THE ORPHEUS FIGURE:
THE VOICE IN WRITING, MUSIC AND MEDIA

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Abstract:

This study traces a historical trajectory of the voice as it encounters the Orpheus figure in writing, music, and other media. Following a critical discussion of Auerbach’s literary figuration, the author questions certain aspects of phonocentrism in relation to opera and texts using the voice for authoritative or rhetorical purposes. Grounded in the prefiguration of opera’s earlier displacement of the singing voice, the understanding of mass media and digital media then developed is critical of theories of immersion in media. The analyses of the series of works and figures (Orpheus, Ossian, and Tristan) in this study lead the author to propose a threefold historical definition of the voice: the mimetic, the representational, and the expressive.

Keywords:

Aura; devocalization; digital media; figuration; figure; media; mimesis; Monteverdi; narratology; occularcentrism; opera; L’Orfeo; Orpheus; Ossian; psychoanalysis; singing; Tristan und Isolde; videocentrism; voice; Wagner.
La voix se présente comme l'énigme de la réalité humaine.

Denis Vasse
To the memory of Raymond Joly
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List of Abbreviations (in order of appearance)

KJV  The English Bible, King James Version
GNT  Greek New Testament
BT    Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Birth of Tragedy
DWB  Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm
OED  Oxford English Dictionary
WW   Schopenhauer, Arthur. World as Will and Presentation
HA   Nietzsche, Friedrich. Human, All Too Human
Introduction

This dissertation investigates four topics as I encountered them throughout Western history: the voice, music, the psyche, and writing. Although these topics are long-standing interests of mine, this study presents them as they were organized by two recent research questions. The first came from wondering why there had been no new Orpheus operas in the nineteenth century. The second asked why such a figure of authorial authority enjoyed increased popularity in new opera and music over the last three decades—an era marked by the discursive dominance of deconstruction. Influenced at first by psychoanalytic readings of Orpheus in opera, my project soon required a reevaluation of my critical stance and a historicization of its topics.

With Erwin Rhode and Walter Burkert, I came to see the evolving definitions of the psyche in Archaic and Classical Greece. With Eric Havelock, Walter J. Ong, and Bruce Lincoln, I tied in these transformations of the psyche to the transition from a culture of vocal transmission to the rational heritage made possible by literacy. With M. Owen Lee, I began to think of Orpheus less as the incorporation by Greek religion of pre-existing shamanism from Northern Europe and more as a religious figure necessary or organic to that very period, insofar as Orpheus combines the ritual means of oral traditions—embedded into his very story of song and invocation—with the logical requirements of emerging rational thought in the themes the story develops—a celebration of individual life, the painful consciousness of human mortality, and an attempt to avoid eternal death. The anxiety in foreseeing the separation of the psyche from the dead body and of the voice’s

1 From the prologue to Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo. See the appendix for an English translation of the text.
dislocation from its embodied site of presence, could only happen once s/he who cannot be divided, the individual, had taken hold in Greek culture. Fascination with the world of shades became possible because of the aching delight one experienced when faced with the world’s incandescence, as the French Hellenist Jacqueline de Romilly describes it, and knowing that one’s experience of it was ephemeral compared to the world’s ongoing life. With this stage upon which the Orpheus figure could set, I turned to other historical moments in which the relation between the voice, song, and the psyche had also been put into writing, albeit in different ways, in order to start answering my two questions.²

Before I continue, however, what might seem like a simple question needs what can only be an attempt at a partial, straightforward answer: Who was Orpheus to the Ancient Greeks? The first recorded mention of Orpheus is a fragment by the lyric poet Ibykus, who, around the middle of the sixth century BCE, wrote a poem of which only two words remain: “onomaklyton Orphēn,” or “famous Orpheus.” (Ibykus, frag. 17) Three centuries later, Apollonius of Rhodes presented Orpheus as a legendary hero who accompanied and assisted Jason and the Argonauts. Accordingly, classicists conclude that Orpheus was believed by the Ancient Greeks to have lived one generation before the Battle of Troy. Even in his Hellenistic epic configuration, however, Orpheus contrasts with the legendary heroes of Homer: he does not engage in battle, but calms the Argonauts when they fight amongst each other; he does not help in planning attacks, but offers sacrifices in order that the gods not impede the Argo’s journey. In short, he acts more like a priest than a warrior. This obvious religious function of Orpheus in Ancient Greece has led to an ongoing debate since the nineteenth century on the extent to which Orphism participated in the transformation of

² See Jacqueline de Romilly, Ce que je crois. (2012: 11-44) With my thanks to Mathilde Branthomme for giving me a copy of this book.
Greek religion, especially in the development of the mystery cults.\(^3\)

An unsuspecting reader or opera-goer encountering Orpheus today on any type of media support is engaged in a revived moment of the psyche’s metamorphoses in the history of Greek religious beliefs, albeit in a romanticized way. In Homer, when the psyche leaves the body to go to Hades, it does not enjoy eternal life. There is as yet no common sense of individuality that feels the need to live on after this life, in one form or another. The contrast with Plato’s moral use of the myth of metempsychosis (the translation of a soul to another body) is striking. In between these two conceptions of the psyche—on one hand, a minimal

\[\text{3 On the Ancient Greek dating of Orpheus, see Burkert, Greek Religion: “For the Greeks he [Orpheus] is dated one generation before the Trojan War, since he was associated with the expedition of the Argonauts; for us no evidence goes back beyond the middle of the sixth century.” (Burkert 1985: 296)}\]

In Apollonius’s Argonautica, Orpheus is portrayed as a mediator of the manifestations of divine will in the human world. Through his knowledge of the gods, Orpheus interprets divine signs that help the Argo on its journey. When storms prevent the Argo from casting off, he instructs the men to join in a sacrificial ritual offered to Rhea that will appease her and the weather. (I. 1134) Similarly, after what seems to be an earthquake, he interprets the moving ground as Apollo’s treading on the island and orders the men to build him an altar. (II. 685) He also foresees the ire of the Muses and knows what will appease them when the men kill the serpent that guards their sacred tree. (IV. 1409) At the end of the poem, Orpheus once again performs a ritual function, as he makes offerings to barbarian divinities in order to let the Argo return home safely. (IV. 1547) In these situations Orpheus plays a conciliatory role in reckoning the world of human beings with the divinities who order it.

Orpheus thereby gives human activities and relations their proper measure and rhythm, which are combined with the effects of his music on the crew. When the men of the Argo start to quarrel amongst each other, Jason intervenes to break up the fight with the help of Orpheus who hushes them with “his lyre along with his divinely beautiful voice” and the quarrelling men lean “their heads forward longingly, one and all, with intent ears, immobile with enchantment.” (I. 494) His ability to civilize the warrior, to purge him of his killing instincts after combat, is once again emphasized in book II. After a battle, the Argonauts make a sacrifice and end the night by singing “a hymn to the accompaniment of Orpheus’ lyre in beautiful harmony, and round about them the windless shore was charmed by their singing.” (II. 161) In the famous passage of the sirens’ singing, Apollonius does not call upon wax-clogged ears to save the sailors, but on Orpheus’s singing over their seductive voices. (IV. 905) His Apollonian capacity to drown out the call to jouissance of non-linguistic sounds might also account for his singing duties outside the doors of Jason and Medea’s bridal chamber. (IV. 1159)

The psychoanalytic term jouissance will reappear throughout this thesis. For a theoretical definition and occurrences of the term in Lacan’s work, see Evans 1996: 91-92. I use the term jouissance to describe that excessive and fleeting state of physical and psychical enjoyment in which the subject is under the illusion that he has attained, and perhaps even retained, the unattainable object of his desire. Although the alternation of desire (a state of striving for the object) and of jouissance form a constitutive part of the subject’s experience, the call to jouissance is an altogether different and violent problem. When figures of authority, which should symbolically uphold the difference between fantasies and reality, demand jouissance of their subjects, the transgressive element disappears and the subject’s desire is itself objectified. Furthermore, when these two stances get associated to a life force (Eros) and the death drive (Thanatos), it raises the question of ecstasy’s function in an aesthetic experience. I discuss these matters further at the end of the second chapter and in chapter three.
literary token for a character’s death; and on the other, a philosophical agent responsible for the individual’s morality and eschatological redemption—the nineteenth-century German philologist Erwin Rohde identified the other Greek conceptions of life after death, which evolved from the privilege of the few into the aspiration of the many.\(^4\) We find thereby the Olympic religion, which defines immortality as the sole privilege of the gods, cohabiting with the mystery cults, which promise the initiates at least some form of life in the Netherworld. Although we do not know for certain the reasons for Orpheus’s fame in the sixth century BCE, M. Owen Lee thinks “it seems best to say that the passage in Euripides [from \textit{Alcestis}] really does refer [to] an Orphic descent.” (Lee 1996: 5) He argues that a century after Ibykus, “Euripides’ audience was familiar” with the story of the singer’s descent to Hades to rescue his deceased wife. (ibid.) About a century passes before we find the first trace of the name Eurydice, at the end of the fourth century. Either as the Queen of the Dead or as the morally endowed soul, Eurydice enters the Orpheus myth in its phase of religious development as a sign that differentiates the initiate’s soul from his embodied life. Of course, the myth might very well have been religious from the start, as Robert McGahey discusses in regards to the many similarities between the Orpheus myth and shamanism. (McGahey 1994) This religious background informs Orpheus’s descent before Virgil transformed it into the

\(^4\) Erwin Rohde, \textit{Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks}. According to Rohde, bodily translation was the privilege of heroes married to divinities, such as Menelaus, Helen’s husband; he avoided death by being translated alive to the Elysian Fields, an earthly abode were time does not exist. Incubation was the privilege of heroes fallen in battle, who, before they could die, had been engulfed alive; they dwelt in the caves that used to house the sanctuaries of chthonic deities. Since daemons were invisible and were not attached to specific locations, their numbers did not need to be restrained; thus, with them, the cult of the dead could expand to commoners as well. Following in their midst, the mysteries, which were centered around rituals of harvesting, continued this expansion of afterlife privileges to men and women alike, either free citizens or slaves.

According to Nicole Loraux, the expansion of the cult of the dead led to the first laws explicitly designed to contain the mourning voices that disrupted civic order. “We know how wary civic legislation was of excessive expressions of mourning, especially those initiated by women. The lawmaker Solon is said to have forbidden Athenian women to engage in \textit{threnoi.”} (Loraux 2002: 87) For Loraux, the repression of this vocal mourning finds its way into tragedies, albeit in a sublimated form. Eurydice might also have become a symbol for this repression of vocalized mourning. With thanks to Asturia Fuica for suggesting, years ago, that I read Loraux.
story of the singer, grief-stricken at having lost his beloved, not once but twice.\(^5\)

At this point, it might be best to refresh the reader's memory concerning the fable of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the story developed by Virgil and by Ovid, and taken up by medieval and Renaissance writers, Eurydice dies after having being bitten by a snake on her wedding day. Orpheus refuses to be separated from her and decides to retrieve her from the clutches of hell. Thus he travels to the gates of Hades where he first charms the three-headed dog Cerberus, before lulling Charon to sleep and sneaking into the Netherworld. What ensues is a series of wondrous sonic appeasements, including the quieting of the Furies, the immobilization of Sisyphus's ball, and the abeyance of Prometheus's supplice at the beak of a vulture eternally feeding off of his equally eternally regenerating liver. After finding his way to the throne of bones, Orpheus's song secures from Hades and Persephone the release of Eurydice's psyche from the chains of eternal death. Hades takes pity on Orpheus in light of his own torturous mythical love-story and of his prior dealings with his mother-in-law: Hades had dragged Persephone to Hell and only consented to let her visit the world of the living each year (Spring and Summer) after Demeter, Persephone's mother, had

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\(^5\) In the Myth of Er, which Plato relates in the last book of the Republic, there are two paths that a soul can take when it is freed at the body's death. Although it bypasses the Titanic origins of humanity, as related in the Orphic theogonies, Plato’s eschatological myth serves the same purpose: a story of origins is used to regulate human interactions by giving them a purposeful, extra-worldly end.

The first chapter of Virgil as Orpheus, “Orpheus and Aristaeus,” offers a critical overview of Orphean literature in Antiquity, from archaic Greek fragments to Virgil and Ovid's romanticizing of the myth. (Lee 1996: 1-19) As I discuss in relation to Nietzsche in chapter two, twentieth-century archeological discoveries definitely place initiates of an Orphic mystery cult in the Greek colony of Olbia (present-day Sardinia), during the mid-fifth century BCE.

As for Eurydice's appearance in the history of the myth, Father Lee makes the following remarks:

Fragments of a Peri Ariston ascribed to a certain Palaephatus and dating probably to the late fourth century BC, give rationalized accounts of various myths. [...] Palaephatus is also the first to give Orpheus' wife a name—Eurydice, 'she who gives justice far and wide.' It seems a name more appropriate for a judging queen of the dead [Persephone] than for a woman rescued from death. So this most obscure writer in our canon suggests, as the others do, the possibility that the story of Orpheus descending might originally have been a kind of charter myth for Orphism: the founder claims to have brought from the underworld the secrets of life and death, in the person of hell's very queen. (Lee 1996: 7)
starved earthly inhabitants, since her mourning (Fall and Winter) had prevented the crops from growing (forcing Zeus to intervene). The only condition Hades poses for Eurydice’s return to life is that neither Orpheus nor Eurydice usurps Persephone’s privilege in coming and going from Hades as she (almost) pleases: that is, neither one is to look back onto death’s abode on their way back to daylight. Before both of them arrive in the world of the living, however, Orpheus turns around to make sure Eurydice’s psyche is still following him, thereby transgressing the law that the god of the Underworld has just proclaimed. Eurydice’s psyche is drawn back into the darkness and although she had not yet been resurrected, the wishful expectancy of seeing her alive again could lead one to think that she then dies a second death. Inconsolable, Orpheus retreats to the woods, where he finds a receptive audience for his art: he sings for mammals and birds, as well as the vegetal and mineral elements of the forest.\(^6\)

One must backtrack a few centuries to Aeschylus’ lost tragedy, \textit{The Bassarids}—an “Orpheus tragedy” according to Burkert—for the first account of the singer’s own death. Having forsaken the cult of Dionysus and his interest in women, he greets the rising sun in the sole name of Apollo. Dionysus, incensed at this second display of seemingly mastery over the chthonic deities, has a band of maenads dismember him. (Burkert 1985: 225) But like his recently departed beloved, part of Orpheus, although dead, continues to live on. In Ovid’s retelling, the severed head of Orpheus, afloat on his lyre, makes its way downstream on the Hebrus, all the way to the sea. Orpheus’s head washes up on the shores of Lesbos,\(^6\)

\(^6\) The Orpheus myth is related by Virgil in book four of \textit{Georgics} and by Ovid in books ten and eleven of \textit{Metamorphoses}. The lulling of hell’s torments is related in \textit{Metamorphoses} 10.40-44. The importance of Persephone in the myth is explained in the Orphic theogonies. Orphism explains the origins of human mortality as a fall from immortality, the last episode of a history of the creation of the gods. The Titans lured the infant Dionysus, the son of Persephone and Zeus, with toys and a mirror before killing him, tearing him to pieces, boiling him, and then eating him. In reaction, Zeus’s bolts of lightning destroyed the Titans and thus humanity was born from their ashes. Transient human life is therefore an opportunity for atonement of humanity’s ancestral excesses, an individual atonement which will be judged by Persephone in Hades. (Guthrie 1935: 79-83)
where the inhabitants build it a temple from which it prophesies. After a while, Apollo gets
tired of vying for prophetic monopoly and commands him to silence. Not to seem
ungrateful after Orpheus has favored him over the ghastly goat-god, Apollo grants him
immortality, transforming him into the constellation Lyra. Thus Orpheus shines down upon
humanity as a symbol, but no longer directly speaks to us.7

As mentioned above, the Orpheus myth developed later in Greek Antiquity, along
with the advent of literacy in its socio-cultural landscape. The literary figuration of a singer
like Orpheus necessarily evokes the theme of the voice’s historical ties to discursive authority
in the cultural transition from orality to literacy. Implicit in this authoritative voice as a site
for dominant discourse is the inspiration that precedes expression. Bruce Lincoln discusses
this at length when analyzing the use of *mythos* and *logos* in the Homeric epos and Hesiod’s
didactic poetry. The true poet’s inspiration imparts him with a voice to recount factual
elements of a story he never witnessed. In the *Odyssey*, for example, the poet Demodocus is
even put on trial by a disguised Odysseus to see if he knows what really happened at Troy,
while the reader/auditor is already privy to this knowledge as narrated in the preceding
chapters and in the *Iliad*:

> If you can properly catalogue these things for me,
> Then I will proclaim to all people
> That a thoughtful god bestowed divine song on you.
> (Homer in Lincoln 1999: 20)

Thus divine bestowal of knowledge in the form of inspiration is necessary for a truthful
expression that is authenticated, in this instance, by other elements of the narrative. Later,
with the belief in the psyche’s immortality, this singing voice did not only carry a knowledge

7 In book eleven of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Apollo saves Orpheus’s head from a snake’s attack in Lesbos, while
Dionysus punishes the maenads for killing Orpheus. While Ovid has Orpheus and Eurydice happily reunited in
Hades and the Lyra constellation shine as a symbol of their love, the transfiguration of Orpheus I have outlined
above is described in Monteverdi’s second ending of *L’Orfeo*. 
that transcended geographical space and time; it could also mediate the worlds of the living and of the dead.\(^8\)

With the story of the descent of Orpheus to Hades, the poet’s inspiration comes under the aegis of memory. Thus we find mentions of Orpheus on the little tablets that initiates in the Orphic mysteries would take with them to their graves, in order not to forget what to do and what to say in the Netherworld, thereby saving their souls from eternal darkness:

Mnemosyne presides over the poetic function, insofar as her daughters, the Muses, are responsible for poets’ “recalling” the contents of their poetry. The σοφία [sophia] that Mnemosyne dispenses to her chosen ones is an “omniscience” of a divinatory kind. However, just as the fact that the poet sings through the inspiration by the Muses does not exclude him from a difficult preparation and learning of the art of a seer, so a similar preparation is demanded of the initiate who invokes the divinity at the entrance to Hades. (Bernabé 2008: 15)

Already in the fifth century, Orpheus is clearly a figure that allows one to follow the inspired voice (of poetry and song) as it meets different supports (the internal support of memory and the external support of writing) within an understanding of time and history grounded in eschatology.

As I discuss in the first chapter, Christianity recuperated the Orphic descent and the psychopomp’s authoritative voice and invested them in a book. Throughout the Middle Ages, the authority of Orpheus had been allegorized to fit with the Christian transmission of the written Word, in turn inspiring early modern poets like Dante and, later, Poliziano. I argue that opera’s intermediality subverted the traditional transmission of knowledge by staging the voice’s alternate musico-poetic authority over the rationalized discursive authority

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\(^8\) Instead of laurel or dew, Hesiod’s poet’s mind is given extraordinary breath with which to blow away his audience: “And [the Muses] breathed a voice into me: A divine one, so that I might tell of things that were and will be.” (Hesiod in Lincoln 1999: 23). The poet is therefore considered closest to the truth, “For if royal speech acquires divine character by virtue of its honeyed veneer [by the ingestion of dew], poetic speech is represented as divine in its own substance, for its divinity resides in the very air of which it is constituted.” (Lincoln 1999: 24) Demodocus’ test by Ulysses is but the first moment of the tension between mimesis and diegesis that this study will encounter.
of the book. Later on, following the increasingly predominant role of print in the
distribution of literary works, a trajectory of inspired vocal figuration can be traced by
following Orpheus, Ossian and Tristan, highly popular figures in the European cultural
landscape during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

What exactly is meant by the term “vocal figuration”? Intertwined with the
aforementioned vocal themes of inspiration, authenticity, and authority, the structure of
figuration relates to Erich Auerbach’s literary theorization of phenomenal prophecy, a way
of conciliating the Old Testament with the Gospel, which was initiated by Luke and Paul,
then further developed by the early Church Fathers. Figural interpretation functions on the
basis of identifying a figure in the Old Testament that gets rounded out in a figure from the
New Testament, insofar as both figures are phenomenal—i.e., real living human beings.9 It is
a messianic type of interpretation that historicizes the book, but, as the Messiah has already
come and gone in the Christian worldview, it also tends to preclude from its history the
living world and its breathing inhabitants. Indeed, figural interpretation places the Word’s
human reiteration in historical limbo, a time situated between the darkness that preceded
Christ’s coming and the chiaroscuro in which He left us, while we await the radiant return of
His second coming. In such a worldview, the phenomenological world can only be a
representation, a prefiguration of real eternal life “located” on the far side of
phenomenological life’s historical manifestation. Recently, theorists concerned with
conserving literature’s claims to historicity have argued that the figure, even after the collapse
of Christian cultural hegemony, can provide readers with meaningful interpretations of
human realities situated in a historical continuum, not understood as causal or progressing,
but rather in the fashion of Walter Benjamin’s backward *Tiegersprüinge*. In doing so, however,

9 All references to The Bible are from the Norton Critical Edition of *The English Bible* (2012).
they follow Auerbach’s proscriptive definition of the figure: it is neither an allegory, nor a symbol. This distinction was employed by Auerbach to ban mythological characters from his theory of figuration. The deleterious consequence of these proscriptions, as I will argue, is to perpetuate in literary studies the silencing of artificial or rhetorical vocal components from the text’s figuration, components whose effects inform belief in narratives. The reevaluation of the figure’s sonority is especially important, since it is the hinge upon which the Orpheus of Antiquity can swivel into the Renaissance. This is, for the most part, the first chapter’s reevaluation of this aspect of literary theory.10

While narratological studies of vocal representation rely on linguistic analysis or discourse structure to understand the transition from oral to literary cultures, my interdisciplinary approach brings musicological insights to the discussion.11 Christopher Page’s research on the function of music and singing in the primitive Church and its subsequent doctrinal containment through inscriptive practices led me to question the realism Auerbach finds at work in both Augustine and Tertullian. Tertullian’s endorsement of pneumatic worship, as a vocalization of the Spirit, contrasts unequivocally with Augustine’s experience of God’s active guidance through bibliomancy. Bibliomancy is the practice of blindly opening the Bible and believing that the Holy Spirit has guided one’s finger and gaze to a given passage. The difference between voicing the Spirit and imparting

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10 On the historian’s function of making “tiger leaps” through time, see Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*. (Benjamin 1968: 253-264)

11 On the differences between the voice in oral and literary discourse, see Monika Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*:

The proposals that I am offering in this study therefore attempt to elude a purely linguistic argument based on ‘oral’ features (parataxis, discourse particles) and to substitute for it a narratological cognitive frame related to discourse structure. In so far as structural patterns typical of oral types of narration can be observed to survive in written texts, I will suggest that they can then legitimately be called reflexes of oral structures of storytelling, with the immediate proviso that oral structures function differently in the written medium and are subject to quite extensive remodelling for the various purposes of the more literary genres. (Fludernik 1996: 40)

I consider Fludernik’s work on narratological studies of the voice in the third chapter.
the reading of an ocular encounter of a biblical passage with oracular authority is, I think, symptomatic of a transition from an oral to a more literate Christian tradition. This is especially true when reading becomes a silent practice. Already in Augustine’s experience of conversion, as related in *Confessions*, the written word has the phenomenological meaning that Derrida, in *Speech and Phenomena*, finds Husserl has attributed to oral discourse and vocal structure: bibliomancy is meaningful because God, through the Spirit at work in opening the Book, wants to say something (vouloir-dire) to the reader. Accordingly, Augustine, a man of letters, was already fighting against inspiration as something outside the text. A telling example of this struggle can be found in his pastoral concern when he became aware of his congregation’s lack of linguistic precision during Mass: since they did not sing in proper Latin, they could have grammatically corrupted the sacred text by adding a heterodox inspiration to its dissemination. (Page 2010: 204-06)

The Voice thereby becomes less of a source and final outcome of divine authority, and more of a literary resource that helps define history through the exclusion of voices from its writing. By examining excerpts from the Gospel of Luke and Augustine’s *Confessions*, I argue

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Although this thesis does not explore the problem of bibliomancy in detail, I am bringing attention to its practice here in order to introduce other topics that are examined more attentively. I thank Sara Danièle Bélanger Michaud for having brought to my attention the function of bibliomancy in narratives of Christian conversion, but especially for having fostered and nurtured, over the last few years, an intellectual space in which to discuss such topics.

Page relates the “grammatical” event described by Augustine in a letter:

In one case, he heard a grammatical mistake “in the mouth of the singing congregation” and pondered what should be done. This occurred as the people sang the last verse of Psalm 131 (132) – presumably the congregational response – using the words *Super ipsum autem floriet sanctificatio mea*, where *floret* is a grammatical error for *florebit* or *efflorebit*. Augustine is quite explicit that he heard this mistake as the congregation sang (*de ore cantatium populorum*). (Page 2010: 204-05)

According to Page, Augustine’s concern was for a lack of knowledgeable people to properly or literally transmit God’s message. Yet, paradoxically, it was already, in translation, a vulgarization:

There was a body of texts in Latin, the Holy Scriptures, which had to be preserved in a written form and protected from the encroachment of any radical linguistic changes taking place in the common speech, even though these texts were in some measure a transcription (using standard Latin spelling) of a raised version of the common vulgar tongue, whence the ‘Vulgate.’ (Page 2010: 205)
that vocal expression was not necessarily the disavowed desire of early Church Fathers, but rather a point at stake in the literary recuperation of the authority of the Greek psychopomp’s witnessing, of his coming back from Hades to tell the living how to avoid the eternal death of the psyche. If one takes the canonization of the New Testament and the codification of singing in the primitive Church’s liturgy into account, the history of phonocentrism must reckon with documents tracing the containment of expressive voices in order to ensure doctrinal unity: only His voice must be heard; therefore it must speak from the Book, since the Book’s supposed univocality is the only true guarantor of transmitting its and His (incarnated) reality.

Yet the mystery of the death of a god—the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Dionysus, and Christ—spoke to all believers precisely because it expressed what they also wished to voice: their anxiety about eternal death, about the disappearance of their (relatively newly found) individuality at the moment when the spirit or breath is dislocated from the body. Thus the eschatological counterpart of the inspired voice’s literary inscription can be understood as the wish to contain, or at least direct, this final dislocating exhalation. In turn, the staging of the inspired voice, as it leaves the body in musical ecstasy, articulates this inexorable drive to dislocation and the hopes of avoiding this imagined division of self. Because he transcends the Judeo-Christian worldview and the different spheres (religion, philosophy, music, poetry, etc.) of Western culture, Orpheus is a suitable figure to think through this existential problem and the means that have been employed in the past to provide it with solutions.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{13}\) According to Christiane Sourvini-Inwood,

[T]he Eleusinian cult acquired an eschatological component in the early sixth century [in response to] a shift in [“attitudes to death”] in the Archaic period, from an acceptance of a familiar (hateful but not frightening death), to the appearance of attitudes of greater anxiety and a more individual perception of one’s death, conducive to the creation of eschatologies involving a happy afterlife and, above all, of
By examining literary, religious, and philosophical prejudices against the inspired voice, it is possible to open up the literary space of figuration to Orpheus. Orpheus was not only a theological allegory or a magical symbol in early Christian funerary art: he was also thought to have been at some point in time a living, breathing, and therefore real historical human being. Ancient Greece’s passage from orality to literacy in the sixth century had already given rise to polemics about Orpheus’s authority. If Plato and Aristotle directly criticized the wandering Orphic priests, Aristophanes’s comic portrayal of Dionysus’s trip to Hades in *The Frogs* also sought to undermine the oral authority of the psychopomp-cum-witness in the Greek mysteries. Nevertheless, it is on the basis of his revealed knowledge of how to attain a felicitous afterlife that Orpheus is incorporated not only into Olympian religion, but also into Judaic monotheism. This last conversion happens in Alexandria during the second century BCE and it is to this written chronology that Clement of Alexandria refers to when, in the second century CE, he places Orpheus in historical perspective. With the revival of Platonism in the fifteenth century, the Renaissance came to believe again in the historicity of Orpheus as a figure, which explains his key role in the creation of opera. This summarizes the work of the first chapter.  

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reassuring religious responses, of which the Mysteries is an important instance. (Sourvini-Inwood 2003: 28)

Consult also Walter Burkert’s book *Greek Religion* for translated source material about the mystery cults’ answers to anxiety about death. (Burkert 1985: 276-89)

14 See Walter Burkert’s discussion of “Bacchica and Orphica” (Burkert 1985: 290-300), in particular the following:

The characteristic appeal to books is an indicative of a revolution: with the *Orphica* literacy takes hold in a field that had previously been dominated by the immediacy of ritual and the spoken word of myth. The new form of transmission introduces a new form of authority to which the individual, provided he can read, has direct access without collective mediation. The emancipation of the individual and the appearance of books go together in religion as elsewhere. (Burkert 1985: 297)
Chapter two examines key modern reconfigurations of Orpheus which have been previously overlooked. Since a figure is simultaneously composed of its prefiguration and of its fulfillment, pre-modern Christian prophecy and early modern poetry here come together as one. Thus the Orpheus figure accounts not only for a prefiguration of Christ but also for transformations in neo-classical poetics. Taking into account opera’s cultural role and Orpheus’s popularity throughout the seventeenth century as a subject of musical representation, the figural worldview in its Orphic guise is seen to carry on the hegemonic culture of Christianity for at least a century more than Auerbach thought. Furthermore, the ancient pseudonymous practice of writing *Orphica* was a direct influence on the rise of a proto-romantic understanding of poetic truth, more akin to the authenticity of emotional expression than to the proof of reason’s representations. This topic is taken up around readings of James Macpherson’s *Poems of Ossian* and Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*.

The expressive voice is contextualized here in theories of the musical origins of language and is seen to be a point of contention among thinkers as the closing of the figural worldview left the revelatory figure of God’s incarnation as an “empty sign” waiting to be recuperated. Humanist opera might have been an attempt to resurrect Greek tragedy, but the fact that it is still called opera today (or even music drama) and not tragedy says a great deal about the asymptotic trajectory of this thoroughly modern art form. I argue that the worldview held up by Orphic figuration definitely came to an end with Wagner, as opera stopped aspiring to represent tragedy and music drama became in itself tragic. In the historical trajectory I have traced, this tragic moment culminates in the recuperation of the

Interestingly, even recent research cannot determine Orpheus’s lack of historicity. See Plato, *Rep.* 364d. As George Grube writes in a note: “It is not clear whether or not Orpheus was a real person or a mythical figure.” (in Plato 1997: 1005n7) Aristotle, however, only ever mentions the poetry of Orpheus with the attribute “so-called” or “attributed to” (*De Anima* 410b, *Hist. Animals* 734a). Furthermore, commentators throughout Antiquity mention Orpheus in the same breath as Onomacritus, (ca. 530 – ca. 480) who was found guilty of forging Orphic hymns. (Guthrie 1935: 4-5, 13-14)
expressive voice by music drama’s extended narrative means of representation. With Carolyn Abbate, I understand opera’s poetics to complement and amplify the voice’s expression, which in a sense foreshadows the voice’s inscription onto media supports. It is one thing to dynamically imitate, direct, or accentuate the voice’s expression, however, and another to confine its “dynamic” expressivity to the exact repetition of mechanical reproduction.

After reviewing theories of the voice in literary and musicological narratology, I continue in the third chapter to examine how the dynamics of the captation of sound and its notation differ from mechanical redeployments of recordings. The difference between reiteration and redeployment speaks to active and passive receptions of literature and music that, in turn, influence how its traditionally creative elements are understood: expressivity is decisively an active and participative form of transmission, although not necessarily exact in replication; while redeployment favors an objectifying relation to what is heard, reducing artistic expression to the production of sonorous commodities. Such were Adorno’s concerns in the wake of the mechanical reproduction of sound for a mass media market. This type of critique might seem outdated or overdone to some. Nevertheless, recent theoretical interest in the voice and sonority’s ties to a relatively new market of digital media should make us question again the means by which it was historically appropriated by the music market. Although digital media and the Internet change how opera or vocal music is disseminated, the voice’s expressive characteristics must be understood and historicized in order to maintain a difference between the performer and spectator, between poetics and aesthetics. Granted, the historical ties to poetic authority and the inspired voice must not be

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15 According to the online edition of the *Trésor de la langue française* (http://atilf.atilf.fr), the French term *captation* is used to indicate the action of physically capturing or gathering waves of different nature (sound, Hertzian, telepathic, etc.) and fixing them to a physical medium through audio-visual technology. I use *captation* instead of recording in order to distinguish between the reproduction of musical objects and the redeployment of sonorous expression.
glossed over, as demonstrated in the danger of politicizing aesthetics and uncritically accepting the seemingly unanimous voice of power. But socio-political coercion is no longer simply obtained through assent to a representation; it is also exercised in the relation to the reality a medium can impose. When Orpheus encounters his symbolic decapitation (or dismemberment) in twentieth-century media, he becomes a figure for thinking through these problems. His beheading should make us wonder what kind of body we are being coerced into inhabiting by media’s power of suggestion.

This critique of politicized media is informed in turn by a psychoanalytic understanding of the voice. A psychoanalytic approach to the expressive voice does not simply listen and assign a symptom. To speak in Denis Vasse’s terms, it would postpone immediate reasoning on what the voice says in order to allow how it expresses itself to resonate within oneself, deferring the interpretative moment until another, more favorable associative juncture, although this is not always the case in psychoanalytic criticism of opera. Like the voice, expression is often understood in a dialectical fashion, to use a colloquial definition of the term “dialectical.” Describing these movements with binary terms might seem reductive to some, yet it reveals the underlying dynamics of a mundane yet fundamental structure of address: the voice expresses our unconscious emotions and impresses them upon the listener. The subversion of dominant discourses by idealist musicians, composers, singers and other artists, can be understood in terms of Jacques Lacan’s hystericization of discourse and of power relations, as he talked about in a year of seminars collected as The Other Side of Psychoanalysis. The critical composer’s hysterical refusal of commodity-value does not necessarily need to express itself in a complete break with musical tradition. Once more, the Orpheus figure opens a path in understanding artistic criticism of media: composing is understood as a scene of creative lucidity that has, is, and will repeat itself for as long as
those in power use media to control or to divert mass expressive outbursts that accompany existential and political awareness.

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Having presented my writing project, it seems appropriate to also present the reader with a brief overview of existing literature on the Orpheus figure. I will start with the psychoanalytically influenced secondary material on Orpheus. Perhaps the visual orientation of Judith Bernstock’s book *Under the Spell of Orpheus* (1991) confines it to a Freudian reading of the figure. Her autobiographic interpretations of artistic pursuits—symptomatic of failed or successful relationships with parental or authority figures—should have ultimately led to her to postulate an Orpheus complex at work in every artist’s sublimating identifications. Even within Lacanian parameters, the voice can be used to simply fasten Orpheus-cum-Opera into a dialectic of self-consciousness’s unconscious appeal to the Other. On the heels of Mladen Dolar’s brief comments on Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* in *Opera’s Second Death* (Dolar and Žižek 2002), Slavoj Žižek’s essay “The Sex of Orpheus” (2004) develops this strain of psychoanalytic criticism on Orpheus in the history of opera until the nineteenth century. Here the modern reconstructions of Orpheus are aligned with their historical counterparts in the philosophical understanding of subjectivity, as the progression of self-consciousness in the increased awareness of the unconscious.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan’s inclusion of the voice in the list of partial objects changes the way of relating to the Orpheus figure’s vocal expression. The object voice, that part of the voice that endures and remains after the linguistic act, runs parallel to the history of phonocentrism and is best recognized in its musical garb:

Not just writing, but also the voice can appear as a menace to metaphysical consistency and can be seen as disruptive of presence and sense. [...] The particular place where one can look for this is in philosophical treatments of music—again a rather limited perspective, to be sure, but one that casts long shadows. (Dolar 1996: 16)
A more productive reading of the Orpheus figure’s voice, insofar as it does not assign psychological determinations to artistic practice and creation, is Robert McGahey’s book *The Orphic Moment* (1994). Although his historical trajectory of the Orpheus figure differs from the one proposed here, his understanding of Orpheus has more in common with a reading underscoring the expressive voice. McGahey’s belief in the shamanistic origins of Orpheus leads him to posit an Orphic daemon (one similar to the voice Socrates heard) driving artistic creation. Instead of visually interpreting symptoms of Orphean identification and representation, the daemon Orpheus visits and inspires the artists. While the Freudian point of view sees in the restaging of the Orpheus myth the representation of images symptomatic of unconscious conflicts, McGahey understands the figure as a vector of inspiration that does not necessarily determine the artistic content of the future artwork.

Among the vast literature on Orpheus in English that is not psychoanalytically inclined and which has accompanied me throughout this study are W.K.C. Guthrie’s *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (1935), M. Owen Lee’s *Virgil as Orpheus* (1996), John Friedman’s *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (1970), Walter Strauss’s *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (1971), and Frederick Sternfeld’s *Birth of Opera* (1993). In addition to these monographs, there are also a few collections of essays dedicated to the Orpheus figure in all aspects of the humanities. *Orpheus, the Metamorphoses of a Myth* (1982), edited by John Warden, remains the only collection of essays in English for such interdisciplinary research. The publication of *Blick auf Orpheus: 2500 Jahre europäischer Rezeptionsgeschichte eines antiken Mythos* (2003) edited by Christine Mundt-Espin, sought to address the recrudescence of artistic interest in Orpheus.

See the remainder of the article for a history of the musical voice as object voice. Although I basically agree with this association of the object voice with certain musical uses of the voice (melismas, jubilations, and neumes), I will nevertheless critically examine certain of these associations in an effort to problematize sites or *topoi* of this musical object voice that have come to be taken for granted.

See yet another version of Žižek’s essay on Orpheus in opera, in his article “Die Psyche des Orpheus.” (2011) Other psychoanalytic theorists only mention Orpheus in passing and will therefore be considered in context.
in Europe since the 1990s through essays on the cultural history of the figure. And while the French collection *Le Regard d'Orphée: les Mythes littéraires de l'Occident* (2001) refers to Blanchot’s famous Orphic expression, only Pierre Brunel’s contribution on the vocations of Orpheus directly relates to the figure. (Brunel 2001: 35-56) In addition to these interdisciplinary books, new publications in recent years on the religious role of Orpheus in Ancient Greece should also be noted, especially those by Alberto Bernabé, and, for the opposite view, the publications of Radcliffe Edmonds.¹⁷

A glance at any of the bibliographies of these works will demonstrate to which point the Orpheus figure is an inexhaustible subject for research. The necessity of selecting works becomes all the more apparent in this study since by extending the Orpheus figure to Orphic figuration, it also engages with other watershed figures that have also caused a considerable amount of ink to flow. Indeed, the controversy surrounding Ossian and his immense popularity in Europe (from the 1760s and well into the nineteenth-century), as well as recent newfound interest in James Macpherson’s poetry, would also add to what would be a Herculean task of hermeneutic compilation and analysis, if that were how I had understood this project. The same applies to Richard Wagner and his depiction of Tristan. Although much of the current interest in *Tristan und Isolde* follows from the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of Richard Wagner’s birth, secondary literature on Wagner is also inexhaustible. Already during Wagner's lifetime, the amount of critical publications on his work was staggering and, as Carl Dahlhaus deplored in 1971, “literature on Wagner is legion.” (in Trippett 2010: 235) Furthermore, thinking of *Tristan und Isolde* in terms of the expressive voice’s figuration also afforded the opportunity to include Nietzsche in this trajectory,

¹⁷ Consult the selection of works on Orpheus Mundt-Espín lists in her bibliography. (Mundt-Espín 2003: 20-22) See also Reinhard Kapp’s 81-page “chronological list of Orpheus in operas, cantatas, instrumental music, literary texts, theatre pieces, films, and historical works” (Kapp 2012) hosted at *Musikgeschichte Online*, an initiative of the Institute for the Analysis, Theory, and History of Music of the University of Vienna.
another controversial writer who has also inspired an inexhaustible amount of secondary literature. In other words, in full acceptance of the impossibility of exhaustiveness, and of the dangers of perfunctory readings, I have selected these writers, composers, and figures in order to follow Orpheus into the nineteenth century and beyond.

As my research encountered different concerns and scholarly outlooks, it became increasingly clear that the voice had been consistently redefined in order to fit a given writer or period’s organization of knowledge. In order to resist these objectifications of the voice, I often have recourse to psychoanalytical criticism to unravel the imaginary discursive ties that hold the voice in place, namely Denis Vasse’s chapter on the voice in *L’ombilic et la voix*, (1974). Psychoanalysis, as a clinical practice, seeks to counter the voice’s objectification, because its imaginary objectification leads to a deterioration of the subject’s psychical well-being. Throughout this dissertation, the reader will find references to Vasse’s chapter on the voice, since it gives the interpretation of literary and musical texts the diachrony that is needed to listen to the voice beyond its linguistic use of sonority:

There is in the “dialogue of the deaf,” for example, which often represents a “discussion,” a way of not listening, of not letting the other’s voice resonate within ourselves, in pretending to let ourselves fall for the sole coherence of discourse, of reasoning. Everyone knows, who has experienced it, that there is no subtler aggression than that which consists in shackling someone in his own words. Speech thus finds itself cut off, separated from the site whence the subject seeks to say itself. (Vasse 1974: 178)

Vasse argues that an “either/or” logic cannot do justice to what the voice means to our experience of subjectivity and otherness. “Either” and “or” are terms used to define phenomena by categorically distinguishing them from others, while the use of “and” compels the reader/listener to understand the voice in a conciliation of opposites. For example, Vasse believes that discourse is the space where knowledge unfolds in representations, while the body is the site of presence. He argues, however, that *site* and
*The voice* are indications of different locations that the voice inhabits at the same time:

> The voice is manifestation of presence, outside the site (body), in the concept, which is a representation of the presence. Apart from the concept of which the voice is the operator, there is neither presence nor knowledge. *The voice is the original in-between of knowledge and site.* (Vasse 1974: 179)

In the voice, body and knowledge are never separated by the objectifying discourse of representation, and neither is the conceptualization it makes possible alienating as such. Nevertheless, evacuating expressivity from any form of vocal “representation” can be understood as a form of discursive violence meant to objectify vocal phenomena. A listener, refusing to be impressed, acts violently on the other’s utterance—thereby turning the voice into the infamous *objet (a)—*in order to give it the necessary form for his or her desire, or, in an institutional context, for its evaluation on the epistemological market.  

Although French scholars like Anne-Marie Castarède and Michel Poizat had initiated psychoanalytic work on opera and the voice in the early 1980s, it was *Opera’s Second Death* (2001), a book co-authored by Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, that got the opera-ball rolling in critical theory circles, thereby sparking new theoretical interest in the singing voice. Dolar’s subsequent publication of *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) renewed the theoretical discussion on the voice for an even wider audience. In complement to the psychoanalytic approach, Roland Barthes, as well as Michel Chion (*The Voice in Cinema* 1982, trans. 1999) have also written about the voice, but they were concerned with how different uses and representations of the voice participate in making meaning in and through analog technology. In her book *Sounding New Media* (2009), Frances Dyson discusses both of these

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18 All translations of Vasse’s chapter “*La voix*” are mine. Italics reproduce Vasse’s emphasis, I will underline my own emphasis if necessary.

Of course, psychoanalysis itself is not immune from such domineering discursive stances. The reverse form of discursive violence, imposing one’s belief of the unconscious provenance of the other’s utterance, is the other end of this interpretative spectrum, which is called “wild interpretation.” Floating attention, Vasse goes on to explain in Freud’s terms, allows the listener to hear in the speaking subject “the unconscious weft that associates his body as the site of his discourse.” (Vasse 1974: 179)
approaches and criticizes a visually oriented strand of new media theory, which would implicitly appropriate the voice’s supposedly metaphysical characteristics in order to argue for an immersive experience of digital media. Yet the metaphysical stigmata imputed to the voice in the wake of deconstruction’s critique of logocentrism-cum-phonocentrism, has only really been reevaluated (outside of musicological research like Carolyn Abbate’s) by David Appelbaum in his book Voice (1996) and by Adriana Cavarero in her book A più voci (2003), translated as For More Than One Voice (2005). Cavarero’s call for a philosophy of the expressive voice follows Jean-Luc Nancy’s understanding of Listening (2007), the translated title of À l’écoute (2002), which tries to conciliate the voice’s resonance while upholding Derrida’s critique of phenomenology’s internalized, silent expressive voice. I have also often relied on Metaphysical Song, Gary Tomlinson’s book of opera’s historical periodization, which is based on the voice’s different poetic and aesthetic functions in relation to evolving philosophical definitions of subjectivity. Although Tomlinson is not preoccupied with figuration, his framing of opera as a cultural production for dominant ideologies is an engaging complement for the reader who would find the present study of the voice in opera lacking in elaborate philosophical correlations.19

There are only a few direct correspondences between the recent body of research on

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19 See Tomlinson on the voice in opera:

the notion of voice in opera has grown increasingly complex and rich in recent years. It has been scrutinized from enough perspectives—from narratology to post-Freudian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, from feminist theory to queer sensibility—that we must think twice before presuming to know just who expresses what as a singer portrays for us a dramatic role. Musicologists in particular have tried out on the operatic voice a wide array of the approaches to utterance and self that have emerged from other academic disciplines. In the process, voice has seemed at times almost to displace the musical score at the heart of operatic study. It has done so provocatively and, often, productively. (Tomlinson 1998: 3)

In May 2013, after I had completed my research and was finishing the writing of this thesis, Marcel Cobussen, Holger Schulze, and Vincent Meelberg, the editors of the relatively new Journal of Sonic Studies, published an editorial “Towards New Sonic Epistemologies.” Some of the thinkers they mention are discussed in this thesis, others not. Because the epistemological problems they raise are related to this thesis, however, I still wanted to draw attention to these works, even though I could not integrate them here at such short notice.

http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol04/nr01/a01
the expressive voice and that on the Orpheus figure, such as a section of Sigrid Weigel’s essay “Die Stimme der Toten. Schnittpunkte zwischen Mythos, Literatur und Kulturwissenschaft,” in a collection dedicated to the cultural and media history of the voice, Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung (2008). Nevertheless, the coincidence of renewed contemporary debate on the expressive voice and the intensification of artistic and cultural interest in the Orpheus figure should be further examined. The proliferation of mass media might have led Derrida to comment on how by the mid-twentieth century, through loose metaphorical extension, everything had become language and writing, diluting these signifiers to the point of endangering their strict meanings. (Derrida 1976: 9) In our own context, however, the transformation of the media landscape and the possibilities that come with it call for renewed attention to the expressive voice, this time, not to contain its structural effects of belief through writing, but to guide our understanding of the transmission of traditions and cultures through sound and within audiovisual media.

The psychoanalytic approaches previously mentioned help situate the staging of the Orpheus myth in relation to a historical subversion of rationality within modernity, culminating in its psychoanalytic theorization: however, psychoanalytic criticism’s prevailing lack of dialogue with musicology and media theory—even though the preface to Opera’s Second Death claims something better for opera than the usual brand of plot analysis—misses a crucial point. If the unconscious expresses itself beyond the linguistic containment of speech, on another stage as it were, then the captation of sound inaugurates new ways of interacting with the psyche. As recorded sound from the subject returns and crosses through him by the means of sound’s technological redeployment, this uncanny captation of the voice’s function in primary narcissism (Dolar 1996) further indicates the subject’s unconscious beyond. It is fascinating to think how the methodic interrogation of the
unconscious by psychoanalysis historically coincides with the technical capacity to objectify
the dialectical juncture of the voice between presence in the embodied site of subjectivity and
its rational and aesthetic representation, to use Vasse’s terms. Thus Orphic figuration in
literature and music—both before and after the technical possibility of sound’s captation—
can be thought of as the writer’s or the composer’s self-awareness and critical engagement
with the media at their disposal to explore the disjunction of self-presence and the
unconscious. These threads come together in discussing alienation in the face of the singing
voice’s reproduction and I open this space for discussion by questioning the musical
attributes of the Benjaminian aura. After tracing a trajectory of Orpheus-as-media in the
third chapter, I end with readings of relatively recent opera on Orpheus, in order to examine
how the understanding of split consciousness was at work in media at the turn of the twenty-
first century.

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This introduction should have made clear by now that, in wanting to answer two
seemingly simple questions about Orpheus, I found myself diving head first into historically
charged philosophical discussions about identity, presence, the metaphysical qualities of
music, the phonocentric critique of Western philosophy, and the role of the voice in the
talking cure. Countless studies have been written on only a few aspects of each of these
separate topics. In hindsight, it seems unrealistic to have attempted such a project, but I only
realized what I was getting myself into as the research and the writing progressed. Although
it has seemed at times an impossible task to conciliate the different threads of these
discussions, I have tried my best not to oversimplify the issues informing diverging points of
view. Readers versed in a particular field of knowledge discussed here might have misgivings
about the presentation of their disciplinary interests. I hope, however, that they will find in
compensation new arguments from different perspectives that will challenge their interested
positions, in order to nourish further interdisciplinary debates.
Chapter I – The Descent

Before a performance of Claudio Monteverdi and Alessandro Striggio’s *L’Orfeo* even begins, the personification of Music appears at the curtain to deliver the opera’s prologue. Although *L’Orfeo* is often considered as the founding moment of opera, Ottavio Rinuccini and Jacopo Peri’s *Euridice* precedes it by seven years and thereby holds the official title of “first opera.” *Euridice*’s prologue is, contrastingly, placed under the aegis of Tragedy. The personification of Tragedy relates how horror and pity fell upon the faces of her spectators in the amphitheatres of old, but reassures her audience that she will tone down her pathetic effects—a travesty, which requires her to change garments—as to be more suitable to the festive occasion that has called for her return. *La Musica*, on the other hand, since she is not singing at a wedding, does not need to compromise her poetics, especially since her invisible artistic persuasions run the gamut of affects. The differences in poetic outlook are further underlined in terms of variation and repetition. While Peri’s tragicomic prologue relies on strophic repetition (the same music for each stanza), Monteverdi uses strophic variation, “retaining the strophic nature of the setting, while also adhering to the principle of following the dictates of the individual lines of text.” (McGee 1982: 175) Monteverdi thereby takes care of the prosodic shortfalls Peri had left to the improvisation of *La Tragedia* and her musicians. His written music is not merely in the service of the text, nor is the text a simple pretext for word painting or *figuralismes*—note, for example, the abrupt vocal and instrumental pause before the poem’s mention of silence. *L’Orfeo* is, rather, an effort to bring
them together.¹

This could have been the point of departure of this dissertation, an origin upon which to build a (mythological) discourse on representation and imitation in modernity. Although I had read around Baroque opera in an initial phase of research, I soon left it aside to concentrate on its vocal antecedents. I did not analyze the composition of madrigals and other musical genres of the Renaissance, nor did I work on opera’s poetic precursors, that is, the sources for the libretto. Musicologists like Howard Mayer Brown, Gary Tomlinson, Frederick Sternfeld, and Nino Pirrotta have already devoted fruitful efforts to these concerns. Instead, I was drawn to Claude Palisca’s work, especially around Girolamo Mei, a figure who promised to elucidate ties between Humanist thought, poetics, and opera. I decided to pursue this type of inquiry outside Palisca’s immediate frame of reference. To narrow the historical compass, I chose key figures in this tradition insofar as they were related to the Orpheus myth. Subsequently, I examined accounts of the voice and of singing in Plato, Augustine, and Marsilio Ficino. The first two sections of this chapter bear witness to this second phase of research.

The psychoanalytic criticism of opera that previously informed my methodological frame of reference proved generally unwilling to discuss the multiple factors—many of them

¹ Claude Palisca concurs: “unlike his predecessors, Monteverdi did not leave the differentiation of the sung strophes to the performers; he wrote out the variations.” (Palisca 2003)

This study was written with a broad scholarly public in mind. In order to facilitate access to musical references, recordings will be cited along with track numbers and cues if pertinent. Because the University of Western Ontario’s libraries subscribe to the Naxos Music Library (NML), I will be citing recordings available through this online resource (along with catalogue and track numbers) for fast and accessible consultation via the library website’s proxy. For readers who do not have access to the NML, complete details of the recordings are given in the bibliography.


Monteverdi, Claudio. “Prologo.” L’Orfeo. NML: HML5901553.54, disc 1, track 2. Listen to Monteverdi’s depiction of silence through the suspension of the strophic music in the seconds following 5:12.

Texts and translations can be consulted in the proper appendix. Along with each translation, I have included in the appendices a link to online digital copies of the musical scores, hosted by the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP).
paradoxically pertaining to the voice—that had led to the invention of opera. (Poizat 1986; Dolar 2002; and Vivès 2012) This realization was even more intriguing as these thinkers have also written or edited other books on the voice. In place of attention to opera’s vocal antecedents, I found instead that these authors conflated the psychoanalytic meaning of the voice with the Orpheus myth and implicitly promoted the equation that opera, as a staging of the voice, represents the subject of the unconscious. Aware that the nature of their writing projects might have called for this strategic narrative deployment of origins, Monteverdi’s opera being but a passage obligé in their books, I decided to complement their Lacanian elucidations of the voice and of the Orpheus myth with further analyses of the figuration at work in L’Orfeo.

Like the first two operas I cite above, an extensive “prologue” of my own devising precedes my interpretation of L’Orfeo and constitutes the greater part of this chapter. It starts with a philosophical understanding of voice and finds its way to the figuration of Orpheus, which is concerned with matters of orality and literacy. I then follow this tension between voice and writing into early Christian musical practices and figuration before addressing the problematic myth-making of recent psychoanalytic criticism of opera. Thereafter, I discuss the influence of Humanism on the music of the late-sixteenth century and, finally, open the curtain onto Monteverdi’s musical figuration. The chapter ends with a discussion of figuration in modernity.
The Hidden Voice’s Luminous Revelation

The articulate voice illuminates (reveals) what is being thought. from the Aëtius Placita

This section situates the voice and Orpheus in the revelatory logic of Platonist knowledge. Beyond a critique of how Plato’s morality attempts to contain music and the voice, I seek to better comprehend the inclusion of a visual metaphor of illumination in classical understandings of the voice. By following this thread of the illuminated voice, one can account for the Christian transmission of the Orpheus figure. In the decades following the end of the Roman persecution of Christians, however, the increasing transition from oral forms of transmission to literacy in Christianity meant that the Orphic figure would be divested of its central aspects, namely its musicality and vocality, in the interests of doctrinal unity. This argument is supported by recent musicological and theological research, and then compared to certain passages from Augustine’s Confessions and his elaborations on music and singing in the Christian faith.

Pythagoras and Plato on the Origins of the Voice

Orpheus played an important role in Greek religion, influencing Pythagoreanism, which led to Plato’s conception of the afterlife, notably in the Phaedo. This dialogue, however, does not account for the debt it owed to Orphic stories of human voices resounding in the Netherworld, stories that had made the living morally responsible for their souls. Yet Platonic reticence in trusting to writing the highest order of knowledge suggests

2 Unless otherwise noted, the epigraphs to each section are discussed in the text’s body, where the reader will find complete bibliographical indications.
an important role for the voice in its transmission, which is confirmed by the Stoics who claimed it was the *archè* of dialectics and also by the Middle Platonist doctrine of the voice. This subsection examines how philosophy originally framed its claims by playing on the voice’s paradoxical characteristics: as an immaterial embodiment, it is a medium between human and celestial bodies.³

The esoteric use of the voice by Pythagoras is the founding moment of philosophy, according to Mladen Dolar. In fact, he raises to the status of “philosophical origin” the tale in which Pythagoras spoke to his new followers from behind a curtain during the first years of their initiation:

The Teacher, the Master behind a curtain, proffering his teaching from there without being seen: no doubt a stroke of genius which stands at the very origin of philosophy [...]. The advantage of this mechanism was obvious: the students, the followers, were confined to “their Master’s voice,” [...]; they had to concentrate merely on the meaning emanating from it. It appears that at its origin philosophy depends on a theatrical *coup de force*: there is the simple minimal device which defines the theatre, the curtain which serves as a screen, but a curtain not to be raised, not for many years—philosophy appears as the art of an actor behind a curtain. (Dolar 2006: 61)

Although Dolar’s book aims to raise the veil covering the voice, the pertinence of his philological frame of reference raises the question of the veil’s very existence. Dolar situates his discussion of the acousmatic voice according to Michel Chion’s understanding of François Bayle and Pierre Schaeffer’s music. (Chion 1999) These twentieth-century French composers and music theorists pioneered the use of recordings in “live” musical performance to dissociate the source of the music from the living bodies that usually sing or

³ The Pythagorean cosmic music of the spheres, as related in Plato’s *Timaeus* and, to a lesser degree, in the *Republic’s* myth of Er, is discussed in a following section in relation with Ficino. The highest order of knowledge and the impossibility of writing about it—as discussed in *Phaedrus* (§274b ff.) and in the Tenth Epistle attributed to Plato—also point toward the voice’s central function in communicating knowledge of that which lies beyond perception. (Cooper 1997: 551 ff.; 1673-74) For a summary of recent scholarship on Plato’s debt to Pythagoreanism, consult Edmonds 2004a: 159-170. Furthermore, “the majority of the Stoics, Diogenes Laërtius tells us ‘are agreed that dialectical theory begins with the part (topoi) dealing with voice.’” (Diogenes in Mansfeld 2005: 392)
play the instruments. They called it *musique acousmatique* or *musique concrète.*

Although Dolar directs the reader to Schaeffer’s source for his neologism “*acousmatique*” (the *Larousse* dictionary and its sole reference to Diogenes Laërtius), he quickly re-directs the reader to Iamblichus (in an end note) for an account of a curtain, since Diogenes only speaks of a veil. (Dolar 2006: 60, 196) Schaeffer’s *one and only* source makes the music theorist and philosopher Brian Kane doubt its validity. If the author did not witness the event himself—paradoxically an event of non-witnessing—then as hearsay the curtain/veil must necessarily be read as an allegory:

The claim that Pythagoras lectured in the dark has only one ancient source. Diogenes [Laërtius] refers to a set of evening lectures by Pythagoras; however, the passage includes no mention of the veil and explicitly mentions that some were lucky enough to see Pythagoras (Diogenes 1925: VIII. 15) It seems improbable that Pythagoras lectured behind a literal veil while also employing the veil of darkness. (Kane 2012: 179)

To support his argument, Kane cites Walter Burkert as an authority on Pythagoras and the *akousmata.* Unfortunately, he overlooks Burkert’s analysis of the same sources, which contradicts his thesis:

[Timaeus of Locri] tells of a five-year period of probation, during which the new disciple must listen in silence, and did not even see Pythagoras face to face; the voice of the sage came from behind a curtain (οὐράνιον). Only after this period did the pupil become ἐπωτερικός. (Burkert 1972: 192)

Perhaps those “who were lucky enough to see Pythagoras” were no longer pupils, but ἐπωτερικός? Furthermore, Burkert contextualizes his study of Pythagoreanism in the emerging literacy of sixth-century BCE Greece. *Akousmata* were orally transmitted sayings concerned with eschatological morality, in contrast with the necessarily written mathematical theorizations of Pythagoreanism. In the century to come, those who lived by the *acousmata* would be discredited by the *mathematici* because authority had come to lay in the dialectical

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development of an argument—a way of thinking that relies on literacy—rather than in the revelation of esoteric knowledge—a state of mind sought after in oral societies. (Burkert 1972: 166-207) Burkert’s contextualization of his sources does not lead him to conclude that the curtain/veil is a neo-Platonic allegory. It seems likelier that such a mechanism was inherited from mystery cults. Since knowledge was revealed in the mysteries, ritual re-enactment proved the myths were true: “A myth was told to explain a rite, and at the end of the telling the rite was held up as proof that the myth had happened so.” (Robertson 2003: 220) Revelation can only function if the source of knowledge is or at least was previously concealed.  

Nevertheless, the material curtain explains how a voice without an apparent bodily source could persuade human beings of their metaphysical nature:

The point of this device was ultimately to separate the spirit from the body. It was not only that the disciples could follow the meaning better with no visual distractions, it was the voice itself which acquired authority and surplus-meaning by virtue of the fact that its source was concealed: it seemed to become omnipresent and omnipotent. (Dolar 2006: 61-62)

I have found that Plato does not directly attribute authority to the voice. In fact, the exact contrary happened as myths were replaced by rational, philosophical religion: with the arrival of literacy, the recited myth lost its confirmation in ritual re-enactments, and thus the voice

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5 Burkert does not question the validity of his sources: Clement of Alexandria, as well as later biographies of Pythagoras by Iamblichus and Porphyry. (Burkert 1972: 192n1-5). The English translation of his book gives “curtain” for σηνδων, a term with even more material consonance than a veil or a “fine cloth, usually linen” found in Liddell & Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon. This being said, tales of origins are necessarily subject to (dis)belief: “The practitioners of musique concrète invoke Pythagoras in order to pronounce their own origin. […] The tale of the Pythagorean veil is the primal scene of de-visualised music, retroactively founding an arche and projecting a telos.” (Kane 2012: 180) Even so, the importance of separating aural and visual aspects in initiatory rituals (promising the esoteric revelation of a mystery) should not be underestimated. The practice is so effective it found its way into the rituals of the Christian Mass, influencing architectural elements of churches at least up until the Council of Trent (1545-63):

In addition to the linguistic barrier [Mass in Latin], some churches had a large choir-screen of wood, wrought iron or stone that virtually hid the officiating priest and his assistants from view; in a few Italian churches a transverse wall (tramezzo) across the nave blocked the entire altar space from the view of those standing in the nave. (Dyer)
became subservient to a greater logic. The philosophical voice is not a site of metaphysical authority; it is a hook that weaves into human silence the stories that boil the world down to first principles. As Denis Vasse would say, if the voice is to mediate the subject’s belief in the unseen, its metaphorical activity must be grounded in a site: just as the other’s body is the voice’s silent site, the place where it goes to and returns from, the veil represents the listener’s silence, a silence that opens the space necessary for one’s own, but also for the space of the other’s voice to be gathered and to exist. (Vasse 1974: 177 ff.) Plato’s view of literacy accounts in part for his misgiving that esoteric knowledge, a revelatory knowledge which masters orally transmitted to those properly initiated in rituals, could have been profaned by writing. This certainly is not the same thing as attributing authority to the Master’s voice. Literacy does not allow for the same control of revelation: in order to keep certain knowledge from the literate yet uninitiated, physical access to the book must be limited. (Burkert 1985: 297) It seems more likely then that philosophy, a literate activity by Plato’s time, fell back on the voice as a traditional site or topos of authority’s ritualized embodiment.

Bruce Lincoln has shown how the warrior’s voice was divested of its authority in the Greek transition from orality to literacy. In the age of warrior nobility, previous to Plato’s life, the voice expressed the ruler’s power and the poet invoked the Muses or gods in order to speak truly of the warrior’s deeds. In turn, the literary inscriptions of these poems promoted the voice as a *topos* of authority. (Lincoln 1999: 17-24) Yet philosophy’s rationalization of the epic’s powerful utterances (*muthos*) into universal principles based on rational speech (*logos*) could not do without the voice in the literary and social transmission of its knowledge. Consider Plato’s prescription of Dorian and Phrygian harmonies (modes) in his ideal city:
I don’t know all the musical modes. Just leave me the mode that would suitably imitate
the tone and rhythm of a courageous person who is active in battle or doing other
violent deeds, or who is failing and facing wounds, death, or some other misfortune,
and who, in all these circumstances, is fighting off his fate steadily and with self-control.
Leave me also another mode, that of someone engaged in a peaceful, unforced,
voluntary action, persuading someone or asking a favor of a god in prayer or of a
human being through teaching or exhortation, or, on the other hand, of someone
submitting to the supplications of another who is teaching him and trying to get him to
change his mind, and, who in all of these circumstances is acting with self-control, not
with arrogance but with understanding, and is content with the outcome. Leave me,
then, these two modes, which will best imitate the violent or voluntary tones of those
who are moderate and courageous, whether in fortune good or bad. (Rep. III, §399a-c)

Unsurprisingly, for Plato these modes correspond to poetic and rational authority in Archaic
and Classical Greece, as Lincoln demonstrates: the Dorian mode is like the archaic mythos
and the Phrygian like the classical logos. Plato conflates the tone of voice previously
associated with warriors like Achilles with the Dorian mode, “one of the most widely used in
the fifth century and probably earlier, and […] always well regarded.” (West 1992: 179)
Similarly, the piety and sensibility of the Phrygian mode are associated with the temperate
tone and voice of the rational thinker.6

Although the regulation of musical modes to a conservative social ideal might bruise
the post-moral sensitivity of critical readers, they do not justify Dolar’s conflation of Plato’s
proscriptive music with “the dichotomy of voice and logos”: “the core of [musical] danger is
the voice that sets itself loose from the word, the voice beyond logos, the lawless voice.”
(Dolar 2006: 43, 45) The Dorian and Phrygian modes were not inherently rational; rather,

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6 In the first section of Theorizing Myth, “Mythos among the Greeks,” Bruce Lincoln examines how the words
mythos and logos went through a semantic substitution for one another in regards to the power and authority of
speech, in between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE. In other words, mythos in Homer was associated with the
authority of the warrior’s speech and logos with the lack of authority in the soothing or deceptive speech of the
weak. Cf. Edmonds’ assessment of the definitions of these terms in Plato’s thought:

Myθος [myth] is generally defined as irrational, unverifiable, or simply speculative discourse in
opposition to λογος [logos], which is thus rational, verifiable, and properly philosophical. Most often,
Myθος [myth] is understood as inferior to λογος [logos]; it is a discarded relic of the past, a remnant of
Orphic superstition or childish fancy. (Edmonds 2004a: 163)
they were native Greek musical modes. While Dolar goes to great lengths to prove how Plato subordinates music to the articulated voice (Plato says so himself in *Timaeus*), his conflation of music with irrationality confuses the matter. It perpetuates the melomane notion that music does not have its own set of laws or regulations and is a disinhibiting, free association of sounds. Dolar’s deconstruction mistakes Plato’s conflation of *tone* of voice and musical *modes* with what psychoanalytic theory understands as the voice’s sonorous (non-linguistic) remnants, which are present within speech and undermine rational discourse. Of course, it is necessary to remind ourselves that not all we are saying is being said through our words. Elevating social conservatism to the dignity of the law, however, and opposing to it the voice’s non-linguistic sounds—understood to mean its musicality—creates a circular frame of reference that overlooks the differences between *tone of voice* and *musical mode*—a confusion fostered by Plato’s rhetoric—thereby precluding a discussion of their subsequent fusion in Humanist poetics. If contemporary theory’s understanding of the musical voice is to make more of it than an opposition to philosophy’s *logos* and boisterous claims of unfounded musical subversion, then greater care must be taken to understand what the voice meant for Plato outside of the particular social context that gave rise to his reactionary musical comments.

Plato’s influence in the musical Renaissance does not stem so much from his

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7 In Plato’s time, the Dorian mode “was used for processions, paean songs of love, and in tragedy, especially for laments. Clearly it was a versatile mode, often employed for choral song but not confined to it, and compatible with more than one mood.” (West 1992: 179) Likewise, the Phrygian mode was “appropriate to a range of moods, from cheerful bonhomie or piety to wild excitement or religious frenzy.” (West 1992: 180) West also remarks how Plato must have ignored its use in ecstatic Dionysian worship, a slip Aristotle had already noticed. (*Pol.* 1342a) On Ancient Greek modes and scales, consult West 1992: 160-189. Cf. the technical aspects of sound production with its theoretical ethos (246-253) for an informed opinion on Plato’s ideal music: “Both in the *Republic* and the *Laws* Plato manipulates [musical] theory to legislate for the Classical forms of music and dance that he likes, and to exclude other kinds as useless.” (249) For a detailed and referenced discussion of this musical transition in Ancient Greece, consult the section on “New Music,” (356-372) especially West’s contextualization of Plato’s conservative comments. (369-370)

Cf. Dolar’s previous assessment of Plato’s thoughts on music in “The Object Voice.” (Dolar 1996: 17-18)
conservative musical morals in *Republic* or *Laws* as from the cosmic origin of the voice, as well as its use in the pursuit of truth. The Platonist doctrine of the voice was extracted from other dialogues, namely *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*. *Theaetetus* seeks to avoid a static theory of knowledge, informed by perception, and puts forward instead the drive to learn. Here one finds the basis for the physical definition of the voice or, in other words, the production of vocal sound. The dialogue aims in demonstrating the decline in one’s energy and love for life that comes from the misperception of “owning” the truth. Desire wanes when one no longer strives for anything. Thus one must not try to perceive the object of true knowledge in its material form, but rather enjoy the dialectical progression from objects of thought to vocalization of thought-processes. Plato’s narrative structures this progression by continually returning to the running metaphor of the midwife in order to end digressions: according to Jowett’s comment, Socrates “ushers into light, not children, but the thoughts of men.”

The other important part of the dialogue’s argument complements Protagoras’s aphorism—“Man is the measure of all things”—with a linguistic component, in order to avoid relativism. It thereby introduces at the outset the problem of language in knowledge, by demonstrating how speech is not in itself responsible for understanding. The materiality of language, the part of language that can be perceived, (speech and script) is not meaningful in itself, as the undecipherable sight and sound of foreign tongues and scripts aptly establish. (§163) Therefore one should not mistake the capacity to give a knowledgeable opinion with the truth; it is but simply one step among many toward this unattainable goal. As Walter Benjamin would remind us:

> Again and again the statement that the object of knowledge is not identical with truth will prove itself to be one of the profoundest intentions of philosophy in its original

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8 Plato’s dialogue *Sophist* also speaks of the voice, but for the sake of brevity, I will concentrate on the two other dialogues, which give me ample enough material. The quote is from Jowett’s analysis of *Theaetetus* §149. (Plato 1892)
form, the Platonic theory of ideas. Knowledge is open to question, but truth is not. (Benjamin 2003: 30)

Speech and the voice are subservient to this process, “making one’s thought apparent vocally by means of words and verbal expressions—when a man impresses his judgment on a stream of speech, like reflections upon water or in a mirror.” (§206d) This visual metaphor of speech will have a lasting influence, as we shall see shortly, not so much because of the reflection of the image, about which Plato clearly has reservations, but for its implied presence of light.9

Timaeus seems more like a theological treatise than a Platonist dialogue. One finds here the basis for the physiological definition of the voice, the voice that enables one to listen. God gave human beings perception in order that they may regulate their minds according to the constant and consistent elements of the world, especially the celestial bodies. Plato starts with the dominant sense of sight:

The god invented sight and gave it to us so that we may observe the orbits of intelligence in the universe and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding. For there is a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed, whereas the universal orbits are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and to share in the ability to make correct calculations according to nature, we should stabilize the straying revolutions within ourselves by imitating the completely unstraying revolutions of the god. (§47b)10

Sight is above all analytic: it allows us to distinguish regularity, recurrence, identity, and stability of movement, as well as deviations. The same is required for philosophy as a discipline or a practice: one must be capable of adjusting one’s judgment to that which is stable and to adjust one’s point of view when one has deviated from it. This is the goal of

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9 For a discussion of the difference between truth and knowledge in Plato's dialogues, see also Bruce Benson’s Graven Ideologies. (Benson 2002: 30-33)

10 Cf. Jowett’s translation:

God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heavens, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries.
philosophy as a practice; to regulate one’s life. (Hadot 2002)

The same analytic, ordering function subsumes sound to sight: “Likewise, the same account goes for sound and hearing—these too are the gods’ gifts, given for the same purpose and intended to achieve the same results. Speech was designed for this very purpose—it plays the greatest part in its achievement.” (§47d) One also finds here Plato’s own parallel definitions of music and language, which he mediates by the voice. Although he compares the voice to sight, and explains speech with visual metaphors, one does not find in Plato any mention of the voice’s enlightenment, a metaphor that informed the Church Fathers’ reception of Orpheus, as I examine below, and contributed to Orpheus’s reception in medieval Christian culture.¹¹

According to Jaap Mansfeld, as early as the second century BCE the Aëtius Placita (or doctrines) contained a section on the voice. This philosophical compendium was undoubtedly in circulation throughout the Ancient world, since one can find almost identical formulations of its vocal doctrine from one ancient school of philosophy to the next:

Plato defines “voice” (φωνή) [physically] as breath (πνεῦμα), impelled from the mind through the mouth, and [physiologically] as a shock propagated by the air through the ears and brain and blood to the soul; in a loose sense (or: improper sense) “voice” is also said in the case of irrational animals and lifeless things, such as whinnyings and mere noises, but in the proper sense it is articulate voice, considered as illuminating [προφήτευσα, i.e. revealing] what is being thought. (in Mansfeld 2005: 359)¹²

¹¹ Plato assigns to music the same analytical task as to the voice. Notice in light of the previous discussion his reference to “new” (foreign) music, namely the Phrygian mode, as an “irrational pleasure.”

And all such composition as lends itself to making audible musical sound is given in order to express harmony, and so serves this purpose well. And harmony, whose movements are akin to the orbits within our souls, is a gift of the Muses, if our dealings with them are guided by understanding, not for irrational pleasure, for which people nowadays seem to make use of it, but to serve as an ally in the fight to bring order to any orbit in our souls that has become unharmonized, and make it concordant with itself. Rhythm, too, as likewise been given us by the Muses for the same purpose, to assist us. For with most of us our condition is such that we have lost all sense of measure, and are lacking in grace. (Plato, Tim. §47d-e)

¹² Cf. the Aëtius Placita with Plutarch’s description of the voice, about a century later:

Plato thus defines a voice—that it is a breath drawn by the mind through the mouth, and a blow impressed on the air and through the ear, brain, and blood transmitted to the soul. Voice is abusively
Recent research on the Platonist doctrine of the voice demonstrates how Plato’s definition had “been adapted and distorted, or ‘modernized’, in some sense of the word” in the centuries following his teaching. (Mansfeld “Doxography”) For example, Wolfram Ax argues that the first definition of the voice in the *placita* conflates the original definitions of thought and speech (*logos*) with breath (*pneuma*). (Ax 1986: 78-79) What is most interesting for our purposes, however, is the metaphorical distortion that transformed the voice’s manifestation of thought into its illumination. Mansfeld’s detailed article goes to great length to trace the confluxes of definitions that led to a “Platonist” understanding of the voice. Nevertheless, he cannot pinpoint its source of vocal light:

I do not know who first thought of the etymologies of *phonē* [voice] as *phūtǐkonta* *Ṭ ḥ ẹ́ ṃ ệ ṃ ẹ̈ ṇ ọ ṇ [illuminating thought] [...]. Several of these derivations could be quite early [...]. However this may be, what I think happened is that someone modernized the striking formula found in *Theaetetus* [cited above] by replacing it with an equivalent (and apparently quite popular) etymological explanation. Thus Plato’s incidental remarks concerned with speech, voice, and hearing in *Theaetetus, Sophist* and *Timaeus* were abstracted from their context, and coalesced to form a single account dedicated to voice […]. (Mansfeld 2005: 400)

Thus the articulated voice, which distinguishes linguistic sound from animal-like utterances in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, could become a channel through which a luminous, heavenly source of knowledge, as described in the *Timaeus*, would find its way into human understanding. In other words, the voice’s function as an analytic tool could reassume its cosmological part in a mechanism or device (*dispositif*) of revelation. The hidden source of the acousmatic voice—or in Dolar’s words, the invisible metaphysical Master’s voice—could illuminate thought as it was revealed through speech. The philosophical voice itself did not gain metaphysical authority; rather, it became a channel for the presence of the divine in human beings.13

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13 Mansfeld’s summary “Plato Interpretatus” is especially accessible to a non-specialist and yet is quite instructive. (Mansfeld 2005: 395 ff.)
Hebraic Orphic Figuration

Since at least the fifth century BCE, the story of Orpheus has revolved around the voice’s ties to the psyche and the authority of myth to reconfigure how both relate to each other. (Rohde 1925: 335-61) Later on in this chapter, I will clarify what I mean by literary figuration. For now, however, Orphic figuration should be understood as a literary way of presenting these ties. This subsection examines the Judeo-Christian reconfiguration of Orpheus by comparing its literary tradition with its religious and philosophical discourses about the voice.

John Friedman examines how the Judeo-Christian tradition first adopted Orpheus by projecting him back into history and making him a pupil of Moses. Interestingly, pseudonymous authorship was also at work in Greece during the same period in order to incorporate Orpheus into Olympian religion. Classical Greek writers created works that authenticated the Orphic theogonies: “The fiction that Orpheus is the author [of the Orphic poems] is supported by a couple of allusions to Apollo and Calliope as his parents.” (West 1983: 29) The method is rather simple: one gives Orpheus a new, more convenient filiation by ascribing him new parents or teachers. Friedman historically situates the Testament of Orpheus, along with other Judaic apologies, in Ptolemaic Alexandria’s relative tolerance of its important Jewish community. The poem raises Orpheus to the status of the first Greek philosopher by making him a student of Hebraic monotheism, without denying however his role in Greek civic rituals and religious mysteries. Of course, by changing the attributed source of Orpheus’s knowledge, the later Christian apologists could claim that Judeo-Christian monotheism had informed the Greek religious functions over which Orpheus had
The Christian apologists who cite the Testament were less concerned with religious intolerance, as the Alexandrian apologists were, than they were with discrediting pagan beliefs. Taken out of the apologetic context of its redaction, the Testament in itself is not concerned with strengthening a Jewish community’s identity “but rather with the existence of one God.” (Friedman 1970: 23) Of the early Church Fathers who mention the Hebraic Orpheus, Tatian (ca.120-180 CE) chastises the Greeks for claiming to be the cradle of civilization, showing how their knowledge came from Barbarians, i.e. people who did not speak Greek. He cites a chronology that makes Moses an earlier historical figure than Orpheus or Homer. When Theophilus (also second century CE) cites the Testament, he too is concerned with Orpheus’s chronology: he discredits him in favor of the biblical Jubal as the inventor of the lyre and singing. (Gen 4:21) As Friedman points out, however, Theophilus “still feels that God was present though to a lesser degree in the revelations of the pagans.” (Friedman 1970: 31) Theophilus seems to be the first inspired by the projection back in time of Orpheus into a Hebraic tradition, to consider the historical projection of the Christian God’s presence not only in the Testament of Orpheus, but also to the beginning of recorded

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14 The Church historian Eusebius (fl. 300 CE) preserved a version of the Testament of Orpheus by copying it from the Alexandrian philosopher Aristobulus of Paneas (second century BCE). Friedman gives an English translation of the text, as the apologists would have known it. (Friedman 1970: 14-16) A similar tradition of pseudonymous works claimed that Pythagoras and Plato also made trips to Egypt, where they were initiated to Judaic monotheism. Cf. Jan Assmann, Moses the Egyptian. Assmann argues that Moses was an Egyptian priest during Ancient Egypt’s brief monotheistic worship of Aten. When Akhenaten’s (Amenhotep IV) brief reign collapsed sometime in the fourteenth century BCE, Moses would have fled to the desert with other adorers of Aten. Erased from official Ancient Egyptian history, artifacts from Akhenaten’s tomb discovered in 1893, the only ones untouched by the Ancient historical purge, are the oldest surviving records of state monotheism.
memory in music and song.\textsuperscript{15}

Like Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria also makes an apology of his Hellenic cultural heritage. He devotes a chapter in his \textit{Protrepticus or Exhortation to the Heathens} (its title in translation) to the demonstration of how “The Poets Also Bear Testimony to the Truth.” (Clement 1887: 73-75) At first, Orpheus is a theologian of idols (in reference to his role in the mysteries of Greek religion) but then, in light of the Testament’s rejection of polytheism, a poet who speaks at least some truth. For Clement, Greek poetry, and Orpheus along with it, foreshadow the revelation of the truth in Christ’s coming through “certain \textit{scintillations} of the divine word” that the pagans gave forth in “some utterances of truth,” which bore “witness that the force of truth [was] not hidden” in the Greek past. (Clement 1887: 74, my emphasis) I will address shortly with Augustine the tensions I am teasing out here between the textually-based authority of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Platonist doctrine of the voice. For now, let us simply note that Clement thinks that God’s truth was always present in the voices of the Greek poets and singers, except that they did not show a constant or

\textsuperscript{15} Tatian scowls over the supposed Greek hegemony of knowledge: “Cease, then, to call these imitations your discoveries. For Orpheus [a Thracian] taught you to compose and sing poetry, and also to participate in the mysteries.” (in McKinnon 1987: 22) In the Ancient world, as the reader will recall, Orpheus was believed to have lived before Homer, as he had taken part in the Argo’s journey, which traditionally was dated a generation before the battle of Troy:

But the matter of principal importance is to endeavour with all accuracy to make it clear that Moses is not only older than Homer, but than all the writers that were before him—older than Linus, Philammon, Thamyris, Amphion, Musaeus, Orpheus, Demodocus [...]. (Tatian 1887: 44)

Theophilus also uses chronology to discredit Orpheus:

Jubal is he who invented the psaltery and cithara [...]. But as for music, some claimed frivolously that Apollo was its inventor, while others say that Orpheus discovered it in the sweet songs of the birds. But their story is manifestly groundless and foolish, for these were born many years after the deluge. (in McKinnon 1987: 23)

Here one realizes how Mosaic Law, because it is also a written record of Hebraic history, challenges the historicity of the oral tradition of Greek ritual religion and mythology.
direct light, such as an illumination, but a flickering, wavering type of light, like a scintillation.\footnote{In Butterworth’s translation for the Loeb Classical Library, the section is entitled “The Witness of Poetry,” and Orpheus sings “at very last […] the really sacred Word.” This translation concludes that “the Greeks received some glimmerings of the divine word, and gave utterances to a few scraps of truth.” (Clement 1960: 167, my emphasis) Clement does not make a chronological rejection of Orpheus because he is concerned with God’s presence in the pagan past.}

By Augustine’s time the Testament of Orpheus and other Hellenized Judaic apologies could only strengthen the new faith of converts to Christianity by discrediting their old pagan beliefs. Augustine, however, cannot believe that pagans, let alone Jews, would convert to Christianity on the basis of a text meant to promote the antiquity of Mosaic Law. By the fourth century CE, Orpheus was no longer of use in establishing the primacy of monotheism: for Augustine, Christ’s recorded life is testament enough to believe in Him without the aid of an intermediary. Friedman concurs that Augustine refutes the pagan poet because he spoke of idols and that he "could dispense with Orpheus as a prophet of monotheism because there was no longer any need for Christianity to vie with the pagan religions for more venerable origins." (Friedman 1970: 36) Nevertheless, with a few pertinent examples from the Confessions, I will show how Augustine valued the “Platonist” understanding of the voice and how the framing narrative of his book is structurally indebted to the Greek katabases, or descents. I will then discuss common elements in Augustine and Clement in regards to the scintillating voice.\footnote{Augustine on Hebraic apologies: “We did not first become Jews, so as to reach Christianity through faith in their prophets; but were attracted solely by the fame, and the virtues, and the wisdom of our liberator Jesus Christ.” (Augustine 1887: 199)}

\textit{Descent and Music in Augustine’s Confessions}

Among Augustine’s writings none better marks the transition from the pagan to the Christian worldview than the story of his conversion in Confessions. In this moment, the drive
for knowledge is implicitly tied by Augustine to myths of descent to the Underworld, binding these stories in yet another layer of interpretative literary displacement. More interestingly, in these new narratives the voice is once again the centre of authoritative concerns.

In the first chapter of *Confessions*, before even recalling his earlier quests for wisdom, Augustine opens with a rhetorical gesture similar to the one found in the first book of Hesiod’s *Theogony*:

> Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you—and calling upon you is an act of believing in you. You have been preached to us. My faith, Lord, calls upon you. It is your gift to me. You breathed it into me by the humanity of your Son, by the ministry of your preacher. (Conf. I.1, my emphasis)

Augustine calls upon a higher power to guide his words, like Hesiod invokes the Muses. Faith is a divine inspiration, which comes complete with reference to the physical and physiological vocal apparatus of phonation and respiration. Contrary to Hesiod’s address to the Muses in his *Theogony*, the author’s invocation of higher powers does not lead to air being breathed into his voice. (Lincoln 1999: 24) Augustine does not charge his own voice with the authority of a semantic field of divinely inspired speech. Instead, he submits to the knowledge he supposes God to have of human beings, and thereby says that he foregoes an appropriation of authority for himself. His invocatory gesture is rhetorical: it is meant to represent a search for truth, but presents itself as a submissive act of faith, the staging of a subjection from which the subject’s truth—here equated with a universal truth—can emerge. The literary voice’s authority in Augustine does not come from material, vocal attributes as it does in the Archaic Greek epos, but from a rhetorical dialectics of faith. Contrary to Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, (Lincoln 1999: 20) Augustine does not need divine inspiration in order to attain knowledge of geographically and temporally unattainable events: he can look up the truth in the revealed scriptures containing God’s Word. Yet even in this literary
economy, the voice is central in staging this written reorganization of knowledge.\textsuperscript{18}

One of the first quotations of which Augustine avails himself in this authenticating gesture comes from the Psalter attributed to King David, yet another Orphic figure: “I am not now possessed by Hades; yet even there are you [God]; for ‘even if I were to go down \[καταβάω in the Septuagint Bible, Ps. 138:8\] to Hades, you would be present.”” (I.2)\textsuperscript{19} The first part of the quote is Augustine’s, the second is from Psalm 139 (KJV). Augustine couches the rejection of the material world in the structure of the \textit{katabases} by displacing the site of invocation to the living world—“I am not now possessed by Hades”—and repositioning the invoked God into the text. Although he does write that He is everywhere, Hades is no longer here the Netherworld of the Orphic initiates, but has been allegorically displaced to the “lower regions” (\textit{infernum}) where bodily satiety rhymes with spiritual death. As I will examine with Barthes and Dolar below, the revealed authority of the scriptures inverses the restitutive logic of the romanticized Orpheus myth: in Augustine’s descent, one does not seek a return of the deceased \textit{psyche} to its body and the world of the living, but an embodied reunion with God in the next. Augustine was not the first Christian to subvert the Greek narratives of descent (\textit{katabases}) in such a manner: The Gospel of Luke reserves this honor

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Augustine’s authoritative poetics with Hesiod’s in Grace Ledbetter’s \textit{Poetics Before Plato}. (Ledbetter 2003: 40 ff.)

for the very first among them.\(^{20}\)

Luke also cites the psalm Augustine quotes. Although the chapter is titled for its parable of the unjust steward, I am here interested in its second story, the parable known as “Lazarus and Dives.” Dives, a man of plenty, does not feed the beggar Lazarus who dies of hunger on his doorstep. The rich man also dies and winds up “in hell” (KJV) or in ᾅδη (GNT), apparently in plain sight and shouting distance from Lazarus. (Luke 16:23) When Dives sees Abraham cradling Lazarus, he cries out to Abraham to have Lazarus fetch him water. Abraham interposes himself and says that their roles (in regards to suffering) have been reversed and that a gulf lies between them now, which neither can cross. The rich man finally repents and asks Abraham to send word to his family so that they will not make the same mistake as he:

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\text{Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. (Luke 16:29-31)}
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In other words, Abraham—through the mouth of Jesus, reported by Luke’s “pen,” and

\(^{20}\) For a history of the Orpheus-David figure consult Friedman 1970:147 ff.; Irwin 1982: 55-59; and Walker 1953: 101n2. Augustine’s references to psalms reflect his usage of the Vetus Latina bible and not, of course, the King James Version. For example, Ps. 138 for Augustine is equivalent to Ps. 139 in the KJV.

According to Chadwick’s translation, Augustine uses Hades to describe the place of death. It was common in this period to borrow from Greek when writing in Latin. (Shanzer 2012: 161-162) The Septuagint uses ᾅδην and the Vulgate translates it into infernum, lower regions. (Ps. 138:8) He thereby metaphorically redraws the boundaries between life and death according to the neo-Platonist view in which God emanates into the physical world and reaches the confines of the universe. (Ayres 1999: 97) Edmonds underlines Plato’s similar association of materiality with the senses as problematic for eschatological morality. Plato etymologically associates Hades with the invisible in order to identify the philosophical search for Forms with a preparation for the afterlife:

The visible is accessible to the senses, while the invisible can only be grasped by the reasoning of the mind. By referring to the invisible as τὸ ἀδέξιον, Plato sets up the identification of the invisible world proper to the soul with the traditional mythic idea of the realm of Hades, Ἀδὲσι. This connection of Hades and the unseen is part of the mythic tradition at least as early as Homer, and Plato refers to it in the Cratylus as well, where he makes the etymology of Hades not from τὸ ἀδέξιον (not-visible) but rather from τὴν ἀδέξιον (to know) (404b, cp. 403a). In the Phaedo, it would seem, Plato is toying with both associations, since the unseen world is that which is accessible only to the mind—it is that which is known rather than sensed. By associating the world of the soul with the unseen world of Hades, Plato justifies his idea that the soul that is too mixed with the body and the visible world cannot fully enter Hades, the realm of the dead. (Edmonds 2004a: 179)
quoted by Augustine—is telling those who can hear that the books of the Law and of the Prophets had already replaced the witnessing of Greek stories of descent to the Underworld and their concomitant ritual reenactments in mystery rituals. Furthermore, the passage cited foreshadows Christ’s own resurrection and Abraham predicts that even this testimony will not reach the incredulous.

Thus it is clear from Augustine’s references in *Confessions* that there is no place in the Christian doctrine for the type of knowledge the Orphic descent represented in Greek religion. A witness to the shadows of Hades, Orpheus’s knowledge could only function through ritual reenactments in which the assembled initiates could also witness the mystery’s revelation. Eyewitness accounts, however, cannot compete with the revelations of a God made flesh, especially when the figure of Christ is represented as a homodiegetic narrator who cross-references a written tradition. Such transmission necessarily calls for a cult based on literacy. This Christian *katabasis* distances itself from the ritual reenactment of myth and calls for belief in Christ’s Word in an interweaving of vocal figuration and writing: Christ’s descent into the world to care for the suffering—those not yet possessed by death—fulfills Abraham’s foreshadowing in the parable. These excursions into Augustine’s frame of reference—both explicit (Hebraic) and implicit (Greek)—remind one of the cultural assimilation that took place during this period and the voice’s function in this transition. Two biographical episodes from the *Confessions* will further demonstrate the extent of this assimilation and Augustine’s subscription to the Platonist voice, a voice which only
scintillated until its true source was revealed in Christ to illuminate humanity.  

The first episode relates Augustine’s acquaintance with Bishop Ambrose of Milan prior to his conversion to Christianity. The still pagan Augustine is more concerned with the rhetoric of Ambrose’s sermons than with the truth his words contain: “I hung on his diction in rapt attention, but remained bored and contemptuous of the subject-matter. My pleasure was in the charm of his language.” (V.23) He also makes sure to use figurative language to describe this bodily or sensuous way of listening to Ambrose: “My ears were only for his rhetorical technique […].” (V.24, my emphasis) For Augustine, there is a way of listening to speech that is more concerned with how it convinces or seduces an audience than with the path it opens in one’s heart. Of course, the reader is meant to associate this sensuous way of listening to Augustine’s pre-conversion profession of rhetorician.

The other willful confession of Augustine that is useful to our present purpose pertains to the physical aspects of the voice, the production of vocal sounds. This contrasts with the above description of listening to a voice, its physiological aspect, to remind the reader of Platonist vocal categories. The biographer tells us how busy Ambrose was kept by various arbitrations as a bishop, and how little time he had left for bodily and spiritual replenishment. The whole context sets up his justification of Ambrose’s unusual habit by early Christian standards of reading in silence, especially when surrounded by people: “When he was reading, his eyes ran over the page and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice

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21 The parable’s evocation of the selfish man’s hunger and thirst also raises the question of the voice’s after-death embodiment and Christian asceticism, which I discuss below in relation to Tertullian. Neither is it a coincidence that one finds here yet another reference to man’s subjection to God in the literary figure that bears Augustine and Luke’s cross-referenced message: Abraham, who even faced with the end of his filiation in the sacrifice of his one and only son, could not question God’s voiced commandment based on his human understanding of Him. (Gen. 22) While Abraham heard God, the new economy of knowledge described here, tied as it is to eschatological concerns, calls for the relinquishing of materiality and its correlative representations of the beyond in favor of the belief in the Scriptures as God’s revealed Word (through his Son). With this excerpt from Luke’s Gospel, we find a text that relates the words of God’s human incarnation, as he relates the words of a prophet who had related the voice of God the Father. The Messianic voice’s textual inscription betrays historical time at the same time as it institutes the historicity of revealed scripture.
and tongue were silent.” (VI.3). While Ambrose thus read, visitors would come in unannounced and would sit with him, not disturbing his literary meditation, and would often leave without having talked to him. Augustine tries to explain this habit by giving practical reasons for the bishop’s desire to avoid interruption in order to read more books and better rest his voice. He then calls Ambrose God’s “holy oracle” and defines his own previous attacks on Christian doctrine as “barking against mental figments of physical images.” (VI.4) He thus supports his oracular epithet for Ambrose with an act of contrition for his unreasonable youth—his voice was animal-like and was directed toward imagined idols. He follows up with gratitude in having been brought closer to conversion through the bishop’s sermons: “I heard him ‘rightly preaching the word of truth’ (2 Tim. 2:15) among the people.” (VI.4) Augustine is here reconciling the practice of silent reading with the understanding that speech illuminates one’s thoughts. Reading without voicing the text could turn the word of God into “mental figments of physical images,” a heresy from which Augustine protects Ambrose’s legacy.22 This marks the beginning of a transition that Frances Dyson remarks upon as the “decontamination of the voice.” (Dyson 2009: 20) Augustine, however, is not advocating silent reading here, but making its apology. Because of advancing literacy and the emergence of biblical hegemony, true thoughts no longer necessarily needed speech to illuminate them and could be contained on the page, especially if one were among God’s

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22 Indeed, the voice’s illuminating function is central to the videocentric epistemology of Augustine’s Confessions. As in the Platonism of Augustine, sound evokes the idea; the order of the signified appertains to the realm of the eye. This is expressed in Greek by terms such as noema and idea. What we call “signified” is, in fact, for metaphysics an object of thought that is characterized by visibility and clarity. The problem here is not only the relation between the realm of thought and that of speech, nor is it simply the usual metaphysical privileging of thought over speech. Rather, at stake is the fundamental gesture that locates the principle of the system of signification, of the signified, in the visual sphere. (Cavarero 2005: 35)
oracles, one of the righteous.23

Justus ut palma florebit; sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur.
The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
(Ps. 92, KJV)

These verses reoccur in the first musical examples of Richard Taruskin’s History of Western Music, in the form of analyses of different settings of Psalm 92 in Gregorian chant, a ninth-century Frankish adaptation of Roman plainchant, whose earliest notation dates from the eleventh century. The settings differ according to which part of the Mass they serve, and the music in the examples becomes increasingly complex. Melismas, prolongations of a single syllable over any number of notes, abound in the Justus ut palma as Alleluia or as Gradual portions of the Mass when there is little or no liturgical action going on. Of all the chants in the Mass, these are the most florid, because more than any other they are meant as listener’s music, filling the mind with the inexpressible joy of which St. Augustine wrote so eloquently.
(Taruskin 2005: 25-26, my emphasis)

Taruskin is referring here to his earlier quote of Augustine on melismatic singing: “It is a certain sound of joy without words... the expression of a mind poured forth in joy.” (Taruskin 2005: 11, my emphasis) Because of the participative distinctions between liturgical and officiated singing, Taruskin conflates the joy of singing (expression) with the joy of listening to music (impression) and thereby confuses the Platonist definitions of the physical and physiological voice. He supports this conflation with an excerpt from Augustine’s Confessions:

How I wept during your hymns and songs! I was deeply moved by the music of the sweet chants of your Church. The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled into my heart. (Conf. IX.14)

23 Cf. Curzio Chiesa’s article on thought as an “interior voice” and the voice as the symbolic expression of thought, from Plato to Porphyry. With Augustine, however, the distinction of inner and outer voice is not only a matter of rational language (logos) identifying humans with God, to the detriment of other animals, but also a return to God of human voices united in Christ, notably through singing: “For Augustine the voice of the totus Christus is the radiating hermeneutical center of the Psalms.” (Cameron 1999: 293)
Augustine’s thoughts on the joy of listening to music are much more ambivalent when this citation is not taken out of context—in this particular case, the overwhelming joy of conversion in the alignment of revelation and faith.

Taruskin’s view of changes in musical style in accordance with social causes pushes his discussion toward the social determinisms at work in music-making. He thereby avoids the question of excess and satiety in Augustine’s epistemology of the voice by focusing on the joy of hearing music, rather than those of praise or conversion. While Dolar wants to oppose the musical voice to the *logos*, Taruskin thus avoids the subject all together. While Augustine apologizes for Ambrose's silent reading, Taruskin would have him also advocating sonorous jubilation unhinged from speech or text. These clarifications are all the more important since one is at a loss to find where Augustine writes about the melismatic *jubilus* in the musical setting of the Mass as Taruskin, along with Weiss, claims:

> The most enthusiastic description of music by any Christian theologian before Luther, in fact, is Augustine's description of the *jubilus*, the lengthy melisma on the last syllable of the word *Alleluia* sung before the Gospel reading at Mass, which sometimes goes on for as many as thirty or forty notes. Far from a merely 'decorative' embellishment, the *jubilus* was the most mystically meaningful part of the chant for Augustine. (Taruskin & Weiss 1984: 25)

24 The full quote in Augustine, which Taruskin (2005: 11) rather conveniently edits, reads:

> One who jubilates, utters not words, but it is a certain sound of joy without words: for it is the expression of a mind poured forth in joy, expressing, as far as it is able, the affection, but not understanding the feeling. A man rejoicing in his own exultation without words, so that it seems that he indeed does rejoice with his voice itself, but as if filled with excessive joy, cannot express in words the subject of that joy.” (Augustine *Exposition*: 488, trans. modified).

More importantly, Augustine goes on to remark how humans are jubilant not when they listen to music, but when they are overwhelmed by the immensity and beauty of the natural world. Jubilation is a vocal reaction to God’s sublime presence in the natural world and is meant to be overcome in prayer and meditation: “And when, being like Him [in piety] you will have begun to approach Him, and to feel God, the more love increases in you, since God is love, you will perceive somewhat that which you were trying to say, and yet could not say.” (Augustine *Exposition*: 488, trans. modified)

Taruskin could also have quoted Augustine’s exposition of Psalm 32: “Sing ‘in jubilation.’ For this is to sing well to God, to sing in jubilation. What is it to sing in jubilation? To be unable to understand, to express in words, what is sung in the heart.” (in McKinnon 1987: 156) Or better yet: “Now our jubilation will not be such as theirs, for we ought to jubilate in justification, while they jubilate in iniquity; we, then, in confession, they in confusion.” (Augustine in McKinnon 1987: 158)
Taruskin’s previous reading of Augustine lends legitimacy to melismatic singing not through its subservience to the voice, but through its social use, i.e. by impressing a mystical joy upon the faithful during Mass.

Perhaps Taruskin compounds melisma, jubilation, and alleluia in order to disregard Augustine’s cautions against the sensual life, including sonorous seduction. Indeed, after his initial shock with the sacred musical experience, Augustine reflects on how the listener can be tricked into a false sense of piety by letting sensuous sound lead his spiritual experience instead of submitting it to the rationality of the word:

The pleasures of the ear had more tenacious hold on me, and had subjugated me; but you set me free and liberated me. As things now stand, I confess that I have some sense of restful contentment in sounds whose soul is your words, when they are sung by a pleasant and well-trained voice. Not that I am riveted by them, for I can rise up and go when I wish. Nevertheless, on being combined with the thoughts which give them life, they demand in my heart some position of honour, and I have difficulty in finding what is appropriate to offer them. Sometimes I seem to myself to give them more honour than is fitting. I feel that when the sacred words are chanted well, our souls are moved and are more religiously and with a warmed devotion kindled to piety than if they are not sung. […] But my physical delight, which has to be checked from enervating the mind, often deceives me when the perception of the senses is unaccompanied by reason, and is not patiently content to be in a subordinate place. It tries to be first and to be in the leading role, though it deserves to be allowed only as secondary to reason. (Conf. X.49, my emphasis)

Augustine is basing the appropriateness of singing on distinctions found in the different categories of the Platonist doctrine of the voice, on the difference between the voice’s loose definition as a material sound and its strict meaning as uplifting speech. Equally Platonist is his conception that singing, insofar as it relies on the articulate, analytical voice, is illuminated by a divine source. Augustine’s linguistically influenced and oriented views on singing, however, should also be briefly contextualized through other contrasting uses of music and voice in the primitive Church.²⁵

²⁵ Although later medieval scholars in the ninth century associate the jubilus with the alleluia, there is not a trace of this association in Augustine. James McKinnon would share in my perplexity:

Needless to say, Augustine saw spiritual implications in this kind of joy, but he never associated the jubilus with the textless melisma of a liturgical alleluia. He spoke of the jubilus numerous times in his
Perhaps the most contrasting practice of worship to reading in silence is not singing, but that of glossolalia or speaking in tongues. After his visit to Corinth, Paul’s views on the practice could not have been clearer:

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousands words in an unknown tongue. (1 Cor. 14:18-19)

Roughly a century after Paul and two centuries before Augustine, Tertullian advocated pneumatic worship, the expression of the Spirit’s inspiration, albeit in growing dissent with the rest of the Church. He wrote how the Spirit would descend upon a woman of his assembled congregation, and would drive her to talk in tongues: “The material for her visions is supplied as the Scriptures are read (leguntur), psalms are sung (canuntur), the homily delivered and prayers offered.” (Tertullian in Page 2010: 68) Just as the phonatory body became a vessel for the Spirit, Tertullian believed in a form of bodily existence in Heaven, a body devoid of its baser functions and only maintaining those requisite for vocal praise.26

Followed to its literary conclusion, the practice of speaking in tongues meant that the Spirit could visit human beings after Christ’s coming and that this human inspiration, in its prophetic form, should also be recorded and shared in assemblies. The idea of the Spirit descending upon the congregation and voicing itself through a woman came into conflict

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Psalm Commentary but always in connection with the appearance of some form of the word jubilare in the biblical text. He never introduced the word “alleluia” into any of these passages, nor, conversely, did he introduce the idea of the jubilus into his many extended discussions of the liturgical exclamation “alleluia.” (McKinnon, “Jubilus”)

McKinnon mentions elsewhere the facile conflation of alleluia and jubilus in the musicological reception of Augustine. (McKinnon 1987: 156, 163)

Among the heresies menacing doctrinal authority and even the existence of a unified Church in the fourth century, Page cites Montanists who, like the Corinthians and Tertullian approximately two centuries prior, believed in New Prophecy. (Page 2010: 89) See also Christine Trevett, Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy (1996). According to Page, the anticipation of the heavenly singing body, devoid of its digestive and procreative functions, led in turn to asceticism and prescriptions for the type of singers used in early Church assemblies, namely virgins and prepubescent children. (49-53) The structural necessity of music and singing in worship (39-40) provides more ground for including Tertullian’s pneumatic worship in an overall understanding of the voice’s liturgical use at the time, rather than for relegating them to a marginal occurrence. (69) See also Tertullian’s “Letter to Diognetus” in The Apostolic Fathers. (156-57)
with the voice’s inscription in the Scriptures read out by a man, the lector. This practice would have been especially problematic in the fourth century, as no further texts were being added to the New Testament’s canon. (Page 2010: 93) Five centuries previously, *The Testament of Orpheus* and *The Sibylline Oracles* had also been put aside since, at that time, “the Jews began to regard the canon of the Old Testament as permanently constituted for all time,” thereby making it “impossible for the books of any new prophets to be added to the biblical cannon.” (Friedman 1970: 21) Similarly, the Spirit’s inspiration would increasingly be limited to its textual reiteration as a way of controlling conflicting messages. A way of conciliating both practices would have been singing, the giving of breath to the written word, for the literate and illiterate alike.27

Literacy also becomes a way of containing singing, or at least of controlling officiating singers during Mass. Page resumes a previous discussion on this topic (2010: 66) with reference to the “Canons of Laodicea,” minutes from a meeting of bishops in Asia Minor around the mid-fourth century. By regulating the role of singers in church services, these bishops left the first records of musical office. Because the psalms were obligatorily

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27 According to Michael Cameron, Augustine advocated that the faithful should wish to overcome the distinctions between singing and listening, expression and impression:

Augustine thus awakened his hearers to themselves as subjects of the paschal mystery and participants in its dynamic of charity. Unwittingly, he also gave an intriguing reply to the hermeneutical conundrum created by the modern division between participant and observer, the subject and the object, positing their conjunction not by mere fiat but by uncovering the engine of participation in the structure of redemption itself. (Cameron 1999: 293)

The will to reconcile the collectivism of doctrine with the individual experience of the paschal mystery, to use Cameron’s terms, might well account for the important place Augustine, following Ambrose, gives to singing in Mass:

“Give praise to the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.’ (Ps. 117.1) What the Holy Spirit has advised us in the words (*uoce*) of the psalm, to which we responded with one mouth and one heart Alleluia – which means praise the Lord in Latin – this the same Holy Spirit advises you through my words (*uoce*): ‘Give praise to the Lord…” (Augustine *Sermo* XXIX in McKinnon 1987: 161)

Cf. with his Epistle CCXI: “When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, let what is pronounced by the voice be meditated upon in the heart; and do not sing something unless you read that it is to be sung, for what is not thus noted to be sung, ought not to be sung.” (Augustine in McKinnon 1987: 164)
interspersed with readings, there must have been “churches where psalmody was no longer regarded as a form of reading,” but as a form of singing. (Page 2010: 95) Furthermore, the bishops at Laodicea make literacy a necessary skill for employment in the Church: singers must be able to read texts from parchments kept in churches, instead of singing from memory or from other written sources (papyrus copies) that might be non-canonical or corrupted by heresy. (Page 2010: 93) After surviving the state’s persecution over two centuries, the Church now focused on orthodoxy, which meant reading and singing from the same set of texts. The literary containment of voices would only increase throughout the Middle Ages, as Latin and the other Roman attributes of the Church were sought after by early medieval kings in order to ritualize their displays of power.

Through these examples of tensions between singing and reading in the early Church, I have tried to show two things: first, how phonocentrism is grounded on a visual metaphor that ties the voice to metaphysical epistemology; and second, how inspiration and expression are not simply responsible for phonocentrism, but also a privileged tool in the imposition of univocal doctrine. As the historical figure of Orpheus well indicates, inspiration and expression are subversive elements that could, already two millennia ago, destabilize the authority of institutionalized meaning. Furthermore, the brief discussion of Tertullian and Montanism prepares the way for a reconsideration of realism in Auerbach’s understanding of figuration in phenomenal prophecy.
Historicity and the Musical Voice

“For God, there is no difference of time,” writes Tertullian and, amongst his precursors and contemporaries, Augustine is the champion of this idea of (a)historical time.

Auerbach

This section argues how sound’s ephemeral characteristics are not incompatible with literary figuration. In framing this discussion within Augustine’s meditation on speech, music, and time, I attempt to contextualize the problem in terms of a worldview that is not necessarily familiar to contemporary readers. Keeping in mind the eschatological similarities informing the economy of meaning in Orphism and in the early Church—and how they both give voice to the psyche in the afterlife—I ponder the paradox that institutes the writing of the Word to ensure its transmission at (what can almost be seen as) the expense of the vocal expression of the faithful. Indeed, tensions between a communal faith and the individual experience of belief in early Christianity are mediated by singing or liturgical worship, and, as mentioned in the introduction, Augustine himself already raises the problem of equivocal song and univocal text.

With these problems in mind, I reconsider Erich Auerbach’s theory of figural interpretation. I examine how music and sonority are marginalized in his essay “Figura” and question his arguments for Tertullian’s realism in contrast with Clement’s supposed lack thereof. When one further takes into account that a Church Father extended the prefiguration of Christ in a singular case to a Greek pagan figure, Orpheus, and that Auerbach hushes it from his discussion by precluding myth from literary figuration, the necessity of revising Auerbach’s theory imposes itself on this reader.

The last part of this section is an excursus into psychoanalytic theories of voice and
their readings of opera. It has two purposes. The first, to bring some relief to those readers who fail to see Auerbach as a theorist and who are anxious for more than a discussion of patristic literature and literary theory. The second, to demonstrate how readings of opera that equate the invocation of Hades by Orpheus with psychoanalytic theories of the voice preclude a discussion of time and history, and how the voice has sought to transcend both in opera’s history.

*The Voice’s Betrayal of Time*

In an article on Augustine’s conception of time and Monteverdi’s laments, the musicologist Ståle Wikshåland writes: “I am trying to capture the voice as it directs itself to us, in present time – even if the voice in question catches our attention through a text.” (Wikshåland 2008: 13) Read closely, the relation to the voice this sentence describes, woven into the text, bears the contradictory tensions between the pre-modern and modern worldviews: the modern effort in trying (to capture) opposes the pre-modern passive reception of the voice’s direction; literary transmission (of the past) meets the present time of the text’s reiteration; and the voice, situated in both phrases of the sentence, before and after the hyphen—in both worldviews as it were—cements our acceptance of the “before and after” being present as we read. Wikshåland, as I examine in a following section, explains the appeal of Monteverdi’s operas in terms of their figuration of vocal music. I will supplement this convincing line of argumentation with a revision of Auerbach’s theory of literary figuration. Properly intertwined, these separate threads will reveal how figuration
underscores the voice in the creation of opera.28

When Wikshåland thinks about the importance of Augustine’s Confessions for music in Western modernity, he does not concentrate his attention on the passages about proper or improper singing (in books IX and X), but on those about time. (XI) The starting point of Augustine’s meditation on time can be roughly summarized as follows: by the time one finishes talking about the present time, the present has already become the past. Augustine is concerned that when people use common language to talk about past, present and future, they make the mistake of thinking of time as a linear, worldly experience. In doing so, they lose their sense of wonder at time’s eternal essence. For him as for others writing much later, the attention to time’s inexistence brings forward an authentic presence to self, which the expressed voice betrays both literally and figuratively. It literally betrays Augustine, for when forced to answer the question of what time is, although he knows from experience what authentic self-presence feels like in terms of inner experience, he cannot represent it for others in real time, that is, he cannot speak his jubilating mind without there being a lapse. In other words, for Augustine, speech is a betrayal of the immediate present in self-presence (XI.17) or of the auto-affectation of the inner voice, as Derrida would put it. On the other hand, the voice figuratively betrays the problem as it reveals its structure. Augustine’s answer is not only to invoke God, that he may give him resolve to understand the problem, but also to show him the way. This way ultimately leads him to the singing voice and, more specifically, to a hymn written by Ambrose.

28 Wikshåland writes elsewhere about Orpheus in Monteverdi’s opera, the voice, and modernity in the following terms:

If “being modern” is characterized by a character self-consciously entering into different relations and yet remaining himself—or displaying different attitudes in one and the same relationship, as Orpheus does when he opposes Charon—it would seem that we are indeed encountering a modern form of subjectivity, situated and articulated through Orpheus’s voice in different modes. (Wikshåland 2009: 231)
Wikshåland does not directly address these betrayals of the voice. Instead, he hears in the last paragraphs of book XI a voice emerging from the text. Indeed, Augustine writes about the act of singing in the first person, as a subjective experience. Unfortunately, Wikshåland errs in taking Augustine’s previous comments on Ambrose’s hymn as the hymn itself:

As he often does, Augustine chooses an example from St. Ambrose, or, to be more precise, from Ambrose’s hymn *Deus creator omnium*: “Persevere, O my mind, and give earnest heed… Give heed, where truth dawns. Lo, suppose the voice of a body begins to sound, and does sound, and sounds on, and lo! it ceases.” (Wikshåland 2008: 132)

This is not a question of quoting from different translations of *Confessions*, although this translation does seem somewhat dated. These excerpts are not part of the hymn *Deus creator omnium*, they are passing comments Augustine makes about the voice and sonority. (XI.27)

Ambrose’s hymn occupies such a prominent place in Augustine’s difficult meditation on time, precisely because it is a prayer on the very same problem. The hymn evokes God’s creation of the heavens and light, of day and night, and asks for the mind’s peaceful rest, though not its material slumber:

[...] Now that the day is over and night has begun we, your devotees, sing our hymn, [...] May the depths of our hearts magnify you, may our harmonious voices sound you, may our chaste affections love you, may our sober minds adore you. [...] (Ambrose in Ramsey 1997: 170-71)

As Wikshåland points out, Augustine does appropriate the experience of singing and writes about it in a first person narrative. He is writing, however, about a hymn that puts emphasis on the act of singing *together*: the verse “may our harmonious voices sound you” is a translation of “*Te cordis ima concinant,*” in which the verb *concinō* means “to sing or sound *together.*”

Furthermore, the hymn speaks of faith in the mind’s and the voice’s rest, not as a

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fall into slumber (in the materiality of the senses), but a necessary pause in the quest for the truth. Thus, the communal singing of this hymn creates a shared space in which the future sleeping devotees find solace together in witnessing for each other their desire to solve the problem of time’s flight, as day turns into night and as the illuminating light fades away. Singing for Augustine might be the experience of the individual relying on the community’s support, but it does not make his song an emerging individualistic authorial voice in the modern sense of the term.30

Singing was crucial in the early Christian church’s liturgy; the works of McKinnon and Page, among those of many other scholars, bear witness to this fact. As touched upon previously in relation to pneumatic worship, part of Christianity’s success was its promise of a bodily resurrection in the next world, an improvement on the Greek mystery cults. (Burkert 1985: 278 ff.) In this eschatological promise, eternal life is envisioned as God’s constant and eternal praise:

Christians hoped that the righteous would eventually stand, in some form of bodily life,

30 Prior to Augustine, Athanasius (c. 296-373) wrote about the difference between reciting with continuity (speech) and the expansion of the voice in singing:

[... ] it was proper to Divine Scripture to hymn God not only with continuity but with expanse of voice. Recited with continuity, then, are such words as those of the Law and the Prophets, and all those of history, along with the New Testament; while recited with expanse are those of psalms, odes and songs. And thus it is assured that men love God with their entire strength and capability.

(in McKinnon 1987: 53)

It is hard to think of Augustine’s supposedly individualistic voice emerging in this context, especially built upon the argument of the voice’s distensio or expansion in liturgical practices of communal song. (But Wikshåland is deliberately offering another, phenomenological interpretation of Augustine’s relation to musical time.)

Cf. Joan Stambaugh, “Music as Temporal Form:”

After Augustine time came to be viewed more and more exclusively as a function of consciousness, until in modern philosophy it has become practically identified with consciousness itself. The question here is: can this time of consciousness be identified with musical time? The time of consciousness is not bound to outer objects; it is strictly an inner time, a kind of spontaneous flow of experiencing. What is moving here is nothing material or objective, but rather the act of awareness itself. It is obvious that musical time lies nearer to subjective time than to objective time. It has several elements in common with subjective time. The complete phenomenon of music includes the act of being heard; it has an indisputable relationship to the subject. In order to be fully realized, music must sound; it must be played and heard. In this sounding, in the act of perceiving sound, lies musical time. Is, then, musical time equivalent to subjective time? It is not. (Stambaugh 1964: 268)
before the throne of God, where the only imaginable alternative to ecstatic praise was the disobedience of Satan and the rebel angels. Christians were therefore making a pilgrimage through a temporary world, which was not their true home, to an eternal liturgy. (Page 2010: 2)

Singing together is a shared commitment to withstand this life in a “temporary world” in which the essence of time, as the possibility of truthful self-expression, is unattainable.

Psalmody and the singing of hymns become ways of guarding against lack of humility or pride of putting one’s faith in one’s understanding of the material world and its common conceptions of time, rather than preparing for the next.31

Wikshåland does not understand Augustine’s singing voice as being included in communal hymns or psalms. Rather, he interprets his intention of singing as enabling “Augustine to think of time […] as a temporal phenomenon, as human through and through, distinct from any divine plan or overview.” (Wikshåland 2008: 133) As I have shown, this line of thinking is supported by a misreference to the hymn Deus creator omnium, which divests it of its references to time (especially the phenomenal revolutions of night and day, indicating the metaphorical illumination of thought) and worship, and replaces it with Augustine’s supposed intention to simply sing a “song.” Yet the problem of time and self-presence is not solved through singing, even when it is jubilatory, but through worship. Wikshåland’s reading does foreshadow, however, transformations of music theory in sixteenth-century Italy, which I discuss below. For now, suffice it to say that instead of an adjustment to a “prescribed place in a superhuman structure,” which refers to a Pythagorean cosmic conception of music found in the Timaeus, Wikshåland finds in Augustine precedence

31 Revelation mentions music and singing in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 15:1-3), while the music of the eternal liturgy is anticipated in Isaiah (35:10, 65:14). Consider also Clement of Rome’s (fl. c.96) First Epistle to the Corinthians: “Let us, therefore, gathered together in concord by conscience, cry out earnestly to him as if with one voice, so that we might come to share in his great and glorious promises.” (1 Cor. 34:7) Giving of one’s voice becomes sacred, in the sense of a sacrifice: according to Justin Martyr, (c.100-c.165) the Christian singing of the offertory (sacrificium in the Mozarabic church) had replaced the blood sacrifices of pagan religion. (McKinnon 1987: 20)
for the liberation of music from theology and, instead, its ascription “to the mind in action, to the *actio* of the rhetoricians,” (Wikshåland 2008: 133) here espousing the ethical necessities of Aristotelian poetics. Such a foreshadowing of the Renaissance’s modern relation to the voice in music does not require the prefiguration of rhetorical *intention* in Augustine’s relation to time. Rather, Augustine’s text can be seen in a tradition of reading that already relies on foreshadowing or figuration itself in the contraction and distension of historical time.

**Figuration and the Word’s Song**

I open this section on figuration with a quote from Erich Auerbach’s seminal essay, “Figura,” in order to already give the reader an idea of where this discussion will lead: “Virgil the poet was a guide because he had described the realm of the dead—thus he knew the way thither… the historic Virgil was for [Dante] a figura of the poet-prophet-guide, now fulfilled in the other world.” (Auerbach 1984: 69) The essay starts out by explaining how the term *figura* was coined at some point near the end of the Roman Republic. Its first signification of “outward appearance” or “outline” was immediately inflected by its grammatical use to designate “the form of the plural,” “*figura multitudinis*.” (ibid. 12, 14) Therefore, though it denotes materiality, figura also connotes an abstract meaning of form through its grammatical career. While *forma* was generally used to translate the Greek *morphē* and *eidos*, “the form or idea which ‘informs’ matter,” *figura* was usually employed to translate *schema*, “the purely perceptual shape.” (ibid. 14-15, 229n4) *Schema*, however, was not only a philosophical term, as it was also used in other Greek sciences to denote an “outward shape.” (ibid. 15) Auerbach concludes that side by side with the original plastic signification [of *figura*] and overshadowing it, there appeared a far more general concept of grammatical, rhetorical, mathematical—and later even of musical and choreographic—form. (ibid. 15)
Thereby in *figura* one finds, *at the same time*, the idea’s formation and the perception of its material shape, which explains its central importance in the history of “serious reflective literature.” (Bahti 2001: 39-40) One might already intuit how the figure brings one to understand language, especially writing, in terms of a visual representation of reality. Therefore, it is all the more important to pay special attention to its uses in denoting the shaping or formation of sound.

From the start, *figura* was also applied to sonorous forms. Criticizing the reticence of his contemporaries to accept Latin neologisms for Greek words, Varro wrote:

> And do they think there is so much difference between the two senses that they are always looking for new shapes [*figuras*] of furniture for their eyes, but yet wish their ears to avoid such things? (in Auerbach 1984: 13)

Auerbach plays down the sonorous *figura* which appears with the grammatical use of the term: “Here we are *not far from* the idea that figures exist also for the sense of hearing […].” (13, my emphasis) Varro’s point, however, is completely valid. No matter how linguistics might theorize language, translation’s appropriative act of neologizing requires new sounds to take on old meanings. Thus the transmission of “figure” has left us with a literary term that expresses not only multiple meanings, but also transmits in and of itself a conceptual tension between sight and sound in language and literature. In other words, *figura* connotes a sonorous outline within the denotation of a visual form, and nowhere in written language can this be better observed than in careful attention to its presentation of voice.

The tension between the visual and abstract significations of *figura* is further intensified when Lucretius (ca. 99-55 BCE) “transposes the term from the plastic and visual to the auditory sphere, when he speaks of the *figura verborum* (‘the figure of words’).” (in Auerbach 1984:16) According to Auerbach, Lucretius employs *figura* for its mediating action in order to describe transmission and generation:
The important transition from the form to its imitation, from model to copy [...]. Here we see that only figura could serve for this play on model and copy; forma and imago are too solidly anchored in one or the other of the two meanings; figura is more concrete and dynamic than forma. (ibid. 16)

This being said, Lucretius also uses it to speak of the rather less concrete remnants of the signifying operation, “in the sense of ‘dream image,’ ‘figment of fancy,’ ‘ghost.’” (ibid. 16-17)

Although Auerbach identifies this use as coming from Lucretius’s understanding of materiality, it nevertheless accords with the reverse imitating movement of generational transmission: the child might be a copy of its parents, but both generations eventually become paler copies of their real selves. Furthermore, just as Auerbach is reticent to acknowledge Varro’s conception of auditory figures, he relegates Lucretius’s use of figura in music to a footnote: “Cf. also the shaping of tones ‘which harpers with nimble fingers arouse and shape [figurant] on the strings.’” (ibid. 229-30) The fleeting qualities of musical and sonorous figures are invisible originals/copies that must be marginalized in this discussion, otherwise they contradict the figure’s function of ensuring the historical transmission of reality. Therefore, this theory of figuration accounts for, but does not integrate, music and sound into its understanding of transmission because their evanescence does not conform to a representational conception of reality in literature. Indeed, the shaping of the tones prefigures reality’s disappearance: from figure to form to phantasm.32

Figuration in literature is precisely a rampart against individual dissolution and, more precisely, of the knowledge of past realities. (Cochran 2001: 38) This is further implied in a quote from Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) on the many portraits in Varro’s book, which

[...] not allowing their likeness [figuras] to disappear or the passage of time to prevail against men, and thus being the inventor of a benefit which even the gods might envy,

32 Even when Auerbach makes the following comment, it has no bearing on the general direction of the discussion: “Clear distinctions between figura and forma are rare, and neither is confined to the realm of the visual; Cicero speaks of figura vocei (‘of the voice’), figura negotii (‘types of occupation’), and quite frequently of figuras dicendi (‘figures of speech’).” (Auerbach 1984: 18)
for he not only bestowed immortality but also sent it all over the world, that those concerned might be felt to be present everywhere. (in Auerbach 1984: 24)

Figural interpretation and reading rely on mimēsis, in the sense that its representation must imitate the schema or outline of the real person in the beyond of literary posterity. Thus the literary figure is already a way of preserving time, bringing the individual experience of writing and reading outside of one’s temporal condition: with the figura, the transfiguration of the individual's time, his life after death, can be achieved through his backward projection into literary tradition. The inscription of Jesus of Nazareth’s life and teaching, although entrusted to writers who lived one or two generations after him, is the archetype of a literary figure’s transfiguration.

As the Church Fathers understood it, following the Gospel of Luke and Paul, the figura is split: the Old Testament’s prophecies outline Christ’s coming, the formation of his Church, and other symbolic events during and after His passage on earth. As Auerbach notes, “from now on we shall refer to the two events as figure and fulfillment.” (Auerbach 1984: 30) He also claims that Tertullian consolidates this way of reading the scriptures, precisely because he believed that the prophetic figure “is a concrete historical fact, and it is fulfilled by concrete historical facts.” (ibid. 30) Thus figural interpretation differs from its allegorical counterpart because (ibid. 29) while allegory displaces concepts, morals, etc. onto the historical and fictional alike. In other words, one must believe that Moses and Jesus were real men whose lives are recorded in the Scriptures respectively as the former’s (pre)figuration, which the latter’s coming fulfills. At first hand these distinctions might seem simple enough, but Terry Cochran warns his readers that “although the basic tenets of figuration are relatively easy to state, their implications for understanding are far from evident.” (Cochran 2001: 59) Cochran makes it clear that the figure should be thought of in an interpretive literary tradition other than hermeneutics. For him, the figure is the third topos
in making meaning through literature, which supplements the hermeneutics of symbol and allegory:

> Figuration […] marks a process whereby an event or personage that exists or existed historically displays characteristics that place it in relation with subsequent historical events or personages. This historicity separates the figure from allegory, on the one hand, and symbol, on the other; in contrast, the element that falls out of meaning production in modernity is not simply figural interpretation but historicity itself. (Cochran 2001: 59)

In this sense, the figure not only reaches across space and time with concrete effects in the world, it also guards against a complete fictionalization of literature: “the figure cannot be peeled away from the substance it expresses, must be read in its literality, and has a concrete historical meaning as well as a figural one.” (Cochran 2001: 59) How then can Orpheus be a figure or how can one speak of Orphic figuration? Would not an Orpheus figure tear the seams of literary historicity and leave it to run the risk of becoming historically irrelevant fiction?

The historical incarnation of God had implications on the transmission of knowledge, which differ from mythological accounts of divine embodiment. How does one properly relate such a story and how does it relate to other bodies of knowledge and, in particular, the interpretation of text? Auerbach associates the recuperation of pagan myth in the Middle Ages with symbolism. Along with allegory, symbolism is the other type of

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33 Wikshåland’s interpretation of Augustine’s voice is informed by Paul Ricoeur’s reading of *Confessions* in *Time and Narrative*. This partly accounts for our contradicting readings of the voice and time in Augustine’s writings. Ricoeur does acknowledge Auerbach’s book *Mimesis*, but only in passing: “For Auerbach […] the imaginary is defined in opposition to the ‘real’ and history continues to be the model for realism of representation.” (Ricoeur 1984: 163) It is useful to distinguish here between Plato and Aristotle’s use of mimesis:

As narratives are traditionally couched in language, the dual role it plays in them has been an object of enquiry for scholars of poetics and narratology since ancient times. In his *Republic*, Plato distinguishes between mimesis and diegesis: mimesis refers to the characters’ discourse and diegesis to the narrative discourse of the poet or bard. By contrast, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the use of the term mimesis (in the sense of representation, i.e. with reference to the fictional world) is not restricted to the utterances of characters but describes the process of depicting the fictional world in general. (Fludernik 2009: 64)

The literary representation of singing poets or reciting singers confuses historical realism. Ricoeur goes on to point how “aspects of verbal fiction […] force us to return to the notion of the representation of the real in history.” (Ricoeur 1984: 163)
medieval interpretation to be distinguished from figuration:

The so-called symbolic or mythical forms [...] are often regarded as characteristic of primitive cultures [...]. The symbol must possess magic power, not the figura; the figura, on the other hand, must always be historical, but not the symbol. Of course Christianity has no lack of magic symbols; but the figura as such is not one of them. (Auerbach 1984: 57)

The persistence of pagan motifs in early Christian funerary art can only be interpreted, from the point of view of orthodoxy, as symbols in theurgic and magical rituals. In *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, Friedman devotes a complete chapter to the demonstration of how similar narratives around both figures allowed for the allegory of “Orpheus-Christus” and the Christianization of Orphic symbols, such as the lyre and some of the beasts that gathered to hear Orpheus play, like the peacock. (Friedman 1970: 38-53) Orphic symbolism is even more concretely displayed in the amulets found in the graves of some early Christians. (Friedman 1970: 58-85) Once again, however, this analysis leaves our legendary poet and musician in a visual setting.

Notwithstanding my admiration for Auerbach’s rigorous readings and for Cochran’s erudition, my bias in favor of the voice drives me to doubt the validity of the apparent rejection of mythical figuration on grounds of its non-historical, that is, “oral” transmission. Auerbach’s implicit dismissal of figural myth as a symbol “characteristic of primitive cultures” and Cochran’s deliberate focus on print influence their conception of tradition’s transmission. The comments Auerbach makes underline his presupposition that history is equated with written records. And while Cochran acknowledges in passing the importance of the oral tradition for the study of literary history, it is mainly to give his reader insight into the limitations of an oral economy of knowledge. Cochran also relegates the question of sonorous matter’s ephemeral existence to an endnote in which he takes care to emphasize how our knowledge of orality is secondary and can only come from textual reconstruction.
The ephemeral and evanescent characteristics of the voice do not bring to mind figural prophecy to those who wish to transmit the literary remnants of a pre-modern worldview and its concomitant understanding of time and history, because attention is focused on literature’s signifying goal (historicity).

While Auerbach is aware that “purely spiritual” and not only realist “elements enter into the conceptions of the ultimate fulfillment” of human life in eternal life, he draws upon Tertullian’s belief in the embodiment of Christian resurrection, that “the flesh shall rise again,” in order to counter any argument that the next world could lack in realism: “he resolutely attacks those who twist the clearly proclaimed resurrection of the dead into an ‘imaginary meaning.’” (Auerbach 1984: 54) Auerbach claims that “the staunch realism” of Tertullian should be understood as “diametrically opposite” to “allegorical interpretations of historical events.” (ibid. 30, 54) Implicitly evoking Clement, he insists that the Hellenic Fathers of Alexandria did not have a method of interpretation that preserved the historic reality of both figures involved in phenomenal prophecy: “By its success it [figural interpretation] paved the way for less concrete schools of allegorism, such as that of the Alexandrians.” (ibid. 56) Auerbach maintains that only figures of the Old Testament must be cited as true, historical prefigurations of Christ’s historical passage on earth. In other words, the temporally transcending aspects of historical realism depend on the belief in lives having been recorded in writing. Therefore, the myths of Ancient Greek culture cannot promote realism, since they transmit symbols that must be allegorically interpreted when
taken out of their original ritual or magical context of primitive societies. (ibid. 57)³⁴

Without further discussing the matter, Auerbach thereby dismisses Clement of Alexandria’s theology of the Word’s New Song in his Protrepticus, which claims the prefiguration of God’s incarnated Verb in Orpheus, the religious poet of the Greeks.³⁵

Auerbach argues that the avowed goal of the realist Fathers, as they rely only on what had been written in the Old Testament to define reality, is an eternal embodiment in which history is overcome. He fails to mention, however, the vocal nature of this post-historical telos of eternal embodiment. For Tertullian, the resurrected flesh is rid of all appetitive characteristics of embodiment, but it retains the body’s vocal and phonatory capacities in order to praise God throughout eternity. The vocal paradigm that informs humanity’s

³⁴ Tertullian and Clement were contemporaries. The way Auerbach presents the matter, the reader might think that the former’s literalness paved the way for the latter’s looser kind of interpretation, when in fact one’s defense of pneumatic worship and the other’s theology of divine vocal incarnation point to their shared contemporaneous experiences of the remnants of oral traditions in early Christianity. This being said, however, when Auerbach writes about Tertullian’s realism, he is also commenting on his method of biblical interpretation:

His exegesis was formulated in response largely to gnostic biblical interpretations, which were usually governed by mytho-poetic narratives about creation or redemption. […] Even when he was thoroughly immersed in Montanism, Tertullian observes the same principle in not taking parables as sources of doctrine. (Williams 2009: 221)

While Auerbach follows this opposition to these “mytho-poetic narratives about creation and redemption,” my interest in Orpheus leads me to look for a way in extending figural interpretation.

³⁵ Clement’s prefiguration of Christ through Orpheus can already be intimated as a way of conciliating the Gospel’s profession of the Christian God’s illuminating Logos, which had shone in the darkness of the pagan past:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1-4, my emphasis)

In a footnote of the Norton Critical Edition of The English Bible, Austin Busch writes:

*The Word*: capitalized by KJV as a reference to Christ, like “Light” and “Son” below. It translates Gk. *logos*, which connotes at once the creative power of God, whose utterance brings everything into existence (cf. Gen 1: 1-24); the Torah, the law God promulgated through Moses, and, more generally the divine wisdom lying behind it […] and the principle of order governing the cosmos (a technical meaning of *logos* in Hellenistic philosophy.) (The English Bible 2012: 195)

Tertullian’s christology also historicizes the Logos: “Tertullian taught that the Son was the Logos of the Father, having been begotten at the event of Genesis 1:2: “And God said, ‘Let there be light.’” (Williams 2009: 222).
historical fulfillment is left aside by Auerbach since it does not correspond to his conception of *literary* transmission. While some might easily conclude that orality is therefore understood as a (take your pick) *pre-, post-, or a-*historical origin and end, the point being made here is about the text’s discursive authority precisely because of the Word’s vocal identification with the Father and the Holy Spirit *in writing.*

Paradoxically, without considering the place of sound and of the voice in prophecy, and thereby figural interpretation, the ritual economy of liturgy, which structurally reenacts the Christian community’s understanding of time and of the world, becomes divorced from the flesh whose vocalized worship transmitted its belief throughout the centuries. One of the reasons for the importance of psalmody and hymns in the early Church is certainly the voice’s capacity to project one’s individuality beyond one’s physical boundaries. Although this structural characteristic is not particular to Christianity but also to “primitive cultures,” to use Auerbach’s term again, it certainly applies to a discussion of voice and figural prophecy. In a section titled “The Singing Body of Christians,” Page writes:

> The desire to sing together in this life so that the categories of present and future momentarily dissolve, and so that one may be mystically present in a life still to come and yet already available to be lived, was not simply a concern of *Revelation* [...]; it was also shared by those Christians who accepted a general resurrection in some form of bodily existence. (Page 2010: 47)

It would seem then that a literary conception of figuration that relies solely on written records for its definition of historicity overtly contradicts, while it implicitly perpetuates, the literary beliefs that the Church Fathers helped form through the containment of the pneumatic aspects of prophecy in the canonization of the New Testament. Page’s understanding of history in terms of the social forces at work in shaping institutions does

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36 Tellingly, the Pentecost’s narrative for cross-cultural dissemination—spreading the Gospel in all languages without loss of the original spirit of the utterance—is mediated by the Spirit’s descent in “divided tongues, as of fire,” heard by each witness in their own mother tongue, in order that the people may believe in the prophecy “that his soul was not left in hell, nor did his flesh see corruption.” (Acts 2: 1-31)
not neglect the people that form these institutions and their cultural and ideological transmission. Although a few of these people, like the Church Fathers, left records of their individual thoughts, the communal practice of singing indicates anonymous historical figures. While Page’s reconstruction of singing practices in the primitive Church relies inevitably on writing, he does not need the figure of an author to project the figures of singers into the past, like Dante needs Virgil according to Auerbach. Although not recognized individually, Page’s Christian singers have left their outline in their institution’s documented history and their figures are fulfilled in the recognition of the voice’s core function in the psychic underpinnings of belief. Perhaps one should look in this direction to explain Orphic figuration.37

In “The Songs of Orpheus and the New Song of Christ,” Eleanor Irwin explains how Clement of Alexandria culturally broadened the use of figural prophecy. Clement not only used figures from the Old Testament to interpret Christ as their fulfillment, but also “took the daring step of typifying Christ through a figure of Greek mythology.” (Irwin 1982: 51) Like Page, Irwin does not cite Auerbach as a reference, but she takes great care in distinguishing the different uses of allegory, symbol, and figure that identify Orpheus with Christ. For example, David’s “musical skills” are allegorically attributed to Christ and Orpheus, while the lyre with which all three are portrayed in the early Middle Ages

37 Page does not seem to be familiar with Auerbach’s article, as it does not figure in his extensive bibliography. His thoughts about singing and the conception of time found in Revelation connote, however, the same deconstruction of time at work in singing worship:

This perspective (if perspective it can be called that seeks to dismantle terrestrial categories of perception) encompasses the various descriptions of celestial hymnody in the text […] This is a vision of hymnody in the ‘already-and-not-yet’ final glorification of God. (Page 2010: 47)

Here too, Derrida’s reading in Of Grammatology can be of help. Within the vocal structure of Orphic figuration we thus can identify the representation of a “metaphysics of presence” in literature, “from Plato to Hegel, rhythmed by the articulation of presence upon self-presence.” “Eschatological parousia is also the presence of full speech, bringing together all its differences and its articulations within the consciousness (of) self of the logos.” (Derrida 1976: 246)
“confirms its significance as a symbol rather than as a representation of a particular figure.” (Irwin 1982: 57-58) She also stresses how descriptions of the effects of music are not properly figurative either, but allegorical:

Non-Christian writers previously had made Orpheus a bringer of civilization, but Clement claims that the taming of beasts is an allegory, not of Orpheus, but of the activity of the Word in dealing with mankind. […] His claim that the Word is the only one to tame human beings suggests that he is unaware of attempts to allegorize Orpheus. (Irwin 1982: 54)

Because prophecy is a vocal matter—the prophets hear the voice of the Lord and give voice to his message—Orphic figurations of Christ must also be understood in terms of the voice, which is neither a complete abstraction (effect or skills) nor an objectification (instrument) of music.\(^{38}\)

I have discussed above Clement’s use of a metaphor of scintillating light in relation to the Platonist doctrine of the voice and the presence of the Word in the utterance of Greek poets. The importance of the voice for Clement is confirmed in his theology of the Word. Since he associates the Word of God to “the second person of the Trinity,” Christ is outlined in the expressions of the Prophets, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. (Irwin 1982: 54) The physical and physiological distinctions of the voice find their way into Clement’s doctrine of the Trinity: just like the voice in speech is articulated sound, “the new song [the Word of God] does more than tame the savage and revive the insensible; it gives order to the universe,” (ibid. 54) just as the demiurge’s music does in Timaeus. Here again, to prevent figural misreading, Clement makes sure that the “New Song” is not colloquially understood as live music, but understood as an allegory, in the Pythagorean fashion:

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\(^{38}\) The persuasion of musical allegory or symbolism finds its limit when the partial divine identity of human beings becomes an issue. Athenagoras (fl. c.175), a contemporary of Clement, wrote in his Supplication for the Christians: “Now if the cosmos is an harmonious instrument set in rhythmic motion, I worship him who tuned it, who strikes its notes and sings it concordant melody, not the instrument. Nor do judges at the contests pass over the cithara players and crown their citharas.” (in McKinnon 1987: 22)
He makes it clear that the music he means is not produced on instruments like the lyre and the cithara, but that the Word uses the macrocosm and the human microcosm to make music to God. (Irwin 1982: 54)

Thus the eternal source of the voice historically resonates in this world through human utterances, independently of the traditions it influenced and of the forms its revelation took, whether written or oral: Orphic figuration is not only literary, but a coexistence of pagan voices and Christian script. Instead of a purely script-based approach—how Orpheus studied Mosaic Law in the Testament of Orpheus—this vocal approach completes the figure, or at least partially renders some of its previous sonorous prophetic meaning: Orpheus is a scintillating vocal prefiguration for the Word’s illuminating fulfillment in Christ’s incarnation.39

To answer the questions I posed above, one can speak of Orpheus as a figure precisely when the modern understanding of the author-as-writer—a deviation from the medieval auctor (Friedman 1970: 95-96)—is not the primary authenticating mechanism of the text’s fulfillment of signification. At one point in the metamorphoses of the myth, Orpheus was not used simply as an apology for monotheism; he was integrated into early Christian culture. One might therefore understand communal Christian singing as a fulfillment of

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39 The reader should recall here Clement’s argument “that as Old Testament prophets wrote without complete understanding about Christ, so Greek poets may without comprehending have seen the truth.” (Irwin 1982: 53)

The Platonist strands of vocal illumination and inspiration are here allegorically combined:

[S]imply by singing [David] healed Saul who was plagued by [demons]. The Lord made man a beautiful breathing instrument after his own image; certainly he is himself an all-harmonious instrument of God, well tuned and holy, the transcendental wisdom, the heavenly Word… This is the New Song, the shining manifestation among us now of the Word, who was in the beginning and before the beginning. (Clement Exhortation I 5, in McKinnon 1987: 30)

Other relevant passages of Clement’s theology of the New Song are given in McKinnon 1987: 28-31.

Furthermore, Clement does not stand alone in his Orphic figuration of Christ:

The accounts offered by Clement and Eusebius are the main sources for the idea in the writings of the early Fathers that the pagan legend of Orpheus in some way prefigures the story of Christ’s ministry […]. In the fourth and fifth centuries this idea became more wide spread, and even well into the Middle Ages writers compared the actions of Orpheus and Christ in the underworld, showing that what Orpheus had begun, Christ had finished, fulfilling prophecies inherent in pagan myth. (Friedman 1970: 57)

Of course, Friedman is also quite clear about the stylistic differences between allegory, symbol, and figure.
Orphic prefiguration, not as an expression of individual wills, but as a subjection to the actions of God’s own song in the world. The significance and pertinence of this Orphic figuration, however, could only be appreciated after the previous discussion of vocal worship, as well as figural prophecy and its co-dependence on the Christian Platonic doctrine of the voice. In its departure from traditional literary historicity, Orphic figuration does not tear apart the historical fabric of literature; rather, it reveals the vocal presence it has always tried to contain and which opens literary space to revelation through narrative mechanisms that perform a transcending reading within the written text. A vocal projection of a previously internalized text might free and concretize a desire for knowledge that, without vocal expression, could lead to blind indoctrination—in the belief that one owns the truth, that one’s eye had grasped its meaning, or that one’s inner ear had heard the auto-affected voice as the Word.  

*L’Orfeo & the Origins of Opera According to Psychoanalysis*

A characteristic of figural interpretation, sometimes advantageous, other times inconvenient, is the breadth of possibilities it allows one to choose from in order to compile one’s series of historical figures. In the present case, the series is constrained by other factors, such as the voice’s preponderance in the formal organization of the figure and its

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40 For Derrida, “there would be no history of writing and knowledge—one might simply say no history at all—except between” the poles of an absolute pictography doubling the world and an absolute “graphie reducing” the world “to almost nothing.” (Derrida 1976: 285) His conclusions on this subject show how an eschatological a- or non-historical definition of human history is necessarily based on an understanding of written history as a fall from the Word’s incarnation.

If one has always thought the contrary, opposing history to the transparence of true language, it was no doubt through a blindness toward the archeological or eschatological limits, starting from which the concept of history was formed. (Derrida 1976: 285)

It is quite singular then that literary historicity should be predicated upon the writing of One voice and its ties to the illuminating sphere of Forms and Ideas in the visual figure. Even the addition of another prefigured voice—that of Orpheus—needs to be excluded in order to preserve textual historicity.
visual attributes, which it borrows in part from Orphic allegory and symbolism. While these visual attributes impress an image of the ideal singer on the poet/musician, they only indicate an ideal sound, and in turn, to cite Abbate out of context, foster a “music that is present but that points towards music that is absent, and that can never be captured.” (Abbate 2001: 26) As I make my way to Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo, I will once again make a historical detour through Orphic figuration to examine the stories theorists and critics write about opera’s origins and how it might obfuscate our view of the voice’s role in the creation of opera.

In *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Barthes warns the reader about the repetitions that come with being in love: “Il ne sait pas encore qu’en bon sujet culturel il ne doit ni se répéter, ni se contredire, ni prendre le tout pour la partie; il sait seulement que ce qui lui passe par la tête à tel moment est marqué, comme l’empreinte d’un code.” (Barthes 1977: 8) The fragments of his book are organized in alphabetical order and offer variations on the theme of the loved-one’s absence. Although the literary figure is in itself historically repetitive, Barthes couples his figuration with an equally recurring literary theme: love. These fragments are meaningful not only because of their figurative style, but also because, combined, their economy of desire provides an underlying narrative unity. Apart from his repeated annotations referencing Wagner’s *Tristan* and Goethe’s *Werther* throughout the

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41 Modern historical concerns aside, this is certainly how the musicologist Frederick W. Sternfeld understood the *figura* of Orpheus. Picking up on Igor Stravinsky’s use of the term to describe Noah, (Stravinsky & Craft 1982: 72) Sternfeld was the first musicologist to think of Orpheus as a *figura* in the Auerbachian sense. (Sternfeld 1988: 179-180) See his article for a thorough account of Renaissance opera’s poetic reprise of medieval Orphic figuration through its adaptation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the *Ovide moralisé*. I am following here a complementary thread.

42 Orpheus is such a familiar character in literature, especially poetry, that the constitution of a series seems necessarily arbitrary without the structural condition of figuration. Unfortunately, there is neither in French nor in English an equivalent to the German sourcebook *Mythos Orpheus: Texte von Vergil bis Ingeborg Bachmann* edited by Wolfgang Storch (1997), which provides the reader with excerpts from approximately eighty authors, from Aristophanes to Arwood, as well as bibliographical indications.
book, which I discuss in chapter two, the fragment “Inexpressible Love” is particularly interesting to this study since it opens on a definition of writing as the “desire to ‘express’ amorous feeling in a ‘creation’ (particularly of writing),” while citing Orpheus to make its point. (Barthes 1977: 113)

Barthes evokes Orpheus and the scene of his turning back toward Eurydice as a metaphor for writing and the loss of the beloved. Authenticity is at stake because expression might be seen as taking away from the original sentiment, just like Augustine cannot voice thoughts about present time without betraying his sense of self-presence. One is not simply transmitting the likeliness of someone here, but trying to pour into the page the particularities of one’s desire. The “tearing apart” of which Barthes writes is at once the looking back on love—hence the Virgilian reference to Orpheus—and the acceptance that writing about it is “sacrificing a bit of one’s Imaginary,” since love “must be sublimated in aesthetic creation” and creates an authorial tension that leads to an almost post-modern conclusion that “one cannot write without mourning one’s sincerity.” (Barthes 1977: 113-15)

Barthes is thinking about love through literature, but writing in psychoanalytic terms. His thoughts about language are informed by an incapacitating experience: “the knowledge that these things that I will write will never make me be loved by whom I love.” (Barthes 1977: 116) No matter what one sacrifices to write of the absent loved-one, one is not necessarily

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43 “Écrire […] donne lieu [au] désir d’« exprimer » le sentiment amoureux dans une « création » (notamment d’écriture).” (Barthes 1977: 113) The translations of Barthes are mine.

44 In The Space of Literature, Maurice Blanchot also reads this strand of the Orpheus myth as a metaphor for literary creation. Although he uses different terms, he basically comes to the same conclusion as Barthes: the enduring quality of the myth stems from its structural capacity in allowing successive generations of artists and thinkers the possibility to create new sets of metaphors to give meaning to the “night beyond night,” which awaits even those whose sensual sacrifices have been successfully sublimated. (Blanchot 1955: 179-184) Blanchot’s identification with Orpheus is closer to Mallarmé’s poetic music of silence (Strauss 1971) than the loud vulgarity of the operatic voice I am here putting on display.
loved in return for having thus torn oneself apart.  

Although the figure of the lover can be shown to repeat itself through literary history, Barthes’s rhetorical deviation of the figure’s schema—an inverted deviation—leads not so much to an eternal beyond than to a psychical dead-end. This kind of arch, in its libidinal source and telos, is typical of a modern relation to belief. Whereas Augustine trusts God and Dante trusts Beatrice to guide their writing through revelation, Barthes cites fictional lovers who, for better or for worse, entrust their death-wish to the Other-qua-Lover: Werther, Tristan, and Orpheus, the latter straddling pre-modern and modern worldviews. In both worldviews, the writing of romance is not concerned with the enjoyment of this world, but with its renunciation, with its sacrifice. Whereas Augustine willingly sacrifices this world to his Lord and a better hereafter, Barthes’ sacrifice, however, is structurally imposed upon his subjectivity: the optimism of the former and the pessimistic laissez-faire of the latter speak of the dialectical difference between an imagined complete Other and the knowledge of the Other’s equal alienation from his/her desire. Yet—and here I anticipate a later discussion with Linda and Michael Hutcheon—is the ultimate dialectical sacrifice that of one’s desire for the living world or rather the sacrifice of our death wish (Thanatos) to renounce on desire (Eros) because of the broken promise of a fallen transcendental figure? The dialectical sacrifice of modernity is choosing desire over jouissance, of accepting the world not as we wish it (not) to be, but as what it (not so) simply is. Desire would then be a structural faith without figural belief.

The wish to master expression, to reduce experience to a text, is also akin to  

45 Sternfeld’s article “Orpheus, Ovid and Opera,” which I have mentioned above, traces this trope common to literary creation and opera to Ovid’s *Heroides* in the longstanding tradition of the lament. (Sternfeld 1988: 177-78) He comments on how pathetic repetition in Ovid had found its way to the theatre—for example, “Make verbal repetitions of her moans” (line 831) from Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*—and how, “Without considerations of these literary models the verse of the operatic libretti, which permits the composers to allow their protagonists to lament and to ‘make repetition of their moans’, cannot be understood.” (Ibid.)
renouncing the limits of knowledge, especially when it is predicated upon a phonetic language mined by the sonorous demands of the unconscious. All poets and writers share similar frustrations to those Barthes describes in writing haikus. (Barthes 1977: 114) The presence of the voice within a text whose goal it is to master expression is not necessarily a mechanism of intimacy, as I discuss later in relation to Ossian, but rather a site of frustration. Although one can use the voice to simulate closeness between the writer and the reader—the legendary “author’s voice”—vocal nuances in narratives cannot function simply as phenomenological cues ready to be inscribed in the categories of knowledge, as we have learned from Derrida, starting with his reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*. The voice and the figures that embody these cues betray the problem of time in the text, while the lover’s wish for union with the dead beloved necessitates time’s definitive end, insofar as the subject experiences it. Barthes’ references to *Werther* and Orpheus in this fragment are symptomatic of this enduring frustration of romantic love and of its formal equivalent in the voice’s present absence within the text.⁴⁶

Barthes is here, however, as much of a literary saint as Augustine was in *Confessions*. His style is just as didactic, meant to welcome, encourage, and educate. At each reiteration of his ignorance, feeling, emotion, and sensitivity form and dissipate only to reform a few lines below or beckon one back to visit a previous passage. This lack of systematic exposition in Barthes’ fragments is similar to Augustine’s *Confessions* in relation to their author’s work: both texts acknowledge a fragmentary knowledge, although both authors have extensive bodies of work that testify to the literary exception of their style. This aporetic style—as Wikshåland, following Ricoeur, calls it—is not only cultivated for the sake of rhetorical effect, but for the

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⁴⁶ I address the question of the voice’s present absence, its role in creating the illusion of intimacy between author and reader, as well as Derrida’s grammatology in the next chapters.
sake of historical synchronism: citations and references to the past are brought in to fill the present’s aporia, thereby making sense of what was previously a lack of meaning. In doing so, however, Barthes reveals the vocal weft in his fabric of citations: a double weft which unites and separates at the same time; the literary voices that harmonize the discordance of the absent loved-one’s call and the writer’s calling.

To say at this point that love occupies a key position in Western cultural history would be tautological; however, the posterity of Virgil’s romancing of the Orpheus myth renders it impossible to avoid. Along with Jakob Burkhardt’s notion of individualism as a re-emerging characteristic of the Renaissance, modern romance can be seen as the keystone that holds together the individual’s first attempts at conciliating his own worldview with the cultural hegemony fostered by Christianity’s institutions. Above this keystone, poets raised translucent portraits of ideal otherness, like Beatrice, through which the heavens shone down upon their manuscripts. As the detour through Barthes’s fragments show, our own amorous sensibilities seem more inclined to look down at love’s images through the ruins of engulfed cathedrals or temples crumbling under sprawling vines; that is, when one’s view of love is informed by literary history at all. Although romantic love endures, the psychoanalytic view of less-than-ideal love may cloud one’s understanding of opera’s history and the Orphic figuration it transmits.47

Another example of a confession that involves the voice, Orpheus, and love comes from Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek’s co-authored book, Opera’s Second Death. Their introduction, “For the Love of Opera,” starts by denouncing opera’s mistreatment at the hands of psychoanalytic critics and signs off with the wish that—like the Vienna

47 The French historian Jules Michelet first used the term Renaissance in 1855 (“Histoire de la France au 16e siècle: La Renaissance”) to describe the period in which the West discovered its Greek past. Five years later, Jakob Burkhardt used it again in “The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,” adding individualism to Humanism’s characteristics and thereby consecrating the term. (Palisca 1985: 2)
Philharmonic reacting to Wilhelm Furtwangler’s fortuitous appearance during its rehearsal with a less imposing conductor—the idealized presence of opera during the book’s conception will have influenced them too to give it their best: “The two authors entertain an immodest hope that a similar effect will be discernible in the present book: that the love of its subject did leave at least some traces in its writing.” (Dolar and Žižek 2002: ix) The fact that Furtwangler in the anecdote did not need to speak but only needed to be seen or felt points to the general stance of the book: this brand of psychoanalytic criticism’s interpretation will be geared toward expressing its desire to Opera.48

Needless to say, they do express their point of view. Since opera was invented at the turn of the seventeenth century in Italy, in his portion of the book—aptly titled “If Music Be The Food Of Love”—Dolar speaks of its birth from the spirit of absolutism. (Dolar 2002: 6-7) He conciliates political and philosophical absolutism through the invocatory nexus of the Orpheus myth: “In Orpheus’s story, Pluto, god of the underworld, yields to the singer’s lament and supplication […]” (Dolar 2002: 9) This equation allows Dolar to conflate temporal and divine power. Hades is not only a god, but also a king, who responds mercifully to musical appeals:

To awaken love, and hence mercy, in deities and monarch – for mercy is their only way to show love to humans – and to awaken the love of a beautiful woman: The whole history of opera is there, the simple clue to all its plots and scenarios. In its minimal dispositive the opera not only enacts this appeal but also simultaneously stages its effect: It enacts the response of the Other, the act of mercy and love – that is the sublime moment toward which opera strives, the true object of the opera. (Dolar 2002: 11)

Sternfeld might have agreed with Dolar that opera is historically constituted in a series of lamenti, which are either addressed to a sovereign or to a lover elevated to the same position.

48 Cf. Vivès’s structural analysis of the voice and its objectual relations in the dialectics of desire:

From this perspective, however, the Orphic voice in opera seems to be reduced to the figure’s pathetic function in the Ancient Greek epic, that is to appease and charm the powerful. Like some kind of archaic musical *logos,* (see Lincoln) the singing voice in this psychoanalytic criticism is subjected to the critic’s authoritative myth-making of Opera.49

While Dolar subjects Orpheus to an absolute monarch in order to represent the dialectic of desire and *jouissance* of opera, and Vivès uses the castrato—a literary figure for twentieth-century structuralist and feminist criticism if there ever was one—or, better yet, the castrato-cum-angel as a figure for sacred music, neither sees the necessity of questioning their literary use of vocal figuration. (Vivès 2012: 58-59) This assumption seems to reveal their cultural presupposition that music carries the voice in the same manner as a subject does, which might also be opera’s very effect on modernity: the singer’s performance of a text, especially if his or her character on stage is also a singer, embodies a voice previously read, thereby subjecting music, if not to the rationality of the word, then at least to the structuring of notation and to the representative visual logic of its staging. By passing Orpheus’s voice through the graph of desire, however, psychoanalytic criticism backs the operatic voice up against the conceptual wall of the Thing. One might understand the psychic drive to sing then as an expression of drives that circulate around the voice as object, as a fragment of the Thing. The singing voice or the operatic voice, however, cannot simply be personified as the subject of a structural plot without conflating the layers of voices at work in opera, not to mention without confusing different aesthetics of vocal expression. In other words, the psychoanalytic critics of opera would have us believe that the voice in song is directly created by the singing subject, when in fact, the singing subject is performing a text and is engaged in a dramatic reciting that combines multiple voices. Thinking of

49 I take up this topic again in the conclusion of the thesis.
Orpheus operas as media, as sites in which these drives can be directed to and have them come back to us, not only inscribes them in the historical emergence of the subject of the unconscious, but aligns them in a larger discussion of alienation. By insisting upon a difference between the subject’s voice and the Orphic or singing voice, one opens a space which makes it possible to investigate the changing aesthetics of opera, and the desire of composers to inscribe their unsung voices within opera’s textual space. The distinctions I am making here will be further justified in the third chapter.

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the Thing refers to the lost object that was the total union of the *infans* with the caregiver, a mythical stage that predates the necessary perception of distinguishing between bodies that, in turn, allows language to take hold in the emerging subject.50 Dolar stages opera’s artistic genesis—its attempt at recreating Greek tragedy—in the same terms as the psychic formation of the subject and its symptomatic redeployment in self-consciousness:

On one hand, it [opera] presents a fabulous past transcending time, beyond time, a past raised to the temporality of fantasy; on the other hand, it invents new forms by means of which the myth can find a dramatic realization and a corresponding new social function and hence, in its very above-time nature, introduce new temporality. (Dolar 2002: 6)

For Dolar, opera, like the subject, unconsciously relates to an irretrievable past, which it asymptotically attempts to revisit. Lacan described this kind of theoretical fiction as myth-making, since it uses language to describe a moment before the emergence of subjectivity into language.51 How then can we think about the pre-linguistic Thing when our thinking is...

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51 See Lacan’s seminar on Psychoses. (1981: 56-86) Although I will turn to Derrida later on in the next chapters, one should already note here how his deconstruction of Rousseau’s musical linguistics leads him to the same conclusions:

The neume, the spell of self-presence, inarticulate experience of time, tantamount to saying: *utopia*. Such a language—since a language must be involved—does not, properly speaking, take place. […] What [chapters 8 through 11 of Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Language*] describe is that before articulation,
always already determined by language? Indeed, one cannot describe in speech the (con)fusion with the Thing one would have experienced, except by using metaphors (and parentheses). Such descriptions of origins (or telos) are also at work in the myths of Plato’s dialogues. The problem with opera is that it is not a subject, except when using the expression *a subject of study*. And even if we were to decide to treat it as such, it is still irresponsible to pretend it was not inscribed from the start in the meshes of its own filiation.\(^2\)

Treating the preponderant presence of the Orpheus myth as a revealing structure of opera can give us insight into the ideas and aesthetics of the time. Unfortunately, the superimposition of a myth of linguistic origins upon opera disconnects psychoanalytic readings of opera from enquiries into its Humanist antecedents. Dolar and Žižek are not alone here: their predecessor, Michel Poizat’s focus on later opera made him rush over

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\(^2\) Instead of examining theories of the voice and singing in the Renaissance, Vivès uses the figure of the castrato to organize his brief reading of sacred music and Church doctrine concerning the voice. (Vivès 2012: 58-59; 62-63) His association of the castrato to yet another vocal figure, the angel, excludes the vocal and pneumatic aspects of prophecy from his argument—according to him, a decidedly psychotic stance. In his historical vocal timeline, these figurations replace the Pythagorean theory of harmony, which like the Platonist doctrine of the voice had pointed back to Plato’s *Timaeus* and had mediated the divine and the human until the Renaissance. (Godwin 1993) Like the castrato, the figure of the angel offers Vivès the means for a historically superficial structural reading of the aesthetic stakes in play in the voice’s figural transmission.

Nelly Furman’s review of psychoanalytic criticism of opera in the 1980s—Anne-Marie Castèrède’s *La Voix et ses sortilèges*, Poizat’s book and Philippe-Joseph Salazar’s *Idéologies de l’opéra*—situates these non-musicological studies in a postmodern break with usual historical documentation. These books stage the voice-cum-opera in order to represent the stakes of embodied sound in vocal emission and in the spectator’s enjoyment or *jouissance* of singing. The postmodern epistemological premises Furman observes in these books, also explain the difficulties I have had with their almost *ex nihilo* conception of opera’s genesis. A decade later, Dolar does try to musically historicize his interpretation by citing Sternfeld’s seminal essay on Orpheus and opera. (Sternfeld 1988) Vivès, however, sticks to this reduction of opera to the voice throughout his book and repeatedly cites Lévi-Strauss to justify his framework:

Sans doute la musique parle-t-elle aussi ; mais ce ne peut être qu’en raison de son rapport négatif à la langue […] : il ne saurait y avoir de la musique sans langage qui lui préexiste et dont elle continue à dépendre […]. La musique, c’est le langage moins le sens […]. (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 578-579, in Vivès 2012: 32).

Such theoretical conflations of voice and music are further discussed in chapter three in relation to music and narratology.
Monteverdi; (Poizat 1986: 80-81) and his successor, Jean-Michel Vivès, almost conflates music with the voice, citing Claude Lévi-Strauss as a musicological authority in the matter: “Tout au long de cet ouvrage, musique et voix seront considérées comme étroitement liées, la musique n’étant que l’extension instrumentalisée de la voix.” (Vivès 2012: 32-33) This is not to say that the spoken voice does not have its own musicality, metaphorically understood as meaning its range of intonations and shades, nor to say that music did not help in elucidating certain problems within structuralism, just as a certain attention to the voice was essential in understanding psychosis. Nevertheless, should criticism of opera “enter the list at [the Thing’s] call and howl at the sound of [its] voice”? (Lacan 2006: 342)

Evacuating the difference between voice and music (between Orpheus and the subject of the unconscious) precludes a scholarly discussion of opera’s aesthetic genesis before it even takes place. As touched upon previously, a reason for this might be how psychoanalysis comes to the voice from its clinical work on psychosis. For example, Denis Vasse’s L’ombilic et la voix (1974) theorizes the voice based on observations of psychotic children, and Michèle Aquien’s L’Autre versant du langage (1997) approaches the poetical voice via Antonin Artaud’s Glossolalies, written during his internment in a psychiatric ward. Both authors follow Lacan’s work on the voice as an object of the drive, a theory he started to elaborate through clinical work with psychotic patients, in which the voice of the Other is
always literally taken as an injunction to jouissance. (Lacan 1981) Faced with this imagined demand of the Other, the psychotic subject is excluded from the symbolic space of language. Psychoanalytic readings of opera are often interested in the sonorous aspects of the singing voice from a similar perspective, although Orpheus’s invocation inverses the direction of the address. Looming behind the invocation, however, is the possibility that this singing voice might not make it back from this imaginary encounter with Otherness. The return from this imaginary encounter produces a symbolic castration that enfolds the subject in the wefts of language. No wonder then that certain critics inspired by these theories limit the interpretation of opera’s birth to a love-sick and tragic Roman(tic) Orpheus, in his Virgilian and Ovidian guise, who, in his post-descent guise speaks not to other human beings, but to animals lacking in reason. This psychotic Orpheus regresses to the infans stage, does his best to incorporate a Thing he might have come too close to in Hades, and is forcluded to the linguistic articulation of sound, making friends with living beings devoid of speech. Taken to its logical conclusion, this post-modern psychoanalytic criticism of opera inverts the historical development of the Orpheus myth: it makes Orpheus stand for the exact reverse

53 The preceding quote of Lacan is from the paper “The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud” that Lacan gave in Vienna on 7 November 1955, and in which the voice plays an important role. In his opening remarks, Lacan speaks of Vienna “making itself heard again through the voice of its Opera.” (Lacan 2002: 334) The Vienna State Opera had reopened only a few days earlier (5 November 1955) after undergoing reconstruction to repair the devastation left by American bombardments during WWII. Lacan could not have imagined or wished for a better historically charged event with which to compare his return to Freud with the American ego derivations from Freudianism: he is the herald of a noble old-world defense against the historical amnesia Americans and Allied forces seemed to promote by bombarding Vienna’s architectural heritage and whose psychoanalytic school, by using Freudian terms as clean slates with an old veneer, wished to impose ego theories incompatible with the foundations of Freud’s theories. The reader will understand then how the baroque section of Lacan’s paper titled “The Thing Speaks of Itself” (340-342) should be read as Lacan’s personification of the Thing, a prologue for the mythical origins of the psychoanalytic opera (of Anna Freud’s love and betrayal?). <http://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/Content.Node/home/opernhaus/geschichte/Allgemein.en.php> Accessed 9 December 2012.

In order to better understand the Lacanian Thing, one can read Lacan’s paper on “The Subversion of the Subject in the Dialectics of Desire” (Lacan 2006: 671-702) and turn to Bruce Fink’s commentary. (Fink 2004: 106-128) If these texts will not tell the reader what the Thing is, it will certainly give one an understanding of how psychoanalysis thinks of it through the object voice: as a remnant of the desiring subject’s entry into language and—seeing as how the whole desiring dialectic veils the Thing—the unattainable object of the subject’s desire.
of what Italian Humanists saw in him. In the process, however, psychoanalysis does make one thing crystal clear: written history and the expressive voice, like myth and rational analysis, are theoretically antagonistic.
The Backwards-Glancing Voice

The meaning of the voice in literature goes far beyond the rhetorical function of speech and those rhetorical figures with which textual space is personified; in it converge the work of the poet and that of the historian, who Heine, following Friedrich Schlegel, described as “the backwards looking Prophet.”

Sigrid Weigel

This section situates Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo in a Humanist reception of the Orpheus figure. In discussing the many oral characteristics of poetic and musical practice in Marsilio Ficino’s intellectual sphere of influence, I aim to present early opera as a conciliation of a sonorous cosmological worldview with an increased use of musical notation. At the time, an authoritative neo-Platonic chronology attributed to Orpheus the revelation of the Music of the Spheres. This attribution foregrounds how the fable, as a method of literary interpretation, at once enables Orphean authorship while reuniting with an esoteric conception of knowledge based on opaque veiling and illuminating revelation. Orpheus thus became a figure for mystical revelations that could be impressed on the listener through the initiate’s improvised musical expression. The discussion then goes on to examine how sixteenth-century poetics and musical theory attempt a mediation of a mimetic music, in line with cosmic vibrations, and the necessity of a univocal design for the music to affect its listeners. Humanist opera thereby inverses the dynamic tension between the communal singers and individual performers by establishing the audience’s passivity in this secular version of musical worship. The composer’s use of musical figuration can be understood as the emergence of literary space within music for the staging of a voice that would be at once sonorous, yet not completely metaphysical. I then return to the notion of voice, writing, and the contemporaneous literary anxiety of losing historical footing under the pressures brought about by the poetic extensions of cultural studies. This contrast aims to remind readers that
music was making use of sonorous figures well before New Historicism came along. It also begins to situate the interrogation of the intersections of musical and literary history, thereby grounding interpretations of the voice in later works.

*Orpheus and Figuration in Italian Humanism*

In a letter to the scientist Paul of Middelburg written near the end of the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino, a priest, doctor, and humanist philosopher wrote:

>This age, like a golden age, has brought back to light those liberal disciplines that were practically extinguished: grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre. (in Voss 2002: 227)

Remarkably, “singing songs to the Orphic lyre” figures among disciplines that for the most part have not only found their way, but also secured their place in the modern university’s faculty of Arts and Humanities. Although this juxtaposition of disciplines might seem odd, when confronted with the question of “how seriously all this should all be taken,” John Warden, who is aware of “the gently bantering tone” of Ficino’s letters cites the same excerpt as “further evidence that Ficino himself took his singing and playing seriously.” (Warden 1982: 87-88) Circular epistolary references aside, when Ficino wrote the letter at the age of 59, he was aware of the central role he had played in this golden age: his self-identification with Orpheus in this wider context speaks to the figure’s role in deviating the traditional scholastic reception of knowledge.54

54 Both Warden and Voss cite contemporaries of Ficino on his identification with Orpheus: Lorenzo de Medici and his grand-father Cosimo, Naldo Naldi, Poliziano (who wrote a proto-operatic *Orfeo*, see Pirotta 1975), Corsi, etc. (Warden 1982: 85-87; Voss 2002: 228) Lorenzo de Medici’s poem *L’Albercazione* is especially telling:

>... una nuova voce a sì gli trasse  
da più dolci armonie legate e presi.  
Pensai che Orfeo al mondo ritornasse…

(in Warden 1982: 85-86)

(A new voice drew them towards itself, bound and taken captive by its sweeter harmony. I thought that
In 1439, when Ficino was only a child, Florence was the stage of an unofficial Council of the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Churches. Although the schism was not healed, the meeting signaled the beginning of Latin translations of the writings of Eastern Church Fathers and, along with them, a revival of Platonism. In the years to come, the head of the Florentine Camaldulensian monastic order, Ambrogio Traversari, would translate ancient Christian Platonists, including pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite:

Dyonisius provides one of the keys to Renaissance Platonism in his use of mystical symbolism to evoke the divine realm. His emphasis on a higher, intuitive intellect, *noesis*, clearly places the discursive reasoning, so stressed by the schoolmen, on a secondary plane. [...] While undertaking these translations Traversari sought with the Lord’s help “to enter with Moses into that darkness more full of grace than any light, so that from there I may hear the voice of the Lord.” (Lackner 2002: 21-22)

While Dennis Lackner places emphasis on Dyonisius’s symbolic theology, Traversari is undoubtedly placing himself, the translator, in terms of figuration as *declamatio*: the lending of his voice to a historical figure. This return to the writings of Eastern and Hellenic Church Fathers further supported practices of figurative reading, which followed from secular poetic interests. Secular poetry had been severely criticized by scholastic conservatives who wanted to rid Italian cities of their classical traces. Thus Traversari’s Christian Humanism benefited from Coluccio Salutati’s 1397 defense of classical poetry. He had argued that without knowledge of classical poetry, Scholastic theologians could not understand and interpret the figural writings of the Church Fathers. He “asserted that whoever condemns the nature of poetry condemns Scripture itself, which uses the figural and allegorical language of the poets.” (Stinger 1977: 9) I will show how the flourishing of Italian Humanism is indebted to literature and mysticism’s subversion of historical teleology, which especially applies in

Orpheus had returned to the world.)
regards to Orpheus.  

Although the striking Orphic symbolism of Ficino’s lyre and his reported singing from the *Orphic Hymns* (Athanassakis 1977) makes for a convenient entry point into the matter, and though the fecundity of neo-Platonic allegorical interpretation has led some to comment on how “anything can be shown to be Orphic” (Warden 1982: 91), figuration quickly becomes a convincing approach to explain Ficino’s involvement with the Greek myth. Following in Traversari’s footsteps, Ficino would further explore Platonic mysticism through not only Judeo-Christian figures but, like Clement before him, through the pagan figure as well:

> In the latter fifteenth century, Florentine intellectual energies centered on the revival of Platonic and neo-Platonic thought. Ficino’s return to metaphysics, and the stress he and Pico placed on the esoteric *prisci theologi* – Hermes Trismegistos, Zoroaster, and Orpheus – went beyond Traversari’s conception of sacred letters. The Florentine neo-Platonists sought the prophetic, poetic, mystical, and mythic origins of religion in the mysteries of the Egyptian and Persian sages rather than in the piety of the Greek Fathers. (Stinger 1977: 224)

It was mainly his attribution of the *Orphica* quoted by the Church Fathers to a historical author—one in a line of “ancient thinkers, the *prisci theologi*, all teaching the same truth” (Walker 1953: 105)—that fostered Humanism’s renewal of Orphic figuration. Like the neo-

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55 The literary concept of the authorial persona, of the public figure that transmits a tradition’s message, was not unknown to Traversari, or to pseudo-Dyonisius for that matter:

> Like Plotinus and the Cappadocians before him, Dionysius does not claim to be an innovator, but rather a communicator of a tradition. Adopting the persona of an ancient figure was a long established rhetorical device (known as declamatio), and others in Dionysius’ circle also adopted pseudonymous names from the New Testament. Dionysius’ works, therefore, are much less a forgery in the modern sense than an acknowledgement of reception and transmission, namely, a kind of coded recognition that the resonances of any sacred undertaking are intertextual, bringing the diachronic structures of time and space together in a synchronic way, and that this theological teaching, at least, is dialectically received from another. (Corrigan & Harrington)

Friedman also contextualizes Salutati’s defense of secular poetry by emphasizing the knowledge one could find in its stories of descent:

> Virgil, Orpheus, and Dante were all poets who had made the voyage to hell and returned to tell of its mysteries. For the Christian, [according to Salutati] these stories were particularly instructive because they allowed him to make that journey vicariously rather than as a punishment for his sins in this world. (Friedman 1970: 142)
Platonists of Antiquity, those following Ficino in the sixteenth century believed that Orpheus, if he was not the author of all *Orphica*, was nevertheless a historical figure who had founded a mystery religion and left sacred writings. Indeed, “it is the whole figure of Orpheus, *three-dimensional and real*, not just his theoretical teaching, that is drawn in Ficino’s thought.” (Warden 1982: 89, my emphasis) The Renaissance Platonist reception of Orpheus as a monotheist theologian differs, however, from Clement’s reception of the *Testament of Orpheus* in one important respect. With Ficino the voice of Orpheus does not only carry a *scintillating* light that prefigures Christ’s *illumination*, but like Moses, he had made use of the poetic veiling of truth with fables, and its correlative, the allegorical interpretation of religious texts [...] in order not to blind the simple and ignorant with too much light. [...] Thus Plato and Orpheus are only following their master’s example [Moses] when they too conceal the truth in enigmas, fables and myths, lest it should be profaned and despised by the vulgar. (Walker 1953: 106)

Prefiguration, in this case, is no longer predicated upon the fulfillment of its partial truth, but on veiling a light it had already known. With this theory of the fables, the figure itself becomes veiled in allegory in order to enter, like Traversari, “into that darkness more full of grace than any light.” Thus the fable, with its use of symbol and allegory, unites with figuration during the Renaissance mainly through Orpheus. By positing Orpheus as an author at the source of this knowledge, however, it reopens the possibility of his poetic fulfillment in the historical present. Instead of being subjected to a world that has already been fulfilled by Christ’s coming, through the Orpheus figure, Humanism renews with a prophetic view of history that opens its poetic horizons onto new possibilities. One can already guess the importance of figuration in understanding Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*, especially

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56 Walker goes on to clarify how he is “using the term ‘allegorical’ a little loosely, to refer to any non-literal interpretation.” (Walker 1953: 106n5)
in light of its subtitle, *favola in musica*.

For Humanists, Orpheus was the figure who united revealed knowledge and music. The first Greek in Ficino’s line of *prisci theologi* to have been initiated to Mosaic monotheism in Egypt, neither Plato nor Pythagoras, but Orpheus became the “ultimate source of the *Timaeus*.” (Walker 1953: 100) Along with this authorship, he also became the creator of a theory known as the Music of the Spheres, a theory traditionally attributed to Pythagoras, which claims that a demiurge created a singing cosmos in which revolving planets produce tones according to numeric ratios, sounds that humans can no longer hear from force of habit. This theory of music was transmitted during the Middle Ages in Boethius’s *De institutionae musica*. In an authorial stance similar to his contemporary Denis the Aeropagite, Boethius was relaying Greek musical tradition by making a compendium of earlier works on music. While he was aware, however, through Ptolemy’s *Harmonics* of the other musical theory of Antiquity—the Aristoxenian tradition relied on the ear’s perception of tone division rather than on mathematical ratios—his book nevertheless adhered to the cosmologically inspired mathematical conception of tone division and scale elaboration.

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57 According to Walker, the elder Pico knew of Aristotle’s rebuttal of Orpheus’s authorship of *Orphica* via Cicero; however, “those syncretists who make great use of Orpheus assumed that the Orphica, even if not all literally by Orpheus, were the genuine sacred writings of a very ancient religious tradition.” (Walker 1953: 104) Pico della Mirandola (the younger Pico) also subscribed to the theory of the pagan veiling of truth: “Orpheus ‘intervowed the mysteries of his doctrines with the texture of fables, covering them with a poetic veil’ so that to the uninitiated they would appear to be ‘the sheerest tales and trifles.’” (in Wind 1980: 18) Interestingly, as a symbol of the obfuscation of Orpheus in the nineteenth century, which is the subject of the next chapter, the Victorian art critic Walter Pater in his widely read studies on *The Renaissance* (1873) writes about Pico’s interest in the ancient lineage of theologians (*prisci theologi*), but omits Orpheus from the list. (Pater 1980: 34-35) This being said, the theory of the fables as allegorical reading, is neither a Humanist creation, nor is it simply a patristic tool to incorporate the Hellenistic tradition into Christian culture: ever since the first critiques of Homer, it has been a way of according the past with the present. For a summary of the allegorical reading of fables in Ancient Greece, consult Sorel 2000: 3-18.

58 The figural interpretation of Orpheus as the foreshadowed author of *Timaeus* is so important that I reproduce here the context in which I cite Walker:

It is also important […] that according to Diodorus Siculus [Orpheus] learnt his religious rites in Egypt. Though Diodorus and others specifically connect these with Dionysus, he was also regarded as the source of all esoteric Greek religion; as Proclus says, “All the Greeks’ theology is the offspring of the Orphic mystical doctrine.” Among the sects thus connected with Orpheus the Pythagoreans are
Although “Boethius’ treatise on music […] carried classical theory into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” (Godwin 1993: 86) it was the first time Orpheus was considered the author of its theories. For example, when Ficino writes a letter to Domenico Benivieni, a musician and member of his Florentine Academy, he quotes Orpheus on the origin of Greek musical terminology:

> Advancing step by step on this principle, the notes proceed from the low one, which Orpheus calls hypate, up to the high one, which he calls neate, by way of the intermediate ones, which he calls dorian. (Ficino in Godwin 1993: 165)

From these Orphic principles, Ficino goes on to explain the consonant and dissonant tensions of the diatonic scale and, further on, allegorically associates them to the divine characteristics of the planets they represent. (in Godwin 1993: 168-69) There are no puns in this letter and its “bantering tone” lies in the complements Ficino makes to Benivieni, not in the letter’s theoretical content.59

No matter how Ficino tries to historically ground his theory of musical agency with Orphic figuration, it nevertheless largely relies on an allegorical interpretation of the powers of music within a pre-ordained universal order. While Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the notion of Enlightenment deconstructs the very idea of the cultural and historical

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59 The letter then describes the shape of this scale as “round, yet ovate rather than spherical.” (in Godwin 1993: 165) Godwin notes that although this statement cannot be traced to the Pythagoreans, other letters of Ficino encourage him “to add the cosmic parallel of the Orphic World-Egg” (Godwin 1993: 446) from the Orphic Theogony (Guthrie 1935: 79-83) in order to make sense of this reference.
progress the Renaissance might seem to have sparked and ignited, (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002; Bouwsma 2000: vii-viii) Burkhardt’s observation on the re-emergence of individuality during this period still holds fast, if one allows for some earlier exceptions. (Burkhardt 1988)

Ficino’s (self-)identification with Orpheus speaks volumes about his belief in the individual’s power to reconfigure existence, albeit by tuning oneself to the demiurge’s eternal harmonic grid. Thus his epistemological frame of reference further deviates from the Orphic descent Augustine had subverted. Relying on the fourth-century CE Argonautica, Ficino is the first modern writer to effectively argue for a lieto fine, a happy ending to the myth, to replace Virgil’s romantic death-wish:

And so, like Orpheus, Ficino rescues her—but not from Hades. His is a new Eurydice, a Eurydice who shines with the clear light of divine knowledge, who brings Goodness, Truth and Beauty to draw the minds of men away from their secular concerns. “I have not, in company with Claudian, impiously sung of… Proserpine, snatched, as the story goes, into the underworld,” exclaims Ficino, “but, as is the way of the Platonists, I have depicted the sublime upward soaring of the heavenly mind.” His Eurydice, Philosophy, has not sojourned in the […] “bowels of earth and Hades but descend[s] from Jove’s head and the very top of heaven.” (Voss 2002: 229)

The Gospels of Luke had appropriated the narrative structure of the descent—his Eurydice figure had taken on the form of poor Lazarus—and Augustine, evoking Scripture as a calling upon God with the Holy Spirit for inspiration, had already confined the revealed voice to the written text. With Ficino, the narrative’s allegorical appropriation of the myth is submitted to the figure’s vocal redeployment in the present: the descent is not subverted into a story about the material destitution of the soul, but like Dante’s spiritual epic that precedes it, is inverted into a story of the soul’s ascent.

60 See Vian, Les Argonautiques orphiques. This later version (fourth to sixth century CE) of Orpheus’s journeys on the Argo is mostly based on Apollonius as well as an earlier, fourth-century BCE tradition. (Vian 2003: 28)

61 Poliziano, repeating medieval allegorical tropes, writes that Ficino’s lyre, “far more successful than the lyre of the Thracian Orpheus, has brought back from the underworld what is, if I am not mistaken, the true Eurydice, that is, Platonic wisdom with its all-embracing understanding.” (in Voss 2002: 228) Friedman (1970) reviews these tropes and their interpretation of the Orpheus–Eurydice binary in the last two chapters of his book.
In this sense, the individualism Ficino represents in playing the Orphic lyre does not breach the medieval opposition of musicus (music theorist) and cantor, (the singer without knowledge of theory) since music continues to be understood along the dividing line of knowledge of musical theory or lack thereof. (Dyer, “Cantor”) Ficino’s endeavor is comparable to Fulgentius’s medieval allegorical and etymological interpretation of the myth:

Orpheus […] should be interpreted as best voice, Eurydice as profound [musical] judgment. Orpheus—that is, anyone devoting himself to the practice of music—wished Eurydice to himself and make her his wife by means of his alluring lyre, because whoever studies music, unless he understands the most hidden profundities of the art itself, cannot be a musician. (Fulgentius in Friedman 1970: 133)

According to Nino Pirrotta, however, the Humanists had already overcome this distinction in their conception “che la parola poetica è già musica,” that poetic speech is already music. (Pirrotta 1975: 22) They thought the musical execution of their verses was an extension of speech as it took on poetic form. Other prominent Florentine neo-Platonists also plucked the Orphic lyre in order to resonate in divine harmony with the cosmos and thus gain perfect poetic vibration. And while Pirrotta will not advance the claim that Lorenzo de Medici and Poliziano were completely insensitive to polyphonic music, it stands to reason that their monodic musical practice was in direct opposition to the musical language and theory of the period’s professional composers. Pirrotta is convinced that the Humanist conception of music is above all poetic, so much so that his study will “ravvisare nell’Orfeo del Poliziano […] il simbolo o la personificazione di questa più ampia concezione della poesia come canto.” (Pirrotta 1975: 23) Accordingly, the prologue to Poliziano’s fabula—not favola, he insisted on the Latin term—is neither a personification of music nor of tragedy, but of communication itself in the form of Jove’s heavenly messenger, Mercury. How then did this Humanist conception of musical-poetic improvisation come to be formalized with the invention of
The medieval misconception that the musical modes of plainchant were the same as those described in Boethius was tenacious. According to Palisca, most ancient Greek sources on musical theory could be found in Italy by the end of the fifteenth century, but their geographical isolation and sometimes lack of a Latin translation made it difficult for most composers/theorists to compare them and correct presuppositions that had dominated the field for centuries. (Palisca 1985: 280-332) Although the reception of Greek music theory in the sixteenth century cannot be adequately summarized here, one should note how the neo-Platonist revival of Ficino and his Academy was followed by a return to Aristotelianism. For example, by the mid-sixteenth century, a composer like Zarlino, maestro di capella at St. Mark’s in Venice, “was not a Pythagorean, although he was fond of number theories” and yet could still be “quite consistent in applying Aristotle’s categories and dialectics.” (Palisca 1985: 245) Without the ideological necessity of conforming to a predefined cosmological order, music theory could dissociate the scientific investigation into the organization of sound from the ethical use neo-Platonic artistic practice intended to make of it. Thus in a letter he sent to Vincenzo Galilei in 1572, Girolamo Mei could write that “the science of music […] lets art exploit as it sees fit without any limitation [the truth] about those tones which science has learned.” (in Palisca 1985: 267) Although Mei never composed or practiced music, his

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62 Cf. Tomlinson’s account of the importance of the song repertories of the period:

Late Renaissance song conveys this Ficinian subject. […] This is true of the repertories of solo songs that played such important a role in elite music of the time. The best singers of such music […] could be praised [by Vicenzo Calmeta] for ‘reciting his poems so ardently and concerting music and words so judiciously that the souls of his listeners […] were equally moved.’ (Tomlinson 1998: 15, 158n11)

In this paragraph I rely highly on Pirrotta through paraphrase and translation. He writes how “I poeti umanisti erano invece indotti da una tradizione ancor viva […] a vedere nell’esecuzione musicale dei loro versi una estensione del processo in cui la parola prende forma poetica.” (Pirrotta 1975: 22) Further down, he specifies: “Non oserò affermare che Lorenzo dei Medici o il Poliziano fossero completamente insensibili a musiche polifoniche […]” He also names and documents the figures in Lorenzo de Medici’s circle that sang verses while accompanying themselves to the lyre: “cantavano nella sua [Lorenzo the Magnificent’s] cerchia Marsilio Ficino, Domenico Benivieni, Antonio Naldi e Baccio Ugolino […]” (Pirrotta 1975: 23; 41-42n54)
research would change the course of musical history and pave the way for the creation of opera.\(^6\)

Perhaps the single most irreconcilable fact of Ancient Greek music theory and the modern music of Mei’s time was that the former had been monophonic, while the latter, in its highest developed form, was thoroughly polyphonic. This difference was all the more important in light of the relatively recent Latin translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1499) and its ethical vision of art’s cathartic purpose: music should have the power to affect listeners, to purge them of bad habits and move them to more constructive action. If both earlier and later Humanists believed in Greek music’s affective potency and in modern music’s failure in this respect, their opinions diverged on the matter of how to reform it. The inconvenient truth for writers of polyphonic music was that the complicated and technical music they wrote turned out to be incompatible with the revised Greek theories of music, the very same theories they had cited to justify their practice, but had—in accordance with a millennial tradition—misunderstood. Polyphonic music could not move its listener like Ancient Greek music supposedly had, because it obfuscated speech and cancelled out the effects voices have on listeners. The argument came from Mei and was published by Galilei, a former student of Zarlino. (Palisca 1954: 4-5)

According to Palisca, by 1573 Mei had read all the same sources from Greek Antiquity a music theorist has at his or her disposal today. His argument rested on the fact

\(^6\) On the advancement of knowledge of Greek musical theory, see Palisca 1985. “Gallicus de Namur (c. 1415-73) […] was the first Western writer to appreciate that the Greek modes [described in Boethius] and those of plainchant were different and independent systems;” (7) however, his book did not garner much attention. Before Ficino, Traversari had already amassed a considerable number of “manuscripts containing strictly musical treatises” to which one may add those found in Niccolo Niccoli’s library, which Cosimo de Medici acquired after Niccoli died in 1437. (25-26) Ficino and the other Florentine Platonists of his generation, however, were still misinterpreting the misleading passages in Boethius. It was not until 1579 that Girolamo Mei started comparing the different tables of modes and tones in the Greek treatises and corrected the common misunderstandings in what exactly it was musicians were trying to recreate. Consult Palisca’s subsection, “The State of Knowledge of Greek Theory” for a detailed history of Ancient Greek music’s (mis)reception. (35-50)
that none of the musical treatises of Antiquity mention the practice of simultaneously singing more than one melody at a time. Of course, the Greek tragedies had choirs, but they sang in unison, meaning many voices simultaneously sang the same melody. (Palisca 1954: 9-10) In turn, the practice of monophony (one melody) is directly related by then to the supposed effects certain vocal ranges have on listeners:

Similarly it is clear that the affections are moved in the souls of others by representing, as if in the presence of these others, affections through objects or recollections that have previously aroused those same affections. Now this cannot be done with the voice otherwise than through that quality, whether low, high, or intermediate, with which nature provided the voice for this purpose and which is a characteristic and natural sign of that which we wish to arouse in the listener. It is similarly well known that the tones intermediate between the extremely high and the extremely low are appropriate for showing a quiet and moderate disposition of the affections, while the very high are signs of a very excited and aroused spirit, and the very low, of abject and humble thoughts, in the same way that a rhythm intermediate between rapid and slow shows a poised spirit while a rapid one manifests excitement, and a slow one, sluggishness and laziness. (Mei in Palisca 1954: 11)

Furthermore, Mei argues that if one writes for two, three, four or more voices at the same time—for example, bass, tenor and soprano parts—they cancel out each other’s mimetic effect. The power of music resides, not only in its clear declamation of the words, but also in its support of the poetic voice’s tone, its pitch, and its accented expression of affects to convey. The voice here does not stand in for the rationality of the word, the logos, but as a medium whose tones convey emotions. Mei’s Aristotelian poetics of music does not oppose an irrational musical voice to a rational logos (shall we call it speech?): it opposes the moralizing conception that music can pull one out of materiality and into a purer sphere. With Mei’s understanding of the technical aspects of music, sounds become ways of influencing the
listener’s mind and body through poetic imitation.⁶⁴

Vincenzo Galilei, informed through his correspondence with Mei, would share this conception of musical poetics with the other members of Bardi’s Florentine Camerata and publicly through his publication of *Della Musica Antiqua et Della Moderna* in 1581. From the mid-1580s onward Giulio Caccini, Jacopo Peri, and Emilio de’ Cavalieri wrote monodic music, starting with simple song settings and gradually elaborating their technical skills in the new style so they could compose music for much longer pieces, like opera. It was the beginning of the *recitar cantando* and of debates about old versus new music, which led to the invention of opera and convinced Monteverdi to adopt his *seconda prattica*. Yet, a century prior, Poliziano’s *Fabula d’Orfeo* had probably espoused the same principles. This has lead Pirrotta to comment: “For the history of music, basically, the text of [Poliziano’s] *Orfeo* is like a commemorative epigraph of an irremediably lost musical fact.” (Pirrotta 1975: 5, my trans.)⁶⁵

*Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo: Staged Musical Figuration*

After demonstrating how the first operas were a mix of oral improvisation and musical notation, Jette Barnholdt Hansen writes the following lines in her article’s

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⁶⁴ While Poliziano and his Florentine friends could improvise monodic accompaniments to their Tuscan poems, sixteenth-century theorists adjusted ancient poetics to modern vernacular languages. Of course, in *Poetics* Aristotle was not concerned with the poetic rhythm of Latin (or Tuscan for that matter), but with the variation of short and long syllables. Since Tuscan does not have short and long syllables, but rather high and grave pitches with a tonic accent, modern poetry must organize its material in terms of variation on the height or tone of the voice on alternating syllables, while also taking into account the voice’s pressure on the tonic accent. It makes all the more sense then that Poliziano could not repeat his *Orfeo* elsewhere than in Florence: it was not only the musicianship that was lacking for the lead singer, but a feel for the poetics of the Tuscan language. (Pirrotta 1975: 23)

⁶⁵ Pirrotta’s quote, in the original Italian: “Per la storia della musica, in fondo, il testo dell’Orfeo è come un’epigrafe commemorativa di un fatto musicale irremediabilmente perduto.”

For a brief yet informative summary on the transition from polyphony to monophony, or from *prima* to *seconda prattica*, consult the first chapter of Palisca’s popularization of the history of baroque music. (Palisca 1981)
conclusion, offering the reader a glimpse into a lost relation to sound in the transmission of musical tradition: “For us, born in a culture in which poetry is perceived primarily as written words in a book, [...] the degree to which poetry was a spoken and sung art will always be elusive—a kind of missing link.” (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 595) The technological transformations at work in the notation and creation of music and poetry had a direct impact on figuration. With the Humanist theory of the fables, Orphic figuration seems closer to allegory after its philological reception is poetically redeployed. For if the stories about Orpheus cited by the Greek theologians were veiled truths, then the proper way to interpret the new Orphic fables should also be through allegorical readings. The historicity of men and women whose projection through time is inseparable from their body of work cannot be compared to anonymous tales mixing legend and myth. What then happens to Orpheus the theologian, the authorial figure when his story is staged as a fable? All depends then on the listener’s knowledge of the tradition Orpheus had transmitted throughout the centuries. In other words, Orphic figuration becomes the privileged knowledge of the literate.

At this point, the reader of this study could listen to Music’s prologue in Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo (consult the appendix) and recognize aspects of the tradition in which it is inscribed. For example, “in the third stanza, musica humana is contrasted with musica mundana, since Musica’s song evokes a transcendent longing for the harmony of the spheres.” (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 591) The second stanza also positions the prologue in line with Aristotelian poetics of affects and catharsis. In other words, Music announces itself as the affective fulfillment of mimetic art. In opera, however, Orphic figuration enters into conflict with the vocal and musical elements that had constantly challenged literary authorship in the past: notation inscribes the Orpheus figure into the musical text. With the creation of opera—a new type of vocal inscription and redeployment—a double-binding of
figuration took place, further trying to capture the temporally transcending aspects of sound.  

At the very beginning of this chapter, the comparison of the two first opera prologues demonstrated how the first looked to traditional poetics (improvisation) and the second experimented with musical compositional techniques. With Barnholdt Hansen, one could say that Peri’s use of strophic variation for his prologue, its *cantar recitando*, called upon an oral tradition of musical improvisation in Renaissance theatre, (ibid. 559, 573-74) while Monteverdi’s notation of the variations in his prologue, a form of *recitar cantando*, displays an aesthetic aim to capture tuneful speech and its emotional impact. As a consequence, vocal music in its graphic representation becomes fixed and immanent orality, which is embodied in the score and capable of being brought to life in musical performance. (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 560)

Barnholdt Hansen’s article goes on to explain how reading practices transformed the relation to the poetic/musical voice in sixteenth-century Italy. In her discussion with Pirrotta about the Humanist conflation of poetry and music, she mentions that “even when reading by oneself, it was usual to speak the words aloud.” (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 568) Like Augustine’s anecdote about Ambrose, here too the question of vocalization is connected to authentic transmission, except apologies are not necessary here, since writing and music are on an equal footing.

The revived interest in Ancient Greek *musike* meant that the composer saw himself at once as musician and poet. It would be tempting here to simply make the composer into an author figure and read his self-figuration into his written operas.  

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66 For Florence Dupont, Aristotle’s *Poetics* also demonstrate a literary relation to orality. In *Aristote ou le vampire du théâtre moderne*, she develops the argument that Aristotle only knew the great tragedies from their textual inscriptions and that his poetics disembodied their performance practice, thereby diminishing the ritualistic aspects of ancient theatre. (Dupont 2007)

67 To do so would circumvent a discussion on the means with which this was done. I will revisit this topic below and in relation to Wagner in the next chapter.
not simply an authoritative mediator; it is a way of writing and reading that foreshadows or prefigures an historic person or event revealed in the figure’s fulfillment. Barnholdt Hansen writes that Humanist opera prologues were a deliberate continuation of the Renaissance scenic tradition, and the choice of a mediating figure that would carry the greatest possible authority as a validation and raison d’être for the new genre give some of the prologues the character of a manifesto. (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 578)

In her reading, the “mediating figure” does not realize what was foreshadowed, but as a symbol of poetic authority that simply validates an unestablished practice. Nothing seems to be fulfilled in these figures, which might be figures in name only, and one should probably continue to call them (allegorical) personifications. In contrast, Monteverdi’s musical notation clearly demonstrates a different relation to orality and vocal composition:

Musica’s prologue is thus an example of how a musical form that was originally attached to an oral tradition was translated into a written form and thus became a concrete expression of Monteverdi’s personal interpretation and rhetorical delivery. (Barnholdt Hansen 2003: 588)

With Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo, one finds the idea that the musical voice was not only sung, but also heard in the composer’s mind, before being vocalized (perhaps at the keyboard) and making its way onto the page.68

In this transitional period between musical orality and printed literacy, as Barnholdt Hansen notes, Monteverdi must still have read aloud Striggio’s poem while composing the verses. Barnholdt Hansen’s argument demonstrates how the ideality of the composer’s prosody could be notated for future performance.69 In the notation’s performance, however, the realization of the composer’s voice—to prefigure a future discussion—actualizes the

68 Cf. Tomlinson’s stylistic origins of Humanist opera’s voice:

Recitative took its staged presence and its stock characters from the many sung mythologies presented at court, in the form of intermedi and other entertainments, from the late fifteenth century on. It derived its practice of envoicing a person not the singer’s own from these and also from polyphonic madrigal [...]. (Tomlinson 1998: 17, my emphasis)

69 Wikshåland and Barnholdt Hansen agree on this point. (Wikshåland 2009: 227)
Orpheus figure that Ficino was said to have also embodied. As discussed above with Page, Orphic figuration, prior to its notation, can be seen to oppose strict Auerbachian figuration: the lack of traces and the voice’s ephemerality problematize historicity (even though they inform the (a)historical temporal conception of prophecy). With notation, however, music meets the same difficulty as figural prophecy did in terms of the voice’s textual inscription. Music needs a figure in order to manage or mediate the passing of reality onto and off of the page, and the narrative of the Orpheus myth is once again put to use.

Like the literary lovers encountered earlier with Barthes, Monteverdi’s Orpheus is also torn between artistically voicing his lament and regaining the presence of his beloved. One might assume that Orfeo, contrary to the modern lover, would not question his capacity to rescue Eurydice, confident in religious philosophy’s capacity to retrieve his soul. When he turns back, however, Orfeo reveals his modern doubt: in the end, the almighty Other might not show him love or pity, to use Dolar’s terms, but trick him and refuse to fill the lack of the loved one’s absence. In the third act, at the very core of *L’Orfeo*, the inconsolable lover sings the famous aria “*Possente spirto*” in order to win Caronte, the guardian of the Styx, and gain passage to Hades where Eurydice’s psyche awaits. At the outset of his descent, Orfeo’s song acknowledges how a soul must be split from its body (“*Alma da corpo sciolta*”) in order to cross over to the dark side. Thus, Orfeo is asking Caronte to let him pass only insofar as his soul is seemingly capable of leaving his body through song. The aria’s atmosphere of ecstasy is rendered in its upward and downward runs and the *trilli*, or rapid repetitions of vowel sounds: “compared with the standards of the day, the result is extraordinary […].” (Wikshåland 2009: 226) Indeed, Pirrotta remarks how the formal organization of this musical and poetic material, “*l’intera serie di variazioni strofiche sopra le repetizioni di una stessa linea di basso*,” renders the incantatory stylization and transforms the
scene into an Orphic ritual. (Pirrotta 1975: 318) The Orphic incantation turns into an invocation, which prefigures the “urgent request, a heartfelt appeal followed by an unrestrained exclamation of rage and despair” and the “demand” of the *Abi, sventurate amante* that follows Caronte’s rejection of his plea. (Wikshåland 2009: 228) After singing three stanzas interspersed with ritornellos, Orfeo loses hope. “At this point all virtuosity for its own sake is dropped” (Wikshåland 2009: 227) and Orfeo asks no one in particular: “*Abi, chi niega il conforto alle mie pene?*” or “ah, who refuses comfort to my pains?” To underline the question’s rhetorical nature, Monteverdi sets the same line twice to different music. The second setting is especially interesting since it is precisely at the moment when Orfeo repeats his question that one hears a descending chromatic tetrachord under the melody in order to figure the invocation.

With Monteverdi’s descending tetrachord on “*abi, chi niega il conforto a le mie pene?*” one can say that Orphic figuration enters music through the structural poetics of invocation, “*una preghiera nei termini familiari di miseria umana e di speranza fiduciosa in un poter sovrumano.*” (Pirrotta 1975: 318) Monteverdi uses a musical figure, the grim descent of the chromatic tetrachord, to prefigure Orfeo’s actual descent into Hades. Perhaps it is not the *mimesis* of Orpheus’s musical powers over the gods that allow him to cross over into Hades and, to an even lesser extent, to retrieve Eurydice. Perhaps he is allowed to cross precisely because Monteverdi’s
musical diegesis clarifies that Orpheus has proven that he had effectively relinquished all hope.\footnote{The third act of L’Orfeo opens with La Speranza (Hope) accompanying Orfeo to the gates of the Underworld and leaving him after repeating the words from Dante’s Divine Comedy, which are engraved above the gates: “Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate.” (I, 22-24) I am simply pointing out that although the personification of hope leaves Orfeo before he meets Caronte, Orfeo can only pass into the Netherworld once the descending tetrachord has been heard. Monteverdi. “Possente spirto.” L’Orfeo. NML: HML.5901553.54, disc 2, tracks 4-5. The descending chromatic tetrachord can be heard in the bass line at 3:02 of track 5.}

This figure, which is not sung by the singer, resides in the bass line and punctuates the scene. Monteverdi, who was not a singer like Caccini and Peri, could not supplement his written music in a sung performance. Therefore, he not only made further use of notation to set texts to music in greater detail, but also created an instrumental musical figure that foreshadowed a later obsession of Romantic, unrequited love and spiritual or psychological descent into despair, as evoked previously with Barthes:

[The descending tetrachord] invokes the full range of somber affects traditionally associated with minor [mode] since the Renaissance; and, in its unremitting descent, its gravity, the pattern offers an analogue of obsession, perceptible as an expression of hopeless suffering. (Rosand 1979: 350)

As the musicologist Ellen Rosand further remarks, “the descending minor tetrachord came to assume a quite specific function associated almost exclusively with a single expressive genre, the lament.” (Rosand 1979: 346) Wikshåland and Rosand, however, seem to have overlooked the aforementioned passage in L’Orfeo, probably because it is only a detail in a strophic aria, rather than a repetitive bass line that structures a whole lament:

Monteverdi contributed substantially to making the lament a new genre, not only by setting a new standard through Lamento d’Arianna, or through the uninterrupted flow of lamenti from his hand, but foremost by inventing a rhetorical lexicon for lamenting, which would be ready at hand for any other composer. (Wikshåland 2008: 142)

For Wikshåland Monteverdi’s figuration fills Arianna’s lack with repetitions of the sung
words “Tesoro mio.” (Wikshåland 2008: 140-141)\(^\text{72}\) In my ongoing discussion of Orphic figuration, it is rather Monteverdi’s formal integration of poetic invocation with musical notation that characterizes his innovation. Monteverdi adapted a poetic tradition of lament (from Ovid and Ariosto, according to Rosand and Sternfeld) and used an emblematic moment of the love-sick Orfeo’s hopeless descent to configure the modern musical reception of amorous lament. *L’Orfeo* musically prefigures not merely the descent of the character’s body and psyche in the opera; it foreshadows an operatic tradition of despair and of love that tears apart the voice to reveal the death drive that would bind it to the Thing. It comes as no surprise then that Monteverdi’s romanticized Orpheus figure, like later Romantic lovesick figures, is taken up by postmodern psychoanalytic myths of opera’s origins.\(^\text{72}\)

Although I am highly indebted to Wikshåland’s attention to musical figuration and his conception of opera as discourse, our readings once again diverge. Just as our understandings of time and voice in Augustine are opposed, so are our conceptions of vocal representation and the recognition of discursive address. While one might say that Dolar and Žižek are intent on having opera listen to their psychoanalytically informed ideas about its conception, Wikshåland asks:

\[^\text{71}\] Monteverdi. “Lamento della ninfa.” *Madrigals*. NML: HMC901736.37, disc 2, track 8. This madrigal is discussed below. The four repeated notes in the bass line, on a loop as it were (ostinato), are also a descending minor tetrachord, although not chromatic.

\[^\text{72}\] Rosand also remarks how Monteverdi’s later madrigal setting of the same verses goes further in transferring the character’s invocation to the music’s structure:

The tetrachord supplants the most important source of affect in recitative laments like that of Arianna — the interpretation of the singer. In laments with freer bass lines, the singer’s declamation of the text, rhythmically more flexible, ornamented according to the tastes of the individual performer, created the affect. Indeed, contemporary descriptions of *Arianna* specifically praise the power of the singer, Virginia Andreini Ramponi, whose performance of the lament moved the audience to tears. (Rosand 1979: 350)

I will return to this discussion of the composer’s extended poetic voice when examining with Carolyn Abbate the reversal of the Orphic figure in Wagner’s *Tristan*. Wikshåland, whose reference to the lovers’ fragments led me to Barthes in the first place, surprisingly does not discuss Barthes’ Orphic fragment in reference to Monteverdi’s opera.
What if we no longer try primarily to reconstruct what makes the opera work, but instead listen carefully to the voice that interpellates our attention, lamenting its fate or drawing attention to its merits? (Wikshåland 2009: 225)

For the reader of critical theory, Wikshåland’s repeated question, “Chi parla?” (2009: 223, 231), put to the voice of the veiled fable, recalls the Lacanian formula Che vuoi? This interrogation expresses the moment in which desiring subjectivity is formed in the splitting of need and demand. The subject’s demand is directed to the Other, who is supposed to know what our subject wants and will fulfill what is wanting. A linguistic encounter with the Other can produce in the subject the illusion of attaining his object of desire (jouissance) or, in the linguistic encounter, let him know that both parties are lacking in what it takes to perpetuate the illusion (frustration). Independent of the outcome, the subject is alienated from his desire in one form or another.\(^73\) One enters here the theoretical discursive space Michel Poizat explored in his book on jouissance and opera. (Poizat 1986) For the critic not engaged in the theorization of the psychical dialectical response to the voice in opera, however, this discursive means of producing knowledge inevitably leads to the figure’s being assigned to an author, in this case Monteverdi. (Wikshåland 2009: 231) To do so, Wikshåland calls upon the modern concept of the subject’s self-fashioning and Stephen Greenblatt’s cultural poetics which inscribe the voice into a textual mise-en-abyme of identification, fostering a lack of distinction between and among author, figure, critic, and reader.

\textit{Modern Vocal Figuration}

Greenblatt opens his book Shakesperean Negotiations by writing “I began with the desire to speak with the dead.” (1988: 1) He is quick to specify, however, that the dead did not reply, yet he metonymically holds on to the preposition “with” even as his text erases its

\(^{73}\) See the discussion of Lacan above for references, especially p. 85n53.
traces by speaking of traces:

It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living. (Greenblatt 1988: 1, my emphasis)

Holding on seems to define Greenblatt’s literary desire here, in the sense that he is willing to incorporate dead voices into his own in the hope that at some point they will speak above his and finally reveal their hidden treasures. He then confesses, albeit with some self-irony, as Sigrid Weigel notes, (Weigel 2002: 75) the pleasure and benefits he gains by retaining these voices and making them his own: the salary and the standing of an American middle-class literature professor-cum-shaman. (Greenblatt 1988: 1) A self-described bard, Greenblatt represents himself as an Orpheus figure, aware of his desire to be heard, but not completely avowing the denial of his own impending end. The metaphorical confusion of voices comes to a climax when, after reviewing his previous methodology based on authorial authority, he announces his cultural turn:

I had dreamed of speaking with the dead and even now I do not abandon this dream. But the mistake was to imagine that I would hear a single voice, the voice of the other. If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear the many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property. (Greenblatt 1988: 20)

One’s speech may not be one’s private property; one’s voice, however, certainly is one’s own. In his terminology, Greenblatt uses the voice as a metaphor for the site of a self-critical interpretative gaze.

Greenblatt’s metaphors of the voice-as-literary-trace betray the hermeneutic belief that by fine tuning his ear, he will be able to rid his readings of his previous subconscious intentions and finally hear the literary echo of the other’s voice, free of his own voice’s static noise, as it were. In other words, he is elaborating a kind of literary counter-transference. In contrast, Denis Vasse’s psychoanalytic conception of the voice withdraws from such a mise-
en-abyme of voices and establishes how the other’s voice can only gather in the silence of one’s own:

To hear someone is to gather in the silent depth of self the subtest modification expressed in the air by the other’s most intimate activity. To let the other’s speech resonate necessarily implies the suspension of all reasoning. (Vasse 1974: 177)

Vasse tells us that as long as one’s inner voice reacts to what the other says, it occupies the space in which the other’s voice must resonate in order to be heard, not simply linguistically decoded. It should be evident to most that when another person is speaking, if the voice in one’s head is not silent, then one is not letting the other’s voice resonate within oneself. This confusion of one’s inner voice with the other’s speech deprives the other’s voice of the embodiment it paradoxically seeks in relation to his or her listener.

How then can the reader, who is responsible for the text’s sonorous reiteration, give voice and listen to the text at the same time?

Perhaps it is here, where belief in the representability of the absent and the past is deconstructed, that the concept of the voice becomes interesting, in contrast to the scholar who conceives himself as its medium. […] The echo of those textual traces, left behind by that which has past and is made audible in the present of reading, clearly unites the obsessions of literature and cultural studies. (Weigel 2002: 75, my trans.)

For Weigel, Greenblatt’s testimonial resides on the side of cultural studies, or New Historicism’s poetics of culture, while her reading of Heinrich Heine’s love for battlefields places the poet’s attempts to capture the traces of history on the side of literature. The difference she notices in regards to a literary understanding of the voice instead of the cultural understanding of New Historicism, is “daß die Stimme im literarischen Text als Agentur des Performativen operiert,” or, that the voice in the literary text operates as the agency of its performatives. (Weigel 2002: 76) Instead of thinking of the voice as the sonorous opposition of the silent trace, which needs resounding, its literary conception as an agent maintains a differentiation between texts, characters, authors, and readers:
This meaning of the voice in literature goes far beyond the rhetorical function of speech and those rhetorical figures with which textual space is personified; in it converge the work of the poet and that of the historian, who Heine, following Friedrich Schlegel, described as “the backwards looking Prophet.” (Weigel 2002: 76, my trans.)

Weigel invokes Heine’s fascination with old battlefields in order to discuss the problem of sound for historicity in literature. The “rhetorical figures” of the voice, however, should not be mistaken for literary figuration itself. Adopting an ancient author’s persona to transmit a tradition was not only a practice amongst the pseudonymous hermetic writers of antiquity. As discussed above, this practice was revived in the Renaissance’s acquisition of the Hellenic Church Fathers, through translations broadly described as giving a modern voice to ancient authors (declamatio), but also through an appropriation of patristic interpretation as veiled fables. It is as if, in looking back to the past, they had met the gaze of an ancient prophet looking forward, but instead of a gaze, this encounter was thought of in terms of resounding voices. The vocal nature of prophecy and its textual inscription in figural prophecy is undoubtedly the other side of the literary voice’s coin.74

I have discussed above how Orpheus was regarded as a historical figure and how, as such, he helped the Renaissance reorganize and synthesize philosophical and musical

74 Weigel’s cited text, in German:

Vielleicht gerade dort, wo der Glaube an die Repräsentierbarkeit des Abwesenden und Gewesenen in den überlieferten Spuren dekonstruiert ist, wird ein Konzept der Stimme interessant, demgegenüber der Wissenschaftler sich selbst als Medium begreift. […] Die Echostimme jener Textspuren, die von den Gewesenen hinterlassen wurden und die in der Jetztzeit der Lektüre hörbar werden, vereint offensichtlich die Obsessionen von Literature und Kulturwissenschaft.

Diese Bedeutung der Stimme in der Literatur geht über die rhetorische Funktion der Sprache und jene Figuren der Rhetorik hinaus, mit denen der Textraum personifiziert wird; in ihr berühren sich die Arbeit des Poeten und die des Geschichtsschreibers, den auch Heine – nach Friedrich Schlegel – als ‘rückwärts schauenden Propheten’ bezeichnet.

Cochran also raises the question of figuration as a way of preventing the de-historicization of literature: “Walter Benjamin’s and, later, Paul de Man’s rehabilitation of allegory stemmed explicitly from their different but related attempts to reintroduce the question of historicity and its concomitant figurality.” (Cochran 2001: 59) For Weigel, although Benjamin’s later writings on proto-modernity are dominated by a visual approach, it is obvious that the voice is important in his earlier work, especially concerning his conception of a historical time-continuum, namely through his numerous references to citations as echoes and voices. (Weigel 2002: 76n3) In comparison, Cochran subsumes the echoes of voices from the past in Benjamin’s theses “On the Concept of History” to the visual register of their historical index. (Cochran 2001: 94-95)
knowledge. The veiling during the Renaissance of the knowledge Orpheus transmits, the allegorical interpretation of the fables as a means to avoid vulgar appropriation, in turn compounded this knowledge when the Ovidian story of Orpheus and his backward looking glance was set to music. While Poliziano adhered to Ficino’s vision of an Orphic golden age, he disguised his story in a fabula. For example, instead of having Mercury finish singing the last two verses of the second Tuscan ottava—an eight-verse strophe—that structures the prologue of La Fabula d’Orfeo, he left the last two verses to a shepherd, who mangles them up and calls the god Marcurio.

Stat’attanto, brigata, bono argurio
Che di ciavolo in terra vien Marcurio.
(Poliziano in Pirrotta 1975: 13-14)

Whether the play was intended for the Florence carnival or not, as Pirrotta notes, the abrupt change of tone indicates that this tragicomic type of fable also plays on two levels of representation: the literal (comic) and the allegorical (tragic). Thus Orphic figuration was veiled and the expressive voice was once again subjected to romanticization, so much so that recent psychoanalytic criticism now analyzes opera in terms of love and the psychical structure of invocation.  

75 As Philippe-Joseph Salazar notes in Le Culte de la voix au XVIIe siècle, fables using imagery of the voice were meant to convey pre-scientific knowledge of the voice with literary means. The voice was the metonymical element of the narrative, which facilitated the allegory between concept and the (invisible) body:

The fable is the ultimate receptacle for this cultural “orality,” which Eric Havelock has tried to explain. It preserves the traces of a deeper anatomy and physiognomy: the signs of a magic presence of the voice, which form the scattered elements of a prisia theologia of the voice, a transition from pre-scientific knowledge to a literary imaginary. [...] The fable would therefore be the privileged locus of a representation in the proper sense of the term, a rei præsentatio, of the voice. The literary or iconic means used to see this representation through would be the scientific images of knowledge about the voice.

(Salazar 1995: 43-44, my trans.)

(La Fable est, par excellence, réceptacle de cette « oralité » culturelle qu’a tenté d’expliquer Eric Havelock. Elle préserve les traces d’une anatope et d’une physionomie plus profonde : les signes d’une présence magique de la voix, qui forment les éléments épars d’une prisia theologia de la voix, passage d’un savoir pré-scientifique à un imaginaire littéraire. [...] La Fable serait ainsi le lieu privilégié d’une représentation, au sens propre de ce terme, une rei præsentatio, de la voix, et les moyens littéraires ou icôniques, utilisés pour la mener à bonne fin, seraient des images scientifiques, d’un savoir sur la voix.)
An interdisciplinary historical study of opera, the voice, and literature might also, like cultural studies, “try to bind the historiographic claims of the poetics of culture with the properties of literature.” (Weigel 2002: 77) However, paying close attention to the interconnecting roles of Orphic figuration, of the figural transmission of knowledge, and of the epistemology of the voice, further problematizes their supposedly seamless binding. If such a project “definitely calls to mind an idea of tradition, which goes back to a time before the separation of historia and fabula, and which considers the ancient text, for instance, as the archive of deceased voices,” (Weigel 2002: 77) it does so within the boundaries of literary figuration.76 Thereby it brings attention to the pressure literary theory has faced in the wake of studies on orality and the ever-evolving media landscape. It also helps understand what roles musicology—the other, often ignored, intellectual literary practice, whose object of study is music—attributes to the voice when it acts as a medium for literary subjectivity, as in Wikshåland’s reading of Augustine and as in Abbate’s reading of Wagner’s poetics, which I discuss in the next chapter.

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If singing is not creating but conserving someone’s speech, as Reynal Sorel writes in *La critique de la raison mythologique*, (Sorel 2000: 2) then Orphic figuration is the means by which this desire for transmission takes hold in literature. It is a way of capturing voices and giving them a form they are not meant to have, conserving their outlines in literary traces which are transmitted throughout history. Yet Orphic figuration functions in the extended time and space of phenomenal prophecy, giving the text and modern music a transcendental

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76 Once again, Weigel’s cited text in German:

Insofern könnte man sagen, daß die Kulturwissenschaften heute den Anspruch der Geschichtsschreibung mit dem Vermögen der Literatur zu verbinden suchten. Damit erinnert sie durchaus an eine Vorstellung von Überlieferung, die vor die Trennung von historia und fabula zurückgeht und die die antiken Text beispielsweise als Archiv von Stimmen der Verstorbenen betrachtet.
quality, pointing to another time, beyond history, beyond this world. Early attempts at inscribing this extended spatiotemporal aspect of prophetic figuration in literacy rely on the authority of righteous oracular figures, inspired by the hidden divine sources their voices reveal. These righteous oracles find their way into modern literature in the figures of the early authors, in which we recognize the first examples of burgeoning individualism, as in Ficino. With Girolamo Mei, the literary-philosophical tradition is inscribed in a poetics deviated from Antiquity in order to fit a modern language and then put to music in a new style especially created to adapt to its scansion. It is only when music adopts a more common language to express human emotions that this inverted figural relation to the voice seeks to redress its deviation in musical notation. With Monteverdi’s *favola in musica*, the music itself becomes a discourse, a narration of events, an articulated transmission of ideas, since it invents its own figures in the hopes of touching listeners and changing them. It thereby becomes the site of the musical inscription of Orphic figuration. Although music’s relation to linguistic *mimesis* will change throughout modernity, the groundwork of modern musical prosody and narrative was established here and continues to influence how people think of music.

These successive inscriptions and redeployments of Orphic figuration often pass unnoticed today because of a visual reception of printed poetry and a mostly passive reception of music, both instrumental and vocal. As early Christian ritual singing foreshadows an eternal liturgy, Humanism’s musical poetics, or its poetics of music, helped shape our modern relation to figuration and the voice in literature and music. The early Humanist relation to knowledge turned figures into inspiration for fables: looking back meant the inversion of vocal revelation into the veiled inscription of voices into the text. In other words, vocal figuration becomes even more difficult to think through when one only
reads transcriptions of speech or song with an *inner voice*—*pace* Derrida—and thinks about music in terms of aesthetics rather than poetics. Furthermore, the structuralist argument that music is but an extension of the voice’s extra-linguistic capacities does not hold once one accepts that music without words is not simply jubilation—or a sonorous transgression of the logos, as it were—but also a figural and poetic experience. In Humanist opera’s case, music should never be reduced to a non-linguistic reading of invocation or vocal *jouissance*—whether or not a voice embodies sonority beyond language—because its artistic project is to fuse music and poetry. Music has never been simply an irrational release, but, as opera makes clear, also its own form of narration.
Chapter II – The Reversed Return

In the first chapter, I sought to demonstrate how Orpheus had been integrated into the Christian culture of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Rather than disavow the oral components of Christian worship and faith to the benefit of a purely scripturally informed worldview, I argued that the very structure of phenomenal prophetic figuration was, if not based on, then at least parallel to the singing voice’s projected resurrection in the afterlife, an “eternal liturgy” to repair to Christopher Page’s term once again. While other forms of embodiment do not survive in this idea of the Christian afterlife, singing does: thus, the individual’s historicity is not completely effaced through death, but transfigured into a never-ending exhalation in constant praise of God throughout eternity. For Christians who took the figure of Orpheus seriously, he would have been closer to them than Virgil was to Dante: the pagan prefiguration of an individual fulfilled in his return and conversion to the Christian God. In this logic Orpheus is neither a symbol nor an allegory; these terms should be reserved respectively for his instrument and the moral fables constructed around him.

Although Orpheus was an important figure in opera throughout the seventeenth century, his appeal had subsided by the end of the eighteenth century. All that was left of “famous Orpheus” in nineteenth-century opera was either Berlioz’s version of Gluck’s opera or Jacques Offenbach’s satire operetta, Orphée aux Enfers. During this period, when Orpheus’s musical representation no longer carried the same authoritative cultural weight, a different type of shadow was cast over the singing voice, thereby shining a new, though darker light on its importance in occidental culture. That this should start to happen when aesthetics are defined because of a new understanding of music and language is not a simple
coincidence.¹

This chapter traces a trajectory for Orphic figuration that reverses the classical Orpheus figure by examining emerging figures of poet-singers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I will first explore how the Orpheus figure inspired the folkloric pursuits of James Maepherson in writing *The Poems of Ossian*. The staging of the voice of Orpheus in opera and the inscription of the oral poetic gesture into notation, when combined with Maepherson’s antiquarianism, perpetuated the symbolic and allegorical meaning of poetic figuration but reversed its relation to history and the figure’s historicity. Instead of insisting on how new writers were the fulfillment of a previous poetic foreshadowing of greatness, the weight of literary history pressured poets and musicians to invert the promissory relation: by inventing early medieval bard figures, they could project backwards in time an almost pristine tradition into which they could retroactively deploy their poetic genius. A close reading of some of these poems will show to what extent Maepherson identified the source of the poetic voice as reaching toward nature rather than toward the cosmic divine, thereby participating in discourses which transformed the meaning of history, literature, authenticity, and truth.

Commenting on the reappearance of “the conscious distinction of the categories of tragic and comic in human destiny” in Shakespeare’s plays, Auerbach ascertains that up until the sixteenth century “the Christian figural world view was opposed to a development of the tragic.” (Auerbach 1953: 317) Although I certainly agree in general with him and with Cochran on the hegemony of the Christian worldview in Europe until the sixteenth century,

¹ As Frederick Sternfeld remarks:

At the same time the frequency with which the ancient myth provides the main action of the plot either in Italy or abroad decreases steadily through the later seventeenth and entire eighteenth century. Gluck’s *Orfeo of 1762*, although a ‘reform’ opera in terms of Calzabigi’s programme, is still a courtly entertainment written for the emperor’s name-day, and thus connected with the centuries-old tradition of royal, ducal and aristocratic pastimes. (Sternfeld 1988: 174)
I argue that figuration persisted into the eighteenth century and lived on in the nineteenth century, albeit in a reverse fashion. While Judeo-Christian figures revealed their ties to a suspended historical time, the creation of fictitious medieval bards by eighteenth-century antiquarian poets like Macpherson aimed to transcend historical time by projecting their creations into the past. (Cf. Rancière 2004: 72-73) These reversed Orphic figures can even be thought to have ushered in a culture of the tragic, which brought the Christian worldview definitely to a close. According to Auerbach, the killing of the Son of God at the hands of human beings, His subsequent transfiguration and resurrection, as well as the possibility of human redemption through Him, had displaced the outcome of any tragedy onto the ahistorical plane of parousia. I will therefore examine how Orphic figuration’s reversal is related to the emergence of the tragic as an aesthetic cultural concept, rather than opera’s rehearsal of tragedy as a used genre, to take up Peter Szondi’s useful distinction. In order to distinguish between Orphic figuration, with its close ties to the hegemonic Christian worldview, and the emergence of a secular literature seeking to recuperate its discursive authority, I will start using in the course of this chapter the term “Orphean figuration.” The sonorous resonances of the Orphian with Nietzsche’s two aesthetic poles in Birth of Tragedy, namely the Apollonian and the Dionysian, demarcates the beginning of a new use of the singer’s literary figure. Instead of transmitting revealed knowledge, Orphean figuration expresses the creative tensions which inhere in the invention of an immanent origin (and telos) that nevertheless must secure an aesthetic experience of transcendence.

The combination of the figural and tragic outlook significantly changed the mode in which literature and opera represented the voice. The Orphean figures I examine in the following pages are not presented as all-powerful singers who can displace mountains and rivers and force gods to resurrect the dead. They are melancholic anti-heroes who aspire to
this convincing voice, but feel that they could not embody it even if it were handed to them on a silver platter. Ossian, Werther, and Tristan all aspire to sing divinely well, but their songs only bring about sorrow and hopeless tragedy. Yet the ending of Wagner’s opera, the dialectical mode of Isolde’s monologue in the last scene, is precisely what calls attention to the other, all-too often forgotten aspect of the voice: Isolde’s call to listen to Tristan’s transfigured voice reminds us (even though it is too late, in a certain sense) that a voice also needs to be heard in order for it to be symbolically embodied. It also demonstrates how music has been continuously put forward as an agent for raising the dead. Therefore, after discussing Goethe’s incorporation of Ossian’s song in his first novel, but before embarking on Wagner’s Tristan, I will situate my work within theories involving the voice. Writings by Rousseau, Derrida, Adriana Cavarero, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Denis Vasse will inform this in-between space of vocality—in-between the beginning and end of the chapter, at the centre of this dissertation, as well as rhetorically enfolded within these text themselves—and foreshadow the voice’s role in our experience of media’s reproduction of sound, which I address in the third and last chapter.
Ossian: The Veiled Light of an Orphic Fable

Learning thinks everything that is not committed to writing fabulous.
James Macpherson

In this first section of the second chapter, I begin by examining how the belief in a historical Orpheus influenced Thomas Blackwell’s theory of the epic and, in turn, the antiquarian poetry of James Macpherson. Interestingly, Blackwell’s *Enquiry* quotes from the chronology of the *prisci theologi*, but diverts the fulfillment of Orpheus’s prefiguration onto Homer: epic poetry is here the fulfillment of an Orphic promise. Although I understand the importance of ongoing debates on the question, I do not rehearse (to its full extent) the nationalist quarrels that have often informed the reception of Macpherson’s poetry, whether it was a translation or an invention of a Gaelic poetic past, and whether or not accusations of fraud were justified. I do understand, however, that the *Poems of Ossian* are the result of a desire to revive a local ancient oral tradition presumed to be epic. It is the means with which this project was carried out that mainly interest me. I argue that Macpherson, while reconstructing his Gaelic fragments as Blackwell had similarly theoretically reconstructed the Orphic fragments, subverts the Christian worldview while retaining the structure of figuration. I end the section by examining how this structure is maintained through references to the voice, allegories of the psyche, and the stylistic use of parallelism, which replicates within the poem’s style the interpretative practice of figural reading.

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2 The exact citation is from Macpherson’s dissertation on the antiquity of Ossian’s poems:

This oral chronicle of the Germans was not forgot in the eight century, and it probably would have remained to this day, had not learning, which thinks every thing, that is not committed to writing, fabulous, been introduced. (Macpherson 1996: 50)
Homer Plagiarizing Orpheus

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the rediscovery of Greek patristic literature in the late fifteenth century bound once again the Orpheus figure to Orphic symbolism and allegory. These allegorical and symbolic interpretations of the myth had been transmitted by readings of Virgil and Ovid throughout the Middle Ages, and then taken up by Petrarch and Dante. Through Ficino, the philosophical and religious knowledge represented by the figure of Orpheus found its way into the veiled meanings of Poliziano’s fable, which in turn influenced humanist literature during the sixteenth century and then the libretti of the first operas. As a plot for further operas, the Orpheus fable was highly popular throughout the seventeenth century and during the first half of the eighteenth century. As Sternfeld remarks, however,

with the demise of the ancien régime at the end of the eighteenth century, the previously ubiquitous plot becomes even rarer, and when it reappears it frequently quotes or refers to Gluck […]. (Sternfeld 1988: 174)

Sternfeld’s article is an excellent entry point into Orphic figuration, as he is the first (and only musicologist to date) to treat the representation of Orpheus in opera as a figure, in the way Auerbach understood the term. (Sternfeld 1988: 180 ff.) When Orpheus stops being a subject for new operas around the end of the eighteenth century, Sternfeld follows Orpheus into the nineteenth century by commenting on the entry of Gluck’s Orfée (1762) or the French version, Orphée et Eurydice (1774) into the opera repertory at the hands of Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt, who revived it in their respective venues. This strategy diverts Orpheus away from figuration as a creative artistic force. Therefore, instead of following Sternfeld’s thread, a look at eighteenth-century primitivism and antiquarianism will show

3 See Sternfeld 1988: 180-82 and Fisardi’s online article.
4 Consult Sternfeld’s chart of “operas based on the Orpheus myth” in his article “Orpheus (ii).”
how Orpheus cleared the way there as well, but this time in the secular appropriation of
figuration.

In 1735, Thomas Blackwell, principal of Marischal College at the University of
Aberdeen and an eminent member of the Scottish Enlightenment, published an *Enquiry into
the Life and Writings of Homer*. The book “was not a work of literary criticism, but an attempt
to investigate the causes that had resulted in Homer’s extraordinary ability. It was a study of
Homer the [historical] man [...].” (Stafford 1988: 30) Kirsti Simonsuuri points out how
Blackwell’s arguments were meant to show Homer’s genius was not a divine gift, as
neoclassical theories of genius argued, but “‘personal Good-fortune’, by which he meant
Homer’s opportunities for extensive travel [and his] encounters with wise teachers in Egypt,
Asia Minor and Phoenicia [...].” (Simonsuuri 1979: 107) I am not concerned, as Simonssuri
is, with how Blackwell’s research on Homer fails to stand up to current standards of
scholarship; rather, I want to examine his chronological arguments, which treated both
Homer and Orpheus as historical figures. Blackwell follows a neo-Platonic genealogy similar
to the *prisci theologi*, discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Ficino, in order to argue
that Orpheus predated Homer and was the principal source for the latter’s hidden—or
allegorically veiled—religious doctrine.5

First, Blackwell makes an allusion to the Orphic palinode (another title for *The
Testament of Orpheus*) and to Justin Martyr’s quotation of it in order to tie Homer into this
“divine Tradition.” (Blackwell 1736: 51) The purpose of Blackwell’s enquiry—to refute the
neoclassical view of a divinely bestowed poetic inspiration—explains why he does not draw

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5 Although the *Enquiry* was widely discussed throughout Northwest Europe in its time and later on by
Romantics, Simonsuuri notes that it “was conducted in an impressionist manner and was based on
speculation,” large parts of which “will not stand up to critical scholarship.” (Simonsuuri 1979: 101, 107) When
citing Blackwell, I will reproduce the upper cases and italics found in the text. Therefore, when I want to put
emphasis on certain portions of his text, I will underline parts of the citations.
on Orpheus’s prefiguration of Christ in Clement of Alexandria’s theology of the Word, but focuses instead on Justin Martyr’s passing reference to the Testament. As its argument unfolds, the Enquiry touches on two recurring themes of this present study: first, the veiled truth of the fables and second, the authorial persona of a pseudonymous tradition. Blackwell writes how, at first, Orpheus was not a charmer of the “wildest beasts of the woods,” as he is in the popular Ovidian strand, but that his theogony “had acquainted his savage Audience ‘that Time and Space were the ancientest of things […]’” (Blackwell 1736: 155-56) Because the “uncultivated crowd” was not impressed by this invitation to philosophical knowledge, as it were, Orpheus struck his lyre again and “took up another strain,” this time to relate the adventures of anthropomorphic gods and elements that make up the genealogical parts of the Orphic theogony: “It was then that the stubborn Multitude opened their Hearts to the wondrous Tale […]” (Blackwell 1736: 156) Thus Orpheus at the opera—in other words, the Ovidian Orpheus, as Sternfeld puts it—becomes the second layer of a fable whose first layer is comprised of allegorical narratives of the Orphic theogony, and whose truthful core is a philosophical call to the study of time and space. Blackwell’s interpretation of the romancing of the Orphic theogonies creates fertile analogous ground in which he recognizes how the same “Allegories […] are found in [Homer’s] Writings.” (Blackwell 1736: 173)

There also emerges from Blackwell’s allegorical readings of Orphic fragments an understanding of authorial persona which transcends space and time, in the rhetorical

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6 Blackwell cites Clement of Alexandria by name once (as Clemens), in a note, and refers to him in the body of the text simply as “another primitive Writer,” not as the only Church Father who had considered Orpheus a prefiguration of Christ. (Blackwell 1736: 175) Note, as well, how he attributes to fables and poetry the same characteristics as music:

Orpheus’s Mistress was Musick. The Powers of it are enchanting. It lulls the Reason, and raises the Fancy in so agreeable a manner, that we forget ourselves while it lasts: The Mind turns dissolute and gay; and hugs itself in all the deluding prospects and fond wishes of a golden Dream. Whilst every Accent is warbled over by a charming Voice, a silly Song appears sound Morality; and the very Words of the Opera pass for Sense, in presence of their Acompagnamento. But no sooner does the Musick cease, than the Charm is undone, and the Fancies disappear. (Blackwell 1736: 226-27)
tradition of *declamatio*, which I have also touched on in the previous chapter:

> His actions [Orpheus’s] are themselves involved in *Allegory*, and related in the same kind of Fable as he was wont to employ about his *Gods* and *Heroes*. Whether he left any thing of his own in *Writing*, is to me a great Doubt. I find no reason to conclude he did not. But the Fame of his Knowledge was so high, that we have from Suidas, the *Titles* of sixteen or seventeen poems written under his Name, chiefly by the *Pythagoreans*, who embraced his Doctrine; and from others, we may reckon up twice the number.

(Blackwell 1736: 89-90, underlining my emphasis)

Since Blackwell acknowledges how Orphic hymns could be written in his name by someone else, it seems slightly presumptuous to claim that “oral tradition with its laws and conventions was an unknown concept to him.” (Simonsuuri 1979: 107) Indeed, Blackwell brings up again neo-Platonic chronology which makes Homer “come after” Orpheus in order to chastise critics for failing to understand that Homer’s poetry

> was the perfectest Collection of them [the doctrines spread by Orpheus] the *Grecians* had in *Writing* [...]. Nor are there wanting other Proofs, not only of our Poet’s [Homer] following the general Doctrine of the *Egyptians*, and of the *Grecian Law-Giver* their Scholar [Orpheus], but plainly borrowing *Images* and *Descriptions* from him, and inserting them in his Poetry: Especially if your Lordship will take it upon the Word of the early *Fathers* of our Church, it will be easy to make out nothing less than downright *Plagiarism*.

(Blackwell 1736: 168-69, underlining my emphasis)

The oral tradition was clearly a concept known to Blackwell, although he did not know, as we do now, that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, like the earlier books of the Hebraic Testament, had been transmitted orally for generations before they were transcribed from human memory onto an external support. (Parry 1971) Blackwell does plainly realize, however, that this was the case with Orpheus: he knew that most, if not all of the writings of these “authors” were cultural constructs of later literate periods. Therefore, he clearly thought that although not all written records could account for the historical lives of their authors, an interpretation of literary history could. Literature was not simply a collection of manuscripts and printed books preserving biographical data, but the transmission of living ideas from one generation
to another. Thus he had the genius of Homer plagiarising Orpheus.\(^7\)

As an important intellectual figure in Aberdeen, Blackwell’s theory of epic poetic genius undoubtedly influenced James Macpherson’s literary ambitions. Blackwell’s favouring of Homer’s life experience over bookish learning would have especially impressed the young Macpherson, given the prevailing socio-cultural denigration of the simple rural life of Highlanders in comparison to the refined urban life of the Scottish Lowlands and England:

Instead of emphasising the importance of libraries, Blackwell was advocating wide experience, just at a time when Macpherson was turning his back on the very lifestyle most admired. Such views must surely have begun to open Macpherson’s eyes to the value of his home community […]. (Stafford 1988: 29)

Among the worldly experiences Blackwell advocated as inducing poetic genius, nothing compared to the violence of war. The suspension of civic laws in time of war, in combination with the instinct for survival, drives the poet to answer to a higher law: social lawlessness thus produces a psychical reaction in the poet that leads to artistic sublimation. (Blackwell 1736: 66 ff.) Stafford notes, however, how Blackwell’s notion of violence was tempered with that of art: over time, it civilizes human beings by softening and polishing their manners. (Stafford 1988: 30-31) But how could one belong to a civilized age, have refined manners, and still have the war-induced genius to write an epic poem? How could one write sublime poetry after so many centuries marked by art’s civilizing effects?

\(^7\) Perhaps the greatest difference between such divergent points of view on literary truth as those expressed by Samuel Johnson (Curley 2009) and Thomas Blackwell, comes from the fact that the latter was not only a man of letters, but also a respected and admired teacher in a society whose culture was threatened with assimilation.

On the question of authorship, it seems that Blackwell did not know where to situate the end of oral traditions and the beginning of their literary transcriptions, as his equation of writing with authorship clearly demonstrates. Elsewhere, Simonsuuri remarks, Blackwell’s “analytical framework was not historical relativism, but poetics. It was an inquiry concerning the conditions of poetic authenticity, thus constituting a central theme for the Scottish Enlightenment.” (Simonsuuri 1987: 199, in Maclean 2009: 63) For Robert Folkenflik, “Both Macpherson’s defenders and opponents were largely unaware of how oral epics came about, knowledge attendant upon Robert Wood and F.A. Wolf later in the eighteenth century and Milman Parry in the twentieth.” (Folkenflik 2005: 608) As discussed with Friedman in the previous chapter, the Testament of Orpheus imitated Homer’s language, not vice versa.
Macpherson sought to solve this poetic and historical problem through the figure of Ossian.  

**Macpherson’s Ossian Figure**

Oisín is a legendary character of Celtic mythology. According to James MacKillop, in the early Fenian literature, he is born of Sadb, a deer-mother, and the warrior Fionn. In this tradition Oisín “is one of the half-dozen most important members of the Fianna, although not necessarily the leader; neither is he the esteemed poet of later tradition.” It is only in the later Fenian literature that he becomes an important character and narrator of the poems. Written between 1175 and 1200, and preserved in the fifteenth-century manuscript *The Colloquy of Elders*, the story of Oisín meeting Saint Patrick inspired “an immense body of popular variations […] composed between the 13th and 18th centuries” on the theme of posthumously converting pagan heroes to Christianity. In this body of literature,

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8 In his *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, Robert Chambers had already recorded Blackwell’s influence on Macpherson. (Chambers 1835: I, 238) Whitney follows suit: “he could not have failed to come somewhat under the influence of Blackwell […]” (Whitney 1924: 340) In a chapter of *The Sublime Savage* devoted to Macpherson’s studies at the University of Aberdeen, Fiona Stafford also remarks that Although Macpherson was introduced to Greek at King’s [thereby missing Blackwell’s first-year Greek class at Marischal College], he can hardly have avoided Blackwell’s influence, even if he failed to attend any lectures, he would certainly have read the influential *Enquiry into the Life and Writing of Homer* (London 1735), which sold out so quickly that it went into a second edition in 1736. Blackwell’s books are among the most interesting and popular works to come out of the University of Aberdeen in the mid eighteenth century. They are certainly the most relevant to the study of Ossian. (Stafford 1988: 28) Folkenflik concurs: “Although eighteenth-century primitivism derived from many sources, the most important for Macpherson was Thomas Blackwell’s *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*.” (Folkenflik 2005: 604)

In her description of Macpherson’s childhood, Stafford gives pertinent examples of such racism. (Stafford 1988: 6-23) She also warns “it would be misleading to label the men of Aberdeen University as ‘primitivists’, [yet] given their interest in improvement and academic advance, they seem to have shared a burden of anxiety about the progress of civilization.” (Stafford 1988: 33) Nevertheless, in the endnotes to the chapter, she compares Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s work with that of Thomas Reid and Blackwell (Stafford 1988: 38-39) Cf. earlier debates on the definition of primitivism: Lovejoy 1923; Whitney 1924. I follow Peter France in using “the term ‘primitivism’ in a deliberately broad sense, to signify a preference for earlier, more primitive states.” (France 1985: 64) This being said, I also agree with him that Rousseau (like the “men of Aberdeen”) did not advocate for a return to primitive life, but saw the psychological and moral benefit in contemplating and imitating some of its aspects.

9 All quotations in this paragraph are from James MacKillop’s article “Oisín” in the online edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. 
Oisín retells new adventures of the Fianna not found in the older literature, and continually champions the pagan nobility and generosity of Fionn against what he portrays as the cramped and joyless strictures of the new Christian dispensation. (MacKillop)

It is from this secondary tradition – “constructed on this rhetorical frame, with Oisín as narrator” – as it had made its way into Scottish Gaelic ballads, that James Macpherson “fabricated a series of prose narratives purportedly derived from Ossian [ang. of Oisín], whom he depicts as a historical figure.”

Inspired by Gaelic ballads from his childhood and others he had started to collect in 1758, Macpherson wanted to write an epic poem for the Highlands. (Stafford 1988: 66-67) By projecting the poem’s source into the past and presenting himself as its translator, Macpherson could prompt readers to attribute to it the authority and value of an ancient epic. Thus, “the poet’s task is no longer imitation, but rehearsal or re-creation.” (Folkenflik 2005: 603) As Macpherson had undoubtedly read in Blackwell, approximately thirty-five fragments attributed to Orpheus were known to have been written in his name after his death. Ossian was Macpherson’s ideal figural candidate for his own project of epic reconstruction: what Homer had been to Orpheus, Macpherson would be to Ossian. Thus he argued in a dissertation, which as of 1765 acted as a preface to the poems, that Ossian was a historical figure of late Antiquity. He based his claim on a combination of thematic, historical and chronological arguments, which coalesce around the absence of Christian themes in the poems:

> [A]s there is not the least allusion to [Christianity], or any of its rites, in his poems; [it] absolutely fixes [Ossian] to an era prior to the introduction of that religion. The persecution begun by Dioclesian, in the year 303, is the most probable time in which the first dawning of Christianity in the north of Britain can be fixed. (Macpherson 1996: 46)

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10 As Uwe Böker remarks, “following the publication of Thomas Blackwell’s _Enquiry […]_, the search was on, in Scotland as elsewhere in Europe, to find the truly national poet.” (Böker 1991: 73)
According to Macpherson, Ossian would have been “in his extreme old age” when he would have met a retired Christian missionary in northern Britain and, with him, “disputed concerning the Christian religion. The dispute is still extant, and is couched in verse, according to the customs of the time.” (Macpherson 1996: 46) Macpherson then ties a chronological argument to a thematic one, and claims that Ossian lived in “the latter end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century”: “Allusions in his poems” to verifiable historical facts about the Roman Empire put “this point beyond dispute.” (Macpherson 1996: 47) Macpherson thereby established Ossian as a historical figure, using a method taken from Blackwell’s *Enquiry*: because Orpheus had not been associated by Blackwell as a prefiguration of Christ—*pace* Clement—the fulfillment of Orpheus’s poetic genius could be diverted to Homer. By using Blackwell’s method of deviation to turn Ossian into the prefiguration of Scottish epic fulfillment, Macpherson was also injuring a third party, since Oisín had fulfilled a similar role in Irish oral tradition. (Curley 2009: 156-90; Mac Craith 2005) He could use the symbolic attributes of Orpheus (like the harp or lyre), but, as Blackwell mentioned, Orpheus had had a civilizing effect on the Greeks and the Orphic fables contained neo-Platonic allegories. Macpherson needed to avoid allegorical associations with Orpheus, if readers were to believe a pagan Celtic warrior-bard had sung these poems. There remain, however, the outlines of the legendary singer/poet: his figure. By projecting the historical Ossian into the past (which the secondary Fenian tradition could honestly have led him to believe), Macpherson was using figuration to conciliate the poetic demands of the time (that genius must be primitive) with the ambition to write a national epic by completing

11 In a subsequent edition of the dissertation, (1773) Macpherson confesses to the conjectural proof of his argument, and seems to want to replace his initial historical argument with an emphasis on the remoteness of oral tradition (pre-history, in a literal sense) and the manners of the people described in the poems (historical primitivism), thereby further displacing Ossian’s point of origin. (Macpherson 1996: 418n49)
or fulfilling what he had initially presented as its fragmentary epic traces.\textsuperscript{12}

When one imagines today the “authors” of the Homeric epos, as Walter Ong does, and of the Orphic Hymns and Testament, as Ficino did, the word fraud does not first come to mind to describe their pseudonymous practice.\textsuperscript{13} If Blackwell and his contemporaries could not benefit from later research on oral traditions, they could still differentiate between historical figure and authorial \textit{persona}, as I have discussed above.\textsuperscript{14} Reconstructing larger works from fragments, even the act of translating, as discussed in relation to Traversari in the previous chapter, could be understood in terms of figuration: i.e., two human beings, in different places and at different times, giving voice to the same message, the latter completing the former’s meaning, and thereby transcending modern conceptions of space.

\textsuperscript{12} What had started in 1760 with the publication of sixteen translated fragments of Gaelic oral tradition, turned into two fully reconstructed epics only five years later in 1765, poems which take up two hundred and fifty pages in their final edition. (Macpherson 1996: 53-200, 225-328)

According to Folkenflik, “Both Blair and Macpherson would also have known Blackwell’s linkage of the ‘Fragments of Orpheus so called’ to Homer’s Verses’, a possible model for turning fragments into epic, and Ferguson compares Macpherson’s procedure to ‘the scattered rhapsodies of Homer himself.’” (Folkenflik 2005: 608)

\textsuperscript{13} As previously mentioned, Friedman is apologetic of the pseudonymous writings of Antiquity and explains how later religious writers wrote under a persona from the past, because the religious canon had already been fixed. (Friedman 1970: 21)

\textsuperscript{14} See the discussion of \textit{declamatio} above, in chapter one, esp. p. 95n57. Steeped as the Scottish Enlightenment was in the study of rhetoric and the reading of the Church Fathers, it is likely that they would not have been aware of the rhetorical practice of \textit{declamatio}. Ralph McLean’s recent doctoral thesis, \textit{Rhetoric and Literary Criticism in the Early Scottish Enlightenment}, does not specifically attest to the use of figuration, but he does mention several times the practice of “speaking in the persona of a […] preacher,” “a critic,” “a ‘Presbyterian persona,’” “the Person of the Laird of Brae,” and “the ironic persona of a moderate minister.” (McLean 2009: 117, 176, 301, 313)
and historical time. As I argue below, it would seem then that the oxymoronic tension between the primitivist idealization of the past and the cliché of the Enlightenment’s conception of history as the progress of civilization obfuscated the function of figuration in The Poems of Ossian.15

Although eighteenth-century readers did not live “in some sort of epistemological haze,” which would have prevented them from critically differentiating fact from fiction, (Folley 1986: 110) the debate around Macpherson’s Ossian poems nevertheless demonstrates how differing definitions of history were at odds when faced with questions of truth and authenticity. On one hand, the traditional use of biographical material in writing history meant a (presupposed) direct relation of author with discourse, of narrator with subject. On the other, theories on the distinct character of peoples and nations—what was termed the history of manners—considerably divested historical sources of their testimonial function and relied on an early form of anthropological speculation. The opposition and overlapping of both positions is best exemplified here by a conversation between Samuel Johnson—the instigating and persistent force behind enduring accusations of Macpherson’s literary fraud (see Curley 2009)—and Lord Monboddo, a Scottish primitivist:

Monboddo: ‘The history of manners is the most valuable. I never set a high value on any other history.’ Johnson. ‘Nor I; and therefore I esteem biography, as giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use.’ Boswell. ‘But in the course of general history, we find manners. In wars, we see the dispositions of people, their degrees of humanity, and other particulars.’ Johnson. ‘Yes; but then you must take all the facts to get this, and it is but little you get.’ Monboddo. ‘And it is that little which makes history valuable.’ (Boswell 1936: 55, in O’Brien 2005: 381)

The history of manners was tied to a view of historical ages, as described by Hesiod in Work and Days, relating the progressive alienation of human beings from their natural state and

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15 As Peter France writes about Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Scottish Enlightenment, “It is often the same people who are attracted both by the advanced values of the Encyclopédie and by the myths of ancient simplicity. Primitivism seems paradoxically to be a constituent part of Enlightenment.” (France 1985: 64)
their concomitant corruption. Primitivists like Lord Monboddo (and Rousseau) believed in a
golden age, a time before civilization in which individual property did not yet exist. The
writers who believed in this golden age thought of “Man” as being fundamentally (naturally)
good. (France 1985: 65-67) For example, Monboddo wrote in *The Origin and Progress of
Language*.

The poetical fictions concerning the golden age have, like most of the Greek fables, a
foundation in historical truth; particularly in that circumstance, of men living upon the
fruits of the earth, without blood or slaughter. […] This golden age may be said yet to
exist in some of the countries that have been discovered in the South Sea, where the
inhabitants live, without toil or labour, upon the bounty of nature, in those fine
climates. (Mondobbo in Whitney 1924: 374)17

Primitivism makes an argument based on what was thought of as empirical evidence—
accounts of savages secluded from mercantile civilization until “first contact” with European
explorers—and projects it into the local past, based on interpretation of literary sources of
Antiquity. It proposes to rehabilitate modern man’s moral corruption by contemplating the
uncorrupted manners of primitive man. (France 1985: 65) In this sense, the allegorical
structure of fables allowed writers to posit a fictitious origin, which still served the function
of attaining a higher truth:

The search for origins was thus an attempt to locate the moment at which culture
separates from nature. The idea of the origin was a way of “resolving” the difficulty of
universality (of generality) and particularity which became apparent when Europe began
to explore and colonize. (Thomas 1995: 38)

16 Although such suppositions were already criticized at the time as naive, and we see this occurring especially
in light of accounts of cannibalism in the “South Sea.”

17 According to Downing Thomas in *The Musical Origins of Language*, the first history of music in French by
l’abbé Bourdot and Jacques Bonnet (1715) had already taken this very same position on fables and truth:
“Fiction, then, is an acceptable vehicle for truth, and the historian can in principle reveal the “true story” which
is contained within the ornaments of the fable.” (in Thomas 1995: 47-48)

18 Cf. the third section of Blackwell’s *Enquiry*, which starts with this sentence: “Whoever reflects upon the Rise
and Fall of States, will find, that along with their Manners, their Language too accompanies them both in their
Growth and Decay.” (Blackwell 1736: 36-48) The roughness of Ossian’s language, the crudeness of the
metaphors was also an answer to this problem. If human beings could not revert back to a lost natural paradise,
they could still contemplate it from afar and, better yet, express its language in order to regain by imitation
some of their lost, natural virtue.
The appeal of antiquarianism came from the retrieval of such origins from supposedly local or national European oral traditions, as attests the popularity at the time of collections of ballads. (Dugaw 2006) Thus the “foundation in historical truth” of “fables” and “poetical fictions” becomes another vital piece of the puzzle in understanding the importance of the Ossian figure in the early reversal of the Orpheus figure.

As Robert Folkenflik notes, antiquarianism, or folklore as we usually call it today, rehearsed primitivist concerns with an ideal past way of life, whose manners should be contemplated and imitated through a rehabilitation of its poetic language. “The 1760s saw an explosion of publications” devoted to “older British poetry and northern poetry” and how they changed the appreciation of literature. (Folkenflik 2005: 621) Thomas Warton wrote in The English History of Poetry (1781) that while rational inquiry might have given readers “much good sense, good taste, and good criticism,” it had also shaken the transcendental horizon of their figural worldview: “We have parted with extravagancies that are above propriety, with incredibilities that are more acceptable than truth, and with fictions that are more valuable than reality.” (Warton 1781: 627) Folkenflik also quotes Richard Hurt writing: “What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine fabling.” (in Folkenflik 2005: 618-19) The whole debate around the translation or the invention of the poems by Macpherson speaks to a literary tradition’s refusal of figural language (and figuration), which nevertheless lies at the core of emerging nationalisms:

The poetry of Macpherson and Chatterton, while claimed as historical, was part of the making of national myth. Myth, which seemed rejected and exploded for much of the century, and was actually lurking not too far beneath the surface, would make a comeback. (Folkenflik 2005: 620)

Folklore was a way of retrieving from oral traditions a sense of belonging that bridged a growing sense of subjective isolation and was tied to the land through its native language.
But in order to achieve these goals of local transcendence, literature had to don once more the poetic attributes of “imagery, […] personification and allegory,” to quote Warton again.19

Meanwhile, the polish of written literature, its capacity to constantly revise and edit, as well as to visually reorganize its materials meant that particular attention had to be given to the tone of the poems, in order that they should sound authentically primitive, thus compensating for the visual aspects of modern editing. In other words, it was not only the primitive images evoked by poetry that were sought after, but also rough sounds:

To the extent that it is composed without a manuscript or oral basis, James Macpherson’s Ossianic poetry is the fulfillment of the late eighteenth-century desire to be fooled by the imagination […]. (Folkenflik 2005: 603)

Like the ballads that constitute the core of the antiquarian movement in the eighteenth century, Ossian is more a reminder than a remainder of a local/national oral tradition.20 Macpherson can thus be thought of as a cultural mediator. (Porter 2001) For James Mulholland, Macpherson’s poems are the culmination of a century-long literary experiment with folk culture as a means to regain the imagined intimacy and authenticity of the poetry of oral cultures:

While Macpherson claims that he uncovers and translates the traditions of Scotland,

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19 In his discussion of Ossian’s influence on Schiller, Wolf G. Schmidt remarks on how Macpherson’s poetry had answered a need to reconcile what was then the incredibility of fiction (the order of belief) with a rational, critical tradition (the order of truth), in order to claim for literature the space of religious ritual:

What remains for the Ossianic hero is, at best, the hope of gaining a glory passed on by art, thus ensuring a kind of eternity which is not transcendental. The trust in a moral order is replaced by a culture of remembrance. In Ossian, man becomes the generator and administrator of immortality. (Schmidt 2004: 191)

It would seem that by appropriating the authenticity of an earlier oral tradition, Macpherson was accomplishing in modern literature the same function visual figures had played in the books of pre-Christian Rome. Auerbach quotes Pliny the Elder about the many portraits in Varro’s book. (1984: 24) See my discussion of Auerbach in the previous chapter.

A similar poetic preoccupation with the artifices of myth still preoccupied the Romantics. See Strauss on Romantic mythopoeia (Strauss 1971: 20 ff.)

20 Derrick Thomson has identified The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson’s “Ossian,” (1952) See also his article “James Macpherson: The Gaelic Dimension” in From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations. (Stafford and Gaskill, eds. 1998: 17-27)
examining the Ossian poems as a printed object reveals that he actually reconstructs these traditions by using literary devices such as personification, mode of address, and diacritical indicators like quotations marks. He then fashions printed voices that emulate bardic speech and the intimacy of their implied audiences. (Mulholland 2009: 395)

Mulholland thinks that the emergence of a reading public, brought on by technological advances in printing, is partially responsible for the sense of isolation writers were trying to avoid through the inscription of the poetic voice onto the page. Thus, poetic imagination should not be merely understood in a videocentric manner: the poetry’s literary images and figural language mainly serve the purposes of indicating the expression of a raw, unpolished voice in print.

This foray into the critical material surrounding Macpherson’s Ossian sketches out a portrait of the authenticity expected from the resurrection of “fine fabling.” It could be argued that much of the controversy about the Ossian forgery revolves around distinctions between the definitions of historical truth and authenticity (and their effects upon historicity), a difference that is paralleled by distinctions between visual and aural receptions of literature. Those who accused Macpherson of fraud wanted to see the originals, i.e. the transcriptions of the recited Gaelic poetry he had supposedly collected. Since the poems restored the allegorical style of the fable, however, their claim to authenticity was not merely to be measured in terms of an objective proof in which “seeing is believing” and hearsay merely rumor. Accordingly, those who defended Macpherson did so based on the expressive capacities of the poems and on how they had been affected by them: “Thomas Gray declared, for example, that he was in “extasie” after reading the Ossian poems and characterized Macpherson as a thrilling “demon” of poetry.” (Mulholland 2009: 393) How then did this printed daemonic voice speak to its readers? 21

21 According to Thomas Curley, Macpherson was a poet, unaccustomed to the exacting standards of scholarly transcription that his own editorial
The Voice of Ossian

Upon reading The Poems of Ossian, one is struck by their frequent references to the word voice. The importance of this semantic space of vocality in Macpherson’s Ossian is already obvious in his Fragments of Ancient Poetry (1760). The word voice is cited in all but four of the fifteen poems comprising the Fragments. In the reproduction of the quarto edition, the word voice appears thirty-three times within sixty pages of large font text with wide margins. (Macpherson 1966) In other words, on average, one cannot turn a page without having read the word. Although Macpherson undoubtedly wanted to recreate the semblance of an oral tradition, the voice in these poems also mediates problems of historicity and primitivist authenticity.22

The first poem of the Fragments of Ancient Poetry is a dialogue between the maid Vinvela and her lover, the warrior Shilric. In this first fragment, the printing of his or her name over each strophe identifies the speaker. In the opening strophe, Vinvela remembers comments led Johnson to expect. After all, Macpherson acted like a bard following Gaelic tradition known to him since boyhood, even though his transformation of that legacy seems clearly a case of mainly original authorship rather than conventional bardic adaptation of an inherited body of evolving native literature. (Curley 2009: 36)

The rumour of fame, or the rippling effects of hearsay, was precisely the means by which heroes in the oral epic tradition believed they would gain immortality:

When the Homeric hero took death on the battlefield into consideration, it is because he hoped to gain from it an “imperial glory.” It is significant that the word that is translated as “glory” or “call” has the basic meaning of “sound,” (Klang) as it is confirmed by the etymology of the word in the Germanic languages, for example by the German noun sound. (Laut) (Svenbro 2005: 55, my trans.)


22 In the 634-page edition of 1805 it appears no less than 393 times. When one takes into account the space taken up by the numerous explanatory notes that Macpherson had added to his last editions of the book, the blatant repetitions of the word voice within the body of the poems becomes even more striking. Consult my appendix of excerpts from the Fragments in which the word voice appears.
how she first met Shilric near a spring, a “fount in the rock.” Surprisingly, the next strophe, indicated as Shilric’s, does not simply describe in its turn Vinvela. Instead, upon turning the page, one finds that Shilric has been interpolated by the preceding strophe: “What voice is that I hear? that voice like the summer-wind.” (Macpherson 1966: 10) Only then is it evident that this poem is a form of dialogue. The end of this first sentence, however, clarifies that the characters are not in the same place: “I sit not by the nodding rushes; I hear not the fount of the rock.” Vinvela’s next strophe confirms their physical separation: “Then thou art gone, O Shilric! and I am alone on the hill.” (Macpherson 1966: 10) Because all of these situations are narrated in the present tense, the reader is not sure if the first two strophes are a scene of parting in the present, or if the summer-wind reminds Shilric of his maiden’s voice, if it carries her voice to him from afar or from a distant past.

The second fragment does not specify who the speakers are by printing their names over the stanzas. The gendered themes common to this and the previous poems make it clear, however, already in the first lines of the stanza, that the story of Vinvela and Shilric continues, even before she mentions his name. They confirm that they were separated when he went off to war, while she stayed home and died. Macpherson’s use of the present tense in both fragments makes the reader interpret the text as a transcription of an oral tradition, an identification supplemented by the use of the voice to negotiate presence from beyond the grave. Once again, Shilric hears Vinvela’s voice: “She speaks: but how weak her voice! like the breeze in the reeds of the pool.” (Macpherson 1966: 14). He then sees her image appear

23 Reading this fragment in the reproduction of the quarto edition (Macpherson 1966) is quite different from reading Gaskill’s edition, in which the whole fragment almost fits on one page. (Macpherson 1996: 7-8) Not having the preceding stanza on the same page turns the experience of reading into one of memorizing or internalizing the iterative voice of the preceding page, a mechanism only reinforced if one needs to go back and forth between recto and verso to find one’s bearings. Gaskill’s edition makes for a more visual experience of the printed poem, the eye usually looking up and down at the same page to verify or confirm the various examples of parallelism Macpherson uses.
at a distance, on high, in a mist of light, telling him that she is speaking from the “winter-
house” and that she “with grief for [him] expired” and is now “pale in the tomb.”

Macpherson describes Vinvela’s voice to first hint at her decline in strength (“but how weak
her voice”) before indicating it’s source (“I am pale in the tomb’’). Parallelism is used here as
a way of completing meaning. The warm “summer-wind” voice from the first poem has
turned into a cooler “breeze in the reeds of the pool,” and Shilric’s mourning is represented
by a metaphor of seclusion in an inhospitable landscape: he “will sit; on the top of the hill of
winds”—which should be the one most exposed, therefore logically the highest and over
which the first “beam of light” should appear on the heath—to wait for her voice to return
not in a fragile breeze, but in the strength of violent bursts of gales:

[...]. When
mid-day is silent around, converse, O
my love, with me! come on the wings
of the gale! on the blast of the moun-
tain, come! Let me hear thy voice, as
thou passest, when mid-day is silent a-
round.

(Macpherson 1966: 15)

Although this second poem already demonstrates how the voice negotiates time and space, it
also is the bonding agent of the characters with their natural surroundings: they seem
primitive because they speak in a figural language which identifies them with the four
physical elements of ancient physics (air, water, earth, fire (the sun)). Furthermore,

Macpherson’s description of the voice of the dead is similar to the dream Achilles has of
Patroclus. (Homer, Iliad: XXIII 103-107) There too, the voice does not speak but resounds,
and the similar handling of life after-death reminds the reader of archaic pagan beliefs in
fame as immortality.24

24 Pre-Christian beliefs in the afterlife are also hinted at when death is metaphorically described as the “winter-
house,” just as Persephone leaves nature to die when she returns to Hades in Fall and Winter.
In the other fragments, the voice is similarly woven into a semantic fabric of war, remembrance, and natural phenomena, as in fragment III. The staging of “Oscian” in fragment VI, however, imbeds the presence of the voice into the text. Here Ossian not only voices his own mourning, but narrates the discussions of other characters, as when he takes on Fingal’s voice: “Speak secure, replies the king, daughter of beauty, speak: our ear is open to all: our swords redress the injured.” (Macpherson 1966: 27) Thus Fingal’s voice is homodiegetically described through the personification of a narrator within the poems. Ossian’s voice is also invoked from the same narrative perspective at the beginning of the fragment by another character, the son of Alpin, who wants him to speak up. Finally, the voice of Alpin’s son, who prompted all of these utterances, is also enfolded into the text by Ossian’s own invocation: “Son of Alpin! […] Thou hast heard my grief.” Macpherson might not have printed quotation marks, but printing the name of the speaker over one fragment, while omitting to do so for another, requires the reader to constantly question whether or not the words are a dialogue within an overarching narrative at which the fragments hint, or simply an apostrophe to an absent other. What is more, the persistent references to the voice suggest that one should regard these poems as a vocal network rather than as a collection of printed poems. Although attention to the narrative mechanisms of the poems is essential in understanding how we believe in the printed voice’s sonority, further analysis of the *Fragments* will also clarify how their style contributes to this belief.

John Dunn’s introduction to the 1966 reprint of the *Fragments* includes a brief account of Macpherson’s use of “what his contemporaries called ‘measured prose’ […]” (Dunn in Macpherson 1966: v) Measured prose was a literary innovation at the time. Writing an epic poem in measured prose instead of rhyming hexameters was in clear rupture with the neoclassical prescriptions to imitate Homer or Virgil, which had prevailed until the early
The earliest [German] translations [of Ossian] were in rhythmic prose, a fact that did much to increase the popularity of this style of writing in Germany at the time. About the time of Klopstock’s entrance upon the literary stage, and for some time afterwards, the theory was widely prevailed, that the poet enters into more direct contact with nature by clothing his thoughts in prose. This prose, however, was to be a poetic prose, poetic and at the same time natural; for prose was regarded as the most natural expression of the soul. (Tombo 1901: 69)

Thus while Macpherson imitated selected vocal *topoi* from the Homeric epics, which placed Ossian in a pre-Christian worldview of the afterlife, he still needed to find another archaic literary source that could provide him with the stylistic inspiration to make the poems sound ancient in English. Paradoxically, he found the solution to this problem in the King James Version of the Old Testament.

Macpherson’s appropriation of a biblical style of measured prose was probably facilitated by the work of Robert Lowth, a professor of poetry at Oxford. Although *The Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* were not translated from Latin and published until the year of Lowth’s death (1787), they were the work of his doctoral thesis (1754). It is believed that Macpherson knew of Lowth’s thesis and that he drew upon it when he wrote *Ossian*.

Instead of the Miltonic, Thomsonian ‘high, limited’ sublime, well suited to ideal presence, Macpherson restored to the more spontaneous biblical sublime, *perhaps familiar to him from his studies in divinity in the 1750s and the work of Lowth*. Here he found the right ring for the verse of a warlike, primitive tribe, expressed in images, direct language, and conceptual simplicity. The parallels of meaning and phraseology, the evocative metaphors, and the choice of images from the likely experiences of a primitive people—all are clear in these ‘translations’ [...]. (Rothstein 1981: 114, my emphasis)

The “parallels of meaning” are a stylistic or rhetorical structure that Lowth, in his lecture on prophetic poetry, describes in succeeding verses of the *Psalms* and the *Book of Isaiah*:

The poetical conformation of the sentences [...] consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period) things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure. [...] The first species is the synonymous parallelism when the same sentiment is repeated in different
but equivalent terms. (Lowth 1815: 259)

For the sake of convenience, Dunn condensed Lowth’s “rule or measure” by adding two “principal forms of parallelism” in his analysis of Macpherson’s versification; repetition and completion:

For his new species of poetry [measured prose] Macpherson drew upon the stylistic techniques of the King James Version of the Bible, just as Blake and Whitman were to do later. As Bishop Lowth was the first to point out, parallelism is the basic structural technique. Macpherson incorporated two principal forms of parallelism in his poems: repetition, a pattern in which the second line nearly restates the sense of the first, and completion in which the second line picks up part of the sense of the first line and adds to it. (Dunn in Macpherson 1966: vi)

The preceding analysis of the voice in the first three poems of the Fragments demonstrates exactly how Macpherson used completion in order to reinforce the primitive qualities of his poetry. By doing so, however, he also imitated, albeit on a much smaller scale, the interpretative structure of Auerbach’s phenomenal prophetic figuration: the first parallel element is only fulfilled when completed by the second. One can therefore conclude that through its incorporation of various elements I describe in the preceding chapter, Macpherson’s Poems of Ossian compound the historical macro-thematic elements of figuration with its micro-poetic means of transmission, while further revealing figuration’s close ties to literature’s rhetorical inscription of the expressive voice.

25 Cf. Lowth’s own description of parallelism:

There is great variety in the form of the synonymous parallelism, some instances of which are deserving of remark. The parallelism is sometimes formed by the iteration of the former member either in the whole or in part. […] There is frequently something wanting in the latter member, which must be repeated from the former to complete the sentence […] (Lowth 1815: 262-263)

26 Although this is not the place to delve further into the musico-poetic origins of phenomenal figural interpretation, there is certainly more research to be done on the stylistic structure Lowth identifies in the Psalter, which was used for singing in the early Church, and Auerbach’s discussion of phenomenal prophecy as a way of binding both Testaments.
Origins & Supplements of the Musical Voice

A voice like the breeze in the reeds of the pool.
Kircher, Macpherson, Rousseau, etc.

In this section I demonstrate the importance of the voice as the site for the musical origins of natural language. Taking into account Derrida’s debunking of the hidden revelation I had found already at work in Macpherson’s writing, I loosely tie the Scottish primitivist poet to Rousseau through a metaphor they both used to describe music’s natural origins. While Rousseau uses this legendary metaphor to ground his linguistic theory, Macpherson had employed it to authenticate the figure of his medieval bard. Although this portrait might already seem crowded, I also add to the discussion Goethe’s Werther, in light of how he nestled Ossian’s poems into his first novel. The juxtaposition of these texts affords a closer look at the narrative means by which Goethe inscribes Ossian’s voice into his novels. This narrativized figural voice marks for me a turning point in understanding the literary expressive voice. Whereas the figure of Orpheus had mediated orality’s inscription into writing, his inversion is here included in layers of narratives, which confirm each other’s authenticity by referring to each other: expressivity need not be imitative, just as Demodocus need no longer be tested. Hence, expression is also indicated by narrative means rather than simply expecting a mimetic reading of the signs “voice, “music,” “song,” or of the figure of a poet-singer.

I then discuss Derrida’s reading of phenomenology’s logical reduction of the voice and confront it to Adriana Cavarero’s criticism. In line with my arguments for the ritual voice’s silencing in the preceding chapter, Cavarero understands the progressive devocalization of logos as the work of visually organized epistemologies. I then contrast the
philosophical discourse through which Derrida arrests the flight of the sonorous voice on its way to the other (and Other) with Lacan’s analysis of social discourses in relation to their experience of the unconscious. Lacan’s underlying structural hypothesis seems to be that relations to knowledge—fantasized omniscience, proud ignorance, refusal of being an object for knowledge—are not merely based on how one voices them, but especially on how one listens to them, that is, how one reacts to the sounds that accompany speech.

The Musical Origins of Natural Language

Throughout the eighteenth century, the epistemological sources of musical practice, that had been divinely preordained in the past were being redefined in accordance with new, natural points of origin. While Luke’s recuperation of the Orphic descent stories was meant to enfold the vocal aspects of pagan rituals within the Scriptures, in this historical conjuncture, writers sough to move away from the millenary literate tradition of the Book and displace its authority onto Nature. While Derrida points out the persistent metaphor in which biblical authority was replaced with the equally metaphysical Book of Nature, I will be focusing instead on the musical metaphor that grounds the voice in nature.27

Derrida and others, such as Downing Thomas in Music and the Origins of Language, have pointed out how this shift towards natural origins was not in complete break with the previous worldview, (Derrida 1976: 15-18) as these new origins were often located after the Great Flood (Gen. 6-9) in order to spare religious sensibilities:

Seventeenth-century theorists sought to recapture or re-create the transparence of knowledge to expression that characterized the biblical origin. […] The original character, lost after the deluge, was considered a direct reflection, an imprint, of the nature of the world and reproduced the internal structure of all things and the logic of

27 For an overview of how this natural voice had been outlined in seventeenth-century French literature (science, music, fables, etc.), consult Salazar 1995.
If one could capture the essence of the natural voice’s origin and make it resound again, then what was being expressed through this voice should have been an intuitively insightful form of knowledge. By the end of the eighteenth century, the representation of the voice had thus become a privileged literary mechanism in resituating human beings in a natural rather than a scriptural (or figurative) outlook on the world:

Rather than locate the spark that unites sign and meaning, voice and knowledge, in divine fiat, the eighteenth-century search for origins sought to evoke the self-determination of human language and culture. The eighteenth-century witnessed a proliferation of essays on the question of origins. [...] As an alternative to a religious episteme which favored divine origins [...], eighteenth-century writers adopted a conceptual framework of empiricism, creating narratives that would link language, society, and culture to a common origin in human experience. As analogues of the story of the Creation, origin narratives created the security of a stable, singular reference point. (Thomas 1995: 38-39)

Music was an important, if not the most important, unifying aspect of these naturalistic socio-cultural narratives, since it offered a space in which primitivism and the study of language could converge. The speculation on a pre-historic origin of music and language led to a re-evaluation of their mimetic function:

The extant reports documenting the miraculous effects of ancient Greek music on its listeners had puzzled medieval musicians, and inspired musicians in the Renaissance; but in the late eighteenth century the classical ancients began in much musical discourse to play a role increasingly akin to that of the “savages.” Their music could now be viewed as a catalogued developmental stage rather than as the object lesson it had been for earlier times. (Gelbart 2007: 57)

If the voice of Orpheus, for early Christians, had been a figure on which to project the semi-presence of the Word backwards into the past of pagan poetry, then for the proto-Romantics, the expression of a non-Christian voice could more easily lead the way back to a pre-historical (human) nature that had nevertheless been impressed with the stamp of
universalit.38

An example in point is Macpherson’s natural metaphors for the voice in the Ossian fragments of 1750. Although Vinvela is not described with the allegorical attributes of the soul, as one finds in the medieval allegories of Eurydice that Ficino perpetuates, she nonetheless remains the object of a desire to transcend time and space, as her dead spirit is described as having been transformed into evanescent aural and luminous phenomena. The succeeding physical separations of Shilric and Vinvela, brought on by war and death, are mediated in the poem by the voice’s materialization out of thin air. Through the work of the encyclopedists, the voice “like the summer-wind,” “like the breeze in the reeds of the pool,” was replacing the Word’s New Song, just as Blackwell had overlooked Clement of Alexandria a few decades earlier. Thus, Jean-Jacques Rousseau would write in his *Dictionnaire de la Musique* (1767) under the heading “Music”:

> One commonly supposes that the word *Music* comes from *Musa*, because one believes that the Muses invented this art. But Kircher, following Diodorus, derives this word from an Egyptian word, claiming that it is in Egypt that *Music* started to re-establish itself after the Flood, and that the first idea of it was received because of the sound the reeds, which grow on the banks of the Nile, made when the wind blew through their pipes.

(Rousseau 1995: 916, my trans. and emphasis)29

Macpherson’s use of the same metaphor—“She speaks: but how weak her voice! like the breeze in the reeds of the pool.” (Macpherson 1966: 14)—to describe an archaic poetic voice

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28 The musical origin of natural language attempts to theorize its organic, rather than its previously classical, causal development. Cf. Strauss’s differentiation of the Orpheus and the Prometheus figures during the same period:

From about 1750 the idea of art as *mimesis* began to be replaced, or at least transformed, by the idea of art as *poiesis*. In this development the accent shifts gradually from the Prometheus-figure, creator in a *natura naturata*, to the Orpheus-figure, creator in and through a *natura naturans*. This represents, in effect, a discovery of the dynamic principle of nature-as-organic, over and against the idea of nature-as-organized; it ushers in an age of process, rather than progress. (Strauss 1971: 11)

29 Rousseau’s cited text in French:

> On suppose communément que le mot de Musique vient de Musa, parce qu’on croit que les Muses ont inventé cet Art; mais Kircher, d’après Diodore, fait venir ce nom d’un mot Égyptien; prétendant que c’est en Égypte que la Musique a commencé à se rétablir après le déluge, et qu’on en reçut la première idée du Son que rendoient les roseaux qui croissent sur le bord du Nil, quand le vent souffloit dans leurs tuyaux.
surprisingly corresponds to the legend of the natural origin of music found in Rousseau’s article. Although Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire* was not yet published when Macpherson wrote his *Fragments*, the likely answer to the shared origins of the Ossianic voice and Rousseau’s natural conception of music is that they had both read the entry on music from Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopedia* (1727). Like other entries from Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire de la musique* (1767), his “music” article had previously been published in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (publication starting in 1751). As a listed contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau “must have had a translation of Chambers’ *Cyclopedia* (1727)” (Jean Starobinski in Rousseau 1995: cclxxi, my trans.) or, at very least, a French translation of those articles he was to contribute. Indeed, the relevant part of the “Music” entry in Chambers’ English version reads:

> We find a strange Diversity in the antient Writers, as to the Nature, Office, Extent, Division, &c. of Music. The Name is suppos’d originally form’d from Mufa, Mufe; the Mufes being suppos’d to be the Inventors there of. Kircher, however, will have it take its Name from an Egyptian Word, as fupposing its Restoration after the Flood to have begun there, by reason of the Reeds, &tc. on the Banks of the Nile. (Chambers 1727: 607)

Through a combination of interwoven paradoxes, the encyclopedists’ desire to collect knowledge in print and the poet’s desire for vocal expression find in Kircher’s fictitious fabulation on music an original point of convergence in nature. The voice, once again, is the literary object that mediates this epistemological turn.

There seems to have been some confusion recently around the antiquity of the story of the breeze in these hollow reeds and the natural origin of music. Marie-Élisabeth Duchez writes that Rousseau *relates the legend* (“rapporte la légende”) of this musical origin found in Athanasius Kircher’s 1636 *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus*. (Duchez 1974: 77; Thomas 1995: 50) In the *Preliminary Study of Coptic or Egyptian*, Kircher does cite §41 of Diodorus’s *Library of History* on the natural causes of the Nile’s annual flood. (Kircher 1636: 131; Diodorus 1933 I: 147-151) In his comparative etymological study, Kircher goes on to claim that the meaning
of the name Moses (Moyses: saved from the waters) comes from Coptic Egyptian, not Hebrew, and is analogous to music’s etymological origin in the Coptic Musa, which allows him to conclude in favor of Egypt as the site of a post-diluvian, natural origin of music. To summarize Kircher’s argument: stagnant pools of water left by the recrudescent Nile allowed for the abundant growth of reeds; it is therefore plausible that wind passing through a hollowed reed, in a pool of stagnant water, would have led to the initial discovery of the pipe reed. Hence the Nile’s annual recrudescence (and stagnant water’s hollowing effect on reeds) would have saved the musical arts from the Great Flood’s devastation, like the infant Moses was also saved by and from the waters. (Kircher 1636: 138-39) It should be noted, however, that at this point Kircher is no longer citing Diodorus, and that he had only made reference to his history in order to attest for the antiquity of the Nile’s annual flood. (Kircher 1636: 131) By the time he gets to the hollowed reed, he has already long gone off into his own speculative comparative etymologies, with the aim of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs. Diodorus himself never wrote that music originated in wind resounding in hollow reeds.

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30 Johann Gottfried Herder already expressed strong reservations about Kircher’s methodology in his own Essay on the Origin of Language: “The best book on this matter [the natural origins of language] differs from the dreams of Kircher and numerous others as a history of antiquity differs from fairy tales.” (Herder 1966: 96n2)

I have not found a translation of Kircher’s essay, so I tentatively offer my own until someone provides us with a better version, with Coptic words in a Latinate transliteration in brackets:

Moses is therefore Egyptian, not Hebrew, by [mo] and [yses], which means saved from water, and, as Joseph noted so well, is also their combination. From all this, we conclude that music is an Egyptian word [mosy], since it is not unreasonable to think that the first waters came from Egypt. From the stagnant pools of water left by the Nile in Egypt, papyrus and reeds grew plentiful: it is not implausible, therefore, to think that the first discovery of a single sounding reed-pipe came from the growing of shoots in stagnant pools of water, which were everywhere. Also the Muses [mosy], which means art in Coptic, is not a bad deduction, since all the skills of the Egyptians were occasioned by water and rivers, which has been abundantly demonstrated elsewhere. (Kircher 1636: 138-39, my trans.)

(Mose igitur Aegypti acum est, non Hebraicum, a [mo] & [yses] quo ex aquis servatam dicim, vi bene Iosephus notat, compositum. Atque ex his colligitur, eos qui musicam a voce Ægyptiaca [mosy], quod Ægypti primi eam adaquas invenirent, haud inconvenienter sentire. Cum enim in Aëgypto Papyrus & arundo ex stagnantis Nili lacunis copiosa propagine pullulasceret, ex arundine vero primo fistularum & monaulaurum inventio exiterti, occasione fistularum arundinarum, quae stagnantis aquae solubes passim habentur, Musica prima fundamenta sua iecisse, haud inverisimile est. Unde et Muse quoque, quod artem Coptice significat, a [mosy] non malè didicero, cum Ægyptios omnes artes occasione aquae, et fluminum repertisse, alibi abunde demonstratus.)
Quite to the contrary, he wrote of the Egyptian myth in which the god Hermes gave humanity music in the symbolic form of a three-stringed lyre. (Diodorus 1933 I: 54)

Furthermore, he only mentions Moyses as the Jewish lawgiver. (Diodorus 1933 I: 321)

Notwithstanding the modernity rather than antiquity of the claim, if music and the voice come together in this natural point of origin, then nature becomes a privileged site or topos for musical expression through the literary voice. Derrida’s analysis of Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origins of Language* clearly demonstrates how the “expression of emotions” accounts for a “primitively figural language.” (Derrida 1976: 275) The primitive past for Rousseau was not a conveniently forgotten medieval bard, but rather a speculated set of psychological and physical determinations, whose origins coalesce with a conception of the lost ideal nature of humanity. As noted above, *The Poems of Ossian*, following Blackwell’s *Enquiry*, participated in the stylistically authenticating gesture of writing new national epics in measured or rhythmic prose. I would like to argue here that the incorporation of the expressive natural voice within the epistolary novel, which extended the genre’s aesthetic parameters, was also influenced by Macpherson’s reversed Orphic figuration. Indeed Goethe’s citation of Ossian in *Werther* exemplifies how the novel’s strategies of incorporating this musical expressive voice in its narration creates at once an illusion of intimacy and of

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31 Cf. Matthew Rilley’s publications, which cite the *legend* twice as deriving from verified ancient sources and name Kircher, of all people, as a reliable author, but omit to provide the original reference in Diodorus:

Diodorus Siculus believed that music had been invented in Egypt, where people had imitated the sound of the wind in the reeds on the banks of the Nile. […] Diodorus Siculus is cited by Athanasius Kircher, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* […] (1636), pp. 131, 138-39. (Riley 2002: 159, 159n15)

Ancient writers who tried to take a more rigorous approach to the question of music’s origins retained the motif of the reed. Diodorus Siculus believed that music had been invented in Egypt, where people had imitated the sound of the wind in the reeds of the banks of the Nile. (Riley 2007: 86)

The whole misunderstanding on the Antiquity of Kircher’s natural source of music could possibly come from the mistranslation of “would have” in Chamber’s definition into “d’après” (according to) and from the omission of “supposedly” in Rousseau’s text, thereby explaining the ensuing confusion of attributing philological credence to the expression of Kircher’s modern desire for an ancient natural origin of music and language.
objective removal, and thereby prepares the way for a discussion of phonocentric criticism.\textsuperscript{32}

When Madame de Staël wrote that Ossian was the Homer of the north, (Gaskill 2007-08: 13) she was echoing Goethe’s opinion that Macpherson’s “translations” were a breath of fresh poetic air. Goethe actively participated in Europe’s fascination with Ossian. In 1771, he ordered several Gaelic dictionaries and reference books in order to translate the supposedly original poems into German. (Ó Dochartaigh 2004: 157-58) Eventually, he was to include these translations in his epistolary novel, \textit{The Sorrows of the Young Werther}, poems that Werther recites to Charlotte in their last meeting before he kills himself.\textsuperscript{33} Well before this pathetic scene, in his letter of October 12\textsuperscript{th}, Werther writes that Ossian has replaced Homer in his heart. (Goethe 2001: 100) Beyond the shift in worldview this literary displacement announces, the problem at hand remains a renewal of the poetic voice. Therefore, it is not surprising to find in the first parts of the novel, when Werther is still interested in painting and in Homer, the expression of the following desire:

\begin{quote}
O my friend! – then when twilight invests my eyes, and the world about me and the heaven above me rests wholly in my soul like the image of a woman one loves – then I am often all longing and I think: ah, could you express \textit{[ausdrücken]} all that again, could you breathe onto \textit{[einhauchen]} paper that which lives in you so fully, so warmly, so that it would become the reflection of your soul, as your soul is a mirror of the infinite God! My friend – but this experience is beyond my strength, I succumb to the overpowering glory of what I behold. (Goethe 1957: 9)
\end{quote}

Like Blackwell’s Homer and Fiona Stafford’s Macpherson, Goethe’s Werther is no longer interested in knowledge gained from books, as he leaves them aside to lie in the tall grass by the river. Neither is he interested in imitating nature by painting it, but desires to express it

\textsuperscript{32} See Straus 1971: 275n15 on Elizabeth Sewell’s reading of Goethe’s organic conception of poetry. Although he writes about Cervantes rather than Goethe, Rancière’s discussion of “The Body of the Letter: Bible, Epic, Novel” is also instructive in this respect. (Rancière 2004: 71-93)

\textsuperscript{33} This is the chronological reconstruction of the plot’s events. As I discuss below, the narrative confuses the site of these poems’ reiteration by playing on the posthumous reception of Werther’s last letters.
after having listened to it. This voice of nature and what it means becomes Werther’s new poetic desire for expression (ausdrücken), which he wishes he could breathe into (einhauchen) the page. Here as well, the metaphor of “a woman one loves,” and her place in Werther’s soul, is reminiscent of the appearance of Vinvela’s ghost/soul in a beam of light over the mountain at midday, except with Goethe she dons a nocturnal gown closer to Orphic symbolism. What the “instrumentless” musician cannot play, here the would-be painter would write, just as an opera composer who cannot sing can write the figure that still rhetorically says his piece on the matter.

Werther’s professed inability to breathe life into the page, to have the letter sing as it were, sets the scene for the love story’s paroxism of pathos in song. At the end of the novel, in his last meeting with Charlotte, Werther recites his translations of Ossian’s poems, which he had given her and that she retrieves from a drawer. (Goethe 2001: 133) Thus the written word prepares itself to recite: although Werther’s voice has already been enfolded within the novel through an authenticating mechanism, in which a supposed editor ends the story in a quasi-omniscient way, by confessing how he has put together what was left of the letters and

34 Consult the lines immediately preceding the ones cited above and the letter of May 13th.

35 Recall Orpheus’s reunion with Eurydice in the heavens, as Apollo transfigures Orpheus’s sorrow into the constellation Lyra in the last scene of Monteverdi’s favola in musica.

Goethe does directly address the Orpheus myth and its ties to Greek religion in a later poem, “Urworte. Orphisch.” (1820) Interestingly, it was the classicist Friedrich Creuzer, who had first argued for a Dionysian interpretation of Orpheus, (more on Creuzer below in relation to Nietzsche) who brought the matter to Goethe’s attention. M.R. Minden also writes that “To speak of ‘Urworte’ almost seems a reversal of Faust’s retranslation of the opening of St John’s Gospel, for it seems to be changing ‘die Tat’, the act, of Faust’s version, back into the word which he rejects.” (Minden 1983: 78) The word that Faust had rejected was precisely the Word (das Wort). Minden concludes, however, that

Our awe at the ‘Damon’ stanza is not that of the Orphic initiate at the feet of the cultic priest – it is the result of a vague awareness that the best of our language will be the best by virtue of pointing beyond itself to the paradoxical relationships which, for Goethe, determine our lives. (Minden 1983: 85)

Cf. Strauss 1971: 22-26. Of course, there is also abundant Orphic symbolism in Faust II, but like so many other Orphic threads, I could not follow this particular one (which musically leads to Schumann and Mahler).
the testimonies he could gather. (2001: 114 ff.) On the one hand, the narrative’s epistolary mise en abyme gives credibility to the novel as a seemingly non-fictional work; yet on the other, the intrusion at the end of omniscient narration opens an interpretative distance between the characters and the readers, which leaves the latter enough room to decide whether or not the “editor” was faithful to the spirit of the letter(s). From a narrative standpoint these letters read as a voice resounding from beyond the grave, as the reflection of Werther’s ghost/soul. They thereby mirror his letter of May 10th, albeit in a chiral manner, creating a self-reflexive space of inversed textual interpretation. Indeed, the very last poem Werther recites—“Warum weckst du mich, Frühlingsluft?” or “Why dost thou awake me, O gale?” (Macpherson 1847: 374)—describes Ossian with images of a withered nature that cannot be revived through heavenly drops of dew, thus reflecting the reverse portrait of the ecstatic young man reveling in nature’s wondrous might at the beginning of the story. The novel enfolds the expressive voice of Werther within the text by situating the source of the posthumous letter’s poetic voice in another liminal figure, Ossian, who, as the last of his race and well advanced in years, had already been situated on the edge of the world of the living and that of the dead. For these very reasons—namely, the narrative extension of the poetic voice and the location of its voice in a simulated beyond—Goethe’s narrative setting of

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36 This fiction of the editor, standing in for the once-removed real author, recalls the preface to Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, in which a story about letters found in an old desk is the narrative’s explicit/ironic authenticating mechanism. At the outset of the book, Kierkegaard points out the vocal components of confessions as a metaphor for writing’s capacity to lure us into thinking a feigned intimacy of otherwise private lives necessarily concords with truth. (Kierkegaard 1987: 3-15)

37 Indeed, when one consults the corresponding passage in *The Poems of Ossian*, one discovers that the poem’s voice is speaking for a flower: “The flower hangs its heavy head, waving, at times, to the gale. ‘Why dost thou awake me, O gale?’ it seems to say.” (Macpherson 1847: 374) Opera-goers will recognize Goethe’s citation of Ossianic poetry in his novel from the famous aria (“Pourquoi me réveiller, ô souffle du printemps?”) from the third act of Jules Massenet’s *Werther*. In the opera, of course, a narrator does not come on stage to let us know that the scene is a posthumous epistolary reconstruction. The opera relies on the fact that this is common knowledge among its spectators.
Ossian’s voice prefigures the vocal economy of jouissance in Wagner’s Tristan.  

In the preceding chapter, I suggested that the singing practices of the primitive Church and the formation of the New Testament canon meant that the expression of the Spirit was directed away from participation in the ritual (except in music), in order to contain the message within the available form of its historical transmission, namely the scriptures. The interpretative practice of prophetic figuration can be seen, in a sense, to accomplish in Werther the same purpose: combining historically disparate oral events into one utterance. While Macpherson’s use of figuration as a mechanism of antiquarian authenticity problematized literary historicity, Goethe’s incorporation of Ossian’s poetic figural voice into the novel reverses the biblical authority over underworld testimonies, also discussed above with Augustine. When the reader hears Werther recite Ossian’s poems, he is in fact hearing the redoubled literary testament of a dead man. This is the overarching context of figuration and of its reversal, a context from which I feel bound to read Derrida’s critique of phonocentrism.

38 The “voice” of the translator plays an important part in this secular reconfiguration of the declamatio, as previously touched on in relation to Traversari. For Werther, translation also plays an important part in figural interpretation, not only as a way of giving voice to the historical figure of the ancient poet, but as situating himself outside of the world of the living, though still participating in it. An observant reader has also pointed out how an older meaning of the word “translation” implies a conversion of being. (“Translation.” OED I.1.a, II.3.a.)

 Translate! Ah! Often my dreams took flight
On the wings of theses verses, and it is you, dear poet,
Who, rather, was my interpreter!
All my soul is there! (Blau, Milliet, and Hartmann: my trans.)

(Traduire! Ah! bien souvent mon rêve s’envola
sur l’aile de ses vers, et c’est toi, cher poète
qui bien plutôt était mon interprète!
Toute mon âme est là!)

**Phonocentrism and The Expressive Voice**

Before deconstructing Rousseau’s understanding of writing as a transcription of speech in *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida summarizes the modern historical trajectory of the relation between the voice and knowledge:

From Descartes to Hegel and in spite of all the differences that separate the different places and moments in the structure of the epoch, God’s infinite understanding is the other name for the logos as self-presence. The logos can be infinite and self-present, it can be produced as auto-affection, only through the voice: an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time. Such is at least the experience—or consciousness—of the voice: of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak [*s’entendre-parler*]. That experience lives and proclaims itself as the exclusion of writing, that is to say of the invoking of an “exterior,” “sensible,” “spatial” signifier interrupting self-presence. (Derrida 1976: 98)

The voice Derrida describes here is neither the speaking, nor the singing voice. In this context, the expressive voice is not defined by its phonatory act, but rather counterintuitively as the voice of consciousness, the voice of one’s “silent interior monologue.” (Spivak in Derrida 1976: liii) In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida demonstrates that this inversion of our everyday understanding of the expressive voice occurs because Husserl, “being interested in language only within the compass of rationality, determining the logos from logic […] determined the essence of language by taking the logical as its telos or norm.” (Derrida 1973: 8) In other words, in order for language to hold any truth value, it has to be logically consequential in its assertions about itself.

Derrida underlines the lack of logicality of existing French translation that systematically render Husserl’s *Bedeutung* into French as “*signification*,” although he understands the necessity of doing so because French lacks the distinction between the German term *Sinn* (sense, *signification*) and the term *Bedeutung* (meaning, *signification*). For Husserl, meaning is the result of an interpretation (*Deutung*) that should be reserved to describe a type of communication that relies on the expression (*Ausdruck*) of speech (*Rede*);
on the other hand, although it is always also part of meaningful speech, signification only encompasses the sense (Sinn) of non-linguistic indications (Anzeichen). According to Derrida, in Husserl “meaning is reserved for the content in the ideal sense of verbal expression, spoken language, while sense (Sinn) covers the whole noematic sphere right down to its nonexpressive stratum.” (Derrida 1973: 19) As Husserl points out himself, “meaning (bedeuten)—in communicative speech (in mitteilender Rede)—is always interwoven (verflochten) with such an indicative relation.” (Husserl in Derrida 1973: 20) If this logic is to be brought to its rightful end, one must categorize the definitions of meaningful expression and signifying indication: the former thus becomes a species of the latter’s genus, for while expression always also indicates, indication cannot necessarily always say what it means. Therefore, in order to secure a logically sound theory of knowledge in and through language, meaning and expression must be kept apart from the “indicative relation” that occurs in oral communication, even as it retains the vocal structure of speech.

The impossibility of really knowing what the other means also becomes part of the rationale for silencing the expressive voice: first, because expression indicates a content forever hidden from intuition, that is, from the lived experience of another, and also because the ideal content of the meaning and spirituality of expression are here united to sensibility. (Derrida 1973: 22)

Logical reasoning is not the place for the voice’s resonance. In order to keep the structure of linguistic address, the intention of an “objective ideality”—in the pure meaning of the eidetic voice’s internal expression—becomes a substitute for the external other. This paradox of suspending expressivity’s communicating relation to an exterior is necessary in order to assure that logos coincides with truth and is nothing less than the foundation of phenomenology’s epistemological project, according to Derrida:

Transcendental phenomenological idealism answers to the necessity of describing the objectivity of the object and the presence of the present—and objectivity in presence—
from the standpoint of “interiority,” or rather from a self-proximity, an ownness, which is not a simple inside but rather the intimate possibility of a relation to a beyond and to an outside in general. (Derrida 1973: 22)

The expressive voice thus unites thought and language in self-presence, but does so at the expense of discursive or oral speech—a tautological paradox, which, in any other context would be utterly ridiculous—and by avoiding the exhaustion of the productive capacities of communication.  

The curious distinction between interiority and exteriority—or lack thereof, no matter what Derrida says about its necessity for the condition of an exterior in Husserl—that follows the incorporation of the expressive voice into the phenomenological voice by Husserl, allows Derrida, in turn, to deconstruct the relation of speech and writing. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in the prefatory introduction to her translation *Of Grammatology*, this “structure of speech or voice is seen to be constituted by the necessary absence of both the object and the subject. It is constituted, in other words, by the structure of writing […]” (in Derrida 1976: liii) Derrida thereby criticizes logocentrism-cum-phonocentrism, the self-present voice producing linguistic truth, and counters it with writing’s deferral of truth in the proliferation of interpretative possibilities. But what happens to the living voice in this theory?

In the dedicatory essay to Derrida of her book *For More Than One Voice: Towards A Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Adriana Cavarero states her reservations about Derrida’s overall project. She notes how Derrida’s early works dialogued with phenomenology, but failed to

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39 Derrida summarizes his point rather well in the introductory comments to the chapter:  

We know already in fact that the discursive sign, and consequently the meaning, is always involved, always caught up in an indicative system. Caught up is the same as contaminated: Husserl wants to grasp the expressive and logical purity of meaning as the possibility of logos. In fact and always (allzeit verflochten ist) [it is interwoven] to the extent to which the meaning is taken up in communicative speech. To be sure, as we shall see, communication itself is for Husserl a stratum extrinsic to expression. But each time an expression is in fact produced, it communicates, even if it is not exhausted in that communicative role, or even if its role is simply associated with it. (Derrida 1973: 20)
acknowledge how emerging studies on orality had begun to influence thinkers of his generation:

If the debt to Heidegger, while full of reservations, is explicit, then the debt to the studies on orality—and more generally to the modern rediscovery of the voice, if not of writing—is, however, rather deceptive. (Cavarero 2005: 213)

Cavarero argues that Derrida is critical of the metaphysical function of the voice, but does not address the metamorphoses the voice underwent in order for it to continue suiting the historical developments of visually centered epistemologies. Cavarero suggests that Derrida does not integrate into his framework a conception of the voice as the instrument, rather than the guardian of metaphysics. 40 Once Derrida had shown how Husserl recuperates expression as an implicit and disavowed metaphysical strategy for phenomenology, he failed to step back and free the expressive voice from its ancillary inscription in discursive knowledge. According to Cavarero, the project of a “philosophy of différance […] orients the theoretical axis in which Derrida places the theme of the voice, making it play a metaphysical role in opposition to the antimetaphysical valence of writing.” (Cavarero 2005: 220)

Derrida’s writing of différance could therefore also be understood as the last scene, albeit deviated, in a historical “devocalization of the logos.” (Cavarero 2005: 33-41) In other words, the task of deconstructing the traditional view of writing as fallen speech might have occulted how constraining representations of the voices had been employed in order to elevate them to writing’s status of univocality. She insists upon the following: since writing takes place in space and is a visual experience, Derrida’s “metaphysical phonocentrism

40 Derrida is aware of the devocalization of the logos, as his study of Husserl in Speech and Phenomena demonstrates. Although Of Grammatology does not contribute particular examples of the devocalization of logos between Plato and Rousseau’s time, it certainly acknowledges the philosophical trend to silence language’s sonority. “The evolution and properly philosophic economy of writing go therefore in the direction of the effacing of the signifier, whether it takes the form of forgetting or repression.” (Derrida 1976: 286) Cavarero’s confession in the dedicatory appendix about writing her book with Derrida in mind from the very beginning is certainly not a rhetorical gesture. For example, cf. Cavarero’s earlier critique of the signifier. (Cavarero 2005: 35)
supplants the far more plausible, and philologically documentable, centrality of videocentrism.” (Cavarero 2005: 222) The argument rests on a shift in perspective and, although the gap it opens is rather narrow, this is precisely the “tight fit” I have been negotiating while following Orpheus.  

As I have shown in the last chapter, it was principally because of the visual metaphor of light in the Platonist doctrine of the voice (scintillation and illumination) that the vocal figure of Orpheus found his way into Christian culture and European modernity. Although the figurative trace of this “heliotropic metaphor” might be discarded because of its lack of historicity and of its figural language, it is precisely the aspect of Platonist dialogues that, according to Caverero, Derrida’s reading of Phaedrus in Dissemination precludes. (Cavarero 2005: 223-24, 227 ff.) She understands Derrida’s reading of Plato in terms of a “condemnation of writing [which] ends up being in keeping with a system that, if well deconstructed, shows itself to be always already built on the removal of the trace.” (Cavarero 2005: 228) But if the trace is to be understood as “the sign of a sign,” or indication bringing attention to itself, Derrida “fails to emphasize that this deferral, after having passed through speech, finds its fixed point, its origin in the pure presence that the videocentric horizon guarantees to the idea.” (Cavarero 2005: 228) Cavarero is making the point that

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41 Although I criticize Mladen Dolar for conflating voice, tone, and music in the first chapter, his overarching argument does make a point in the same direction as Cavarero’s videocentric critique:

One can draw, from this brief and necessarily schematic survey [of the voice and music], the tentative conclusion that the history of “logocentrism” doesn’t run quite hand in hand with “phonocentrism,” that there is a dimension of the voice that runs counter to self-transparency, sense, and presence: the voice against the logos, the voice as the other of logos, its radical alterity. (Dolar 1996: 24)

Frances Dyson also comments on Derrida’s ambivalent relation to sound:

The often contradictory thinking about sound that these artists and philosophers demonstrate [Cage, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari] emanates from aurality itself: that is, from the conceptual lacuna that remains when sound not only is theorized but, crucially, is party to a negotiation between embodiment, technology, and modernity. (Dyson 2009: 84)

Cf. Derrida on sound’s penetrating violence because of the ear’s incapacity, unlike that of the eye, to shut out external stimuli. (Derrida 1976: 240)
phonocentrism can only function through the disavowal of the videocentric history of
Western epistemology, the Saussurian sign included:

The logos that is written in the soul of the one who apprehends, with science [episteme], is precisely the devocalized logos that coincides with the visible and mute order of ideas. [...] In effect, it is precisely the art of dialectic that functions as a means of transmission between the world of words and the world of ideas. This art belongs to the verbal sphere, but it belongs to it as a method for showing the insufficiency of words and at the same time, their constitutive dependency on the order of ideas.
(Cavarero 2005: 230-31)

This passage brings to mind the opening lines of Augustine’s Confessions. In turn, it also underlines what is missing in Derrida’s reading of Socratic dialogue: the third term, the aphoristic desire that drives the dialectic to its “aporetic outcome”—a deferral in itself—as the interlocutors “rub the[ir] words against one another [...] to grasp the luminosity of the idea that suddenly flashes up, present to the eye of the soul.” (Cavarero 2005: 231)

Thus the Platonist doctrine of the voice’s illumination would not necessarily be a metaphorical misconstruction of Plato’s philosophy, but rather a shortcut to the visual register of the idea.

Derrida’s choice to concentrate on Rousseau’s Essay on the Origin of Language, which was considered a marginal text in the 1960s, (Thomas 1996: 85) relies on an intuition,

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42 Cavarero’s feminist reading of the Platonic desire for knowledge, by describing the desired revelatory aim of aporetic dialogue as a veiled metaphor of female genitalia and orgasm, subverts the received Aristotelian generative metaphor of paternal and the concomitant dissemination of the written word (the male pen inscribes the female surface).

Cf. Lofts and Rosemann:

Why is it that the phallus functions as the privileged signifier of human identity? When all is said and done, because it is so easily seen… This “phallo-ego-eido-centrism,” as Mr. Borch-Jacobsen calls it, would confirm that Lacanian thought belongs to the “onto-photo-logical” tradition (which is, in fact, that of Western metaphysics.) (Lofts & Rosemann 1994b: 97n11, my trans.)

(Pourquoi est-ce le phallus qui fonctionne comme le signifiant privilégié de l’identité humaine? En définitive, c’est qu’il se voit si bien… Ce « phallo-ego-eido-centrisme », comme l’appelle M. Borch-Jacobsen (p. 258), confirmerait donc le soupçon que la pensée lacanienne appartient à la tradition « onto-photo-logique » (qui est, de fait, celle de la métaphysique occidentale.))

Cavarero further discusses the feminist deconstruction of phallogocentrism with Hélène Cixous in the section “Truth Sings in Key.” (Cavarero 2005: 139-45)
confirmed by Duchez in 1974, of its musical import. If we recall Mei’s Humanist attempts to get polyphonists to write monodic music, one might understand how Rousseau’s repeated attacks on Rameau’s theoretical conception of musical harmony were to usher in a similar type of musico-poetic renewal for Romanticism. Although Rousseau, like Nietzsche later, was not successful in turning his musical criticism into an artistic practice, their idea of the predominance of melody in musical composition would find an artist to see it through, namely Richard Wagner. Before moving on to Wagner and Nietzsche, and in light of this section’s criticism of the musical origins of language, I want to remind the reader of the importance of the voice in psychoanalysis, and Lacan’s critical view of institutionalized knowledge, as well as recent attempts by proponents of deconstruction to allow the expressive voice to resonate once again through metaphors of listening.

43 Derrida’s speculation in 1967 that Rousseau’s Essay on the Origins of Language had been a work in progress throughout his life (Derrida 1976: 171–72) was confirmed by Duchez’s publication in 1974 of an early manuscript of Rousseau’s (1755), which she entitles “The Origin of Melody,” and that contains many of the chapters later included in the posthumously published essay. “The Origin of Melody” has since been inserted in the Pléiade’s new edition of Rousseau’s complete works (1995). As Duchez demonstrates, ideas from this manuscript found their way into the posthumously printed essay, as well as in an early essay on music in response to Rameau. The manuscript on melody, however, should not be relegated to the status of a collection of notes in an incomplete form: according to Duchez, it stands on its own as a short essay and cast a decidedly musical slant on Rousseau’s linguistic anthropology. (Duchez 1974)

44 The confusion of musical melody, tone of voice, and the linguistically unbound voice that Dollar reads into Plato (see chapter 1) come together not only in theory, but also in practice in Richard Wagner’s works. Mary Cicora, who cites seminal studies devoted to the problem of language in Wagner, summarizes this musical, poetic, and dramatic weaving:

According to Wagner, language and music once formed a unity, though he specifies that he is discussing an architectonic, not a temporal, progression. Wagner states that the human voice is the oldest and most genuine organ of music. The tone of language was one and the same as the tone of speech. Wagner calls this means of expression ‘Tonsprache’. The vowel of language (‘Wortsprache’) corresponds to the tone of music (‘Tonsprache’) as the language of feeling (‘Empfindungssprache’). The vowel is the subjective, spontaneous expression of feeling. Thus pure ‘Tonsprache,’ consisting only of vowel sounds, is the original, most primal way of expressing the inner being. This is accomplished as the vowel sounds rise and fall, lengthen and shorten. This ‘Tonsprache’ is, in Wagner’s system, the beginning and end of ‘Wortsprache’. Melody, according to Wagner, forms the essence of music. Rhythm, the temporal dimension, is derived from gesture. Wagner explains the emergence of language from this ‘Urmelodie’. (Cicora 1988: 16)
Barring the Voice's Objectification

What follows might be misconstrued by some as a strategy to qualify psychoanalysis as a better form of theoretical thinking. To quote Derrida, however, “the ethic of speech is the delusion of presence mastered.” (Derrida 1976: 139) This citation aptly demonstrates the many ways of getting at the same goal by different means. Thus the main similarity of deconstruction and psychoanalysis that interests me is their different yet critical relation to the voice. While the former theory argues that the precedence of speech over writing is a fiction on which authoritative interpretations should not be grounded, the latter analyses the spoken voice as if it were a text full of gaps, certainly not an authoritative source for the discourse speech would claim to represent as the only aspect of utterance—at the expense of the voice’s non-linguistic, sonorous characteristics.45

In The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, (Seminar XVII) Lacan describes four relationships to knowledge, which I think are paradigmatic of different representations of the voice, and which he introduces as “four radical discourses.” (Lacan 1991: 20) For Lacan,

discourse is […] a necessary structure that goes well beyond speech […]. The fact is that, in truth, discourse can clearly subsist without words. It subsists in certain fundamental relations which would literally not be able to be maintained without language. Through the instrument of language a number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much farther than actual utterances can, of course, be inscribed. (Lacan 1991: 12-13)

While Derrida denounces writing’s subsumption to speech, Lacan denounces the voice’s subsumption to discourse. From this structural vantage point, the representation of the voice is the product of the tension between instances of power and the subject’s relation to his unconscious drives. In other words, conservative institutions which validate and transmit

45 Although Dolar does not question the literary use of vocal figuration in Opera's Second Death, as previously discussed, in the chapter on the ethical voice in A Voice and Nothing More, he starts by discussing how the daemonic voice of Socrates was never prescriptive, but only proscriptive. (Dolar 2006: 83-85)
certain ideas of subjectivity attempt to constrain individual expressions of unconscious truths, in order to establish communal definition of subjective meaning. According to Lacan, there are four discourses that revolve around the production of meaning: they are the university, the master, the hysteric, and the analyst. Lacan’s unfolding explanation of them throughout the year follows an implicit understanding of their historical emergence for thought.

The university discourse is the first introduced since it can be traced back to the aporetic dialogues in which Socrates even asks a slave to teach him about mathematics. This type of discourse dispossesses the subject’s know-how of its trading value. Once the person with the know-how (savoir-faire) has told Socrates how he can make things, then the philosopher can show other people how to do the same:

The point is that this, the second layer, the articulated apparatus, can be transmitted, which means, it can be transmitted from the slave’s pocket to the master’s—assuming they had pockets in those days. It is here that you have the entire effort to isolate what is called episteme. It’s a funny word, I don’t know whether you have given it much thought—“putting oneself in the right position,” in short it is the same word as Verstehen. It is all about finding the position that makes it possible for knowledge to become the master’s knowledge—see Plato’s dialogues—is always borrowed from the techniques of craftsmen, that is to say of serfs. It is a matter of extracting the essence of this knowledge in order for it to become the master’s knowledge. (Lacan 1991: 22)

Lacan chooses to comment specifically on Plato’s Meno because the person interrogated by Socrates is Meno’s slave, that is to say a human being treated as an object. By claiming this as a founding scene for philosophy, Lacan is saying that the university discourse is interested in what the slave’s master neither knows nor asks, because he does not feel the need to know: “the master […] does not know what he wants” and usually does without this knowledge “since the slave satisfies him even before he himself knows what he might desire.” (Lacan 1991: 32, 34) Lacan’s references to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit show how the master starts to acknowledge his lack of desire after the French revolution deprives him of
the symbolic Other of absolutism. I leave the figures of the academic and the master to
themselves for a while longer, but will come back to what their relation to the voice—having
the slave speak or not—means for a structural understanding of their respective discourses.

The academic is to the master what the analyst is to the hysteric, albeit in reverse
fashion. After evoking Plato and Hegel, Lacan turns to a series of women who had stopped
speaking, silently indicating their refusal of their objectified status in the patriarchal
hierarchies of late nineteenth-century societies. In hindsight, what Freud and Breuer
stumbled upon in their *Studies on Hysteria* was the refusal of a subjective stance that political
power, through the control mechanisms of sociocultural discourse, had instituted for these
disenfranchised women. Although Freud’s first stumblings in treating hysteria can be
rightfully criticized (as in the infamous case of Dora), it did finally demonstrate for the rest
of us, and in more ways than Hegel had thought, that “it is not at all self-evident that all
knowledge, by virtue of being knowledge, is known as knowledge.” (Lacan 1991: 30) This
critical understanding of self, beyond dominant discourses and, instead, in relation to
experienced knowledge is

What the analyst establishes as analytic experience […]—the hysterization of discourse.
In other words, it is the structural introduction, under artificial conditions, of the
hysteric’s discourse […]. Since we have signifiers, we must understand one another, and
this is precisely why we don’t understand one another. Signifiers are not made for sexual
relations. […] This is what the hysteric’s discourse means, industrious as she is. In
saying “she,” we are making the hysteric a woman, but this is not her privilege alone.
Many men get themselves analyzed who, by this fact alone, are obliged to pass through
the hysterics discourse, since this is the law, the rule of the game. It is a matter of
knowing what one deduces from this concerning the relations between men and

I would add: nor in any other gender configuration, for that matter. There is no sexual
relation: sex does not signify anything. In turn, this is the work the hysterics discourse

46 Although I am evoking here alienation in labor or work and its recuperation in Lacan’s criticism of the
institutionalization of psychoanalysis’s non-knowledge, I further address this intersection of material and
psychical alienation in the introduction to chapter three.
requires from the master: an embodiment of castration ($), of not being able to signify completion (even at the expense of the other's silence), and a working through of all the mechanisms at work to deny or disavow the interdependency of silence and mastery through fantasies of (sharing in) the other's projected plenitude.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2: Lacan's Four Discourses, Sem. XVII

Since the hysteric's discourse produces the analytic experience, it is also fitting that it is the first psychical structure to reveal by name its association with a discourse, thereby pointing the way to the other psychical structures as well. If one looks at the master's discourse (M), one finds that the denying relation to castration ($) occupies the position of the expense at which desire is produced, namely the neurotic's denial that he is symbolically castrated, that the unconscious exists, and that he cannot master presence through speech. In a regressive quarter-turn revolution, in the discourse to the left of the master, the disavowing relation to castration (the ($) is still under the bar of consciousness) is in the field of the other. This basically means that while the university discourse is ready to theoretically recognize the fact that the unconscious exists, it will not recognize its use in its practice. Hence, the subjective expressions that often constitute the material of the humanities continue to be taken at the face value of their words, a disavowing practice often ensured by methodological constraints, which is especially symptomatic in research obsessed with objectivity, especially in its need for statistics or in its search for rational, definitive
definitions. In other words, the university discourse is the cruelest of the four—it is perverse, after all—since it acknowledges the other’s unconscious for the expedient purposes of speaking of it, of defining it, of observing it squirm as it produces new symptoms that accompany the emerging socio-political constraints brought about by the master’s continued indolence.

The insight gained by understanding these relations to the unconscious allows us to posit them analogously to representations of the voice. Any attempt to listen to the voice, apart from knowing what it already has to say, will be met in the university with a certain form of unease, if not violence. Derrida experienced this institutional sadism, especially in its analytical incarnation, when he tried to displace the authority derived from the voice and institute instead the act of writing as a lack of authority.\(^{47}\) Nietzsche’s relation to an earlier version of the university does not need to be rehearsed here neither. One could also qualify Cavarero’s discourse as revolutionary, not in the colloquial meaning of the term, but in the sense that her book requires from the reader more than a simple agreement or rejection of its thesis: her attention to the voice necessitates a meditation on one’s relation to knowledge and what it has conveniently come to hide.

The revolution is therefore one of discourse and it happens when the position of the agent of the discourse revolves around the bar that demarcates one’s conscious relation to the unconscious. In other words, and to summarize my reading of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, the master’s discourse describes the classic subject of philosophy, namely the neurotic; the hysteric’s discourse describes the eponymous psychic structure; while the university discourse can only be understood in light of perversion. The analyst’s position, characterized by silence, is that his or her *symbolic function* is to embody that which stays out

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\(^{47}\) See, for example, Lamont 1987.
of the imaginary identifications of these discourses and, thereby, forces the analysand to understand them on his/her own terms. This was the ethical importance of Lacan’s message in 1968-69, at the eve of the first integration of psychoanalysis into the university’s institutionalized framework. This being said, I do not intend to psychoanalyze theorists that have tried to textually constrain or free the voice, include or evacuate it from literary theory or from philosophical discourse. I do think, however, that Orphic figuration and its Orphean counterpart show an artistic resilience in the creative means it developed in order to avoid the voice’s confinement as an object for knowledge.

This brings me to Denis Vasse’s understanding of the voice in L’ombilic et la voix, a book dedicated to the study of psychosis in early childhood. In the last chapter, a theoretical summary simply titled “La voix,” Vasse puts forward a dialectical description of the voice, meant to avoid an either-or logic of exclusion and to promote an inclusive understanding (in a diachronic logic) of the voice:

The voice is offered to the permanent risk of being immediately understood as site or knowledge, of standing under one or the other, recuperated. The or is here excluding: it is opposed to the simultaneity of the and. The or introduces the opposition of a radical contradiction. As a support for clarifying understanding, the or manifests the incompatibility of contraries in the field of consciousness. It is the structure of knowledge’s domain and the agent of the contradiction principle, which governs its discourse. In the empty focus of representation, the or forbids that two concepts of different orders be thought of at the same time, such as, for example, presence and representation, the gathering of self in oneself and external self-expression. (Vasse 1974: 180)

Therefore, although Vasse’s definitions always come in pairs, they do not act as binaries, since they exclude the very logic upon which the exclusionary logic of binaries functions. The reader will find in these pairs many of the issues I have discussed so far, namely: presence and representation, embodiment and knowledge, self-expression and dominant discourse.

For Vasse, the comprehension of these pairs is all made possible because of how the
voice constitutes our experience of consciousness:

The voice is neither of the order of representation (knowledge) nor of the order of presence to self (site). It is only conceivable as the clearing that founds the limit it crosses. As the founding crossing of the limit, the voice specifies the limit that separates and counter-distinguishes the body and discourse, site and knowledge. The voice is manifestation of presence, outside the site (body), in the concept, which is a representation of the presence. Apart from the concept of which the voice is the operator, there is neither presence nor knowledge. The voice is the original in-between of knowledge and site. (Vasse 1974: 179)

Since the voice is this in-between that makes all of these concepts thinkable, it is impossible to think of the voice in oppositional terms that exclude each other’s signification. In his inclusionary, diachronic understanding of the voice’s function for thought, Vasse takes into account its physical and physiological definitions. The voice is not only constituted by phonation (physical); the voice only comes into being if it is also heard (physiological), if another listens. Being heard, being listened to, symbolically constitutes for the subject the space of the other’s silent body: it grounds the subject’s voice and founds its embodiment as it resonates in the other’s silent body, a welcoming gathering that is necessary for individuation and the sense of self in self-expression. A voice is never only an expression of subjectivity or of presence, nor simply a tool to participate in the discourses of knowledge, but always already both at the same time.

By insisting on the diachronic character of vocal experience, Vasse distances himself from positions that rely solely on the physical aspects of the voice:

Quite the contrary, to define it as founder of the limit it crosses is to say that there is no presence thinkable “on this side” nor representation thinkable “on that side” of the voice. If it were otherwise, it would be but what it already is in the mind of many: as presence, the indescribable realm delivered to the ineffable intuition of the “metaphysicians;” and as knowledge, the realm of the describable, delivered to the empty focus of the physicians’ discourse. (Vasse 1974: 180)

A metaphysical approach to the voice is not contrary to a physical one, it only perpetuates the logic of physicality on an allegorical plane, as it were. Belief, however, precisely operates in a logic contrary to physicality, one of being heard (the physiological voice). If listening to
someone is to gather his/her voice and give it a symbolic resting place within the resonating cavity created by one’s silent body, then belief arises from the feeling of having been heard in the other’s silence. The other’s silence is the promised beyond that is called upon through invocation.

The subject’s relation to his or her own history is here shown to be organized not so much in relation to a book, but in relation to vocal experience. To only know reality as a being constituted through and within language is a limitation, yet this linguistic perception of reality is precisely what allows us to imagine the limit and its beyond. This is precisely the symbolic function of the voice in the linguistic constitution of subjectivity: to be the original yet constantly reiterative site of an embodiment articulated within a space that lies beyond the sense of self. By extension, the physiological definition of the voice also creates the possibility of a space beyond perception of self and others which awaits the subject. Invocative singing also lies in the liminality of presence and knowledge, outside and inside, here and there; it is a promisory experience, a glimpse of a completion to come. This is yet another reason why figuration, which operates within this logic of advent, should not simply be confined to literary historicity, but should also include those figures that call upon the rhetorical presence of the voice within the text.48

In Listening, Jean-Luc Nancy writes that “figure and idea” are better suited to each other than sound and understanding. By doing so, he confirms the philosophical tradition’s marginalization of sound from the figure. For him, the figure is understood as an object situated between “the view or the vision and the gaze” and “the goal or contemplation of the philosopher.” (Nancy 2007: 2) When philosophy stops analyzing its objects, however, and pays attention to “the appearance or manifestation of being” (Nancy 2007: 3), then the

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48 See Walter J. Ong (1977: 56).
figure is clothed in metaphors of sonorous repetition: truth “becomes no longer the naked figure emerging from the cistern but the resonance of the cistern […], the echo of the naked figure in the open depths.” (Nancy 2007: 4) Nancy’s reading of listening through the phenomenological tradition seems to displace Adriana Cavarero’s problem of the “devocalization of the *logos*” throughout Western history in order for it to “conform to the videocentric sphere of thought” (Cavarero 2005: 45)—an argument that runs counter to the supposed phonocentrism of Derrida’s history of philosophy—when he writes:

> perhaps it is necessary that sense not be contented to make sense (or to be *logos*), but that it want also to resound. My whole proposal will revolve around a resonance as a foundation, as a first or last profundity of “sense” itself (or of truth). (Nancy 2007: 6)

Elsewhere, Nancy writes in an endnote that listening “would offer a differential in relation to and in the ‘presence-to-self’ of the philosophical ‘voice,’ especially the Husserlian voice, as Derrida has analyzed it.” (in Szendy 2008: 145)**49** I do not think Nancy is suggesting here that writing about listening is another way of expressing the live voice. In fact, without saying so in a metaphor, his reference to *Speech and Phenomena* insists that listening should be understood in terms of a visual spacing of communication. Indeed, the image of the resonating figure in the cistern speaks of sound, but only in a metaphorical space of visual, yet invisible containment. What if Nancy, however, had been asking the right question from the start: “hasn’t philosophy superimposed upon listening?” (2007: 1) Avowedly, this move purposefully misinterprets Nancy by taking sides with Cavarero and Dyson in thinking of the history of philosophy as a videocentric enterprise. The musical representations of the voice are not simply figures contained within the confines of the cistern metaphor, however, but indications of dynamic gestures. Since these sounds are not merely static objects, nor the as

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**49** Nancy ends his preface to Peter Szendy’s book *Listen* with a reference to Nietzsche that is reminiscent, once again, of the structure of figuration: “Why did Nietzsche speak about the “music of the future”* l’avenir*, or the yet-to-come *l’à venir*, always above all musical?” (Nancy in Szendy 2008: xiii)
yet undefined representations of articulated words to come, their transgression of a delimited conceptual space demonstrates how expressivity makes knowledge lose its bearings. This is a liminal space in which sonorous artistic practice subverts the relation between language and reason.50

50 Once again, see Dolar 1996: 17 ff.
The Orphean Reversal

Inverting the Orpheus legend, Tristan returns to the world of light and life to find his beloved and take her to the world of night, death, and love.

Linda & Michael Hutcheon

In this last section of the chapter, I will begin by examining how Nietzsche’s views on Orphism should be distinguished from those on Orpheus. By thinking of Orpheus as a figure akin to the Hellenic Dionysus, a Dionysus which Apollo has incorporated into Greek culture, I rehearse how Wagner and Nietzsche respond differently to tragic Romantic art. The poetic extension of the voice in Tristan und Isolde does beg the question of its inscription into a discourse. Beyond speech and the voice, there is a relation to truth and authority in Wagner’s sublime appropriation of the sung voice, which, although it undeniably procures an aesthetic jouissance, leaves one with an uneasy sense of foreboding. The overpowering of the subject, the inscription of its silenced voice into a larger driving force that propels it, will reemerge in the next chapter. Nietzsche’s reaction to Wagner, his care in not using transcending aesthetics to appropriate the moral authority left vacant by the failure of Christianity, is examined by underlining the importance of voice in his writings as the expression of one’s own experience, instead of the sublimation of multiple voices into a larger discursive aesthetic.

Nietzsche and the Dionysian Orpheus

It might seem counterintuitive to associate Nietzsche with Orpheus rather than with Dionysus, especially in light of the Apollonian attributes Orpheus inherits from the iconographic tradition and of his supposed revelation of the Music of the Spheres to the
Pythagoreans. Thinking of Orpheus as an Apollonian Christ-figure makes further sense when one understands the ascetic eschatological concerns of Orphism as precursors to Christian morality. Indeed, Nietzsche’s criticism of world-hating asceticism influenced a whole philological tradition that sees in Orpheus the precursor to Paul’s rejection of the world and of his doctrine of ascetic repentence:

Nietzsche’s idea that Socrates (or Plato) was responsible for the transformation of the world-affirming Hellenic spirit to the world-hating ethic later dominant in Christianity seems to have profoundly influenced not only Nietzsche’s friend Rohde, but generations of scholars who followed in the wake of Rohde’s fundamental study of Greek eschatological beliefs. The Orphic ideology postulated by Rohde and others provide a chain of transmission for these beliefs […]. Rohde vigorously places the blame for Christian eschatology on the perversions of the Orphics and the Platonic philosophers. (Edmonds 2004a: 16, 16n37)

If one also allows, pace Auerbach, that the Orpheus figure transmitted the Christian worldview of reality, which is to say, the illusion of this world and the reality of the next, Nietzsche’s ties to Orpheus seem definitively contrived, to say the very least. Nevertheless, the association of Nietzsche with an Orphic figure is not as farfetched as one might initially think. If the voice of Orpheus could resonate in the world of the dead, and come back to daylight to sing of this experience, surely Nietzsche must have associated him with Dionysus, the only Greek god, along with Persephone, to have died and been restored to life, although only partially in the case of the latter.

Disbelief in the possibility of Nietzsche’s interest in Orpheus also goes back to what Walter Burkert criticizes as a misinterpretation of Nietzsche’s “primal opposition of ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian.’” (Burkert 1972: 132) In trying to explain the opposition by way of divine cult, Burkert reconstitutes the argument that if Apollo was the only god of Pythagoras, the first mathematician, then “the antithesis of Apollonian rationality and
Dionysian mysticism fits very nicely.” (Burkert 1972: 132) But Burkert warns against drawing such hasty conclusions:

We must bear in mind, however, that as the Greeks thought of them, Apollo and Dionysus were brothers; the supposed clear differentiation of Pythagoreanism from Orphism is simply not attested in the oldest sources. (Burkert 1972: 132)

First of all, the Pythagoreans had not always been mathematicians, as Burkert’s discussions of the oral acusmatici and literate mathematici aptly demonstrates. (Burkert 1972: 192-207) In turn, the earlier oral strand of Pythagoreanism explains how it was also connected to the mysteries:

Pythagoras’ teaching is permeated with the kind of religion characteristic of Magna Graecia [today’s Italy]. Typical of this is the prominence of the chthonian divinities—Demeter, Persephone, Dionysus—and of eschatological beliefs, especially the type that produced the numerous representations of the journey of the deified dead into the Beyond. (Burkert 1972: 112)

Accordingly, when scholars want to minimize the importance of Orpheus as a religious reformer in Ancient Greece, they argue for an increased presence of the Pythagorean cult:

Scholars’ conceptions of Pythagoreanism and of Orphism are inevitably as interdependent as the pans of a balance. A ‘minimalist’ attitude to the Orphic tradition raises the importance of Pythagoreanism, while hypercriticism toward Pythagoreanism peoples Greece with Orphotelestae.” (Burkert 1972: 125)

As Burkert points out, it is for these very reasons that there is no common opinion on

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51 One should also keep in mind that Dionysus is no longer the symbol of frenzied dithyrambs in Nietzsche’s later writing, but of artistic passion mastered:

This picture of the Dionysian, as a most destructive fever, is so far from its alleged glorification at the expense of the Apollinian [Kaufmann’s translation] that one may wonder how The Birth of Tragedy could ever have been so thoroughly misconstrued. The explanation, however, is easy enough. It has been overlooked that the Dionysus whom Nietzsche celebrated as his own god in his later writings is no longer the deity of formless frenzy whom we meet in Nietzsche’s first book. Only the name remains, but later the Dionysian represents passion controlled as opposed to the extirpation of the passions which Nietzsche more and more associated with Christianity. The “Dionysus” in the Dionysus versus Apollo of Nietzsche’s first book and the “Dionysus versus the Crucified” in the last line of Nietzsche’s last book do not mean the same thing. The later Dionysus is the synthesis of the two forces represented by Dionysus and Apollo in The Birth of Tragedy—and thus Goethe, certainly not an anti-Apollinian, can appear in one of Nietzsche’s last books [Twilight of the Idols, IX 49] as the perfect representative of what is now called Dionysian. (Kaufmann 1974: 128)

52 Consult Burkert 1972: 132, n67 for a summary of the “apollonizing” debate by synchronist and minimalist scholars. See also Biebuyck et al for a discussion of Apollo’s weaving of Dionysus into Greek culture: Dionysus Zagreus is a product of a Hellenized Dionysus. (Biebuyck et al 2004: 162-63)
Orphism. Nonetheless, archaeological discoveries of the past decades have rendered traces connecting the Orphics with the cult of Dionysus.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1951, three small tablets dating from the fifth or sixth century BCE were found at Olbia, a colony of Miletus, in Northern Sardinia, but they were only published in 1978. They bear inscriptions that connect the Orphics to the worship of Dionysus.\textsuperscript{54} By combining these finds with the distinctions Noel Robertson makes between private and civic cults in Ancient Olbia, we come one step closer to understanding the Dionysian origins of Orphism:

From the epigraphic record we happen to know as well that Dionysus Bakcheios was honored with civic cult and age-old ceremony in the mother city of Miletus and in her numerous colonies, including Olbia. During the fifth century, then, something of the civic cult was put to private use by Orphic believers. (Robertson 2003: 219)\textsuperscript{55}

Robertson concludes that Orphics were followers of Dionysus from the outset. If the beliefs of Orphics were inspired by civic cults, they must have been initiates, i.e. prominent

\textsuperscript{53} Since the nineteenth century, the role of Orpheus in the transformation of Archaic Greek religion has been a point of disagreement between readers who interpret the remaining traces as scant indications of a widespread religious fact, and those who refuse to speculate, who only carefully deduce certainties of a general nature based on hard literary evidence. The latter, because of their minimalist approach, criticize the former’s diachronic interpretations of the traces; they would be reading too much of our own culture—mainly a literary understanding of religion—into the fragments passed down by tradition and those discovered through archaeological work. Such a technological conception of history—history as the sum of inscriptions—confines literature to its material objectification, namely script:

There is no such thing as a communis opinio on Orphism, especially since the sensational discovery of the papyrus of Derveni has shaken many established views. [...] The most critical study of the Orphic tradition is Linforth’s, followed by Moulinier [...]. The most favorable treatment of the Orphic tradition since Kern, is that of Ziegler [...]. A middle position is sought by Guthrie [and] Nilsson. (Burkert 1972: 125, 125n28)

Edmonds falls decidedly in the category of the minimalists, and his reading of Erwin Rohde’s views on Orphism aims at demonstrating how apparently synchronic arguments rely on a Christian conception of religion projected back onto Ancient Greek mystery cults. Consult Edmonds’ review of Bernabé’s recent edition of Orphic fragments (Edmonds 2004b) and Bernabé’s reply (2008: 179 ff.).

\textsuperscript{54} “Encroaching upon ΔΙΟ is the most exciting word of all: ΟΡΦΙΚ. Rusyaeva reads ΟΡΘΟΚΟΤ. If she is right, these devotees of Dionysus call themselves Orphics, and this is the first piece of evidence for the application of the term to a religious community in antiquity [...]” (West 1982: 21)

\textsuperscript{55} Robertson argues that

At Olbia the bone plaques were employed in rites which had to do both with “Dionysus” and with “Orphic” belief. [...] The rites in question were doubtless private rather than civic, and yet they were conspicuous. Now it is just such rites, and at Olbia, that we hear of in a famous passage of Herodotus (4.79) — private rites of Dionysus Bakcheios that were conspicuous to all [...]. (Robertson 2003: 219)

members of the city’s religious socio-economical organization:

To understand Orphic ritual and belief we must go back to the rites and myths of Dionysus in Greek cities. [...] The original Greek initiates or mystai did not join a separate social group, a tribe or band or sect or livelihood. They lent themselves instead to civic cults of, chiefly, Dionysus or Demeter and sought to promote the fertility of the corresponding part of nature, vine or grain. (Robertson 2003: 219-220)

Thus the Orphic initiates revolved within preexisting social and religious structures. These considerations lead Robertson to think of other examples of civic cults that might have influenced Orphism, like the coexistence of Apollo and Dionysus in the temple at Delphi.

In The Birth of Tragedy (BT) Nietzsche mentions Orpheus twice, once in relation to Euripides, and then in reference to the Italian Humanists, in order to make the same criticism: both Euripides’ Socratic tragedy and Humanist opera are genres in which an uncomfortable mix of rational thought and poetics cannot do proper justice to the musical qualities of true art. (Nietzsche 1999: 64, 90) Socratic culture and Euripides’s personification of gods to legitimize moral laws constitute the backdrop of this discussion. Nietzsche speculates that Euripides would have imagined Socrates as his “second spectator” in order to

56 One could then speculate that Orphic ascetism might even have been a private form of sacrificial offering for nature’s regeneration, which would explain the mythic strands that name Orpheus as the law-giver who taught the Greeks to forego human sacrifices:

Orpheus’s cultural historical deed was the introduction of rites [teletatai: initiations] and the end of murders [phonoi: human sacrifices]. Some have seen in this second deed an indication of Orphic vegetarianism, but this Thracian teaching may have been important enough for only a few people, such that it could serve here as an argument for the meaning of the poet, and the word phonos forbids such a connection; phonoi were the murders of men. (Graf 1974: 34, my trans.)

(Des Orpheus kulturhistorische Tat war die Einführung von teletatai und die Beendigung von phonoi. Man hat in dieser zweiten Tat einen Hinweis auf orphischen Vegetarismus gesehen – aber diese Lehre des Thrakers dürfte wenig Menschen so wichtig gewesen sein, daß sie hier als Argument für die Bedeutung der Dichter dienen könnte, und das Wort phonos verbietet eine solche Beziehung; phonoi sind Morde an Menschen.)

57 Robertson argues that “behind the Orphic creation story we [are] able to discern the Delphic festivals of Dionysus.” (Robertson 2003: 229) Rohde’s insistence that Dionysus must be buried under Apollo’s tripod at Delphi can be interpreted as an attempt to uphold the “primal opposition” between them that Burkert denounces: “one and only one quite untrustworthy witness says it was Dionysos” that lay buried under the tempel’s navel stone. (Rohde 1925: 97) (Incidentally, Robertson’s reconstruction of rituals gives credence to this source.) All other sources, according to Rohde, relate how the torn limbs of Dionysus-Zagreus (the name given to the victim of the Titans) were buried under Apollo’s tripod. To clarify the point: Rohde’s Apollo is not sharing the scene here, but excluding Dionysus from worship in the temple. According to Biebuyck et al, this was also Nietzsche’s view (BT §2). (Biebuyck et al 2004: 160)
come up with his own type of tragic representation. Nietzsche remarks that by wanting to become the creator of the object of Socrates’s aesthetic desire, Euripides misunderstands the Dionysian-Apollonian tension that previously drove tragic creation and made it sublime.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus through Euripides’s fantasy of satisfying Socrates’s supposed aesthetic desire, a “new Orpheus […] rises up against […] the Dionysiac nature of the older art.” (Nietzsche 1999: 64, my emphasis) Similarly, the Humanist’s desire to re-create Greek tragedy is symptomatic for Nietzsche of a culture that misses the whole point of artistic creation, namely the tension between the expressive drive (to dislocation) with a formal organization to indicate its appearance.\textsuperscript{59} Before moving on, however, one should not forget to ask what is so new about this Orpheus.

Modernity did inherit from Orpheus’s Renaissance attributes a rather rational conception of the poet, in line with his Apollonian lyre and the order and harmony he brings to the world:

In himself Orpheus has many Apolline characteristics, his music, his calm and civilised air. [...] It is worthy of mention that Apollo’s music too was said to gather wild beasts around him. [...] This brings the two figures into very close connection indeed. (Guthrie 1935: 42)

Nietzsche argues in *BT* that this rationalization of Orpheus had already taken place in the “development” of tragedy in Ancient Greece. Indeed, Guthrie, in the passage I have just quoted, relies on Euripides’s *Alestis* to promote Apollo’s Orphic musicianship:

In you even Pythian Apollo of the goodly lyre deigned to dwell, in your pastures he condescended to become herdsmen, piping to your flocks shepherds’ wedding songs

\textsuperscript{58} On Nietzsche’s understanding of the sublime in tragedy, see Brillenburg-Wurth 2009: 91-94.

\textsuperscript{59} On music and the drives, see Stambaugh’s article, “Music As a Temporal Form:”

The temporal character of musical material requires a principle of renewal. This renewal does not happen at random. It is articulated in its inner matrix as rhythm. Rhythm is not a pure flowing extension, pure duration, but rather a pulse, a kind of punctuated force. In order to have rhythm, the “material” in question cannot be massively, continuously present. It must be such that it renews itself constantly. (Stambaugh 1964: 270, my emphasis)
upon the sloping hills. (Euripides, Alcestis 578 ff)\textsuperscript{60}

Here the lyre acts once again as an Orphic symbol. In recalling the previous discussion, however, one should remember that the voice is neither symbol nor allegory, and therefore is not part of Euripides’s Apollonian musical \textit{objects}. If Apollo is the condescending force that orders the music making of common people, then the expressive force driving their folk songs must be in some kind of opposition to the rationalizing enterprise.\textsuperscript{61} Therefore, one could argue that the \textit{old} Orpheus is the absent figure in \textit{BT}, whose implied vocal presence by omission resists symbolization in objects like the lyre or even the \textit{aulos}.\textsuperscript{62}

Nietzsche’s problem with the figuration of Orpheus in Humanist opera is that, as a \textit{new and improved} Orpheus, he symbolizes modernity’s docile imitation of artistic creation, aiming to reorganize the disillusion, brought on by the awareness of life’s existence above

\textsuperscript{60}This certainly evokes the first act choruses of Monteverdi’s \textit{L’Orfeo}. Yet even within Nietzsche’s sources concerning Euripides, Orpheus cannot be solely understood as Apollonian: “Very ancient: Heraklides testifies that in the Temple of Dionysus at Haemus there existed old records of the name Orpheus and that Pythagoras had used it (scholium to Euripides’ Alcestis, 968).” (Nietzsche 2001: 11n2)

\textsuperscript{61}F. Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}. “What have I never forgiven Wagner for? That he \textit{condescended} to the Germans, that he became \textit{reichdeutsch}…” (Nietzsche 2005: 93) I thank Nandita Biswas-Mellamphy for having pointed out this passage to me.

\textsuperscript{62}Noting that Nietzsche was not attracted to Plato’s refiguration of Socrates as a flute player and disciple of Dionysus in \textit{Symposium}, Cavarero explains why Nietzsche would have omitted this reference in \textit{BT}. The origin of philosophy, in an Apollonian victory,

is not simply the triumph of the cithara over the flute, but rather the triumph of visionary reason over musical experience. Letting Dionysus preside over the acoustic sphere, Nietzsche understands Apollo above all as the god of figurative art, and thus of the eye and vision, of beautiful and luminous appearance, of form. The essential Platonism of philosophy has its roots precisely in this privileging form, which organizes the videocentric logic of thought. Starting with an already Platonized Socrates who, rather than embodying the bewitching song of the flute, gets placed on the cithara, philosophy announces itself as Apollonian contemplation of the ideas and, at the same time, as dialectic. Videocentrism and logocentrism coincide in metaphysical knowledge, which opposed itself to the enchanting flute playing of Dionysus. (Cavarero 2005: 75)

\textsuperscript{Cf. Biebuyck, Praet, and Vanden Poel’s explanation of this “new Orpheus”:}

When discussing the impact of Socrates on tragic civilization in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, Nietzsche calls him the “new Orpheus,” thereby alluding to the laceration of the famous singer by the Bassarids, the votaries of Dionysus, after he had betrayed their god and started worshipping Apollo, and to Lycurgus, whom we already met as an Apollonian metamorphosis (\textit{BT} §12). Even though the Dionysian was, in many ways, superior in force and violence to the rationalizing opponent who challenged him—and who was destined to be subdued—it chose to continue its action, not as part of public society, but as an underground and secret movement. (Biebuyck et al 2004: 165)
and beyond human life, into abating representations of existential plenitude. Nietzsche reproaches the *theoretical men* of the Renaissance for their invention of opera from an abstraction of Greek music obtained through bookish knowledge. The *stile rappresentativo*, or the singing recitation of a poem, does not embody his views of the tearing experience music drama or tragedy should be. While Girolamo Mei—a *theoretical man* par excellence since he never practiced music—helped pave the way towards opera with his work on the prosodic clarity of monophony in Ancient Greek tragedy, Humanist opera’s aim “to hear the words clearly,” (Nietzsche 1999: 89) to Nietzsche’s mind, betrays the wish to subsume music to the delusion that understanding can “heal the eternal wound of existence.” (Nietzsche 1999: 85) Relying on Schopenhauer and Wagner’s conception of music to distance himself from “theoretical” opera, Nietzsche claims that the faith in being able to explain away the world, in understanding it abstractly as a whole—what he calls Socratic optimism—is precisely the illusion music helps to dispel, as it manifests the drive of the Will. One concludes here that underlying ideology of the Orpheus figure, in its Romantic reconfiguration, has been reversed.  

Whether as a literary/musical promise of an afterworld or of this world’s cosmic harmony, reality is denounced as an illusion upon the same authority of the expressive aspect of figuration that tradition had strived to contain, namely sonority. This brings to mind how Auerbach’s history of the literary representation of reality acknowledges how figuration had restrained the modern development of tragedy. (Auerbach 1953: 317) Nietzsche’s affirmation in *BT* that Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s “insight marks the beginning of a culture which [he] dare[s] to describe as a tragic culture” (Nietzsche 1999: 87) concords with my understanding of the Orpheus figure’s reversal and with Peter Szondi’s thesis in *An Essay on*
from the emergence of the concept of the tragic, as opposed to tragedy as a genre.

Thinking of Orpheus as anti-Dionysian in Nietzsche’s thought is all the more difficult after the translation of his Basle lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. In light of these lectures, which precede *BT* by only a few years and inform its writing, Orpheus cannot be shown to have been despised by Nietzsche as a precursor to Christian moralists and the Humanists (theoretical men): rather, Nietzsche despised what had been made of him. The difference is important in terms of figuration, since Orpheus has become the name (once-removed) for Dionysus. In a note to the third lecture on the “Mythical Preliminary Stage of Philosophy,” Nietzsche writes:

Orpheus was the manifestation of the Dionysus ruling in Hades, Zagreus. The name points to darkness, as well as underworld descent: Orpheus is torn to pieces by the Maenads; Zagreus, by the Titans. The religious songs around which the ancient Orphic mysteries revolved were inspirational. The usual viewpoint that Orphic secret teachings entered only after Homer is entirely uncertain. Homer’s silence is explained well by the contradiction in which the spirit of Homeric poetry stands to Orphic poetry. […] From the beginning of the sixth-century, religion set itself in motion, and with it the Orphic teachings rose out of the darkness. […] Onomacritus and Orpheus of Croton then seek to bring the Orphic teachings into agreement with folk belief. (Nietzsche 2001: 11)

Apart from making manifest the Netherworld-figure of Dionysus, Nietzsche’s understanding of Orpheus is neither incompatible with “folk belief” nor with the singing of shepherds. In fact, Orpheus appears to be in Nietzsche’s thought, as he is for others, the very figure to embody the tension between a condescending Apollo and a frenzy-inducing Dionysus:

The genius of the heart, as it is possessed by that great hidden one, the tempter god and born pied piper of consciences, *whose voice knows how to descend into the underworld of every soul,* […] that makes everything loud and complacent fall silent and learn to listen, that smooths out rough souls and gives them the taste of a new desire, […] that guesses the hidden and forgotten treasure, the drop of goodness and sweet spirituality under thick,
Thus, in Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche associates the Orphic descent and the attributes of the Orphic lyre with the flute-playing searching-god, Dionysus.65

The refinement of the argument, which distinguishes Nietzsche’s understanding of the “old Orpheus” from his symbolic appropriation in Orphism, will help in understanding the resilience of Nietzsche’s expressive, musical voice, of which I write below. Before I come back to this discussion, however, I turn now to the third figure in the Romantic reversal of Orpheus: Tristan. While Ossian sings and longs for a bygone era during which his loved-ones were still alive, Macpherson’s poems represent him as an older man whose active days are over. With Werther this same despair had been transmitted to a young man who could emulate the veiled Orphean romance, but who only sings—that is recites his translation of the poems—from the grave through a posthumous letter. In Gottfried von Strassburg’s poem, the source for Wagner’s libretto, Tristan combines both Ossianic melancholia and Werther’s youth. Tristan is orphaned while still an infant, and when he discovers this fact as a young man, the knowledge that his adoptive father is not his own blood doubles his feeling of loss. From then on, Gottfried’s poem shows a young man who has already given up his

65 Guthrie gives the following account:

The Orphics never had the power to bring [the union of Apollo and Dionysus] about, but it was their purpose to foster it, and in their syncretistic literature they identified the two gods by giving out that both alike were Helios, the Sun. Helios = supreme god = Dionysos = Apollo (cp. Kern, Orpheus, 7). (Guthrie 1935: 43)

Jörg Zimmerman explains Nietzsche’s lack of overt identification with Orpheus “because of the state of research in classics during his day, which made difficult the transition to an equally official Dionysian interpretation of the Orpheus myth.” (Zimmerman 2003: 59, my trans.) (Dies erklärt sich vor allem aus Forschungssituation in der Altphilologie, die den Übergang zu einer gleichsam offiziellen dionysischen Lesart des orphicus-mythos erschwert.) Indeed, the very first confrontation of the Apollonian interpretation of the Orpheus myth was only published in 1809, in George Friedrich Creuzer’s study of the Dionysian origins and causes of Orphica. (Zimmermann 2003: 56)

ties to this world: he forsakes his claim to his lands in France and embarks on a series of hopeless missions that he does not expect to complete. The last mission, fetching Isolde for Mark, defeats him, precisely because in love—beyond the *jouissance* provoked by the love elixir—he would have found a home, a body in which his voice would have once again resonated, been welcomed, and in which his self could have been gathered.66

*Tristan und Isolde, “an Orphic figure in reverse”*

In the previous chapter, I describe the Orpheus figure as a prefiguration of the dislocation of the body and self at the final exhalation, and the eternal liturgy of early Christian eschatology as an imaginary fulfillment that rescinds the individual’s psyche and body. In the present chapter, by organizing my thoughts around the reversal of the Orpheus figure, I have written thus far of how Macpherson avoids any type of Christian symbol or allegory—like the eternal soul’s salvation, for example—in order to ground Ossian’s claims to antiquity. As previously mentioned, one of the consequences of this claim to fame is the transposition of belief in the afterlife to

> the hope of gaining a glory passed on by art, thus ensuring a kind of eternity which is not transcendental. The trust in a moral order is replaced by a culture of remembrance. In *Ossian*, man becomes the generator and administrator of immortality.”

(Schmidt 2004: 191)

Ossian, like Werther, is remembered for his tragic pathos. Their tragic despair speaks to their impossibility of knowing whether or not their songs will resound beyond their lives. The pathos of the literature resides in the very fact that we as readers are there, in their projected future, to receive (or not) the echoes of their uncertain voices. Although there are aesthetic

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66 Other studies link Orpheus to Nietzsche. Roberto di Bella (2004) reads the five categories of travelers in part two of *Human, All Too Human* in order to tie them into Orphic quests for personal aesthetics in twentieth-century Italian literature.
musical considerations that tie Ossian to Wagner’s music drama, I want to consider here the pessimism that accompanies this reversal of figuration and its ties to sonority and the unconscious. Without hope in an embodied afterlife but still gripped with the unconscious drive to foreshadow through singing the beyond of death’s dislocation of body and self, Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde seeks to transcend this despair and pessimism. He does so by artistically representing the embodiment of the intellect and the Will, as theorized by Arthur Schopenhauer, using all of his musical and poetic abilities to give the spectators, suspended

67 See Christopher Smith’s contribution to The Reception of Ossian in Europe, which ends on this note:

Though saying that Ossian was one element among many is true, [in searching for alternatives to Classical routines] that would hardly be fair: the contribution was recognized as possessing a character of its own. In many works this implied a particular tone of lament. In some of Schubert’s songs, as in Le Sueur’s Les Bardes which also opened up new spheres for opera to explore, this led to a movement away from melody towards a style of modulated declamation. The importance of this development for the greatest operatic presentations of tragic German myth can hardly be exaggerated. (Smith 2004: 392)

Indeed Schubert’s Ossian lieder, in their attempt to musically convey the poetic qualities of these “new” epic poems, use a sort of declamation that one also finds in his long German folkloric ballads. Although these songs are of historical interest, they are not as popular with song enthusiasts as the lieder in which Ossianic themes have been distilled into a more lyrical voice, such as in Schubert’s two settings of Goethe’s An den Mond.

Smith’s claim for the influence of Ossian on “the greatest operatic presentations of German myth,” a barely veiled allusion to Wagner, merits here at least the mention of Matthias Wessel’s Die Ossian-Dichtung in der musikalischen Komposition (1994). Wessel mainly cites Wagner because of Friedrich Eduard Sobolewski. A minor composer, Sobolewski succeeded in gaining some attention by polemically opposing his Ossianic opera Komala (given in Bremen in 1856 and Weimar in 1858) to Wagner’s romantic operas (Tannhäuser, Der fliegende Holländer and Lohengrin) by publishing an aesthetic pamphlet titled “Opera, not Drama.” (1857) According to Wessel,

The violent reaction to Wagner’s [dramatic] innovations, which realistically arises from a misunderstanding, is rooted in Sobolewski’s opinion that music is a medium whose content cannot by grasped by language and that transcends conceptualization. He turns the term “true melody” against Richard Wagner, without however - as Richard Pohl’s review of Komala [1859] rightly criticizes - submitting it to theoretical clarification. Since the overall writing is not original, one may suspect the work of ideas foreign to the text. Sobolewski was probably inspired by Eduard Hanslick, who did not speak of “true melody,” but who did speak out against the interruption of melodic flow through the insertion of recitative and who points out that music does not rise to language, but can only condescend to it. (Wessel 1994: 79, my trans.)

(Die heftige Reaktion auf Wagners Neuerungen, die sachlich einem Mißverständnis entspringt, ist in Sobolewskis Auffassung begründet, daß die Musik ein inhaltlich durch die Sprache nicht faßbares und deren Begrifflichkeit transcendierendes Medium sei. Gegen Richard Wagner wendet er den Terminus der “wahren Melodie”, ohne ihn jedoch - wie Richard Pohl in der Rezension der Komala zurecht kritisiert - einer theoretischen Klärung zu unterziehen. Da die Originalität der Schrift insgesamt als gering eingestuft ist, kann auch hier fremdes Gedankengut vermutet werde. Mit einiger Wahrscheinlichkeit lehnt sich Sobolewski an Eduard Hanslick an, der zwar nicht von “wahrer Melodie” spricht, sich aber gleichfalls gegen eine Unterbrechung des melodischen Flusses durch rezitativische Einschübe ausrichtet und darauf verweist, daß die Musik sich nicht zur Sprache erheben, sondern nur zu ihr herablassen könne.)

By this time, Wagner had already read Schopenhauer and started work on Tristan. Sobolewski’s aesthetic polemic against Wagner’s Romantic operas, using the poetic authority of Ossian, was therefore met only a few years later with another revamped medieval poet figure, when Tristan premiered in 1865.
in a veil of beautiful appearances, an aesthetic experience of how their opposing tension is transfigured.\(^{68}\)

At the outset of their first chapter on *Tristan* in their book *Opera: The Art of Dying*, Linda and Michael Hutcheon introduce the ideological worldview that informs their historical reading of Wagner’s music drama. They evoke the conceptualization of death in the works of Novalis, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to make their readers aware of a gap between the dominant relation to death in present-day Western societies and that of the nineteenth century, a time in which death was “sought after” and was thought to be not only the termination of life “but also specifically its aim and goal.” (Hutcheon 2004: 45) An earlier example of this morbid fascination can also be found in the Ossianic pathos of Goethe’s *Werther*, which inspired many a melancholic youth to don a blue coat over a yellow vest, put a copy of the novel in his pocket, and commit suicide:

> In order to express this view in a convincing manner, as you might expect, they have had to reverse many of the expectations and assumptions of their age. […] Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) offers a relevant focus for exploring this strangely positive view of death, in part because it is so often misinterpreted as a conventional tragic love story. But this music drama’s obsession with death is not, in fact, at all pessimistic or tragic. (Hutcheon 2004: 45-46, my emphasis)\(^{69}\)

As the title to this subsection affirms, I am especially indebted to the Hutcheons in underlining the inversion of the Orpheus figure at the hands of Wagner.\(^{70}\) While they argue

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\(^{68}\) On the self, the Will, and the unconscious see Günter Zöller and Sebastian Gardner’s contributions to *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*. (Janoway, ed. 2006)

\(^{69}\) According to Walter Strauss, the principal distinction between Dante’s religious renewal after Beatrice’s death (as recalled in *La Vita Nuova*) and Novalis’s spiritual regeneration after the death of Sophie, is the latter’s resignation to continue on living in spite of a manifest death wish and its expression in nocturnal mysticism. “This remarkable work [Hymnen an die Nacht] is the locus classicus of the voluptuous mystique of the night and the ultimate expression of the nostalgia of death; it is the indisputable source of many of the best and most seductive passages in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*.” (Strauss: 1971: 28)

\(^{70}\) To put the citation from this section’s epigraph in context:

This Freudian and Schopenhauerian inversion of the meaning and value of death is also enacted in *Tristan und Isolde*: […] in the portrayal of Tristan as a kind of Orpheus figure in reverse in Act 3, as he returns to the world of the living to bring Isolde to that transfigured state in death. These cultural inversions are Wagner’s means of convincing his audience through his art that a new—and different—
for Tristan’s anti-Orphic figuration from a philosophical perspective, invoking Wagner’s sympathies for Schopenhauer and Novalis, I have been working towards its inversion from a historical perspective of Orphic figuration. Of the writers referenced by the Hutcheons who also associate Tristan with Orpheus, I will be discussing the work of Carolyn Abbate. I will also be bringing to the discussion on the medieval source of Tristan a book chapter by Raymond Joly titled “Wehen – Weise. La transfiguration du souffle dans Tristan und Isolde de Richard Wagner.” (Joly 1998)

Of the introductory comments Abbate’s article makes in order to frame her argument, the reference to the fable is most salient to the present discussion. She mentions the fable only, it would seem, to dispel it; however, though she does not mention the fable again by name, her critique of the purely musical analyses of Wagner’s Tristan reads—reminiscent of Warton’s above—as an apology for a return to a more poetic reading of music drama:

Wagner proposes, as he had before in Oper und Drama, that his music transcends canonic rules governing pure music. But he also makes a point about music’s means for symbolising the poetic idea justifying this transcendence: that modulation, a harmonic phenomenon, is a metaphor for meaning residing in words. The latter is perhaps the view of the end of life could indeed be held. (Hutcheon 2004: 55)

The following discussion will demonstrate how I agree with the reversal of the Orphic figure in Tristan. It will also show, however, how my reading of the inversion also inverts the roles of saviour and saved, insofar as it is Isolde who comes to rescue Tristan in the third act and it is her incantation that transfigures them both.

Indeed, the Hutcheons and I seem to have shared with Sternfeld the same perplexity about the absence of Orpheus in new nineteenth-century operas, but have sought to answer it in different ways:

It appears an historical oddity that new Orpheus operas almost ceased to be composed during the nineteenth century, because this was a time obsessed not only with representations of Orpheus in the visual arts but also, as Ariès argues, with the trappings of death and mourning on a social level. (Hutcheon 2004: 41)

Consult their references to other writers who have “offered different readings of Tristan as Orphic.” (Hutcheon 2004: 200-201n28)

All English citations of Raymond Joly’s book chapter are my translations.

She quotes from Shakespeare’s Othello, looking for daemonic indicators (hooved feet) in Iago (“I look down towards his feet, but that’s a fable”) only to mention its absence in Verdi’s eponymous opera. One might allow, however, for a certain allusion to fabling in the last line of Iago’s first act aria: “È vecchia fola il Ciel,” that is “Heaven is an old tale.”
more telling point, for it was one Wagner was to make again and again: that music’s representation of poetry resides not solely or primarily in the fashioning of leitmotifs, but in harmonic unfolding. (Abbate 1989: 39-40)

Abbate’s review of the musicological reception of Tristan opens onto a possibility of interdisciplinary dialogue somewhat discouraged by purely “score-based” analytic approaches. She accomplishes this turn by minimizing the correlation between leitmotivs to their supposed meaning content,\(^75\) and by searching for “connections between poetry and music in a realm other than semiotics.” (Abbate 1989: 42) In other words, she understands Wagner’s aesthetics as transcending a signifier-signified duality, while being intimately tied to an extended notion of the poetic voice.\(^76\)

This poetic voice is a fruitful concept for Abbate, in this article as elsewhere, since it allows her to metonymically displace her critical viewpoint from the common musicological perspective. This is not, however, a simple rhetorical device used to demarcate her work: she thereby takes into account the broader poetic devices she finds in Wagner’s music dramas:

Wagner was extraordinarily sensitive to voices, not in the usual operatic sense, but rather to how different characters are set to manipulating their German Romantic clichés, how their use of language differs. From Hagen’s obsessive repetitions to Gurnemanz’s dilated, wandering improvisations, every major character “speaks” in his own way. This is a fundamentally musical sense, a sense of poetry that is sung by human subjects and performed in time, and a sense of dramatic conversation residing not only in back-chat between characters, but between different poetic voices. Such “conversations” can be projected in music as well as words. (Abbate 1989: 51)

By focusing her interpretation on these sung yet unsung voices in Tristan, her article opens the way to figural interpretation, not only by discussing how Wagner’s “modulation could shadow the unfolding of a poem,” but also by reconnecting with an approach of the

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75 Abbate on assigned meanings to Wagnerian leitmotivs:

My own view is that Wagner’s motifs have no referential meaning; they may, and of course do, absorb meaning at exceptional and solemn moments, by being used with elaborate calculation as signs, but unless purposely maintained in this artificial state, they shed their specific poetic meaning and revert to their natural state as musical thoughts. (Abbate 1989: 45)

76 In the next chapter, I will be discussing how this musical and poetic understanding of figural language and its relations to the voice in different types of media also undermines Derrida’s early analytic claims concerning the voice, music, and language.
ineffable in music, reminiscent of the work of Jankélévitch that she was to later translate. (Abbate 1989: 48) I would like to pause here and argue how not only a figurative but also a figural reading both find their way once again into a discussion about meaning by way of the musical voice.77

While Hans Sachs might be likened to a Romantic cliché of the early-modern bard, the tragic atmosphere of Tristan, no matter how positive the meaning of its dramatic outcome (death), can only result from the poet’s voice unfolding a harmonic juggernaut, to paraphrase Abbate. (Abbate 1989: 51)78 It is precisely because of the intertextual relation between the Tristan libretto and its medieval source in Gottfried von Strassburg’s poem that a figural reading of Wagner’s music drama can operate in reverse motion:

In Gottfried’s poem – Wagner’s main source – Tristan is in fact a musician and composer; “Tantris” can pose as a harper and become Isolde’s tutor in musical art (an art in which, in Gottfried’s tale, she eventually surpasses him). Wagner made no overt reference to Tristan’s musical gift. Tristan’s identity as composer nonetheless seeps into the poem, encoded in the representation of Tristan’s speech as authorial. The representation, then, marks a secret autobiographical conversation, carried on between Wagner and his work. (Abbate 1989: 48-49)

The representation of the voice is not only an autobiographical secret of Wagner’s, but also necessary to the framing of Abbate’s argument about the voice’s poetic importance, an argument she picks up again in her discussion of modulation. It is because Wagner is fulfilling the promise of Tristan’s musicianship that his poetic voice—meaning here a combination of poetry, harmony, and orchestration—is so charged with unsaid meaning.

77 Abbate’s repetitive use of the verb “shadow” to describe music’s production of meaning resonates with my previous use of “foreshadowing” to describe the prior latent promise necessary for figural interpretation:

The text is bound up with a play of modulation that shadows its course, and with a covert portrayal of Tristan’s as the hand that twists language; that is, as the hand that wrote the poem he sings. The forms taken by the idea of day, like mythical beasts, shift their shape from moment to moment. (Abbate 1989: 48)

78 The sentimentalism that informs the self-awareness of both Sachs (in Wagner’s Die Meistersinger) and the Marschallin (in Strauss’s Der Rosenkavalier) in their sacrifice of love objects does not affect the overall comic tone of the operas. (Robinson 1985: 211-14) Furthermore, it would be incongruous to expect in the bourgeois mastersinger, even in his renouncement of physical love, a figure that resolves the Christian worldview by embracing a tragic one.
The fact that Wagner makes “no overt reference” to his hero’s musical gifts is not only meant to reserve for himself the leading role as composer, but also to defer until the music drama’s very last scene the revelation of the voice’s central function in the economy of its production of meaning. Indeed, Wagner not only hushes Tristan’s composing or musical abilities, as Abbate points out, but also his mastery of the singing voice:

In composing the biography of his hero, Wagner had omitted a crucial trait found in Gottfried’s poem, that is, Tristan divinely mastered the voice and musical instruments. It is this musical talent that gained Tantris admittance into the Dublin palace and to the queen’s healing powers. As he says himself, he was to “relive thanks to his music, mit spil genesen.” The Transfiguration precisely has this function, to glorify Tristan in his musician’s nature. Isolde, hallucinated, resurrects him: he smiles, opens his eyes, his body irradiates and rises like a star; soon he releases a soft trickle of melody that becomes an ocean of sounds, of knowledge, of perfumes, of laments in which opposites are reconciled in order to finally drown into the supreme voluptuousness of unconsciousness. (Joly 1998: 176, my emphasis)

By associating song (Weise) with breath (Wehen), Raymond Joly also locates the transfiguration of Tristan’s musical nature in an expressive voice that rises above the pneumatic voice’s agony. One could conclude then that the aesthetic efficacy of the composer’s music drama, and of the musicologist’s theory of its extended poetic voice, function precisely because the “original” voice of this “Orpheus figure in reverse” is hidden. Without invoking a natural origin for the voice, but by simulating a temporal

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79 Joly’s cited text, in French:

En composant la biographie de son héros, Wagner avait omis un trait capital chez Gottfried, à savoir que Tristan maîtrisait divinement bien la voix et les instruments. C’est ce talent qui avait introduit Tantris dans le palais de Dublin auprès de la reine guérisseuse ; il allait, comme il le dit lui-même, « revivre grâce à sa musique, mit spil genesen » (7863). La Transfiguration a justement pour fonction de glorifier Tristan dans sa nature de musicien. Isolde hallucinée lui redonne la vie ; il sourit et ouvre les yeux ; son corps irradié et s’élève comme un astre ; bientôt sort de lui un doux filet de mélodie, qui devient un océan — de sons, de savoir, de parfums, de plaintes, de délices — où se réconcilient les opposés pour enfin tout noyer dans l’inconscience de la suprême volupté.

80 While Raymond Joly, trained in Romance languages, knew of Wagner’s omission for having compared Gottfried’s poem with Tristan’s libretto, it should also be noted, following Linda and Michael Hutcheon, that Joseph Campbell had already brought up the same point in English secondary literature. (Campbell: 1968, 227) Indeed, Orpheus is an important figure in Campbell’s book insofar as he mediates metaphysical opposites: the after/netherworld and the living world; signification and ideality; phenomena and the higher order of a hidden reality; etc. The Hutcheons also note how “Tristan’s singing and harp-playing are said to bewitch those who find him in his small boat off the shores of Ireland.” (Hutcheon 1999: 283n53) Furthermore, they mention Tristan’s singing in order to demonstrate how “there are many Orphic analogies in that version [Gottfried’s].”
Tristan’s economy of vocal representation imitates the structure of a tradition of revelation, only to better overrule it. Like Werther and Ossian before him, however, Tristan was never created for his life-affirming qualities, but to represent the death drive. This somewhat confusing logic of inversion would benefit from a comparison with the Orphic figure it reverses.

There is an evident parallel to be made here between the last scene of Tristan and the (pen)ultimate scene of Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo. When Apollo raises Orpheus to the heavens they sing (“Apollo & Orfeo assende al Cielo cantando”): “Saliam cantand’ al cielo,” and accordingly the music uses, what the French language calls, a *figuralisme* to describe this step-by-step ascension.\(^1\)

![Figure 3: Monteverdi, L’Orfeo, Act V, “Saliam cantand’ al cielo”](image)

In comparison, the last scene of Tristan – Isolde’s Verklärung or Isolde’s (illuminated) Transfiguration – also depicts a form of ascension as the music “swings upwards” on the breath of Tristan’s song, as it is hallucinated by Isolde and musically embodied by the orchestra. In Wagner’s scene of ascent, the chromatic *figuralisme* or word-painting, to use the

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English term, transforms Isolde’s voice as it is engulfed by the orchestrated voice of Tristan. Although the ascension happens over a longer period of time and its spatial organization is not as visually striking as it is in the score of *L’Orfeo*, the reproduction below of the vocal score still gives a good idea of how the diatonic repetition in the voice and its chromatic counterpart in the piano reduction impart the notation with a visual sense of ascension.

![Figure 4: Richard Wagner, Act III, *Tristan und Isolde*, “Isoldes Verklärung”](image)

Albeit in terms of a winding on itself (on E in the voice, on G# in the orchestra) before blending into the orchestra’s E major in the leap to the word “Welt”—in one last musical drive representing the Will, as it were—the culmination of the transfiguration is followed by a winding down and the scene ends with the silencing of the voice, yet only after we have

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82 In order to have a better idea of the scale on which Wagner constructs his ascending representation of transfiguration, one can also consult the translation of this last scene, which I have copied in appendix, along with an English translation.
glimpsed another unheard song. First, Tristan’s voice is metonymically displaced to the orchestra, a displacement tempered by Isolde’s mediation of it in song. Second, this mediation is itself terminated by Isolde’s collapse into the sublime jouissance of unconsciousness. In other words, the outcome of Isolde’s vocal jouissance is the silencing of Tristan’s second poetic voice or, simply put, of Wagner’s. All that is left, at the very end, is for the listener “to wonder what unknown place now harbours the English horn.” (Abbate 1989: 58) Of course, singers are meant to stop singing at the end of operas; however, the point I am making here is that Wagner, by completely appropriating the poet’s singing voice, has given the expressive voice its second death, not only figurally but also aesthetically. Mimesis and diegesis have been so thoroughly combined, in the plot’s configuration, in its imitation of the creative musical act, that one can very well speak of the destruction of the expressive voice, even as it serves as an index of the ineffable.

Raymond Joly’s reading of Tristan also brings to the foreground Wagner’s

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83 The last two beats before this culmination actually show in the piano’s soprano voice a chromatic ascension (G#, E#, F#, FX, G#, A) leading up to Isolde’s leap to G#. One is reminded here of the upward coloratura in L’Orfeo’s “Possente spirto.” As Abbate writes:

The instruments, strings and brass alike, are all being passionately vocal: they imitate expulsions of coloratura, pauses for breath, and repeated floods of singing, doing so hard on the heels of Orfeo, as if they were his voice, and still, not imitating exactly what he sings. (Abbate 2001: 21)


The last part of the scene I have quoted above starts at 2:42. Especially remarkable in this recording is the unfolding of the orchestration, which has “become” the voice of Tristan. The “winding up” I describe above starts at 4:03 and the portion of the score I have reproduced can be heard at 4:39.

84 Cf. Žižek’s mimetic comment on the implosion of vocal representation in “Liebestod”:

In the sublime moment of Liebestod, Isolde’s singing as such is at stake. Here singing does not simply represent her inner state, her longing to unite herself with Tristan in her death—she dies of singing, of immersing into the song; in other words, the culminating identification with the voice is the very medium of her death. (Žižek 2002: 105)

In light of their knowledge of how Isolde surpasses Tristan in the musical talents he had taught her in their first acquaintance (he as Tantris), I find it interesting that none of the sources I have read so far has considered that the so-called Liebestod might not be a song Isolde is singing, albeit without any scenic indication from Wagner. If she were singing, Isoldes Verklärung would not only participate in this musical narrativising of opera, (its Orphic reversal) but would also crown its poetic achievement.
predilection for what Freud calls “the need for an injured third party” in his choice of object.  
(Freud 1986: 166; Joly 1998: 172) Far from using this schema to dwell on the biographical 
details of Wagner’s sex life, from our combined readings it transpires that Wagner’s hushing 
of Tristan’s vocal and musical abilities, the difficulty of the tenor’s vocal part, and the 
harmonic “juggernaut” that accompanies his part, as Abbate demonstrates (Abbate 1989: 51- 
53), end up overpowering the singer’s traditional privileged status to impart meaning to his 
role’s interpretation. Far more interesting than a reading which debates whether Wagner 
might have needed to cuckold Otto Wesendonck while writing the music drama, is one 
which considers the symbolic diminishment of the singer’s importance in incarnating and 
expressing the meaning of Tristan’s role. It points to Wagner’s desire to objectify the 
expressive voice of this third party of the traditional performance model of communication 
(composer, interpreter, audience). Indeed, vocal performance is more central to the aesthetic 
of less symphonic operas, as in the operas preceding Wagner’s reading of Schopenhauer. 
In contrast with Monteverdi, the orality or vocality that sustains reversed-Orphic figuration is 
subsumed and transcended by the composer’s authorial voice, which, not insignificantly, has 
just crushed and silenced the figural poet’s and singer’s voice, albeit in order to represent the 
“end of yearning, the end of the struggle of the Schopenhauerian Will-to-live.” 
(Hutcheon 1999: 275). 
No matter how much joy or jouissance one feels in contemplating the 
end of a cruel and illusory phenomenal world, whether through the figures on stage or the 
dissonance in the music, Wagner has nonetheless had to first incorporate the expressive 
voice into the larger poetics of his work before silencing it twice in order to achieve his 

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85 It is well documented how Wagner changed his mind about the function of music in opera after reading Schopenhauer. In his earlier aesthetic essay, Opera and Drama, Wagner subsumes music to drama, while he was to later write (in 1870) about the abasement or lower position (Geringstellung) of poetry to music in his essay “Beethoven.” (1966: 103 ff.) See Brillenburg-Wurth 2009: 84-91 and Cicora 1988: 23.

metaphysical aesthetic goal.

The transfiguration scenes in L'Orfeo and Tristan might both connote ascent through musical figuralisme; Wagner’s use of dissonance in the final scene, however, as has been remarked repeatedly, contrasts darkly with the transformation of Orpheus into a constellation, illuminating the night’s sky.\textsuperscript{87} Wagner’s modification of poetic and musical material from the end of Act II in his final scene has led less observant commentators to call it the \textit{Liebestod}.\textsuperscript{88} Raymond Joly remarks on this “inextricable universal obstinacy to christen “\textit{Liebestod}” the piece that closes Tristan,” because it confuses the desiring economy of the music drama. (Joly 1998: 175) Since Joly considers Tristan to be a “Treatise on Jouissance,” then distinguishing Wagner’s different uses of the term is crucial in understanding the meaning of the closing scene. He notes that while the word “\textit{Liebestod}” is sung in the Act-II duet, Wagner never referred to the duet or the second act that way, but sometimes used “\textit{Liebestod}” for the prelude of the first act. (Joly 1998: 176) To these distinctions, Joly further adds that the illusion of passionate love (“\textit{höchste Liebeslust}”) in Acts I and II is finally dispelled at the end of Act III with the omission of the word “love” from Isolde’s dying breath (“\textit{höchste Lust}”)—a distinction the Hutcheons also make—as well as Wagner’s decision not to put to music the word “Night” (“\textit{Nacht}”) that precedes Isolde’s collapse in the poem/libretto.

For Joly, Wagner’s decision to omit the words clearly demarks the transformation of passionate love from a dark foreboding into an illuminated yet inexpressible meaning. Both English and French differ from German in their etymologies of “transfiguration.” While

\textsuperscript{87} See Linda and Michael Hutcheon’s article on Tristan und Isolde in regards to the dissonance of the “Tristan chord” and the poetic symbolism of the night in relation to German Romanticism and Wagner. (1999)

\textsuperscript{88} The Hutcheons use the term \textit{Liebestod} because of its “cultural shorthand” for the “German Romantic obsession with sexuality and death.” They are careful, however, to note “that Wagner never intended Isolde’s final section to be so labelled: that passage was referred to by him as the ‘Verklärung’ or transfiguration.” (1999: 269) Accordingly they go on to use both terms in their discussion of Tristan.
“Verklärung” in German means a “transforming illumination,” transfiguration in both French and English underlines the transformative meaning of the word, “while the German retains foremost the radiance of the revealed divinity.” (Joly 1998: 176n1)

Indeed, while both the metamorphosis of Christ and his illumination are described in the New Testament (Matt. 17:2), it is less the prefix “trans-” than “figuration” itself that is here once more at fault in failing to transmit the extracorporeal aspect of the visual and vocal experience. What lies beyond the “Orpheus figure in reverse” is the illuminative transfiguration of Isolde’s sublimation:

If the word sublimation were to have but one meaning, it would be to designate what is accomplished in Transfiguration: transcendence and illusion. [...] A jouissance is attained, of which only music is capable. One leaves the domain of the thinkable, of the utterable, and of the representable, without however falling into non-sense, thereby acceding to the ineffable meaning, neither alone nor with another, but with everyone. O Death, where is your victory? (Joly 1998: 178-79)

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90 Once again, reading Joly and the Hutcheons’ articles together proves to be complementarily revealing. Note how Tristan’s pairing of hearing and light informs the parallel that the Hutcheons make in the Transfiguration scene:

Tristan, in his dying moments, had responded similarly, as if he could hear the light (“hör’ ich das Licht”). But Isolde goes beyond that single, simple comingling of senses. Following her sensual vision of a transfigured Tristan, Isolde asks if she is the only one to hear the melody that sounds from him, a lamenting, reconciling, vibrating sound that physically penetrates her. (Hutcheon 1999: 286)
It is not so much how music is a transcendental signifier in Wagner’s appropriation of Schopenhauer’s artistic hierarchy that I wish to bring attention to, but rather to underline once more how he achieves the metaphysical goal of the music drama at the price of the expressive voice’s sublimation into his musical poetics. As visions of the sublime leave ordinary (wo)men speechless, it takes an extraordinary writer to overcome them. In the next section on Nietzsche, I examine how his disagreement with Wagner arose from his overcoming of art’s metaphysical occupation and its replacement with an existential stance, a transition once again mediated through the expressive voice.\(^{91}\)

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\textit{Nietzsche’s Musical Figuration of the Expressive Voice}

The infamous aphorism from The Gay Science that “God is dead” is not always contextualized. People often forget that the madman starts by looking for God in the marketplace and, “Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter.” (Nietzsche 2001: 119) Their lack of seriousness prompts a fit from the disturbed character: “Where is God? I’ll tell you! \textit{We have killed him} – you and I! We’re all his murderers.” (ibid. 119-120) Yet no longer believing in the Christian god is not the real problem here. Like his critique of the philistines in his first Untimely Meditations also demonstrates, the overarching problem that really concerns Nietzsche is the nonchalance with which certain writers interpret the transcendental sign left vacant by God’s

\(^{91}\) According to the OED, “the Latin preposition trans,” denotes the meanings of “across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over.” The passage from Matthew boasts two Hebraic figurations of Christ: one representing the written, historical record of the Law, Moses; the other, the oral and trans-historical aspects of prophecy, Elijah. Furthermore, it also depicts the disciple’s visual witnessing of the Hebraic figures, but also the aural revelation of God’s voice (Matt. 17:5-6) Here too, however, the disciples must silence their knowledge of the revelation until Christ’s fulfilled transfiguration in the Resurrection. (Matt. 17:9) This passage clearly demonstrates how figuration, while it historicizes the text, fails to transmit the psychological components of vocal embodiment, more specifically the representation of those dialectical partial objects that Lacan finds missing in Freudian theory, namely the gaze and the voice.
The consequences of uncritically re-appropriating this master signifier, especially in a popular (or populist) discourse could be socially devastating, as it could be used to endorse the worst horrors. I am following here a rather conventional reading in which the expressive voice was for Nietzsche at once a means to live through this cultural desacralization and to prevent the instrumentalization of this empty sign. In other words, I am saying that the expressive (musical, poetic) voice in Nietzsche’s writing is part of his own form or contribution to the writing of *differance*.

In *Language and Death*, Giorgio Agamben reproduces “Eleusis,” a poem about the

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92 Nietzsche’s *BT* benefited from Romantic philosophy’s insights about the tragic vacuity of existence. For example, the problem I am underlining here is also one with which Hölderlin grappled in “The Significance of Tragedies.” (Hölderlin 1988: 89) According to Peter Szondi’s reading of Hölderlin,

> This dialectic, whereby the strong can appear only as weakness and needs something weak so that its strength can appear, ground the necessity of art. In art, nature no longer appears “properly,” but through the mediation of a sign. In tragedy, the sign is the tragic hero. Insofar as he can do nothing against the power of nature and is destroyed by it, he is “insignificant” and “without effect.” But in the tragic hero’s demise, when the sign = O, nature presents itself as a conqueror in its strongest talent and “the original is openly revealed.” (Szondi 2002: 12)

Although Hölderlin’s tragic figure is Empedocles, one could argue that after the passing of the figural worldview into a tragic culture of natural origin, the death of God could also be understood as a tragic sacrifice: “The tragic in man consists in the fact that he can render this service [to reveal nature’s true appearance], which lends his being significance, only in death, when he is posited as a sign that is ‘in itself insignificant = O.’” (ibid.) By killing God, the meaning that had been gained by the sacrifice of His incarnation was also forsaken and reverted back to an insignificant sign. This empty sign, which signifies a human being’s mortality, becomes his or her particular end (both in the literal and figural sense), thereby informing Nietzsche’s problem with values in a post-figural world.

Cf. Rancière’s reading of Hegel’s view on the Christian worldview informing Romantic art:

> […] “Romantic” art, that is to say art founded on the Christian separation between individual subjectivity and an absolute that deserted the world with the body of the resurrected Christ. For Hegel, Romantic art is “Christian” art, an art in which no figure can adequately represent the divine since individuality cannot recognize in any object of the world the divinity that lives in its heart, because it is ceaselessly tossed back and forth between an essential interiority that does not find any reality fully adequate to it, and the multitude of adventures and encountered figures that mark the path of this impossible quest. (Rancière 2004: 72)

93 This critique was especially apparent in Freiburg Oper’s 2013 production of *Parsifal*, which I saw on 27 April 2013. At the end of the first act, as Parsifal sets off to find a remedy for the dying king Amfortas, a compilation of audiovisual documentary excerpts of twentieth century violence on defenseless human beings, often children, was projected onto part of the decor meant to represent the Hall of the Grail. Its comment was evident, but I will make it explicit for those who are not familiar with the production: look at the horrors human beings are willing to perpetrate on their fellow human beings in the name of one idea or the idea of one.

<http://www.theater.freiburg.de/index.php?SpId=46464&puid=1&pageid=11>

94 See “Structure, Sign, and Play” in *Writing and Difference*. (Derrida 1978: 351-70)
Ancient Greek mysteries written by a young Hegel and sent to Hölderlin. Here is an excerpt:

Your sons, Oh Goddess, miserly with your honor, did not
carry it through the streets and markets, but they cultivated it
in the breast’s inner chambers.
And so you did not live on their lips.
(Hegel in Agamben 1982: 9)

The contrast with Nietzsche’s narration of the madman’s stroll through the marketplace is
remarkable. There transpires from the juxtaposition of both scenes an understanding of the
emptiness of discourse when it no longer proceeds from belief, but rather a higher value of
certain ideas or concepts commonly agreed upon, or, in other words, from a value based on
their current desirability in the epistemological marketplace. The madness Nietzsche
characterizes is not imitative—the screaming of “God is dead”—but is narrated through the
madman’s capacity to say that which the crowd of “believers” would conceal with their
laughter, in order to continue on benefiting from the authority of what remains unexpressed.
In his confession for the whole group, the madman’s madness is ironic, since it denounces
the disjointedness of unfounded discourses resting on the desirability of transitory values
and of lives wasted in believing in them. Nietzsche thus goes on to mention the divinity’s
decay:

Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? - Gods, too, decompose! […]
How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! […] Do we not
ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? (Nietzsche 2001: 120)

In Hegel’s poem, the priests of the mysteries, in their eternal afterlife, have almost gained a
god-like status in terms of temporality, but also in terms of sacred privilege. Hegel represents
the silence kept by the initiates about the mysteries as the eternal jouissance of the dead
priests:

And yet, even rotting and lifeless they congratulate themselves,
the eternally dead!—easily satisfied—in vain — no sign
remains of your celebration, no trace of an image.
For the son of the initiation the lofty doctrine was too full,
the profundity of the ineffable sentiment was too sacred,
for him to value the desiccated signs. [...] 
He who should want to speak about it with others, 
would have to speak the language of angels, would have to 
experience the poverty of words. 
(Hegel in Agamben 1982: 8)

Just as it weaves around Hegel’s poem, the function of the expressive voice in Nietzsche’s post-figural worldview is remarkable. Nietzsche’s marketplace confessions reveal the majority’s disavowal of their disbelief—since by laughing, they scream out their confession—for the paradoxical safeguard of supposed piousness in all its hypocritical morality, which is a lure by those who control discourse, a way to still give their supposed piety value when their idols and accompanying ideologies have faltered.

In contrast, Nietzsche’s “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” which prefaces the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), gives a strong indication of his own project to use the expressive voice as a means of promoting an experience of belief that would not be tied to a supposedly scientific or rational definition of religion and its concomitant morality:

> A strange voice was speaking here, the disciple of an as yet ‘unknown god’ who concealed himself beneath the cowl of a scholar [...] here one heard—as people remarked distrustfully—something like the voice of a mystical and almost maenadic soul which stammers in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself. It should have sung this new soul and not talked. (Nietzsche 1999: 6)

Looking back on the way he had expressed his admiration for *Tristan und Isolde*, Nietzsche’s enthusiasm concerning the literary voice, the text’s musical expressivity so to speak, can be seen as an opportunity to distance himself from Wagner’s ideological recuperation of the expressive voice in his last music drama, *Parsifal* (1882). In the same self-critical commentary, Nietzsche writes:

> Already in the preface to Richard Wagner, it is asserted that art – and not morality – is the true metaphysical activity of man; several times in the book the provocative sentence recurs that the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. (Nietzsche 1999: 8)

It was justified as such because the contemplation of art was understood as an abeyance of
the Will, as Schopenhauer had thought of it, by making the spectator aware of the illusion they entertain when they imagine their desires (for knowledge, virtue, and even beauty) mean something universally true in the world.

Even in his first book, however, Nietzsche’s thought was not confined to simply reproducing Schopenhauer’s philosophy on another stage. In BT, he starts by setting up a description of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics:

Anyone who has not had this experience of being compelled to look and, at the same time, of being filled with a desire to go beyond looking, will have difficulty in imagining how clearly and definitely these two processes are felt to coexist when one is contemplating the tragic myth; on the other hand, the truly aesthetic spectator will confirm my observation that the coexistence of these two things is the most remarkable of the peculiar effects of tragedy. (Nietzsche 1999: 112)

Then Nietzsche distinguishes himself from Schopenhauer by making the tragic artist the weaver of his own web of illusions and revelations: “If one translates this phenomenon of the aesthetic spectator into an analogous process in the tragic artist, one will have understood the genesis of the tragic myth.” (ibid.) Indeed, the difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer can also be understood through their diverging definitions of the tragic: “Just as Schopenhauer viewed the conflicting power of tragedy as a manifestation of the one will, Nietzsche maintains that up until Euripides, Dionysus ‘never ceased to be the tragic hero […].’” (Szondi 2002: 42) Thus the artist-god, a Dionysus mastered, not the Will, must musically invest the aesthetic discursive place of the empty sign in order to overcome a valuation of life that up until then had been based on a metaphysical conception

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95 Here too, Nietzsche is hinting at the sublime.

96 Thus the second preface is not an apology for his past sympathies, but a reminder of what, even in 1872, distinguished his thought from Schopenhauer’s:

Indeed the whole book acknowledges only an artist’s meaning (and hidden meaning) behind all that happens - a ‘god,’ if you will, but certainly only an utterly unscrupulous and amoral artist-god who frees (löst) himself from the dire pressure of fullness and over-fullness, from suffering the oppositions packed within him, and who wishes to become conscious of his autarchic power and constant delight and desire, whether he is building or destroying, whether acting benignly or malevolently. (Nietzsche 1999: 8)
of what lies beyond phenomena (the world as presentation or as a Christian figural limbo).

Hence Nietzsche’s enduring ambivalent admiration for the artist who created Tristan und Isolde. Nietzsche would further differ from Wagner, however, in conceiving this overcoming of metaphysics not solely as music’s prerogative, but also as a challenge for poetic writing or musike in its extended meaning. This is also the gist of Rainer Maria Rilke’s comment on BT:

It seems to me that the accident of Wagner is to be blamed for the fact that Nietzsche immediately applied his insights and hopes, which suit the German character so little, to this occasion, which was nearest at hand (too near!); this detracts greatly from the final third of the book. This damage is far greater than his use of Kantian and Schopenhauerian terminology. If Schopenhauer’s conception of music in particular did much to advance Nietzsche’s purpose, the immediate application of everything to Wagner’s creations spells disappointment: one does not wish that all these lofty promises are supposed to have been already fulfilled; above all, one believes that the author of the book is himself well qualified (as a poet) to make the attempt at a ‘resurrection of Dionysus.’

(Rilke in Kaufmann 1974: 394, my emphasis)

Although Tristan und Isolde might have provided Nietzsche with a sublime Dionysian “pleasure in the destruction of the visible world of appearance” (Szondi 2002: 43), especially the second act’s refusal of diurnal morality, Rilke’s criticism of Nietzsche’s early emulation of Wagner exemplifies the literary malaise in seeing music’s power of destroying illusions leap

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97 Kiene Brillenburg-Wurth remarks in Musically Sublime:

Because the different art forms embody, according to Schopenhauer, different stages and aspects of the Will, they can be placed in a hierarchical order that moves from the “baser” ideas of gravity and cohesion (architecture) to the “higher” movements of actions and thoughts in (wo)man (literature) (WS II, 39, 453-54). The art of music is absent from this hierarchy because it has a status apart. Unlike all the other arts, including its temporal sister poetry, music stands apart from the world of appearances: just as the world is an objectification of the Will, so is instrumental music. (Brillenburg-Wurth 2009: 75, underlining my emphasis)

Brillenburg-Wurth’s emphasis of stands apart reminds one that music is involved, once again, in an epistemological shift that changes where one stands and therefore how one understands. The fact that Nietzsche would bridge Schopenhauer and Wagner’s conception of metaphysical music and his post-moral or post-metaphysical philosophy with his own poetic prose via the expressive (musical) voice, demonstrates the possibility of enfolding the expressive voice within literature by subverting—rather than submitting to—the traditional use of parallel or analogical musical means of vocal rhetorical representation.
In Nietzsche’s lifelong search for a Dionysian faith, as Bruce Ellis Benson put it in *Pious Nietzsche*, the expressive voice, which was by then resolutely disconnected from the worldview of figuration, was in need of another telos in order to define its epistemological horizons. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s own fictional figure of the wise poet meets characters that speak of transcendence in musical terms. Consider how the hermit Saint describes his worship: “I make songs and sing them; and when I make songs, I laugh, cry, and hum: thus I praise God. With singing, weeping, laughing, and humming I praise the God who is my God.” (Nietzsche 2006: 5) The Saint’s songs of worship are non-linguistic: they only use the expressive aspects of the voice without putting them into words. In contrast, Zarathustra’s expressive voice subverts figuration’s promisory logic of fulfillment, while overcoming music’s privileged position—as non-representational art, and, hence, easily recuperated—of attributing value. Benson’s attention to the voice teases out a certain kind of prefiguration at work in Nietzsche’s book: “the saint’s formula of ‘singing, weeping, laughing and humming’ will soon become [Zarathustra’s] own, in praise to the god who is his god.” (Benson 2007: 47) Indeed, in the seventh and last section of the “Yes and Amen Song,” Zarathustra describes a subjective production of truth as a musical phenomenon:

If ever I spread silent skies above me and flew into my own sky with my own wings: If I playfully swam in deep expanses of light, and my freedom’s bird-wisdom came—but bird-wisdom speaks like this: See, there is no up, no down! Throw yourself around, out, back you light one! Sing! Speak no more! are not all words made for the heavy? Do not all words lie to the light? Sing! Speak no more! Oh how then could I not lust for eternity

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98 In *Musica ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe makes sure to clarify at the outset of his book that “Everything begins with a letter,” although Baudelaire’s letter to Wagner recognizes Wagner’s music as his own music and avows his failure as a writer to express its meaning, of “saying it all” in his own words:

At first it seemed to me that I knew this music already, and later, in thinking it over, I understood what had caused this illusion. It seemed to me that the music was my own, and I recognized it as any man recognizes those things he is destined to love. […] I had begun to write a few meditations on the pieces from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* that we heard, but I recognized the impossibility of saying it all.

(Baudelaire in Lacoue-Labarthe 1994: 2-3)
and for the nuptial ring of rings - the ring of recurrence. (Nietzsche 2006: 187)

This is not a description of speech as a mental phenomenon, but of song as a physical expression of sound. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra expresses a “yes to life” by invoking the reader to produce his or her own expressive, musical invocation outside of received notions of truth, of good, or of beauty. As Tilottama Rajan writes, Nietzsche grants [music] a privilege in degree if not in kind over other modes of representation. This authority conferred on music is necessarily negative and liminal. Music cannot manifest whatever is behind it: it can do no more than imitate this substratum by marking a limit to representation that allows immediacy to be felt only as a desire produced by the inadequacy of mediation. (Rajan 1995: 151)

By representing music in this figural fashion, Nietzsche does not so much attempt to imitate the voice than to express its embodiment through other narrative means (diegesis). As Vasse puts it, the madman’s voice “can no longer gather itself in a site in which it is characterized and specified” and thereby “literally [becomes] the voice of everyone and nobody, failing to gather itself in the silence of the body.” (Vasse 1974: 198) With Zarathustra—Nietzsche’s answer to the madman’s plea in the marketplace, as it were—music serves at once to give the figure his expressive force (by representing a narrative foundation of mimetic utterance) and to ground its transfiguring possibilities in a site (the represented body of the figure) that ties it to the symbolic world. In other words, while Wagner’s narrative had sacrificed the embodied site of Tristan’s musical utterance in order to subsume it to a metaphysical telos of music drama, Nietzsche would reinstate the figure’s

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99 Zarathustra dramatizes Nietzsche’s musical thought. Cf. Tilottama Rajan’s comments on the musical origin of tragedy:

Significantly, for Nietzsche drama is at its most authentic when it is only “chorus” and not yet “drama,” and when Dionysos is not “actually present” but “merely imagined [vorgestellt]” as present. The realism of drama, which substitutes for the phenomenological affect of presence, the physical presence of the hero, is a declination from a more original stage of tragedy. At that stage what the audience sees is not “the awkwardly masked human being but rather a visionary figure, born as it were from their own rapture” (BT, 66). Thus the immediacy of presence is perhaps the immediacy of this rapture, an immediacy whose basis is phenomenological rather than metaphysical. (Rajan 1995: 150)
embodied voice, which had collapsed in Wagner’s aesthetic jouissance, in order for it to continue symbolizing an unattainable desire of expressive immediacy. In a figure like Zarathustra, music is at once a driving force of the narrative and the embodiment of this drive, which allows the reader to identify with a need similar to that of song, a release (un exutoire) of a pressure or excess of tension in the self, produced by the confrontation of an irrational drive towards dislocation (rapture or ecstasy as prefiguring the höchsten Lust of death) and yet, releasing itself from the rational desire of self-preservation in explaining away the world (the ego’s fulfillment of incorporated protective parental instincts declined in moral obligations).

Although Nietzsche did not use Orphean figuration per se, by choosing a figure like Zarathustra as his mouthpiece, he was also engaging in a kind of pre-historical reconstruction similar to Macpherson’s reconstruction of Ossian. However, whereas Macpherson thought he was reconstructing (at least in spirit if not to the letter) a complete epic poem from fragments he had found, Nietzsche understood the rehabilitation of a poetic and prophetic figure as a necessary artifice of poetic fiction for transmitting something of the order of truth. Commenting on the passage from “Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in which Nietzsche writes “truths are illusions of which we have forgotten they are illusions,” (Nietzsche 1999: 146) Rajan argues that

Like the essay as a whole, the passage denies that there is such a thing as truth in a conventional sense. But within this denial is the trace of a predication: the suggestion that the kind of language that knows itself to be figural (that of art and myth) is somehow truer than a conceptual language that has forgotten its origins in metaphor. To read Nietzsche as collapsing truth into error is precisely to maintain the binary opposition he criticizes, by suggesting there is such a thing as error (and by implication that there is truth). (Rajan 1995: 149)

The same type of misleading interpretation of myth applies to the laughing crowd in the

100 Indeed, Nietzsche does not “glorify the origin.” (HA 1996: 302)
market. To read them as non-believers would imply that the madman really believes in God. The point is not the criticism of belief or non-belief, but the objectification of truth in a medium that cannot convey it. Thus, contrary to preceding objectifications of the figure’s expressive voice, Nietzsche does not ascribe a value to it, apart from the need or imperative to fly in a sky of one’s own making, a fictive sky that does not pre- or proscribe certain flights, certain songs, or certain voices.\textsuperscript{101}

Alone in the woods, the Saint does not communicate his experience of belief with songs: he can only tell Zarathustra about them and explain how they are an offering. The Saint’s musical voice strangely prefigures, and yet disavows, the silent expressive (inner) voice Derrida reads in Husserl: a voice that attains complete self-presence only by being silenced and becoming the voice of consciousness; a voice that, in its social seclusion, does not exhaust its communicative possibilities.\textsuperscript{102} Instead of secluding himself in such phenomenological self-presence, however, Zarathustra, who is emerging from his own hermitage, takes the parallel aesthetic status of music—that, while it was running behind the scenes, informed Wagner’s discursive music drama—and foregrounds it in his narrative. Because Nietzsche’s figure is not entangled in fraught issues of primitivism and origin, the expressive voice is already understood as a supplement of the narration, \textit{not of writing}. Thus while it becomes a goal for self-expression, the expressive voice in Nietzsche is at once a

\textsuperscript{101} Cf. Cicora’s distinction between Wagner and Nietzsche’s relation to linguistic convention and language’s mythical function of creating the subject’s world:

Wagner explains the formation of myth, similarly, as mankind imposing order on reality, though this process has, for Wagner, positive, rather than negative, connotations. […] Language is, for Nietzsche, illusion, for it posits things in the external world which are merely syntactic entities. It is, thus, misleading. […] That is, a person feels that he is being truthful if he forgets that he is lying according to a fixed [linguistic] convention. […] In Wagner’s system, the word has a metonymic relationship to the referent. According to Nietzsche, language is mere metaphor that has no relation to things. Language is never an adequate expression of reality. (Cicora 1998: 26)

\textsuperscript{102} Cf. Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s famous description of his secluded reverie on the Island of St. Pierre. The movement of life or of nature is likened by Derrida to inarticulate speech and comes on the heels of a discussion of the musical neume and jubilus. (Derrida 1976: 250)
critical tool in the deconstruction of the metaphysical values that had tied it down to certain traditional figures for representation, like Orpheus.

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There is an almost constant element in the Orphean genealogy I have attempted to map into the nineteenth century, namely the attempt to institute (or subvert) an unattainable poetic origin and speak from its source. Walter Strauss outlines the problem very nicely when he cites Mallarmé’s concern for his own Orphic poetics as being not a problem of religion, but one of religiosity. In Blackwell’s *Enquiry*, the fulfillment of Orphic figuration is deviated onto Homer instead of Christ. With Macpherson the Orphic inspiration for the completion of fragmentary epic material is obscured in favor of the aesthetics of authenticity. For his part, Rousseau uses music as the unverifiable authoritative source of his theory of language. In Goethe’s *Werther*, these literary mechanisms of the authorial musical voice of folkloric nature, as it were, are combined in the novel’s narrative and a further layer of interpretation is needed in order to understand its aesthetic effects. Thus Wagner’s music dramas, *Tristan und Isolde*, can be seen as an attempt to synthesize, through musical narrative, Romantic culture’s preoccupation with the natural musical voice and its authenticating function for poetic and discursive authority.

By confronting Derrida’s critique of Rousseau’s musical language to theories that side for the expressive voice, this chapter does not seek to add its voice to longstanding disagreements between deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and music, but rather looks to revisit these problems within a historical cultural context that is experienced again each time one attends the opera or listens to/watches the decoding of a recorded opera from a digital file.
Admittedly, Wagner’s conception of speech and language is resolutely phonocentric.\textsuperscript{103} Yet his integration of the voice into the overall narration of \textit{Tristan und Isolde} already displaces the representation of the singer’s vocal embodiment qua metaphysical subject.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, by reconsidering how Nietzsche distances himself from Schopenhauer’s view of the tragic aesthetic representation of the Will and Wagner’s musical coercion of metaphysical authority, one better understands the discursive issues at stake for the voice’s authority in the twentieth century, as well as the importance of the reemergence of the Orpheus figure on opera stages in finding one’s way out of the immersive maze of new media.

\textsuperscript{103} The preceding discussion on Wagner and Nietzsche’s relation to truth, language and music demonstrates how the former espouses Rousseau’s conception of writing as fallen (musical) speech. See Wagner’s essay “Beethoven” 1966: 116-17.

\textsuperscript{104} Incidentally, this metaphysical displacement of voice might have been the promise that Nietzsche had seen (even if only intuitively) in Wagner.
Chapter III – The Beheading

After diving into the dark reflecting pool of Romantic folklore, the head of the Orpheus figure reemerges in the troubled waters of the twentieth century. During this immersion, the broadening of musical aesthetics can be thought to have disembodied Orpheus in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, theoretical representations of music that rely on a structure of address conserve certain ineffable characteristics through which the sung voice retains a portion of its transcendental, if not metaphysical, privileges. Recall how Raymond Joly writes of the musical sublime:

One leaves the domain of the thinkable, of the utterable, and of the representable, without however falling into non-sense, thereby acceding to the ineffable meaning, neither alone nor with another, but with everyone. (Joly 1998: 178-79)

The ineffable and the sublime have been central concepts for interrogating the liminality of musical meaning ever since Kant. The ineffable, or the unnamable, participates in a network of unseen phenomena that I have been thinking through with the Orpheus figure, phenomena whose outlines merely serve the purpose of indicating what they circumscribe: the psyche (soul/unconscious), the voice, music, death, and even the afterworld and its divinities.

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1 Parts of this chapter were previously published in an article titled “Orpheus in New Media: Images of The Voice in Digital Opera,” as part of a special issue on digital opera in The International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media. (D’Aoust 2012)

2 Sternfeld’s article and Bernstock’s book give a good idea of the many important artistic projects in which Orphean figuration was employed during the twentieth century.

3 Abbate has translated Vladimir Jankélévitch’s La Musique et l’Ineffable (1961/2003). For a genealogy of the musical sublime, see the first chapters of Brillenburg-Wurth 2009, which I have been pillaging in the previous chapter. Cf. Samuel Weber’s remarks on English translations of the Critique of Judgment (§49) that usually render unnenbar as ineffable mistaken, and that they should read unnamable.

For if the aesthetic idea is indeed irreducible to “a determinate concept” and is hence incompatible with conceptualization, or even with semantics, it is nevertheless not simply the other of language, as the word “ineffable” might seem to imply. Far from being that which cannot be uttered, it is in the nature of aesthetical ideas to be uttered all the time […]. What Kant writes […] is not that aesthetical ideas are “ineffable” but rather that they are unnamable (in German unnenbar). (Weber 1996: 29)
By examining writings and works about music and singing—the historical depository of the object voice, according to Dolar (1996: 17 ff.)—I have pointed out in the previous chapters reason’s difficulty in coming to terms with sonorous phenomena that evade its eidetic categories. Indeed, I often contrast moments of musical understanding with their irrational musical counterparts. I have thereby joined ongoing discussions of how singing has been an important site for attempts at the theoretical containment of sound. I have come, however, to personal conclusions. For example, rather than invoke the unconscious and completely subsume music or singing to a psychoanalytic structure, I think that in order to ensure understanding (hypo-stasis), the rational practice of reading music has aimed at preventing sound from leaving the self (ex-stasis) by maintaining singing in a logic of representation rather than one of expression. One finds this same issue (of sonorous containment) at work in the opposition of Samuel Johnson’s definition of the transmission of (rational) truth with Thomas Gray’s experience of “extasie” in reciting Ossian’s poems and thereby voicing their “primitive sonorities.” Therefore, the problem of sonority’s containment can also be brought to bear on modern conceptions of literature. Coming back to opera and (once again) put it in psychoanalytic terms, one could agree with Poizat and Žižek that the operatic voice’s progressive unraveling from the libretto’s text is a transhistorical, cultural example of a structural drive to invocation, while adding that it progresses alongside the technological dissemination of writing.4 In yet other words, the Apollonian need to contain (desire) sonority is inseparable from the Dionysian drive for Weber’s avoidance here of music as “the other language” will meet its conceptual limit when his visual reading of the Benjaminian aura forces him later on in his essay to evade the question of musical reiteration. Cf. Stambaugh 1964: 269, 274.

4 While Poizat and Žižek share the thesis that the history of opera marks the voice’s unbinding from the word into sonority, they presuppose that it evolves into a regression, into the pre-linguistic cry. The theory of singing based on this presupposition necessarily differs from a musicological point of view, which understands music as a para- (neither pre-, nor hypo-, nor extra-) linguistic medium.
aural bewilderment (*jouissance*), and their practices combined result in an aesthetics of the musical sublime, an a-conceptual, irrepresentable experience. If, however, the moral imposition of aesthetic immediacy is a metaphysical lure, the desire for aesthetic immediacy (freed from moral dictates) persists nevertheless in the twentieth-century transmission of opera, as a historical and contemporary performance art form.

The meeting of historical opera and mass media, as well as that of contemporary opera and digital media offers at once the risk of an aesthetic sclerosis and the possibility of a renewed critical approach to representation. Since opera is an audiovisual medium in and of itself, its audiovisual redeployment can become either a metacritical space of representation or an extra layer of cultural commodification. I use the term “audiovisual redeployment” here in the largest sense possible, as long as it describes the process of a *captation* and of its redeployment from any support to any type of platform, like radio and television, CDs, DVDs, and digital files. Within this interstitial and self-reflexive space comprised of performance, *captation*, editing, and redeployment, the expression of the unconscious in one’s vocalized sounds is once again foregrounded. In other words, as a sonorous objectification of certain aspects of unconscious life, singing can be understood as a work of self-realization. This time, however, I am putting the question in such a way that it overlaps with a sociological critique, using the concept of alienation. I will therefore briefly outline the term alienation and define the use I will be making of it in this chapter.

The *Grimm Dictionary* gives the Latin *alienare* as the origin of *entäuszen* (an old spelling of *entäußern*), and *entfremden* as its synonym.\(^5\) In turn, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the Latin etymology for alienation: “to transfer (property) to somebody else, to give up or lose

\(^5\) *DWB*. Bd. 3: 490-492. Cf. Richard Schacht’s etymological survey of alienation in the section “The Linguistic and Intellectual Background” in his eponymous book, *Alienation*. (Schacht 1970: 1-29) Although he discusses the historical use of *Entfremdung*, he does not discuss the history of the term *Entäußerung*. Perhaps he does so in order to give the reader a better sense of the distinction Fichte was making when he used the latter term.
possession of, to change the nature or identity of, to deprive of sanity, make mad, to render hostile or averse, estrange.”

Already the term denotes a sense of loss and connotes its psychological effects. But as Nathan Rotenstreich observes, the negative metaphorical meaning of the term alienation, to describe a mental or psychological state, depends on whether or not an addressee is implied. In other words, being alienated from oneself is a state of psychological distress, while being alienated from someone else is a rather common occurrence. In the transcendental setting of mysticism, in which the Orpheus figure certainly participates, the Latin *alienatio*, however, is also used to translate the Greek *ecstasis*: “As ecstasis connotes one’s going outside oneself to the stage of going above oneself, so the term ‘*alienatio*’ connotes man’s going above himself and reaching his submersion in God.”

(Rotenstreich 1963: 551) In its ecstatic form, the mind’s alienation is transcended through meditation’s transfiguration of the object/subject division. Augustine’s account of singing Ambrose’s hymn comes quite close to the description of such ecstatic meditation. Orfeo’s scene of invocation, “Possente spirto” has been discussed above in precisely these terms. One can also describe the experience of hearing *Isolde Verklärung*, as it calls the spectator to listen to the voice she is both hearing and singing herself, by saying that “the contemplated object engenders the act of contemplation on behalf of the contemplating subject.” (ibid.) In other words, the sung performance representing a song—as Isolde sings “*höre ich nur diese Weise*?”—culminates in sublime ecstasy before the transfiguration unites the subject with its object of contemplation. As Linda and Michael Hutcheon remark, this fusion is anticipated throughout Wagner’s music drama in the double chiasma with which the lovers are

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6 In the etymological definition of the *OED*’s entry for “Alienate, v.”

7 Rotenstreich also discusses Augustine’s use of alienation, “an elevation from the senses […] it reaches the divine realm, and ceases to be a negative act of estrangement […]. Yet it is still an alienation because it occurs, as it were, outside the mind […], maintaining the separation between the knower and the known.” (Rotenstreich 1963: 552) Cf. the discussion of jubilus in the first chapter. Cf. also Ficino’s theory of the artist’s divine fury. (in Tomlinson 1993: 175 ff.)
identified: “Tristan Isolde, Isolde Tristan.” (Hutcheon 1999: 272) Thus, one might say that the ecstatic strand of alienation shares not only the same structure of address that one observes in invocation, but demonstrates a structural similarity to the figure’s promise of fulfillment.⁸

In the context of the present chapter, however, I will ask how this transfigured ecstatic sacrifice or offering of the voice fares in its mechanical reproduction. This is not a question about the presupposed authentic value of live performances in comparison with the fallen metaphysical state of recorded music; but rather one about the advent of the mechanical reproduction of music and how music could seemingly be redeployed without really controlling the means of its production. (One does not own the means of production because one owns one or several means of redeployment.) The real concern is the dissociation of the voice’s representation from the site of its emission for the benefit of commodification. Ensconced as we are today in the corporate dissemination of digital aesthetics, one requires an effort of informed imagination to project oneself back in time in order to understand the cleavage that occurred when the site of the singing utterance and its musical representation were technologically separated. As I discuss below, Adorno and Benjamin’s exchange on the reproduction of the artwork and the actor’s aura, as well as the non-applicability of this line of thought to music are necessarily informed by the different meanings of the term alienation. For Benjamin, captation does exactly what it implies: it captures the individual’s expressive sonority (speech) and transfers it to an object, which can then be mass reproduced and redeployed in the absence of the actor’s presence. Part of the subject, namely “man’s aura,” is thus objectified, taken from him, thereby precluding the

⁸ Cf. Brillenburg-Wurth’s comments on the alienated self in Wagner’s sublime musical self-reconciliation:

Wagner’s promotion of music’s noumenal potential almost reads like a Barthean mythology: “music” no longer merely denotes a sound world but becomes a secondary sign that connotes the promise of a spiritual experience of self-loss and self-fulfillment at the same time: an experience in which an individual objectification of the Will (the subject) merges with the larger life-Will. “Music” is thus constructed as a mystic passage, a promise of return to the One. (Brillenburg-Wurth 2009: 85-86)
positive transformation of the alienation and generating feelings of estrangement.

This alienation of the traditional artist differs from that of the industrial worker, however, since the latter does not own the means of production nor does he gain satisfaction from what he produces. A live performance might alienate a singer, since he goes to great effort to produce a work of art that is not his own; however, the experience of self-realization compensates him for having lent it his voice. This should be differentiated from the sense of estrangement the singer might experience upon listening to the redeployment of his own voice outside of his body, dislocated in time and space from its normal site of utterance. It is only with the advent of industrial competition to produce perfect studio recordings of historical masterpieces, however, that the endless takes—sometimes the numbing repetition of only a few bars—turned musical performance into a heroic, existential defiance of alienation. In the article I discuss below, Adorno is not yet thinking of this eventuality, however, when he criticizes the uneducated reception of recorded music as a commodity and, in turn, the imitation of the successful voices as the standard for aesthetic achievement, equally mistaken for sales in the culture industry’s market. This doubled alienation, or reification, turns singing into a fetish for the “big beautiful voices” one has come to expect in opera, rather than the singer’s musicianship. Yet this is not a consequence of the recording of a musical event per se—only a conservative fear of the supposedly inherent alienation in technological development could justify such an equation—but the consequence of an uneducated, and therefore misplaced desire to appropriate the means of production that would allow one to transcend not only alienation from the means of production, but also existential estrangement or the fear of wasting one’s

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9 For a re-evaluation of Hegel’s acknowledgement of alienation in the material (not only spiritual) activity of work, see Sean Sayers’ article “Creative Activity and Alienation in Hegel and Marx” (2003).
life. Once more, the voice is critical in operating a shift in ideological perspective. In this case, however, it is not through the voice's epistemological containment, but precisely because of its ubiquity: since everyone has a voice, the singing voice's reified commodification has a potentially universal market.  

Every Orpheus opera in this chapter addresses in some way the problem of alienation following music's dissemination through “new” media. The first section explores ways of inscribing music and song before the technological capacity for its mechanical redeployment. In short, I think the Orpheus figure could be shorthand for this technological type of musical inscription. The following critical discussion of aura and mass media is complemented with a reading of Harry Kupfer’s production of Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*. This example of a twentieth-century scenic adaptation of a historical Orpheus opera is an opportunity to reflect on not only the audience’s, but especially on the performer’s alienating relation to the voice as a fetish. The next two operas discussed are adaptations of plays by the twentieth-century writers Jean Cocteau and Tennessee Williams. While Williams’s *Orpheus Descending* symbolically speaks of social and existential alienation by casting Orpheus as an artistic misfit in a conservative backwater town, Cocteau’s *Orphée* addresses not only the problem of creation within the web of social expectations, but also subverts the usual

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10 This explains the popularity of recent televised talent shows during times of economic hardship for the lower classes, hardship perpetrated by the ruling class’s successive deregulations of the world economy and financial institutions (they were as popular in the 1980s as they have been over the past few years); the showcase of working class “natural” talent is accompanied by the promise that its commodification will provide nature’s elect (the strong, the beautiful, the daring; the talented) with an *individually deserved* way out of alienation and estrangement (fame). The italics here emphasize the perversion of the logic informing such entertainment productions, since these productions reinforce a desire for class differences even as they demonstrate its incredible injustice.

11 For media theorists, the difference between old and new media is defined according to the technological divide of analog and digital means of reproduction. For my present purposes, I use “new” to define those means of transmitting performances that are not embodied. Thus, in my argument, any external support containing the recording of a performance is considered new media, from wax rolls to mp3 files. In contrast, I define traditional media as the means of transmitting indications for reiterations of performances, namely literary script and print, as well as musical notation. Accordingly, I define “old” or archaic media as the means for repeating performances, namely the internal support of mnemonic inscription in oral traditions.
dissemination model of mass media by turning a car radio into Orphée’s vehicle for inspiration. In other words, Cocteau understood how the myth of Orpheus is always already about media, since it is about mediation. Although the presentation of my argument in this chapter leaves me with little time to discuss the opera adaptations of the plays by Bruce Saylor and Philip Glass, I do point out the success and—I write it very tentatively, since the space for this discussion is quite limited—the failures in expressing the plays’ differing critiques of social and artistic alienation. The last opera considered here, Orpheus Kristall, also speaks of alienation, but shatters or fragments the concept into a multiplicity of occurrences: psychological, social, amorous, existential, and other forms of alienation are all part of its elliptical plot. Yet like Cocteau, Manfred Stahnke, the opera’s composer, uses the new technological means of dissemination at his disposal and integrates them into the work’s means of production, thereby proposing what I call a digital poetics. Only then can Orpheus’s head, once severed from his body by the industrial maenads, transcend its/his alienation and be transfigured as it/he is uploaded to the artistic posterity of the Cloud.

It is precisely because these works are concerned with the musical voice’s resistance to objectification and commodification that I start this chapter with a discussion of Derrida’s attempt to theorize music as an object for reduplication. In my reading, I place the debate on the voice in narrative theory as a buffer between grammatology and musicological research on Orpheus operas. I find that although Abbate is overtly opposed to the metaphysical critique of phonocentrism, her theoretical extension of Edward Cone’s musical narratology leads her, nevertheless, to use deferral strategies to categorize different voices, sometimes only indicated ones, in opera. Abbate’s theoretical work thus opens a space for a multiplicity of previously unconsidered voices in opera, thereby destabilizing, deferring even, univocal interpretations of opera.
Before Sound’s Captation

In the previous chapters, I looked at the ways in which deconstruction and other theories concerned with literature and culture define the voice. Writing and thinking about Orpheus as a literary figure has also been productive precisely because his singing voice confronts the dominant epistemologies in which the voice must remain silent or be silenced. Yet singers continue to sing, composers still write Orphean operas, and eminent musicologists persist in transmitting a form of knowledge marginalized from mainstream theory. If these artistic and intellectual activities are not to be simply dismissed as neo-Romantic indulgences on the part of the musically inclined, then one must pay closer attention to the ways in which the voice is being negotiated in these artistic figurations and their theoretical representations. In the next section, I start by exploring connections between the musical origin of language, the desire for immediacy, and song in Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. From this point, I discuss how the distinction between mimesis and diegesis is central to the development of narrative theory. Complementing this examination of the recent use of voice in narratology with the research of musicologists, I conclude that they offer similar strategies in defining figural voices, namely by using textual poetics as a site of figural staging. Thus, although the figural worldview definitely came to an end in the nineteenth century, spacing musical reception—not in terms of a visual representation of music, but by adding unheard figural voices—ensures that such readings of opera do not fall back on a metaphysical fiction of the sung voice as immediate self-presence.

12 For a discussion of the silent voice in Heidegger’s writings, see Dyson 2009: 83-106. W. Strauss discusses the topic of the silent Orphic voice in relation to Mallarmé and Blanchot.
'Derrida’s Musical Parenthesis

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida offers a critical assessment of the metaphysical presuppositions informing the concept of sign in Rousseau and de Saussure, scrutinizing the different ways writing was devoid of sound. In one instance, he does so by comparing writing to the body and speech to the breath or spirit:

Writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems—conversely—to borrow its metaphor. (Derrida 1976: 35)

From this point onward, Derrida starts to unravel Saussure’s description of writing as a “figuration.” Contrary to Auerbach, de Saussure does not even allow for certain secondary minor meanings of figuration: those in which the figure’s contours could contain sonority, or at least indicate a sonorous content it would constrain. Figuration is a means for de Saussure to describe writing in visual terms only, and it is precisely this narrowed videocentric use of the term that allows Derrida to operate another inversion that informs his deconstructive readings—“from figure, to form, to fantasy,” to recall an earlier discussion with Auerbach:

One already suspects that if writing is “image” and exterior “figuration,” this “representation” is not innocent. The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa. (Derrida 1976: 35)

Interestingly, in describing how Rousseau and Saussure demand of the linguistic subject the knowledge of how to situate itself in regards to interior and exterior, to impression and expression, Derrida cannot resist unsettling the musical metaphor on which Rousseau and Macpherson rely to ground language in nature’s cultural imprint:

Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. *There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring.*
There is no longer a simple origin. (Derrida 1976: 36, my emphasis)

Derrida’s paraphrasing of Rousseau’s thought should not prevent us from distinguishing between these different pools. With Derrida, the reedy pool is no longer the fertile ground of music’s original natural voice, but is critically understood as the site of a psychological illusion, of a fantasy.

After commenting on Saussure’s and Rousseau’s moral reproaches to their readers for having forgotten about writing’s sonorous origins, a common stance in both writers, he goes on to write that these recriminations about misplaced origins are as old as the association of technique and memory. As he will later do in Dissemination, already in Of Grammatology Derrida revisits Plato’s Phaedrus to historically situate the initial scene of the problem of writing in philosophy:

Writing, a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness. It is exactly what Plato said in the Phaedrus, comparing writing to speech as hypomnēsis to mnēmē, the auxiliary aide-mémoire to the living memory. Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. Without writing, the latter would remain in itself. (Derrida 1976: 37)

The reader will recall that according to Bernabé, this was precisely the function of the Orphic gold tablets, which followers of Orpheus, a century prior to Plato’s life, had had placed around their necks prior to their burial. At a moment in history in which logos still meant an emotional lure, when the ultimate exhalation of these initiates dislocated breath from the body, the “departure of the logos from itself” was mediated in the Underworld not only by the mythical voice of Orpheus the psychopomp, but by writing as well. Indeed, Bernabé reminds us that Orpheus was the designated mediating figure in such eschatological cults since, in his function as prince of the poets, the Muses had already bestowed upon him the gifts they held from their mother, that is Mnemosyne. Once again, Orpheus reminds us of the function of the voice’s representation in a conception of literature as transmission.
Orphic figuration, the voice’s ritual inscription within the texts of the tablets, was a way of also representing writing’s mnemonic *metaphysical* function in a transitional economy of transmission.\(^{13}\)

As discussed previously, Cavarero is critical of Derrida’s lack of explicit dialogue with orality studies. Yet Derrida states quite clearly that he has no qualms with phonology, as long as it informs theories that would understand writing as parallel to speech rather than as derived from it. What he wishes to avoid in the twentieth century’s rediscovery of oral traditions is a phonologism that does not brook any objections as long as one conserves the colloquial concept of speech and writing which forms the solid fabric of its argumentation.

Colloquial and quotidian conceptions, inhabited besides—uncontradictorily enough—by an old history, limited by frontiers that are hardly visible yet all the more rigorous by that very fact. (Derrida 1976: 56)

Hence the importance of *différance*, understood as an ongoing play of signifiers, a game in which the end of the production of meaning (in the assertion of a truth) is put off or deferred: an interpretative space that does not rely on (fixed) definitions of origin and telos.

In order to study “the functioning of language,” Derrida goes on to say, one must place “the substance of *meaning* and, among other possible substances, that of *sound* […] in parenthesis.”

\(^{13}\) The Homeric epic understands *mythos* as “an assertive discourse of power” declaring its intentions and, by the same token, giving its declaration the seal of truth: “Nowhere in the epic does it mean ‘false story,’ ‘symbolic story,’ ‘sacred story,’ or anything of the sort.” (Lincoln 1999: 18) The authority to name what is just and truthful is even valid for actions that have not yet been carried out – and thus slips into the field of intention and will – to which the use of *mythos* by Zeus in the *Iliad* attests, in which he forbids his wife to meddle in his restoration of Achilles’s honor: “O Hera, do not think to know all of my thoughts [*muthous]*.” (Homer, *Iliad* I 545) While *mythos* is the privileged enunciation of truth claims by the powerful, it is the speech of the weak in Homer, and also in Hesiod, which is designated by the term *logos*.

In all instances, the term denotes acts of speech—often soothing, sometimes deceitful—that persuade men either to abandon the battlefield and renounce physical force, or to find comfort and solace in moments of peace. The voices of official and conventional morality, however, tend to depict those who use and those who are influenced by such speech as irresponsible, womanly, or childish in nature. (Lincoln 1999: 8)

Orphic figuration, the literary motif that describes the voice’s central function in establishing an imaginary relation with the gods (or the Other), enters Western culture through religious rituals before literacy completely inverses the meanings of *mythos* and *logos*. Orpheus becomes a psychompomp, a guide for the dead, right before the meaning of *logos* changes from an emotional entreaty, a plea to the powerful, into the main tool for rationality’s progressive discovery of the way to a better life, both in this and the next world.
Although he does not say so explicitly, the history of phonocentrism seems to culminate for him during the late-eighteenth century, in theories of language which postulate a loose definition of music as the origin of speech. Like the figure, music blurs the limits of return and repetition which counter-distinguish representation and mimesis.

The preceding discussions on figuration and the poetics of Humanist opera’s ethical conception of musical imitation have prepared the way for a critical reading of Derrida’s analysis of the musical metaphors at work in Rousseau’s ambivalence towards mimesis. First, it should be remarked that Derrida’s privileging of the work of spacing in writing is necessarily suspicious of the implicit immediacy of mimesis in the performing arts.  

What cannot be thus represented by a line is the turn (trick/trope) of the re-turn when it has the bearing of re-presentation. What one cannot represent is the relationship of representation to so-called originary presence. The representation is also de-presentation. It is tied to the work of spacing. (Derrida 1976: 203)

Indeed, an implied difference between the object and its artistic reproduction as an image for re-presentation frames his reading of music as a form of reduplication rather than expression. In the following paragraphs, Derrida advances that this logic of representation is already at work, unbeknownst to Rousseau, in his ambivalent relation to imitative art, ambivalent because of the possible moral uselessness of a “supplementary mimesis [that] adds nothing” to the natural phenomena it imitates. (ibid.) As the following lines will point out, in the space of a (musically infamous) page (Abbate also singles it out), Derrida has inserted a gap, a space, in a poetics of expression traditionally held in esteem for its claim to immediacy of emotion, and he has done so by refusing any claim to music’s separate status apart from the other arts in the name of (opposing) Rousseau’s morality. Apart from his elaborate critical framework that precedes this analysis, Derrida can also impose this reading

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14 Although, by now, the distinction between the jouissance in imagined immediacy and the necessity of expression’s desire for immediacy should be quite clear.
through the exclusion of the figure.

Returning to Auerbach for a moment, one will recall how the line that sketches the design of a given phenomenon guarantees transmission through the figure’s process of resemblance. Since its Roman conception, the word *figura* has always asserted the outline’s capacity to indicate a fulfilling return, to preserve re-presentation in historical continuity. Figuration does not only disturb the aforementioned visually representative frame of analysis as quoted in the preceding paragraph; its musical use, a line sketching a sonorous gesture, is also silenced in Derrida’s inversion of Rousseau’s musical and pictorial mimesis.

(Rousseau 1966: 61-64)

> In the living arts, and preeminently in song, the outside imitates the inside. It is *expressive*. It “paints” passions. The metaphor which makes song a painting is possible, it can wrest from itself and drag outside into space the intimacy of its virtue, only under the common authority of the concept of imitation. Painting and song are reproductions, whatever might be their differences […] (Derrida 1976: 203, my emphasis)

The videocentric bias of representation is symptomatic in this re-ordering of poetic expression. Notice how painting here is what makes music a mimetic art form: the metaphor *makes song a painting*. The inversion is subtle, almost unnoticeable, but its consequences are remarkable. Expression is no longer an organic outward movement, an emotional gesture creating intimacy by revealing the unseen interior to the other (and his or her silent reception), but a re-presentation, an outside copy of the inside, only *claiming* immediacy through (possibly duplicitous) duplication: “In the living arts, and preeminently in song, the

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15 One might even think that Derrida’s critique of representation in Rousseau through the lens of moral education displaces his definition of music back to the *Affektenlehre*, in which a precise musical phenomenon has a 1:1 relation to an interior feeling it is supposed to convey on the outside. (See Buelow 2001) Indeed, to the musically literate, Derrida’s deconstruction of Rousseau reads sometimes as an enlightened or neoclassical, dialectic critique of representation without its moral veneer.
Rousseau’s criticism of Rameau’s harmonic music and his adherence to a melodic conception of music resemble Girolamo Mei’s theories of the importance of monodic composition for the clear transmission of its affective expression. In his return to Renaissance principles of music-making, at a time when nobody had yet thought of using the term Renaissance, Rousseau is not arguing for the possibility of music as a reproduction or representation, but for the return to a poetics of sonority.

Derrida must be recognized, however, for reintroducing lack into Rousseau’s discourse based on musical plenitude (the jouissance of immediate self-presence in expression). There transpires from Derrida’s critical reading of Rousseau’s speculation of a natural, evolutionary psychology—a conceptual edifice grounded on the musical origin of language—an evident absence of divine revelation which could only justify such a leap into immediacy, musical or otherwise:

It is on this onto-theological model that Rousseau regulates his repetitions of origin. With this exemplary model of a pure breath (pneuma) and of an intact life, of a song and an inarticulate language, of speech without spacing, we have, even if it is placeless:

16 As mentioned previously, the English term “word-painting” is called figuralisme in French. When I commented on how unfortunate the English term is, it was precisely for what should be apparent by now: in translation, even within musical discourse, the term “word-painting” precludes the figure’s capacity to produce meaning through sound.

Understanding Rousseau’s criticism of Rameau’s music as an appeal for a return to the ethical poetics of mimesis undermines the reading in which “song is made a painting.” If one looks to the sixteenth century that Rousseau is here evoking, one finds that the exact contrary mimetic hierarchy of the sister arts was imposed on painting. Consider the following comments by Rensselaer W. Lee in his study *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*:

Aristotle had said for instance that human nature in action is the object of imitation among painters as well as poets [...]. [C]omparisons [between visual art and poetry] which to Aristotle were certainly no more than a means of clarifying his discourse on the drama served the critics as a point of departure for developing their often questionable doctrine of the sister arts. The theory of painting that resulted could not fail under such conditions to show much that was pedantic and absurd if it was not absolutely false, for in imposing on painting what was merely a reconditioned theory of poetry, the enthusiastic critics did not stop to ask whether an art with a different medium could reasonably submit to a borrowed aesthetic. [...] Leonardo further shows the inalienable humanism of his race in his famous and often repeated statement that the expression of human emotion through bodily movement is fundamental to the painter’s art. (Lee 1967: 5, 7-8)

Derrida then goes on to cite Rousseau’s definition of neume in the *Dictionary of Music*. Cf. Strauss’s previously mentioned comment on the creative (poietic) rather than representational characteristics of the late eighteenth-century and Romantic aesthetic project. (Strauss 1971: 11)
[atopique] or utopian, a paradigm suitable to our measure. We can name and define it. It is the neume: pure vocalization, form of an inarticulate song without speech, whose name means breath, which is inspired in us by God and may address only Him. (Derrida 1976: 249)

Although Rousseau’s conception of musical language is discursively built to imitate religious theories of the origin’s revelation, it cannot successfully claim immediacy, even through a metaphor of the natural expressive living arts, inspired by their mimetic predecessors. Music, the expressive or living art _par excellence_, is thus revealed to be a lure that only tricks one into believing in immediacy with its origin and its expression of ecstatic elevation, when, in reality, one has only been made dizzy by its lateral, circular movements. In other words, through Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s musical origins of language, one loses the transcending potential of the figure’s sonority, (both in the imitative gesture of ascension and reiteration, and in the elevation of pitch) as the delusion deflates the _transfiguration_ and brings it back down to a plane so immanent that it can only be thought of in terms of literary translation, that is, a lateral, physical movement in the space of the page, from top to bottom, from left to right. In other words, Derrida helps to distinguish between Rousseau’s intentions and his pathetic results.

Although Derrida’s strategy of horizontally spacing the two-dimensional text blurs the differences between imitative and expressive art, it is also a way of explaining the composer’s relation to the living arts. If the composer is writing expressive music to be later performed, then surely this is a model of representation as well. “Spacing insinuates into presence an interval which not only separates the different times of speech and of song but also the represented from the representer.” (Derrida 1976: 203) I have discussed above with

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17 Cf. the previous discussion of musical jubilation in ch. 1. One will recall how Augustine, via the voice’s illumination, was already “spacing” the immediate jubilation of singing melisma (see above, pp. 50-53).

18 The reference to Rohde’s use of the term “translation” is here deliberate. As discussed previously, translation occurs when a mortal is whisked off to an immanent plane where time is suspended, such as the Elysian Fields or the Isle of the Blessed, where the passing of time has no effect on his body.
Abbate how Wagner’s extended poetic voice accounts in a certain way for this representation of mimesis: it maintains its aesthetic efficacy by constantly erasing the traces of its reduplication of the poet-character’s singing voice as he is singing, thereby hiding in plain (non-)sight, like Pythagoras behind the fabled veil of night’s darkness. Before I move on to examining how recording technologies were also prefigured by the poetic extension of sung voices, I will discuss elements from the two types of theory here concerned, namely literary theory and musical narratology. Hopefully, the foray into musicological literature will constitute for readers of literary and critical theory another “parenthesis of sound,” direly needed in the wake of a new form of technological plenitude proposed by theories of immersion in media.

**Narratological Voices**

In the dominant discourse of scientific rationalism, a person who firmly believes that a book is speaking to them is either hearing voices in the psychiatric sense of the expression, or over-indulging in poetic license through the metaphor of the narrator’s voice. Although any text can contain indications for vocal reiteration, of which printed plays are the best example, the written signs in themselves do not contain sound.\(^{19}\) It might seem like I am stating the obvious, but I want to avoid any confusion that might have resulted from my detour through sonorous figuration. The preceding descriptions of Orphean figuration were

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\(^{19}\) Consult the introduction to Monika Fludernik’s first book, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction*: Reproduction of language in the medium of language is never an actual, complete reproduction but only the reproduction of an ideal type. Iterability, the possibility of repetition, intrinsically demands a correlation with the ideality of reproducible form in contrast to the individual not entirely reproducible substance of expression. (Fludernik 1993: 15)

As the rest of the section will demonstrate, Fludernik’s research on the mise en abyme of language, in its act of representing itself, is particularly effective in building a bridge between linguistic and musicological theories of the voice, especially because of its rehabilitation of the imitation of expression.
not meant to argue for the specific sound of the figure, which would have been unheard yet transmitted through the ages, as Ficino would have it, but rather to demonstrate how the staging of a singer or speaker cannot avoid the confrontation of imitation and expression within its narrative. The inclusion of a poet or of a singer within a narration begs for some type of figural language and rhetoric that are meant to maintain the reader under the illusion that the ideal sound indicated in the narrative was and is, in the moment of its inscription and reiteration, somehow real or, even better, an imagined manifestation of a phenomenally impossible aesthetic vocal ideal.

A similar kind of friction between imitation and representation can be observed in the use of the term voice in narratology. One might argue that the figure opposite Derrida’s in literary theory would be that of Gérard Genette, whose “metaphorical extension of the grammatical term voice” (Fludernik 2001: 619) was later to further extend into a “voice [that] refers to a subject-position, namely a narrating instance governing the text.” (Jongeneel 2006: 11) Jongeneel’s retracing of the narratological debate over the voice demonstrates how the metaphor of the narrator’s voice, which is how it was strictly used initially, was then hypostatized and given a substantive function within the text. The demise of the concept of the author as the focal point of literary interpretation, combined with Derrida’s work in trying “to dissolve the union between text and voice in modern western culture” (ibid. 14) should have led to the abandonment of the voice-concept when, about a decade or so later, American scholars reconsidered “the mimetic illusion of the voice in narrative and its idealist

20 In the next paragraphs, I borrow freely from Jongeneel’s article “Silencing the Voice in Narratology? A Synopsis.” Consult Fludernik’s Introduction to Narratology (2009) for a broader and more detailed historical summary of its theoretical debates and problems.

21 To use psychoanalytic terminology, the objectification of the voice always leads to its unhinging in the symbolic and its collapse into the imaginary. This objectification of the voice by classic narratology should come with a warning of its objet (a)’s imminent fall and the revelation of its fantasy of slavish subjection, which the following lines outline.
anthropomorphic implications.” (ibid. 16) In giving the narrator a substantive voice—in making him a subject almost—Genette had reinstated the structure of authorship as the focal point of interpretative meaning by bringing it back into the text through the back door of its metaphorical voice, as it were. Because Genette would “not take into account how the voice speaks,” however, he left the task of theorizing the rhetoric of the written voice to another generation of scholars.22 From then on, Jongeneel recalls how the concept of voice in narratology was influenced by reappraisals of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of polyphonic discourse in Dostoyevsky’s novels and of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s positing of an “audible voice” in the text, which turns reading into “a process of hearing the voice of the text.” (ibid. 22) As you will recall from my earlier discussion of Sigrid Weigel and Stephen Greenblatt, these cultural conceptions of hearing voices rather than understanding them as textual constructs are misleading in terms of identifying the reiterative voice. These metaphorical voices can lead to a scholar’s confusion in imagining himself as a repository of imagined historical voices, rather than the reader of the text’s performative agents. Since, however, my goal is to understand the disappearance and reemergence of the Orpheus figure, I am less interested in the use of musical metaphors for the novel’s structural organization and reception by the reader than I am in narratological models of the rhetorical voice at work in literary and musical practice. Before turning my attention to that discussion, however, I would like to follow the trajectory of the voice in narrative theory in the work of Monika Fludernik.

Fludernik’s work demands separate attention here because it reinstates the voice’s

22 “Qualitative aspects of voice such as tone, idiomatic signals, diction—in short the expressive potential of style, had to be taken into account in order not to banish aesthetic and ethic value from narrative analysis.” (Jongeneel 2006: 20)
central function in narration without undoing the efforts of deconstruction, which is to say, turning writing into a supplement of speech. Although her methodology differs considerably from the historical and musicological slant of the present study, Fludernik’s research rehabilitates the voice in terms of its rhetorical efficacy. This preoccupation is already apparent in her first book, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction*, (1993) in which the narratologist attempts “to capture the multiplicity of languages among different fictional speakers” as she encounters them in written dialogues, “a fiction of mimesis even in the realm of the most purely mimetic substance, that of linguistic expression iconically represented by itself.” (Fludernik 1993: 2) Following the American contributions to the field in order to ground narrative theory in a more empirical methodology, Fludernik invariably differentiates problems of imitation from those of narrative at the outset of her research. She does so by commenting on the presence of narration—not only in high modernist literature, as had been the case in classic narratology, but also—in everyday life. Thus, for example, she pays renewed attention to the need for belief in the validity of paraphrase in newspaper articles or in transcriptions of court proceedings, as well as in the workings of everyday storytelling.

Within the cognitive parameters of the “natural narratology” Fludernik advocates, she finds that “readers are inclined to mimetic reading.” (Jongeneel 2006: 25) Therefore, a consequence of the scientific (cognitive linguistics) rather than literary ambitions of this narrative theory is its apparent reinstatement of a colloquial understanding of the basic structure of communication. I use “colloquial” here in its figural meaning—in reference to Derrida’s almost oracular warning of possible future regressions into the linguistic structures of metaphysical discourse—as well as in its stricter sense, that is “to talk together.” In keeping with her distinction between grammatology and of narratology, Fludernik
consistently brings attention to the other originary scene of writing, which is to be found not in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, but in *Republic*. For the sake of convenience, and since the same distinction will later be taken up with Samuel Weber in reference to media and aurality, I cite Plato’s framing of the problem and its conclusion in the following scene of *Republic*:

- Maybe you’ll understand it better if I put it this way. Isn’t everything said by poets and storytellers a narrative about past, present, or future events?
- What else could it be?
- And aren’t these narratives either narrative alone [diegesis], or narrative through imitation [mimesis], or both?
- I need a clearer understanding of that as well. (*Rep.* III, 392d)

Socrates then explains the problem to Adeimantus by commenting on reported speech in the *Iliad*. They then both conclude that

> One kind of poetry and story-telling employs only imitation—tragedy and comedy as you say. Another kind employs only narration by the poet himself—you find this most of all in dithyrambs. A third kind uses both—as in epic poetry and many other places, if you follow me. [...] We need to come to an agreement about whether we’ll allow poets to narrate through imitation, and, if so, whether they are to imitate some things but not others—and what things these are, or whether they are not to imitate at all. (*Rep.* III, 394c-d)

Since it has been repeated so many times, I feel almost foolish in pointing out the obvious: one must be wary of the problematic use of *written dialogue* in discussing the different merits of mimesis and diegesis, and especially in concluding in favor of the latter. Because Fludernik’s research focuses on reinstating a wider definition of the audible voice in narratology, and because this occurs precisely in the gap between the reproduction or reduplication of speech—as in dialogue (mimesis)—and the representation of speech—as in reported speech (diegesis)—one might assume that it challenges deconstruction’s silencing
of the voice. Yet, this certainly is not the case.

According to Fludernik, the integration of mimesis into the larger concept of representation confirms, in yet another way, “Derrida’s insights into the basically ‘written’ (i.e. formal) nature of the spoken language.” (Fludernik 1996: 11) Although mimesis might seem like the narrative stumbling block in Derrida’s critique of Rousseau’s musical language to musically inclined readers, narratology’s object is not the expressive voice per se, but rather the different shades taken on by metaphors of the voice:

The term representation is in fact less infelicitous than one might at first conceive once one excludes its mimetic, i.e. imitative, and reproductive overtones. If representation is seen entirely in terms of cross-medial evocation of material objects or objects of language—a statue representing a person or a painting representing nature—then representations of linguistic tokens in the medium of language short-circuit the definition because the same medium would seem merely to reproduce and not represent. However, as we have seen, this constitutes a superficial account of the workings of reproduction, which in fact displays the very same representational structure as painterly representation. In both cases the medium is exercised to create an impression of the original idea, and in both cases our realistic commonsensical notions identify that idea with the original object or utterance. (Fludernik 1993: 16)

The very terms with which Cavarero criticizes Derrida’s epistemological videocentric bias are echoed here in Fludernik’s positing of the idea as the origin of representation. With Fludernik, however, commonsense identifications of the original idea with a visual object instead of its image (or with the utterance instead of its sound-image/signifier) are implicitly criticized for failing to effectuate the continuous displacement or the reiterative deferral of the “original” speech object, which turns ex-pression (from the source) into re-production (of the image reflecting in the pool). This being said, could one not also speak of music’s abstract character as a deferring metaphor for the idea of origin, precisely because of the

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26 As discussed above in the first chapter, around the voice in Augustine’s Confessions, it is through a visual metaphor, a metaphor of illumination, that metaphysical discourse contains the voice’s sonority within the visual register of the idea. In the second chapter, I confront the luminescent underpinnings of the articulate voice (speech) to Cavarero’s feminist critique of logocentrism.
impossibility in visually identifying music’s origin or analytically defining the musical work?\textsuperscript{27} Or are we to take only Rousseau’s metaphors literally and criticize them as such? What is at stake here has less to do with the impossible definition of the musical work and more to do with a discourse’s authoritative rhetorical capacity to project plenitude onto the empty signifier, which has characterized discussions on music since the end of the eighteenth century.

It is all the more important to ask these questions since narratology seems to be heading back to the good old days of the Word’s (not so new) song. After evoking Andrew Gibson’s research, which claims that “the concept of voice authenticates the text as living presence,” Jongeneel concludes that

In its treatment of narrative voice, however, narratology is reluctant to completely renounce the audible, because it cannot conceive of story-telling as an autonomous mode of written language. Writing is audition without hearing. We will have to live and to work with the metaphor of the voice. In the beginning was the Word, not the Text, \textit{pace} Derrida. In our time the body and the bodily functions are prominent again in the arts. The subject and its stories are back in literature and so is history. This revenge by the actual epoch dominated by reality and documentary realism on the postmodernist formalism of the past three decades will open new perspectives on the ambiguous and difficult partnership between the written and the audible. Hence narrative theory survives as a humble servant that has to know and to interpret the Word. (Jongeneel 2006: 27)

From my brief and targeted overview of her work, it is quite clear that conclusions from Fludernik’s cognitive linguistic methods do not endorse this narratological return to writing as a supplement to speech, for the simple reason that she frames her research methods from the outset within the parameters of deconstruction’s ideological critique, in order to translate the metaphor of narrative voice into a rhetorical categorization of multiple narrative voices.\textsuperscript{28}

Rather than reverting back to metaphysical models to understand the importance of

\textsuperscript{27} The reader will recall how the acousmatic voice is the starting point of the present study, even though music and the voice must be differentiated. On the impossibility of analytically defining the work of music, consult the introduction to Lydia Goehr’s book \textit{The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works} (1992).

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, Fludernik 1996: 143-55.
embodiment and aurality in the new media and artistic landscape, it would be more productive to consider the voice in narratology as an example of the deferral of any such type of return within the arts, literature, and history.\textsuperscript{29} Therefore, in order to answer the question previously raised about the natural metaphor with which music is attributed the origins of language, I turn to the discussion of writing the singing character’s voice.

\textit{Voice in Musical Narratology}

The Orpheus figure’s longstanding history on opera stages problematizes, while it informs, an increasingly popular theoretical topos of “staging” (of the voice, of affects) as a rhetorical means to defer speaking about a subject. Recent musicological studies of the Orpheus and Tristan figures mention Edward T. Cone, whose lectures on musical reception (1972) were gathered into a book titled \textit{The Composer’s Voice} and are a point of departure for reflections on the staging of the singing voice. Indeed, the presence on stage of a singer singing the role of a mythical singer begs for narratological analysis, just as does the presence on a stage of a singer whose identity as a singer (Tristan) has been veiled by the composer who writes his vocal lines.

\textsuperscript{29} Compare Fludernik’s assessment of natural narratology’s contribution to the deconstruction of the metaphysical voice or the text’s univocality:

Results from the analysis of even prototypically natural storytelling in spontaneous conversational settings indeed document the entirely structured nature of that discourse much on the lines of Derrida’s insights into the basically ‘written’ (i.e. formal) nature of the spoken language. Thus, despite the use of the term ‘natural,’ any mythic or originary concepts of naturalness will here be decidedly repudiated. As long as one starts out from a consideration of orality, and specifically of natural narrative, in terms of pure otherness or of an unstructured natural pre-existence and self-emergence, no significant similarities and influences can be observed between the oral and the literary language; which may, in fact, account for the near-complete silence on natural narrative within classic narratology. Interaction between the oral and the written, the spontaneous and the consciously structured, or between the apparently non-institutionalized and the societally determined generic (the legal, the theologico-moralistic, the literary, etc.), becomes possible only on the basis of comparable cognitive structurations which then prepare the ground for processes of intertextuality and cross-fertilization. My methodology therefore fully endorses the analyses of the deconstructionist debate, although I then move on to more pragmatic exploitations of these insights. (Fludernik 1996: 11)
For Wikshåland, in writing about *L’Orfeo* and the construction of subjectivity, Cone understood the composer as an author whose intentions are to be deciphered by the audience/reader:

> When we listen to music, we listen to the composer’s voice, according to Cone’s renowned study. Even if we do not accept Cone’s uncomplicated assumption of a direct communication between virtual composer and a more or less real audience, his argument still reminds us of opera’s distinctive character: someone is singing to us. Thus Cone approaches opera from the point of view of the audience, before any theoretical construction gets in the way. (Wikshåland 2009: 223)

Wikshåland makes an apology for its “uncomplicated assumption of a direct communication,” precisely because he intends to work within similar parameters of this recently renovated stage of the voice, in order to think through the writing of early modern musical subjectivity:

> Music, re-presenting the text on stage, speaks both directly and within quotation marks. It lifts the scene into our line of vision and delineates the framing of it; it directs itself and comments upon what it says, all at the same time. […] In *L’Orfeo*, however, the quality of the singing is just the point of the plot. The fascination exerted by the singing voices thus turns out to work together with the fascination exerted by the drama, both of them serving the opera’s end. (Wikshåland 2009: 230)

Although vocal performativity is an interesting way to think of Orphic figuration, I will focus instead on a reading of drama more akin to narration than to its performance.

In the previous chapter, I wrote of the extended poetic voice Carolyn Abbate examines in her article on Wagner’s *Tristan*, which foreshadows her more elaborate and articulated theory of musical narratology. In *Unsung Voices*, she defines nineteenth-century music drama, and the program music it inspired, (song or music without words) as a precursor to musical narrative theory:

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30 Wikshåland concurs with Abbate:

Cone’s vision of voice is thus one of a virtual author, and he associates voice securely with a creative mind [which] we assume to have made the work as a whole. The work created by the “composer’s voice” is in Cone’s view essentially monologic (in the Bakhtinian sense) and monophonic—not, of course, literally (as a one-line melody), but in that all its utterances are heard as emanating from a single composing subject. (Abbate 1991: 11-12)
Nineteenth-century critics such as [Adolph Bernhard] Marx and Berlioz, or musical hermeneuticists such as Schering, seldom use the word “narrative,” and certainly do not dwell on the meanings that might be ascribed to it; when they invoke a literary concept, they are much more likely to refer to drama. (Abbate 1991: 23)

In searching for theoretical footing upon which to secure her extension of Cone’s classic musical narratology, Abbate is also confronted by the phonocentric critique of presence. In reference to the same string of enquiry I discuss in the previous chapter—Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Derrida, and she adds de Man (Abbate 1991: 254n27)—Abbate excoriates critics of literary theory for perpetuating “entrenched and historically limited platitudes about the purely formal or structural substance of music.” (Abbate 1991: 17) Abbate points out how their understanding of music is also heavily influenced by their critique of phonocentrism:

Voice, according to these writers, is unduly privileged in a metaphysical tradition that [it] suppresses because it fears the contrary notion of inscription and text. But music’s voices—unlike the voices assumed to reside in written texts, or voice as a metaphysical desideratum—cannot be summarily stilled in these terms. As a consequence of the inherently live and performed existence of music, its own voices are stubborn, insisting upon their privilege. (Abbate 1991: 12)

As Abbate understands the problem, de Man’s reading of Derrida’s reading of Rousseau builds upon the synchronic observation that the ephemerality of sound makes the basic unit of harmonic musical language, the chord, an empty sign. Because Rousseau posits a musical origin of language, as we have amply discussed, Abbate observes how de Man can then claim that “the emptiness of music speaks secretly for the emptiness of language.” (Abbate 1991: 17) In answer to this conception of meaningless music as a succession of empty chords not

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31 See Abbate’s preface to *Unsung Voices*:

In both novels and film, the presence of this diegetic subject (even if that subject is deemed, as it were, at present absent) is taken for granted. It was precisely because most theorists of narrative had denied such a presence in music that I (in contrary fashion) wondered what would ensue if one listened for the sound of that voice. (Abbate 1991: xii)

fit to be signs, the musicologist reinstates a diachronic model for understanding music as a language in which synchronic moments only take on meaning through their temporal unfolding and the relations they develop with each other. Unless it is one’s wish to impede discussion between musicological and literary theory, the difference between music and the “empty sign” must be maintained, in the same way as the voice should not be too quickly equated with music, as does Vivès, in following Lévi-Strauss.33

As a previous discussion of Plato demonstrated, theorists have always tried to conflate musical tones with tones of voice. A moral conception of music thus dictates the relation between tonality and subjective stance.34 To do so, it must also repress the unconscious drives, which are not present to moral consciousness, into the repository of music as the alter-ego of rational speech, understood as utterance completely mastered by reason:

In the voice, as in a musical register, are manifested the harmonies and the dissonances, the ardor or the dreariness, the joy or the anguish of a presence that seeks to say itself and that is but presence to self in the “f/act” [dans le fait] of saying oneself to another.

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33 Beyond the obsessive attempts of cultural historicism to reconcile literary theory and musicology, one should recall Sigrid Weigel, and studiously admit their differences. In The Flesh of Words, Jacques Rancière distinguishes philosophical and literary stances to mimesis, yet he too maintains that the philosophical tradition is phonocentric:

Philosophy, which wants to separate its language from all the glamour of mimesis and its effect from all “literary” vacuity, does so only at the price of uniting with the most radical forms by which literature mimics the incarnation of the word. With these mad sorts of philosophy our era readily contrasts the wisdom of literature, separating the solitude of words and the pure chance of their encounters from the philosophical and political mirages of incarnation. But this wisdom is not linked to some more original conception of the nature of language, or to some more lucid view of the communal incarnation of the word. It is rather a logic of perseverance in its being. Literature lives only by the separation of words in relation to any body that might incarnate their power. It lives only by evading the incarnation that it incessantly puts into play. (Rancière 2004: 5)

It is my goal here, however, to show how Abbate’s musicological research is precisely literature on music, in the sense that the poetic extensions of the voices she has elaborated in her readings of opera are no longer embodied voices. Their poetics, which she patiently unravels, are in themselves the work of spacing, which thereby renounces metaphysical claims to immediacy, to an instant revelation of musical meaning.

34 Frances Dyson loosely associates the Humanist harmonization of the human with the cosmos in the Music of the Spheres with the signification of a silent attunement present in the German word *Stimmung* as Heidegger employs it. (Dyson 2009: 84-88) See also Agamben 1997: 89 ff. The *Stimmung*'s silencing of the voice will be all the more interesting when discussing Benjamin’s notion of the aura.
These manifestations are always already entwined and veiled by language’s plays of signification, in which the voice, as soon as it is issued, finds itself caught, although it is not reduced to them. (Vasse 1974: 177)

Notwithstanding my earlier reticence of the psychoanalytic tendency to conflate voice and music, the substratum of sonority in speech—the other stage on which the unconscious speaks—is the hinge on which deconstruction and psychoanalysis appear to be the different sides of the same revolving door. Yet the point of the musical metaphor is not to retrieve a fullness of speech, as Derrida implies when he writes that “there is no full speech, however much one might wish to restore it by means or without benefit of psychoanalysis.” (Derrida 1976: 69) Rather, the point is to ground the utterance in a sonorous consistency in which the advent of something like selfhood, yet of a self beyond rational consciousness or “mastered” self-presence, can come to pass (and go).

In a way similar to the arguments it wields against the clinical aspects of psychoanalysis (i.e. full speech), deconstruction’s treatment of musical discourse is incompatible with the experience of music as a practice.

Because it exists as a living sonority, music is animated by voices, and these voices do not evaporate when music confronts the insights of contemporary literary criticism, or philosophy of language. […] My claim that voice cannot be suppressed in speculation on music as it can in speculation on literary texts has important consequences for thinking about the links between narrative and music. (Abbate 1991: 14)

Abbate’s argument against the exclusion of the living sonority of musical voices from deconstructive readings echoes my previous discussion of the expressive voice and Cavarero’s criticism of Derrida. Yet Abbate’s interpretative strategy to write about music’s unsung voices opens a discursive space in which to chart their interactions, rather than to identify any of them or their sum as the authoritative point of origin of the musical work:

They [the unsung voices] manifest themselves, in my interpretations, as different kinds or modes of music that inhabit a single work. They are not uncovered by analyses that assume all music in a given work is stylistically or technically identical, originating from a single source in “the Composer.” (Abbate 1991: 12)
The absence of a univocal origin of the musical work in Abbate’s theory thus espouses the same deferral of meaning in deconstructive readings, in the sense that these sung yet unsung voices are not interpretative means to retrieve a truth fallen or lost in their transcription into writing or notation. Thus she finds her way out of a musical grammatology and onto the more level playing field of musical narratology.

Yet for all these interdisciplinary and intermedial disagreements, Abbate’s interpretation of figural voices is strangely akin to Fludernik’s figuralization of narrative voices—which agrees and is based on the conclusion of deconstruction—inasmuch as they both reinstate the sonorous aspects of utterance (spoken or sung) without ascribing them the metaphysical privileges associated with the subject’s voice as self-presence. While Fludernik engages in the figuralization of voices within narratives, Abbate’s reading of opera uncovers unsung figural voices. For the past twenty years or so, both narratologists have therefore been employing similar strategies to reintegrate the voice within their theoretical concerns. Although Abbate has continued to claim the inapplicability of the phonocentric critique to living sonority, her interpretations of figural voices have less to do with securing the projection of ideal self-presence than with dislocating the singing voice from its traditional site of interpretative authority. In this sense, one could very well say that Abbate’s figural voices partially participate in a deferral that destabilizes traditional interpretations of opera as a metaphysical art genre.

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35 One should add here with Lydia Goehr that thinking of the composer-as-author is an interpretative stance predicated upon the identification of the concept of “musical work” with its notation (by the composer) in a musical score, which, in and of itself, is an historical construct of the nineteenth-century. The composer-as-author is a fictional construct under which shifting definitions of music and work can find provisional containment and signification. This is why, Goehr argues, analytic philosophy cannot definitively define the musical work, precisely because it is continuously open to historical reinterpretation. See Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992). As I have been concentrating on opera and vocal music in relation to deconstruction, I have not undertaken a study of instrumental music and deconstruction. The interested reader can consult, for example, the works of Marcel Cobussen. (http://cobussen.com/publications-and-courses/books/)
Before continuing into the maze of media representations of the voice, let us stand back for a moment and think of how the experience of the voice might still inform our ways of dealing with its metaphors and allegories. For Denis Vasse, the voice is at once “the support for the formal coherence of a knowledge that condenses representations” but also, and at the same time, “in the discourse it holds ‘on the outside,’ the voice expresses life in the very moment when life is felt as the proximity of the subject to itself ‘in’ the body.” (1974: 179–81) On one hand, the inner-voice is the mental backdrop against which the sonorous images of words are placed and upon which their meanings and, hence, knowledge is built. On the other hand, and at the same time, the spoken voice is, in an outward push, the living body’s sonorous point of eruption, thereby delimiting it from the world and founding individuation. The psychoanalytic understanding of the voice challenges the dominance of eidetic knowledge (the order of representation) by including the subject’s experience of his or her embodiment (the relation of the voice to its site) in the meaning of presence and identity, gained through expression and listening. In contrast, imaginary experiences of immediate mediation or immersion in media are predicated upon the displacement of embodiment by rhetorically garbing visual representations with the characteristics of the voice. As Nancy understands it, the writing of the voice takes these theoretical pretensions of originary immediacy and of immersion in media and returns them to a symbolic signification; writing of this kind accomplishes this signification by introducing a space between the voice’s emission and its reception in listening or reading. The writing of
the voice thereby replicates the problem of primary and secondary orality, and—in a reversal of Rousseau’s masculine fantasies of maternal, musical language—often relies on music to do so.

Because Orpheus emerges in Greece at the same time as literacy, as M. Owen Lee remarks, his figure acts as a reminder of this paradoxical condition of always being in-between orality and literacy, thereby testifying to the linguistic limits of knowledge and the ways in which music evades representation. With Orpheus as a subject of and for music, and particularly for opera, it could be easy to organize the figure’s inscription into further media without taking into account the original embodied site of the individual voice, which only subsequently allows for its manifestation outside of the body in representation. As I discuss below, this is how Melina Esse elaborates on Abbate’s narratological reading of opera’s extended poetic voice. Nevertheless, opera’s figuration of Orpheus’s voice still speaks of the invocation of the dead Eurydice, thereby representing a discourse of loss, but also expressing simultaneously the body’s affects. The final literary metamorphosis of the Orpheus myth—his beheading by the maenads—also sheds light on the logocentric containment of this living disembodied voice. Prophesying in the land of Sappho, the severed head speaks of music’s undying feminine spirit and the historical repetition of looking towards music in its attempts to understand the future, just like priests used to interpret the oracle’s ecstatic, mysterious revelations.

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36 Brunel, citing Détienne, concurs. (Brunel 2001)
37 Vasse’s understanding of the voice and his careful distancing of the sonorous body from the phallogocentric eidetic order of representation, offers a space of resonance for Kristeva’s theorization of the chora and Cixous’s “vocal” writing of the feminine-maternal body. (Rajan1995: 155 ff.; Dolar 1996: 15; Cavarero 2005: 131-45) See Abbate’s discussion of Giulia Sissa’s work on the oracle. (Abbate 2001: 7-10) See also Christine Trevett’s discussion of “Montanism and Women,” in order to understand the literary containment of the prophetic female “pneuma/neuma” in early Christianity. (Trevett 1996: 159-97)
Literary Excursus – Zweig’s Confusion

And yet: when I had leafed through the two hundred industrious pages and looked my intellectual reflection in the eye, I couldn’t help smiling. Was that really my life, did it truly trace as purposeful a course with such ease, from the first to the present day, as the biographer describes, sorting the paper records into order? I felt exactly as I did when I first heard my own voice on a recording: initially I did not recognize it at all, for it was indeed my voice but only as others hear it, not as I hear it myself through my blood and within my very being, so to speak. And so I, who have spent a lifetime depicting human beings in the light of their work, portraying the intrinsic intellectual structure of their worlds, was made aware again from my own experience of the impenetrability in every human life of the true core of its being, the malleable cell from which all growth proceeds.

Stefan Zweig, Confusion.

The story of The Confusion of Feelings (its alternative title in translation) is a story about Roland, a young and idle university student in Berlin at the beginning of the last century, who is utterly shamed by his father when caught in the midst of heterosexual promiscuity rather than diligent study. Instead of bringing the young man home, where perhaps another more understanding parent would help relieve him of his traumatic shaming, the father sends the lad straight off to a provincial university town, in order that he may redress his academic and moral situation. Roland’s first meeting with his new advisor, a professor of English philology, has the aural and visual hallmarks that structure Pythagorean initiation: “the indistinct sound I had caught [through the door] was only the professor’s voice raised in energetic speech.” (Zweig 2012: 44) If the door is somewhat more opaque than a veil would be, the knowledge Roland is to obtain from his master is also less mysterious than it is.

38 With thanks to Biliana Raytcheva for giving me a French translation of this book a long time ago and for having had the insight to know I would want to read it someday.
obscure, more of a repressed secret than a luminous revelation.\textsuperscript{39}

After moving into an upstairs room at the back of the professor’s house and fervently applying himself to his studies, the excitement of the pair’s initial meeting wanes. Roland tries his best to stimulate tumescence in the professor’s desire by enquiring after the belated publication of his magnum opus. The reader finds out that the professor had not persevered in writing his book on \textit{The Globe Theatre: History, Productions, Poets} because he could not stand the solitude required to write. The young student, eager to please, proposes himself not only as an audience for the older man’s ecstatic flights of enraptured rhapsody, but also as his scribe, thereby becoming the supplement to the professor’s desire. The lure is enticing enough to succeed, for after filling Roland with a constant flow of learned soliloquy for months, the professor not only finds himself near the accomplishment of his life’s work, but also in the presence of an other, who, for the first time in his life, gives him the possibility of projecting his sexual desire onto another man without feeling alienated.\textsuperscript{40}

Roland’s engaged silence allows the professor to gradually feel as though his self has countenance, precisely because his speech has been gathered and welcomed within Roland’s listening as a space of resonance, thereby \textit{embodi}ng the professor’s voice. This capacity to listen, and not simply to impose one’s self onto another—a way of asserting himself that Roland had been previously cultivating in Berlin—is acquired through his peculiar education, a consequence of the proximity and intimacy in the transmission of the desire for knowledge, which is not only directed toward objects, but also speaks to the other and to the subject. In

\textsuperscript{39} Although not quite as ubiquitous as in \textit{The Poems of Ossian}, there are still too many instances in this novella when the narrator comments on the voice of the professor to list them all here. For another description of the novel’s story, the reader may also refer to George Prochnik’s synopsis in the second part of the introduction to \textit{Confusion} in its edition by the \textit{New York Review of Books}.

\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, Roland’s listening to the voice’s resonance in the English grammar class foreshadows the professor’s avowed alienation from writing. “Even the voice sounded strange, moving stiffly through grey, crunching sand at a monotonous and tiring pace, as if sobered by the grammatical subject.” (Zweig 2012: 64)
its attention to the voice and its descriptions of love as a narcissistic idealization of self, lifting the subject out of its unconscious alienation, _Confusion_ could have been included as one of the literary works Strauss discusses in _Descent and Return_.

The voice is always a means by which one is situated and one situates others. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, the voice plays a central part in situating subjectivity within dominant discourses, or resituating it when there is a shift in the organization of knowledge. Through Derrida’s critique of presence, one understands how the subject’s voicing of himself can enfold self-consciousness in an illusory experience of truth. The supposed immediacy of the auto-affected voice—suppressing any distance between the enunciating subject and truthful meaning of the inner voice’s fullness—would erase the trace of the voice’s function as mediator of the subject’s inner-world (its embodied site) and its exteriorization in speech (its representation of/for knowledge), only insofar as this inner-world is understood as a completely rational mind (with a body at its entire disposal). The opposing view would have the embodied voice, separated from any expressive function, acting as a shuttle, retrieving information or data from the self and disseminating it to others. In this mechanical perspective, the voice merely occupies the position of the shifter.

This is exactly what a colloquial definition of the term “media” entails: that the voice becomes understood and experienced as a piece of technological equipment in a mechanical (or digital) horizon of media. As Walter J. Ong writes in _Interfaces of the Word_,

Unreflective reliance on [mechanical] models has generated the term “media” to designate new technological ways of managing the word, such as writing, print, and electronic devices. The term is useful and I use it regularly here. But it can be misleading, encouraging us to think of writing, print, and electronic devices simply as ways of “moving information” over some sort of space intermediate between one person and another. In fact, each of the so-called “media” does far more than this: it

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41 For the relation between the voice and primary narcissism, see Dolar 1996. See also Herbert Marcuse’s _Eros and Civilization_ for a theoretical use of the Orpheus and Narcissus figures to represent the aesthetic possibility of overcoming the repressive “performance principle” of reason. (Marcuse 1974: 159-71)
makes possible thought processes inconceivable before. The “media” are more significantly within the mind than outside it. (Ong 1977: 46)

Ong goes on to write that technological developments in means of communication are not alienating in themselves, since they free human minds of the burdens of consciousness and “releases more energy for new kinds of exploratory operations by the human mind itself, in which the unconscious is deeply involved […]. Earlier, writing and print had effected comparable energy releases.” (Ong 1977: 47) It is less the objectification of one’s voice in media, such as Zweig’s mention of the recorded voice, than the reconciliation with what had seemed alien in this objectified voice which allows one to intuit the underlying unconscious motivations of the recorded utterance. Similarly, the story of transmission told within Confusion’s narrative framework represents an analogous process. The professor’s alienation is gradually alleviated through his discussions with Roland, whose silence offers him the possibility of self-reflection in otherness. Thus, at the very end of the story, when the professor breaks off their relationship, it is for the sake of preserving the difference that made possible this salutary return to the self. Upholding desire in the face of love is precisely the saving grace, albeit narcissistic, of Zweig’s novella.42

Yet the voice is neither metaphysical nor physical, as Denis Vasse reminds us, but something in between:

> Quite the contrary, to define [the voice] as founder of the limit it crosses is to say that there is no presence thinkable “on this side” nor representation thinkable “on that side” of the voice. If it were otherwise, it would be but what it already is in the mind of many: as presence, the indescribable realm delivered to the ineffable intuition of the “metaphysicians;” and as knowledge, the realm of the describable, delivered to the empty focus of the physicians’ discourse. Clearing the limit of site as the condensation of knowledge for the other, the voice founds and is the knowledge that cannot be conceived apart from the relation these concepts entertain with the voice. (Vasse 1974: 179-180)

Cf. Derrida’s comment about learning to write as the partial liberation of the child’s ego from the introjected ideality of good and bad objects. (Derrida 1976: 88) In anticipation of a future discussion below, cf. also Kontaxopoulos’s comment on Orpheus as a self-analyzing figure for gay artists: “The actual catharsis in Williams’s work, as in Cocteau’s, is brought about by transfer of the repressed impulses from the subconscious to the conscious.” (Kontaxopoulos 2001: 18)

Ong also writes of alienation in terms of desire, as the maintaining of distance between others and oneself that is necessary in order to know oneself:

> Alienation, cleavage, is not all bad. To understand other things and themselves, to grow, human beings need not only proximity but also distance, even from themselves. Out of alienation, and only out of
Zweig’s *Confusion* prefigures Derrida’s criticism of Rousseau’s maternal needs and Ong’s interpretation of a programmed return to orality in Western societies—a return to the traditionally maternal aspects of spoken languages—not in terms of the first language learnt, but rather in terms of a felt proximity in communication. (Derrida 1976: 141-52; Ong 1977: 22 ff.) Indeed, if one were to give way to a psychoanalytic reading of the characters in *Confusion*, it would seem that the traditional gender-normative roles of the patriarchal nuclear family are reversed in Roland’s new home. The professor seeks proximity with the “child,” an enterprise that is frustrated by his androgynous wife’s interference, a disempowering *interdiction* which results in the alternation of various psycho-somatic expressions of the professor’s desire, first in violent lashing out at Roland, and then in withholding affection from him. Take away the confusion, as well as the inversion of normative gender roles, and all three writers (Derrida, Ong, and Zweig) announce the same historical program: further technological advances result in a need for more human proximity, which is often difficult to conciliate with traditional notions of embodied authority (namely, the father figure).

Of course, answers to this problem differ, but they have a way of repeating themselves:

> All this is forty years ago, yet still today, when I am in the middle of a lecture and what I am saying breaks free from me and spreads its wings, I am suddenly, self-consciously aware that it is not I myself speaking, but someone else, as it were, out of my mouth. Then I recognize the voice of the beloved dead, who now has breath only on my lips; when enthusiasm comes over me, he and I are one. And I know that those hours formed me. (Zweig 2012: 115)

Here too one finds a scene of alienation that is reconciled in recognition, as the voice of the departed returns in a delicate diachrony of cordial inspiration. One is here reminded of

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See also Lofts and Rosemann’s interpretation of Lacan’s seminar *Encore* for a reading of love as a narcissistic enterprise seeking to surpass alienation, which opens the definition of love onto Otherness through a neo-Platonic reading of Lacan. (Lofts & Rosemann 1994a)
Greenblatt’s desire to speak with and through the dead. Both narratives share a common object of desire, namely English literature; however, the sublimated homoeroticism with which *Confusion* attains its goal reminds one more of Cavarero’s reading of Plato, in which the rubbing of words against themselves produces a flash of light and follows an asymptotic trajectory propelled by what Vasse calls the “epistemological drive.” What happens, however, when an attempt at a return from the descent is precluded? What happens when Orphic narcissism and the concomitant homoeroticism of Western metaphysical culture ends up being not only castrated, but also decapitated?

*Orpheus’s Severed Head: An Analogical Precursor to Mass Media*

Carolyn Abbate’s book *In Search of Opera* proposes technological metaphors for opera’s orchestration of non-linguistic vocal sounds. She convincingly demonstrates, for example, how the echo in Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* and the power of seemingly unending breath in Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (Abbate 2001: 20–36) are rendered through orchestral composition. Likewise, Abbate understands “Orpheus’ [severed] head as a minor symbol for mechanical force.” (ibid. 28) By identifying the problem of vocal amplification with the figure of Orpheus’s severed head, she establishes a logic in which the increasing amplification of vocal aerial matter by the orchestra results in an increasingly disembodied singing voice. Thus her work raises the question of what happens to the status of singing as an invocation when fetishistic obsessions with vocal size and volume replace the proper musical function of singing and culminate in disembodiment, rather than in a glorified and powerful imagined
embodiment.⁴³

The implications of Abbate’s work also problematize the embodied voice, especially in media, since her historical trajectory of the orchestral translations of the voice seems to foreshadow the voice’s technological reification. She uses the image of Orpheus’s severed head as a metaphor for the reproduction of the mediating qualities of the singing voice: “the head represents singing that travels far from the body in which it originated, as a physical object that is cousin to a classic poetic image, the echo.” (Abbate 2001: 5) By choosing to examine Orpheus’s last encore in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Abbate puts forward a definition of the mediated singing voice that “travels far from the body in which it originated,” thereby reducing the embodied site of the voice’s emission to his severed head and identifying the source of the voice with its percussive and articulating parts, namely with the mouth, rather than with breath.

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Abbate thus reads the image of the severed head as a mechanical voice that has had the air blown out of it. There is no embodiment in this singing, just as Echo cannot express herself

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⁴³Michel Poizat is also interested in the liminal, almost non-vocal aspects of singing that frame the history of opera, as he understands it. On the one end, Eurydice’s sigh is not yet quite singing; while at the other end, Lulu’s final screamed sounds in Berg’s eponymous opera are beyond singing. (Poizat 1992: 42, 205) Abbate also discusses the question of embodiment, but her concerns are not directed at the affective expression of the body as site of the subject of the unconscious, but rather at the sociopolitical implications of embodiment and essentialism to feminism. (Abbate 2001: 52–53)
(se dire). It becomes harder, however, to follow the metaphor when the severed head and its murmurs, as Ovid described them, metamorphose into an analogy for amplification, unless if one thinks of mechanically reproduced sound as a new set of electric lungs.44

Abbate’s decapitated Orpheus becomes in turn an authoritative reference for Melina Esse’s analysis of a fetishistic Orpheus in Harry Kupfer’s production of Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice, first staged in 1987 and recorded for television at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 1991. (Kupfer 2002) In this production, critical of capitalism’s reification of music, Orpheus treats Eurydice as a commodity. Since he reacts to loss by replacing it with objects—a disavowal of castration in psychoanalytic theory—Orpheus is alienated from the living Eurydice he supposedly loved (she does leave him during the staged overture), as well as from the deceased Eurydice he supposedly still loves. Although Esse brings attention to Orpheus’s fetishistic relation with the objects Eurydice has left behind, she does not write of the central fetish in this production: whenever Orpheus picks up his electric guitar to invoke the dead Eurydice, he seems to revel more in his power of invocation than in expressing his loss. Indeed why would he dwell on his loss, since his fetishism prevents him from experiencing it?

44 Cf. Dyson: “In the modern era we find the potentially infinite electrical impulses coursing through the machine substituting for the once-divine pneuma and symbolically corresponding to the flows and circuits of the nervous system.” (Dyson 2009: 25) My answer to the foreshadowing of the mechanical breathless voice Abbate describes, which I discuss in the next section, is the translation of the voice’s breath into the aura and its obscured function in regulating identification in mass media.

Of interest here as well, is the relation between dismemberment, castration anxiety, and narcissism. Judith Bernstock associates these elements of representation and psychological angst to the Orpheus myth, as it might have constituted “primitive man’s unconscious expression of punishment by the superego (society’s ideals embodied in the parents) for homosexuality.” (Bernstock 1991: 164) My Lacanian reading of perversion below in Cocteau’s work and Stiegler’s critique of media corrects this tendentious Freudian understanding of homosexuality as a wrong choice of object.
Musical invocation, singing, is here the main fetish, the non-revealed object of the music. Accordingly, the overwrought acting of Jochen Kowalski, who performs the role of Orpheus, is that of a Romantic artist, almost kitsch in his awareness of his suffering and his preoccupation with its uses for artistic self-glorification. One might even see him as singing for an imagined, internalized audience.

While overlooking this central fetish in Harry Kupfer’s production, which is in itself critical of media, Melina Esse wishes to “reconsider distinctions being made […] between the live and the mediated, between televisual immediacy and lively distance.” (Esse 2010b: 82, my emphasis). Esse wants to include televised opera in theories of media immersion and argues for the voice’s capacity to project presence into its analog and digital inscriptions. I will be deconstructing her argument by comparing it to Frances Dyson’s criticism of immersion in Sounding New Media. Dyson’s work examines how the visual rhetoric of new media theories, when claiming immediacy or embodiment in a mediated (artistic) experience, is based on the supposedly metaphysical characteristics of sound.

In discussing Barthes’s essays on music and the voice in The Responsibility of Forms, Dyson recalls how the invention of the telephone and the phonograph has lead to an
assumption that bodily presence can be technologically displaced by the (re)transmission of the voice. (Dyson 2009: 18-26) She maintains that the ontological mediation of sound is then attributed to visual objects by new media theory through the use of rhetorical argumentation. The first rhetorical maneuver of this kind that Dyson identifies concerns the redefinition and confusion of space and presence “by the artful dropping of analogical markers.” (Dyson 2009: 2) To use her examples, such a manoeuvre eschews distinctions between on the one hand “looking at” or “watching something” and, on the other, “being in,” while the familiar claim “it’s as if you were there” loses the conditionality of “it’s as if” and simply reads “you are there.” The paradoxical inversion of the regular spatial attributes of embodied presence and mediated representation that Esse sees and applauds in Kupfer’s production would not be lost on Dyson:

The impact and slipperiness of these terms, their ability to articulate what are often fictional scenarios that nonetheless appear as fact, have much to do with their provocative construction. Uniting […] tele with presence opens both terms to reinterpretation – disturbing the once-solid meaning of the latter term while grounding the former in accepted phenomenal concepts. (Dyson 2009: 2)

Accordingly, Esse’s argument relies on the ‘increasingly blurred boundaries between mediatized forms and the unsullied “live”’ (2010b: 82, my emphasis) to bring forth an imaginary immersive space of opera’s visual captation at the expense of the already mediating aspects of the voice. Esse claims that a focus on the visual aspects of Kupfer’s production better ensures the viewer’s critical reception of the spectacle:

Here the up-close presence made possible by televisual technology is steeped in poignant and productive distance (because the real object is absent, unattainable), while live, unmediated presence is stripped of fantasy, closing the distance so necessary for

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45 Esse does acknowledge work on the voice in her article, but this is limited to Abbate’s mechanical conception of the decapitated Orpheus discussed above. In her editorial note in the same issue, however, she does write about the recorded voice’s presence: “For Gumbrecht, mediation does not preclude the possibility of enlivening presence; it is important, he insists, ‘to allow oneself to be touched, literally, by the intensity of the voice that comes from a compact disk. […]’” (Esse 2010a: 2–3)
Esse’s discussion of meaningful *telepresence* stems from a scene in Kupfer’s production during which the image of Eurydice is transmitted to a television set onstage, the television set that Orpheus drags along as they are leaving Hades.

![Image of Eurydice's televised psyche in Kupfer's Orfeo ed Euridice](image)

**Figure 8: Euridice’s televised psyche in Kupfer’s *Orfeo ed Euridice***

What seems the reduplication of Eurydice’s body on the staged television set might lead to confusion: it is her *psyche* (her ghost or her soul) which follows Orpheus out of Hades, not her body, since her body never went to Hades in the first place. Interpretations of Eurydice’s psyche in Hades need not necessarily be based on eschatological conceptions of embodiment. The resurrection of Eurydice in Christian culture was always allegorical, a metaphor for the soul’s ascent. Therefore, feminist revisions of Eurydice’s

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46 Both Abbate and Esse follow Adorno in their criticism of the regressive admiration of audiophiles and melomanes for vocal material. Esse does not share, however, his acerbic criticism of media’s marketing pretense of immediacy:

> Above all, arranging seeks to make the great distant sound, which always has aspects of the public and unprivate, assimilable. [...] It is a compulsion similar to that which requires radio favorites to insinuate themselves into the families of their listeners like uncles and aunts and pretend to a human proximity. Radical reification produces its own pretense of immediacy and intimacy. (Adorno 2002: 299)

My reading does not agree with Esse’s claim that the live production is “stripped of fantasy,” whether in the characters’ relation to each other or in the fall of the fourth wall at the end of the opera. If anything, the reflection of the audience in the mirrors at the back of the stage further encourages the imaginary identifications—or reified fetishisms—that had already been presented on stage.

47 Cf. the fourth act of Roland Aeschlimann’s production of Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* at La Monnaie (1998), in which Eurydice is only seen from the waist up until Pluto accepts that she may return to the world of the living. When Orfeo transgresses Pluto’s interdiction, she loses her legs again but stays on stage a while longer in order to sing her last sigh.
underrepresentation in the myth are also necessary in order to understand the history of female disembodiment that the myth can continue to carry. This being said, the doubling of Eurydice’s psyche by Kupfer also allows for a reading of the televised image Orpheus drags around as his weighty fantasy of woman, thus liberating Eurydice’s staged psyche and its singing from the space of male fantasy, and rendering her embodiment denied by Orpheus’s narcissistic attachment to her lost image. In this case, the electrical cord he drags along with the television set across the stage can be understood as a metaphor for his maternal fantasy of Eurydice, dragging along his unsevered ties to his imagined maternal matrix.48

On the other hand, the telepresence Esse evokes seeks to embody a non-presence (Eurydice’s disembodied psyche) or, to use the substitutive vocabulary already in place, it wants to turn a fetish into a subject. This ethical redress is only accomplished, however, when Eurydice’s televised voice and image are reunited with her body onstage. This is not

48 Liz Locke frames her doctoral dissertation on Euridice with the following questions:

Why, in Western Europe’s arguably most popular, enduring heterosexual love story, the Orphic descent myth, is the female protagonist essentially absent? What—and where—is Eurydice’s body? And why does the ancient image of this never-lived, long-dead Dryad nymph continue to serve so well as the incorporeal sign-woman in its most extreme form, never to index the presence of the woman, nor even to indicate the elusive “feminine element” in heterosexual human love, but rather to signify the potential capacity of the truly great male artist—whether musician, dancer, painter, or poet—to transcend those categories long characterized as feminine altogether? (Locke 2000: 2)

Admittedly Euridice, as well as Vinvela, Charlotte, and Isolde, are underrepresented in this study. Nevertheless, the revision of phonocentrism based upon a video-centric critique of epistemology by such feminist scholars like Cavarero and Dyson—upon which I have based my overarching argument—can be understood, in part, as a revision of a phallogocentrism predicated upon a visual containment of sonority and the unseen, and the social agents which have usually been associated with such characteristics.

Apart from the misogyny Locke identifies in Cocteau’s film Orphée and elsewhere in relation to the Orpheus figure, I feel obligated to point out, even though I cannot properly contextualize the quotation here (no doubt there are allusions to his sister and to Lou Salomé), how Nietzsche expresses in Ecce Homo his unflagging allegiance to Dionysus in a misogynistic Orphic allegory:

This is part of my Dionysian dowry. Who knows? Perhaps I am the first psychologist of the eternal-feminine. They all love me – an old story: not counting unsuccessful women, the “emancipated” who do not have what it takes to have children. Luckily, I have no desire to let myself be torn apart: the perfect woman tears apart what she loves… I know these obliging maenads… Oh, what dangerous, insidious, subterranean little beasts of prey they are. (Nietzsche 2005: 105)

That said, this observation should be tempered with Nietzsche’s own self-identification with a maenadic soul or voice, as discussed above.
the work of media immersion in the production, but rather of media’s collapse as it happens on stage. If the staging of Kupfer’s production seems to grind to halt at this point and emulate a concert version of the opera, it is partially because the Orphic fantasy of an ideal rather than embodied woman vanishes with his bittersweet take on Gluck’s happy ending. Even were it not based on the rhetorically-attributed metaphysical characteristics of the voice, Eurydice’s *telepresence* would remain but a concept, *a representation of the presence*, to put it in Vasse’s words. Without Eurydice’s embodiment, without the reception (in the act of listening) of her voice’s expression (through the body), one is left with only her image on a screen, an imagined difference; a rather convenient state of things when her desire interferes with Orpheus’s own desire, namely artistic self-glorification. That Orpheus is not listening to Eurydice in this production makes it quite clear why her image, remembered or projected, is so predominant. Esse’s appreciation of televisual opportunities involves the blurring of boundaries between embodied subjectivity and the projection of the fantasy through which objects appear in the world. It thereby minimizes what is disturbing in Kupfer’s production of *Orfeo ed Euridice*, namely Eurydice’s return from the dead as a hindrance to the necessary fetishism for Orpheus’s musical and poetic *jouissance*.

**Sound Recordings, the Silent Aura, and Politics**

My critical perception of Esse’s understanding of media immersion and its historical precedent in opera’s different technological deviations of the voice is further informed below by a revision of the pneumatic and sonorous characteristics of the Benjaminian aura and its crucial function in media theory. I argue that the aura is a hinge upon which the attributes of the aural or the sonorous swivel into the sphere of the visual. As Samuel Weber understands it, the aura is already the mediating symbol for (audio)visual recuperation which enables mass
media to embody and voice the mass’s identity at the same time as it projects its disembodiment.

The voice has always been a challenge to categorize, since its sounds traverse and transcend the categories of knowledge. Take, for example, another use of the voice in Plato’s dialogues, this time in *Cratylus*. Scientific knowledge acquired by observation is technical in the narrowest sense: “Plato […] refers to the voice as an instrument not in the modern sense, but rather as a *technikon*, a technology, for revealing *alethia* (truth) and linked to *episteme*, knowledge in the widest sense.” (Dyson 2009: 22) According to Dyson, when Plato pronounced words, his speech used the same linguistic forms that had been given to things by the gods, thereby evoking their divine essence—an echo of my previous discussion of *Timaeus*. Aristotle’s categorizing project, on the other hand, rationalized the experience into its material aspects:

> Voice then is the impact of the inbreathed air against the ‘windpipe’, and the agent that produces the impact is the soul resident in these parts of the body […]; what produces the impact must have soul in it and must be accompanied by an act of the imagination, for voice is a sound with a meaning […]. (Aristotle 2001: 573)

Note that “air” makes its appearance into the equation here: it is not so much the instrument that produces sound, the windpipe, but rather the life-giving property that is absorbed and given form by the imagination which makes it possible to give voice to something meaningful. If, for Plato, speech allows for the mediation of the human and the divine, then for Aristotle, the voice is the mediation of air and an active *phantasm*, while the soul is the hook that anchors together these threads in the body. Dyson is quite right to provide the Greek term *phantasm* because “imagination,” as it is given in McKeon’s translation of Aristotle, aligns itself too readily with a Thomist reading. While Augustine was fascinated and disturbed to see Ambrose read without voicing the text, in his reading of Aristotle,
Thomas of Aquinas brought the practice into church orthodoxy by making phantasm the
divine agent of the voice: phantasm became “an image originating in the imagination”
because “operations proceeding from the imagination can be said to be from the soul.”

(in Dyson 2009: 23) Air was no longer the divine source of the psyche, that authority was
transferred to the phantasm, to the imagination. The voice thereby had its air supply cut off,
as the soul was now associated with the mind and the formation of images, rather than tying
meaning into a sonorous, expressive body. As the inner voice increasingly supports eidetic
knowledge, the voice is no longer needed to inhale or to exhale.

This inner voice presents to the mind’s eye the images of sounds, thus reconciling
the voice’s sonority with the dominant historical projects of knowledge built upon
observation of objects. Dyson’s understanding of meaningful embodiment and its artistic
expression are akin to the subversion psychoanalysis performs on discourses of knowledge:
both give voice to what dominant discourses silence by objectifying the site (self and body)
of subjectivity:

Ontology and epistemology are united via the being of the object, and the knowledge of
this being is given through the sense of sight and touch. Being, knowing, and seeing (in
Greek “to be” is etymologically associated with “to know” and “to see”) lay the ground
for modern notions of eidetic knowledge, which is captured in nouns such as idea,
reflection, speculation, enlightenment, and vision. The “total darkness of matter-in-itself” gives way to enlightenment, through the spiritual truths of the cosmos and what
will later be thought of as scientific truths of Reason. Not surprisingly, sound and the
speaking voice are banished from this ontological elite, not because of their sonority,
but because of what sonority represents – impermanence, instability, change, becoming.
(Dyson 2009: 21, my emphasis)

In other words, while the recollection of an image of the body or of the voice to the mind’s
eye or ear is a function of reason – which objectifies a particular subject’s voice or body –
listening or speaking are acts of embodiment and potential expressions of the unseen, of the
affective unknown. New media theories, as seen above, seek to impart visual experiences
with these meaningful aspects of embodied subjectivity. In order to achieve this, however,
these theories need intermediary sites where subjective sonorous attributes are transferred to images and objects. I argue that “aura” serves this function in media theory.

Since Aristotle, the voice’s impetus has mainly been thought to be made of air. The voice should certainly not be conflated with aura, however, even though epistemological negotiations of the voice have sought to assign it a similar place between the body, the soul and knowledge, which sometimes overlap:

Dyson’s understanding of the voice resonates in sympathy with that of Vasse. The voice has a pivotal function without being in itself objectified. Aura, however, is already a step away from the embodying voice, an objectifying phenomenon that can recuperate the exhaled air of the voice and, for example, turn it into an object’s attribute of authenticity: for example, the “emanation” of a visual work of art or of a particularly breath-taking landscape. If the aura is still a point of theoretical debate today, the reason is that it indicates the limits of knowledge based on observation, even as it disavows the vocal or, at very least, pneumatic characteristics that place it within the sphere of aurality and sonority.

By way of example, I will read Samuel Weber’s essay “Art, Aura, and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin” in *Mass Mediauras*, in order to underline the intermingling of voice and aura in his argument. It could be criticized as an unfair reading, since it proceeds by taking its concluding points and reading its argument in reverse. Yet it is a close reading of the text: indeed, Weber only mentions the voice twenty-five pages into his essay and only six pages before it concludes. When he does finally mention the voice, it is to subsume it under the gaze—voice and face form an inseparable pair in his analysis—and cement mass
media’s creation of imaginary authority figures in their aesthetic and political personifications:

Media would in fact go on to reduce the difference between the two categories, actor and politician, to the point of allowing the one to become the other. The Star and the Dictator had a similar function and origin. In both, the “amorphous mass” could find a face and a voice that it might call its own, or if not its own, that it could at least recognize and use to secure its [identity] position. A face with eyes that seemed to look back and a voice that seemed to address one directly. (Weber 1996: 101)

Because of its capacity to produce mass identification with personifications of fame, mass media breaks down the differences between imitation and narration, upon which historicity (or the representation of historical reality) depends. One might as well say that Benjamin was spelling out the death of the artist *qua* author as a historical figure and that this murder was accomplished through art’s mass mediatic dismemberment of the artist’s figure at the hands of fascist aesthetics:

Through the use of media, above all film, […] the reproductive apparatus that creates the mass as a dispersed and faceless phenomenon […] at the same time restores the semblance of a face to that amorphous mass. (Weber 1996: 103)

The mass is formed by visually disavowing the singular individualities which comprise it, that is, by filming it at a distance in which individual faces and voices are no longer distinguishable.

Figure 9: Successing shots from Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

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50 The displacement of “famous Orpheus” by Ossian is all the more interesting in this respect.
On these massively severed heads, a politically motivated cinematographic aesthetics repeatedly apposes the head of the leader, in a visual rendering of the alternation of address. Thus, “Fascism offers the masses self-expression [...] as it reinstates the aura of the world-picture by means of the very media that undermine it.” (Weber 1996: 102) In other words, in a sidestepping of historical reality brought about by confusion of the represented and the representor, the mass’s beheaded body becomes literally and figuratively headed by its leader, who retains the singular privilege of giving voice to its needs and desires. Furthermore, this use of film “imparts the aura of individuality to a product which ‘takes place’ in many places at once,” (Weber 1996: 90) in movie houses across the world. The aura’s “voice” demonstrates how the politics of mass media aesthetics had recuperated the devocalized (Cavarero) or anechoic (Dyson) authoritative mechanisms of written media’s univocality quite early on in film’s technological and stylistic development.

Dyson does not engage with Benjamin in *Sounding New Media*, but her overall reading can help problematize the ambiguous mediation of sound and image in his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The epigraph to Benjamin’s essay comes from a short text by Paul Valéry, “The Conquest of Ubiquity,” which advocates the psychological advantages of playing recorded music in one’s home. Benjamin’s quotation from Valéry, however, strips it of its references to music, which are reduced to “auditory images.” (Valéry in Benjamin 1985: 219) It is safe to conclude that although Benjamin’s motivation in writing the essay was prompted by reading Valéry’s remarks on the reproduction of music, a critique of musical reproduction—either in agreement or

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51 Notice how, in the shots from Riefenstahl’s film, the direction of the crowd’s saluting hands, over their unseen heads, coincides with the leader’s reversed palm. The continuation of the manual line visually influences the spectator to conflate both images or at very least to associate the masses decapitated salute with its reception by the leader’s hand and head.
disagreement with him—did not find its way into his text.  

In his essay, Benjamin attributes auras to visual works of art and even landscapes but, significantly, fails to distinguish clearly between the reproduction of music and of visual art. This failure stems from his definition of the artwork’s inscription in a historical reality, as the account of time passing through the artwork’s unmoved site:

> Since the historical testimony rests on authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. […] One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. (Benjamin 1985: 221, my emphasis)

Duration is conceived by the spatial fixation of the artwork, which in turn allows for its aura. When reproduction of the work dislocates the aura from its original site, its duration can no longer be accounted for. As a result, the aura loses its historicity, and it becomes an empty sign waiting to be recuperated. In order to keep the dehistoricizing definition of mechanical

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52 Benjamin does, however, quote Aldous Huxley about how “prosperity, the gramophone and radio have created an audience of hearers who consume an amount of hearing-matter that has increased out of all proportion to the increase of population and the consequent natural increase of talented musicians.” (Huxley in Benjamin 1985: 248n13)

On the sonorous aspects of the Benjaminian aura, see also Richard Schiff's contribution to *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age*, “Digitized Analogies,” in which he writes:

> Aura collects such associations because it derives from the Greek and Latin words for breeze or air in motion, something ethereal that extends itself and permeates the environment. Although the eye cannot see its substance, a breeze (like the air of emotion surrounding an event) can be visualized as luminous emanation; thus, with the concept of aura, Benjamin could conflate atmospheric inhalation with visible halation: “[T]o let your eyes follow a mountain range on the horizon… until the moment or the hour partakes of its appearance—this is to breathe the aura of these mountains.” (Schiff 2003: 64-65)

See also Aleida and Jan Assmann’s contribution to the same volume, especially pp. 153-54.

53 I am aware of Benjamin’s definition of aura found in “A Short History of Photography” (1931) and of his knowledge of Proust’s use of the term to qualify the actress la Berma’s mass appeal. (See Shiff in Gumbrecht and Marrinan 2003: 63–64) Likewise, I am also aware of his equally visual understanding of aura later in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939). (See Weber 1996: 99-100) I have chosen, however, to focus on aura as a mediating function of the visual and the aural.

Cf. this discussion of the aura’s “voice” with Agamben’s essay “Vocation and Voice,” in which he quotes Leo Spitzer and then discusses the absence of an equivalent for the German word *Stimmung* in the main European languages[,] a term that would express the unity of feeling experienced by a man face to face with his environment (a landscape, nature, one’s own fellow man) and would comprehend and weld together the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity. (Spitzer in Agamben 1997: 89)
reproduction in place when audiovisual technology begins to reproduce movement,

Benjamin must claim that the actor’s presence also loses its aura, in film’s disembodying of the voice. Tellingly, Benjamin constructs his argument for the captation of “auditory images” based on Pirandello’s account of the actor’s disenfranchised embodiment in visual reproduction, even though the latter’s remarks “were limited to the negative aspects of the question and to the silent film only:”

The film actor feels as if in exile – exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence. (Pirandello in Benjamin 1985: 229)

For Pirandello, the alienation (felt as a result of being recorded) is caused by the loss of one’s voice, as a withdrawal of the actor’s grasp on his own means of dramatic production, and anticipates vacated embodiment in media, a morbid “vanishing into silence.” Benjamin acquiesces and adds that even with the advent of audio-visual recordings, “the sound film did not change anything essential” in this respect. (1985: 229)

The next conclusion that Benjamin draws is central to this discussion, in the sense that it relies upon remarks that deal with the captation of speech, which, I argue, should be differentiated from that of singing: “for the first time – and this is the effect of the film – man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to presence; there can be no replica of it.” (Benjamin 1985: 229) Benjamin discusses neither filmed musical events nor filmed opera, although both had been explored prior to 1936.54

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54 Gyorgy Markus’s analysis of Benjamin’s understanding of the voice and language, however, would lead one to think that recordings of the voice can reveal the bodily traces of its expression:

One can communicate what is meant through language, because the way it is meant is directly and unintentionally expressed, physiognomically revealed in language as the medium of communication. Similarly, to understand the intentions of an interlocutor it is not sufficient to comprehend to what his or her words and sentences refer. It is also necessary to grasp the pragmatic force of the utterances, which may be directly expressed solely in countenance, tone of the voice, or the manner of speaking. (Markus 2001: 12)
Perhaps Benjamin avoids the discussion of mechanically reproduced music because it would have tampered with the mediating notion of aura upon which his argument stands. Indeed music, whether it is created or reproduced, maintains a *substantive duration*. One might ask then if music can lose its aura when it is reproduced by the *captation* of moving sound waves and their mechanical redeployment.\(^{55}\) Benjamin’s ambiguity in this matter, however, suggests that he already thought of aura as associated, in some respect (perhaps psychological), with the musical.\(^{56}\) After the essay’s publication, Adorno raised the point of musical reproduction in a letter to Benjamin in November 1938, to which the latter replied: “I do not mean to suggest that acoustic and optical perception are equally susceptible to revolutionary transformation.” (Adorno and Benjamin 1999: 295)

Adorno’s letter to Benjamin included a copy of his article “On the fetish-character in music and the regression of listening,” which sought to complement Benjamin’s critique of ‘the work of art as a commodity’ (Markus 2001: 3) with an analysis of musical consumption.

Consult Eli Friedlander’s (2005) article for a detailed discussion of Benjamin’s understanding of the voice, language, and music in the *Trauerspiel* qua precursor to opera.

\(^{55}\) Dyson engages in a similar discussion about the metaphysical qualities of recorded sound. (Dyson 2009: 72-82) See also Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (2003).

\(^{56}\) Weber anticipates the “obvious objection” that the plastic work of art (a sculpture or a painting) cannot have its aura “simultaneously taking-place” in places other than its original, authentic location, by stating that it is far less obvious just how the ‘reproducibility’ of photographs or of films is different from that of a piece of music or a work of literature, in which the ‘here-and-now’ of the aura seems to be entirely compatible with the proliferation of its material embodiments (books, performances, scores, etc.). (Weber 1996: 90)

The preceding discussions of the use of voice in literature and music precisely aim at problematizing this comparison. Weber uses location rather than duration to pinpoint the aura’s substance. Although he cites music’s inscription into media (scores and performances), like others commenting on the aura’s reproducibility, he does not define the work of music. Is it an ideal performance, every performance, the sum of all of its performances, or simply the score? If with Goehr (1992) one concludes that an analytical definition of the musical work is impossible, then the historical context in which the “piece of music” comes to reside in a book, a recorded performance or a score should be considered before making general comparisons with other art forms. Like Benjamin who compares “the choral production performed in an auditorium or in the open air” as the original musical work (live) with its reproduction that “resounds in the drawing room,” (Benjamin 1985: 221) Weber simply invokes music’s supports for redeployment, without clarifying how the technological inscription of sound was then a novelty, (he takes care not to mention recordings) before going onto visual discussions of film, photography, and printed poetry.
In this essay, Adorno makes observations about the appreciation of the singing voice which are germane to this discussion. He clearly distinguishes between those listeners who appreciate the musicality and artistry of a singer and the consumer listener, who looks to the voice as an ideal site for the reduction of music qua development (substantive duration) to its static possession as an object of consumption:

At its most passionate, musical fetishism takes possession of the public valuation of singing voices. Their sensuous magic is traditional as is the close relation between success and the person endowed with “material.” But today it is forgotten that it is material. For musical vulgar materialists, it is synonymous to have a voice and to be a singer. (Adorno 2002: 294)

He goes on to deplore that traditional concerns with the voice’s virtuosity or capacity for musical expression are no longer important. Furthermore, this fetishistic commodification of the voice is reified when, in turn, the commodity-voice is reproduced according to the same uncritical logic informed by capitalist ideology:

Voices are holy properties like a national trademark. As if the voices wanted to revenge themselves for this, they begin to lose the sensuous magic in whose name they are merchandised. Most of them sound like imitations of those who have made it, even when they themselves have made it. (Adorno 2002: 295)

As a response to Benjamin, it would seem that Adorno maintains that the singer’s aura cannot be heard unless his or her voice is fetishized. He draws attention to the manner in which the reduction of music’s substantive duration through the fetishism of the voice commodifies its magical qualities, only to see it wither away in turn through the reduplication of its reification. As in psychoanalytic theory, the voice can be transformed into an object of fascination through fantasmatic activity, leaving its expressive utterance unheard:

“Recuperated by representation, the voice no longer gives itself as the support of difference […] but becomes a reified difference. It then occupies the place of the objet (a).” (Vasse 1974: 294)
In contrast, Adorno says nothing against the recorded singing voice’s potential for expressivity.

Coming back to Benjamin, one understands that the reproduction of a work of art, turning the object into an image without an aura, is not merely the occasion for art’s distribution to the masses, but the basis of the aestheticization of politics. Moreover, the death of the work of art’s historical meaning by asphyxiation, its impossibility of expressing itself from its original site, is the modern beginning of expressive art’s subservience to eidetic, that is, to breathless and bodiless knowledge. This emanation or exhalation, the non-vocal yet pneumatic aspect of the Benjaminian aura, is not unrelated to claims within new media theories that virtual reality offers experiences of meaningful “mediated embodiment.” When sound becomes image it is “abstracted in the appropriation of externality: the aural becomes a metaphor, and actual sound is forgotten.” (Dyson 2009: 25)

The singing voice’s captation requires therefore that one should not only listen to its recorded sounds, but also—while keeping in mind the fascination it can exert if it is objectified—not forget its original site of production.

57 The advantage of also understanding the singing voice as an articulated expression of its representations of musical language becomes here quite apparent. Thus the musical voice is not simply the irrational bearer of the object voice and, therefore, not so easily thought of as an implicit fetishistic enabler of consumer ideology.


The later, materialistic writings of Benjamin give a sociological derivation of the aura, perceiving in it “the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship of the inanimate or natural object and man.” Aura shows itself as the ideological investment [Belebung] of the reified and alienated, with the capacity of “opening its gaze.” At the same time, the “beautiful semblance” [schöner Schein], as ascribed to art by idealist aesthetics, rests on auratic Schein. (in Rosen 2004: 49)

The Orphean Resurgence

Never before has death been so consistently taken into the essence of life; but never before also has death come so close to Eros.
Herbert Marcuse

In this section, I examine how the tragic inversion of Orphean figuration reemerges at the end of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first in new operas. These first two operas that I present, *Orpheus Descending* (1994) and *Orphée* (1996), are adapted from plays and had earlier cinematographic adaptations as well. In contrast, the libretto of the last opera discussed in this section, *Orpheus Kristall* (2002), was specifically written for the project. I have chosen these works in particular because they represent the progressive disembodiment of the voice and the psychological, as well as aesthetic alienation underlined in this chapter so far. Before discussing these operas, however, I want to contextualize the discussion of media immersion within a larger critique of media’s role in the commodification of desire.

The meeting of opera and new media requires discussion beyond appreciation of the creative possibilities new technologies offer. It comes at a moment when it is imperative to discuss problems within the three inseparable orders of technology, psychology and aesthetics, which contribute to the political backdrop of present-day society. The digitalization of traditional opera can lead to uncritical discourse and an undisclosed rhetoric which promote the idea of meaningful embodiment in the face of actual alienation. It is not a simple matter, however, of completely dismissing the new audio-visual possibilities of digital technology. As the philosopher Bernard Stiegler writes,

There cannot be a “fetishism of merchandise” because *economic exchange is at its base libidinal*. The “denunciation” of this fetishism by Marxism is therefore a lure: it is the essence of merchandise to be a fetish. And *not a single object* can appear in this world
without the projection of the phantasm through which it appears. But the critique of the libidinal captivation by mercantile fetishism qua hegemonic destruction of the libido is not at all a decoy: it is even, moreover, the first political imperative. (Stiegler 2004a: 25)

The word phantasm brings us back to the Thomist move that took the air out of the expressive voice (vocalized speech). Just as the attributes of sonority (impermanence, instability, change, becoming) were banished from epistemology by the phantasm’s incorporation into the divinely “inspired” yet aphasic imagination, media-related discourse immersed in “the phantasm through which fetishism appears” leads to the grim reality of ideology-driven performances of digitally mediated desire. Although Stiegler does not discuss immersion and embodiment in new media theory, his analysis of the present industrial turn towards digital technologies and media allows for a critical distance in which to re-evaluate our identification with mediatized representations and the subsequent loss of individually expressed desires.

If Benjamin, in the same essay, states that “All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (Benjamin 1985: 241), it certainly does not mean that aesthetics should not have their own politics. Benjamin denounced how the masses can be aesthetically persuaded to go to war in order to eliminate surplus production. But the face of war has changed. In reminding his readers of Le partage du sensible/The Politics of Aesthetics (Rancière [2000] 2006), Bernard Stiegler adds that “in the industrial era, sensibility’s bombardment by marketing has become the stakes of an actual war, whose arms are technologies and whose victims are individual or collective singularities.” (Stiegler 2004a: 19) In many ways, Stiegler continues Benjamin’s work throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, except that his critique of the aesthetic hijacking through mass reproduction is not directed at fascism but, instead, at the present-day threat against dignified life: the capitalist digital

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60 All English citations of Stiegler’s work are my translations.
industry. An understanding of Stiegler’s psycho-political critique is thus all the more important to the present critical discussion of artistic uses of digital media.

Stiegler finds a parallel between the evolution of mass media and the enslavement of desiring subjectivity to consumption. Time and again, he describes the historical collusion between mass media and the industry’s constant need to eliminate its surplus production by stimulating market growth (Stiegler et al. 2009: 23). The BBC documentary *The Century of the Self* (Curtis 2002) brought to the attention of a large public the use of Freudian psychoanalysis in the ‘invention’ of marketing and public relations, or, as Stiegler would put it, the individual and collective captivation and channelling of desire. The manipulation of the masses by media is not unknown to Al Gore, who writes about Bernays in his book *The Assault on Reason*. Perhaps, however, Gore could not foretell how Bill Clinton’s and his policy statement on “Technology for America’s Economic Growth” (1993) would steer societies into the problems for which he criticizes Bernays, since the digital technology and “information highways” this policy helped to foster are fuelled by the harnessing of sublimation and its industrial fetishizing of creativity’s by-products.

Stiegler analyses how the political vision and state intervention of Clinton and Gore is behind the digital turn of the economy:

> It was a question of straightening a situation in which the United States had lost their leadership in the field of the electronics industry, to the partial benefit of Europe, and essentially to the benefit of Japan and then Korea. Today, the dynamic is no longer on the side of electronics issued from audiovisual analog technologies, but on that of chips, processors, programs, servers and digital networks, from which a completely different audiovisual era starts […]. (Stiegler et al. 2009: 30)

Gore and Clinton’s political vision did not change the economic logic of capitalism: according to Stiegler, it created an industrial revolution, as the automobile and petrochemical industry partially gave way to the digital industry. Approximately one decade after the issue of this new technology policy, Maurice Lévy – at the time, the French Finance Minister
under Nicholas Sarkozy’s neoliberal presidency – published a report entitled “L’Économie de l’immatériel”/“The economy of the immaterial” (2006) in which he states: “Our principal wealth is human beings [l’homme] and it is suitable to deal economically with human capital as we treated physical and industrial capital in the past.” (in Stiegler et al. 2009: 56, my trans.) In short, governments are looking to prolong a model of unsustainable growth, inherited from the previous industry, into the new (digital) economy by curbing the Internet’s capacity to erode the system of property. Therefore, they institute laws on intellectual property and communications that legalize the Internet market, thereby defining what constitutes sublimation and its products.61

According to Stiegler, this absence of political vision is based upon a misunderstanding of the psyche and how desire and libido function. Individuals who are exposed to prolonged imperatives to consume by televisual publicity spots and movies packaged to fit the fantasies of the markets (not to mention product placement) are left with deep psychological effects: “The result is a symbolic misery that is also a libidinal and affective misery, which leads to the loss of what I call primordial narcissm: individuals are deprived of their capacity for aesthetic attachment to singularities, to singular objects.” (Stiegler 2004a: 23, my trans.) In other words, people are bombarded with competing marketing messages by mass media, which has channeled their desire in such a way that media now has the capacity to make them jump from one object to another that has a similar set of particulars. What Stiegler is spelling out here is that marketing, over the last seventy years or so, is responsible for an increased propensity in traits of perversion in contemporary

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61 At the time of my article’s initial publication, the American Congress and Senate were revising the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect IP Act, two bills which were highly contested by defenders of the Internet’s uncensored and unhindered flow of information. On 18 January 2012, the Wikipedia Foundation blacked out its English content to raise awareness about the potential consequences of the legislation of digital intellectual property. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA_initiative/Learn_more>
consuming and desiring subjectivities. The discussion of a media-induced deviation of desire and consumption brings us back to fetishism.

For psychoanalysis, fetishistic traits are often presented in practices widely referred to as perverse, in the sense that desire has been deviated from the goal of copulation. I am certainly not making an argument for normative heterosexual copulation, nor am I criticizing perversion’s potential as a subversive concept, especially since the Lacanian distinction between the object of perverse desire and the structure of perversion discards value judgments on the nature of the desire for its object. Rather, I am interested in setting the symptoms Stiegler describes in relation to a fetishistic, immersive relation to media. Roland Chemama gives a description of fetishism that is analogous to Stiegler’s description, except that here the subject has chosen his or her category of objects:

> If the fetishist elects a particular category of objects, he or she is not thereby “fixated” to one of them. Always susceptible to displacing his or herself towards another, equivalent but different, fetishism comprises that part of dissatisfaction constitutive of all desire. (Chemama 2005: 134, my trans.)

A fetishistic organization of desire does not lead to symbolic misery and libidinal disaffectation per se; its marketing, and its imposition of categories of objects are what spells ruin for individual and collective desire, according to Stiegler. Furthermore, with increased legislation of the Internet and the digitalization of society, desire is being, or is on the point of being, evacuated from artistic production. The digital industry has not only inherited, on the one hand, an agent (marketing) enforcing an economy of non-desire (through images that tell us what to want and how to be), but is, on the other, creating an industry that feeds off people’s creative drives in supposedly free acts of self-expression. The antinomy of this conjecture thus begs the question: what will be left to desire within the realm of digital

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aesthetics once the industry has consumed the libido that fuels the life-support machines of Orpheus’s severed head?

While media, as a support for marketing’s imperative discourse, can entertain the fascination for commodities, it can also generate fascination for itself as it becomes a commodity in its own right. Esse’s article on opera and televsual immediacy speaks directly to this problem. The multiplication of images onstage and their reduplication on home entertainment systems, whether high- or low-tech, invokes the *simulacrum* as a fetish, and indeed Esse notes that Eurydice’s simulacrum on the television screen calls into question the “fetishistic thinking of the modern television viewer.” (Esse 2010b: 89) But if Kupfer’s production demonstrates how a libidinal investment (Orpheus’s desire for Eurydice) can be captivated by media and results in the fetishism of musical invocation, it does not, to my understanding, relieve Orpheus’s alienation by allowing him to access a real unsullied by fantasy. This is exactly the problem *Orpheus Kristall* addresses, a problem to which I turn shortly. Before doing so, however, I want to first discuss two other recent operas that depict the reversal and beheading of Orpheus.

**Orpheus Descending, Tennessee Williams and Bruce Saylor**

In 1957, Tennessee Williams presented the play *Orpheus Descending*, a revision of an earlier play titled *Battle of Angels* (1940). In it, Valentine Xavier or Val, a guitar-playing young man (he has just turned thirty), leaves an openly immoral New Orleans only to find himself in a small, hypocritically immoral Southern town, where he brings hope to dominated and
socially repressed women before their husbands kill him.\(^63\) He is greeted upon his arrival in town by Vee, Sheriff Talbott’s wife, who finds him a job in the Torrance Mercantile Store, run by “Lady” Torrance for her dying husband Jabe. Before going on to write about the adaptation of the play into an opera by Bruce Saylor (1994), I want to consider some of the mythological symbols, both Christian and Greek, which structure the story and impart its themes with veiled meanings. I will point out some of these symbols with stills from Sidney Lumet’s cinematographic adaptation of the same play, *The Fugitive Kind* (1959) with Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani.\(^64\)

Critics and scholars have questioned the extent of Williams’s involvement with Nietzsche’s work and have looked for evidence of his having read him. (Crandell 2011: 105-06n1) Yet a more productive way of questioning the links between both is to examine the function of characters within the play. Although George Crandell has already brought attention to the Nietzschean qualities of Lady Torrance’s experience of “life’s regenerative power” and Jabe’s role as the “Dionysus the Destroyer” in *Orpheus Descending*, (Crandell 2011: 104-05), I would like to discuss the sacrificial or tragic function of Val in the

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\(^63\) Jean Kontaxopoulos sums up this point well, although he writes that Sheriff Talbot drives Val out of town. Although the Sheriff warns Val and tries to drive him out of town, he ends up burning Val alive. Chance in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is persecuted by the patriarchal society which he calls in question through his actions […] even more so in the case of Val in *Orpheus Descending*, whom the Sheriff drives out of town. The whole atmosphere of the latter work smoulders with the suppression of the “misfit” in the infernal town where the story is set. (Kontaxopoulos 2001: 4)

Consult the rest of the article for an analysis of the “many common elements” in “the adaptation of the Orphic myth by the two writers,” namely Williams and Cocteau. (Kontaxopoulos 2001)

\(^64\) Although Bruce Saylor was very generous and helpful in sharing primary (the score and a recording) and secondary material (articles, reviews, etc.), I had neither photos nor video recordings of the opera at my disposal with which to bring attention to the work’s visual elements.

Williams also wrote a depression-era play titled *Fugitive Kind* (1937). Set in a cheap hotel for vagrants, the play’s characters included a guitar-playing vagabond named Texas, a man named Jabe who also enjoys close ties to law enforcement officers, and Glory, the adopted daughter of the hotel’s owner, out of place and very defensive, like Lady. (Williams 2001)
work. Is the poet here a redeemer out to save an allegorical Eurydice, or is he a conductor and dynamo of the drives that would explode a hypocritical society’s moral sclerosis?

Commenting on the absence of the battle between good and evil angels in the second version of the play, Nancy Baker Traubitz writes that

the hero/savior Orpheus or Val, as Williams calls his hero, embodies the playwright as he chooses to see himself […]. Williams comes to emphasize the responsibility which love places upon the poet/singer Orpheus and the pull toward life and fruitfulness that the Orpheus figure creates in those dead souls he meets in the hades of the Torrance Mercantile Store. (Baker Traubitz 1976: 58)

Baker Traubitz goes on to point out the biblical symbolism at work in Orpheus Descending, especially those elements likening Val to Christ. She also draws attention to Carol Cutrere’s sibylline character: “In the earlier version of the play her name was Cassandra and she retains her function as a prophetess.” (Baker Traubitz 1976: 59) Accordingly, she awakens from a dream with a message for Val. These symbolic allusions were certainly not lost on Lumet in his adaptation of the play. Consider how he depicts Carol’s sibylline warning when she returns to Two River County: “The message I came here to give you […] is let me take you away before it’s—too late.” (Williams 1961: 65) If Lady complains to Jabe in the first act that they “always had a problem with light in this store,” Val poses himself as the answer to the problem: “I do electric repairs.” (Williams 1961: 35, 45)

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65 Cf. Traubitz: “She [Lady] is also ‘cold.’ Val immediately gives Lady the snakeskin jacket, symbolic of regeneration, to wear and introduces the guitar, a phallic life-giver.” (Traubitz 1976: 60)
Figure 10: The prefiguration of Val’s sacrifice in *The Fugitive Kind* (1957)

The still shots I have copied above from the second-act scene visually foreshadow Val’s sacrifice as the very reason for his presence in Two River County: to bring light through his “repairs.” Therefore, when Carol announces his intended sacrifice by the villagers, his acceptance of it all (one could almost call it *amor fati*) is visually represented by Lumet’s camera through his ascension onto an electrical cross. Indeed the composition of the frame in the stills above remains cluttered; the lines of the staircase, under which they are standing, remain askew, and Val’s head is tilted, until he is finally “mounted” on the electrical cross.66

This example of cinematographic figuration also calls temporality into question. In this scene, Val’s answer to Carol’s warning is to give her the watch he stole from her brother in New Orleans (first still above). He is not simply cutting himself off from his former life by giving back the stolen object, but is also renouncing it to keep track of time, to account for it: basically, he will no longer commodify the time he has left, for he is not long for this

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world. Therefore, both thematically and symbolically, Val’s relation to the women of the
town speaks of the Orphic figuration examined in the first chapter, albeit without an
eschatologically informed morality.

Val’s prefiguration of a Christlike sacrifice is interrupted, however, when physicality
and sex are foreshadowed as the outcome of his relationship with Lady. In the film
adaptation the transformation is made even clearer by a change of scenery. After Lady’s
sexual proposition, but before their desire turns into *jouissance*, Val goes out drinking and
comes back to town in the back of a pick-up truck. There, alone except for the company of
his guitar, he sings the only song of the film.

Last night I crossed the river
with a heavy blanket roll
I took nobody with me
not a soul.

I took a few provisions
some for hunger, some for cold
but I took nobody with me
not a soul. (Williams 2002: 259-260)

Orpheus-Val is definitely crossing the river Lethe, on his way back to Hades, but is no
longer a psychopomp. This episode in the film’s plot is the structural equivalent to the
moment in *L’Orfeo* when Monteverdi writes a descending chromatic tetrachord under the
second occurrence of “*Ahi, chi niega il conforto a le mie penne.*” In pursuing the comparison
between the romanced Orpheus myth and the play/film, however, the main difference,
which also explains the violent end to the play, is that “Lady” is not a modern version of
Eurydice in *Orpheus Descending*, but rather of Persephone, as she is the wife of Jabe (Hades)
who reigns over a realm of lifeless servitude. It might seem a banal point of mythological
pedantry, but none of the previous commentators of the play or film have addressed the
Eurydice/Persephone digression.  

In the third act, Val and Lady have become lovers. This is certainly not a moral Christian or Orphic redemption, an ascetic dulling of the senses to better identify with that part of one’s self that is not material and thereby prepare it for a disembodied afterlife; it is a regenerative act, a renewal of life, not a sacrifice for an imagined life to come in a supra-sensible world. Lady, who had been childless, conceives with Val. This inversion of values (morality/regeneration) is symbolized by the extension of the luxuriant and luminous confectionary (her father’s Dionysian wine garden resurrected) growing from the side of the dark and arid mercantile store. Since Val’s life-giving bed is located on the ground floor and Jabe lies in cancerous agony in his room on the upper landing, the inversion of the normal division of eschatological space also contributes to the representation of moral revolution.

The tragedy in Orpheus Descending is that this revolution does not take place; the regeneration does not lead to the dismantling of the commodification of uxorial duties, but rather, provokes power’s destruction of its runaway slaves. Before dying and leaving the happy couple to their productive lives, Jabe/Hades intervenes. When he starts a fire in the confectionary and Lady tries to prevent Val’s sacrifice, the revolution’s inversion is reversed. At the end of The Fugitive Kind, in a shot that follows Lady entering the store (upside down) and coming round the stairs (right side up), Lumet attributes the subjective camera to Jabe’s character, who finally shoots Lady on the stairs. He then screams for help, framing Val as the culprit, who then dies in the confectionary’s fire (in the play, he is also burnt alive).

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67 M. Owen Lee does raise the question of Eurydice’s identification with Persephone, already in Greek Antiquity: “Palaephatus is also the first to give Orpheus’ wife a name—Eurydice, ‘she who gives justice far and wide.’ It seems a name more appropriate for a judging queen of the dead [Persephone] than for a woman rescued from death.” (Lee 1996: 7)

68 Similarly, act three of Aeschlimann’s production of L’Orfeo (Monteverdi 2006) the Monnaie Opera House in Brussels horizontally represents the division of this metaphysical space, rather than the traditional vertical representation of Heaven and Hades (the Netherworld or infernum).
Orpheus does not return from his expressionist descent into this immoral underworld. The audience of the melodrama is left with a taste of what could have been, rather than a cathartic lieto fine from which it could conclude that all is for the best in the best of worlds.

In a 1994 interview with Deborah Holloway for the American magazine Opera News, the librettist and composer of a then new opera based on Tennessee Williams’s play were asked:

DH: What contribution do you hope to make with Orpheus Descending?

JDM: It takes one of the greatest playwrights America has produced and brings him once again to the opera stage. Recently we’ve had operas from Esther to Akhenaten, but this is a uniquely American story—something rarer still. That’s where the strength of this opera comes from.

BSS: By the way, there’s not a hint of Americana in the score—no quotations from folk songs or bluegrass. (in Holloway 1994: 19)

In these the final moments of the interview, J.D. McClatchy is seeking to define the work as truly American by invoking the source for his libretto—the playwright’s nationality, as well as the location and contemporaneity of the action—in contrast with other operas based on
plays by Williams that had been recently created in the United States. On the other hand, Bruce Saylor—of his own accord, a composer whose musical language is influenced by late-Romanticism and its Modernist exponents, “Verdi and Wagner, Britten and Berg” (Saylor 1994b: 4)—is specifying for the reader that neither does his music cite homegrown American musical idioms nor does it try to capture their essence. Rather, he insists that he composes in the elevated style of a cosmopolitan and continental elite.69

The disagreement about what makes the opera authentically American follows in the wake of a disagreement over the presence of myth in the play. For McClatchy it has “the material of melodrama, with this strong mythic underpinning,” while Saylor reluctantly agrees that certain details of the piece have “mythic overtones.” (Halloway 1994: 18-19) In their interview with Opera Monthly, McClatchy further sings the praises of Williams’s aptitude at transposing mythology into a contemporary American worldview: “His verbal mastery allows him to move easily between the mythic and the realistic, between the otherworldly and Southern Gothic.” (in Gelbert 1994: 24) Although Saylor is coy about this literary transposition in the interviews, he is not when it comes to expressing it in music.

For the most part, the music Saylor has given Val contrasts with the dark and violent chromaticism that characterizes the atmosphere of the town and, therefore, the opera’s overall musical language. Saylor has said that Val’s music is “more tonal, if you will, very lyrical, and even seductive.” (in Gelbert 1994: 24)

69 Since then, André Prévin also created the opera A Streetcar Named Desire (comp. 1995, prem. 1998). On the difficulty of defining what constitutes an American opera, see Midgette 2007.
Accordingly, when Val picks up his guitar, the lyre of Orpheus is awakened: suddenly, the listener hears an *almost* major chord on C:

> Featuring a falling octave followed by a raising scale, this [Val’s] music, when preceded by an ascending fourth, resembles the opening of his highly figured “lyre” music [copied above]—the magical draught which attracts Lady. Played on the harp, it is always in C, as changeless as the demigod Orpheus. (Saylor 1994b: 4)

The effect, whether on the musically literate or the naive listener, is the same: Val’s music is anchored in harmony’s most basic key. If Val/Orpheus’s guitar/lyre playing is grounded in C, however, Saylor sharpens the 4th of the chord (sometimes he also lowers the 7th) and the listener finds himself in the modern Lydian mode.70

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70 Saylor is quite explicit about his use of modes in *Orpheus Descending* and their historically charged meanings:

> The key areas of B and C are important throughout, from the germinal cell that opens the opera B-C-A, until its conclusion nearly two hours later. The interval of the half step and its corresponding key relationship, characteristic of the Phrygian mode with its initial half step, have been associated with death from Josquin to Verdi. (Saylor 1994b: 5)

I thank Matthew Ricketts for pointing out to me the Lydian mode in Val/Orpheus’s music. See also Harold Powers’ articles on modes in *The Grove Dictionary of Music.*
Saylor’s use of the Lydian mode has several effects. The chromatic displacement of the 4th on the C chord helps to blend Val’s music in the overall chromatic language of the opera and prevents the listener from identifying him as some kind of *deus ex machina*, while still evoking “mysterious or religious associations.” (Powers) While for J.D. McClatchy *Orpheus Descending* spells the ascension of the greatest American playwright to the opera stage, for Bruce Saylor it seems to mean the repetition of a timeless musical mode, a mode more major than the brightest major chord. It is one not of idealism, but of elevation. In the reprise of the theme at the end of the opera’s first act—when Lady and Val first make love to each other (corresponding to the end of Act II in the play)—the flute, harp and clarinet orchestration add to the airy musical mysticism of the mode. The music is contrasted with its violent, repressive surroundings; Val’s faith in something better, to make “some beauty out of this dark country” is successfully affirmed, although the opera sticks to the play’s tragic ending. The theme Tennessee Williams wished to express—the persistence of hope in dominated and humiliated human beings, whose expressive outbursts are subjugated and contained by institutions of power—is articulated in sound by Saylor’s music.

My equation of the ascendant Lydian mode with hope and spiritual elevation might be seen as an interpretative inanity (especially as it comes from a non-musicologist) produced by a determination to conflate different forms of media through the voice. Of course, the Lydian mode does not have an identity simply in its organization of sound. This organization can be historically contextualized, however, and thereby situate the listener within a musical tradition of which s/he might often be unaware, yet still be influenced. By analyzing the central “Val/Orpheus” theme, or the prosopopeia of opera singing about itself, I wanted to

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71 This is Siegrid Weigel’s criticism of the use of voice in cultural studies, in that it would impose methodologies from other disciplines on literature. See chapter 1.
examine a poetic claim for music in contemporary society. Like the descending tetrachord which opens the gates of Hell to Orpheus in Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*, figural music still has a fundamental, albeit not always conscious, structuring effect of meaning. In *Orpheus Descending*, this common musical language is not being invented, but acts as a cultural reference for the spectator. In my opinion, Saylor’s modal references affirm both the importance of historical ties to the mythological theme and to the power of music to express what cannot be said or what will not be heard, as the unsayable often finds refuge in the indistinctiveness of sound.

*Orphée*, Jean Cocteau and Phillip Glass

A year prior to *Orpheus Descending*’s premiere in Chicago, New York saw Philip Glass’ premiere of *Orphée* (1993). Like *The Fugitive Kind*, Jean Cocteau’s screenplay for *Orphée* (1950) is based on an earlier eponymous play (1926). It is an important work, if only because it departs from the solar representation Mallarmé’s poetry had imposed on the myth. Orphée is of particular interest here, however, because of the scenes in which the young dead poet, Cégeste, speaks over the radio and those in which the old living poet, Orphée, listens to him and takes dictation. I want to compare these scenes to Philip Glass’s, which is based largely on the film’s screenplay. If Harry Kupfer’s staging of a television set in his production of *Orfeo ed Euridice* still generates debate around media and fetishism, how does Glass’s stage adaptation of the invasion of media in the creative process fare?

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73 Interestingly, like the earlier play on which *Orpheus Descending* is based (*The Battle of Angels*), Cocteau’s earlier play of the same name (*Orphée*) also had an important angelic theme that has been, if not lost, then at the very least transformed (in the character of Heurtebise) in the later work.
In critiquing the adaptation of the film into an opera, Edward Rothstein wrote in *The New York Times*:

Cocteau’s film is haunting not because of banal views about the artist’s relationship to death, but because of the eerie sexual tensions created by the music and the characters; what fascinated Cocteau is the erotic charge of the Princess, his script’s true artist, the underworld persona who takes passion and obsession seriously. (Rothstein 1993)

I disagree. In falling in love with his death, (a.k.a. “The Princess”), Orphée becomes devoted to the sublimation of his death drive. The passionate obsession and erotic charge of the relation between Orphée and the Princess revolves around the deviation of the sexual impulse into a creative outlet and results in Orphée distancing himself from his wife Eurydice. That is why the Princess has Cégeste killed. By forcing him to broadcast his inspired poetry over a radio frequency that only Orphée’s car radio can receive, and which he obsessively transcribes, she effectively estranges Eurydice from Orphée. As in a prior discussion with Barthes, the Princess, or Orphée’s death, plays exactly the same part here as the electric guitar in Kupfer’s production: fame’s disavowal and artistic commodification of passionate love’s death. In idealizing the Princess as a passionate lover, Eurydice’s plight is again ignored and Cocteau’s representation of her as a needy, narrow-minded, *petite-bourgeoise* wife is accurately described as misogyny. Therefore, let us take the Princess for the phantasm she really is: the conductor of Orphée’s otherworldly inspiration, therefore the narcissistic symbol of his unresolved relation to mortality, and, in turn, of his castration anxiety.

In Cocteau’s cinematography, small means make for great poetic effect: Cégeste is dead and therefore his voice and body no longer coincide when he sends messages to the living. The return of the dead has been represented this way since Patroclus’ *psyche* paid a nocturnal visit to Achilles’ dreams, and the traditional understanding of transmission also relies on the homoeroticism of the voice. In the film, the radio broadcasts of what seem like coded messages (or surrealist poems) are given a source. In the first of these scenes, the
Princess orders the recently deceased Jacques Cégeste to sit at the microphone and broadcast his poetry. The spectator sees Cégeste from a rear angle, but hears Cocteau’s voice dubbed over, reciting a passage from his *Essai de critique indirecte* published eighteen years prior: “The mirrors would do well to reflect further.” After this initial broadcasted fragment, the camera is placed directly opposite Cégeste and the Princess in order to capture the hierarchical dynamic involved.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 13: Death’s inspired medium in Cocteau’s *Orphée* (1950)*

We recognize Cocteau’s distinctive nasal tone, but the face that seemingly produces its voice is not his. This should be a moment of alienation, in the sense that the voice is cut from the site of its enunciation, not only once—in broadcasting a disembodied voice—but twice—in audiovisually representing the expressions of another’s voice as one’s own. The effect is the sight of a body that has been hollowed out and filled with another man’s voice, like a hollow reed resonating in the autumn breeze of analog media. Because he is reclaiming the mass media beheading of Orpheus for poetic purposes, however, Cocteau is not as alarmed as the narrator of *Confusion* or as Pirandello. Indeed, this dissertation’s continuous discussion of the displacement of the voice paves the way for understanding Cocteau’s eerie scenes as a musical effect of Orphic figuration. I use music here in the extended poetic and narratological meaning I have been patiently outlining throughout this thesis. I call it a “musical effect” because it displaces the relation of author-enunciator-audience, while using
the vocal mechanisms of figuration and combining the disparate historical enunciations of declamatio. The recitation of self-citation acts as a musical figure repeated throughout the film and structures the drama through sonorous means that blur the relation between mimesis, diegesis, and poeisis.

Although Cocteau certainly questions the authorial voice, he does not wish to minimize his presence in the work, but instead overstates it, thereby confusing traditional interpretations of attribution of meaning and asking the question of identity in the maze of media. What becomes of identity when one is surrounded by images and recordings of oneself? This is the problem at the outset of the film: Orphée’s fame has left him with nothing to say that is particular to himself. It is also his impetus for listening to coded messages on the radio. He wants to regain his lost identity as a poet—one in which creation and identity went hand in hand. But his naive life-affirming creation has been tainted by his confrontation with the rising generation of poets and the embodiment of transmission, namely, his approaching fatherhood. In other words, he can no longer create because he is all too aware of his mortality:

O.—Where do these messages come from, Heurtebise? I’m certain they’re addressed to me.
E.—Nothing matters but this radio. I could die and you wouldn’t even notice.
O.—We were already dead.
H.—Beware of the sirens.
O.—It is I who charm them.
H.—Your voice is extremely beautiful. Be satisfied with your own voice.
O.—Quiet!

Cocteau’s use of media shows us that Orphée cannot say something new about himself since his is a lost self, one that can only pick up on some suprasensible thing and become its messenger. Orpheus’s addiction to the radio broadcast points to one of the symptomatic mechanisms of fame: one must find something to say, a thing so wonderful that the “I” who voices it will supposedly live on forever as a figure in media, rather than a figure for media.
Once beheaded, “famous Orpheus” needs to spread rumors about himself. Cocteau thereby presents the secret obsession in artistic creation: that thing is not just some or any thing, but death as thing. While trying to regenerate his art by looking for his lost identity, Orpheus not only looks for, but also falls in love with, his own death. In his media-induced narcissism, he does not even need to really search for Eurydice in Hell. Instead, he continues in a morbid quest for immanent immortality through art, an ethical responsibility projected unto art not merely since the “discovery” of Ossian in the eighteenth century, but at least since Varro’s comments on the figura. As the poet says in the cafe scene: “Orphée, your worst fault is knowing how far one can go before going too far.” In other words, his only problem as a vainglorious poet is that he is not already dead.

These words from a literary critic in the film’s first scene prefigure a post-descent oracular comment made by the Princess: “The death of a poet must be sacrificed to make him immortal.” (Cocteau 1999: 90 in Kontaxopoulos 2001: 6, his trans.) Kontaxopoulos writes of the spatial inversion of this world and the Underworld in Cocteau’s Orphée and of the importance of the Princess/Persephone as an idealized antithesis to the misogynistic portrayal of the overprotective mothering figure of Eurydice. I partially disagree, as I think that in this narcissistic projection of otherness, Eurydice is a mother for the living, desiring world, while the Princess/Persephone is also a mother, but in residing in the world of the dead, she thereby represents the call to jouissance.

As readily appears from the story, the real reason for the descent of this Orpheus into Hades (or more accurately, the ascent of Hades to the world of the living and his meeting with Orpheus) is not his love for the conventional Eurydice, whom he indeed finds unbearable and overprotective (34-35) like the mother in Les Parents terribles or The Glass Menagerie, but his love for the Princess-Death which becomes mutual; in this way the poet achieves immortality. The love of Orpheus for his Death is partly love for himself, or “the same,” a narcissistic element closely linked with homosexuality. (Kontaxopoulos 2001: 6)

If we follow this line of thought to its rightful end, the poet’s identification with Orpheus is
a way of voicing his ego, of protecting himself from the call of an overbearing superego or parent-figure. Dolar’s association of the voice to the myth of Narcissus is informative in this respect:

The best witness is, after all, Narcissus himself, whose story, maybe not unsurprisingly, involves both the gaze and the voice. But his curious “affair” with the nymph Echo, who could only echo his words and couldn’t speak by herself, is a story of a failed love and a failed narcissism—the voice returned is not his own voice, and he would rather die than abandon himself to the other (“Ante, ait, emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri,” says Ovid). And when the nymph dies, only her voice is left, which still makes echo to our own, the voice without a body, the remainder, the trace of the object. (Dolar 1996: 14)

Because the ego is called by the superego to transcend its desire by transgressing the limits it represents, the echo here becomes an aural analog to the self-reflecting image, assuaging the ego’s anxiety about being threatened with castration, of disappearing, for having resisted the call to forego instincts of self-preservation. When one puts these twentieth-century threads together, there emerges a socially conservative way of interpreting the post-figural Orpheus, as he is made to represent the sublimations of anxious gay men who are afraid not only of social persecution, but also of their problematic relation to desire and jouissance. My remarks on the lack of interest in Eurydice in favor of Persephone in Orphée and Orpheus Descending concords with Kontaxopoulos’s argument for an Orpheus complex unconsciously influencing the works of both writers:

This ambivalent relationship between father and son could be called an “Orpheus complex” along the lines of the prototype mother-son relationship conveyed by means of the “Oedipus complex,” which equally exists in both Orphic versions, between on the one hand, Val and Lady (Nelson 1961: 210), and on the other, Orpheus and Princess Death (Conolly 1999: 160). Either the psychological absence of the father or else his harshness and his replacement by a tender mother results in the child’s identification with the mother and his search for a father (i.e. male) substitute (survival of the father’s image through the mother). (Kontaxopoulos 2001: 11)

Here too I agree in principle with Kontaxopoulos, but not with his interpretation. If the Orpheus complex is built upon the psychical absence of the father, then it is both the overprotective relation (Orphée/Eurydice, Val/Vee Talbot) and the overbearing or over-
demanding relation (Orphée/Princess, Val/Lady) that constitute its dialectical matrix.\textsuperscript{74}

Let us now turn briefly to Glass’s adaptation of \textit{Orphée} (1996). I will focus on how he adapts the car radio for the opera stage. I will not comment on the music Glass gives Orpheus, since in his minimalist setting, Orpheus appears to lack any distinctive musical characteristics. Out of this homogenous musical material, we hear a prerecorded voice (not Cocteau’s) speaking \textit{recto tono} Cocteau’s script for the radio broadcasts. The set for the Seattle production is mundane and so are the characters. By scene six of the first act, the listener comes to register Glass’s declamations as virtually spoken rather than sung, at least for those who understand French. This spoken voice, then, breaks the illusion of the identification of Orpheus with the voice on the radio: the voices are on different registers; one musical, the other spoken. The voice of the dead Cégeste functions more as an aesthetic intrusion and less as a poetic means to convey the death drive’s intrusion into the artist’s consciousness. If the constant loop of the musical material would at least stop, then these media incursions would have more effect, but Glass’ translation of media to the stage fails to recreate the fascination with the ether: the transmission is too clean—there are no distortions, no cracks, nowhere to hide, nothing but the flat digital sound surface.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} Kontaxopoulos comes close to saying so when, later in his article, he writes:

In contrast to the classical myth, where Orpheus takes the initiative in his actions and Eurydice puts up with them, the modern Orpheus of Cocteau and Williams is more passive. The initiative is in the hands mainly of the female protagonists (Lady Death and Lady Torrance) rather than in those of Orpheus, who philosophizes. The women take action to get what they want, just as the frenzied women (Maenads) tear apart whatever they want but cannot get. (Kontaxopoulos 2001: 14)

\textsuperscript{75} Earlier in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, radiowaves were thought to pick up on messages from the other side, hence Cocteau’s use of it in a car that look like a hearse. This fascination with technology’s \textit{captation} of the ethereal had even brought Freud to think that psychoanalysis could explain the workings of telepathy through scientific evidence. (Dyson 2009: 29-30).
Orpheus Kristall, Manfred Stahnke

In line with the twentieth century’s psychological turn in treating the Orpheus myth (Bernstock 1991), Manfred Stahnke and Simone de Mello’s opera Orpheus Kristall (2002a, 2002b) is akin to Ovid’s description of the grief-stricken lover, psychically struggling in the aftermath of his Virgilian double loss of Eurydice. Its fragmented narrative takes the form of a man’s dream-like quest to regain self-identity in a maze of staged mental images and voices. According to the formal disposition of Stahnke’s score, Orpheus is thus confronted with the mnemonic incursions of three Eurydice figures: the first (Sopran 1, S.1) is Medusan, and will have Orpheus narcissistically seduce himself by gazing at himself; the second (S.2) is Sibylline, whose reflective remarks on speech contrast with the first figure; and the third (S.3) is like Ariadne, an overbearing parental figure (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: 1). The opera, however, never directly invokes Eurydice. Rather, the fantasies about the lost object of desire found in the myth are used to question how memories are retroactively given signification. The sonorous voice here acts as the copula between site and representation as the split self confronts the impossibility of grasping (his) reality.

In the world premiere of the work at the 2002 Munich Biennale, Stefanie Wilhelm’s stage design represented an open laptop computer without the letter markings of the keyboard (picture below). While Orpheus sang where one would normally type, the screen maintained its function for the projection of images.

In one of the scenes, a woman’s picture appears on-screen. In another, the three female figures mentioned above literally burst through the screen, which had been constructed with three swivel panels for this purpose. The opera’s representation of digital technology contrasts sharply with Esse’s interpretation of Kupfer’s use of television and mirrors in his production of *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Wilhelm does not use media for immersive purposes, but incorporates the problem of immersive media in the production’s overall design. Since Eurydice is never mentioned onstage in *Orpheus Kristall*, the lost love object is not what is to be retrieved or mourned. What is at stake, rather, is the subject’s capacity to give meaning to his memories (images), and thus to his subjective experience, when literally surrounded by digital media. Media is not the answer here; neither is it the path nor the door to the real, but is instead part of the problem, the contours of the maze, as it were.

Stahnke’s use of digital periphery also questions how one understands media and mediation when a musical performance becomes a combination of “live” performance and digitally conveyed improvisation. He thereby frames the same questions of sound’s source or

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77 Cf. Walter Strauss’s description of the modern artistic conception of the Orpheus myth:

The choice of Orpheus as a screen suggests that there are certain particularities in the Orpheus myth that make it eminently suitable to a certain kind of modern mentality. When the myth itself is looked at and the points where it lends itself to the modern imagination analyzed, it is clear that the screen is in reality a prism. (Strauss 1971: 5)
origin, as did the earlier analog practices of *musique acousmatique*, but does so in a digital setting. After the ‘poème percussion’ representing Orpheus’s soul, the first tableau gives way to the ‘poème Internet’, which is the in-hall projection, on top of traditionally-produced music, of a five-part improvisation on the Internet through software designed by Georg Hajdu:

The players interact over the Internet or local networks by exchanging musical streams (control messages) via the Quintet.net server. For this, various inputs ranging from the computer keyboard, MIDI controllers, sensor input and/or the built-in pitch tracker can be used. On the server, the streams get multiplied, processed by algorithms, and sent back to the clients as well as to the listeners. In addition, a sixth performer, the conductor, can control the musical outcome by changing settings remotely and sending streams of parameter values either manually or by utilizing a timeline. (Hajdu)

In contrast with earlier uses of the Internet in live music, Quintet.net corrects the deferral between Internet participation and its real-time integration in the performance hall.

Computers connected to the network through the Internet have become instruments in their own right, producing sound just as Orpheus onstage or the musicians in the orchestra pit do. Like the set design, the music’s digital poetics summon the listener to an aesthetic experience in which digital media are not only means of transmission, but also an integral part of the creative process. Stahnke’s use of a digitally expanded network of sound, beyond the physical confines of the Carl-Orff-Saal in Munich (where the opera was staged), negotiates the immediate presence of digital sound with voices in the hall, thereby confronting the audience with the integration of media into the work’s live performance.

After the opening ‘poème percussion’, Orpheus Kristall mixes Orpheus’s singing onstage into a microphone with the projection of Quintet.net in the ‘poème Internet’ (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: I/2–12). The text of the ‘poème Internet’ uses material found in the subsequent scenes but adds words like ‘ethernet’ and ‘obernet’, as well as vocalization on vowels. These words are used specifically to evoke digital media, while mixing together the different

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78 The score’s pagination is divided into five sections in Roman numerals followed by page numbers in Arabic numerals, e.g.: 1/12.
registers of sound, both live and digital. This procedure is used as well in the second scene, ‘Cerberus – Shattering’. The baritone (Orpheus) reacts to the incursion of the three Eurydice figures, which together form the three-headed Cerberus. The libretto contrasts Orpheus’s memories of a woman locked in fluid circles—‘scheinbar gefesselt/ sahst du sie im kreis schwimmen’ / ‘seemingly shackled/you saw her swim in the circle’ (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: II/4–5)—with the three Eurydices giving him instructions in where to stand in order to understand:

S.2 (as if dreamt): step back
S.1 (harshest): stay there
S.2 the space
that your path delimits
can hardly be followed
S.3: to where your shadow leads you.
(Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: II/6–8)

In reaction to these spatial imperatives, the baritone ‘/ “speaks through the Internet music” (spricht durch die Internetmusik) as he recites “in this silence nearly suffocated” (‘an dieser stille fast ersticken). (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: II–16) In this scene, the imagery of circles upon which the libretto relies heavily is made manifest in the weaving of Orpheus’s speech with the improvisation from the Internet. Indeed, Stahnke’s score calls for the baritone to ““speak in the microphone again: it weaves with the Net” (weiter ins Mikro sprechen: Krächzen übers Net) while the baritone-Orpheus speaks of “the whirlpool in which you saw her swim, she seized your mouth” (dem wirbel in dem du sie schwimmen sahst, hielt sie deinen mund fest). (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: II/21–22). The baritone goes on speaking this way for the remainder of the scene, in which he comes to terms with the images of a woman he is drowning.
In the third scene of the opera, the image of Eurydice’s body, reduced to a drowning head by the visual framing of the memory, fulfills the inversion of the dismemberment of Orpheus at the hands of the maenads. This morbid conflation speaks of the psychic violence produced by the absence of distinction between the other and the self. Orpheus can only find his way back to himself by talking through the furious images and voices imposed by the media surrounding him, bursting out of the screen in an attempt to take over his life. Unsurprisingly, it is the voice which orders this spatial confusion and leads him back to subjective embodiment when, in the third scene, he finally distinguishes his own fingers from those of the image he is conjuring. The drama then takes a different turn. The three Eurydices express their mournful laments at no longer being able to impose meaning on Orpheus’s memories (scene 4). Significantly, the last lament, sung by the Sybil-Eurydice, is the most ingrained mediatic resistance, letting go of its repressive power only at the very end of the scene. This lament conflates the myths of Orpheus and Tiresias, and thus reminds one that meaningful subjective embodiment cannot necessarily be regained in simply turning a blind eye to images, and that the voice, once it is institutionalized and has been affixed authoritative, univocal representations—like the prophetic, religious function of the Sybil’s voice—can also contribute to subjective alienation.

In response, Orpheus Kristall interrogates the voice as a technikon in which the resounding deferral of meaning is translated to percussion. Time and again, Orpheus sings the words “after the fact” (nach der Tat) of Eurydice’s murder, which are also the last three words of the opera before his voice gives way to a fading percussion solo. (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: V/44–45) In a technical musical displacement reminiscent of Aristotle’s “agent

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79 For a case study of a patient’s psychosis inducing identification with a voice heard over the telephone, consult Jean-Michel Vivès (2002).
that produces impact,” Orpheus’s soul (anima in the score) is translated to the percussion (wood blocks), which opens and closes the opera. (Stahnke and de Mello 2002a: I/1, V–45)

This metaphorical displacement of the soul and the voice, especially the dying-out of sound in the final scene, brings to mind the symbolic use Abbate makes of Orpheus’s severed head. Similarly, Orpheus Kristall demonstrates how voice, psyche, and instrumentation combine in an artistic production in which these elements are not assimilated to the eidetic reception of Orpheus, of the expressive voice, and of musical reproduction, but instead challenge their historical signification in traditional transmission, that is, in the inscriptive use of media.

When Orpheus’s voice is translated to an instrument, it is at the price of his bodily expression. It symbolizes the gradual fading out of his animated presence. When Orpheus dies, his head can no longer sing, and the music dies with him.

As in the eponymous myth, Orpheus Kristall is concerned, on the whole, with coming to terms with mediation. All aspects of the production remind one that the myth of Orpheus itself is structured according to the voice’s relation to the psyche: one expresses unconscious affects through invocation in order to recognize in this projection the unknown part of oneself, just as one’s voice – on its way to the other – carries the traces of unconscious singular desires in search of recognition. The descent into hell to retrieve Eurydice’s psyche (or ghost) also reminds one that the voice’s embodiment is a necessary anchoring point for subjectivity. By staging a split subject’s negotiation of digital media and combining it with an analogous digital musical and poetic experience, Orpheus Kristall’s themes criticize traditional uses of media, while its formal disposition anticipates a reappropriation of digital media for self-expression. Thus, it is a work akin to Stiegler’s critique of media in the digital industry:

It is not a question of condemning, far from it, the industrial and technological destiny of humanity. It is rather the question of reinventing this destiny and, in this goal, of acquiring a comprehension of the situation that has led to aesthetic conditioning and, which, if it is not overcome, will lead to the ruin of consumption itself and a generalized
disgust. (2004a: 23, author’s emphasis, my trans.)

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In sum, I contend that the rhetorical manoeuvres which metaphorically displace or conflate the voice with the head, the bodiless voice with authoritative knowledge, sound with image, and imagination with media can lead to a loss of critical distance from media. Distance, however, is precisely what is needed in order to resist an ideology that overtly uses marketing as a political tool to reorganize individual and collective desires toward ruinous expenditure and consumption. I have suggested that marketing’s successful harnessing of media relies psychically on the phantasm’s undisclosed characteristics of invocation (it calls to us). An attention to this two-faced voice can help in understanding, and hopefully preventing, the further deviation of desiring singularities. For if media in the previous industry was deployed to deviate desire towards the need to consume commodified objects, then in the digital industry, it will be used to completely invert the desiring relation and reduce meaningful bodily expression and creative sublimation to the felt need of responding to corporate media’s demands.
Conclusion: Mimetic, Representational, and Expressive Voices

... Narra la fama eccelsi pregì, 
Né giunge al ver, perch’è tropp’alto il segno.
La Musica, Striggio/Monteverdi

This investigation into works representing or obfuscating the Orpheus figure has been the occasion to further understand different aspects of different voices, as partially preserved through literary, musical, or recorded indices. I have, by now, answered the initial question that had prompted my research project: “Why did Orpheus all but disappear from the opera stages of the nineteenth-century?” This historicization should also afford, however, a better understanding of the Orphean return in opera, as well as answer my other question, namely “Why has Orpheus resurfaced in operas in the last thirty years or so?” I have already hinted at the reasons for my choice of contemporary Orpheus operas in establishing my choice of works: namely, they allowed for contrasts between adaptations prolonging in the late twentieth-century a meta-critique of mass media, with a twenty-first century work committed to establishing a digital poetics and, in so doing, producing a psycho-social critique of new media’s captation of creative and expressive drives.

As I write this conclusion, almost four years have elapsed between beginning research into this project and having to say, if not the final word—only folly could justify the attempt to give a definitive definition to a myth about media—then at least some final words about what the Orpheus figure means in these contemporary works. During this time, I have noticed how Orpheus disappears from opera at the same time as the Romantic death-wish emerges. That the Hutcheons write of lovesick Romantic poet-singers in the same breath as the reversal of the Orpheus figure is already, in itself, a strong indicator of the connection between hidden representations of the voice and the unconscious relation to the ultimate site
of castration: death. Schopenhauer’s critique of conscious reality and his understanding of it as an illusion, upheld by the psychological avoidance of suffering, benefits from a comparison with Herbert Marcuse’s discussion of Freud’s coming to theoretical terms with the forces personified by Eros and Thanatos. The artistic choice of returning to the death of Orpheus, to the violence inflicted upon his body—decapitation, dismemberment, blowtorches, fires, gunshots—or Eurydice’s (her drowning) reminds one of the compulsive rehearsal of traumatic events that Freud, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, thought was an anomaly in the psychical mechanism of mastering painful memories. That Eurydice’s limited narrative function as an allegory for the soul is neglected or understated in these twentieth-century Orphean figurations—including Kupfer’s production of Gluck’s opera—and that, instead, it is Persephone (or death) herself that must be subdued, is paradoxically symptomatic of an anxiety that the psychopomp’s story was first meant to alleviate, if not dispel. Yet even when Eurydice’s presence is implied, this problem persists. In the twenty-first-century work, Orpheus Kristall, the redoubling of the Eurydice figures and the appearance of her ghost in the machine (her phantasm projected onto the set’s laptop screen), as well as the fragmentation of the text and elision of the narrative, displace this coming to terms with

1 The Hutcheons’ article does not refer to Marcuse directly, but their title points the reader in this direction. In any case, the similarities between Freud’s metapsychology and Schopenhauer’s philosophy have long been recognized and are well documented, as the Hutcheons discuss in the same article. Consider the following quotation from Marcuse’s book Eros and Civilization, describing the antagonism of the life and death drives in Freud’s metapsychology:

If the “regression-compulsion” in all organic life is striving for integral quiescence, if the Nirvana principle is the ground of the pleasure principle, then the necessity of death appears in an entirely new light. The death instinct [or death drive] is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension. The descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is an expression of the eternal struggle against suffering and repression. And the death instinct itself seems to be affected by the historical changes which affect this struggle. (Marcuse 1974: 29)

For a recent discussion of Freud’s reliance on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, see Grimwade 2012.
the death drive not only into language, but also in the vocal-internet feed itself.2

Although relations to death are historically contingent, as the Hutcheons and Marcuse point out, the persistence of the Orpheus figure reminds one that more than a century after the death of God, the figure still expects some kind of Other to accept his collect-call.3 As the Orpheus figure’s hidden or reversed return in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows, the prolonged desire for some kind of positive outcome of the afterlife and his repeated decapitation in the twentieth century speaks to a crucial insight: the traumatic impossibility of a return from media’s disembodiment of the voice. Beheaded Orpheus gets stuck in Hades after he follows Eurydice there, because what he finds in her psyche is not the living death of a beautiful soul, but the empty sign of a metaphysical lure. Lacanian analogy is helpful in understanding the psychological stumbling block in the face of a non-metaphysical yet linguistic existence. The descent of the subject through the artificial hysterization of the analytic experience does not produce an encounter with the Other. On the contrary, in unknotting the subject’s unconscious identifications with the representatives of power—the masters and the learned of his or her world—the subject must come to terms with his need for the recognition of an all-knowing, all-having Other. In fact, this fantasized

2 See also the fifth chapter, “Anxiety: The Sublime as Trauma and Repetition,” of Brillenburg-Wurth’s oft-quoted book in this study. (Brillenburg-Wurth 2009: 139-72)

3 See Allan Pero’s argument for the detective novel as an allegorical “Totentanz” in his article on Muriel Spark’s Memento Mori.

Despite all attempts made by the police to track down the source of the calls, they are revealed to be untraceable. But it is precisely the absence of a trace that leads Mortimer to his conclusion. The senselessness of the phone calls is endowed with meaning: death gives spice to life. The problem is that the meaning ascribed to them does not explain why they happen. In this gesture, Mortimer is radically undermining the traditional role of the detective by refusing to fully narrate and explain the traumatic shocks produced by the phone calls. The trauma of the voice on the phone, then, is still not accounted for by Mortimer’s theory of the crime. Privately, he believes that the voice on the phone belongs to Death itself, but he resists telling them the name of the culprit because it would disrupt the victims’ unique and highly emotional reaction to the calls. (Pero 2008: 563)

Here too one sees how the Other’s call for the subject’s jouissance and the subject’s call to jouissance make all the difference in the world for the subject. The difference with Orphic invocation is obviously that, in calling collect, the call is issued not received.
Other does not exist: they are merely limited individuals one elevates to the summit of idolatry. These imperfect idols also have questions and long after things they do not have. In other words, the subject comes to terms with his Other being an Øther. Left to himself, the subject discovers that the embodiment of his partial truth, however, has no revelatory or transcending characteristics with which it could assume a universalizing stance, since its production, in the analyst’s discourse, is only attained at the price of one’s belief in the linguistic mastery of rational enunciation. This partial truth cannot be represented; it can only be expressed. The tension of the invocation is never as naive as it was afterwards; however, the subject has discovered in his utterances something of the order of truth, an unknown origin and telos that resound in his sonorities that, happily, have no authority over others, except when they are, perhaps, aesthetically convincing. The return to embodiment as a site of expressive meaning is not, however, a necessary causal outcome of the Orphean series which constitutes the historical trajectory of my study. It is highly indebted to the secondary literature I have drawn upon in order to make sense of the self-reflexive representations and imitations of the voice with which I was struggling. It is not, however, solely indebted to psychoanalytic theory. Cavarero’s feminist revision of videocentric logocentrism that opens and maintains a gap between the living voice and the phonocentric critique, and Dyson’s techno-criticism of the ocularcentric bias which silences the aural’s ancillary function in rhetorically immersing the spectator in media, have both significantly influenced the ways in which I have recast the historical Orpheus figure. In combination with Rajan’s reading of musical embodiment and Brillenburg-Wurth’s study of music’s enduring sublime qualities in Nietzsche’s BT, I have been put on a path through the history of philosophy, theory, music, and media, which this dissertation only starts to explore.

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At this point, it is also necessary to acknowledge the price I paid in order to answer the first question: namely, searching for ways other than representation to think and write about the voice, which led to putting aside classical configurations of the Orpheus figure in opera. In order to explain nineteenth-century opera’s absence of Orphic figuration, the second chapter justifies this leap from Humanist opera to eighteenth-century primitivist epic by recalling what had been the continuous popularity of Orpheus for libretti since opera’s conception, seconded by the modern transmission of the prisci theologi that identified Orpheus as a historical person. The ensuing juxtaposition of Romantic and Humanist culture foregrounded affinities between the two periods, namely the poetic appreciation of the stylistic attributes of myth (fables, figural language) and a worldview in which the singing voice participates in the suprasensible, to evoke Gary Tomlinson’s work. One should note, however, that the term “expressive voice,” which has been used in its loose sense throughout this study, better suits a Romantic rather than a pre-modern understanding of the voice.

Contrary to what psychoanalytic criticism of opera would lead one to believe, L’Orfeo is not simply the unconscious representation of a skewed dualist subjectivity. In their application of a Lacanian grid to Striggio’s adaptation of a sixteenth-century Italian tradition of the Orpheus fable, Dolar and Žižek single out Orpheus’s invocation of the divinity and the resulting mercy of Hades to connect L’Orfeo with absolutism and Cartesian subjectivity. But as Gary Tomlinson notes, “when opera began, voice, psyche, and the subject as a whole were at one with the hidden regions of the world.” (Tomlinson 1998: 9) The mediating agent

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4 Of course there are existing works that address the representation of Orpheus in early modern opera. See Sternfeld (1993: 1-30), Rosand (1991: 387-91), Abbate (2001: 24-29), and Buller (1995). The numerous examples of invocation scenes in early French opera (in Rameau’s operas, for example, especially Hyppolite et Ariée) would have afforded an interesting comparison in this respect.

5 I would point out again that Blackwell’s use of chronology and the Orpheus figure are what really tie the Humanist conception of Orpheus to Ossian.
of the apparent and the hidden was the spirit, and its manifestation took on a pneumatic form in song through the voice:

The human subject, whose place and special status in the cosmos are determined not so much by a dualism of body and soul as by the spiritual mechanism that assuages it, finds in voice and particularly in song the most potent bodily medium of this unique mechanism. [...] Voice resides at the center of the Ficinian subject in the form of spirit. (Tomlinson 1998: 12)

This Ficinian theory of pneumatic subjectivity broadly informed a poetics of affect in which song had the power to spiritually realign its listener in a balanced cosmic order, to make it harmonious, a problem I discussed in chapter one. To evoke my previous reading of Augustine, whose *Confessions* were widely read in the Renaissance, the spirit was the active principle of the divine in the material world, even in Hades. One might dismiss the Humanist enterprise in opera as a childish belief in the magical powers of language by comparing its stage uses of *dei ex machina* to metaphysical games of *fort-da*. In circumventing musicological work on pre-modern concordance of subjectivity and singing, like the first chapter of Tomlinson’s history of opera in *Metaphysical Song*, psychoanalytic theorists of the voice and of opera, as well as proponents of Auerbach’s literary figuration, fail to realize the importance of sonority in the pneumatic pre-modern worldview, which nevertheless informs Humanist opera. Instead, they superimpose upon it a dualist representation of the voice of consciousness (to better expose its unconscious underpinnings), which in both Dolar and Žižek is accordingly symbolized through the paradigmatic “puppet,” perversely animated by

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mechanical (read hidden human) means.⁷

On the other hand, the term “expressive voice” gives an accurate description of the pressure built through the propulsion of the voice from its natural point of origin when it meets the constraining effects of culture or civilization, as well as the release it finds in artistic sublimation.⁸ Trying to apply the term to other periods informed by a different dominant ideology, however, leads to historical cultural confusion. Therefore, at the outcome of this dissertation, as my original contribution to the overall discussion, I suggest the use of the following terms to historically define and situate the voice as it appears in literature, music, and media. First, the voice only really becomes expressive at the time of Rousseau, when its origin is understood as being natural, rather than celestial or divine. In other words, the pneumatic or mimetic voice of Humanist opera is more preoccupied with moving or re-aligning animated bodies that were always-already partially divine; while Romantic opera, on the other hand, working with a voice whose origins are natural, sought to elevate phenomenal existence onto a higher aesthetic plane through expression. Put in terms of figuration, one might say that Orpheus could very well have failed to resurrect Eurydice because humanity has fallen, yet has also been saved through Christ and the Holy Incidentally, Isolde’s illuminative transfiguration (Verklärung) can be compared to Brünnhilde’s Immolation Scene in Götterdämmerung, which Wagner composed only after he had taken a break from the Ring Cycle to write Tristan. Not only does the voice there too gain its expressive potency from an extended upward chromatic progression, but it also clearly demonstrates the use of this extended poetic voice (here, it is Siegfried’s voice that Brünnhilde takes along with her) in the project of doing away with the figural worldview, the destruction of the gods’ figuration. The question of whether or not Götterdämmerung is as successful as Tristan and Isolde in that respect is another discussion altogether. Once should mention here how Sternfeld, in wanting to discuss the genesis of opera through the Orpheus figure, also briefly refers to both of these Wagnerian scenes in the second chapter of The Birth of Opera.


⁷ Incidentally, Isolde’s illuminative transfiguration (Verklärung) can be compared to Brünnhilde’s Immolation Scene in Götterdämmerung, which Wagner composed only after he had taken a break from the Ring Cycle to write Tristan. Not only does the voice there too gain its expressive potency from an extended upward chromatic progression, but it also clearly demonstrates the use of this extended poetic voice (here, it is Siegfried’s voice that Brünnhilde takes along with her) in the project of doing away with the figural worldview, the destruction of the gods’ figuration. The question of whether or not Götterdämmerung is as successful as Tristan und Isolde in that respect is another discussion altogether. Once should mention here how Sternfeld, in wanting to discuss the genesis of opera through the Orpheus figure, also briefly refers to both of these Wagnerian scenes in the second chapter of The Birth of Opera.

Spirit still at work in the world. In opposition, Tristan and Isolde are willingly sacrificed representations, sublime and sublimated figures, which, as their voices are silenced by Wagner’s extended poetic narrative (turning them into a vocal objet (a)), reveal the call of the Thing, or, if you will, the existence of the world as representation of the Will.9

The juxtaposition of the Humanist mimetic voice (pneumatic breath) and of the Romantic expressive voice (pneumatic lungs), which came from questioning Orpheus’s problematic trajectory in nineteenth-century opera, largely explains my reservations about the psychoanalytic interpretation of opera’s origins. By focusing my examination on the genesis of Orpheus operas and their disappearance, I had unwillingly put the Cartesian subject in operatic parentheses, so to speak. By avoiding psychoanalytic criticism’s traditional hunting ground, however, I came to understand how such readings often rely on the projection of dualism into opera’s early history in order to make their discourse operational. As previously mentioned, recent psychoanalytic critics have framed their discussions of opera’s origins around the invocation scene of L’Orfeo.10 This staging of the Other as

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9 Of interest here is Lacan’s definition of the Holy Spirit in the fourth year of his seminar: “The Holy Spirit is the entry of the signifier into the world. This is certainly what Freud brought us under the title of death drive.” (Lacan in Žižek 2003: 9-10) Žižek goes on to write how the Holy Spirit was a way for Lacan to speak of the symbolic order, as “that which cancels the entire domain of life.” (Ibid.) It would be wise to add, however, with Steve Lofts that for Lacan

passing into the human world is only realized at the price of the thing’s death—and, paradoxically, of the Other’s death also, even of man’s death [...] Life is denied in order that the living being might come into existence. (Lofts 1994a: 89, my trans.)

(Le passage au monde humain n’est réalisé qu’au prix de la mort de la chose—et, paradoxalement, aussi de la mort de l’Autre, voire de l’homme lui-même [...]. La vie est née pour que l’être vivant puisse advenir à l’existence.)

This is the distinction Vasse also makes when discussing the psychotic’s foreclosure to the symbolic order and language, and his concomitant absolute knowledge of life only in death: “It is in precipitating himself toward death that the psychotic testifies to the desire of being alive and no longer being life itself.” (Vasse 1974: 202)

10 Yet another more recent example is Žižek’s article “Die Psyche des Orpheus,” in which he makes the distinction that Orpheus asks “the gods,” then quickly moves from the plural to the singular to establish the addressee of the invocation as the Other:

The figure of Orpheus, who asks the gods to bring back his Eurydice, is like an intersubjective constellation, the fundamental matrix of the opera, as it were, specifically represented in the opera aria: the song of the hero – (the counterpoint to the choir’s collective embodiment) a song that is a request
addressee of Orpheus’s entreaty allows them to pass Opera through the graph of desire and, after a dialectical inversion of Cartesian subjectivity, to arrive at Tristan and conclude that the operatic voice starts as the site of castration and ends in jouissance. Far be it from me to take away their pleasure and enjoyment in so doing, or to affirm that there is no partial truth to what they say. That being said, not only does this simplification come at the expense of confusing early modern opera (ca. after 1650) with Humanist opera, which includes L’Orfeo, but it also suffocates the voice which gives life to opera, turning it into the hallucinated projections of a dualist puppet. Accordingly, Žižek and Dolar personify opera as a lifeless windbag in their co-authored introduction when they state that “from its very beginning, opera was dead, a stillborn child of musical art.” (Dolar & Žižek 2002: viii)

What then of the classical opera that this dissertation seems to have shunned? According to Tomlinson, although the singing of opera seria (early modern opera) aspires to the magical characteristics of Humanist opera, it can only achieve an artificial presentation of a cosmological voice through the accumulative representations of what was an earlier given.

Early modern or classical opera’s powers are magical not in the operative, participatory manner of Renaissance voice, and not through the assertion of a transcendental subjectivity that would come only later, but because they refer to a system of divine correspondences that underpins the dualistic subject and cannot, from its perspective, be perceived. This dualism is reflected in the dualism of absolute kingship that reached its apogee, in the West, in the age of addressed to the Lord, is basically a plea to grant clemency, to make an exception to forgive the hero’s excess – reveals the relationship between the subject (in both meanings as an acting autonomously and as subjected to legal power) and his Lord (the Godhead, the King, or the frouwe [lady] of courtly love). (Žižek 2011: 88, my trans.)

(Die Gestalt des Orpheus, der die Götter bittet, ihm seine Eurydike zurückzubringen, steht für eine intersubjective Konstellation, die gleichsam die elementare Matrix der Oper, genauer der Opernarie, darstellt: Im Gesang des Helden (dem Kontrapunkt zu dem im Chor verkörperten Kollektiv), einem Gesang, der im Grunde ein an den Herrn gerichtetes Gesuch ist, eine Bitte, Gnade walten zu lassen, eine Ausnahme zu machen, dem Helden seine Überschreitung zu vergeben, wird die Beziehung zwischen dem Subjekt (in den beiden Bedeutungen als autonom Handelndem und als legaler Macht Unterworfenem) und seinem Herrn (der Gottheit, dem König oder der frouwe der höfischen Minne) enthüllt.)

11 This is Dolar and Žižek’s combined trajectory in Opera’s Second Death (2002), the book on opera they co-authored. It is also the implicit trajectory of Michel Poizat’s book The Angel’s Cry: Opera Beyond the Death Drive.
While psychoanalytic critics rely on the scene of Orpheus’s invocation of Hades to ground their mythologizing of opera’s origin, they fail to realize what musicologists have picked up on long ago: that Montverdi’s Orfeo does not plead with Hades for mercy, but rather, that his ecstatic display of grief-stricken loss takes place when he meets Caronte. Indeed, his invocation is addressed to a servant of Hades and occurs at the border separating the living and the dead. Accordingly, it is Persephone, the mythical goddess that negotiates the border crossing every year, who pleads with Hades to release Eurydice, in memory of their own fraught love story.

12 Wikshåland points out that Monteverdi stages Orpheus’s musical power over “the guardian of Hades.” (2009: 226) Carolyn Abbate also notes this difference in her book, In Search of Opera:

“One possente spirto” is a red herring: Orpheus’s most important song is being excluded quite carefully from any actual onstage manifestation. Just as the song by the floating head was suppressed, so the mythic song before Pluto is suppressed, once more in response to dismay, since no opera can discover the song that brings back the dead, and any attempt to create it fails before a note has been written or sung. An ultimate operatic noumenon can be kept safe (along with one’s compositional self-respect) by being shown indirectly, or not at all. Thus the netherworld performance in the opera is not the primal operatic scene at all, but a prelude. (Abbate 2001: 19)

Avoiding Orpheus’s song [to Hades] was a dilemma faced by every composer who set the Orpheus plot, a foundational challenge presented by opera. Suppressing Orpheus’s primal song seems to distinguish great Orpheus operas from silly ones. Lesser composers put Orpheus directly in front of Pluto and are diminished by their hubris. In 1647, Luigi Rossi wrote a song for Orfeo that is strophic and remorselessly banal. Pluto and Proserpina’s giddy responses, […] far lovelier than anything Orfeo just sang, suggest quite straightforwardly that they heard something the theatre audience did not. This absurdity may signal Orpheus’s descent in the later seventeenth century, when his mythic image was debased in broad comedy, as if the subject were easily exhausted or too serious to bear repetition. (Abbate 2001: 27)

13 To close a citation open since the introduction of this thesis, and to summarize a point I have been repetitively trying to convey, the naive representation of the powers of singing (which reminds me of La Tragedia’s prologue) and a poetics of their expression (La Musica) are the narrative hinge on which the popularity of Orpheus in opera swivels. If L’Orfeo is more persuasive than most early Orpheus operas, it is precisely because Orpheus does not need to invoke Hades, since La Musica’s diegetic prologue has already proclaimed the success of his musical invocation:

Hence desire spurs me to tell you of Orpheus,  
Who drew wild beasts to him by his singing,  
Who subdued Hades by his invocations,  
He, the immortal glory of Pindus and Helicon.

(Quinci a dirvi d’Orfeo desio mi sprona,  
D’Orfeo che trasse al suo cantar le fere,
One could say, at the very most, that the reduplication of Orpheus’s plea in the goddess’s voice announces the later parallel correspondences of the human and the divine in the dualist representation of subjectivity described by Tomlinson. In making the distinction that the voice of Orpheus does not directly move Hades, but rather presses Persephone to do so, we watch the differences between the exciting aesthetic possibilities of a beyond indicated by *diegesis* and the avoidance of its disappointing *mimesis* start to redefine themselves. The *expressive* voice then seems less like a radical break with pre-modernity and more like a revaluation of its desire for immediacy, for an aesthetic energy emanating from a point (whether source or end) beyond representation. In this sense, the expressive voice participates in a critique of the stasis upon which a videocentric organization of representational knowledge relies, as it advocates for a more dynamic type of aesthetic understanding.¹⁴

To recapitulate, in using opera’s evolving poetic uses of the voice as a means for culturally situating different subjective stances throughout pre-modern and modern history, I suggest the following three terms to characterize the different voices of these periods:

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¹⁴ Although Tomlinson, in his discussion of Nietzsche, declares that a “fourth kind of opera, post-Wagnerian and, more generally, postmetaphysical, has never come to pass,” (Tomlinson 1998: 109) his reading of Nietzsche’s critique of Wagner’s music drama concords with the existential stance I find in Nietzsche’s recuperation of what I have termed the expressive voice. Although I did not go into great detail in discussing the operas *Orpheus Descending* or *Orphée*, the numerous allusions to Nietzsche in Williams’s play and Lumet’s film, not to mention the meeting of surrealism and minimalism in Glass’s project, along with Stahnke’s opera, indicate paths to follow in arguing for post-metaphysical opera.
namely mimetic, representational, and expressive.\textsuperscript{15} That such a tripartite conception of vocal aesthetics has not yet taken firmer ground, despite Tomlinson’s work, when Jacques Rancière’s three “artistic regimes” of the ethical, representational, and aesthetic have effectively given contemporary theorists clear artistic and ideological markers to understand the contemporary pertinence of the history of visual art, undeniably speaks to the continuous videocentric privilege in the production of knowledge. Using these distinguishing adjectives would allow readers and writers to better identify what kind of “live” or “singing” voices they are trying to hear in their mind’s ear, as they reverse the devocalization of the logos. It would also help, I think, in better defining the performative acts the literary voice-agent requires from the reader. Finally, it is my hope that as audiovisual means of production meet further possibilities for musical dissemination in digital media, these three terms will help in making distinctions between what is felt, what is produced, and what is desired as musical or vocal immediacy.

\textsuperscript{15} According to the OED, the term express comes from Old French through medieval Latin, “to press out.” The Trésor de la langue française lists the first attested use of expression in French to the medical field, “\textit{action de faire sortir quelque chose en pressant}.” The transition of the word to characterize speech comes from a grammatical use: “Empr. du lat. tardif expression « action de faire sortir en pressant » et terme de gramm. « expression de la pensée d’où « description vivante ».” See the entry “expression” in the online version of the Trésor de la langue française. <http://atilf.atilf.fr>. Accessed 8 June 2013.

Thus the verb “express” has a strict and loose definition. Although the literal translation from Latin means “to press out,” when it is used to describe a dynamic object such as language or music, it can take on the meaning of something that has been pressed out of the body (or an instrument) by another thing (the mind or a musician) and that had previously molded this expression, or given it a form in an abstract idea. Hence expression as imitation, copy, representation. Tomlinson, like Cavarero, applies the term expressive to pre-modern and modern voices indiscriminately, but always in an attempt to capture the dynamic attributes of the voice. Understanding the Romantic voice, following Rousseau, as a departure from the representational voice of the Enlightenment means employing the term in its strict sense, that is, in locating the voice’s point of origin in the natural, material body. Therefore, one must also make the distinction between the transcending expressive voice (from Ossian to Wagner) and the existential expressive voice (post-Nietzsche).
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Appendices

Personified Prologues (translations)

Monteverdi-Striggio, *L’Orfeo*. Prologo – La Musica

<http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/e/e7/IMSLP30835-PMLP21363-Monteverdi_Orfeo.pdf> (p. 3-6 of the pdf file)

Dal mio Permesso amato a voi ne vegno, incliti eroi, sangue gentil de’ regi, Di cui narra la fama ecclesi pregi, Né giunge al ver, perch’è tropp’alto il segno.

Io la Musica son, ch’ai dolci accenti So far tranquillo ogni turbato core, Et or di nobil ira et or d’amore Poss’infiammar le più gelate menti.

Io su cetera d’or cantando soglio Mortal orecchio lu singar talora; E in questa guisa all’armonia sonora Della lira del ciel più l’alme invoglio.

Quinci a dirvi d’Orfeo desio mi sprona, D’Orfeo che trasse al suo cantar le fere, E servo fé l’Inferno a sue preghiere, Gloria immortal di Pindo e d’Elicona.

Or mentre i canti alterno, or lieti or mesti, Non si move augellin fra queste piante, Ne s’oda in queste rive onda sonante, Et ogni auretta in suo cammin s’arresti.

From my beloved Permessus to you I come, illustrious heroes, noble scions of kings, Whose glorious deeds Fame relates, Without attaining truth, as the target is too high.

I am Music, who in sweet accents can calm each troubled heart, And now with noble anger, now with love, Can kindle the most frigid minds.

Singing on a golden lyre, I am wont sometimes to charm mortal ears; And in this way, for the sonorous harmony of heavens lyre, inspire souls with a longing.

Hence desire spurs me to tell you of Orpheus, who drew wild beasts to him by his singing, Who subjugated Hades by his invocations, He, the immortal glory of Pindus and Helicon.

While I alternate my songs, now happy, now sad, Let no small bird stir among these trees, No noisy wave be heard on these riverbanks, And let each little breeze halt in its course.
Peri-Rinuccini, *Euridice*. Prologo – La Tragedia

<http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/1/15/IMSLP84138-PMLP62879-Peri_Euridice.pdf>  
(p.7 of the pdf file)

Io, che d'alti sospir vaga e di pianti spars'or di doglia, or di minacce il volto fei negl'ampi teatri al popol folto scolorir di pietà volti, e sembianti.

Non sangue sparso d'innocenti vene non ciglia spente di tiranno insano, spettacolo infelice al guardo umano canto su meste, e lagrimose scene.

Lungi via lungi pur da regi tetti simolacri funesti, ombre d'affanni, ecco i mesti coturni, e i foschi panni cangio, e desto nei cor più dolci affetti.

Or s'avverrà, che le cangiate forme non senza alto stupor la terra ammiri, tal ch'ogni alma gentil ch'Apollo inspiri del mio novo cammin calpesti l'orme.

Vostro regina sia cotanto alloro qual forse anco non colse Atene, o Roma, fregio non vil fu l'onorata chioma fronda febea fra due corone d'oro.

Mentre Senna real prepara intanto alto diadema, onde il bel crin si fregi, e i manti, e seggi degli'antichi regi del tracio Orfeo date l'orecchia al canto.

I, who, eager for loud sighs and tears,  
My face now filled with sorrow, now with threats,  
Once made the faces of the crowd in great theatres  
Turn pale with pity.

No longer of blood shed by innocent veins,  
Nor of eyes put out by the insane Tyrant,  
Unhappy spectacle to human sight  
Do I sing now on a gloomy and tear-filled stage.

Away, away from this house,  
Funeral images, shades of sorrow!  
I change my gloomy buskins and dark robes  
To awaken in the heart sweeter emotions.

Should it now come to pass that the world admire,  
With great amazement, these changed forms,  
So that every gentle spirit that Apollo inspires  
Will tread in the tracks of my new path.

Yours, Queen, will be so much laurel,  
Perhaps not even Athens or Rome gathered more  
An ornament worthy of those honoured tresses,  
A frond of Phoebus between two crowns of gold.

Thus changes, I return: serenely,  
I, too, adorn myself for the Royal wedding,  
And temper my song with happier notes,  
Sweet delight of the noble hear.

While the royal Seine prepares  
A noble crown to decorate noble hair,  
And the mantle and throne of the ancient Kings,  
Listen to the singing of Orpheus of Thrace.

“Vocal” Excerpts from Macpherson’s *Fragments* (1760)

Fragment I
- “What voice is that I hear? that voice like the summer-wind.” (10)

Fragment II
- “She speaks: but how weak her voice! like the breeze in the reeds of the pool.” (Macpherson 1966: 14).
- “Let me hear thy voice, as thou passest, when mid-day is silent around.” (15)

Fragment III
- “Clear to the roaring winds he lifts his voice of woe.” (16)
- “We might have heard, with thee, the voice of the deep; have seen the oozy rock.” (16)
- “But no white sail is on the sea; no voice is heard except the blustering winds.” (17)
- “But, Oh! what voice is that? Who rides on that meteor of fire!” (17)
- “—Rest, lovely soul, rest on the rock; and let me hear thy voice!—” (17)
- “No more from the distant rock shall his voice greet thine ear.” (17-18)
- “Hear my voice, ye trees! as ye bend on the shaggy hill. My voice shall preserve the praise of him, the hope of the isles.” (18)

Fragment IV
- “Whose voice is that, loud as the wind, but pleasant as the harp of Carryl?” (19)
- “Loud is the voice of the youth; the war, my love, is near.” (19-20)

Fragment V
- “Louder than a storm was thy voice, when thou confoundest the field.” (24)

Fragment VI
- Oscian…“Speak secure, replies the king, daughter of beauty, speak: our ear is open to all: our swords redress the injured.” (27)
- “There, was the clashing of swords; there was the voice of steel.” (29)

Fragment VIII
- “Dull through the leafless trees he heard the voice of the north.” (37)
- “He stood on the hill like an oak; his voice was like the streams of the hill.” (38)
- “The voice of war is ceased.” (40)
Fragment X

- “The stream and the wind roar; nor can I hear the voice of my love.” (46)
- “Cease a little while, O wind! stream, be thou silent a while! let my voice be heard over
  the heart; let my wanderer hear me.” (47)
- “Dear were ye both to me! speak to me; hear my voice, sons of my love!” (48)
- “The hunter shall hear from his booth. He shall fear, but love my voice. For sweet
  shall my voice be for my friends; for pleasant were they both to me.” (49)

Fragment XI

- “She lifted up her voice, and cried for her brother and father.” (52)
- “Her voice came over the sea.” (52)
- “Before morning appeared her voice was weak. It died away, like the evening-breeze
  among the grass of the rocks.” (53)

Fragment XII

- “Sweet are thy murmurs, O stream! but more sweet is the voice I hear. It is the voice of
  Alpin the son of the song, mourning for the dead. […] Alpin, thou son of the song,
  […] why complainest thou, as a blast in the wood; as a wave on the lonely shore?”
  (55)
- “My tears, O Ryno! are for the dead; my voice, for the inhabitants of the grave.” (56)
- “Thy voice was like a stream after rain; like thunder on distant hills.” (56)
- “No more shall he hear thy voice, no more shall he awake at thy call.” (58)

Fragment XV

- “Silent is the hall of joy; I hear not the voice of the singer.” (67)
Mildly and gently how he smiles,
how the eye he opens sweetly ---
Do you see it, friends?
Don’t you see it?
Brighter and brighter how he shines,
illuminated by stars rises high?
Don’t you see it?
How his heart boldly swells,
fully and nobly wells in his breast?
How from his lips delightfully, mildly,
sweet breath softly wafts ---
Friends! Look!
Don’t you feel and see it?
Do I alone hear this melody,
which wonderfully and softly,
lamenting delight, telling it all,
mildly reconciling sounds out of him,
invades me, swings upwards,
sweetly resonating rings around me?
Sounding more clearly, wafting around me ---
Are these waves of soft airs?
Are these billows of delightful fragrances?
How they swell, how they sough around me,
shall I breathe, shall I listen,
shall I drink, immerse,
sweetly in fragrances melt away?
In the billowing orrent,
in the resonating sound,
in the wafting Universe of the World-Breath -
drown, be engulfed ---
supreme delight!

Trans. Barbara Pothen
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Jason R. D’Aoust
Doctoral candidate
Schmeelk Foundation of Canada Fellow
The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism
The University of Western Ontario

--

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Doctorate of Philosophy in Theory and Criticism
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Doctoral Research Trip (2012-2013)
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Master of Arts in Comparative Literature
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Bachelor of Arts in English Studies and Comparative Literature
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Diploma of College Studies in Music
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Selected Publications

D’Aoust, Jason R. “Orpheus in New Media: Images of The Voice in Digital Opera.”

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