Borrowed Forms

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Notes

Introduction


2 In this sense, “Clone” differs from Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counterpoint*, in that Huxley makes explicit his project of incorporating musical forms and effects into the novel. Huxley overtly frames the narrative with Bach’s Suite in B minor and Beethoven’s String Quartet no. 15 in a minor.

3 Oulipo is short for Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (Workshop for Potential Literature), an experimental group founded in 1960 by the poet Raymond Queneau and mathematician François Le Lionnais. Oulipo writers rejected the subconscious as a source of literary creativity, instead using systematic constraints to generate their texts.

4 Of course, both Bakhtin and Derrida have shown how multilingualism and difference inhabit every voice. Bakhtin (1981, 291) holds that “at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form.”

5 See Anthea Morrison (1995) for an insightful discussion of voice and voicelessness.

6 Tom Cohen (1996) offers a fascinating assessment of the different ways in which critics on the left and the right have appropriated Bakhtin. He also discusses the relation between Bakhtin’s work and that of Paul de Man.

7 Since Bakhtin’s work precedes the advent of deconstruction and many of the insights of psychoanalysis and phenomenology, it can seem to offer
a less fraught approach to notions of voice and subjectivity, although in fact, Bakhtin understands every voice as emerging from a specific sociohistorical situation, and asserting its singularity in contestation against homogenizing forces. See Kristeva, 1973.

8 Kassav is a popular Antillean Zouk band.

9 The musician cautions the protagonist: “Regarde ce pays, le nôtre, le tien, à l’encan. Bientôt peut-être, il ne sera plus qu’un souvenir qui s’amenuisera petit à petit dans les mémoires. Moi, ce que j’essaie de faire, c’est de lui garder sa voix. Et toi aussi, tu peux, tu dois faire quelque chose” (Condé, 1987, 333). [Look at this country, ours, yours, being sold off to the highest bidder. Soon perhaps it will be no more than a memory, little by little growing dim in our minds. Me, what I’m trying to do is preserve its voice. And you, too, you can, you must do something.]

10 *Disgrace* also inspired a stage adaptation by Alexander Maxime at the Baxter Theater in Cape Town which premiered in 2012.

11 This book looks particularly at forms that emerged in the Baroque period, but I use the term “classical” here in the broad sense to designate the tradition of Western music that encompasses works from the Renaissance through the twenty-first century.

12 Coetzee’s doctoral thesis of 1969 focused on the novels of Samuel Beckett, the Irish writer whose revolutionary act of deterritorialization—writing in French—can be seen as both a political act of resistance against English rule in Ireland and an aesthetic desire to submit writing to difficulty and constraint. Coetzee’s engagement with the French tradition—with Rousseau and Beckett—constitutes a similar gesture of deterritorialization. Coetzee also engages with European literature more broadly, and particularly with Wordsworth, Byron, Kafka, Defoe, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.

13 My translation. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

14 See Catherine Bédarida, “John Coetzee dans son exil intérieur” in *Le Monde*, October 10, 1997: “Qu’en est-il de quelqu’un né en Afrique du Sud, qui peut-être y réside, qui écrit en anglais, est édité en Angleterre ou aux Etats-Unis, qui est extrêmement lu dans ces pays et traduit en Europe, de telle sorte que pour chaque lecteur qu’il a en Afrique du Sud il en a des centaines ou des milliers par ailleurs, quelqu’un qui se sent peut-être témoin de son pays d’origine pour le monde alors que chez lui il est accusé par les critiques de propager sur son pays une vision d’étranger, ou au moins une vision confortable pour les étrangers ? […] J’espère avoir démontré que le terme ‘écrivain sud-africain’ n’est pas aussi transparent qu’il le paraît.” My translation.

15 Lionnet made this case compellingly in a talk entitled “New World Exiles
and Ironists from Evariste Parny to Susan Howe and Ananda Devi” at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in April 2011.

16 On these issues, see also Graham Huggan (2008, 1).

17 While the “First World” and the “winners” of globalization may be ready to move beyond the concept of the nation state, the national remains an important category for young and emerging states such as Israel, Palestine, and Kosovo, as well as for regions that still aspire to statehood, like Quebec and the French Antilles.

18 In Quebec, by contrast, the French language represents a mode of resistance against the dominance of English.

19 Writing and reading presuppose education, material means, and the luxuries of solitude and leisure, which are not universally available. According to Soňa Hradilová, the editor of the Barzakh editions in Algiers, books are prohibitively expensive in Algeria, restricting both publishing and reading. Personal communication with Hradilová, Paris, October 6, 2005.

20 J. Michael Dash (1998, 117) evokes the “verbal delirium, the quest for orality” as examples of a “radical, modern poetics that reacts violently to the tragic separation of artist and life, observer and observed in the past.”

21 Djebar makes this point in an interview conducted by journalist Anne-Brigitte Kern on Radio France Culture on May 27, 1994: “On parle tellement d’oralité mais il y a une culture écrite, toute une patrimoine d’écriture au Maghreb.”

22 See in particular Bakhtin’s Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics, Barthes’s Le grain de la voix and S/Z; Deleuze’s Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque and Milles plateaux; Said’s Culture and Imperialism, Musical Elaborations, and Of Late Style.

23 See Mai Al-Nakib’s insightful discussion of musical ekphrasis in Djebar’s L’amour la fantasia. Al-Nakib (2005, 266) uses Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization to argue that the turn to music in the novel opens up lines of escape, a way of moving beyond the dominant, rigid orders of being and understanding, whether colonial or patriarchal.

24 I argue for a much more dynamic, hybridized understanding of forms and genealogies.


26 Simon Gikandi’s (2001, 628–29) caveat is well taken that “while we live in a world defined by cultural and economic flows across formally entrenched national boundaries, the world continues to be divided, in stark terms, between its ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ sectors. It is precisely because of the starkness of this division that the discourse of globalization
seems to be perpetually caught between two competing narratives, one of celebration, the other of crisis."

27 Smyth (2008, 22–23) sees Bakhtin as "the most powerful influence on the development of English literary theory in the late twentieth century."

Chapter 1: From Mikhail Bakhtin to Maryse Condé:

the Problems of Literary Polyphony


3 Of course, this notion of return is itself a myth, particularly in Condé’s case. See Rosello (1995).

4 “Pendant trois jours et trois nuits, le corps de Francis Sancher traina sur le marbre froid des tables d’autopsie, jusqu’à ce qu’un médecin appelé de la Pointe en désespoir de cause fût formel. […] Alors l’après-midi du quatrième jour, Francis Sancher revint chez lui...” (Condé, 1989a, 23–24). This recalls Chamoiseau’s Solibo magnifique (1988), as the official police investigation of Solibo’s death founders miserably, while popular understanding is rich in insights and interpretations.

5 The novel presents the villagers’ diverse attempts to understand Sancher’s death, while never privileging any one version as authoritative. This structure recalls Umberto Eco’s understanding of Baroque art (1989, 7): “it never allows for a privileged, definitive, frontal view; rather, it induces the spectator to shift his position continuously in order to see the work in constantly new aspects, as if it were in a state of perpetual transformation.”

6 With the notable exception of Suzanne Crosta, most critics have missed this dimension. Perret (1995, 663) attributes a theatrical quality to Traversée de la mangrove, and reads the novel as “an example of multiple voices, but in an alternating and recognizable fashion, like theatre.” Fulton (2001, 307) highlights the place of oral storytelling in the text: “Story-telling itself thus becomes the link between characters; although their readings do not conjoin into a thematically or temporally consistent portrait of Francis Sancher, their entangled stories share his absence.” Both critics thus attribute a vocal, theatrical quality to the novel, failing to pick up on the silent, interior status of the narratives. This point is critical to understanding what is so innovative about the narrative structure Condé puts into play. The narratives do not necessarily follow one another in succession, but could in fact unfold simultaneously within the minds of the characters. The
text thus does not merely unfold horizontally (in linear succession), but gains an important vertical and simultaneous dimension as well, by staging interior narratives that overlap with one another.

7 Francis Sancher is said to be from a slave-owning family of békés; according to one theory, his untimely death is the result of a curse on the family. Reputed to have treated their slaves with particular cruelty, all the male descendants in his genealogical line are doomed to die at the age of fifty, wherever they may find themselves at the time. Unlike many of his predecessors, Sancher comes back to Rivière au Sel to confront his destiny head on.

8 Celia Britton (1999, 19) offers an excellent account of Glissant’s understanding of opacity.

9 Peterson (1993, 762–64) writes: “To my hearing, some of the finest and most refined applications of Bakhtinian analysis in the present day reconstruction of the African American literary legacy fall short, in their celebratory mood, of listening to the whole story.” Peterson sees polyphony as a valuable alternative to both structuralism and deconstruction as it does not enclose meaning “within stable binary codes of opposed terms,” nor make it subject to “an endless play of signifiers.” He locates Bakhtin’s key insight in the observation that “utterances come into the world [as] sites of social contestation.”


12 Condé, however, makes extremely productive use of the media in her fiction, exploiting its clichés and melodramatic character. This is particularly the case in Histoire de la femme cannibale (2003) and Célanire cou-coupé (2000).

13 In her work on Condé, Sanders (2003, 151) argues that “polyphony can best be analyzed across long stretches of text and within the context of the novel as a whole.” However, as this reading demonstrates, both approaches can be extremely useful to understanding Condé’s poetics.

14 Kundera’s later essays, Testaments trahis (1993) and Le rideau (2005), also play on these issues, although his most complete articulation of a theory of literary polyphony comes in L’art du roman (1986). The son of a musicologist, Kundera trained as a professional musician. He makes frequent reference to Bach, Beethoven, Janáček, and Messiaen.

15 See Lawrence Kramer (1995, 17–18) for a critique of the ideal wholeness that intellectuals ascribe to music. Kramer argues that form is associated with
unity and structure, “the idea that every note is necessary to the whole and no note is superfluous.”

Note that in music, the term “polyphony” is used with similar flexibility: polyphony is often used as a general term for multivoicedness, whereas counterpoint implies more rigorous formal constraints.

Emerson (2002) argues that Kundera’s “polyphony” is really a technique of variation.

As we saw in the Introduction, Assia Djebar prefers the term “francographie” over francophonie, as it places emphasis on writing rather than on voice.

Edward Cone refers to an identifiable composer’s voice that comes across in music. As Stephen Connor (2001, 468–70) observes, Carolyn Abbate and Cone disagree over the status of the composer’s voice in opera: Abbate subscribes to a Bakhtinian view of opera as structured by a multiplicity of voices, whereas Cone argues that all music can be thought of as “a form of purely symbolic utterance,” linked to the implicit persona of the composer, and felt to convey a “sense of the composer’s voice.”

This is also the case with J. M. Coetzee, who similarly resists reductive, biographical readings of his work.

Condé describes how hearing local high school students dismiss her earlier novels as remote and uninteresting reinforced her conviction that writing must address the present (Broichhagen et al., 2006, 24). In both La vie scélérante and Traversée de la mangrove, Condé represents writers whom no one reads, confronting—and perhaps exorcising—this hazard of the profession with characteristic humor and irony.

“Néanmoins, la plante de cette médisance crût et fleurit dans le terreau du village et ne s’étiola que lorsque éclata la nouvelle de l’affaire avec Mira” [“Nonetheless, the plant of this rumor grew and blossomed in the rich soil of the village and only wilted when the news broke of the affair with Mira”] (Condé, 1989a, 36).

Personal communication with the author at Princeton University in the fall of 2003.

The relation Condé draws between writing and the act of crossing the mangrove recalls Derrida’s assertion (1976, 107–8) that “one should meditate upon all of the following together: writing as the possibility of the road and of difference, the history of writing and the history of the road, of the rupture, of the via rupta, of the path that is broken, beaten, fracta, of the space of reversibility and of repetition traced by the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of nature, of the natural, savage, salvage, forest.”
25 Condé invited Chamoiseau to serve as the first public reader of her novel, and his response figured in the journal Callaloo in 1991.

26 “La pensée de la trace promet ainsi alliance, elle réfute possession, elle donne sur ces temps diffractés que les humanités d’aujourd’hui multiplient entre elles, par heurts et merveilles. Telle est l’errance violente du poème” (Glissant, 1996, 71). “[‘The notion of the trace thus promises alliance, refutes possession, opens onto these diffracted times that today’s societies develop among themselves, through clashes and wonders. Such is the violent wandering of the poem.’]"

27 Condé asserts that créolité “effaces the history of slavery, of the plantation culture, and the economic foundations of the island. The term créolité makes the cultural laboratory more important than the memory of a sugar-based economy” (Apter, 2001, 94).

28 The novel ironically performs the commemoration that Loulou Lemeaulnes predicts: “Bientôt quelqu’un commencerait de broder une légende autour de Francis Sancher et ferait de lui un géant incompris” (Condé, 1989a, 124). [“Soon someone will start to embroider a legend around Francis Sancher and will make him into a misunderstood giant.”]

29 Condé has expressed admiration for Chamoiseau’s literary talent on numerous occasions, despite her irritation at the aggressive and prescriptive agenda he pursues in the Eloge de la créolité.

30 “Cyrille faisait ses pitreries ordinaires et les gens s’esclaffaient. Pourtant son cœur n’y était pas” (Condé, 1989a, 154). [“Cyrille clowned around as usual and people burst out laughing. But his heart wasn’t in it.”] “Qu’est-ce qui arrivait à leur conteur préféré de déparler?” (158) [“How come their favorite storyteller was talking nonsense?”]

31 In an interview with VèVè Clark in 1989, Condé discussed the dichotomy between written culture and lived experience. Interestingly, she flips the terms to evoke written experience and lived culture. “In other words, it is the writer who gave the people power, strength, unity, and faith. Césaire’s was an intellectual attitude to culture that nobody believes in now—culture is a lived rather than a written experience in contemporary Guadeloupe” (Clark, 1989, “11).


33 As Smyth (2002, 18–19) points out, the mangrove is an important symbol for the founders of the créolité movement. In Eloge de la créolité, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant proclaim: “Creoleness is our primitive soup
and our continuation, our primeval chaos and our mangrove swamp of virtualities."

34 This image alludes to Baudelaire’s Correspondances: “La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers / Laisserait parfois sortir de confuses paroles; / L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles / Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers…” (Baudelaire, 1975, 11).

35 Morrison examines voicelessness in La vie scélérate, linking it to the trope of silence in contemporary writing by Caribbean women authors.

36 As Léocadie says, “Pour un peu je changerais de place et j’irais m’asseoir dans l’autre pièce ou sur la galerie où se tiennent ceux qui ne soucient pas de faire semblant, qui regardent la hauteur du rhum dans les bouteilles et vident leurs assiettes de soupe grasse en écoutant Cyrille crier ses ‘yé krik’ et ses ‘yé krak’” (Condé, 1989a, 151).

37 My emphasis.

38 Condé comments in an interview, “In film, everything is communicated through visual means, through the acting […] I learned to externalize things” (Broichhagen et al., 2006, 10).

39 On these different narrative planes, see Genette (1972, 237). Genette opposes diegesis, the universe of the first narrative, to metadiegesis, the universe of the second degree of narration, a story within a story.

40 Joby and Xantippe are the two exceptions to this rule.

41 Leah Hewitt (1995, 641–51) suggests that Condé undoes this in her subsequent novel: “Unlike Condé’s preceding novel, Traversée de la mangrove, Les derniers rois mages does not affirm female voices in any privileged way. It is as if Les derniers rois mages were meant to correct any (false) impression that Condé is a writer who promotes a feminist stance over and against men’s concerns. Her rich dialectics of past and present, male and female, Antillean and American cultures, provide as many questions as answers.”

Chapter 2: Edward Said and Assia Djebar: Counterpoint and the Practice of Comparative Literature

1 The occasion for Said’s remarks was an interdisciplinary conference on Space, History, Identity at the American University of Beirut for which he was the keynote speaker. His presentation, “Unresolved Geographies, Embattled Landscapes,” drew a standing-room-only crowd of more than one thousand Lebanese students.

2 At the time of the conference, Israel still occupied a “security zone” in South Lebanon. They withdrew from the zone in May 2000 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425.

3 As I mention later in the chapter, many recent critical approaches suggest
a debt to Said and the model of counterpoint, including Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality, Sarah Nuttall’s notion of entanglement, Michael Rothberg’s multidirectional memory, Mark Sanders’ complicity, and Françoise Lionnet’s and Shu-mei Shih’s minor transnationalism.

4 Djebar’s emphasis on relating architecture and music to the novel recalls Friedrich Schlegel’s famous formulation in fragment no. 88 that the innermost form of the novel is mathematical, rhetorical, and musical (see Werner Wolf, 1999, 99).

5 For a different treatment of this subject, see particularly Mildred Mortimer (2005, 58–63). Mortimer offers a useful discussion of how Djebar extends Said’s project to include women and non-canonical writers, although her definition of counterpoint as “reading back” and as the setting “of one narrative against the other” does not address the specifically musical foundations of counterpoint. It also misses the political aspirations of the term and the potential for reading more than two voices. Mai Al-Nakib’s article on musical ekphrasis offers a compelling consideration of the relationship between music and literature in Djebar’s work, as well as a broader overview of ekphrasis in general. In her discussion of counterpoint, Al-Nakib stresses the relation between voices, as well as the transformative potential of what she terms “paradoxical entanglements” (273). See also Moneera Al-Ghadeer (2008).

6 In his introduction to Musical Elaborations, Said (1991, xviii) writes: “Adorno is a creature of the Hegelian tradition, which presumes an inescapable historical teleology that incorporates everything in its relentless forward path. This I find unacceptable for all sorts of reasons. Rather than spelling them out here I shall briefly suggest an alternative based on a geographical or spatial idea that is truer to the diversity and spread of human activity.”


8 John Docker (2007, 272–73) notes Said’s “curious” disinterest in Bakhtin, and suggests that the fundamental difference between the two critics lies in Said’s emphasis on the role of the individual in history, a position that clearly assigns to intellectuals the responsibility to act and intervene, whereas Bakhtin addresses literary and cultural forces at the impersonal level. Of course, Said’s silence on Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic polyphony could also be read as an instance of the anxiety of influence of the Russian precursor on the younger scholar. Said is interested in contested histories and geographies and how these play out in narratives; Bakhtin’s interests lie in the novel.

9 According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the term “counterpoint” was
used in music as early as 1550, while the extra-musical usage of the term came later: in 1599, counterpoint was used to designate an antithesis, and in 1626, it was first used for a contrary point in an argument. On the relationship between music and rhetoric, see Patrick McCreless (2002).

While polyphony is universal, Bakhtin developed the notion of polyphony with Bach in mind. Painter (2001, 222) discusses this in the German context as well, citing how German theorists in the early twentieth century attempted to deny the notion that the origins of Western polyphony might lie in the heterophony of folk and non-Western music by insisting that “counterpoint required planning and foresight, but ‘heterophony’ was improvised.”

De Groot quotes an interview Said gave to Dutch television in 2000: “I think [Umm Kalthoum’s music] is designed to send people, not exactly into a stupor, but it would induce a kind of melancholic haze, which people like. And I found it disturbing. Mentally it made you inactive... So I very early on rejected it and began to focus exclusively on Western music, for which I hungered more and more.” Said (1991, 98) also discusses his early encounter with Umm Kalthoum in Musical Elaborations.

Anthropologist Paulla Ebron (2002, 39–40) critiques Said for avoiding “an analysis of the interactive relationship between Western art music and imperialism. The text on music offers only a little information on global interconnections... By ignoring the ways ‘music’ comes into being, socially and historically, Said eschews the question of how the West and its classical music are inscribed in global history. He fails to disrupt Western art music as a coherent, locally configured object.” On the contrary, I would argue that Said’s critical reflections on his own musical education and his exploration of the values associated with such forms as variation, counterpoint, and the sonata illustrate his attentiveness to these very issues.

The vertical point-against-point, note-against-note dimension of counterpoint is the one most readily used by critics currently working with the term. The horizontal development of simultaneous voices is less easy to transpose to the literary domain, but Kundera makes an attempt to do so in his discussion of Hermann Broch’s The Sleepwalkers in L’art du roman (1986). Djebar’s juxtaposition of multiple interlaced storylines (i.e., the simultaneously unfolding dramas of different characters) is one of the ways through which her text approximates the horizontal aspect of contrapuntal music.

On June 13, 2005, Djebar became the first North African woman writer to be elected to the prestigious Académie française, occupying the Chair of M. Georges Vedel. Only one other African writer had previously held
a chair in the Académie: Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, who was appointed in 1983.

16 This was a recurring theme in interviews I conducted in Paris in October 2005, particularly with Sofiane Hadjadj, a founding editor of Éditions Barzakh.

17 Djebbar (1994, 149) invests this traditional Berber writing with an irrepressible music and orality: “le sens même—et la musique, et l’oralité palpitante—de cet alphabet qui se ranime et réussit à ne pas être étouffée” [“the meaning itself—and the music and palpable orality—of this alphabet comes alive again and succeeds in not being stifled”].

18 Quasi una fantasia is also the title of a collection of essays by Adorno that discuss how Beethoven transcends the classical sonata form by incorporating contrapuntal material. Djebbar may take her citation from Beethoven, or alternatively from Adorno.

19 At New York University in October 2004, Djebbar and I discussed the links between democracy and polyphony. Djebbar made these remarks several years before the popular uprisings that swept through Egypt and Tunisia in the spring of 2011; the Arab Spring clearly indicates the potential of the Internet as a venue for polyphonic exchange, and it now seems that the degree to which a society has access to Internet resources suggests its democratic potential.

20 In the French context, the power of film to transform the relations between different communities is particularly striking. Two recent works, Philippe Lioret’s Welcome (2009) and Rachid Bouchareb’s Days of Glory (2006), effectively changed public policy by fostering empathy for immigrants and veterans from the former colonies.

21 In Nulle part dans la maison de mon père (2007) as in her earlier novel L’amour la fantasia (1985), Djebbar evokes her own near-suicide in front of an oncoming tram in Algiers. Following an argument with her lover, she ran off in the direction of the sea and was suddenly overcome by an irresistible urge to throw herself down on the tracks. It is unclear how we are to read Thelja’s suicide: an act of despair; a momentary, self-destructive impulse like that which Djebbar describes having experienced in her own life; a mystical desire for an irrecoverable wholeness; or perhaps the poetic fulfillment of her name, snow.

22 Djebbar commented on the genesis of Les nuits de Strasbourg in a radio interview with Laure Adler on January 31, 2006, in which she explains she won a writer’s fellowship from the city of Strasbourg and refers to the book as a “pur roman de fiction” (“a purely fictional novel”). Djebbar wrote most of the novel itself in Louisiana.

23 The term “palimpsest” derives from the Greek and has come to connote
both erasure and retention. When scribes reused parchment, they would erase the original text and superimpose a new layer. Genette employs the term, notably in the essay “Proust Palimpseste” in *Figures I* (1966). Donadey (2001, 65–68) uses Genette in her insightful analysis of palimpsest in Djebar’s fiction. The palimpsest is a key strategy in contrapuntal writing because of this simultaneous layering of different voices across disparate times and places. It allows the voices of the past to speak alongside contemporary voices.

24 Reda Bensmaïa (2003, 45) notes a similar chiasmic crossing of France and Algeria in Malek Allouache’s film, *Salut Cousin*: “a becoming French of Algeria, or rather, a becoming Parisian of Algiers.”

25 Barbé (2001, 134) provides an insightful discussion of the nomadic character of Strasbourg and characterizes the city as a “purely deterritorialized locus where only exile and wandering are possible.”

26 Djebar (1999, 234). Taos Amrouche’s *Jacinthe noire* (1947), one of the first francophone novels to be published by an Algerian author, also takes place entirely in France.

27 The French government gave 100,000 hectares of land to 8,000 incoming refugees from Alsace in 1871 (Bennoune, 2002, 53). Hugh Roberts also addresses this wave of immigration in his commentary to Gilo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* for Criterion Films.

28 Djebar’s invention of an “Alsagérie” has drawn a great deal of critical attention. See particularly Rosello (2005), Rice (2003), and O’Riley (2002).

29 Algerian author Mohammed Dib also deploys sand and snow as interchangeable figures of emptiness and plenitude.

30 Fanon (1968, 22–24) famously argues, “Chaque voile rejeté découvre aux colonialistes [...] morceau par morceau la chair algérienne mise à nue [...] Chaque voile qui tombe exprime en négatif que l’Algérie commence à se renier et accepte le viol du colonisateur.” [“Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists [...] piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. [...] Every veil that fell [...] was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.”] Rita Faulkner (1996, 847–55) claims that Djebar rejects the theoretical constructs of patriarchal nationalist thinkers like Fanon.


32 Interestingly, the significance of Assia as one who accompanies and consoles also accords well with the role that Antigone takes on with respect to her father, whom she accompanies into exile.

33 The phrase “toutes ces morts en marche” includes not only those who have not been properly buried, but also those who have died in exile, or whose
tombs have been uprooted and displaced as in the case of the Jewish graves of Constantine.

34 Djebbar trained as a historian at the Ecole normale supérieure, and was an assistant in history at the University of Rabat, Morocco. From 1962 to 1965, she was the only Algerian woman to hold the post of professor of history at the University of Algiers. In 1965, the government sponsored a program of Arabization, requiring professors to teach in Arabic. Djebar left for France, and subsequently taught in the department of French at the University of Algiers in 1975.

35 Carolyn Steedman (2007, 11) takes up Anderson’s description of Michelet as a young historian who went into the archive “in order to enact a particular kind of national imagining”: “the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires,” and after Michelet, “historians found themselves able to speak on behalf of the dead and to interpret the words and acts that the dead themselves had not understood in life.” White (1973, 92) discusses Michelet’s (1842) comment that the dead require “an Oedipus who will solve for them their own riddle, which made no sense to them, one who would explain to them the meaning of their words, their actions which they did not understand.”

36 I have in mind Judith Butler’s probing work, Antigone’s Claim (2000). See also Catherine Holland (1998, 1108–32) for an analysis of Antigone’s legacy in feminist political theory.

37 See Donadey’s discussion (2008, 65–88) of a similar relationship between the French interrogation agent Costa and a captive Algerian woman militant. The figure of Costa haunts Djebar’s novels, particularly L’amour, la fantasia.

38 Nicole Dombrowski Risser (2012, 70) documents this period in detail: “Residents left without closing windows and shutters. Potted flowers stood unattended on windowsills […] Women even left their laundry drying on the wash line. […] The large plaza in the center of the city hall resembled a giant Parisian flea market where furniture and household objects of evacuated families sat like refugees themselves waiting for the next train out of town.”

39 Personal communication with the author at NYU in October 2004.

40 The Palestinian–Israeli conflict is an obvious instance of a historical context fraught with violence and mistrust where performative encounters can be extremely productive; several contemporary films, including Erez Tadmor and Guy Nattiz’s Strangers (2007), seek to open up new possibilities for understanding by staging encounters between individuals from Israel and Palestine in unanticipated settings, such as Berlin during the 2006 Football World Cup finals.
41 As in Stéphane Mallarmé’s “Salut,” this oscillation demonstrates the productive ambiguity and simultaneity of which language is capable.

42 Derrida (2000, 5) also observes that the Foreigner “shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal logos.”

43 While Jane Hiddleston (2006, 154–55) sees Jean Anouihl’s Antigone as the author’s implicit intertextual reference, I contend that Djebar, on the contrary, makes every effort to call attention to multiple versions of Antigone. Djebar particularly favors the work of writers from outside metropolitan France.

44 After a century of silence, Djebar commemorates the victims of this episode: “Ces femmes, ces hommes, ces enfants pour lesquels les pleureuses n’ont pu officier (nulle face lacérée, nul hymne lancinant lentement dévidé), car les pleureuses se sont trouvées confondues dans le brasier... Une tribu entière!” [“Those women, men, and children for whom mourners were unable to officiate (no cut faces, no tormenting hymns slowly unfurled), since the mourners were among those in the flames... An entire tribe!”] (Djebar, 1985, 114).

45 Zimra (2004, 154). This admission is astonishing and cannot be taken at face value, considering that Djebar is exceptionally well read, has a pronounced interest in theory, and reflects at length on writing and voice throughout Ces voix qui m’assiègent. In this same text, Djebar (1999, 171) even quotes a lecture Derrida gave in Lisbon: “l’on n’invente que l’impossible.”

46 The Civil War broke out shortly after the victory of the populist Islamist party (the FIS, or Islamic Salvation Front) in the first round of Algerian national elections in 1991. The FLN (National Liberation Front), which has dominated Algerian politics since independence, refused to relinquish power, declared a state of emergency, and canceled the second round of the elections, claiming that the platform of their rivals threatened democracy itself. Islamist militias and the national army then found themselves locked in a drawn-out struggle for power in which thousands of civilian non-combatants lost their lives.

47 This is a particularly powerful observation in the Algerian context, because proponents of French Algeria fought bitterly to keep the colony as they had sworn never to abandon the graves of their ancestors.

48 Many Algerians still lack information regarding the fate of loved ones who disappeared in the Civil War, but the government of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika passed amnesty legislation in 2006 that made it illegal for families even to pose the question. Women who previously had staged sit-ins to focus public attention on the disappeared, a strategy also deployed in Argentina’s Plaza de Mayo, were forbidden by law to do so.
Critics accused the Algerian state of abdicating its responsibility to citizens and of closing down public debate.

October 17, 1961 is the subject of Michael Haneke’s film Caché (2006), a psychological thriller which highlights how repressed memories of the massacres come back to haunt not only those responsible for the violence, but their children as well.


Calling itself a “theatre without walls,” the Théâtre du Grabuge has made a practice of bringing theatre into unconventional public spaces. A recent production, for instance, situated the Odyssey in the Lyon TGV station, incorporating passers-by into the performance. Le cri d’Antigone was featured on the fringe at Avignon in 2009.

Chapter 3: Glenn Gould and the Birth of the Author: Variation and Performance in Nancy Huston’s Goldberg Variations

1 Les variations Goldberg won the (appropriately named) Prix Contrepoint and was shortlisted for the Prix Femina. Huston’s English translation of the novel appeared in 1996 as The Goldberg Variations, and earned the Governor General’s Award for Translation.

2 Huston (2003, 65) recalls Barthes’ insistence that “form and content [be] as inseparable as oil and vinegar in a good salad dressing.”

3 In an insightful study, Ioanna Chatzidimitriou (2009, 24) describes the linguistic disruption at work within translingual narratives in terms that are particularly resonant for Huston’s work: “the ever more silent, disappearing mother tongue and the deafening, overly self-reflexive presence of the foreign language.”

4 Barthes lost his life in 1980 at the age of sixty-five due to injuries sustained in a road accident. According to Huston, his death coincided with her birth as a writer (Shread, 2009, 57).

5 Huston dedicates Les variations Goldberg to Barthes, “à celui qui est mort comme un enfant.” [“To someone who died like a child.”] In an autobiographical essay many years later, “The Mask and the Pen,” Huston (2003, 65–66) recalls Barthes’s inability to write fiction: “Barthes himself had fantasies of writing a novel but was brought up short by the first obstacle he encountered—namely, the difficulty of inventing proper names for his characters and then believing in them. [...] Like the proverbial centipede who can’t figure out which leg to start with, Barthes was so paralyzed by his own need to understand how novels worked; therefore he had no choice but to renounce novel writing. [...] Not by chance did I make the leap at least in 1980—daring to embark upon fiction-writing at last, just a few months after the death of Roland Barthes.” Ironically, Huston makes
Liliane a harpsichordist, notwithstanding the fact that Barthes openly proclaimed his distaste for the harpsichord in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Noudelmann, 2012, 126). It was her instrument after all; she took up the harpsichord at the same time as she started learning French as a high school student in New Hampshire. In *Nord perdu*, Huston connects the piano to English and to the mother, and sees it as a vehicle for emotionalism, exaggerated dynamics, and manipulation; by contrast, she associates the harpsichord with neutrality, intellectualism, and the French language (Arroyas 2008, 93–105).

6 Huston was awarded the Governor General’s Award for a French-language novel in 1993 for *Cantique des plaines*, although some argued that the novel should not qualify for the award since the author first published it in English as *Plainsong*, and later translated it herself into French. *Infrarouge/Infrared* (2010) won the less coveted *Literary Review’s* Bad Sex prize in 2012.

7 Huston is married to Franco-Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov.

8 My aim here is to demonstrate how these aspects of Huston’s work are inseparable.

9 See in particular Kaiama L. Glover (2010, 99–110). Huston has called herself a “faux bilingue” (a false bilingual) in *Nord perdu*. Reda Bensmaïa and Rey Chow (2005, 249–52) take Huston’s comments on bilingualism as an “invitation to reflect on the connotations of bilingualism as a cultural condition.”

10 Interestingly, Huston accords French this neutral quality in opposition to English, which she affiliates with the mother, emotion, and excess. If Assia Djebar similarly refers to French as a stepmother tongue, she does not accord it the same neutrality—French supplanted the Berber and colloquial Arabic spoken in her childhood home, even while it also gave her the freedom to express herself, access to higher education, and the ability to move about in society, unlike many other of her peers who remained cloistered at home.

11 Huston quotes Georges Sand in a collection of essays on contemporary literature, *Professeurs du désespoir* (2005): “L’homme est bon et mauvais. Mais il est quelque chose encore: la nuance, la nuance qui est pour moi le but de l’art.” Huston, like Djebar, is interested in the nuances in human experience that connect people across national or historical divides. Among the questions her work explores are affiliation (how one inherits or elects an affiliation), the difference between genius and bricolage, and what writing or music can do in the face of violence and trauma.

12 Like many of her leading characters, Huston herself is an accomplished musician.

13 Huston recognizes the influence of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute on
her writing, and notes her special affinity for Marguerite Duras, Romain Gary, and Samuel Beckett.

14 Wolf considers music in *The Goldberg Variations* alongside film in David Lodge’s *Changing Places* and painting in Thomas Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

15 Thomas Forrest Kelly (2011, 2–4) corroborates this connection between the early music movement and social protests: “The protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s—civil rights, antiwar, and the like—produced what many called a ‘counterculture’ resisting all that was passed down as traditional and elitist. To the extent that early music was seen as traditional and participatory, it could be seen as part of a cultural trend toward music of the people, music without pretense, music that expresses a general union of popular and learned. It cannot be sheer coincidence that the [movement] arose at the same time as a number of other populist movements: the folk-music revival, for example, propelled by Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, and others.” Kelly speculates that early music performances appealed to audiences through their claim to offer spontaneous creativity in the moment; such performances drew on scholarship (not received ideas) and involved improvisation: “A substantial part of the activity of the modern early-music movement is an effort to evoke that excitement, the one-time, you-were-there effect of music being made now. […] The impetus for its existence is grounded in the idea of spontaneity, of excitement, of recapturing experiences otherwise lost to us.”

16 Theodore Ziolkowski (2010) considers four contemporary literary renditions of the Goldberg Variations, including Huston’s, and speculates that the resurgence of interest in Bach’s work comes from a postmodern nostalgia for order and a widespread fascination with Glenn Gould. The three other novels he examines are Thomas Bernhard’s *Der Untergeher* [1983, *The Loser*], Richard Powers’ *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), and Gabriel Josipovici’s *Goldberg: Variations* (2002). Unfortunately, his readings are primarily plot-based and he glosses over Huston’s novel very quickly. In his view, “despite the virtuoso formal display and the shrewd insights into thirty different personalities, the work never succeeds in making clear any connection, other than the structural one, between Bach’s Variations and the performance [it] depict[es].” It is a pity that Ziolkowski brings up Gould right at the very end of the essay, as it prevents him from developing what is otherwise an important insight.

17 While I do not wish to impose a psychological reading on Huston’s work, it seems plausible that her fascination with Gould’s sudden rejection of performance may stem from her own efforts to understand her mother’s abrupt departure.
18 *Pérégrinations Goldberg* was released under the record label Naïve in 2000.

19 One character compares Liliane’s halting way of speaking to the chords of Frescobaldi’s music: “Elle prononce plutôt une phrase, elle la laisse résonner comme l’accord de Frescobaldi, elle attend pour voir si l’arpège de quelqu’un d’autre ne viendra pas s’y intriguer, puis elle essaie une autre phrase” (Huston, 1981, 46). [“She pronounces a sentence, lets it resonate like a chord of Frescobaldi, waits to see if someone else’s arpeggio will join in, then tries another sentence.”]

20 *Pérégrinations Goldberg* consists of thirteen tracts. The first and last tracts feature Huston reading the first and last sections of the novel with the aria of the Goldberg Variations played on harpsichord in the background. The eleven intervening variations represent original compositions (with the exception of Frescobaldi’s *Canzona Terza*) for harpsichord, percussion, serpent, and voice. They include: “Joyal”; “L’Araignée” (Spider); “Mesure” (Measure); “Vert” (Green); “Figer” (Freeze); “Roche” (Rock); “L’Aile de la mort” (Death’s Wing); “Tumeur” (Tumor); “Faux” (Out of Tune); and “Variation sur variation” (Variation on a Variation).

21 In Huston’s recording, the counterpoint is primarily between the voice and the instrument, and between the text and the music; each variation unfolds in sequence, unlike Gould’s vertical layering of voices. Gould’s experiments in contrapuntal radio reflect his interest in Renaissance and Baroque composers whom he identified as “the first people who recognized that it was possible and feasible and realistic to expect the human mind and the human ear to be aware of many simultaneous relationships, to follow their diverse courses and to be involved in all of them” (Kostelanetz, 1988, 567).

22 The contrast between formal constraint and creative freedom figures at the very opening of the text in the two contradictory epigraphs: “Vous avez exactement quatre-vingt-seize minutes” [“You have exactly ninety-six minutes”] and “Vous avez tout votre temps” [“You have all your time”] (Huston, 1981: 10–11).

23 Mary Coldwell recalls that while the 1970s saw a prevalence of recordings labeled “authentic performance” on “original instruments,” scholars in the 1980s (Taruskin, Dreyfus, and others) challenged the notion of “authenticity” on the grounds that it was “impossible to create a truly historically authentic Baroque performance 300 years after the fact, because among other things, contemporary audiences, venues, values, and contexts are so different. Also, in some cases the desire to create historically authentic replicas (a 20th-century ‘modernist’ idea) had led to rather boring, inexpressive performances—the opposite of ‘authentic’ performances in
the sense of performances that were truly imagined, created and owned by the performers.” http://earlymusic.org/what-early-music.

24 In the sense that the concert brings together people Liliane loves or has loved, it recalls a scene from Proust’s *Le Temps retrouvé*, in which many of the characters are reunited in the drawing room of the Princesse de Guermantes.

25 One of the speakers explicitly evokes Brecht in relation to the cinema, the theater, and music, to argue that desire and taste are not personal, but “fabriqués par l’appareil idéologique mis en place par le pouvoir” [“fabricated by the ideological apparatus established by power”] (Huston, 1981, 226).

26 Liliane reflects, “je ne dois penser qu’à mes doigts, et même à eux je ne dois pas vraiment penser. Sinon je sais qu’ils deviendront des bouts de chair, des boudins blancs, petits porcs frétillants, et je risquerai de m’interrompre horrifiée de les voir se rouler sur les morceaux d’ivoire” (Huston, 1982, 13). [“I should just think of my fingers, and still, I should not really think of them. If I do, I know they’ll turn into bits of flesh, white sausages, wiggling little pigs, and I might interrupt myself, horrified at seeing them roll around on the ivory keys.”] Gould made a similar observation in 1981: “Part of the secret in playing the piano is to separate yourself from the instrument in every possible way […] I have to find a way of standing outside myself while at the same time being totally committed to what I’m doing” (Bazzana, 2004, 428).

27 A variant of this dream reappears in *Instruments of Darkness* where the writer Nadia has a nightmare that she is packing suitcases and playing the violin (her mother’s instrument), but the notes disintegrate and fray, until only a single note remains. Nadia recalls that Schumann’s madness at the end of his life consisted in hearing a single note in his head, a persistent, repeated “la” (A) that she interprets as a form of recovered innocence. Considering the wordplay Huston creates in *Les Variations Goldberg* between the note “mi” and me (the self), the “la” could well have something to do with the feminine and with questions of gender, signaling the way classical music has (until recently) marginalized women performers and composers. Liliane’s inability to focus her thoughts on her performance recalls a passage in Barthes’s autobiography, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, in which the author evokes his own struggle to keep his mind from wandering during a student performance of Aeschylus’s *The Persians* at the Sorbonne. “I was fascinated by the temptation of thinking of something else; through the tiny holes of the mask, I could only see very high up and far way. As I delivered the dead king’s speeches, my eyes came to rest on inert—free—objects and books, a window, a
cornice, a piece of the sky: they at least weren’t afraid. I excoriated myself for getting caught in this uncomfortable trap—while my voice continued its smooth delivery, resisting the expressions I should have given it” (Barthes, 1977, 33). His voice continues to produce the text as required, while his thoughts are elsewhere, truant, detached. For Timothy Scheie, this scene reveals something essential about performance: a “reluctant subject constrained to ‘be’ in a particular way; a desiring body palpable beneath an ideological mask; language and voice severed from their expressive function; and finally, a utopian dream of liberation from this predicament forever deferred by the inability—or unwillingness—to remove the imposed mask of meaning and subjectivity.” Scheie goes on to ask: “When is performance a liberating gesture and when is it a ‘trap’?” (Scheie, 2006, 21–22).

28 An amateur pianist himself, Barthes extolled the virtues of amateur playing because its objective is pleasure rather than technical perfection (Noudelmann, 2012, 106–7).

29 The passage makes some very simplistic and problematic assumptions about translation; if Liliane had compared the translation of spoken-word poetry to music, form and timing would be absolutely critical, just as they are in rendering a piece of music. An interesting element of this comparison is that while both the performer and interpreter may be vehicles of another’s meaning, the interpreter is effaced in the act, while the performer of a piece of music receives particular attention.

30 See Sisman’s extensive discussion of the history and aesthetic problems of variation form in the Grove Music Online. She highlights a number of critical issues that come into play when analyzing any set of variations: What logic, if any, motivates the number and order of variations? How does the set of variations come to an end? Does the theme return, and if so, what kind of closure (artificial or revelatory) does this achieve? Elsewhere, Sisman observes that music critics tend to treat variations as “interpretations or criticisms of a theme,” as Edward Cone does in writing on Schubert (Sisman, 1993, 36).

31 As is the case with much of Said’s writing on music, critics have been quick to point out the flaws in his understanding of the Goldberg Variations: for instance, although she praises Said’s efforts to consider music in relation to Vico’s notion of history, Sisman (1993, 6) argues that one can hardly qualify the Goldberg Variations as “aberrant” as they adhere to a highly determined, mathematical logic.

32 Rosen’s program notes to Jerome Robbins’s 1971 version of the Goldberg Variations at the New York City Ballet.

33 In a sense, the novel—like other literary or artistic adaptations of musical
works—offers a highly creative response to Said and Daniel Barenboim’s (2002, 156) question, “How does one give music a kind of resonance beyond itself? How does one give it a kind of extension?”

34 Even so, some musicologists contend that listeners experience the return of the aria in an entirely different way from the opening of the piece, because the listener’s understanding of that aria has been expanded and transformed over the course of the variations.

35 Much as Barbara Johnson (1979) showed Baudelaire to do in his prose poems.

36 See John Caldwell’s entry on “Invention” for Grove Music Online. Caldwell argues that the word invention has “affinities with ‘ricercare’, with its connotation of ‘seeking out’ or ‘finding.’” He also notes that Bach used the word “invention” in the preface to the Clavier-Büchlein vor W. F. Bach (1720) to denote “original ideas.”

37 These dimensions come together in the persona of Liliane, whose identity and self-expression as a woman is as much under critique as her musicianship. Liliane’s controlled performance is explicitly contrasted to the highly sexualized, extroverted musical production of male performers who wield their instrument like a phallus that ejaculates on the public (Huston, 1981, 143–45). Feminine performance is at stake throughout the text, perhaps most remarkably in Variation XX: “Je plaque sur mon visage une expression quelconque en espérant que cet arrangement de ma physionomie correspondra à l’idée qu’ils se font d’une jeune fille ‘animée’ ou ‘curieuse’ ou ‘intelligente’; j’essaie de me voir à travers leurs yeux. Mais ensuite, je m’affole à l’idée qu’ils vont réellement me juger là-dessus: toute cette comédie aboutira fatalement à un avis sur ma personne, alors qu’elle n’a rien à voir avec ce que je suis au fond” (162). [“I put any old expression on my face, hoping that this arrangement of my physiognomy will correspond to their idea of a ‘vivacious,’ ‘curious,’ or ‘intelligent’ young woman; I try to see myself through their eyes. But then, I panic that they will really judge me by it: this whole comedy will fatally lead to an assessment of me, even though it will have nothing to do with who I really am at heart.”]

38 The Bibliothèque National de France in Paris houses one of the nineteen original manuscript copies of Bach’s Goldberg Variations, including corrections and additions made by the composer.

39 Wolf (2002b, 21) calls attention to the “affinities between music, the ‘song of the body’, and a transgressive, anti-patriarchal écriture féminine, which disregards linear, rational discourse as described by Hélène Cixous with reference to musical terms.” He argues that a “possible parallel in musicalized fiction between the feminine as the Other of the masculine
and music as literature’s Other is indeed an intriguing perspective. It has not yet received its due attention, and I would at least like to point it out here as deserving further investigation although the majority of experiments with musicalization seems so far to have been written by men without consciously attempting an écriture féminine.” Note that this movement from the masculine roman to the feminine romance is replicated in Variation XV; Bernald insists on contrasting music and meaning: he describes music as “roche” (a feminine term for rock that evokes a certain porosity) and meaning as “roc” (a masculine term that signifies hardness, solidity) (Huston, 1981, 127–28).

40 Biber’s patron, the Archbishop Max Gandolf von Khuenberg, was a member of an Austrian society devoted to the veneration of Mary. The sonata uses scordatura in such a way that the strings of the violin cross; the high and low registers exchange their conventional positions. Arroyas (2008, 110–11) argues that Huston deliberately uses the sonata and its association with the Virgin Mary “to criticize and subvert Christian orthodoxy,” “in opposition to the relegation of women to the role of procreation, [...] as paving a way for women to gain access to the spiritual and divine orders, to be creators and not only procreators.”

41 “Le roman est d’une linéarité enrageante” (Huston, 1996b, 50–51). [“Novels are maddeningly linear!”]

42 According to Lévi-Strauss, musical performance holds the same social power as myth, since both music and myth are “instruments for the obliteration of time” (Dunsby, Grove Music Online).

43 Cameron Fae Bushnell (2009) offers an insightful analysis of tuning and difference in Vikram Seth’s An Unequal Music and Daniel Mason’s The Piano Tuner in “The Art of Tuning: A Politics of Exile.”

44 Huston comments, “J’ai composé l’histoire alternée de deux femmes dans Instruments des ténèbres, en passant de l’anglais au français, chapitre après chapitre. Tous les jours, je me repassais d’une langue sur l’autre et y puisais un regain d’énergie” [“I wrote the alternating stories of two women in Instruments of Darkness, passing from English to French chapter after chapter. Every day, I’d switch from one language to the other, tapping into a new burst of energy”] (Gazier, Laval and Bouchez, 1997, 4). As critics have observed, even if the writer forced herself to respect the norms in each language, the French version contains anglicisms, like adjectives before the verb. It is impossible to label either version an original, due to the fact that Huston produced both texts simultaneously, side by side.

45 The narrative construction, focus on trauma, and historical concerns of the novel recall Nicole Krauss’s fiction, particularly Great House (2011). In her insightful reading of Fault Lines, Katherine Kolb (2010) is particularly
attuned to the layers of meaning in Huston’s title in both the French and English versions.

Chapter 4: Opera and the Limits of Representation in J. M. Coetzee’s Disgrace

1 I come to this conclusion after having taught the novel several times to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Students invariably feel repulsed by Lurie’s attitudes.

2 See Kerry Bystrom (2007) for a critique of the use of rape to imagine the genealogy of the new South Africa.

3 Lurie’s effort to access other perspectives is seen in passages such as: “He can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?” (Coetzee, 1999, 160); and “Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is?” Lucy repeatedly tells Lurie, “You weren’t there. You don’t know what happened” (140).

4 Condé’s Histoire de la femme cannibale (2003) reworks several elements of Coetzee’s novel, notably the academic setting, the disgraced professor, prostitution, and old age.

5 Byron’s life and work inspired several nineteenth- and twentieth-century operas, including Giuseppe Verdi’s I Due Foscari (1844) based on Byron’s play, The Two Foscari (1821) (Johnson, 2005, 541), and Virgil Thomson’s Lord Byron (1968), a three-act opera about Byron himself. The Ford Foundation at the Metropolitan Opera commissioned the opera, although the Met never produced it. It was finally premiered by the Julliard Opera (1972) with Gerhard Samuel as music director and Alvin Ailey as choreographer.

6 Note Coetzee’s striking repetition of the word “passionate”; I come back to the question of passion later in my analysis of language and the lyrical.

7 Through this question of whether or not it would be appropriate to write an operatic role for the stray dog, Coetzee interrogates the boundaries of opera. Ironically, stray dogs have made an appearance in two recent operatic productions. First, in Russian composer Alexander Raskatov’s A Dog’s Heart, an operatic adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov’s satirical novel Heart of a Dog (1925) about a medical professor who implants a human pituitary gland into a stray dog, upon which the dog becomes human. Raskatov thus does exactly what Lurie contemplates: he writes the stray dog into opera, but the dog no longer remains a dog (although ultimately, a reverse operation returns him to his initial state at the end of the opera). The work premiered at the Netherlands Opera on June 7, 2010, and went on to La Scala and other venues. The second instance, Laika, the Spacedog, is a 2013 production of The English Touring Opera. A “science opera”
directed at young audiences, it recounts the story of Laika, the stray dog discovered in Gorky park in Moscow in 1957 who was sent into space as the first animal in orbit, becoming the most famous animal victim of the space race. Russell Hepplewhite composed the musical score to a libretto by Tim Yealland.

8 Lucy Valerie Graham (2003, 444) argues that the text omits the scene of violence against women: “Since the stories of Melanie and Lucy are elided in Disgrace, the responsibility for such an imagining is left with the reader. To consign rape to a space outside articulation may contribute to a wider phenomenon of silencing.” Linda Seidel (2001, 22) reinforces this same point: “Someone else will have to write the stories of Lucy and Petrus and Pollox.”

9 Steve Jacob’s 2008 film adaptation of Disgrace does the novel a disservice in that it uses Graeme Koehne’s arias, “Three Byron Poems,” to give audial presence to Lurie’s compositions. Aesthetically, this decision is very successful, as the music is haltingly beautiful and evocative; it does, however, compromise what I see as the ethical and performative function of the opera: to open up a space within the text that remains unreadable, opaque, and “other.”

10 Ultimately, Parry (1996, 63) concurs that Coetzee’s writing is nonetheless “ethically saturated” and a virtuoso “self-interrogation of narrative production and authority” and yet “diverts and disperses the engagement with political conditions it also inscribes.”

11 Interestingly, when asked why he performed so badly at the university harassment hearing, Lurie claims it was for the principle of “[f]reedom of speech. Freedom to remain silent” (Coetzee, 1999, 188).

12 For an insightful discussion of non-verbal sounds in the novel, see also Michael Holland (2002).


14 Bystrom addresses these issues with respect to the TRC and land distribution.

15 In Age of Iron, Mrs Curren entrusts Mr. Vercueil to mail a long letter (a sort of posthumous confession) to her daughter in America after her death. This manuscript constitutes the novel we read. The end of the novel, however, tests the limits of narratability. Mrs Curren narrates her own death, describing the final embrace she receives from Vercueil, who serves as her Angel of Death. Her account of death—whiteness closing in all around her—makes an impossible claim on our credibility and exposes the hand of another author. One cannot write one’s own death, so who completed her
narrative? The text thus comes to us necessarily tampered with, mediated, completed.

16 The name Vercueil further underscores the importance of music in the novel. Vercueil suggests a hybrid of Vinteuil, the piano teacher/composer in Proust’s *A côté de chez Swann*, and Vercors, the pseudonym under which Jean Bruller published the resistance novel, *Le silence de la mer* (1942), alluding thus to two novels that engage extensively with music. Through the Vinteuil sonata, Proust explores the capacity of music to isolate and prolong an instant in time. In *Le silence de la mer*, the German officer stationed in a French home is an amateur composer who dreams of countering Bach’s “musique inhumane” with his own “musique de l’homme.”

17 The language in this passage recalls Rousseauist and Enlightenment theories on how music speaks. Sound penetrates the subject and acts directly on the emotions, on the heart. Note the almost parodic repetition of “heart.”

18 This lecture, originally given in Graz, Austria in 1991 and then published in *Current Writing* in 1993, is the opening piece of the collection, *Stranger Shores* (2001). In *Age of Iron*, the music of Bach again epitomizes the classic. Many of these preoccupations return in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2008).

19 Coetzee is ambivalent in his attitude to criticism. While fiction allows a writer to stage his passions, “criticism is always either a betrayal (the usual case) or an overpowering (the rarer case) of its object” (Coetzee, 1992, 60).


21 Another parallel between the two novels is a preoccupation with castration.

22 As the narrator of the novel is situated in Australia, it is unclear who precisely the “we” of this statement represents. Is it the West? The question is particularly nagging in that it opposes the vague, transnational “we, our people” whom the narrator holds responsible for Guantanamo, to a grounded, national subjectivity, the Finns.

23 Lurie is conscious of this, as he observes, “It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic” (Coetzee, 1999, 184).

24 “The girl he has brought home is not just thirty years his junior: she is a student, his student, under his tutelage” (Coetzee, 1999, 12). Of course, Lurie is not just a middle-aged professor sleeping with a young
student, but a white man with a colored woman just years after the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Incongruous couplings pervade Coetzee’s fictions—Mrs Curren and Mr Verceuil in *Age of Iron*, Leda and the swan in *Elizabeth Costello*. Critics have read into these mismatched pairs Coetzee’s desire to forge ties across radical differences, by locking two unlikely individuals into a reciprocal exchange. Attwell (1992, 7) calls our attention in particular to Coetzee’s interest in reciprocity.

25 “There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to the idea of the world. One could for instance work longer hours at the clinic. [...] Even sitting down more purposefully with the Byron libretto might, at a pinch, be construed as a service to mankind. But there are other people to do these things—the animal welfare thing, the social rehabilitation thing, even the Byron thing” (Coetzee, 1999, 146).

26 Lurie’s dedication to ideas distances him from his daughter, as an early dispute between the two illustrates. Rooted to the present and the earth, Lucy asserts: “[The dogs] aren’t going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals. [...] That’s the example I try to follow. To share some of our human privilege with the beasts” (Coetzee, 1999, 74). Lurie, by contrast, aspires to transcendence, and pursues it through art. As several critics have noted, if he renounces this goal at the end of the novel, it is only because, as a result of Lucy’s rape and subsequent conception, he is about to become a grandfather and will thus survive biologically through Lucy’s progeny.

27 “A father had been watching beside his child’s sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom the room in which his child’s body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours’ sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: ‘Father, don’t you see I’m burning?’ He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child’s dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them” (qtd in Caruth, 1996, 93).

28 “So faint, so faltering is the voice of Byron that Teresa has to sing his words back to him, helping him along breath by breath, drawing him back to life. That is how it must be from here on: Teresa giving voice to her lover, and he, the man in the ransacked house, giving voice to Teresa” (Coetzee, 1999, 183). The Orphic quality of this passage is unmistakable: “With the aid of
the banjo he begins to notate the music that Teresa, now mournful, now angry, will sing to her dead lover, and that pale-voiced Byron will sing back to her from the land of the shades” (186).

29 On this subject, see Abbate (1991), Smart (2000), and Clément (1988). Clément exposes opera’s obsessive need to kill off the soprano heroine, in order to tame the ungovernable power of her voice.

30 My emphasis.

31 Need and passion overlap in this passage, subverting any clear-cut understanding of these two terms. The need to fill out the overlarge and rather empty human soul is like the need/desire that drives Lurie in his encounters with Melanie.

32 This portrayal of the degeneration of language recalls Wagner: “Science has laid bare to us the organism of language, but what she showed us was a dead organism, which only the poet’s utmost can bring to life again, namely, by suturing the wounds with which the anatomist’s scalpel has gashed the body of language and by breathing into it the breath that may animate it with living motion. This breath, however, is—music” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1994, 119).

33 Zoë Wicomb (2002) argues that the English poets’ vision of the landscape is an unnecessary filter, disrupting the spontaneous and immediate sensual relationship between people and their own country.

34 Graham Pechey (2002, 380) comments on this as well: “Words as song, he believes, are words in their ur-state, protected from all merely instrumentalizing uses.”

35 Kofi Agawu (2001, 9) argues, “To the extent that speech rhythm and speech tone serve as defining characteristics of natural language, we might think of African languages as forms of music.”

36 Rousseau gives a full account of his beginnings in music in the Confessions.

37 Abbate and Parker (2012, 7) address the issue of creative license, commenting on the current tendency to turn operatic performance into an activity “policed by a reverence for the work as a well nigh sacred object—a reverence in almost all cases not present at the time it was created.”

38 Note the reference here to Broch’s Sleepwalkers discussed in Chapter One.

39 My translation.

Conclusion

1 “When with a happy heart I hum a tune, it isn’t always a Congolese rhumba. Am I a traitor? I express a substantial part of myself when I whistle a blues melody, a Jazz tune, a waltz, phrases from a Beethoven symphony, from a Verdi opera or the Song of the Volga Boatmen. Beyond the Congo, I feel African.” My translation.
2 The contrapuntal approach developed here in relation to historical conflict in *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* provides a lens for considering many other contemporary novels that engage competing memories, including Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land*, Alexander Hermon’s *The Lazarus Project*, Nancy Huston’s *Fault Lines*, or Boris Boubakar Diop’s harrowing *Murambi or the Book of Bones*.

3 Carpentier (1988, 3). The score of Vivaldi’s opera was long considered lost, but it was finally recovered in the Ukraine in 2002.

4 Carpentier develops these ideas more fully in his theoretical writing on “Barroquismo” where he argues that the “recurrent interaction (crossover) gives rise to continually new sources of identity as each expression becomes interwoven with others resulting in ever-shifting boundaries and borders” (Bromberg, 2008, 8).