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Edward W. Said. *On Late Style*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006. 176 pp.

Edward W. Said's death in September 2003 abruptly ended the life of an extremely active writer and critic. By choosing to produce a book on artists' and writers' "late style," Said was probably well aware of his own life coming to an end as the result of his long-term suffering from leukaemia – and thus possibly of his own changing way of addressing issues he had been concerned with throughout his life, his "late style." Having been a pianist and music lover himself, he focuses on music (composers as well as performers) as the object of his analysis.

The foreword, written by his wife Mariam C. Said, describes the unfinished state of some of Said's books when he died (amongst them *On Late Style*). In this sense, the fragmentary nature of *On Late Style* relates to many of the works discussed in this book, yet also to what Said was interested in, namely "what gets left out" in works of art, particularly due to an artist's coming closer to old age and ultimate death.

This idea is taken up in the introduction written by editor Michael Wood who completed the book by assembling Said's remaining manuscripts. Wood discusses what "late" in the context of this book means: "Lateness doesn't name a single relation to time, but it always brings time in its wake. It is a way of remembering time, whether it is missed or met or gone." (xi) At this point Wood introduces Adorno whose term "late style" (*Spätstil*) is adopted by Said. (Said described himself as "the only true follower of Adorno" (xiii).) Wood also points out that "[l]ateness for Said is 'a form of exile'" (xiv) – one cannot go beyond it. This is an interesting issue considering Said's own personal background, and he frequently refers to the notion of exile throughout the book. *On Late Style* thus appears as a personal account of what Said was interested in, and how this interest related to himself as a critic and writer.

The first chapter ("Timeliness and Lateness") sets out Said's agenda. He starts his analysis of lateness with a reflection on timeliness by firstly discussing the notion of beginning (4) and then moving on to the "continuity that occurs after birth" (5), by which he means what is achievable later in life. Said points out that "both in art and in our general ideas about the passage of human life there is assumed to be a general abiding *timelessness*, by which I mean that what is appropriate to early life is not appropriate for later stages, and vice versa." (5) The idea of different stages of an artists' work that can be distinguished is only graspable later in or even after an artist's life. The question is, therefore, when and how we know when "late style" begins. Said then formulates his objective: "I shall focus on great artists and how near the end of their lives their work and thought acquires a new idiom, what I shall be calling a late style." (6) Lateness is therefore examined as "a factor of style": "I'd like to explore the experience of late style that involves a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and, above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against* ..." (7) Lateness is, therefore, a style that does not conform to standards; there seems to exist a certain artistic freedom towards the end of an artist's working life. In this context, Said explicitly refers to Adorno for the first time when mentioning Beethoven. References to Adorno will continue throughout the book (particularly in the fifth chapter, "The Lingering Old Order"). Another aspect that features throughout *On Late Style* is the notion that lateness is "conscious of memory and present" (14). Time, memory and an awareness of death in relation to the present and the present development of style thus play a significant role in the analysis of "late style."

In the chapters that follow, Said examines a diversity of late styles: chapter two, "Return to the Eighteenth Century," focuses on Richard Strauss and his traditionalism (43). Chapter three, "*Così fan tutte* at the Limits," explores Mozart's opera and the way it sheds light on a "society in crisis," thus displaying discomfort, which Said associates with "late style" (49). Throughout the chapters, Said provides his readers with other artists' opinions on the

musicians discussed: for example, Glenn Gould's attitude towards Strauss (39), thus anticipating a section on Gould later in the book (chapter six, "The Virtuoso as Intellectual," which focuses on art and commercialism), or Beethoven's "curious silence" on Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (52). This is a technique Said often employs throughout the text: many of the artists whose works he analyses are linked through admiration for or rejection of someone else's piece of music or writing. Style is thus something that is also created in interaction with other artists and not developed entirely in seclusion.

The fourth chapter ("On Jean Genet") is the only chapter which does include a discussion of music, and is strongly connected to two of Said's previous works, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. Here the theme of death is extremely significant: Genet was well aware of his own coming death and related it to the death of the Palestinians (88), whose cause he supported. "Late style" thus also seems to go beyond personal boundaries and experiences.

The final chapter ("Glimpses of Late Style") gives an overview of what late style could mean more generally. Said goes back to "[l]iterary modernism [...] as late-style phenomenon [...] out of their time altogether, returning to ancient myth or antique forms" (136). He refers to a number of writers: Euripides (137) and the Greek Alexandrian poet Constantine Cavafy (142) who has a "sense of enduring exile" (145), which is also of personal concern for Said. A comparison between Benjamin Britten's and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (147 ff.) gives an interesting reading of the interaction between music and literature, thus bringing Said's interest in music and literature together. Said concludes his examination of "late style" as follows: "[t]his is the prerogative of late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile." (148)

Overall, the reader is left with a number of questions. For example, Said focuses on Western art, which reflects his personal encounters with "great" (6) art and music. Artists, writers and musicians of a non-Western background do not feature in *On Late Style*. The question is what this says about Said as a critic with a Palestinian background who spent most of his life in the West, and his opinion on what "great" in art means. Furthermore, one can ask oneself what else Said would/could have written (or how he would have completed *On Late Style*), if he had not died (then). How could we describe his own late style? What is left out of and what unites his work? *On Late Style* is a challenging read, particularly for non-musicologists, yet a valuable one for everybody who is interested in a more personal reading of some pieces of Western music and literature that reveals their mature nature.

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