



John T. Hamilton, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Comparative Literature

Harvard University

Born in 1963 in New York

Studied German and French Literature, Greco-Roman Literature,
Music and Philosophy at New York University

PROJECT

Music, Madness, and the Opening of Language

The project investigates literary representations of musical and mad experience, which point to moments in the text where representation itself is called into question. Readings in Diderot, Hoffmann, Wackenroder, Kleist, Nietzsche, Kafka, and Th. Mann demonstrate how music and madness are claimed to work together to open up new, non-representational dimensions in language. Critical analyses interrogate these claims and consider their ramifications not only for literature, but also for the aesthetics of music and for theories of interpretation.

Recommended Reading

Hamilton, John T. *Soliciting Darkness: Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

-. "Fulguratores: Inscribing Thunderbolts in Lessing and Hölderlin." *Poetica* 33 (2001): 445-464.

-. "'Ist das Spiel vielleicht unangenehm?' Musical Disturbances and Acoustic Space in Kafka." *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* 29 (2005).

Unequal Song: On Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*

The working title of my project is *Music, Madness and the Unworking of Language*. It addresses the persistent literary practice of associating notions of madness with musical experience. In general, the mad and the musical constitute limits to communication, re-presentation, and subjective identity: moments where language is either surpassed, as in affective theories of music or in the claims of so-called "absolute music"; or where language breaks down entirely as in Foucault's "archaeology of silence." If language works-as communication, representation, description, or expression-then music and madness in literature may demonstrate how language can unwork itself.

The project does not assume that all music is mad, nor that all madness is somehow musical. Rather it concentrates on a single literary topos, the mad musician, which has enjoyed stunning longevity in the European tradition. Nor is the project to be considered a simple exercise in traditional "Toposforschung", but rather as an opportunity to investigate philosophical, musicological, semiotic and semantic issues as they have been broached by literary practice.

Music and madness seem to share a lack of concepts, which may be variously regarded:

as a deficit (e.g., in Enlightenment attacks against irrationalism); as a benefit (e.g., in Kant's "reflective judgment" or Schelling's "intellectual intuition," which is liberated from conceptual strategies); or as language-critique (as in Nietzsche's anti-verbalism; Ernst Bloch's parallel theory of obscurity and philosophy of music; in Adorno's musically coded "begrifflose Erkenntnis"). What is the relation of sound (concordant or dissonant) to speech? Can music and madness be meaningful without concepts? Can it be comprehensible, while being pre- or post-verbal? What are the ramifications of a "musicalized language" (melopoeia) or a textualized music (musica poetica)?

Although I concentrate primarily on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German and French literature and philosophy, where these problems are particularly explicit, my project reaches back to Greek antiquity (e.g., the ambivalent role of music in tragedy and pedagogy) and forward to modernist myths, with a concluding chapter on Thomas Mann's *"Doktor Faustus"* as a compendium of the varied and complex traditions outlined in the body of my book. Other chapters focus on the following: Diderot (*"Le Neveu de Rameau"*); Heinse, Wackenroder, and Tieck; E.T.A. Hoffmann; Kleist (*"Die heilige Cäcilie, oder die Gewalt der Musik"*); Balzac (*"Gambara"* and *"Sarasine"*); Nietzsche and Wagner; and D'Annunzio (*"Il Trionfo della Morte"*).

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Hamilton, John T. (Princeton, N.J. [u.a.], 2013)

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Hamilton, John T. (New York, NY, 2008)

Music, madness, and the unworking of language

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Hamilton, John T. (Düsseldorf, 2006)

Die Ohren sind ein Hirn für sich : Prof. Hamilton (Harvard) über "Musik und Wahnsinn" ; Alexander Kluge im Gespräch mit John T. Hamilton

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Soliciting darkness : Pindar, obscurity, and the classical tradition

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Fulguratores : Lessing and Hölderlin

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Hamilton, John T. (2001)

Thunder from a clear sky : on Lessing's redemption of Horace

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Hamilton, John T. (2000)

Poetica obscura : reexamining Hamann's contribution to the Pindaric tradition

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