The Textual Afterlife of a Musical Hero: Glenn Gould’s Reception in Posthumous Literature

MARKUS MANTERE

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould (1932–1982) was in many ways an odd figure in the history of classical music performance. An inborn virtuoso and captivating live performer, he nevertheless retired from giving live concerts at the age of 32 to focus on studio work and the recording and production of programs for television and radio. This shift in vocational focus proved immensely productive and resulted in seven monumental audio documentaries about various musicians, including Leopold Stokowski, Pablo Casals, Arnold Schoenberg, and Ernst Krenek. He also produced a number of shorter documentaries on musical subjects for the CBC and French media corporation ORTF. His discography amounts to more than 100 volumes, of which more than 50 were published during his lifetime.

Gould was always something more than a musician. As Edward Said has put it, Gould “seemed never to have done anything that was not in some way purposefully eccentric”, and for this reason his career seems like a “self-conscious counter-narrative to the careers of all other musicians.” Seeing Gould as something other than “all other musicians” may be an overstatement on Said’s part – what, in this case, should we make of the idiosyncrasies of Vladimir de Pachmann or Thelonius Monk? Even so, it is safe to say that Gould’s eccentricity, together with his unconventional and provocative insights on music, have been crucial in evoking the huge public fascination with his character. Said argues that Gould’s multi-faceted professional career, in particular his tireless exploration of his intellectual capacities through essay writing and the production of ra-
dio and television programs, functions in an interesting way as an extension of his music making. Said’s term for this dynamic is Gould’s “cultural presence”; a particular multi-modal way of engaging with the audience, which also contributes to a particular appreciation of his recordings.

Referring to his cult status, the music critic Terry Teachout has written about “Gouldism”; the public character of Gould’s persona, which is almost comparable to that of pop stars. Teachout’s “Gouldism” points to the stardom Gould enjoyed in the world of musical performance – not unlike that of his counterparts in popular culture. This stardom, of course, did not emerge of its own accord. Teachout lists three important factors at work in the birth of the public “Gould”. Firstly, Columbia Records was, from the very start of their collaboration, busy making Gould and his eccentricity and “difference” into an attractive product – a campaign that, in retrospect, was highly successful. Secondly, Gould gave up performing live concerts at a time (1964) when discussions of the prospects of information technology were very much in the air, and when North American intellectuals in the rapidly developing new area of study, communications, were attempting to come to grips with Marshall McLuhan’s prophecies for the electronic future. The third important point about Gould was that he, unlike most of his internationally successful compatriots, never left Canada for the US. He lived in Toronto all his life, in the midst of the more reserved and quiet Canadian cultural ethos that he always held dear. This is also the country that recognised his talent early on; following huge success as a child prodigy, his career remained at the centre of public attention in the Canadian media for more than three decades. He was also acknowledged in many areas of intellectual and cultural life and was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Toronto in 1964. In 1968 he would have been a strong candidate for the Order of Canada, the highest non-military honour in the country, had he not declined the proposal put forward by the nomination committee.

Considering all this, it is indeed no exaggeration to talk about the existence of a cult surrounding Gould’s legacy. Institutionally supported by The Estate of Glenn Gould and The National Archives of Canada, his legacy was celebrated by the journal Glenn Gould, published until 2009. Institutional commemorations abound; the university program for musical performance at the Royal Conservatory of Music is called the “Glenn Gould School of Music”; the concert hall of the CBC is named “Glenn Gould Studio”; and a variety of statues have been installed in public places all over Canada, commissioned over the years in veneration of his memory. Canada Post even recognised Gould’s musical legacy with a commemorative envelope in 2007. CBC maintains Gould’s status by broadcasting documentaries and previously unreleased material, together with Sony Classical, which owns the rights for most of the unreleased material.

It is no wonder that Gould’s public reception, during his lifetime and posthumously, has taken such a wide variety of forms. The figure of Gould as a fictional character surfaces in the most unexpected places: in youth novels, as an inspiration for poems, and
even as an alter ego in horror films. All of these instances contribute interesting ways in which to come to terms with the meaning of Gould in popular and high cultural contexts, both during and after his lifetime. It is exactly this, Gould’s “afterlife” that I will discuss in this article, focusing on Gould’s reception in literature.

**GOULD THE ECCENTRIC**

In the biographical literature on Gould, his life is often laid out as the narrative of a youthful, sexy, and dynamic musician who turns into a prophet increasingly detached from social interaction with the outside world. A good example of this metanarrative of Gould’s musicianship sublimating into philosophy is John McGreevy’s depiction of Gould’s second, 1981 recording of the *Goldberg Variations*:

> For me, it speaks volumes about where he was headed. He’s going to another place. This is his farewell … particularly the closing aria, knowing that he was saying farewell… There’s a man who was determined to impose, aesthetically and emotionally, his sensibility on his listeners. And he was saying, ‘Good-bye’. And this was such an exquisite way of doing it.6

These kinds of comments are particularly interesting in light of how things really were. Gould’s second recording of the *Goldberg Variations* (1982) was not the last recording he made, and there is no sign whatsoever in the surviving documents from that time that Gould had any idea about his imminent death. He had a number of plans for the musical future: conducting, composing, new radio documentaries, and recording. And yet McGreevy heard Gould’s recording as a farewell to this world.

McGreevy’s comment is conditioned by history. The idea of an artist sublimating his last times into a crystallised, late masterpiece is common in music history. Let us, for instance, reflect for a while on the public reception of the unfinished *Contrapunctus XIV* from *Kunst der Fuge*. In a certain sense, this unfinished piece has the status of “Bach’s musical will”. Legend has it that Bach died after his having jotted down the B-A-C-H -motive.7 Dying while at work has been a popular myth associated with composers – we also enjoy the story of Mozart’s dictation of the *Requiem* to his student Franz Xavier Süssmayr from his deathbed. We encounter this myth in many of the countless dramatisations of Mozart’s life – the famous Milos Forman film *Amadeus* comes to mind. Gould’s 1982 recording of the *Goldbergs* has obviously been heard in a similar historical frame, as a sublime message from a prophet dying and leaving his last musical wish for his audience.

In the numerous commentaries on Gould’s musicianship, he is often written off as an “eccentric genius.” A good example of this topos in Gould’s reception is Harold Schoenberg’s account of Gould:
To many musicians today, Glenn Gould is a symbol, a sort of Bobby Fischer of the piano. Like the eccentric chess genius, he was an amazing talent who retired early and went into seclusion. Like Bobby Fischer, Glenn Gould made his own rules, went his own way, did not care what the world thought of him, and ended up bending the world to his will. ….

To his generation he still represents revolt against authority, contempt for the Establishment.8

Even this short excerpt shows the clichés of Gould’s public reception: eccentricity, rebellion, enormous talent, and deliberate isolation from the social community. The 2001 edition of the New Grove is quite similar in its tone:

In January 1955 Gould made his American début, with recitals in Washington, DC, and New York. His unorthodox programme (Gibbons, Sweelinck, Bach, late Beethoven, Berg, Webern), distinctive style and platform mannerisms immediately marked him as an iconoclast. …. His idiosyncratic interpretations, published pronouncements and personal eccentricities made him a controversial figure, but he was also widely admired for his virtuosity, probing intellect, command of musical architecture, rhythmic dynamism, precise fingerwork and extreme clarity of part-playing.9

The Toronto Star, which claimed credit for inspiring city officials to honour Gould in its Star Weekly magazine, paid tribute to the recipient’s eccentricities in an editorial on 20 April 1955:

Is man, the individual, on the way out? If you think he is and that his place is being taken by a dull automaton named “mass man” who is conditioned to absolute conformity, consider for a moment Glenn Gould, the 23-year-old Toronto pianist whom critics call a genius.

Even on the hottest day in the summer this young man may be seen wearing an overcoat, galoshes, a wool beret and two pairs of gloves. He swallows handfuls of vitamin tablets and other pills and bathes his hands in warm water before playing. At the piano he slumps over until his hair tangles with the keys. He sings and hums while playing the most intricate Bach and Beethoven compositions, or stamps his feet in time to the music.

In an age where even artists are supposed to be “normal” and as ordinary as the man on the street, Glenn Gould triumphantly affirms that man’s spirit remains free. Long may he flourish and may he never conform!
Comments of this nature about Gould are prolific throughout his career. The Finnish music historian Mikko Heiniö, in writing about the public reception of composers and musicians, uses the concept of *topos* to refer to a petrified, unreflective mode of an individual’s public reception, which may have even turned into a cliché. This mode of reception has its own impact on how the composer or musician’s music is received. Following this notion, one could talk about the *topos* typically associated with Gould’s reception, which includes epithets such as “radical”, “iconoclast”, “eccentric”, “isolated”, and so on. These conceptions of Gould have found their way into most of the literary, visual, poetic, and documentary receptions of Gould’s musicianship that I have encountered over the years.

The *topos* concept, of course, is manifest only in scrutinizing well-known individuals, that is, stars. Richard Dyer (1982, 38) has raised important issues regarding stardom in popular culture that apply equally well to Gould’s afterlife in popular culture. Dyer argues that stardom is often built on a certain kind of image of its object. This image is not, however, seen as a simple visual image but rather as a “complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs”, which have become associated together with the stardom of a given individual. In Gould’s case, it is easy to point to his eccentricity, intellectual brilliance, probing interpretations, and perhaps even his good looks as constitutive of his stardom. Gould was always “special”, a thinking person’s choice in classical music, one who never ceased to be original and innovative.

Typical of clichés that make a *topos* of a musical star is that it comes into being quite rapidly and that purely visual matters – such as Gould’s strange antics on the concert stage – are very important for its formation. The reception of Gould efficiently circulates these “signs” and gestures of Gould: constant humming, his low position by the piano, the intensity of his musical interpretation – so intense as to disturb the listener’s experience – soaking his hands in hot water before playing, playing with gloves on, etcetera. Good examples of this process are Francois Girard’s famous 32 Short Films of Glenn Gould (1993), as well as the photo collections taken of Gould. Nevertheless, we should not forget the main source for public conceptions of Gould as an “eccentric iconoclast” – himself. Any classical musician writing about “egoistic pomposity” as the hallmark of Beethoven’s heroic style, and of Mozart as a composer “who died rather too late than too early” (1976/1990) is bound to be seen as exceptional in the public eye. Gould’s denial of live performance as the primary mode of classical music’s mediation was also an exceptional view in his own time.

**Gould as a Canadian Role Model**

The general reception of Gould’s musicianship (articles, documentaries and newspaper criticism) has emphasised Gould’s eccentricity – his, as it were, “otherness” in classical music. This public discourse of Gould’s eccentricity involves stories and anecdotes of
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his humming while playing, dressing up in winter clothes in the middle of summer, hypochondria, social isolation, his obsession with long phone calls at odd hours, notable gestique in live performance, enigmatic sexuality, and a fondness for a number of alter egos – such as New York taxi driver “Theodore Slutz”, a British authenticist-conductor named “Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite”, and the German musicologist “Herbert von Hochmeister” – all of whom were hilarious showcases in Gould’s radio and television programs. Gould, however, went as far as to publish some of his writings under these pseudonyms.

Gould has been a major cultural icon in his native Canada for more than 40 years. For some of his fans, finding Gould’s music has meant a life-changing experience, almost like a religious conversion (see, for instance, Rhona Bergman’s The Idea of Gould).17 This kind of reception is not even exceptional among Gould’s fans. Here’s an example from a 1972 letter from a fan:

When one listens to your interpretations of Bach-works, he notices at once, that there comes to exist a foreign cosmos around him, namely your own particular cosmos, resulting probably from that very specific, the most exquisite articulation, rhythm and tact of your own, of your inner respiration. And this very cosmos, strained to the highest degree, seems to me to have nothing to do with our five senses, but have rather to do with something being far beyond such a category of human sense. … Your way of interpretation in general suggests to me, somehow, something of transcendental, of metaphysical nature.18

Reading a large number of letters, personal reminiscences and other documents such as this has helped me to understand the vast quantity and qualitative range of secondary literature on Gould, which I’ve come to know quite thoroughly. I have also come across genres of Gould’s literary reception previously unknown to me, such as biographies of Gould aimed at children. Here I discuss two examples of this interesting literary genre: Vladimir Konieczny’s Struggling for Perfection: The Story of Glenn Gould and Lynette Roy’s Glenn Gould: The Genius and His Music 1932–1982.

The ideological roots of the biography as a literary genre reach back to the 19th century. The original idea of the genre was to “enlighten” and “develop” the reader through reading about the lives of exceptional and exemplary individuals. In Gould’s case, this exemplarity has to do with his national iconicity in Canada. As Robin Elliott19 observes, nationally significant individuals are most often biographically constructed in discourses that have to do with important national values. As such, the meanings of exceptional life stories become associated with national histories and particular modes in which a given nation defines its history and identity. A biography, in this sense, becomes national history, symbolising aspects of a nation’s self-image, hopes and ambitions.
This is the ideological frame in which I am looking at the biographies mentioned above. Generally viewed, these biographies set an example by creating a success narrative of Gould’s exceptional talent, devotion to music, and willingness to work towards a goal. On a macro-level, all biographies of Gould that I am aware of – including the two children’s biographies – display a similar kind of master narrative:

1. Gould is a *Wunderkind*, studying the piano with his mother and later with Alberto Guerrero;
2. Gould ends up in conflict with Guerrero at the age of 19 and states that he has learned nothing from him;
3. Gould withdraws to the family summerhouse, ponders his future, and soon afterwards starts a successful career as a performing artist;
4. Gould becomes frustrated with excessive travelling, the limitations that live performance imposes on musical interpretation, and the “lust-for-blood” atmosphere of live concerts. He thereafter suffers from deteriorating health;
5. Gould withdraws once again to the summerhouse to ponder his future;
6. Gould returns again to the stage, this time concentrating on recording, television, and radio documentaries;
7. Gould’s mother dies, his relationship with his father cools because of his father’s subsequent re-marriage;
8. Gould isolates himself from the world more than before and plans a new career as a conductor;

This quasi-narratological sketch is not to question whether or not the incidents were “real” but rather to draw attention to how linear and straight-forward this life-narrative plays out. Also, within this kind of schema, certain events gain a greater function within the larger whole. Withdrawing to the summerhouse, for instance, plays out as an almost quasi-mythological “recharge” – as in Vladimir Propp’s theory of the universal structure of folk tales where the protagonist returns, having matured and resolved conflicts. These events unfold clearly in Konieczny’s *Struggling for Perfection*. Gould’s childhood summers at the summerhouse are depicted as an outright idyll: “The small, white cottage was a sanctuary. He hated to go back to the city. When it was time to go back to school in September, he would become very sad. The cottage was his haven, a place of peace where he could just be himself.”

The isolation following the conflict and breakup with his piano teacher Alberto Guerrero is described as follows:

So he removed himself from Toronto’s music scene for a while and went to the cottage, leaving only to perform concerts arranged for him by Wal-
The solitude following Gould’s retirement from giving concerts is narrated in a similar tone:

Glenn retreated to the cottage, where he recharged his batteries. With the exception of a few speaking engagements, he kept mostly to himself, reading, walking and thinking a great deal. This period was very important to him, as critical as the time years earlier when he’d quit his music lessons and taken refuge at the cottage to ready himself for the future.22

All these examples show Gould’s isolation in the pastoral of the countryside as a kind of withdrawal into the serenity of solitude. It could be argued that Gould is living the life of a 19th-century artist in these examples; close to the sublimity of nature, immersed in his music, at a distance from everyday worries, surrounded by “pure” emotions and thoughts. This kind of pastoral has traditionally been the **locus** within which celebrated artists have been situated in biographical narratives.

The traditional function of a biography as setting an example for the reader clearly comes to the fore in *Struggling for Perfection*. Gould’s complex personality is idealised – he is described as “a gentle rebel who struggled for perfection in everything he did”;

23 as “different”, one who “some people thought … was strange, but they simply didn’t understand him”;

24 as “an honest man” who “had no fear about stating what he believed”;25 as “courageous”, always “prepared to take a chance with music and in life”; as well as a man with an “eccentric lifestyle”, but who was “brilliant, funny, kind and interesting”.26 Considering Gould’s disregard for Mozart’s music, I was surprised to read about Gould having played Mozart’s music “beautifully”.27

What, then, is particularly “Canadian” in *Struggling for Perfection*? Even though Gould never regarded his Canadian-ness as an essential part of his identity, this aspect is highlighted in the biographical narrative: “Glenn loved Canada. … He was in awe of this country’s natural beauty, its vastness and its people. He believed Canadians to be very cultivated people”.28 It should be stressed that Gould, to my knowledge, never said or wrote **any** of these things, nor did he ever emphasise his own nationality in relation to his music or his life.
to his identity. All this, however, is not relevant for my argument here: in the biography, “Gould” is constructed as a national hero, an example for children – a cosmopolite who, in spite of all possibilities available, loves his native country and does service to her through his work. This, of course, relates more generally to the biographies of significant persons: through reading about the lives of the elite, we also learn what the essence of their nationality is.

Lynette Roy’s *Biography for Young People* is, compared with my previous example, clearly more neutral in its tone. There is almost none of the disturbing hagiography characteristic of *Struggling for Perfection*, and overall the targeted reader seems to be the teenager or older. Roy’s main argument in her book is that Gould was a “visionary” in classical music and that his exceptional commitment to recording as the main mode of musical interpretation pointed directly to the future. Roy also argues that the world today is changing in much the same vein as it did when Gould was living in the 1960s. By this she means that Gould preferred living in isolation from normal social interaction, often using the telephone to communicate to the world outside. This might be perceived as similar to how we use email, skype, and other forms of electronic communication via the world wide web. Roy is guilty of only slight overstatements in her characterisations of Gould as a “music theorist and philosopher”, and as a “compassionate humanitarian who cared little about material things”. Gould’s oft-cited success in the stock market proves the contrary. She also identifies him as a thinking individual, who “perceived that there was disrespect for the value of life, and that we should teach our children that they are special and unique”, and as a man that believed that “if children learned to value themselves and others there would be less violence in the world”.

Again, I want to point out that the critical reading practiced here is not intended to question the real-life validity of these characterisations regarding Gould as a person. No public or archival material gives reason for such accusations of meanness, malevolence or plain socio-pathological behaviour of the kind put forward by – among other commentators – Gould’s long-time producer Andrew Kazdin in his book on Gould. The contrary, however, is true as well; there are no particular signs of philanthropy, charity or goodwill in Gould’s doings or the documents of his life. Gould’s vast correspondence consists for the most part of business letters, letters to fans and colleagues, and casual short notes to family members. There are hardly any signs of a private life in the letters. In their stead is a picture of an almost obsessively music-devoted, talented and intelligent person, who does not seem to have had time for serious relationships.

It is obvious that Gould’s particularly charitable personality, as well as the “genius in the pastoral”-topos that Konieczny puts forth, are biographical and literary constructions. The same can be said of another extraordinary mode of Gould’s literary mediation; his portrayal as a fictitious character in a Boy Scout novel. Classic examples of literary personifications of musicians are “Adrian Leverkuhn” in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* and “Hans Castorp” in Hermann Hesse’s *Glass Bead Game* as alter egos of Ar-
nold Schoenberg. As will become apparent, however, Gould’s literary reception is both qualitatively and quantitatively very different from that of these older literary peers.

Gould’s personification can be found in Tim Wynne-Jones’s novel *The Maestro*. In this book, obviously intended for pre-teenage readers, “Gould” enters under another name; eccentric pianist “Nathaniel Gow.” The narrative in the novel is interesting: the protagonist, “Burl Crow,” 14 years of age, escapes from his violent and dishonest father into the woods, where he wanders for days with no food or drink. Finally he finds, in the middle of the forest, a peculiar cottage shaped like a pyramid, where the pianist Gow has isolated himself in order to finish the highlight of his musical career, an oratorio. The encounter with the Genius is significant for young Burl. For the first time in his young life he is heard and challenged to take part in an intellectual and moral dialogue, and he gains the courage to explore his spiritual potential.

As Alan West and Lee Harris accurately describe, Gow serves as a spiritual and moral guide for Burl in his journey towards understanding the world around him and above all, himself. West and Lee also point out that the relationship between Gow and Burl plays out in a way reminiscent of the archetypal patterns found in relationships between guides and novices in many myths, legends, fairy tales, and children’s fiction. To be secluded with the Maestro provides an opportunity for intellectual and moral growth and ultimately a “re-birth” as a more mature individual.

How, then, is the benevolent genius depicted in the novel? First of all, he seems to have all the features, including the eccentric behaviour, of the Gould of the 1970s. He conducts his “imaginary orchestra” with fingerless gloves – both prevalent features of the existing iconography of Gould.

He was stooped a bit, balding, and dressed in a heavy gray coat, a scarf, and a flat hat. He took a cookie out of a box but paused with it halfway to his mouth, as if struck by a thought. He raised the cookie, held it poised in the air, and then he began to wave it around. Not waving, thought Burl. Conducting. As if he was not on a deck at all but on the podium of a music hall and there was an orchestra below him on the lake. The man was wearing gloves with the fingers cut out of them. The man was humming, lost in the music.

Part of the eccentricity of Nathaniel Gow is that he, too, uses what amount to alter egos in conversation with Burl – just like Gould in his radio and television programs. Here is an excerpt from one conversation, which evokes associations to Gould’s alter ego, the German conductor/musicologist “Karlheinz Klopweisser.”

‘You are, by ze looks of you, a second bassoon player’, he said in an imperious voice. ‘Vell, I’m sorry, you’re too late. Ze position has already been
filled. Good day.' He dismissed Burl with a wave of his hand. But Burl did not move. 'I wonder –

'No, vaat!' said the man. He took another cookie from the box, an Arrowroot cookie, and took a thoughtful bite. 'I've got it wrong. You're ze new public relations fellah from Columbia Records – zey get younger every year – und you've got a slate of interviews with ze press lined up for me. Ja?'

As far as Gould's reception in literature is concerned, it is of particular interest that not only is the Maestro obviously modelled on Glenn Gould – "a heavy grey coat, a scarf, and a flat hat" – but also the frame of the whole narrative plays out under very Gouldian circumstances: isolated north, hermetic nocturnal living, extreme privacy, outside the social collective. In a word, Nathaniel Gow is “Gould,” so familiar to us from his representation in other media; a modern sage, who never tired of speaking about the importance of relying on one's own resources, on one's own creativity, and on one's own aesthetic norms.

The maestro, just like his real-life counterpart, is also a hypochondriac, using a number of different medicines and taking his own blood pressure many times a day. The Maestro finally dies of a heart attack. Furthermore, it is interesting that two particular pieces of moral guidance that the Maestro bestows on Burl resonate strongly with Gould's ethics of life: animal rights and anti-competitiveness in arts. To Burl's seemingly innocent question as to whether the Maestro considered editing takes of the studio recorded music to be somehow dishonest, the latter bursts out:

Even the woods are filled with critics! Do you really think, Master Burl, that art is like a game of football? That the dropped pass must forever remain dropped? The fumble cannot be scooped up and placed back in the hands of the otherwise competent fullback? Nonsense. And that, you see, is the problem with live concerts. They are like some dreadful sports event: the noisy crowd, the fumbles, having to play when you're sick as a dog. That's not art.

Animal rights are discussed in a scene where Burl thinks he has done both himself and his master a favour by catching a perch from the lake for dinner. When showing the fish to the Maestro, the latter's reaction is the opposite of the one intended:

'I'm almost entirely a vegetarian', he said. 'A fact you obviously had not noticed. I have a great affinity for animals.' 'This is a fish', said Burl. The Maestro's grip on the railing tightened. 'It is something that is – was – alive.'
Burl felt his insides cave in. His arm ached from holding up his prize. He lowered it to the sandy ground. Hung his head. The Maestro spoke again – quiet, distant. ‘There is a basic problem here, Burl Crow. You seem to thrive on excitement. I’m quite dizzy with it.’

The animal-loving and anti-competitive Maestro plays out as a sage whose characteristics are immediately recognisable to anyone familiar with the real-life Gould. The novel also has other indirect references to Gould’s world: the Maestro’s mistress Reggie Corngold works as producer for the CBC, just as Susan Kosics and Margaret Pacsu did in real life – both were rumoured to have romantic affiliations with Gould. Just like Gould, the Maestro loves the North, winter and solitude; the Maestro’s full name is Nathaniel Orlando Gow – an obvious reference to Gould’s “favourite composer”, Orlando Gibbons.

Also, the Maestro’s **oeuvre** as a composer recollects Gould’s real compositions: “The Northern Suite” (Gould’s **Solitude Trilogy**), “The First Quartet” (Gould’s **Quartet** op. 1), and “Twelve Variations on a Theme by Orlando Gibbons” are all imaginary works with obvious references to Gould’s music. Considering the circumstances of the novel, it is noteworthy how Sherrill Grace’s ideas of the North in Canadian literature dovetail with those in **The Maestro**. As Grace observes, “north” often points to “manlihood”, “escape”, “freedom”, and “rebirth” – these issues are very much at stake in this novel. It is the northern nature that Burl escapes from his violent father. Also, Burl learns and matures not only through his encounter with the Maestro but also through nature, and he finally goes through a kind of “rebirth”. **The Maestro** suggests to its reader that there is always hope, no matter how strong the feeling of alienation, or how great the sense of angst. The novel, then, offers an “important threshold to be crossed on the journey in which every child must be a hero, that of life”. This ideal of a modern “Bildungsroman”, I think, would not be realised without the semiotic icon-potential of Glenn Gould. “Gould’s” appearance in the middle of what might seem a most unlikely context, a Boy Scout novel, only further testifies to the wide array of semiotic potential that his character evinces in Canadian culture. Gould himself died in 1982; however, his character, the “star”, goes on living in his many guises.

“Gould” is not always a benign sage. One of the most interesting examples of Gould’s literary mediation is Thomas Bernhard’s **Der Untergehr** (trans. **The Loser**). This absurd and tragic novel introduces “Glenn Gould” in the past tense, as a genius who has died at the age of 51 (cf. this with Gould’s actual death at 50!) while listening to his own recording of the **Goldberg Variations** – Gould’s signature piece. Gould, the unnamed narrator of the novel, and a third character, “Wertheimer”, all studied in Vladimir Horowitz’s masterclass at the Mozarteum in Salzburg in 1953. Glenn Gould’s genius is the real protagonist in the narrative: its destructive power leads Wertheimer to first give up his own playing, and later, after Gould himself had died, to commit suicide.
for not “daring to be alive anymore”. Wertheimer commits an act of self-destruction as a result of his tragic inability to desire to be anyone other than Glenn Gould. His maniacal belief that Gould’s performance of the Goldberg Variations is the unattainable model that he must struggle against all hope to emulate in his own performance of this work condemns him to utter despair. The narrator, in turn, gives up his own playing and develops an obsession for writing about Glenn Gould.

The “Gould” in the novel is, for anyone familiar with the real Glenn Gould, absurd – “absurd” not in the sense that there should be a correspondence between literary fiction and reality, but rather in that many of “Gould’s” personal characteristics in Bernhard’s novel are, intentionally, exact opposites to the character’s real-life counterpart. For instance, “Gould” advances his friend’s decision to commit suicide by calling him a “loser” directly to his face. To imagine the real Gould, who preached against the competition principle throughout his life, committing such an act would seem quite preposterous. One also finds other “distortions” of the facts: Gould would never have studied with his older contemporary Horowitz because he hated him and everything that he represented pianistically: sentimentality, dazzling displays of virtuosity, and spontaneity. Gould did not love New York, nor was he a German-speaking cosmopolitan. Gould was not keen on practising his repertory, nor did he have a pulmonary disease like the “Gould” in the novel.

In spite of these differences, there are a number of characteristics in the novel that make the character recognisable: Gould performed the music of Brahms, Schoenberg and Webern, and constantly criticized that of Mozart and Beethoven; Gould escaped, in a way, from the audience into a voluntary isolation; Gould was sloppy in his appearance but was, at the same time, a control fanatic, and in many ways his own worst critic.

As an example of Gould’s cultural mediation, then, Bernhard’s novel is peculiar. Kevin Bazzana gives an interesting reading of this strange novel: its depiction of “Gould” could be read as a kind of self-portrait of Bernhard himself. Bernhard turned 51 when Gould died; he had a pulmonary disease; he broke up with his family and isolated himself in the countryside. According to Bazzana, the obsessive and intensive mode of narrative prevalent in the novel, as well as the temporal shifts between present and the past, unfold just like a dialogue contained in the writer’s experience and his memories.

It is also interesting that many commentaries on Bernhard’s novel raise issues that are particularly difficult not to associate with Gould’s own aesthetic thought. Michael Olson, for instance, reads Der Untergeher as a literary contrapuntal work, which by its very ontology assimilates its musical counterpart, the fugue. Furthermore, Olson points out that “Glenn Gould” is also a key figure in two other novels by Bernhard: Alte Meister (1985) and Heldenplatz (1988). He asserts that not only was the quest for complete control and perfectionism a hallmark of Gould’s work but also Bernhard’s – counter-
point was a means to achieve this experience of total control over the whole. Olson writes that Bernhard was compiling his *Magnum opus* through his individual novels, and he was constantly renewing his literary language from work to work. It is in this sense that Olson writes about Bernhard’s *oeuvre* in very Gouldian terms: it can be seen as a series of “takes”.

In a more recent commentary on *Der Untergehr*, Reinhild Steingröver pays attention to intertextuality and philosophical heroes in the novel. Steingröver reads “Gould”, for instance, as a Schopenhauerian reflection on Romantic genius; a solitary, isolated and tragic character. At the same time, however, parody is prevalent: the tension involved between the real Glenn Gould and “Glenn Gould” in the novel is never resolved, and forms part of the controversial Genius in the narrative. Another element of textual parody in the novel is that the novel focuses mostly on the losers in the narrative – the narrator and “Wertheimer” rather than the Genius, who merely lurks in the background.

In addition to this kind of philosophical and historical intertextuality, Steingröver reads the novel as a musical allusion: ostinato, repetitiveness and variation are musical elements that he detects in the novel. The textual counterpart to all this, the “Gould”-genius, is ultimately left alone, in spite of the parody and controversy embedded within the character.

The last “Gould-novel” I discuss here is *The Song Beneath the Ice* by Joe Fiorito. This is a very different example of Gould’s literary mediation in comparison with the two previous examples. “Glenn Gould” never appears in the novel. Just like in *Der Untergehr*, “Gould” shadows the protagonist concert pianist Don Amoruso’s tragic life. The narrative in the novel starts off in a very peculiar way: Amoruso interrupts his piano recital in the middle of Musorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, leaves the stage, and disappears for months. A year goes by and there is no word from Amoruso. Then all of a sudden his friend, journalist Joe Serafino (who is also the narrator in the novel), receives a postal delivery, which contains Amoruso’s notepads and cassette recordings of various moments in his life. This is where the actual narrative begins: Serafino manically starts listening to the tapes and reading the notepads in his efforts to locate Amoruso.

So it is Gould’s “shadow” that haunts Amoruso. At the very start we learn that Amoruso has had trouble relating to his more famous senior colleague:

Dom had a thing about Gould. A mania, really. He never quite explained why, but I think he was jealous of GG’s gift, despised the liberties Gould took with scores, was scornful of his retreat to the recording studio, and above all could not bear the legendary quirks – the famous little boy’s chair, the overcoat and gloves at the height of summer’s heat, the naïve belief in chiropractic and homeopathic remedies – Imaginary cures for imagined ailments!
After all, Amoruso is in many ways just like Gould. He won the Kiwanis Music Festival piano competition just as Gould did, and likewise, he is a hypochondriac living in solitude. Amoruso, as a kind of “Gould-allusion”, is also a parody of his real-life counterpart: Amoruso’s disappearance from the concert stage could be seen as an allegory for Gould’s retirement from live concerts. In addition, Amoruso’s obsession for documenting his personal life on audio cassettes could be seen as a kind of distortion of Gould’s preference for working in recording studios instead of live. Finally, like Gould, Amoruso is obsessed with the Canadian North, but in an entirely different way than Gould. Here’s how he describes Gould’s *The Idea of North* radio documentary:

snobbish, stiff, unoriginal, and hard to listen to. Plenty of references to Shakespeare and Pirandello, Eldorado and Utopia, Prospero and Caliban. There are no native people. Not a word in Inuktikut. The flaw is typically Gouldian. There was nothing in his North to show how northerners might view southerners. In addition to which, the device he used of overlapping voices was a contrivance, an annoyance, an impediment.49

As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Amoruso is hiding in a little town called “Wolf Cove” in the northern part of Canada. Amoruso has escaped from his recital in a tuxedo, taken a plane to the little town, and slowly made himself at home in the new environment. He now works at a grocery store and has even made new friends in Wolf Cove.

From the very start of his residence in the North, it’s obvious that Amoruso has a very different take on it than Gould:

Gould never imagined any of this. He never got his hands dirty, never ate raw seal – not that I recommend raw seal or dirty hands – never sat next to a nickel miner who handed him an envelope stuffed with pornographic photos and the admonition, ‘It’s a long winter, you better take a good look, there’s no women up there.’ He met no men on the run from wives and families or themselves. He met none of the men who have lived in the North so long they are afraid of the South, who no longer go South, not even for a holiday; this town is full of them. Nor did he, at breakfast, sit next to drunk white men who call their Inuit girlfriends rats. Gould, deaf to the North.50

Within the narrative of the novel, Amoruso’s own “idea of the North” begins to emerge through the audiotapes that Joe Serafino, the narrator, transcribes. The polyphonic, multi-faceted North for Amoruso is a little town, in which incest, amorality, suicides, and alcoholism are features of everyday life. Paradoxically, through the experience of
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this all, the protagonist begins the healing process and starts to rise above his earlier obsession with Glenn Gould. He rediscovers his independent, creative self, which becomes obvious in the final audiotape:

You will think the real story is that I stopped and walked away and found myself again. I suppose that’s true. The people of Wolf Cove took me in, no questions asked. I was the man in the tuxedo. I was the penguin, I was that man who worked at Northern Ventures. I have no illusions – I did not rock the boat while I was here – if I had, they’d have found a way to push me over the side and cut off my fingers. Or they would have left me buried under a heap of stones. … I have a better idea of North now that Gould ever did. I will play again, and seriously, and soon.

The North, then, has liberated Amoruso not only from his own personal anxiety but also from his obsession with Gould. This, I think, is of great interest in a novel that exemplifies Gould’s literary mediation. Just as in Bernhard’s *The Loser*, “Gould” is a shadow from which the protagonist seeks escape. In Fiorito’s novel, however, it is of particular interest that the protagonist escapes to the North, just like the object of his anxiety, but instead meets a very different reality than he imagined. Amoruso has to emancipate himself from the romantic, idealised – and Gouldian – conception of the North to become himself.

GOULD IN POETRY

Glenn Gould has also been an inspiration for poetry. My example here, the collection *Northern Music – Poems about and inspired by Glenn Gould*, is quite a unique example of Gould’s mediation in the world of classical music. It is, as far as I know, the only example of a whole collection of poems inspired by a 20th-century musician. 19th-century poetry inspired by Wagner (Baudelaire, Valéry), Paganini and Franz Liszt is, as one can imagine, a broad literary domain. However, the closer one draws to our own times, the more sparse this literary genre – inspired by classical musicians – becomes.

*Northern Music* is, I think, a good case in point for discussing the exceptional and multi-faceted afterlife that Gould has received following his death. The 39 poems in the collection, divided into 6 larger “chapters” – “Performance”, “Lore”, “North”, “Tributes”, “Variations”, and “Coda” – focus, in their poetic substance, on issues, anecdotes, and myths in Gould’s life that are often prevalent in the biographical literature. For instance, Ka Po Eleanor Kwan’s *Two Verses on a Note by Glenn Gould* opens with a quotation from a well-known letter by Gould to an unidentified woman named “Dell”, which in itself has been perceived as a document proving Gould’s intimate secret relationship with a woman. In her poem, Kwan creates a fictional romance between Gould
and the woman, left unidentified in the poem. One is, of course, reminded of the 19th-century discourse in which the “suffering genius” writes letters to his “immortal beloved”, which is exactly the topos reflected in the poem.

The “suffering genius” is not the only mythological figure that is reflected in the poems. Lola Haskins’s *Story*, to draw on another example, is also based on a well-known incident in Gould’s life; the famous 1962 recording of Brahms’s D minor concerto with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic. This oft-cited live performance has persisted in the history of classical music because of Gould’s odd choice of tempi in the piece and Bernstein’s public dissociation with the interpretation that he nevertheless executes with his orchestra and the soloist. This incident has been commented upon widely in the biographical literature, and Gould’s intentions regarding his interpretation may have been at least partly misunderstood. Haskins creates a dichotomy between “the North” and tradition, represented by Leonard Bernstein:

>This is not our tempo, Bernstein said. And, more to the point, this is not what Brahms wanted. But Gould said: I am Canadian. And I know something about mountains. And I know something about genius, which is like a mountain. And I know how this piece should be played, which is like the snow that lies quiet and glittering on the Rockies. And Gould was cold in this, and adamant as diamonds.52

Gould’s Canadian-ness is reflected in the poem above all as having a close affinity with sublime nature, out of which the “Gould” in the poem draws inspiration for his interpretation. It is noteworthy that the metaphor for his interpretation is located in the “northern” sphere – the performance of the Brahms concerto should be “like the snow that lies quiet and glittering on the Rockies”. The dialectics in the poem could also be grasped through an old dichotomy between “nature” and “culture” – Bernstein representing tradition and Brahms’s intentions as they guide the musician into an “accepted”, “normal” interpretation, while Gould’s “northern” music-making points to an archaic and strong interpretation inspired by “genius” and “nature”.

It comes as no surprise that the “North” plays a prominent role in other poems as well. Laura Hope-Gill’s poem *To Understand a Canadian* takes the reader into the mythical, sublime pastoral of the arctic:

>Understand that Canada is made mostly out of air  
>That disintegrates into nothingness the farther you go North  
>See how the atlas lies about how much of us  
cannot be lived in when we lose our distance from the city  
>Know the city is a falseness even the forests understand  
>To understand a Canadian do not push too hard on the surface.
Under Canada is a silence
Only ice can break. 53

This is the sublime “North” surrounding the Canadian genius in the poem. Jeff Kersh’s *Contrasts* is in very much the same domain:

A pile of kindling wards off
Canadian cold as a man
in far too brief of a coat
trudges off in blossoming snow,
no destination in particular.
He hums as he walks, fingers
twitching expert fingerings
for concertos, fugues, sonatas. 54

The last “northern” poem in the collection, Diane Raptosh’s *The Idea of North* associates Gould with isolation; searching for the truth within oneself in the arctic surroundings:

began with a compulsion to look out
on the polar sea and find it
in my blood. Remove the gear, the I don’t-
know-how-many pairs of gloves.
the two black hats, pull down all
the parkas I must wear before I step
from my apartment I shall leave
my mauve hot water bowls at once 55

The “North” points to solitude, Canadian-ness, and overall spiritual purity. From this topos only a semiotic stone throw is required to signify Gould’s music-making within a religious frame of reference, in the sphere of the sacred. Robert Gray’s poem *An Art of the Fugue* is a good example of this:

His face is as ecstatic as any saint’s or martyr’s
and those ethereal hands would never stop playing
if they could choose their own destiny, but ahead
lurks a white void where the notes simply vanish.
Gould plays and plays and then, suddenly, he snatches
his fingers from the keyboard as if he’s been shocked
into freeze frame – a silent stillness and an enviable death. 56
Gould, the “saint” and “martyr” of the poem is playing with his “ethereal” hands the mythical last Contrapunctus of the Kunst der Fuge, which the composer – so the famous myth tells us – was fervently attempting to finish on his deathbed. We can’t be quite sure whether the “silent stillness and an enviable death” points to Bach or Gould’s death. My impression is that both historical and biographical meanings are actualised: associations with Bach and death, the mythical origin of the music, and the sacred transcendence of Bach’s music. At the same time, the poem is a kind of homage to Gould, who is poeticized in the context of the writer’s own experience of his music.

The most common type of narrative position in the poems is one in which the narrator poeticizes a musical experience that is named and defined in the poem. These poems in the collection include Listening to Glenn Gould Play the Grieg E Minor Sonata (June Owens), Glenn Gould: The Bizet Variations Chromatiques, Eyes Shut (June Owens) and Listening to Bach’s English Suites at the Seashore (Richard Broderick). Leslie Monsour’s The Last Concert can also be read in the same context. It is obviously inspired by one scene – “The Last Concert” – in Francois Girard’s film Thirty-Two Short Films of Glenn Gould.

Before he plays, he fills the bathroom basin with birthwarm water for his room-chillled hands. The way he floats them, they could be his child; they have his seriousness, and there’s his face in their grasp, which heaven won’t exceed. He stands flexing off tension, bathes his wrists with mild affection, almost with a father’s pride.

Gould is also seen as an object of romantic and erotic longing in some poems; Rebecca Loudon’s is a good example:

Glenn Gould is my secret lover
He sails to my bed as I sleep
Hovers above my piano
Tapered hands veined as a leaf
He sails to my bed as I sleep
Voice rising above the fugue
Tapered hands veined as a leaf
Bach from his body blooms

In addition to these kinds of sensual metaphors, an important topos of Gould’s poetic reception is textual counterpoint. Even though these two verses don’t suffice to display this in detail, the total eight verses of the poem construct a kind of textual simulation of
a fugue; the lines assimilate the voices into a fugal texture. As the same expressions in
the poem – “He sails to my bed as I sleep,” and “Tapered hands veined as a leaf” –
change positions in the totality, the experience of the totality becomes, in an intriguing
way, contrapuntal.

All in all, one can argue that the poems circulate and re-imbue with significance the
same “Glenn Gould” so familiar to us from representations in other media: an eccen-
tric, isolated, lonely genius somehow particularly associated with the North. Even
though this character is strange, peculiar, and even frightening, he also achieves the
affinity of the erotic fantasy – as in my last example. On the other hand, in a number of
poems, poetry serves simply as the medium of a musical experience, which is an old
form of music’s public reception – one thinks, for instance, of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s poet-
ic reception of Beethoven’s and Haydn’s symphonies. In this sense, Gould-inspired po-
etry is not as exceptional as it may seem – particularly if one sets aside the fact that
Gould was a musician, not a composer. However, what I consider to be exceptional is
that in the poems we meet the same “Gould” as elsewhere, the “Gould” that the man
himself seems to have wanted to leave us with; a lonely genius immersed in his private
ecstasy, necessarily observed from a distance.

CONCLUSIONS

Gould’s reception in all its richness and thematic variety derives simply from the star-
dom that his image enjoys in the world of classical music. In a strikingly similar vein,
Thomas C. Carlson writes about Elvis that the “King of Rock ’n’ Roll” has become a
cultural icon, a persistent figure refusing to “leave the building”, even decades after his
death. Carlson brings up interesting examples of obvious allusions to Elvis in two
Hollywood-movies, Mystery Train and True Romance. Elvis’s iconicity in Western popu-
lar culture has invaded our collective consciousness to such extent that certain bodily
gestures, verbal ties, and facial expressions constitute enough information to evoke and
actualise the image of Elvis – even though the star himself remains absent. Through
these patterns of reception, Elvis indeed refuses to “leave the building”.

The same characteristics apply to Gould very well. Erika Doss writes about Elvis’s
first appearance on public television – the hot new medium of the day – in 1956 as the
obvious starting point for his cultural reception. Since then, his iconicity has become
the subject of continuing redefinition – in other words, we’re never quite sure what
“Elvis” is taken to mean. The next excerpt from Doss’s essay could also apply, mutatis
mutandis, to Gould:

But there is no particular agreement about what his image really means.
Multifaceted and diverse – rockabilly rebel, teen angel, Army private,
matinee idol, Las Vegas superstar, Nixon admirer, drug addict – Elvis’s
image is ambiguous and contradictory, solid but unstable in terms of his larger cultural significance. Just as American popular culture has always been unstable – ‘a site of conflicting interests, appropriations, impersonations’, says historian Eric Lott – Elvis’s image has been consistently renegotiated and reconstituted to mesh with individual and institutional preferences. The various ways Elvis is seen on racial, sexual, religious, and class terms reveal the plurality of meanings that any single image can embody.

It is obvious that Gould’s cultural significance is very different from that of Elvis’s. Religion, politics, youth culture and race are not exactly the frames in which Gould’s meaning is located. However, the vagueness and constant re-definition of meaning over time – in notions of “Gould” and “Elvis” – is something that both artists are subjected to. Just as we have seen above, “Gould” is played out and represented as a national icon, a gentle sage who loves his northern country; this kind of figure has been used to construct a model for being “Canadian”. On the other hand, the same “Gould” is an eccentric genius, located in his sphere of “otherness” and walking his own sublime path “between ‘sanity’ and ‘madness’, between the ‘monstrous’ and the ‘superhuman’”, which is how Christine Battersby describes the 19th-century conception of genius.

On the other hand, “Gould” is very much like “Elvis”; an object of daydreams and romantic love, an object who quite simply “changes the life” of his listeners – I have read this particular phrase in dozens of fan letters while researching in the Gould archive. The musician-documentarist Bruno Monsaingeon, one of the most prolific commentators on Gould and a close friend of his, has described his own “conversion” to Gould’s music in almost biblical terms: studying in Moscow in 1965 and getting his hands on his first recording by Gould, Monsaingeon writes of having heard “a gentle but imperative voice which said: come and follow me”.

The reception of Gould also functions as a medium for “nailing down”, in order to solve and clarify certain puzzling features in Gould’s public image. The poem by Rebecca Loudon, cited earlier, in which the female narrator speaks of Gould as her “secret lover” points directly to this – the sexuality of the unmarried Gould has been an enigma for many of his biographers. Loudon’s poem constructs an unproblematic heterosexual, an object of a woman’s erotic love.

Heterosexuality is by no means the only topos of Gould’s public reception. In the criticism of Gould’s musicianship, the interpretation of Gould as a homosexual is far from unique: Kevin Kopelson (1996), for instance, takes Gould’s homosexuality as a given and characterises his playing as a “touchstone of queer pianism”. Gould’s sexual orientation has been a prevalent theme in much of the secondary literature about Gould, and it is not my aim here to contribute further to this discussion. The reason I raise this issue here is that in Gould’s literary reception, his sexuality, as such, plays an important
role. It is interesting that the mediation of his figure functions as an arena of cultural negotiation in which certain ambiguous features in his persona – such as his sexuality – are “explained”, settled and turned into unquestioned “truths”. Rebecca Loudon, in her poem cited earlier, sees and hears Gould as an object for erotic, heterosexual love. For Kopelson, on the other hand, Gould is a homosexual pianist, a conception that in itself provides a context for Kopelson’s criticism of Gould. Both of these examples, in their own way, settle and remedy the question of Gould’s sexuality.

In addition, the patterns of reception discussed in this chapter show evidence of Gould’s cultural status and iconicity in his native Canada. In my reading, the very fact that a deceased Canadian pianist gains a new life within the narrative of a Boy Scout novel or the grim world surrounding the fictional pianist Don Amoruso, is highly interesting and exceptional. Furthermore, the remarkable patterns of Gould’s reception briefly touched upon above remind us of something even more interesting. They prove that not much has changed in 200 years: just as in the 19th century, even today we require our geniuses to be exceptional, enigmatic and peculiar characters, who through their work are capable of transcending the border from the everyday to the metaphysical. This idea of a musical genius expressing the inexpressible, capable of seeing beyond the world around us, is something that has been with us for a long time. And it shows no signs of leaving us: judging by most biographical literature, we seem to want our “Gould” to be an eccentric, isolated genius, who refused to shake hands but played Bach’s music as Bach himself would have played it. Gould, according to this perspective, was someone who deconstructed the “normal” conceptions of what classical music is, who owns it, and demonstrated how it should be played.

Gould’s posthumous reception in literature, poetry, as well as in other artistic media unexplored in this essay – visual arts and cinema – reminds us of one important thing: fame is always relative. That is, the public ultimately constructs for itself the very kind of “Gould” that it needs. In looking at the mediation of a significant musician such as Gould in different domains, we end up looking at ourselves – at the norms defining musicianship, genius and artistic quality.

On a more personal note, I regard this mythic, cultic, repeatedly circulated figure of Gould as a somewhat tragic figure. He must have been aware of the ingredients of the myth as something of his own making: the eccentricity, the isolation, the iconoclastic approach to the deities (Mozart, Beethoven) of classical music. Just like the numerous interviews he scripted beforehand to maintain total control of the whole, Gould himself, for the most part, also constructed the frame in which his picture has remained on display in the world of classical music.
Notes

4 It is no coincidence that in those same years the LP was, for the first time in its history, changing from a documentary medium into a creative one – the Beatles’s *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band* (1967) and the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* (1966) are classic examples of new, studio-produced music never meant to sound the same when performed live. Gould was following this line of progress in audio engineering with a keen eye.
5 Sometimes this cult takes on openly comical characteristics: on the 60th anniversary of Gould’s birth, a “Gould-parade” was organized in which the parading children were dressed up like “little Goulds” – all of them were wearing a flat newsboy cap, and a long trench coat (see the clip at [http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/arts-entertainment/music/glenn-gould-variations-on-an-artist/goulds-cult-like-status.html](http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/arts-entertainment/music/glenn-gould-variations-on-an-artist/goulds-cult-like-status.html)). These kinds of public manifestations, cultural performances, tell of the huge national significance that Gould enjoys as a Canadian icon.
13 For an excellent deconstruction of the emphasis of Gould’s intellectual and disembodied music-making in his public reception, see Paul Sanden, “Hearing Glenn Gould’s Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music” in *Current Musicology* No. 88 (Fall 2009), 7–34.
18 *Letter from a fan* (Glenn Gould Archive (GGA), call number 35, 6, 9).
21 Konieczny, *Struggling for Perfection*, 45.
22 Konieczny, *Struggling for Perfection*, 77.
26 Konieczny, *Struggling for Perfection*, 64.
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27 Konieczny, Struggling for Perfection, 17.
28 Konieczny, Struggling for Perfection, 83.
30 Roy, Glenn Gould, 45.
31 Roy, Glenn Gould, 56.
32 Roy, Glenn Gould, 50, 52.
37 Wynne-Jones, The Maestro, 45.
38 Wynne-Jones, The Maestro, 72.
40 West & Harris, “Secrecy and Space”, 85.
43 Bernhard’s own personal background is interesting. He also studied music before embarking on a literary career, and it is difficult to imagine that he would have missed Gould’s concert in Salzburg in 1959. Be that as it may, Gould’s musicianship obviously had a great impact on Bernhard, and the fact that Der Untergeher was published in 1983 compels one to ponder the possibility that the novel is a peculiar homage to Gould.
46 It should be emphasized that the literature discussed in this essay is by no means all of the Gould-related literature found in the English language. One obvious, perhaps the best-known example in literary Gouldiana, is Richard Powers’ Gold Bug Variations (1991). I have excluded this work from the present discussion on the basis that Gould is not a “character” in this book per se, even though he occupies a special position for many of the book’s characters by way of his famous 1955 recording of the piece.
48 Fiorito, The Song, 9.
49 Fiorito, The Song, 271.
50 Fiorito, The Song, 289.
51 Fiorito, The Song, 347–348.
53 Smith, Northern Music, 35–36.
54 Smith, Northern Music, 42.
55 Smith, Northern Music, 43.
56 Smith, Northern Music, 14.
57 Smith, Northern Music, 25.
58 Smith, Northern Music, 72.
62 Bruno Monsaingeon, Non, je ne suis pas du tout un excentrique (Paris: Fayard), 9.
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Summary
In my article, I discuss the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould's (1932–1982) reception in literature; in novels, children's biographies and poetry. Through close reading, I scrutinize the meanings associated with Gould in these three literary genres. I give particular focus to Gould's national iconicity, that is, his position as a cultural icon and national hero. I utilise Mikko Heiniö's concept of topos, referring to a petrified and unreflective mode of an individual's public reception. Gould's reputation as a radical, iconoclastic, eccentric, and solitary artist is reflected in the qualities that circulate repeatedly in Gould's reception historically, and is therefore also instrumental in constructing his public image. Topos, thus defined, always functions as a backdrop for the reception of Gould's music. One of the main conclusions of my essay, admittedly one in need of a further discussion, is that the experience of any music is, particularly in today's age of information technology, a multimodal process in which an artist's textual representation plays a crucial role.

Keywords:
Glenn Gould (1932-1982), Canada, national iconicity, public reception, literature

Biography
Markus Mantere is a Research Fellow at Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, Finland. He is a member of the research project "Rethinking Finnish Music History," funded by the Finnish Academy of Science (2012-2015). Mantere is currently working on a scholarly book on the intellectual history of Finnish musicology. As of spring 2013, he is also the chair of the Finnish Society of Musicology.

E-mail: markus.mantere@siba.fi