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Technological Triumph: The Future of Music in a Digital Age

Alberto Rodriguez

The future of music is a rebirth of the music industry as we know it. Musician and inventor Rodger Linn, who was quoted in Rick Karr's 2002 NPR article *TechnoPop: The secret history of technology and pop music* held a strong opinion about music's future, and said that "technology gave birth to the music industry—now it's destroying it....there will be fewer professional musicians...but more people making music. The triumph of the amateurs will be complete" (2002, par. 7). Linn's statement made two bold predictions about the future of music: the first being wrong and the latter very wise. The music industry of today is not being destroyed by technology at all—it's being revolutionized by it. In years to come, music will become more and more dependent on technology in order to survive, thrive, and remain a popular art form. The amateurs that Linn spoke of are quickly becoming the new professionals, and their use of technology is going to change and shape the way that music is created, distributed and shared now and for years to come, even to the point of destroying an industry. The future of music depends on technology and its users. That future is happening now.

Anybody can become a musician, if they want—all it takes is one click. Music is a universal art, and technology is giving the average, untrained person the ability to create and record music quickly and at high quality. In 2002, Rodger Linn predicted in "*TechnoPop*" that in the future, "there will be fewer professional musicians...but more people making music" (Karr, 2002, par. 7). Since 2002, his prediction has started to come true, and will continue to for years beyond this generation.

Music will thrive for future generations because of its ability to be made well by many, and not just by the few. Technology is promising this musical accessibility to all. Even in 2002, at the time of Karr's article, there existed technology so advanced that it let "aspiring musicians...turn a laptop computer into a recording studio" (Karr, 2002, par. 8).

Today, this technology is cheaper and easier to find, with high-performance laptops becoming more affordable, and with free software programs such as Audacity and GarageBand (pre-loaded on most Apple computers) being at the possible artists' fingertips. With technological innovations so easily attainable for music creation, the line between formally trained, "professional" musician and an inexperienced amateur is beginning to blur. Karr said in his article that "while virtual hip-hop and bedroom rock haven't produced their first megastars, musicians and record producers say it won't be long before they do—or before technology helps create a whole new genre of music" (2002, par. 10). In the nine years since, artists have achieved mainstream success using computerized programs and technology, like electronic artist Owl City and their hit "Fireflies", which features many artificially-generated sounds that mirror real instruments (*Ocean Eyes*, 2009). Furthermore, take for example the electronic artist Skrillex, who produced his EP *Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites* (2010) in his apartment only using a laptop. The genre of music that Skrillex writes and performs, dubstep, is a form of music that technology has created, that relies heavily on generated, remixed, and looped samples and tracks. New artists who embrace this technology are making high-quality music and getting famous in a much cheaper and efficient way than ever before. What amateurs have begun to do with technology is make the professional musician the middle man between creation and live performance.

Linn's prediction about the future having less professional musicians is accurate—there will be less and less of a demand for them and their skills. If an entire band or orchestra can be simulated at a similar quality to a real, professional orchestra, why hire musicians? The amateurs are using technology to overcome the need for formally trained musicianship and show that their ally is in technology. In chapter three, Dave Kusek and Gerd Leonhard's book *The future of music: Manifesto for the digital music revolution* (2005) stated that "technology has always been the artist's friend, not his enemy" (2005, p. 53). These artists who utilize technology will continue to bypass both professional training and the record industry to keep control of their art and how it gets to their audience. Due to technology, the distribution and sharing of music is a service becoming digital and more in the hands of the artist. Here sets the scene for the battlefield where both the tech-savvy amateur musician and music lovers have been fighting for the music *they* want, when *they* want it, and at *their* price.

There's a distinct difference between "the music industry" and "the record industry", the first being about art and entertainment, the second being about profit. (Kusek, D. & Leonhard, G., 2002, p. 21). In the future, the latter might not exist. Modern technology is assisting today's music industry, but has also been and will continue to be the downfall of the record industry by slowly draining the money out of the industry. The record industry has been at war with modern file-sharing and illegal downloading technology since the creation of Napster, an easy-to-use music file sharing and downloading software in 1999. Since then, consumers have had the option to easily find their music for free in various corners of the web, bypassing the traditional CD format (Kot, 2009, p. 25). The record industry won the Napster battle, but soon found

that, as Greg Kot said in *Ripped*, “Napster’s demise was just the beginning of the record industry’s problems” (Kot, 2009, p. 41). The record industry’s further problems came to include many peer-to-peer file sharing services such as LimeWire, SoulSeek, Kazaa, and Bit Torrent, amongst others, that caused 20 billion illegal downloads in 2006 (Kot, 2009, p. 50). This is causing loss of money for the recording industry, and is going to bleed the record companies dry, because they haven’t found an effective solution yet. One of the Recording Industry Association of America’s (RIAA) solutions has been going so far as to sue individual offenders that were “liable for damages of \$750 to \$150,000 per [illegally downloaded] song” (Kot, 2009, p. 44). More recently, the RIAA has abandoned individual lawsuits in favor of partnering with Internet Providers to target “copyright infringer’s internet access instead of their wallets” (Greenwood, 2009). While the RIAA can still send a strong message to offenders, their power is relatively small when compared against the enormity of the internet and the technology that is and will be developed to share music more efficiently. Once Napster was created, digital file-sharing became impossible to reverse, and the battle was already lost. Today, even artists are joining the digital age, rebelling against labels and using technology to deliver music directly and cheaply. A leading example of this is alternative rock band Radiohead, who released their 2007 album *In Rainbows* independently and digitally, letting consumers pay what they saw fit. Other big artists such as the Beastie Boys and Tom Petty have also embraced technology and gone digital, delivering their music straight to the fan (Kot, 2009, p. 27). In order to topple the billions of music pirates and the artists who shed their labels, the record industry needs to do what National Association of Recording Merchandizers president Pam Horowitz said: “The solution is to create something better than free” (Kot,

2009, p. 48). If this and individualized targeting are the record industry's only solutions, their demise in the generations of tomorrow is certain, and amateurs and music lovers will triumph once again, using technology to make music a free commodity, not a product for the artists and consumers who have had to pay.

The future of technology directly influences the future of music. Rodger Linn's predictions apply well to the future generations of music-makers and lovers, signaling a triumph of creative, artistic amateurs who use technology to make the art want, and technology that will surpass the old-school methods of record companies. Technology is making it easier for the music to be placed in the hands of the artists and the consumer, with little involvement from anything or anyone else. This near-direct connection fostered by technology will be one of music's greatest assets in years to come. Music is an art of the people, not a tightly-controlled product of the recording industry, or a selective ability given only to the few. The triumph of the amateurs in future generations is a significant one, a success of modern innovation that signals the full transition into the digital age of the future.

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Does an Audience Understand Nothing **Charles Burke**

I sat over a Latin transcription of Catullus 58 and lamented that no English speaker would be able to appreciate what I was seeing. The perfect chiasmus from “Lesbia illa” to “illa Lesbia” could not be captured in the syntax-heavy rules of English grammar; the hyperbaton to emphasize “omnes” could not be imitated except possibly through ugly and awkward italics; and the euphemism and onomatopoeia in “glubit” – there is simply no poetic way to say “oral sex” in English. Further, the last line contained a sarcastic reference to ancient Roman mythology that would be lost on a modern audience. And as I juggled all these complications, I was forced to confess that the metrical pattern would be impossible to mimic if I hoped to simultaneously preserve the vocabulary. Something was lost in translation.

People expect this loss. Catullus 58 is Latin, and no one speaks Latin anymore. However, to even claim something is a translation of Catullus 58 does not do Catullus justice. Catullus wrote far better than his translators. His poems should not be translated because his translators cannot write as he wrote. The best course of action is to admit that Latin is a dead language, let Catullus speak to those who can understand him, and let Catullus influence modern writers.

Similarly, the best course of action for Shakespeare is to admit that sixteenth-century English is a dead language. It is not that Shakespeare cannot speak to modern people; he can speak and continues to do so. Nor is it that there are no similarities between Shakespeare’s English and modern English; most people can understand the gist of a Shakespearean play without footnotes. Rather, the majority of modern English speakers will be missing

too many shades of meaning to actually be reading Shakespeare.

In his article, “Will Shakespeare’s Come and Gone,” McWhorter argues that Shakespeare should be translated into modern English. The primary objections to this argument are that Shakespeare wrote in English and translations ruin the poetry. Unfortunately, Shakespeare did not write in modern English, and even un-translated Shakespeare will be translated by an audience. Therefore, it is best to take the attitude toward Catullus: let Shakespeare speak to those who can understand him, and let Shakespeare inspire modern artists, who can write what could be improperly called “translations.”

When someone does not understand a word in a sentence, s/he will try to correct this flaw by using context clues and previous knowledge of the English language. In this sense, a reader will translate even English into more understandable terms. For example, someone reading *Hamlet* may come upon the line, “Jump at this dead hour,” and realize that “jump” could not possibly mean what it means today. But the context, “Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour/ With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch,” is comprehensible enough that the reader may understand, “Jump at this dead hour” to mean something along the lines of, “this time exactly.” (1.1.64-65) Such a translation is not much of a problem; the reader still hears the metrical patterns of Shakespeare and the vocabulary gap, though existent, is not wide.

The problem grows, however, when the reader begins to lose sight of context clues. McWhorter draws attention to the line, “Look thou character.” Here, two very important words elude a modern English speaker: “look” and “character.” Unfortunately, “thou” is not about to yield any clues as to their meanings. The preceding clause, “And these few precepts in thy memory,” gives no hint either.

The reader or listener will attempt to translate this passage into understandable terms, but will never come close to the archaic use of “look,” which here means “see to it that,” or Shakespeare’s intention for “character,” which here means “to write.” Unaided, the audience will interpret this passage incorrectly.

The key word is “unaided.” The actor will attempt to bring his audience with him, and often will succeed to some extent. This example, however, poignantly refutes the notion that actors should provide a major role in aiding translation. Though with simpler vocabulary differences, an actor may be able to provide additional context clues by way of motions and expressions and thus help the audience to a more accurate translation, no actor can subtly hint that character means, “to write,” and any non-subtle hints, such as perhaps picking up a pen and paper, will not lead the audience to connect “character” with the writing motion. Rather, the audience will understand that writing is being discussed, and will therefore understand only the gist of the speech, not the poetry of it. If someone were to watch a visual retelling of Catullus 58, they could certainly be shown that Lesbia is promiscuous and they may understand the basic idea of the poem, but they certainly would not understand the language. An audience understanding a connection between “character” and writing will be reading the actors, not hearing the lines, and then it is no longer Shakespeare they come for, but the actors inspired by him. This obvious problem scenario raises questions even about more subtle acting: Are people understanding Shakespeare fully? How close is the audience’s translation to the language of the Bard and how close to the understanding of the director? What depths of meaning are being forgotten?

Further depth in the poetry is lost when double and triple meanings are incomprehensible. For example, someone watching a performance of *Richard III* might

figure out that “sun of York” refers to the peace after the winter, and perhaps a particularly clever listener will reflect later that “sun” could be understood as “son.” (1.1.2)

However, just as I lamented that Roman mythology is little known, so one must lament that only scholars today will remember that the sun is the emblem of King Edward.

There are ways to solve this particular problem; perhaps a stage set has King Edward’s emblem prominently displayed and Richard points to it. Still, with some investigation, it becomes evident that the problem of double-meanings occurs often and is sometimes impossible to correct. In the title *Much Ado About Nothing* is a blatant but outdated reference to a vagina. (Bate and Rasmussen 21) There is no way for an actor or director to help an audience understand a sixteenth-century pun in the play’s title. The gap thus occurs not only in the language, but also in the culture.

The culture becomes a further barrier in the reader’s understanding in other aspects of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare’s audience was aware of the War of the Roses and understood the historical background to *Richard III*, but a modern audience will find the beginning of the play quite abrupt. Readers miss references in *Much Ado About Nothing*, such as Beatrice’s insistence that she’d gladly lead apes into hell (2.1.39-41) or Benedick’s mention of Prester John’s foot and Cham’s beard. (2.1.265-267) In *Macbeth*, the code of hospitality will be understood, but only weakly in comparison to how it was understood in Shakespeare’s day. Even the passages referring to the trust between host and guest do not give the full thrust of the social stigma because Shakespeare never intended them to. The stigma was already present. Thus the murder will lose some of its villainous nature to modern listeners. In all these things, though a translation is not provided, the audience translate

the plays instinctively, and most of the audience translate the plays badly.

Therefore, the taboo against translating Shakespeare should be lifted only so much as to admit that leaving Shakespeare un-translated is no better except to the scholar. Shakespearean English is dead. However, as with my beloved Catullus, no translator is fit to convey anything that could be called a translation. Though it is true that without a translation, the pun on nothing in *Much Ado About Nothing* is lost, that pun cannot be preserved even in translation. There is no modern word with both meanings of nothing, and there is no poetic way to bring an audience to understand all the necessary background knowledge Shakespeare expected his audience to have. Whatever method is employed to educate the audience on such matters will stray from the original in that it will break meter, ruin syntax, misplace lines, or injure the diction. Therefore, a translator can convey neither the precise meaning of “Prester John’s foot” nor the precise emotions and memories such a reference would stir in a sixteenth-century listener. A translator can never be Shakespeare.

Thus, one must confess that Shakespeare should be read by scholars. He can speak to those who take the time to learn his language, but to the modern audience, he is lost. The average listener will miss so much from *Hamlet* that Shakespeare might as well have written in Latin, and though certain passages ring true even today, only a deliberate reader can be expected to take in a significant amount of what is being said. The problem is not that Shakespeare is incomprehensible; the problem is that Shakespeare said so much more than will be comprehended. That said, Shakespeare continues to speak to writers who take the time to listen, and those writers can be inspired to write new works.

In this sense, McWhorter is right to call on artists to translate Shakespeare, but to call their works a translation can be an insult to the original. No one can take what Shakespeare did in his language and bring it perfectly or even nearly perfectly into the modern verse. Instead, writers can take Shakespeare's ideas, plots, and characters to create something new, just as Shakespeare employed the ideas, plots, and characters of those who came before him. These are not translators; they are artists.

In fact, actors have already begun the difficult craft of creating Shakespeare-inspired works. Audiences still flock to Shakespeare performances, but it is not for the poetry. Few people still profess to have enjoyed reading Shakespeare in high school, and fewer still actually enjoyed it and continue to read it after high school. Rather, people come partly for the novelty, as McWhorter points out, but more importantly for the acting. Actors carry the performance as they attempt to help an audience understand the distant diction. They act as they interpret the character ought to act, and thus their version is only one understanding of the text. As stated earlier, the audience may only understand the gist of the plot because the language is still difficult to follow, and they may miss the depths of meaning and nuances in the poetry. The audience finds, however, an inspired group of artists prancing around the stage in a wonderful masterpiece devised from a Shakespearean text.

The work should not be left half-transformed. The words should become as comprehensible as the acting. Modern poets should read Shakespeare, learn Shakespeare, and be inspired by Shakespeare. With inspired writers working beside inspired actors and directors, new and wonderful plays can be created. Shakespeare is dead and no one can resurrect him, but that does not mean his influence is gone.

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Usage and Interpretation of Song in the *Odyssey* and its Modern Counterpart in Film

Aaron Chiu

Throughout the annals of history, music has always been one of the fundamental means of abstract communication. This is no exception even for histories and cultures of fictitious worlds created throughout history, such as the *Odyssey* by Homer and its modern counterpart *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* created by the Coen brothers. In these works, music appears in perhaps its most ancient and revered form, song. However, though song is a dominant and important theme in both works, and though both works are based strongly upon the same story, it is no surprise that there is a large difference between the two, as a large breach in time and culture divide for the two works. In the *Odyssey*, song is used as a form of commemoration and immortalization of events and the heroes they involve, while in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* song is used as a precursor for coming events and an elaboration of events occurring. However, despite the differences in the context in which the concept of song is explored, in both the epic and the movie song plays the same integral role of enhancing the understanding of the text/screenplay through utilizing several of its inherent qualities, mainly its ability to induce pleasure through arousing emotion and the respect and power it commands for itself and those who wield it because it has such an ability.

The occurrence of the usage of song is not hard to find in the *Odyssey*, as it occurs in two main parts of the plot: when Phemius sings the tales of the heroes in the hall of Ithaca and stirs Penelope to tears and when Demodocus sings of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles and causes Odysseus to weep (Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.343-345, 8.79-104). From these two examples, we see that in the

Odyssey, song is mainly used to commemorate events and people. The songs are explicitly about the Trojan War; from the context provided within the *Odyssey*, we know that the Trojan War has already been over for ten years. From the strong reactions that Penelope and Odysseus show to the music despite the temporal distance between the present and the events described, and from the pleasure that Antinous associates with the music of Demodocus, it is clear that the medium of song is honored and respected at the very least in the representation of Greek culture presented in the *Odyssey*. It is shown in these various segments of the plot to have the power of being emotionally powerful (Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.356-364, 8.46-47). Demodocus himself also seems to reap a bit of this respect for song, as he seems to have a personal herald to help him about in Antinous' court (Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.50-51, 8:114-117). This power of song presented in the *Odyssey* is not lost in its translation into film.

Song in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* calls for respect and elicits, just like in the Homeric epic its storyline is derived from, an emotional response from its characters. The respect is manifested in a rather interesting way from the character of Demodocus, for just as the blind Demodocus earns his bread at the court of Alcinous by singing songs, so too do Ulysses and his friends earn enough to pay for their living expenses for an extended period of time by creating a record. This ability to earn a livelihood by song is simply not possible without a respect for song. This respect is present in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* in providing livelihood for artists in order to garner the sympathy of the public in political campaigns. The campaign concept also places special emphasis on the emotional power of music, as Pappy O'Daniel's theatrics of being "moved" by the music of the Soggy Bottom Boys inspires the crowd in his favor. In fact, concepts of respect

and emotional power are seen in the campaigns of both Homer Stokes and Pappy O'Daniel: Homer Stokes recruits the musical talents of Ulysses' family to augment the support for his campaign, and conversely has the public turned against him and to Pappy O'Daniel because of his opposition to the popular music group the Soggy Bottom Boys.

In the movie, song is also used to provide an elaboration of events that are occurring. The song "I'm a Man of Constant Sorrow" serves to provide emotional insight into the pain and sorrow Ulysses and Odysseus have to endure in their journey home. Though the song is accurate to the plot timeline of the movie, for Ulysses, the song seems almost an over-exaggeration of his suffering because of the almost indefatigable quality of his happy-go-lucky attitude. However, certain lyrics of the song pertain well to Odysseus, as the lyric "I've seen sorrow all through my days" serves better to elaborate on the 20 years of suffering Odysseus endured during and after the war (Soggy Bottom Boys, 2011). Each song in the movie also demonstrates the emotional power of song that becomes the driving force behind the climax of the movie. With each song, Ulysses and his friends are moved to action. During the song "Come Down into the River to Pray," Delmar and Pete are so moved by the choral procession that they run down into the river to get baptized. Ironically, the songs are also markers of turning points in the movie, as each song separates one arc of events from another. One such example is the sudden downturn for Ulysses and his men after "Siren Song," as Pete disappears and a series of rather unfortunate events occur, notwithstanding a swindling and beating by Big Dan Teague.

From the display of song in the movie, it is easy to see its parallels with traditional Homeric verse as both emphasize the respect for song present in their respective

cultures and stress the emotional power of song. The respect is seen in the gainful employment of musicians by prominent persons, and the emotional power present in song is seen in the way it moves the characters: in the *Odyssey*, both Odysseus and Penelope are moved to tears when they hear the history of their lost loved ones in song, while in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, song rouses people to action, whether it be voting or baptism. However, because of context that is not only based on different cultures but subtly different plots, the way that song is used by Homer and the Coen brothers differ: in Homer, song is used as a medium for relaying the tales of heroes that are gone, as both main instances of song's appearance in the *Odyssey* are tales of the events and heroes of the Trojan War. In the film, song is used to elaborate on the plot and meaning behind the plot while also serving as marking points for changes in the plot paradigm: the song "I'm a Man of Constant Sorrow" serves as not only an elaboration upon the character of Ulysses, but the turning point in Ulysses' fortunes. For the *Odyssey*, song exists as a tie to the past as it commemorates and honors those lost in war. For the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, it serves as an elaboration of the general plot themes. In some cases, such as in the song "I'm a Man of Constant Sorrow," it even serves as an indirect portent of things to come.

Song combines the tangible form of spoken word with the stirrings of melodic sound to create a form of expression that mixes the communication of thoughts and emotions. In the *Odyssey*, it is used to recount past events while providing insight on Odysseus's and Penelope's view of the past. In *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, it is used to elaborate on events that are currently or about to take place and to serve as a foreshadowing of a change to come. In both, song has the inherent qualities of commanding respect and not only serving as a vent for artistic and

emotional expression, but also having power over the emotions of others. These differences are not so surprising, as while the *Odyssey* is the literal rendition of the ancient Greek oral tradition, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is a modern interpretation of the characters and plot. However, the similarities in the view of music and its effect on people has not changed despite these differences, and that demonstrates the ageless and almost unchanging role of music in human culture, and the power it has even today.

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