

HOMAGE TO GLENN GOULD*Anthony Walton*

I

Addicted to the extremities—
cold, fever,

the beautiful long
fingers

and everything they could do—

The lights were always on
in that house,

because clarity
must be relentless, a loving

marriage of rigor
and loneliness

rigor and loneliness, like

left and right hands
working through the fugues
in a slow
dance of erotic
nonchalance

Slow dance.

Clocks spinning and ticking, clashing
increments

of time and acoustics making music
out of snow, pain,

infinity—
the slow fugue
of time and harmony, days
and light

II

To be sufficient for oneself, and consequently to have no need of society, without at the same time being unsociable, i.e. without flying from it, is something bordering on the sublime, as is any dispensing with wants.

—Immanuel Kant

This is the sort of thing he would say:

“Musicians have filled the world with excessive rubato too much emotion—facile emotion”—

III

Lost inside the canonical labyrinths

one can almost hear Bach humming, incidentally,
the various lullabies, playfully

expanding the gentle aria composed
for his wife as he walked

from his home to his work
at the cathedral, and off-handedly

home again, looking forward to his family
and dinner.

“Give me something that will help me
sleep, or at least

pass the hours less painfully,” Count Keyserlingk
requested in 1741, and there,

two hundred and thirty years later, was Gould,
nursing himself through the darkness

swaying and humming as he played, year by
year more slowly counting his way

through Bach’s maze of repeat
and elaboration

IV

Days of relentless clarity, and reckless pursuit:

chord upon chord in an architecture of cadence, tempered and
measured intervals, without measure, major, minor, minor chords,

Gould humming through it all, head dipping and weaving in time,
the piano as a loom. The gears he heard ticking and spinning in space,

in his room, in his head—chord upon chord, arpeggiating tonic
pleasure of resolution; His beautiful fingers grasping

and bending the edges of the Euclidean world, stretching the notion
of order almost until it dissolves, blurring, through Bach, the square

clear equations of Sir Isaac Newton. Resolution, then, but more
the resolve of the insomniac, whose only need for all that power

and light is to keep moving, to see through dreams with light—
Pascal, sitting quietly in his room, his heart beating wildly—

clarity as the best friend of mystery: the more you can see
the more you can see

V

temper, from the Latin meaning proper
mixing, meaning to observe

proper measure, to mix, regulate
forbear: to keep one's self in check,

to control one's self under provocation—
to refrain from, avoid, or cease
doing, saying, thinking—

ill-tempered—if a piano were to be described
as ill-tempered, it would be considered out
of tune: as if there were such a thing as *in tune*
as if the state of being in tune, well-tempered,
were more than a pleasant fiction, an agreement
to convene at certain times, on certain spectrums
at of time and space at certain times

how does a man balance his temper, his humors
sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic

how does he make himself, in effect, into a melody,
if not a scale; how does he *adjust* and tune himself

to the pitch of the world, the lyre of the universe

and if the cosmos is one vast instrument tuned
and turning in infinite series, and in that turning
making as it wheels against itself a sort of music

when does that wheeling tighten, *scale* the continuum
of sound into that pleasant and necessary fiction

that narrowing of possibility that which can be managed
that which can be considered measured and equal

VI

The piano is an ax,
a chainsaw, a hammer,
a tool; a musician
is a carpenter
and nothing more,
blocking and framing
events that are processed
and perceived; physics;
notes are waves
oscillating at frequencies
more or less intense
than those before
or after, manufactured
by a harp strung
with steel and tapped
with velvet in patterns

VII

A concert is like a tennis match, except that the opponent is not across the net, but you.

—Ernest Bacon

He talked about his dreams, one, in particular, recurring:

sleeping, I wake

*I do not know if within the dream I myself
am dreaming—*

I shed my bedclothes

and set off through the house

walking.

*The house is empty, barren, my parents
have gone,*

and I run outside to find my world

*where there was a garden I see only granite
shelf, and this is covered with leaves,
dead leaves, up to waist, calf, knee,
billions of gray leaves; the dream, you see,
is in black and white...*

Notice that this is a dream without sound, no scraping, rattling, rusting, dryness—
it is about using bare trees as a barrier against the wind, bare trees as a wall against
December. A world without the color of music? His inner landscape?

He would wake, again, in his bedclothes, this time scared, and frightened of the day.
The dream of the dead leaves, I think, was a dream about dread, the dread of pleasure;

that, the obvious, said, what is the meaning of beauty without peace, the twining,
tuned, strings of the double helix of heaven—

punished by beauty, or
perceiving beauty
as purgatory

plague of endless variation
the neverending theme