

Qualities of Musical Instruments as a Device of Hierarchisation

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The conflict between specialisation and personality is the main theme in the novels by Peter Høeg, Vladimir Orlov, Jose Saramago, and Patrick Süskind. The protagonists are brought together in their attempts to find and prove their new identities but quite different problems are discovered in the process. The violinist Kasper Krone, the violist Vladimir Danilov, and the unnamed cellist and the double bassist have their own status in the hierarchy of the musical world: this element of the narrative is a lure for readers who would like to learn the secrets of different professions. Sometimes the ways postmodern authors create images both in correlation with professional stereotypes and drama overcomplicate the plot for the unprepared recipient. For them, the variety of allusions and the brilliant game of intertextuality make no sense; however, this problem can be the reason to seek more information about the aforementioned musical opuses for a better understanding. In this case, readers will build strong links between implicit information and the motives of the protagonist's behaviour.

KEYWORDS: intertextuality, comparative studies, postmodernism

Modern culture considers key images as symbols with deep connections in several areas. According to the cultural code, everybody interprets them in their own way, so sometimes art creators are misunderstood. Every time they have to seek the balance between powerful polysemic images and univocal messages to prevent the lack of interest and to focus the recipients' attention on aspects they have never considered before. That is why musical hermeneutics and semiotics have become so popular and important to contemporary explorers.

The problem of the interpretation of signs is very deep in the case of non-verbal languages. The postmodern 'game' concept gave art creators a lot of instruments for expression, and meanings became the intertextual mediums that multiplied art methods and enriched the 'text'.¹ This postmodern 'game' creates a maze of reflection for the readers, so they should be given the key for deciphering writer's allusions in a story about musicians. As usual, most of the meanings are invisible for non-musicians and books lose their value because individual associations based on unique experience generate new meanings and secondary interpretation.

Although there exists some type of conflict between the works by Eduard Hanslick and the group of researchers with alternative views (E. T. A. Hoffmann, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck),² there is another way for using narratology,

1 As the object of hermeneutics.

2 Pederson 2009: 240–262.

hermeneutics, and semiotics. For example, on the one hand, Susanne K. Langer agrees with the concept of absolute music by Carl Dahlhaus and considers that all modes of human comprehension are forms of symbolic transformation and that music may serve as a paradigm of a symbolic system. Hence, on the other hand, she thinks that musical works may be credited with meaning, but it is not possible to inform what exactly this meaning is. This point of view directs to the assumption about the increasing role of the intrinsic nature of music, which influences readers aware of the ‘programme’ of the cited music or the referent of allusion.

Does it mean that all aspects of the musician’s life become the signs for listeners and readers? Probably, if the writer uses them for enriching their story with important details and inventing a special cultural code between the creator and the user. And if the hidden meaning of non-verbal citations is used as an invitation to the investigation, signs that can be decoded with associations appear to explain something unusual or highlight the implicit meaning. One of those is gender identity of musical instruments.

Since ancient times, musicians have been choosing instruments according to their physical abilities. Besides, appearance also influences the perception and formation of associative relationships regarding the gender of an instrument in the public perception. However, the perception of musicians and composers themselves has always been less based on the external characteristics of the instrument or the performer (who were predominantly male³) than on the expressed possibilities of timbres and the possibility of creating a special texture of sound of an ensemble or an orchestra. Such differences, of course, create discrepancies that are reinforced by gender stereotypes previously propagated in music schools.⁴ Figure 1 demonstrates male domination that is still relevant in academic music.⁵ The photo does not contain all the members. Only 15 of 145 permanent members of Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra are women.

In the article ‘Sex-Role Associations of Music Instruments and Occupations by Gender and Major’, Philip A. Griswold and Denise A. Chrobak⁶ observe that stereotyping of the sex-role and sex differences in vocational preferences are well developed by early childhood. They made conclusions after studying Harold F. Abeles and Susan Y. Porter⁷ survey with four groups (two opposite pairs). Respondents

3 Writers quite often use the stereotypical image in their novels, extrapolating the correlation between the number of male and female characters to the relationships between musicians and their partners.

4 Redell, M. Sexism totally discredits women’s success, even when they have the same results as their male colleagues. Thus, the image of a male musician-protagonist is usually used in fiction.

5 Nayeri, F. When an Orchestra Was No Place for a Woman. https://static01.nyt.com/images/2019/12/27/multimedia/27SP-ORCHESTRA-INYT-2/merlin_166091778_ced1313f-cf34-4bd2-aae2-fbc7a98ee677-mobileMasterAt3x.jpg [accessed 2021 March 16]

6 Griswold, Chrobak 1981: 57–62.

7 Abeles, Porter 1978: 65–75.



Fig. 1. Gender stereotypes in a symphonic orchestra

had to associate instruments with feminine and masculine connotations. As we can see in Fig. 2, results vary in major/non-major pair, but have a little difference in male-female pair.⁸

The findings show that gender associations have been prevalent for more than 30 years. Though Delzell and Leppla (1992) reported a slight reduction of the range in the normalised instrument gender scale compared to the Abeles and Porter's first study (1978), no additional lessening of instrument gender associations has occurred over the next 15 years (see Delzell and Leppla⁹). Graham singled out such factors determining these gender associations of the instrument as physical properties of the instrument, male or female relatives' and teachers' influences. Katherine Sinsabaugh supplemented this list with peer impact, personal inclinations, school environment pressure as well as instrument sound, students' body sizes, their ethnic origin, and the like.¹⁰ Finally, Abeles concluded that different conflicting stereotypes urge students to choose a particular musical instrument to play.¹¹

This trend is illustrated with the gender instrument correlation in the performer populations of 40 international orchestras from the UK, Europe, and the USA (see Table).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Delzell, J. K., Leppla, D. A. 1992: 93–103.

¹⁰ Abeles 2009: 136.

¹¹ Abeles 2009: 127–139.

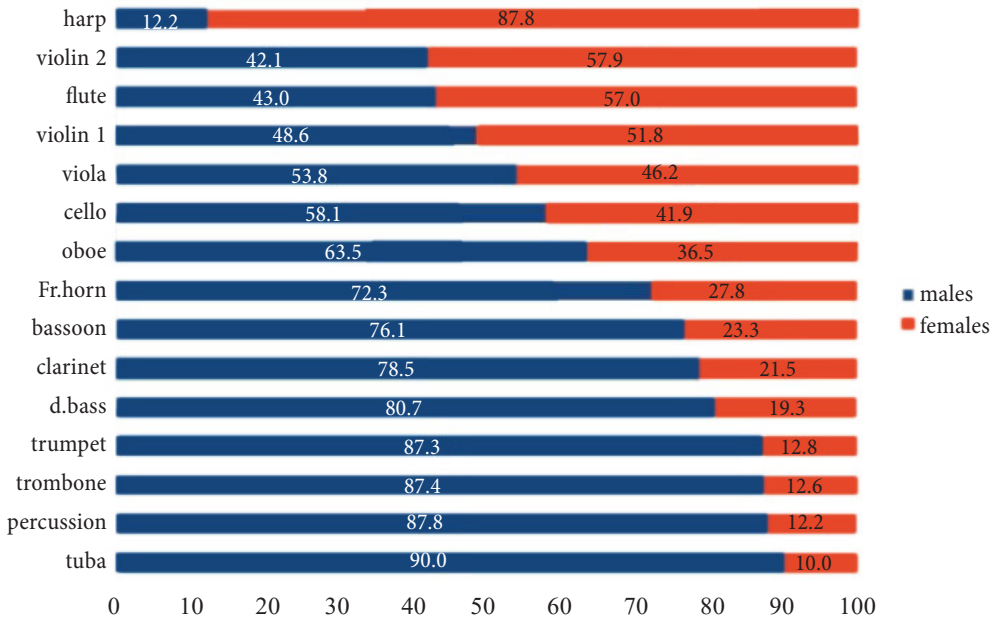


Fig. 2. Survey by Harold F. Abeles and Susan Y. Porter

Table. Performer population structure of 40 international orchestras (from Abeles)

Instrument	Total n	Male (%)	Female (%)	Bias	<i>p</i>	Diff. (%)
1st violin	585	48.55	51.75	F	<0.026	3.5
2nd violin	520	42.12	57.88	F	<0.012	15.76
All violins	1.105	45.25	54.50	F	<0.000	9.00
Viola	422	53.79	46.21	M	<0.012	7.58
Cello	350	58.06	41.94	M	<0.015	16.12
Double bass	254	80.70	19.30	M	<0.000	61.12
Flute	135	43.00	57.00	F	<0.020	14.00
Oboe	148	63.51	36.49	M	<0.001	27.02
Clarinet	149	78.52	21.48	M	<0.000	57.04
Bassoon	147	66.00	34.00	M	<0.000	32.00
Horn	195	72.25	27.75	M	<0.000	44.50
Trumpet	149	87.25	12.75	M	<0.000	74.50
Trombone	127	87.40	12.6	M	<0.000	74.2
Tuba	40	90.00	10.00	M	<0.000	80.00
Tympani/percussion	148	87.80	12.2	M	<0.000	75.60
Harp	40	12.20	87.80	F	<0.000	75.60
Total	3.420	60.32	39.68	M	<0.0001	20.64

Abeles¹² confirmed that factors of influence changed over the years and sometimes teachers had to correct stereotypes because they restrict students' participation in some aspects of musical education.

The voice and shape of the instrument does not always meet students' expectations as for their actual place and role in the music community hierarchy. This idea is strongly supported with the symphonic orchestra seating shown in Figure 3.¹³

Two basic families are differentiated here, namely the strings and the woodwinds with brass. Although the drums, the piano, the harp, and others are also included, the above-mentioned two are the main part of the complex musical organism. Let us focus on the most homogeneous group, the strings. They



Fig. 4. Symphonic orchestra seating chart

are of similar shapes, but of different timbres and functions. The differences in the shapes of the strings can be associated with age-related changes in the human body: a violin looks like a girl, a viola resembles a young woman, a cello is similar to a mature woman, and a double bass is approximate to an older woman (see Fig. 5).¹⁴ Consequently, some writers use this aspect for the creation of special linkages between the character and their partner.

But a look at the functions of these instruments reveals a difference in musical perceptions. The double bass is given masculine qualities not because of its size (which is the reason the double bassists are predominantly male) or timbre, but because the rhythm of its musical part 'holds' on itself the entire orchestra, like a column holding a beam or a balcony. Following this analogy, it is possible to continue the associative series determining the place of a particular instrument in the hierarchy by their importance, where the violins have the place at the top.

Creating certain stereotypes through associations, musicians have historically formed not only a specific conceptual apparatus but also subtle and complex mechanisms of representation. That is why some writers use this theme for creating special

¹² Abeles 2009: 137.

¹³ <https://stanworthmusic.com/2018/01/13/orchestral-instruments-games/> [accessed 2021 March 16]

¹⁴ <http://eurekalovelove.blogspot.com/2014/01/life-music-instrument-storage-violin.html> [accessed 2021 March 16]

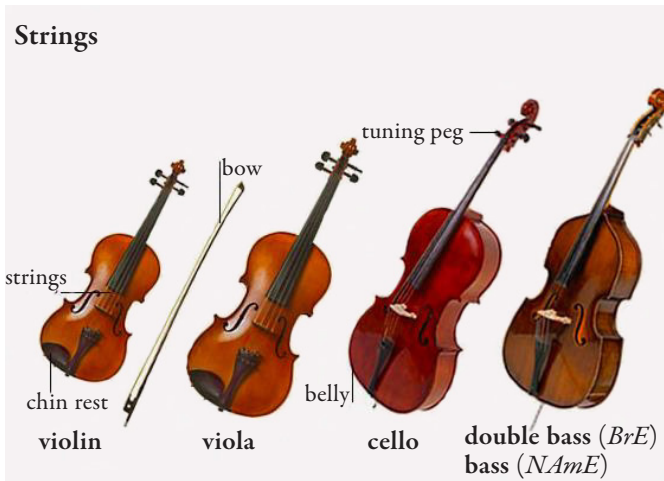


Fig. 5. The strings family

physical violence (as Krone demonstrates it in prison). Being angry at himself for losing his chance to accomplish his destiny in a relationship with the perfect beloved woman reduces the status of an academic musician to that of a clown and relegates him to a secondary role in the universe. By addressing the supreme power of Almighty and turning to the string theory, Høeg suggests his personal view of the music as the means of moving through space and time.

The violinist-clown can hear people in the tonality of the music he knows. All these imaginative people are expected to be played by an academic ensemble, which testifies to the connections of these imaginative people with society. Kaspar's music is comparable to J. S. Bach's sonatas and partitas for violin solo (BWV 1001–1006).¹⁵ He is an outcast, so his music, despite its great significance, is isolated and self-contained. The musician's reflections on the influence of the music by the great composer are actually a metaphor because the music he performs is used by modern musicians as a demonstration of the mastery of technical skills and their combination with artistic creativity. This is why his words about the possibilities of Bach's music can be interpreted as his attempts to change, to rebuild his relationship with his wife, and to return to society as a complete and developed individual.

The appearance of a girl who absorbs sounds thus creating silence is not only a reference to the Great Nothing but also an obscure clue that is central to the narrative. This is because the girl is not just a silencer for the vibrations of sound: she is a conductor who, at the end of the novel, makes a strange face. This act reminds a musician that conductors express their feelings differently, but an ordinary reader just receives a 'post-modernist aftertaste'.

links between the characters and their partners.

In his novel *The Quiet Girl*, Peter Høeg demonstrates a contradictory and complex relationship between Kasper Krone and his beloved woman by choosing a violin for the protagonist. The shape of the violin is a reminder of Stine's mental suffering: a reflection of their destructive relationship, the last straw of which is

15 Bach, J. S. Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004: Chaconne.

Vladimir Orlov's novel *Danilov, the Violist*¹⁶ has a different concept. Continuing the tradition of the image of the 'little man', the central figure in Nikolai Gogol's novels, Orlov reveals the difference between musicians, creative people, and the audience the music is played to. The crucial difference between the violist and his colleagues lies in his origin. To tell the difference between a violist and a violinist is as difficult as to distinguish between a semi-demon and an ordinary human. Danilov's semi-demonic origin and position in the musical community are similar to those of the viola in the orchestra. This instrument is seldom able of showing its potential in solo as it is caught between the solo violins and the cellos that support them.

The unbelievable theft of the legendary musical instrument ruins Danilov's life. He cannot identify himself without Albani's viola. However, the worst thing is the possible cancellation of the concert where he has to solo in Pereslegin's symphony. Missing this chance is equivalent to a suicide for the little nobody, the one the violist identifies himself with. This background transforms an adult fairy-tale into a real drama in Russian style, and the main character must choose which half of his nature, demonic or human, is stronger. Complicated personal relationships increase the suffering, but, after finding the instrument, Vladimir becomes himself again and chooses the human side with all its joys and sorrows.

In the novel, there is not only the dramatic line but also the development of the ideas of Quietism propagated by the violinist Nikolay Zemskii. Specifically interpreted by the violinist, the ideas of this philosophical trend become fatal to a colleague who commits suicide. Referring to John Cage's composition 4' 33",¹⁷ where the musician is required to 'perform' the silence while the audience is the one who creates the unique work, the emphasis falls on the depth of the metaphor about the musician's dependence on the recipient. In this work, silence is meaningful and independent of the conductor's actions. It is an act of interaction of the musician's inner world with the response of the dominating public.

Although the cello is not the most popular instrument, but its soft and deep timber has big power and influence in Jose Saramago's novel *Death with Interruptions*. The power of Death's feelings towards music makes her forget her primary responsibilities at the first sounds of J. S. Bach's Suite.¹⁸ This is a typical allusion on the soloist's interaction with the audience which is characterised with the erroneous and unreturned feeling of their unity. Since the soloist is highly concentrated on the unity with music but not with the audience (as it happens in Høeg's novel). Saramago emphasises the fact that, combined with a wholehearted and inspired performance, even the cellist's average

¹⁶ It was initially assumed that Orlov based his character on the famous Russian violist Yuri Bashmet. However, the novel was published before Bashmet became known and the author said in an interview that the character was based on Vladimir Grot, his friend violist.

¹⁷ Cage, J. 4' 33".

¹⁸ Bach, J. S. Cello Suite No. 6 in D major, BWV 1012: Prelude.

musical skills can touch Death and make miracles. In such a way, the link between the characters and the phenomena they symbolize is created.

Meanwhile, Patrick Süskind discovers a great injustice in the musical community in his play *The Double Bass*. In contrast to the aforementioned novels, where the musicians suffer because of the loss of their identity (*The Quiet Girl*, *Danilov*, *the Violist*) or are simply scared of something (*Death with Interruptions*), Süskind describes painful affection triggered by the numerous psychological traumas the musician had experienced. The complexes of the unnamed protagonist affect his self-esteem. They make it difficult for him to concentrate on his advantages and realise that without him (as the orchestra unit) no academic or jazz ensemble can exist, because without the rhythm of the double bass all the orchestra performers lose their unity.

The depressed double bassist is a reminder of the contemporary problem of professional burnout of an undervalued worker. He sees the depth of the gap between himself and those who have the opportunity to choose their occupation as they are less immersed in their psychological problems, and, for their specialties, there are many more possibilities. It is reflected in the fact that there are only two musical works¹⁹ for his instrument and the voice of his beloved Sarah where they will not be disturbed by other instruments. The metaphor is very informative for musicians, as the combination of such heterogeneous parts as a double bass and a soprano underscores the differences and social distance between the characters.

Declaring readiness to commit a crime may seem comical to the reader, but it is the development of the drama of the 'little man' that has increased proportionately to the size of the instrument.²⁰ On the part of the author of *Perfume*, this may be the key to understanding the motives of the crime and, in a way, to his acquittal.

All the above leads us to agree with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's words, 'Music is the universal language for all mankind.'²¹ So, the reason a child may have chosen a musical profession is not as important as the consequences of their choice, which significantly influences their future life, as it places them in a certain system of signs and a professional community.

The writers mentioned above used both associations and connotation with a new context for the reader. Peter Høeg, Vladimir Orlov, Jose Saramago, and Patrick Süskind opened the doors to the mysterious world of music where every detail matters. This kind of fiction has become popular because values have changed: not material things, but a unique experience and vivid impressions have become the most precious things in modern life. That is why biopics have revived in new forms. And

¹⁹ Bottesini, G. Aria for soprano and double bass. Tutto che il mondo serra. The opus is one of two pieces for this unusual duet.

²⁰ Comparing a viola to a double bass.

²¹ Quoted from: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. *Outre-mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea*, p. 202, in: <https://archive.org/details/outremerapilgri01longgoog/page/n212/mode/2up> [cited 2021 March 6]

who knows, maybe books will become one of the many factors that form not just stereotypes but a deep understanding of musical instruments in the orchestra score.

Received 9 April 2021

Accepted 3 May 2021

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Yanina Yukhymuk

Muzikos instrumentų savybės kaip hierarchizacijos priemonės

Santrauka

Specializacijos ir asmenybės konfliktas yra pagrindinė Peterio Høego, Vladimiro Orlovo, Jose Saramago ir Patricko Süskindo romanų tema. Bandymai surasti ir įrodyti savo naują tapatybę suartina veikėjus, tačiau atsiranda įvairių problemų. Smuikininkas Kasparas Krone, altininkas Vladimiras Danilovas ir neįvardytas kontrabosininkas neturi savo statuso muzikos pasaulio hierarchijoje – šis pasakojimo elementas yra masalas skaitytojams, mėgstantiems sužinoti įvairių profesijų paslaptis. Kartais priemonės, kuriomis postmodernūs rašytojai kuria savo herojus, derinamos su profesiniais stereotipais ir drama, pernelyg komplikuoja siužetą. Nepatyrusiam skaitytojui dažnai nesuvokiama aliuzijų įvairovė ir intertekstualūs žaidimai gali paskatinti ieškoti informacijos apie minimus muzikos kūrinius, kad juos padėtų geriau suprasti. Tokiu atveju skaitytojui gali užmegzti tvirtesnius ryšius tarp numanomos informacijos ir herojų elgesio motyvų. Taip jie atras bejėgį koncertmeisterį, kuris pasirodys, kai solistas pradės groti, talentingą kompozitorių, turintį savo pasirinkimo paslaptį, ir beviltišką meilužį, pasirengusį nužudyti, kad tik taptų geriau matomas. RAKTAŽODŽIAI: intertekstualumas, lyginamieji tyrimai, postmodernizmas