

Alternative Texts: Audiovisual, Visual and Musical

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In 1975, the New York Times published an essay by Anthony Burgess, 'On the Hopelessness of Turning Good Books into Film,' in which Burgess presented a hierarchy with literature at the top, and ballet at the bottom, with sculpture a few rungs above ballet. As for film: the medium cannot produce anything as great as a great work of literature (15). Burgess does not mean that there are no great films, only no great films derived from literature. Perhaps he was reacting to the movie version of his novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). It was Stanley Kubrick who adapted, directed, and produced *A Clockwork Orange*; thus there is Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Kubrick's *Bone for readers*, one for filmgoers, and, ideally, a diptych for both.

Burgess does not explain where film fits into his hierarchy, perhaps because he does not consider it an art, but only a hybrid art like opera. Hierarchies by their very nature are exclusive. At least in *An Apology for Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney did a less exclusive ranking, placing pastoral at the bottom and epic at the top (116-19). Even so, he found something worthwhile to say about each genre, although heroic poetry transcends all the others. If he tried, Burgess might have found something good to say about ballet, or at least classics like *Swan Lake*, *The Firebird*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Naturally, film lacks the richness of a literary text. How could a film version of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* reproduce the novel's extraordinary first sentence: 'A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment' (3).

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The embrowning could be visualized through a series of dissolves, but that would contribute nothing to the onward thrust of the narrative, which is what filmgoers expect. This is language, not a filmic image. Language that must be savored, pondered, and visualized on the screen of the imagination, not the movie screen.

In the film version of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1971), Luchino Visconti realized he could never replicate, even visually, the haunting prose of the original. In the novella, Aschenbach is a writer, obsessed with form; he is Apollonian, not Dionysian. Instead, Visconti turned Aschenbach into a composer, a stand-in for Gustav Mahler, which was ironic, since Dirk Bogarde, who played Aschenbach, was made up to resemble Mann. Still, the basic themes transferred successfully to film: the infatuation of age with youth, the destructive power of Eros, and Aschenbach's death wish, which kept him in an environment that had been declared a health hazard. But what does it matter if the lover, at the moment of death, is welcomed by the beloved in a shimmering vision?

Clearly, we approach literature differently from film. We approach a written text on our terms, spending as little or as much time with it as we want, skipping some parts and devouring others; querying unfamiliar references and creating marginalia as if we were medieval scribes annotating a manuscript. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes compares the act of reading to the impatience some men experience during a striptease: "Our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get to the warmer parts...we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations; doing so, we resemble a spectator in a nightclub who climbs onto the stage and speeds up the dancer's striptease, tearing off her clothing, but in the same order, that is: on the one hand respecting and on the other hastening the episodes of the ritual" (11).

Barthes' comparison may be a bit sensational for some tastes, but, in principle, he is right. We do skip; "cut to the chase," we say to ourselves when the text turns prolix. In a theatrical film, one cannot skip.

(I exclude tapes and DVDs, which allow fast forwarding, a practice alien to the nature of film.) In film, time is imposed upon the viewer. A film unfolds in one time, regardless of how many years it covers—the running time.

(I am speaking specifically of the theatrical release, not the DVD, over which we have more control.) If perception is cognition, and audiovisual perception is visual thinking, then the visual text is quite different (Arnheim 14). It is not what we read, but what we see; or rather, what we read is what we see. What do we see in that extraordinary scene in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957), in which Isaac Borg recalls a childhood incident in which Sara brought him through a meadow and showed him his mother and father? The father is fishing, and the mother is knitting. The shot resembles an impressionistic painting, which is something film can achieve better than literature, since film and art are visual media. It is not a staged tableau but a painterly composition. Isaac has been momentarily transported to a bygone era, one of stillness and tranquility, of which all that remains is the afterglow of a beloved memory.

Or consider the famous sequence in another film with an original screenplay, the deep focus shot in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), in which Mary Kane hands her son Charles over to Thatcher, making the banker his sole guardian. Mary, her husband, and Thatcher are in the foreground. We see straight through to the window and into the yard, where young Charles, unaware that his fate is being sealed, is sleigh riding. We realize immediately what is happening: Mary Kane is relinquishing all rights to her son, so that he can be raised properly now that he is heir to the second richest gold mine in America. She is, in a sense, selling him to a bank. We experience the event in its totality; as if it were a painting that might be called *The Selling of Charles Foster Kane, Age 8*. Language is unnecessary because the visuals are doing the speaking. And even dialogue becomes part of the visual text when the characters speak, resulting in the fusion of word, image, and sound. When they do not speak--for example, Charles blithely sleigh riding, not knowing that this will be his last day in his Colorado home--the visuals still tell us what is happening. It is only when we have to describe what we have seen that we resort to language, either of the written or spoken variety.

A film text is a weave of the visual, the verbal, and the aural united by codes of camera movement, lighting, editing, framing, and transitional devices that propel the narrative. The camera can direct the eye's attention to what the filmmaker wants the viewer to see. Lighting determines mood--somber and forbidding, or bright and airy. Editing allows for change of scene, with one location replacing another, and for alterations in rhythm, with some scenes moving faster than others.

An editor can cut back and forth between the participants in a conversation, generating kinesis in a situation that would otherwise have been static, if photographed in long shot. Framing allows the filmmaker to position actors and objects in a predetermined way, so that some are seen in focus, and others peripherally; and to give the frame the effect of a canvas, as Bergman did in *Wild Strawberries*, and Luis Buñuel did in *Viridiana* (1961) in his notorious parody of *The Last Supper*, with a table of beggars, a blind man in the center, and the Hallelujah Chorus on the soundtrack..

What film can also do effectively is present two actions occurring simultaneously by cutting back and forth from one to another. Crosscutting has been a staple of moviemaking since the days of E. S. Porter and D.W. Griffith. There are numerous examples of crosscutting in film, but one of the most famous occurs at the end of *The Godfather* (1972), in which a baptism is crosscut with a series of assassinations ordered by the baby's godfather (Al Pacino), who is aware that they are happening while his nephew is being baptized. The crosscutting emphasizes the disparity between the administering of a sacrament and the taking of lives because of the violation of the code of omertà that takes precedence over the Fifth Commandment.

Drama can achieve a similar effect if the staging is fluid enough to imply simultaneity. A creative director can suggest that the first two scenes in act 5 of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*--Romeo's purchase of the poison and Friar John's explaining to Friar Laurence that he could not deliver the crucial letter--are unfolding simultaneously, thus heightening the impact of the double tragedy at the end. Similarly, in *Macbeth* (1.5), it is clear that as Macbeth is arriving at his castle in Inverness, Lady Macbeth is reading his letter about the witches' prophecies, so that by the time he appears, she is already plotting Duncan's murder.

In the second act of *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller forges an ironic connection between Willie Loman and his son Biff, who are exploring job possibilities at the same time. Willie, desperate for anything in sales that would not involve travel, behaves so erratically that he loses the only job he has; Biff, waiting in vain for an interview, becomes so frustrated that he leaves without the possibility even of getting a job.

In their dramatic accounts of Christ's Passion, the four evangelists (Matthew 26.57-75, Mark 14.53-72, Luke 22. 54-71, John 18.15-27) imply that Peter's denial of Christ was occurring at the same time as Christ's interrogation by the Sanhedrin—one event taking place in the courtyard, the other in the council (The New American Bible). In fiction, simultaneity can be expressed simply by a line of dialogue, as it is in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. In chapter 1, Pip is being detained in the graveyard by Magwitch at the same time as his sister is out searching for him, which Pip learns about in chapter 2. Iris Murdoch uses a different and less subtle method in *Harry and Cato*: "At about the hour when Cato Forbes was walking up and down in the mist on Hungerford Bridge, Henry Marshalson was awakening from a brief nap upon an eastbound jumbo jet (3).... Then, "at about the hour when Cato Forbes was walking to and fro...and Henry Marshalson was awakening...Gerda Marshalson and Lucius Lamb were in conference.... (9)And finally, "at about the hour" that Cato Forbes was on Hungerford Bridge, Henry Marshalson was awakening, and Gerda and Lucius were conferring, John Forbes was reading a letter from his daughter (18). Then,, Murdoch followed the classical multi-plot narrative which alternates between the plot lines, subordinating some to others and bringing each to a certain peak before moving on to the next; and implying that certain actions are occurring at the same time by using a transitional device like "meanwhile" or a bit of expository dialogue.

Let us look at two texts, a novel and its film adaptation, in which time present and time past alternate within the consciousness of the protagonist. The film, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1996), is a faithful adaptation of Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel; the story line has not been altered, and the major characters all appear. But what does not translate is Clarissa Dalloway's obsession with death. At the time that Woolf was writing the novel, she was reading the Greek tragedians, expecting to publish an essay on the tragic sense of life concurrently with her novel.

Woolf originally intended *Mrs. Dalloway* to end with Clarissa's suicide; there is a suicide in the novel, but it is that of Septimus, her mirror image. On an unnamed day in mid June, Clarissa goes flower shopping for a party she is giving that evening.

For most of us, it would simply mean a trip to the florist; to Clarissa, it is a @lark@, a @plunge@ (3)--but into what?

A new day, in which she would not feel that her life is over or that she is just an MP=s wife giving dinner parties for her husband=s friends. Yet as she makes her way to the florist, she becomes much obsessed with death, like John Webster in T.S. Eliot=s poem, *A Whispers of Immortality*,@ who could see "the skull beneath the skin" (Eliot 32).

Woolf constantly interweaves Clarissa=s carefree youth in Bourton, where every day was a lark, a plunge, with her present in Westminster, when a lark is a bit of shopping and a return to a house, where her husband may or may not come home for lunch, depending upon who offers him a invitation that he cannot refuse. Director Marleen Gorris does the same, cutting imperceptibly from present to past without the old-fashioned fade out/ fade in that would gently usher the viewer into a flashback. Instead, she follows Woolf and turns the past into a world parallel to the present.

Before reaching the florist, Clarissa passes a bookstore and sees in the window a copy of Shakespeare=s plays, open to the verse, *A Fear no more the heat of the sun, nor the furious winter=s rages*.@ Woolf does not cite the source; that is not the point. The point is that Clarissa not only recognizes the text, but also identifies with it, as if she yearns to be released from the same fears. Woolf, however, goes further; in the same context, she speaks of *A the well of tears*@ (9) that sprang up in everyone, men and women, after World War I, a war that, as Ezra Pound wrote, *was fought A for an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization* (Friar and Brinnin 129)." So much for western culture, the wasteland where corpses are planted in gardens and the Tarot replaces Revelation.

A Fear no more the heat of the sun, nor the furious winter=s rages.@ The source is Shakespeare=s *Cymbeline* (4,2). It is the first verse of a dirge (lines 258-80) that *Cymbeline=s* sons sing over the body of the disguised Imogen, whom they believe is dead (Kittredge 1362).

.. At this point, the two young men, kidnapped as infants by Belarius, do not know that they are Cymbeline=s sons, or that Imogen, disguised as the page Fidele, is their sister.

They sing this poignant dirge over her body. Even if one does not know the context, it is evident from the first stanza that these words are intended not for the living, but for the dead: AThou thy worldly task has done,/Home art gone and ta=en thy wages/Golden lads and girls all must/As chimney sweepers come to dust.@ But, as Woolf insists, these lines are not just personal, reflecting Clarissa=s death wish, now that her worldly task is done and she is simply waiting for nature to realize it and deliver her to the nothingness for which she yearns, and that Woolf herself achieved sixteen years after the novel=s publication; they also denote cosmic suffering, the tears that poured forth after World War I, very much like Virgil=s *lacrimae rerum* (Aeneid, 1,655)-- literally Athe tears of things,@ not idle tears but those that spring from human affairs, such as wars. There is no way Afear no more the heat of the sun@ could be visualized.

These are words, words, words. Instead, the verse is heard as voice over. It seems to emanate from Clarissa=s consciousness, reflecting her frame of mind when she returns home after a morning that did not offer the plunge she was anticipating, feeling like an appendage after the maid informs her that her husband will be lunching with Lady Bruton. No sooner do we hear the prophetic verse than Clarissa sees the face of Septimus, a World War I veteran suffering from what today would be called extreme postwar traumatic stress syndrome, reflected in her bedroom window. In the novel, she is unaware that Septimus is in the same general vicinity during her morning lark and that their paths could easily have crossed. Eventually, the reader learns that Septimus and Clarissa are doubles, but not so early. However, in the film, while Clarissa is selecting the flowers, Septimus is peering through the florist=s window. A car backfires, reminding Septimus of the sounds of war. Clarissa turns around and sees his horror-stricken face against the window. From the empathetic look on the face of Vanessa Redgrave, who gives a superb performance as Clarissa Dalloway, we sense that some kind of connection has been forged between them. Significantly, Clarissa sees her mirror image reflected in a window and then in a mirror. She understands him, even though she knows nothing about him, but clearly feels they are kindred spirits. This is cinema, not literature; the visual image, not the written word.

At the end of the novel, the party has been hugely successful until the arrival of the psychiatrist who had been treating Septimus and recommended that he be institutionalized.

He is late, he explains, because a patient leaped from a window and impaled himself on a spiked fence. The details are too much for Clarissa, who excuses herself and retires to an empty room to reflect on what she has just heard. In one of Woolf's greatest interior monologues, Clarissa muses on suicide as the flinging away of life, the ultimate act of defiance. "Fear no more the heat of the sun," she reflects. "She felt somehow very much like him-- the young man who had killed himself." Whether or not she knows it is Septimus is immaterial. He had done what she could not do (and what Virginia Woolf could); his death redeemed her drab existence, if only for the remainder of the evening. "He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun" (186). All Clarissa wanted was a successful party; and that she got.

Much of the monologue is rendered as voiceover in the film, but what is masterful about the novel, and less so in the film, is that it is only at the end that we know that Septimus and Clarissa are doubles, and that unlike Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which the composite being perishes, in Woolf, only the mirror image dies, returning the other to a state of wholeness until death becomes her double.

Clearly the density of the original cannot transfer to the screen. No great work of literature can. What we have is a version, director Marleen Goris's and screenwriter Eileen Atkins's respectful, perhaps reverentially so, homage to Woolf for those who never read the novel, read it and forgot it, or could not finish it. And for those who hold it dear, the film is a visual corollary.

Can a great film come from a great work of literature? Burgess says no, but it is perfectly possible to make a great film inspired by a great work of literature. Students who have never read Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and think they do not have to after having seen David Lean's film version would fail a test based solely on the plot. The film is Dickensian in its *mise-en-scène*: the fogbound graveyard where Pip encounters Magwitch, Miss Havisham's decaying estate, and her disintegrating wedding gown all bear the novel's imprint.

But this is David Lean's *Great Expectations*, not Charles Dickens's. Lean specifically told the screenwriters, "Choose what you want to do from the novel and do it proud. If necessary, cut characters, don't keep every character and just take a sniff of each one" (Phillips 105). He might have added, "If need be, invent." Miss Havisham is obviously dead by the end of the novel (we are never told how).

In the film, her rotting wedding gown catches fire, and she burns to death. In the novel, Pip and Estella meet again after an eleven-year absence, during which Estella married and lost her husband. Since Pip is unmarried, as is Estella, Dickens arranged a tentatively happy ending. In the film, Pip returns to Satis House, where he finds Estella living in solitude like Miss Havisham. He disenchants her by tearing down the curtains and letting the sun shine in, thus freeing Estella from the past and for himself as the two of them rush out of the house of shadows into the sunlight and a brighter day. We read a book one way, a film in another, and a painting in a way that is a combination of both. Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* was inspired by the myth of Daedalus and Icarus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.183-235). However, the artist is only using the myth as a point of departure for something far more disturbing than a son's disobeying his father by flying too close to the sun, which melts his wings of wax and sends him plunging into the Aegean.

In Ovid, a ploughman and a shepherd look up at the sky in amazement (Miller 420). In the painting, there is a ploughman in the foreground, trudging behind a horse-drawn ploughshare, but his gaze is riveted to the earth. There is also a shepherd with his sheep and his sheepdog. The shepherd is resting on his staff, looking away from the sea. The spectator's gaze is then directed across the shore and onto the sea. On the left, there is one of those chalk-white Mediterranean towns. But the narrative is continuing on the right. Where is Icarus? we wonder. Then we see two legs thrashing about in the water, the rest of the body submerged. Will no one help him? A ship seems ready to sail. A man is up on the rigging and must have seen what happened. Another man is fishing off the shore. He must have seen, too, but has probably caught something.

Breughel did not call his painting *The Fall of Icarus*, but *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. It is the landscape that is important, and everything that goes on in it. Plowing a field, shepherding a flock, catching a fish, and setting sail are more important than someone's falling out of the sky.

If we feel a certain detachment from the tragedy, rendered in such impersonal detail, it is because, as Denis Dutton observed, “human beings like a prospect from which they can survey a landscape, and at the same time experience a sense of safety, particularly if what they see may be disturbing (21).” Thus we read the painting at a remove, creating a gulf between ourselves and the figures in the landscape.

The painting’s objectivity discourages an emotional reading, the kind inspired by, for example, Rubens’ *Prometheus Bound*, in which Prometheus is chained to a rock where an eagle pecks at his liver.

Thus, one reads a painting differently from a written text like *Mrs. Dalloway*. But before the experience can be rendered in words, the spectator must process the visual data, absorbing them before they can be articulated.

Even non-narrative art has to be experienced before it can be explained. Miró’s *Le Cheval Ivre* (*The Drunken Horse*) is a wonderful piece of whimsy. One can discern the outline of a horse amid a skein of loops and dabs of blue, black, and red. The tail is bushy like a squirrel’s, and the eyes are spidery splotches of blue. Miró seems to have painted a picture of the horse’s personal unconscious, the way a drunken horse might have depicted itself, if a horse could become inebriated and paint how it felt..

It is tempting to speculate how the Warchowski brothers, who created the *Matrix* Trilogy (*The Matrix*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *The Matrix Revolutions*) might make a film about the ideal way in which art lovers could communicate what they feel to each other, without resorting to the spoken word. Instead, they would carry minicomputers that would register reactions in a symbolic language characteristic of a visual medium, so that each would know what the other is experiencing, instead of the exchange of smiles and nods that occur when two people are equally transfixed and momentarily bonded by the same work of art.

As with any medium, the more knowledgeable the spectator is, the better he or she can read the work. This is especially true in paintings with classical themes. Spectators who have never been exposed to Greek mythology would only see in Corregio’s *Venus, Mercury and Cupid* a nude female, a nude male wearing an odd hat with wings protruding from either side, and nude child with wings on his back.

Similarly, Bernini's magnificent sculpture, *Apollo and Daphne* would translate as a garlanded male standing behind a naked female with leaf-like hair and fingers, and bark rising up her right leg. Readers of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.452-567) would know that Bernini's inspiration was the myth of Apollo and Daphne, who, to avoid being ravished by the amorous Apollo, pleaded with her father, the river god Peneus, to grant her perpetual virginity. Peneus did more than oblige her; he transformed her into a laurel tree, which Apollo embraced as if it were human.

Biblically inspired art is more complex, often demanding a knowledge of both Scripture and history. Antoniazzo's *The Annunciation* seems to be a typical representation of the angel Gabriel appearing before Mary, kneeling on a wooden platform, and informing her that she is to be the mother of God. The space between the angel and Mary is occupied by a Dominican monk and three young women in white, kneeling in adoration. Reading the painting (actually a panel) requires the services of an art historian familiar with the fifteenth century Church. The Dominican was Cardinal Juan de Torquemada, uncle of Tomás de Torquemada, who established a fund that would provide dowries for needy young women (Lev vi). Each 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation, the Pope would present the dowries to the recipients, represented by the three white-clad young women. Thus, two different events, centuries apart, come together in one painting, illustrating the malleability of time in the spatial arts.

A similar connection between the work and its source occurs in literature with texts generated by other texts. Familiarity with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* makes it possible to see the correspondences in Jean Rhys' *Wide Saragaso Sea*; knowledge of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* allows for an interpretation of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Erasers* as a modern reworking of the Oedipus myth as a detective story; and of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, for an appreciation of the way Eugene O'Neill transplanted the Greek trilogy to post-bellum New England in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It may be a truism, but the more one brings to a text in any medium, the more one derives from it.

A common sight in New York subways is singers and musicians engrossed in their scores, both vocal and instrumental. They are engaged in the act of reading—not words, but notes, and in some cases, words as well, if they are lieder recitalists and opera or oratorio singers. Their scores are enclosed within covers, like a book or a journal. Their scores are texts, musical texts.

Can they hear, in some way, what they read? Trained musicians can sight read a piece of music in much the same way that advanced language students can—or should be able to—sight read an unfamiliar passage. In upper-level Classics courses, a sight passage is often part of a final examination. At first, the experience is daunting. But once a student has developed a facility in the language, it is like reading something for the first time and understanding it at least in a basic way.

Music admits of extremes. On the one hand, there is a genius like pianist Glenn Gould, who rarely practiced and could absorb a score without hearing it performed. At three, he had perfect pitch (Bazzana 46) and could easily sight read a score like Greig's *Piano Concerto in A Minor*. In high school, he read and assimilated the geometry textbook by October, committing it to memory as he went through it (Bazzana 52). On the other hand, there is the great opera basso, Ezio Pinza, who admitted he could never sight read: "At the time I entered the [Bologna] conservatory, I could not identify a single note on paper, and to this day I cannot sight read" (56). The reason is that Pinza's voice teacher encouraged him to leave the conservatory after a year and learn more roles. And yet with the help of accompanists and teachers who played the score for him, Pinza absorbed the music and became a world-famous artist. Pinza's case is unusual because he mastered the text in the way in which it was written: as sound.

But he did not hear it in the way other singers do—by picking up the score and accompanying themselves on the piano, or, as singers on the subway do, by mouthing it, with their eyes indicating that they are experiencing something akin to the actual sound.

An orchestral score, however, is more complex than a piano score. Can a conductor open a score, with which he or she is unfamiliar, and read it, hearing at least a semblance of what it would sound like with full orchestra?

When the question was posed to Leon Botstein, president of Bard College and conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, he replied: "Indeed, yes, score reading involves opening a score and reading it. One reads a text of music and imagines the sound. The differences between an orchestra score and a piano score are timbre and variety of sound and the need to transpose. But there is a difference between hearing something in one's head and acoustic reality. They are different perceptions" (Botstein, email). Interestingly, President Botstein used the word "text." Thus, he thought of a score as a musical text, which when read, offers an approximation, an eidolon, of the music—but enough so that one can envision aurally what it would sound like in performance. It is fascinating to spend time with a performer, like Jon Garrison, former tenor with the Metropolitan Opera and New York City Opera, who explained how he prepared to sing Admetus in Gluck's *Alceste*. First, he studied the music; observing the markings, the key, the rhythm, and the tempo, to see how they supported the libretto, which, to him, was equally important.

As he went through the score, he noted sustained chords requiring him to speak conversationally. Discovering broken notes, held notes, and passages that were angular and in different metres, he exclaimed, "Look at all that ink in this passage. More ink, more notes" (Garrison, personal interview). Garrison read, hummed, sang softly sometimes, and at others made the kind of sounds that English teachers do when introducing students to metre—the iambic pentameter, for example, by chanting *da-dum, da-dum, da-dum, da-dum, da-dum* and then explaining, with examples, the substitutions (trochees and anapests for iambs) that variegates the rhythm.

When Garrison was asked to prepare Kurt Weill's *Four Whitman Songs*, he first examined the text, since it was that of a major American poet. In "Beat! Beat! Drums!" when Weill got to "So fierce you whirr and pound you drums/So shrill you bugles blow" (Scully and Blodgett 283), the music, marked forte, becomes so agitated that the performer has to sound the same. Garrison insists that, in the art song, the singer must analyze the poem's language and structure, approaching them as if one were explicating a literary text.

Burgess was both right and wrong in his elevation of literature over the other arts. Naturally, filmmakers, artists, and composers would scoff at his hierarchy. There can be a hierarchy of literary forms, as Sidney has demonstrated. Certainly no one could consider Virgil's *Eclogues* superior to the *Aeneid* or Dante's *La vita nuova* to the *Divine Comedy*. But the arts are not genres; they are forms of expression in different media that one might rank in terms of preference, but not in terms of superiority.

What they do have in common is their dependence on critical discourse for their interpretation and evaluation. Critics and scholars of any art form are dependent on words, the stuff that, when refined and perfected, can become literature—perhaps not imaginative literature, but at least well-written prose exemplifying the Earl of Roscommon's belief, quoted by Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Criticism*, that "Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well" (line 724). Good writing is good writing in any genre or discipline.

Even in the case of a non-literary art like painting or music, one still speaks of the "literature" about it, using the word in its root sense—that which has been written about it.

Critics of any art form must aspire to the level of the form itself, realizing that their criticism may never reach that stage, but nonetheless attempting to come as close as possible to being a reliable ancilla. That requires humility and the realization that, as a critic, one serves a text—written, visual, audiovisual, or musical—that may have achieved a level of excellence in its own medium, but it not superior to one in another.

As Wallace Stevens observed in "Of Modern Poetry," art can ascend to a plane no higher than the mind, "beyond which it has no will to rise" (Ellman and O'Clair 253). The written word allows critics in any medium to attempt the ascent to a work of art and bring the artist's vision down to the reader, realizing that what they produce is a simulacrum of the original, but written in as gemlike prose as can be fashioned from a flawless stone. Fairleigh Dickinson University

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