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Music in the Fiction of Richard Powers

Pim Verheyen

Promotor: Professor Luc Herman
Assessor: Professor Geert Lernout

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INTRODUCTION

In order to examine the narrative strategies authors employ to incorporate music in their literary works, it is necessary to have a look at the research field that investigates such efforts, namely comparative literature. While some argue for the inclusion of the comparison between literature and other forms of artistic expression, like music, others are reluctant to accept these examinations as a proper subdiscipline of comparative literature. But even when attempting to define comparative literature without the inclusion of the arts, the discipline remains difficult to delineate due to its diverse and fragmented nature. There is no agreement on the scope of this study, nor is there a methodology that can be applied to all comparative studies. If we want to clarify the nature of this complex research field, we will have to investigate how comparative literature acquired its name as well as the various changes the concept has undergone from its early beginnings until present times. Several scholars and critics have attempted to define and redefine comparative literature at various moments in history. The commonly acknowledged descriptions evolve through time according to the period's practices, generally conforming to the definition advocated by one of the most influential figures in the research field. The most important and relevant outlines of these will be presented in this introduction.

The name of this branch of knowledge does not always correspond to the subject matter dealt with and the method applied in studying it. The subject matter covers a large and uncertain territory as the words "comparative" and "literature" can be understood in various ways. The position of theory within the discipline is also a complicated matter as comparative literature constantly accommodates new theoretical positions (Hutcheon 1995: 299; Komar 1995: 290; Loriggio 1995: 259). The overall methodological approach derived from the scientific practice to compare and contrast items as a means of confirming a hypothesis (Bassnett 1993: 12; McCredie 1994: 253). Because this comparative method is a simple and common one applied in various fields of studies, it will not assist in fixing the boundaries of the discipline. In 1960, Henry H. H. Remak observes that the area of comparative literature is so diversified that a well-defined approach with guiding principles, methods and working agreements must be sought in order to validate comparative studies and assist scholars in their research (3). A decade later, Remak modifies his view and posits that "[c]omparative literature, as does the study of all literature, must in principle admit of

all methods of approach. It is up to the individual scholar to show that the approach chosen for a particular literary object or subject is appropriate" (1973: 20).

Horst Frenz and Ulrich Weisstein have two pieces of advice for the comparatist (1956: 68, 70). Firstly, the scholar should start with the differences and then move on to the similarities between the two subjects under study. Secondly, it is best to vary the procedure in accordance with the characteristics of each style and the historical background of each movement. Haun Saussy offers a third piece of advice by putting forward that comparative literature "does its work best as a chain of *ands*: this relationship and that relation and that relation … – each *and* modifying the sense of those that came before" (2003: 338, italics and ellipsis in original).

The practice of comparing literatures, even in its modern sense, is older than its current disciplinary term as even the earliest periods of literary development had generated uncritical comparative investigations between authors, works or national literatures (Gayley 1973: 91; Levin 1968: 7; McCredie 1994: 252; Prawer 1973: 10; Saussy 2006: 5). However, these occurrences are considered to be accidental, rather than an established principle. The most formative period for the discipline is the nineteenth century, in which the term "comparative literature" came into existence as nations were rediscovering the past in an attempt to locate their cultural roots as part of an ongoing revolutionary struggle for independence (Bassnett 1993: 8-9, 17; Brunetière 1973: 181; Damrosch 2003a: 327; Jost 1974: 8; Saussy 2006: 6; Wellek and Warren 1948: 40). The research field developed greatly during the Romantic period since it was linked to the notion of national self-consciousness and to the question of establishing a firm cultural identity by means of an organised literary history.

Comparative literature acquired its name from *Cours de littérature comparée* (1816-1825), a series of French anthologies assembled by François Noël and Ghislain François Marie Joseph De La Place for the purpose of teaching literature at the Sorbonne (Bassnett 1993: 12; Jost 1974: 11; Prawer 1973: 10). Although the collection may have given the discipline its name, it does not foreshadow any comparative techniques as they developed later on. The English equivalent of the term was used for the first time by Matthew Arnold in 1848, but it was not established until 1886, the year in which Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett published his book on *Comparative Literature* (Bassnett 1993: 12; Damrosch 2006: 99-100; Damrosch 2008: 485; Gayley 1973: 87; Prawer 1973: 1; Wellek and Warren 1948: 34). In 1854, the German term "vergeleichende Literaturgeschichte" appeared for the first time in a work written by Moritz Carrière (Baldensperger qtd. in Wellek and Warren 1948: 34).

French comparatists dominated the field in the early nineteenth century (Bassnett 1993: 22; Levin 1968: 9; McCredie 1994: 253). During the second half of the twentieth century, intellectuals from all over the world gathered in Paris at the Institut de Littérature Comparée at the Sorbonne, which was founded and directed by Fernand Baldensperger. These scholars attempted to find connections and associations between French literature and their own. The discipline gained international recognition during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In 1877, Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz and Sámuel Brassai established the multilingual *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877-1888). Unfortunately, this first journal of comparative and world literature had little impact outside Eastern Europe (Bassnett 1993: 26). Max Koch founded and edited the quarterly *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* (1887-1910) and a scholarly series called *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* (1901-1909). By establishing these two journals, Koch made Germany an important contender in the study of comparative literature because he emphasised the national value of comparative studies (Damrosch 2006: 110). The development of the discipline in the United States came about due to its colonial past and its many emigrations (Levin 1968: 9). American scholars were induced to look outward and draw comparisons between their literature and that of European writers. *The Journal of Comparative Literature*, established at Columbia University, was short-lived as it did not last beyond its year of inception in 1903 (Levin 1968: 7). The comparatists René Wellek and Austin Warren also contributed greatly to this research field when publishing their *Theory of Literature* (1948).

From the 1950s onward, the discipline was losing its ground in the West. Wellek described this process in his 1958 essay entitled "The Crisis of Comparative Literature", which he presented at the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Bassnett 1993: 2; Hutcheon 1995: 299; Levin 1968: 12; Wellek 1963: 282, 290; Wellek 1965: 325). Three problems were situated at the core of this crisis: firstly, the lack of unity, subject matter and a fixed methodological approach; secondly, a cumbersome and mechanical investigation of sources and influences; and thirdly, a motivation by cultural nationalism.

The research field began to gain new ground in the 1960s and the early 1970s (Bassnett 1993: 4; Tötösy de Zepetnek 1998: 79). However, the Euro-American tradition was challenged by alternative models from the 1970s onwards (Bassnett 1993: 6, 9, 38, 40; Damrosch 2003a: 326; Loriggio 1995: 256). For a long time, comparative literature started with Western literature in order to juxtapose it with non-Western art works. The West was placed under a microscope when non-Western nations were struggling for their independence from foreign

occupation by using their own culture as a starting point in their post-colonial literary studies. These developments challenged the pervasive European influence on comparative literature as critics began questioning the canon of the great European masters. As a consequence, the literary order gradually began to change. But, as John A. Irving indicates, the development of post-colonial studies in non-Western nations does not need to be perceived in a negative light since "the use of information derived from various cultures […] enables us to observe our own culture more thoroughly" (1949: 551). Kathleen L. Komar takes a similar view and comments that "[t]his feeling of being haunted by the other […] can produce a self-reflexive consciousness that may be as close as we can come to 'fairness' in our comparative efforts" (1995: 289).

In her influential study on *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Susan Bassnett writes that "comparative literature in one sense is dead" due to the fact that the discipline is losing its ground in the traditional centres, namely France, Germany and the United States (1993: 47). According to Komar, the long-term survival of comparative literature should be viewed in a Darwinian context (1995: 291). As Charles Darwin observed in the nineteenth century, species must be able to adapt in order to avoid becoming extinct. The same sentiment can be applied to academic disciplines. Because of the fact that comparative literature has had a long tradition of doubts about its right to exist, the adepts of this branch of knowledge remain self-reflexive and are constantly renewing their research field by adapting to the changing intellectual world by challenging the latest theories and methods (Block 1958: 30; Remak 1960: 3, 17).

Several critics have proposed various approaches so that comparative literature can still thrive today. In order to provide "an alternative that may aid us against […] marginalization – and Eurocentrism", Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek proposes a framework concerning "The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature and Culture" (1998: 34). The methodology of his "Manifesto" covers various areas in the research of comparative literature by means of ten general principles. This new set of theories is aimed to reconfer the scientific status to the discipline. A secondary aid to assist in the enhancement of the research field is the active incorporation of translation studies (Bassnett 1993: 138-161; Damrosch 2003a: 328; Levin 1968: 14). Although these investigations have been taken for granted in the past, they can be a valuable tool for bringing out stylistic and cultural traits that literatures can have in common. Geert Lernout mentions another promising development in literary studies when he observes in his 2006 article on "Comparative Literature in the Low Countries" that scholars "return to the archives" by reinvestigating methods which were

previously considered to be out-dated (46). A similar view is shared by David Damrosch, who recommends in his 2006 article on the "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies" to reinvestigate the global perspective that the early comparatists Meltzl and Posnett proposed, to which I shall return shortly (99, 111).

The fact that comparative literature holds an unstable position among the academic disciplines is further complicated due to the existence of several terms that overlap with comparative literature, namely "national literature", "general literature" and "world literature". National literature refers to the building blocks of comparative literature, as it comprises the question concerning what constitutes the literature of a country and the limits imposed upon such an entity. The scholar has to decide whether the notion of national literature should be constructed according to politico-historical or linguistic criteria and has to be able to prove a significant difference in language, nationality or tradition (C. S. Brown 1970b: 101; Das 2000: 3; Remak 1973: 9; Weisstein 1973: 11).

Paul Van Tieghem, a representative of the Paris school, declared that comparative literature should examine only the interrelations between two national literatures, while general literature should compare the international movements and fashions that concern several literatures. Many comparatists thought that this distinction was impractical and untenable because it only added to the confusion (Bassnett 1993: 27-33; Block 1958: 31-32; Malone 1954: 14; Prawer 1973: 3; Remak 1960: 4, 6, 10, 21; Remak 1973: 1-2, 14-15; Weisstein 1973: 4, 8, 16-17; Wellek 1953: 5; Wellek 1963: 283; Wellek 1965: 329; Wellek and Warren 1948: 36-38). Furthermore, the description of the French tradition was too narrow as it restricted the scope of comparative literature by only studying two literatures and focusing on externally verifiable connections between authors and works of differing nationalities. This approach would only lead to an incoherent group of unrelated facts and would not allow the comparatist to analyse one individual work of art completely.

To counteract Van Tieghem's narrow definition of comparative literature, Remak constructed his own wide-ranging definition of the "American school", which is quoted quite often as it points towards two important developments:

> Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts […], philosophy, history, the social sciences […], the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.

(1973: 1)

Remak's description was significant since it depoliticised the discipline by employing the neutral word "country" instead of "nation" (Bassnett 1993: 32). The field of investigation that comprises comparative literature developed further after the growing awareness of the necessity to transcend national boundaries and move beyond cultural narrowness. Arnold, Posnett, Meltzl and Charles Mills Gayley provided an early version of this definition (Bassnett 1993: 4, 8, 34, 40; Gayley 1973: 89; Meltzl de Lomnitz 1973: 60-61; Posnett 1973: 191, 206). They proposed a non-nationalistic model and emphasised the universal values of literature as it could bring about solidarity between different nations.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's coinage of the term "Weltliteratur" in 1827 is also significant:

> [i]t is becoming more and more obvious to me that poetry is the common property of all mankind and that it is manifest everywhere and in all ages in hundreds and hundreds of people. […] I therefore like to keep informed about foreign productions, and I advise everybody to do the same. National literature means little now, the age of *Weltliteratur* has begun; and everyone should further its course.
>
> (1973: 6, italics in original)

It is not clear in which context Goethe used the term and, as a consequence, he has been frequently misunderstood by various critics. In present times, the concept of world literature is interpreted in three main ways: as multiple windows on the world, as an evolving canon of masterpieces, or, as a collection of internationally valued works of enduring quality (Damrosch 2003b: 15; Jost 1974: 16; Pizer 2000: 220; Remak 1973: 11; Wellek and Warren 1948: 37).

When examining the literary endeavours of various authors around the globe, Goethe perceived "a common reservoir of forms, processes, gestures and topoi, exhorting the emergent national literatures to accord each other mutual recognition" (McCredie 1994: 253). By supporting the concept of world literature, Goethe hoped to emphasise the international contacts and interrelationships as it could assist in bringing about an end to the wars in Europe (Bassnett 1993: 2, 21; Betz 1973: 150; Cohen 1989: 4; Goethe 1973: 8; Hoesel-Uhlig 2004: 31; Madsen 2004: 56, 73-74; Pizer 2000: 222; Prawer 1973: 4; Weisstein 1973: 18-20). However, Goethe remained ambivalent about the formation of world literature and also acknowledged that "it cannot be hoped that this will produce a general peace, but it can be

hoped that the inevitable conflicts will gradually become less important, that war will become less cruel and victory less arrogant" (qtd. in Birus 2003: 18).

Unfortunately, the previously mentioned universal ideals of embracing all cultural differences have not yet been met due to the fact that no nation would like to give up its sense of individuality (Bassnett 1993: 4, 41; Das 2000: 3; Wellek and Warren 1948: 37). Moreover, once the discipline is no longer connected to the cultural identity of a nation, comparative literature loses its way. Despite the fact that various comparatists have emphasised the universal nature of literature and the need to transcend cultural boundaries, the discipline largely remains embedded in European literary and historical traditions, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us in her 1995 article on "Productive Comparative Angst: Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism" (300).

Remak's definition of comparative literature is not only important in the depolitisation of the discipline since it also draws attention to the connection between literature and the other arts. He asserts that the comparative study of the arts is a proper subdiscipline of comparative literature, that is, as long as literature is used either as the starting point or as the focal point of the analysis (Frenz and Weisstein 1956: 67-68; Remak 1973: 8; Weisstein 1973: 150). Steven Paul Scher agrees as he maintains that the topics and approaches of comparative studies should primarily be determined by literary concerns (1975: 40).

Calvin S. Brown, author of the influential book on *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (1948), was a pioneering authority concerning the comparative studies of literature and the arts in America since he provided the theoretical foundation of the subdiscipline. In a lecture delivered and published in 1959, he professed that

> Comparative Literature accepts the fact that all the fine arts are similar activities, despite their differing media and techniques, and that there are not only parallels between them induced by the general spirit of differing eras, but that there are frequently direct influences of one art on another.
>
> (qtd. in Weisstein 1973: 150)

Brown examines the interrelatedness of literature and the arts based upon the universal aesthetic principles they have in common. Wellek and Warren elaborate on Brown's "general spirit of differing eras" by showing that the comparison between literature and the arts is based on a common social and cultural background, which in turn can point towards the common influences working on both artistic expressions, a phenomenon which they label as the "common denominator in the act of all artistic creation" (1948: 119).

Weisstein also acknowledges the inclusion of the arts in comparative literature and reports that "inspiration is often extra-literary, drawing its nourishment from painting, music, history, or life itself" (1973: 44). Weisstein picks up on the "common denominator" in the artistic expressions mentioned by Wellek and Warren above, and concludes that literature and the arts have "natural affinities":

> insofar as literature is an art, that is, the product of a nonutilitarian, creative activity, it has certain natural affinities with the realms presided over by the other Muses, which makes it plausible, and even probable, that common denominators (which, in turn, may serve as a solid basis for comparison) exist in spite of the different media involved.
>
> (1973: 23-24)

Mary Gaither investigates Weisstein's "natural affinities" between literature and the individual arts. She elucidates that

> [t]he serious artist and critic are ever-conscious of the "natural affinities" that exist between art and literature, and almost without exception allow these affinities themselves to suggest the parallels, the influences, the borrowings that become the basis for comparative analysis. At times the artist himself is consciously aware of themes, techniques of composition, formal arrangement, and development of ideas that come from another work of art. […T]he relevance of literature to the arts is not an invention of the critics; it is an actual fact acknowledged by the artists themselves.
>
> (1973: 199-200)

In his 1976 article on "The Unity of the Arts: Time, Space, and Distance", Rudolf Arnheim argues for the unity of the media of the arts and insists that they are extensions of the senses:

> [t]he unity of the senses manifests itself genetically, in that the various modalities, with their distinguishing characteristics of sight, sound, touch, etc., can be said to have evolved by gradual differentiation from originally much more integrated equipment; and unity manifests itself structurally by the basic qualities shared across the board in differing sense modalities.
>
> (7)

Brown and Weisstein do not agree with Arnheim as they both emphasise the differing media of literature and the arts.

Although Brown notes that the study of the connections between literature and the arts was commonly acknowledged to be a part of comparative literature due to the "fact that it is

the study of literature involving two different media of expression", other comparatists were hesitant to accept the study of these connections as an integral branch of the research field (1970b: 102). Siegbert Salomon Prawer even rejects the incorporation of Remak's "other areas of knowledge and belief" entirely (1973: 9).

The interrelationship between literature and the arts was not included in the scope of the discipline until the eighteenth century. Although Harry Levin postulates that scholars in Great Britain took little interest in comparative literature, they were the first to publish critical treatises concerning literature and the arts in the last decade of the seventeenth century and continued to provide pioneering work throughout the eighteenth century (C. S. Brown 1970b: 98-99; Levin 1968: 9; Scher 2004b: 194). In France, the possibility for the inclusion of the comparison between literature and the arts emerged only in the 1960s (Munteano qtd. in Remak 1960: 10; Remak 1973: 4; Weisstein 1973: 152). Studies mentioned before that period are assigned to the field of general literature.

The historical perspective of the subdiscipline is somewhat more complex in Germany. In 1887, Koch recognised the influence of the arts on literature and announced that "art history and literary history [could] reinforce each other" (qtd. in Weisstein 1973: 155). However, it was not until Oskar Walzel's 1917 lecture on the "Mutual Illumination of the Arts" that the subdiscipline gathered a following outside of Germany. During the Second World War and its aftermath, the subject was not expanded upon in Germany and no renewed effort seems to have been made in order to improve this state of affairs (Weisstein 1973: 155-156).

The comparison of literature and the arts can contribute to acquiring a greater understanding of culture and to the analytical and aesthetic comprehension of individual works of art. However, as Weisstein points out, "the mutual illumination of the arts can [just as] easily lead to their confusion" (1973: 164). The "reciprocal illumination of the arts", a method of comparison much used in the early decades of the twentieth century, was questioned by Karl Vossler, Kurt Wais and Wellek (Scher 1972: 52). These comparatists drew attention to the mistakes which inevitably resulted from the vague analogies that Walzel, Heinrich Wöfflin and Oswald Spengler defended.

The fact that the arts can be included in the definition of the discipline of comparative literature complicates matters since there is no agreement on the scope of this study, nor are the terms used in the analysis adequate as they do not convey the same meaning when moving from one art to another (C. S. Brown 1970a: 6, 25; C. S. Brown 1978: 35; Gaither 1973: 183; Miner 1987: 124; Scher 1972: 52; Scher 2004a: 166; Szegedy-Maszák 1983: 40; Wellek and

Warren 1948: 117). Another problem that confuses matters even more is the fact that there is no standard methodology that scholars should apply when examining the connection between literature and the arts. As a consequence, the discipline largely remains individual and unorganised.

One example of a possible methodology was suggested by György M. Vajda, Wendy Steiner, Claudia S. Stanger and Rose Subotnik. All advocated for the application of the semiotic principles drawn from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Leonard B. Meyer and Jacques Derrida (Scher 1983: 56-58; Scher 2004a: 170-171). However, Nicholas Ruwet, Henry Orlov, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and Scher are sceptic about this strained attempt to devise a theoretical framework for these investigations and contend that this is not a constructive manner to analyse works, given the fact that the proponents of the approach barely mention any concrete examples.

Unlike the semiotic methodology mentioned above, Gaither identifies three workable approaches to the comparative studies of literature and the arts: first of all, the relationship of form and content; secondly, the relationship of influence; and lastly, the importance of synthesis (1973: 184). The first approach concerns style, technique, narrative and idea. The second approach deals with a key concept in comparative literature, namely the notion of influence, whether it appears in a conscious or in an unconscious form (Block 1958: 34-35; Prawer 1973: 51, 68; Weisstein 1973: 29, 31, 36). Influence can be defined as unconscious imitation, while direct influence or borrowing can be described as imitation. The primary goal of influence studies is to track down the sources of creativity. The notion of influence is an intrinsic part of comparative literature, provided that the scholar focuses on the movement of influences from work to work rather than from artist to artist. In this manner, the study of influences can shed some light on the aesthetic character of individual works. Remak articulates that the third approach is invaluable because "[w]e must have syntheses unless the study of literature wants to condemn itself to eternal fragmentation and isolation" (1973: 3). This resonates with Claude Lévi-Strauss's dictum that "the proof of the analysis is in the synthesis. If the synthesis is shown to be impossible, it is because the analysis is incomplete" (1983: 135).

Wellek and Warren point towards an interesting caveat that the comparatist must bear in mind when analysing works (1948: 123-124). Literature and the arts did not develop with the same pace at the same time as various artistic expressions, such as literature and music, each have their own individual evolution. Literature and the arts are in constant relationship

with each other. As a consequence, this connection must be perceived as a dialectical relationship that works both ways.

Now that we have examined the subdiscipline of comparative literature which analyses literary works that are connected to the arts, it is time to zoom in on one of these artistic expressions, namely music. In his 1970 article on "The Relations between Music and Literature As a Field of Study", Brown hypothesises that "[i]t is practically certain that music and literature […] arose as a single activity long before the concept of an art existed" (97). The lost unity of the arts at an earlier stage in history brought about the possibility of one influencing the other. Various composers and authors have felt the need to go beyond the limits of one art and searched for ways to express more than was possible in either music or literature.

The various techniques employed to draw connections between the arts are based upon the similarities between literature and music (Arnheim 1976: 8-9; C. S. Brown 1984: 17; C. S. Brown 1987: 8-11; Justin 1987: 80-82; Scher 1970: 154-155; Scher 1975: 38; Scher 2004b: 182). A novel and a score are both rendered in printed forms that need to be decoded in order for the activity to be realised. The process of reading words or notes is essentially the same. Literature and music are also auditory art forms as both are artistic expressions presented through the sense of hearing. Because literary and musical pieces have their development in time, the reader of a novel and the listener of a composition need to possess a good memory in order to comprehend the entire work.

According to Scher, there are three principle ways in which literature and music influence one another (1970: 151-153; 1975: 38-39; 2004a: 166; 2004b: 175-201). Firstly, there is the possibility to combine multiple art forms in a single work, a category Scher labels as "music and literature". The most common manifestations of this combination are ballads, cantatas, *Lieder*, operas and oratorios. Secondly, music can be influenced by literature. This category is referred to as "literature in music" or the "literarization" of music, and is primarily investigated by musicologists who are concerned with two aspects of program music. On the one hand, they examine the adaptation of literary models that break down the structure of fixed forms. On the other hand, they analyse the attempts of composers who transport the sounds of language into music. Thirdly, and more importantly regarding to this thesis, literature can be influenced by music, a category Scher labels as "music in literature" or as the "musicalization" of literature. This research field is mainly the domain of literary scholars rather than that of musicologists. Without the use of scores, music is extremely difficult to represent accurately in literature. Thus, it can only be referred to or

translated by means of language. Although translations will never be able to replace the original, various authors have made great efforts to incorporate music in their works. Scher divides this third category into three subcategories, namely "musical structures and techniques", "verbal music" and "word music" [1]. In the first category, the author draws inspiration from musical structures and techniques by referring to a direct musical experience or a score. In "verbal music", the writer attempts to render the effects that compositions can have on its listeners. The author tries to reproduce the music in words so that the reading of the text resembles the experience of listening to the composition. In "word music", which aims at an imitation of musical sound, the writer adapts musical forms, composition techniques and other musical devices for literary purposes.

Finding the right way to convey the abstractions and complexities of music represents a challenge American writer Richard Powers (°1957) is willing to take on. He developed a love of music and has a notable skill in vocal music as well as proficiency in cello, clarinet, guitar and saxophone. This singularly gifted author has put his strength as a writer on display by using his advanced knowledge of music in a most sophisticated manner, which has earned him a number of prestigious literary awards.

Music and language interact with one another as Powers selects references from their original context and alters their signification by placing them in a new textual environment. There are two novels written by Powers that stand out for their incredible integration of music, namely *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991) and *The Time of Our Singing* (2003)[2]. In the first novel, Powers already indicates the limits of language as well as the shortcomings of models and representations as he questions "how words might fit to music. But music into words? Don't push your luck. It will run from any description like floaters skidding across the cornea when and only when you look directly at them" (*GV* 602).

The Gold Bug Variations tells the story of four characters who are looking for the genetic code that unites all living things. In 1957, the promising postdoctoral researcher Stuart Ressler receives a fellowship at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. He meets and falls in love with his married co-worker at Cyfer, Dr. Jeanette Koss. After a while, Ressler decides to withdraw from an academic life in science and works the gravenight shift at

[1] The term "verbal music" seems appropriate, but the term "word music" is confusing since it does not suggest the category it supposedly represents. The distinction between "word music" and the category of "musical structures and techniques" exacerbates the terminological chaos as both groups seem to deal with the adaptation of musical forms and devices.

[2] All subsequent references to either of these novels will appear in parenthesis in the text.

Manhattan-on Line (MOL), a computer data-processing firm through which most of the city's financial transactions are processed. In 1983, Ressler's younger co-worker Franklin Todd, an Art-History ABD, asks Jan O'Deigh, who works at the Reference Desk in the Brooklyn Public Library, to dig up the goods on Ressler. In trying to understand Ressler's renunciation from science and his ensuing years of obscurity, Jan takes a sabbatical and spends an entire year educating herself in several fields of knowledge.

In *The Time of Our Singing*, physicist David Strom, a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, goes to Marian Anderson's outdoor recital in 1939 where he meets African-American Delia Daley, a classically-trained singer from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The two marry in a time when interracial marriages are still illegal in most of the United States. The couple bears three prodigiously talented children, named Jonah, Joseph and Ruth, each increasingly of a darker complexion. The eldest son, Jonah, is an egotistical singing prodigy with an impressive 3 ½ range. He is accompanied on the piano by his self-sacrificing brother, Joseph, also known as "Mix". Ruth, or "Rootie", becomes a militant activist by joining the Black Panthers in the late 1960s.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the many different ways music has found its way into Powers's fiction by comparing *The Gold Bug Variations* and *The Time of Our Singing*. In the analysis, many similarities and differences between the two novels will arise. A secondary aim is to explicate the musical references that are imbedded in the novels for an audience who may not be entirely familiar with the history, the theory or the analysis of this particular art form. By establishing connections between music and the fictional universe of *The Gold Bug Variations* and *The Time of Our Singing*, the active reader is able to draw conclusions about the characters and the events that take place in the narrative.

In order to establish any connections between the two stories, it is paramount to approach both novels in a more systematic fashion. The first chapter explains the notion of translation in order to make sense of the dense network of discourses that make up *The Gold Bug Variations*. However, the reader is in no position to do much translating if he does not possess the right code with which to crack open the mysteries contained in the novel. The second chapter examines the main code, namely that of music, as it helps the characters to come to new insights concerning science, life, love and friendship. Because Johann Sebastian Bach plays such a major role in this novel, chapter three will be entirely devoted to him. However, there are a number of other musicians and composers who also find their way into the narrative. Since there are so many composers and works mentioned in the novel, a close examination of all of them would be beyond the scope of this thesis. For this reason, I have

decided to focus my attention on Marian Anderson, George Gershwin and Paul Robeson. Given the fact that they are also incorporated in *The Time of Our Singing*, an analysis of their music will be valuable when comparing the two novels in the conclusion of this thesis. I will round off the examination of *The Gold Bug Variations* with a detailed character sketch of Glenn Gould, whose vision on music will prove to be a nice bridge towards the chapter on *The Time of Our Singing*, given the fact that the pianist sees art as a perfect means to cultivate the state of surprise in his listeners.

The sense of wonder that Powers celebrates in both novels becomes a complicated notion in *The Time of Our Singing* due to people's small-minded intolerance towards different skin colours. In this novel, Powers argues for a world in which people abandon these racial classifications. The first chapter demonstrates this by applying a fluid notion of time as well as by drawing on music that knows no boundaries. Because an understanding of the Stroms's educational experiment is crucial in order to continue with the analysis of the novel, I will present this in the second chapter. The following chapter delves into the notion of cultural ownership and the sense of belonging. A detailed description of the careers of Anderson and Robeson will shed some light on this topic. Bach is also important in the context of cultural ownership since various characters want to call this famous composer their own. In order to subvert the notion of cultural ownership, Powers draws on Gershwin's compositions that celebrate varieties. Music is not only an important instrument in the stride for racial equality as the last chapter will illustrate. The performances of the compositions from John Dowland, Franz Schubert and Bach are important as they seem to forebode the premature deaths of two main characters in the novel.

During my research for this thesis I encountered two main problems. The first problem mainly concerns the analysis of *The Time of Our Singing* for which I have drawn upon the lyrics of some of the compositions. These lyrics are relevant in order to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the connections between the narrative and the music pieces. However, many composers adapted lyrics that they borrowed from poets, other musicians or anonymous writers. In order to achieve a clear classification system concerning the reference works listed at the end of this thesis, I have classified these lyrics under the name of the composer.

The second problem revolves around the terminology used in this thesis. I consulted many authors who discovered interesting connections between the two novels and music. Unfortunately, in some of the articles about *The Gold Bug Variations*, I came across writers who had misinterpreted various musical terminology. Because I did want to incorporate

their ideas in this thesis, I tried to match the musical technique or the given definition to the correct term. In this manner, I hope to have captured the essence of their much-valued work in this particular research field.

The problem concerning terminology becomes further complicated when one considers whether or not it is adequate to borrow terms from the vocabulary of musical analysis when examining literature. A number of comparatists, such as Brown, Wellek and Warren, Weisstein, Gaither and Scher, have commented upon this terminological chaos. However, there does not seem to be any solution which is applicable to all investigations of comparative studies that examine literature in relation to music. In order to present the reader with a clear analysis of the two novels in this thesis, I will explain the terminology in a musical context and then establish the connection between literature and music by means of examples.

A. THE GOLD BUG VARIATIONS

1. "The World is Only Translation"

The intellectual variety of *The Gold Bug Variations* is apparent as the novel represents the limitless boundaries of diverse disciplinary knowledge, such as mathematical number theory, molecular and evolutionary biology, computer and library science, neurology as well as literature. Other fields, such as botany, chemistry, ecology, history, philosophy, theology and chaos theory, also find their way into the narrative. However, the most important discourse in the narrative is that of music as the novel focuses on one particular composition from Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). The fact that Richard Powers chose Bach's "Goldberg Variations" to structure his narrative is significant since it underlines the encyclopaedic character of the book. The composition sums up the entire history of Baroque variations as it systematically arranges an array of genres and styles as well as taxing technical demands. The many different canons, keys and time signatures are signs that the composer was aiming at a survey (Jander 1991: 188-189; Jones 1997: 48; Lernout 2001: 54-55; Williams 2001: 48).

Determining the genre of *The Gold Bug Variations* has proven to be difficult since it defies straightforward categorisation: Kelly A. Marsh labels it as a "neo-sensation novel" (1995: 99); Joseph Tabbi uses the term "environmental novel" (2002: 59); Trey Strecker identifies the book as a "narrative ecolog[y]" (1998: 68; 2004: 230); while Eric Athenot (2002: 70), Gordon Burn (2003: n.p.), Luc Herman and Geert Lernout (1998: 151) write about an "encyclopaedic novel". Edward Mendelson's definition of the "encyclopedic narrative" could apply to this novel too, since it "attempt[s] to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge" (1976: 1269). Tom LeClair opts for the label "system novel" (1996: 13), and also takes the term "Crackpot Realism" from one of Powers's characters in *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) in order to refer to "a fusion of traditional representational methods with contemporary paradigms that will seem like crackpot ideas to readers clinging to the common-sense empiricism of traditional realism" (1996: 24).

Whatever label we assign to this novel, the readers as well as the characters struggle to make sense of the eclectic range of the topics mentioned above. Stuart Ressler discovers "[n]ot what a thing *is*, but how it connects to others. […] Each thing is what it is only through

everything else" (*GV* 182, italics in original). The reader is placed in a similar position: in order to wrap our minds around something so diverse and complicated as the assembly of the specialised fields, people start looking for patterns that the novel provides in the form of metaphors. Jan O'Deigh comes to a similar conclusion, namely that "the aim is not to extend the source but to widen the target, to embrace more than was possible before" (*GV* 516).

Strecker points out that "all knowledge, essentially, is translation" of information (1998: 70; 2004: 235). Jan, too, discovers that "the world is only translation, nothing but" (*GV* 516). When she looks up the definition of "to translate", Jan learns that it does not only signify "to relocate, carry across, port over", but also "to move the substance of a text from one language or dialect into another" (*GV* 512-513). Jan reflects that "translation inhabits every sentence ever predicated. Nothing is what it is but by contrast, cracking, porting over" (*GV* 513). The reader is put in the position of a translator (J. D. Thomas 2010: 20). In order to investigate the many references that might otherwise be lost in translation, the reader must approach the narrative as "a rough transcript requiring interpretation" (*GV* 512).

The novel suggests that all discourses mentioned throughout the narrative are variations on the same theme. Powers draws many parallels between various information systems as each of these fields can be understood to encode for one another. By means of these analogies or translations, one discourse can thus be used to explain other discourses, a strategy which results in the synthesising of all human knowledge. This is exactly the importance of contemporary novels according to Powers, who states the following in an interview with Stephen J. Burn: "[n]ot only could literature be a form of genuine knowledge, but it could represent and enact kinds of interdependent knowing that other disciplines acknowledged but were unable to reach" (2008a: 169). Further on in the interview, Powers explains that "[t]here truly are no independent disciplines that operate exclusive of any other. […] And fiction is uniquely privileged to place its camera at those imaginary boundaries between disciplines, to show the ways in which the turbulent currents generated by any mode of apprehending the world necessarily cascade into all other streams of thought" (qtd. in S. J. Burn 2008a: 171).

The Gold Bug Variations embodies a model of narrative that patches up the incompleteness of encyclopaedic novels because the accumulated properties of the interlacing disciplines allow the whole to surpass the boundaries of the individual fields (Herman and Lernout 1998: 151-152, 157; Snyder 1998: 89; Strecker 1998: 68-69; Strecker 2004: 235). The structural parallels between several discourses do not entirely overlap as Powers

will sometimes deviate from Bach's music. The difference resulting from translating one information system to another is thus illustrated by the novel itself.

2. "Cracking the Code is Just the Tip of the Goldberg"

This chapter focuses on codes by first examining the introductory strategy of the novel. Next, the connection between the two main codes, science and music, will be described.

2.1 Introductory Strategy

The specialised fields mentioned in the preceding chapter are brought into connection with one another by means of codes. The significance of code-making and code-breaking in *The Gold Bug Variations* is alluded to before the narrative begins by means of the title and the epigraph as both open up several interpretative paths simultaneously. To borrow a phrase from Jan, "cracking the code is just the tip of the *Goldberg*" (*GV* 386, italics in original). The codes help the reader by setting up structural guidelines, but these are only available to the attentive reader who picks up on the references or the active reader who looks up the original materials (Labinger 1995: 84; Morgan 1989: 265-266). The deciphering of the intertexts depends on the reader's cultural and linguistic competence in order to locate the musical influences that the narrative has distorted.

The title, *The Gold Bug Variations*, points towards two structuring models. First of all, it alludes to Edgar Allen Poe's "The Gold Bug" (1843), a short story in which the treasure hunter Mr. Legrand needs to decipher a code in order to locate Captain Kidd's gold. The code depends on simple encryption, which Jay A. Labinger calls a "substitution code", that will only reveal the instructions to find the hidden treasure (1995: 80). The substitution does not supply any productive meaning, or, in the words of Douglas Richard Hofstadter, "decoding mechanisms […] do not *add* any meaning to the signs or objects which they take as input; they merely *reveal* the intrinsic meaning" (1979: 164, italics in original).

Secondly, the novel's title points towards Johann Sebastian Bach's BWV 988, otherwise known as the "Goldberg Variations", composed in 1739-40 and first published in Nürnberg a

year later under the formal title of *Keyboard Practice consisting of an Aria with Diverse Variations for the Harpsichord with Two Manuals. Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits*[3].

Bach's earliest biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, claims that the composition was commissioned in 1742 by Count Hermann Karl von Kaiserling (1696-1764), the Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony (1802: 51-52). Count Kaiserling supposedly asked Bach to compose a restful musical cure for his insomnia which his resident musician Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (?1727-1756) could play for him at night. The book was an assembly of information Forkel gathered mainly from Bach's children. Lernout sees Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann as the most likely source of the legend since he lived in Dresden at the time, knew Count Kaiserling and was the tutor of the young virtuoso harpsichordist (2001: 154-157). When Goldberg became too accomplished, Wilhelm Friedemann began to feel insecure about his own teaching abilities and asked his father to take over his position as a teacher.

However, there is much scepticism about this report (Lernout 2001: 19, 91). Firstly, there is neither documentary evidence of the work ever being commissioned by Count Kaiserling, nor is there a dedication in the published scores. Secondly, the intellectually challenging music is too exciting to be a valuable soporific for insomnia. Lastly, Goldberg was only thirteen years old at the time the piece was published, which is too young to play this technically demanding work.

Bach's piece represents a "generation code" rather than a "substitution code", since it expands the scope of meaning and brings about action as it turns information into something more meaningful (Labinger 1995: 81). Profound complexity arises out of the composition's elementary origins since the simple set of thirty-two notes in the bass-line of the initial Aria of the "Goldberg Variations" generates thirty-two variations in total. However, Jan comments that such generation codes could produce infinity as Bach's "canons proceed beyond the octave, start all over again at the ninth, as if to suggest, 'We could do this for eons'. The *Goldbergs* threaten to expand the modest four-note germ of the thirty-two note Base to the scale of infinite invention, a perpetual calendar" (*GV* 614, italics in original).

The narrator comments that "[t]he set is built around a scheme of infinitely supple, proliferating relations. Each of the thirty is a complete ontogeny, unfolding until it denies that it differs at conception from all siblings by only the smallest mutation" (*GV* 608-609).

[3] When drawing connections between Powers's novel and Bach's piece further on in this paper, I will refer to Christoff Wolff's 1996 edition of the "Goldberg Variations" given the fact that it is the best reliable source available to me at present since it incorporates the corrections Bach himself made in his original copy of the composition.

Bach's piece illustrates how patterns strive to preserve sameness, while at the same time perpetuate difference (Copeland 1995: 114):

> [u]ltimately, the *Goldbergs* are about the paradox of variation, preserved divergence, the transition effect inherent in terraced unfolding, the change in nature attendant upon a change in degree. How necessity might arise out of chance. How difference might arise out of more of the same. By the time the delinquent parent aria returns to close out the set, the music is about how variation might ultimately free itself from the instruction that underwrites it, sets it in motion, but nowhere anticipates what might come from experience's trial run.
>
> (*GV* 616-617, italics in original)

Having discussed the title in detail, it is now time to have a closer look at the epigraph which draws attention to the common features of all intricate systems, namely code-making and code-breaking (Janton 2009: 2, 4). The puzzling form creates suspense since the reader is eager to decipher it in order to find out what is behind the code:

> RLS CMW DJP RFP J?P CEP JJN PRG
> ZTS MCJ JEH BLM CRR PLC JCM MEP
> JNH JDM RBS J?H BJP PJP SCB TLC
> KES REP RCP DTH I?H CRB JSB SDG
>
> (*GV*, n.p.)

The last but one triplet clearly refers to Bach's initials (Herman and Lernout 1998: 162). Powers gives the hint for the last triplet himself as "Bach liked to inscribe his compositions with the triplet SDG, *Soli Dei Gloria*. To God alone the glory" (*GV* 617, italics in original). "SDG" thus clearly alludes to Bach's motto, *Soli Dei Gloria* (Butt 1997: 52; Lernout 2001: 60, 165). The other triplets indicate the initials of thirty names and the question marks represent unknown middle names. I do not understand how Herman and Lernout arrive at "sixty-three" names (1998: 162). J. T. Thomas counts "thirty-two" names, but he most likely forgot to subtract the last triplet representing Bach's motto, clearly not a name, which would bring the total to thirty-one names (2006: 9).

Because of the proliferation of P's in the final position of the triplets, it is possible that Powers is referring to family members here (Herman and Lernout 1998: 162). Although Herman and Lernout believe the epigraph to be a "motto" (1998: 162), Thomas argues that it functions rather as a kind of "acknowledgements page" (2006: 9). This view is supported by Powers's own admission in a 1998 interview with Jim Neilson for the *Review of Contemporary*

Fiction: "I have always tried to write my personal landmarks directly into my books in some way, if not in an acknowledgements page, then by some quotation or homage or identifiable theft that brands the book's indebtedness" (21).

Although speculating about this ambiguous epigraph is interesting, the reader must not lose sight of the main important aspect about this intertext, namely that it is yet another example of a generation code as numerous meanings can be ascribed to it (Herman and Lernout 1998: 163; Janton 2009: 2, 9; J. T. Thomas 2006: 10).

2.2 Music & Science

Breaking the code is inherent to Bach's "Goldberg Variations" and to the DNA research that is being discussed in Powers's narrative. In 1957, Stuart Ressler discovers the piece by way of "a two-year-old recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in a debut performance by a pianist who has the bad taste to be both as Canadian as Avery and a shade younger than Ressler" (*GV* 156, italics in original). The record is one of Glenn Gould (1932-1982). Otto Friedrich explains that being a Canadian citizen was important to Gould and confirms that Bach's composition was indeed the pianist's first recording, despite objections made by an anxious executive at Columbia Records (1989: xiii, 47, 49, 53). The recording supposedly only took one week to make during the month of June 1955 at the Columbia studio in a Presbyterian church at 207 East Thirtieth Street in New York.

Ressler is given a scratchy disc of Gould's recording of the piece as a non-birthday present from Jeanette Koss. As they listen to it together, Ressler detects something as

> [t]he first sound of the octave, the simplicity of unfolding triad initiates a process that will mutate his insides for life. The transparent tones, surprising his mind in precisely the right state of confusion and readiness, suggest a concealed message of immense importance. But he comes no closer to naming the fingerscrape across the keys. The pleasure of harmony – subtle, statistical sequence of expectation and release – he can as yet only dimly feel. But the first measure announces a plan of heartbreaking proportions. What he fails to learn from these notes tonight will lodge in his lungs until they stop pumping.
>
> (*GV* 157)

Ressler immediately becomes obsessed with the intricate structure and examines Bach's composition in order to decipher its code (Athenot 2002: 72; Gillespie 2011: n.p.; Iuli 2009:

610; Ziolkowski 2010: 634). He insists that his senior colleague Dr. Toveh Botkin, a European expatriate, "tell[s him] everything [she] knows about music" (*GV* 218). As Herman and Lernout remark in their *Mosaic* article, this "crash course" again underlines the encyclopaedic nature of the narrative, since it covers the entire history of Western music as well as the theoretical analysis of several compositions (1998: 155).

When Ressler examines the work closer, he comes to understand that a limited basis set can bring about infinite variety and complexity (Labinger 1995: 79; Zuelke 2003: 165, 167). Ressler discovers that

> [u]nderneath the *Goldberg* aria's graceful surface is a skeleton, a stripped-down fragment, a moment not even a moment, a melody not yet the essential one. The real melody, the one that will pass with the trivial bass line through thirty wildly varying but constant mutations, is the accompaniment of desire and remorse in [his] listening.
>
> (*GV* 158, italics in original)

Ressler's insights will be useful when starting his work for Cyfer, an interdisciplinary group of six scientists who research genetic processes. Initially collaborating, the group breaks up into two camps: "gnostics versus nominalists, formalists against functionalists" (*GV* 467). Before Ressler arrives on the scene, Cyfer was cryptographic in its design as it examined recurring patterns and their frequencies of appearance. When Jeanette slips him a note saying that "Ulrich has contracted Poe's Gold Bug" (*GV* 68), Ressler reads Poe's short story and begins to question the substitution method, only to conclude that Cyfer's approach is wrong (Copeland 1995: 106, 128; Dewey 1998: 59; Herman and Lernout 1998: 160; Labinger 1995: 91; Lewis 2008: 79; Snyder 1998: 93; Strecker 2004: 236; Zuelke 2003: 158). By using the *in vitro* approach, Cyfer has only acquired information in a mechanical and linear manner.

Although he initially makes the mistake of analysing Bach's "Goldberg Variations" "as if it were a scientific problem, treating the score as a DNA sequence", Ressler is able to construct a new method, the *in vivo* approach, due to his repeated listening to the piece (Herman and Lernout 1998: 155). Ressler naïvely assumed that he could understand the music's emotional impact by examining and translating the mechanical score (Zuelke 2003: 165):

> I was trying to discover why the thirty minute waltzes reduced me to hopeless emotion, to neutralize them through over-exposure so I could forget them and recover an even emotional keel.
>
> "I had secured myself a pocket score [in which] I could detect little more in printed notes than inscrutable black bugs crawling across the bars of their prison."

(*GV* 192)

Ressler soon discovers that his way of analysing the score will not help him to understand the intricate music. He comes to the conclusion that "the piece has the same numerology as the systems [they] were working with" and, consequently, "found [his] model for replication" (*GV* 194). Ressler decides to pursue the *in vivo* approach with Jeanette Koss and Toveh Botkin. Staying with the old approach are Joseph Lovering, who will end up killing himself as well as the laboratory's animals; Daniel Woytowich, who files for divorce thinking his wife, Renée, cheated on him; and Karl Ulrich, the administrator.

When Ressler decides to leave science in order to live in obscurity, he does not listen to Bach's masterpiece again as "[t]he music would remain unlistenable for decades. Love was long over, but what was lost to him he still loved so harshly that it prevented him from listening even to its trace" (*GV* 197). Ressler "chose the moment of Todd's arrival to return to the unlistenable piece" (*GV* 197). He hears Gould's 1981 recording in the 1983-84 plot, not long after Gould dies of a stroke on October 4, 1982 (Friedrich 1989: 326):

> [Ressler] turns the radio on […]. It's the Canadian kid, beyond a doubt. […] Playing the piece that woman gave him. […] But in an instant's listening, he's shocked to hear that it's not the same piece, not the same performance. It's a radical rethinking from beginning to end, worlds slower, more variegated, richer in execution. A lot of the variations enter attaca, without pause, the last notes of one spilling into the first notes of the next, anxious to hear how they might sound all at once, on top of one another.
>
> He can't believe his luck at getting a new recording. But […] the announcer reports that the pianist has suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage just after releasing this take two.
>
> (*GV* 672-673)

Gould's second recording was made in April and May 1981. The virtuoso pianist was very emphatic about the fact that he wanted people to understand his "radical rethinking" of Bach's composition (*GV* 672). During a self-interview in which Tim Page played the part of the interviewer, Gould revealed that he believed his first recording was no more than an assembly of unconnected pieces, while his second recording was far more coherent because for each variation, he chose a tempo that closely corresponded to the tempi of all the others (Friedrich 1989: 305, 309). As Anna Darden Copeland observes, the moment Gould dies, so does the potential of yet another try and another interpretation (1995: 118).

When Ressler is confronted with Franklin and Jan's relationship, "he had grown ready to teach, undertake again, discover. Something in [their] blundering, slow courtship had tricked him into thinking this time it could go right" (*GV* 461). In Chapter X, Ressler instructs

the young couple how to listen to Variation 10 of Bach's composition by pointing out the successive entrances of the four voices (Herman and Lernout 1998: 154; Ziolkowski 2010: 634-635). Variation 10 is a *fugue*, the most imitative counterpoint technique ("Fugue"), "because the same subject enters slavishly in each voice" (*GV* 213). Variation 10 begins with the "bass entry", then the "tenor", the "soprano" and the "alto" join in (*GV* 212). The second "four-voice rotation […] this time rearranged, accompanied by a counterfigure" starts off with the "soprano", followed by the "alto", the "bass" and lastly, the "tenor" (*GV* 212).

Not only does Ressler indicate the structure of the piece, he also establishes a connection to genetics:

> [w]ith Dr. Ressler pointing them out, [Jan] heard the successive reentrant voices, layering one on top of another, musical analogs of those plastic anatomical overlays in biology books. Each transparent sheet contains its own, separate hierarchies – circulatory, skeletal, nervous. But each overlay, flipped on the stack, adds its system, compacts its parts into a surprising, indivisible composite.
>
> (*GV* 213)

When Jan listens to the *fugue* in Chapter X, her understanding changes (Zuelke 2003: 167-168):

> [t]he whole piece, as well as my brief understanding of it, lasted forty seconds. How Bach could meet both horizontal and vertical constraints with such efficiency of material, how he could add insight to inquiry without showing either seam or sweat left me in awe, even after my ability to hear it died away. During those forty seconds, I first felt the resonant, connecting joints holding together this experiment in reversing the randomness of inert matter. I heard the sound that caused Dr. Ressler's eyes to water, the sound that had once vibrated in the tones of scientific reductionism. Pure analogy. No, I needed a better name for being unable to tell where I left off and the piece began. I heard, for a moment, the explosion of shape, the diversity of living awareness, dovetail into one simple, accidental, but necessary and breathtaking generating form. For forty seconds, I understood that all evolution was accomplished by juggling only four voices. In the fughetta: SATB. In us listeners, in the fughetta-writer himself: GATC.
>
> (*GV* 214)

This lengthy passage demonstrates how Jan momentarily perceives Bach's multiple layers of meaning which are constructed both horizontally and vertically by a "generating" code, rather than by applying "pure analogy" (*GV* 214). Because she perceives the simple basis set of "only four voices", Jan comprehends the "diversity of living awareness" that was previously beyond her range of normal understanding (*GV* 214).

After she held her private "memorial service" for Ressler by listening to Bach's piece again, Jan goes to her work and hears the music internally (*GV* 10). She notes that "I was at last *hearing*, picking out pattern with my ears, knowing what sound meant, without translation: that tune – four notes by four – Dr. Ressler's life theme, the pattern-matching analog he had always been after" (*GV* 14-15, italics in original).

Bach's piece, which is at the heart of Powers's novel, is indeed quite complex in order to comprehend entirely. About Bach's composition, Powers writes that

> [t]he *Goldbergs* are layered all the way from bottom to top and back down again, with every layer of ordering – from canonically entering canons to contrasting triplet groups, from note to measure to line to variation to entire work and back to note – contributing to, particularizing, and lost in the next rung of the hierarchy it generates.
>
> (*GV* 614, italics in original)

Both Ressler and Jan only have a small understanding about the complexity of "The Enigma Variations" and admire the multiple layers of meaning that the work brings forth (*GV* 224). Harmony in music is a vertical phenomenon that comes into existence due to the interplay of several horizontal lines. It is difficult for the listener to hear the intricate harmony of a piece, as Jan herself is only gifted with "forty seconds" of understanding (*GV* 214).

Karl William Zuelke remarks that the proliferation of knowledge in the world happens in a horizontal manner, but that true meaning is a vertical phenomenon (2003: 173). We could apply the musical analogy to Powers's novel too. As Joseph Dewey points out, "in piling up separate melodies (stories), we recover harmony (plot)" (1996: n.p.).

Like the harmonies in Bach's music, or the separate storylines in Powers's novel, the knowledge of our contemporary world can be too overwhelming for some people in order to find any significant meaning in it. Ressler, Jan and many other characters, like Franklin Todd and Tooney Blake, eventually come to the conclusion that assembling massive amounts of information will lead them nowhere because they do not have to search for "the limited game of translation [but] the game rules themselves" (*GV* 72).

3. Bach's Composition Techniques as Structuring Devices

"The Perpetual Calendar" and the narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* are fairly straightforward, taking the reader through the stories of two couples by means of the

contrapuntal braiding technique that is employed throughout the novel. Adapting musical composition techniques in order to structure the narrative of the novel is only present in *The Gold Bug Variations* as it imitates the texture of Bach's "Goldberg Variations". Many late twentieth-century literary works have been inspired by Bach's work (Lernout 2001: 173; Lewis 2008: 85; Ziolkowski 2010: 626). Thomas Bernhard, Nancy Huston and Gabriel Josipovici are just a few authors who have appropriated the "Goldberg Variations" to give their novels a literary musical structure.

According to Scher, the structure of a composition consisting of a theme with variations is one of the most popular musical patterns writers have adapted in order to shape their texts (1975: 38). Novels that are inspired by Bach can also be seen as variations on the same theme written by one of history's greatest composers. Theodore Ziolkowski suggests that contemporary authors writing in a chaotic time and place were intrigued by the ordering principle of Bach's piece, "for music […] provides patterns with which to control and shape the seemingly disparate fragments of modern reality" (2010: 639).

The predominant presence of Bach among many contemporary writers can be accounted for by the Bach renaissance of the late twentieth century (Ziolkowski 2010: 637-640). The literary discovery of Bach's work started in 1955 when Glenn Gould recorded the famous masterpiece for the first time. In 1979, renewed interest came about due to the widely publicised and influential study of Hofstadter, titled *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. Hofstadter analyses the "Goldberg Variations" and makes the connection to numerology as well as art and science as he reveals parallels between genetic coding and the canonic structure of musical compositions. Powers explores this connection further from a fictional perspective as the novel's cross-disciplinary borrowing from music serves as the basis for revolutions in Ressler's scientific work, as was mentioned in chapter A 2.2.

The first subchapter of this section concerns the mathematical number theory and focuses on the numbers thirty-two, three and four. The following subchapter relates the canonic techniques inversion, retrograde, augmentation and diminution. The last subchapter explains other connections and associations between the composition and the novel, which can help the readers to make sense of the behaviour and the decisions of various characters.

3.1 Mathematical Number Theory

Powers includes a warning in *The Gold Bug Variations* as the search for connections in random sequences can lead the reader to what William Gibson identifies as "apophenia – the spontaneous perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things" (2003: 22). The ability to interpret patterns is fundamental, but it is both a gift and a trap: on the one hand, it facilitates a close reading of characteristics; on the other hand, it runs the risk of overgeneralisation.

When examining numbers there is always the possibility of finding patterns that are just a mere coincidence (Lernout 2001: 38, 42-43; Lewis 2008: 86). For example, the Cyfer team falls into this trap as "they forget the first article of scientific skepticism: meaning always reveals pattern, but pattern does not necessarily imply meaning" (*GV* 467). Ressler soon discovers that "[a]ll we've done to date is uncover part of a pattern. We can't mistake that for meaning. Meaning can't be gotten at by pattern-matching" (*GV* 432).

By means of the many references in the novel, Powers expresses in various ways the "poignancy of a pattern lifted beyond identity, beyond the thing it was mimicking, past metaphor, into the first mystery: the bliss beyond the fiddle" (*GV* 604). There are several patterns connected to numerals that prove to be meaningful in both Powers's novel and Bach's music. I will provide the reader with sufficient evidence of these numbers, which should eliminate any doubt that these patterns are coincidental. Although many numbers will inevitably arise in the following analysis, I will mainly focus on the numerals thirty-two, three and four.

3.1.1 A Total of Thirty-Two Variations & Chapters

Both the novel and the composition consist of thirty-two sections. The prologue in the novel corresponds to Bach's Aria, the thirty chapters numbered with Roman numerals are constructed in a similar fashion to the thirty variations[4], and the epilogue refers back to the initial Aria. Both Bach's piece and Powers's novel consist of thirty sections framed by two arias, resulting in a total of thirty-two variations or chapters. As we shall see later in chapter A 3.3.2, the repetition of Bach's Aria and Powers's "The Perpetual Calendar" can both be

[4] In order to facilitate the discussion about Bach's work and Powers's novel, the variations will be given with cardinal numerals, while the chapters will be presented by means of Roman numerals.

considered as variations since they will not be perceived in the same manner as the first time the listeners and the readers encounter the pieces.

Bach's initial Aria "itself is just another variation, built upon the all-generating, sarabande Base" (*GV* 609). There is much dispute about the authenticity of the Aria. The ground bass melody seems to be a traditional theme (Williams 2001: 38). The Aria itself is considered to be a *sarabande*, a Baroque dance movement in triple metre, imported to Spain by the Arabs ("Sarabande"). While some believe Bach composed the Aria for his wife, many critics believe that the Aria was probably not written by Bach himself. The modulation and the ornamentation are considered to be un-Bachian when examining the composer's other work.

The piece was found in *Notenbüchlein II* of *Clavierbüchlein* (Friedrich 1989: 48). In 1725, Bach gave this notebook to his second wife, Anna Magdalena Wilcke (1701-1760). A first hypothesis is that Anna Magdalena supposedly copied the composition, without mentioning the composer nor its title (Lernout 2001: 30). A second explanation derives from Frederick Neumann, who shared his concerns with his teacher, Arthur Mendel. The latter examined the Aria and exclaimed: "[y]ou are absolutely right, it is a piece of French fluff" (qtd. in Lernout 2001: 15). The last interpretation comes from Christoph Wolff, who believes Bach composed the Aria, building it on an existing bass-line from a *soggetto* from the early seventeenth century (1991: 212). The term *soggetto* refers to a melody that forms the subject or the theme of the basis of a canon ("Soggetto").

The importance of the number thirty-two in Bach's work is strengthened by the fact that "the composer will vary through his gigantic construction. Not the melody; [but] the harmonic sequence" (*GV* 195). The bass-line of the Aria consists of thirty-two notes that make up the chord structure that is explored in the following thirty variations as each variation plays with the duration, the key, the pitch and the amplitude of these notes. Another impressive piece of evidence is that Bach's piece consists of thirty-two sections written down on thirty-two pages, at least in the original edition (Lernout 2001: 248). Most movements are notated in thirty-two bars, except for variations 3, 9, 21 and 30, which have 16 bars (Williams 2001: 44).

The structure of thirty sections enclosed by two other pieces also finds its way into the novel on a micro level during Ressler's "string of self-contempt" after he comes to one of Cyfer's Blue Sky meetings unprepared (*GV* 136). He remembers his parents' seventh birthday present, the *Britannica*, as a "ruinously expensive set of encyclopedias" consisting of "thirty inexhaustible volumes, a yearbook and an index" (*GV* 133). His father had to work so

hard to pay off the encyclopaedias that he suffered "a massive myocardial infarction" which led to his death (*GV* 134).

Both the book and the composition have a symmetrical structure. Powers writes that "[s]uperimposed over those first four triplet rungs, a diversionary tune that, with grace notes, contains twenty tones. Two halves of the aria, each sixteen bars, both scored to repeat, totaling sixty-four measures" (*GV* 195). Each variation consists of two parts that must be repeated. One variation thus consists of four sections. There are thirty-two variations which results in a total of sixty-four halves, if these are not repeated. Powers's initial aria is a poem that also consists of sixty-four lines, the same number of halves in Bach's entire work and the same number of bars in the Aria, when counting the repetitions. The inner structure of the code used as an epigraph at the beginning of the novel resembles the musical phrase of Bach's work as well, since it consists of four lines with eight triplets and thirty-two groups of three letters (Herman and Lernout 1998: 162).

3.1.2 The "Rule of Three"

Both Powers's novel and Bach's composition are organised around the "rule of three" (*GV* 32). In the "Goldberg Variations", every group of three variations forms a triplet; the first is a genre piece or a dance; the second, a lively virtuoso arabesque-like movement on two keyboards with a lot of hand-crossing; and the third, a canon (Gillespie 2011: n.p.; Herman and Lernout 1998: 156; Jones 1997: 148; Lernout 2001: 52; Lewis 2008: 84; Williams 2001: 40, 47). There are no forms of imitation to be found in the genre pieces, there are free forms of imitation located in the arabesques, and the most strict forms of imitation in this composition can be found in the canons.

These three musical forms are mimicked by Powers's intertwining narrative threads concerning the three plots of 1957-58, 1983-84 and 1985-86. While Bach opted to follow the sequence of genre piece – arabesque – canon, Powers chose to combine the three narratives in each chapter in a less strictly manner: twenty-one chapters represent all voices; five chapters contain only two voices; and four chapters focus on a single voice (Lewis 2008: 84, 88). The disparity resulting from translating the information system of music to that of literature is demonstrated here.

Aside from organising his composition in groups of three, Bach embeds the number in many other ways. For example, the Aria on which all the variations are built is a *sarabande* in

3/4 time. The idea that everything is built upon a three-based structure can also be found when examining the key in which the variations are composed. There are three bases, namely major, minor and chromatic (Williams 2001: 50). All variations are in G major, except for three, namely variations 15, 21 and 25, which are in G minor.

As mentioned above, the large structure of the novel revolves around three intertwining narrative threads. But Powers also includes the number on a micro level. The first example concerns Ressler, who "becomes triply obsessed" after joining the Cyfer unit (Labinger 1995: 86). Not only is Ressler fascinated by Bach's music and the genetic code, he is also obsessed with Jeanette since he "thinks of Dr. Koss […] three times a day" (*GV* 672). The second example revolves around genetic research as "Dr. Ressler assisted in the final push to join three islands": Mendel on one, Mendeleyev on the other, and Darwin on the last island (*GV* 85).

The third example deals with the three pieces of mail that Jan receives from Franklin (Labinger 1995: 89; Lewis 2008: 77; Strecker 2004: 240-241; White 2008: 91, 96-97). Jan first misinterprets these messages because she did not consider the disparity between European and American methods of formulating the date. The first piece, which starts the novel after the initial aria, is the undated death notice of molecular biologist Stuart Ressler, posted and delivered to Jan in a timely fashion, namely June 23, 1985. The second piece of mail is a post card received in mid-July. However, the post card has been delayed in transit for more than a month, since it was marked June 7, 1985. The last piece is a long letter from Franklin dated June 12, 1985, but did not arrive until late December of the same year. After discovering the correct dates of the three pieces of mail send by Franklin, Jan views "the old tune as if it were some absurdly singable new song" (*GV* 517). Franklin did not simply shrug off Ressler's death as Jan originally believed. Instead, he returned to America in order to take care of Ressler while he was dying of cancer. In the words of Patti White, "Franklin is translated from villain to hero by a simple act of decoding; only the postal system is at fault" (2008: 97).

3.1.3 "Four Scale-Steps Descend from Do"

The number four plays a major role in both Bach's piece and Powers's novel. In the seventeenth century, many *ostinato* works started with four descending notes, a technique familiar to Bach (Williams 2001: 37-38). The "Goldberg Variations" can be reduced to "four scale-steps descend[ing] from Do" (*GV* n.p.). Powers's poem contains the four notes upon

which Bach's variations are built, namely Do, Ti, La and Sol, or in letter notation C, B, A and G, respectively.

The "Goldberg Variations" are based on the initial Aria, which consists of a melody of two sixteen-note lines, each consisting of quadruple four-note phrases: "four notes, four measures, four phrases, pouring forth everything" (*GV* 10). As Powers puts it, it is a "four-by-four-by-four aria" (*GV* 442). Powers's "The Perpetual Calendar" similarly consists of four sections of four stanzas, each consisting of four lines. The poem introduces the novel's narrative structure, four nameless characters and lays out the four main themes of the book in a similar fashion to Bach, who introduces his most important motifs in the Aria (Athenot 2002: 70; Copeland 1995: 137; Hurt 1998: 34-35; Lewis 2008: 83; Strecker 2004: 228; Zuelke 2003: 170-171). The poem's first stanza is about music, the second concerns genetics, the third deals with relationships, and the last one revolves around time and calendars. The novel's ensuing thirty chapters are all built upon these four themes, just as the bass-line of Bach's Aria is the unifying item of the following variations. The topics in the poem seem to describe different realms, but the reader soon finds out that the themes are connected and even stand in for one another.

There are other compelling connections to the number four in the novel. At the beginning of 1985, Jan receives a postcard from Franklin that informs her of Ressler's death from cancer in "four lines squeezed on a three-by-five" (*GV* 1). These are four important lines since upon reading them, Jan quits her job at the library to undertake a year-long sabbatical of self-study in science and music (Dewey 1998: 53; Labinger 1995: 86; Lewis 2008: 76-77; Strecker 2004: 229; Zuelke 2003: 157).

The following example concerning the number four deals with a substitution code that can be found in the 1983-84 plot when Franklin hums the "four letter tune" which Jan needs in order to gain entry to the offices at MOL: "down a minor second, up a major third, down a minor second" (*GV* 316). In German notation, the four-letter word would read "BACH" (Herman and Lernout 1998: 156; Ziolkowski 2010: 635). Given the large and detailed account of Bach's music, it is safe to assume that Powers is aware of the German notation which would represent a B natural as the letter H and a B flat as B. Bach's name, consisting of four letters, would be rendered as B, A, C and H in musical scores, as is the case in bb. 11-13 in Variation 6 and in bb. 7-8 in Variation 25 (Williams 2001: 102).

The most intriguing connection to the number four in the novel deals with the structure of a DNA strand as Bach's composition presents itself as a musical chart of the genetic code (Copeland 1995: 108, 113-115; Hermanson 1996: 41; Ickstadt 2007: 2). *The Gold*

Bug Variations links genetics to musicology and the structure of a DNA cell to that of Bach's piece, the "best metaphor for the living gene" (*GV* 610). There is a clear link between the four notes that are at the heart of Bach's music and the genetic code contained in the DNA's spiral helix as the former serves as a metaphor for the looping and recursive structure of genetics. The genetic information, like Bach's "Goldberg Variations", is built upon a simple base consisting of the four nucleotides isolated by Albrecht Kossel, namely G, A, T and C, which stand for guanine, adenine, thymine and cytosine, respectively. These four bases form two pairs, namely A-T and G-C, and turn around each other like a double helix. Powers links the replication and the variation mechanisms of these four bases to Bach's music as he describes the composition as a play of "two paired strands, four phrase-building blocks, a sixty-four-codon catalog" (*GV* 610).

Ressler's research team, Cyfer, is looking for the way DNA produces twenty different molecules. Three nucleotide bases are necessary to code for one of twenty amino acids, resulting in sixty-four possible combinations of the three bases (Gillespie 2011: n.p.; Lernout 2001: 42). Ressler discovers sixty-four possible words made of three letters that one can form with the four nucleotides G, A, T and C. The time signatures of Bach's canons in the "Goldberg Variations" similarly produce all possible combinations that one can form with the numbers two, three and four (Jander 1991: 192-193; Williams 2001: 99). To draw the connection between genetics and music even further, there are "canons at every scalar interval arch across the work like a giant backbone. But at each vertebra, the canonic lines are tied into position by the spinal chord of a theme that released them" (*GV* 611).

3.2 Canonic Techniques

Apart from borrowing Bach's mathematical structure of the "Goldberg Variations", Powers also adapts many musical devices used by the composer. The first subchapter concerns the writing style of the novel that comes about through the use of canonic techniques, since the braiding of the narrative strands can be equated to the alternating voices in a canon. The canons also play a major role on the level of the characters and their relationships towards each other. In the second subchapter, I will discuss the inversion and the retrograde technique. While inversion is mainly connected to the development of the two couples, the retrograde technique is connected to the actions, the decisions and the skills of various

characters. The last subchapter explains the narrative rhythm of Chapter XXII in connection to the augmentation and the diminution technique.

3.2.1 The Braiding of Narrative Strands

Powers draws on Bach's contrapuntal techniques to construct his narrative. Counterpoint is seen as the most fascinating musical device that can be translated into literary works (Brown 1987: 39-42; Scher 1975: 39; Scher 2004b: 186-188). Many writers, for instance John Milton, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Stephen Leacock, André Gide, James Joyce, Conrad Aiken and Aldous Huxley, have attempted to render the effects of counterpoint in their effort to overcome the inherent differences between literature and the arts. The term "counterpoint" is used to refer to the practice of combining melodies point against point, or note against note ("Counterpoint"). This results in simultaneously produced tones. In order to adapt the technique for literary purposes, authors have to find ways in which to present two or more ideas or narrative strains simultaneously. Even though the material is presented in a linear manner, it has to be rendered in a way that the reader keeps the two ideas or the two plots at the back of his mind. Incorporating contrapuntal techniques is no easy task, since any parallel between musical and literary polyphonic structures can only be metaphorical. While musicians are able to read more than one line simultaneously, it is physically impossible to read two sequences of words at the same time.

In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Powers presents the literary equivalent of the polyphonic structure of Bach's "Goldberg Variations". When examining the composition, the canons are the most frequently used contrapuntal techniques. A canon is a musical term that refers to a melodic line brought by the first voice (also called subject, leader, *proposta*, or *dux*), which is repeated by the second voice (also called subordinate, follower, *riposta*, or *comes*) delivering the same melody but delayed by one or two bars with respect to the first. The third voice serves to unite voices one and two ("Canon").

Powers exploits the structures of Bach's canons for the construction of his entire novel. The canons find their way into the narrative in four main ways: firstly, by inserting overt references found in the subtitles of several sections; secondly, in Powers's own writing process; thirdly, in the construction of the narrative strands and the timing of the events that take place in the novel; and lastly, on the level of the characters and their behaviour towards each other.

Bach places a canon at every third variation, starting with Variation 3, again indicating the importance of the number three. For Variation 30, where one would expect a canon at the tenth, Bach composes a *quodlibet*, which will be explained further on in chapter A 3.3.2. Powers's narrative is a literal analogue to the structure of Bach's work as many chapters of the novel contain canons as subtitles at the appropriate place (Herman and Lernout 1998: 153; Hurt 1998: 35; Ziolkowski 2010: 635): Chapter III ends with a "Canon at unison" (*GV* 57); Chapter VI concludes with a "Canon at the second" (*GV* 125); Chapter IX starts with a "Canon at the third" (*GV* 175); Chapter XII contains a "Canon at the fourth" (*GV* 262); Chapter XVIII begins with a "Canon at the sixth" (*GV* 399); Chapter XXI includes a "Canon at the seventh" on two occasions (*GV* 478, 485); Chapter XXIV starts with a "Canon at the octave" (*GV* 539); Chapter XXVII ends with a "Canon at the ninth" (*GV* 622); and Chapter XXX includes the "Quodlibet" (*GV* 665).

The novel contains two deviations in relation to the structure of Bach's "Goldberg Variations". Firstly, Chapter XV should normally contain a canon at the fifth, but this is not the case. In the opinion of LeClair, the missing canon points to the fact that Jan learns in this chapter that "life is not designed" and that not everything follows a perfectly-preconceived pattern (1996: 20). Secondly, "Canon at the seventh" is mentioned twice in Chapter XXI. The first subchapter deals with the Ressler-Koss relationship, while the second subchapter concerns the Todd-O'Deigh relationship. The two subtitles could indicate the importance of the fact that both relationships evolve rapidly at this point in the narrative as Ressler makes love to Jeanette for the first time and Franklin is practically living together with Jan. As was revealed in the first chapter of this thesis, the structural parallels between the "Goldberg Variations" and the novel do not entirely overlap since Powers sometimes deviates from Bach's music. When examining the subtitles, the narrative again embodies the divergence resulting from translating one information system to another.

The double structure of the first two voices in a canon becomes clear when looking at Powers's writing process. In his interview with Kevin Berger for *The Paris Review*, Powers explains that he was driven by stories about laboratory fraud before realising that laboratory research was a more promising topic since it contained more paradoxes and ambiguity (2002-03: n.p.). Powers started to write a three-hundred-and-fifty page manuscript set in the 1950s about the sceptical and withdrawn Dr. Ressler, who was trying to find the genetic code uniting all living things. Powers felt that something was missing in the story and put it aside and started to write *Prisoner's Dilemma*. He then wrote a character-driven plot about a man who wanted the help of a librarian in order to find out more information about his older

colleague. After writing more than two hundred pages, Powers realised that this older colleague was Dr. Ressler and combined the two stories into what came to be known as *The Gold Bug Variations*. The end product of this process can be seen as the third voice of a canon, which serves to unite voices one and two.

Powers's novels often encompass double alternating narratives, generally taking place in different times and different spaces. *The Gold Bug Variations* relates two love affairs: the plot in 1983-84 takes place in New York City, where the two young researcher lovers Franklin Todd and Jan O'Deigh trace the story set in a small town in the Midwest in 1957-58 about the two geneticist lovers Stuart Ressler and Jeanette Koss. These two plots spiral around each other like voices one and two of a canon (Gillespie 2011: n.p.; Lewis 2008: 84; Ziolkowski 2010: 634), but also like the DNA's twisting double helix as "two copies twist about each other with helical precision" (*GV* 611).

The second narrative thread about Franklin and Jan takes place twenty-five years later than the plot concerning Ressler and Jeanette. The two contrapuntal love stories resemble each other, but there is a two-months delay in the Ressler-Koss relationship. Labinger comes to this conclusion by examining five key events in the two relationships, namely first meeting, first date, first kiss, first consummation, and separation (1995: 87). The narrative present set in 1985-86, which begins and ends the novel, ties the two alternating narratives together as if it were a bass-line uniting the two imitating voices of a canon (Labinger 1995: 87; Lewis 2008: 84; Zuelke 2003: 172).

In his interview with Neilson, Powers reveals more information about his writing process as he tried to develop two unique styles or voices for Jan and Franklin (1998: 20). The entire narration is a joint collaboration on the part of these two characters (Athenot 2002: 75; Clayton 2002: 43, 48; Copeland 1995: 96-97, 129; Dewey 1996: n.p.; Hurt 1998: 36-37; Iuli 2009: 612-613; LeClair 1996: 19; Lewis 2008: 77; Neilson 1998: 20; Strecker 2004: 229-230, 242; Strecker 2008: 196; J. D. Thomas 2010: 20; Van den Beemt 2008: 46; White 2008: 100-101; Ziolkowski 2010: 635). When Franklin returns in Chapter XXX, he proposes to Jan to "make a baby" and unite her scientific journal and her personal narrative of 1985-86 together with his manuscript that contains an account of Ressler (*GV* 674). The reader can assign the present-tense, third-person narrative set in 1957-58 to Franklin and the past-tense, first-person narrative set in 1985-86 to Jan. However, there are authorial ambiguities that make it difficult to assign the two narrative strands to either character. The chapters and subsections obey two codes, the genetic and the musical code, that neither Jan nor Franklin could have managed alone.

A last reference to the canonic structures in Bach's piece can be found at the level of the characters. While listening to the "Goldberg Variations" again, Jan notices "an unnamed correspondent. A third party. […] I hear another voice in the bass, below the love duet. However entwined the upper lines, another figure informs them, insists on singing along. All two-part voice separation harbors a secret trio in dense fretwork" (*GV* 33). Ressler, functioning as bass-part, is the driving force behind Franklin and Jan, voices one and two, as he encourages them to unite and become a couple (Dewey 1998: 62-63; Herman and Lernout 1998: 154; Lewis 2008: 76; Ziolkowski 2010: 634). When reminiscing about his own unhappy love affair with Jeanette, Ressler wants Franklin and Jan to give their love a chance as he "had from the first been [their] matchmaker" (*GV* 300). Jan believes that "our happiness made *him* happy" as Ressler was "slipping deeper into human ways" (*GV* 420-421, italics in original).

This unifying bass-line is not present in the following example when Ressler is close to cracking the genetic code in Chapter XXVII. He runs to his barracks in Stadium Terrace to tell Jeanette of his *in vivo* breakthrough. Much to his surprise, "he hears a strain of music as familiar to him as breathing" (*GV* 627). "When Jeanette sat in the barracks writing her *Abschied*", she put on Bach's "Goldberg Variations" (*GV* 633, italics in original). At the moment Ressler comes home, Variation 27 is playing: "[t]he record has run out while he read [Jeanette's letter]. It was in the high twenties when he entered" (*GV* 631). The canon at the ninth is the only pure canon of the composition since it does not have a bass-line uniting the two canonic voices (Williams 2001: 85). This particular variation seems to fit the moment of the narration as the unifying structure that held Jeanette and Ressler together is gone.

3.2.2 Inversion & Retrograde

"'Treatment by retrograde and inversion,' Toveh Botkin mumbles, troubled. 'Bach was fond of putting fugue subjects through both'" (*GV* 465). Composers can mirror a melody either vertically or horizontally. The first technique is called inversion, or *al rovescio canon*, and comes about when the initial melodic line is answered *inversus* by a second melodic line that presents the subject upside down so that all the intervals are in the opposite direction from the subject ("Canon"). Examples of this mirroring can be found in Bach's variations 12 and 15. The relative newness of the technique is signalled due to the fact that none of the canonic phrases begins on a main beat, as opposed to the other variations (Williams 2001: 67, 69). The

second technique is termed retrograde or *canon cancrizans* (Lat. for "crab canon"), whereby the notes in an imitative voice are placed backwards in relation to their sequence in the original, just like crabs walk backwards ("Canon"). The first two canons of the fourteen canons Bach placed at the end of his "Goldberg Variations", further on explained in chapter A 3.3.2, are *canon cancrizans*.

In order to illustrate the treatment of inversion and retrograde, I will present two examples that contain both of these techniques. In Chapter XIII, Jeanette visits Ressler at night, "letting herself in through his front door, a thief in the night" (*GV* 287). When Ressler leaves in the morning in order to buy some breakfast, "he slips in, an exact inversion of their positions hours ago" (*GV* 297). After breakfast, Jeanette leaves, but "she turns, walks backwards like a schoolgirl" (*GV* 299).

The second example that combines the inversion and retrograde technique concerns the dodecaphonic music of Anton Webern (1883-1945), a composer associated with the Second Viennese School. As Botkin explains to Ressler, Webern's Opus 21

> is a perfect palindrome: a symphony that reads the same forward and backward, entirely generated from a densely threaded theme. Of course, the ear can't hear that perfect order. As far as the listener is concerned, the piece might as well be random! But his text. His "message", as you so wonderfully and naively put it. I paraphrase the cantata: "Keep deep down, for the innermost life hums in the hive."
>
> (*GV* 224)

The symmetry of the entire composition comes about vertically through mirror inversion, and horizontally through the palindrome or retrograde technique. The fact that Powers chose to include this particular piece is quite fascinating since it underscores his encyclopaedic endeavour once more. In *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language*, Kathryn Bailey describes Opus 21 as follows: "in the course of their combined 165 bars, Webern presents an anthology of canonic techniques rivalling [Bach's] *The Art of Fugue* in its comprehensiveness and ingenuity" (2006: 95, italics in original). When examining his own compositions, Webern concludes that all discourses are interrelated and asserts that "[t]he same law applies to everything living: 'variations on a theme' – that's the primeval form, which is at the bottom of everything. Something that seems quite different is really the same. The most comprehensive unity results from this" (qtd. in P. A. Brown 2003: 875). A similar notion has been mentioned previously in chapter A 1 in connection to Powers's narrative. *The Gold Bug Variations* suggests that all branches of knowledge are essentially variations on the same theme.

The references to inversion in the novel mainly concern the development of the Todd-O'Deigh relationship and the Ressler-Koss relationship. From the parallel set of characters and the double-helix like structure from the narrative, the reader can deduce that the book is based on a symmetrical construction. However, Powers does not adhere to a strict symmetrical pattern and will sometimes oppose the two patterns in order for the one to comment on the other (Hurt 1998: 36; Lewis 2008: 84; Zuelke 2003: 172).

The novel contains many other examples of inversion, but there are three that caught my attention. The first example concerns Jan O'Deigh and Jeanette Koss (Copeland 1995: 129-131; Hermanson 1996: 42; Hurt 1998: 36; Labinger 1995: 87; Lewis 2008: 76, 84; Marsh 1995: 116; White 2008: 100; Zuelke 2003: 172). Jeanette wants children but becomes sterile by nature, while Jan fears the chances of mutation and has had her fallopian tubes ligatured. Jeanette is married to Herbert, a food technology engineer, and ends up staying with him. The couple later on adopts children. The reverse is true for Jan, who has been living with adrenal advertising executive Keith Tuckwell for the past four years. She eventually leaves Keith for Franklin Todd. Jan and Franklin do not adopt, but they bring something to life in the form of a manuscript they have collaborated on. Jeanette and Ressler never come back together, while Jan and Franklin renew their relationship at the end of the narrative.

There is a second example of inversion dealing with the development of the two relationships. Although Barry Lewis ascribes the following scene to the retrograde technique, I believe the term inversion is more appropriate in this context (2008: 83). Lewis asserts that Jeanette and Ressler become lovers in Chapter XV, while, according to my reading, this only happens in Chapter XXI. However, it is possible to deduce from the narrative that Jeanette and Ressler have never been more intimate as they are listening to Bach's "Goldberg Variations", a piece that has come to mean much for the both of them. In section "C. Evolution", Jan imagines the couple listening to Variation 15 in the darkness, twenty-seven years earlier than the narrative present. While Jeanette and Ressler have never been closer, Franklin and Jan have never been more apart. Chapter XV, entirely composed by Jan, seems an assembly of her notes as she indulges in scientific research, while Franklin is almost entirely absent from this part of the narrative. The factual writing style and the chapter's headings with the letters A, B, C and D, a numeration method not used in the other chapters, suggests a methodical Jan, who seems to struggle with her emotions for Franklin as she pushes them into non-existence. The struggle in Jan's relationship with Franklin corresponds to Bach's Variation 15, which is written in G minor and ends in a fade-away. Variation 16, a French *Ouverture*, presents a strong contrast due to the fact that it begins with a large chord

in the left hand and has a more lively character as it is written in G major (Lernout 2001: 46; Williams 2001: 44). Variation 16 marks the beginning of the second half of the composition. Chapter XVI consists entirely of Franklin's "botched dissertation draft" which he mails to Jan (*GV* 368). The narrative does not exactly constitute a new beginning at this point. Franklin is roaming around Europe, but he is not even close to finishing his dissertation, nor are he and Jan finding their way back to each other.

The third interesting reference to inversion revolves around the method of learning music that is employed by Ressler and Jan as their artistic training stands in contrast to one another (LeClair 1996: 18). Ressler tries to grasp music by listening to it and learning about it in a rather theoretical manner: "I've never taken a music lesson in my life. I am your classic, digital autodidact. I can clunk along a keyboard fairly grammatically, but with the thick accent of a Pole who has learned to speak English through books" (*GV* 191). While he is still working at Cyfer, Ressler "has studied music […], listened each evening, learned notation, sight-read scores for much of the basic repertoire" (*GV* 583). Franklin later on explains to Jan that "the professor came to music late in life. He says the whole enterprise caught him by surprise. Other noises, other tunes. Said he spent years committing to memory the entire repertoire. But somewhere along the way, he's pared Western music down to just what he can carry" (*GV* 394).

When she was young, Jan once brought home a cello and

> touched the bow to the catgut C. A bass swell filled the house, penetrating to the root cellar – the only successful sound I ever made on the thing. All subsequent attacks on the instrument were failed attempts to recreate that first resonance. I turned the box in the following [year], after a frustrating summer stuck in first position. Next autumn I took up piano. Czerny exercises (Chopin without sex, Brahms with a bad conscience) every October from then on.
>
> (*GV* 172)

Despite the fact that she played the cello first, using only her intuition, Jan decided to switch to the piano. She explains to Ressler that "[t]here are two sorts of piano students. The first is proud of the piece she's just mastered. The second hears the next piece snickering. I started out as the first, but drifted into the second" (*GV* 191). Jan began to study the instrument in a mechanical and academic manner "before giving up the piano in favor of pragmatics" (*GV* 54).

There are three noteworthy examples of the retrograde technique. The first example concerns Jan, who states that "I've decided to learn something, become expert, exchange fact

for feeling, reverse what I've done with my life to date" (*GV* 81). She quits her job at the library after learning Ressler died. By studying science and music, Jan hopes to understand Ressler's ideas and views better. The second example revolves around Ressler, who abandons the *in vitro* approach for the *in vivo* approach when he discovers that they have "been attacking the problem ass-backwards" (*GV* 263).

The third illustration concerns the wife of Cyfer-member Tooney Blake, Eva, who "possesses skills that can only be called freakish" (*GV* 117). Eva, the "living palindromist" (*GV* 118), has a "brain capable of retrograde inversions" (*GV* 178). Ressler gives her one of his favourite quotes of Gustave Flaubert and Eva recites "the whole stream, backwards": "[s]trong the fascinate to cease never which recesses innermost …" (*GV* 118, ellipsis in original). Flaubert's quote refers to the notion that people must never stop to be amazed at what they can discover, a sentiment which will be explained further on in chapter A 4.4. Eva also reverses her husband's blessing: "'Service selves Lord thank food bless!' Retrograde grace, in Eva's mouth, the purest thanksgiving imaginable" (*GV* 178).

3.2.3 Augmentation & Diminution

Powers translates two musical devices in his narrative that concern the duration of notes, namely diminution and augmentation. In a canon by diminution, the notes are reduced in duration compared to the original. The voice in the canon harmonises with a sped-up version of itself ("Diminutions"). The opposite of this device is called augmentation. In a canon by augmentation, the notes are extended in duration compared to the original. The voice in the canon is accompanied by a slowed-down version of the same tune ("Augmentation"). There is an interesting similarity between Bach's Variation 22 and Powers's Chapter XXII. Both demonstrate the diminution technique as there is an acceleration in the tempo of the music and the narrative (Gillespie 2011: n.p.; Lewis 2008: 83-84). However, when we take Chapter XXII as our starting point, Chapters XX and XXI are in augmentation.

Labinger does not identify the musical technique in relation to Chapter XXII as diminution, but as *stretto* (1995: 87-88). He appears to believe that *stretto* and augmentation are opposites, but these two techniques are not related to each other in this manner. *Stretto*, the Italian for "narrow" or "tight", can be perceived when the entries of different voices overlap and come in closer succession as when they were first heard so that the answer

enters before the first voice is completed ("Stretto"). It is an intricate technique that is mainly used at the end of a *fugue*, bringing the work to a climax by the increasing intensity. In order to achieve the full impact with this device, the composer has to choose a short, powerful motif that can be played or sung in all the voices in quick succession and thus creating tension. Indeed, the technique could very well apply to Chapter XXII as the three narrative braids come together and follow each other rapidly. One could also argue that the chapter has a high-point in it, namely that Jan comes to understand Ressler's character better and that she has finally identified the dates of Franklin's pieces of mail correctly.

But more remains to be said about Chapter XXII. Most chapters have several subchapters, each marking a shift from one storyline to another (Labinger 1995: 87). However, Chapter XXII contains only one subtitle, namely the marking of Bach's Variation 22: "Alla breve" (*GV* 499). Lewis seems to confuse this tempo indication with "double time" (2008: 83-84), a jazz term meaning that one must play or sing twice as fast ("Double time"). Instead, *alla breve* is a time signature, also referred to as 2/2, which is derived from the note value of the breve that must be considered as the pulse or the unit of time ("Alla breve"). By the time Bach was composing the "Goldberg Variations", the brevis – in duration equivalent to two whole notes – was replaced by half notes, which have the duration of two quarter notes or crotchets. Until now, Powers kept his three narrative threads apart. However, in this chapter, he brings them together. The narrative rhythm thus resembles the pulse of a musical composition in 2/2, which has a fast and lively character.

3.3 Musical Analogies Concerning Content

Various sections in the novel correspond to specific variations in Bach's composition. Before explaining Chapter XXX, Variation 30, and the *da capo* form of the novel and the composition in the second subchapter, I will analyse the previous chapters that hint at the corresponding variations in Bach's piece. The connections in this chapter of the thesis revolve around many different parallels that can help the readers to make sense of the fictional universe Powers creates as the content of the narrative seems to resemble Bach's score. In various chapters, the characters are listening to the corresponding variation. In these scenes, the atmosphere that the variation creates is of great importance. While some chapters incorporate the more abstract and theoretical aspects of musical analysis, other chapters include comments on the rhythm, the tempi indications, the intervals or the key in which the variations are written.

But the comparisons do not end here. There are several connections to the formal structure of the corresponding variations as well as to the manner and the timing in which the canonic lines enter, the reiteration of motifs and the length of phrases. The piano-specific technique of hand-crossing comes to the fore when examining how the characters behave towards each other. The narrative also investigates various dances, such as *courants*, *polonaises* and jigs.

3.3.1 A One-to-One Mapping of Chapters & Variations

Variation 1 is a slow Polish dance in triple metre (Williams 2001: 56). The rhythm of the first measure in Variation 1 is described in Chapter I as "short-short-long in the right hand completing a simultaneous long-short-short in the left" (*GV* 14). The rhythm describes Jan's footsteps as she feels like dancing (Herman and Lernout 1998: 153-154).

Variation 2 is suggested in Chapter II when Franklin visits Jan at the library and asks her to dig up the goods on Ressler (Herman and Lernout 1998: 154). Franklin hums a song that "flirt[s] between major and minor" which Jan cannot recognise (*GV* 22). The variation enters the narrative once more when Jan plays the "Goldberg Variations" again a week after she held her private memorial service for Ressler. Jan comments that "last week, the dance seemed a duet, subtle play between a right hand too close" (*GV* 32). This seems to refer to Variation 1, a piece consisting of only two voices with hand-crossing in b. 4 and bb. 21-24. The description of Jan continues with the word "*courant*" (*GV* 32, italics in original), which indicates a dance in triple time of which the parts are to be repeated ("Courant"). This matches Bach's Variation 1, although that piece is considered to be a *polonaise*, a couple dance of Polish origin ("Polonaise"). Peter Williams points out that "the genre is nevertheless elusive" since musicians and critics can only make educated guesses concerning the genre of Variation 1 (2001: 56). Jan further on reports that she heard "a left I left so long ago I didn't at first recognize it" (*GV* 32). This description refers to the bass-line in the pianist's left hand in the last six bars of Variation 1, which resemble the last six bars of the Aria's bass-line (Williams 2001: 56-57). After Jan remembers last week's listening to Variation 1, the reader comes across Variation 2 when Jan "definitely hear[s a] trio. Love triangle. Dr. Ressler's story is nothing if not a threesome" (*GV* 32). The fact that Variation 2 consists of three voices and not two, like Variation 1, is important in Jan's new understanding of Dr. Ressler in this scene.

In Chapter III, Jan recollects a lunch date when Franklin demanded her to "name that tune" that was playing in the background at the "clam shack" (*GV* 53-54). Jan recognises

Bach's "Goldberg Variations" as she "learned the first, trivial thirty-two measures as a young girl" (*GV* 54). After hearing two variations, Franklin reports that "this piece – 'this *particular* recording, in fact' – was the only music our mutual friend had listened to for the last year. […] 'All the way through, both sides, three times a night for the last few months.' [… T]he restaurant sound track reached the third permutation" (*GV* 54, italics in original). The "Canon at unison" (*GV* 57), or Variation 3, is thus brought in the third chapter of the novel (Herman and Lernout 1998: 154).

Variation 4 is suggested in Chapter IV when Franklin asks Jan out for a second date that "meant to erase whatever impression of weakness the first might have left. We were not to mention the case. We were to be absolutely upbeat. And afterwards, as befit cheerful strangers, never see each other again" (*GV* 74-75). In my view, the description refers to Bach's tempo indication for Variation 4, namely *L'istesso movimento*, meaning that the pulse stays the same after a change of metre in order to make a smooth transition ("Istesso tempo"). The indication points to a more up-beat tempo when comparing Variation 3 in 12/8 to Variation 4 in 3/8. However, this is just a deception since the tempo actually stays the same. Franklin similarly proposes a change in tempo, yet Jan remains sceptical and predicts that things will remain the same. This changes when Jan calls up Franklin, who suggests that she visits MOL in order to meet Ressler. While Jan initially predicted that their relationship would stay the same in a more negatively manner, she now senses a "familiar forward motion" and "had to count the thing in three" before she could agree to come (*GV* 80).

In Chapter V, Jan struggles when she is beginning to date Franklin while still living with Keith. She asks herself: "[h]ow did I accomplish those leaps, the terrible intervals of those days? All done cross-hands. Independent lines somehow crossing over" (*GV* 91). The description matches Variation 5, which is a two-voiced piece with a lot of hand-crossing (Williams 2001: 60). The variation consists of "a rush of unstoppable, jarring intervals" that can be linked to the "leaps" Jan mentions (*GV* 94).

In Chapter VI, Jan visits MOL for the first time and hears "imitative voices chased and cascaded over one another, interleaving, pausing at pivots, only to tag-team pratfall down the scale in close-intervals clashes" (*GV* 107-108). The section she describes here is Variation 6 (Herman and Lernout 1998: 154). The two voices of the canon are built upon a motif that starts with a dotted crotchet linked to an eighth note that is followed by six descending steps. This motif is kept up the entire variation in various forms. The longer notes of the two voices cause tension as they form seconds and sevenths. These two dissonant intervals represent combinations that clash harmonically. The variation enters the narrative once more when

Powers describes Jan and Franklin's courtship in terms of the musical composition: it was "hard to say which of us led the flirtation walk. A stepladder catch, second voice identical, only higher. He chases her until she catches him" (*GV* 111). Variation 6 is a canon at the second with two voices mimicking each other. The first voice starts on a high G, while the second voice "make[s] the catch" one measure later on a high A, i.e., one note higher (*GV* 111). The couple's flirting stands in contrast to Woytowich's "information dependence: if he hears an event while it's still going on, he has an infinitesimal chance to alter the outcome" (*GV* 115). Woyty is unwilling to wait for "the next day's newspapers" and does not want to come in one bar later than the day on which the event takes place (*GV* 115).

Variation 7, which is supposed to be played *al tempo di giga* (Williams 2001: 62), enters Chapter VII when Jan tries to tell Keith about Franklin: "'I've made a few friends.' I thought once I got going, I could imitate Frank's easy jig. But after those six quavers, I softened the contour of the line. 'Eccentrics,' I added, choosing the perfect word to render them harmless" (*GV* 149). *Giga*, the Italian for jig, is a fast Baroque dance in binary form ("Jig"). The most common structure is that in 6/8, the time indication of Variation 7. The form corresponds to the six quavers or eighth notes which Jan mentions when she remembers that she caved in after only one measure and decided not to tell Keith about her affair with Franklin just yet.

Variation 8 consists of one-bar phrases (Williams 2001: 62). While the right hand plays a motif consisting of eleven sixteenth notes, the left hand plays a motif consisting of three sixteenth notes followed by four eighth notes. Both motifs last only one bar. The variation resembles Jan and Keith's conversation of which "the chain jumped off sprocket at the last torque. Something caused one of us to miss the pickup, and we'd be off, attacking one another" (*GV* 152). Jan cannot seem to complete what she started saying in the previous chapter as she constantly backs out after her one-bar phrases. While Jan and Keith become further alienated from each other, Jeanette and Ressler come closer together. Unfortunately, Ressler can only utter short phrases, such as "I would like, very much" and "I want", before breaking off (*GV* 161). The one-bar phrases also find their way into Franklin's notebooks as he "attacked his news. He snipped at section one with a pair of lefty scissors, gluing the composed facts into a spiral notebook" (*GV* 162).

In Chapter IX, the canon at the third enters the narrative three times. The first time happens when Jeanette leaves a clipping on Ressler's desk revealing a "cartoon of a marvelous, machine-age invention employing two dozen elaborate programmed steps to butter a piece of toast" (*GV* 177). Ressler is supposed to guess that the cartoon refers to Variation 9, although I cannot seem to locate the twenty-four steps necessary to arrive at the

same conclusion. The second reference to Variation 9 occurs right after Ressler almost informs the Blakes about his love for Jeanette. He listens once more to the record she gave him. As he puts the needle on the vinyl, "the flowering, formal perfection of the music is so close that he rips the playing arm off the motionless canon" (*GV* 185). Williams clarifies that the variation has a logical binary structure where the upper voice is answered by the second voice in a "pretty cadence" (2001: 64). The formal and logical structure of the piece stands too much in contrast to Ressler's feelings for Jeanette as they seem to defy all reason. Indeed, the disparity is so large that Ressler has to turn off the music he has come to love so dearly. The variation is brought into the narrative a third time when Jan visits MOL. She and Ressler listen to the "Goldberg Variations": "[o]ne of the more demanding variations was in the air, a juggling act demanding three separate hands each under the control of its own brain" (*GV* 191). The logical structure of this variation is pointed out once more.

Variation 11 is composed for two voices only and is "geared to create maximum hand-crossing" (Williams 2001: 66). The technique could refer to Jan and Franklin, who reach a new phase in their relationship in Chapter XI as "from that moment, visa granted, our way of being with one another changed. From then on, we could not be in the same room without resorting to the etymology of touch" (*GV* 237). Ressler and Jeanette experience a similar attraction, but Ressler is doomed to just "look at her, taste without touching. […] Their each move changes the other's. He studies her technique, indifferent to how the lines between them separate, oblivious to which of them is tagger, which taggee" (*GV* 234-235). At one point, after exchanging glances, Jeanette is frightened: "[i]t could only have been [Ressler], his own cross-hands panic, his broadcast desire" (*GV* 245). The hand-crossing technique of Variation 11 could also refer to the debate that Ressler and Woytowich are watching on television. Edward Teller, a Hungarian-American theoretical physicist, and Linus Carl Pauling, an American biochemist, are "battling toe to toe on the feasibility – no, the desirability – of a comprehensive nuclear test ban" (*GV* 251). The two are "flipping the hot potato between their four hands as if the quarrel is just its subject matter" (*GV* 252).

In Chapter XII, Jan examines her time spent on her self-education and concludes that "I'm no closer to recovering that tune I dreamed myself inside of the night I heard of Dr. Ressler's death. No closer to recording that score, the dance step that made me quit the working world" (*GV* 255). The dance step refers to Variation 1, which is a *polonaise*. Variation 12 suggests this stylish dance due to the left hand's full-length repeated crotchets in bb. 1-3 and bb. 5-7, the dactyl rhythms and the many Gs and Ds at the beginning of this variation (Williams 2001: 67).

In the following chapter, Ressler "dips into a variation that confirms, in a burst of quavers, the only possible mechanism: transcription. RNA transcribes DNA, ports its message away for translation" (*GV* 278). Variation 13 finds its way into Chapter XIII as the piece is "the clearest variation yet on the original Aria" and is thus the most likely variation to confirm the notion of translation (Williams 2001: 67). The variation not only imitates the Aria's textures, but it also rises and falls with a melodic line which is as immediate as that of the Aria's. Variation 13 also happens to be the section on which Ressler and Jeanette "overstep, accelerating into inexcusable touch" after listening to "the first dozen variations – her tender strokings, their skittish explorations of mouth and neck and shoulder salient, surveys afraid of the data they are after – he finds relief from the relentless organic trap" (*GV* 291, 293).

Variation 14 is described in Chapter XIV when Jan thinks about her break up with Keith, "still regretting the mess I'd made of things with Tuckwell, I felt remorse scatter in instrumental brilliance, bravura trills, shakes, flourishes, demisemiquavers" (*GV* 301). The variation is very virtuosic as it has many thirty-second notes and trills. The fact that the previous variation has a more meditative character and that Variation 14 is described as having "high spirits" could indicate that Jan is slowly getting over her break-up with Keith (Williams 2001: 68).

Chapter XV incorporates an examination of "the fifteenth variation, replication by inversion" (*GV* 345). Variation 15 is the first of three that is written in G minor: "for the first time, unmitigated minor, […] discolors the set at midpoint" (*GV* 345). Powers writes a detailed analysis concerning the three voices in the canon. The second voice starts with "a question, framed by the initial canonic voice, descends frightened down the scale ladder" (*GV* 345). Williams describes the "slurred falling semi-quavers" present in the first bar as a "dragging motif" (2001: 69). The second voice is answered *inversus* by the first "a measure later, the answer, predetermined by its complement, begins an awful, mirror rise" (*GV* 345). In b. 21, "[t]he canonic lines cross" and in b. 22, "the question begins a long – excessively, over-and-again long – terminal descent into obscurity, broken only by a last, four-note, densely pitched, failed attempt to lift itself before the final fall" (*GV* 345-346). The last bar contains the answer of the first voice, which is "constrained by transcription to rise note by note, continues to do so, long after other motion stops, winding up somewhere without footing, in the far reaches of unsupported space" (*GV* 346). The answer is not accompanied by the second voice, which has a crotchet rest, nor by the bass-line, which consists of a crotchet note that dies out before the first voice can finish its motif. Having analysed voices

one and two, it must be pointed out that the bass-line tries to imitate the motifs of these top two voices. However, as Powers reveals, the "bass […] tries to preserve the sarabande by desperately introducing passing accidentals, combines in harmonies more unforgiving than any until late this century. […] The bass falters, then fails to translate the Base into distant minors. It capitulates, lapses into the despair of part-writing freedom" (*GV* 345).

After Ressler "makes love to Jeanette Koss on the floor of the Cyfer lab" in chapter XXI, he goes home to listen to Bach's Variation 21 (*GV* 495). Ressler "unleash[es] a keyboard exercise that wanders far off the face of the earth into a canonic minor modulation as full of pathos as the first creation" (*GV* 484). Variation 21 is a canon at the seventh and also the second variation composed in G minor. The piece is "chromatic beyond recognition" (*GV* 484). "The Base slips inconceivably downstream from the peaceful thematic trickle of its source Brook" (*GV* 484). The bass theme is present in every half bar and somehow manages to be largely in the G major key, giving the variation its peaceful character (Williams 2001: 78). The "Brook" mentioned in this extract refers to the composer's name, as "Bach" is the German word for "brook" (Labinger 1995: 84; Lernout 2001: 11).

Powers includes another comment on the Todd-O'Deigh relationship by establishing a connection between Variation 24 and the "Canon at the octave" of Chapter XXIV (*GV* 539). The variation "makes use of the largest possible musical interval", the octave, and the chapter deals with the large distance between Jan and Franklin (Herman and Lernout 1998: 155).

The content of Chapter XXV closely corresponds to Variation 25 (Herman and Lernout 1998: 155; Labinger 1995: 85; Lewis 2008: 83; Ziolkowski 2010: 635). The narrative line starts with a section on all the disasters that are recorded in calendars. This is made more personal by the characters in the narrative as the reader learns about Jimmy Steadman's stroke, Joe Lovering's suicide, and the break up of Jeanette and Ressler. Ressler tries to determine what is keeping him and Jeanette apart. He attempts to find an explanation in "a variation that stands apart from the others, bizarre, instantly detectable, alien. […] Five sixths of the way through the *Goldberg* set – variation twenty-five – is the most profound resignation to existence ever written. […] H]e hears […] a sorrow that did not exist in its parent sarabande" (*GV* 582-583, italics in original). The sombre mood of Powers's chapter stands in parallel to Bach's Variation 25, which is the third variation written in G minor and contains an intricate chromatic structure and many modulations, giving the composition its dark, hopeless and melancholic feeling. Williams confirms this sentiment as he describes the variation as "the emotional high point of the work" (2001: 82).

Chapter XXVII contains a section titled "The Goldberg Variations" and provides the reader with an abstract analysis of Bach's work. The section also relates the legend concerning Count Kaiserling, previously explained in chapter A 2.1.

3.3.2 "Once More with Feeling"

At the end of the "Goldberg Variations", Bach writes *Aria da Capo è fine*. The term *da capo* instructs the performer to return to the beginning and play the piece again to a place marked with *fine* ("Da capo"). Powers's novel similarly ends with the final musical inscription to read the opening aria, "The Perpetual Calendar", again. Bach and Powers do not write out the section that is to be repeated and merely inform the musician and the reader to go back to the beginning.

The repetition of both arias takes on a new meaning due to the fact that they are presented again at a later stage in both the composition and the narrative. The significance of the arias is modified because of the parts heard or read up until the repetition of the initial section (Frye 2007: 103; Williams 2001: 2). Bach's Aria changes its aura as it is first a greeting, then a farewell. The rereading of Powers's aria can also be considered as a variation since we read it with a better understanding of the thematic elements in the poem. Parts must be rethought when having read the entire book. When the readers encounter the poem for the first time, they encounter events, characters and situations that are then still unclear. The readers have to adjust the connections previously made due to the shift in context since, to borrow Jan's words, "the smallest tweak of context changes every sentence" (*GV* 498).

Powers's aria runs in its entirety "*Aria* Da Capo e Fine. What could be simpler? In rough translation: Once more with feeling" (*GV* 675, italics in original). The question "[w]hat could be simpler?" repeats the first line of "The Perpetual Calendar". It points to the importance of the calendar and the continuity of human activity during the seasonal changes throughout the narrative (Copeland 1995: 119; Hurt 1998: 35). The fact that there are two subsections titled "The Perpetual Calendar" supports this view (*GV* 165, 661).

There is a second interpretation possible in relation to the novel's *da capo* structure. In 1974, Bach's personal copy of the "Goldberg Variations" was retrieved in Strasbourg (Lernout 2001: 94). Bach concluded the "Goldberg Variations" not with *Soli Dei Gloria*, nor with the reprisal of the Aria, but with his very own musical signature. The manuscript contains fourteen canons based on the first eight bass notes of the Aria. The official title runs

Verschiedene Canones über die ersteren acht Fundamental-Noten vorheriger Arie (BWV 1087) and was composed in 1742-1746. The fourteen canons, also called riddle canons, are not completely written out. There is only one voice accompanied by a title that the musician needs to decode if he wants to know how to play the work. The number fourteen is of importance here, since it is Bach's numerical signature as it is the sum of the ordinal values of the letters in his name. If we assign a number to each letter in the alphabet, we will have Bach's name as the sum of two, one, three and eight equals fourteen.

Bach writes "etc." at the bottom of the piece, suggesting that he could make more if he wanted to (Lernout 2001: 129; Williams 2001: 32; Wolff 1991: 168). The subscription "etc." stands in contrast to the word *fine* after the Aria in the "Goldberg Variations". The fact that something can continue forever finds its way in the Todd-O'Deigh relationship of the novel. Jan withdraws after discovering Franklin in bed with Annie Martens, "a fighting Fundy from Spiritus Mundi" (*GV* 453) and "a teller for the Mother Ship", a bank affiliated with MOL (*GV* 188). At the firm, Ressler programs a message that will appear when Jan types in the four-digit code to activate her bank card. Ressler is already "a year dead" when Jan discovers the message on an Automatic Teller Machine that reads: "[h]e is a man. Take him for all in all" (*GV* 667). Ressler further instructed the machine to play the melody of the *quodlibet* from Bach's "Goldberg Variations".

A *quodlibet* (Lat. "what you please") refers to a long tradition that consists of improvised harmonising as was the custom at Bach's family reunions ("Quodlibet"). They began with a devout chorale and started adding well-known songs – some of them having racy texts – on the spur of the moment (Lernout 2001: 243, 262; Williams 2001: 88-89). The closing variation begins with an upbeat, the only one in the entire work, emphasising that something different appears here. After all, the audience expects a "canon at the tenth, as the variation's position demands" (*GV* 665). Instead, Bach brings two popular old German folk songs together in counterpoint, namely "Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir gewest. Ruck her, Ruck her, Ruck her" ("I have been away from you so long. Come here, come here, come here") and "Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben. Hätt mein Mutter Fleisch gekocht, so wär ich länger blieben" ("Cabbage and beets drove me away. Had my mother cooked meat, I would have hung around longer"). These innocent love songs often concluded a dancing party and were known as *Kehraus*. Normally the two songs should not sound well together, but when juxtaposed in counterpoint they somehow do.

The musical metaphor suggests that, according to Ressler, Jan and Franklin should give their relationship another chance and not end up like him and Jeanette did twenty-seven

years earlier (S. J. Burn 2008c: 105-106; Dewey 1998: 63; Herman and Lernout 1998: 155; Labinger 1995: 85-86; Lewis 2008: 77; Ziolkowski 2010: 635). The *quodlibet* immediately precedes the repetition of the initial aria, which has not been played, listened to, or read since the beginning of the composition or the novel. Similarly, Chapter XXX represents the reunion of Franklin and Jan, who have been separated for a long time. Already in Chapter XXII, Jan wants Franklin to come back from Europe as she quotes the translation of the first folk song of the *quodlibet*: "[h]ow long you have been away from me. Come home, come home, come home" (*GV* 516-517). However, when Franklin eventually does come home, Jan is not sure that their relationship will last forever, upon which Franklin answers "[w]ho said anything about lasting?" (*GV* 674). As Dewey points out, "to love here is to risk vulnerability" and not make a "withdrawal" as Jan is doing when she perceives Ressler's message from the ATM (1996: n.p.).

The impression that things can go on forever not only finds its way into the narrative when we examine the Todd-O'Deigh relationship. It also comes to the fore when we take a closer look at Powers's novel and Bach's masterpiece. The fact that both chose not to go on forever and stopped writing and composing at one point, could indicate that it would become meaningless if one continues for ever. This sentiment can be linked to the encyclopaedic nature of the novel, since cataloguing all the pieces of information one can assemble from the different specialised fields does not necessarily enrich or enlighten us. Powers's novel leaves the reader richer in understanding about the origins and the boundaries of human knowledge. He warns his readers about the danger for people who depend too much on what their interpretation of a code is and suggests that the sentence "[w]hat could be simpler?" mocks those who try to fit the complexity inherent in the world into a simple pattern (Copeland 1995: 93; Frye 2007: 103; Hermanson 1996: 49-50; Janton 2009: 6; Strecker 2004: 228). The question is repeated so many times it seems to have become refrain (*GV* 1, 3, 14, 16, 123, 157, 483, 620, 675). It builds up the delusion that everything seems quite harmonious in the beginning, but when we read further in the novel this impression grows progressively weaker.

4. More Composers & More Compositions

Aside from Bach's work, there is a lot more music to be discovered in *The Gold Bug Variations*. In this chapter, I will discuss Marian Anderson, George Gershwin, Paul Robeson and Glenn Gould.

4.1 Marian Anderson

Powers incorporates the historical circumstances of Marian Anderson's epochal concert on April 9, 1939, in *The Gold Bug Variation* and *The Time of Our Singing*. Bibliographical information concerning Anderson is more relevant in the discussion of the second novel, so it will not be presented here, but in chapter B 3.1.

As we have seen earlier, *The Gold Bug Variations* is an encyclopaedic novel that deals with how the characters incorporate large amounts of information. During a freak December tornado, Tooney Blake is trapped in Deck One that houses a part of the vast archives of the university library, the "third-biggest collection in the country" (*GV* 377). Blake has the time to sift through the pieces of information his team has assembled up until now, including "accounts of Marian Anderson singing the national anthem at the Lincoln Memorial, because the DAR wouldn't let her sing it inside" (*GV* 378).

At first, Blake is not overwhelmed by the huge number of facts gathered there. However, when he thinks about the hopeless enterprise it would be to understand everything that has been written so far, he starts to panic (Dewey 1998: 54; Frye 2007: 99; Hermanson 1996: 48-49; LeClair 1996: 21; Strecker 2004: 240; Zuelke 2003: 166). According to Blake, intellectuals are "committed to nothing less than a point-for-point transcript of everything there is" (*GV* 379). He remarks that "[t]he words spread in all directions, an endless, continuous thread […]. It's the world's damn DNA in there" (*GV* 378). In Blake's view, the library contains too many complicated and ineffectual texts of the world it is supposed to reflect, as "retrieving [information] from the catalog becomes more difficult than extracting it from the world the catalog condenses" (*GV* 379). As a result of this information overload, "the Blakes commit themselves, overnight, to hopeless generalism" (*GV* 381).

4.2 George Gershwin

As with Anderson, detailed biographical information about George Gershwin will prove of little value in this chapter and will be deferred until chapter B 3.4. Celebrating differences between people belonging to various classes finds its way into the narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* when Tooney Blake, "the pianist of less than gershwinning ways" (*GV* 64), "is at the piano doing a terrifyingly down-tempo version of 'Let's Call the Whole Thing Off.' Only he's missed the point of the song: 'Potato, potato, tomato, tomato,' all pronounced exactly the same" (*GV* 41).

"Let's Call the Whole Thing Off", a song from the movie *Shall We Dance?* (1937), is about different dialects as it plays with the phonetic qualities of the words "potato" and "tomato". The song implies that intralinguistic dialectal differences can easily give rise to conflict (Shell 2006: 60), as the two lovers in the musical, played by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, cannot agree about pronunciations: "[y]ou say eether and I say eyether, / You say neether and I say nyther" (Gershwin 2012: n.p., lines 9-10).

While Keith tried to "keep [Jan and him] from drifting into different dialects" by showing her all the ad campaigns he had ever worked on in order to stave off boredom, their relationship will fail (*GV* 267). However, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" is "a wooer's song of warring against war by way of contrapuntal harmony" (Shell 2006: 60). Unlike Jan and Keith, the couple in the movie realises they "need each other, / So we better call the calling off off" (Gershwin 2012: n.p., lines 23-24).

4.3 Paul Robeson

Paul Robeson is a very important figure in both novels. *The Gold Bug Variations* mainly focuses on the implications of one of his songs, while *The Time of Our Singing* incorporates biographical elements in the narrative in order to draw a connection between the non-fictional singer and the fictional character Jonah. At present, an analysis of the song will suffice. In chapter B 3.2, a detailed description of the musician's life will be given.

One of Ressler's first vinyl purchases when starting his research with Cyfer is "an album of spirituals by Paul Robeson" (*GV* 43). Ressler first listens to Robeson's rendition of Diamanda Galás's "There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral". The third line from the ninth stanza, "[s]ometimes it causes me to wonder", is repeated twice in this scene (*GV* 43-44).

Galás, who lost her brother to Aids, performed the song half-naked covered in cow's blood in order to take a stand in the fight against the disease (Schwarz 1997: 133-134).

However, the importance of another song stands out as it is one of the subtitles in Chapter III, namely "We are climbing Jacob's Ladder" (*GV* 35). The relevance of the song lies in the lyrics of "Jacob's Ladder". The spiritual depicts the biblical story of Jacob's Ladder, described in verse 28 of Genesis (J. D. Thomas 2010: 27). According to the story, Jacob travels to a relative's home in Haran where he spends the night. While he is dreaming, Jacob envisions a ladder extending to heaven. God's angels are ascending and descending this stairway. At the top of the ladder is God, who promises Jacob to watch over him. Upon awakening, Jacob exclaims what a dreadful place the earth is. He eventually receives God's blessing after working hard to make up for mistakes made in the past.

When Ressler first listens to Robeson's rendition of the song, he is overcome with "a sadness so overpowering that, before he can interpret it, tears seep out his eyes on underground spring" (*GV 44*). Labinger makes the connection between Ressler's name and the noun "wrestler" (1995: 93). James Hurt also comments upon this character's name and suggests it refers to the biblical Jacob, who wrestled with an angel (1998: 35). Ressler similarly struggles to understand the implications of the song, but soon discovers that the notes of the song "are *climbing* Jacob's Ladder" as "every rung […] goes higher and higher" (*GV* 44, italics mine).

According to Copeland, the parallel between the song and the novel points to a dream of progress and the compelling desire to believe and assert that human suffering leads to the promised land (1995: 117). The spiritual incorporates a similar positive message as it draws a connection between the ladder's steps and the end of American slavery. The song is a battle cry, one that reminds the listeners that happiness is something worth fighting for. Copeland's view is supported by the message that Jeanette gives Ressler as a goodbye gift contained in "*A Field Guide to Flowering Plants*" (*GV* 631, italics in original). The book opens to the picture of a flower that Ressler "remembers having seen […] before, in another, hypothetical life. The only clue to [Jeanette's] whereabouts, her one return address. The caption gives both scientific and popular names. '*Polemonium van-bruntiae*. Jacob's Ladder'" (*GV* 631-632, italics in original).

Powers includes a warning about the downward or upward movement of Jacob's Ladder as it can be recursive (Hurt 1998: 35; J. D. Thomas 2010: 27-28; Zuelke 2003: 180). The recursive character of the ladder finds its parallel in Bach's "Goldberg Variations", which are

"built on the repetition and recycling of this Base. Music that goes nowhere, that simply is, hovering around the fixed center of diatonic time" (*GV* 609).

Not only does Ressler initially struggle to understand "Jacob's Ladder" and Bach's masterpiece, he also tries to wrap his mind around the genetic code. When he attempts to construct a model of the double helix in order to present it to his team, Ressler discovers the connections between the complex structure of the DNA strand and "Jacob's Ladder":

> [t]he spiral molecular staircase – two paired railings sinuously twisting around one another, eternally unmeeting snakes caught in a caduceus – becomes in his fueled brain the stairs of Robeson's spiritual: Jacob's Ladder, the two-lane highway to higher kingdoms. Angels are caught descending and ascending in two solemn, frozen opposing columns. […] Jacob's helical staircase ladder conjured out of a single strand of nucleid acid. […] Four years ago Ressler […] noticed that the double-spiral staircase embodies two identical informational queues. The ascending angel order complements and mirrors the descending stream. Wholly redundant. Each angel-file sequence can be entirely recreated from the other. [… F]our bases alone – is all the sequence needed to conduct the full angel choir.
>
> (*GV* 69-70)

Jan recollects that her mentor "always called geneticist soldiers of the cross" (*GV* 88), a clear reference to the last line of each stanza in the song: "[w]e're soldiers of the Cross" (*GV* 45; Robeson 1998: 176). Instead of interpreting the "cross" as a religious symbol, Ressler reinterprets it as the "crucial test cross" (*GV* 45). Ressler echoes Jacob's sentiments as he comes to see the world as a dreadful, but awe-inspiring place and ends up devoting his life to the "universal and apostolic genetic code" (*GV* 350).

The ladder in the story eventually leads to the house of God, just as Ressler sees his progress in his research field as "the great ascent up Jacob's Ladder" (*GV* 44). However, when Ressler examines the *in vivo* approach, he wonders whether Cyfer "stand[s] at the base of Jacob's Ladder. Can they be on the threshold of completing what until then had been merely repetitive climb?" (*GV* 440). When commenting upon the *in vitro* approach that the rest of the team are following, Ressler uses Jacob's Ladder again as a metaphor: "[c]ode-writing code. Program-designing programs. Uncomfortably like the thing they built this tool to help examine. Why stop there? Why not assembler-assemblers? Application-generating applications? Jacob's Ladder off and runging, climbing themselves; tools that turn the trick of replication" (*GV* 469).

Ressler again acknowledges the potential recursiveness of the ladder when he thinks about the strong desire he experienced to smash Lovering against the wall after finding out that he was not going to be asked to stay on the Cyfer team next year: "[v]iolence forever in

the serum. Jacob's Ladder does not ascend; it coils forever around the same four rungs" (*GV* 503).

Ressler is not the only character in the novel who is struggling with Jacob's Ladder. Jan also recognises its recursive nature: "[l]ife proceeded not by survival of the fittest, but by differential reproduction. It was enough simply to make more than you lost. There was no Jacob's Ladder leading higher and higher. There was only breeding, faster, hungrier, until speed, appetite, and success did you in" (*GV* 450).

Jan's insight into the recursive nature of science is paralleled by her recognition about her own recursive learning process. After quitting her job as a reference librarian, Jan attempts to recover Ressler through an understanding of his work. She thinks that "the code codes only for the desire to break it" (*GV* 649) and constructs a plan of action: "I start with top magnification, fix my lens on cosmology. If that level remains abstract, I could drop to the step below, stop down an order of magnitude, make due with astronomy" (*GV* 82). Her research takes her one step down at a time until it leads her right back to cosmology, her starting point: "[n]o ladders lead back up from where I've been lowered. I must lie down where all the ladders start" (*GV* 493).

When she has almost exhausted her savings, Jan believes that "'There is, in the Universe, a Stair.' Small, too small for me to see the steps […]. The Stair Dr. Ressler was intent on climbing is not rolled up in the nucleus like builder's blueprint. The plan does not map out the organism in so many words" (*GV* 540). Jan discovers that all the information she has gathered will not help her in understanding Ressler, which was her original goal (Zuelke 2003: 158-159). She learns that "information is never the same as knowledge" (*GV* 5) and that she should not have gone after Ressler "as an abstraction" (*GV* 17). Jan realises that "we lag behind ourselves, knowledge always hopelessly outstripped by available information" (*GV* 625). In describing the same phenomenon in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Hofstadter states that the "'Strange Loop' phenomenon occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started" (1979: 10).

Powers's narrative suggests that the only manner to counteract the recursive nature of the ladder is to look at both horizontal and vertical connections, as they alleviate the tenuous relationship between gathering information and the knowledge or meaning that one can produce from it. This notion was already alluded to at the end of chapter A 2.2 when examining Bach's "Goldberg Variations". The piece consists of various harmonies, a vertical phenomenon that comes about due to the interconnectedness of several horizontal lines.

Powers, Ressler and Bach focus on "the first rung up form's ladder toward free will" because this lowest level is revealed most clearly and represents the theme on which the other rungs – or variations – are built (*GV* 388).

The upward movement of the ladder ties in with the fact that vertical understanding of any kind of field is necessary in order to make sense of the horizontal information. The vertical movement is emphasised by the repeated use of the "[f]our scale-steps descend[ing] from Do", which are mentioned at the beginning of "The Perpetual Calendar" (*GV* n.p.). Jan explains that "a haunting tune [is] *just* the intervals that walk it down the scale. But what other way to grasp a thing except as the emergent interplay of parts, themselves emergent from combined performances at lower levels?" (*GV* 387, italics in original). This statement again emphasises the fact that individual parts do not generate meaning themselves, but if one looks at the vertical and horizontal connections, understanding will begin to arise.

In Powers's novel, the story of Jacob's Ladder finds its parallel in many references to Peter Breughel's *The Tower of Babel* (J. D. Thomas 2010: 28). While Jacob's Ladder concerns God's outreach from heaven to earth, the Tower of Babel deals with man's grasping from earth towards heaven. This act had serious consequences because the structure "already [started] crumbling in mid-construction around the base" (*GV* 651). "That perfect equivalence between name and thing was scattered in ten thousand languages, punishment for an overly ambitious engineering project" (*GV* 330). Because they were speaking in different tongues, people were unable to finish their tower. Similarly, Cyfer's "problem in this moment of synthesis is that the mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and biologists don't all speak the same language", which would help them to solve the "coding problem" (*GV* 95).

In the novel, the Tower of Babel is mainly connected to the limitations of language and its shortcomings to represent other discourses, such as music and science, accurately. In the context of recursive structures, another aspect of this myth is more important as the act of overreaching is connected to making scientific headway. Although Franklin believes scientific progress will lead to a better world, Ressler does not support this view for two reasons. Firstly, his past experiences have taught him that scientific discoveries have often been manipulated into controlling others in political and corporate corruption. Ressler is anxious about the overreaching aspect of scientific ambition since it could lead to unexpected repercussions (J. D. Thomas 2010: 28). Secondly, if science continuous to evolve, it is "in danger of becoming nothing more than a database for new technologies" (Copeland 1995: 128). Jan comes to the same conclusion when she states that "[s]cience remains at best a

marvelous mine, not a replacement for the shattered Tower" (*GV* 543). Ressler believes that the purpose that should govern all work of science is not the manipulation nor the accumulation of more information, but to cultivate a sense of wonder, described in further detail below when examining Glenn Gould's views on music.

4.4 Glenn Gould

There are several similarities between Glenn Gould and Stuart Ressler (Frye 2007: 107; Gillespie 2011, n.p.; Herman and Lernout 1998: 158; Labinger 1995: 84; LeClair 1996: 17, 19, 21, 36; Lewis 2008: 82, 86). The references to this non-fictive person help the reader to make sense of the complex character of the fictive Ressler.

Both men were born in the same year, 1932, and die prematurely at a similar age: Gould dies in 1982 and Ressler in 1985. Gould and Ressler are prodigies who left their profession while being at the top of their game. Gould was becoming an extremely famous pianist who was asked to play on many concerts. He gave his last concert on April 10, 1964, because these events exhausted him both physically and mentally (Lernout 2001: 147). He recorded the "Goldberg Variations" five times and was asked to perform it live on so many occasions that the piece must have become somewhat tiresome and unchallenging.

Ressler was becoming a small celebrity since the first article on him appeared in *Life Magazine* at the age of twenty-five. He was described as "one of the new breed who will help uncover the formula for human life" (*GV* 31). Ressler was found out by a journalist whom had learned of a "bright, young, single, obscure young man out in the Midwest who had initiated an interesting bit of work and who, word had it, was not entirely unphotogenic" (*GV* 501). "The Life photo essay horrified [Ressler]" because "his words [were] badly quoted and out of context" (*GV* 575). *Life Magazine* also featured a piece on Gould that Ressler reads. The description of Gould resembles that of Ressler's. Gould is depicted as a

> young, single, romantically eccentric, a crank hypochondriac, never seen without his panoply of pills and jars of spring water. […] He sings out loud while recording – ghostly, alternate vocalizings the technicians can't muffle. […] Yet the nut is a genius. He has inherited a contrapuntal brain, and the Bach decoding algorithm is congenitally embedded into his ten-bit, digital circuitry.
>
> (*GV* 442)

Gould and Ressler share a need for isolation as both disappeared from the public view. Gould left the concert hall in 1959 to retreat to the recording studios. He had "a carefully worked-out, outlandish theory about recordings rendering the concert obsolete" (*GV* 442). "Even as the magazine was busy promoting that fellow, he'd already begun to trade the international concert circuit for a life where even his closest friends could reach him only by phone. *Life* never caught on that his keyboard exercises were a refusal of natural selection, a means of surviving solitude" (*GV* 510, italics in original). In 1957, two years earlier than Gould retreated from the public view, Ressler decided to leave science despite the fact that "he stood on the code's threshold" (*GV* 5).

The most striking parallel between the pianist and the researcher is the similar vision they have on music and science. In 1962, Gould states that "the purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but is, rather, the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity" (qtd. in Lewis 2008: 82). Ressler shares a similar view as the goal of science is "the purpose of being alive: not efficiency or mastery, but the revival of appropriate surprise" (*GV* 128). A little later on in the novel, Ressler similarly concludes that the field should not be regulated by the *in vitro* approach, with its reductionist restrictions (Frye 2007: 101; Strecker 2004: 239-240). Ressler observes that

> the purpose of all science, like living, which amounts to the same thing, was not the accumulation of gnostic power, fixing of formulas for the names of God, stockpiling brutal efficiency, accomplishing the sadistic myth of progress. The purpose of science was to revive and cultivate a perpetual state of wonder. For nothing deserved wonder so much as our capacity to feel it.
>
> (*GV* 645-646)

Ressler realises that "[s]cience is not about control. It is about cultivating a perpetual condition of wonder in the face of something that forever grows one step richer and subtler than our latest theory about it. It is about reverence, not mastery" (*GV* 431). Ressler firmly believes in the ability of science to cultivate surprise and discerns "the courage of curiosity" (*GV* 649) and "the built-in desire for discovery" (*GV* 650).

Jan quotes Ressler's conclusion in her journal: "[t]he proper response ought not to be distress at all. We should feel dumb amazement. Incredulous, gasping gratitude that we've landed the chance at all, the outside chance to be able to comprehend, to save any fraction of it" (*GV* 347). According to Jan, "the point of science was to lose ourselves in the world's desire" (*GV* 432). Concisely put, Ressler, Jan and Gould find that curiosity is the most

important thing, be it in science, in art or in life. In the words of Thomas B. Byers, the point is not to "pin down the tune, but to worry it, to keep tuning, to keep harmonizing" (2009: 6).

The sense of wonder is a powerful motif in all of Powers's novels. Copeland believes that "for Powers the true wonder of the human intellect rests in our remarkable ability to balance observation and interpretation" (1995: 8). When reading *The Gold Bug Variations*, it is very challenging to grasp all the references, even after a period of detailed research following the first read of the book. The fact that it will never be possible to understand every detail of this dense and intricate book can bring forth a sense of wonder in the reader (Karnicky 2007: 77; LeClair 1996: 16, 24).

The cleverly-built narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* takes the reader along for one strange ride that can only produce the utmost reverence towards its maker, a sentiment that can be repeated in relation to *The Time of Our Singing*. Inspiring wonder in his readers is very important in Powers's next novel that will be discussed in this thesis. The narrative challenges the readers to redefine their perception of racial borderlines, if such boundaries should exist at all. But if fiction is to have any significant impact on society, it must inspire wonder in its readers: "[f]or it is wonder, in Powers's fiction, that is the catalyst for fostering the engagement of his readers to bring about social change" (Copeland 1995: 18).

When describing the "fascinated disgust" that Powers's novels produce (*GV* 35), Jeffrey Karnicky writes that "[r]eading Powers's novels raises questions about the political and ethical implications of how one encounters the world" (2007: 72). "To read Powers is to engage in a continuing experiment on how otherness can be engaged, and on what is produced in these encounters" (Karnicky 2007: 88). Dewey agrees and remarks that

> [a]t its most immediate level, the imagination first responds – a capacity easily dismissed in an inflated age when we are visually oppressed by confected images. But Powers reinvests that most primary level of engagement with unsuspected wonder – he reminds us that the engaged imagination starts with the rare capacity to respond: not only to the unfolding miracles of the natural world but to images, to artifacts, to words, and thus to participate in the fullest realization of a culture's accumulated expressions. We can be moved and even changed by the aesthetic apprehension of a thing and, in turn, can preserve that momentary charge for a lifetime.
>
> (1996: n.p.)

In a 2003 interview with Emma Brockes for *The Guardian*, Powers reveals that he "does not doubt that, over time, the slow arts have power to change perception, in the way that running water cuts into rock over generations" (n.p.). Powers expresses the same tentative

conclusion in his interview with Burn: "[p]erhaps fiction can provide a way of thinking about the revolution in life that other disciplines are bringing about but are not yet equipped or permitted to evaluate" (2008a: 178).

Powers draws on chaos theory in order to demonstrate the significance of literature. The standard analogy of the theory concerns a small change in a system, for example the flapping of a butterfly's wings, which can produce a far-reaching effect, for example a hurricane. To borrow Ressler's words, "small changes produce large swings in outcome" (*GV* 429). When explaining the relationship of chaos theory to literature, Powers says that

> [i]t may well be that chaos theory's lasting contribution to literature will be the creation of a place where one might once again believe in the efficacy of fiction's project – a place where "no war is inevitable until it breaks out," where the individual counts "a lot, I fancy, if he pushes the right way," where we might play the whole hypothetical piece "once more with feeling," for it seems to me that many novels get written on the naive belief that a small seed of words can still create a great stir.
>
> (qtd. in Copeland 1995: 11)

B. THE TIME OF OUR SINGING

1. The Notion of Time

The Time of Our Singing consists of thirty-three sections that can be divided into two separate storylines that unwind themselves simultaneously. The first one is a traditional omniscient third-person chronicle of David and Delia's relationship through the 1940s, the second one is a first-person narration told by Joseph in the 1990s about the children's education in the nearly all-white world of classical music. Christina Oltmann argues that there is a third autonomous voice that constructs a narrative distinct from these two voices, namely the authorial voice of Richard Powers himself (2009: 193). The narrative voices alternate in irregular intervals and complement each other like "a polyphonic piece of medieval music […] in which several independent voices sing in counterpoint to form the whole" (Oltmann 2009: 197).

Defining the narrative time and space is quite complex. The opening sentence "[i]n some empty hall, my brother is still singing" (*TS* 3) already indicates the disorienting nature of this novel as both time and place remain undetermined (Janton 2009: 5). The generational saga spans a period of approximately 150 years, from 1843 to the mid 1990s (Ickstadt 2007: 8; Oltmann 2009: 194). The narrative mainly travels back and forth between the 1930s and the 1990s. There is a small detour to the 1840s that relates the origin of the last name of the Daleys. The novel goes backwards since it starts in 1961 and ends in the year 1939.

The narrative takes its structure from David Strom's concept of time, which he bases on Albert Einstein's theory of relativity (Dempsey 2003: n.p.): "[t]he universe is an orchestra that, at every interval, splits into two full ensembles, each one continuing on a different piece. As many whole universes as there are notes in this one!" (*TS* 94). David, a mathematician and expert on quantum time at the Physics Department at Columbia University, tries to overcome the boundaries of time by "exploring curves of time. On such a curve, events can move continuously into their own local future while turning back onto their own past" (*TS* 476). In laymen's terms, David investigates whether or not time travel is possible. The desire to prove the existence of these unstable spatio-temporal parameters derives from David's wish to advance science, but also from a more personal need to bring deceased loved ones back to life (Oltmann 2009: 173-175).

The novel is built upon a connection between time and music. Delia points out that "*[o]f course there is no time. Of course there's nothing but standing change. Music knows that, every time out. Every time you lift your voice to sing*" (*TS* 629, italics in original). Oltmann opines that Delia refers to music's performative character in which the composition exists in the present (2009: 215). During one of their private lessons from Kimberly Monera, a fellow student at Boylston academy, Joseph and Jonah discover that "[m]usic itself, like its own rhythms, played out in time. A piece was what it was because of all the pieces written before and after it. Every song sang the moment that brought it into being. Music talked endlessly to itself" (*TS* 58). David spends his entire career trying to find evidence for the fact that "[t]ime must be like chords. Not even a series of chords. An enormous polytonal cluster that has the whole horizontal tune stacked up inside it" (*TS* 93). During the Stroms's singalongs, they "crawled through loopy timelike holes in the evening, five lines braiding in space, each one curling back on the other, spinning in place" (*TS* 11).

David eventually discovers that "time is not a string, but a series of knots. This is how we sing. Not straight through, but turning back on ourselves, harmonizing with bits we've already sung through, accompanying those nights we haven't yet sung" (*TS* 522). The image of the "series of knots" derives from the visit that David and his two sons pay to the Cloisters, "a museum-complex overlooking the Hudson River near New York City that is actually an improbable conglomeration of imported sections of five different French abbeys, reassembled stone by stone" (Dewey 2008: 198). The building itself already hints at the lesson which David will teach his sons while visiting the museum, namely that one moment can lead to infinity (Dewey 2008: 199-200).

At one point during their visit, Jonah is fascinated by a tapestry of a beautiful white unicorn that has been caught, stabbed, fastened to a tree and fenced in. The tapestry foredooms two things: first of all, it predicts that Jonah will face many difficulties in life; secondly, it foreshadows that Jonah will die at a relatively young age. David asks his son "[w]hat is it a picture *of*?" (*TS* 158, italics mine). Little Joey, however, cannot think of a satisfactory answer which would please his father, who eventually tells him that "the picture is of […] little knots, tied in the clothing of time" (*TS* 158). David encourages Joseph, as Powers challenges his audience, to look past the mesmerising surface and examine the intricate construction of the tapestry. The readers of *The Time of Our Singing*, like Joseph, are enthralled by the surface of works of art, like novels and tapestries. However, Powers, like David, urges the reader to investigate narrative moments more closely in order to discover that time is not fixed, but fluid.

In both novels discussed in this paper, Powers celebrates the sense of wonder that people can experience. The desire for discovery finds its way into *The Gold Bug Variations* as it resembles Ressler's conclusion about science, mentioned previously in chapter A 4.4. To recapitulate, Ressler believes that the discipline should revolve around a perpetual state of wonder which derives from investigating objects more closely. In the words of Dewey, "twentieth-century science, not the arts, reanimated the imagination, reignited wonder, redefined possibility, and reinvigorated awe" (2008: 214).

In order to illustrate the connection between the two novels, I will compare the tapestry discussed earlier to the quilt mentioned in *The Gold Bug Variations*. In Chapter XXIII, Ressler and Jeanette visit an Amish Village where they buy a quilt that turns into an analogue of the genetic code as "[t]hey buy it for the haunting pattern neither of them can quite make out. It repeats yet is never twice the same, develops, yet stands in place, constantly spinning, unspun. Each time they look at it, it changes" (*GV* 528). The variations of the quilt change as different people look at it or when the same people view it from different perspectives (Frye 2007: 100; Hurt 1998: 36). To sum up, the quilt and the tapestry bring forth a sense of awe felt by its onlookers by either examining it into closer detail or by viewing it with fresh eyes from a new perspective.

The reader is given the opportunity to investigate several scenes of *The Time of Our Singing* in detail as various events are described from different perspectives, either by changing the time or the character that is recollecting memories or looking forward to an event. The intricate temporal space rotates back to crucial events in the family history, which Heinz Ickstadt terms as "moments of stillness", "moments of suspended time" or "temporal still-points" (2007: 8-9); Dewey as "multiple-moments" (2008: 207); and Oltmann as "multiple spacetimes" (2009: 166).

Whatever label we assign, these moments challenge the traditional narrative modes as they defy any linearity by refuting the persuasive logic of past, present and future. According to Ruth Mayer, Powers uses this counter-realist narrative technique "to conjure up a world in defiance of identity ascriptions: a world in which self and identification exist in harmony, at least briefly" (2010: 177). Oltmann agrees as she believes Powers "juxtapose[s] naturalized assumptions about fixed meanings of space, temporality, and ensuing notions of self prevailing in the narrated historical past to ever changing combinations of ethnic, cultural, and social belonging within shifting spatial and temporal parameters, until these assumptions become untenable" (2009: ii).

The two most striking examples of these moments that are related to music concern the competition of "America's Next Voices" and Marian Anderson's 1939 concert. The narrative returns twice to December 1961, when Jonah triumphs in a national singing competition at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. The event marks both the beginning of the narrative as well as the start of Jonah's career (Ickstadt 2007: 9; Oltmann 2009: 199; Van den Beemt 2008: 28). The first time this event is narrated is in the beginning of the novel, which starts *in medias res* and thus keeps the reader in suspense about the brothers' racial background as well as their motives for entering the competition.

The narrative returns four times to Easter Sunday in 1939, when David and Delia meet on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington during Marian Anderson's concert (Ickstadt 2007: 9). David and Delia connect over their love for music, an art form that transgresses the lines of segregation. The two nearly part until they come across a lost boy whom they assist in finding his family. David calms him down by talking to him about "the stars and planets, frequencies and wavelengths, distances so great, no message can cross them and be read, matter so dense that space collapses into it, places where the rules of length and depth get bent double and flipped about in the Creator's trick mirror" (*TS* 629).

The scene collapses with the story told in October 1995 as the novel suggests that the lost boy is the couple's grandson Robert, who was not born until long after the deaths of both his grandparents. Robert, his older brother, Kwame, and their uncle Joseph travel to Washington in order to take part in Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March at the National Mall. After the protest is over, Joseph, Ruth and her two sons fly back to California. On the plane home, Robert asks his mother about the stars and the planets, and later on about relationship between the perception of colours and wavelengths. Ruth remembers the enigmatic message her estranged father passed on to her through Joseph before he died and tells her son that there are "more wavelengths than there are planets […] a different one everywhere you point your telescope" (*TS* 627).

Scientifically, David's cryptic message refers to the electromagnetic waves of which we can only perceive a small range, just like we are only capable to detect a small range of the high vibratory speed of the wavelengths of sound. The message strengthens the bond between mother and son as Ruth reassures Robert, like Delia once reassured her, that colour is not black and white, but that the world consists of uncountable shades (Dewey 2008: 201; Oltmann 2009: 210, 220).

To illustrate the connection between colour and music in more detail, it is necessary to examine the passage concerning Delia's funeral. Joseph wonders

> [h]ow many gradations did anyone see? This polytonal, polychordal piece played for a stone-deaf audience who heard only tonic and dominant, and were pretty shaky even picking out those two. But all the pitches in the chromatic scale had turned out for my mother, and many of the microtones between.
>
> (*TS* 141)

The scene deals with the fact that it is easier for people to perceive only black and white, just as it is easier to hear only tonic and dominant, the first and the fifth scale degree in music. The extract suggests that music and mourning over a loved one can draw people together as acquaintances from many different racial backgrounds show up at this memorial to pay their last respects to Delia.

Although people have long ago come to terms with all shades and tones of music, the connection between colour and sound demonstrates that there is still a reluctance to accept the same variety in skin colour (Oltmann 2009: 221). The sense of wonder described previously is complicated by small-minded intolerance as "[r]acism, argues Powers, measures our rejection at wonder [because of] stubborn minds unavailable to awe" (Dewey 2008: 208). The lamentable faith of the Stroms "derives not from their mixed-race status but from American society's embarrassing failure to appreciate each citizen according to his own unique and unclassifiable glory" (Asim 2003: n.p.).

"Music and color exemplify that all things are essentially the same, yet in their manifestation show their beauty in diversity" (Oltmann 2009: 252). The world in Powers's narrative, like post-war America with its culturally-ingrained racism, does not accept nor does it see the beauty there is to be found in diversity. In his interview with Berger, Powers points out that

> [w]e often think that racism is driven by a hatred of difference, a fear of difference, and a desire to annihilate difference and create a kind of sameness. […] But just as important is an understanding of the degree to which racism is driven by a fear of similarities. […] If what looks so different from me is not that different, what happens to my sense of uniqueness?
>
> (qtd. in 2002-03: n.p.)

When Jonah and Joseph tell their mother that they believe people hate them, Delia expresses a similar notion: "[m]aybe they're not scared of different. Maybe they're scared of same. If we turn out to be too much like them, who can they be?" (*TS* 517). On the one hand, the dominant culture fears losing its uniqueness through blending. On the other hand, ethnic groups fear assimilation (Ickstadt 2007: 7). These sentiments are expressed in the novel as

"[w]e do not fear difference. We fear most being lost in likeness. The thing no race can abide" (*TS* 630).

Powers's take on race in *The Time of Our Singing* was partly influenced by his personal life. In the mid-1960s, his father moved the family to the north Chicago suburb of Lincolnwood that was heavily Jewish at the time. Powers states that he "always had a sense that we weren't quite native, a self-image compounded when we moved to Bangkok right before my eleventh birthday" when his father became the headmaster of the International School there in 1968 (qtd. in Dewey 2002: 6). About his experience of being part of a white minority in Bangkok, Powers acknowledges that "I can't pretend that anything I've ever experienced can compare to what black or mixed-race people confront on a daily basis in this country … But I can say that I drew on weak analogies in my own past, most specifically being an American child in Asia" (S. J. Burn 2008b: xx-xxi, ellipsis in original).

By narrating how if felt to be a mixed-race person in America during the turmoil of the civil-rights era during the mid-twentieth century, Powers challenges his readers to rethink their assumptions about race and the hypocrisy concerning the segregation laws. He argues for a multi-ethnical culture, rather than a culture determined by fixed racial categories. In order to demonstrate his view, Powers draws upon the aforementioned fluid notion of time and on the fact that music knows no boundaries, which will be explained in the following chapter.

2. "We've Decided to Raise the Children Beyond Race"

A detailed analysis on how David and Delia Strom decide to raise their children will prove interesting at this point. The first subchapter relates the four sources of inspiration for the couple's unique educational experiment: firstly, music, an art form free from racial boundaries; secondly, Johann Sebastian Bach; thirdly, Philipa Duke Schuyler; and lastly, the meeting with their grandson Robert. The second subchapter reveals that the Stroms's experiment is bound to fail as the couple's precocious children start asking questions at an early age. The children's grandfather also foreshadows an unsuccessful outcome. David and Delia's child-rearing experiment has a profound effect on the lives of the three Strom children, which will be analysed in the last subchapter.

2.1 The Educational Experiment

The Stroms challenge the prevailing assumptions concerning racial boundaries. Since there is no room for the Strom children in the present, Delia and David decide to raise their children for a future that does not yet exist. Their utopian dream turns into an educational experiment that revolves around race as they attempt to "raise the children beyond race" (*TS* 424).

In order to keep the children from getting acquainted with the categories of differentiation, Delia "turn[s] their rented half of the freestone into a fortress. And for pure safety, nothing beat music" (*TS* 9). In the domestic sphere of their own home, the couple home-schools the children with "heavy doses of the Strom Experiment" until they acquire an astounding repertoire of classical music (*TS* 442). The only refuge the artistically-gifted Stroms have is music: "[a]t night, we sing. Then music envelops us. It offers us limited safety" (*TS* 520). Delia realises "she must protect her boys from the present, preserve their unlabeled joy, refuse to say what they are, teach them to sing through every invented limit the human mind ever cowered behind" (*TS* 346).

The family holds evening singalongs consisting of playing musical games, such as "Crazed Quotations". Powers's family would also gather around the organ for similar singalongs as did the Bach family (S. J. Burn 2008b: xx; Ickstadt 2007: 8; Williams 2001: 89). The Strom family regularly gathers around the spinet and exchange musical phrases drawn from different musical genres, types and eras in order to create the "wildest mixed marriages, love matches that even the heaven of half-breeds looked sidelong at" (*TS* 13). The "Crazed Quotations" illustrate that music is an art form blind to colour. The game is described in terms of David and Delia's union (Oltmann 2009: 171), who "went to their graves swearing that any two melodies could fit together, given the right twists of tempo and turns of key" (*TS* 462).

Apart from their love for music, the couple's grand experiment is inspired by many people, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Philipa Duke Schuyler and their grandson Robert. During their last private lesson, Joseph and Delia are perusing the "Anna Magdalena notebook. […] It's a family notebook, Mama says, something Bach made to build his wife a home in music" (*TS* 523). In 1725, Bach devoted this notebook to his second wife Anna Magdalena Wilcke, a court soprano at Köthen (Jones 1997: 143; Liebergen 2005: 39; Wolff 1991: 29). Delia wants her children to find a home in music, just as Anna Magdalena did (Stock 2005: 10).

The second source of inspiration is Philipa Duke Schuyler (1931-1967), a historical figure of whom Delia learns in the narrative of the 1940s. Philipa, a mixed-race child prodigy, was "raised to defy the categories of racialization" (Mayer 2010: 167). Philipa's education resembles that of the Strom children:

> I was born and grew up … without any consciousness of America's race prejudice … [but] I became intellectually aware of it when I … entered the world of economic competition as a full-fledged adult. Then I encountered vicious barriers of prejudice in the field of employment because I was the off-spring of what America calls a "mixed marriage". It was a ruthless shock to me that, at first, made the walls of my self-confidence crumble. It horrified, humiliated me. But instead of breaking under the strain, I adjusted to it. I left [America].
>
> (qtd. in Honey 1999: 30, ellipses in original)

The basic outline of Delia's educational scheme is influenced by the account of Philipa that she reads in the *Courier*:

> [t]he principles are simple. Raw milk, wheat germ, and cod-liver oil. Intensive education – a two-parent home schooling scheme of around-the-clock instruction. But the real secret is that old western farming trick of hybrid vigor. The basics of agricultural breeding. Twin-race children – that genius girl proves it – represent a new strain of crossed traits more robust than either of their parental lines.
>
> (*TS* 347)

Delia comes to think of Philipa as "an advance scout in this newfound land. The continent exists already, and it's inhabited" (*TS* 347). Delia buys as many of Philipa's compositions as possible. These scores "are among the first the boys learn – the foundation stone of the new Strom schoolhouse" (*TS* 347). However, the reader learns that Philipa's education has not worked out as planned because she did not live up to the promises entailed by her early fame (Mayer 2010: 168):

> [Philipa's] country had loved the girl for the shortest moment, until she passed through puberty and lost her status as a freak of nature. When precocity failed her, all those whom hybrid vigor threatened with extinction turned the full force of purebred unity against her. She fled to Europe [and] toured internationally as Felipa Monterro, racially, nationally, and historically ambiguous.
>
> (*TS* 399)

The fact that Delia takes Philipa as the role-model for her own children already hints to the fact that Delia's child-rearing experiment is unfortunately bound to fail.

The moment they meet their grandson serves as an inspiration for both Delia and David because it gives them the necessary strength and courage to cross racial boundaries (Dewey 2008: 204; Ickstadt 2007: 9; Mayer 2010: 177). Delia later on muses that "she'd never have married [David] but for the lost boy, the hidden future they fell into together at the stray boy's words, that day in Washington" (*TS* 331). Robert quotes the obscure Jewish proverb that turns out to be a favourite of David's: "[t]he bird and the fish can fall in love. But where they gonna build their nest?" (*TS* 630). The boy raps to this mixed-race couple that "[t]he bird and fish can make a bish. The fish and the bird can make a fird" (*TS* 631). The fact that Robert's nickname is "Ode" proves to be interesting, since an ode refers to a poem that is intended to be sung ("Ode"). This indicates that the young couple now has the lyrics for their educational experiment which will take place in the future, they just need to find a way to put these words to music.

David and Delia assign a profound meaning to Robert's words and are convinced that "all things that are possible must exist" (*TS* 476), which is a variation of "Bach's favorite saying: 'Ess muss alles möglicb [sic.] zu machen seyn.' All things must be possible" (*GV* 126). In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Bach's music is described as "that tightly bound, symmetry-laced catalog of unity" which reveals "how nothing was the same as anything else. […] It needs the conviction, in a third favorite phrase of the provincial choirmaster, that all things must be possible, sayable, particular, real" (*GV* 617). Bach perceived his works as technical challenges in which he wanted to try out every possible way of writing music (Lernout 2001: 118, 252). Johann Philipp Kirnberger, one of Bach's many students, reported that "[t]he Great J. Seb. Bach used to say: 'It must be possible to do anything' and he would never stand to hear of anything not being feasible" (qtd. in Butt 1997: 57).

Bach's dictum is a central motif in both novels (Ickstadt 2007: 3, 9). *The Time of Our Singing* expresses a hopeful, utopian vision of Bach's saying in which two different cultures share values and traditions beyond racial boundaries. By drawing on Wolfgang Mieder, Dennis F. Mahoney points out that although the folk wisdom that Robert quotes initially warns against crossing boundaries, the formulaic structure of proverbs "encourage[s] the creation of anti-proverbs that call into question past truisms and sometimes even promote new and maybe better alternatives" (2009: 246).

The Gold Bug Variations presents a more ambivalent vision about Bach's "tenuous assertion" as the problem arises whether or not all things possible should also become real (*GV* 126). Bach's phrase enters the narrative for the first time when Ressler talks to Jan about the ethics of the commercialisation of science. Companies use actors in white lab coats in

order to make successful sales pitches. Legislators tried to pass a bill which forced companies to make known to the public that they were watching a simulation. However, as Ressler so eloquently points out, "'simulation beats legislation nine falls out of ten.' […] 'The bill eventually passed, but did nothing to stop the human mind from reifying every conceivable sales pitch.' All things must be possible. And all possible things are real" (*GV* 128-129). Ressler later on explains that "[l]egislation is too late. Legislation is about commerce, rights, equity. Once you need to pass laws about science, you've taken a wrong turn" (*GV* 431).

The second time Bach's dictum enters the narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* is when Ressler thinks about the power of the human imagination to create reality (Ickstadt 2007: 9). The question of the ethical responsibility of science comes into play once again:

> [w]hat exactly did the phrase mean? "Everything that *is*, is possible" was possible, if redundant. "All things that might be, can be" rubbed up in my mind against unlikelihood. Yet an evolutionist might say the same. All permutations on an amino acid theme are possible; given sufficient time and the persistent tick of the mutation clock, everything might be tried, with varying success. Not every experiment will fly; but every conceivable message string is – whatever the word means – possible.
>
> The mind, emerging from blind patterning in possession of catastrophic awareness, condensed the eon-work or random field trials into instants. Did Bach's baroque ditty harbor the political horrors of Ressler's own lifetime? Everything that humans *can* image *will* be implemented. Bergen-Belsen, Nagasaki, Soweto, Armenia, Bhopal: he had lived through all manner of atrocity. These mutations too were built on the little phrase, and then some. To listen to a theme and variations, he suggested, one had to be prepared for dissonance severe enough to destroy even the original theme.
>
> (*GV* 196, italics in original)

2.2 A Utopian Dream Bound to Fail?

Could Bach have been mistaken when he claimed that "[i]t must be possible to do anything" (qtd. in Butt 1997: 57)? In their idealistic home, David and Delia attempt to raise their children beyond time as well as beyond race. However, the children must survive the present in a place where people are judged by the colour or their skin. The children are "raised in an illusory colorblind paradise" (Miller 2003: n.p.). They are descendants from two different races, but they are neither black nor white, neither American nor German, neither Christian nor Jewish. Their father tells them: "[y]ou must run your own race" (*TS* 29), but this is a very complicated notion since "the impulse to hope for change within that culture is self-defeating naïveté" (Dewey 2008: 200).

The parents are unable to keep out the entire world. Both the children and the parents set up a fictional world in order to protect each other (Mayer 2010: 168). Music, the foundation of the experiment, is unable to hold this talented family together. Dewey proclaims that the shelter which art provides is only of a fragile nature (2008: 203). Oltmann confirms this statement by saying that "dwelling in music […] is not sufficient to make their experiment succeed" (2009: 195).

The Stroms's controlled experiment begins to show its cracks as the children start asking questions about who and what they are. After one of the children's first concert with the church choir, Jonah asks his mother: "[y]ou are a Negro, right? And Da's … some kind of Jewish guy. What exactly does that make me, Joey, and Root?" (*TS* 29, ellipsis in original). Given the fact that neither of the Strom children have a pronounced skin colour, they are not easy to categorise as either white or black. This causes problems as they grow up in a time where African-American identity politics still play a major role (Oltmann 2009: 172). The doctrine relies on clearly identifiable skin tones in order to affirm and reinforce racial differences.

When Jonah and Joseph finally come into contact with the outside world by means of concerts at their neighbourhood churches, they are faced with the following question: "[w]hat right do people not from that culture have to appropriate and own Western concert music?" (Powers qtd. in Berger 2002-03: n.p.). "At the first rehearsals, everyone stared", because two black boys were performing white music (*TS* 25). After the concert, several members of the audience came up to the two boys:

> [t]wo ladies […] had something momentous to say, some secret they weren't supposed to tell […]. "We just want you to know what an honor it is for us to have … a voice like yours in the service of the church." Like *yours*. Some sinful Easter egg we were supposed to discover. […] "I just can't tell you how much it means to me, personally, to have a little Negro boy singing like that. In our church. For us."
>
> (*TS* 28, italics in original)

The scene mentioned above is not the only negative experience that the boys have encountered when meeting members of the audience. After Jonah wins "America's Next Voices", an old man asks Jonah and Joseph "[w]hat exactly *are* you boys?" (*TS* 6, italics in original). Delia's sons will have to struggle with this question for the remainder of their careers.

Dr. William Daley, a Philadelphia physician, notices early on that his daughter's educational project is doomed to fail (Flusfeder 2003: n.p.; Oltmann 2009: 168; Stock 2005:

17). The two have a heated discussion about the children's upbringing, a conflict that destroys the family bond as it leads to an enduring fallout. Dr. Daley's major concern is the fact that the couple will raise their three children at home: "'You going to give them history?' […] 'Where are they going to learn who they are?'" (*TS* 419). Dr. Daley comes from a proud black family that has climbed up the social ladder "not into a white world but apart from it" (Eder 2003: n.p.). He believes that Delia will not tell her children about their black heritage. This sentiment becomes clear when Dr. Daley accuses his daughter: "[y]ou mean you're going to raise them white" (*TS* 424).

David and Delia want to bring up their children without specific ethnic identities and do not denominate their children as being either black or white. Delia explains to her father that "'We don't name them. They'll do that for themselves.' Anything they want. 'We're going to raise them for when everybody will be past color'" (*TS* 425).

When Dr. Daley uses the word "nigger", Delia hushes him up and tells him that "we don't use that word in this house" (*TS* 419). Dr. Daley maintains that avoiding such terms implies denying the grip these racially discriminating terms have on African Americans (Oltmann 2009: 169). Delia clearly wants to protect her children from the harsh reality, but she will not be able to keep out racial hatred forever. The children will have to face reality sooner or later, as Dr. Daley observes, "[y]our boys are going to have to learn it, between their pretty four-part hymns. Full dictionary definition. Count on it" (*TS* 419). Dr. Daley forgets that his daughter's attitude stems from how he himself raised her. He has always instructed Delia to "[b]e anything. Do anything. Dare them stop you", but this was before he found out that Delia wanted to become a classical singer (*TS* 36).

Dr. Daley is not only worried that the couple will raise their children at home without knowing any racial history or terminology, he already forecasts that music will not keep them safe: "[m]usic's going to protect you when they start throwing stones? You are going to sing when the world strings you up?" (*TS* 227). When Delia looks back on the conversation she had with her father, she realises that "[a]ll she can give [her children] is choice. Free as anyone, free to own, to attach themselves to any tune that catches their inner ear" (*TS* 479).

2.3 The Children's Path in Life

The novel raises the question whether or not the children are really free to choose as the educational experiment is not without its consequences. Growing up in a family that is

everywhere out of place, the Strom children struggle with the disparity between how their environment defines them and how they want to define themselves. The development of these three characters is important as they try to find their place in the world. Only Joseph and Ruth will successfully come to terms with their mixed-racial background. As Richard Eder points out in his 2003 article for *The New York Times*, Jonah will only succeed professionally, but will fail on "personal and historical" grounds (n.p.).

This chapter outlines the development of the three Strom children. First, I will discuss the evolution of Jonah's character. Next, I will outline Joseph's development, which will result in a more detailed analysis for two reasons. On the one hand, he is one of the narrators of the novel and is consequently a major focus point. On the other hand, Joseph needs a long time in order to come to terms with his mixed inheritance. He goes through several stages that are necessary to illustrate to the reader as it will lead to a better understanding of this character. Lastly, an analysis of Ruth will be presented. Her chapter will be less elaborate since she looses touch with her family for a long time and because she chooses a path in life which is not as intricately linked to music as that of her brothers.

During his childhood, it becomes clear that Jonah has a special gift. David's colleagues join some of the family's famous musical gatherings. On one evening, physicist Albert Einstein comes over to play the violin. He hears Jonah and scolds the parents immediately because "[t]his child has a gift. You don't hear how big. You are too close. It's unforgivable that you do nothing for him" (*TS* 15). Joseph remembers "the look my parents trade then, pricing the experiment they've been running. Calculating the cost of their union" (*TS* 522).

Feeling guilty that they are not doing enough for the boy's education, David and Delia try to get their son into a good school. The novel deals with multifaceted racism as the dichotomy of black and white is not the only one the Stroms have to face. Jonah was not accepted at the first music school he applied to. When David finds out it is because of his "contribution", he bursts out saying: "[a] music program without Jews! Madman! How can you have classical music without Jews?" (*TS* 19-20). The excellency of Jonah's performance does not matter in a society where racial discrimination is still prevalent. The Strom family faces "a double dose of racism", which continues to haunt them throughout the rest of the narrative (Bate 2003: n.p.).

Eventually the couple sends Jonah to an all-white pre-conservatory boarding school in Boston. His brother, Joseph, follows a year later. After graduating from Boylston academy, the boys attend Juilliard. The two brothers make their first record for the "Harmondial" label in Los Angeles in 1965 during a time when racial crimes are breaking out. While Jonah tries

to be a successful tenor in the competitive business of classical music, which was predominantly white at the time, he tries to demonstrate his loyalty to blackness by singing "his way back *before* [race], into that moment before conquest, before the slave trade, before genocide" (*TS* 530, italics in original). Jonah is drawn towards scenes of racial violence, for example the Watts Riots in 1965 and the Rodney King riots in 1992 (Ickstadt 2007: 8). Jonah needed "to hear [the violence]. He no longer trusted anything but the sense that would finally kill him" (*TS* 322).

When the Metropolitan, an opera company in New York City, asks him to sing the lead of "the Negro" in Gunther Schuller's *The Visitation* (*TS* 390), Jonah declines: "I don't mind being a Negro. I refuse to be a Negro tenor. […] I won't be the Caruso of Black America. The Sidney Poitier of opera" (*TS* 393). Enrico Caruso was a popular Italian tenor and sang in many major opera houses (Caruso and Tetrazzini 2003: 38). In 1963, Sidney Poitier became the first black person who received an Academy Award for Best Actor (Goudsouzian 2004: 1, 3). During the 1950s and 1960s, he was America's icon of racial enlightenment as he was able to obtain many leading roles in motion pictures, regardless of his skin colour. Like Jonah, Poitier objected to the fact that the media turned him into a spokesperson for black America because he did not want to be defined by his racial background. Poitier had to face a lot of criticism from the press: *Variety* dubbed him "The Useful Negro", while *The New York Times* called him a "showcase nigger" (Goudsouzian 2004: 4). Jonah also has to deal with bad reviews in the press, as I will demonstrate in chapter B 3.1.

Jonah pessimistically believes that "[a]rt can't beat this country at its own game. Art shouldn't even try" (*TS* 391). However, during the Rodney King riots, Jonah is wearing a T-shirt that says "FEAR NO ART" (*TS* 617, upper-case letters in original). According to Powers,

> art is the most terrifying of human inventions. It preserves the right to undermine all the categories. The history of art is the history of iconoclasm, the history of some new voice saying that everything you know is wrong. I see Jonah's persistence in the world of classical music, and his desire to redeem the urge toward beauty and apotheosis that underwrites that music, as both laudable and tragic. In his persistence, he turns classical music into something other than it was. His knowledge that there are people in the audience asking, What is this mixed-race man doing on this classical-music stage? becomes a source of strength for him. He is saying, I will remain a fearful art until you hear yourself asking that question. You will have to fear this art. In that sense, the white person who's asking, What's he doing up on that stage, singing *Winterreise*? is being troubled into a fuller awareness of what's in that music. The black person in the audience who's asking, What is that person up on stage singing *Winterreise*? is asking a very different question. And yet Jonah consistently persists in saying, I reserve the American right to define myself. [Jonah's desire for transcendence is tragic b]ecause what he's really doing is saying, I was happy once—at

> eight years old, singing unaccompanied vocal music in a small group, my family, before I got kicked out of Eden. And now I'm trying to go back there. And of course there's tremendous anxiety, hope, and fear in that—a hope that art can somehow satisfy the nonbelonging of the condition of material existence. But there's also the fear that it might. That push-pull is at the heart of everything he chooses to do.
>
> (qtd. in Berger 2002-03, n.p., italics in original)

After performing a few years, Jonah moves to Europe in 1968 because his roots do not present such a problem there as they did in America. Jonah finds that there is no room for him in contemporary America and will create something new by starting up his experimental group called "Voces Antiquae", the first *a cappella* group to rediscover Early Music from the past and put it back on the map by touring around Europe. When Joseph hears of Jonah's good fortune, he muses that "my brother had achieved a level of success that almost justified the botched experiment our parents made of us" (*TS* 507). However, Jonah's success is not entirely positive since his preference for Early Music demonstrates his inability and his unwillingness to choose between white or black music (Van den Beemt 2008: 39). This choice of genre is related to the troubles he experiences in finding his own identity.

Jonah eventually asks Joseph to be the group's bass: "Joey, this is about blending. Merging. Giving up the self. Breathing as a group. All the things we used to think music was, when we were kids. Making five voices sound as if they're a single vibrating soul" (*TS* 515). Jonah thinks Joseph will be a good addition to the group due to the musical past they share. When the two were performing together as children, they were able to communicate through music because of their brotherly bond (Oltmann 2009: 207).

A short time before Jonah's death, Joseph goes to listen to one of his brother's concerts at Grace Cathedral in Oakland, California. He realises that Jonah had "gotten beyond not only race. He'd gone beyond being anything at all" (*TS* 596). In the opinion of Elaine Blair, this quote seems to suggest that Jonah is "almost a disembodied voice" (2003: 165). Jonah's career ends in isolation as he realises that he has disregarded a large part of his inheritance. Throughout the narrative, Jonah cannot come to terms with the conflict that arises between his African heritage and his European education as he is unable to keep the two parts of his heritage together (Dewey 2008: 203; Ickstadt 2007: 8).

When Joseph evaluates his parents' educational experiment, he concludes that "whatever dream my brother and I had been raised on was dead" (*TS* 577). During their evenings of musical play, it never enters Joseph's mind that "the sound isn't ours, that it's the last twitch of someone else's old, abandoned dream" (*TS* 520). Throughout the narrative, Joseph struggles to remain loyal to either of his siblings. In the words of David Yaffe, he is

"everyone's accompanist" (2006: 54). Joseph is especially "unable to develop either with Jonah or apart from him" (Ickstadt 2007: 8).

When his brother plans a solo career in the opera houses, Joseph finds a job in Atlanta City as a lounge pianist playing in the Glimmer Room, a night-club where he comes into contact with popular music: "[w]ith my first two weeks' salary, I bought a trash can full of LPs – not a single track older than 1960. And with that, I commenced my education in real culture" (*TS* 431). While playing at night, Joseph already perceives a connection between colours and music, previously alluded to in chapter B 1: "[m]usic at night in a noisy bar didn't stop at two colors; it had more shades than would fit into the wildest paint box" (*TS* 433).

Joseph also notices a darker side to his performances as his "professional survival consisted of playing a music that belonged to no one" (*TS* 490). On top of that, he is "performing a New York street credibility that he never held" (Mayer 2010: 172). He fakes his authenticity as he did his "best to accommodate, keeping my voice low and my answers peppered with mangled Brooklyn street slang. Mumbling always works wonders – an authenticity all its own" (*TS* 436). Joseph fakes his street authenticity not only while playing in the bar, but also while touring with his brother's *a cappella* group as Jonah enlisted him "to give his monastic ensemble some street cred" (*TS* 542).

While working with "Voces Antiquae", Jonah continues to mould his voice until "every nub in his sound had been burned away, all impurity purged" (*TS* 529). He achieves the perfection his brother Joseph aspires to as he struggles to master the piano:

> I'd return to my cage for another two hours of dismantling and rebuilding. […] In the focus of my will, the sheer hammering repetition, I could burn off all of the world's impurities, everything ugly and extraneous, and leave behind nothing but a burnished rightness, suspended in space. […] But even such a focused blaze couldn't burn off the teenage body that fueled it. I'd sit rolling the stone up the hill for half an hour before admitting the stone was rolling back over me.
>
> (*TS* 185)

Given the fact that the world inherently consists of impurities, Joseph's dream cannot become a reality. His desire for purity by eliminating all imperfections in his playing is impossible (Mayer 2010: 169).

Teresa Wierzbicki, Joseph's ex-girlfriend who works in a taffy factory near Atlantic City, calls him with news about his sister, namely that her husband, Robert Rider, has died. Joseph's life takes a more positive turn as he decides to return to America where he makes

peace with the remnants of his family and "finds his social conscience" (Blair 2003: 165). Joseph discovers his place in life by composing music and by becoming a music teacher in Ruth's community school, which is established in the projects of Oakland, California (Ickstadt 2007: 8). While teaching these underprivileged children, Joseph has to draw on every type of music he has studied during his life. He learns to combine both black and white music in order to construct a diverse and challenging curriculum for his students.

At the end of the novel, Jonah comes to Oakland to listen to a school concert. The choir consists of very talented singers who impress Jonah. He realises that "this chorus was the thing he'd trained for his whole life" (*TS* 615). Jonah wants to reclaim his black roots by becoming a part of this educational project and proposes to perform songs with the children and his family: "[w]hy not? Make a new species? Old wine in new bottles. Sing unto the Lord a new song" (*TS* 614). The statement hints at Bach's "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied", but more about this in chapter B 3.3. The "old wine in new bottles" refers to the fact that due to time pressure, Bach was frequently forced to reuse old music under new titles (Schwarm 2011: 356). Ruth and Jonah know that this is not what they want for a better future without racial hatred and decline Jonah's offer (Stock 2005: 15). Joseph remarks that "[w]e were our brother's future. But he wasn't ours" (*TS* 615). This view is supported by the fact that Jonah describes the performance of the school choir as a "hybrid vigor" that is "better than identity" (*TS* 615). The description resembles the "trick of hybrid vigor" that is related to the home schooling scheme of Schuyler, which was mentioned in chapter B 2.1 (*TS* 347). To sum up, the "hybrid vigor" in relation to Schuyler forecasts that Delia's experiment will fail. When Jonah describes Ruth and Joseph's school in this manner, it indicates that if Jonah is allowed to sing with the children, their educational project will fail as well.

Joseph does not only find his way in life by teaching. Wilson Hart, one of the few black students at Juilliard, asks Joseph to promise him "that someday you will write down all the notes that are inside you" (*TS* 175). Because Joseph is a classically-trained musician, he initially confronts jazz music through rigorous study. But when he improvises with Wilson on the piano "for a while, for at least as long as our four hands kept moving, the music for writing down and the music for letting loose found a way to share a nest" (*TS* 205). Joseph is stunned by his emotional reaction to improvisation (Yaffe 2006: 55). The fact that Powers describes Joseph's improvisation in a fashion similar to Robert's Jewish proverb indicates that Joseph will be able to come to terms with his mixed-racial background by means of composing his own music.

In the 1950s, Juilliard did not look favourably on jazz music and largely ignored it. Wilson, however, encourages Joseph to improvise on Joaquín Rodrigo's 1939 "Concierto de Aranjuez", a "total throwback", according to Jonah (*TS* 176). When Joseph and Wilson depart from Rodrigo's score, Joseph realises that he is creating the music he wants to compose. When Joseph listens to Miles Davis's "Sketches of Spain" (1960), he realises that it is an adaptation of Rodrigo's composition, originally written for guitar, now transcribed for trumpet. It is then that he understands "that American music is as ad hoc as American identity" (Yaffe 2006: 55-56). Or, to borrow Wilson's favourite saying, "[t]here isn't a horse alive that's purebred" (*TS* 263).

Joseph finally writes down his own music. However, when examining his compositions, he realises that "everything that I wrote down came from somewhere else […]. There wasn't an original idea in me. All I could do – and that, only without knowing – was revive the motives that had hijacked my life" (*TS* 494). "The longer I composed, the more fraudulent I became. My notes were going nowhere but backward" (*TS* 499). Joseph declares that his music sounds conventional since it consists of nothing but clichés echoing existing motifs. There is one scene that changes Joseph's attitude towards his own compositions. When Robert is lost during the Million Man March, Joseph

> sense[s] a peace coming over me, so great that I think it will be fatal. I know where Robert has gone, I could tell Kwame. I have the whole piece, the whole song cycle there, intact, in front of my sight-singing eyes. The piece I've been writing, the one that's been writing me since before my own beginning. The anthem for this country in me, fighting to be born.
>
> I try to tell my nephew, but I can't. "Don't panic", I say. "Let's stay close by. He's around here somewhere." In fact, I know exactly how close the lost boy is. […] As close as the trace of tune turning up in me at last, begging to compose it.
>
> (*TS* 625)

Joseph re-evaluates his compositions and commits himself to an aesthetic of diversity by accepting the inevitable interference of the past (Mayer 2010: 173; Oltmann 2009: 197, 208). The novel implies that music does not know time, and yet also states that this form of artistic expression carries the stamp of its own time as the composition of music is always informed by the past; it either incorporates earlier genres and styles, or rejects them. Joseph muses that

> [i]f I studied what I wrote long enough, I could always find a source hiding in it, evading and yet craving detection. Only now, instead of the misery that this discovery caused me in Atlantic City, I felt an excruciating release in watching these hostages escape. […] But the scribbling was mine, and had to be

> enough. My notebook filled up with floating, disconnected fragments, each of them pointing toward some urgent revision they couldn't get to.
>
> (*TS* 544)

Dewey states that Joseph's troubled and fragmented compositions seem to be connected to the unimaginative narrative he relates in the novel (2008: 203). Oltmann completes the analogy by stating that at the end of the narrative in 1995, Joseph "feels ready to write the song, or tell the story, he has long been trying to create" (2009: 204). In the words of Joseph, "the tunes spelled out the story of my life, half as it had happened to me, and half as I'd failed to make it happen" (*TS* 544).

After his father's death, Joseph starts to understand David's research on time. Joseph comprehends what his father tried to pass on to him, namely the stepping stone for "the new song that struggles to emerge" (Oltmann 2009: 216). Linking this notion to the creation of new music, Joseph discovers what his father already knows at the time of Delia's death. For his wife's funeral, David composes a *quodlibet*, a term previously explained in chapter A 3.3.2. The piece is for five voices and incorporates musical phrases from the large classical repertoire on which Delia and David brought up their children (Dewey 2008: 213). The composition is performed by "an ad hoc quintet of [Delia's] friends and students" from different ethnic backgrounds (*TS* 144). Joseph remembers that "[t]his was the only composition Da ever wrote down, his one answer to the murderous question of where the fish and the bird might build their impossible nest" (*TS* 144). The fact that Joseph describes his father's *quodlibet* in a similar manner as Robert's Jewish proverb indicates the importance of including several genres and styles in compositions. This technique is applied to subvert the notion of race in *The Time of Our Singing*, further on explained in chapters B 3.3 and B 3.4.

David is a lonely and gifted scientist who loses contact with the outside world after Delia dies. While being on the verge of a breakthrough concerning the notion of time, he dies of pancreatic cancer. This character can be linked to Stuart Ressler in *The Gold Bug Variations*. Like David, Ressler is an aloof and brilliant scientist on the brink of discovering life's origin at its base before he withdraws from science after losing Jeanette Koss. He later on dies of galloping cancer.

When examining Ressler's compositions, we can draw a parallel to those of Joseph's. Franklin Todd and Jan O'Deigh are interested in finding out what Ressler has been doing in his obscure years away from science. He reveals to his young friends that he "never quit science" (*GV* 643). He spent the last twenty-five years writing his own "computer-generated

compositions" (Ziolkowski 2010: 635) as "Opus One debuts tomorrow. […] The sole work by which [Ressler] hope[s] to be remembered" (*GV* 646).

Dewey sees Ressler's compositions as a "displaced creativity" that "no one else hears" (1998: 56). In an article published earlier for the *Hollins Critic*, Dewey explains that Ressler's considerable talents are wasted when used to compose music (1996: n.p.). I believe Dewey's view stems from the impression Ressler leaves on Jan while he tries to explain his compositions. Jan's comments that she

> tried to follow this tech shoptalk but found myself hearing something else, absolutely silent: a monk, late twentieth century, working in total isolation, locked in a cell for longer than I could imagine, a lifetime, just composing, trying to emulate, recreate, variegate, state, consecrate the sound he had once heard while standing on his front porch on a spring morning, about to enter, thinking his love waited for him inside. I thought of all the experimental, heuristic, and botched compositions that kept him company over long years, and how, whatever the orchestration, form, choice of language, all pieces amounted to love songs, not just to a lost woman, but to a world whose pattern he could not help wanting to save.
>
> (*GV* 645)

Burn disagrees with Dewey's views and draws other conclusions when examining Ressler's compositions (2008c: 112-113). Besides composing, Ressler investigates music's relationship to the brain as he attempts to register the effects of music. The link between music and the brain is first made clear after "a burst vessel" has caused Jimmy Steadman, the highly-strung and incompetent Chief of Operations at MOL, to suffer a debilitating stroke (*GV* 568). In an effort to understand Steadman's condition, Jan reads a study and discovers that

> [a]ccording to the scan, even the simplest compositional rules are enough to awaken primitive wonder, release the brain from the conventions of verisimilitude, free it from its constant dictionary of representation. But the scan shows something even more surprising. Composers, skilled in theory, hear music differently. CAT profiles of their listening brains show more verbal hemisphere activity, as if they don't just let the associative sensations of timbre and rhythm swell through them, but somehow eavesdrop on a point being argued on thought's original instruments.
>
> (*GV* 602)

The relationship between music and the brain becomes more elaborate when Ressler analyses his own compositions as an attempt to find "another language, cleaner than math, closer to our insides than words" (*GV* 645). Burn draws on Steven Pinker, who claims that music, literature, and other forms of art, are activities which "in the struggle to survive and

reproduce, seem pointless" (2008c: 113). This is exactly the freedom from evolutionary dictates that attracts Ressler after abandoning science.

But more remains to be said about Ressler's compositions since they also serve as Jan and Franklin's "dowry. A trunk packed with hand-written full scores. [Ressler] thought we might like to try to decipher them together" (*GV* 673). Reading the scores brings Jan and Franklin together as they take out the "old pump-organ" and play the "four-hands" compositions (*GV* 673).

Interestingly, Ressler comments on the same problem that Joseph struggled with for a long time. When Ressler talks to Jan and Franklin about his "woodwind octet", he admits that he "stole this bit from Berg. But he stole a similar bit from Bach, so I'm safe from lawsuit" (*GV* 645). Briefly put, both Ressler and Joseph draw on existing materials in order to compose something new. This artistic activity presents an opportunity for both men as it gives them a sense of freedom. Creating music makes Ressler feel relieved from the constraints that come with language and mathematics. Likewise, Joseph experiences a sense of freedom from the restrictions that derive from compositions made in the past as he embraces the aesthetic of diversity.

The condition Joseph and Ressler find themselves in can apply to Powers's literary expression, as William Gillespie reports, "it is not possible for an author to write something new. It is all written" (2011: n.p.). "In order to speak," Roland Barthes observes, "one must seek support from other texts" to bring about new meaning (1977: 102). Powers, like Joseph, is able to create a unique art work by drawing on existing materials (Mayer 2010: 166).

Having discussed the effects of the educational project on Jonah and Joseph, it is now time to analyse how the youngest child experienced this peculiar upbringing. Ruth becomes alienated from her family in the search for her racial identity. At an early age, she turns away from her white roots as well as classical music, which she perceives as belonging to white people. Ruth believes that the utopian dream of a transcendent culture beyond race does not exist since "only white men have the luxury of ignoring race" (*TS* 304). She feels angry towards her parents' educational project as she later tells Joseph, "[t]he two of them, raising us like three sweet little white kids. See No Race, Hear No Race, Sing No Race. The whole, daily, humiliating, endless …" (*TS* 375, ellipsis in original). Ruth's early awareness of the naïveté of her parents' experiment comes about when her mother is killed in a fire. Unable to follow her brothers to the conservatory, she enters an integrated public school, where she learns what it means to be black in a segregated world (Blair 2003: 164).

Ruth "is the one who will break the family's art-versus-life standoff" (Birkerts 2003: n.p.). She joins the Black Panthers, an Afro-American civil rights movement in the 1960s, and starts up her own experimental education program in Oakland. Ickstadt describes Ruth's school as a place where "culture/music is communally reinvented, where it becomes once more alive by being reconnected with its social function, where the family game of 'crazed quotations' can be practised again" (2007: 8). Mayer takes a similar view and affirms that by establishing the alternative community school for poor children, Ruth has accomplished what Delia tried to bring about, namely "to totalize the experiment from a private onto a social scale, to turn the fortress into a true shelter" (2010: 170). At the end of the narrative, Ruth is eventually reacquainted with her brothers, her family on her mother's side and, through a message beyond the grave, with her estranged father.

3. The Ownership of Culture *&* the Sense of Belonging

Powers states that "[w]e will live with racism forever, […]. But senses of self, senses of belonging, senses of us and of others? Those are up for grabs" (qtd. in Brockes 2003: n.p.). The theme of belonging is closely related to Delia and David's educational experiment. The annulment of race entails a hope for the couple to raise their children beyond race. However, the children's sense of racial belonging is complicated by their parents' denial to "name them" (*TS* 425).

Music plays a crucial part in forming the identity of the Strom children. Delia believes that she "can give them a tune stronger than belonging. Thicker than identity. A singular song, a self better than any available armor. Teach them to sing the way they breathe, the song of all their ancestries" (TS 480). Delia early on discovers that "[s]inging was something that might make sense of a person. Singing might make more sense of life than living had to start with" (TS 83). "Singing, they were no one's outcasts" (TS 11), because "[m]usic was their lease, their dead, their eminent domain" (TS 9).

Delia believes that "in the only world worth reaching, everyone owns all song" (*TS* 488). While singing, Joseph muses that "[e]ach piece we do springs into being right here, the night we make it. Its country is this spinet; its government, my mother's fingers; its people, our throats" (*TS* 520). By skilfully practising music, the family tries to make the music their own. In this manner, the Stroms attempt to break down a society ruled by false categories, dated conventions and traditions (Ickstadt 2007: 7; Mayer 2010: 166-167; Stock 2005: 20).

The unifying force of music initially keeps the family together. However, the novel also points out that music does not necessarily bring people closer. It can emphasise the notion of race as music can belong to certain groups in society (Stock 2005: 13). The question that is constantly raised is whether or not blacks should perform music that is not part of their own cultural heritage. The rhetoric of membership is embedded in the entire novel as several characters from different racial backgrounds claim a certain genre, style or even specific compositions and musicians as their own. The careers of Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson as well as several compositions from Johann Sebastian Bach will shed some light on this notion. According to Yaffe, the only way to counter this wrong sense of music belonging to either one group or the other is by "subvert[ing] ethnic stereotypes and their musical associations by mixing them up" (2006: 53). Oltmann shares this view and adds that "the novel celebrates music with its diverse temporal modes – a human practice in which such differences are embraced" (2009: 179-180). These sentiments are demonstrated in the novel by Gershwin's music.

3.1 Marian Anderson

Marian Anderson has been discussed previously in chapter A 4.1. The circumstances of her prejudice-defying concert only play a minor role in *The Gold Bug Variations*, because the narrative incorporates the record of the event as just one piece of information among the many facts that are accumulated in the novel. This is untrue for *The Time of Our Singing*, since the narrative returns no less than four times to this historical milestone. The novel refers to Anderson's career in connection to Delia and Jonah's struggle for racial equality.

Marian Anderson (1897-1993), like Delia Daley, was born in Philadelphia. Anderson had no formal musical training and was only able to receive a professional education as a singer through the financial support of her church (Rutter 1995: 32). She attended the Chicago Conservatory of Music and started performing in public from 1914 onwards. In the 1920s, Anderson ventured to go to Europe because she believed it was the only way to expand her concert tours. Her manager, "the great Sol Hurok", recognised that Anderson was becoming more successful and told her it was time to sing in places where the best musicians performed (*TS* 31).

Aspiring to become an Afro-American opera singer, Delia takes Anderson as her role model. Although he is sceptical about his daughter's singing aspirations, Dr. Daley points

out that "*[t]he woman's our vanguard. Our last, best hope of getting the white world's attention. You want to go to singing school? There's your first, best teacher*" (*TS* 37, italics in original). As David later on points out, Anderson is able to "rival the greatest Europeans in tearing open the fabric of space-time" (*TS* 41). Delia cannot be stopped to go to Anderson's concert in Washington: "[t]he deeper Delia wades in towards the speck of grand piano, the stickpin corsage of microphones where her idol will stand, the thicker this celebration" (*TS* 40).

After the concert, Delia feels brave enough to apply to a music school. However, at her first audition, she is rejected because of her skin tone. She believes music to be colourless until she senses that they are going to turn her down regardless of how well she sings: "*[n]ot this. Not here. Not in this castle of music*" (*TS* 86, italics in original). Delia chooses to sing for the faculty, consisting of "four white faces", fully aware of the fact that they will not admit her (*TS* 87). She quickly realises that "everything she'd worked for was lost. And she'd just agreed to give her destroyers one more chance to mock her" (*TS* 87). Her father helps her to find a school that is willing to accept a black student, "but both father and daughter knew, without ever admitting as much to each other, that she would never, now, be schooled at the upper level of her skills, let alone the lower reaches of her dreams" (*TS* 88).

One of the most significant actions in the struggle for a future with racial equality came about when the Daughters of the American Revolution banned Anderson to perform at the Constitution Hall. When asked by the press about their reasons

> [t]he DAR answers that, by tradition, certain of the city's concert halls are reserved for performances by Miss Anderson's people. Constitution Hall is not one. It's not DAR policy to defy community standards. Should sentiment change, Miss Anderson might sing there. Sometime in the future. Or shortly thereafter.
>
> (*TS* 32)

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was shocked at this disgraceful and racially-motivated rebuke. She immediately cancelled her membership in the DAR and made sure Anderson was able to perform at the Lincoln monument in Washington by working with NAACP President Walter White (Oltmann 2009: 167). Anderson gave a legendary open-air concert, free of charge, to an audience estimated at seventy-five thousand people. The concert was also broadcasted to a listening audience of millions.

The entire incident was very painful to Anderson as her vocal accomplishments were rendered less significant in comparison to the importance of the event:

> [s]he has trained since the age of six to build a voice that can withstand the description "colored contralto." […] Now color will forever be the theme of her peak moment, the reason she'll be remembered when her sound is gone. She has no counter to this fate, but her sound itself. Her throat drops, her trembling lips open, and she readies a voice that is steeped in color, the only thing worth singing.
>
> (*TS* 45)

As Stephen Blum writes in his 2010 article on the "Musical Enactment of Attitudes toward Conflict in the USA", events like these "can acquire weight that makes it difficult for musicians to perform in ways that aren't fixed by the stories" (233). Anderson, like Schuyler and Poitier, was seen as one of the leaders in the fight against racism.

Anderson's career is not only linked to that of Delia's, but to that of Jonah's as well. Not only does Jonah find a way to get around the image that people have of him, he also retrains his voice to stand for nothing else but his voice. This aspect becomes clear when the reader examines Jonah's troubled relationship with the press. Throughout his singing career, he remains the target of both black and white critics (Amidon 2003: n.p.; Van den Beemt 2008: 41). This comes about because Jonah's "ideal world of artistic shelter" collides with the reality of the racially-divided world he lives in (Yaffe 2006: 54).

In 1967, Jonah peruses a magazine article in *Harper's* that reads: "[y]et there are amazingly talented young black men out there still trying to play the white culture game, even while their brothers are dying in the streets" (*TS* 106, 381). "The *Harper's* accusation chewed him up" because they represent Jonah as a "big time back-stabber" (*TS* 381, italics in original). Joseph believes the "passing line [is] not a venue likely to cause [Jonah's] career much lasting harm" (*TS* 106). Jonah initially thinks that "his career [is] over. Orchestra Hall would rescind the engagement when they found out" (*TS* 381). After a while, Jonah decides to "revel in it" now that he is "blessed by the condemnation" (*TS* 381). He senses that the article is "going to make him notorious" as "the movement's opening doors. Providing for our people" (*TS* 382).

While Jonah retrains his voice in order to sing Early Music with his *a cappella* group, "he'd gotten past any emblem that others had made of him" (*TS* 529). Jonah creates his own sound, "one that, with each passing month, grew clearer, finer, and less categorizable" (*TS* 542). After his professional debut, *The New York Times* depicts him as "one of the finest Negro recitalists" and not simply as one of the best vocalists, regardless of his skin colour (*TS* 313). Jonah eventually gets his vindication several years later when *The New York Times* depicts him as "the clearest-voiced male singing early music in any country. No mention of color,

outside the vocal. […] He had the listening world's adulation, and he made a sound that stood for nothing other than what it was" (*TS* 600).

3.2 Paul Robeson

Paul Robeson's rendition of "Jacob's Ladder" has been analysed in chapter A 4.3. The spiritual finds its way into *The Gold Bug Variations* on many occasions and can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the song represents a dream of progress and a hope for a better future. On the other hand, the song is connected to the recursive nature of the ladder as it is associated with the notion of evolution, Jan's learning process, the commercialisation of science, the recursive nature of this field of study, the approaches used in studying the discipline and the overreaching aspect when making scientific headway. The last interpretation of the song is paralleled by the professional careers of Robeson and Jonah in *The Time of Our Singing*. Both singers aim too high and fail to combine a musical career with their political concerns. In order to fully grasp the connection between Robeson and Jonah, some biographical information about the non-fictional musician will be necessary in this chapter.

Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was a "runaway slave's son" (*GV* 44), whose father wanted his children to have the opportunities then only available to the whites (Carlin 2006: 174). Over protest, Robeson was the third black student to be admitted to Rutgers University. He studied law and theatre, but also developed a career as an athlete and a concert singer, performing both music belonging to the whites, for example German opera, and music belonging to the blacks, for example Negro spirituals.

When asked by the "Harmondial" publicist if he has any black role models singing classical music, Jonah answers "Paul Robeson […]. Not for his voice so much. His voice was … okay, I guess. We liked his politics" (*TS* 318, ellipsis in original). Robeson was one of the most important leaders of the Harlem Renaissance in the first half of the twentieth century. He advocated for the equality of minorities. Unfortunately, the last twenty years of his life were troubled due to his communistic beliefs and the fact that the American government thought him to be "a national security risk" because he criticised the United States civil rights policies (*GV* 128).

In October 1968, Jonah receives "an invitation to a monthlong music residency in Magdeburg" (*TS* 404). When he decides to leave for East Germany, Joseph cautions him: "I'm

serious, Jonah. Aid and comfort to the enemy. They'll hassle you over this for the rest of your life. Look what they did to Robeson" (*TS* 404). But Jonah answers that "[i]f there's a problem coming back, I don't want to" (*TS* 404). Joseph acknowledges that "music was supposed to be cosmopolitan – free travel across all borders" (*TS* 405). This statement is problematic for Jonah as well as for Robeson. As a result of his career as a political activist, Robeson was not allowed to perform in America anymore. From 1950 to 1958, Robeson's "Ol' Man River's passport" was revoked under the McCarran Act (*GV* 43-44). His income decreased even more since he was unable to travel overseas (Carlin 2006: 174). Robeson attempted suicide and wasted away in obscurity from the 1950s onward. The fact that Robeson is Jonah's role model reveals to the reader that Jonah's career is troubled by political concerns and is most likely to fail because of these problems.

3.3 Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach is related to various themes that one can find in *The Time of Our Singing*. The composer is important when it comes to the theme of cultural ownership and the sense of belonging. The following four compositions are discussed in this chapter: "Bist du bei mir", "Gott ist unsere Zuversicht", "Jesu, der du meine Seele" and "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied".

"Bist du bei mir" (BWV 508) is by far one of the most important songs of Bach that Powers weaves through his narrative. The song is "by Bach and not by Bach, the simplest tune in the world, too simple for Bach himself to have written it without help" (*TS* 147). At first, it was considered to be by Anna Magdalena (Boyd qtd. in Stock 2005: 9). However, the melody, the bass-line and the German text are now considered to be written by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel (1690-1749) in 1718, a contemporary of Bach (Lernout 2001: 18; Liebergen 2005: 39). There is a connection to Bach's "Goldberg Variations", discussed in chapter A, as Anna Magdalena copied the Aria which formed the basis of the piece between the empty pages left open when she had written down "Bist du bei mir" (Lernout 2001: 16).

The composition enters the narrative when Delia introduces David to her parents at a family dinner at the Daleys. The couple sings Bach's "Bist du bei mir" after the meal. Both Delia and David each believe they own Bach until Delia asks, "'You know this, too?' […] Then ashamed to hear herself. What membership is strong enough to keep them from *having* this same tune? All ownership is theft, and melody above all" (*TS* 234, italics in original).

This is a particularly interesting notion, especially in relation to Bach, who was often pressured to recycle old music, as we have seen earlier in chapter B 2.3.

After the couple has finished singing, Delia's eldest brother, Charlie, asks, "[a]in't that the same song the whites used to sing, right after spending the day whipping us?" (*TS* 234). David is shocked by this discovery: "'Is this serious?' David says, two steps behind, by every measurable measure. 'People used to sing this song while … Can this be so? This song was written … '" (*TS* 234, ellipses in original). The question whether Bach belongs to the whites or the blacks is a complicated one. On the one hand, the scene suggests that both Delia and David share a profound love for this classical piece. On the other hand, racism and separation are suggested as well (Stock 2005: 10).

For his gift to the newlyweds, Delia's teacher, Franco Lugati, performs Bach's Aria B from "Gott ist unsere Zuversicht" (BWV 197), composed in 1736-37. Lugati is a good-natured man and wishes David and Delia all the best. Apart from the bridegroom, Lugati is the only white person present at the party. It is inappropriate that he sings white music with other white musicians at a more or less black marriage (Stock 2005: 13). "Dr. Daley stood at attention in front of the instrumentalists, guarding them. The players left in a rush, one quick glass of punch after the final cadence. Lugati, mixing excuses with blessings, departed soon after. Once the musicians left, the real music began" (*TS* 282-283).

The composition hints to the desperate situation David and Delia find themselves in as they are breaking society's rules by marrying each other (Stock 2005: 14). The "angenehmes Paar" is told by Lugati that "God wird dich aus Zion segnen / Und dich leiten immerdar" (Bach 2011-12d: n.p., lines 1, 3-4). David and Delia will only be able to rely on God, but even this is a complicated notion since they do not even share the same religion as David is a Jew and Delia a Christian.

Bach's "Jesu, der du meine Seele" (BWV 78), composed in 1724, appears on three different occasions in the novel. Lois Helmer, Jonah's first teacher, "wanted to take that brilliant duet from Cantata 78 out for a test spin" to proof that Early Music without the use of vibrato would make its comeback (*TS* 26). When she hears Jonah sing during choir practices, she knows that he is the only one capable of performing Bach's first duet from Cantata 78 with her. A cantata is a vocal composition from the Baroque period, usually consisting of a number of movements, such as arias, choruses, duets and recitatives, which are based on a continuous narrative text ("Cantata").

The first line of the duet points to the manner in which Lois and Jonah are singing the cantata while practising it (Stock 2005: 16):

> Miss Helmer's Bach would do what its words said. If the duet began "*Wir eilen mit schwachen, doch emsigen Schritten*" – "We rush with faint but earnest footsteps" – then the damn thing would rush. She harassed the continuo players until they brought the song up to her mental tempo, a third faster than the piece had ever been performed.
>
> (*TS* 26, italics in original)

During the concert, Jonah "sang as easily as the rest of the world chatted. His voice […] cut through the Cold War gloom […]. Then Lois entered, spurred on to match the boy's pinpoint clarity, singing with a brilliance she hadn't owned since her own confirmation. We rush with faint but earnest footsteps. *Ach, höre*. Ah, hear!" (*TS* 27, italics in original). Lois and Jonah raise their voices in order to call for help: "[a]ch höre, wie wir / Die Stimmen erheben, um Hülfe zu bitten!" (Bach 2011-12b: n.p., lines 4-5).

When Joseph heard his brother sing this piece, he discovered that music can belong to certain people (Stock 2005: 15-16): "[w]hen Jonah sang, even in rehearsal, making his noise for people who weren't like us, I felt ashamed, like we were betraying the family secret" (*TS* 26). But for Joseph it is unclear which future they were rushing to: "[b]ut where were we rushing? […] Rushing to aid this Jesu [sic.]. But then we lifted our voices to ask for his help. As far as I could hear, the song reversed itself, as split as my brother, unable to say who helped whom. Someone must have botched the English translation, and I couldn't follow the original" (*TS* 27).

Jonah performs "Jesu, der du meine Seele" again at his debut in New York. Lois comes to listen to his performance and serves as a reminder of Jonah's origins (Stock 2005: 16). When she greets him with the first line of the duet, Jonah does not recognise his former teacher, "even as her voice's imprint came rushing back to him" (*TS* 310). By that time in the narrative, Jonah has left his origins behind and denies his own past until he even forgets what he was like as a young boy: "[h]e remembered that first public performance but couldn't remember the boy who had sung it. The joy, the trust, the total ignorance: Nothing visible remained, from this distance. All he had left were the lines of that great duet" (*TS* 310-311). He is unwilling to accept his identity as a mixed-race human being and desperately tries to build a new one.

The third and last time the song appears is when Joseph leaves "Voces Antiquae", which is only a "salvage of the past" for him (*TS* 580). Joseph realises that Jonah "tries to hide his won past by performing a past he does not belong to" (Stock 2005: 16). Joseph breaks free from his brother's power over him and rediscovers his origins by being reacquainted with his sister, his grandfather, and many of his nephews and nieces. He listens to the hip-

hop music of his nephew Kwame on the radio and recognises "a clear signal of a chorus that, within three notes, I pegged as Bach. Cantata 78" (*TS* 584). According to Daniel Stock, Joseph is so filled with the hope of a bright future that he starts to drive so fast the police pulls him over (2005: 17). Ruth is relieved when she realises "the man [is] black" (*TS* 584). Black police officers will "let you walk, every single time" and so did this one, but not before he cautions Joseph to "keep it below allegro next time" (*TS* 585).

The last composition discussed in this chapter has already been mentioned in chapter B 2.2, when Jonah wants to become part of Joseph and Ruth's inner-city educational project in Oakland. Jonah proposes to perform with Joseph's school children and "Sing unto the Lord a new Song" (*TS* 614). The sentence refers to Bach's "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" (BWV 190), composed in 1723.

Jonah wants to sing this piece with the other members of "Voces Antiquae". Hans Lauscher opposes to perform Bach by observing that "the music was a full century younger than the latest piece we'd ever sung" (*TS* 545). Hans concludes that "[o]ther people already own this. People know these pieces, forward and retrograde" (*TS* 545). Jonah tries to persuade the other members of the group: "[a] world masterpiece that hasn't been sung properly in all its two hundred fifty years. I want to hear things once before I die. […] Come on. 'Sing unto the Lord a *new* song.' Johnny Bach heard for the first time" (*TS* 545, italics in original). The fact that Jonah is referring to his own death in this scene is a bad omen. It seems that Jonah's notion of creating new music that is built upon existing materials can only lead towards death. This sentiment could indicate why Joseph and Ruth do not want their brother to perform music with their students.

Jonah insists on taking the lyrics of the song literally, although this poses a problem. Stock remarks that an *a cappella* group should not even attempt to sing the piece in the first place (2005: 14). Taking the words of the text literally, the choir of the song honours God "mit Pauken und […] mit Saiten und Pfeifen" (Bach 2011-12c: n.p., lines 3-4). Powers jokingly adds that "the thing about Bach is, he never wrote for the human voice" (*TS* 545). Joseph later on recollects that "[i]n the world we occupied, our future was fixed and we could do nothing about it. But the past was infinitely pliable. We were in the thick of a movement that made sure history would never be what it used to be. Every month brought a new musical revolution, constantly updating where music had come from" (*TS* 545).

Jonah urges his *a cappella* group to sing Bach and develops an entirely new approach to performing the cantata. "Voces Antiquae" eventually returns to their roots and stops singing the Bach pieces all together. When Delia Banks, Lorene's daughter, later on asks Joseph

"whose idea [it was] to do Bach like that", he answers that "everyone has their own Bach" (*TS* 571). After Joseph hears his niece singing, they meet up for lunch to discuss Bach and consequently touch upon the theme of the ownership of music. Delia believes that "every piece we do, we make our own, whatever post office it came on through" (*TS* 572). But Joseph questions this: "[w]ell, I've heard what you did to that backwoods German cracker [Bach]. So I know this isn't about cultural ownership" (*TS* 573). Delia tries to explain her take on music and the notion of cultural exchange to Joseph (Ickstadt 2007: 8):

> "Every song we sing's got white notes running through it. But that's the beauty of the situation, cuz. We're making a little country here, out of *mutual theft*. They come over into our neck of the woods, take all we got. We sneak over into their neighborhood, middle of the night, grab a little something back, something they didn't even know they had, something they can't even recognize no more! More for everybody that way, and more kinds of everybody." She shook her head. A low mezzo growl of despite came out of her chest. "No. Can't be anti-Europe when everyone's part Europe. But got to be pro-Africa, for the same reason."
>
> (*TS* 573, italics mine)

"Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" is a significant song since it appears on several occasions in the narrative of *The Time of Our Singing*. In this novel, the cantata is mainly connected to the theme of cultural ownership. The composition also appears in *The Gold Bug Variations* during a rather critical moment when Botkin informs Ressler that Francis Crick has already published a paper revealing what Ressler was trying to prove with his own research. Botkin attempts to reassure her friend by reading an extract from a book: "'At the suggestion of Doles, the Cantor at the Leipzig Thomas-Schule, the choir surprised Mozart by performing the double-chorus motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*' […] Mozart […] cried out joyfully, 'Here is at last something one might learn from'" (*GV* 507, italics in original). Botkin's message "only augments the strange understanding welling in Ressler" as "the image of Europe's prodigy [Mozart], exiled in the loneliness of his abilities, unexpectedly discovering that he is not alone" (*GV* 507). The cantata reminds Ressler that he should learn from others and develop his scientific approach further.

3.4 George Gershwin

Joseph's niece, Delia Banks, firmly believes that the only way to counteract the notion of music belonging to either one group or the other is by mixing up several types of music. In order to subvert these stereotypes, whether they concern different classes or different races, composers have to incorporate music from different eras, genres and styles. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Powers celebrates differences between people belonging to various classes by means of George Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off". In *The Time of Our Singing*, Powers similarly advocates for a multi-ethnical culture with no fixed racial categories by drawing on another one of Gershwin's popular tunes, namely "The Man I Love".

George Gershwin (1898-1937) was an American composer and pianist, born to Jewish parents. In his compositions, Gershwin mixed up several musical genres and styles. He incorporated influences from classical, opera and jazz music as well as techniques from the twelve-tone serialism from the Second Viennese School and elements from the French composers of the early twentieth century.

The fact that Gershwin draws many musical influences together in his work makes "The Man I Love", a standard, the perfect background music for Joseph's affair with Polish-American Teresa Wierzbicki, who learned about black music from her father. She catches Joseph's eye while he is playing in the Glimmer Room in Atlantic City. In 1970, he is told by the Jewish club owner, Mr. Saul Silber, that it was "[e]nough with the old people's music. Nix the Gershwin. Gershwin's for people dying of shuffleboard injuries up at the Nevele. We want the *new* stuff, the *mod* stuff" (*TS* 431, italics in original). In the 1970s, the techniques of Tin Pan Alley were no longer considered to be the new ticket (Yaffe 2006: 52). Tin Pan Alley refers to the centre of music publishing in New York City from the nineteenth century to the 1950s and was so-called because the noise made by pianists working in different buildings of the alley sounded to passers-by like rattling tin pans ("Tin Pan Alley").

At one evening when Joseph visits Teresa, she puts on one of Gershwin's songs, namely "The Man I Love" (1924). The lyrics seem to work ideally as a mode of communication for their sexually-laden discourse as Gershwin's tune is appropriate for the interracial private erotics between blacks and Jews (Yaffe 2006: 52-53):

> Teresa held her breath and became my instrument. I hit each note as squarely as if it were real. She heard my free flight in her skin. I could feel her feeling my fingers' tone clusters. Around *We'll build a little home for two*, I built an obligato line so right, I was surprised it wasn't in the original. At *from which I'll never roam*, I roamed a little, beyond the deniable, up into the hemline octave.

(*TS* 444, italics in the original)

"The Man I Love" was originally part of the musical *Lady, Be Good*, written by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson. Gershwin composed the music, while his brother Ira composed the lyrics. The musical deals with a destitute brother and sister who are both willing to sacrifice themselves to help the other. The story of the musical is relevant in this scene as Teresa is willingly sacrificing herself for Joseph, who, in turn, has spent the majority of his life in the service of his brother, Jonah.

Like in the song, Teresa will "do [her] best to / Make him stay" (Gershwin 2007: 293, lines 14-15). During the evening, the two come closer together and "both won't say a word" (Gershwin 2007: 293, line 21). Teresa hands Joseph an envelope with a self-made card that reads: "I will if you will" (*TS* 444). At one point, Teresa sighs, "ah, Sunday", to which Joseph singingly answers, "maybe Monday" (*TS* 443). Teresa foreshadows the downfall of their relationship when she replies, "[m]aybe not" (*TS* 443). The beginning of the song already hints to the fact that their relationship will fail as "[i]t is seldom that a dream comes true" (Gershwin 2007: 293, line 6). Joseph, who did not care deeply about Teresa, will "roam" away when Ruth needs his help (Gershwin 2007: 294, line 28).

The fact that this mixed-racial couple is not meant to be indicates that Powers is aware of the great difficulty in subverting ethnic stereotypes by mixed music as these hybridised compositions may not always be successful. The question that remains to be asked is whether or not music has this overbearing influence to change people's attitudes, opinions and sentiments. One not only has to listen to the music, but one also has to hear its underlying message.

4. "The Use of Music is to Remind Us How Short a Time We Have a Body"

Music is not only an important instrument in the strive for racial equality as it also serves to "remind us how short a time we have a body" (*TS* 536). In his interview with Berger, Powers explains that "[w]hen the beat stops, you are aware of having had that beat moving through you, and moving you, and you are aware of the ephemerality of your own existence, the fragility of your own body, the fact that your body is already becoming something else" (2002-03: n.p.). *The Time of Our Singing* deals with a number of deaths. David Strom dies of pancreatic cancer. David's parents, his sister, Hannah, and her husband, Vihar, are most

likely dead since anti-Semitism called the mass extermination program of the Holocaust into being. Charlie, Delia's eldest brother, is killed during World War II. Ruth's husband, Robert Rider, also dies when he is stopped by a police patrol. When Robert reaches into his front pocket for his wallet, the police officer shoots him in the knee thinking he is extracting a gun. He dies in an emergency room procedure from anaesthesia complications. Dr. Daley's wife, Nettie Ellen Alexander, also passes on.

The most important deaths, however, are those of Jonah and Delia. In her early forties, Delia dies in a 1950s furnace explosion at the family's Upper West Side apartment either by an accident or, as Ruth believes, by the result of a racist crime. Delia's death is significant in the novel since it causes her family to disintegrate (Oltmann 2009: 214). Racial violence also indirectly causes Jonah's death in 1992. During his stay in Los Angeles, racial crimes break out once again after the King verdict. Jonah tries "to get involved in the struggle of 'his' race, which he feels he has neglected throughout his musical career" (Oltmann 2009: 175). Afterwards, Jonah calls Joseph because he is upset after losing his hearing on one side by a severe blow to the head with a piece of paving stone. Jonah refuses to go to the hospital and is later found lying dead on his bed by Hans Lauscher, a fellow member of "Voces Antiquae".

The compositions from John Dowland, Franz Schubert and Johann Sebastian Bach described in this chapter mainly concern Jonah and Delia. The pieces are connected to the theme of death in two ways. First of all, Bach's music, which is played at funerals in the narrative, leaves a deep impression both on the performers and on the listeners. Secondly, the manner in which various family members perform several pieces forebodes the premature deaths of Jonah and Delia.

4.1 John Dowland

In *The Time of Our Singing*, Powers incorporates two songs written by John Dowland (1563-1626), namely "Come Again" and "Time Stands Still". Both songs are examples of the Early Music that Jonah will prefer throughout his life.

During one of the family's singalongs, the Stroms perform "Come Again", first published in 1597 in Dowland's *First Book of Songs*. "Ma and Da can sing right of the page, songs they've never seen before, and still sound like they've known them from birth" (*TS*

520). The family does not know this piece and is sight-reading the score, which enables them to create something new for themselves and to make the music their own (Stock 2005: 21):

> [s]oon we all climb up that scale together – "to see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die" – building step by step until we pull back at the peak, the "die" at the top of the phrase just a plaything sound we fondle, tuning to one another. Five phrases, sparkling, innocent, replaying the courtiers' party game from the day of this tune's making, that festive beauty, financed by the slave trade.
>
> (*TS* 520)

The music to the lyrics "[t]o see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die" matches the content of these five disjointed phrases (Dowland 1997: 41, line 5). The notes reach higher and higher, until the sentence reaches its climax on the long note at the end, signifying "the final transports of physical love" (Poulton 1982: 237-238).

The song relates to many of the failed relationships in the novel (Stock 2005: 21). First of all, Delia and David's relationship is doomed from the start since they marry in a country where the anti-miscegenation laws are still in action in the majority of the American States. Delia dies as the result of a racial crime, leaving David and her three children behind. Both Joseph and Jonah's childhood crushes as well as their adult relationships come to nothing. In 1963, Jonah's relationship with his teacher Lisette Soer ends badly when she decides to have an abortion, rather than accepting his proposal of marriage. Jonah's marriage with Celeste ends in divorce. Joseph breaks up with Teresa. While Jonah and Joseph have trouble finding a suitable partner and are unable to procreate, Ruth conceives two children, Kwame and Robert. Ruth's husband dies prematurely and leaves his wife with two children to raise on her own.

The first stanza of "Time Stands Still", a song from Dowland's *Third and Last Book of Songs* (1603), is frequently quoted by Powers. The song is connected to David's notion of time, explained previously in chapter B 1. "Time Stands Still" is about an eternal beauty, most likely Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), a contemporary figure of Dowland (Kelnberger 2004: 122, 127; Poulton 1982: 59). Thomas Oliphant agrees as he claims that "[t]hese lines must surely have been addressed to Queen Elizabeth. The flattery is too gross for anybody but her to have swallowed" (qtd. in Poulton 1982: 277).

The first verse concerns the Queen's ability to command time, love and fortune by her beauty. In the second verse, the speaker asserts his faithful attitude towards Elizabeth. The *Third and Last Book of Songs* can be perceived as a summing-up of the composer's trouble with the Queen and his resignation towards his courtly ambitions. Dowland was unsuccessful

when auditioning for the English court, because he supposedly came into contact with exiled English Catholics in Italy who were contriving a plot to assassinate the Queen (Kelnberger 2004: 120; Liebergen 2005: 7). After this rejection, Dowland, like Jonah, travelled to Europe in order to find performance venues.

The fact that time stands still could be a sign of resignation (Stock 2005: 19). While time runs on perpetually, nothing can be changed as society's rules will always stay the same, just like the woman in the song "remains the same" (Dowland 2002: 5, line 3). This notion implies that no matter what we do, it will be meaningless. When the reader applies this to Jonah's situation, it indicates that regardless of how good a vocalist he is, he remains mortal and will someday be forgotten.

Jonah, however, desires to be immortal. This sentiment finds its way into the narrative when examining the tempo of one of the many performances of the song. At one point during the family's singalongs, Jonah forces the family to take the Dowland song so slowly since "[t]hat is all he wants: to stop the melody's forward motion and collapse it into a single chord. He doesn't want us to finish" (*TS* 521). This sentiment is repeated when Jonah sings "Time Stands Still", "a bit of ravishing sass for this stunned *Lieder* crowd" for the finals of "America's Next Voices" in 1961 (*TS* 215, italics in original). He wins the competition that same night. Although it will help set up Jonah's career as a famous singer, he will "later deny ever having entered" (*TS* 3). His attempt to overcome time is expressed as

> [h]e sings that gaze, the one the heart tried to hang on to but couldn't. His eyes shine with the light of those who've freed themselves to do what they need. Those who see shine back, fixed at this moment, arrested, innocent. As he sings, Elizabeth's ships sail out to sudden new continents. As he sings, Freedom Riders one state away are rounded up and jailed. But in this hall, time stands still, afraid to do so much as breathe.
>
> (*TS* 215)

Dowland's "Time Stands Still" is connected to Schubert's "Der Erlkönig", analysed below. Not only do the two pieces appear on the very first page of the novel, they both seem to foreshadow Jonah's untimely death. When his brother sings Dowland's song, Joseph realises "where [Jonah's] voice is headed" because after "two stanzas, […] his tune is done" (*TS* 4).

4.2 Franz Schubert

Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828) is most famous for his sets of *Lieder*, a German term for art songs for voice and piano ("Lied"). Three compositions from him are connected to the theme of death in *The Time of Our Singing*, namely "Der Erlkönig", *Winterreise* and "Ave Maria". These works are all based on the creations from several poets.

In 1815, the eighteen-year-old Schubert adapted the lyrics of "Der Erlkönig", "Goethe's fake medieval ballad", to music (*TS* 212). The poem was originally part of Goethe's 1782 ballad opera called *Die Fischerin*. Schubert used Sir Walter Scott's translation of Goethe's original text (Reed 1997a: 254). Many composers adapted the poem for *Lieder*, but Schubert's version of "Der Erlkönig" (Opus 1, D 328) remains the most popular one, despite the fact that he supposedly only needed a few hours one afternoon to compose the whole thing (Gibbs 1997: 38). However, John Reed believes this to be a misunderstanding on the part of Josef von Spaun (1997b: 222).

The story of "Der Erlkönig" derives from Danish folk tales. In the original version, the antagonist was the Erlking's daughter, who caught human beings in order to satisfy her jealousy and her desire for revenge. Goethe's story depicts a father who carries his sick son home on horseback during a windy night. The young boy imagines he is hearing and seeing strange things as the Erlking tries to entice him into following him to his kingdom that has a pleasure garden attached to it. The father, however, dismisses the boy's outcries as feverish hallucinations. At one point, the little boy screams that he has been attacked. When the father arrives home, he comes to the shocking conclusion that his son is dead.

Schubert places the entire scene almost exclusively in a major key as if the Erlking tries to lure the boy away by singing in a "melodious, dancing major" (Fisk 2001: 134). Likewise, Jonah is lured by the dream of a successful singing career in classical music. The many modulations hint to the fact that he will never experience a well-balanced attitude towards his mixed heritage. Like the father in the story, David dismisses the outcries of his children when they ask who and what they really are. Although the boy in the poem turns to his father for help, Jonah will do no such thing and eventually becomes estranged from most of his family.

"Der Erlkönig" is a recurrent motif throughout the entire novel as the two brothers perform "that piece so many times, it could have galloped along by itself after throwing both of us" (*TS* 308). The reader is introduced to this motif on the very first page. In 1961, the judges ask Jonah to bring "Der Erlkönig" for the semi-finals of "America's Next Voices".

The performance of the brothers resembles the ride of the father and his son in Goethe's text as the expressions in Powers's novel are taken from the song's lyrics (Stock 2005: 6). The brothers "set out on [their] customary gallop" and "took off running in the all-stakes darkness" (*TS* 212). The music underlines this aspect as the triplets in the right hand of the piano accompaniment resemble the stormy weather as well as the rhythm of the galloping horse. So far, the performance and the ride start off as usual. Suddenly, something goes awry in both the poem and the performance. Joseph "seized up with memory lapse" and "stopped, leaving my brother galloping along in the dead of night over a yawning expanse of nothing" (*TS* 212). Although Jonah considered "bolting a cappella through the rest of the piece", he "reined in" when he understood Joseph could not accompany him any longer (*TS* 212). Jonah decided to "take this again, from the top. Once more with feeling!", a dictum of which the second part reminds the readers of the last sentence in *The Gold Bug Variations* (*TS* 213, *GV* 675). During their second try, "the line galloped as it never had" as Joseph "played along, racing the wild late night". Jonah "sang with death incarnate sitting on his shoulder, the ride that much wilder because of the heart-stopping stumble" (*TS* 213).

Joseph perceives the Erlking, the personification of death, "hunched on my brother's shoulder, whispering a blessed death" (*TS* 3), while at the same time "breathing the promise of a blessed deliverance" (*TS* 215). During this performance, Joseph foreshadows his brother's untimely death. The agitated rhythm of the song emphasises this aspect as Jonah seems to be rushing towards his destiny, just like the father and the son in the song. Joseph does not follow Jonah in his strong desire to reach his destiny. Instead, Joseph finds his own path in life and breaks free from the yoke imposed on him by his elder brother. This sentiment becomes clear in the last line "[i]n seinen Armen das Kind war tot", which is not accompanied by the piano (Schubert 2012a: n.p.). While Jonah keeps singing until he dies, Joseph ends his career as his brother's accompanist and as a member of Jonah's *a cappella* group in order to find himself.

The following composition from Schubert plays a significant role in *The Time of Our Singing*. Not only is the manner of the performance relevant, but the story of the cycle resembles Jonah's development in Powers's narrative. In 1827, Schubert composed *Winterreise* (Opus 89, D 911), a cycle of twenty-four *Lieder* based on the text written in 1822-23 by the poet Wilhelm Müller (Korff qtd. in Stock 2005: 4, 6). Schubert slightly adapted the order and the words of Müller's poem (Georgiades qtd. in Stock 2005: 6). According to Wellek and Warren, Schubert's successful reworking of Müller's text was due to the mediocre nature of the poet's work (1948: 166). Highly intricate poems with a high literary

value do not lend themselves so easily to musical settings. Müller's text provided Schubert with many opportunities for free play because the poem was of a vague and conventionally romantic nature.

While reading an analysis of Schubert's composition in Charles Fisk's *Returning Cycles*, I noticed a close parallel to the story of the wanderer in the poem and Jonah's development in Powers's narrative (2001: 5). From the first song in the cycle, the lonely wanderer immediately depicts himself as a "Fremdling", an outsider, who leaves the town which might have become his home if only he was able to identify with it (Fisk 2001: 134). Jonah is immediately seen as an outsider given the fact that he is neither black nor white. He leaves America, his home with which he cannot identify, because it does not accept his mixed-racial nature. The wanderer's journey has no clearly-defined purpose as he wanders out into a frozen wasteland after his beloved abandons him. Jonah, too, meanders around Europe aimlessly after his affair with Lisette Soer ends badly.

The fading of memories and illusions is an important theme in both the song and the narrative. While walking around aimlessly in a wintry landscape, the wanderer becomes alienated from himself and even loses his memory through which he might have retained a sense of his own identity. As demonstrated earlier in chapter B 3.3, Jonah chooses to leave his origins behind. The decision has a huge impact on him since he later on fails to remember what he was like as a young boy. Having that said, it must be pointed out that at this point in the narrative, Jonah is still in New York, not in Europe. The translation from music to literature is not entirely complete in this example and demonstrates the disparity when translating one information system to another one.

In the twentieth song, near the end of the cycle, the wanderer realises that not even "Der Wegweiser" which he is following stands on solid ground. Jonah initially thought that singing Early Music was the career path that he should follow, until he acknowledges that Joseph's singing class at Ruth's school is what he was training his voice for. The wanderer walks around aimlessly awaiting his death. In his desperate search to be at peace with his own identity, Jonah goes to a riot in order to get involved in the fight of his own race. Although a very determined Jonah follows a clear path at this point in the narrative, he does not know what he is doing and gets hit on the head by a flying stone. Jonah leaves the wound untreated, a decision that will hasten his demise. Throughout the song cycle and the narrative, the listener and the reader sense the approaching death of Jonah and of the wanderer. Both characters never reach the transcendence they seek after. The wanderer's

death is foreshadowed by the symbolic death of winter, while Jonah's is predetermined by the struggle about his own identity in terms of his racial background (Fisk 2001: 53).

In his compositions, Schubert frequently uses wandering as a metaphor of human existence (Budde qtd. in Stock 2005: 6). The entire song cycle lacks unifying motives and techniques. This aspect can be linked to the futility of the wanderer's journey as he even fails to achieve the death he desires (Fisk 2001: 4). The many modulations underscore the roaming nature of the wanderer. The major key is never firmly established throughout the song cycle and thus points towards the theme of fading memories and unrealised dreams, hopes and desires (Fisk 2001: 132). Given the fact that it is always linked to the minor key, the major key never becomes a real aspect in the composition. When we make the connection to Powers's narrative, Jonah's career may seem successful, as critics like Eder assume, but there is always a sense of downfall looming (2003: n.p.). By investigating Jonah's performances of two songs taken from *Winterreise*, namely "Irrlicht" and "Die Krähe", I will be able to demonstrate the aforementioned statement in further detail.

For his degree recital at Juilliard, Jonah chooses to sing Schubert's "Irrlicht". The song resembles the hopeless situation Jonah finds himself in (Hallmark 2011: 29; Stock 2005: 7; Youens 1991: 197). In the first five lines, the will-o'-the-wisp, a ghostly light, leads the wanderer astray from the safe roads at night, but he does not care. When Jonah adapts the lyrics and mockingly turns them into a commercial song for "Pepsi-Cola", Joseph saw "all our joys and sorrows [as] a will-o'-the-wisp" (*TS* 194). The song closely corresponds to the road Jonah has to travel as he employs music in order to try and change a society that is characterised by racial thinking. Jonah's singing career is just a will-o'-the-wisp that leads him astray from the rest of his family. Like the wanderer, Jonah follows the light because he does not care that he is being led astray by a successful singing career. He is reluctant to get involved in the struggle of his race. The "almost nihilistic" second part of the song demonstrates that nothing ever changes, a sentiment also expressed in Dowland's "Come Again" (*TS* 194). The wanderer believes that all paths lead to the same place and that feelings of joy or sorrow are nothing but mere illusions. Death is at the end of everything: "'s führt ja jeder Weg zum Ziel" (Schubert 2005b: 7, line 6). The last line of the song confirms Jonah's approaching death because every sorrow eventually reaches its grave: "[j]edes Leiden [findet] auch sein Grab" (Schubert 2005b: 7).

Against the advice of their impresario, Mr. Milton Weisman, the two brothers start working for the record label "Harmondial". For Jonah's second recording, "the label wanted something darker, to capitalize on Jonah's controversy" and eventually "settled on

Schubert's *Winterreise*. That was a piece for grown men, to sing when the singer had traveled far enough to describe the journey in full. But no sooner did they suggest the idea than Jonah took it up and sealed it" (*TS* 382, italics in original). Jonah sang "with total clairvoyance" as if he knew "where we were headed, things he couldn't have known as he sang them, things I wouldn't recognize even now except for his explanation waiting for me telegraphed from an unfinished past" (*TS* 383).

The recording of Schubert's "Die Krähe" goes without a hitch as they "hit [the] song perfectly on a single try" (*TS* 386). The wanderer describes a crow which follows him until he dies so that he can eat him. This is the first living creature in *Winterreise* to take an interest in the wanderer's misfortunes. The wanderer looks forward to his inevitable end as he welcomes the crow and blesses him (Hallmark 2011: 16; Reed 1997b: 425).

The crow in the poem becomes a symbol of death as it relates to Delia's death and predetermines Jonah's (Stock 2005: 8). Just before making the record, both brothers realised that their mother died due to the colour of her skin. The song foretells Jonah's death as he realises his voice will fail him at one point and, consequently, will ensure his death as a singer and as a person. Without his music, Jonah will not be able to find his way in life. He asks of death's personification "willst mich nicht verlassen?" (Schubert 2005a: 9, line 6). But, as the last line of the song already forebodes, Jonah realises that the crow will be "[t]reue bis zum Grabe!" (Schubert 2005a: 9). Joseph foreshadows his brother's death in relation to this particular composition. When he listens to the recording, Joseph perceives his brother with "a glow in his eyes, about to launch into some tune that will mean the end of self" (*TS* 385).

While Jonah sings *Winterreise* with a lot of conviction as if he knows what life has in store for him, Ressler is not as clairvoyant when he assesses his relationship with his married colleague Dr. Jeanette Koss. "Beauty, as Botkin once read to him during their joint listening sessions, Schubert's Winter's Journey, is just the beginning of a terror he might not be able to endure" (*GV* 475). Both Jonah and Ressler are intelligent people who experience failed relationships. While Jonah confidently faces his destiny, Ressler walks away from science when Jeanette leaves him.

A third composition from Schubert, namely "Ave Maria" ("Ellens Gesang III", number 6 of Opus 52, D 839), finds its way into the novel in connection with the theme of death. It was composed in 1825 as an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's 1810 epic poem *The Lady of the Lake* (Schwarm 2011: 215). Delia's mother, Nettie Ellen, takes her five children to Bethel Covenant every seventh day. Delia performs her first solo there. In order to find the right song, the choir and Delia rehearse several works. But "Delia looked for something more

somber. The junior choir director, Mr. Sampson, found her a piece called 'Ave Maria', by a long-dead white man named Schubert" (*TS 83*).

Scott's poem concerns Ellen Douglas and her father. In order to escape the vengeance of the king who exiled them, the two main characters hide in Loch Katrine in the Scottish Highlands. Frightened and unhappy, Ellen prays to the Virgin Mary and asks her for assistance: "Ave Maria! Jungfrau mild, / Erhöre einer Jungfrau Flehen" (Schubert 2012b: n.p., lines 1-2). Delia favours a song that is about a virgin who is innocent and immaculate. Virgin Mary is depicted in the song as "[u]nbefleckt" and as a "[r]eine Magd" (Schubert 2012b: n.p., lines 10, 19).

The song hints towards Delia's conviction in her own innocence concerning her marriage to David and their joint educational experiment (Stock 2005: 8). Both Delia and Ellen Douglas are surrounded by a harsh world and can only find their peace when dying: "[w]ir schlafen sicher bis zum Morgen, / Ob Menschen noch so grausam sind. […] Wenn wir auf diesen Fels hinsinken / Zum Schlaf […]. Wir woll'n uns still dem Schicksal beugen" (Schubert 2012b: n.p., lines 5-6, 11-12, 23).

The second time the song appears in the novel is at Delia's funeral. Joseph remembers that "[t]he best of my mother's amateur women took a run at the Schubert 'Ave Maria,' […], so loved by my mother that she herself had not sung it since girlhood. The student singer couldn't control any note above her second E. Grief tore up her vibrato, and yet, she'd never again come so close to a perfect rendering" (*TS* 143).

4.3 Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach has been mentioned many times in relation to *The Time of Our Singing*. Four works from him have already been discussed in connection to the theme of cultural ownership. The composer's work is also associated with several deaths in the novel. This chapter will focus on "Bist du bei mir", already described in chapter B 3.3 above, the "Saint Matthew Passion", "Willst du dein Herz mir schenken" and "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort".

The text of "Bist du bei mir" is appropriate for a funeral song (Lernout 2001: 17). Bach himself experienced the loss of his first wife and eleven of his children. The first time the song appears in connection to the theme of death is when Ruth sings it in 1955 at Delia's memorial in honour of her mother of whom she "had learned it […] without a lesson at all" (*TS* 147). During one of the children's lessons Joseph begins

> number 25, but before we can get three measures into it, Mama stops. I do, too, to see what's wrong, but she waves frantically for me to keep playing. Rootie the mimic is towering above her clothespin family, standing as she's seen Mama do a thousand times, posed in front of a room full of listening people, Mama herself, at one-third size. Little Root's voice enacts an adulthood already in her. She takes over from my mother 'Bist du bei mir', singing it for her, to her, *as* her.
>
> (*TS* 524, italics in original)

Delia recognises "what's to come [as] she hears it in Ruth's song: what's waiting for her" (*TS* 524). She predicts her own death while listening to her daughter sing (Stock 2005: 10-11).

Delia sang the song herself at the evening when she introduced David to her parents. Back then, the song was one of hope as the couple still believed their relationship would be possible. Delia now understands that nobody believed that she and David could have a good future together and realises that all hope is in vain. However, she tries to give hope to her children and sets a task for Joseph:

> [h]er look swears me to a vow: I must take care of everyone, all her song-blasted family, when I'm the only one who remembers this glimpse of how things must go. *Watch over this girl. Watch over your brother. Watch over that hopeless foreign man who can't watch over anything smaller than a galaxy*. She looks right at me, forward across the years, at my later self, grown, broken, the only person who stands between her and final knowing. She hears effect before cause, response before call: her own daughter singing to her, the one tune that will do for her funeral.
>
> (*TS* 524, italics in original)

In this scene, Delia recognises that classical music belonging to the whites had torn "her song-blasted family" apart (*TS* 524).

When Ruth sings "Bist du bei mir" at her mother's funeral, Powers gives the German lyrics of the song together with the English translation. He continues by describing the performance through the eyes of Joseph:

> Ruth sang as if she and I were the only two souls left alive. Her sound was small but as clear as a music box. I kept off the sustain pedal, sounding each chord almost tentatively, not with the press of my fingers but with the release. Her held lines floated above my stepwise modulations like moonlight on a lost, small craft. I tried not to listen, except to stay inside the throw of her beam.
>
> The simplest tune in the world, as simple and strange as breathing. Who knows what the room heard? I'm not even sure Rootie understood the words. They may have been meant originally for God. But that's not where Ruth sent them.
>
> (*TS* 147-148)

The manner in which Joseph and Ruth perform the song can be linked to their chosen paths in life. Ruth's voice, which is "small but as clear as a music box", parallels her educational project, which is relatively small, but presents a clear signal to contribute to the neighbourhood (*TS* 147). While Ruth has a clear idea of what she wants in life, Joseph needs the "stepwise modulations" in order to come to terms with his mixed-racial background (*TS* 147). Joseph keeps off the "sustain pedal" and lives his life "tentatively" in the shadow of his older brother, Jonah (*TS* 147). Joseph describes himself as a "lost, small craft" that needs the guidance of Ruth's "moonlight" (*TS* 147). During his life, Joseph does his best to "stay inside the throw of her beam" (*TS* 147).

Throughout her life, Ruth favours her black roots. She shares a great bond with her mother that she does not have with her white father. When Ruth looses her mother, the closeness that she felt to Delia is gone. The bond with her father becomes increasingly more complicated after Delia dies as Ruth will rarely sing in German again (Stock 2005: 9): "Ruth never again sang in her father's language, never again performed her mother's beloved European music in public. Never again, until she had to" (*TS* 148).

Ruth performs the song again at Jonah's "European memorial" (*TS* 619). The connection to her mother's death becomes clear as "we sounded as if we hadn't made music since our mother's funeral" (*TS* 620). Ruth despised Jonah because he chose to sing white music and at one point even calls him "the Negro Caruso" (*TS* 455). Stock states that Bach's "Bist du bei mir" expresses a sense of peace in this scene, since Ruth and Jonah have finally reconciled after years of being separated (2005: 11): "[b]ist du bei mir, geh' ich mit Freuden / zum Sterben und zu meiner Ruh'" (Bach 1994: 19, lines 1-2).

The second piece of Bach related to the theme of death enters the narrative during one of the family's "Crazed Quotations" games. Jonah sings the "chorus opening [of] Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*" (BWV 244), a work composed in 1727 and rewritten in 1736-1742 (*TS* 14, italics in original). The verses were mostly supplied by Christian Friedrich Henrici, also known as Picander (Schwarm 2011: 356). A "passion" consists of a musical reworking of Biblical texts about the suffering and the crucifixion of Christ (Schwarm 2011: 357).

The lyrics of the "Saint Matthew Passion" directly hint at the Stroms's faith (Stock 2005: 9). They are innocent victims of a society burdened by racial segregation: "[o] Lamm Gottes unschuldig, / Am Stamm des Kreuzes geschlachtet" (Bach 2011-12e: n.p., lines 8-9). They are found guilty on the grounds of their skin colour and have to carry their cross to their grave, as Jesus did. When Jonah sings the chorus opening during the family game, his parents

foretell their son's death: "this was when David and Delia Strom first knew that their firstborn would soon be taken from them" (*TS* 14).

The third reference to Bach in this context occurs during Delia and Joseph's last private lesson. They play a piece from Anna Magdalena's notebook, namely "number 37, 'Willst du dein Herz mir schenken'", composed in 1725 (*TS* 524). Bach wrote it into his wife's notebook and inscribed it "Aria di Giovannini" (BWV 518). The preface of the 2001 edition of the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* reveals that the title undoubtedly refers to the Italian composer Giovannini, who lived in Germany for a while (7). The page on which the piece was copied in the notebook was at one point removed, to be replaced again later (Geck 2006: 263). There are strong doubts whether or not Bach composed this song (Schmieder qtd. in Lernout 2001: 18; Schweitzer 1967: 301).

The lyrics of the first and the third verse are closely connected to the novel (Stock 2005: 11-12). Delia and David have to keep their feelings hidden because love beyond race was still an unbreakable taboo: "[d]ie Liebe muss bei beiden / Allzeit verschwiegen sein" (Bach 2012: n.p., lines 5-6). Their relationship is doomed from the beginning since mixed marriages are still forbidden at the time. This sentiment becomes clear when Franco Lugati sings "Gott ist unsere Zuversicht" at the couple's wedding. During their last private lesson, Joseph foreshadows his mother's death while she is singing the melody of "Willst du dein Herz mir schenken". Delia is described as "already a creature from another world" (*TS* 524).

The fourth and last reference to Bach's work concerns the chorale from the first part of "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort" (BWV 20), composed in 1724. The preface of the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* mentions that the composer used Johann Rist's text and Johann Schop's melody (Bach 2001: 7). During one evening that the Stroms visit Delia's parents, Joseph and Jonah sing the piece for their grandfather. On the performance of the two boys, Powers comments that "[n]obody in this room knows the words. […] The music is in them. Just *in* them" (*TS* 418, italics in original).

The song expresses a certain desire for death (Stock 2005: 17). The believers addressed in the text are requested to choose suffering on earth, which is only of a relative short duration, rather than the eternal pain felt by the doomed in the afterlife. "Ewigkeit" in the song is even depicted as a "Schwert, das durch die Seele bohrt" (Bach 2011-12a: n.p., lines 1-2). The song immediately precedes the fight between Delia and her father about the education she and David are giving the children. Because of the intense grief that Delia experiences, she embodies the same sentiment expressed in the song: "[i]ch weiß vor großer Traurigkeit / Nicht, wo ich mich hinwend" (Bach 2011-2012a: n.p., lines 5-6).

The manner in which Powers describes the performance hints to Jonah's untimely death as he "gets the melody, of course" (*TS* 418). The listeners can recognise Jonah because the melody of a piece is always the easiest to perceive as it is the most important part of a composition. Joseph, however, is not that clearly distinguishable as he "holds down the bass" (*TS* 418). He does have an important role in the performance as well as in real life. While singing the piece, he is the bass on which the other voice has to build. During his life, Joseph will help out his family as he keeps the promise that he made to his mother, who asked him to take care of the others after she died. Joseph assists Jonah with his singing career by faithfully accompanying him on the piano and by singing the bass-line for "Voces Antiquae". He stands by his father while he is dying of cancer and helps his sister while she tries to establish her primary school. Joseph also tries to assist Ruth's children: Kwame, "the gangsta son of a doctor of education", who was imprisoned for stealing CDs; and the precocious Robert, who admires his older brother and is in danger of following the same bad path in life (*TS* 590).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the narrative strategies Richard Powers employs to include music in his literary works. Powers does not only incorporate biographical elements of composers in order to link his fictional characters to non-fictional human beings. He also includes the adaptations of composition techniques, the musical analyses of scores as well as information on the recordings and the performances of various compositions. Many of these strategies are used in both novels. However, there is one major difference between *The Gold Bug Variations* and *The Time of Our Singing*. While the first novel presents a close correspondence to Bach's score of the "Goldberg Variations", the second novel focuses on the manner in which various compositions are performed on concerts, competitions, school performances and funerals. The aspects of several of the performances mentioned in the narrative are connected to the contents of the cantatas, the *Lieder*, the jazz standards and the other songs mentioned in the novel.

In his attempt to overcome the inherent differences between literature and music, Powers translates one of the most challenging composition techniques into literature. In both *The Time of Our Singing* and *The Gold Bug Variations*, Powers constructs his narratives by means of the contrapuntal braiding technique. Although "polyphony" and "counterpoint" may not be the correct terms to describe this phenomenon in literary works, several critics have employed them when arguing that the writing technique is drawn from this type of music. In the case of *The Time of Our Singing*, it has been mentioned that the technique resembles pieces from the period of Early Music, while the writing style of *The Gold Bug Variations* is connected to a composition from the Baroque era.

Both novels contain references to Bach, which will be recapitulated here. The narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* reveals many structural connections to Bach's contrapuntal composition titled the "Goldberg Variations". The piece is mainly grouped around the numbers thirty-two, three and four. Powers's narrative is similarly constructed around these numbers. The story alludes to the canons one can find in the composition. Not only are these overt references, as placing a subtitle of a canon at the appropriate place, but there are many implicit references as well. The voices of the canons are paralleled by the relationships the characters have towards each other and the events that take place within the narrative. The novel incorporates the canonic techniques inversion, retrograde, augmentation and diminution. While inversion is mainly connected to the development of the relationships of

the two couples, the retrograde technique is linked to the actions, decisions and skills of several characters. The augmentation and diminution techniques are mainly associated with the narrative rhythm of one particular chapter in the narrative.

Bach is not only important when it comes to the structure of *The Gold Bug Variations*. His famous saying that "all things must be possible" is a central motif in both novels. *The Gold Bug Variations* presents an ambivalent vision when the quote is connected to science as Ressler questions the commercialisation of the discipline as well as the ethical responsibility of scientists. *The Time of Our Singing* expresses a more hopeful aspect of the dictum as the novel celebrates a world that knows no racial boundaries. While the characters in *The Gold Bug Variations* are mainly concerned with locating their genetic identity, the characters in *The Time of Our Singing* experience many troubles in order to find a cultural, racial and personal identity. The novel supports the notion of a multi-ethnical world by drawing on a fluid notion of time and on music that knows no categories. By drawing on elements from different eras, the characters are able to expand one moment into infinity. Music is intricately connected to time as David and Delia try to raise their children for a future that knows no racial boundaries by teaching them music of different eras, genres and styles. Their favourite game called "Crazed Quotations" is a perfect example of this strategy. But the notion of time is a complicated one. On the one hand, several characters embrace the future and look forward to it in the hope that something will change for the better. On the other hand, the compositions from Dowland, Schubert and Bach seem to forebode the untimely deaths of both Delia and Jonah. The pieces of these three composers are also connected to the fading of dreams and memories.

One of Bach's cantatas, namely "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied", is incorporated in both novels. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Bach's cantata serves as a reminder for Ressler that he is not the only scientist who is discovering new theories. When Ressler realises that others have already commented upon the same scientific approach, he is initially taken aback. But the song that Botkin plays for him reminds him that he should learn from others and construct his method further. The cantata in this novel is seen in a positive light. In *The Time of Our Singing*, the composition is mainly related to the notion of cultural ownership when Jonah offers to help Joseph and Ruth with their school project. In this novel, the cantata is placed in a more negative light as Joseph and Ruth do not want their brother to help them in their effort to build a healthy and constructive environment for the children they are teaching. By following Jonah's idea of incorporating old songs into a new form, they believe that they will not be able to achieve a future with racial equality. In one particular scene, the

cantata is even connected to Jonah's death, which hints to the fact that Jonah's notion of creating new music that is built upon existing materials can only lead towards death.

It would be wrong to assume that Bach is the only composer that plays a major role in these two narratives. The references to the careers of several musicians can assist Powers's readers to make sense of his complex fictional characters. In *The Time of Our Singing*, Joseph mainly draws inspiration from the careers of Davis and Gershwin, two composers who mix genres and successfully incorporate the old into the new. This approach seems to be the only way to subvert the notion of cultural ownership. Powers applies this strategy too, since the entire novels themselves are an assembly of music taken from different periods, genres and styles. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Powers celebrates differences between people from various classes by means of Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off". In *The Time of Our Singing*, Powers similarly advocates for more tolerance towards people of different racial backgrounds by drawing on Gershwin's "The Man I Love".

Powers, Bach, Ressler, Joseph and David create new art by drawing on existing materials. Powers embeds his narratives with references to concerts, musicians, composers and their work. In much the same fashion, Bach incorporates old tunes by reusing them in new compositions. The fictional characters David, Joseph and Ressler also employ this technique. David creates a song for Delia's funeral which resembles their "Crazed Quotation" game as it is built upon the music that he and his wife raised their three children on. When composing music, both Joseph and Ressler feel a sense of freedom from constraints that they previously experienced. On the one hand, Joseph feels relieved from restrictions that derive from compositions made in the past as he embraces the aesthetic of diversity, just as Gershwin and Davis did. On the other hand, creating music makes Ressler feel relieved from the constraints that come with language and mathematics.

The figure of Robeson can be connected to both novels. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Robeson's rendition of "Jacob's Ladder" induces Ressler to think about the overreaching aspect of science and the commercialisation of the discipline. These concerns also came to the fore when Ressler examined Bach's saying that "all things must be possible". While listening to Robeson's spiritual, Ressler questions the recursive nature of the discourse and the various approaches used in studying it. Ressler is not the only character who struggles with "Jacob's Ladder". Jan also recognises its recursive nature and links this to the notion of evolution as well as to her own learning process when studying science and music during her sabbatical.

While Ressler contemplates the overreaching aspect of his work as a scientist, Jonah desperately tries to achieve eternal fame and is not concerned that he might be aiming too

high. In *The Time of Our Singing*, Robeson's career can be connected to that of Jonah's as both singers fail to successfully combine a musical career with their political beliefs and opinions. Jonah's roaming through Europe follows a similar path made by Robeson and Dowland as these musicians try to find venues on which they can perform.

Anderson's career is intricately connected to the life of Delia and Jonah. All three musicians experience the disappointment of denied opportunities when auditioning for music schools. Jonah's life is similar to Anderson's and Schuyler's in the sense that the careers of these non-fictional musicians were seen as contributing to a future with racial equality. Although Anderson and Schuyler will not be able to sing and play music without bearing the heavy burden of taking on the fight of an entire race, Jonah is able to retrain his voice to represent nothing else but his voice.

Delia and David choose Schuyler as a role model for their children as the child prodigy was an influential figure in the struggle for racial equality. While the world is initially charmed by this young girl, people do not accept her mixed racial nature as she grows older. The parallels between the non-fictional Schuyler and the fictional Strom children point out to the reader that Delia and David's educational program is doomed to fail. Although Jonah will continue to struggle with the manner in which his parents brought him up, Ruth and Joseph will be able to transform the experiment into something more positive.

Music does not only find its way into the two novels by referring to various biographical elements of musicians and composers. Powers makes a literary effort to explain the sound, the structure and the harmony of music as well as what the characters experience when listening to or playing music. By means of these techniques, the reader is able to make sense of Powers's complex characters. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, the emphasis is mainly on how characters listen to music as it helps them to discover new insights concerning science, life, love and friendship. Ressler, Jeanette, Franklin and Jan mostly discuss Bach's "Goldberg Variations" by expressing their thoughts and feelings that the piece arouses in them. In various chapters, the characters are listening to the corresponding variation. In these sections, the atmosphere that the variation creates is significant as it can bring characters together, but it can also keep them apart. While some chapters incorporate the more abstract and theoretical aspects of musical analysis, other chapters include comments on rhythm, tempi indications, intervals or the key in which the variations are written. There are connections with the formal structure of the corresponding variations as well as the manner and the timing in which the canonic lines enter, the reiteration of motifs and the length of the phrases. Various dances, for example *courants*, *polonaises*, *sarabandes* and jigs, find their way

into the novel as well. Stated succinctly, the narrative of the novel closely corresponds to various elements one can discover in Bach's score.

While *The Gold Bug Variations* mainly focuses on listening to music, *The Time of Our Singing* stresses the experience of playing and singing music. Powers describes many rehearsals of the compositions as well as how several works are performed on concerts, competitions, school performances and funerals. Listening to music can bring people together or keep them apart. The same is true for the performances of various compositions as it can unite characters, but it can also lead to a separation. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Jan and Franklin come closer together when playing Ressler's compositions on an old pump-organ. In *The Time of Our Singing*, gathering around the spinet in order to read classical scores initially brings the Strom family together as they sing "Crazed Quotations". But music is unable to keep the family together: Dr. Delay's fight with Delia and David leads to a long separation; Delia dies as the result of a racial crime, leaving her husband and her three children to fend for themselves; Ruth leaves the family and joins the Black Panthers; Ruth's husband, Robert, dies as the result of a racial crime; Jonah goes to Europe to pursue a solo career without Joseph; the mixed music of Gershwin is unable to keep Joseph and Teresa together; David loses his parents, his sister and his brother-in-law as the result of the Holocaust; and David dies of cancer before reuniting with Ruth and Jonah. Joseph is able to bring the remnants of his family back together when he starts teaching music. His lessons resemble the family's favourite game of "Crazed Quotations". While teaching, he lets the whole community experience a sense of unity when they are singing and playing music from different eras, genres and styles. When the Strom family sings at the memorial services for Delia and Jonah, some members of the family seem to reunite with the deceased person they are honouring. For example, Ruth reconnects with Jonah when she sings at his funeral.

Another interesting aspect concerning the performances is the tempi that Jonah takes with Dowland's "Time Stands Still", Bach's "Jesu, der du meine Seele" and Schubert's "Der Erlkönig". These performances are linked to the contents of the lyrics. Jonah sings Dowland's song slowly as he wants to achieve eternal fame. Jonah and Lois Helmer's rendition of Bach's cantata rushes in order to ask God for help. Schubert's *Lied* is performed in an agitated tempo as Jonah seems to rush towards his own death. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Powers also changes the tempo of one particular song, which results in a very amusing description of one of the members of the Cyfer unit. Tooney Blake completely misses the point of Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" as he mispronounces the lyrics and plays it in a slowed-down tempo. The song is supposed to be a humorous one about the different dialects of two

classes and overcoming these differences. Gershwin intended this song to be performed in a more lively manner in order to achieve a comical moment in his musical.

Different playing techniques are found in both novels. Jan first plays intuitively when she practices the cello. Later on, she studies the cello and the piano in a more academic manner. Joseph follows a path that stands in contrast to Jan's. As a young boy, Joseph practices the piano in order to burn off all impurities. When accompanying Ruth and Jonah, he touches the piano keys tentatively, almost as if he is afraid to live his life to the fullest. Joseph initially plays jazz music in a classical and mechanical manner, until he re-educates himself by listening to records and by improvising with his friend Wilson Hart. Joseph is stunned by his emotional reaction while improvising and learns to play more intuitively.

The previously mentioned conclusions in this thesis fall under what Scher labels as "music in literature". However, there are a number of instances where Scher's category "literature and music" comes to the fore as the author draws upon works of art which demonstrate a close collaboration between the two arts. These pieces start out as literary works and are later on translated into music. In these instances, we have the transformation of literature into music, followed by the transformation of music into literature. The first example concerns Bach's "Saint Matthew Passion" and four of his cantatas, namely "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort", "Jesu, der du meine Seele", "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" and "Gott ist unser Zuversicht". The second example deals with Robeson's "Jacob's Ladder". Bach's passion and cantatas as well as Robeson's spiritual are musical translations of biblical texts. The other examples relate to three compositions from Schubert: "Ave Maria", an adaptation of Scott's poem; "Der Erlkönig", an adaptation of Goethe's poem; and *Winterreise*, an adaptation of Müller's poem. In these works, Schubert demonstrates how closely poetry and music are connected. By including the works from Bach, Robeson and Schubert, Powers indicates his flexibility as a writer as he is able to bridge the gap between literature and music. Although the incorporation of absolute music in literary works is very challenging, Powers goes one step further as he draws upon works that demonstrate a close collaboration between literature and music.

Having recapitulated the instances of the mutual influence of music and literature in the two novels, the last important aspects that need to be addressed in this conclusion are the contemporary concerns which Powers touches upon in both narratives. In *The Time of Our Singing*, Powers confronts the socio-political problems concerning racial discrimination. The question of race poses problems as the reader is forced to consider if hatred towards others comes about due to the fear of a resemblance to that same other. In *The Gold Bug Variations*,

Powers addresses the explosion of information technology and how it affects human society. He challenges his audience to reflect about the possibilities and the boundaries of human knowledge. The question is raised whether or not large amounts of information are more valuable than knowledge. In the process of acquiring meaning from the dense network of the discourses present in the fictional world of the novel, various characters get side-tracked in the vast amounts of information as they are determined to look for patterns that, in the end, will only prove to be meaningless when examined in a more sceptical manner. Jan, Franklin and several members of the Cyfer team seem to lose themselves in the search for the particulars instead of acquiring information in a more meaningful way.

Powers never imposes answers or solutions concerning the above-mentioned problems. Instead, he invites the active reader to revise former perceptions. In both novels discussed in this thesis, Powers celebrates the sense of wonder that people can experience. The desire for discovery finds its way into *The Gold Bug Variations* as Ressler and Jan conclude that science and music revolve around the perpetual state of wonder. In her research about the workings of the brain, Jan discovers that the most basic compositional rules can bring about a sense of surprise and reverence in the listener. The quilt that Ressler and Jeanette buy, as well as the tapestry that David and his two sons examine in *The Time of Our Singing*, all reveal the same sense of awe felt by its onlookers by investigating works of art more closely or by viewing them from different angles. Gould also came to this conclusion when he recorded Bach's "Goldberg Variations" for the last time as he reconsidered the entire work from a different viewpoint and adjusted his tempi for each variation. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, the notion of curiosity is further supported by means of the generation codes, which allow infinite possibilities as people keep questioning and re-examining the epigraph and Bach's simple structure of the Aria that is based upon four descending notes. Ressler's favourite quote from Flaubert that Eva recites backwards also refers to the importance of discovering new things in life without ever stopping to be amazed at what you can find.

In both novels, Powers celebrates the richness resulting from differences. *The Gold Bug Variations* and *The Time of Our Singing* approach this subject from similar vantage points. The first novel stresses the importance of variation in order to evolve as simple reiteration leads to no clearer insight. We should value knowledge more instead of merely assembling insignificant amounts of information. As Powers demonstrates in his narrative, all discourses, such as literature, music and science, are translations of the same theme. On the surface, these branches of knowledge may seem different, but essentially, they represent the

same underlying message. The sense of wonder becomes a complicated notion in the second novel because of people's intolerance towards different skin tones. The narrative opts for a variety in music genres and races as Powers wants to enhance the reader's tolerance towards differences and variations in skin colour. In a nutshell, embracing the varieties in life can make us richer as they will enhance the knowledge that we have of ourselves.

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