



“RUBBED BY THE WARMING VIOLINS”

MUSIC AND PATRICK WHITE

FIONA RICHARDS

The Open University

“I can’t have enough of music,” declared Patrick White bluntly in a letter of 3 June 1951 to his close friend Peggy Garland [MARR 83]. Many of his fictional characters express the same sentiment. For Aunt Maro in the short story, “The Full Belly,” music is “more nourishing than food” [Cockatoos 90], while General Sokolnikov in *The Aunt’s Story* finds it “difficult to escape from music. Music pursues” [235]. Although Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector* does not understand music, “the idea of it” refreshes him [46]. Topp, the music master in *Voss*, even dreams of “an ideal state in which the official tongue [is] music” [30].

Music was of the utmost importance to White. He spoke on a number of occasions of using it as an aid in his writing, a recording of one of Bartók’s violin concertos with Yehudi Menuhin as soloist helping him to find the right ending for *Voss*, for example [WHITE, *Flaws* 141]. His turn of phrase and use of rhythm owes much to the music that filled his life. The novels are liberally sprinkled with musical references and allusions: Con in *The Tree of Man*, for example, forms his lips “into a trumpet, from which the words of a fresh, impatient song were waiting to slip” [231]. White might even be considered a uniquely powerful and astute music critic depicting performers in a poetic and sparkling manner. He sometimes ascribes particular qualities to them, for example when he describes Dame Nellie Melba’s famous soprano voice as “pure lark-notes” [Flaws 19]. He writes of the sounds of music with the same imaginative engagement: “the scented organ meandered through the melodious groves of flowers” [Voss 330] and “there was a second white note which the dark mouth of the music just failed to swallow down” [The Aunt’s Story 53]. Distinctive phrases such as “gouty golden music” [The Aunt’s Story 154] perfectly conjure up the sense of thick, shimmering sonorities. Glowing musical metaphors and similes abound, for example “as plain as the notes of a five-finger exercise played in the frost” [The Aunt’s Story 126] and “fuchsias tumbled like detached notes waiting to bridge the gap between bars” [47]. The voice, the piano and the cello are

recurring images across White's works. Dulcie in *The Solid Mandala* has a voice with "cello notes" [66], which rise 'muted' from her throat" [131]. In *The Aunt's Story* Father carves the mutton "like somebody with music, someone with a 'cello in his hands" [38] and later in the same novel Wetherby, the young Englishman, is personified as having a face which "when seen full on was a 'cello" [162]. The musical cadence to each novel is different: *The Eye of the Storm* is dense, operatic, while *The Vivisector* is lilting, lively and full of dialogue.

This article examines some of the rich and complex ways in which music plays an integral role in the works of Patrick White. While there is an increasing body of writings on analogies between music and fiction, there is as yet no comprehensive study of the extensive use of music in Australian poetry and fiction, and none written from the perspective of a musicologist. White belongs to a strong tradition of writers in Australia who are or were in various senses musical; that is, either they make specific references to pieces of music in their writing, they deploy musical structures and techniques, or the way in which they write is inherently musical.

White was drawn to music at a young age. Early in his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass*, he writes of the importance of his music mistress, reminiscing about his childhood schooldays in sound: "through it all I hear the birdsong, alternately cynical and sweet, piano notes faltering on frosty mornings, treble laughter intertwined with the harsh braying of broken voices" [27]. We know that early loves were the nineteenth-century nationalist composers, as White recalls listening to melodies from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* [Ex.1] and Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, syrupy "Andante doloroso" tunes such as the "Death of Ase" [Ex.2] dominating his youth [*Flaws* 54]. Music also features in White's earliest works. His first novel, *Happy Valley* (1939), was set in a part of the Snowy Mountains in which he had worked, with a focus on the town's spinster piano teacher.

Ex.1 Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko*, "Chanson hindoue"



Ex.2 Grieg, *Peer Gynt*, "Death of Ase"

White retained a keen sensibility to music throughout his life. While living in Ebury Street in London, he was aware that he was lodging in the same road in which Mozart had stayed in 1764 [Flaws 52]. He was also receptive to the music of the church: references to the harmonium, the organ and hymns are scattered across his work. White always noticed musicians. In *Flaws in the Glass*, he describes meeting a director of an opera house in a German provincial town [110] and a trumpet-player from an Athens nightclub [159]. And while living in Greece, he is haunted by a concertina melody, a "melancholy tune, breaking and mending [...] expressing everything I felt at the end of those tumultuous years" [118]. He also had a perceptive interest in contemporary Australian composers such as Richard Meale and Nigel Butterley, attending the many concerts of new music in Sydney's Cell Block Theatre in the early 1970s.

In *Flaws in the Glass* and in the author's letters there are numerous references to particular musical works, to composers and performers heard by or known to the writer. We know from a letter of 24 March 1957, for example, that he was listening to Stravinsky, Brahms, Mahler and Bach, as he waxes lyrical over the countertenor Alfred Deller [MARR 115]. He saw Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in Sydney in 1963, in a staging with sets and costumes by Sidney Nolan [MARR 239] and in *Flaws in the Glass* talks of meeting this composer in person [152]. He writes of disliking fellow Australian Malcolm Williamson's 1957 Symphony no.1 "Elevameni," but of loving the Hungarian String Quartet playing Bartók [270], the latter a recurring name and clearly a composer much liked by White. Wagner he mentions many times with some ambivalence. On the one hand, he states that he dislikes his music [Marr 84]. But he also held social, musical evenings bringing friends together to listen to complete operas, including *Tristan und Isolde* [MARR 302] and certainly Wagnerian techniques and references appear across his novels, for example, to *Götterdämmerung* in *The Solid Mandala* [217] and to *Tristan* in *The Aunt's Story* [139].

The works of Austrian and German composers feature very prominently in White's life and novels: Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, Mahler and Wolf, Bruckner and Hindemith. The author acknowledged that he liked Beethoven

[Marr 169], especially his string quartets and wrote of the significant role played by some friends in developing his own musical tastes:

Through Fritz Krieger, an Austro-Hungarian business man, and his Hungarian wife Ile, I started my Mahler-Bruckner phase. Through them I came to Bartók also, though he was a composer they detested. My relations with Fritz became strained through my passion for Bach. He accused me of being tone-deaf. Then, Mozart: 'a stream of lemonade.'
[Flaws 140]

This knowledge and love of German music stemmed not only from the contacts mentioned above, but also from the author's study of languages while at university in Cambridge and from his frequent visits to Germany in the 1930s.

White's relationship with music has links with the language and style of some European modernist writers, most notably D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster. His connections with the latter are worth examination on a much larger scale as they share many sensibilities, including an exceptional imaginative ability to project music in words. The two passages below show Forster and White respectively portraying women characters playing piano sonatas by Beethoven. In *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch performs the first movement of Op.111, Beethoven's last piano sonata. Her performance is transcendent, captivating:

She was no dazzling *exécutante*; her runs were not at all like strings of pearls, and she struck no more right notes than was suitable for one of her age and situation. Nor was she the passionate young lady, who performs so tragically on a summer's evening with the window open. [...] But that some sonatas of Beethoven are written tragic no one can gainsay; yet they can triumph or despair as the player decides, and Lucy had decided that they should triumph. [...] With the roar of the opening theme [Ex.3] [Mr Beebe] knew that things were going extraordinarily; in the chords that herald the conclusion he heard the hammer-strokes of victory. [FORSTER 50–51]

Ex.3 Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op.111, opening

Maestoso

White must surely have been influenced by Forster, his predecessor at King's College, Cambridge, in his own representation of Beethoven. In *The Solid Mandala* Dulcie Feinstein plays an earlier work, Op.27, no.2, the "Moonlight" Sonata. Her interpretation is much less convincing and in his depiction, White perfectly conveys the image of a clumsy girl out of her depth as she reaches the difficult final fast movement of the sonata:

But it was going to be a heroic struggle. Not in the beginning, not in the *Adagio* *whats-it*. There she could lay the atmosphere on, and did, in almost visible slabs. [...] If she had started humbly, the music had made her proud. It was kidding her all over again into becoming the genius she was never intended to be, dissolving the bones in her arms with a promise of release, offering a universe of passion instead of plunketty-plunk on the home upright. [...] Unwisely she allowed herself to indulge in coy skips and pretty side-steps for the *Allegretto*, and did not recover her balance in time for arrival at the precipice. [...] Dulcie plainly wasn't prepared, and never would be, for Beethoven's prestiferous night [Ex.4]. It made her lunge at the piano as if to crack, to tear the walnut open. Her arms lashing. [135]

Ex.4 Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op.27 no.2, opening of last movement

Presto agitato

White's love of music, his depth of knowledge and understanding of it is manifest in many different ways across his works, most evidently in the numerous references to composers and musical works. Sometimes these are clearly named, sometimes they are possible to pin down through the clues that White leaves in his texts, sometimes they are looser and impossible to identify precisely, as the three examples below demonstrate.

In *The Aunt's Story*, Charlie King plays "smooth mad music," which we are told is Johann Strauss's *The Blue Danube* [Ex.5]. We are even given a rhythmic semblance of a part of this waltz when Fanny Goodman sings "La la le-le lasa" [75].

Ex.5 Johann Strauss, *The Blue Danube*



In *The Solid Mandala*, Mother plays a Paderewski minuet at the piano [231]. Though not identified as precisely as the Strauss example above, this is quite clearly a well-known little minuet by the Polish composer, one of his Op.14, recorded by the composer in 1937. White uses this type of musical reference to locate his novels in time and place, but also to enhance the evocation of atmosphere. In this particular example the simple, decorated right-hand melody and contained writing for the left hand exemplify the music played by amateur pianists in their homes [Ex.6].

Ex.6 Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Minuet Op.14, no.1

Allegretto

Two staves of music in treble and bass clefs, key signature of two sharps (D major), and 3/4 time signature. The tempo marking is *Allegretto*. The right hand has a melody of quarter notes with accents: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, followed by a quarter rest, then G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The left hand has a simple accompaniment of chords: D4-F#4-A4, E4-G4-B4, F#4-A4-C5, D5-F#4-A4, G4-F#4-E4, F#4-A4-C5, D5-F#4-A4, G4-F#4-E4. The piece ends with a fermata over the final chord.

The Irish composer John Field features in several novels, such as *The Eye of the Storm*, where he is described as "mediocre" [397]. As an example of a looser musical reference, in *Voss* one of Field's piano nocturnes is played, with a "pretty tune towards the end" [92]. A number of Field's short pieces match this description, though no. 7 of Field's 18 Nocturnes is a strong contender, given its relative simplicity and shapely final melody [Ex.7].

Ex.7 John Field, Nocturne no.7, from towards the end



Sometimes White uses music as a means of establishing oppositions. In *The Solid Mandala* the twins Waldo and Arthur Brown are quite dissimilar. One wears “stiff oilskin,” the other “yellowed herringbone” [19]. Arthur has wonderful hair but no voice, while Waldo has a “rather fine tenor voice” [26] with “*Rigoletto*-tones” [72]. He had hoped for intellectual companions with whom “to play Schubert after tea” [30] and learns to play popular piano pieces such as Chopin’s “Raindrop” Prelude, Mozart’s “Turkish” Rondo and Beethoven’s “Für Elise” [231].

Similarly, in the short story “The Cockatoos,” the complex relationship between Mick Davoren, his wife Olive, his mistress Miss Busby Le Cornu and the cockatoos who come to visit, is played out as a musical dualism. His wife plays music, his mistress listens to it; Olive plays Bach on the violin, Busby listens to Mozart, especially sung by a “velvety mezzo” [255]: Baroque suite and Classical opera juxtaposed across the neighbourhood. The cockatoos listen first to Olive playing a Sarabande [Ex.8], then to Busby’s recording of the aria “Mi tradi” [Ex.9] from *Don Giovanni*, an apposite choice on the part of White as the text of the opera refers to seduction and betrayal.

Ex.8 J.S. Bach, Partita no.2 in D minor BWV 1004, “Sarabande”

Ex.9 Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, “Mi tradi quell’ alma ingrata”

Through the clues in the story it is possible to deduce exactly which of Bach’s dance movements is played, as Olive moves from her Sarabande into a Chaconne. Only one of the Bach sonatas and partitas for violin has this combination of movements, the Partita no.2 in D minor, BWV 1004. Hence we know exactly what the cockatoos hear. White’s choice of music is very astute, as there are many contrasts between the two pieces, in terms of their

tempo, time signature, key, timbre and texture. The Bach example is in triple time, a minor key and makes use of thick, chordal textures, while the Mozart aria is in duple time, has a lyrical melody and is in a major key. These musical dualisms resonate with a much wider theme in Australian culture, and indeed some of the many dualities in White's fictional world, such as silence/speech and good/evil have already been considered elsewhere [for example, see Steven, 1989].

White's short story collections, *The Cockatoos* and *The Burnt Ones*, demonstrate the various ways in which he uses music. Several of the eleven stories in *The Burnt Ones* contain musical allusions. In "Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight," Nora talks of the purity of "the song of the wagtail" and "some of Schubert" [88]. In "Clay," there is a rare mention of jazz, where the pianist's hands jump and frolic, the music "playing out of every warm hole in the old, sea-changed piano" [132]. And in "The Woman who wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats," Kikitsa's voice is "suddenly transposed into the darker key of the midnight alleys" [264]. In "Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover," music is a catalyst where guitars "break the light into splinters" [219], while in "Being Kind to Titina" Aunt Thalia sings German Lieder and plays Schumann on the piano "sweet and sticky" [206] and an accordionist plays notes "as gentle and persuasive as wood-pigeons" [205]. The other collection, *The Cockatoos*, has similar references. In "The Full Belly," for example, there are mentions of Bach, Chopin and Debussy. Costa's aunt's voice is compared to Debussy's piano prelude "La cathédrale engloutie," as shown in Ex.10. While the music is marked "dans une brume doucement sonore" ("in a softly resonant haze"), her voice correspondingly rises "slowly in sonorities of green masonry" [91].

Ex.10 Debussy, "La cathédrale engloutie," bars 1-2

Profondément calme (Dans une brume doucement sonore)

The musical score for Debussy's "La cathédrale engloutie" (bars 1-2) is presented in a grand staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 6/4. The piece is marked "Profondément calme" (Very calmly) and "Dans une brume doucement sonore" (In a softly resonant haze). The dynamics are marked "pp" (pianissimo). The right hand (treble clef) features a series of chords with a "gliss" marking, indicating a glissando effect. The left hand (bass clef) provides a steady, low-register accompaniment with a series of chords and moving lines.

Turning now to White's novels, three of them, each from a different decade, will be examined in greater detail. *The Aunt's Story* [1948], *Voss* [1957] and *Riders in the Chariot* [1961] have been chosen in order to show some of the different ways in which the author uses music and infuses each individual novel with a particular sound quality.

The Aunt's Story is in three parts, with the titles Meroë, Jardin Exotique and Holstius. The title of each part has both a narrative meaning and a musical connotation. Meroë is the name of a house and of a character in Alessandro Scarlatti's 1715 opera *Tigrane*. Jardin Exotique is set in France, but is also a distorted reference to Debussy's 1903 piano piece "*Jardins sous la pluie*." Holstius is both a person and perhaps an oblique reference to the mystical English composer Gustav Holst.

In Part I, Meroë is a house where "music had been played" [19]. It is the type of faded home full of memories that echoes across Australian literature, sharing characteristics with "Misrule" in Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and "Malin" in Stow's later *A Haunted Land* [1956]. Meroë has shut rooms that sound "like music boxes that have stopped playing. You hold your ear against the sides, which contain a creaking, of music waiting to burst out" [27]. It has "white windows that could not contain the music that flowed perpetually into the garden, the complicated pieces played by old girls. The garden was full of broken music" [47]. Music is part of a nostalgic, bygone era at Meroë. The piano features prominently here as it did in many Australian historic houses. As a child growing up there, Theodora Goodman has to practise her scales. Theo is one of White's rather anguished and wooden performers. Her sister Fanny, on the other hand, is musical and her scales are "always so smooth and pleasing" [30]. Theo's hands beat out "the icy bars of a nocturne, which were stiff and blunt when they should have sailed out as smooth and continuous as a wedge of swans" [28]. She plays a Chopin nocturne "as it was never meant, expressing some angular agony that she knew" [31]. Fanny, however, turns a piece into "a whole bright, tight bunch of artificial flowers surrounded by a paper frill" [28].

The other significant musical aspect of Part I is the vivid description of the performances of the character Moraïtis, a somewhat mysterious Greek cellist who shares some sensibilities with D.H. Lawrence's Loerke in *Women in Love* (1920) and who creates a "magnificent tapestry of sound and colour woven by a master hand" [109]. Here White envelopes the reader in a heady, emotional experience. Like Lawrence, he evokes the power of the elemental and the sensual in this passage:

Then the silence crackled. The concerto had begun. The violins made a suave forest through which Moraitis stepped. The passage of the 'cello was difficult at first, struggling to achieve its own existence in spite of the pressure of the blander violins. Moraitis sat upright. He was prim. He was pure. I am a peasant, he said. And he saw with the purity of primitive vision, whether the bones of the hills or the shape of a cup. Now the music that he played was full of touching, simple shapes, but because of their simplicity and their purity they bordered on the dark and tragic, and were threatened with destruction by the violins. But Moraitis closed his eyes as if he did not see, as if his faith would not allow. He believed in the integrity of his first tentative, now more constant, theme. And Theodora, inside her, was torn by his threatened innocence, by all she knew there was to come. She watched him take the 'cello between his knees and wring from its body a more apparent, a thwarted, a passionate music, which had been thrust on him by the violins. [111]

In Part II, Theodora has left the old Australian house for France. The narrative and the writing in this section subsequently become much more impressionistic. The music has changed too, shifting from private salon performances to public concerts. Now the music has the formality of the French Baroque: "the rather stiff overture muffled by the velvet through which it played, the heavily encrusted bows just scraping the wreaking gut" [154]. Instead of piano scales and nocturnes, the French grand operas of the nineteenth-century composer Meyerbeer are utilised as a means of characterising the Colonel. He hums and his moustache plays Meyerbeer "as convincingly as a French horn" [177]. An obvious contender for this musical reference is a well-known passage from the 1836 opera *Les Huguenots*, where the character Marcel sings a jaunty tune "roughly," complete with musical whistles [Ex.11].

Ex.11 Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, "Chanson Huguenote"

[Marcel] *rudement*
 Pour les con- vents, c'est fi-ni! Les

8va

White's unusual understanding of French opera shown here dated back to a summer spent in Dieppe studying the works of Massenet [*Flaws* 37]. Later, his knowledge expanded to embrace Meyerbeer and Debussy.

Across Part II there are leitmotivic references to the gavotte, a formal French dance: "She heard with some sadness the gavotte [...] tight, frilled [...] mechanical" [187]; "like a mouse in a piano picking at the bones of a gavotte" [192], and "a hand was practising a gavotte, each note white and separate that it picked up" [234]. This particular gavotte is probably from one of J.S. Bach's French suites, which contain several short gavottes as proposed in Ex.12:

Ex.12 J.S. Bach, French Suite no. 5 in G major, BWV 816, "Gavotte"



Part II also carries echoes of Africa, written in Alexandria opposite a café "churning out non-stop Arab music." White wrote that this "did not detract me from what I was doing. In fact it helped bring me closer to what was happening in Theodora Goodman's confused mind" [*Flaws* 128].

In the very short Part III Theodora Goodman's story comes to its conclusion in a welter of musical metaphors as highlighted below:

Sometimes against the full golden theme of corn and the whiter pizzicato of the telephone wires there was a counterpoint of houses. Theodora Goodman sat. The other side of the incessant train she could read the music off. There were the single notes of houses, that gathered into gravely structural phrases. There was a smooth passage of ponds and trees. There was a big bass barn... Where children played with tins, or a girl waited at a window, or calves lolloped in long grass, it was a frill of flutes twisted round a higher theme, to grace, but only grace, the solemnity of living and of days. There were now the two coiled themes. There was the flowing corn song, and the deliberate accompaniment of houses, which did not impede, however structural, because it was part of the same integrity of purpose and of being. [259]

The sheer profusion of musical allusions in *The Aunt's Story* is striking. White makes subtle and careful choices of music to reflect the three distinct periods, locations and moods of the novel.

Voss is quite different. Instead of the three-part structure, it is an epic narrative that uses music architecturally. In a letter of 11 September 1956, White wrote that he had tried to think of the sound of this novel, marrying Liszt to Mahler [MARR 108]. More specifically, he wrote in a letter to Geoffrey Dutton a few years later in 1960: “Mahler, yes; I found him very helpful when I was writing *Voss*. But I cannot say that I like Liszt, only that his bravura and a certain formal side helped me in conveying some of the more worldly, superficial passages of *Voss*” [MARR 169]. Why Mahler, why Liszt? The attention to detail within the huge dimensions and organic structures of Mahler’s symphonies for vast orchestras would have played a role in White’s approach to form, while, as he states, Liszt’s virtuosic piano writing informed the city aspects of the novel.

During the writing of *Voss*, White also immersed himself in the dense sounds of Berg’s Violin Concerto [MARR 159]. In addition to some of the personal connections, he felt he had with Berg [White cites that they were both asthmatics], this work would also have had organisational implications for *Voss*, given its combination of two musical systems, serialism and tonality. In the Concerto, Berg combines passages written in a tonal musical language with the twelve-tone system, a method of composition in which composers created a note “row” using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. The last four notes of Berg’s row are also the first four notes of a chorale melody “Es ist genug” (“It is enough”). Berg then quoted this chorale later in the Violin Concerto. The architectural and emotional aspects of this work, along with its quotations of other music, would have appealed to White. He wrote of using music during the creation of *Voss* as a means of approaching the structural issues that confronted him, saying that he felt that listening “constantly” to music helped him to “develop a book more logically” [MARR 110].

Voss has parallels with the nineteenth-century programmatic tone poem, particularly those of Richard Strauss, such as *Don Juan* (1888), in that it tells a story through the symphonic exposition and development of its characters. The novel has a small cast of individuals who interact with each other in diverse ways. Voss and Laura have lengthy solos, but there are also ensembles: Voss and Frank Le Mesurier play out a duet in Sydney’s Domain [34] and the men who ride off into the desert form what is effectively a male vocal group. There are contrasting episodes within this organic structure where Voss, in the dangerous desert, and Laura, in the safety of Sydney, are alternated. White also uses the musical technique of “developing variation,” a term created by Arnold Schoenberg, whose works were known to the

author. In music, variations evolve through the development of existing material. In *Voss*, Laura is introduced at first sketchily [7] and her character then built up gradually [74, for example], with developing variations of her aspect and demeanour recurring across the novel [see 223 for example].

Language is sometimes used pointedly and rhythmically, with frequent small motifs and very brief sentences which appear almost as short musical phrases:

- And stood breathing. [7].
- And closed the door. [10].
- In this treacherous wind. [92].

Punctuation is featured as vocal breath marks, as for example in “blacks, and deserts, and rocks, and skeletons” [28]. White also imbues objects with a musicality of their own, as when Laura’s Sunday dress “sighs” [7].

Setting *Voss* in 1845, White makes reference to the musical culture of the novel’s historical backdrop, as he did in *The Aunt’s Story*. People take lessons in flute, piano and harp [7] and gather together to listen to music [222]. Mr Palfreyman collects musical instruments in his Palladian house [46]. Topp is a professor of music with a piano that “scatters its distracted notes” [29]. He is a single gentleman who teaches the pianoforte, but plays the flute for pleasure:

Exquisite, pearly, translucent notes would flower on that unpromising wood, and fall from the windows as they faded, causing bullock teams to flick their tails, or some drunkard to invoke Jesus Christ. On days when Topp played his flute the dumpy house was garlanded with music, and it did sometimes happen that people passing in the street, through dust or mud, would grow gladder without thinking to discover why. [30]

Social, domestic music-making includes the music typical of the Victorian drawing-room: Laura performs one of the piano pieces of Mendelssohn or Field with an “admirably light touch” [74], though, like Theodora Goodman, she suffers “all the difficulties of music” [159].

There are a number of subtle, rather enigmatic, hidden musical connections within this novel. Tom Radcliffe sings “Love’s Witchcraft” in his high bass voice. This is an 1801 English translation of a popular, simple German song, “Liebeszauber,” with words by Gottfried Bürger (1747–1794) and music by Johann Schulz (1747–1800) [Ex.13].

Ex.13



In the novel, the song is in English, with the German background left unspoken, yet surely a deliberate link to Voss's nationality on the part of White. Similarly White composes a song for Voss to sing, "Eine blosse Seele ritt hinaus" [189]. This too has undertones of another German folk song "Es ritten drei Ritter zum Tor hinaus."

Like many Australian writers, White reveals a strong engagement with the sounds of landscape, particularly in this novel where we hear "the intimate hum of insects" [12] and an audible "feathery colloquy of the bamboos" [54]. In summer, there are "murmurous voices of insects" [71]. Voss wails "a little tune of insect music" [176]. The valley across which he rides has "tapestries of musical green" [197]. The birds make "rackety screams of utter abandon" [196] and doves "soothe" [230].

The sheer number of times that music is either itself described or used to describe something else is striking. Across a few pages, toward the end of the novel, the following rapid sequence of appearances of the word music occurs:

- the invisible consort in the gallery began to pick over the first, fragile notes of music [315]
- that mad wind of concealed music [322]
- seas of experience and music [322]
- the capital music [322]
- the sunny avenues of rather pretty music [323]
- the silly, invisible music [325]
- the music continued to ache [326]

Taking this example a stage further, analysis of *Riders in the Chariot* provides data to support the case that Patrick White uses music extensively and consciously. The word "music" appears 44 times in the novel. There are "gusts of music" [36], "slippery funnels" of music [36] and "streamers of music" [233]. There is a "swell of music" [36], "jerky music" [145] and Mrs

Jolley makes an “icy music” with fragments of broken jug [100]. There are arabesques [110] and waltzes [232], “thumping hymns” [306] and a Heldentenor [153]. The word “dance” occurs 34 times.

The word “sing” features 27 times, “sang” 22 times and singing is an activity carried out by many homely women. Mrs Jolley sings “pinker hymns” as she bakes [75]. She has a “rather girlish voice,” which falls “in little pearly drops” [614]. Mrs Godbold, on the other hand, likes to sing as she irons. She has “a rich, but rather trembly, mezzo voice, which her daughter Else once said reminded her of melting chocolate” [299]. Sometimes Mrs Godbold thumps the board with her iron to emphasize a musical phrase [299]. Mrs Spice is also musical: “when squeezed in a certain way would let out a thin soprano in imitation of an oriental bagpipe” [441]. The wonderful images of these cheerful, musical women recur at intervals across the novel.

Perhaps more than in any other novel, *Riders in the Chariot* is liberally infused with musical metaphors. Among these are some of White’s most memorable descriptive passages, such as “the grace-notes of crab and plum blossom, sprinkled at intervals on black nets of twigs” [52], with its colourful image of small musical symbols hanging on tree branches; and the “plain-song of bees” [201], where the reference to chanted, mesmeric music encapsulates humming. There is a “sustained pizzicato of conversation” [626], a reference to short, plucked string sonorities which again captures the sounds of brittle, clipped speech.

Riders in the Chariot is full of specific musical references; to the operas of Weber and [229], to *Tristan* [209], to Bach, played “rather badly on an indifferent harpsichord” [209], to Schoenberg [192], Franz Lehár [234] and to popular songs such as “The Little Brown Jug,” “Waltzing Matilda” and “Pack Up Your Troubles” [491]. There is a boy who goes by the name Fiddle Paganini [465] and a passing reference to Mörike, “just the thing” to read [174]. This denotes Eduard Mörike’s (1804–1875) *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag* first published in 1856. The English translation, *Mozart on the way to Prague*, was available in print from 1946, some time before White wrote this novel. White wrote that he leant very heavily on Bach, Bartók and Bloch while writing *Riders in the Chariot* [Marr 170]. The reference to Ernest Bloch (1880–1959) is an interesting one as the composer Peter Sculthorpe, writing *Irkanda IV* in 1961 (the same year *Riders in the Chariot* was first published), has also spoken of the influence of Bloch, whose music was popular in Australia at this time.

That music resonates through White's words makes this a significant part of his personal style. His novels are not primarily focused on music in the way of, say, Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* (1999), nor are they quite like the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose descriptions of jazz concerts and specific pieces of music locate his novels very precisely in the 1920s and 30s. White produces musical fiction in a number of senses. It is possible to trace structural analogies and there are passages where the text is shaped by musical principles such as counterpoint. There is an inherent musicality in White's use of language; he employs musical devices such as repetition, fragmentation and changes in tempo. Musical performance has a strong presence in White's work: domestic music-making, worship, opera, piano and chamber music. Many named pieces of music are used as a means of locating fiction in time and place. White uses musical allusion for a number of different purposes, sometimes allegorically, to characterise and colour his narratives.

White's approach to music had a seminal impact on successive Australian writers, most obviously on Randolph Stow [1935–2010], whose literary output entwines sound, words and often place as well. Like White, Stow has music for every situation. And like White, he too wrote of music in his letters, though his knowledge, range and experience of music were more limited. He was influenced by White in his attempts to conjure up a sonorous landscape. Passages such as "the morning sang with bulbuls engaged in palms, their throats throbbing" [*The Aunt's Story* 12] have their counterpart in Stow's evocative descriptions of birdsong in *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, where cockatoos are a "snowstorm" of "screaming flowers" [21]. The Scottish pipers, hymns and drums that reverberate through Stow's words are the equivalent of White's German music that more weightily permeates the latter's writings. Like White, Stow uses repetition in a musical way. As *The Aunt's Story* uses a three-part structure with different settings, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* is in two distinct parts.

Exploited as a stimulus for his imagination, White's personal use of music is much more than tangential reference or effect. It plays a significant structural role and creates resonance. Ultimately there is a symbiotic relationship between music and prose. His novels are infused with the shapes and colours of the sounds that reverberated through his home.

Works Cited

- AUSTER, Paul. *In the Country of Last Things* [1987]. London: Faber & Faber, 1989.
- FORSTER, E.M. *A Room with a View*. [1908] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
- MARR, David (ed). *Patrick White Letters*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994.
- SHOCKLEY, Alan. *Music in the Words : Musical Form and Counterpoint in the Twentieth-Century Novel*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.
- STEVEN, Laurence. *Dissociation and Wholeness in Patrick White's Fiction*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1989.
- STOW, Randolph. *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*. [1965] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2009.
- WHITE, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass*. [1981] London: Vintage, 1998.
- _____. *Riders in the Chariot*. [1974] Kindle Digital Edition, 2011.
- _____. *Signal Driver*. Sydney: Currency Press, 1983.
- _____. *The Aunt's Story*. [1948] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.
- _____. *The Burnt Ones*. [1964] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.
- _____. *The Cockatoos*. [1974] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.
- *The Eye of the Storm*. [1973] London: Vintage, 1995.
- *The Solid Mandala*. [1966] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988.
- *The Tree of Man*. [1955] London: Vintage, 1994.
- *The Vivisector*. [1970] London: Vintage, 1994.
- *Voss*. 1957. London: Vintage, 1994.