

# Conjuring and Conjecturing: Friel's Performances

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**Abstract:** *Though most critics were negative about Performances I believe this is a vintage Friel play, first in its theme: (1) its interaction of different languages (whereby music is more important than ever) and (2) its illustration of epistemological questions (especially the question of performativity), but also in its components: (1) the seemingly fruitless journey, (2) the opposition Dionysiac-Apollonian forces, (3) the communication which fails, due to the strong narcissism of one of the protagonists. As Performances is really the staging of the epistemological journey of a PhD student, Anezka, who probes into the force of Janacek's passionate desire for his muse Kamila Stösslova, desire will be a key concept in the play. This interaction between the student and the dead author's work is represented by a live Janacek. Though Friel used this device before (in Faith Healer) it is more to the point now, as it allows the playwright to stage the postmodern awareness that "the author is dead": it is his work that is alive, and challenging both readers and performers. It is interesting that a pronounced division between two kinds of reading is sustained throughout the play. On the one hand, Janacek appears as a self-centred figure who refuses to have his authorial position challenged, and sees language as a representative-imitative tool. Anezka, on the other hand, looks at expressions in a more Deleuzian way, not focusing on the product but on the production, its heterogeneity and inconsistencies. Though Janacek keeps turning Anezka's interpretations down, she will turn out to be the more convincing, as she discovers the maestro's discordant desires, not only in his social relations and in his poetics but also in the way he maintains his authorial position. His own solipsistic stance will be unmasked by the echoes in his own text, by his use of shifters and by the "general iterability" Derrida considers essential to language as such, but which is exacerbated in the quoting practice which is even more visibly effective in research work as well as in music performances.*

Style is no longer the privileged access to essence, it is an assemblage of enunciation (and as such always collective, even if associated with a proper name and a "celibate" author), and a becoming [...] the main object of philosophical enquiry for

Deleuze ... is not the single “thing”, or the static structure of objects, but always a becoming a series of acts “expressed in a certain style”. ...So style is a name not for a form of diction ... not for a deliberate organisation of language, ... but for the discord, the disequilibrium, the stuttering that affect language at its most alive. (Lacerle 221)

## **Introduction: Leos Janacek and Brian Friel**

When Friel’s play *Performances* was premiered on 30 September 2003, the critics were almost unanimously negative. According to Ian Shuttleworth in *Financial Times* “the problem is the damned material. It can’t decide what it wants to be”. I fully disagree, and want to argue that Friel comes to the core of his business here: as Seamus Deane indicated, “his drama evolves, with increasing sureness, toward an analysis of the behaviour of language itself” (13). The over seven hundred passionate love-letters Leos Janacek wrote to his unattainable beloved over the last eleven years of his life form the core of the play. Anezka Ungrova, a PhD student from Prague university, is so excited about the intense language of these love letters that they inspire her to investigate the links between Janacek’s life, his love letters and the string quartet which he named after his “intimate letters”. This investigation is staged as a visit to the “living quarters” of the composer – that is, to the workroom of the dead composer, which is enlivened by the performance of a string quartet that actually plays *Intimate Letters*. Opposing all negative critics, I want to show in this article just how the multiplicity and range of expressions, the interaction of verbal, musical and body language makes *Performances* into a vintage Friel play. Whereas Shuttleworth sees the play as “merely a dramatic doodle” I intend to show that *Performances* is indeed a doodle of interacting citations, but a very intricate and therein surprisingly interesting one. The “doodle” that will be under scrutiny is formed by desire – a powerful vector in the thought systems of Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler. Indeed, the one positive critic, James Boylan, focuses on how “Ungrova’s relentless questioning of Janacek... is elevated above the tedium of mere biographical inquiry. This device allows Friel to expertly home in on the broader themes of human longing and love, and their subsequent manifestations in art and music”.<sup>1</sup>

The problem, how desire can “perform” a bridge, realise a continuity from emotion to letters to a quartet seems interesting enough to me. So what is it some critics think so “damned” about “the material” of Janacek’s life and art? Let us take a brief look at that first, and then see how it might have appealed to Friel.

## **Aspects of Janacek’s Life (1854-1928)**

The composer’s life seems to have been marked by two contradictory emotions: on the one hand, his biographies show a controlling streak; on the other, he was dependent on and driven by strong desires.

That he was of a strongly individualistic cast of mind shows in the many conflicts he had with masters and colleagues from his early days in the Vienna Conservatoire onwards. This was further illustrated by his rivalry with his old friend Antonin Dvorak<sup>2</sup> and by the troubles in his marriage. In his sexual relations too he seemed to want to be in command, as we can deduce from his marriage with Zdenka Schulzova, a former student who was not quite sixteen when he married her. His second great love was also incited by a much younger woman: Kamila Stösslova, a housewife with two sons, was thirty-seven years his junior, and intellectually less sophisticated; yet she inspired him to his most glorious operas and most complicated chamber music.

The most important structural aspects of his oeuvre can best be summarized in four sets of opposites. First, the link between *life and work* was always very strong. Here, both the controlling and desiring forces alternate again, as we find very *descriptive* passages (Janacek is said to have carried a notebook along all the time to register peculiarities of human speech or birds' song, as Friel indicates in the passage where Anezka has to recognise the nightingale sound in the music) but also very *imaginative* ones. The opera *Katya Kabanova* (1921) for instance is modelled on and dedicated to Kamila<sup>3</sup> but some dramatic romantic motifs, like the suicide, are invented. This brings us to a third important tension in his work: whereas the composer *disdained* "Wagnerian romanticism", he was often prone – especially in the eleven years of his passion for Kamila – to cast his expressions in a *romantic* mould; so that all critics consider "his two quartets are quintessentially romantic"<sup>4</sup>. The links between *life and death* are a fourth motif which recurs: it is the theme of an operatic trilogy but also of the series of lullabies Janacek composed for the birthday of his son who died when he was two. Finally, it is significant to note that all sources underscore that Janacek was outstanding in that the melody of his operas always closely follows the words<sup>5</sup>, and that he was a prolific word artist as well, as the over seven hundred letters to Kamila record, which in turn led to the composing of his second string quartet called *Intimate Letters* first performed in 1928 after his death.

### **The appeal to Friel**

If Janacek tended to closely follow words in his music, Friel is a playwright who tends to insert music in his words. This is the case in the vast majority of his plays: *Aristocrats*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* are full of it, *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer* have some, as does *Fathers and Sons*. In *Performances* the "insertion" is more intricate than ever before. The play's title, which contains the Frielian keyword "performance"<sup>6</sup> in the plural, indeed covers a range of performances, on, say, four different levels: (1) in the libidinal undertow of the verbal score, (which contain an imagery rich in body language) (2) and in that of the musical notation, (3) in the performances by Anezka and the musicians, who both perform and comment on respectively the intimate letters and the quartet *Intimate Letters*; (4) in the interaction of the "literal" and the musical

interpretations of Anezka and the members of the quartet. It is important, however, to realize that the “consecutive” aspect, the genesis of these sources can only be settled in a “simultaneous” way: the Janacek on the stage is “dead”; he is merely their master’s voice that is interpreted by Anezka and her contemporaries. Again, in this sense *Performances* is a vintage Friel piece, as it is primarily a play which dramatizes the very act of interpretation. What we get on stage here is *the epistemological journey* of a PhD student, Anezka, who probes into the relation between the composer and his beloved muse, Kamila Stösslova; she is thereby assisted by four musicians, who also interpret Janacek’s work in interaction with her research. We could further nuance Deane’s remark that Friel offers “an analysis of the behaviour of language itself”, i.e. an interaction between music, verbal and body language.<sup>7</sup> Two things are striking in these forms of language: all three utterances have that in common that they all respond to a written form of language; and they all fully correspond to what Gilles Deleuze calls “style”. Let us briefly look at the graphic aspect first. Indeed, this is, especially with regard to Anezka’s sources, constantly underscored. The PhD consults other biographies alongside with the information she gathers from Janacek’s autobiographical writings. These sometimes clash, as is the way with sources in research, and so we find Janacek complaining about Anezka’s work.) To my surprise, several critics are surprised to find Janacek on stage while others and he himself often talk of his death.<sup>8</sup> This is a device we are familiar with from Friel’s *Faith Healer*, who is repeatedly represented as an artist, thus allowing the playwright to literally represent the “artist” as dead, illustrating the postmodernist tenet that “the author is dead”. Indeed, the interpreters have to grope their way solely by means of the written traces he left. This is also the reason why Janacek is given “presence” on the stage, while Kamila is omitted: almost all her letters were destroyed, she did not leave many traces for the researcher. But not only does Friel make Anezka stress the written nature of her verbal sources (she sits at the work table over his papers and talks about other written sources on Janacek’s life), he also clearly marks that without the performers there is no Janacek, so he makes his Janacek figure state explicitly “Where would I be without their company? They’re my life-support group” (28). Without the musicians, Janacek is gone, and this seems also to be the case with Anezka’s “verbal” work. After Anezka’s interview with the composer (her interaction with his work), the musicians come in and remark “You’re looking energetic today, Maestro” (36). Indeed, it is thanks to Anezka’s work and the quartet’s that Janacek will “live” on<sup>9</sup>.

Second, the epistemological journey of the young people, Anezka and the quartet; focuses on the Deleuzian concept of “style”; in Janacek’s language<sup>10</sup>, “style” meaning “an original syntactic treatment of language, called stuttering or stammering, and the capacity to take language to its frontiers with silence, but also with other media, notably music” (Lecerle 222). Especially in the moments when Janacek is overwhelmed by his passion for Kamila, and when his quartet still sounds like “a whistle in the dark”, the composer reaches this extreme aspect of his expression, where language strains and wavers between being complete and not quite language any more. As the Janacek figure puts it: “All you have in those stammering pages are dreams of music, desires for the dream sounds in the

head. And in those stammering pages those aspirations – desires – dreams – they're transferred on to a... quite untutored young woman. And in time the distinction between his dreams and that young woman became indistinguishable..." (34). ( This will be the question at the core of the interaction of the different kinds of language: how desire of the desire, and desire of recognition, will be represented by the two groups of interpreters: the lonely, academic literary scholar Anezka and the humorous, creative quartet of musicians.)

So in general we may say that *Performances* is a thematization of the force of performativity, and in that sense the 2003 play is an elaboration of *Faith Healer*. Simultaneously, it is an objectification or bold representation of the act of interpreting, and in that sense the play under scrutiny is an elaboration of *The Communication Cord*, which is the farcical counterpart of this play<sup>11</sup>. *Performances* is much more complex. It seems as if the "dead" Janacek represents the traditionally representative, essentialistic, narcissistic, imitative interpreter, while Anezka will prove to be the curious, enthusiastically comparative and creative researcher. Yet, the positions are not that easy to delineate: one cannot simply maintain that the old Janacek represents old, biography-focused hermeneutic methods of reading and Anezka the more postmodern ones. As the Janacek figure complains when Anezka deviates from his own letters, yet protests (too) much when she sticks to them, the "dead author" illustrates how the "material" of his life and work resists research.

But apart from its use of music, its interaction of different languages (not only verbal, as in *Translations*) and in its illustration of epistemological questions (especially the question of performativity), *Performances* is also typical of Friel in its components. Like so often, the general frame is again that of a (seemingly fruitless) journey, during which the protagonist (i.e. Anezka) is stuck between two interpretations<sup>12</sup>; the opposition of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian forces is one of the central lines of conflict; and communication between the protagonist and the antagonist fails, due to the strong narcissism of one of them<sup>13</sup>. In Richard Pine's terms, *Performances* would be as much a love as a language play, as both are in constant, tense interaction. Indeed, Judith Butler's observation that communication is always a plea for love, whereby the need for recognition always implies the danger of destruction of the Other, is at the core of *Performances*, as we will see in Janacek's belittling of others.

### **Desire for Ignition, Desire for Recognition: the Maestro Enslaved**

With the question of how Janacek's passionate desire produces the chain of performances we come to the core business of Friel's play. We will therefore mainly focus on the relationship between Janacek and Anezka, the subject and its author, or vice versa. What catches the eye here is the different attitudes both have towards language. Janacek is the one who seems to see language as a representative-imitative tool while Anezka concentrates on the passages of performative use of language and on transitions. While he focuses on identities and positions, she keeps an eye and ear peeled for metamorphoses and variations. As a result, we might try out the hypothesis that Janacek

stands for the traditional interpreter, who follows Buffon in his definition that “style” “involves notions of individuality , ... of subjectivity , ... of authorship” (Lecerclre 220) while Anezka sees style more in a Deleuzian definition: “language is in a state of continuous variation. This continuous variation creates heterogeneity and imbalance: language is not a stable system” (Lecerclre 224). In this context we can indeed speak, with Lecerclre, of “vitalist metaphysics” (Lecerclre 255) – and so it should not surprise us to find Janacek alive on the stage, as his work appeals so strongly to all those present in his “house”, his cosmos. But again as the whole dialogue is meant to show the interactionality between the compositions, composer and interpreters, we will see how questions about representation and production will alternate.

Anezka chose to work on the links between Janacek’s love letters and the quartet *Intimate Letters* because she felt ignited by the ecstatic, and almost “literally” dionysiac language he uses in these letters: “Anezka: ‘And what can I tell you of that great love that inspired this work? It is a fire that boils like strong wine’ . ...And where did it come from, this inextinguishable flame?’” (30). Kamila, it seems in the letters, is the one that breaks all boundaries in the composer so that they both *com*-pose the quartet together: “how *our* very first meeting set my soul ablaze with the most exquisite melodies. And this will be *our* composition because it will be quick with *our* passion” (23). Sheer emotion seems to have annihilated the boundary between the composer’s body, that of his beloved, and of his art: the dionysiac aspect of “raw life” hurtles things into being: the love letters are “written kisses”, “‘This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh’” (30). The emotionality is underscored by the fact that Janacek’s most “dionysiac” passages are larded with the greatest amount of performative verbs. So he wrote to Kamila about the quartet “as I wrote it I trembled with such joy, such happiness, that every bar is a proclamation of my desire for you because my whole creative life takes its heartbeat from you” (24). The words “calling” and “proclamation”, performative verbs par excellence, are combined with strong words denoting intensity like “desire, whole, heartbeat”. In a later passage of the letters, Janacek characterises his idea of performativity in seeing it as a direct effect of *his emotions*, rather than of speech itself: “‘But with this quartet, my *Intimate Letters* to you, my love, I wrote from feelings experienced directly and vividly. This was composed in fire out of the furnace that is our great love’” (30) – thus proving once more the minor impact of the “dead author” and the major one of the “living letters”. But this is not the only peculiarity, discrepancy, in the interpretation of texts we find in *Performances*. On the one hand, Anezka loves the dionysiac language, on the other she thinks of Janacek and Kamila as a Dante and Beatrice. The wild yet spiritual nature of his passionate language indeed reveals a discrepancy in Janacek, who will insist, on the one hand, that his language was cut out of his own flesh, while maintaining, on the other hand, that the beloved of the “Intimate Letters” was purely conceived by his own mind<sup>14</sup>.

In summary, what we find in *Performances* is exactly what Deleuze means by “style”: “style is ... the absence of style ... the moment when language is no longer

defined by what it says, even by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow and to explode – *desire*. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process, and not a goal, a production and not an expression” (Lecerle 222). Indeed Janacek shows an interesting schizoid pattern in his sayings.

In the “biographical” information about Janacek we saw that his life and art was riddled with opposites. No wonder: the human being is a “dramatic construct”, the psychic system lives from the assimilation and balancing of conflict. Janacek even states this explicitly, when he advises Anezka to combine the image of her Italian ex-friend with the image of a “blonde Swede” in her head, thus showing that the “com-poser” sees the combination of opposites as the method of his work. Indeed, we further find the artist saying that in the middle of his final, violent tryst with Kamila he found innocence intoned; in the most complex relationship he finds something trivial<sup>15</sup>. And Janacek’s paradoxes also work the other way round: the “quite untutored woman” (34) incites him to write “that complex architecture again, probably the most intricate structure a man can put together ... getting the precise balance between a statement and its qualification, maybe even its denial” (28). Statement and denial are combined, as well as contrary emotions: while Janacek points out that “I was terrified tackling that complex architecture again” (28) his letters speak “again and again about the great joy and excitement of composing” (28). Finally, Janacek suggests that, when at his richest, he was the most threadbare; and when his death was impending, he wrote a song expecting new life: “if he could sing, maybe Adam sang something like this to his Eve. (*Laughs*) Or maybe ... Maybe at that point the old composer was finally threadbare. And he called it “I’ll Wait for You”. Silly title: his time had run out by then” (25)<sup>16</sup>. So Janacek is aware of certain oppositions, but not of others. We will now come to the crux of the play – the “schizophrenia”, “the discord, the disequilibrium, the stuttering that affect language at its most alive”.)

We will first see how the author’s discordant desires are realised in Janacek’s **social** relations, secondly in his “**poetics**”, where he sets out the differences between good and bad art, and finally we will see how language itself, in the actors’ citational games, will undercut the authorial position and become **co-author**.

### **Janacek’s Social Relations: Desire for Recognition or for Power?**

Janacek’s social interactions are represented by the quotes from his “intimate letters” which we hear from Anezka, and by Janacek’s reactions to her quoting. Thereby the discrepancy between both sources strikes us immediately. On the one hand the letter-writer Janacek stresses how the late quartets were made “between him and Kamila”: he stresses their first “meeting” and how the work will be “... *our* composition because it will be quick with *our* passion, and our *mutual* love” (23); in his comments on Anezka’s reading, however (which are the symbolisation of her having consulted other sources apart from Janacek’s own), he *belittles* her: she is metaphorized as “small-town granite” (38). But not only Kamila is described as “small”: all women who threaten the maestro’s

control over his image are dwarfed. So, Janacek's wife, who wrote her autobiography, is diminished as "Moravia's [sic]supreme fantasist", while Anezka, felt to be threatening in her persistence in probing his relationships, is constantly linked up with "belittling" words: she "has her own ... impish way of classifying events" (19) and was in love with a "little statistician" (22). Finally, the first violinist, Ruth, is bagatellized to "an accomplished fiddler" (18) and kept in an almost exclusively ancillary position, as she can help the master to food and drink, but is subsequently sent out of the room. Interestingly, the PhD student who had come in with glorious addresses to the maestro, whom she described as "generous", "courageous, so faithful" "just noble", even "august" (33) is later found to be "cruel and heartless and deeply misogynistic" (36). The latter definition, however, is too narrow, because men too are belittled by Janacek. Especially his rival Dvorak's music is described in diminutives "Much too folksy-themes-and-dirndl-skirt for my taste" (16, my emphasis). Yet, when the rival composes a *Requiem* for the "real master", Janacek, the addressee's effect on Dvorak's work is that it becomes all of a sudden "august" (17). Moreover, the passage where Janacek passes this judgment on his rival is ambiguous as to what exactly was so grand: the music or the occasion? "Janacek: And you should have heard his *Requiem* at my funeral service. It was ... august. In the old Opera House where they had me lying in state. Curious expression that – 'lying in state' isn't it?" (17). As Janacek can see himself as the giant mainly by belittling all others, we find here an illustration of Judith Butler's tactics of the performativity of someone who moves from a position of authority to one of power. "If the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that ... 'undo' the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power" (Butler 2004, 2). This is precisely what happens to the Janacek figure: when Anezka delves further into his writings and in those of his circle, she finds that the man had his generous moments, but that his hunger for power was very strong as well. Along with that hunger came a denial of it, and thereby a denial of self-knowledge. As a result of her readings, Anezka moves from seeing the composer as an "august" figure to a self-centred one. Indeed, rereading the play shows how the artist has been "self-centred" all along. The Janacek figure only thinks of his own health, forgets Anezka's name all the time and never lets her finish a sentence; he quotes himself when he pleases, but when she does he denies he ever wrote it. This egocentrism becomes most clear in the passage when Janacek jealously remembers an American musical that was much more popular in Bruno than his own music. The composer recalls merely one line from the musical, and does not even finish it: "I want to be happy but I won't be happy". Like an evangelical hymn, isn't it?" (21). First of all, this contradictory statement reflects Janacek's contradictory frame of mind, and the paradoxical nature of desire at that: desire, by definition, is never fulfilled, since it is desire of the desire. But also significant is that this song, which punctuates *Wonderful Tennessee* – another play which has the endlessness and potential destructiveness of desire for its theme – is quoted there in its full form: "*I want to be Happy ... But I won't be happy/Till I make you happy, too*" (Friel 1993, 3. My emphasis) Significantly, the "altruistic" aspect about the "you" is left out by the Janacek figure, underscoring his egocentrism.



## Janacek's Poetics

Even in his assessment of the verbal and musical arts Janacek sports a need to belittle the former in order to let the latter shine in greater glory<sup>17</sup>. I will limit myself here to refer to two of his main statements and show how the author contradicts himself. First, the language of music is declared to be the sole and perfect language; second, this perfect language consists of a “unified” expression.

Indeed, Friel's Janacek strongly hierarchizes the different languages he knows, and therein displays an anger with words in general that betrays the attitude of one who “doth protest too much”. “The people who huckster in words merely report on feeling. We speak feeling” (31), he maintains. He even applies W.B. Yeats's line that one should choose either perfection of life or of the work to his own situation, trying to impress Anezka with his self-sacrificing attitude with regard to Kamila:

“Janacek: I never considered the life all that important. I gave myself to the perfection of the work. Did I make the wrong choice?  
Anezka: Crap.” (37)

The PhD is duly unimpressed: Janacek contradicts himself in many ways here. First, he writes over seven hundred letters to his beloved Kamila, stressing that the music flows directly from his fascination with her, which is a *contradictio in terminis*: first, the composer apparently needs these hundreds of letters to master “the ferment” as he calls it, and secondly he later maintains that not Kamila Stösslova was the source of his inspiration, but his own mind – his letters. Moreover, the unity of both the verbal and the music work is symbolised by their common title, *Intimate Letters*. So Anezka is right to say that the composer's alleged suggestion of a heart-rending choice is “crap” as if the letters were no work, and the work no letters.

Second, there is Janacek's definition of the perfect expression which also contains a paradox. In the ideal utterance, he says, “we reach into that amorphous world of feeling and sing what we hear in *the language of feeling itself*; a unique vocabulary of sounds created by feeling itself” (31, my stress). The composer stresses that the chosen expression is unbroken, coinciding with itself and with the outside world. Yet he himself contradicts this twice in blatant ways. First, because the very motif, impetus of the work, desire, is exactly that which cannot be contained, and that is the very reason why his work remains fascinating. Second, Janacek totally denies the impact of the young Kamila Stösslova in order to retreat to a totally solipsistic kind of idealism. Not the real woman made him write, he says, but the woman in his head, some self-conceived ideal:

Janacek: The thing realized. The aspiration fulfilled. All you have in those stammering pages are dreams of music, desires for the dream sounds in the head. And in those stammering pages those aspirations – desires – dreams – they're transferred on to a perfectly decent but quite untutored young woman.

And in time the distinction between his dreams and that young woman became indistinguishable, so that in his head she was transformed into something immeasurably greater – of infinitely more importance – than the quite modest young woman she was, in fact. Indeed in time he came to see her – miraculously – as the achieved thing itself! The music in the head made real, become carnal! Came to know no distinction between the dream music and the dream woman!

...

Anezka (*Total shock*) You're teasing me, Mr Janacek, aren't you? (34)<sup>18</sup>

## Language as Co-author

But not only the content of what the Janacek figure says contradicts his other utterances: both the verbal and the musical *forms* of the maestro's statements turn against himself. This brings us to the third point where Janacek's style shows its Deleuzian disequilibria – in the ironies that result from the tricks language plays upon its author. To streamline the playful aspects of language somewhat, we will limit ourselves to three kinds of ambiguities: those created by echoes, those brought about by shifters and finally those originating in the quoting practice, the "Excitable Speech" shared by all actors involved.

As far as the *echoes* go, let us look at two instances to see how they work. First, there is the signal word "enslaved". In one of his letters, Janacek writes to Kamila that "'I've just completed the opening movement and it is all about our first fateful encounter and how you instantly *enslaved* me'" (19) Only, the maestro later maintains that she, Kamila, was the one who was enslaved, and more specifically by public opinion: "Forever vigilant of her good name. A *slave* to small-town tyrannies. ...practically illiterate... Mrs Stösslova was a woman of resolute ... ordinariness." (25) However, there is a double irony in this double enslavement. First, it is precisely because she did bow to the so-called "small-town tyrannies" that she could both respond to his love and be responsible to her own family, which allowed the artist eleven years of desire, and an apotheosis in brilliant quartets. But on a second level, the author is ironicized in his fulminations against Kamila's "grocery thoughts", as it is the composer himself who turns out to be the one enslaved by the small-town tyranny, as he is ashamed of the "ordinariness" of the woman who had fascinated him into his major work. A second set of signal words are the qualifications Janacek gives the two ladies that threaten to overrule him with their interpretations: the first violinist, Ruth, and the PhD, Anezka. He describes "Ruthie" (another diminutive) as "a skilled do-it-yourself woman" (18) whereon she plays the beginning of the quartet which she then interprets: "Ruth (*Sings*) Ta-ra-ra-ra – Ti-ra-ra-ra. 'I'm my own man', that's what it says to me." (19) So, with her interpretation of Janacek's music she echoes what he, that is his music, says about her: *interpreting* is a matter of interaction<sup>19</sup>. Simultaneously, Janacek introduces Anezka to Ruth as a "persistent" lady. These adjectives, however,

will boomerang back on the maestro himself: the play will plainly show that it is Janacek who is the persistent do-it-yourself man, as he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the influence his wife, Kamila and Anezka have on him. Though Kamila fired his artistic abilities into full action, he inverts the situation and pretends to have invented her. Only, the composer's language – his own name to start with – show us a downsized kind of speaker.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, the *shifters* show us a different picture of the author than the one he himself intended. As Derrida pointed out in his study of shifters in Husserl, it is these pronouns which are most liable to create ambiguities of reference. So Janacek says a few disparaging things about Kamila and her husband: "What you must understand is that Mrs Stösslova was a woman of resolute ... ordinariness. Wasn't *he* a real pig!" (25) As Anezka switches to the second person singular: "I just know *you* did love her" with Janacek switching back to the position of the artist "Aren't *all artists* users?" (26 all stresses are my own) the referent of the signifier "pig" becomes unclear: is it Mr Stösslova or Janacek? This ambiguity is confirmed when Janacek dismisses Kamila's role again: "Anezka (*Incredulous*): Oh, Mr Janacek, you – / Janacek: Look at that – disapproving face! Yes - yes - yes - a real pig, I know" (34-35).

Thirdly, and most importantly, there is the praxis with quotations – representations par excellence – which oust the speaking subjects from their controlling position, thus proving to be "creative" after all. Of course it should not surprise us that in a play entitled *Performances*, Austin's remarks about performativity will prove to be very useful, especially his observation that "the performative breaks the link between intention and meaning: not my intention but the social and linguistic conventions are determining" (Culler 507). This is exactly what we have just seen: language has its own ways of situating its speakers. Yet more striking is that the Janacek figure uses the very method Austin presents, in order to negate his own previous utterances: "A performative utterance will... be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage ... or spoken in a soliloquy" (Culler 507). Indeed Janacek treats Anezka's reading of his work as but an utterance by an actor on stage, whose performance makes the sayings void. Anezka's point of view, on the other hand, is that observed by other literary theorists, who maintain that whether an utterance is performative or not depends on whether it is felicitous or infelicitous, i.e. whether they fit well into the conventions of a genre (Culler 508). The very goal of her PhD is to show the interaction of "The work and the life! Inextricable! Indistinguishable! Identical!" (24), but before she checks this with Janacek she wants to make sure with the man whether she works on terms which are acceptable to him. So, in her concern about the legitimacy, viability, felicity of her approach, to link life and work, Anezka brings in another interesting criterion of performativity: its acceptability. As Mary Louise Pratt remarks: "a literary composition is felicitous only when accepted as such ... it is like a bet, which becomes a bet only when it is accepted" (Culler 508).

Anezka: I did scruple over this, Mr Janacek: is it an area of honest exploration or is it just vulgar curiosity? And I came to the conclusion that it is totally honest.

Janacek: Well scrupled. Congratulations.

Anezka: Because there must be a connection between the private life and the public work, Mr Janacek.

Janacek: Must there?" (21)

But Janacek does not take up the bet: his congratulations were only ironical, thus symbolizing Anezka's insecurity about the approach in her PhD. And yet the authorial position is once more ironized. While Austin tried to distinguish between serious and nonserious or citational utterances, Derrida, in *Signature event context*, points out that "a general iterability" is one of the laws of language as such (Culler 509). This is an aspect of quotations which Friel's Janacek figure wants to use in order to undercut the "authorial power" Anezka borrows from her quoting practice. By multiplying authors, he wants to wipe out the dionysiac unicity he once was proud of, in order to hide it behind reference upon reference:

Anezka: "This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh."

Janacek: I never wrote that!

Anezka: "Before this I composed from emotions remembered, out of feeling recollected in perfect calm."

Janacek: That's true. (*Laughs*) Pinched that line from some English poet. Name's gone, too" (30).

Though the reference to Wordsworth's "emotions recollected in tranquillity" is not exactly a quote – or not an exact quote – Janacek wants to pretend that it is a quote. Therein he proves Derrida's observation right, that to distinguish between quotes and non-quotes in a clear-cut way is impossible, and that, as a result, the power of the performative cannot simply be delineated. However, the corollary of this is that no "author" can have "the final word" about himself: performativity belongs to the language itself and to the situation, not to the author.

The musicians, too, are invited by Janacek to add quote to quote. Here, the most significant passage is that where the composer asks Judith to play the "flautato", whereby Anezka is tested. In his request that she should be able to recognize which bird he represented in the flautato figure Janacek once more proves to be of the representative rather than of the creative type. The fact that Anezka first does not know what is expected of her, and then finds it a ridiculously simple question shows that indeed she belongs more to the Deleuzian approach which researches the infinite variations that great art should engender. She is herein assisted by John, who volunteers to play a variation on the passage the maestro had ordered his colleague to play; only, he plays it in a joking

way<sup>21</sup> which displeases the maestro who feels, once more, betrayed by the creativity of others and the unexpected turns of (ex)citational exercises.

## Conclusion

In the biographical information on Janacek we saw that his work was moulded by several tensions: that between life and work, life and death, between an anti-romantic stance and a romantic one, and between a descriptive and imaginative tendency in his compositions. When we looked at the interactions between Anezka and the “subject” of her PhD we noticed indeed that these contradictions steered Janacek into a stuttering style, and his desire often sent him into rapturous language. The “dionysiac” passages clearly showed how “Stuttering for Deleuze is, therefore, an equivalent of poetic language. ...The hero of stuttering, the philosophical character needed to support the concept, is the exiled poet, who subverts *langue* and aims at the noble form of silence, the silence of the ineffable ... And the problem with this, of course is that it is a Romantic pose” (Lecerclé 234). Being opposed to romanticism, however, Friel’s Janacek disavows his passionate writings but therein becomes totally unconvincing as he constantly contradicts himself. In the process, Anezka’s research is represented as an act of interpretation in which the performative aspect is foregrounded, and in which two paradigms constantly interact in non-intentional ways. On the one hand, there is the essentialist narcissistic author who considers style in a traditional way, like Buffon, seeing it as a tool with which to fashion one’s own self-image. On the other hand we have the dogged and the playful interpreters, Anezka and the musicians, who see style more as “an assemblage of enunciation (and as such always collective, even if associated with a proper name and a ‘celibate’ author), and a becoming” (Lecerclé 221), thus illustrating a Deleuzian idea of style which shows language in its interaction with others rather than as an individual’s possession. In this opposition, Friel added one more masterful play to an oeuvre which always shows “language at its most alive”: one in which to play is to work, to work is to play.

## Notes

- 1 James Boylan, <http://www.rte.ie/arts/2003/1003/performances.html>. Whereas *Making History* concentrated on the transposition from life into text, *Performances* doubles the stakes and also tries to see how life, text and music interact.
- 2 Friel refers to this circumstance several times in *Performances*. “Janacek: An American millionaire paid Dvorak’s heirs two hundred thousand dollars for just six of his manuscripts. Isn’t that astonishing? And that was eighty years ago!” (17) The jealousy may be due to the commonly received opinion that “Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) is the best known and world’s most-played Czech composer of all times. His musical inventiveness was bottomless, and the beauty of his melodies unique. He composed everything – from symphonies and operas through songs and various chamber compositions to spiritual music such as oratorios and cantatas”. (<http://>

- [dvorak.musicabona.com](http://dvorak.musicabona.com)); his works display the influences of folk music, mainly Czech ... but also American (pentatonic themes), Classical composers & Brahms. *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music*, ed Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan. Indeed Friel's Janacek will complain to Anezka that the citizens of Brno were more taken by an American musical than by his own compositions.
- 3 The plot is relatively simple. Boris loves Katya who is unhappily married. While Katya's husband is away, servants can arrange a tryst. The husband comes back, Katya confesses her love for another and commits suicide. [http://www.naxos.com/NewDesign/fintro.files/bintro.files/operas/Katya\\_Kabanova.htm](http://www.naxos.com/NewDesign/fintro.files/bintro.files/operas/Katya_Kabanova.htm))
  - 4 Janos Gereben/SF [www.sfcv.org](http://www.sfcv.org) <http://home.ease.lsoft.com/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind0310&L=classical>
  - 5 In his play, Friel makes Janacek test the PhD student Anezka by playing piano pieces, mostly quotes from his own work, which she has to recognise. In order to confuse her, he sometimes plays Dvorak, and then Anezka guesses wrongly: "I know. From your opera Katya Kab – " (16).
  - 6 Even surgeons like Dr Rice and his colleagues in *Molly Sweeney* refer to their operations as "performances": "We're not mechanics. We're artists. We perform." (*Molly Sweeney*, Friel, Brian. *Plays 1*. Introduced by Seamus Deane. ff Contemporary Classics. London: Faber & Faber, 1996. 488)
  - 7 One might even say that Janacek's love letters are a kind of 'written body language', as he wrote that "This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh" (30). Unfortunately, we cannot go into the aspect of body language, which is especially relevant in the musicians.
  - 8 "...there's the whimsy. No mention at all of the oddity of Janáček being alive in the present; he takes mild exception whenever student Anezka blithely refers to his death in 1928, but is barely less casual about it himself." Shuttleworth, <http://www.cix.co.uk/~shutters/reviews/03065.htm>
  - 9 Throughout the play, Janacek will comment on and change his version of his own life as Anezka finds it in Janacek's letters to Kamila. In an early interview, Friel had indicated that there are no "facts" in an autobiography: "A fact is something that happened to me ... It can also be something I thought happened to me, something I thought I experienced. Or indeed an autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that." Pine, Richard. *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*. London/NY: Routledge, 1990. 19.
  - 10 Though Friel repeatedly thanks George Steiner for his inspiring essays, I believe Deleuze works equally well with Friel, and even in more elucidating ways, as I hope to show in some longer article.
  - 11 *Performances* is an elaboration of the previous play on communication, but this one is much more implicit and focused on form than the former. *The Communication Cord* was very explicit in its thematizations, like when Tim explains what his PhD is all about: That response cry – the imprecation – the expletive", the protagonist goes on about "conventionalized utterances" (*The Communication Cord* 30), "communicational possibilities" (34) and the like. Here, the focus is much more on passionate language itself and the ironies it can generate.
  - 12 She is stuck between different interpretations as Cass McGuire is between Ireland and America, the past and the present; as Molly Sweeney is between life and death, seeing and not-seeing; as Hugh O'Neill is between fact and fiction, as Christopher Gore will be between being English and Irish.
  - 13 "The works of Brian Friel ... are studies in broken communities – failures in sharing, and shared failures." RTE, Radio Telefis Eireann. Paul Delaney, Ed. *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: U of Michigan Press, 2000. 178-191. 180.
  - 14 As this information endorses Anezka's interpretation that their relationship is to be compared to Dante and Beatrice, or Petrarch and Laura, it is ironic that the Janacek figure mocks his interpreter.

As Janacek will, in the course of the play, deny his love and move further to the solipsistic position, he will further underscore Anezka's parallel, as the famous Italian lovers met when he was in puberty and she a child, and they were never lovers, but Dante nevertheless went on writing about a Beatrice which had nothing in common with the living woman – which is exactly the image Janacek tries to convey to Anezka.

- 15 “Janacek (*Quietly*) A time of frenzy. Violence even. Despair too. And then when all that ferment was about to overwhelm me - a few minutes of sudden peace - no longer - an amnesty sent from above maybe; and this fragment came to me, a little melodic tendril. Trivial, I know. But I remember placing those limpid notes on the page with such care, so delicately, as if they were fragile. And I remember thinking: simplicity like this, innocence like this, that's closer to the heart of it, isn't it?” (24).
- 16 Because the theme of never-ending desire is so important in this play, JANACEK This is the last thing I ever wrote. ...*He begins playing “I'll Wait for You”* (24).
- 17 F.C. McGrath is right in observing that “it is Friel's awareness of the intimate relations among language, discourse, illusion, myth, politics, and history that distinguishes his mature work from his early work. (McGrath 1)
- 18 Here it would be interesting to compare the poetics of the Janacek figure with W.B. Yeats's as he propounds them in his famous poem “Michael Robartes and the Dancer”. The passage “Paul Veronese/And all his sacred company/Imagined bodies all their days/By the lagoon you love so much, /For proud, soft, ceremonious proof/That all must come to sight and touch” seems here realised in an exemplary way (Yeats 198).
- 19 A similar thing happens to Anezka: after Janacek has half-mockingly called his folksy works “The Loodles of Deos Danacek” (16), Anezka will echo this in her lapsus as she addresses “Mr Danacek” (21); thus showing how one internalizes one's object of study.
- 20 The fact that the composer's very name is a diminutive (-cek being the diminutive suffix in Czech) brings another fine shade of irony in the context of one who tended to belittle the great personalities in his direct environment.
- 21 *Judith plays the flautato*. Janacek: Kamila identified the song immediately. She was very good at birds. Well?  
 Anezka: Well what?  
 Janacek: What bird is it?  
 Anezka: (Immediately) A nightingale.  
 Janacek: Clever!  
 Judith: Well done, Anezka.  
 Janacek: A nightingale in mourning, a lamenting nightingale.  
*John plays the same flautato figure – very slowly and woozily.*  
 John: And that, Maestro?  
 Janacek: (To Anezka) They're comedians, too. (To John)  
 All right, what is it?  
 John: The same mourning nightingale on the way home from the pub.  
 Janacek: Out – Out – Out! (27)

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