their lives as we do with Mann’s and Grass’s protagonists. In *Concrete*, the narrator continually and compulsively thwarts his attempt to write about Mendelssohn, but it is a “scientific” work rather than a biography. To be sure, Ben-Horin writes lucidly about Bernhard and Bachmann’s intense engagement with music, but is it enough to transfer this engagement to their works and make it stand as the main biographical

element? Instead of providing theoretical coordinates around which to argue that his chosen texts rework, extend, perhaps even radicalize our understanding of the musical biography, Ben-Horin once again more or less assumes their status as such. In the absence of these coordinates, it is difficult to accept the metanarrative that he constructs around the genre, namely that, inspired by the tradition of the *Künstlerroman*, the musical biography is reborn around 1945 as a matter of necessity, since it offered a uniquely effective way of engaging the wartime past. Further, it is a genre that might soon fade into the background again—the concluding discussion is carried out under the question “the end of musical biography?” Ben-Horin’s answer is a tentative no, but the recent literary works he draws on for his answer, such as W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, could only with strain be regarded as musical biographies.

Writing elsewhere about the sound of memory in post-Shoah Germany, Leslie Morris has pointed out that the topic remains a speculative one, given the paucity of similar inquiries. Her remark, when transferred to the present study on music and memory, might incline us to soften our view of the unevenness of its results. At a minimum, Ben-Horin deserves credit for attempting a rare and sustained exploration of how musical modes (opposed to exclusively visual or literary “modes”) might figure into representations of the German past. One can only hope that this book prompts further efforts within German studies and its allied fields at expanding and embracing music as a serious and culturally vital object of literary inquiry.

*Simon Trevor Walsh*

Franziska Gygax and Miriam A. Locher, editors. *Narrative Matters in Medical Contexts across Disciplines*. John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2015, 217 pp. ISBN 978-9027226600, \$135.00.

This collection of essays discusses the way narratives are used and can be used in the medical field. The authors have a background in various disciplines, from the humanities to psychology and medicine. The wider context of the book is the emerging interest in how people live with and experience diseases. This interest is a result of a growing awareness of how patients’ experiences of their illnesses often affect both the course of the disease and the treatment. Both patients’ and doctors’ experiences are often expressed in stories, a fact that led to an interest in the relation between narrative and medicine in the 1980s. Today, medical doctors are oftentimes expected to listen to and take into account the patient’s illness stories to diagnose diseases correctly, treat the patient, and especially to support patients living with chronic diseases.