

POETRY LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

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Abstract: *The article focuses on the nature of poetry as expounded by Elizabeth Jennings in her critical prose and incorporated into many of her poems. Jennings' reflections on the potential of the poetic word revolve around two interconnected notions, which define its ontological status. One of them concerns the divine Logos and its intrinsic link with the language of poetry. The other refers to a perfect order and harmony, known as music of the spheres, which is operative in the Cosmos and resounds in poetry.*

Keywords: *Elizabeth Jennings, Logos, metaphysics, music, visionary poetry*

1. Introduction: Elizabeth Jennings as the poet exploring the nature of poetry

The following discussion concentrates on the nature of poetry and its status among different branches of art. However, in view of such broad consideration, a more specific approach seems to be more viable. That is why, apparently contrary to the announcement made in the title, the perspective adopted in the subsequent discussion will direct the reader's attention to a particular poet. The poet whom I have chosen is Elizabeth Jennings (1926-2001), one of the most highly acclaimed English lyrical poets of the twentieth-century, who, in the words of Michael Schmidt, her friend, a poet himself and editor of much of Jennings' poetic work, "was the most unconditionally loved writer of [her] generation" (Schmidt 2002: xix). Schmidt's appraisal, unsurprisingly, echoes similar comments made by Jennings' contemporaries, associated with a group of young and sundry poets called "The Movement", alternatively known as "Poets of the Fifties".

At the beginning of her poetic career, Jennings was loosely connected with the Movement, which included such literary figures as Philip Larkin, Robert Conquest, Thom Gunn, Donald Davie, John Holloway, D.J. Enright or Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Many years after the Movement had already dispersed, Amis, in his *Memoirs*, evoked Jennings in the context of the group as "the star of the show, our discovery" (Buxton 2009: 293). In turn, referring to the force of Jennings' poetic impulse prevailing over her recurrent nervous problems and mental collapses, John Wain dedicated to her a laudatory poetic letter, which ends with a dramatic and, at the same time, unmistakably complimentary proclamation: "Your art will save your life, Elizabeth" (Wain 1969: 55).

Jennings' association with the Movement, however, was loose and short. She saw in it an artificial construct rather than a conscious enterprise. A clear note of her rather critical attitude to the Movement can be heard in her book of literary appraisal *Poetry To-Day*, in which she deplores the fact that the poetry of the Movement often lacks "world-schemes [and] personal philosophies, and would have nothing to do with the symbolic and the allegorical" (Jennings 1961b: 10). Besides, as she made it clear in a 1964 interview with John Press (Orr 1966: 91 – 96), being a woman and a Catholic believer among men and atheists, she could hardly find there a place for herself (idem: 92).

Hence, almost right from her poetic debut and throughout all her writing that comprises poetry as well as critical prose, Jennings was building up her own *ars poetica*, which she carefully elaborated not only in the pages of her books of literary essays, such as *Every Changing Shape* (1961a) or *Seven Men of Vision* (1976), but also inscribed into the body of many of her poems. Jennings' poetic output was enormous. Between the years 1956 – 2001, she published twenty-six collections of poetry containing over twelve-hundred poems. In 1983 Erwin Stürzl published a book on the "thematic content" of Jennings' poetry, though on account of the date of its publication, Stürzl's work cannot be considered either final or completely satisfactory. Six years before Jennings' death, Gerlinde Gramang (1995) published another study, addressing what she called "major themes" in Jennings' poetry. But after the year of Gramang's publication, four new volumes of Jennings' poetry came out: *In the Meantime* (1996), *A Spell of Words* (1997), *Praises* (1998) and *Timely Issues* (2001). Yet, in spite of incomplete attempts to classify Jennings' creative output, at all stages one can still distinguish in her impressive poetic corpus a great number of poems related to three sister arts, corresponding to three Muses – of poetry, music, and painting. That is one of the reasons why Jennings' work can be used as a very good illustration of a certain type of poetic art, which is rooted in metaphysics and interlocks with painting and music, the latter being in the focus of the present discussion.

Therefore a close look at Jennings' particular poems, especially those which in various ways involve music, sheds much light on the poet's ideas about the nature of poetry. Furthermore it calls attention to rhetorical and imaginative strategies which Jennings frequently employed in order to express her artistic *Credo* in the poetic idiom.

2. The bond between poetry and music: major queries

The title of the present article poses two questions which need to be clarified right at the beginning, not only because they emphasise the gist of the following argument, but also because the answers to these questions constitute one of the founding blocks of Jennings' own philosophy of poetry and her *ars poetica*, which was the guiding principle for her writing and reading of poems.

The first query concerns what critics of literature usually call the function of poetry, namely what it does. Reading Jennings' work makes one reverse common assumptions about poetry and readers' expectations. Why should poetry be *listening*, while habitually a poem is thought of as saying something, so, as a result, we tend to talk about a message which the poem spells out, or conveys. In Jennings' case, the intriguing switch from *speaking* to *listening* is partly analogous (allowing for all deficiencies of analogical thinking) to the switch from painting to writing, which takes place both in the discourse and the perception of icons.

The first question leads to another, namely what is the object of *listening*, or, in other words, what is poetry listening to? Remarkably, poetry is not listening to the creative orders of the poet, who, as the source of the poem, is withdrawn and overshadowed by something greater than merely human agency or artisan's craft. Thus the second query concerns the object of listening, the *music of the spheres*, and precisely what it means for Jennings and how her ideas of the music of the spheres get expounded in her literary output. Since music comes to the foreground as the target of listening, it is appropriate to start with music.

2.1. Music of the spheres

The concept of *music of the spheres*, otherwise known as *harmony of the spheres* or *musica universalis*, derives from antiquity and owes much to the quasi-mystical thought of Pythagoras, who, having studied the correlation between mathematics and music, postulated the existence of the strict relation between the pitch of musical notes and the length of the strings that produced them. In its primary meaning, *music of the spheres* refers to a perfect harmony and order in which celestial bodies move in the cosmic space. As such it concerns strictly balanced proportions in their orbital motion, which was believed to produce a distinctive and unique resonance. Ancient philosophers, like Pythagoras, saw such regularity and synchronization amounting to the absolute order in the Cosmos in terms of music, and they claimed, accordingly, that the Sun, the Moon and other celestial bodies emit musical tones as a result of their movements. This specific music, though imperceptible to the physical ear, was presumably audible to the inward ear of the human soul.

Etymologically, the term ‘music’, borrowed from French (*mousique*), has its origin in the Latin *musica*, the art of music; this was derived from the Greek word *mousiké*, which refers to the art of the Muses. The etymology points to the art over which the Muses preside, i.e. all art including lyrical verbal poetry alongside sound and melodies. Especially the Greek word explains why poetry and music have often been twinned: not only special colouring of the sound, meter and rhythm have always been incorporated into the body of the poem, but also, especially in the past, poetry was often given audible voice by being recited to the accompaniment of music. Hence the figure of Old English *scop*, or medieval *bard*, well-known in the history of literature, the maker and performer, who combined the words of poetry with the sound of music.

It should be stressed, however, that *music of the spheres* is essentially a metaphysical concept that hints at the transcendental order of reality which assumes the form of disembodied music, and, no matter how elusive of the sensual cognition, it can be perceived in an extra-sensory way. In Jennings’ view, it is poetry that may provide a pathway to approach the domain of the music of the spheres and to get a foretaste of transcendence. It is so because, as she claims in the “Foreword” to *Every Changing Shape*, there exists “a connection between poetry and mysticism”, and that is why she states, accordingly, that in this book she is “concerned with three things – the making of poems, the nature of mystical experience, and the relationship between the two” (Jennings 1961a: 9).

2.2. The mystical and visionary intertwined with music

In Jennings’ poems there are numerous references to the music of the spheres. On the one hand, they presuppose the ontological link between music and poetry, as confirmed by the Greek etymology of the word; and on the other hand, they hint at the capacity of poetry to reach out towards transcendence. The latter aspect accounts for the proximity of poetry, particularly that with a visionary slant, to mysticism. Looking for the connection between poetry and mysticism, Jennings compares the poet and the mystic, and observes that while the mystic is concerned with the description of the mystical experience as such, the poet’s interest lies in the fruits of his poetic experience, i.e. the poem. Consequently, she concludes that “[t]he mystic looks for the seed, the poet for the flower” (Jennings 1961a: 10).

Nevertheless, she insists that they are both involved in the process of cognizance of the same mystical object. The sense of the affinity of poetry with mysticism underpins much of Jennings' creative writing. It is not only expounded in her works of prose, but it also gets built into a considerable body of her poetry.

What she sees as a profound parallel between mysticism and poetry is epitomised in the title of one of her poems, "Seers and Makers" (*In the Meantime*, 1996). The poem underscores the similarity between the poet, or artist in general, and the mystic, which lies in the fact that they both step back in order to make room for something greater, be it either a poem or mystical experience. In Jennings' artistic Credo, the self has to be always reduced in order to allow the music of the spheres to enter into the realm of experience. Hence the poem solemnly asserts: "Self disappears when man becomes his prayer, / Likewise man and his art" (Jennings 2012: 732).

Music is frequently evoked in Jennings' poetry, however, more often than not, it is the music which is neither played on man-made instruments nor available for a musical notation on sheet music. Sometimes it is associated with the light of the stars as, for example, in "The Early Work" (*Tributes*, 1989), which may be read as the poet's personal testimony of the creative process of poetry making:

Now I would reach
For the sound and so

Discover the pure
And untrammelled note
[...]
... . O let
My poems find,
As stars do light,
The music of mind. (Jennings 2012: 588)

While "the pure note" suggests the Absolute and "the music of mind" points to melodies inaccessible to the physical ear, they both markedly adumbrate the music of the spheres.

Music, which is inscribed into Jennings' poetic idiom, permeates the poet's imagination. It is usually linked with the elevation of the spirit and a special insight into the core of reality, both of which are accompanied with emotional intensity in its purest form, free from sentimentality and hallmarked with truthfulness. When Jennings' philosophical and poetic reflections concentrate on what she calls "The First Music" (*Familiar Spirits*, 1994) in the title and in the first line of the poem, she thinks of it inquiringly as

... music that was its own
Purpose, a pattern or phrasing, a quality
Of sound that came between silences and cast out
All other possible sounds? (Jennings 2012: 686)

The "pure note" from the poem "The Early Work" corresponds to the music that is "its own" in the poem "The First Music", and they both hint at a metaphysical domain which transcends any sensory perception. In "the first music", the poet finds the praise of the mystery of creation, and she yearns for that profound

understanding which was supposedly given to some mystics, when they touched the divine. In Jennings' poetic vision, "the first music" lies at the foundation of the Universe and, consequently, it stirs up in the poet a deep-seated desire to feel at one with the principle of being. Therefore the words of the poem echo the existential urgency to transcend all limitations and plunge into the heart of meaning.

... O how much I would give
To hear that first and pristine music and know
That it changed the turning planet and visited stars. (Jennings 2012: 687)

Whenever poetry attains a visionary quality, it always resounds in Jennings' imagination with the music of the spheres. In some poems, the music of the spheres is mentioned explicitly, or even underscored by the title of the poem, as can be seen in the collection *Familiar Spirits* (1994) which includes the poem thus entitled, with the phrase "Music of the Spheres" put in inverted commas. The form of the poem emulates a philosophical query commencing with the rhetorical question:

Is there a music underneath the kind
The instruments send up, conductor draws
Out of the orchestra. Is there a sound behind
The theme we hear that fills another pause

No echo eases? ... (Jennings 2012: 707).

In subsequent attempts to define the music of the spheres, it is compared to "heavenly harmonies / Which only on a wise, controlled mind fall", and presented as "Heaven-sent / Sound" or "a grace that's lent" (Jennings 2012: 707). In Jennings' poetry, the music of the spheres undoubtedly belongs to a different order of reality, as is made clear in the poem "A Happy Death" (*Tributes*, 1989), dedicated to the memory of Jennings' friend, a Dominican priest, who in the poet's vision:

Is out in the elements, one with the music of spheres
Which God plays over and over in artists' minds
For the great ones to copy out in little fragments.
Angel messages putting this frightened world
At peace with itself. ... (Jennings 2012: 619).

2.3. Music accommodating nature and art

In the majority of her poems, however, the music of the spheres is not overtly named but compellingly implied. It is subtly linked with other conspicuous elements of Jennings' poetic imagination, such as a sense of peace, serenity and harmony. It is also associated with light, another typical marker of Jennings' poetic landscapes, which is often presented as shining through the leaves of a tree, or as the light of the setting sun which tints the landscape in red, or else as delicate luminosity spread over the starlit or moonlit sky. The world depicted in Jennings' poetry is listening to *musica universalis* which is full of metaphysical significations. Likewise, Nature, with all its splendour illuminated by the radiance

of celestial bodies, becomes, in the poet's perception, an open window that lets in the tunes and glimpses of transcendence, which combine into the music of the spheres, inaudible to the senses, but capable of being heard by the attentive soul of the poet and then encapsulated in the potential of the poetic word.

The poet is brought into the act of listening in "Precursors" (*Extending the Territory*, 1985), a poem with clear autobiographical overtones, which brings in and shows the impact of various sights in Nature not only on one's extrasensory perception, but also on the poet's capacity to experience it in terms of music, which is then converted into poetry:

Passages of music, a violin's slow pace, a picture
Recording the sunset but telling more ...
[...]
... Today it is Autumn outside
And as the sun reddens the whole landscape
And a smell of bonfires haunts me, a tune begins
To sing in my mind. It has no words as yet
And a life and a half would probably be too short
To set the music down with appropriate words, (Jennings 2012: 546).

The words "telling more" from "Precursors" may be treated as a key-phrase to much of Jennings poetry, similarly to the title of another poem, "On the Edge of My Mind" (*Tributes*, 1989), which is clearly suggestive of the borderline territory where the physical encounters the metaphysical. In the poem, Jennings muses on the experience of touching spiritual reality with the baffled intellect and roused imagination, and she speaks of it in terms of "[a] rhythm of pure thought which must I think mean music" (Jennings 2012: 616).

Alongside Nature, Art also figures significantly in Jennings' poetry as another factor which opens up human perception to the continual flow of that singular music which is not contained in any sound. "On the Edge of My Mind" refers to impressionistic painting and raises the general question of art contemplation, which transports the spirit to the metaphysical dimension that reverberates with the music of the spheres.

... It is music of the spheres,
No less than that, which will speak to my weary spirit.
No, do more, release my spirit
Till I fly like Ariel given his total freedom
But with Caliban's music singing in my ears. (Jennings 2012: 616)

The intertextual allusion to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is here highly significant, for it underscores the possibility of a miraculous transformation of the barbarous and mundane into the sublime. Caliban, invoked in Jennings' poem, in spite of being uncouth and brutish, can hear that the island of the shipwreck is "full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not". What is more they "show riches / Ready to drop upon [him]" (III. 2. 133-134, 139-140). Notably, within the bounds of Jennings' poetry, places revealed to the eye in physical or geographical categories appear as permeated with music. That is why, in "Particular Music" (*Extending the Territory*, 1985), the poet declares: "So I make / A music out of places" (Jennings 2012: 537). Consequently, the whole world, with all its natural beauty, becomes in Jennings' handling a place framed in music.

2.4. The position of the poet altered through the mode of listening

In Jennings' view, poetry which contemplates Nature and Art listens to the whole gamut of audible sounds coming from the surrounding world, where, in Keats's words from his "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "unheard [melodies] are sweeter" (Church 1948: 88). For Jennings the sounding of music in poetry is primarily due not to the power of imagination, as in Keats, but rather to the fact that those "unheard" melodies carry intimations of *musica universalis* that is independent of the poet's will and external to the body of the poem. The idea of poetry getting tuned into the world of Nature and Art and primarily listening to its music is embedded in Jennings' entire creative output. It is not surprising therefore that the gist of her poetic Credo is that poetry is especially predisposed to ascend from the echelons of making a statement to the mode of listening to the music of the spheres. This poetic act of faith is corroborated by her claim from one of her introductions to a book of poems that "poetry, whatever its theme, offers experience, not sermons" (Jennings 1981: 10).

If making definite, doctrinal statements is not the foremost function of poetry, then, in consequence, the role of the so-called lyrical subject, usually identified with the voice speaking in the poem, is considerably reduced. In Jennings' poems, one can observe a curious suppression of the poet's persona that does not flood the reader with carefully worded pronouncements, but instead makes room for something else, inviting the reader to participate in the exquisite experience of listening.

In order to switch poetry from the mode of speaking to the mode of listening, it is essential to alter the position of the poet within the body of the poem. That is why Jennings pleads for humility in the rapport with a work of art and, accordingly, denies the authoritarian ownership of the poetic world to both: the poet, as the maker, and the reader as the receiver. Her favourite wording for this attitude is: *not to possess, but to be possessed* by a work of art, and it gets interwoven into her poetry in a variety of forms. While contemplating ancient sculptures in "Greek Statues" (*Song for a Birth or a Death*, 1961), for example, the poet records the accompanying aesthetic experience in the following words:

... one wants to touch not simply stare,
To run one's fingers over the flanks and arms,
Not to possess, rather to be possessed.
[...]
And our probing hands move not to grasp but praise. (Jennings 2012: 108)

Such humility is not only Jennings' personal trait, but first and foremost it is an essential part of her poetic practice. Erwin Stürzl observed it already very early in his study published during Jennings' lifetime. Stürzl included in the title of his book one line from Jennings' poem, "Rembrandt's Late Self-Portraits" (*Growing Points*, 1975), which is a comment on the greatness of Rembrandt's art and reads: "Here / Is a humility at one with craft" (the indefinite article in Jennings' line is missing from Stürzl's title).

2.5. Humility of the poet and silence in the poem

Humility naturally combines with the attitude of selflessness and both of them are fostered in Jennings' poetry. One of the poems which addresses this issue

is tellingly and provocatively entitled “Total” (*Tributes*, 1989). Here the poet struggling with difficulties and mental obstacles eventually declares: “The spirit of me discards crude self, takes on / Unpossessiveness” (Jennings 2012: 576). And further, she concludes with a reflection apparently triggered off by the sight of the moon which, in Jennings’ handling, becomes a symbol of the totally selfless and non-possessive disposition of the poet:

The full moon outstared me to show
Like it I must become less,
A silver of self alone
Diminished to quarter moon. (Jennings 2012: 576)

Likewise, “Nocturne” (*Tributes*) foregrounds the process of “becoming less” and presents the poet as a mere instrument for the transfiguration of human experience into the art of poetry, which is intrinsically intertwined with music:

... I am
Simply imagination and a hand
Ready to score the music that’s moving fast
In my veins and arteries. ... (Jennings 2012: 617-8)

Thus Jennings posits the figure of the poet as a humble receptacle of the music of the spheres rather than the originator of its rare beauty. These and many similar examples additionally show that, in Jennings’ vision, the moral virtue of humility constitutes an important prerequisite for the aesthetic valour of poetry and a most desirable condition not only for its making, but also for its proper reception.

The hushing up of the voice of the self makes room for silence, which has a fundamental significance in Jennings’ *ars poetica*. First of all, it is a necessary state which stimulates listening; besides, it creates an indispensable space which allows echoes of the music of the spheres. In another poem with strong personal overtones, “Sky in Childhood” (*Familiar Spirits*, 1994), the poet refers to a state of mind when “Man’s spirit is aglow” (Jennings 2012: 690), and makes it clear that one has to keep silent in order to develop a special disposition to hear the music of the spheres:

And there is surely ‘music of the spheres’
If we will only keep
Silent for it to drive away our fears
And orchestrate our sleep. (Jennings 2012: 690)

It should be emphasised that silence in Jennings’ conception is never identified with a wordless void. On the contrary, it is always pregnant with meanings. The poem “Mozart in the Middle of the Night” (*Timely Issues*, 2001) points to what seems a paradoxical nature of silence, which is conducive to music. The poet listening to the music of Mozart ponders on how the composer “elaborates the silence” (Jennings 2012: 794), so that his composition works miracles which transfigure reality:

In the night there is a singing sun.
I listen in a rapture of repose;
Drop after drop, there another goes. (Jennings 2012: 794)

“Drop after drop” in the context of the poem refers to musical notes and it illustrates one of Jennings’ favourite rhetorical strategies to make silence in the poem. She uses a simple repetition of words, or more formal anaphora, which provide an extension of verse that generates an extra space, without filling it in with new semantic signs or, attached to them, definite signifiers.

2.6. Inklings of logos in poetry

In the already mentioned “Particular Music” (*Extending the Territory*, 1985), Jennings forcefully proclaims that “Words are music to find” (Jennings 2012: 537), thus pointing to a profound link that amounts to an ontological analogy between the language of poetry and *musica universalis*. Evidently, Jennings endorses the ancient view that the exquisite harmony and perfect order of the Universe are revealed in the music of the spheres, and Logos essentially refers to the same idea. That is why Jennings accords a special status to poetic words which, through the sacramental mystery discussed in my book on the nature of Jennings’ poetry (Walczuk 2017), have a special share in Logos – the Word of God which, in the biblical account, lies at the foundation of the entire Cosmos (cf. John 1: 1-4). Jennings is strongly convinced that the language of poetry, by virtue of being affiliated to the divine discourse discernible in the world, reaches out towards transcendence, and so it naturally resonates with Logos.

Undoubtedly, Jennings’ thinking about poetry and the world was affected by her religious faith and additionally inspired by David Jones’s views of sacramentality, as expounded particularly in his 1955 essay “Art and Sacrament”. Jones sees the artist as a sign-maker and a sacramentalist whose signs are “re-presenting [or] showing again under other forms”, hence they are significant of a greater reality, “of something that is sacred” and outgrows the mere sign (Jones 1988: 157). Therefore the art of man essentially becomes a “sacramental activity” (idem: 161), which binds human sign-making to God. Jennings alike ascribes the quality of sacredness to poetic activity, and all her thinking about the making of poems supports Jones’s claim that “art is, at bottom, and inescapably, a ‘religious’ activity, for it deals with realities and the real is sacred and religious” (idem: 158). Jennings’ reverence for poetic words stems from her belief that the words of the poet, regardless of the poet’s intention, will, or religious denomination, always originate from and resonate with the supreme Word of God. As a result, Logos is foreshadowed in the body of a poem. Jennings poetic output provides ample evidence for her artistic Credo, which is epitomised in her poem significantly entitled “A Metaphysical Point About Poetry” (*Praises*, 1998), where she solemnly professes: “I wish to say that God / Is present in all poetry that’s made / With form and purpose” (Jennings 2012: 775).

In the poem paying tribute to the poetic heritage of Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Hopkins in Wales” (*Growing Points*, 1975), Jennings speaks in the same vein: “God’s Presence / Was granted a new kind of immanence in your lines” (Jennings 2012: 328), thus expressing her belief that transcendence may be embodied in imaginative constructs through the words of poetry. A similar note of grateful admiration and subtly acknowledged affinity with other poets sounds in her “Homage to Thomas Traherne” (*Timely Issues*, 2001), whose poetry “soars”, “sings” and has God as its “great theme” (Jennings 2012: 801).

Jennings own views on the nature, function, and value of poetry are often embedded in her reflections on other poets, for she feels part of a great community of artists, and like them, as she asserts in “For the Times” (*Times and Seasons*, 1992), through the power of words “[she] seek[s] / Intensity of music in each rhyme, / Each rhythm” (Jennings 2012: 669). In “Thinking of Descartes” (*Tributes*, 1989), Jennings ponders on the status of poetry, and she plays with the famous Cartesian dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, transposing it into a statement about poetic activity. Her musings lead her to the conclusion that a poem is a transcendent entity inherent in the music of the spheres, originating in Logos and substantiated through the working of the poet’s imagination in the words of the poem. So she states, with great emotional intensity, that:

... I feel (yes,
Not think) that poems or their substance are
Upheld by moon and stars, lifted by winds
But won’t be words until some poet catches
The moment and the music. ... (Jennings 2012: 609–610)

In Jennings’ ideas about poetry, there is a striking parallel between Logos and the music of the spheres. Their close analogy rests on the poet’s vision that the music of the spheres is an emanation of Logos, and Logos is also the fountainhead of poetry.

3. Conclusion: Elizabeth Jennings’ metaphysical poetics

Jennings worked out her own poetics, in which the music of the spheres and Logos as the fountainhead of all poetic words occupy a prominent position. In her poetic imagination, the music of the spheres represents a unique language which resonates throughout the world with the divine Logos, or the primary Word of God, that calls the Universe into being and institutes harmony and perfect order. In Jennings’ poetics the relation between Logos and the music of the spheres is reciprocal: Logos is the source of the music of the spheres, while the latter irresistibly adumbrates Logos. Their proximity, which underlies a great number of Jennings’ poems, explains why the ontological link between poetry and music is embedded in her artistic Credo.

In Jennings’ *ars poetica*, the poetic persona is often cast as listening to music, while poetry is presented as especially predisposed to be listening to the music of the spheres. This is an ongoing process, which never finds its completion and is never brought to a closure. That is why in Jennings’ poetry, listening is intertwined with continual seeking and, in consequence, her entire poetic *oeuvre* is characterised by a friendly openness, which can accommodate all seekers of truth.

In “A Music Sought” (*Tributes*, 1989), the poet reiterates the rhetorical question of artists, philosophers, and ordinary readers of poetry. Therefore the following poetic lines seem to provide a suitable closure to the necessarily open-ended meditations on poetry listening to the music of the spheres:

Shall I ever find
This music which I seek?
[...]
Yet there’s a universe
Which Bach and Mozart knew,
[...]

... There's
 A starlight brilliance too
 We but half-understand
 Yet recognise as true –
 The music of the spheres. (Jennings 2012: 570–571)

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