

BOOK REVIEW

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The Living Lyre in English Verse: from Elizabeth through the Restoration by Louise Schleiner. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984. 218 pp.

THIS USEFUL AND often engaging book examines lyric poetry from about 1580 to 1690 from the perspective of that period's vocal music. It is not a book for the casual reader. However, for the serious scholar or musician the book will yield many new insights.

Unlike other books concerned with the musico-literary interrelations of that period, such as Wilfrid Mellers' *Harmonius Meeting: a Study of Music, Poetry and Theatre in England, 1600-1900*, Gretchen Finney's *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, 1580-1650*, and Elise Jorgens' *The Well-Tun'd Word: Musical Interpretations of English Poetry, 1597-1651*, Schleiner focuses on the changing interaction of the lyric verse and music. In response to her rhetorical question, "what was involved in the changes of lyric style from Sidney to Dryden?" she succinctly states the purpose of her book, which is "to show that song setting, through its interaction with lyric poetry, played a part in these stylistic changes, and further that many poems have dimensions we will miss unless we are aware of their musical contexts, their musically influenced features of rhythm and verbal pattern, and their musically allusive effects" (p. 5).

In the first chapter, "Three Modes of Lyric among the Elizabethans," she carefully sets out the linguistic scheme and methodology with which she will examine the changing ideas of poets and composers concerning the kinds of poetry that should be set and how. She bases her analysis on three lyric modes—song, declamatory, and conversational speech—which are represented respectively by the "relatively pure samples": "Come Away, Come" from John Dowland's *First Book of Aires* (1597); "Full many a glorious morning have I seen"

(Sonnet 33) by Shakespeare; and "The Good-morrow" by John Donne. In her discussion of the poetics, meter, phonemics, and syntax of these three modes of lyric, she uses the terminology of traditional grammar and rhetoric along with some terms taken from modern linguistics. Although the jacket notes stress the author's ability to reveal "much about both arts without losing the reader in technical detail," I found her frequent overuse of prosodic jargon, as in the example "the first four lines of each stanza are accentual anacreontics catalectic . . ." (p. 41), a bit heavy-handed, especially for the music portion of her intended audience.

On the other hand, her methodological approach is very useful. After setting out in helpful chart form the linguistic traits that tend to predominate in each mode of the lyric, she first applies these modes to the lyrics of Sidney, Thomas Watson, and Shakespeare. With Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, for example, she discusses the song-mode lyrics which are intermingled with and contrast sharply with the sonnets, which she says are "well on the way to speech-mode lyric" (p. 12). Particularly interesting in this chapter is her treatment of contrafacta verse (verse written to fit pre-existing music) in Sidney's *Certain Sonnets* (from Spanish and Italian songs) and Thomas Watson's contrafacta verses for his *Italian Madrigals Englished*.

Chapter Two deals with Herbert's "Divine and Moral Songs" and includes sections on 'Herbert's Song-Mode Prosody and Lute Songs' and 'Herbert's Speech Mode and Declamatory Song.' Chapter Three discusses "Herrick's Songs and the Character of *Hesperides*" while Chapter Four treats the "Song Mode in Crashaw." Chapter Five concerns "Milton, G.B. Doni, and Italian Dramatic Song" with individual sections entitled, 'Doni, Musical-Dramatic Monody, and "Lycidas";' 'The Monodies and Choral Odes of *Samson Agonistes*'; and 'Italian Song and the Inset Lyrics of *Paradise Lost*.' The sixth chapter concerns "Cowley and Restoration Song."

Throughout the book, Schleiner uses numerous musical examples of complete songs or monodies to illustrate her arguments and to give the reader "a quick minicourse in the changing song styles of the century and the kinds of lyric verse associated with each" (p. 3).

The last chapter, "Interacting Stylistic Changes in Lyric and Song Setting through the Century," is a welcome recapitulation and summary of the related progressions of lyric poetry from Sidney to Dryden and of vocal music from Morley to Purcell. In discussing Shakespeare's sonnets in the first chapter, Schleiner makes the striking comment that considering the sonnets' "distinctive declamatory/oratorical features . . . we understand why composers of Shakespeare's time could not have known how to set the sonnets to

music" (p. 34). But in the next chapters she explains clearly how in the half-century after Shakespeare a new form of oratorical lyric emerged suited to the new form of oratorical music. By the end of the book, she has given the reader a good sense of how "midcentury composers responded to lyrics with prominent features of speech and declamatory modes" (p. 192) and how the composers developed a highly literary mode of song composition with which they could deal successfully with irony, for example, or with poetic conceits.