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Thoughtwriting—in Poetry and Music

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But to return to myself, I was thinking about my book in more modest terms, and it would even be a mistake to say that I was thinking of those who would read it as my readers. For they were not, as I saw it, my readers, so much as readers of their own selves, my book being merely one of those magnifying glasses of the sort the optician at Combray used to offer his customers; my book, but a book thanks to which I would be providing them with the means of reading within themselves. With the result that I would not ask them to praise me or to denigrate me, only to tell me if it was right, if the words they were reading in themselves were really the ones I had written (possible divergences in this regard not necessarily always originating, it should be said, in my having been wrong, but sometimes in the fact that the reader's eyes might not be of a type for which my book was suitable as an aid for self-reading).

Marcel Proust¹

SPEECHWRITERS COMPOSE SPEECHES FOR OTHERS to deliver; *speechwritings* are speeches composed for this purpose. By *thoughtwriters* I shall mean writers who compose texts for others to use in expressing their thoughts (feelings, attitudes). The texts *thoughtwriters* compose are *thoughtwritings*.

I shall argue that poets are often plausibly regarded as *thoughtwriters*, and their poems as *thoughtwritings*. Music and music making can frequently be understood in an analogous way.

I. Poetry and Music

The arts are customarily divided into several broad categories, two of which are literature and music. A third is the visual arts, whose species include painting and sculpture.

Literature—the *word arts*—includes novels, stories, and poetry. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe* and elsewhere I treated these literary forms mostly together, usually using novels or stories as my examples but thinking, assuming, that what I said about them would, for the most part, go for poetry as well.² I should have been alert to significant differences between poetry, some poetry at least, and most novels and stories. Poetry, some of it, belongs more naturally with music in important respects than with other literary forms. This should not be surprising given the intertwined histories of these arts. It is arguable that in the murky ancient past when poetry was almost always spoken, it was hardly distinguishable from song, then probably the dominant form of music.³ Sound is important in poetry as it is in music, of course, and much less so, ordinarily, in the novel. Likewise for meter and rhythm. Indeed, the particular meter and rhythms of a poem may match those of a musical work, even if the sounds are very different.⁴ Hence the felicitous combination of poetry and instrumental music in opera, oratorio, musicals, lieder, popular song, jingles, etc.⁵

I am interested now in another respect in which poetry is like music and unlike the novel and other forms of literature, one that is less obvious than those I just mentioned, but no less important. Bringing out this similarity will require rethinking the nature and function of (some) poetry, and resisting a recent trend in philosophers' and music theorists' understanding of musical expressiveness.

II. Narrators and Personae

I begin with a sweeping claim about all of the arts, advanced by a well-known musicologist and music theorist, Edward Cone: “[E]ach art in its own way projects the illusion of the existence of a personal subject through whose consciousness [a certain kind of experience] is made known to the rest of us. That is the role of the character in a play, of the narrator in a novel, of the persona in a lyric.”⁶

Cone's main point is that this applies to music, that there are *musical personae* that function somewhat as narrators in novels and “speakers” of lyric poems do. He doesn't have in mind just the vocal line of songs like Franz Schubert's *Erlkönig*; personae are to be found in all music.

The piano accompaniment of *Erkönig* has its own persona, he thinks. And there are personae in all purely instrumental music. He mentions a fugue in J. S. Bach's Second Brandenburg Concerto.⁷ On this picture, appreciation of all of the arts—including instrumental music and all literature—centrally involves recognizing, engaging with, and responding to another person, a fictional person if not an actual one.

Most of us will have little trouble with Cone's claim about literature, the notion that most if not all literary works have narrators. But, special cases aside, it is by no means obvious that there are anything like narrators in instrumental music. I have worries about both—about literature as well as music.⁸ I will propose an alternative to recognizing narrators in literary works, even in instances in which they seem most obvious. This will suggest a way of understanding instrumental music that does not postulate musical personae, one that is, as it happens, an approximation of one I proposed previously.⁹

Literature

In nonfictional literature, a real person (typically) uses the words of the text to communicate with readers, asserting the declarative sentences it contains. Novels, stories, and poems are standardly understood as modelled on such ordinary nonfictional uses of language, as fictional or pretend instances of what we might call (with tongues partly in cheeks) "serious" discourse. Literary fictions are created by real persons, of course. But the reader may be more interested in fictional narrators than in the actual authors. Narrators (what I have called *reporting narrators* [MMB 368–69]) are characters who, in the fictional world of the work, speak or write the words of the text "seriously," asserting the declarative sentences it contains, thereby recounting the events of the story as known fact. (In some instances narrators merely *think* the words of the text, think them "seriously.")

The reader's experience of novels, stories, and poems, on this familiar picture, is in the first instance an experience of recognizing, engaging with, responding to this fictional person—doing so in imagination, at least—sometimes empathizing with her. The reader's experience is akin to being addressed by or overhearing a real person speaking or writing "seriously."

Narrators are more prominent and more important in some works than in others. Sometimes they are "effaced," some would say to the point of disappearance. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe* I expressed a preference for recognizing narrators, "effaced" ones at least, in virtually all

literary fictions, partly to leave plenty of room for detecting even the slightest hint of expressions of attitude or point of view on the part of the narrator (*MMB* 368–69).¹⁰

But that was then. There is an important possibility that I did not think of, a way of understanding and experiencing literary works—and not just special or unusual ones—that does not involve recognizing narrators, and need not consist in anything like recognizing and responding to another person.¹¹ This, I say, is a *possible* way of understanding literary works. Whether and to what extent the possibility is actual is another question. I doubt that readers' experiences are ever fully or exclusively of the kind I shall describe. But it will be obvious, I think, that in the case of poetry they are often partly so. This is an important dimension of many experiences of literature, one that has been seriously neglected by philosophers and theorists of literature.

Poetry

Poetry, especially lyric poetry, is a form of literature in which narrators tend not to be effaced, in which they are especially prominent—so it seems anyway. Jenefer Robinson develops what she calls a new Romantic theory of expression in the arts, on which works expressive of emotions (or ideas or attitudes) are works in which there is a narrator or persona who expresses the emotions (ideas, attitudes) in question. The theory applies to all of the arts, she thinks, “at least to all those artworks that have some claim to be called *expressions*,” but paradigmatically to lyric poetry—most obviously lyric poems in the first person. Her main examples are John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelly.¹²

But it is poetry especially—more than novels and stories—in particular lyric poetry, where my alternative proposal is most plausible! And I most certainly include lyric poetry in the first person.

How could we not think of the words, “My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk”¹³ as *someone's* words, used “seriously”? How could we not, when we read them, imagine a person using them to express his or her heartaches? By understanding them to be an instance of *thoughtwriting*. I will explain shortly.

Robinson allows for several familiar varieties of narrators (personae, poetic speakers) in poetry, and I will as well. Sometimes the actual poet is the narrator. Sometimes the narrator is a fictionalized version of the poet. And some narrators are just plain fictions. Let's not worry about these differences. What is important now is the notion that the words of lyric poems are understood to be written or spoken or thought, “seriously,” by someone (either fictional or actual) other than the reader or listener.

Music

What about music? Edward Cone is not alone in taking narrators in literary works to have analogues in music, pure instrumental music included. Robinson does also, and so does Jerrold Levinson. They do so largely in order to account for musical expressions of emotion. All three are committed to something like this: Just as narrators in literary works express beliefs, attitudes, intentions, emotions, by means of the words of the text, musical personae express emotions (feelings, attitudes) by means of the sounds (or “gestures”) of the music. So listeners’ experiences, like those of readers, involve something like recognizing and responding to another person, one who experiences and expresses the emotion in question. Levinson proposed a general account of musical expression, a predecessor of Robinson’s new Romantic theory, which we can gloss as follows (omitting qualifications that need not concern us now): a passage of music expresses a given emotion just in case it is aptly heard as the expression of that emotion by the music’s persona.¹⁴

I also made a suggestion in the direction of musical personae some years ago. I proposed that to describe music as *anguished* is to say that it is fictional that the music expresses someone’s or something’s anguish.¹⁵ I continue to think that some instrumental music—a lyrical passage of a piano sonata, for instance—is naturally and appropriately heard in this way.¹⁶ But it now seems to me that the prevalence and importance of personae in music have been seriously exaggerated. The insight I thought I had about anguished music was very limited.

Here is an initial worry: On the persona hypothesis, expression turns out to be a species of representation: music represents itself as someone’s expression of feelings, as a story represents itself as someone’s reports of a series of events. (Levinson contributes to this impression by comparing *hearing-as* to *seeing-as*, which he substitutes for Richard Wollheim’s *seeing-in*.¹⁷) I expect that others will share my impression that this fails to do justice to the depth of the difference between stories and (instrumental) music, between literary or pictorial representation and musical expression.

III. Experiences “From Within”

An essay by R. K. Elliott, “Aesthetic Theory and the Experience of Art,” has always struck me as uncommonly perceptive, yet frustratingly obscure.¹⁸ Elliott distinguished between what he called experiencing a work of art “from without” and experiencing it “from within,” and applied

these notions to poetry, music, and painting. The clearest application of the former, indeed the latter as well, is to lyric poetry. "A poem can be perceived . . . as if it were the speech or thought of another person," he wrote, and "it is possible for us to make this expression our own" (*AT* 146). When we do make the expression our own, we are experiencing the poem *from within*; otherwise we experience it *from without*.

This and other formulations suggest that, for Elliott, in both cases we perceive the poem as the expression of another person, a person with whom we have a third-person relation. The idea may be (although he doesn't put it this way) that in the "from within" case we not only *recognize* this other person—"the poet (*qua* 'speaker' of the poem)"—and her expressive behavior; we also *empathize* with her, imaginatively occupying her shoes and feeling (somewhat) as she does: "We experience an emotion . . . through an imaginative assumption of the expression and situation of another person (real or imaginary) . . . I do not merely recognize that the poet is expressing, for example, sadness, but actually feel this sadness" (*AT* 147).¹⁹

If empathy is what Elliott has in mind, the reader empathizes not just with the poet's situation and her feelings, attitudes, etc., but also with her expressing these feelings or attitudes by means of the words of the text. This means, I take it, that the reader imagines using the words of the poem to express her own feelings or attitudes. One can empathize with a person's feelings, or those of another sentient being, without empathizing with her way of expressing them. I may feel contentment, in imagination or actually, as I take a purring cat to feel, or joy while watching a dog wagging its tail. But it is unlikely that I should imagine expressing contentment by purring, or joy by wagging my tail.

There is no challenge yet to the idea that experiencing a poem is fundamentally, in the first instance, a matter of recognizing and responding to another person, a (possibly fictional) speaker of the poem. The reader's experience from within is triggered by, comes after, and is dependent on, the experience from without.²⁰

IV. Speechwriters

Another way of understanding readers' experiences—the alternative I promised—does challenge this idea.

Rather than understanding a poem on the model of an ordinary assertive or expressive utterance, addressed to or overheard by a listener, we might understand it on the model of a speech written by a speechwriter, for use by another person. Speechwriters don't *use* the words

they inscribe (not insofar as they are simply speechwriters); they *mention* them.²¹ They produce a text for use by someone else. The speechwriter doesn't assert the declarative sentences he comes up with; his client asserts them when she delivers the speech.

The client knows where the words came from. She may appreciate and admire the speech writer's skill and pay him well for his services. But recognizing him is not necessary in order to make use of his words in her speech. The words might have grown on trees or appeared in driftwood patterns on a beach. Or she might think they did. Once she has the words before her, no matter how they got there, she can use them assertively (or to perform other illocutionary actions) in her address.

There are lots of disanalogies between poets and speechwriters, of course. Poems and the speeches speechwriters prepare, the ways they are understood and used and appreciated, differ hugely in obvious ways. But the differences *are* obvious. The similarities I will point out are less so, but striking nonetheless once noticed. So there is more to learn by focusing on the similarities than on the differences. (We will take note of some differences in Section X.)

Lest we suppose that relying on speechwriters is rare or special or unusual, keep in mind that we learn the language we use from others. Not only do we master its syntax and semantics largely by witnessing others using it, we also pick up, from other speakers and writers, pithy phrases, apt metaphors, allegories, hypothetical examples, telling anecdotes, rhetorical tricks, and so on. We don't usually acquire complete speeches from other language users, extended texts of the kind a politician might pay a speechwriter to supply. But we do learn from others combinations of words that may come in handy for our own use, as we search for ways to express ourselves in our language. Some examples: "Nothing succeeds like success," "It ain't over 'til it's over," "Boys will be boys." I have learned from several politicians that if you want to admit that you screwed up without admitting that you screwed up, the thing to say is "Mistakes were made."

Our "teachers"—other speakers—don't usually speak for the purpose of providing listeners with words to use. They simply use words themselves, assertively or otherwise. We needn't be concerned with what these speakers are up to. The pithy phrases and so on are there, in what might as well be mentions rather than uses, available to be added to our working repertoire for later use.

There are more formal cases as well. A judge who says, to people getting married or to courtroom witnesses taking the oath, "Say after me . . .," feeds words to the bride and groom, or the witness, for them to use "seriously."

V. Poets as Thoughtwriters

Poems aren't trees. But they do contain phrases, sentences, paragraphs, verses which readers can, if they wish, use themselves. The words are there ripe for picking, no matter what the poet was doing in writing them down, and no matter what the reader takes her to have been doing. People sometimes borrow phrases or sentences from Shakespeare in conversation and in formal speech: "To be or not to be," "Methinks she protests too much,"²² "All's well that ends well," "You can't take it with you."²³

We use words in thinking, in formulating thoughts for ourselves, as well as in communicating with others. Words found in a poem or learned from other speakers may come in handy for this purpose also—to articulate thoughts, to express to ourselves opinions, feelings, attitudes. A poet's words might strike me as just the right way of expressing a thought I thought I had.²⁴ Or, on reading a poem I might decide then and there to endorse the thought they express, and use the words of the poem to assert it to myself. Alternatively, I may think of the words as clarifying my thoughts, as well as providing a means of expressing them.²⁵ So I will say that poets sometimes serve not exactly as speechwriters, but as *thoughtwriters*. (By "thoughts" I include not just "intellectual" ideas, but any feelings, emotions, sentiments, attitudes, etc., that might be expressed by means of words.)

If I agree with the sentiments expressed by the words of a poem or find them especially apropos on a particular occasion, I might recite the entire poem, seriously asserting (if only to myself) those sentiments. Think of a person who, finding herself in a tight spot, recites the twenty-third Psalm.

It is not just while repeating the words of a poem after reading it that I may make use of them in thought. I can think or say them assertively to myself, even as I read. When I do, I have the text of my internal speech in front of my eyes.

It is not unlikely that poets sometimes have, as at least part of their purpose in composing a poem, the objective of making words available for use by their readers. They may think of themselves, maybe not very explicitly, as thoughtwriters. This could be the poet's main or primary purpose. Insofar as it is her purpose, she need not expect readers to imagine a fictional narrator using the words of the poem, or to suppose that she herself, the author, meant them "seriously." The poet might expect the reader merely to recognize her invitation to use the words himself, to recognize her role as a thoughtwriter. Or she might not expect even this. The words are there for readers to use, no matter what

the poet was doing in writing them down, and no matter what readers think she was doing. For this purpose, poems might as well be trees.²⁶

Fiction or Nonfiction?

Suppose this is all that is going on. Consider an unlikely pure and simple case in which the poet thinks of herself as just a thoughtwriter; she intends simply to put words into readers' mouths or minds, to give them a text by means of which they can express, articulate sincerely held opinions. And suppose that this is understood to be the proper, appropriate function of the poem. The poet does not use the words or mean them "seriously." And she does not expect readers to recognize a fictional narrator who does. Appreciators then use the text in the expected manner; some do anyway. Finding the words suitable for his purposes, the reader genuinely expresses genuinely felt convictions by means of them. Does the poem, in this pure case, count as a work of fiction, or of nonfiction?

There need be no imagining at all, and no prescriptions to imagine. Nothing is true in the world of the poem; there is no fictional world. The poem isn't a work of fiction, any more than a speech written by a speechwriter is.

Is it nonfiction? Yes, if that just means that it is *not fiction*. But it isn't a typical work of nonfiction, an ordinary instance of nonfictional literature. The poet, the author of the work, didn't use the words in the usual manner, but only mentioned them. She didn't assert its declarative sentences. The reader alone uses the words (the word types)—if he chooses to do so. The poem doesn't serve as an actual vehicle of communication, not the usual kind at least—not even a pretended or attempted one.

Imagination, Pretense

It is not always possible for a reader to use the words of a poem "seriously"; she might not be in a position to do so. Sometimes she will be unwilling to.

Consider these words:

Whenever Richard Cory went downtown,
 We people on the pavement looked at him:
 He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
 Clean favored, and imperially slim.²⁷

I am not a homeless street person, a pavement person. Nor have I ever known a distinguished gentleman named “Richard Cory.” So I can hardly assert these words sincerely. I might read a poem, written in the first person, about a deathbed experience, when I am not facing imminent death (John Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*), or a love poem when I am not in love, or not with the person or the sort of person mentioned in the poem. Few of us are likely to use the words “Twas the night before Christmas . . .” to recount, seriously, seeing a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer, and the rest.

If the ideas or attitudes expressed in a poem are ones the reader doesn’t accept, she may be unwilling to think or utter them assertively, and unable to do so sincerely. She might not share the religious convictions expressed in one of Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*, for instance.

Does the reader, in these cases, have no choice but to read the poem either as another person’s serious utterance, or as the unusable and perhaps inappropriate handiwork of a thoughtwriter? Enter the imagination, pretense, role-playing. The reader may imagine uttering or thinking the words of the poem “seriously”; he may pretend to do so. I can imagine being a person of the pavement, observing from that lowly perspective a well-dressed gentlemen named “Richard Cory,” and I may use, in imagination, the words Edwin Arlington Robinson supplied to describe him. I might pretend to curse death as I prepare to die or, employing John Donne’s words, pretend to praise God and express confidence in an afterlife. We use the words of “The Night Before Christmas” to express a delightful fantasy. No doubt karaoke singers often pretend to endorse the attitudes or feelings they are expressing.

If I disagree with the sentiments expressed in a poem, I may try them on, imagining uttering the words “seriously” to see what it feels like to express such thoughts or attitudes—and probably what it feels like to endorse or accept or adopt them.

I need not, in any of these cases, empathize with anyone, with a fictional pavement person, for instance, or someone who wholeheartedly endorses the sentiments or accepts the ideas that I merely try on. I needn’t recognize anyone (either fictional or actual) to empathize with.²⁸

Does this imagining or pretense make the work a work of fiction? No. The text itself doesn’t make anything fictional, doesn’t prescribe any imaginings. It is not fictional, by virtue of the words on the page, that anyone uses them—“seriously” or at all.²⁹ What the text does is to invite readers to do so—in speech or thought, actually or in pretense. If a reader does use the words in pretense, he will be engaging in what I call a game of make-believe. It will be fictional in his game that he asserts the declarative sentences in the poem. But nothing is fictional

unless and until he does so. So there may be what I have called a game world, but not a work world. (This is exactly the situation I envisioned for music, insofar as it is expressive just in the sense that does not involve musical personae.³⁰)

Imaginative Resistance

If I disagree strongly enough with the sentiments I would be expressing should I assert the words of a poem “seriously,” if I find them sufficiently repugnant, I might refuse to utter or think them even in pretense, refuse to try them out. I may be unable to bring myself to sing the praises of the Nazis even in pretense, when a fascist poem invites me to do so, just as I might be unable to bring myself to stick pins into the portrait of a loved one. This is an instance of imaginative resistance (properly so-called), an instance of the “imaginative puzzle.”³¹ Hearing someone else (a fictional or actual person) express obnoxious sentiments might be unpleasant, but I would expect to be able to tolerate this a lot more easily than expressing those sentiments myself, pretending to express them sincerely.

We have here a partial explanation of the asymmetry there seems to be between moral and descriptive contents of fictions. There may be no very great difference between our willingness to imagine another person claiming that time travel is possible and our willingness to imagine another person claiming that infanticide for purposes of gender selection is right and proper. But I am much less willing to pretend to make the latter claim myself than I am the former. I have no trouble pretending to assert that time travel is possible, but I will resist pretending to assert that it is perfectly all right to kill babies because of their gender.

If, or insofar as, the point of a work is to put words in readers’ mouths, rather than to have the reader observe a fictional speaker, what is a reader to do if he is unwilling or unable to use the words even in pretense? He might still read the poem, of course, and he may recognize the poem’s attempt to get readers to go along, or its invitation to do so. He might also admire, and even appreciate, the author’s skill in expressing obnoxious ideas or sentiments, her skill as a thoughtwriter.

VI. Is the Possibility Actual?

Appropriating the words of a poem or other text for one’s own use, “seriously” or in pretense, is not incompatible with recognizing a narra-

tor, a poetic speaker. Readers probably do both in many instances. Pure cases of thoughtwriting are probably rare, maybe even nonexistent. But it seems to me that the thoughtwriting function of a poem is sometimes by far the more important one. It may be important to the reader, and intended to be so by the poet, even if somewhere in the reader's experience there is an implicit, if not explicit, imagining of or recognition of a "serious" speaker.

If we recognize a narrator of the twenty-third Psalm, a "poetic speaker," it would probably be its presumed actual author, a historical figure named "David." Alternatively, we might recognize a fictional narrator whom we imagine to be using the words "seriously," without presuming that it is David; the real David might have been just a thoughtwriter. But the adventurer lost hopelessly in a trackless desert who recites the Psalm in serious desperation may have not the slightest interest in David or whatever predicament he might have been in or what he might have meant by his words, or in any fictitious speaker. The words are there in the adventurer's memory. He deems them appropriate in his situation, and uses them. Notice that the Psalm is in the first person. ("Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. . . .") But the adventurer needn't take its first-person pronouns to refer to David or to a fictional narrator. "I," in his recitation of the Psalm, refers to himself.

Think also of political and religious songs (for example, "We Shall Overcome"), prayers, chants, mantras. It is unlikely that in singing "We Shall Overcome" at a political rally people have a substantial interest in another person, the real life composer of the lines or a fictional speaker, whom they believe or imagine to express her genuine sentiments by means of them. I doubt that readers or reciters of "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," enjoying their fantasy, pay any attention to a fictional character who had an amazing experience one Christmas eve, if they even recognize such a character. (*The Night Before Christmas* is also in the first person).

What about the purposes of the authors of these texts—the twenty-third Psalm, "We Shall Overcome," "'Twas the Night Before Christmas"? Did they regard themselves as thoughtwriters? Who knows? The origins of the twenty-third Psalm are murky. Those of "We Shall Overcome" are complicated. (I gather that the latter arose gradually out of something like an oral tradition, though not a very long one.) But if authors of these texts meant them to be recited or sung repeatedly in religious services or political rallies or ceremonies or ritual events, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that they meant the reciters or singers to use them in expressing their own feelings or ideas or attitudes.

One final group of examples: T-shirt and bumper-sticker slogans: “Buy Local,” “Vote for X,” “Support our Troops, Bring them Home,” or on T-shirts at the Ann Arbor Art Fair, “It Ain’t Art, and it Ain’t Fair!” The composer of such slogans can hardly have anything in mind but their being used, on automobile bumpers and T-shirts, to express thoughts of the driver or the wearer. The composer may or may not agree with the sentiments of the slogans he produces. He may just be producing them for the money, knowing that slogans other people want to use are the ones that will sell. In any case surely he doesn’t expect drivers and T-shirt wearers to think of *him*, the slogan composer, as using the slogans “seriously,” or to imagine a fictional narrator who does. (Compare a speechwriter for a politician of an opposing political party, who needs the money, and hopes to cash in on his wordsmithing talent.) Poems on commercial greeting cards are not addressed by their authors to friends whose birthdays or anniversaries are to be celebrated, or to whom they mean to offer sympathy for a loss.³² The authors are paid to produce lines for others to use in these ways.

The twenty-third Psalm, “We Shall Overcome,” “The Night Before Christmas,” bumper stickers, commercial greeting cards, don’t say anything directly about the early nineteenth-century lyric poems that I mentioned earlier (Keats and Shelley). But they do show that we have it in us to employ words primarily, or even exclusively, in thoughtwriting or speechwriting modes. We shouldn’t be surprised if thoughtwriting is, in some instances, the primary function of literary works, more important than their serving as vehicles for the author’s actual assertions, or for fictional assertions by a narrator.

Am I being disrespectful to poets by comparing them to speechwriters, slogan composers, etc.? Not at all. The analogy between poets and speechwriters goes only so far. We will note differences in Section X that should put this worry to rest.

VII. Clarification: Two Kinds of “Appropriation”

The appropriation I am interested in is not to be confused with another kind. A reader with an agenda or an axe to grind might read or interpret a poem as endorsing or supporting his own personal views, ignoring what the poet meant or might have meant or what by some other standard the poem, in its context, actually does mean. The appropriation I am interested in is not a matter of what the words are taken to mean, but rather who it is who means something by them. To appropriate the words of a poem, in my sense, is to use them oneself, not to make them mean what one wants them to mean.

The first kind of appropriation is misreading, misinterpreting. To appropriate a poem in my sense is not to misread it. A reader may be careful to understand the poem correctly (by whatever standard one considers relevant), when he thinks or utters the words assertively. I don't rule out the possibility that he misconstrues the poem in a different way. If the poet meant her words to be understood only as the words of another person, not to be used by readers, or if for some other reason such appropriation is understood to be inappropriate, doing so may amount to misusing the poem. But if the author intended readers to use her words themselves, and/or if that is understood to be the function or point of the poem, readers who do not appropriate it in this way will, arguably, not be appreciating it properly and fully.

VIII. Why Poetry in Particular?

All literary works contain words, words the reader can appropriate for her own use if she chooses. Any text could conceivably be used by a reader to express her thoughts or feelings. Is there anything special about poetry, or lyric poetry, in this regard?

In poetry there is often special emphasis on *how* things are said, rather than just what is said.³³ (Speechwriters are charged with finding the best ways of saying things, usually what the client wants to say.) So poems, in contrast to novels, for instance, are especially likely to express thoughts or ideas in a manner that the reader will find particularly apt for his expression.

There are indications that readers do in fact appropriate the words of poems more often than those of other literary forms. We tend to "perform" poems as we read them, to pronounce the words ourselves, sometimes to read them aloud; arguably this is the best way to read them. People memorize poems or parts of them, and recite them on other occasions. We are generally much less inclined to repeat and recite passages from novels. (Some stories are told repeatedly, to be sure, but often not in the same words.)

It is well-known that verse, with rhyme, alliteration, regular meters, tends to be easier to remember, to memorize, than other linguistic forms. Hence the usefulness of ditties to recall, for instance, the number of days in each month. More seriously, stories, fables, myths are typically transmitted in oral traditions by means of poetic language. Using words learned from his ancestors, an elder of a tribe passes on to his offspring the wisdom and traditions of the culture.³⁴

Peter Kivy's arguments in *The Performance of Reading* are somewhat helpful to my cause, although his cause is very different from mine.³⁵

He points out analogies between reading literary fictions and performing music, and he proposes counting the readings, silent ones included, as performances. Insofar as these analogies hold, it seems to me, the “performing” reader is likely to be using the words himself, rather than (just) observing or recognizing another person’s use of them.

Kivy’s focus is on novels and stories, although he thinks his point applies equally to poetry. But he excludes nonliterary texts entirely; no silent readings of nonliterary texts are performances, he claims (*PR* 90–93). I think the analogies between reading and musical performance are far more impressive in the case of poetry than that of novels. And I am unpersuaded by his reasons for excluding nonliterary texts (by which he means texts that are not works of art). In any case, readers can appropriate the words of nonliterary texts for their own use about as naturally as they can those of novels—depending heavily of course, in both cases, on what the words are. We do frequently, as I mentioned, add pithy sayings and other combinations of words heard in ordinary conversation to our own repertoires. But it seems clear that readers appropriate words of poems far more often, and far more of them, especially while reading, than they do words of either novels or nonliterary texts.³⁶

Live theatrical events are almost inevitably experienced “from without,” that is, we almost inevitably regard the words as spoken by another person, the character, even if the character uses poetic verse. Seeing the actor pronounce the words, we can hardly avoid thinking of them as being used, assertively, by a person other than ourselves. This doesn’t prevent us from *also* experiencing the words “from within,” of course, thinking them assertively ourselves; we may very well do both. What is unlikely is understanding the words *merely* as resources made available for our use. This will be less likely, also, when we listen to a recitation of a poem, than when we read it to ourselves. But the reciter, who, unlike the stage actor, does not act (and dress) convincingly like a “serious” user of the words, could be understood as a thoughtwriter offering words to the audience verbally rather than in writing. We can hardly avoid recognizing narrators of texts written in the second person, speakers or writers distinct from ourselves addressing us.³⁷

IX. Music

Several of the features that distinguish poetry rather sharply from the novel and other literary forms are ones poetry shares with music (with much “common practice period” music, at least). I mentioned our tendency to “perform” poems as we read, to mouth the words ourselves, and the tendency to remember and recite them on later occasions. Listeners

sing along with music as they hear it, or tap their feet, or sway with the music, dance, or march. Even if we don't actually voice a melody, we may *follow along*, thinking it as we listen. I doubt that we do anything much like this "following along" very often when we read a novel, or watch a film. Listeners also remember previously heard melodies and, on later occasions, hum or sing, or just think them, or tap out rhythms.

In "performing" music in these ways, listeners are likely to be using the sounds (the sound types, anyway, or tokens of the types they hear) to express their own feelings or emotions, or feelings or emotions they try on, ones they experience at least in imagination. If musical sounds can be understood as someone else's expression, that of a musical persona, as Levinson and Robinson claim, there is no reason why they shouldn't be appropriated by listeners for their own expression.

Nor is there any reason why they could not function *only* in the latter way. Using musical sounds or gestures to express one's own feelings is not incompatible with regarding them as expressions of another person, a musical persona. We often do both, no doubt. But we don't need to recognize a persona in order to use the music for our own expressive purposes; we needn't take the music to depict or represent itself as someone else's expression. Appropriating musical sounds for one's own use need not involve anything like recognizing or empathizing with another person's expressive behavior.³⁸ This suggests that musical personae, even when there are such, may not be very central in listeners' experiences. Even if at some level we do recognize a persona, what is important may be just our own expressive use of the sounds (sound types).

So musical performances can be understood to present tunes, rhythmic patterns, musical gestures for possible use by the listener, whether or not they also present personae. Musicians (composers and performers) may intend or expect their music to be so understood. They may serve as something like thoughtwriters—as gesture- or expressive-behavior indicators. In some instances we may not want to or may be unwilling to make music our own—music that we find disgustingly pompous, for instance.³⁹

Jenefer Robinson mounts an interesting and elaborate defense of musical personae in (much) instrumental music. (She rejects "Cone's view that *all* music should be experienced as an utterance by a persona" [DR 325].) A "psychological" reading of certain musical works is needed, she thinks, to make sense of some apparently anomalous musical events, ones that would not make sense in formal or purely structural terms (DR 329).⁴⁰ She may be right about this. But a "psychological" reading need not include personae. One can hear a musical work as a kind of psychological drama without hearing it as expressing a succession of

another person's psychological states. The psychology of the psychological reading may be the listener's own, as she "performs" the music. The listener, rather than a persona, may be the protagonist of the drama.⁴¹ Moreover, it seems to me that *just* recognizing personae and the progression of their psychological states, in the Robert Schumann, Dmitri Shostakovich, Franz Schubert, and Johannes Brahms works she discusses, experiencing performances of these compositions *only* "from without," would not begin to account for the experiences appreciative listeners enjoy, for the "intimacy" that, I have suggested, listeners often feel with music.⁴² Robinson's "new Romantic theory" of expression does have appreciators "recreating" in themselves the emotions they recognize in personae.⁴³ But the appreciators' emotions, and their expressing them by means of musical sounds and gestures, need not be recreations of another person's emotion or expression. Whether or not listeners do experience music "from without," it is their experience "from within" that is central to appreciation, at least of the Romantic music Robinson focuses on.

X. Differences—Amidst the Similarities

Most useful analogies can be misleading if pressed too far or in the wrong directions. The analogies I have proposed, including that between speechwriters and thoughtwriting poets or musicians, are no exceptions. We need to acknowledge differences, including obvious ones, if only to prevent them from obscuring the similarities. Recognition of one especially striking difference will also deflect the worry that my comparisons are disrespectful to poets.

Poets who serve as thoughtwriters are rarely if ever mere wordsmiths, and it is not for their wordsmithing alone that we admire and appreciate them and their poetry. They have wonderful things to say, as well as wonderful ways of saying them. Poets contribute original ideas, fresh insights, perspectives, points of view that may be new to the reader, as well as giving readers words with which to understand and explore them.

Speechwriters employed by politicians are often more than wordsmiths also. The words they supply inevitably suggest clarifications and refinements, at least, of the client's ideas. Aides hired as speechwriters frequently double as advisers expected to make substantive proposals about the content of a speech. But the speechwriter *qua* *speechwriter* is charged primarily with inventing effective ways of expressing, of communicating to audiences, what his client has already decided to say.

Poets are under no such restriction. They are free to compose words expressing thoughts that diverge as radically as they like from the pre-conceptions of likely readers. Contributing new ideas doesn't have to consist in offering them assertively, however. Poets needn't mean what they say any more than speechwriters must, although they often do. A contribution might consist just in making words available for readers to use; in using them, readers may achieve drastically new insights or find themselves adopting or trying on previously unimagined points of view. The insights along with the words to express them would be available even if the words grew on trees.

The thoughtwriting poet, by her choices of what ideas to offer readers the means of expressing, is likely to reveal much about herself, notably her attitudes about what ideas are worth expressing, worth (at least) trying on. Insofar as the speechwriter's client dictates the content of the speech he is to write, his text will not convey information of this kind about him. Speechwriters (qua speechwriters) are likely to reveal much less of themselves than thoughtwriters do. Of course readers can use a poet's words themselves even if they don't learn anything much from it about the poet.

When a musician offers listeners means of expressing feelings or emotions, these may be feelings or emotions new to them, ones that differ at least to some extent from any the listener has experienced previously. (Or they may be ones the listener is not aware of or whose expression she has repressed.) Combined with a narrative—in film, theater, song, opera—music may encourage the appreciator to feel or imagine feeling about depicted situations or the actions of characters very differently from how she feels about similar real-life situations or actions. Appropriating the music to express her (real or imagined) pleasure, for instance, she may find herself taking pleasure, actually or in imagination, in (fictional) events of a kind she would not take pleasure in in real life. (She might resist, of course.) A speechwriter who attempted to manipulate his client's feelings or attitudes in an analogous way would be dramatically exceeding his job description.

* * *

These differences, important though they are, do not conflict with or call into question my claim that poetry and music are often instances of thoughtwriting, thoughtwriting understood as analogous to speechwriting in the ways I have insisted on. There can be no doubt that readers do, frequently, use words they find in poems for their own expressive purposes (and sometimes communicative ones), and that listeners use

melodies and other musical materials similarly. It is more than likely, also, that poets and musicians, expecting their works to be so used, often craft them specifically so as to serve this purpose. Appropriation is a hugely important aspect of our experience of music and poetry—including sung poetry, of course—a substantial part of why we value them and why they matter in our lives.

Understanding poems and musical works as thoughtwritings (or expressive-behavior indicators) nicely explains much of what counts as their expressive qualities. Doing so thus undercuts a primary motivation for recognizing narrators in poetry and personae in music. It does not follow that narrators and personae are absent when poems and music are so understood. They can be present even if they are not needed to account for a work's expressive properties. But narrators and personae are far less important, if not less pervasive, than philosophers of literature and music have made them out to be.

Poetry and music are strikingly similar in their propensity to function as thoughtwriting. In this respect poetry is more like music than like other forms of literature.

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NOTES

Thanks to many people with whom I have discussed the ideas in this paper, beginning in 2007 and 2008 with audiences at the University of Southern California, Victoria University in Wellington (New Zealand), the University of Sussex (U.K.), and the University of Warwick (U.K.). A conversation with Eileen John first inspired me to try turning vague intuitions into something more coherent.

1 Marcel Proust, *Finding Time Again*, trans. Ian Patterson (1927; New York: Penguin, 2002), 342–43. (Thanks to Michael Gorowitz.)

2 *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990) (hereafter cited as *MMB*).

3 Cf. Andrew Barker, ed. *Greek Musical Writings*, vol. 1. *The Musician and His Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984); James Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1981); and Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1984).

4 Cf. C. L. Stevenson, "The Rhythm of English Verse," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 3 (1970): 326–44.

5 Those who bemoan the lack of interest in poetry in our fast paced, digitally pumped up twenty-first century, are forgetting that sung poetry is poetry. Probably no other art form is more pervasive in contemporary culture.

6 Edward Cone, "Some Thoughts on 'Erkönig,'" in *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1974), 3.

7 Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, 94–95.

8 Cf. Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1997), 208.

9 Cf. my “Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52, no. 1 (1994): 47–61. I raised objections—different from those in the present essay—to profligate postulation of musical personae in “Projectivism, Empathy, and Musical Tension,” *Philosophical Topics* 26, nos. 1–2 (1999): 407–40. Stephen Davies offered other objections in “Contra the Hypothetical Persona in Music,” in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997): 95–109. See also Derek Matravers, “The Experience of Emotion in Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61, no. 4 (2003): 353–63. Skeptics about the wholesale postulation of narrators in literary fictions include Robert Stecker, “Apparent, Implied, and Postulated Authors,” *Philosophy and Literature* 11, no. 2 (1987): 258–71; Andrew Kania, “Against the Ubiquity of Fictional Narrators,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 1 (2005): 47–54; Thomas E. Wartenberg, “Need There Be Implicit Narrators of Literary Fictions?” *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007): 89–94; and Gregory Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010). See also George Wilson, “Elusive Narrators in Literature and Film,” *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007): 73–88.

10 I did suggest that in very special cases, for example, Manuel Puig’s *Heartbreak Tango*, literary works might be best understood as lacking narrators. Another special case is Lydia Davis’s short story “Wife One in Country.” (Thanks to Sarah Buss.) I have always emphasized that nonliterary works of fiction often do not have anything like narrators.

11 Readers do, of course, recognize the actual authors of poems and other literary works, and respond to them in various ways. Arguably they must do so in order to identify a work as an instance of thoughtwriting. But one need not identify a work as an instance of thoughtwriting or even recognize its author, in order to treat or experience it as such, that is, to appropriate its words for one’s own purposes. The actual author (or musician or artist) is obviously not what Cone means by a “personal subject,” to be found in any work of art.

12 Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 234, 254–55 (her emphasis) (hereafter cited as *DR*). Anna Christina Ribeiro takes the first person in lyric poetry to encourage readers to identify with the speaker of the poem. “Toward a Philosophy of Poetry,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009): 69–70.

13 John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” in *The Golden Treasury*, ed. Francis T. Palgrave, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 296.

14 Jerrold Levinson, “Musical Expressiveness,” in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 107.

15 “Pictures and Make-Believe,” *The Philosophical Review* 32, no. 3 (1973), 299. See also my “Style and the Products and Processes of Art,” reprinted in *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

16 Cf. my “Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 1 (1994): 49. It is not easy to see how certain expressive features of music, for example, harmonic progressions, dissonances and consonances, major and minor modes, can be heard as a person’s expression of emotion.

17 Levinson, “Musical Expressiveness,” in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 109.

18 R. K. Elliott, “Aesthetic Theory and the Experience of Art,” in *Aesthetics*, ed. Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 145–57 (hereafter cited as *AT*).

19 But the appreciator’s experience is not an ordinary instance of feeling the emotion. “When we experience an emotion . . . through an imaginative assumption of the expression and situation of another person (real or imaginary) we need not and commonly do not experience it as we would if the situation were unequivocally our own. . . . [T]he emotion that I feel in experiencing a work of art from within (and that which I feel as

another person's in real life) may be present in me without being predicable of me. . . . [I]t would be false to say that I *am* sad or even, unqualifiedly, that I feel sad" (147).

20 Robinson, who also claims, following R. G. Collingwood, that readers or listeners take on, experience for themselves, or "recreate in imagination" the emotion they observe in the narrator or persona of an expressive work, emphasizes that these emotional responses result from recognition of the narrator's or persona's emotion. "An emotional expression will evoke emotion in those who observe or hear or feel it *because of what it signifies about the emotional state of the person expressing the emotion.*" (*Deeper than Reason*, 290–91, her emphasis. See also 255, 265, 270–71, 276–77, 288–89.)

21 A speechwriter does make use of the words he produces, but not in the standard way—not by asserting the declarative sentences the words express, for instance. He uses them, nonstandardly, to recommend that the client use them assertively in her speech. In quoting someone directly, I also make use of the words I produce, the ones I mention. I speak or inscribe them in order to report that the person I am quoting used them, for example, assertively. Both speechwriting and direct quotation essentially involve calling attention specifically to the words one produces. So I count both as *mentioning* the words.

22 Shakespeare's exact words, in *Hamlet*, are: "The lady protests too much, methinks."

23 Anna Christina Ribeiro remarks on "the common practice of 'appropriation,' where we use poems written by others to express our own ideas or feelings." See "Toward a Philosophy of Poetry," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009): 70.

24 "One of our most ordinary reactions to a good piece of literary art is expressed in the formula: 'This is what I have always felt and thought, but have never been able to put clearly into words, even for myself.'" Aldous Huxley, "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," in *Music at Night: and Other Essays* (New York: Fountain Press, 1931), 6. Thanks to Tilmann Koeppe.

25 There is a clear affinity here with the views of Benedetto Croce and R. G. Collingwood.

26 Words growing on trees and words of poems are equally available for use by readers. But readers may have much better reason to expect that using the latter will be rewarding in one way or another than that using the former would be.

27 Edwin Arlington Robinson, "Richard Cory," in *Modern American Poetry*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1950), 123.

28 It would be misleading to say that I empathize with a *hypothetical* or *possible* person. I need not be thinking even of a hypothetical or possible individual, whom I imagine to share the sentiments I imagine expressing, even if I am well aware that it is possible that there should be such a person.

29 I am relying here on the account of fiction and nonfiction that I present in *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, chapter 2. Very roughly, a work counts as fiction if it prescribes propositional imaginings, thereby making the imagined propositions fictional, i.e., true in the fictional world of the work.

30 Cf. "Listening with Imagination," 59–60. See also "What Is Abstract About the Art of Music?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 3 (1988): 351–64, and "Projectivism, Empathy, and Musical Tension."

31 Thanks to Jessica Wilson. This is not an instance of the *fictionality* puzzle. That puzzle can't arise if the work doesn't purport to generate any fictional truths. Cf. my "On the (So-Called) Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance," reprinted in *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts*.

32 Thanks to Jennifer Neilson.

33 Thanks to Gregg Crane.

34 Thanks to Susan Pratt Walton.

35 Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006) (hereafter cited as *PR*). See also J. O. Urmson, "Literature," in

Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, ed. George Dickie and Richard K. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 334–41.

36 The performing Kivy thinks readers of novels and stories engage in *storytelling*. To tell a story is, I suppose, to pretend to assert the declarative sentences of the text. My interest is also in readers' "serious" uses of the words of a poem, in their actually asserting its declarative sentences. Kivy claims that the reader impersonates the teller of the story, the author, or fictional author. He declines to call this impersonation make-believe, but gives no hint as to what special sense of make-believe he might have in mind. It does count as make-believe in the sense of the term I have employed.

37 Thanks to Steve Campbell.

38 Elliott seems to allow that music, unlike poetry, can be experienced from within without being experienced from without, although he doesn't make this explicit.

39 Thanks to Alicyn Warren. She suggested that one might resist experiencing Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* as one's own expression.

40 She relies on discussions by Anthony Newcomb, Robinson and Gregory Karl, and Charles Fisk, of works by Schuman, Shostakovich, and Schubert, respectively.

41 The work itself isn't a psychological drama, with the listener as protagonist. There is no fictional work world at all in the "pure" case, and in impure cases the listener does not belong to the work world. The dramatic psychological events unfold in the listener's game world.

Robinson adduces several other considerations in favor of recognizing musical personae (326–29). But it is clear, I think, that they count equally in favor of the hypothesis that the music is heard from within but not from without. They do count against certain other alternatives, however

42 "Listening with Imagination," 54–55.

43 Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*, 255, 265, 270–71, 276–77.