

Recensioni/*Essay Reviews*

NAGER F., Goethe und die Medizin, Artemis and Winkler, 1990, 280 pp.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, born in Frankfurt am Main (1749), is known as poet, dramatist, novelist and scientist; in the first place, he was the principal founder of the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) movement. *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The sufferings of Young Werther) was the work which revealed to the general public the Sturm und Drang movement, when Goethe was 24 years old. Then he moved away to classicism, and a trip to Italy (1786-1788) consolidated the change of the poet in this direction. In fact, on his return to Germany, at the invitation to Weimar by Duke Karl August, he dedicated his work to classical Hemes, e.g. Greek subjects (*Iphigenie auf Tauris*, first written in prose, then in verse; *Hermann und Dorothea*, an idyllic epic in Homeric hexameters) or subjects inspired by Shakespeare and the theatre. (Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung, that is *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission*, later revised as **Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre**, e.g. W.M.'s Apprenticeship).

In Strasbourg he did research in natural sciences, publishing a **Theory of Colors** and the **Metamorphosis of plants**, and continued to work on the history of **Faust**, the tragic history of the fight for freedom between the devil (Mephistopheles) and the soul of Dr. Faust.

Goethe died in 1832, when he was 83 years old, asking those present to open the windows of his room, to let in the light and sun of a morning of March.

A hard-working life, therefore in good health, for such a long time? - No, this is a false opinion, says Frank Nager, a physician of Zurich, who has analyzed the life and works of Goethe, and particularly his autobiographic writings.

Asphyctic at birth, ulcerous at 19 years old, when he was a student in Leipzig, probably suffering from syphilis, he was

treated at home by Johann Metz, who was a follower of natural medicine, i.e. homeopathy. Thus, Goethe is interested in natural sciences: in Strasbourg he is devoted to studies of anatomy more than of the faculty of law. But he appears psychotic, affected by hypochondria and a series of diseases (pharyngitis, gingivitis, renal colic, constipation, insomnia, etc.), which are treated by thermal waters or decoctions or tinctures of rhubarb or henbane. He was also filled with terror of infectious diseases and dying men, so that his wife, Charlotte von Stein, when moribund, ordered that the funeral hearse by-pass the poet's home. He had a tendency to become alcoholic, probably because of a family predisposition and his son August died of alcoholism. His psychopathia is shown, Nager says, by the depression caused by his unrequited love for Charlotte Buff (when he was 24 years old) or by the death of Schiller, or by the fact that, when he was refused by Ulrike von Levetzow (whom he had met at the Baths of Marienbad), he felt bitterly disappointed and an infarction occurred. On the other hand, it is well known that Goethe had a large private collection of obscene things, thus indicating an underlying psychopathological mentality and behaviour.

It may be that the sufferings of the young Werther were the psychological sufferings of his Author, and medicine and pharmacy are a background of his works. Physicians are present in almost seven works of Goethe - Nager says - because it is necessary to cure disease, anxiety, because he feels the need to find a cure for his pathological form of anxiety, in which women are the leitmotif of an obsession, which transforms reality (e.g. Wilhelm Meister, with the theatre-actress as a haunting tune).

Nager's book is very interesting for the accuracy of the analysis, even if some medical conclusions are not proved. However, any speculation moves from the autobiography or works of Goethe, so that the discussion is now open on this new light of the personality of the poet.

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GOZZA P., *La musica nella Rivoluzione scientifica del Seicento*, Il Mulino Bologna, 1989, pp. 273

Due grandi sezioni dividono idealmente questa raccolta di saggi, offrendo due diverse chiavi di lettura dell'esperienza musicale: da una parte, infatti, è seguito il percorso legato alla tradizione interpretativa pitagorico-platonica, dall'altra, quello proposto dalla filosofia meccanicista.

In questa prospettiva, l'introduzione a questa raccolta di saggi, composti originariamente tra il 1947 ed il 1984, acquista il ruolo fondamentale di coordinamento e filo conduttore dei diversi momenti analizzati, fornendo il sostrato indispensabile di storia della musica, nei suoi legami con la riflessione filosofica e scientifica.

Il duplice carattere della musica, quale espressione istintiva e spontanea e, nello stesso tempo, costruzione matematica fondata su principi e paradigmi numerici, è stato avvertito sin dall'antichità, come testimonia l'esistenza di due scuole di teorici musicali, nell'età di Platone. Da esse ebbero origine le diverse tradizioni dei criteri interpretativi "razionale pitagorico" ed "empirico aristosseniiano", perpetuati nella cultura umanistica e resi vivi ed attuali nel dibattito che accompagnò l'evoluzione della scienza musicale moderna, a partire dal XVI secolo, quando ebbe luogo il passaggio da una "analisi matematica della musica" a una "analisi fisica empiricamente orientata".

In realtà, l'espressione musicale presenta numerose tematiche di interesse scientifico, che assumono una particolare rilevanza nell'ottica dello studio della cultura del Seicento.

I saggi presentati tendono a sviscerare compiutamente questa fase, evidenziando il ruolo delle varie personalità nell'elaborazione delle diverse teorie musicali: Newton, Ficino, Fludd, Mersenne, Cartesio, Vincenzo Galilei, Zarlino, Bacon, Beeckman, Keplero, Leibniz, mettendo in luce aspetti spesso sconosciuti della loro attività.