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Roelof Temmingh's *Kantorium*: a reflection on suffering and redemption

First submission: 15 September 2008

Acceptance: 6 March 2009

Roelof Temmingh's *Kantorium* (2003/4), a large-scale work for choir, soloists and orchestra, won the prestigious Helgaard Steyn award in 2006. Temmingh commented briefly on his extremely difficult personal circumstances during its creation. Should a composer suffer in order to produce great music? This question raises the wider problem of contextuality, as well as concomitant theoretical/philosophical considerations. Profoundly religious in nature, the work, whose text is in German, was written for a European audience by an Afrikaans-speaking composer in post-apartheid South Africa. It does not embody any clearly overt political values, nor does it attempt to serve as a repository of cultural identity. Moreover, according to the composer, his personal circumstances were not a prerequisite for its creation.

Roelof Temmingh se *Kantorium*: 'n oordenking van lyding en redding

Roelof Temmingh se *Kantorium* (2003/4), 'n grootskaalse werk vir koor, soliste en orkes, het die prestigieuse Helgaard Steyn-prys in 2006 verwerf. Temmingh het kortliks sy uitermate moeilike persoonlike omstandighede tydens die ontstaan daarvan geskets. Is dit nodig dat 'n komponis ly om groot musiek te skryf? Hierdie vraag raak aan die breër probleem van kontekstualiteit en aan samegaande teoreties/filosofiese oorwegings. As 'n diep religieuse uiting is die werk, getoonset op 'n Duitse teks, deur 'n Afrikaanssprekende komponis in post-apartheid Suid-Afrika vir 'n Europese gehoor geskryf. Dit bevat geen openlik waarneembare politieke waardes nie, en poog nie om te dien as 'n neerslag van kulturele identiteit nie. Ook was die komponis se persoonlike omstandighede volgens sy eie uitspraak geen voorvereiste vir die skepping daarvan nie.

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Acta Academica
2009 41(2): 50-76
ISSN 0587-2405
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<http://www.ufs.ac.za/ActaAcademica>

SUN MODIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

Commissioned by the Evangelical Church in Germany, Roelof Temmingh's *Kantorium* (2003/4) was, as the composer states on the first page of the score, written

... for a special concert on the 3rd of September 2004 during a double jubilee: 475 years of Reformation and the celebration of the hundredth year of the massive *Gedächtniskirche* in Speyer.¹ The Biblical and few other texts of the work were selected by the composer (who is Afrikaans speaking).²

A large-scale two-part work for choir, soloists and orchestra, the composition won the prestigious Helgaard Steyn award in 2006. On accepting the prize during a ceremony held in Bloemfontein, Temmingh made a brief comment on the background to the work by sketching his extremely difficult personal circumstances during its creation. He then posed the following question: Should a composer suffer in order to produce great music?

This question raises the broader problem of contextuality, as well as concomitant theoretical/philosophical considerations. Profoundly religious in nature, the work, whose text is in German, was written for a European audience by an Afrikaans-speaking composer in post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike other local art-music compositions of this period, it does not embody any overt political values, nor does it attempt to serve as a repository of national memory or instill a unified “new” South African cultural identity. Moreover, Temmingh concluded his comments on the work by stating that his personal circumstances were not a prerequisite for its creation — he would have written the work “anyway”, and he described its uncomplicated progress as “being fast”.

1 This article is a reworking of a paper read at the first conference of the South African Society for Research in Music (SASRIM), University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 23–25 August 2007.

2 Temmingh's inscription mentions the Lutheran and not the Evangelical church. According to the official web page of *Die Gedächtniskirche der Protestant, Speyer* ('The Memorial Church of the Protestant' <<http://www.evpfatz.de/gemeinden/sp-gedaechtniskirche/index.htm>>), the church was built between 1893 and 1904 in memory of the protest that took place at the Diet of Speyer by the protestant states of the Holy Roman Empire in 1529. Temmingh refers to this date.

It should be remarked at this point that, in defiance of the post-modern spirit, *Kantorium* demonstrates a consistent level of structural unity that provides the composition with unusual balance, and creates a seamless connection between content and form which, if we are to take the composer's word for it, came into existence completely intuitively. It is therefore all the more remarkable that, as an example of what might be regarded within the present musicological milieu as transcendent — and thus (presumably) “politically incorrect” — art, the panel of adjudicators unanimously agreed to award Temmingh the Helgaard Steyn prize, the most substantial and prestigious local grant in the field of art music.

In terms of contemporary critical music scholarship, the apparent paradox of Temmingh's *Kantorium* seems to pose a number of significant questions. Is it possible that the extraordinary force of the music implies that “extra-musical” contexts of the composition, other than those of its religious text, are innately present, and that these mediate subliminally not only the composer's musical style and syntax as an indelible part of his artistic identity, but also the construction of a potential hermeneutic context for reading the work? How does the composition's organicist conception influence the hypothetical relations between such “extra-musical” and “intra-musical” contexts whereby it came into being? Would the possibility of this work composed as a distinct organic unity not be voided when it is considered to be equally constituted by what appears to lie “outside” the work, that which “frames” it, and what is constituted as the unity of its (musical) parts?³

Lawrence Kramer (2006: 43) argues that any meaningful discourse on music presupposes the assumption of “an active, value-laden, rhetorically complex role in the production of meaning”, and that “we must interpret”. He further complicates the interpretative demand of music by emphasising the fact that

3 The idea of the “frame” is derived from Derrida's (1987: 54-5) discourse on the limit between “inside” and “outside”, a discourse on the “frame” of the work, where the divide between *ergon* (work) and *parergon* (“supplement”, “aside”, “remainder”) becomes an ideologically partial, constantly shifting area.

[t]his imperative applies with special force when we deal with texted music [...] we must not regard texts for musical settings as transparently meaningful statements that the music somehow proceeds to 'express' [...] We should be prepared to find that the music tries to annex textual values, or that it 'reads' a text with a deep structure that the text itself can be said to conceal or resist. More generally, the imperative to interpret asks us to recognize that all music is in some sense texted music, music allied to the cultural activity of text-production.

This article will attempt to explain that a musical setting may "interpret" a text through subtle musical means, yet influence its meaning on the ontological level. In this regard, the music becomes an event of temporal specificity with a contingent function in a particular discourse, with "purely" musical parameters entering the referential dimension via a contextual extension or revision of figurative content. In terms of the topic of this article, this implies that Temmingh's music may (figuratively) construct meanings that extend or even "alter" the meanings inherent in the Biblical and doctrinal passages selected by the composer.

1. The limits of interpretation

From Kramer's perspective, it would be presumptuous to suggest that, in the ensuing section of this article, the music of *Kantorium* will simply "speak for itself". Our observations are based on an (inter)active reading and a perceptual experience of the work; to cite Kramer (2006: xiv), the music "itself" seems to demand that this reading goes beyond what is already apparent in the text.⁴

With regard to the matter of music criticism, it must be noted that, following developments within the disciplines of literary theory and philosophy, critical musicology has recently focused increasingly

4 We acknowledge with gratitude the invaluable input of Fr Simon Akin and Dr Ian Drennan who joined us in an intensive listening-session of the work, and whose insights significantly shaped the interpretation of *Kantorium* presented in this article. We are also deeply indebted to Roelof Temmingh for generously sharing with us some of his viewpoints on *Kantorium* by e-mail correspondence conducted during July 2007.

on considerations represented in what may be regarded as a sequence of theoretical trends.⁵ These trends, in the broadest of terms, have focused first on the subject as the controlling author of the work, then on the work, as produced by and absorbed within the larger concept of textuality, and finally textuality, as produced by and absorbed within specific, material socio-historical forces. As Murray Krieger (1987: 2) finds in this regard, “(s)ubject, text, and history” can thus be regarded as “reflecting the consecutive dominance, respectively, of the criticism of consciousness, of deconstruction [...] and of what we might call theories of social power”.

Krieger (1987: 2) argues that, at the end of the 1980s, international literary scholarship highlighted the third aspect, namely the controlling powers of the social-historical domain.⁶ What was at stake, in particular, was “the extent to which literary problems could be subsumed under social-historical ‘realities’” (Krieger 1987: 3). This led to the question whether literary problems still called for special consideration, or whether there were now only general textual problems into which so-called literary ones could be “collapsed”, or whether only socio-historical “realities” now deserved the attention of academe; “realities” that had not yet “been described as a text, and to which texts could be reduced rather than the other way round” (Krieger 1987: 3).

It may be a logical consequence of South Africa’s recent past that current music scholarship in this country is so strongly representative of Krieger’s third phase of socio-historical “realities”. This emphasis on the social dimension, however, has in certain respects proven to be problematic, not only within musicology, but also within a broader

5 Joseph Kerman’s *Contemplating music* (1985) provoked much of the intellectual response which consequently became known as the “new” musicology, opening up approaches to the discipline which Cook & Everist (1999: v-xii) describe as a “humane, critically informed musicology”.

6 Krieger’s essay forms the introduction to *The aims of representation: subject/text/history* (Krieger 1987), a publication which combined a broad spectrum of theoretical approaches as formulated by distinguished theorists from the USA and Europe, including, among others, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Anthony Giddens, Stephen Greenblatt and Wolfgang Iser.

scope of post-apartheid theorisation. Nuttall & Michael (2000: 2), for instance, observe that cultural theorising in South Africa has recently been based on tendencies to overemphasise political aspects, to inflate notions of resistance, and to fixate on issues of racial supremacy and racial victimisation. Furthermore, possibly as a consequence, the adoption of these paradigms has often resulted in a theoretical position that projects the country as a closed space isolated not only within its own continent, but also from other continents.

In local music scholarship, while the post-apartheid re-contextualisation and destabilisation of so-called more “disinterested” frameworks of interpretation have resulted in the emergence of an eclectic array of interdisciplinary approaches, scant attention has at times been paid to the artistic uniqueness and power of expression of the music “itself” in a particular context. It is also ironic that a more rigorous engagement with all the human aspects involved in the creation, performance and reception of local music — a consideration which in post-apartheid South Africa significantly influences all interactions of “text” and “context” — is in some instances conspicuous by its absence.

How do these concerns relate to an interpretation of Temmingh's *Kantorium* — a work that appears to stand so transcendently apart from the post-apartheid aesthetic and from other major local art-music works produced during the past decade? And what special problems does the work pose in terms of current music scholarship?

In a recently republished debate between Gary Tomlinson and Lawrence Kramer (2006: 45-56), Tomlinson detects in musicology, which seeks a postmodernist end, a thick contextualism “darkly tinted [...] with modernist ideology” (Kramer 2006: 45). His accusation is that current music criticism, glossed as “close reading”, is irrevocably invested in “internalism”, “aestheticism”, “formalism”, “transcendentalism”, and “westernism” (Kramer 2006: 45). In his quest for a nonappropriative, nondominating interpretation of music free of tendentiousness, he objects to the fact that current music criticism passes off “personal response as knowledge and blinds itself to the otherness for which it presumes to speak” (Kramer 2006: 46). Kramer (2006: 46-7) proceeds:

Criticism inevitably sets a reified object before a solipsistic subject. It inflates the authority of both the critic and the artist and establishes a spurious transparency of communication between them, a relay of (pseudo-)knowledge that also acts as a network of disciplinary and social power. The locus of knowledge is the artwork — in this case the music — in which criticism corrals too much of our attention. Fetishizing the work, criticism withdraws us from the real, scants the weight of history, creates a kind of transcendental museum or mausoleum of canonical masterpieces. The locus of power is in the figure (person and trope) of the critic. ‘Close reading’ supposedly proceeds from a discursive position that involves the a priori assumption of coercive authority: the (im)posture of mastery, an appropriation by the critic of the composer’s voice(s), a falsification of knowledge by the denial of the differences between the knower and the known. Tomlinson, accordingly, asks us to lay down our scores. We must no longer ‘circle back narrowly to the notes but instead [...] resolutely historicize musical utterance, exploding it outwards through an imaginative building of contexts’.

It is obvious that Tomlinson’s argument problematises Kramer’s viewpoints to a considerable degree. We concur with Kramer that any interpretation of music presupposes the formulation of a subjective musicological discourse, thereby assuming criticism to take on an active role in the production of meaning. Even at this point in the discussion, it can be stated that one’s interpretative point of departure concerning *Kantorium* involves at least some of the strategies of reading which Tomlinson condemns. The relevant aspects of both Kramer and Tomlinson’s arguments will be discussed later.

2. *Kantorium* as God’s Word revealed in music

Kantorium is a setting of Biblical texts based on Luther’s translation of the Bible, which were compiled by the composer.⁷ At the request of the commission committee, references to Lutheran doctrines were

7 This information, and that in this paragraph, has been kindly supplied by the composer. Initially, the composer was presented with a text compiled by a Dr Wien, which was a creative rewriting of Biblical texts based on various sources. The composer found this text to be unsuitable for his use. Neither was he drawn to this more contemporary text incorporating citations from Martin Luther King’s speeches, because he wanted to convey the timelessness of the gospel which, for him, points to its everlasting social relevance.

also included. Temmingh's choice of Biblical passages abstracts the essence of Christian salvation and redemption as narrated in the Bible, and as stated in the Reformed Creed. Thus, the "story" of *Kantorium* commences with the creation, and proceeds through redemption to the glory of the kingdom-come.

For the purpose of this article, a full overview of the composition will not be provided, but those aspects of *Kantorium* most relevant to the central questions guiding the argument will be highlighted. Thus, attention will be paid to those musical gestures and choices of text whereby the composer conveys meaning in an exceptionally unusual or subjective manner. Subsequently, these will be interpreted in light of the seemingly "transcendent" nature of *Kantorium*, and the work will be surmised as a highly personal artistic expression that engages powerfully with the human condition of suffering.

One of the most transfixing moments of *Kantorium* is the opening recitative (Part I, mm 1-27) which impresses on the listener a sense of the darkness and emptiness of the uncreated earth, a musical effect dramatically underlined by an ominous timpani motive which takes on symbolic significance throughout the work. It might be noted that this motive on D and F is set against semitone figures in the flutes, as well as oscillating third figures in the clarinets which sets up opposing tonal centres against the timpani motive with unfulfilled expectations of resolution. In contrast to this tonal barrenness and the dark, brooding orchestral accompaniment, a soaring tenor line suggests the absoluteness and spiritual purity of the heavens.

Similarly, "Die Schöpfung" ("The creation"; Part I, mm 28-271) demonstrates Temmingh's highly imaginative deployment of musical expression, style, and syntax. A contrapuntal orchestral setting involves a series of variations over a ground bass, the six subsections symbolising the six days of creation. Musically these variations start with a single voice which is subsequently presented as a fugue-like subject. Each of the additional voices then presents a further variation on the original subject. The ground bass, above which the fugue-like materials are composed, is derived from the original subject material. This process is articulated through single pitch and chord punctuations which delineate the six separate sections of the movement,

symbolising the six days of creation as noted above. With each new “day” created, an additional single pitch is added to the previous one, thus resulting in their accumulation from one to six pitches, each pitch symbolising one day.⁸ The six accompanying chord punctuations are in the form of a dominant seventh construction, however, without its expected tonal functionality due to the spacing of its pitch elements, and the shifting tonal contexts within which they occur.

The section concludes with an esoteric G minor sonority followed by a rest — suggesting metaphorically God’s rest on the seventh day. It is important to note that the main thematic material of “Die Schöpfung” serves as a precursor to that of “Lass ihn kreuzigen” (“Crucify him”; Part II, mm 139-157) — as if to emphasise, already at its very creation and central to the kingdom of God and its coming, Christ’s suffering on the cross.

The section “Und Gott schuf den Menschen zu seinem Bilde” (“And God created humankind in his image”; Part I, mm 166-230)⁹ is an alto recitative in three sections that consists of an imitative contrapuntal dialogue between clarinet and flute with additional contrapuntal support in the string and bassoon. The melodic contours are characterised by seconds, thirds, and fourths, while an octave is used with subtle effect at the words “zum Bilde Gottes” (“in the image of God”; Part I, mm 183-186):

Figure 1: Octave figure, Part I, mm 183-186



8 The metaphor suggested in this instance is that of the centuries-old image of God as “clock-maker”.

9 All English translations are free, literal translations from the original German.

As the composer explains, the interval of the octave was his only consciously created rhetorical gesture in *Kantorium*, symbolising, as the only “pure” interval of our tonal system, the perfection of God.¹⁰ It should be noted that, while the profoundly lyrical theme of this section accentuates the difference between God and the animal kingdom, the constant counterpoint simultaneously suggests an ongoing “conversation” between God and humanity.

In “Es entbrannte aber ein Kampf im Himmel” (“It erupted however a battle in heaven”; Part I, mm 285-314), the idea of the God of wrath dramatically comes to the fore. In this instance, the battle is represented metaphorically by repeated chord clusters in the woodwinds, strings, brass, as well as in the full orchestra, together with the ominous timpani motive. Contrapuntal lines in the strings accompany the two soloists (tenor and soprano, representing Adam and Eve) in recitative with added fourth sonorities. The tritone, a classic symbol of omen in music, occurs in these solos on the words “der Grosse [*sic*] Drache” (“the great dragon”; Part I, mm 310-311) and “die alte Schlange, die da heißt: Teufel und Satan ” (“the old snake, who is called: Devil and Satan”; Part I, mm 311-317).

Figure 2: Appearance of the tritone, Part I, mm 310-311

"der Grosse Drache" Part I, mm. 310 - 311

Soprano Chorus/Solo
 Alto Chorus/Solo
 Tenor Chorus/Solo
 Bass Chorus/Solo

der Gros - se Dra - che, die al - te Schlan - ge,
 fen der Gros - se Dra - che, die al - te Schlan - ge.

The tritone also appears on the word “nackt” (“naked”; Part I, mm 350-351), preceded by descending chromatic motions in the soprano and tenor parts which are suggestive of Adam and Eve’s awareness of their sin. God’s voice calling to them in the evening

10 This information is derived from e-mail correspondence undertaken during July 2007.

timpani motive, chromatic tonal progressions, patterns of semitones and thirds, ascending whole step-half step melodic construction, descending chromatic melody lines; the use of tritones, parallel intervallic motions, especially thirds, repeated clusters, and repeated parallel chord patterns consisting either of superimposed fourths or tertian chords with added dissonances. Apart from these melodic and harmonic unifying factors, contrapuntal unity is attained throughout the work by way of fugal techniques, obligato lines, and the use of ground bass, as well as two-part counterpoint.

The interpretative impossibility of letting this music “speak for itself” was mentioned earlier. At this stage it might have become clear that it is only through an actively engaged interpretation of Temmingh’s rich musical rhetoric that it becomes possible to understand the work more fully, and to answer provisionally the key questions in this article. For not only is the composer’s musical realisation of his text unusually pictorial; it is also remarkably subjective. In this sense, it could be said that Temmingh’s musical rhetoric constructs theological perspectives in *Kantorium* that take on both a deeply personal and a profoundly ontological nature.

In this regard it is a notable feature that *Kantorium* presents a remarkably complex view of God through carefully constructed imagery of text and musical rhetoric. This is particularly evident in the orchestral repetitions and modulations, as well as in the juxtapositions of major and minor chords occurring in “Die Schöpfung” (“The creation”; Part I, mm 28-271). After the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, it is an austere and sovereign “God on high” who twice “speaks down” threateningly to Adam and Eve by way of a descending broken minor triad in the voice part (Part I, mm 366-368; 374-376). A profoundly juridical view of God is to be found in “Schwer ist das Joch meiner Sünden” (“Heavy is the yoke of my sins”; Part I, mm 435-455). The repetitive nature of this section suggests eternal existential human suffering and the intense agony of the soul burdened by the heavy yoke of sin.¹¹

11 During *Kantorium*’s recorded German premiere, the soprano singing the words “Schwer ist das Joch meiner Sünden” was emotionally so overwhelmed that she involuntarily discontinued the closing phrase in her part.

This image of God is also constructed by the musical setting of the phrase “Ich bin der Mann der Elend sehen muß durch die Rute des Grimmes Gottes” (“I am the man who must see suffering through the wrath of God”; Part I, mm 466-472). Jabbed orchestral chords affirm the idea of a sovereign “God of fury”, simultaneously foreshadowing the “suffering chords” which later appear in the section “Laß ihn kreuzigen” (“Crucify him”; Part II, mm 139-157). Yet the tenor solo of “Ich bin der Mann”, supported by ominous F and E minor sonorities that call to mind the wrath and rod of God, contains a descending chromatic motion that suggests not only intense human, but also divine suffering.

Temmingh’s choice of text and musical materials at this point indeed represents an important instance of subjective theological interpretation. While in the opening sections of the work, it was the “first” Adam who spoke, in “Ich bin der Mann” the proclamation of the “second” Adam is presented; the Messiah who is to suffer on the cross. This moment in *Kantorium* offers a perspective on the Atonement that emphasises suffering as an essential part of Christian redemption, a view closely aligned with Luther’s notion of the “theology of the cross” (McGrath 1994: 215). Thus, in a poignant way, the composer contrasts the earlier mentioned “God of wrath” with an image of a humane, suffering God.

Another gripping instance of subjective musical interpretation occurs after the question “Was soll ich predigen?” (“What should I preach?”; Part I, mm 493-495). Temmingh movingly “answers” this question with a bass solo citing from 1 Peter 1:24: “All flesh is like grass, and its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the Word of God remains forever” (Part I, mm 497-521) followed by the words of comfort: “Tröstet, tröstet, tröstet mein Volk!” (“Comfort, comfort, comfort Ye my people”; Part I, mm 525-528). Yet the “walking bass” motion in this setting holds no comfort, but instead recalls the burden of the command heard earlier: “Predige! Predige! Predige!” (“Preach! Preach! Preach!”; Part I, mm 487-492). The juxtaposed chords, a tritone apart, which occur at the final repetitions of “Tröstet”, correspond to the tritone polychords at “Predige!”.

Figure 4: 'Walking bass motion', Part I, mm 525-530

"Tröstet, tröstet, tröstet mein Volk!" Part I, mm. 525 - 530

The score consists of five staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Bass Solo. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) have lyrics: "Trös - tet, trös - tet, Trös - tet mein Volk! spricht eu - er Gott, sprichet - er Gott." The Bass Solo part has lyrics: "Trös - tet, trös - tet, Trös - tet mein Volk! spricht eu - er Gott, sprichet - er Gott." The bass line features a steady eighth-note pattern, characteristic of a 'walking bass'.

Figure 5: Tritone polychords at "Predige", Part I, mm 487-492

"Predige! Predige! Predige!" Part I, mm. 487 - 492

The score consists of five staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Bass Solo. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) have lyrics: "Pre - di - ge! Pre - di - ge! Pre - di - ge!". The Bass Solo part has lyrics: "Pre - di - ge! Pre - di - ge! Pre - di - ge!". The score includes dynamic markings: *f*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mp*, and *pp* across the vocal lines.

A remarkable instance of theological interpretation via tonal painting also occurs in the section "Das Volk, das im Finstern wandelt sieht ein großes Licht" ("The people who walk in darkness see a great light"; Part I, mm 573-659). Choir and orchestra start with the piling of layers of counterpoint, each layer consisting of a specific *ostinato* or sustained figure which lends the music a Bartokian "night music" effect and a feeling of great expectancy. The choir enters in parallel thirds with the counterpoint juxtaposed by groups of parallel fourth chords moving in seconds and punctuating important points in the text such as "sieht" and "Licht" ("see" and "light"; mm 576 and 577, respectively). Descending motions at "Immanuel" ("Emmanuel"; Part I, mm 592-595) enhance the setting of the Lord's name in a gentle, subdued manner. On the words "Uns ist ein Kind geboren" (Part I, mm 606-614; "unto us a child is born") the choir and orchestra are used in a light

fugal style that creates an almost breathless, reverent setting for the conclusion of the prophecy which is then sung by the choir with the strings in a sustained high tessitura: “Wunderbar Rat, Gott-Held, Ewig Vater, Friede Fürst” (“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”; part I, mm 638-659). In this instance, the coming of the “Mighty God” is announced worshipfully by the awe and mystery of the music, revealing the gentleness of divine Will contrasted with the human expectation that might have presumed the use of more triumphant musical forces at this point.¹²

In “Laß ihn kreuzigen” (“Crucify him”; Part II, mm 139-157), one of the most gripping sections of *Kantorium*, a contrapuntal setting is used for both the chorus and orchestra with fugal entries in the voice parts. The thematic material is based on the first Creation theme (from “Die Schöpfung”; “The Creation”, Part I, mm 28-119), with an emphasis on thirds, seconds, and ascending whole/half motions, the latter outlining tritone intervals, accompanied by crassly punctuated fourth chord figures in the brass. The intensity of this music is increased by parallel augmented sonorities with sevenths in the outer parts of both choir and orchestra on the words “Laß ihn kreuzigen” (“Crucify him”; Part II, mm 139-157). This concentration of the creation theme, while powerfully evoking the jagged and disjointed noises of the unruly crowd in its rising line and increasing brilliance of sound, simultaneously symbolises the light of Christ shining through the cross.

An extraordinary moment in the work is the utterly desolate bass recitative of “Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen” (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”; Part II, mm 401-429). Repeated seventh intervals in the double basses and celli are symbolic of Jesus carrying the sins of the world — indeed this is the interval used also in “Schwer ist das Joch meiner Sünden” (“Heavy is the yoke of my sins”; Part I, mm 457-464). The setting of “Es ist vollbracht” (“It is finished”; Part II, mm 421-425) is perhaps the most gripping moment of the entire composition. At “vollbracht”, the voice part plunges down a tritone from G to C-sharp, followed by a resounding upward leap of a ninth from C-sharp to D, accompanied

12 A notable example is the setting of these words in Händel’s *Messiah*.

by dense low register sonorities on four celli, displaying two juxtaposing tonalities symbolising darkness and light - F-sharp major on C-sharp and D major on D. The momentary triumphant vision in the music is, however, followed by an indecisive harmony, a D minor first inversion triad over C in the bass, supporting the still sounding D in the voice. The section ends with this unresolved tonal situation, the final harmony disappearing and leaving only the solitary D dissipating in the voice. This extraordinary musical depiction magically superimposes on the divine Christ the humane, suffering Christ, now descending into Hell.

Figure 6: Setting of “Es ist vollbracht”, Part II, mm 421-425

"Es ist vollbracht" Part II, mm. 421 - 425

Soprano Chorus/Solo *pp* ge!

Alto Chorus/Solo *pp* ge!

Tenor Chorus/Solo *pp* ge!

Bass Chorus/Solo *pp* ge!

Es ist vollbracht! _____ ge!

3. *Kantorium* as socio-historical reality

The above analysis attempted to demonstrate that *Kantorium* represents a remarkable subjective interpretation of the Christian faith as constructed by a powerful musical rhetoric. The work is devoid of the kind of cultural or political agenda that is so audibly (and sometimes visibly) part of contemporary local art-music compositions. And yet, in its full musical impact, it seems to present to its listener a most compelling social reality that demands the kind of deep, ever-renewed reflection which is the undying task of reputable theology. Despite the apparent “universality” and “transcendence” of the composition’s Biblical message, Temmingh seems to convey to his listener the urgency of the word of God — not as a voice from the past, but as a burning presence in our current social reality.

At various critical moments in the composition *Kantorium* most powerfully returns to the idea of intense human suffering. But in his remarkable selection and ordering of Biblical and doctrinal passages the composer also focuses on the infinite mercy of God and the coming of His kingdom, and on their implications for this world. While declaring all earthly blessings to be valueless (“Alles Fleisch ist Grass [*sic*], und alle seine Güte ist wie eine Blume”; “All flesh is like grass, and its glory like the flower of the grass”; Part I, mm 497-521), *Kantorium* does not emphasise a life of world denial, but one lived amidst the destructive powers and bondages of earthly goods, worldly cares, and human selfishness. This focus on the social order in particular comes to the fore in Temmingh’s remarkable setting of the Beatitudes — a most simple, yet ethereal call for the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.¹³

Returning at this point to one of the main questions stated at the beginning of this article, namely the relevance of the composer’s own suffering as an important motivation for writing this work, one tends to disagree with T S Eliot’s well-known dictum that “the man who suffers” must always be treated as separate from “the mind who creates” (cf Norris 1982: 165). Rather, one calls to mind Lydia Goehr’s (1998: 1) statement in her introduction to *The quest for voice*:

[m]usic means something, not just because it is a well-formed symbolic language, but because when human beings engage with this language they express something about themselves as human beings.

In the case of composition, that something, Goehr (1998: 1) contends, approaches “a subjective freedom expressed within and against objective constraints”. This viewpoint does not imply that naïve parallels are to be drawn between life and work. However, as Christopher Norris’s (1982: 165) work on Shostakovich suggests, it may serve to specify, even in a conceptually rigorous way, “how the work takes shape as an active and determinate part of the subject’s life-history”.

13 According to the composer, the setting of the Beatitudes is his most favoured part of *Kantorium*.

Judging from the closely-knit, organicist nature of *Kantorium*, as well as its spontaneous and unpremeditated process of inception, this composition may be placed within the (Romanticist) category of works of art in which, as Ruth Solie (1980: 155) expresses it, the “organism grows and takes shape by itself: the artist need only give it birth”.¹⁴ If the composer is to be believed, it came into being as the product of “natural forces coming from within”, rather than resulting to a large extent from a process of contrived and rational planning, and as such, is a work of remarkable musical genius.

Does the acknowledgement of these aspects of *Kantorium* clearly place this interpretation within Tomlinson's realm of pseudo-knowledge that does not only fetishize the work, but is also heavily invested in “internalism”, “aestheticism”, “formalism”, “transcendentalism”, and “westernism”; withdrawing us from “the real”, and from “the weight of history” (cf Kramer 2006: 25-6) — also from that of South Africa's recent past?

David Granger (2003: 50) observes that “expressive meaning grows out of a whole situational transformation”, by which may be understood that its content is ultimately informed by the various modalities of larger systems of meaning within which, in this case, not only the composer, but also the critic or listener, thinks, feels, and acts. Such an interpretative milieu is suggestive of a construction of meaning that constantly alters in response to changing situational contexts of aesthetic experience. Granger (2003: 56) cites the thought of John Dewey (1934: 113) when, within this context, he sketches an ideal of organic unity that is “flexible, open-ended, and encouraging its own reconstruction”; “[...] an organicism that actively gestures toward the possible from traces of the previously deferred”.

As far as the debate between Kramer and Tomlinson is concerned, it is important to note Kramer's (2006: 46) observation that Tomlinson's critique of current music criticism:

14 Solie (1980: 155) cites the examples of Jean-Paul Richter and William Blake who testified to the fact that they wrote without premeditation as if from immediate dictation, sometimes even against their will.

cannot merely be written of as a caricature, nor his ethnographic program as a blown-up special interest. On the contrary, the program reflects the pressing need to find the apparent collapse of modernism's cognitive paradigms enabling rather than paralyzing.

Kramer (2006: 47) continues by stating that Tomlinson objects to his proposal “that we learn to read as inscribed within the immediacy-effects of music itself the kind of mediating structures usually positioned outside music under the rubric of context”. In fact, Tomlinson asks for the reverse, namely “the dispersal into context of what we usually grasp as the immediacy of music” (Kramer 2006: 47).

One understands this proposition differently from Kramer (2006: 47) whose interpretation of Tomlinson is that:

[w]hat he wants, if we take him at his word, is music under erasure: a music so decentered, so bought out or bought off by the entrepreneurial historian's 'wealthy [...] concatenation of past traces' [...] that we can no longer claim to know it, or claim it as ours to know.

Kramer (2006: 47) thus believes that Tomlinson's terms of understanding, as translated into terms of listening, imply that “we gave up a listening with the kind of deep engagement, the heightened perception and sense of identification, that both grounds and impels criticism” — and therefore arrive at “a musicology without music”.

Contrary to Kramer (2006: 52), one believes that Tomlinson's ethnographic programme does not preclude the “close reading” of music, but simply approaches this task from a different interpretative angle.¹⁵ The irony in this instance is that, in essence, Kramer (2006: 52) finds Tomlinson's version of musical ethnography to be “positivistic”, while he himself is, to a considerable degree, bound by the “empiricist” claim that seems to be implied in all responsible

15 Clear examples are to be found, for instance, in Tomlinson's *Metaphysical song: an essay on opera* (1999), that offers, as Roger Parker states in a cover blurb, “an ‘alternative story’ of the history of opera, one addressing not the conventional channels of musical/generic development, but something more basic to the way opera is received by its listeners: a view that places at the forefront the genre's various imaginings of the human subject”. In addition, Tomlinson's own rendering of vocal material during his presentation of academic papers directly contradicts any notion that he is an advocate of “a musicology without music”.

close reading of music. And yet both authors strive towards a more democratic practice of musicology; a practice that acknowledges the deeply cultural nature of music. In both cases, the authors strive to understand music “in context” (cf Kramer 2006: 51).

The above analysis of *Kantorium* attempted to show that a reading of the so-called “internalist”, “aestheticist”, “formalist” and “transcendentalist” dimensions of the work suggested a framework for understanding it as a deeply subjective musical statement. This is emphasised once more in the last two sections of the work, where a differentiation between personal and collective faith becomes evident. While first narrating personal resurrection and praise, the words “Ich bin der Anfang und das Ende [...] der Erste und der Letzte, das A und das O” (“I am the Beginning and the End [...] the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega”; Part II, mm 596-620) now proclaim that the whole of creation forms part of the new world. The musical reference to “Und Gott schuf [...]” (“And God created [...]”; Part I, mm 175ff) in a profoundly moving way points to the fact that this revelation is the fulfilment of creation, which lends the message of *Kantorium* a deeply eschatological dimension.

The final section, “Selig sind die Toten” (“Blessed are the dead”; Part II, mm 686-759) features continuous unison lines with octave doublings in the chorus, as is also the case in “Tröstet” (“Comfort”; Part I, mm 525ff), symbolising the perfection of God. In this section, the pervasive use of this interval, together with constantly fluctuating tonal motions, suggests the “world without end”, while the C major conclusion on “Amen” confirms the absence of any shadow, suspicion, or doubt. And yet, the C minor ending of the previous section (Part II, m 685) once more reminds one that this is a victory that has come about through pain.

When Lawrence Kramer (2006: 54) alludes to the thought of Derrida in stating that “(t)here is no musical utterance without an interlocutor; there is no context without a text”, he also reminds one that, similarly, “there is no outside of the text” and “no inside the text, either”. Perhaps it is in this respect that his thought on music criticism differs most from that of Tomlinson in the above-mentioned debate. For Tomlinson’s views on the dangers of an appropriative, dominating

“new” musicology are irrevocably tied to an overly negative, one-sided understanding of the idea of unity as a fetishised and repressively rigid ideal which stifles all creativity and formal experiment (cf Shusterman 1992: 63) — a “context” suppressing its “text”, so to speak. Through both artistic invention and a certain degree of traditionalism, Temmingh’s *Kantorium* serves as a living example of an artistic context within which a considerably more redemptive view on organicism is suggested. Drawing on the thought of John Dewey, Richard Shusterman (1999: 32-3) sketches the theoretical outlines for such a framework as follows:

[...] the unity of aesthetic experience [...] is a developing process which, in culmination, deconstructively dissolves into the flow of consequent experience, pushing us forward into the unknown and toward the challenge of fashioning new aesthetic experience, a new moving and momentary unity from the debris and resistance of past experience and present environing factors [...] It is as much a stimulating disturbance toward the new as an achieved ordering of the old.

This understanding of organic unity culminates, as Granger (2003: 57) points out, not in any vertical movement, that is, in:

[...] a transcendence to a higher level of being through a tighter and more comprehensive unity. It is instead distinctively horizontal — a move toward an ever-expanding horizon of meaning and value. Nor should the consummatory unity of this experience ever be considered a place of final rest. Just as self and world inevitably age and change over the months and years, so too must the particulars of the equilibrium temporarily attained between them.

A reading of *Kantorium* within such an expansive interpretative context shows the hermeneutic potential of metaphor, symbol and narrative. In relation to religious texts, McGrath (1994: 138) states that such figurative constructs can never be reduced to definitive statements, and that, perhaps, their most meaningful feature for Christian theology is their open-ended character. Thus, even centuries-old metaphors such as “God as Creator” or “God as Father” cannot be reduced to a set of precise statements about God, valid for every place and every time; as McGrath (1994: 138) argues, it is:

[...] meant to be suggestive, allowing future readers and interpreters to find new meanings within it. [...] It is an invitation to

discover further levels of meaning, which others may have overlooked or forgotten.¹⁶

Again, such “fluidity” of meaning is of significance for a musical reading of *Kantorium*. As Paul Ricoeur (1981: 158) and Umberto Eco (1983) contend, interpretative contexts are not wholly contingent fields of force, arbitrarily determining the construction of meaning. Rather, a text, in principle, always projects two subject positions, namely that of the author and that of the reader. The actions of the author, however, presuppose those of the reader, and *vice versa*, so that the identity of the author is not only determined by his/her original intentions, but also generated by the imaginary world of the text, which appeals to the interpretative sensibilities and susceptibilities of the reader. Similarly, the author incorporates in the text certain meanings that influence subsequent realisations of the text in new contexts, distanced from those of the work’s inception, and from those of its first readers. In his seminal essay “The poetics of the open work”, Umberto Eco (1983: 47-66), for instance, argues that a work of art is a complete and “closed” organic whole, at the same time constituting an open product susceptible to countless different readings. In this regard, Eco views every reception of a work of art as both an “interpretation” and a “performance”, where the idea of creative speculation is retained. This “openness” of subjective reading implies a very different position on the part of the reader than the idea of rigid and fetishised “mastery” as suggested in Tomlinson’s critique (cf Kramer 2006: 54) — indeed, it is suggestive of an ever creative conjoining of both “internal” and “external” discourses through which a speculative interpretative framework may always be construed anew.

16 Note that the work of Paul Ricoeur, and in particular *Figuring the sacred: religion, narrative and imagination* (1995), focuses on the hermeneutic power of figurative constructs in religious discourse. In emphasising the key role of the figurative in the understanding and articulation of faith, Ricoeur (1995: 8) shows that, in essence, faith is “a living out of the figures of hope unleashed by the imagination”. For Ricoeur, poetic language is not removed from everyday reality; it is not a language unto itself, divorced from any referential function, but rather its power of reference is the power to set forth novel ontologies that “disorientate” in order to “reorientate” the reader by way of an ever-expanding vision of God’s revelation, in the world, of reality and of self.

In Temmingh's *Kantorium* the composer richly draws on the rhetorical and stylistic dimensions of music to construct subjectively-laden religious figures. Within this personalised context, the reading highlighted a certain fascination with the posture of suffering.¹⁷ The extraordinary force of the music, however, suggests to the listener not only the catastrophe of humanity, but also highlights its salvation through the history of God in Christ.¹⁸ Haga (1996: 64) explains that the effect of Christian salvation and justification, the essence of which is the personal benefit from Christ, is nowhere displayed more obviously than in the way his "story" is told. As he explains:

[s]tory does not carry anything material, but transmits and forms a living personal relationship by recollecting and narrating historical events and persons. By preaching and the sacraments *ecclesia narrans* calls to mind the One who died for us on the cross and was resurrected, and so creates new relationships to Christ as the *nova oboedientia* of gratitude for what has been accomplished (Haga 1996: 65).¹⁹

With reference to the relevance of *Kantorium* to post-apartheid South Africa, one considers the thought of Baxandall (1985: 40-1) who observes that "art and society are analytical concepts from two different kinds of categorisation of human experience [...] unhomologous systematic constructions put upon interpenetrating subject-

17 This alludes to Johann Visagie's (1990: 10) observation in religious discourse of a spectrum of archetypal figures involving an assortment of "postures" relating to events typical of the human experience, such as fighting, journeying, working, loving, playing, and so on. These postures, although representing everyday occurrences in the lives of people, may be regarded as existential actions symbolising repetitive patterns of the human condition and, in this sense, function as what Visagie (1990: 10) calls "root metaphors".

18 Schoeman (2007: 24) configures the work of Walter Benjamin, Anselm Kiefer and William Kentridge in and as a melancholy constellation. In this instance constellation suggests the melancholy imagining of history as a catastrophe. He observes that this constellation is "mobile" in that, while traditionally signifying a state of *acedia* or immobility, its historical image is dialectical, signifying both black bile and inspiration.

19 Note that for Ricoeur (1981: 235), metaphors, in themselves, are "texts", "stories", or "narratives" which propose and project a "world", a possible way of seeing the nature and value of human being and identity.

matters". Consequently he suggests that any attempt to relate the two constructs must first "modify one of the terms till it matches the other, but keeping note of what modification has been necessary since this is a necessary part of one's information" (Baxandral 1985: 40-1).

In terms of the above argument, and drawing in particular on the thought of Ricoeur (1995 & 1981), it may be stated that the problem of the relationship between art and material historical events may most meaningfully be addressed by interpreting figurative means such as symbol, metaphor, narrative, or allegory.²⁰ With regard to a Biblical context as constructed in *Kantorium*, one may consider once again the thought of Haga (1996: 65-6) who contends that "the story of Christ binds and relates the hearer to Christ, and it shows the reality of liberty in Christ the Liberator, which frees the hearer from every power of evil, sin and death. Far more than that, it invites the hearer not only to be an audience to this story, but also to be a participating actor/actress in this history of freedom. The hearer of the *proto-story* comes to be a storyteller and then a performer of its post-stories":

All of this process from *pre-stories* through *proto-story* to *post-stories* comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, who brings the real presence of Christ through the word of God. Where spirit and word exists, the *ecclesia narrans* appears, which produces new being in Christ. The apostolic tradition of the church should be considered as the first participant in this narrating act of the Holy Spirit, who tells the *proto-story* successively. This fundamental life-story in the narrating church is nothing more than the fruits of inclusive, participating and ontological sanctification, the result of exclusive, substitutionary and juridical justification.

- 20 Ricoeur explicitly and systematically demonstrated that hermeneutics could offer a philosophical reflection on both being and understanding, as well as a methodological reflection on the nature and tasks of interpretation in social enquiry (cf Thompson 1990: 278). With regard to the role of the figurative, note also that, for Ricoeur (1981: 167), the explanation of metaphor can serve as a paradigm for the explanation of a text. Thus, for Ricoeur, metaphor is "a work in miniature". At the same time, a work of art may be regarded as a sustained or extended metaphor. Ricoeur (1978: 171) believes that metaphors work by "confusing the established logical boundaries for the sake of detecting new similarities which previous categorization prevented our noticing". Thus, Ricoeur (1978: 52) argues, metaphors do not merely "repackage" meaning, but create it, opening new possibilities for seeing and categorising the real.

In conclusion it may be stated that, with regard to its seemingly paradoxical nature, *Kantorium* itself seems to deconstructively widen possible restrictive limitations of its unity by revealing more complex forms of its coherence in a remarkable way. As such, the work is neither “transcendent” nor removed from everyday life — least of all from Roelof Temmingh’s own broken, exuberant life. Deeply committed to principles of unity, *Kantorium* is also a profound acknowledgement of individuality, and of “difference”, not only in aesthetics, but also in ontology. In this respect, the work rightfully claims a place within the traditional Reformed concept of the *ecclesia narrans*, or “story-telling church” (cf Haga 1995: 64). And, as has already become evident, it has also rightfully claimed a place within the history of South African art music, a history involuntarily shaped by the shadows of this country’s painful past.

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