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Of a *ménage*: Burgess, Music and Eroticism

Marcin Stawiarski

“All art is an aspect of sexuality [...]. Great art, the art of the past, is a kind of glorification of increase. I mean, take even drama for instance. I mean, tragedy and comedy had their origin in fertility ceremonies”¹. That is how Tristram, the main character in *The Wanting Seed*, draws a parallel between creation and procreation. The futurist realm of infertility Tristram has come to live in is but a magnifying glass held to the sterility of art, embodied by “remote, cold, abstract, [...] concrete music.” In Burgess’s novels, eroticism and fertility are frequently tied up with creative urge and artistry, and especially with music. But then, the kinship between sexuality and musicality in Burgess’s oeuvre seems to be predicated on both the duplicity between seriousness and jest, and the dynamics between concealment and explicitness of the linguistic sign. On the one hand, the comic stems from numerous musico-erotic puns, and, to an extent, laughter legitimates eroticism. On the other hand, musicality questions literary signification, insofar as it veils and discloses the erotic content at the same time, toying with the ambiguity between musical and literary signs. In this respect, the *sexo-musical ménage* in Burgess permits one to tackle the question of writing and literariness on the whole, for it raises questions about the specificity of musico-literary interrelationships as part of textuality.

I wish to show that the relationship between music and eroticism in Burgess’s novels constitutes a template of literariness itself, and that it thus carries a metatextual potential. I wish to investigate this interrelation in compliance with the well-known distinction in musico-literary studies between verbal music, word music and musicalization of fiction, as defined by Steven P. Scher or Werner Wolf². Hence, I will first refer to the representation of musical reception in which verbal music and word music interplay. Second, I will explore the implications of the musico-erotic metaphor or pun. Finally, I will examine the idea of *musico-literary ménage* itself by referring to mythical elements in Burgess’s *musicalization* or *symphonization* of fiction.

1 Verbal Eroticism

In *A Clockwork Orange* musicality is wedded to eroticism and violence. It may be said that it is the specificity of the representation of music in the novel that constitutes a token of musico-erotic association. What is noteworthy in Burgess’s description of music is not so much what composition is depicted precisely as how it is rendered. In other words, the way in which music is evoked renders the portrayal of musical perception a highly eroticized activity.

First, the descriptions of music in the novel are predicated on the parameter of space, so that the sensory experience is enhanced. The layout of the loud-speakers in Alex’s room reminds one of the use of space in 20th-century compositions such as Karlheinz Stockhausen’s experiments with space³. It also recalls more ancient treatment of space in music such as the 16th-century technique of polychorality (or *coro spezzato*⁴), which makes use of space as a means of sound manipulation, only to mention Thomas Tallis’s 40-part motet for eight choirs, *Spem in Alium*. Similarly, the mere position of the loud-speakers in Alex’s room already brings out into the open the spatial, and thus the tactile aspect of music: “The little speakers of my stereo were all arranged around the room, on ceiling, walls, floor, so, lying on my bed slooshying the music, I was like netted and meshed in the orchestra”⁵. Hence, the spatial element converts the sound perception into a physical and bodily experience, conducive to trance, and reminiscent of primitive aspects of music.

Consequently, when the music starts, it immediately turns into a pictorial representation. The description toys with the cliché of programme music. On the one hand, it resorts to several non musical lexical fields in tandem. Indeed, metaphors and similes intermingle: some sounds become related to watery elements (“the sluice of lovely sounds,” or “like silvery wine flowing in a spaceship”); others take on traits of some dense substance (“the trombones crunched”; “flute and oboe bored, like worms of like platinum”). On the other hand, aural apprehension of music is in step with visual and gustatory perception (“redgold under my bed”; “silverflamed”; “the thick toffee gold and silver”). Music literally materializes: “gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh,” says the text. And such a synaesthetic perception shows a deep kinship with eroticism. The protagonist keeps his eyes shut all through. The visualisation or the tactalization of music are partly internal experiences: “I knew such lovely pictures.” The musical experience partakes of trance and incantation: “bliss and heaven” it leads to proves “better than any synthemesc Bog or God.” Hence, it culminates in an orgasmic rapture: “I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it.”

With music being rendered through a pictorial representation, one could speak of a vivid presentation or hypotyposis. Seeing music echoes romantic discourse on musical reception, so that Alex’s erotic and visual approach to music reminds one, for instance, of Edna’s listening to music in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: “Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind”⁶. As opposed to that, Alex’s images are tinged with violence. His erotica verges on the question of power and domination:

¹ Anthony Burgess. *The Wanting Seed* [1962]. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996. 67.

² Cf. Steven Paul Scher. “Literature and Music.” In Jean-Pierre Barricelli & Joseph Gibaldi (eds.). *Interrelations of Literature*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1982. 225-250. and Werner Wolf. *The Musicalization of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999. 35-70.

³ Cf. Karlheinz Stockhausen. “Musique dans l’espace.” In *Contrechamps*, 9. Paris: L’Age d’Homme, 1988. 78-100.

⁴ That is to say a choir split and arranged in such a way as to extend and enhance sound perception.

⁵ Anthony Burgess. *A Clockwork Orange* [1962]. London: Penguin, 1972. 29.

⁶ Kate Chopin. *The Awakening*. Chicago, New York: Herbert S. Stone, 1899. 65.

There were vecks and ptisas, both young and starry, lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and I was smacking all over my rot and grinding my boot in their litsos. And there were devotchkas ripped and creeching against walls and I plunging a shлага into them.⁷

To an extent, the *Nadsat*⁸ is supposed to act as a filter against erotic and violent content. In *You've Had Your Time*, Burgess says that "the strange new lingo would act as a kind of mist half-hiding the mayhem and protecting the reader from his own baser instincts"⁹. There is undoubtedly a degree of musicality and rhythmicity due to the specificity of the language used in *A Clockwork Orange*, and one may partly agree with the idea of word-music being a means of blurring signification¹⁰.

But then, Burgess's novels often operate a detour of signification. The frequent onomatopoeia in *A Clockwork Orange*, for instance, only enhance the arbitrary nature of language. If the signifier is supposed to be motivated through its alleged convergence with the signified, Burgess seems to exploit the arbitrariness of such sound correspondence or cratylism, only to underline the deceptiveness of linguistic naturalness. In this respect, language is only music, just naturally inexpressive as music, though potentially as potent. Thus, when examining the character of Burgess's onomatopoeia, we suddenly realize that the process of signification turns upon itself: *kashl kashl* is not, in fact, as signified-bare, so to speak, as it would seem to be, for the Russian etymology accounts for it, *kashl* coming from the word *to cough*. There proves to be a detour of sorts, and, as though following a strange loop, we find ourselves exactly at the starting point: what is veiled by the signifier winds up being revealed by another signified embedded within the signifier itself¹¹.

A similar phenomenon appears in erotic descriptions. At first sight, the language of *A Clockwork Orange* seems to constitute an opaque barrier, proof against an overly straightforward depiction of sexuality, so that an unacquainted reader may well overlook the erotic background at first, only skimming over the surface of the language. But, once we have acknowledged the sexual content of a scene, we also have to admit to having experienced its linguistic aspect without necessarily understanding it, hence finding ourselves in a somewhat ambiguous stance towards language, which begins to savour of eroticism. In other words, language offers an erotic experience of sound, and what seemed to serve as a filter, suddenly proves to be the source of enjoyment or erotic energy. And, the voyage through opacity becomes a catalyst of eroticism. If Burgess speaks of the shield-like quality of the language, he also resists the publishers' demands for a glossary to append the text, saying that the reader should experience the brainwashing process, the novel dealing with brainwashing. Reading becomes somewhat musical, giving precedence to the signifier. But it is only partly so, since the signifier once again takes us through a detour, so that instead of being protected, we undergo an experience of violence and eroticism of the word.

Consequently, the musical perception in *A Clockwork Orange* is rendered by way of a synaesthetic approach, so that music is predicated on a bodily experience. It receives an orgasmic quality, but also a degree of violence. Furthermore, the musicality of language reveals a degree of playfulness. Burgess's *lip-music* reminds one of Joyce's *lip-speech*, and it relates as much to the reader's experience of linguistic musicality as to the pleasure of fiction as fiction. The play with fictionality appears frequently in Burgess's novels such as *Earthly Powers* whose narrator often toys with fiction and reliability in a Stern-like witty manner. Thus, the problematic of verbal eroticism tells us something about literariness itself, and the power of the word. It is noteworthy that the stage adaptation of the rape scene from *A Clockwork Orange* should have been based exclusively on verbal suggestiveness and deliberately ill-adapted music: the actors are supposed to repeat "in and out" to the accompaniment of Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique*¹².

2 Playfulness and Ribaldry

The Pianoplayers: between a play and a game

In *Little Wilson and Big God*, Burgess makes use of a musical metaphor: "To Lynne the fact of engagement meant a kind of sexual passacaglia. That is, there was to be a strong ground bass of unassailable love and free variations of philandering above it. She did not understand the image: she was not musical"¹³. What the musico-erotic imagery brings out into the open first and foremost is the humorous aspect of eroticism. In *The Pianoplayers*, for instance, such light-hearted approach to sexuality through music appears very clearly. The title of the novel already establishes the idea of liberty in the practice of art. Being a piano-player rather than a pianist equals casting off all the ceremonious and solemn circumstances tied up with the traditional performance of classical music. The narrator's father is a piano-player, which is to say that he is in communion with the instrument, and that they are "jammed together".

⁷ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *A Clockwork Orange*. 29.

⁸ In a way, Burgessian *Nadsat* may be said to be the opposite of Orwellian *Newspeak* inasmuch as the saturation of language in *A Clockwork Orange* becomes a means for the reader to experience indoctrination whereas the over-simplification of language in Orwell's *1984* is a tool and a result of indoctrination. Cf. Burgess's discussion of the *Newspeak* in 1985. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1978.

⁹ Anthony Burgess. *You've Had Your Time*. London: Heinemann, 1990. 38.

¹⁰ James Guetti follows the idea of verbal musicality as a means of veiling eroticism in his critical book *Word-Music. The Aesthetic Aspect of Narrative Fiction*. Chapter IV: "Voiced Narrative: A Clockwork Orange." New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980. 54-76. According to Guetti, seeing has often been associated with knowing, so that aural narratives undermine the stability of intelligibility.

¹¹ Burgess explores the arbitrariness of signs drawing a parallel between speech and music in *A Mouthful of Air. Language and Languages, Especially English* [1992]. London: Vintage, 1993. 8-16.

¹² Anthony Burgess. *A Clockwork Orange. A Play with Music* [1987]. London: Methuen, 1998. 8-9.

¹³ Anthony Burgess. *Little Wilson and Big God*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986. 211.

Hence, the rigidity of the traditional performance is played down. The musical art becomes a *technê* to be learnt, practiced, but also enjoyed. It then takes on an erotic dimension. The fusion between the player and the instrument echoes an amorous relationship. And there appears an aspect of playfulness, both for the instrumentalist and the audience. One could apply here almost verbatim Michel Picard's idea of texts predicated on the polarity between a play and a game¹⁴. On the one hand, there is *playing*, a joyful, child-like activity, leading to an emotional stance towards the object: that is what Picard names *jocus* (a cognate of *jocundity*, *jocularly*, or *jocosity*). On the other hand, there is *game*, more serious, and adult-like approach: that is what partakes of *ludus*. The first may be seen in the piano-player's liberated attitude towards music, and his playful teaching methods¹⁵. The second may be paralleled with his giving concerts to make a living. A more serious activity is thus at stake. It is more of a game: his marathon-concert aims at achieving precise results. During the performance his status as piano-player is momentarily in jeopardy: "In a way he was turning into what he thought he never could be, Not a Pianoplayer but a Pianist"¹⁶. Playing has clearly switched here to a game.

The extended musico-erotic metaphor in *The Pianoplayers* is also based on such duplicity between what belongs to the playful and what relates to the game:

Love is an art, like music. Like music, it has to be learned. A woman is a sensitive instrument. Properly treated, she can discourse the most heavenly harmony. Ellen Henshaw's School of Love offers to all male aspirants the opportunity to learn. Play the piano of love with the skill of a Horowitz or an Oscar Peterson. Write to Box – for further details.¹⁷

Thus, eroticism appears as a playful and jocular activity, but it also demands that the performer be acquainted with a number of specific skills. Much as playing pertains to a merely hedonistic activity, it also necessitates prior training and acquiring of competence, like in a game whose rules must be learnt and abided by.

Hence, the novel reveals a humorous and playful approach to sexuality. But beside its comic and freewheeling image of the act of love, the novel raises the question of eroticism as a *technê* to be learnt and practiced like a skill. The humorous entails more serious stakes however. One plays, but one also plays for a living. In this respect, one could propound that what this duplicity between a play and a game brings about is a specific questioning of textuality itself, hovering between *ludus* and *jocus*. Moreover, intermediality raises questions about literariness as well. The Rabelaisian lists or series the text resorts to during the musical marathon tell us something about the literary signification. By the same token, the musical score at the end of the novel questions the literary sign as such.

Byrne, M/F, and musico-erotic allusiveness

It is in *Byrne* and in *M/F* that musico-erotic allusions and puns loom large. Bawdy, ribald, or light-hearted sexuality emerges in the interstices of musicality. Music seems to lend itself well to erotic suggestiveness. The musical performance is thus associated with the body and its playfulness as is the case in *The Pianoplayers*. Hence, it is music that permits the text to play down the straightforwardness of the erotic content, inasmuch as it triggers a humorous approach to sexuality. Both *Byrne* and *M/F* display a broad array of musico-erotic interrelations, somehow following in Joyce's footsteps.

First, what with striking, blowing or plucking, musical instruments are themselves suggestive of eroticism by means of specific motion and shape. When in *M/F* Miles Faber is made to imagine an incestuous intercourse, a bottle of champagne is being opened and the narrator states: "they were glued together in a kiss. The cork shot, and the waiter gave the fuming overflow to my flute"¹⁸. In *Byrne* the trombone acquires an erotic suggestiveness, through the metonymic displacement born out by the gestures of the performer:

The trombone's a descendant of the sackbut:
Its music, solemn, martial, crisply clear, is
Produced by sliding forward and then back, but
To have to lip out the harmonic series
In something like an oscular attack, but,
In a young boy like Byrne, the action wearies.
An adjunct of the adult life is missing:
One needs the muscular panache of kissing.¹⁹

The association of sexuality with the specific quality of an instrument is backed up further on: "the horn with sliding rod" is said to be symbolic of "sexual bravado"²⁰. Consequently, just as in *A Clockwork Orange*, music produces a very tangible and physical effect on the listener:

¹⁴ Cf. Michel Picard. *La lecture comme jeu*. Paris: Minuit, 1986.

¹⁵ One may draw a parallel here with some playful musical teaching methods such as Ebenezer Prout's linguistic transliteration of Bach's fugal subjects from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Many of Prout's pedagogical phrases are ribald or absurd, and Burgess must have been cognizant of Prout's books since he quotes the author in *Byrne*.

¹⁶ Anthony Burgess. *The Pianoplayers* [1986]. London: Arrow Books, 1987. 133.

¹⁷ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *The Pianoplayers*. 168.

¹⁸ Anthony Burgess. *M/F* [1971]. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973. 45.

¹⁹ Anthony Burgess. *Byrne*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1997. 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 16.

His father sang the tenor solo (badly)
 In Elgar's famed *Dream of Gerontius*.
 Of a huge orchestra careering madly
 Through a next world weirdly euphonious.
 He loved the tuba, trumpets and trombones,
 Which smote his very scrotum with their groans.²¹

If the human undergoes a sort of musicalization, or more precisely an instrumentalization of sorts, the instrument is anthropomorphised in its turn, acquiring a highly erotic power. This suggestiveness reminds one of Joyce's puns in *Ulysses*. The oral is given precedence both in Joyce and in Burgess. Byrne's voice proves attractive:

John had a treble voice so sweetly piercing
 it quite belied his boyish heathen heart.
 Old ladies, when they heard the little dear sing,
 Could not forbear to let the teardrops smart.²²

It is thanks to his voice that he manages to woo and seduce women, as it happens when he sings a solo in *Messiah* on a Christmas Eve and befriends a mezzo: "There's danger, I suppose, In singing sacred oratorios"²³. The instrumental allusiveness is reminiscent of the "Sirens" chapter in *Ulysses* where "tenors get women by the score"²⁴ and Dedalus says: "you'd burst the tympanum of her ear, man, [...], with an organ like yours"²⁵. Furthermore, the rhythmic element in music is also tinged with eroticism. In *M/F*, for instance, a musico-literary simile highlights the rhythmic element of sexual intercourse: "Her big dancing bubs were exposed, and the male was kissing the one after the other in a brisk rhythm that made him look as if he were doing a head ballet to, say, the slow movement of Haydn's *Clock Symphony*"²⁶. Once again, the rhythmic allusiveness is on a par with Joyce's "Sirens" where a series of paronomasia seem to combine the liquid, the oral, and the rhythmic:

Bloom. Flood of warm jimjam lickitup secretness flowed to flow in music out, in desire, dark to lick flow, invading. Tipping her tepping her tapping her topping her. Tup. Pores to dilate dilating. Tup. The joy the feel the warm the. Tup. To pour o'er sluices pouring gushes. Flood, gush, flow, joygush, tupthrop. Now! Language of love.²⁷

Given Burgess's fascination with Joyce, there is certainly a degree of intertextual relatedness in musico-erotic allusions between both authors. In any case, eroticism becomes inextricably welded to music, and it acquires a humorous dimension.

The comic of the pun leads to several prospects. First, the idea of humorous sex that Burgess mentions in his *Little Wilson and Big God* goes together with popular music, and particularly popular songs. Frequently enough, ribald songs bound eroticism with laughter. It is the boisterous character of songs that brings about a lively and liberated approach to sexuality. Ribald songs may remind one not only of the contemporary popular culture, but also of songs dating back to the Middle Ages what with courtly love songs or drinking and love songs of *Carmina Burana*. They also echo Joyce's frequent use of folklore music. In Burgess's works ribald songs and verses are galore, and one may simply refer to those he quotes in his confessions, or those which appear in his novels:

'I have raised and poised a fiddle,
 Which, will you lend it ears,
 Will utter music's model—
 The music of the spheres [...]

'This musing and this fear's
 Work of your maiden years.
 Why shut longer your ears?
 See how the live earth flowers.
 The land speaks my intent.
 Bear me accompaniment.'²⁸

But the pun as such is also at one with the idea of a riddle. In *M/F*, the riddle stands for the unravelling of incestuous eroticism. There too, one encounters the mechanism of the unveiling veil, abetted by the musicality of the verb:

I stripped myself totally and then set about stripping Irma. I know that the reader claims a right to be let in as voyeur of any sexual encounter required by the action of a story [...], but I have always been shy of, to use Professor's Keteki's heavy whimsy, mabdasizing public activities. All I can do is give you vulgar frigidities of symbolism, debased Blake, saying that she lay on that bed like Long Island, the sheets being blue, and that I caressed such areas as Wantagh and East Norwich till they were flaming with light, and then my calm lapping like the waters of Flanders Bay provoked by a miracle riot in Riverhead. Not, of course, the Amherst Riverhead, but there was a

²¹ *Ibid.* 15.

²² *Ibid.* 10.

²³ *Ibid.* 11.

²⁴ James Joyce. *Ulysses* [1922]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 263.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *M/F*. 136.

²⁷ James Joyce. *op.cit.* 263.

²⁸ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *Byrne*. 150.

coincidence. Eventually it was her wish more than mine that Manlingamhattan, though keeping its rightful place on the map, should have its isolating rivers sucked away, to be embraced by membranous Jersey City and South Brooklyn.²⁹

The typological verbal veil hides eroticism from view, but it discloses it just as much, bringing about a comic effect. Here too the double nature of verbal suggestiveness leads to a paradoxical statement, that of the uncovering concealment. The riddle seems to operate as a secret to be unveiled. But then, the musico-erotic dynamics once again raises questions about literariness and textuality. Burgess is known to have been criticised for his allegedly excessively overt representations of sexuality. Yet, many a time, he describes the craft of the novelist within the scope of the necessity to yield to the reader's whims and needs. And what the book-buyer seems to crave for is, as the author frequently states, "sex, violence and hard information". Talking about *Tremor of Intent*, Burgess states that its reviewers missed on the highly sexual suggestiveness of the verb. Rhythms and hyperbolic verbal musicality contribute to what he calls *pornographic realism*. The anecdote that follows clearly establishes the verbal potential as erotic stimulation:

A massive blond football-playing student shyly brought his small dark girlfriend to me and said: 'You put things right between us, sir. We'd been, you know kinda not hitting off, but that thing you read out made us both kinda horny and, you know, things were okay last night and things are okay today, so gee, thanks.'³⁰

Burgess thus wonders about the idea of pornography or, as he calls it, *pornophony*. Consequently, sexuality appears to be part and parcel of textuality, as it appears to be both a necessary component and the outcome of the somehow musical and stimulating potential of the verb.

Yet another aspect of sexuality in Burgess's works emerges through the association of eroticism and music. Indeed, both the dialectics of the unveiling veil and the dynamics of musico-erotic metaphors, similes, or puns have something to do with theatre, staging, and acting. In *M/F*, for instance, Miles Faber is evicted from school for an exhibitionist act, which echoes Diogenes's performing sexual acts in public. Elsewhere, Byrne finds a theme in *Decameron* for his one-act opera where the sexual intercourse is mimed:

Not even postwar laxness could compel
Huxley, the Sitwells to find elevation
In naked howlers miming copulation.³¹

In *Earthly Powers*, the *melophrasis* of Domenico's opera stages an erotic performance: "Christ appeared, only to reveal himself as the naked god Pan. Great love or sex duet between himself and venere. The music mimed coitus. Some woman to my right tutted loudly. The coitus was interrupted in mid-chord."³²

The theatrical naturally goes together with the operatic. Domenico's would-be *dongiovanismo* appears to be a mask worn by many a protagonist in Burgess's novels. If we read through Kierkegaard's "The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic" based on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* considered to be a template of eroticism, we realize that it is the aesthetic stance towards the object of desire that makes *Don Giovanni* so prototypical of the erotic. In this respect, repetition constitutes the core of *dongiovanismo*. But there is something more to the idea of exhibiting sexuality. In *Earthly Powers*, Domenico's *dogiovanismo* seems to be thwarted by his sterility. His art, too, seems to be rid of fecundity. The parallel between creation and procreation is tell-tale in *Byrne* who physically inherits musicality:

Clearly a passion for the sonic art
Was something that his father's voice bequeathed.
Above the rhythm of his mother's heart
The foetus heard it long before it breathed.
Erotic soarings of a tenor part
Would soothe his gummy twinges when he teethed.³³

It would seem that apart from sheer eroticism, musicality is also akin to the process of procreation as a symbol of artistic engendering.

3 Mythical Eroticism and Music

Musico-literary hybrids

This symbolical analogy between gender, procreation, and the family unit brings us to the mythical dimension of musical eroticism. In fact, both the theatrical and the operatic reveal a degree of sexual exhibitionism. But what is also disclosed is a fascination with the family unit as a sexually-invested entity. In Burgess's works the family is rarely a traditional nuclear family. It

²⁹ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *M/F*. 34.

³⁰ Anthony Burgess. *You've Had Your Time*. London: Heinemann, 1990. 129.

³¹ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *Byrne*. 21.

³² Anthony Burgess. *Earthly Powers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980. 495.

³³ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *Byrne*. 14.

is oftener tackled within the context of incestuous relationships, polygamy, miscegenation, or dysgenic conjugality³⁴. Humorous and freewheeling depiction of sexuality with the help of musical puns and riddles helps bring out graver issues. Exhibiting is sometimes tantamount to showing gender and family matters as curios. There seems to be a degree of curiosity attached to the act of exhibiting sexuality as a familial issue. Eroticism is shown or half-shown, and sometimes becomes somewhat eerie or uncanny. In this respect, twins, as they appear in *Byrne* or *M/F*, for example, are not so much templates of spitting similarity as distorted and monstrous mirror-images. In the context of the carnival or circus, twins seem to be exhibited almost as supernatural phenomena. Symbolically speaking, the amphibiaena, the strange animal with two heads which appears in the tenth chapter of *M/F*, represents an example of a curio on a par with circus freaks or cabinets of curiosities. The animal “goes backward and forward, head at each end,”³⁵ says the text, miming the mirror effect with a chiasmus: “my eyes closed, closed eyes being better than a shaving mirror”³⁶. The singularity of twins is brought up in a dialogue between Miles Faber and his doppelgänger: “-Are you calling me a fucking freak?-No, but both together we are”³⁷. Their twinship is referred to as *lusus naturae*. Thus, family relationships and sexuality are sometimes grounded on the paradigm of exhibitionist and or even peculiar miscibility.

In terms of hybridity, that pertains to textuality itself once again. It might be said that Burgess’s toying with literary genres has something to do with interbreeding. The pastiches in the last movement of *Napoleon Symphony* are predicated on what could be termed *transstylisation*³⁸, inasmuch as the different styles of British writers are supposed to echo Beethoven’s variations. *Transstylisation*, as Genette puts it, consists in stylistic variation. What with verse and prose intermingling the novel, and other trans-generic experiments, one could draw a parallel between the notion of the hybrid and Burgess’s writings.

The principle of intermixture as a concept linked both to eroticism and art appears even more clearly in the case of musico-literary alliance. Byrne’s writing an opera is closely linked to sexuality:

He started writing a bravura
Opera based on Cleopatra’s death
Exploiting all Maria’s tessitura [...]
There was as yet no spite and little poison
In this, their sexo-musical ménage [...]
A goddess is, by nature, half a whore,
And Byrne required some semen for his score.³⁹

Thus, the sexo-musical ménage echoes the musico-literary interrelationship, suffusing it with eroticism. A few pages on, the question of musical meaning is raised: “Can music really speak? Music is merely notes, all self-referring”⁴⁰. This question carries a crucial problem: can music be any useful to the novelist⁴¹? The musico-literary ménage can then be envisaged as a curious and unconventional case of hybrid relationship: a strange sorority, since one speaks of “sister arts,” or even more metaphorically, a marriage which may not be that philoprogenitive after all, since Burgess frequently refers to *musicalization* as a failure. In the epilogue to *Napoleon Symphony*, for example, the interartistic bond is called “a piece of elephantine fun designated to show that the thing cannot be done”⁴². In any case, musico-literary ménage does have something to do with eroticism and the family unit, and does say something about writing itself.

Musical meta-erotics

Structural conditioning of the literary through the musical, as is the case in *Napoleon Symphony* or in *Mozart and the Wolf Gang*, seems to resort to eroticism as well, as if the intersemiotic transposition were seen against the backdrop of sexuality. The musicalization of fiction appears to be in keeping with a somewhat natural propensity of music to eroticism.

In *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, Gilbert Durand highlights the erotic role music plays in some cultures when conceived of as a fusion of contraries⁴³. Music is said to aspire back to primitive instincts of the psyche, and its meta-erotic nature, as Durand says, is closely linked to temporal structures, be they rhythmicity or other mythical dynamics. The meta-erotic stems from musical associations with fecundity, for example. It can be said that music contains, by nature, some erotic substructure. Durand gives the example of the Chinese theory of music which divided its twelve pipes into six male and six female pipes. Furthermore, both music and eroticism partake of rhythmicity. Hence, not only is music akin to the erotic gesture, but it is symbolic of mythical and primitive aspect of sexuality as well.

If we accept to define musico-literary interrelationships as an erotic bond, the musicalization of fiction in Burgess’s works may be said to operate on the level of mythical elements. In *Napoleon Symphony*, for example, the fusion of male and female components appears in the second movement, for instance, where Napoleon and Josephine’s dreams are interrelated and entangled. Symbolical elements of water and fire, as Burgess indicates himself, lead to an opposition between the protagonists. The verse texts that precede their respective dreams are conflated later on into a contrapuntal text. Discourses overlap, and the hierarchical

³⁴ In *The Worm and the Ring*, for example, the Wagnerian model of transgressive relationships is tell-tale.

³⁵ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *M/F*. 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 104.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 100.

³⁸ Cf. Gérard Genette. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Paris: Seuil, 1982. 315.

³⁹ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *Byrne*. 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 34.

⁴¹ Cf. Anthony Burgess. *This Man and Music* [1983]. New York, London: Applause, 2001. 191.

⁴² Anthony Burgess. *Napoleon Symphony* [1974]. New York: Bantam Books, 1975. 364.

⁴³ Cf. Gilbert Durand. *Les Structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire*. Paris: Bordas, 1969. 386-390.

separation between them is partly dismantled. The female and the male interpenetrate, and perhaps it is the device of *metalepsis*⁴⁴, characterized by one level transgressing the other, that is most symbolic of such coalescence. Indeed, Napoleon reads on a newspaper scrap “La lutte était terminée. Il avait remporté la victoire sur lui-même”⁴⁵. Josephine happens to read the same text in a mirror. One reality encroaches upon the other, interrelating both sexes.

Interpreting the musicalization in the light of basic oppositions seems to be valid for Burgess’s *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* as well. A short musicalized text within the book is supposed to have been written by Stendhal. It rhythmically imitates Mozart’s *40th Symphony* in G minor: “he himself, he himself, he himself trod.” Werner Wolf examines this rhythmical transposition in his book on the musicalization of fiction⁴⁶. But what interests me here is the text’s telescoping of contraries within the framework of the sonata form. A classical symphony would obviously be structured upon the sonata form. It is certainly a cliché to say that the sonata form stages a male-female temporal itinerary through its bithemtic scheme: the exposition shows the male theme in the tonic, then the female theme comes usually in the dominant; then it unfolds through its multiple keys in the development; and, in the upshot, it leads to a symbolical reunification of the themes in the recapitulation, both stated in the tonic. Apart from its rhythmical imitation, Burgess’s text allows for a degree of semantic mythical and symbolical transposition, since it stages a male-female fusion thematically. Burgess comments on this somehow stereotypical association:

Literature, in the form of the text to be set to music, must always be ready to help the composer; whether music can help literature is another matter. [...] the reader will find a kind of fiction whose structure is derived from Mozart’s *40th Symphony* in G minor. There is a vague male essence and a vague female, at first disjunct because the principle of key, taken shamefully literally, separates them, later permitted to consummate marriage through the occupation of the room of a common tonality. [...] The symphonisation of fiction is shown to be an implausible undertaking, but things have occasionally to be done to show that they cannot be done.⁴⁷

The musico-erotic ménage is confirmed, though hardly approved of. The *musicalization of fiction* seems to be both a result and a cause of a specific kinship that has something to do with sexuality. Once again, the musico-literary ménage proves frail. If it be an offspring out of a curious wedlock, the question of its feasibility and vitality is unavoidably raised.

Examining the link between music and eroticism in Burgess’s novels, I decided to consider the *sexo-musico-literary ménage* as a concept permitting us to consider textuality and literariness themselves. Indeed, all the characteristics of the association between music and eroticism (word-music, *dongiovanismo*, puns and riddles, the duplicity between a play and a game) have something to do with metatextuality and aesthetics. Music tinged with eroticism is a recurrent feature in Burgess’s novels, and it plays various functions, but the *musico-erotic ménage* as such constitutes itself a metaphor of the intermedial turn in Burgess’s writings, a mirror which shows both a series of fruitful interrelations and a web of misalliances.

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⁴⁴ Cf. Gérard Genette. *Métalepse. De la figure à la fiction*. Paris: Seuil, 2004.

⁴⁵ Anthony Burgess. *op.cit.*, *Napoleon Symphony*. 125.

⁴⁶ Werner Wolf. *op.cit.* 57-69.

⁴⁷ Anthony Burgess. *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* [1991]. London: Vintage, 1992. 146.

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