

# Baroque and classical wordpainting techniques assignment

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Therefore, the use of word painting, the musical representation of a literal word, phrase, or poetic image, is clearly seen in many pieces. Baroque music, with the institution of the opera being created, was able to fully examine human emotion and the expression of characters. While word painting continued to be used, the use of the aria in operas enabled the audience to witness an outpouring of emotions through a soloist. The techniques used during the Renaissance era were carried over into the Baroque era and were expanded upon in order to provide for more in-depth expression.

The madrigal originated in Italy in the 16th century. This type of a piece, which was designed for several soloists with the text being a short poem, was the result of an outpouring of Italian poetry during the Renaissance. As a result, the madrigal has very poetic images and its musical composition speaks to that same idea. The English madrigals, Thomas Wilkes, displays typical characteristics of a madrigal in his work, *As Vesta Was Descending from The Triumphs of Iranian* (1601).

This madrigal paints the image of Vesta, who is the Roman goddess of the hearth (her flame was protected by the nine "Vestal virgins"), descending a hill with her attendants, while Iranian, who is Queen Elizabeth, is climbing the same hill with her young shepherds. The main text of the song, and its parallel musical composition, depicts the act of Vesta's attendants deserting her to join the "fair Iranian." Wilkes makes excellent use of word painting in order to create a piece that is as musically colorful and useful in telling a story as are the lyrics.

As *Vests Was Descending* utilizes six voices, which allows for quite complex harmonies and layers of vocals. The first two lines of the piece contain the words “descending” and “ascending,” and the lines are put to descending and ascending scales respectively in order to illustrate the idea that Vests is making her way down the hill while Iranian is climbing the hill. Continuing through the piece, the words “running down” are portrayed through vocalists quickly descending their voices one after another. Wilkes fully utilizes the multitude of voices in the piece through the next portion.

When describing how Vest’s attendants ran down “first two by two, then three by three together,” he literally has at first two voices singing, then three singing, then all voices singing together. This provides an audible effect of the building and collecting of bodies ultimately all uniting. The next line, “leaving their goddess all alone,” is both physically and emotionally represented by a single voice. A soloist sings the peseta’s feeling of abandonment. Lastly, the concluding line of the piece, “Long live fair Iranian,” contains the longest bass note on the word “long” in comparison to the other words of the line.

This again is a clear musical representation of a word of the text, a common technique used by Wilkes. The last line, in general, is a joyful one, and that is represented through the voices’ quick and joyful reproduction of the phrase through their vocals. Wilkes is able to produce emotion and ideas simply through his musical composition. When placed alongside with the lyrics of the piece, *As Vests Was Descending* takes on a fully developed piece of

expression. The word painting technique was carried over from the Renaissance period and used quite often in the Baroque.

The first opera created, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), utilizes techniques in order to musically illustrate human emotion. In the piece *Tu Se' Mortar* this idea can be heard from the very first notes. After being told of Eurydice's death, Orpheus declares his emotions in *Tu Se' Mortar*. The piece begins with an organ and a bass lute, the lute representing Orpheus' harp, which speak to the song's dark tones. The singer's vocal lines are also fairly free, they have no set beat, meter, or phrase pattern. This, therefore, creates the sense of a monologue or soliloquy, an actor's expression of inner emotion.

Monteverdi, like other Baroque composers, frequently used word painting. The opening words, "You are dead," repeated and culminating in "You have left me forevermore, never to return, and I remain," are sung in a "stretched out," "long and slow" fashion, but as the verse continues, intensity and volume is increased to result in basically an outburst by the words, "Dei rimming," or "and I remain." The free beat and meter of the vocals allows for the singer to illustrate the emotion of the text through the speed in which the words are sung and the intensity of each word.

More 'traditional' word painting is used in the sense that there is a low tone on "basis" or 'abysses' in order to depict the deepness and descending nature of the underworld. Another strategic low note is placed on "mortem" to symbolize death and depression. Very high tones are used on the words "Steele" and "sole" in order to depict the physical and emotional height of the stars and sun. Through the dynamic use of climactic high notes in contrast

to somber low ones, Monteverdi is able to fully express the range of emotions Orpheus is experiencing and illustrate the passion and intensity that he is feeling.

Another opera composer of the period, the English Henry Purcell, makes use of a ground bass in his recitative to set the emotional tone of Dido's Lament. The ground bass, which utilizes a descending chromatic scale, is repeated eleven times. This displays the grief and sorrow that Dido is experiencing after abandonment by her lover, Names. Dido's Lament, as an aria, displays the immense amount of attention laced on expressing human emotion in the opera. The purpose of the piece is to fully examine the emotion or thought to the point where the idea has been fully exhausted.

Through repetition, particularly in the last lines of "Remember me! But forget my fate," and the constant ground bass, Dido's lamentation and thought process has been fully examined and expressed in the aria. In the non-secular, sacred world of the Baroque era, J. S. Bach is a prime example of a composer expressing complex ideas and emotions musically. Bach's B Resurrect. In order to express the immeasurable grief of the crucifixion, Bach's Crucifixes has its foundation in a basso station, a chromatically descending ground bass. This is the same Baroque technique used to symbolize grief as in Parcel's piece.

Crucifixes also contains four parts, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, which have changing melodic lines in order to create dynamic, dissonant harmonies. This use of dissonance is a method used to portray sorrow and grief which dates back to the earliest form of sacred music in the Medieval

era. While this feeling of sorrow is produced throughout the piece by these numerous techniques, there is a shift from the song's minor key to a major one. This provides an uplifting feeling, a sign of hope, which mimics the emotion and story of the actual crucifixion, Christ's grief and sorrow producing hope for all peoples.

*Et Resurrect* contrasts *Crucifixus* as it uses a chorus as opposed to four soloists and uses an orchestra as opposed to a small orchestra of strings. The piece expresses the hope and joy that results from the crucifixion through its jubilant, fast tempo, the fact that it is constructed in major, and rising melodic line on the words, " *Et resurrect.* " The methods used in the Renaissance in order to express emotion were also present in the Baroque and were developed into more complex, prominent musical symbols.

The madrigals of the Renaissance were the foundation for word painting, using high and low tones in order to portray physical space and express happy or somber notions. Rapid notes or ascending and descending scales were commonly used as well. These techniques were also found in the Baroque operas and musical compositions for church services. While Monteverdi and Purcell expanded the idea of word painting into the use of ground basses and constant musical representation of emotion throughout a piece, Bach also included these same symbolic strings of notes in order to express feelings in his sacred musical compositions.