



The Musical Novel (European Studies in North American Literature and Culture)

Emily Petermann

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What is a "musical novel"? This book defines the genre as musical not primarily in terms of its content, but in its form. The musical novel crosses medial boundaries, aspiring to techniques, structures, and impressions similar to those of music. It takes music as a model for its own construction, borrowing techniques and forms that range from immediately perceptible, essential aspects of music (rhythm, timbre, the simultaneity of multiple voices) to microstructural (jazz riffs, call and response, leitmotifs) and macrostructural elements (themes and variations, symphonies, albums). The musical novel also evokes the performance context by imitating elements of spontaneity that characterize improvised jazz or audience interaction. The Musical Novel builds upon theories of intermediality and semiotics to analyze the musical structures, forms, and techniques in two groups of musical novels, which serve as case studies. The first group imitates an entire musical genre and consists of jazz novels by Toni Morrison, Albert Murray, Xam Wilson Cartiér, Stanley Crouch, Jack Fuller, Michael Ondaatje, and Christian Gailly. The second group of novels, by Richard Powers, Gabriel Josipovici, Rachel Cusk, Nancy Huston, and Thomas Bernhard, imitates a single piece of music, J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations. Emily Petermann is Assistant Professor of American Literature at the University of Konstanz.

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