

LIFE & LITERATURE, SOME MUSINGS ON THE RELATIONS OF

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As is true of all speech, **oral** literature (which, before the invention of writing, all "literature" was) is only **heard**, **written** literature is only **seen**. A clever cartoonist like Bud Schulz can have fun, and tickle us, with audio- & video-punning. What's distinctive about PEANUTS 9-13 this month is that a single pun is carried over the whole of what used to be called the workweek, ie Monday through Friday....This Thinksheet invites you to meditate on the weird dialog between Schroeder (a Beethoven monomaniac, whom we usually meet resisting, always successfully, Lucy's approaches) & Snoopy (whom we've never before seen taking any interest whatsoever in piano). Specifically, I direct your meditation to the **narrative convergence of sight and sound**, a complex convergence involving (as does the written music!) transpositions suggestive of the living interweave between life & literature....Yes, what I'm reaching for is a fresh experience of the **hermeneutic** situation, toward greater skill in feeling the organic relation of life and literature ("Erklaerungsgefuehl," if you have an appetite for the whole idea in a single German word). The skillful interpreter is continuously asking "What life lies behind this literature?" & "How, other than in literature, was that life expressing itself?" & "What help can we get, for understanding this literature whose producing life no longer exists, by observing how life today is expressing itself in literature & otherwise?" [#27, a visual from my ThD thesis, displays the dynamic process from the production to the interpretation and application of literature in relation to (a) the producing life & (b) our life.]....Please read playfully my meanderings below. I'm not modeling good interpretation: you'll find me taking the text of the cartoons & turning them into a pretext for whatever comes to mind. That's all I promised you in this Thinksheet's title. You'd do better to look at the cartoons & do your own musing before you read mine. Off the wall, what I'm up to is a **fresh, vital, even playful way of reading the Bible**....This Thinksheet's \$s correspond to the numbers on the cartoons.

1. Though recently deceased premier American songsmith Irving Berlin was a musical illiterate (unable to read/write music), the world will continue to have his music because others let it run into their ears and out their hands. The amanuenses (the word "hand" in this word for secretaries), between the producer and us consumers, were both consumers & producers, thank God. If "author" means somebody who thinks something up & writes it down, most of the Bible wasn't written by authors. Schroeder is sounding, but not writing, Beethoven. Snoopy is hearing, but not seeing, Beethoven; and the chaos of notes tells us that like Irving Berlin, Snoopy can't read music. But oh how IB could hear music, music that had been heard & written & so much music that had never even been heard! And oh how sad that Snoopy's not had a course in music appreciation, & couldn't appreciate it even if he had it!....I have good ears, but what music is there "out there" that I've not heard & some of which I'd not be able to appreciate? What of "the music of the spheres" & "the voice of God"?....Chaos scientists are telling us chaos is an illusion, but you couldn't convince Snoopy: he's heard a piano & (though we don't see him doing it here) howled.

2. To the extent we take a particular literature seriously, we become reproducers of its life, as Schroeder is reproducing Beethoven (doubtless with LvB's extensive notations): the continuity of the written compensates for the disappearance of the originating life....As I always, in growing up, had a dog & sisters, I have good



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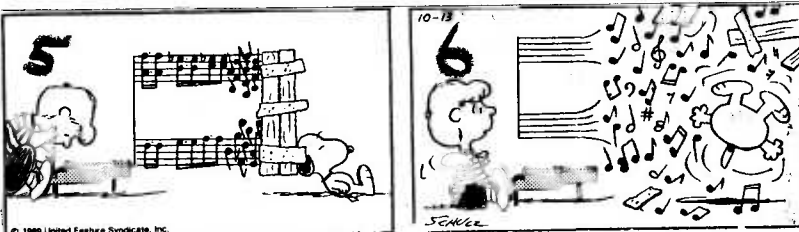
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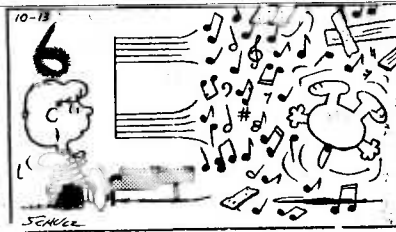
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understanding of dogs & women--& a good feel for music, which the house was also full of. None of the succession of dogs, ranging from a mongrel to a 58-blue-ribbon bluebop, had an ear for music: they all had an ear against music, which (I don't understand the anatomy) tightened their tails between their legs & folded back their ears. What good was it to them that they'd better ears than we? Would that we could have swapped ears with them, as we were eager to hear more and they less!....As you can see, Snoopy is more offended by the bass clef than by the treble: he'd like to push those notes right back into the piano while the high notes continue to fly over his head, falling not on deaf ears but on the deaf floor....The Word became flesh, the sounds became (written) notes. Theologians' dream: the Invisible visibilized!

3. Some folks use all they've got to resist the Word. Note that Snoopy's using all four feet to resist the notes. He's cleaned up all the fallen notes, is preventing the bass notes from getting to him, & is squelching the treble notes as they fall into his bucket, as though sparks quenched in water. Any idea what Schulz, an evangelical Christian, has in mind here? Like any artist, he says make what you want of my work: if I could have said it in words, who would need my art? Yet CMS was not displeased when somebody laid it all out in words & got for it a U. of Chicago Divinity School PhD (Robt. L. Short, *THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PEANUTS*, Jn.Knox/64; *THE PARABLES OF PEANUTS*, H&R/68).

On another tack, Schroeder can't be accused of overplaying to the audience: he's audience-unaware, -uncaring. Here make your usual points about communicating religion, how tough it's gotten to be, & all that. Maybe Schroeder should just stop playing: Snoopy would lick his hand for that. But though silence is sometimes golden, it's often just yellow.

4. What scriptures come to mind as to boarding God out, or in, or up? How about 1K.8²⁷: "Not even all heaven can contain You, so how could this temple I've built be big enough for You?" [#80 is on "The Unconfined."]....Snoopy's tools are right: saw, hammer, nails; but his program is doomed, his purpose amiss. Reminds me of another anti-God building program, Gn.11¹⁻⁹.

But imagine Snoopy's defense: "Gimmie a break! Beethoven isn't the voice of God, & I'm entitled to a little peace & quiet once in the while. Besides, I'm not hurting anybody: Schroeder can keep playing, & I've figured out not to hear him. What's wrong with that?"

Well, there is something wrong with passing up your opportunities to hear, really listen to, great music, great musicians' best offerings to God and to the world. Great music plays the entire pianoforte of human feelings, which are the memory carriers of the soul as it sings & suffers & shapes its destiny. I ask people at the Boston Symphony & the N.Y. Philharmonic (Loree & I have season tickets to both) what the great music greatly played does for them, & almost always the response is soul-ful (though seldom theological in diction, as mine almost always is).

5. But Snoopy is wrong. Schroeder can't keep playing beyond a certain point. The notes are piling up on him, backforming in his direction as they do so. If Snoopy's stratagem succeeds, the visual music will explode in Schroeder's face! But Schroeder keeps on playing, entirely unaware of the stress that's building up against him.

In the life/literature perspective, the pianist. "We live in one world and each act of ours affects the whole" proclaims Corita's New Alchemy poster: each note of Schroeder's, in addition to being itself, is an energy, a pressure, a stress toward--what? Life is ephemeral, space-&-time-bound: literature, lasting literature, is time-&-space-transcendent. And, unlike life, silent. Silent unless--until life, new life, calls it into sound & so renews its own life.

Boarding up the Bible has been going on for so long in America that the pressure is nearing explosion. In public schools, children have had their Bibles closed by bus drivers & free-reading-period supervisors, & recent court decisions have favored the children. Snoopy is asleep, leaning on his Beethoven-resistant structure. "The Great God Blackout" (Marty's column in *THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY* day before yesterday) won't last.

6. In the end, Snoopy misses nothing, gets all the sounds at once, experiences chaos toward new creation. Faithful Schroeder witnesses the power of his persistence.