

THE AFTERLIFE OF A TRADITION: EUROPEAN MUSIC AND IRISH LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Izvilleček: Prisotnost irske književnosti v evropski umetnosti devetnajstega stoletja doslej še ni bila ustrezno raziskana. Njeno prisotnost vzorčno predstavlja Schumannova uglasbitev pesmi Lalla Rookh (Das Paradies und die Peri, 1843) Thomasa Moora, ki jo je potrebno razumeti ločeno od zgodnejših poskusov skladateljev, kot je bil Beethoven, ki je tradicionalne irske melodije preprosto priredil za glas in klavir.

Ključne besede: Irska, Thomas Moore, Charles Villiers Stanford, Robert Schumann, Lalla Rookh.

Abstract: The presence of Irish literature in European art music of the nineteenth century has never been adequately explored. This presence, exemplified by Robert Schumann's setting of Thomas Moore's poem, Lalla Rookh (Das Paradies und die Peri, 1843), should be distinguished from the earlier practice of such composers as Beethoven, who simply arranged traditional Irish melodies for voice and piano.

Keywords: Ireland, Thomas Moore, Charles Villiers Stanford, Robert Schumann, Lalla Rookh.

Although the position of art music in Ireland during the nineteenth century remained tenuous and uncertain, there is no longer any doubt as to the afterlife of Irish literature in European music during the same period. This afterlife must be distinguished from the well-known practice of European composers (including Haydn and Beethoven) who arranged Irish traditional melodies: instead, it may be identified as a characteristically romantic response to the idea of "Ireland" as a cultural concept in the nineteenth century. Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann and Charles Villiers Stanford all provide compelling instances of such an afterlife, particularly with regard to the poetry of Thomas Moore (1779–1852), whose own preoccupation with music finds new modes of expression in the works of such composers. In respect of these settings of Moore, the relationship between music and the Irish literary imagination begets, in turn, a relationship between the Irish literary imagination and European music.

Given its enormous influence, the genesis of Moore's collection deserves some comment in the present context.¹ We know that it was William and James Power who approached Moore early in 1807 with a view to his writing words (along with other poets) for a collec-

¹ For an account of the sources and publication history of the *Irish Melodies*, see Veronica Ní Chinnéide, The Sources of Moore's Melodies, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland* 89/2 (1959), pp. 109–134; and Thérèse Tessier, *La Poésie Lyrique de Thomas Moore (1779–1852)*, Paris, Didier, 1976, passim.

tion of Irish airs to be set with “symphonies and accompaniments” by John Stevenson. We know, too, that Moore had earlier been invited by George Thomson similarly to contribute to a volume which Thomson was planning, in succession to his earlier collections of Scottish and Irish airs. We know, finally, that two of Thomson’s principal musical collaborators were Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven.

In 1805 Moore had written as follows to Thomson: “Sir, I feel very much flattered by the application with which you have honoured me, and the idea of being associated in any manner with Haydn is too tempting to my vanity to be easily resisted. At present, however, I am [so] strictly pledged not to divert one moment from the poems I am engaged in”.² As it transpired, Moore did not fulfil this commission for Thomson, but we may suppose that the prospect of doing so would have influenced his approach to the verses which he wrote for William and James Power. His ready appreciation of Haydn is especially significant in this respect.

Barry Cooper has remarkably informed us that “Beethoven composed more folksong settings than any other genre, and [...] more of them are Irish than any other nationality”.³ Responding to an invitation from Thomson to contribute settings in succession to Haydn, Beethoven first contributed arrangements of Irish, Welsh and Scottish melodies to Thomson in 1809 and 1810. In 1814 and 1816, respectively, Thomson published two volumes of Irish airs with arrangements by Beethoven. In all, the composer provided 71 settings to the Scottish publisher. Cooper makes it plain, however, that Beethoven was not setting texts, which Thomson instead added on receipt of the arrangements. This detail is a crucial one, because Moore’s contemporary settings represented a collaboration in which the creation of new texts was the primary consideration, and in which the musical settings were correspondingly a secondary, if vitally important, undertaking. Moore selected the airs, determined their pitch, and modified their rhythmic contours to suit both his newly-composed verses and his own capacities as a performer. Only then was Stevenson invited to arrange the airs and preface them with modest “symphonies” (introductions) and postludes for piano. In musical terms, as I have argued elsewhere, it is the hapless Stevenson who appears gauche and naïve in terms of this extraneous material, just as it is Stevenson’s contribution that motivated so many subsequent editions which sought to improve on his arrangements throughout the nineteenth century.⁴ What I should wish to emphasize here, however, is the fundamental difference between Moore’s *Irish Melodies* and every other “Hibernian” collection of airs, including those provided by Beethoven for George Thomson. In this connection, it is useful to turn back to Barry Cooper:

² Wilfred S. Dowden, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Moore*, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, pp. 108–109.

³ Barry Cooper, Beethoven’s Folksong Settings as Sources of Irish Music, *The Maynooth International Musicological Conference 1995, Selected Proceedings: Part Two*, ed. Patrick F. Devine and Harry White, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1996, pp. 65–81: 65.

⁴ See Harry White, *The Keeper’s Recital. Music and Culture in Ireland, 1770–1970*, Cork, Cork University Press and Field Day Publications, 1998, pp. 48–49, for further remarks on Stevenson; and Hoover H. Jordan, *Bolt Upright. The Life of Thomas Moore*, vol. 1, Salzburg, Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1975, pp. 139–165, for a detailed account of the compositional process of the *Melodies*.

Being from a non-Irish background, Beethoven was actually in a better position to appreciate local idiosyncrasies than someone brought up amongst them. Moreover, his instrumental introductions and postludes are closely based on material from the melodies themselves; unlike other harmonisers, including Bunting, he does not normally introduce extraneous, classical-style passages into the preludes but builds them up almost entirely from prominent motifs in the melodies [...]. Indeed, it is only in Beethoven's settings that the rich musical potential of these Irish melodies is properly revealed, with material from them being deployed in the ritornellos in extraordinarily imaginative ways. It takes a Beethoven to demonstrate what fine melodies they are (my emphasis).⁵

Without wishing to seem chauvinistic or, still more, to criticize unduly a major Beethoven scholar, I find, nevertheless, that this passage betrays a fundamental difficulty in understanding the significance of Beethoven's folksong arrangements in terms of Irish music at large, and Moore's settings in particular. The proposition that "the rich potential of the melodies" is reserved to Beethoven's businesslike settings seems especially astonishing, but I dwell on Cooper's observations because they illustrate the gulf between the essence of Beethoven's general achievement (in which folksong arrangements were a peripheral activity) and the significance of Moore's address upon this repertory. It is not simply that the Thomson commissions are at best a footnote to the composer's fundamental contribution to the genres of European art music (so that the mere number of 71 folksong settings which exceeds any other genre in Beethoven's output becomes in turn a meaningless statistic), but also that Moore's arrangements went to the heart of Irish music as a transmitter of history and verbal feeling. And not just verbal feeling in general, but verbal feeling in the English language, specifically in relation to those tropes of dispossession and loss which Moore drew from the melodies themselves. Beethoven was arranging tunes. Moore was attempting to translate their meaning into language.

This attempt could not be usurped by the routine commissions which a Scottish publisher sought from a German composer living in Vienna and utterly removed from the orbit of Irish sensibilities and considerations. Moreover, in ways that neither Thomson nor his composers could have conceived, the response to early numbers of the *Irish Melodies* replicated the divide that divided the Protestant Interest in Ireland from its unruly, Papist counterpart. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* was predictably severe in this regard: "Several of them [the Melodies] were composed with a view to their being becoming popular in a very disordered state of society [...]. They are the melancholy ravings of the disappointed rebel, or his ill-educated offspring".⁶ Once again, we are far from the later reception of Moore as a poetaster of the English country house. Much in this vein was to follow: if the *Melodies* would never quite shake off the aura of the drawing-room, neither would they lose their symbolic force as a cumulative petition for self-regulation.

It is tempting to speculate as to what might have happened to the reception of Moore in a country more engaged with art music and less polarized by the music question (to

⁵ B. Cooper, op. cit., p. 80.

⁶ *Anti-Jacobin Review* 58 (1820), p. 314, cited in H. H. Jordan, op. cit., p. 158.

say nothing of the language question) in the nineteenth century. But Moore's reception in Europe is another matter. To consider Moore under the rubric of "music and the Irish literary imagination" is also to consider the impact of the Irish literary imagination on music. In the present context, it is useful to contrast Moore's considerable influence as an agent of romanticism in France and Germany with his fall from grace in Ireland. This contrast helps us to explain not only the context in which his auditory imagination can be more comprehensively understood, but also the difference between a verbally dominated cultural matrix (of the kind represented by the Literary Revival in Ireland) and a musical one (as in nineteenth-century Europe). Despite Moore's unhappy afterlife as a silent partner in the Revival, his alignment of music and poetry would survive in Yeats's habitual insistence on music as a symbol of the poetic imagination and more expressly still in the deeply rooted association between language and music which Yeats, Synge and Joyce so strikingly (if variously) maintained.

"L'Irlande, toujours L'Irlande!", Hector Berlioz wrote in a letter in March, 1829, and although he was thinking inevitably of Harriet Smithson, he was also thinking of Tom Moore. A month later, Berlioz published his Op. 1, *Huit scènes de Faust*, with an epigraph from the *Irish Melodies*. In the following year, he published *Neuf mélodies imitées de l'Anglais* (*Irish Melodies*) which he dedicated to Moore and subsequently re-titled *Irlande*. All nine songs were settings of verses by Moore, eight of them translations (by Berlioz and Thomas Gounet) from the *Irish Melodies*. Berlioz later attributed the genre of his *Mélologue*, *Le retour à la vie* (a work which grew out of the *Symphonie fantastique*) to Moore's *Mélologue upon National Music*.⁷

The impact of Moore's literary imagination on European music is even more tellingly disclosed in Germany following the publication and translation of his "oriental romance" *Lalla Rookh*.

As an instance of Moore's disappearance from reception history, *Lalla Rookh* is exemplary. There could scarcely be a more compelling contrast between the animated reception which this sequence of poems and prose enjoyed on its first publication in 1817 and the general silence in which it has been enveloped since the end of the nineteenth century. *Lalla Rookh* has passed into the archive almost wholly unremarked, other than for the fantastic sums which Moore was paid as an advance by his publishers and the "cream of the copyrights" which followed. It is almost painful to inspect its soaring reputation across Europe and the United States (where it revived Moore's standing) in the aftermath of its subsequent neglect. Published on 22 May 1817 by Longmans, the twenty-six songs it contains were also printed separately by Power with their musical settings. By the end of that year, six editions had been printed. It was widely reviewed in Britain and Ireland, and Moore found himself acclaimed as "the most ingenious, brilliant and fanciful poet of the present age". Comparisons with Byron were commonplace, and *Lalla Rookh* caught the public appetite for orientalism on a scale rivalled by few other literary works. It was translated into German, French, Italian, Polish, Russian and Persian.

⁷ See Julian Rushton, Berlioz and *Irlande*: From Romance to *Mélodie*, P. F. Devine and H. White, op. cit., pp. 224–240.

Nevertheless, as Moore's biographer Helen Jordan remarks, "critics observed of his *Melodies* and *Lalla Rookh* that they would not produce a school of Moore, as the school of Wordsworth or Byron had arisen, for no other poet could work in the two media of music and poetry".⁸

The critics were right: the lustre of Moore's reputation in the years following the publication of *Lalla Rookh* no more secured his position as an English Romantic than it contributed to his ambiguous standing as an Irish (proto)nationalist. To "work in the two media of music and poetry" was to fall between two stools. By 1817, moreover, Wordsworth had already heard inside English poetry "the still, sad music of humanity" and emancipated romanticism from its preoccupation with the enchantments of the east. Orientalism would abide in English writing for decades, but the native pastoral of Wordsworth's auditory imagination would prove a more enduring mode of poetic discourse than the fantastications of Shelley or the *Kubla Khan* of Coleridge. Moore's adventures in the east, definitive of the rage for the exotic, were decisively eclipsed.

The terminus of obscurity in Moore's case is all the more ironic given the essentially lyric cast of his poetic imagination. This irony lies in a comparison with Wordsworth, whose *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) eponymously proclaim the presence of music as an essential consideration in English poetry. But Wordsworth's music is the music of language, and his subject is the growth of the self – two vital discoveries that lay beyond the sphere of Moore's literary conception. The lyric mode in Wordsworth is symbolic: in Moore, it is a literal presence which can only achieve its complete realization in music itself.

The growth of the self now appears to be so preponderant in our reception of European romanticism (in Goethe as in Wordsworth), that it is easy to overlook other preoccupations, equally prominent, which once dominated the romantic imagination. If the self is the enduring hallmark (and the overriding subject) of European poetry after the French Revolution, the "other", expressed in radical relation to the self or explored for the sake of its own compelling power, was no less significant. Expressed as a sequence of contrasts, implicit or explicit, the relationship between the self and the other easily maps the favourite terrain of the romantic imagination: present and past, natural and supernatural, west and east, good and evil, civilization and nature, England and Ireland, to identify a few germane instances.⁹ In the case of *Lalla Rookh*, Moore's appeal to the other, so mellifluously rehearsed in the *Irish Melodies* as a contrast between the felicities of verse in English and the "sad degraded truths" of Irish history, found new and fertile expression in his representation of India. The tale of the Indian Princess Lalla Rookh would represent Moore's principal claim to literary prominence in Europe. "Where in Germany even today would you find three such literary

⁸ This account of *Lalla Rookh* is drawn from H. H. Jordan, op. cit., pp. 259–280.

⁹ Although the literature on romanticism is self-evidently vast, it is interesting to note in passing how Moore's disappearance from the general canon of nineteenth century English literature (as in his total absence from *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature: Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling, London [...], Oxford University Press, 1973) mirrors his exclusion from the canon of Anglo-Irish literature. Bloom and Trilling privilege the growth of the self (as in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*) as the distinctive hallmark of English romantic poetic sensibility, but a more European approach to romanticism (especially in relation to Goethe) would restore the dialectical pairings identified here to the English and Scottish romantic imagination.

heroes to set beside Lord Byron, Moore and Walter Scott?" Goethe inquired in 1824.¹⁰ Goethe had been reading Moore since 1821 (at latest) and knew *Lalla Rookh* certainly no later than 1823. He would afterwards esteem Moore above all for his biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1831), but it is not difficult to understand the German poet's esteem for *Lalla Rookh*, given the vital seam of orientalism which pervaded Goethe's own imagination. The general context of Goethe's prodigious engagement with British writing makes his enthusiasm for Moore all the more remarkable, but the particular affinities between Goethe and Moore (not only in respect of orientalism, but also with regard to their shared structural habit of enclosing stories and songs within the folds of a continuous narrative), account at least in part for Moore's brilliant reception in Germany.¹¹

In the nineteenth century the mutually intensive relationship between German poetry and music, in which the art song became a principal conduit for the interpretation and reception of Goethe's poetry (among much else), apostrophized the equal standing of music and literature in ways that did not (and could not) apply in Britain or Ireland.¹² From Franz Schubert to Hugo Wolf, the German Lied countenances a response to Goethe's verse which self-evidently represents a monumental expression of the musical imagination in relation to poetry. This is true to such an extent that Schubert and Wolf have perforce become the most enduring and widely-known interpreters of Goethe, especially now when few people experience Goethe at first hand, even in Germany.¹³ As with *Faust*, which powerfully

¹⁰ "Und noch heutzutage, wo wollen Sie denn in Deutschland drei literarische Helden finden, die dem Lord Byron, Moore und Walter Scott an die Seite zu setzen wären?" Cited in James Boyd, *Goethe's Knowledge of English Literature*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p. 265. Boyd remarks that "though Goethe's references to Moore are comparatively few, they are sufficiently definite to show that he considered him a great writer".

¹¹ Hazlitt's infamous attack on Moore in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) adverts briefly to the affinities between Moore and Goethe ("with his unpretending origins and mignon figure"), but these affinities have been little explored. Schumann's choral settings of Goethe, including the *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (composed between 1844 and 1853) and his *Requiem fuer Mignon* (composed 1849), neighbour his composition of *Das Paradies und die Peri* (1843). The enclosure of songs in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) and in *Lalla Rookh* (1817) seems to me strikingly similar, to say nothing of Goethe's abiding preoccupation with orientalism in his novels and poetry. H. H. Jordan, op. cit., pp. 272–273, briefly recounts an astonishing testament to the popularity of *Lalla Rookh* in Germany: the representation of "living tableaux" modelled on the poem which the King of Prussia mounted on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter to the brother of the Tsar and the state visit of the couple to Berlin in 1821. "The Grand Duchess of Russia (daughter of the King of Prussia) took the part of Lalla Rookh, and the rest of the cast was composed of suitably eminent royalty" (p. 272). Jordan adds that engravings of these tableaux were sent to Moore and Goethe.

¹² We do not look to English music for settings of Wordsworth or Keats in the nineteenth century; likewise, one cannot find in Irish music a tradition of art song emanating from the precedent of Moore. Moore's influence on the development of French art song, for example, has no useful parallel in the history of art music in Ireland.

¹³ In the course of a keynote address given on 26 March 2004 at a conference on Goethe as "musical poet and musical catalyst" at Maynooth University, Nicholas Boyle remarked that "hardly anyone in Germany reads Goethe anymore". Although it must be difficult to determine the empirical status of that observation, it is somewhat easier to show that the reception of Goethe's poetry through the agency of the German art song is the principal means by which this poetry remains in circulation.

inheres in nineteenth century French opera, twentieth-century German fiction, and late-twentieth-century Irish drama (to name three obvious instances),¹⁴ the afterlife of Goethe's poetry seems more evident in Schubert and Wolf than in any direct encounter with Goethe himself. One only has to think of the currency of nineteenth century German composers (including Schubert) in the present day to understand the difference between the faint reception which now exists for Goethe's own writings (beyond the purview of specialist commentary) and the powerful influence which these writings continue to exert through other works and media. Whether such media only partially represent Goethe (or even misrepresent him) is another question, but Goethe's presence in German music in particular is emblematic of the seminal role which literature enjoys in the German musical imagination from Beethoven to Wagner. And not only is German literature formative in this regard, but – as the history of nineteenth century opera makes plain – Italian, French, and English literature.¹⁵ Viewed in such terms, *Lalla Rookh* is an unfamiliar case in point.¹⁶

“It may surprise some modern-day devotees of Schumann's works”, John Daverio wrote in 1997, “to learn that the composition which secured his international reputation was not a symphony, a song cycle, a chamber work, or a poetic cycle of keyboard miniatures, but rather an oratorio”.¹⁷ Daverio's identification of Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri. Dichtung aus Lalla Rookh vom Th. Moore* (1843) as the work which made his name is indeed a surprise. As with *Lalla Rookh*, *Peri* (to use its affectionate contraction) now languishes in an obscurity which is the obverse of the popularity it once enjoyed. Schumann, like Moore before him, was attempting something new: a secular oratorio which would partly realize his ambition to write what Daverio calls “literary opera”, in which language and music might co-exist as equal partners. When he began to think seriously of adapting Moore's poem (in a translation by Emil Flechsig) in 1842, Schumann discarded the idea of opera *per se* in favour of the dramatic oratorio, but he intended from the outset to devise a musical syntax answerable to the epic, lyric and dramatic registers of Moore's poetry, albeit in (sometimes very close) translation. The result was to be a work which broke new ground in its radical departure from the closed forms and discrete sequences of “number” opera and oratorio, and which instead explored a continuity of musical discourse underpinned by tonal and formal structures, the logic and symmetry of which Daverio compares to Wagner's *Parsifal*.¹⁸

¹⁴ As in Gounod's *Faust*, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert*.

¹⁵ Familiar examples are Verdi's settings and adaptations of Victor Hugo and Shakespeare (as in *Rigoletto*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*), Donizetti's setting of Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lamermoor* (*Lucia di Lamermoor*).

¹⁶ In this connection, Stanford's first opera *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* (1877), also based on *Lalla Rookh*, is a less familiar instance of English opera based on Irish literature.

¹⁷ John Daverio, *Robert Schumann. Herald of a New Poetic Age*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 274. Daverio remarks (p. 276) that “history has not been kind to Moore's poetry”.

¹⁸ See J. Daverio, op. cit., p. 277: “Of the nineteenth century's larger creations for vocal and orchestral forces, only Wagner's *Parsifal* equals the *Peri* in dispositional logic and symmetry”. Daverio's account of the latter work (pp. 267–284) is much the most detailed assessment published in English to date. I owe to Daverio (p. 546) the disclosure that Wagner “also toyed with the idea of setting Moore's poem to music”. Daverio reports that Wagner abandoned the idea because he “couldn't find the proper form in which to render it” and congratulated Schumann “on having done so”.

Even if we leave this comparison (which many would regard as excessively in Schumann's favour) to one side, it is useful to advert to Daverio's understanding of Schumann as "a composer who was perhaps the first in western musical history to view the art of composition as a kind of literary activity".¹⁹ This is surely a characterization which brings Schumann close to Moore. It might not be too much to add that Moore correspondingly regarded poetry as a kind of musical activity. Moore's own description of his poetry as an "effort to translate into words the different feelings and passions which melody seemed to me to express" is one which testifies to the idea of literary composition as an expressly musical enterprise.²⁰ Although he was explicit on this point in regard to the *Melodies*, it is reasonable to extend this argument to *Lalla Rookh* also. The four great poems in *Lalla Rookh* are described in the text as having been recited to musical accompaniment, even if the songs alone were actually intended for musical settings.²¹

In this suggestion we begin to approach the nature of Moore's auditory imagination. "I love the whole Schumann", Daverio remarks at the outset of his monumental study, "not [only] the one known to most everyone, the dreamy composer of quirky piano pieces and gorgeous songs".²² But as with Moore, it is the miniatures and "gorgeous songs" which have fared best. It would be untrue to suggest that Schumann's large-scale works (one thinks of the symphonies and the chamber music) have suffered the same neglect as has so much of Moore, but in either case the judgement of posterity has been notably severe in respect of once-acclaimed masterpieces. Schumann's failures in opera may be heroic, but they are failures nevertheless.²³ His notebooks are filled with dozens of unrealized operatic projects (including works based on Shakespeare and Byron), but of these, only the *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (not strictly an opera in any case) and *Genoveva* actually came to fruition. It is hard thereby not to conclude that Schumann's imagination suffered under the duress of trying to reconcile his literary impulses with the claims of music.

It would be facile to ascribe precisely the same difficulty to Moore, but a degree of comparison between Moore and Schumann helps to identify more narrowly the impact of music on Moore's imagination. The mixed blessings of that preoccupation are perhaps thrown into sharper relief when we observe that scholars have long since conceded the perplexing impact of literature on Schumann.

¹⁹ J. Daverio, op. cit., p. vii.

²⁰ In a letter to Elizabeth Piggott dated April 12 1828, Moore remarked that he hated that "any one should read poetry of mine which was only made to be *sung* and is only passable through that medium". See W. S. Dowden, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 604.

²¹ See *Lalla Rookh* in Alfred Denis Godley, ed., *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, London, Oxford University Press, 1910, p. 394 (the introduction to "Paradise and the Peri"): "It is', said he (Feramorz) [...] 'in a lighter and humbler strain than the other': then, striking a few careless but melancholy chords on his kitar, he thus began". This description supports the general understanding throughout *Lalla Rookh* that the poems are recited to musical accompaniment.

²² J. Daverio, op. cit., p. vii.

²³ The first complete recording of *Genoveva* dates from as recently as 1976. Schumann is perhaps unique among the canonic composers of European classical music in the degree to which so many of his major works are neglected. Certainly his project of "literary opera" is one which has fallen into almost complete neglect in the annals of reception history, despite the central importance Schumann himself attached to this.

Unlike his contemporary Mendelssohn, Schumann did not call his shorter piano compositions “songs without words”, but their extra-musical address on the literary imagination have never been in doubt. He called them instead “character pieces”, and imbued many of them with an expressly extra-musical significance.²⁴ They variously describe scenes from nature, narrate stories, personify friends and dramatize Schumann’s own personality by way of explicit reference to two opposing images of himself characterized by the self-invented personae of “Florestan” and “Eusebius”. Indeed, it was Schumann’s express conviction that (against the grain of post-Beethovenian aesthetics) music was invariably expressive of something beyond its own substantive structure which informed his life’s work as a composer. It is this intimacy of understanding as between music and literature which brings him so close to Moore. Moore shared this perception and regarded music not simply as a symbolic embodiment of the literary imagination (and the creative act itself) but as a correlative of literary discourse. If Schumann’s piano pieces are songs without words, then Moore’s poems by close analogy are lyrics without music. In either case, the tantalizing word is “without”, in the sense that “absence” can yet intimate “presence”. It is this quality which drew Schumann to the second part of *Lalla Rookh*, entitled “Paradise and the Peri”: It was, wrote Schumann, “as if intended for music from the start”.²⁵

It is hard to imagine what might now redeem *Lalla Rookh* from its stagnant reputation (insofar as it has one at all) as “ideal fare for young persons”, which is how it was regarded in late Victorian England.²⁶ When the exoticism of the east gave way to the gothic terror of Transylvania (one Irishman, as it were, usurping another in the annals of popular British public taste),²⁷ *Lalla Rookh* slipped its generic moorings (a predestined pun) as a great dramatic poem and lay becalmed as a harmless adventure story in rhyme. In that capacity, it is in the same region as *Scheherazade* or the novels of Karl May, even if this “eastern romance” (Moore’s own subtitle) fleetingly seems closer to a fable by Borges, with its apparatus of footnotes and arcane reference, than does anything by Byron or Shelley. Just as MacPherson imagined ancient Scotland in his Ossianic forgeries, Moore imagined the orient, if to different purpose.

Lalla Rookh, despite its ostentatious descriptions and sources, had from the start a mixed reception as a serious rendition of Indian and Persian culture, but as a romantic address on

²⁴ Daverio remarks that the early character pieces for piano called *Papillons* (Op. 2) “shows us a young composer in the process of construing music as literature” (p. 79).

²⁵ In a letter from Schumann dated 19 June 1843, cited in J. Daverio, op. cit., p. 277. Although this explicit recognition of the musical nature of Moore’s auditory imagination (beyond the *Melodies*) is rare, it seems only fair to add that Moore’s intimate dependence on music was at least implicitly recognized by many people, and notably by those other composers who set his work. *Lalla Rookh* was set as an opera in whole or in part by C. F. Horn (1818), Gaspare Spontini (1822), Eduard Sobolewski (1850), Félicien David (1862), Anton Rubinstein (1863), Arthur Goring Thomas (1879) and Stanford (1881).

²⁶ See A. D. Godley, op. cit., pp. ix–x. Although Godley concedes that “it is not so surprising that quite serious critics should have admired this kind of literature”, he finds it even less surprising that “Dear Lalla Rookh” should have “delighted generations of schoolgirls”. This characterisation of the poem nevertheless contradicts the reputation which it enjoyed in the first half of the nineteenth century, when Moore’s standing equalled Byron’s.

²⁷ Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* was published in 1897.

the other in relation to the self it was an immediate (if controversial) success. The four poems of which it is made, “The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan”, “Paradise and the Peri”, “The Fire Worshippers” and “The Light of the Haram”, are so prolifically suggestive of allegory (in particular, as between appearance and reality, colonizer and colony, England and Ireland, and notably Moore and his critics), that it is hard to recall that it was apparently read at face value. All four poems are recited by the poet Feramorz, the disguised son of the King of Lesser Bucharía. Feramorz accompanies the caravanserai of Princess Lalla Rookh as she makes her fabulous way from Delhi to Kashmir in the company of her vast entourage, including her advisor Fadladeen. Feramorz accompanies himself on the lute throughout his recitations, and Fadladeen robustly criticizes his efforts. Lalla Rookh, meanwhile, has fallen in love with the poet, whose true identity is revealed only at the close. One false step, and the whole thing could come straight from the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan.²⁸

Despite its literal reception as a tale of the east, Moore’s orientalism masks a pre-occupation with Ireland which may have been obvious to readers from the start: in the preface to “The Fire Worshippers”, the entourage is camped in sight of a ruined tower “which might perhaps be a relic of some of those dark superstitions, which had prevailed in that country before the light of Islam dawned upon it”. Feramorz feels “sympathy [...] with the sufferings of the persecuted Ghebers, which every monument like this before them but tended more powerfully to awaken”. Fadladeen listens to the tale of rebellion and religious tyranny “expecting treason and abomination in every line”.²⁹ Although the tale is allowed to speak for itself, Moore tells us that Fadladeen resolves to have Feramorz silenced on arrival in Cashmere and to urge the King, on account of “the very dangerous sentiments of his minstrel” that a failure to chastise him would make an end “of all legitimate government in Bucharía”.³⁰ “The Fire Worshippers”, for all its exotic charm, speaks directly to the cruelty of political oppression and religious tyranny which Moore denounced in England’s dealings with Ireland throughout his literary career. English corruption and intolerance are removed safely not only to the past, but to the East. But they are present nevertheless.³¹

²⁸ An early overture by Sullivan “after *Lalla Rookh*” dates from the composer’s student years in Leipzig. His “fairy” opera *Iolanthe* (libretto by W. S. Gilbert) is subtitled “The Peer and the Peri” (1882).

²⁹ A. D. Godley, op. cit., pp. 404–405.

³⁰ A. D. Godley, op. cit., pp. 434–435.

³¹ For a compelling assessment of Moore’s poem as a critique of colonialism, see Susan B. Taylor, *Irish Odalisques and Other Seductive Figures: Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh*, retrieved from the internet on 11 September 2005 at www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/containment/taylor/taylor.html. Taylor’s opening paragraph reads as follows: “This is a piece about the power relations embedded in colonial metaphors. The metaphors I examine connect two distinct but related images of British colonization in the early nineteenth century: one of Ireland as woman and one of the East as woman. These metaphors coincide in Irish writer Thomas Moore’s 1817 narrative poem, *Lalla Rookh, An Oriental Romance*. The Indian setting and orientalist rhetoric that Moore employs in *Lalla Rookh* form a sort of literary mantle that allows him to articulate concerns about Irish liberation in the guise of an Eastern tale. Yet as the author of this Eastern tale, Moore is in an almost paradoxical position as a citizen of Ireland, a British colony which is geographically Western but culturally viewed as ‘other’, insofar as prejudicial fantasies and fears about the Irish cast them as shifty, emotional people prone to excesses of all sorts. Ironically enough, Moore in turn presents similar fantasies

The structure Moore employs to organize this material is correspondingly simple and strongly reminiscent of the prelude-verse-postlude design of the *Irish Melodies* (or of the German strophic art song, for that matter). Prose passages introduce the poems and (through the agency of Fadladeen) provide commentary upon them. The prose also conveys the slender plot by which the tales come to be told and by which they are resolved.

To judge by the variety of metrical schemes which Moore employs in *Lalla Rookh* (iambic tetrameters and pentameters prevail, but anapaestic hexameters are notably prominent in the fourth poem and in some of the songs), a primary consideration for Moore was to present his exotic subject matter within the technical conventions of English poetry. The translator of Anacreon did not countenance blank verse (I have been unable to find any blank verse in Moore), but he did allow himself considerable licence in the matter of syllabification. Consider the opening of “Paradise and the Peri”:

One morn a Peri at the gate
Of Eden stood, disconsolate,
And as she listen'd to the Springs
Of Life within, like music flowing
And caught the light upon her wings
Through the half-open portal glowing,
She wept to think her recreant race
Should e'er have lost that glorious place!

“How happy”, exclaimed this child of air,
“Are the holy Spirits who wander there,
Mid flowers that never shall fade or
fall,
Though mine are the gardens of earth
and sea,
And the stars themselves have flowers
For me
One blossom of Heaven outblooms
them all!”³²

“The lax and easy kind of metre” (Fadladeen) in which this is written is most apparent in the second stanza, where the substitution of three short syllables for the iambic short-long stress (“how happy” / “that never” / “the gardens”, etc.) produces a lilt which draws attention not only to Moore’s habitual relaxation of the rules of strict syllabification, but also to his reliance upon a pulse which is strongly suggestive of compound time in musical metre, in which duple beats are subdivided into triplet pulses. Although the poem is ostensibly cast in iambic tetrameter throughout, the constant modification of the syllabic stresses produces a triple division of the beat which is definitive of compound measure. The scansion of the

and anxieties about Arab and Indian cultures as he uses *Lalla Rookh*’s allegorical Eastern tales to depict Ireland’s subjection to British rule”.

³² A. D. Godley, op. cit., p. 394.

second stanza can thus be rendered musically in such a way as to absorb the extra syllables into a continuous 6/8 metre. This rendition underlines the striking difference between the narrative first stanza, with its prevailing iambic pulse, and the compound pulse of direct speech in the second stanza.

This is a difference which Schumann explicitly recognizes in his musical setting. *Das Paradies und die Peri* begins with a “recitative song”, a formally open but motivically coherent alto narrative in which the vocal line is prefigured in the expressive orchestral prelude, and in which the simple time of Moore’s iambic first stanza is closely preserved. In the second stanza, however, the direct speech of Moore’s verse is emphasized by the omission of “exclaimed this child of air” and enriched by the closed form of an aria. More significantly still, Schumann’s orchestral accompaniment to this soprano aria strongly projects the pulse in triplets, so that the German translation (which at this point follows the Moore original very closely), is organized in hendecasyllabic tetrameters which preserve the triplet pulse of Moore’s verse [as in: “though / mine- are- the / gar-dens- of / earth and / sea” and “Sind / mein- auch- die- / Gaer-ten -auf / Lan-den -und / Meer”].³³ In Schumann’s setting it is the orchestra which scans the verse. The voice is thereby freed from the obligations of marking the basic pulse. It has other, more interesting things to do. It is Schumann who resolves the conflict between lyric impulse and technical mastery in Moore. “Syllabic superfluities” are no longer of any account, except as an intimation of music itself.

The flexibility and inventiveness of Schumann’s vocal writing, the richness and suggestive range of his orchestral technique (including its motivic interdependence with the voice) and his imaginative projection of Moore’s poetry throughout *Das Paradies und die Peri* are, to be sure, expressive of the difference between a musical imagination and a literary one. But it would be wrong to dismiss Moore’s ballad-like simplicity in this second stanza as a succession of rudimentary triplets which are overtaken by the throbbing pulse of Schumann’s orchestral textures and the winning flexibility of his vocal line. This is simply because Schumann, in these stanzas and throughout “Paradise and the Peri”, can hear inside Moore’s verse the sounding board of his own musical imagination. *Prima le parole* (“The words come first”) is the operatic formula which acknowledges this creative dependence, and in the first instance, it is only fair to press home the argument that Schumann’s lyric and orchestral opulence creatively depends – in ways that are explicitly related to Moore’s verbal technique – on the poetry that he sets. Schumann’s response to Moore is no less significant an act of interpretation than is his response to Goethe. In either case (Moore or Goethe), the precedent of a literary imagination already imbued with music is unmistakable. The status of music in Moore’s auditory imagination nevertheless remains problematic, however illuminating Schumann’s response to it may be.

The muted condition of music in the formation of English romanticism meant that Moore’s vital afterlife in the music of Robert Schumann would pass almost unremarked. Gavan Duffy’s sympathetic re-appraisal of Moore (1842) does countenance the “long, wild, sweet, barbarous and fascinating melody” of *Lalla Rookh* but remains unaware of his

³³ All references to *Das Paradies und die Peri* are taken from *Robert Schumann: Werke*, ed. Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms, et al., Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtel, 1881–1893, series ix/1, vol. 3.

extensive influence on European music.³⁴ If, as W. J. McCormack suggests, literature (and not music) embodied the soul of Ireland for the writers of mid nineteenth century, then it is scarcely surprising that Moore's achievement in this regard should have counted for so little.³⁵ Moore inspired Berlioz in the creation of French art song; he inspired Schumann in the creation of German dramatic music; he inspired Adam Mickiewicz in the creation of Polish literary nationalism, which in turn created a climate for the musical nationalism of Fryderyk Chopin. Why should he prove so fertile in Europe and so neglected at home? This question returns us to the *Irish Melodies* and to the eclipse of music by literature in Ireland. Irish literature would continue to exercise considerable influence in the domain of European art music, but its presence there cannot wholly account for the corresponding absence of art music in Ireland.

OHRANJANJE TRADICIJE: EVROPSKA GLASBA IN IRSKA LITERATURA V DEVETNAJSTEM STOLETJU

Povzetek

Čeprav je bil položaj umetne glasbe na Irskem v 19. stoletju nebitven in negotov, o preživetju irske literature v evropski glasbi tega časa ni več dvoma. To ohranitev tradicije pa je vendarle treba razlikovati od znane prakse evropskih skladateljev (tudi Haydna in Beethovna), ki so prirejali irske tradicionalne melodije; namesto tega ga namreč lahko prepoznamo kot značilno romantičen odgovor na idejo o »Irski« kot kulturnem konceptu v 19. stoletju. Pri skladateljih kot so Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann in Charles Villiers Stanford najdemo primere takega preživetja, zlasti poezijo Thomasa Moora (1779–1852), čigar lastno ukvarjanje z glasbo je našlo v delih takih skladateljev nove izrazne načine. Kar zadeva uglasbitev Moora, pa razmerje med glasbo in irskim literarnim ustvarjanjem s svoje strani vzpostavi razmerje med irskim literarnim ustvarjanjem in evropsko glasbo.

³⁴ Duffy published his essay on Moore in the "National Gallery" series in *The Nation* (which echoed the "Portrait Gallery" in the *Dublin University Magazine*).

³⁵ See William J. McCormack, editorial introduction to the republication of Charles Gavan Duffy's essay on Thomas Moore (1842), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 1, Derry, Field Day Publications, 1991, pp. 1250–1254: 1251. McCormack remarks that "Literature, for *The Nation*, was not only the embodiment of Ireland's soul but also a field for propagandist colonization". It is hardly necessary to add that in Europe, the embodiment of a nation's soul was far more commonly perceived through the agency of music.