

## LIBRETTO OF MAURICIO KAGEL'S *SANKT-BACH-PASSION*: BETWEEN TRADITION AND AVANT-GARDE

LAURENȚIU BELDEAN<sup>1</sup>, MAŁGORZATA LISECKA<sup>2</sup>,  
CIPRIAN ȚUȚU<sup>3</sup>

**SUMMARY.** The article contains an analysis of the libretto of Mauricio Kagel's work, *Sankt-Bach-Passion*. Analysis is based on the tools of the classical text theory. Using these tools, the authors of the article embed Kagel's postmodern work in the tradition of passion genre, tracing the references between the structure of the traditional passion, in line with the canons set by Johann Sebastian Bach, and the work of the Argentine composer. The article also shows the mechanisms that work to cohere the work at the level of its text and traces the way in which the text of *Sankt-Bach-Passion* enters into a dialogue with tradition, creating at the same time an entirely new and avant-garde piece of art.

**Keywords:** Mauricio Kagel, *Sankt-Bach-Passion*, avant-garde music, passion, narrative

### Introduction remarks

The subject of the research reflection in this article is Mauricio Kagel's *Sankt-Bach-Passion*. However, the tools that are to be used in this analysis don't come from the workshop of a musicologist, but from that of a theoretician of text. We could add here: a theoretician of literary text, if we agree with the assumption formulated as follows by Polish researcher and philosopher, Krzysztof Lipka, in the introduction to his collection of sketches *Słyszalny krajobraz*:

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Transilvania University of Braşov, Braşov, Romania. Email: laurentiubeldeanu@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> PhD, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland. Email: malgorzata.lisecka@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> PhD, Transilvania University of Braşov, Braşov, Romania. Email: tutuciprian@yahoo.com



Let us assume that for people who study art, who study music, it is obvious that the moment of combining music with text is tantamount to recognizing the literary nature of this text and that this undoubtedly applies to all vocal music. Whether it is a Gregorian chant, or a love madrigal, an operetta or a song composed to the words of a Dadaist, in the understanding of researchers of syncretic art, a text will always belong to literature, regardless of its literary level, which is undoubtedly very different. Let us assume then that this type of text, which, if separated from music we wouldn't call literature when it is combined with music, is nevertheless literature, because in this combination it fulfils literary functions<sup>4</sup>.

We therefore wish to put forward the thesis that the text of *Sankt-Bach-Passion*, as an element co-constituting a vocal-instrumental musical work, should be treated in research analysis as if it were a literary text. A literary text – that means, a symbolic, mimetic presentation structure, homologous to certain elements of non-fictional reality<sup>5</sup>, reflecting in itself the author's vision of the world or at least some of its aspects. The assumption of the literary nature of the text also assumes the possibility of situating it within three types: lyrical, epic or dramatic (although the type itself is not yet a sufficiently strong determinant of literary nature) and including it in the repertoire of genres – “set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning”<sup>6</sup>. The assumption of the literariness of a text finally makes it possible, and sometimes even necessary, to read and interpret it in relation to other cultural texts by finding such of its elements that would function as “exponents of intertextuality” in it<sup>7</sup>.

We want to understand the ambiguous and multi-functional concept of text here in accordance with Yuri Lotman's interpretation, namely as a “mechanism constituting the system of heterogenous semiotic spaces in whose continuum the message [...] circulates [...]. When a text interacts with a heterogenous consciousness, new meanings are generated”<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lipka, Krzysztof. *Słyszalny krajobraz. Szkice o powiązaniach muzyki i literatury od Abélarda do Rilkego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Stout, John. *Semiotic Poetics of the Prague School* in Makaryk, Irena (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993 (pp.179-189), pp. 186-187.

<sup>6</sup> Frow, John. *Genre: The New Critical Idiom*. NY: Routledge, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Godard, Barbara. *Intertextuality* in Makaryk, I. 1993. Op. cit. (pp. 568-571), p. 569.

<sup>8</sup> Lotman, Yuri. *The Text within the Text* in *PMLA*, transl. Leo Jerry; Mandelker, Amy, Vol 109(3), 1994 (pp. 377-384), pp. 377-378.

## **Collage as a guiding compositional principle of *Sankt-Bach-Passion***

Kagel's *Sankt-Bach-Passion* seems to be a particularly interesting subject of research, precisely for text theory, because of its specific, "collage" construction. This "collage-like" nature is an element that connects both dimensions of the work's poetics: literary and musical. From a literary – textual perspective – it seems to be the most striking feature of the work. The second important aspect is the extensive and multifaceted intertextual references present in the composition. This aspect results precisely from the aforementioned "collage-like" nature, or more precisely, from the fact that the text is not only based on or refers to fragments of texts of Protestant chorales, cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach or original documents certifying various events from the composer's life – but that it is simply made from them almost entirely.

The recipient of *Sankt-Bach-Passion* is thus seemingly faced with an incoherent text, and thus seemingly impossible to subordinate to one, overarching concept of reading. However, the interpreter's task is precisely to find in the structure of the work the mechanisms that give it coherence; the rules for combining fragments of various texts into another one, which rules make it possible for some holistic meaning to be present in a work constructed in this way.

## ***Sankt-Bach-Passion's* text towards the traditional features of the passion genre**

The text of *Sankt-Bach-Passion* is based, as already mentioned, on the texts of: firstly, documents, secondly, chorale songs (very freely paraphrased), and thirdly, poetic fragments of Bach's cantatas and passions. This circumstance determines – in the literary sense – the genre of the work, which combines epic narration with lyrical monologue, and at times also with dramatized dialogue. However, a similar genre syncretism results to a large extent also from the fact that, not so much in the genre sense, but rather in the formal sense, the work refers to passion, in its cantata-oratorio variety (the lasting monument of which was created by Bach), and, if we are to believe the title, it is a passion<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> The title of a literary work may indeed indicate its genre affiliation, but in the case of Kagel's work the concept of passion functions rather as an element of musical-literary allusion, only to a certain extent defining the genre of the work.

The category of passion defines not only the subject matter of Kagel's work, but also a certain general structural scheme to which it's subordinated. The basic axis of this scheme remains the narrative. In the "classical" passion, it is, as we know, the story of Christ's suffering and His death on the cross. Regardless of the version of the Gospel, in this passion narrative there are clear "units" according to which the action develops – using Roland Barthes' term, they could be called the main functions or cores of the story<sup>10</sup> – and these points always remain unchanged. The lyrical parts of the passion – arias – constitute a kind of retardation element of this narrative, they suspend the course of action, direct the listener's attention to the sphere of the inner experiences and feelings of the speaking (singing) subject. From the point of view of the coherence of the text, a certain disruption appears in the structural scheme of the passion, because there is no single established sender here: the narrator (evangelist) appears alternately with the lyrical subject. Bach's cantata-oratorio passion, probably due to the memory of its sources, is also partly dramatized, but it should be noted that this dramatization is largely apparent<sup>11</sup>: there is simply one narrative sequence, in which the dialogue parts – as in oral practice – are given to be read to individual people, as if "written out" for voices. However, the dramatic nature of the passion is also influenced by the presence of the choir, both in its function as *turba* and commenting on or explaining the Gospel meaning with the help of chorale verses.

Kagel remains faithful to the discussed structural scheme to some extent, or it would be more accurate to say that the structure of his work allusively refers to the formula of Bach's passion. However, we do not mean passion as a specific, one of Bach's two works, but passion as a certain category, a type of verbal and musical statement, a way of explaining meaning, deeply rooted in Protestant spirituality.

In terms of vocal cast (which will be of particular interest to us in the further analysis), *Sankt-Bach-Passion* is intended for two choirs (one children's, the other mixed) and soloists: mezzo-soprano, tenor and baritone, as well as a spoken voice (*Sprecher*). This vocal cast of the work exhausts the repertoire of intratextual senders: similarly to Bach's passions, some of the parts are prescribed here to "storytellers" (tenor, mezzo-soprano, *Sprecher*, who should probably be identified with Bach himself), and some to "commentators" (baritone, mezzo-soprano, tenor, choirs). Similar to the passions, the core of

---

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, Roland. *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative in New Literary History*, Vol. 6(2), 1975 (pp. 237-272), p. 244.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Mukařovský calls this phenomenon "dialogicality potentially contained in the monologue". Cf. Mukařovský, J. *Dialog a monolog in Listy filologické / Folia philologica*, Vol. 67(3/4), 1940 (pp. 139-160).

the text is determined by the narrative – a story about life and death, or rather about life that inevitably leads to death.

Unlike in the classical passion stories, where the narrative spotlight is focused on a certain fragment of life, a fragment of the biography of Jesus Christ considered to be the most important – the culmination of His earthly existence, from the moment of His capture in the Garden of Gethsemane to His death and burial – in Kagel's text the story covers Bach's entire life, from birth (and even earlier: from the beginning of his family's existence) until his death.

### **Biographical elements and their presence in the structure of *Sankt-Bach-Passion's* text**

The main fragment of the story is set in the tenor part, who performs as an evangelist, in the scheme of passion corresponding to the narrator. His speech is divided into fourteen sequences. They can be distinguished thanks to the composer's division into numbers, which in Kagel's work constitutes a clear, graphically recorded signal of text delimitation; and also, thanks to lyrical-dramatic fragments, incrusting this continuous narrative. It constitutes – one might say – a kind of "text within a text", with its own framework. In this case, the framework is particularly expressive and legible, since the whole story has a fairly conventional, and to some extent even formulaic<sup>12</sup>, structure, as it is subject to the schemes that are obligatory in biographical statements. The narrative therefore opens with a phrase introducing the protagonist, containing his most general characterization: "Johann Sebastian Bach belonged to the kind of people whose love and talent for music seemed to be combined with innate abilities common among the members of his family"<sup>13</sup>. This sentence is taken from the obituary of Johannes S. Bach, written by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, and thus indeed from a separate and independent text, now integrated into a higher meaningful

---

<sup>12</sup> Formulaicity is understood here in a broad sense, as a feature of the text in which certain fixed expressions, established and stereotyped utterance units systematically appear. Cf. eg. Kent, Thomas. *Toward a Holistic Theory of Genre* in idem, *Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Perception in the Study of Narrative Texts*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986 (pp. 15-33), pp. 20-25.

<sup>13</sup> „Johann Sebastian Bach gehöret zu einem Geslechte welchem Liebe und Geschicklichkeit zur Musik, gleichsam als ein allgemeines Geschenk, für alle seine Mitglieder, von der Natur mitgetheilet zu seyn scheinen“.

All quotes are from the text of *Sankt-Bach-Passion* by Mauricio Kagel (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1981-1985). Translations of all German-language texts cited in the article – unless otherwise stated – come from the authors. The figures in round brackets after the quotes indicate the numbers of the piece.

structure. The final frame of the story is of particular importance, because it is also the frame that closes the entire piece: “A few weeks later he was struck by a stroke combined with a high fever and on July 28, 1750, at a quarter to nine in the evening, he left, dismissed from service [...]” (33)<sup>14</sup>. It will be necessary to return to the meaning of these words, but for now we want to draw attention to the fact that these two frames are not completely parallel to each other, they do not fit together, apart from the fact that both fulfil the same basic task – to separate the sign from the non-sign. The final frame, however, as already mentioned, must be considered not only as a phrase summarizing the act of narration itself, that is, a sentence talking about the circumstances of the death of the main character (since the action stretches between birth and death), but above all as a solemn *finale* of the entire passion. Much more solemn in the space of the text – let us add – than in the space of the music, which realizes the meanings of this text. We can therefore at least assume that this final phrase concentrates meanings that are very important for the final interpretation of the entire work. The internal frame, which opens the narration, doesn’t have such a semantic charge.

Moreover, apart from the aforementioned function of internal delimitation of the text, the number thirty-three may be (doesn’t have to be though<sup>15</sup>) also a reference to the age at which Christ lived and thus once again indicate the connection of the entire work with the passion theme.

However, we are primarily interested in other “delimiters”, which have much deeper connections with the text. It should be noted that individual sections of the narrative put into the mouth of Kagel’s quasi-evangelist focus point-by-point on single episodes from Bach’s life, which, as we know, are quite commonly divided into periods according to the individual centers in which the composer used to work. Thus, the subsequent parts of the text distinguished in the narrative concern, respectively:

1. Bach’s genealogy;
2. Bach’s birth;
3. Bach’s childhood spent with his brother in Ohrdruff (at this point the narrator’s attention focuses on the story of the book of sheet music that little Bach’s brother hid from the boy and which he furtively copied out at night);

---

<sup>14</sup> „Wenige Wochen später, wurde er von einem Schlagflusse überfallen; auf diesen erfolgte ein hitziges Fieber, an welchem er, am 28. Julius 1750, des Abends nach einem Viertel auf neun Uhr, im sechs und sechzigsten Jahre seines Alters, Auf den Verdienst seines Erlösers [...]”.

<sup>15</sup> Helmut Loos is of the opinion that such an allusion doesn’t take place in this case. Loos, H. “*Sankt-Bach-Passion*” von Mauricio Kagel. Auch ein musikalisches Theater in Kuret, Primož (ed.), *Musical Theatre – yesterday, today, tomorrow. The 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Composer Daniko Svara*. Ljubljana: Slovenski Glasbeni Dnevi, 2002 (pp. 132-140).

4. Bach's studies in the choir in Lüneburg;
5. Bach's stay in Hamburg and then in Arnstadt;
6. the trip to Lübeck and the composer's arbitrarily extended leave (at this point the narrative "opens" to a dramatized scene played out between Bach and his superiors, which in turn becomes a pretext for a digression on the tonal experiments run by Bach on the chorale material);
7. the first marriage (this fragment of the story has a different narrator – a mezzo-soprano);
8. Bach's stay in Weimar;
9. the ultimately unresolved duel with Marchand (a large fragment of the story is devoted to this story);
10. Bach's resignation from service in Weimar, ending with his arrest;
11. the death of composer's first wife and his second marriage (a fragment of the narrative is again set in the mezzo-soprano part);
12. the employment in Leipzig;
13. composer's visit to Berlin;
14. Bach's loss of sight;
15. the composer's death.

### **Historical sources as the textual material of *Sankt-Bach-Passion***

In addition to paraphrasing quotations from chorales and cantatas, free poetic fragments and elements based mainly on the repetition of single words or even syllables and sounds, the other types of texts also appear in this narrative, namely excerpts from documents and statements put into the mouth of Bach himself (*Sprecher*).

These last two types of texts have a specific function in *Sankt-Bach-Passion*. They do not belong to the actual narrative, and this is emphasized in two ways. First, through the change of speaker in the text, with the moment of this change being "opaque" in the course of the story – so that the listener (reader) clearly feels this transition.

TENOR: City Archives in Weimar, document 8995, folio 78 verso (fair copy):

BARITON: On November 6, 1717, the former concertmaster and court organist in Weimar, Bach, was placed in court custody because of his stubbornness and attempts to force his resignation, and then, on December 2, dismissed in disgrace from the prince's service by the court secretary Theodor Benedict Bormann, and simultaneously released from custody. (24)<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> „TENOR: Staatsarchiv Weimar, Dokument 8995, folio 78 verso (Reinschrift): BARITON: Am 6. November 1717 ist der bisherige Concert-Meister und Hof-Organist in Weymar Bach,

The entire narrative, despite being a citation, incorporated into the work in accordance with the poetics of collage, doesn't contain any elements that would clearly indicate to the recipient that it's a citation. Information about the source of the text borrowed from the obituary is contained outside the proper text, in the footnotes meticulously prepared by Kagel. In the fragment quoted above, the narrative situation is completely different: within the frame of the "latent" citation, there is another, internal "explicit" citation – announced, "titled" as it were, by the commentary of the main narrator introducing it. This transition in the text, a kind of "switch" between citations, we could describe, following Janusz Sławiński, as "hard initiated"<sup>17</sup>, while the second method that Kagel uses to include certain secondary meanings in the main thread of the story (changing the narration from third to first person) we would call "soft initiated".

TENOR: Extension of leave due to travel to Lübeck. Negligence in organist's service. On 21 February 1706 the organist of the New Church, Bach, will be questioned, where did he go for so long and from whom did he receive leave?

SPRECHER: I went to Lübeck to achieve this and that in my art, but before that I begged permission from the superintendent<sup>18</sup>.

The text of the document, serving here as a kind of carrier of narrative content, an element developing the action and informing the reader about the further fate of the hero, smoothly develops into a dialogue: to the rhetorical question contained in the official act we receive a "constructed" answer, an alleged answer from Bach himself. This uncomplicated montage effortlessly transfers the recipient from continuous narration to a dramatic, carefully directed scene, which – despite already heading towards another "delimiting" fragment – still in some way belongs to the proper story, connects with it, develops its specific thread, shown incipiently in the basic narrative. It is in this phenomenon that we see the "indirectness" of the functions fulfilled by

---

wegen seiner Halßstarrigen Bezeügung und zu erzwingenden Dimission auf der Landrich er-Stube arrêtiret und endlich den 2. December darauf mit angezeigter Ungnade, Ihme die Entlassung aus den Diensten des Herzogs durch den Hofsecretär Theodor Benedikt Bormann angedeütet, und zugleich des Arrests befreyet worden".

<sup>17</sup> Sławiński uses this phrase to describe a certain way of weaving description into a story. Cf. Sławiński, Janusz. *O opisie in Teksty*, No. 1, 1981 (pp. 119-138), pp. 125-126.

<sup>18</sup> „TENOR: Urlaubsüberschreitung bei der Reise nach Lübeck. Nachlässigkeiten im Organisten dienst. Am 21. Februar 1706 wird der Organist in der Neuen Kirchen Bach vernommen, wo er unlängst solange geweßen, un bey wem er dessen Verlaub genommen? SPRECHER: Bin zu Lübeck geweßen, um daselbst ein und anderes in meiner Kunst zu begreifen, habe aber zu vorher von em Herrn Superintendenten Verlaubnüß gebethen".



the two types of statements mentioned above – while not belonging to the basic narrative stream, they also don't belong to those fragments of the text that build on the story, stop its course and, by separating the plot episodes, at the same time comment on them.

### **The other narrative mechanisms in *Sankt-Bach-Passion***

In opposition to the procedures of delimiting the narrative, “cutting it up” and fragmenting its superimposed basic meaning, there are some mechanisms that make it coherent. These include “narrative mentions”, as Maria Jasińska calls them<sup>19</sup>, which define the position of the speaking subject towards his own statement. However, they are very few in *Sankt-Bach-Passion*. The most expressive one appears at the beginning of the story in the phrase “But let us return to our Johann Sebastian Bach” (5)<sup>20</sup>, which opens the second narrative sequence, after the paraphrase of the chorale *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig* [“Ah how fleeting, ah how insubstantial”]<sup>21</sup>.

The construction principle of collage – building a whole from separate and fragmentary meanings and significances – in the case of Kagel's work creates an impression of surprising coherence, at least on the textual level. It is a brilliantly thought-out collage. Individual episodes of the narrative are suspended in moments of particular “tensions”, breakthrough or even dramatic events that arouse some emotions, or in any case, those that allow for the descriptive development of a specific affective thread at a given moment of the story, while – similarly to baroque rhetoric – each musical and verbal utterance, constituting a commentary on the narrative, its intermission, is subordinated to one, overriding affect. The first narrative sequence (characterizing several of Bach's ancestors) ends with the following phrase: “Johann Bernhard Bach (...), who in 1749 moved into eternity” (3)<sup>22</sup>. After this phrase, there is a smooth transition to the last (shortened) stanza of the chorale *Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig* – a text that speaks of the transience and impermanence of the world, to which the author contrasts the eternal duration of God. The sentence of the story concerning one of the deceased Bach family (death is periphrastically and euphemistically described here as “moving into eternity”) constructs or rather evokes the appropriate emotional climate for evoking this Protestant song. Its words bring recipient to the

---

<sup>19</sup> Jasińska, Maria. *Narrator w powieści (zarys problematyki badań)* in Miodońska-Brookes, Ewa et al. (eds.), *Genologia polska*. Warszawa: Księgarnia PWN, 1983, p. 205.

<sup>20</sup> „Kehren wir zu unserem Johann Sebastian zurück”.

<sup>21</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, [https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale\\_122-Eng3.htm](https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale_122-Eng3.htm) [last access: 13.09.2024].

<sup>22</sup> „Johann Bernhard Bach [...] welcher 1749 in die Ewigkeit gegangen ist”.

Baroque idea of *vanitas*, which dominated the themes of Western European art in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>. Just as in the first narrative sequence, death, in the second – birth (here, of course, Bach’s birth) becomes the basis for including in the space of the piece the joyful chorale from the Christmas cantata *Das neugebor’ne Kindelein* (5) [“The newborn little child”]<sup>24</sup>. In the next episode, such a semantic center is the concept of music (sound), when talking about the boys’ voices in the choir in Lüneburg (10), and in one of the next (19) – the concept of guilt. Surprisingly, in the first case the point of arrival of the narrative is not only the relevant cantata by Bach *O angenehme Melodie* [“O sweet melody”]<sup>25</sup>, but also the motive of Orpheus – the mythical singer, personifying the affective power of music – in a highly conventional setting:

As soon as your music fills the space,  
The mountains jump and the wild animals dance  
And the branches of the trees must bend. (12)<sup>26</sup>

In the second case, the narrative semantics recall the text from the Matthew Passion (“O dearest Jesus, what law hast thou broken?”<sup>27</sup>), and in a further free-flowing association – words reminiscent of the Easter liturgy: “But how wondrous is this punishment!”<sup>28</sup>. The story of Bach’s imprisonment after his resignation from Weimar is commented on by the choir with a phrase from the chorale *O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid* [“O darkest woe”]<sup>29</sup>, but this phrase doesn’t imply any further meaning, which results from the words of the song about Christ’s death and His burial. An analogous process occurs in the further text, where Kagel provides a commentary on Bach’s disability

---

<sup>23</sup> See eg. Benthem, Claudia. *Vanitas, vanitatum, et omnia vanitas: The Baroque Transience Topos and Its Structural Relation to Trauma* in Tatlock, Lynne (ed.), *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*. Leiden: Brill, 2010 (pp. 51-69).

<sup>24</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV122-Eng10.htm> [last access: 13.09.2024].

<sup>25</sup> See: Bach Cantatas Website, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/BWV210a.htm> [last access: 13.09.2024].

<sup>26</sup> „Sobald dein Ton die Luft erfüllt, / So hüpfen die Berge, so tanzet das Wild, / So müssen sich die Zweige biegen“.

<sup>27</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, [https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale159-Eng3.htm#google\\_vignette](https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale159-Eng3.htm#google_vignette) [last access: 13.09.2024]. „Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen“.

<sup>28</sup> Quotation after: Vocal Music Instrumentation Index, <https://www.vonii.org/h-786-matthaeus-passion/22-wie-wunderbarlich-ist-doch-diese-strafe> [last access: 13.09.2024]. „Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe!“.

<sup>29</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, [https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale404-Eng3.htm#google\\_vignette](https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale404-Eng3.htm#google_vignette) [last access: 13.09.2024].

with the chorale *Die Nacht ist kommen* ["Night's darkness fallet"]<sup>30</sup> – a song of those going to bed (31-32). In Bach's interpretation, the request addressed to God for a peaceful night and the care that the Almighty is to provide for man while he rests can also be interpreted as a prayer for a good death and care during the transition from this world to eternal peace. However, Kagel uses only one common aspect of the denotation of the concepts of 'blindness' and 'night' – namely 'darkness'. When speaking about the composer's illness and death, the subject of reference are the words "O Head full of blood and wounds, / full of pain and full of derision" (33)<sup>31</sup> – so that the image of the bleeding head of Christ can be superimposed in the recipient's mind on the image of suffering Bach.

Taken out of their proper context, the words no longer bear witness to the same truth they originally served. It seems that Kagel, by exploiting the line of emotional tension along which the narrative runs, by as it were capturing the moments of its twists and turns and the emotional meanders along which it flows, burdens it with a charge of metaphysics drawn from Bach's work, but by no means in order to read the composer's life story in the light of Protestant spirituality. These insertions only help to preserve the formal structure proper to passion, which is stretched between the story and the individual reflection on this story; they also signal the changes in moods, the change of affect, oscillating between two basic ones: joy and sadness; they constitute an element of unusual imagery, based on sometimes surprising approximations of semantic fields; finally – they designate a set of textual allusions, subordinated to the overriding principle of substituting the figure of Bach for the figure of Christ (the mechanisms of this substitution are partly analysed by Helmut Loos<sup>32</sup>).

Other types of utterances that construct the text, apart from the proper narrative, include repetitions and enumerations. Analysing the structure of repetitions may lead to the conclusion that they are an allusive imitation of excessively ornamented method of organizing the text, which was subjected to the rules of musical rhetoric<sup>33</sup>:

---

<sup>30</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, [https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale\\_296-Eng3.htm](https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale_296-Eng3.htm) [last access: 13.09.2024].

<sup>31</sup> Quotation after: Bach Cantatas Website, [https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale\\_071-Eng3.htm#google\\_vignette](https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale_071-Eng3.htm#google_vignette) [last access: 13.09.2024]. "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden, / Voll Schmerz und voller Hohn!"

<sup>32</sup> Loos, H. 2002. Op. cit., pp. 132-140.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lisecki, Wiesław. *Vademecum muzycznej „ars oratoria”* in *Canor*, No 3(6), 1993 (pp. 10-24), p. 15. Mattheson analyzed in such way the text of the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmerniß*.

O! confudiret confudiret  
O! confused confused  
O! many strangers strangers strangers  
O! he did he did he did...  
do do do  
do and he did he did. (16)

A word a word a word  
[...]  
And no thanks no thanks  
And no thanks and no thanks for that I will receive.

[...] (21)

O man, o man, o man, o man, o man,  
O mourn man, mourn  
Mourn o man  
Mourn your sin,  
Mourn your great sin [...]. (23)<sup>34</sup>

Repetitions are an element that disrupts the coherence<sup>35</sup> of the text in its sentence structure but doesn't disrupt its overall coherence. In the last of the examples cited above, the citation of a redundant message, composed of expressions and phrases taken from the passion chorale, is an ironic commentary on Sprecher's earlier statement:

A peculiar twist of fate! The King of Dresden had given me a reward of 500 thalers: however, due to the infidelity of one of the servants, I received none of this and was forced to content myself with the recognition I had gained as the only reward for my efforts, which I took home with me. (22)<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> „O! confudiret confudiret / O! eingemischet eingemischet / O! viele fremde fremde fremde / O! gemacht gemacht gemacht... / machet machet machet / machet und gemacht gemacht. Wort das Wort das Wort / [...] / Und kein Dank kein Dank / Und kein Dank und und kein Dank dazu haben. / [...] / O Mensch, o Mensch, o Mensch, o Mensch, o Mensch, / O beweine Mensch, beweine / Beweine o Mensch / Beweine dein' Sünde, / Beweine dein' Sünde groß [...]”.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. eg. Delu, Zhang; Rushan, Liu. *Theoretical Research on the Concept of Coherence in eidem, New Research on Cohesion and Coherence in Linguistics*. NY: Routledge, 2021 (pp. 18-36), pp. 18-27.

<sup>36</sup> „Sonederbares Schicksal! Der König von Dreßden hatte für mich ein Geschenk von 500 Thalern bestimmt: allein durch die Untrue eines Bedienten wurde ich drum gebracht, und mußte die erworbene Ehre, als die einzige Belohnung meiner Bermühungen mit mir nach Hause nehmen”.

This commentary, although at the level of cohesion can be linked to the meaning of the above quoted statement – or at least it is possible to interpret it in such a way that it allows for such a link – structurally remains detached from the text as a whole. Similarly in the case of enumerations, which are usually not linked to the structure of the text by any predictable metatextual lexical signals. However, they introduce their own internal order into the space of the work, creating organized wholes of meaning, parallel to the narrative order. This is particularly visible in the fragment of the passion marked by the author with number 26, where the story is interwoven with the enumeration of Bach's children and their dates of birth (the motivation for the order of the enumeration elements in this case is chronology and the sequence of dates). Both orders co-exist formally independently, but they remain in a certain semantic proximity, which is revealed when trying to reconstruct the message carried by Kagel's passion: the regularity and at the same time monotony of this enumeration becomes a measure that orders the story of life, which passes according to the natural rhythm of successive births and deaths.

Two orders also organize the textual punch line of the piece – the narrative arc, developing from the moment of the main character's birth through the individual phases of his life, now descends to the final node of the action: death, which is here called "dismissal from service" – this is also a reference to Bach's type of piety, and at the same time a somewhat perverse drawing of attention to the feudal loyalty and servility that marked the great composer's entire life. But the narrative structure is overlaid with a second scheme, imposed by passion itself: "es ist Genug" ["enough already"] and – unspoken, but one can imagine that it is extremely subtly suggested – "es ist Volbracht" ["it has been done"], where only a fragmentarily outlined word contains a trace or rather an echo of the main character's surname.

## Conclusions

Regardless of the musical realization, Kagel's *Sankt-Bach-Passion* is above all a perfectly composed text with many interpenetrating, complementary and mutually commenting levels of meaning. This text has limited coherence, but it undoubtedly defines a relatively consistent set of meanings around which its interpretation should be focused – meanings that are primarily connected with different types of affects. The question of whether the music in this piece follows the text and whether the composer managed to use it to give this assumed interpretation the direction he set remains open to us.

## REFERENCES

- Bach Cantatas Website, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/>.
- Barthes, Roland. *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* in *New Literary History*, Vol. 6(2), 1975. Pp. 237-272.
- Bentham, Claudia. *Vanitas, vanitatum, et omnia vanitas: The Baroque Transience Topos and Its Structural Relation to Trauma* in Tatlock, Lynne (ed.), *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Pp. 51-69.
- Delu, Zhang; Rushan, Liu. *Theoretical Research on the Concept of Coherence* in eidem, *New Research on Cohesion and Coherence in Linguistics*. NY: Routledge. 2021. Pp. 18-36.
- Frow, John. *Genre: The New Critical Idiom*. NY: Routledge. 2006.
- Godard, Barbara. *Intertextuality* in Makaryk, Irena (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1993. Pp. 568-571.
- Jasińska, Maria. *Narrator w powieści (zarys problematyki badań)* in Miodońska-Brookes, Ewa et al. (eds.), *Genologia polska*. Warszawa: Księgarnia PWN. 1983.
- Kagel, Mauricio. *Sankt-Bach-Passion*. Leipzig: Edition Peters. 1981-1985.
- Kent, Thomas. *Toward a Holistic Theory of Genre* in idem, *Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Perception in the Study of Narrative Texts*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 1986. Pp. 15-33.
- Lipka, Krzysztof. *Słyszalny krajobraz. Szkice o powiązaniach muzyki i literatury od Abélarda do Rilkego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat. 2004.
- Lisecki, Wiesław. *Vademecum muzycznej „ars oratoria”* in *Canor*, No 3(6), 1993. Pp. 10-24.
- Loos, Helmut. *„Sankt-Bach-Passion” von Mauricio Kagel. Auch ein musikalisches Theater* in Kuret, Primož (ed.), *Musical Theatre – yesterday, today, tomorrow. The 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Composer Daniko Svara*. Ljubljana: Slovenski Glasbeni Dnevi. 2002. Pp. 132-140.
- Lotman, Yuri. *The Text within the Text* in *PMLA*, transl. Leo, Jerry; Mandelker, Amy, Vol 109(3), 1994. Pp. 377-384.
- Mukařovský, Jan. *Dialog a monolog* in *Listy filologické / Folia philologica*, Vol. 67(3/4), 1940. Pp. 139-160.
- Sławiński, Janusz. *O opisie* in *Teksty*, No. 1, 1981. Pp. 119-138.
- Stout, John. *Semiotic Poetics of the Prague School* in Makaryk, Irena (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1993 Pp.179-189.
- Vocal Music Instrumentation Index, <https://www.vmii.org/>.