# Ezra Pound and Charles Bernstein: Opera, Poetics, and the Fate of Humanism

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Opera is a peculiar genre.[1] While artistic practices are always enmeshed in the cultural, philosophical, and political tensions of their moment, opera is unique as a veritable petri dish of Renaissance musical humanism. There is perhaps no other instance in which theory so clearly precedes artistic practice, with opera emerging out of the debates over musical composition and text-setting that preoccupied the early humanists.[2] Notions of unity are central to opera from its very earliest stages—unity of words and music, unity of the past and the present, unity of different modes of knowledge, unity of the expressive subject—ideals that reach their apex in the nineteenth century with Richard Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Early opera is also shaped by the epochal shift under way during its founding: a shift from feudal order to a nascent bourgeoisie, the birth of modern science, and the establishment of modern subjectivity.[3] In many ways, opera bridges this gap, recalling the institutions and modes of the past and projecting the possibilities of the future in a combination of aesthetic spectacle and Orphic mystery. As opera participates in the humanistic project of reclaiming the best of the past in order to establish a better future, the practical ideal of unifying words and music becomes an allegory for unity writ large. And, just as political idealism belies the inequities and outright prejudices of practice, so too does the proposed unity of words and music prove elusive.

Opera is often understood as the product of a great compromise between musical and textual demands, a way of thinking about the genre that lays bare the value judgments of aesthetic purists.[4] As Slavoj Žižek wryly summarizes, from this perspective, opera is "a stillborn child of musical art," one that "always has to rely in a parasitic way on other arts (on pure music, on theater)" (viii). While Žižek typically embraces this always-already compromised nature of the genre, others have been much less generous. Even Brian Ferneyhough, the composer of one of the very works that interest us here, *Shadowtime*, has previously pronounced opera

"a mostly closed book" (*Collected Writings* 248). Coming to opera from the literary angle instead of music hardly elevates the genre; such a perspective only accentuates the other, no less happy side of this art-as-compromise, the treatment of the text in operatic text-setting. As I will discuss in more detail below, it is utterly conventional in operatic practice to transform the source text of the libretto so much as to render its semantic content unavailable in performance. While it may be true, as the music purists have it, that opera lets itself be shaped by the demands of narrative (plot and character development, for instance), the resulting artwork is hardly a model of elocutionary clarity. And, if we need to follow the details of a story's plot, the place to look is in the program, not the stage. Nor is this loss of narrative clarity the limit of text-setting's effects on the libretto; the very poetics, from the concept of the work as a whole to the microcosmic level of sound-play, is governed by concerns that are much more properly understood as either musical or dramatic. That is to say, writ large or writ small, the *poeisis* of opera does not simply set a libretto, but, much more significantly, makes something new out of it.

In this essay, I am interested in this troubled status of the text in two iconoclastic contributions to opera, Ezra Pound's *Le testament* and Charles Bernstein's *Shadowtime*, both of which take head-on the foundational issue of text-setting that makes the genre seem such a risky choice for a poet and such a besmirched one for a composer. In *ABC of Reading*, Pound described his motivation for setting the work of the fifteenth-century French poet François Villon, admitting, "technically speaking, translation of Villon is extremely difficult because he rhymes on the exact word," such that "I personally have been reduced to setting [Villon and Catullus] to music as I cannot translate them" (104–5). Bernstein's treatment of his subject, the life and work of Walter Benjamin, could hardly be more different. The synopsis of *Shadowtime* presents its ambitious scope and critical angle:

> *Shadowtime* is a thought opera . . . In its seven scenes, *Shadowtime* explores some of the major themes of Benjamin's work, including the intertwined natures of history, time, transience, timelessness, language, and melancholy; the possibilities for a transformational leftist politics; the interconnectivity of language, things, and cosmos; and the role of dialectical materiality, aura, interpretation, and translation in art . . . *Shadowtime* inhabits a period in human history in which the light flickered and then failed. (13)

As we will see, whereas Pound's opera develops out of and exhibits an intense level of attention to Villon's language, Bernstein's investment in Benjamin's *ideas* results in a radically different work. This essay considers the context and implications of these differences in order to demonstrate

how *Shadowtime* contrasts and contends with Pound's operatic turn, not merely as an element of Bernstein's ongoing critical engagement with Pound's legacy, but also as representative of the larger challenge of accounting for humanism in contemporary innovative writing.[5]

While there are certainly stylistic and contextual differences between *Le testament* and *Shadowtime*, there is also a great deal that invites their pairing. To be sure, Pound's opera is ultimately the highly idiosyncratic work of a self-taught amateur, while *Shadowtime* is the result of Bernstein's collaboration with one of the most widely recognized and influential of contemporary experimental composers, the "Maximalist" Brian Ferneyhough. Nevertheless, these works are more than incidental forays into the genre, and they bear more than incidental relation to one another. Pound turned to opera after working as a music critic for *The New Age* for four years, and he spent more than a decade developing *Le testament*, often with the assistance of other composers and musicians, most notably George Antheil. Distinct versions of the opera appeared in 1921, 1923 (the Pound/Antheil score, considered the opera's "urtext"), 1926, and 1933, in addition to a 1931 adaption for BBC Radio (Fisher and Hughes xii–xiii).[6] In fact, *Le testament* is a key instance of Pound's working out of his ideas about the relationship between poetry and music.[7] *Shadowtime*, I would suggest, is a similarly crucial part of Bernstein's oeuvre as he grapples with his modernist predecessors, not least of all Pound, and the larger, longer intellectual traditions that underwrote their projects. It also represents a sorely underappreciated aspect of his substantial oeuvre, his work in musical theatre.[8]

The relationship between the turns to opera by Pound and Bernstein can be found first in their choices of subject, François Villon and Walter Benjamin, respectively. Both Pound and Bernstein construe the lives of their subjects as allegories for larger historical moments, and the operas most profoundly demonstrate the results of their searches to represent the significance of Villon and of Benjamin in their formal innovations. Just as Bernstein reads the circumstances of Benjamin's death as symptomatic of the failure of modernity, so Pound's Villon "represents also the end of a tradition, the end of the medieval dream, the end of a whole body of knowledge" (*ABC of Reading* 104). As Pound and Bernstein contemplate the work of their predecessors, each of whom embodies a cultural nadir, the decision to work in opera is a loaded choice of genre since opera itself is so thoroughly infused with humanist ideology. To put it rather schematically, Pound's Villon is the embodiment of that period that immediately precedes the very Renaissance that will give rise to opera, while Benjamin's life coincides with the historical moment often invoked as that of opera's death, and his work breaks from the humanist tradition both in its Frankfurt School materialism and in its mysticism. Indeed, Benjamin's

death seems an object lesson in the political failings of humanism. That is to say, *Le testament* and *Shadowtime* are both attempts at epochal intervention by way of aesthetic form; and their differing forms enact the contrast between their worldviews. In order to consider the characteristics and the implications of this tension, I will first briefly discuss the relationship between opera and Renaissance humanism, with particular emphasis on the practice of text-setting, and then contrast Pound's and Bernstein's participation in operatic history, first with respect to the very different relationships between text and music found in their operas, and then their invocations of the Orphic tradition. Ultimately, I will argue that whereas Pound's opera seeks to reclaim and radicalize the humanistic ideals at the core of the genre, *Shadowtime* enacts a critique of humanism consistent with the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Opera was developed as a systematic, nearly scientific attempt to revive the unity of words, music, and drama that the members of the sixteenth-century Florentine *camerata* believed could be found in classical Greece. The fact that Greek music was unknown and unknowable only fueled the fantasy construction of a lost and ideal art capable of feats far beyond anything associated with contemporary musical practice. The intellectual environment out of which opera arose was infused with the Neoplatonic thought of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and other humanists, whose work provided the conceptual basis upon which opera was built. As Peter Kivy summarizes:

> [F]ive major conclusions were reached by the "philosophes" of opera . . . They are, first, that music exerts power over the souls and characters of men; that it can change them, morally, for the better or worse, and raise their emotions. Second, that this emotive arousal and moral manipulation is accomplished through "imitation" or "representation" of human character and emotions. Third, that (as Plato apparently believed) by music's "representing" or "imitating" human character or emotions one can only mean its "representing" or "imitating" human speech and other expressive behavior. Fourth, that Greek drama was a "musical performance" of some kind—that in some sense or other it, or part of it, was sung. Fifth—but only by inference, as the texts bear no witness here—that Greek music was neither contrapuntal nor chordally accompanied: in other words, completely monophonic. (37)

Of the conclusions noted by Kivy, what most interests us here is the link between classical *mimesis* (that possibility for music to "'represent' or 'imitate' human character or emotions") and the persuasive power of music, and the resulting practice of text-setting. As Kivy's catalogue suggests, the

particular mimetic power of music and the rhetorical ends to which it can be put lend it unique weight in the formation of a person's character. Given the clearly pedagogical intent of Pound's aesthetics, it is worth reminding ourselves how Plato conceived of the role of music in pedagogy. The standard place to look is book III of *The Republic*, in which Plato argues that

> education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and *harmonia* find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary . . . And further, because omissions and the failure of beauty in things badly made or grown would be most quickly perceived by one who was properly educated in music, and so, feeling distaste rightly, he would praise beautiful things and take delight in them and receive them into his soul to foster its growth and become himself beautiful and good. The ugly he would rightly disapprove of and hate while still young and yet unable to apprehend the reason, but when reason came the man thus nurtured would be the first to give her welcome, for by this affinity he would know her. (14)

In Plato's discussion, appropriate musical training is both a prophylactic against the possible infection of the ugly and untrue, and, at the same time, a method for habituating the soul to what is true and beautiful. Interestingly, Plato sees this capacity for aesthetic discernment as something that can be fostered and nurtured prior to a person's intellectual maturity—aesthetic judgment, in this framework, is made available to the young and as yet incompletely educated, while reason is acquired only in maturity. It is this profoundly, even elementally pedagogical conception of music that raises the stakes of text-setting. Putting words to music brings language into the higher, musical order of beauty in one of two ways: it locates and heightens a musical beauty already present within the words, or, much more likely, it transmutes the words into the realm of the musical. Ideally, the musicality of the text-setting serves as a warrant for the profundity of the text and integrates it into the Platonic unity. In practice, the very impossibility of the unity between words and music, the fact that language's semantic register will always draw it away from pure form, compels the genre toward endless formal innovation.

The practice of text-setting that lies at the heart of opera thus embodies the humanist belief in a fundamental, if hard won, syncretism that runs through even apparently disparate discourses. As F. W. Sternfeld has noted, this Neoplatonic idealism results in a certain irony at the heart of operatic text-setting, as is found in the compositional practice of Claudio Monteverdi:

> As an opera composer, Monteverdi starts from the words of the li-
> bretto, where the characters express themselves in words . . . But
> only some words (some stories, some emotions) are capable of being
> transformed into music ("cantare," "armonie"). When this is the case,
> communication through music (notably, but not exclusively vocal
> music) as the vehicle of expression is possible. In this case, the words
> give rise to the music, but are ultimately left behind, because inspired
> song ("canto") supersedes them, we are "translated" (to use a biblical
> term) into another realm. (37)

Ultimately, the work of operatic text-setting is not to heighten or punctuate
anything like the beauty of the language on the page, nor even necessarily
to dramatize the text as it is written, but, rather, to find an abstracted, emo-
tive, musical corollary to the text. Since opera was to be a musical form,
the text simply had to give—ironically, having chosen a poetic text because
of its beauty, profundity, and emotional impact, the composer does away
with it precisely as a means of faithfully attending to it. This conceptual-
ization of text-setting practice immediately raises the question of just what
is being taught in and through opera. Certainly, much of the meaning of
opera resides in the content of its stories: it is no accident, for instance, that
the story of Orpheus figures so prominently in early opera. Nor, for that
matter, is it incidental that Pound's opera features a text by François Villon,
nor that Bernstein's focuses on the life and work of Walter Benjamin. It is
just as certain, though, that the edification offered by language set to music
is something quite apart from even the most poignant narrative content: it
is located in the form itself. Put quite simply, the transmutation of a source
text into the libretto of an opera amounts to a Neoplatonic search for the
form hidden yet immanent within the text. As the humanists sought to
recover the truths of syncretism and unity in the laboratory of opera, the
genre became a microcosm of their overarching faith in the pedagogical
role of art.

 The Neoplatonism that underwrites the advent of opera resonates
with Pound's ventures in operatic composition. His work in this area be-
gan in earnest after his Vorticist years, a period during which, as Charles
Altieri has argued, Pound's literary work was largely grounded in his de-
sire to recast Renaissance humanism in modernist terms. Altieri develops
the notion of "expressivist humanism" as the outcome of Pound's project
to restage and radicalize the Renaissance, and focuses on the iconoclastic
possibilities of humanistic thinking. As he frames humanism with respect
to Pound, Altieri argues that "humanism is above all a set of practices and
themes devoted to the process of idealizing the potential of human agents
to produce and respond to certain values not typical of any social market-
place and not derived from some transcendental doctrine but carried in

a privileged set of exemplary actions" (441). In this framework, literary canons are established as a means of perpetuating "projected 'best selves' and thus shaping our behavior as ethical agents" (441). The major distinction Altieri finds in Pound's rethinking of humanism is that he

> makes the expressive individual a set of active qualities rather than a set of determinate contents, and he teaches us to read for the force these qualities might exist [*sic*]. The art work becomes a display and a test: it is possible to give form to an infinite range of qualities by synthesizing a system of equations, and the capacity of those equations once created to serve as instruments intensifying the perceptions and resistances of others becomes the public measure of the value in private acts. Art expresses not worlds or selves but ways of seeing and arranging the world. (451)

What Altieri identifies in Pound is the degree to which the challenge of reclaiming humanism in the face of modernism is met by individualistic formal means. The pedagogy of aesthetic form involves the characters of both the artist and the audience. On the one hand, artwork for Pound exhibits the will of the artist, a demonstration of the strength of the artist's character to be most convincingly located in the force of the artwork's internal self-organization—success with artistic form is a kind of guarantor of the *virtú* of the artist; at the same time, this formal success presents a challenge to the reader, whose responsibility it is to ascertain and learn from the unique qualities of poetic form.

In Pound's work in music theory and composition after the First World War, his "expressivist humanism" is increasingly configured as arising from an artist's rhythmic precision. Pound's notion of rhythm during this period is both complex and all encompassing. In *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, for instance, a work partly devoted to his early collaborator on *Le testament*, the composer and pianist George Antheil, Pound proposes that "music is a composition of frequencies" (24), a claim meant to underline his thesis that ultimately even harmony is a kind of rhythm because pitch is measured by the frequency of sound waves over time; rhythm is thus the most elemental aspect of artistic expression. The Antheil essay explicitly addresses this topic in the context of Vorticism, noting that "[t]he Vorticist Manifestos of 1913–14 left a blank space for music; there was in contemporary music at that date, nothing corresponding to the work of Wyndham Lewis, Pablo Picasso or Gaudier-Brzeska" (37). After the war, Pound found the corresponding figure in Antheil whose musical inclinations satisfied Pound's conception of a possible Vorticist music: "The article on Vorticism in the Fortnightly Review, Aug. 1914 stated that new vorticist music would come from a new computation of the mathematics of

harmony not from mimetic representation of dead cats in a fog horn (alias noise tuners). This was part of the general vorticist stand against the accelerated impressionism of our active and meritorious friend Marinetti" (38). Pound sees Antheil's compositional practices as demonstrating a sense of precision that corresponds to the particular circumstances of modernity. Far from the Art of Noise (the "dead cats in a foghorn") of the Italian Futurists, "Antheil has not only given his attention to rhythmic precision, and noted his rhythms with an exactitude, which we may as well call genius, but he has invented new mechanisms, mechanisms of this particular age" (48). For Pound, the precision of Antheil's music is that of an intricate, solid, and moving object: "a construction or better a 'mechanism' working in time-space, in which all the joints are close knit, the tones fit each other at set distances, it can't simply slide about" (49). This "mechanism" operates at the level of the rhythm within the piece, in the relationships between instruments and voices, and even within the acoustic qualities of and performance practices associated with individual instruments. Thus, for instance, in Antheil's piano playing Pound hears someone who transmutes his detested instrument by playing it like a modern: "There is the use of the piano, no longer melodic, or cantabile, but solid, unified as one drum. I mean *single* sounds produced by multiple impact" (62). Treating the piano as the percussion instrument it is, Antheil's precision demonstrates an energy that Pound sees as authentic to its historical moment.

If Antheil ultimately proved to be only a temporary brother-in-arms, Pound had a much more longstanding exemplar in the figure of François Villon. And while the essay on Antheil can read as a veiled or opportunistic promotion of Pound's own aesthetic agenda, his advocacy for Villon seems to be born of humility and admiration—if not a sense of defeat at his inability to translate the intricacies of Villon's language. In his 1934 essay "Dateline," Pound recalls his work on the Villon opera as an example of one of his favored modes of advocacy: "criticism via music, meaning definitely the setting of a poet's words; e.g. in Le testament, Villon's words . . . this is the most intense form of criticism . . . [with the exception of] Criticism in new composition" (74–75). Pound wears his Neoplatonic belief in the efficacy of music on his sleeve here, as he proposes text-setting and musical composition based upon a poet's work as the highest orders of critical engagement with that work.

With the Villon opera, Pound's belief in the efficacy of Villon's prosody was put into practice when he prepared a broadcast version of it for BBC Radio in 1931. In this adaptation of the opera, Pound maintained his intense commitment to the acoustics of Villon's voice—the musicality of his language—even as he sought to bring Villon to an unprecedentedly broad audience. In fact, the medium of radio provided Pound with a powerful tool for the construction of his "expressivist humanism" because it turns

the abstract concept of voice into the physical reality of a radio voice existing only as sound waves in the air. As Margaret Fisher has argued, the radio production of opera was also an ideal opportunity for Pound in his quest to reinvigorate the relationship between poetry and music that he thought had reached its apex in troubadour practice, since "voice on radio offered the promise of pure sonic contour in a time-based medium, the opportunity 'to cut a shape in time'" (38). For Pound, as the radio audience listened to Villon's words, duly elevated via musical setting, they came into direct contact with the form of his aesthetic, that lasting manifestation of his *virtú*. As Pound works to bring the prosody of Villon's language to the BBC public, his attention to the aurality of Villon's text "mitigates the distance of time, translation, and perception through a music that retains the sonic surface, texture, and movement of the original voice" (15). It is in this sense that the ideal of mechanical precision is linked to that of the poet's own indelible voice. Far more important than the content of Villon's poetry to Pound is its aural movement, which Pound believed could be precisely replicated in performance and broadcast through the radio. As Fisher summarizes the link between Pound's experiments with the new technology and his more archaic interests:

> Electricity in the air became Pound's vorticist key to unlock medieval "forms," by-products of mental powers so highly charged that they ventured beyond, or existed outside . . . the everyday mentality to become the cultural engines that powered a society: love, and *virtú*. (144)

The radio production of the opera was ultimately much more than simply an opportunity to reach a broad audience; the real value of broadcasting Villon's text is that in the medium of radio, Villon's words become pure sound, and thus provide the listener with unimpeded access to the expressivity of his form.

As Fisher's discussion suggests, Pound's work on the opera is something of a laboratory experiment based on his ongoing theoretical and historical concerns with the relationship between poetry and music. Pound's prose writings, of course, are replete with comments on the topic. In *ABC of Reading*, for instance, he describes *melopoeia* as the process of charging words or groups of words with sound (37), and famously asserts that "poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music" (61). In his 1918 discussion of Imagism, "A Retrospect," he clarifies the rhythmic relation between poetry and music when he advises, "as regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome" (3), and he returns to the concept of rhythm in the "Treatise on Metre" appended to *ABC of Reading*, flatly stating, "Rhythm is a form

cut into time" (198). The historiographic element of Pound's interest in the matter is evident in his 1913 essay "The Tradition":

> It is not intelligent to ignore the fact that both in Greece and in Provence the poetry attained its highest rhythmic and metrical brilliance at times when the arts of verse and music were most closely knit together, when each thing done by the poet had some definite musical urge or necessity bound up within it. (91)

These examples, drawn from Pound's writings before and after the war, before and after the Vorticist years, before and after he wrote his own music and operas, not only point to Pound's dedication to the idea that poetry would be reinvigorated by a greater attention to its historical affinity with music. They also show that what animated this dedication was a Neoplatonic belief in music and the musicality of poetry as providing access to some otherwise unknown and unknowable truth.

Pound dwells on the nature of this musical truth as he develops his companion theories of Absolute Rhythm and Great Bass. As R. Murray Schafer argues in his collection of Pound's musical writings, *Ezra Pound and Music*, "Pound first conceived of *absolute rhythm* as something existing above the abrasions of workaday art. It was the breath-pattern of the master artificer, above analysis" (473). Pound first deploys the idea of Absolute Rhythm in the introduction to his 1910 Cavalcanti translations:

> Rhythm is perhaps the most primal of all things known to us. It is basic in poetry and music mutually, their melodies depending on a variation of tone quality and of pitch respectively, as is commonly said, but if we look more closely we will see that music is, by further analysis, pure rhythm; rhythm and nothing else, for the variation of pitch is the variation in rhythms of individual notes, and harmony the blending of these varied rhythms. When we know more of overtones we will see that the tempo of every masterpiece is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord. When it should be possible to show that any given rhythm implies about it a complete musical form—fugue, sonata, I cannot say what form, but a form, perfect, complete. Ergo, the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony, which, had we a little more skill, we could score for orchestra. (*Ezra Pound and Music* 469)

Pound revisits the concept of Absolute Rhythm in the "Credo" section of "A Retrospect": "I believe in an 'absolute rhythm,' a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore,

in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable" (9). Pound's discussions of Absolute Rhythm are marked by his commitment to an intense individualism, an almost primal authenticity, and an aesthetic of precision, qualities which are held together through the force of Great Bass, which Schafer likens to "the keel of a ship, exerting a centripetal pull over everything above it" (479). Through the ever-evolving notions of Absolute Rhythm and Great Bass, Pound grapples with the concept of truthfulness of temporal form—that is to say, a radically conceived musicality—as the measure of a poet's voice.

Pound's understanding of rhythm results in a treatment of Villon's text that differs markedly from the conventions of operatic text-setting. He does not transmute Villon's text into a higher musical order; rather, he identifies the brilliance of Villon's text within the musicality of its language. The truth of Villon's *virtú* is embedded within his prosody, and Pound's task as composer/text-setter is to highlight that truth and bring it forth to the audience. To put it plainly and in stark contrast to the conventions of operatic text-setting described by Sternfeld, Pound derives the opera's rhythm from a microcosmic level of attention to Villon's prosody, with a resulting score that was effectively unplayable in its original form. In spite of various phases of simplification and clarification by Pound and Antheil, the score remains incredibly fragmented and jarring, a fact addressed by many of Pound's best commentators. For example, Fisher draws our attention to the eight lines of Heaulmière's aria which "bear some of the more difficult mixed meter . . . (bars 194–198: 15/32 to 5/8 to 7/16 to 6/16 to 2/8, and bars 203–213: 11/16 to 3/8 to 19/32 to 2/4 to 3/8 to 11/16 to 7/16 to 2/8 to 3/16 to 2/8)" (126). In *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics*, Brad Bucknell similarly considers Villon's first aria, "Et Meure Paris," noting the lines "are set over seven bars, each of which possesses a different time signature: 11/16, 3/4, 5/8, 7/8, 2/4, 5/8, 11/16" (84). Daniel Albright, in *Untwisting the Serpent*, attends to the superimposition of time signatures at this same moment in the opera, observing that

> *Le testament* does not use time signatures in the ordinary sense; the time signatures (evidently devised by Antheil) appear in parentheses beneath the bars when necessary—which is often after every bar. Thus in the first five bars of the first number, we have 11/16, 3/4, 5/8, 7/8, and 2/4. . . [and in the piece "*Dame du ciel*"] there is a sequence of three bars in 33/16, 21/8, and 36/22; . . . [in] the soprano line, . . . [while] the orchestra plays beneath this in 8/4, 8/4, and 5/4. (147)

In passages such as these, Pound's interpreters draw our attention to the intense and intensely idiosyncratic rhythmical contours of the opera, and they rightly frame these as the moments when the work is most deeply

involved in its own project. What interests me about these formal charac-
teristics of the opera is that they derive from Pound's rejection of harmony
as an illusion (perhaps a delusion), and thus directly engage the role of
music in humanist thinking. In this respect, Pound's text-setting practices
can be read as a corrective to those of the Renaissance humanists. Whereas
harmony was a central part of their quest for unity, Pound's opera at-
tempts to capture Villon's "uncounterfeiting and uncounterfeitable voice"
by attending to the poet's own rhythmic signature.

Pound's attention to Villon's voice in *Le testament* is thus an expression
of the Vorticist-rooted aesthetic ideal by which he distinguishes modern
artistic practices. In *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, he compellingly
frames the distinctive feature of modernist practice in contrast to Richard
Wagner, whose *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be read as the culmination of the
existing operatic tradition's ideal of unity between music and text (and
drama). As Pound describes:

> [T]here are two aesthetic ideals, one the Wagnerian . . . [in which] you
> confuse the spectator by smacking as many of his senses as possible
> at every possible moment, this prevents his noting anything with un-
> usual lucidity, but you may fluster or excite him to the point of making
> him receptive; i.e. you may slip over an emotion, or you may sell him
> a rubber doll or a new cake of glass-mender during the hurly-burly.
>
> The other aesthetic has been approved by Brancusi, [Wyndham]
> Lewis, the vorticist manifestos; it aims at focusing the mind on a given
> definition of form, or rhythm, so intensely that it becomes not only
> more aware of that given form, but more sensitive to all other forms,
> rhythms, defined planes, or masses.
>
> It is a scaling of eyeballs, a castigating or purging of aural cortices;
> a sharpening of verbal apperceptions. It is by no means an emollient.
> (44–45)

It is Neoplatonic pedagogy of aesthetics with an acerbic wit. Pound's
amusing allusion to Wagner signals his departure from the aesthetic ideal
of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and, yet, the work of his own opera does not es-
chew unity; rather, it reframes the basis upon which unity is achieved.
Instead of abstracting a musical form from the text, Pound's efforts in *Le
testament* are aimed at the kind of precision he noted in the summation to
a 1918 review from *New Age*: "In affairs of tempo the *beat* is a knife-edge
and *not* the surface of a rolling pin" (*Ezra Pound and Music* 74); or, per-
haps more poignantly, in his 1913 essay "The Serious Artist": "by good
art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise"
(44). Sounding a note that will reverberate throughout twentieth-century
poetics, he goes on to consider what qualifies as great poetry: "in poetry I

mean something like 'maximum efficiency of expression'" (56). Through-
out these comments, Pound demonstrates his consistent commitment to a
modernist aesthetic of precision and radical authenticity. For Pound, text-
setting poses both a great challenge and a tremendous opportunity for the
musically true voice of a poet to be heard.

Pound's rich conceptualization of voice is dependent upon a notion
of a unified and authentic subject with expressive, form-making potential,
an assumption that lies at the core of Bernstein's contention with Pound.
Bernstein has written on several occasions about the challenge of Pound's
legacy to contemporary innovative writing, consistently arguing that
"contemporary poetry's response to Pound is to enact a poetry that does
not fragment for the sake of a greater whole but that allows the pieces
to sing their own story—a chordal simultaneity at pains to put off any
coherence save that found within its own provisional measure" ("Pound
and the Poetry of Today" 161–62). Cautioning against the comfort of dis-
interested formalist readings, Bernstein notes, "[W]hile one may prefer
to dwell on the formal innovations of *The Cantos*, the meaning of these
innovations can be adequately appreciated only after we consider the con-
text of their fascist roots. If we are to take Pound, or ourselves, seriously,
then we must grapple not with the 'structures themselves' but with the
political and historical contexts in which these structures emerge" (160).
In such discussions, Bernstein presents a sharply critical take on the slip-
page between Pound's ideals and his practice. While Altieri recuperates
the humanistic ideals that motivated Pound's literary innovations of the
Vorticist period, thus seeking to more carefully align Pound's work with
his intentions, Bernstein locates in Pound a fundamental misreading of his
own work. As Bernstein argues:

> Pound vilified fragmentation and abstraction as debasing the "gold
> standard" of language, yet his major and considerable contribution
> to the poetry of our language is exactly his rococo overlayings, in-
> direction, elusiveness. His fast-moving contrasts of attitudes and
> atmospheres collapse the theatre of Ideational Representation into a
> textually historicist, unfinishable process of composition by field—a
> field of many voices without the fulcrum point of any final arbitration,
> *listening not judging*: a *dis*integration into the incommensurability of
> parts that marks its entrance into the space of contemporary composi-
> tion. Insofar as contemporary poetry does not wish simply to admire
> or dismiss Pound's work but to come to terms with it, these compet-
> ing dynamics must be reckoned with. (161)

What Altieri identifies as Pound's conscious "undoing of categorical judg-
ment without anxiety about origins" (453), Bernstein suggests is a way

in which Pound's texts slip out of his authorial control, much to Pound's chagrin. In fact, throughout the *Cantos*, whether Pound is drawing from the tradition of Japanese Noh drama, economic theory, contemporary or historical political events, or Greek mythology, the very organizing force behind the poems is none other than Pound's own authority as an expressive subject. That is to say, the very prospect of art as "a display and a test," as Altieri puts it, not only proceeds from but seeks to reify the expressive self of the poet. In this gesture, humanism is recast by establishing authority not by relation to a tradition but via the authority of the individual self. The promise of the *Cantos* and in Pound's poetics more broadly, as Bernstein sees it, is not found by more closely aligning Pound's practice with his ideals, but, rather, by building on the failures of that practice. For Pound's poetics to be comprised ultimately of a "*dis*integration" of the source material is a productive failure within his schema which provides his work with its lasting importance. For his poetics to have achieved the coherence he sought and which Altieri attributes to the figure of the author would mean the perfection of a totalitarian ideal.

Bernstein elsewhere expresses his discomfort with the idea of the poet's autobiography as the guarantor of aesthetic validity in art. While consistently at pains to emphasize the individual and site-specific aspects of poetic practice, Bernstein is equally careful to distinguish such considerations from facile notions of voice which ultimately devolve to measures of artistic sincerity and insists, instead, on poetry as linguistic artifice. In this vein, Bernstein advocates for a poetics of the limit, one that actively resists conventional notions of unity and constantly both seeks and creates difference. In his essay "Time out of Motion," Bernstein acknowledges that "the poetic force of expressing what has been repressed or simply unexpressed—whether individual or collective—has been considerable," yet he maintains:

> There is also the necessity of going beyond the Romantic idea of self and the Romantic idea of the spirit of a nation or group (volksgeist) or of a period (zeitgeist), a necessity for a poetry that does not organize itself around a dominant subject, whether that be understood as a self or a collectivity or a theme—writing, that is, that pushes the limits of what can be identified, that not only reproduces difference but invents it, spawning nomadic syntaxes of desire and excess that defy genre (birth, race, class) in order to relocate it.
>
> All these multifoliate creations of language chime—some would say clang—at once; so that there *is* an acoustic locus to English-language poetry: the negative totalization of many separate chords, the better heard the more distinct each strain. Difference is not isolating, but the material ground of exchange; though perhaps it is a

> dream to hope, in these times, that the pleasurable labor of producing and discerning difference can go beyond the double bind of group identification/individual expression and find idle respite in blooming contrariety—the sonic shift from *KA* to *BOOP* in which the infinite finitude of sound and sensation swells. (120)

In this insistence on the "acentric locus of English-language poetry," it should not go without noticing that Bernstein, by way of a parenthetical phrase, aligns literary genre with "birth, race, class." The point being, of course, that for Bernstein, identity does not precede literary activity but is constituted within and through it. As such, the responsibility of the poet for constantly creating new genres by pushing the limits of conventional literary discourse is prerequisite to opening new possibilities of identity, a much more radically provisional and exploratory process than that envisioned by Pound. We should also not miss Bernstein's use of musical metaphors precisely as he puts the assumption of an expressive subject under pressure: describing the multiplicity of English-language poetry as "chiming" or "clanging," and advocating for "the sonic shift from *KA* to *BOOP* in which the infinite finitude of sound and sensation swells," Bernstein's figurative use of music, here, invokes music as an order of knowledge preferable for its capacity to sustain difference within itself. Bernstein presents the landscape of contemporary poetry as a dissonant soundscape, one that becomes only increasingly dissonant the better we listen to it. In this attention to difference, a desire for the ever-increasing possibilities of poetry as an activity in the world, we can locate the base of Bernstein's critical response to Pound. For if Pound's ideal of poetic force is ultimately centripetal, constituting forms that draw together disparate materials, Bernstein's poetics is persistently centrifugal as it seeks to generate new possibilities for poetry. That is, for Bernstein, inasmuch as "difference is not isolating but the material grounds of exchange," and poetry's greatest responsibility is to ceaselessly create new fields of possibility within language, poetry is the very mechanism of human interaction.

In their notions of unity and difference, Pound and Bernstein thus present two very different relationships to the humanist tradition: one who seeks a "modern renaissance of the Renaissance," in Altieri's phrase, and one who would more radically recast humanism by basing our relations with the past, with one another, and with ourselves not upon essential sameness but upon perhaps insurmountable and even irreconcilable difference. In this sense, we might expand upon a comment made by Fabrice Fitch in the liner notes to *Shadowtime*:

> [T]he adventures of Benjamin's "shade" have distinct echoes of Greek myth, particularly the Orpheus legend . . . this allow[s] [Ferneyhough]

to speculate on the paths that the genre *might* have taken during the early stages of its development, when its definition and conventions (for example, the boundary between oratorio and opera) were yet to become fixed or standardized. . . . Seen in this broader historical context, *Shadowtime* begins to make more sense: neither "anti-opera" (Ferneyhough: "I have no intention of blowing up opera houses") nor "anti-anti-opera," but "*ante*-opera." (8)

I would extend Fitch's discussion of the opera's relation to the history of the genre and suggest that *Shadowtime* is neither anti-humanist (it does not seek to blow up humanistic institutions of learning, for instance), nor anti-anti-humanist (it does not try to reinforce traditional humanism in the face of a critical onslaught), but *ante*-humanist. If *Le testament* is testimony, above all, to Pound's expressivist humanism, then *Shadowtime* both mourns the failures of that ideal and contemplates an alternate course of events from those set in motion half a millennium ago. If opera as we know it embodies a complex set of choices about the relationship between text and music, then *Shadowtime*'s radical reconsideration of this fundamental feature of opera amounts to a reconsideration of humanism itself. However, as is evident from the synopsis that prefaces the opera, even as Bernstein's libretto and Ferneyhough's setting of it place traditional notions of humanism under a great deal of duress, *Shadowtime* vigorously maintains the pedagogical aims so central to the humanist project: to articulate a meaningful relationship with exemplary predecessors (Benjamin), to formulate modes of relation between disparate discourses (music, poetry, and Benjamin's philosophy), and to develop, through art, more authentic and more ethical relations with others.

Although it feels a bit risky to consider Ferneyhough's compositional practices alongside Pound's, not least because of Pound's amateurism and Ferneyhough's complex sophistication, there are at least three points of contact between this aspect of *Le testament* and *Shadowtime*: the status of musical history, the treatment of source texts, and the relationship to the Orphic tradition. Given the desire of each opera to return to the roots of the genre, it is perhaps no great surprise that they both run through miniature histories of music. As Daniel Albright has argued, while *Le testament* does not develop in a conventional sense, it does work through a series of styles, ranging from troubadour song to modernist avant-gardism. Albright takes the opera's last number, "Frère's humains," as a case in point, contrasting Pound's use of the same Villon text with that found in Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. He suggests that "instead of Weill's anger and insistence, Pound hears in it resignation, almost empty wind. An opera that began in a relentlessly monodic fashion has at last achieved if not harmony, at least a fully coordinated counterpoint—an

ending that gives a sense of completeness" (165). Albright concludes that *Le testament*, by contrast, "is a grave comedy, in which styles themselves are dramatis personae" (165). This observation provides a compelling point of comparison with *Shadowtime* inasmuch as it similarly performs a kind of primer on music history, and does so by way of a compartmentalization of the musical material that, if anything, is even more radical than that of *Le testament*.

   *Shadowtime* is divided into seven scenes, two of which (scenes 2 and 6) are described as "barriers," each demarcating shifts in the opera. The first barrier, scene 2, is an eighteen-minute interlude for solo guitar, "marking the beginning of the journey of Benjamin's avatar (shadow or dream figure) from the represented historical times of Scene I to the nonhistorical time of the unfolding opera" ("Synposis" 19–20); the second barrier, scene 6, entitled "Seven Tableau Vivants," imagines Benjamin's Angel of History as Albrecht Dürer's *Melancolia*. The sense of fragmentation continues within scenes. For instance, as Ferneyhough describes in the essay that accompanies the CD, scene 2 "is made up of 128 small fragments, some of them lasting 2 or 3 seconds, some of them lasting maybe 15 seconds, which are played continuously" (Ferneyhough, "Musical and Other Notes" 17). As with Pound's opera, in which shifting musical styles function as a structural allegory of Villon's life, and perhaps the universal state of man (achieving "if not harmony at least fully coordinated counterpoint" on the gallows with our fellow thieves), the fleeting forms of classical music in *Shadowtime* speak to the exhaustion of a tradition.

   *Shadowtime*'s break with the tradition that underwrites *Le testament* is further evident both in Bernstein's libretto and in Ferneyhough's treatment of it. Whereas Pound's sense of Villon's musicality determines *everything* about his resulting composition, *Shadowtime* is a study in contradiction. Ferneyhough has described text and music as being "two world systems, those of verbal/conceptual *as opposed to* musical discourse" (my emphasis), with the difference between them an "impossible fracture" ("Words and Music"). The resulting intense fragmentation, stylization, and layering of Bernstein's text in the setting of *Shadowtime* sometimes virtually and often fully obliterate intelligibility. Such is the case, for instance, in scene 3, whose title, "The Doctrine of Similarity," is an adaptation of the title of Benjamin's essay, "The Doctrine of the Similar," in which he characteristically interweaves his materialism and his mysticism, and suggests that the significance of occult knowledge lies largely in the notion of "the similar," and that "such insight . . . is to be gained less by demonstrating found similarities than by reproducing processes which produce such similarities" (65). We can locate such a process of reproducing similarities in the three pieces entitled "Amphibolies I (Walk Slowly)," "Amphibolies II (noon) [instrumental]," and "Amphibolies III (Pricks)," which punctuate

scene 3. The title "Amphibolies" is an alteration of "amphibole," from the Greek meaning "to throw or hit on both sides," and a term used to designate "an ancient casting net" (*OED*). As we will see, this meaning of the word underwrites the procedure of Bernstein's libretto as it casts text about, but there are other meanings of the word that are equally operative. In the synopsis, Bernstein describes the title as "suggesting mineral ambiguities" (14), a phrase that rather offhandedly combines two additional fields in which the term resonates: mineralogy and logic. For, mineralogically speaking, an "amphibole" (pronounced "amphi-bowl") designates a grouping of dark-colored, flaky rocks, while, logically speaking, an "amphiboly" (note the different pronunciation) is a variety of ambiguity in which the construction of a sentence or clause allows for it to contain multiple distinct meanings. In the very choice of word for the title, then, these pieces revel in the richness and multiplicity of language.

However, even as the naming of these pieces suggests a poetics of drawing out unsuspected similarities in a word, the movement through the three "amphibolies" demonstrates how Bernstein's commitment to poetry as the production of difference extends Benjamin's interest in processes that produce similarity. This can sound paradoxical—with one talking about differences and the other similarities. But their connection lies in their investment in the similarities of process as opposed to those of product. Bernstein conceives of poetry as a difference-producing machine—drawing out the disparate applications of the same Greek roots in "amphibole" is a poetic act not because it brings to light unnoticed similarities between rocks and reason (obduracy would be far too easy a target), but because it encourages us to think about the stunningly different implications that accrue to common roots over time. For his part, Benjamin is committed not to finding similarities that already exist in the world but to a notion of language as "the highest application of the mimetic faculty," an archive of "non-sensuous similarities or non-sensuous correspondences" that functions most like clairvoyance (68). For Benjamin, one of the clearest examples of these "non-sensuous similarities" is to be found in the comparison of words for the same thing in different languages. The similarity is not at all between the two words themselves, but in their relationship to their common signified, a relationship that Benjamin argues was once fundamentally and directly onomatopoeic and is now accessible only through a kind of linguistic reverse engineering. This preoccupation with similarity and difference in the libretto suggests an ethical dimension to the opera's pedagogical intent that would have been familiar to early humanists. As Joel Bettridge has recently argued, *Shadowtime* is clearly a work with a moral at its center; however, "the libretto is not interested in moral teachings or lists of ethical behaviors. It aims to locate ethics in the attempt to read carefully, to interpret our texts and each other well" (750). As the play

of difference in Bernstein's adaptations of "amphiboly" demonstrates, to read well does not mean to arrive at the right conclusion but to participate in an endless act of inquiry and interpretation. In *Shadowtime*, uncertainty is elemental, and contingency is foundational.

The resulting drama of difference production and interrelation is played out over the three "amphibolies" pieces both in Ferneyhough's use of musical form and in the text of Bernstein's libretto. Ferneyhough's use of canon, in which multiple voices imitate one another, functions as a formal corollary to the notions of similarity, difference, and repetition that are central to the opera. In the libretto, this concern, which the synopsis describes as being ultimately one of "life in extremity," is evident in Bernstein's shifting the order of repeated words. The first part of "Amphibolies I (Walk Slowly)" reads:

> Walk slowly
> and jump quickly
> over
> the paths into
> the
> briar. The
> pricks are points on a
> map
> that take
> you back behind the stares
> where shadows are
> thickest at
> noon. (62)

The text is then followed by two phonically based variants, but only the words from this first part return in "amphibolies" 2 and 3. These two later pieces each go through a clear pattern of throwing the text back and forth. In "Amphibolies II (Noon) [instrumental]," the text of the first "amphibole" is reversed line by line and word by word, to read "noon / at thickest / are shadows / where / stares the behind back you" (68), and so on. The third and final "amphibole" maintains the line order of the second and reverses word order within the lines, putting the words within lines back in their original order: "Noon / thickest at / where shadows are / you back behind the stares" (74), and so on. There is one exception to these permutations of words: the three-word line "the paths into" does not change from poem to poem. Thematically, this makes sense because, as the synopsis tells us, scene 2 is the first scene after the transition "of Benjamin's avatar . . . from the represented historical times of Scene I to the nonhistorical time of the unfolding opera" (20). But the line also seems key to

our understanding of this moment in the opera, offering us multiple paths into this aesthetic field in which Benjamin's life and ideas serve as the shared signified treated by two distinct languages, that of Bernstein's poetry and that of Ferneyhough's music. That is to say, as Ferneyhough aptly summarizes it, "like the writings of Benjamin himself, 'Doctrine' concerns itself in the first instance not with presentation but with 're-presentation'" ("Words and Music"), with the similarity between the text and the music found not in their affinities to one another but rather, in the nature of their relationships to both Benjamin's ideas and his life as paradigmatic of modernity.

In this treatment of Benjamin we find the opera's engagement with one of the most important touchstones of operatic tradition, the myth of Orpheus. Even as the form of opera is an expression of humanist classicism, so too do its thematic preoccupations tend toward the ancient world. Particularly in early opera, the myth of Orpheus seemed irresistible—most famously in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and Peri's *Euridice*, but also in countless other examples. Orpheus also prominently returns in the first reform opera of Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Orpheus and Euridice*. The myth of Orpheus has obvious appeal for opera inasmuch as it articulates the very ideal of uniting poetry and music, but the importance of the myth goes beyond the storyline. As Sternfeld argues:

> When one examines the voluminous literature dealing with Orpheus . . . one cannot help feeling that the figure of Orpheus stands for more than the well-known plot suggests superficially. The multitude might be touched and diverted by the traditional tale, but those who know, who have been initiated, perceive a deeper meaning. For them Orpheus becomes a sage, a courageous seeker after divine wisdom, a conqueror of death, a religious prophet (if not the founder of a religious cult, Orphism), an *allegory* for Apollo, Dionysus, Osiris, or Christ. (8)

This allegorical use of Orpheus is clearly at play in Bernstein's opera, even explicitly so. The synopsis describes scene 4 as Benjamin's "Orphic descent into a shadow word," and the second piece from the scene is entitled "*katabasis*," the hero's descent into the underworld. As such, the opera seems to fall in line with the habits of the genre, as Sternfeld notes:

> In [medieval] moralizations [of the myth of Orpheus], Orpheus' descent equals Christ's harrowing of Hell. To a humanist the analogy of such a descent, such a *katabasis*, with that of Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, with Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and, last but not least, with Dante under the guidance of Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*, would be

obvious. It is the symbolism of the *figura* of Orpheus that distin-
guishes him from other musical figures of antiquity (such as Arion
or Amphion). (9)

Insofar as *Shadowtime* proposes Benjamin as yet another figure to map onto
the myth of Orpheus, the opera seeks not only to honor Benjamin, not only
even to demonstrate his life as paradigmatic of modernity, but also to put
his ideas into aesthetic practice. It is useful to recall Pound's use of Villon
in this light. While Villon does not go through *katabasis*, he is nonetheless
an orphic figure who serves a symbolic purpose similar to what Sternfeld
identifies in the humanist response to the broad applicability of the myth
of Orpheus. For Pound, Villon is far more than merely an important pre-
decessor; as a troubadour, he practiced the ideal of poetry closely aligned
with music; as a rogue and an outlaw, he embodied Pound's vision of the
poet as an embattled and misunderstood outsider; as a major figure of
the *ubi sunt* tradition, Villon participated in the crisis between past and
present that forever occupied Pound. As such, Pound's strict fidelity to
the sound patterns of Villon's language, his desire to broadcast them to
the public, and his determination for the total unity of effect all function
to give voice to Villon as a figure of Orpheus, come back from the dead
and singing.

   The stark difference in the orphic treatment of Benjamin lies in the
simple fact that he is not resuscitated. While "*Shadowtime* projects an al-
ternative course for what happened on that fateful night," as the synopsis
tells us, the opera does not work to reunify Benjamin as operatic tradition
does the dismembered poet-singer, either literally, by altering the events
of the story (as was particularly common for operatic performances in-
tended for the court), or figuratively, by uniting words and music. In fact,
the opera is so permeated by images and varieties of fragmentation—from
its splitting of Benjamin into his historical self and his avatar to the inter-
rogations of Benjamin conducted variously by "Three Giant Mouths," "the
two-headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx joined to the body of
Kerberus," to the range of historical figures, to Ferneyhough's text-setting
practices—that the very idea of reunification is deemed implausible. As
such, if Orpheus is a figure for Benjamin in the opera, he is a figure not
for magical reunification (of poetry and music, of the dismembered body,
of modernism recuperated), but for the power of dispersed and irrecon-
cilable parts. In this sense, the opera recovers the dark or even macabre
elements of the orphic legend as described by Carolyn Abbate:

   [Orpheus's] dismemberment . . . entails a split between singing voice
   and human body in terms that suggest the work of those accustomed
   to butchery. A terrible physical reality is precondition for the mira-
   cle—coexisting within the miracle, side by side. To be complacent

about the head, to say it is just a metaphor, thus may reflect willed blindness to the awful aspects of Orpheus' fate, and to a symbolic force that is allied with horror, and not with poetry alone. (3)

The sense of grotesque horror that Abbate describes as an essential element of the Orpheus myth's economy also underwrites *Shadowtime*. As the synopsis tells us, "*Shadowtime* inhabits a period in human history in which the light flickered and then failed" (13). This is not an opera of redemption in which similarity and sympathy rule the day, and in which the awful aspects of Benjamin's fate are turned into heroic metaphor. This is an opera that considers the underside of disembodiment as taken literally. In its very rejection of conventional representation or dramatization, the opera emphasizes the historical specificity, the actualness and factualness of Benjamin's death as he tried to escape the all-too-real violence of occupied France. At the same time, Benjamin does live on in the opera inasmuch as it takes his ideas as compositional principles—the opera itself becomes an example of what might best be described as Benjaminian praxis.

The complex symbolic role that Benjamin thus plays in the opera again resonates with Abbate's discussion of the Orpheus myth as being about the double-edged power of music. As Abbate suggests,

> In one view, power is in a work per se, in another, in its execution. Power may reside in the transcendent aspect of music that rests above its own precipitation into live performance. Or it may reside in the performer, who produces the immanent matter of the moment. As a master symbol for the performance network, Orpheus' postmortem singing reflects the former, suggesting an Orpheus-puppet moved by Apollo, who speaks through heads and lyres as well as through women and men. As a minor symbol of musical power, however, it can also imply an Orpheus who is the source of all sound, a body part that sings through residual energy. (40)

Benjamin's symbolic function in *Shadowtime* can be understood following Abbate's scheme. To a great extent, *Shadowtime* operates in precisely the Apollonian realm of music as disembodied idea, as pure form—this is, after all, a self-described "thought opera." And, yet, at the same time, in the very great degree to which the opera resists ideas of unification, it emphasizes the importance, if not of the physicality of performance, then of the ineffability and ephemerality of it. In its profoundly irreconcilable fragmentation, the opera emphasizes the violent premises of the Orpheus myth that Abbate draws to our attention, and it does so in a way that both revisits those very first operatic invocations of Orpheus and demonstrates a very different set of choices that might have been made about setting text to music. In its grimmest logic, the opera suggests that Benjamin's

death is not only a significant moment in human history, but also the logical conclusion of the humanism of that history, a terrible culmination of events set into motion centuries before his birth. What the opera presents us with, though, is not anti- or post-humanist opera, but an opera that wants to reclaim a humanism that revels in artifice and difference as ways of perpetually resisting the risks of orthodoxy; a humanism that embraces the polyphonous, polyvocal, polycultural, and polymorphous.

 In its desire to thus radically recast the bases and implications of humanism, *Shadowtime* powerfully resonates with the critique developed by Emmanuel Levinas. In *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas observes that "the crisis of humanism in our times undoubtedly originates in an experience of human inefficacy accentuated by the very abundance of our means of action and the scope of our ambitions" (45). In Levinas's analysis, the failure of humanism is ultimately that of the Ego, and he proposes to reconfigure a humanism based on a radical receptivity to the Other, what he describes as "a new concept of passivity" (50). In doing so, as Tony Davies has argued, Levinas "retains an ethical register denied to those for whom the human is simply an effect of structure or discourse. Humanity is neither an essence nor an end, but a continuous and precarious process of becoming human, a process that entails the inescapable recognition that our humanity is on loan from others" (132). Tellingly, Bernstein alludes to Levinas in precisely these terms in his essay "State of the Art," arguing that "what poetry belabors is more important than what poetry says, for 'saying is not a game' and the names that we speak are no more our names than the words that enter our ears and flow through our veins, on loan from the past." Bernstein concludes that "when we get over this idea that we can all speak to each other, I think it will begin to be possible, as it always has been, to listen to one another, one at a time and in the various clusters that present themselves, or that we find the need to make" (8). Listening instead of speaking; multiplicity instead of exactitude; receptivity instead of expressivity: these are the terms in which the formal innovations of *Shadowtime* re-envision humanism.

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NOTES

 1. See Peter Kivy's *Osmin's Rage* for its argument that opera is neither a compromise between music and drama nor a subgenre of either, but, instead, a genre in its own right, the genre of "drama-made-music."
 2. See Kivy, chapter 2.
 3. See Mladen Dolar's contribution to Žižek and Dolar, *Opera's Second Death*, for a discussion of the ways in which opera figures its larger politico-cultural moment.

4. For a discussion of the tension between purists and those more favorably inclined toward artistic collaborations, see Daniel Albright's *Untwisting the Serpent*.

5. "Humanism" is a famously amorphous term, and it is well beyond the scope of this essay to decisively define its parameters. Instead, I would simply note the specific role of Neoplatonic syncretism in the formation of opera, to which Pound returns and against which Bernstein rebels.

6. During this same period, Pound also composed a number of instrumental pieces, often using instruments made for him by the early-music enthusiast and instrument maker Arnold Dolmetsch. In 1931, he also began work on his second opera, *Cavalcanti*, and in 1932 he began work on a third, of which only the scene *Collus o Helliconii*, on the Roman poet Catullus, is extant.

7. As A. David Moody's biography of Pound demonstrates, *Le testament* not only extends from Pound's lifelong interest in the relationship between poetry and music but is preceded by a period in which Pound's life is deeply involved with a whole range of musical matters.

8. The 2008 publication of *Blind Witness*, which contains the libretti for *Blind Witness News*, *The Subject*, and *The Lenny Patschen Show*, all collaborations with the composer Ben Yarmolinsky, presents the opportunity to consider this aspect of Bernstein's career.

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