English Studies in Canada

Aural Memory in Madeleine Thien's Do Not Say We Have Nothing

Kelly Baron

Volume 46, numéro 2-3-4, juin–septembre–décembre 2020

New Sonic Approaches in Literary Studies

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111322ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903544

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)

ISSN

0317-0802 (imprimé)
1913-4835 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Baron, K. (2020). Aural Memory in Madeleine Thien's Do Not Say We Have Nothing. *English Studies in Canada*, *46*(2-3-4), 181–195. https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903544

Aural Memory in Madeleine Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*

Kelly Baron
University of Toronto

It's not an understatement to say that *Goldberg Variations* created this book. But why? And how? It seems to me that music has a truth or some form of understanding.
Madeleine Thien, in conversation with Hsiu-Chuan Lee

In the opening pages of Madeleine Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing,* a novel that considers the intergenerational trauma resulting from the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Asian Canadian communities, Li-ling, the novel's protagonist, is walking through Vancouver's Chinatown when she hears Bach's Sonata for Piano and Violin no. 4 from the speakers of a store. She feels "drawn towards it as keenly as if someone were pulling [her] by hand. The counterpoint, holding together composer, musicians and even silence, the music, with its spiralling waves of grief and rapture, was everything [she] remembered" (4). The result is that she recalls her father, when, in the moments of listening to Bach, he became "so alive, so beloved, that the incomprehensibility of his suicide grieved [her] all over again" (4). By her own admission, she had never before experienced such a "pure memory" of her father, Jiang Kai, in the two decades since his death (4).

ESC 46.2–4 (June/September/December 2020 [Published May 2023]): 181–195

Kelly Baron is a SSHRC-funded PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Smaro Kamboureli, with whom she studies the role of sensorimotor memory in passing down intergenerational trauma in contemporary Canadian genealogical novels. She is also the publisher of *The Ex-Puritan*, formerly *The Puritan Literary Magazine*.

Initially, she does not name the musician performing Bach's Sonata no. 4. But when she journeys to mainland China to hear the last composition written by Sparrow, one of her father's former music teachers at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, she feels a "strange humming, as if [she'd] heard this music in [her] childhood," reflecting that it was perhaps an "echo of Bach's Sonata no. 4, an echo of that recording of Glenn Gould and Yehudie Menuhin [she] would later chance upon in Chinatown" (197). It is impossible that she could remember Sparrow's *The Sun Shines on the People's Square,* a sonata for piano and violin he finished composing shortly before his death during the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Before he died, he sent the only copy to her father, who killed himself shortly after. But the connections she makes indicate the nature of intergenerational memory in the novel. Although Li-ling is the daughter of Jiang Kai, a pianist at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music during the Cultural Revolution, her father never played piano in her presence; by the time he moved to Vancouver, he refused to show interest in the classical music of his life in China, going as far as to deny Li-ling's request for violin lessons during her youth. Instead, the significance of the music of Bach, Glenn Gould, and Sparrow comes to Li-ling through the storytelling she listens to from Ai-ming, Sparrow's daughter. When Li-ling remembers her father that day in Vancouver's Chinatown, the sensory stimulus strong enough to incite such a "pure memory" of her father is not one that has been passed down to her from Jiang Kai but was passed down from Ai-ming instead (4).

Li-ling's experience in Vancouver's Chinatown raises important questions for the role of music in studying literary depictions of intergenerational memory and trauma. What role does music have in understanding memory recall for intergenerational novels of trauma? How can listening to the music of such novels expand our understanding of trauma and memory recall? In this article, I explore the role of music and listening as the sensory stimulus behind a literary depiction of sensorimotor memory, or memories stored in the body. Specifically, I posit that listening in a literary context provides a methodology for understanding intergenerational memory and trauma. The sensory experiences which accompany the scenes of trauma that I analyze are defined by rhythmic repetition and music, resulting in a distinctly sonic approach to intergenerational memory and trauma that can be identified well in the visceral descriptions of classical music in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing.* Resultingly, I want to suggest that listening to the music in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is indicative of a new method for identifying intergenerational memory, one focused both on literary depictions of sound and how that sound then

influences the next generations of a family. If traumatic memories are communicated via silences and gaps in declarative, or narrative, memory, then the sensory stimulus of sound is the conduit by which traumatic memories are passed down to future generations of a family.

It is, at this point, a truism to declare that music has the ability to affect memory recall. Popular music of the past has been connected to nostalgia time and time again, resulting in the common trope in literature and film of hearing a song that transports the subject to a past memory, much like that of Li-ling's memory of her father. Scientific studies have noted the dialectic relationship that music has on memory: memories of the past are more powerfully evoked through music, Susann Eschrich and colleagues argue, but the music is also rendered more important to the subject because of the memory it evokes. The result, as Lutz Jäncke concludes, is that "music we have heard at specific periods of our life is strongly linked to our autobiographical memory and thus is closely involved in forming our view about our own self" (4). In literary studies, music has most commonly been used in analyses of Black writing, such as that of Lars Eckstein's analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Gülrenk Hayircil's article on Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*. And, although musicologists like Michael Pickering argue that "songs seem to evoke memories more powerfully than written prose, because of their combination of rhyme and rhythm," it is worth noting that the music conveyed in literature can frequently maintain the original rhythm of the musical piece (191). Indeed, Jonathan Culler, in his 2019 co-edited collection with Ben Glaser, cites Nicolas Abraham when noting that "rhythm produces in the reader the fundamental affect" of a literary work (qtd. in Culler 22). He then connects rhythm to the body, a comparison frequently found in both old and new inquiries into rhythm; although "our body has its own rhythms, of breathing and of heartbeats," he writes, "our rhythmic competence most often responds to rhythm as something exterior which nonetheless engages us, draws us to beat in time with it, finding or sensing a pattern, in noises, movements, action in the world" (22). Culler goes on to suggest that rhythm "is one of the major forces through which poems haunt us, just as poems themselves are haunted by rhythms of other poems. The tenacity with which rhythms can lodge in our memory, as the tune of a song might, encourages thoughts of occult forces, as if potent effects must have mysterious absent causes" (23). Culler's casual invocation of the "tune of a song" is indicative of the accepted presence of music in memory studies, in that he uses music to establish rhythm as a force for memory recall.

The intergenerational aspect of traumatic memory in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* necessitates engaging with the disjunction between sensorimotor memory, or memory stored in the senses, and declarative memory, or narrativized memories of events. This distinction between forms of memory helps with understanding how events characterized by silences and gaps in knowledge can be passed down to future generations of a family. Such a distinction has also been well-established in studies in psychoanalysis, memory, and neuroscience. For example, Pierre Janet provided the foundations for understanding traumatic memories through psychoanalysis in his early work on trauma. In 1925, he noted that when people experience intense emotions such as trauma, they are "unable to make the recital which we call narrative memory, and yet [they] remain confronted by (the) difficult situation" (660). As a result, he writes, "a phobia of memory" occurs, causing a disjunction between traumatic memories and ordinary consciousness (661). Concurrent to Janet's research in psychoanalysis was Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, which, although not focused on trauma, presented a similar breakdown in types of memory. In Bergson's oeuvre, the two forms of memory are divided into motor mechanisms, or habit-memory, and independent recollections, or declarative memory. Motor mechanistic memory begins with taking the body as a conductor, receiving and transmitting movements to certain motor mechanisms. As events pass, each one is recorded through the bodily response; repetitive actions, or reactions, soon take as their form of recognition a perception already experienced, implying that each new iteration of an action is one that will then recall the actions of the past. This conclusion is one that has been confirmed, time and time again, in recent scientific studies, such as those on H.M. Arguably the most famous patient in modern-day neuroscience, H.M. had his left temporal lobe removed to treat a severe seizure disorder in the 1950s. His surgery resulted in an extreme form of amnesia, in which he would forget events almost as quickly as they occurred, but he managed to retain his motor skills over time, supporting the distinction between sensorimotor memory and declarative memory. Our modern understanding of the division between declarative memory and sensorimotor memory is one that is well-researched, spanning over a hundred years and multiple disciplines.

This broad body of research has since been applied to trauma studies, specifically in the work of psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk, a collaborator of Cathy Caruth. As a conclusion to his 1995 exploratory study of forty-six subjects with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, van der Kolk explains how trauma interferes with memory. There can be extremes of

retention or forgetting, with some patients experiencing both, in which certain elements of the event will remain static and unchanged throughout time in their memories, while other elements will be immediately forgotten and never retrieved. He classifies four major disruptions by trauma in memory: amnesia, global memory impairment, dissociation, and, most important for this analysis, the sensorimotor organization of traumatic experience. As van der Kolk clarifies, memories of trauma "tend to be experienced as fragments of the sensory components of the event: as visual images, olfactory, auditory, or kinesthetic sensations, or intense waves of feelings" (513). Most intriguing for van der Kolk in noting these similarities among his patients is that they "consistently claim that their perceptions are exact representations of sensations at the time of the trauma" (513). Traumatic memories become quite literally stored in repetitions of the bodily sensations that they experienced during the traumatic event. As an assurance that this form of memory recall is unique for traumatic events, van der Kolk later asked his patients to think of a vivid, non-traumatic control memory to give a comparison with their memories of trauma. For these control memories, his patients experienced no amnesias, no triggers, no photographic recollections, and when he asked them about sensorimotor organization—if there were unique sensory or affective experiences they associate with the event—they "considered these questions nonsensical" (517). The sensorimotor organization of past experiences is unique to memories of trauma.

For these control memories, his patients experienced no amnesias, no triggers, no photographic recollections.

The sensorimotor organization of traumatic experiences is one that appears in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* primarily through an aural sensory display. Li-ling's "pure memory" of her father, Jiang Kai, resulting from the moments of listening to Glenn Gould, is not the sole such scene in the novel (4). Indeed, there are a myriad of examples of auditory memory recall that appear throughout the book. When Li-ling thinks of her father, for example, she routinely associates him with the music he loved, such as when she recalls driving down Vancouver's Main Street, "blaring Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto, performed by Gould with Leopold Stokowski" (14). Her memories are of the "tumbling notes cascad[ing] down and infinitely up," as her "father conducted with his right hand while steering with his left" (14). In her memories, she can hear his "humming, melodic and percussive" (14). Another significant, recurring example is that of Ai-ming, Sparrow's daughter who lives with Li-ling briefly after she flees China as a refugee from the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Ai-ming disappears after she returns home to China to care for her mother; long after she left, Li-ling describes Ai-ming's voice as "tugg[ing] away at [her]

thoughts, returning [her] again and again to the same ever-expanding, ever-contracting piece of music" (199).

Even in recalling the life and death of Zhuli, Sparrow's cousin, Li-ling thinks of the importance of music as Zhuli puts on Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, the last piece of music she listens to before her suicide. Consider the following passage:

> Time extended inside Bach, there were repetitions and canons, there were circles and spirals, there were many voices and honest humility as if he knew that reincarnation and loss were inseparable. *The music no longer seemed to come from the record player, but from some chamber of her memory.* (270, emphasis added)

In this passage, Zhuli has bound together the revolutionary sentiments of her childhood with the music she has learnt in the conservatory, music that is directly associated with "some chamber of her memory." She chooses the *Goldberg Variations* over her beloved Prokofiev for the music she listens to before she dies because of how Bach's experiment in repetition and revision extends the concept of time. Time becomes circular for a family trapped in a cycle of cultural trauma; what is masked as progress, through the Cultural Revolution, finds easy comparisons to the Great Leap Forward[1] through the similarities of the humiliation and violence inherent in the struggle sessions.[2] Indeed, Zhuli's declarations that she "took the oath, to dare to think, to speak up, to act" could speak directly to the imprisonment of her parents; much like her parents were imprisoned for a perceived individualism, Zhuli is similarly targeted (270). Music and memory become metaphors for each other in this passage; the *Goldberg*

1 The Great Leap Forward (from 1958 to 1962) was a five-year plan under Chairman Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party. It was developed with the intention of turning the Chinese agrarian society into a communist society through bringing industry to the countryside via people's communes and strict grain production quotas. Private farmers were targeted under the system as counter-revolutionaries and targeted in struggle sessions that frequently resulted in their deaths. The Great Leap Forward resulted in the Great Chinese Famine, one of the largest famines in human history, with estimated deaths of fifteen to fifty-five million, depending on the source.

2 Struggle sessions, or denunciation rallies, involved publicly and violently humiliating people believed to be counter-revolutionaries under the current mass campaign under Maoist China. They would frequently occur in workplaces and in other public settings, and people close to the targeted counter-revolutionary would be encouraged to denounce the counter-revolutionary to avoid being targeted themselves.

Variations present a form of time that is cyclical and repetitive rather than linear, much like the injustices against Zhuli's family. It is unclear if Zhuli is truly thinking about the *Variations* in believing the music to be coming "from some chamber of her memory," or if she is recalling her parent's persecution and the similarities of her own to theirs. And this is a sense of repetition that will appear once more in the novel, through the character of Ai-ming and the trauma of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Although Thien denies making Ai-ming a conscious repetition of Zhuli, she recognizes that is what she becomes, as both Zhuli and Ai-ming "make their choices because of Sparrow" (22). Zhuli views Sparrow's talent as something to protect; Ai-ming's flight to Canada is the result of finding Sparrow's limited correspondence with Jiang Kai. Ai-ming even looks like Zhuli, resulting in both a literal and psychic doubling of Zhuli for the next generation of Sparrow's family (303). Ai-ming, as a psychic doubling of Zhuli, reinforces what can be gleaned from Zhuli's choice of music: that time is not linear but is instead repetitive and circular for lives characterized by cultural trauma.

Because Li-ling's memories of hers and Ai-ming's shared familial persecution is located in the senses, it necessitates a focus on the non-verbal, or the non-said. What that means for a sprawling novel like *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is that the influence of the music of generations past is found not just in the moments of memory recall of Li-ling's father, or of Ai-ming, or of Zhuli. The influence of music is also found in the structure of the novel itself, informing how we read and experience the stories of Ai-ming and Li-ling's families. Although there are a number of musicians mentioned throughout *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, the dominant music reverberating throughout the scenes of memory recall is that of Gould, particularly through his interpretations of the *Goldberg Variations*. Thien herself noted the importance of Gould's *Goldberg Variations* to her novel.[3] She began listening to the *Variations* while writing the novel in Berlin and emphasized in an interview with Hsiu-Chuan Lee that it wasn't "an understatement to say that the *Goldberg Variations* created [*Do Not Say*

3 There is a strange mythos that surrounds the *Goldberg Variations*, a musical piece commissioned by Count Kaiserling, a former Russian ambassador in the court of Saxony, to be an insomnia cure. He requested that Bach compose clavier pieces for Johann Gottlieb Goldberg to play to help him with his sleepless nights, or so the story goes. The details of the event are both largely known and questioned, as their accuracy has since been doubted many times, but the result is ultimately the same: a complicated set of variations known to be "devilishly difficult" to play (Kingwell 12). Glenn Gould's recordings of the *Variations* are the most famous such recordings in Canadian history, and arguably throughout the world.

We Have Nothing]," suggesting after that "music has a truth or some form of understanding" (20). Bach's *Goldberg Variations* begin with an initial aria, after which follow thirty variations, and the opening aria is then repeated as the conclusion of the piece. The variations do not follow the melody but instead the bass line, along with the chord progression, as all the variations are in G major (which the exception of three variations—15, 21, and 25—which are in G minor). Every third variation is a canon, following an ascending pattern, and the variations between the canons also follow a number of patterns. The variations after each canon are genre pieces, including three Baroque dances, a fughetta, and a French overture, among others; the variations two after each canon are arabesques, or variations given in a lively tempo made difficult by the significant amount of hand-crossing necessary to play the pieces. This basic pattern—canon, genre piece, arabesque—is repeated nine times, with each of the pieces maintaining the bass line and chord progression of the initial aria. For the listener, the effect of the pattern is such that the *Variations* sounds like a singular, cohesive musical piece. But Gould took issue with the structure of the *Variations*, proposing in his liner notes to the 1955 recording that "the aria is incompatible with its offspring, that the crucial bass by its very perfection of outline and harmonic implications stunts its own growth and prohibits the accustomed passacaglia evolution towards a cumulative point" (1). By maintaining the bass line and chord progressions, the *Variations* reject progress and fail to develop a resolution to the musical tension. In so doing, variation becomes a form of repetition with a difference, aligned well with the repetitive nature of memory after trauma. It is for this reason that Gould's *Goldberg Variations* are so useful in understanding *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, as Gould's interpretation of the structure of the *Variations* is a productive way to consider the structure of the novel.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing has, at first glance, a novel-within-a-novel structure. There is the continual repetition of *The Book of Records* throughout the novel, a story passed down in Ai-ming's family. But *The Book of Records* is not a static literary work and instead adapts throughout time for the needs of the many characters in the novel. In the novel's chronology, it first appears when Ai-ming is reading to ten-year-old Li-ling, providing Ai-ming with the guise to tell Li-ling their shared family history. There is a very deliberate and quick elision between fiction and reality that occurs for the book during Ai-ming's storytelling. When Ai-ming first begins telling Li-ling the story, she stresses to Li-ling that it's "only a book" and "isn't real," but later on the same page, after Li-ling doesn't believe that Ai-ming's grandmother was named Big Mother Knife, Ai-ming tells her that

"in this story, every name is true" (27). In her storytelling, Ai-ming conflates her family history with the story of *The Book of Records*, calling attention to the role of art as artifice and to the ability of genealogical novels to fictionalize family stories while simultaneously sharing real events in a country's history. And *The Book of Records* holds this responsibility highly, as it has a significant, recurring purpose in the novel. It is through copying *The Book of Records* that Wen the Dreamer courts Swirl; later, Wen the Dreamer begins to copy the names of the dead into *The Book of Records* as a way of ensuring that the revolutionaries killed during the Great Leap Forward would live on in his art; Swirl hides locations in copies of *The Book of Records* that she leaves all over China, which eventually reconnects her with Wen the Dreamer after they were both released from the labour camps. Ai-ming continues this significance by using *The Book of Records* to tell Li-ling the history of how their families are interconnected, and Li-ling very quickly recognizes that Ai-ming's story was not "a recapitulation of those thirty-one notebooks, but about a life much closer to [her] own," opining that it was a "story that contained [her] history and would contain [her] future" (53). Li-ling eventually uses *The Book of Records* to search for Ai-ming online, trying to imitate the map-like quality it held in the story of Swirl and Wen the Dreamer's reconnection. While it is meant to be the story of Da-Wei and May Fourth, traveling across a China in ruins, it becomes a pretense for sharing a family history, a method of courting an eventual partner, a map to reunite the partners, a remembrance of the dead, a failed map to find a lost sister. Because of this, I view *The Book of Records* not as a traditional novel-within-a-novel but, instead, as the opening aria of the *Variations,* reappearing through a repeated base line and chordal progression in the thirty variations that follow.

Following the opening aria in the *Variations* is the pattern of canon, genre piece, and arabesque. In *Do Not Say We Have Nothing,* the canons are the opening fragments of storytelling, serving to remind the readers of the artifice inherent in fiction. A canon is a contrapuntal compositional technique that involves, typically, exact repetition; there is a melody that will then be repeated after a specific duration. The initial melody—in the case of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing,* that is—is Ai-ming's storytelling, which begins the reflection on her family history in the novel. But Li-ling becomes the follower in this canon, imitating Ai-ming as the leader, when she takes on Ai-ming's story after Ai-ming crosses the U.S. border in hopes of amnesty as a refugee from the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The family history that follows becomes the genre pieces, with events that will vary but with broad thematic issues—specifically, revolution,

trauma, and music—that remain the same. And the arabesques, the most complicated pieces to play in the *Variations,* are Li-ling's own search for answers, whether it be regarding her father's suicide or Ai-ming's disappearance, both of which lead her to return to mainland China. Listening to the music of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing,* as a result, provides a greater understanding of the structure behind the narrative and clarifies the importance of music to the novel.

Sparrow's interest in Gould's interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* helps to elucidate his inquiry into Bach's version of time.

Indeed, Gould's focus on repetition and revision draws parallels to the cyclical repetition of revolution in twentieth-century mainland China. As the Cultural Revolution was approaching, Sparrow continues listening to Bach, even though Bach's compositional style had been dismissed as bourgeois, specifically because of his approach to time. Sparrow, as he is listening to music that could result in him being targeted by the Red Guards, wonders how Bach "turned away from the linear and found his voice in the cyclical," in what Bach "referred to as God's time and in what the ancient Song and Tang scholars saw as the continual reiterations of the past, the turning of the wheel of history" (215). Sparrow directly compares Bach's music to the Cultural Revolution and the revolutions of the past, describing the campaigns and revolutions as "waves, ending only to start again" (215). And, in a moment of great insight, Sparrow wonders about the limits of Bach's compositional style, asking if his work "could create another kind of freedom" (215). Sparrow is questioning Bach's turn to cyclical time, considering how progress can be masked in the waves of repetitive revolutions found in the wheel of history, and if individual agency can find new ways to assert itself in a deterministic form of history.

Sparrow's interest in Gould's interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* helps to elucidate his inquiry into Bach's version of time, as Gould shows how it is possible to find agency and individuation amidst music that is structured to appear cyclical and deterministic. Consider, for example, Variation no. 25 from Gould's 1955 recording of the *Variations.* The track is what Sparrow first plays for Ai-ming upon introducing her to Bach and Glenn Gould, prior to returning to Shanghai so Ai-ming can gain entry into university. Sparrow seems unenthused when sharing the music with Ai-ming—Ai-ming is uncertain when he lets go of the arm for the record-player if her father is "bothered or tired, or only lost"—and the music is described as having "slow, spare notes" that "turned out to be Variation No. 25 of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*" (314). The moment holds significance for Ai-ming, as Sparrow then teaches her the "first foreign names she ever learned: the first, Bā Hè (Bach) and the second, Gù Er Dé (Glenn Gould)" (314).

A close reading of Gould's 1955 recording of Variation no. 25 set against the original sheet music that Sparrow would have studied in the conservatory prior to the Cultural Revolution shows the uniqueness of Gould's playing, which I interpret to be the individualism that Sparrow is searching for amidst cyclical political revolutions. Gould was known for ignoring dynamic changes and tempo markings, resulting in his recreations of the *Goldberg Variations* sounding uniquely his. Consider the tempo and slurred grace notes of the first two bars of Variation no. 25 below, emphasized through the box and circles, respectively:

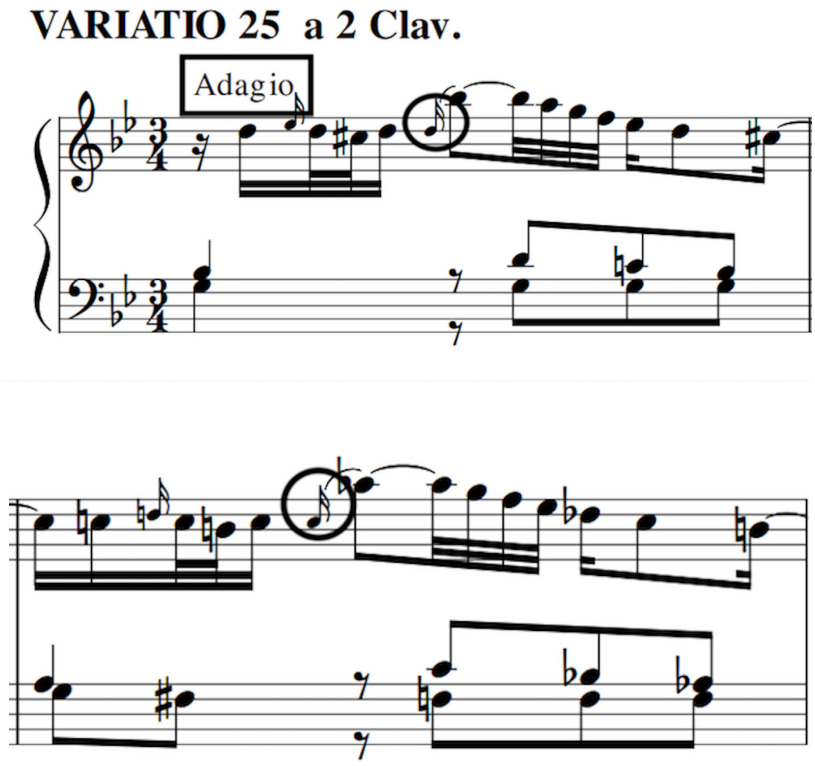

Figure 1. Sheet Music for Variation 25. Johann Sebastian Bach, "Variatio 25 a 2 Clav," *Goldberg-Variationen, BMW 988.* MuseScore, 2012.

A tempo of adagio, meaning slow and stately, has a literal translation of "at ease" and is typically associated with a tempo of 55–65 BPM. Gould does not play Variation no. 25 at adagio, resulting in the "slow, spare notes" that Ai-ming hears when her father plays Gould for her for the first time.

Gould plays the 25th Variation at a tempo more consistent with either lento or grave, 40–45 BPM or 20–40 BPM, respectively. The result is that his recording from 1955 is approximately a minute and a half longer than other common recordings of Variation no. 25, and, when he revisits the *Goldberg Variations* to recreate them once more before he dies, Variation no. 25 loses twenty-seven seconds of playing time without losing any notes, as he speeds up his tempo to be closer to Bach's original in the later recording.

Gould also extends the weight of the slurred grace notes encircled in the sheet music above. Grace notes are not necessary for the rhythm of a musical piece; they do not have their own weighting, nor are they considered a note in the time signature. As a result, they are not meant to affect the tempo of a piece, as they are meant to be played so quickly that the effect is akin to half a trill. While Gould plays the first and third grace notes normally, the slurred grace notes are extended to sound similar in length to the 32nd notes that come shortly after. What this means is that his Variation no. 25 is truly a recreation, as his extended grace notes results in an additional 14/32 of a note—miniscule to the average listener, but identifiable to trained pianists—and the altered tempo extends the length of the variation as well. This additional 14/32 of a note would also be noticeable to a trained mathematician like Li-ling, especially when she begins teaching graduate work on the combinatorial possibilities of the *Goldberg Variations*. I interpret Li-ling's decision to teach the *Goldberg Variations* as a mathematician as her continuing the family legacy of viewing political revolution and loss through music; she, like Sparrow, wants to imagine a future where individualism can flourish, rather than one where individualism results in persecution, loss, and tragedy. Gould's recreation of the *Goldberg Variations* is one that expands our understanding of the cyclical traumas in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, drawing attention to individualism amidst cyclical political revolution. It is for this reason that I find Gould's influence to be so pronounced within the novel.

While Gould's agency appears in his recreation through how he shapes the tempo and, consequently, the duration of the variation, his individualism appears through his deep sense of physicality that comes through with his recordings. He was widely known as an eccentric performer, which is evident most clearly in his recordings through his humming. Even Sparrow notes during the Tiananmen Square Massacre that he could occasionally hear "Glenn Gould himself, humming" on the 1981 recording that Ai-ming finds for him as a cassette (380). In the 1955 recording of Variation no. 25, there is a light background noise that was likely edited down by his producers, occurring approximately halfway through the piece and then again

during the final bars. This could just be him breathing loudly or it could be his humming, made quieter from the editing of the track. His exact bodily imprint on the recording doesn't matter, because the ability to hear either his breathing or his humming provides a degree of authorial imprint onto his recording that emphasizes the individualized, bodily relationship he has to his music. Gould's eccentricities while performing, along with his re-interpretation of the tempo and grace notes in the variation, result in an individualized recording of a classical musical piece that was structured to emphasize repetition and revision.

There are several key insights that arise when attending to the music of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing.* First, and most prominently, is the recurring role of sensorimotor memory throughout the novel. Li-ling learns of her familial trauma through Ai-ming's storytelling, a storytelling that emphasizes the role of music in their shared familial lives. And that music, as demonstrated through my extended analysis of Gould and his *Goldberg Variations,* becomes indicative of the nature of the trauma itself. The *Goldberg Variations* are deeply cyclical, rejecting the dynamism inherent in progress, illustrating well the nature of repetitive cultural trauma that appears in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing.* Revolution after revolution disrupts Li-ling and Ai-ming's familial lives, resulting in their being brought together, finally, when Ai-ming chooses to reject the cyclical path of trauma altogether and flee to Canada. But Gould's interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* also provides a degree of hope for the musicians in Ai-ming and Li-ling's families. The individualism he is able to assert through his recreation of the tempo in the famous classical piece draws attention to the ability of time to be manipulated in the hands of the right agent. Music, then, becomes a conduit for intergenerational memory, a form of novelistic structure, a method for finding hope amidst intergenerational trauma. Listening, in the context of genealogical novels of trauma, has many varied levels: Sparrow and Zhuli listen to Gould's recordings, which then becomes the music for Li-ling, listening to Ai-ming's *Book of Records*; when we, as readers, listen to the music of the novel, we become the next layer of listeners. As readers, when we engage with music that is described in language, we need to attend to the form and history of the musical piece, considering both the composer and the performer, elements of the performance style, and variations between composition and performance. And, to reiterate the insights from the scientific studies on music and memory, we need to be open to music as having a dialectical relationship with literature. Listening to Gould's *Goldberg Variations* in the context of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* places an emphasis on

Gould's individualism amidst deterministic, cyclical time, but doing so also helps to clarify the structure of the novel and the nature of the traumatic memories being passed down to the next generation of a family. In a recent article on witnessing his mother's testimony, Dori Laub, one of the original scholars responsible for articulating the concept of traumatic silences, expresses the need for survivors of trauma to have an empathetic witness, someone who can understand—or at least try to understand—what the survivor endured. Perhaps, in the case of survivors without such a witness, music is able to fill that role. Perhaps listening in the context of trauma requires us to consider the non-said, the music, the rhythm that reverberates throughout the generations that follow.

Acknowledgements

With special thanks to Jason Camlot and Katherine McLeod for their excellent editorial insight; above all, I am grateful for the insight of Smaro Kamboureli, whose rigorous and careful reading of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* was invaluable in developing this article.

Works Cited

Bach, Johann Sebastian. "Variatio 25 a 2 Clav." *Goldberg-Variationen, BMW 988.* MuseScore, 2012.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory.* Trans. Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer. Digireads.com, 2010.

Culler, Jonathan. "Why Rhythm?" *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form.* Eds. Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler. Fordham UP, 2019. 21–40.

Eckstein, Lars. "A Love Supreme: Jazzthetic Strategies in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *African American Review* 40.2 (2006): 271–83.

Eschrich, Susann, Thomas F. Münte, and Eckart O. Altenmüller. "Unforgettable Film Music: The Role of Emotion in Episodic Long-term Memory for Music." *BMC neuroscience* 9.1 (2008): 1–7.

Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Taylor and Francis, 1992.

Gould, Glenn. *Bach: The Goldberg Variations.* Columbia, 1955.

Hayircil, Gülrenk. "The Power of Music as Cultural Memory in Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*." *British and American Studies* 28 (2022): 181–92.

Jäncke, Lutz. "Music, Memory and Emotion." *Journal of Biology* 7.6 (2008): 1–5.

Janet, Pierre. *Psychological Healing*, vols. 1–2. Macmillan, 1925.

Kingwell, Mark. *Extraordinary Canadians: Glenn Gould.* Penguin Random House, 2012.

Laub, Dori. "Listening to My Mother's Testimony." *Wounds of History*. Routledge, 2016. 38–58.

Lee, Hsiu-Chuan. "Writing History and Music in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing:* A Conversation with Madeleine Thien." *Canadian Literature* 238 (Summer 2019): 13–28.

Pickering, Michael. "Popular Music and the Memory Spectrum." In *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage.* Eds. Sarah Baker, Catherine Strong, Lauren Istvandity, and Zelmarie Cantillon. Taylor and Francis, 2018. 192–200.

Squire, Larry R. "The Legacy of Patient HM for Neuroscience." *Neuron* 61. 1 (2009): 6–9.

Thien, Madeleine. *Do Not Say We Have Nothing.* Vintage Canada, 2016.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Fisler, Rita. "Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview and Exploratory Study." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8.4 (1995): 505–25.