

What then am I? Am I more senseless grown  
 Than Trees, or Flint? O Force of constant Woe!  
 'Tis not in Harmony to calm my Griefs. (6–8)

Here is a problem with famous quotes, and with platitudes in general. We often use them to prove our position or even to bypass any proving process. We seek to establish fixed points, or even a single fixed point, when the context out of which the observation emerges is in a state of constant and multiplicitous flux.

Sometimes it is possible to sort these threads, to reach a synthesis of opposing yet complementary ideas. In this instance we might say that Almeria's opening monologue demonstrates that music can both calm and disturb, that the very same tones might strike one person as being harmonious and another as being dissonant. It suggests that these properties of harmony and dissonance, or at least our apprehension of them, are subject to our own dispositions or circumstances, both individual and cultural. Leaving the terms of the debate to consider the process by which we reconcile them, we might draw an important conclusion that also extends beyond this particular discussion. When we interrogate, when we go beyond the well-known expression or the truncated idea, we find that there are more positions, and more to each position, than we had ever suspected.

These are uncontroversial points, but they bear repeating because of the way they reflect the subject at hand, as well as the insistently partisan discussions that still surround it. This is a book about parallels and perpendiculars, and about what can happen when apparently opposing concepts clash. It illustrates these outcomes by considering quotations, the uses we put them to, and the contexts out of which they emerge. The quotations in question are musical, so that the book also addresses the places of music in narrative and in the transmission of meaning generally.

These last are familiar questions, widely debated through recent centuries, and still of central concern to the come-lately communities of film composition. Until recently the question of film musical quotation—of music originally created for one particular purpose being used in a separate, cinematic setting—has not had much of a place in these discussions, whether they be