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Lawrence Kramer. *After the Lovedeath: Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. ix, 281 pp. ISBN 0-520-21012-3 (hardcover)

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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of male/female hierarchies. In this, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* joins other recent publications which embed opera in the discourses of their day. But it is a danger of historical writing in general, and perhaps especially of cultural history, that we go “to hunt for the present in the past.”² Whether or not he intended to do so, Tambling gives the impression of hunting for the seeds of fascism in the nineteenth century with the goal of establishing how it came to fruition in the twentieth century and is with us yet, as though fascism were an infectious disease which has been handed from one generation to the next, and against which we must guard. The shock value comes from the realization that some of our most revered artists were “infected,” perhaps even caused the disease. We need to be reminded that “it is nothing less than the whole of the past ... that produced the whole of the complex present” and that includes movements and ideas of which we ourselves approve as well as abhor.³ Nonetheless, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* should be read (with a critical eye) by all who are interested in opera; we can thank Tambling for ensuring that opera librettos, at least, will not be marginalized from the writing of cultural history.

This is a handsome book, with well-chosen dust cover illustration pertinent to the text, attractive layout, and convenient documentation, including a useful bibliography (pp. 249–67) and index. A couple of errors have slipped past the editorial eye: *Cambridge Music* [recte *Opera*] *Journal* (p. 82 n.) and *Un Ballo in Blaschera* [recte *Maschera*] (p. 110).

Mary S. Woodside

Lawrence Kramer. *After the Lovedeath: Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. ix, 281 pp. ISBN 0-520-21012-3 (hardcover).

In Tolstoy’s story, “The Kreutzer Sonata,” a jealous man named Pozdnyshev murders his wife because he suspects her of infidelity. He grounds his suspicions in the fact that his wife plays Beethoven’s famous sonata with a down-at-heels violinist named Trukhachevski. When Pozdnyshev catches sight of the violinist and pianist together, leaning over the piano examining a score—even when he hears their voices intermingling in conversation, or eavesdrops on their rehearsals of Beethoven—he surmises that they are betraying him. The sonata expresses, synecdochically, this adultery, however fictitious it may be. Moreover, Pozdnyshev promotes their infidelity. When his wife offers to cancel a planned concert, Pozdnyshev threatens her. As Lawrence Kramer argues, “[t]o become a cuckold may well be Pozdnyshev’s strongest sexual desire” (p. 209). Unable to control the desires of his wife, embodied in sonata structure (theme, development, return) and in sound itself, Pozdnyshev stabs her with a dagger. Trukhachevski, on the other hand, escapes the wrath of the jealous husband by ducking under the piano and hightailing it out the door. The

²Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, G. Bell and Sons, 1963), 10.

³*Ibid.*, 19.

only resolution to Pozdnyshv's fantasy of betrayal is to kill the woman onto whom he has heaped all the distorted "misrecognitions" of his own desire.

Around Tolstoy's story, Kramer weaves a dazzling set of psychoanalytic variations on the construction of masculinity over and against a repudiated, violated femininity. Performance of the *Kreutzer Sonata* becomes the ground for multiple interpretations of the nature of desire: desire occurs in the parlour, between a bourgeois wife and an interloper; it occurs at the instigation of the witnessing husband; it occurs as the attempt to reconcile "masculine" and "feminine" melodic lines within the score; it occurs in conjunction with similar musical performances in other nineteenth-century literature.

In part psychoanalysis, in part literary criticism, in part musicology, *After the Lovedeath*, despite its title, is defiantly not concerned with Wagner. Drawing on Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and others, Kramer writes in a now familiar "French" style of short, aphoristic chapters, headed by amusing titles. Sometimes no longer than a paragraph, these chapters outline a thought, a speculation, an insight, a fantasy, a whim. The style recalls Barthes's *Camera Lucida* or *A Lover's Discourse*. Certain ideas about the relation of masculine subjectivity and violence against women are returned to again and again, but each time with added insight. "Femininity," Kramer writes in the opening pages of this book, "constitutes the radically ambivalent polar opposite of a radically unambivalent masculinity" (p. 2). In the closing pages, after showing the nodes of rupture and breakdown of this gender construction, and after suggesting that the construction of a rigid masculinity requires the crushing of analogized and internalized "femininity," he calls for a new "psychodynamics of gender. What has to be changed is the symbolic order itself. We need a new unconscious" (p. 262).

The premise of this book, one bound to distress dyed-in-the-wool formalists, is that music forms the unconscious of literature. More expansively, music stands in for the unconscious (in Freud's sense of what has been repressed) or for the imaginary (in Lacan's sense of that which represents unity, coherence, and grandiosity). In Tolstoy's story, music signifies desires and meanings that never attain verbal articulation. They remain below the barrier of repression that consciousness imposes. Some musicologists have more or less accepted this premise, that music has a surplus of signification in both performance and literary representation. For instance, Michel Poizat opens his study of voice, *La voix du diable: la jouissance lyrique sacrée* (1991), with the statement that

[t]he voice is an object of jouissance. All music-lovers, all those who are ssonate about lyric art, all those who sing for their own pleasure or the pleasure of others, know this (p. 7).

Or, in Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, a meditation on Balzac's story "Sarrasine," the performance by the legendary castrato—singing as a soprano yet dressed as a man—confounds categories of performed gender (p. 183). Gender may be nothing more than masquerade acted out in the theatre of habit. As Kramer elegantly puts it, sexuality should not be confused with genitality; sexuality "comes about in psychical life ... precisely when desire detaches itself from bodily need" (p. 186). Music becomes the sign of that out-of-body desire.

Kramer endorses the idea that music expresses unconscious desires and promotes an idea of musicology inflected with literary and psychoanalytic theory. Lacanian theory is not easily summarized, but this does not preclude an application of psychoanalysis to music. Indeed, psychoanalysis and musicology both isolate voices and sound as instruments of subjective expression. Nevertheless, with its fetishization of aural experience, musicology departs from the Lacanian notion that subjectivity derives from a moment of vision—what Lacan calls “the mirror stage”—and backdates the acquisition of identity to the mother’s voice, or to sound itself, as the ground-zero of fractured, desiring, defeated selfhood. The mother’s gaze, according to Lacan, bestows on the infant a sense of wholeness. Lacan further suggests that learning language exacerbates the sense of split subjectivity as language embodies the striving toward a statement of integral identity or completely recognized desire. Musicologists, however, might argue that, prior to articulate speech, sounds themselves (shrieks, voices, pre-oedipal babblings, grunts, whimpers) express the needs and desires of the individual. The mother’s voice, according to this model of the aural basis of identity, grants a sense of subjective integrity. Music extends and elaborates this primary acoustic experience via formal structures. Walt Whitman, in “Proud Music of the Storm,” describes this infantile acoustic phenomenon as the predecessor to the erotic jubilation implicit in listening to Italian opera: “Ah from a little child, / Thou knowest soul how to me all sounds became music, / My mother’s voice in lullaby or hymn.” By extension, music becomes the sign of the symbolic order, a zone of primary “law” that determines individual identity as “masculine” or “feminine.”

After the Lovedeath sustains an argument about the cultural construction of masculinity as a tale of inadequacy. Men tell stories about their triumphs in order to confirm their masculinity; men perpetrate violence against women because of an inherent instability in gender polarity that, in male psychic life, cannot be permitted. Kramer claims that heterosexual masculinity, in particular, is based on love-hate antagonism with femininity. The feminine, in music and in culture, is injured and dismissed, as in Tolstoy’s story, in order to preserve distance from the thing that it refuses to acknowledge as a constituent of masculine subjectivity: femininity. “The logic of gender polarity is inflexible,” Kramer claims. “Someone must always be castrated: which is to say, someone *else*. The man in an economy of lack needs women to embody that lack” (p. 108). In place of this self-damaging dialectic, Kramer proposes that music opens up a site where “gender synergy,” the fluid intermingling of genders, or the relinquishing altogether of gender identification, can occur.

Several objections and difficulties must be registered about *After the Lovedeath*. Those people already familiar with the critical work of Ellie Ragland on psychoanalysis, Elisabeth Bronfen on dead women, Cathy Caruth on trauma, Julia Kristeva on abjection, Susan McClary on gender codes in music, or Wayne Koestenbaum on the erotics of listening, will hear echoes of their positions in Kramer’s.¹ The difficulty of this book is its easy allusiveness.

¹ Kramer may not have been influenced specifically by these writers, but his work manifests general

However, Kramer has also selectively adopted theories from debates about the construction of femininity in the arena of a predominantly masculine culture. Discussions of men in feminism and the relation of gender to performativity, or gender to bodies, have gone far beyond dichotomies of “masculine” and “feminine,” as theories elaborated by Judith Butler or Slavoj Žižek demonstrate.² Moreover, Kramer does not set forth whether the phantasm of gender haunts all music, or just certain instances of it, as in Tolstoy’s “The Kreutzer Sonata,” where the performance of music and its metaphorization in language necessarily mark it as male and female.

Music is implicated in other systems of meaning apart from gender. For instance, it would be possible to treat music in Tolstoy’s story as an aspect of class: a poor violinist cannot be tolerated by a bourgeois husband. Pozdnyshév’s jealousy might spring from a desire to restrain his wife’s encouragement of a man lower in class than hers. Music, in this analysis, signifies borders of class consciousness more than it signifies gender polarity. The limitations of “psychomusicology” are apparent when one introduces terms that complicate the experience of listening: race, musical training, class, age. The ideal music listener experiences not just a “gender synergy,” but a “class synergy” and perhaps a “social synergy” as well. By contrast, Kramer states that the listener, functioning in the symbolic order, “wants to obey the music, even to be loved by the music for obeying it, but does not want to want this. Listening works, accordingly, like a classic process of hysterical conversion; it resolves the listener’s ambivalence by turning something voluntary, a desire to obey, into something involuntary, a commotion of feeling and sensation that the music is felt to impose” (p. 214). While listening, the auditor does not only strive to annihilate contradictory impulses. Such miniature “lovedeaths,” with their implied sado-masochism, do not explain how listening is contingent on such factors as marketing (telemarketers calling at dinner-hour, opera companies sending flyers through the mail), the provision of cultural capital granted to auditors (“have you seen *Tosca* at the Met?”), its venues (concert hall or living room), its execution (amateur, professional, jazzed-up, electrified), or the floating attention (indifferent, regimented, bored, pained) of the listener. Kramer’s formulation notwithstanding, not all listeners demonstrate obedient attentiveness.

familiarity with Lacanian theory and its application to literary and musical works. For supplementary information, see Ellie Ragland, “Lacan, the Death Drive, and the Dream of the Burning Child,” in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [orig. ed., 1980]); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

²For theories of gender performativity and philosophies of the body, see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993). For a discussion of music and cinema as psychoanalytic media, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York and London: Verso, 1997 [orig. ed., 1988]), and idem, “There is No Sexual Relationship,” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 208–49.

Kramer's aphoristic style sometimes distracts from his argument. The arrangement of ideas into sections produces a hallucinatory effect; it is never easy to remember the "truth" of desire in this complex omnium gatherum of ideas. Local insights about Tolstoy's story or Beethoven's sonata vanish into universal truths covering masculine and feminine subjectivity. "Masculine abjection," Kramer claims, "always debases; it disfigures; it castrates" (p. 88). Always? Abjection also has less aggressive aspects: it dissolves; it founders; it shrinks. In another quotable statement, Kramer asserts that "[i]n traditional narrative, women seek men, but men seek manhood" (p. 146). This diagnosis of unresolvable gender conflict is probably more true of the nineteenth century than the twentieth, and it also does not bear application to all operas, novels, or anecdotes.

Kramer, however, has opened routes of access into musicology that allow quirks of gender and desire to appear. The ways in which music figures as conscious and unconscious event now have a vocabulary and a name. Music, in short, has entered the symbolic and imaginary orders. That is, after all, where we knew we would one day find it.

Allan Hepburn