



A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess by PAUL PHILLIPS
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PHILLIPS, PAUL. *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010. 467 pp. £65.00.

Paul Phillips's *A Clockwork Counterpoint* provides a comprehensive overview of the music and writings of Anthony Burgess. Phillips argues that composing classical music was Burgess's true labor of love, since he was only rarely compensated for his music, most of which went unperformed during his lifetime. Phillips, a conductor himself, was given unprecedented access to Burgess's musical scores by Burgess's widow, and he is clearly an expert in this subject matter.

Apart from cataloguing the wide range of musical forms and genres in which Burgess worked, Phillips explores the ways Burgess's love for music shaped his writing, distinguishing him from contemporary writers/composers such as Paul Bowles and Bruce Montgomery, who regarded writing and composing as separate pursuits. According to Phillips,

Burgess constantly sought ways to unite both halves of his creative personality, either by setting words of his favorite authors to music, incorporating musical characters and themes into his books, or, more radically, assigning musical structure to fiction, whether this meant writing novels in sonata form, or, as in the case of *Napoleon Symphony*, modeling the form and character of a novel on *Beethoven's Eroica*. (4)

Throughout *A Clockwork Counterpoint*, Phillips suggests that to understand Burgess's writing you must understand his music.

Phillips's overarching point—that the ability to write and the desire to compose were interrelated aspects of Burgess's genius—is carefully and convincingly made. Burgess believed that a writer needed a musical ear and strove to make his prose sound and feel like music. In so doing, he hoped to emulate canonical writers with musical backgrounds such as John Milton, whose father was a composer, James Joyce, who worked briefly as a professional tenor, and even William Shakespeare, who Burgess believed possessed considerable musical knowledge (112). Phillips explains how Burgess wrote and composed in the same unusual way, moving from beginning to end with no revisions: “This uncommon creative process helps to explain Burgess's astonishing prolificacy as a writer and composer” (186). From compositional process to finished product, Phillips illuminates Burgess's distinctive integration of music and literature.

Although clearly an admirer of his subject, Phillips maintains an objective perspective, addressing Burgess's artistic and personal limitations directly. He offers a particularly frank examination of Burgess's deficiencies as a lyricist:

Burgess's skill in writing words to be sung rarely matched his ability as a novelist or adapter of spoken plays...He often lacked the sensitivity to the melody of language that great lyricists possess....Although he could achieve a delicacy in his music, his manner of speaking reveals his shortcomings as a lyricist, for he spoke in an aggressive, sometimes hectoring manner, with an accented staccato attack, forced from the back of the throat, that could be almost painful to listen to. No matter how much he may have admired or desired it, the light touch of the natural lyricist was a gift that Burgess simply did not possess. (300)

Phillips also discusses the discrepancies in quality that characterized Burgess's music, pointing out that some of his pieces—such as his solo and chamber works for the oboe

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and recorder—called for notes beyond the range of the specified instruments. Although he connects these foibles to Burgess's lack of formal training and the infrequency with which he heard his music performed, Phillips also—for better or worse—speculates freely, attributing such artistic mishaps to troubled aspects of Burgess's personal life, such as the ambivalence he felt toward his son:

Given the fact that many of Burgess's works for oboe and recorder ignore practical performance considerations and are ill-suited for these instruments, one is forced to wonder what he could have meant by writing such unplayable pieces for his son. As Burgess acknowledged, he was a neglectful parent, too preoccupied with his writing and composing to take much notice of the high-spirited urchin who often ran naked through the house and the neighborhood. (339)

The claim that Burgess subconsciously or perhaps deliberately wrote unplayable music for his son due to a lack of fatherly feeling is highly subjective and may skate too close to psychological theorizing for some. Yet even though some of his conclusions are farfetched, Phillips's candor regarding his subject's flaws makes it easy to trust him when he praises Burgess's best works such as Symphony No. 3 in C, *Mr. W.S.*, his ballet based on the life of Shakespeare, and his compositions for solo guitar and guitar quartet.

The problems with this book have more to do with form than substance. Firstly, it is overbroad: Phillips assesses every book by Burgess, even those, such as *1985*, that he openly admits have nothing to do with music. Secondly, rather than begin with an analysis of the works by Burgess that best combine his musical and literary talents, Phillips chose to organize his study as a biography, a strange decision given that Burgess composed most of his music late in life after the death of his first wife, Lynne. Since Andrew Biswell's recent biography, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*, deals primarily with Burgess's early life and first marriage, *A Clockwork Counterpoint*, which mainly focuses on the years of his second marriage, complements Biswell's fine biography nicely, but its chronological structure means that Phillips leads with the weakest, least relevant part of his manuscript; the second half of *A Clockwork Counterpoint* is more engaging and informative than the first.

Phillips also refuses to tell us in plain language what Burgess's music sounds like. The following description of Sonatina in G Major is fairly representative:

The opening Allegretto movement offers a fine example of Burgess's early style, combining lyricism and traditional harmonic practice with the modernist's avoidance of predictability. The curious alternation of G# and D major chords in bars 14-18 recalls a similar alteration of chords with roots a triton apart (C and F#) in "Saturn" from *The Planets*. The perfect authentic cadence in bars 21-2, replete with 4-3 suspension, is Burgess's way of tidily wrapping up in traditional fashion a passage that—through the use of irregular phrase lengths, unusual harmonic progressions, and an atypical approach to modulation—is less ordinary than its apparent simplicity suggests. (51-52)

Only a trained musician or musicologist would be able to understand all or even much of what is being said here, which is unfortunate since Phillips's otherwise lucid prose aims for the widest possible audience. Phillips does provide numerous examples of sheet music by Burgess, but again—given that his stated purpose is to analyze Burgess's music and literature together—his use of technical musicology and printed music are of little value to people who know of and appreciate Burgess through his literature.

In sum, this smart, edifying book is essential for the Burgess scholar, though its subject ultimately emerges as a clever and versatile composer, not a great or particularly important one.

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RAJAN, TILOTTAMA. *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 282 pp. \$65.00.

One of the most compelling points that Tilottama Rajan makes in introducing her *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft* concerns how the rise of cultural studies in today's academy affects our understanding of British Romanticism and, by extension, of nineteenth-century British literature, for, as she claims, "a redistribution of power" (xiv) has created a milieu in which "the Victorian Novel assume[s] the preeminence once accorded to Romantic 'poetry' during the heyday of deconstruction" (xv). The danger, then, involves "a unigeneric reduction of narrative to the (Victorian) Novel" (xii) by which the distinctiveness of Romantic fictions, whether rendered in prose or in verse, becomes lost when assimilated into "the disciplinary apparatus of the Novel, where the word *Novel*, with a capital *N*, signifies a sociopolitical institution that developed through the nineteenth century" and performed a "normalizing role" (xii) during the Victorian moment and of course beyond. Over the six chapters comprising *Romantic Narrative*, Rajan posits the idea of Romantic *narrativity* as a counterexample to the *Novel* while placing special emphasis on Romanticism's "*poetics* of narrative" (xiii), a phrase she uses to capture an important part of what "remains the horizon of Romanticism as prose: that of poetry's legacy to prose" (8). In this way, Rajan questions accepted categorizations of genre and period and so invites her reader to consider not simply the four radical authors on whom *Romantic Narrative* focuses but also "the epistemologies at stake in poetry and prose from Shelley and Peacock to our own Victorianism" (xvi).

Interestingly, Rajan begins *Romantic Narrative* with two chapters devoted to Percy Bysshe Shelley, a writer seldom studied for his narrative work (surprisingly, Mary Shelley receives little attention in this book save as her late husband's redactor). The first chapter, entitled "The Trauma of Lyric: Shelley's Missed Encounter with Poetry in *Alastor*," plays out Rajan's Romantic narrativity theory by examining the tensions and conflicts between linear storytelling and the fragmentary, impressionistic, disrupted (and thus disruptive) aspects of the poet's 1816 piece. For Rajan, *Alastor* shows "that narrative is a potentially endless process: not a closed structure, but a proliferating web of speculation" (36) because the poem represents a contact point between conventional fiction's sequential, progressive nature and the Romantic lyric's "suppression of temporality" (12) and so coalesces prose and verse traits uniquely, in a manner that resists what Rajan depicts as the Victorian Novel paradigm. The second chapter, entitled "Shelley's Promethean Narratives: Gothic Anamorphoses in *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*, and *Prometheus Unbound*," argues that, in essence, Shelley saw prose as "an unsettled, heterogeneous genre open to poetry," a perspective that makes his novels incompatible with "the normalizing apparatus of modernity and the Novel" (81). In this light, his youthful Gothic performances represent bricolages or pastiches that subvert customary methods of reading and interpretation because "pastiche, rather

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