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***“Edgar Allan Poe: A Case Study for the
Necessity of a ‘Word and Music’
Vocabulary”***

Charity McAdams*

* The University of Edinburgh

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Charity McAdams

The University of Edinburgh

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As the first in a panel submission that explores “the role of music in literature,” this paper champions an intermedial approach to “musico-literary studies” by revealing the complications that arise in “musico-literary” texts written by authors who describe their works in terms of other media, or whose texts resist medial definition in the qualities that they either exhibit or elicit in the reader. When Edgar Allan Poe writes that “Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose from its very definitiveness,” he creates a triangular relationship between “music,” “poetry,” and “idea” that implies an aesthetic that encompasses various forms of art, resisting definition between “music” and “poetry” as medial forms (Letter to B— 11). In doing so, Poe creates a dilemma for criticism that attempts to discuss the relationship between Poe and music and his works and music using only those terms. Thus, using Edgar Allan Poe as a case study, this paper attempts to break down the various ways in which critics have responded to the relationship between Edgar Allan Poe and music by using one possible intermedial terminological framework from a “word and music studies” origin in order to reveal the difficulties that arise when questions of intermediality become questions of an artist’s aesthetics.

That Edgar Poe was, in his own words, “profoundly excited by music,” has not escaped critical attention (Letter to James Russell Lowell 257). Critics have, however, responded to the subject of Poe and music in varying ways reflective of differing intermedial modes of literature and music. However, research into Edgar Poe and music reveals a lack of a useful terminological or theoretical framework that would allow a greater coherence between scholarly work and a stronger

progression of ideas in the field. In fact, scholarship that takes up the issue of Poe and music often either does so in the context of a larger non-intermedial focus, or ends with a lack of a contextual sense of addition to a broader and burgeoning field of Poe and music studies^[1]. Musicalized fiction encompasses a broad, vague and often debatable genre, and the heart of it, the definition of music in fiction, remains an untouched subject across the board in Poe and music scholarship. Because of this lack of a coherent terminological framework and subsequent lack of objective definitions of “music” as they find it in Poe, critics conflate the medial form of “music” with an undefined aesthetic appeal.

It may be equally effective to take a metaphorical stance or to make a theoretical analysis of musicalized fiction, but the problem that arises in analyses of Poe and music is the confusion of one for the other. Thus, one of the basic elements of literature and music studies that would assist in building a coherent discussion among Poe scholars interested in his use and understanding of music is the terminology of intermedial theory in any of its forms. In appropriating such terminology, scholars could begin to separate theoretical and metaphorical analyses, drawing attention to their tactics in order to create a critical dialogue. One such set of terminology is that put forward by Werner Wolf. Although his discussion of the “forms” of ‘musico-literary intermediality’ is by no means the only one available^[2], its application to the existent field of Poe and music studies sheds light on the problems with current discussions of Poe and music, opening the door for a new, organized and interrelated field of Poe and music scholarship through appropriation of a new theoretical vocabulary. It is not that Poe scholars or those in similar fields need to appropriate Wolf’s terminology, this paper simply uses his framework as one possibility, but that a framework such as that he proposes would force scholars to categorize and face head-on the question of what they mean by “music” when discussing Poe’s relationship to it.

In “Musicalized Fiction and Intermediality,” Werner Wolf re-organizes the terminological framework for “word and music studies” previously described by other critics, such as Steven Paul Scher. Wolf diagrams two basic forms of

‘musico-literary intermediality’ as the “overt/direct intermediality,” such as vocal music, and “covert/indirect intermediality,” which is the form into which studies in Poe and music generally fit (52). Of the “main forms of covert musical presence in literature,” Wolf describes three main categories: “positional forms,” including the “textual,” “para-textual” and “con-textual,” the “referential forms,” including “general reference to music” and “specific reference to a musical genre or composition,” and “technical forms,” including “imaginary content analogies,” “formal and structural analogies,” and “word music” (Ibid). Wolf describes the “textual” “positional” form as references to music “in the main text of the literary work (e.g. when characters engage in a discussion on music),” which takes form in Poe studies in characters such as the narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” discussing Usher’s musical experiments (47). The “para-textual” may engage with titles indicative of music, which would include various of Poe’s poems, such as “Hymn,” and the “contextual” deals with authorial commentary on “his or her musical intentions,” which are prevalent in Poe’s criticism and critical theory (Ibid.). The “referential form” then includes a work’s “general reference to music” or “specific reference to a musical genre or composition,” which Poe does a few rare times in texts such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Spectacles,” but also “verbal music,” possibly including a kind of ekphrastic element of literature and music, which, as previously noted, could be an area of debate for Poe and music studies (52). Ultimately, the least-explored and most often confused areas of “musico-literary” analysis in Poe’s work stems from the “technical forms,” or what Wolf describes as “imaginary content analogies,” “a translation of a particular, real or fictitious piece of music into literary images or scenes” (51), or “formal and structural analogies,” which “consist in creating the impression of a musical presence through the non-musical signifieds and (optionally) the signifiers of the text, so that some musical form thereby emerges as signified” (49), and the more broadly coined and understood “word music” (52). All three of these technical forms exist, apart from “word music,” without name in Poe and music criticism, “word music” being the only term that purely literary critics have a term for in analyzing Poe’s literary relationship to music.

In re-adjusting these categories of intermediality, Wolf argues that the difficulty presented by this “covert intermediality” “applies to the recognition of musicalized fiction: intermediality here must often be ‘discovered’ and this discovery justified” (53). Although part of Wolf’s argument deals with detailed distinctions between previously defined categories of “word and music studies” and his own, an argument that is central to theoretical distinctions in “word and music studies,” his overall argument for the categorization of the musicalization of fiction can be used to highlight the stagnancy of “musico-literary” analysis in Poe studies due to this lack of categorical understanding and framework. Indeed, critics often focus on the “recognition of” Poe’s “musicalized fiction” alone, their works “justifying” their “discovery” of this connection, resulting in a conflation of these various forms of musical presence in literature.

One of the few critics whose work crosses into analysis of “overt/direct intermediality” in Poe is Burton Pollin, who is also one of the strongest vocal proponents for the study and creation of unified scholarship for Edgar Poe and music. In “Poe as a Writer of Songs” and “Poe’s ‘Eldorado’ Viewed as a Song of the West” he argues that some of Poe’s poems were originally intended as actual folk-songs, and his other publications focus largely on the transformation of Poe’s works into vocal music later on, as he published multiple collections of titles of musical works based on the writings of Poe^[3]. Of Poe’s “covert/indirect intermediality,” Pollin does not publish much, and nearly every other critic who writes in this area does not take as direct an approach in terms of “overt intermediality.” Because of this distinction, Pollin is the one of the most successful critics of Poe and music; one never has to question what he means by “music,” as he does not discuss “music” metaphorically, and he only refers to the possibility of Poe’s works as actual folk songs or to pieces of music that have cited Poe. “Musicalized fiction” does not really come into play in Pollin’s analyses, although the argument could be made that Pollin implies that various covertly intermedial textual clues exist to implicate an overtly musical purpose in Poe’s pieces. With the exception of authors such as Christopher Rollason, who

takes various stances on Poe only in order to examine the larger theme of Poe's influence on Bob Dylan, arguing that Roderick Usher "may be seen as a prototype of the singer-songwriter whose practice within the text uncannily anticipates early Dylan," critics of Poe and music studies generally take a wider and less defined approach (Rollason 45). Rather, they crossover between the 'positional,' 'referential,' and 'technical forms' of "musico-literary" analysis.

There are, in fact, any number of discussion threads regarding Poe and music that occur in conjunction with specific works. For instance, Ronald Bieganowski describes the valet of "The Fall of the House of Usher" as a "valet to a family with a 'passionate devotion to the intricacies...of musical science,'" who "silently conducts the narrator through intricate passages to Roderick's study, a wild composition representing his imaginative state. Without musical score or baton, the valet conducts the narrator through Usher's creation" (207). Making a rhetorical nod to the musical elements of the text, Bieganowski quotes Poe in describing the Ushers as devoted "to the intricacies...of musical science" and opens the text to the metaphor of the "wild composition" that the valet navigates "without musical score or baton." While Bieganowski does not continue his exploration of the metaphor, he uses it to highlight how important he perceives music to be in Poe's text. Rather than becoming an analysis of the text as a 'formal or structural analogy' to music, the comment relies on the impact of metaphor to indicate to author's 'discovery' of the importance of music in the text.

Similarly, in his analysis of "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," Mark Canada writes that "what eventually saves Pym [...] is [...] a sound that Pym compares to music: he drops his knife, which makes a 'rattling sound' as it hits the floor. He writes, 'Never did any strain of the richest melody come so sweetly to my ears'. Unlike language, music has a place [...] in the realm Pym explores" (67). Canada ties the idea of music with the right brain in his argument that Pym explores only that side of consciousness, but Canada does not move beyond this link to discuss what that connection, in terms of music alone, means in Poe's fiction, or even the

story itself. In this excerpt, Canada implies much about music's place in Poe's literature without providing any framework for its analysis. Rather, the example from "Pym" works to prove the importance of music in Poe's literature, to provide its 'discovery,' rather than to move beyond that discovery into deeper analysis. Moreover, examples similar to these, or discussions of music in Poe that do not fit into an overall framework of music's place in Poe's work as a whole recur continuously in Poe studies, and often do not illuminate how critics tend to think of Poe's relationship to music as a whole. Even when critics attempt to focus on various forms of 'musico-literary intermediality,' their lack of reference to this, or any, intermedial theoretical framework destroys any analytic illumination of the text, continually conflating forms and diminishing the critic's argument to the existence, the proof of music in Poe's literature alone.

In terms of Wolf's categories, most critical analyses of Poe and music can be categorized as 'word music' analyses, which are more commonly rooted in a literary historical framework and which Wolf describes as "the suggestion of a musical presence conveyed by a foregrounding of the acoustic dimension of the verbal signifiers (which, however, remain **verbalsignifiers** and thus do not become, but only imitate, music)" (Emphasis in original 48-49), and which he quotes Scher as describing as aiming towards "poetic imitation of musical sound" (Qtd. in Wolf 46). Whether or not certain critics maintain that the "imitation" or "suggestion" of "musical presence" or "musical sound" actually "become" music does not even arise as a point of comparison. Rather, critics distinguish between Poe's poetry and his fictional prose as conveyances of "word music^[4]," focusing more often on poetry than prose, but these distinctions do not appear to go much beyond individual preference. The more prevalent distinction that critics make is between their perception of Poe's "word music" as either a benefit or detriment to his works.

The poetic effect of Poe's "word music" itself, as well, varies from critic to critic. For James Albert Harrison, "The Bells" is a "melodious *onomato-poem*, the most perfect imitation in word, sound, and rhythm, in suggestion, in exquisite mimicry,

of its theme ever written” (Emphasis in the original 287). Harrison’s argument, while engaging with the idea of the literal “melody” of the poem, does not overtly discuss poetic effect, except that it introduces this idea of “exquisite mimicry,” which Harrison goes on to describe as the “very spirit — and spirituality — the essence and *aura* of the musical bell-metal” (Ibid), an idea which also occupies a ‘referential form’ of intermediality. The idea that the poem is “melodious” indicates that Harrison stakes a claim on “The Bells” as a type of ‘word music,’ its “melody” meshing with its “imitation,” its “suggestion,” and its “exquisite mimicry.” As such, it becomes a ‘technical form’ of music in literature, highlighting the fact that Harrison never explains how, specifically, the poem describes the “*aura* of the musical bell-metal.” Whether the “imitation in word” refers to a kind of “verbal music,” which Wolf describes as “a form of **specific**, quasi-‘intertextual’ intermediality, a kind in which music, that is, an imaginary or real piece of music, becomes a specific referent of the verbal text” (Emphasis in Original 49), or whether the imitation revolves around the “general reference to music” in citing bells, whether the “suggestion” of the poem is that of its ‘formal and structural analogy’ to a kind of bell-music, or whether the “suggestion” of the poem is a kind of ‘imaginary content analogy,’ is unexplained. While each of these categorical distinctions of ‘musico-literary intermediality’ offers a provocative take on the poem, Harrison chooses to sum up his statement with the idea that, more than onomatopoeia, more than sound, more than even the broader concept of ‘word music’ itself, the “melodious” quality of Poe’s poem imbues it with a “spirit,” an “essence” and an “*aura*.” Harrison does not break down exactly how the poem achieves this effect, but the link remains strong between the “musical” quality of the poem and the oblique “spirit” with which it endows the poem.

This coupling of the ‘musical’ quality of Poe’s works and the endowment of an oblique poetic effect pervades criticism that attempts to focus on ‘word music’ without reference to other modes of intermediality that one of Poe’s works introduces. Norman Foerster writes:

[...] a writer [...] some time ago quoted [King Lear...] as an instance of those moments when the play ceases for us and we are transported by the magical music of the lines to the universal, the absolute. These moments occur, we must agree, in all the greatest literature; but when the writer of the article goes on to quote the first stanza of 'To Helen,' [Poe's Poem] and to remark, 'They are like music rising at the wave of a great conductor's wand' [...], one cannot but feel that he has unconsciously changed the subject [...] it does not rise above the normal experience of life but sinks beneath it. (327)

To Foerster, the material 'musicality' of Poe's language is the opposite of magic; rather than raise by divine enchantment the soul of the reader to "vague reverie," it draws attention to its own disfigured nature to "sink beneath" the "normal experience of life." It is not that Foerster denies the possibility of the poetic effect, the transformational quality of music, but that he denies Poe's ability to exhibit it. In doing so, however, Foerster claims that "all the greatest literature" has "these moments" of transformational "magical music." *King Lear*, the only text cited, among others, must include "these moments," which at this point may stem from 'word music,' which Foerster discusses in the article, or may indeed stem from every other 'technical form' of music in literature. What particular 'technical' or 'referential' qualities that these other texts have as opposed to Poe's, however, remain unnamed. Partially due to a lack of a named theoretical framework, Foerster can not even begin to give voice to the lack of literary 'music,' instead allowing his argument to degenerate into that of 'discovery' or lack thereof of music in various forms of literature, rather than a discussion of the forms that music in literature may take.

Similarly, when Celia Whitt writes about her perception of the musicality of Poe's short story "The Assignment," she begins by describing all of those characteristics in favor of sonorous 'word music,' writing that the story evinces "the first time in his writing [that] Poe reaches the high point of his rhythmic, melodic prose, and in the third stanza of the embedded poem, also for the first time, the high point of his

musical effects in poetry” (124). Whitt uses rhythm and melody in direct exchange with “musical effects,” supporting the conceptualization Poe’s ‘word music’ as being sound alone. She goes on in the article, however, to write of the story that “[...] music precedes death,” revealing that Whitt also takes a more symbolic, either ‘referential,’ or possibly ‘formal’ and ‘analogical’ view of Poe’s music in literature, as well, in noting its association with death (130). Whitt does not, in other words, explain whether Poe’s ‘word music,’ precedes death, whether music is referred to in the text prior to death, whether the textual images or structures create something akin to music, or how any of those concepts work and what they might mean in terms of music’s place in the text and music’s relation to death in Poe’s works as a whole. Without a conceptual framework, Whitt’s remarks again fall along the line of ‘discovery’ of music in Poe’s literature.

A similar problem even befalls critics who take a more musicological and historical approach such as Jack Sullivan, who in discussing Poe’s influence on Debussy and Ravel notes that “the elaborate depiction of life’s fragility through a verbal texture alive with musical sounds and images was, for Poe, the very definition of Beauty in art — and art itself become the only antidote to that fragility” (84). For Sullivan, “musical sounds and images” create a “verbal texture alive,” forming an undefined organic effect, or “Beauty,” for however he perceives it. Moreover, that Sullivan combines “musical sounds and images” in this “verbal texture alive” of Poe’s implies that sounds may be musical and images may be musical, as well. Indeed, in saying so, one may assume that Poe’s texts can be analyzed in terms of all various ‘technical forms,’ whether they represent ‘imaginary content analogies’ of unnamed pieces of music, whether they create ‘formal and structural analogies’ to the idea of a piece of music, or whether they are ‘word music’ alone that work in conjunction with images. Sullivan never takes the textual analysis to any of these areas. His comments lack a theoretical framework for naming the ways in which the ‘musico-literary intermediality’ occurs in Poe, stagnating Sullivan’s argument in the realm of “discovery” of a

“verbal texture alive with musical sounds” in Poe that the reader must somehow assume that he has found.

In fact, it is this recurring idea of the musical “indefiniteness of meaning” that often enmeshes Poe’s ‘word music’ and the images his works create. Through this “indefiniteness of meaning” critics begin to focus on music as a poetic effect alone, harnessing a function, in Poe’s works. John Irwin’s work on “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym” exemplifies this idea of music as an indefinite amalgam of sound and image when he discusses how Poe can “transfer the point between waking and sleeping into the realm of memory,” going on to say that, to portray this originally, and not just through “dream images,” Poe must:

[...] suggest something musical rather than visual, or perhaps some blending of the two that reflects the ‘blending between wakefulness and sleep,’ some visual music. As Pym nears the curtain of mist, he says, ‘At intervals there were visible in it wide, yawning, but momentary rents, and from out these rents, within which was a chaos of flitting and indistinct images, there came rushing and mighty, but soundless winds, tearing up the enkindled ocean in their course’ (3: 241-42). This vision combines a glimpse of ‘flitting and indistinct images’ with a traditional image of natural audibility (a rushing wind) and thus of natural musicality (as in the trope of the Aeolian harp), but with the musical component rendered ‘soundless’ and thus visually represented by the fleeting indistinctness of the images. (109)

Irwin tangles his acknowledgement of the ‘referential form’ of music in Poe’s work, or “the trope of the Aeolian harp” invoked with the wind in the scene, with the ‘technical form’ of music in the work, or the “flitting and indistinct images,” to discuss Poe’s music as an indefinite whole. Indeed, the “trope of the Aeolian harp” is invoked, but it is through “soundless winds,” and the images create “a chaos,” yet are “indistinct.” Rather than use a critical ‘musico-literary’ theoretical framework to parse out this argument, exploring the ways in which the

‘referential’ and ‘technical’ forms of music work with or against one another in the text, Irwin chalks the scene up to “some visual music,” the lack of terminology forcing him to take the ‘you see what I mean’ approach to the analysis.

An example of these blurring ‘forms’ is again exhibited in the work of Daniel Hoffman, who similarly speaks of the symbols, images, and ideas of music in Poe while at the same time speaking of the material ‘word music’ of Poe’s works:

When Edgarpoe has really set his lyre within the sky he is capable of a lovely music, a lyrical movement, a fortuitous lilt of chiming sounds. [...] Occasionally Edgarpoe strikes on the lute-strings of his heart a few chords which sound as sweetly as do any struck by Shelley or Byron. Who cannot but be charmed by the melodiousness of rhyme and alliteration, the lulling lilt, and the indefiniteness of meaning imposed by a syntax purposely inconclusive, of the last stanza in ‘To One in Paradise’ [...]. (53)

While Hoffman assumes Poe’s symbols of the “lyre,” of the “lilt,” of the “melodiousness,” the “indefiniteness,” and the “mellifluous” with tongue-in-cheek self-awareness designed to reflect in prose Poe’s “*very uneven ear*,” the fact remains that Hoffman discusses both Poe’s ‘word music,’ his “rhyme and alliteration,” with that recurring “indefiniteness of meaning” that creates the idea, or image of music in his works. Poe’s ‘textual’ references to the lyre, to song, and to music, Poe’s ‘para-textual’ terminology of his poems as “hymns” and “paeans,” Poe’s ‘contextual’ musico-poetic theory, Poe’s ‘word music,’ his “indefiniteness of meaning” as a possible “series of highly poetic images,” and the possible structure of his poems as “songs” conflate into this metaphoric image of “Edgarpoe” as his own seraph harper, “Israfel.”

Indeed, it is this metaphorical issue that theoretical frameworks such as Wolf’s could help to separate from other analyses. Wolf’s specific framework may not always provide the answer, yet it serves as an example, or “a tentative contribution [...] for doing away with the kind of ‘metaphorical impressionism’ one still finds” in both more general intermedial discussions, and, I argue, in

specific examples such as Poe (55). Frameworks such as this move the critic away from mere ‘discovery’ of music in literature, such as in Poe, and towards “wider significance.” Wolf points out that:

what Kramer once said about structural analogies can be generalized for the musicalization of fiction and of literature as a whole: where it is attempted, it is in many cases a symptom of the fact that literature ‘is trying to annex certain values associated with [music], an ‘annexation’ which is often, Kramer says, ‘generally’ motivated by a ‘lack’ (162), that is by the feeling that traditional forms, e.g., especially mimetic ways of storytelling, have become unsatisfactory. (55)

This intermedial perspective offers a vocabulary for “discovery,” so that the analysis of this motivated “loss” or “lack” can take its place. In terms of ‘musico-literary’ research in Poe studies, Poe’s attempt at “annexation” of certain “values associated with [music]” consistently implies motivation that remains unstated, and even critics who attempt to explore how and why Poe attempts to “annex” these musical “values,” what he perceives these “values” to be, and whether or not the “annexation” is in any way successful in his works consistently falter in their quest without the help of a terminological and theoretical framework for their analysis.

Krishna Rayan writes that music is, for Poe, “the vehicle *par excellence* of the sense of Ideal Beauty [...] It is, then, by suggestive indeterminateness of expression (a quality that music possesses in a pre-eminent degree) that in poetry the imagination renders ‘beauty’. This assumption explains why [...] poetry is most itself when it shares the nature of music” (75). That idea of what Poe and other critics describe as “Supernal Beauty” here returns in the form of “Ideal Beauty” as the goal of musical expression. While it appears that Rayan defines music as the medium through which “Ideal Beauty” is translated, music also depends upon the “imagination” to “render ‘beauty’” through the musical “indeterminateness of expression” itself. Rayan does not show how, exactly, one

may define or understand “Ideal Beauty,” rather assuming Poe’s description of it than criticizing it, but the fact remains that transcendence toward or through “Ideal Beauty” is slightly, if only slightly, more specific than music as the medium for transcendence itself. In making such a sweeping statement, Rayan attempts to summarize some overarching connection between Poe’s aesthetic theory and music, but without any intermedial framework that theorizes “indeterminateness of expression” in the ‘technical forms’ it takes, for example, he makes the destructive assumption to his argument that “indeterminateness” is “a quality that music possesses in a pre-eminent degree.” In doing so, Rayan creates a circular argument, an argument that appropriates Poe’s language to discuss itself, rather than a ‘musico-literary’ framework that would allow for a discussion of what he means by “indeterminateness of expression” in literature.

The issue with appropriating Poe’s language and metaphors to discuss his use of music without a proper external ‘musico-literary’ framework arises again when Maurice Bennett explains the relationship of music to the images of Poe’s poem “Al Aaraaf,” “Al Aaraaf” being the “star” he describes:

Objectively, poetry is a Platonic ideal beyond the reach of mortals. This inaccessibility is expressed in the figure of the star [...] To contemplate this star is to arouse those vague and inexpressible longings that most resemble the reaction to music. Considered as a syllogism, music, the star, and a beautiful woman become nearly equivalent metaphors. Unable to define the inexpressible, Poe becomes subjective, and he redefines poetry as effect, as that which most intensely arouses man’s metaphysical aspirations. (2)

Music, in this metaphor, becomes both the longing for the “Platonic ideal beyond the reach of mortals” and the expression of its own longing. Music is both the medium for transcendence and, in a way, the definition for that transcendence itself. Like the incantatory, or enchanting, power aforementioned that sound music supplies to allow the reader to move into a “vague revery,” For some

critics, the experience of the attempt to transcend reality is itself the goal. Poe “redefines poetry as effect” that resembles the contemplation of the musical, an effect that inspires itself as “vague and inexpressible longings that most resemble the reaction to music.” Moreover, Bennett equates in Poe’s theory “music, the star, and a beautiful woman” as “nearly equivalent metaphors,” revealing a simultaneous ‘positional’ or ‘contextual’ form of literary music that takes Poe’s “music” theory and applies it to his own work, a ‘referential’ form of literary music that highlights the “musical” references in the poem, and a ‘technical’ form of literary music that describes “music” as a succession of images. Ultimately, however, the conflation of the three results in a metaphorical and circular discussion of the “annexed” values of music. Poe’s poetry “annexes” musical values that music both inspires and best expresses. As Bennett describes it, “Music, then, is defined by its association with the indefinite, the ethereal, the mystical, fantasy, and the capacity to induce states of hypnotic indolence, its tendency to ‘enthrall’” (2). More specifically, music, whether images or sounds or a combination of the two, is described by its effect, or “the capacity to induce states of hypnotic indolence,” which Bennett, among others, associates with the “ethereal” and the “mystical” and the “tendency to ‘enthrall,’” all of which resort to a “metaphorical” description of some vague effect of music without ever defining what musical qualities are “annexed” in Poe, how, or why they are “annexed.”

One of the few critics who breaks down Poe’s use of the ‘musical’ “indefinite” more scientifically does so through a musicological historical positioning of Poe that contextualizes his theory in terms of some other, more well-known artists such as the French Symbolist poets and the German Romantic writers. Carl Dahlhaus notes that “From the same ideohistorical root as the desire for a ‘pure matter’ in language and music comes the conception that a poet, by being nothing but a ‘literary engineer,’ evokes the ‘wonderous.’ [...] [this] just as characteristic of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe as it was later on for Mallarmé and Valéry” (150). In this way, the aesthetics of Hoffmann, Mallarmé, and Valéry can

be projected onto the work of Poe, but this only works in terms of a historical framing of Poe's work. Outwith this positioning, there is still the same idea that the poet "evokes the 'wonderous'" and desires " 'pure matter' in language and music," and without a 'musico-literary' vocabulary, there is no way to discuss how, specifically, these are evoked in Poe.

Indeed, literary criticism that attempts to answer these questions often ends with Poe's proponents of musical "indefiniteness" discussing its powers of transcendence, usually achieved through an amalgam of sound and image, despite this overarching debate of the conflict of the materiality of the work and the merging of sound and sense. Steven Frye explains this idea of transcendence through the image of "Israfel":

The poet sings in praise of the angel Israfel's song, which embodies a transcendence intimated by the heart but which is imperfectly rendered in our world, through the dark, refracted murmur of human language. Music becomes the metaphor for art in its highest form. As a medium borne of careful composition yet received in pure emotion, the Supernal Beauty in song gives a deep and inexpressible meaning to perception and experience, and the notes and phrases of the lute bring the writer to a profound understanding of his purpose [...] Poe knows that the power of the angel's song is beyond the reach of words. But in all of his work, his hope is to still the stars and to lift the soul to reverie. (7)

Frye assumes Poe's language as he writes about the reception of "Supernal Beauty" through music, or more specifically Israfel's song. Although Frye's phrase of the "dark, refracted murmur of human language" might point towards either what he means or what he does not mean by music in Poe, he does not make the connection clear. This idea of the association of transcendence through Poe's music to achieve "Supernal Beauty" recurs in Poe criticism; in fact, Maurice Bennett notes that "Music's association with the star of supernal beauty [in "Al Aaraaf"] has been noted as essential to Poe's ideas concerning art" (3).

While the topic of Poe and “Supernal Beauty” is too complex to cover here, it is significant that Frye both discusses “Israfel” in musical and indefinite terms, as it is both a song that Poe hopes will “lift the soul to reverie” and yet it must be still conveyed through the “dark, refracted murmur of human language.” For Frye, music is thus conveyed to the reader through an amalgam of the images, however hazy, produced by human language, and the “song” of the poem itself to create an “indefinite” quality that is meant to allow the reader a transcendent experience. Frye does not separate “song” as ‘overt intermediality,’ or as a form of ‘vocal music’ and “song” as a ‘covert intermediality’ or both a ‘formal analogy’ or ‘reference’ to a musical concept. Frye does not place Poe in a historical framework that equates his conceptions of music with those of the German Romantics, and Frye confronts the idea of ‘word music’ by noting “the dark, refracted murmur of human language” while conveying the importance of a metaphorical, undefined (literary) music that can take the form of the ‘absolute’ or of a ‘technical’ form that reflects music through “annexation” of some as yet unnamed values.

Through the use of an intermedial framework, the distinction between “literature” and “music” as media and the resonance of each as art forms becomes clear. It cannot be a pure coincidence that each of these critics refuse, on some level, to name these perceived annexed values from music in literature. Providing a theoretical framework does not necessarily force critics to name these annexed values, but rather forces them to admit the *impossibility* of naming them. As analyses of Poe’s relationship to music move away from the more material ‘word music’ aspect of his writing and towards ‘formal and structural’ analogies, often conflating with ‘positional’ and ‘referential’ forms of literary musical analysis, literary critics from outside an intermedial perspective become entrenched in problematic vocabulary that reduces their arguments to a “discovery” or lack of “discovery” of music in Poe’s texts. Forced to rely on metaphorical explanations of perceived musical “values,” critics that write about Poe and music with the lack of a terminological framework hazard the danger of appropriating Poe’s own

theoretical vocabulary, writing themselves into a circular argument in which ‘music’ in any form becomes both a cause and effect of a text. If the perceived shared “values” of a literary text and music escape both a word definition and a purely musical analysis, then a rational, theoretical analysis of “musicalized fiction” such as Poe’s is impossible, and criticism will continually revert to the original aesthetic triangle of “music,” “poetry” and “idea” all defining themselves by one another. If, however, a distinction is made between an intermedial discussion and a discussion of aesthetics, then the intervention of an intermedial framework is necessary for parsing out these two aspects of analyses of works of authors such as Edgar Poe in order to create a unified and forward-moving scholarship in the field.

Endnotes

[1] The authors presented represent some of the key issues in Poe and music studies, although the list is not comprehensive.

[2] For instance, Claus Clüver offers a reading of certain texts that pose similar issues to Poe’s as ‘ekphrasis,’ re-working the definition to both “contain a measure of *enargeia*” and to “cover nonrepresentational” as well as “representational” texts (188). His work represents one of many frameworks that could be applied to Poe and music studies.

[3] See “More Music to Poe.” *Music and Letters LIV* (1973): 391-404, “Music and Edgar Allan Poe: A Second Annotated Check List” and “Addendum to Part I.” *Poe Studies XV* (1982): 7-13, 42, and “Music and Edgar Allan Poe: A Third Annotated Check List.” *Poe Studies XXVI* (1993): 41-58.

[4] As this terminology was more fashionable in literary criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in another, related sense of meaning, examples tend to be much older. This is another reason for the reclaiming of the term in the context of various modes of intermediality.

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First Response

This is an intriguing piece of research on the vexed question of "musicality" in the work of Edgar Allan Poe. The author is astute in detailing and evaluating prior critical attempts to impute (and in one case deny) musical elements in Poe's

writing. On the other hand the paper does not demonstrate convincingly the necessity of an “intermedial terminological framework” for reading Poe. For instance, could the author give us an example of what an actual, demonstrable and non- (or minimally-) metaphorical case of “music in words” would be like, rather than just a list of failed attempts? The argument invites the further question – the author might like to take it up – of whether an “intermedial framework” (of any kind, not simply of the kind proposed) should itself satisfy the conditions required for an intermedial phenomenon. In other words, should it itself have one of the kinds of “musical” qualities it seeks to apprehend? (On the point of indeterminacy and meaning, Mendelssohn famously remarked that music’s resistance to verbal ‘translation’ lay in the fact that what music ‘expressed’ was not too indefinite but on the contrary too definite to be put into words!) Overall an interesting, well-written and independent paper on an unusual and under-explored subject; but with scope for development in the areas mentioned above.