

THE DISSIDENT DAME
ALTERNATIVE FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND THE MUSIC OF ETHEL SMYTH

By

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ABSTRACT

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While the works of women and other groups typically excluded from the canon are becoming more common in concert programs and historical survey texts, musicological interrogation into the subversive potential of these pieces lags far behind our colleagues in the humanities. This thesis serves as a framework for an intersectional approach to musicology, using the life and oeuvre of self-consciously feminist composer Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) as a case study. Much of her musical output remains understudied in relation to the social, political, and cultural climate of Victorian England and in the context of Western art music.

Each chapter takes a specific genre of Smyth's music and uses a multidisciplinary approach to illuminate the political work of select, representative pieces. Chapter One draws on the fields of literature and narratology to unpack the feminist potential of minor-mode sonatas. In Chapter Two, I evaluate the lasting impact of Smyth's choral literature, both apolitical and suffrage-oriented, in terms of their contributions to the British nationalist movement. Finally, I turn to Smyth's operatic masterpiece, *The Wreckers*, in Chapter Three; I call on sociology, anthropology, and history to contextualize how the composer pits moral tropes against ideas about female sexuality.

Together, these chapters suggest that early feminist politics pervade Ethel Smyth's music more than originally thought, thus encouraging music scholars to look more deeply at works that we have, as a field, perhaps dismissed too quickly as simple, straightforward, and even trivial.

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To R. S.
For helping me find my voice.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century, feminist musicologists called for the reclamation of the works and stories of women in music across time and place.¹ Through this endeavor, numerous female composers and musicians finally began to receive the attention they rightfully deserve. One such composer is Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944); born in Great Britain and trained in Germany, Smyth worked to become a successful composer in an age of extreme barriers for female musicians. The patriarchal musical establishment resisted her efforts in all aspects of her career, from education to performance and publication. These roadblocks provoked her involvement in first-wave feminist politics, as she became a part of the British Women's Suffrage movement via the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). While historians have often relegated Smyth to the sidebars of music history, a revived interest in her compositions, inspired by the search to recover the music of female composers, recently brought about a thirst for scholarship about her life and music.² Surprisingly, most discussions linking Smyth and her politics remain relatively surface level, yet Smyth's feminism runs deep within her music. As gender and sexuality

¹ Adrienne Fried Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'?: Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, op. 45," *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 394-416; Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 102-17; Suzanne G. Cusick, "'Thinking from Women's Lives': Francesca Caccini after 1627," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 484-507; Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Sarah Rothenberg, "'Thus Far, But No Farther': Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel's Unfinished Journey," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (Winter, 1993): 689-708; and Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870-1900," *Aquaria Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 9 (1973): 95-133.

² Her grandest opera, *The Wreckers*, received its North American premiere in the summer of 2015 at Bard College. Furthermore, to this day, she stands as the only woman to have an opera performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, with the 1903 performance of her opera, *Der Wald*. See Phillip Lutz, "Staging 'The Wreckers' Opera at Bard College," *NYTimes.com*, last modified July 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/nyregion/staging-the-wreckers-opera-at-bard-college.html>; Mike Silverman, "Bard reviving Ethel Smyth's forgotten opera," *AP: The Big Story*, last modified July 15, 2015, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/e8d33092a955452bbc46d1a38eb74988/bard-reviving-ethel-smyths-forgotten-opera>.

scholars continue their efforts to make more musical women visible, it is essential to move past projects of recovery (such as simple biography) to the creation, application, and dissemination of feminist methodologies to the study of all musics, not just those closely associated with women.

Most of the existing Smyth literature complies with trends in early feminist musicology, in which intellectuals focused on the reclamation of information concerning forgotten female composers and performing musicians. In particular, Smyth scholarship owes a great debt to Elizabeth Wood. As a pioneering feminist musicologist, Wood published extensively on this intrepid British composer, uncovering a great number Smyth's various social and political relationships, as well as how she expressed her voice as a lesbian composer.³ Several musicologists around the globe continue to work on Smyth; however, even these scholars do not position Smyth's music in relationship to more current feminist theory. Christopher Wiley recently published a series of articles on Smyth's literary output, as well as her relationship to Virginia Woolf.⁴ Elizabeth Kertesz's dissertation and subsequent articles on Smyth's operas and issues of reception provide a great framework for understanding Smyth as a composer within the

³ Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A Solie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 154-83; Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 606-43; Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, Second Edition, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 27-66; Elizabeth Wood, "Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music," *Massachusetts Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 125-39.

⁴ Christopher Wiley, "Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and 'The First Woman to Write an Opera,'" *The Musical Quarterly* 96, no 2 (Summer 2013): 263-95; Christopher Wiley, "'When a Woman Speaks the Truth about Her Body': Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography," *Music & Letters* 85, no. 3 (Aug. 2004): 388-414.

European art music establishment.⁵ A friend of Smyth, Christopher St. John, wrote her definitive biography, which includes a number of appendices concerning various aspects of her life; there have been, however, a number of other recent biographies, with varying degrees of accuracy and musical analysis.⁶ And finally, one must not forget Smyth's own written record, consisting of ten volumes of memoirs that concern, to various degrees, her musical career and relationship to the Women's Suffrage movement.⁷

Building on these initial studies of female composers, of which Smyth is an example, later feminist music scholars began to branch out and adapt academic techniques from a wide variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, most importantly literature, film studies, narratology, sociology, political science, and anthropology, to interrogate all music from a feminist perspective, not just the works of women.⁸ My thesis aims to exhibit a variety of new, interdisciplinary feminist methodologies for the analysis of music, as well as to provide a

⁵ Elizabeth Kertesz, "Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas in England and Germany" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2001); Elizabeth Kertesz, "Ethel Smyth's The Wreckers: a cosmopolitan voice for English opera," *Studia Musicologica - Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 52, no. 1-4 (2001): 485-97; Elizabeth Kertesz, "Gender and Beyond: Talking about the critical reception of Ethel Smyth," in *Gender Studies & Musik*, ed. Stefan Fragner, Jan Hemmin, and Beate Kutschke (Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998), 65-74.

⁶ Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959); Kathleen Dale, "Appendix B. Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study," in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, by Christopher St. John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 288-304; Christopher St. John, "Appendix C. Ethel Smyth's Compositions," in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, by Christopher St. John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 305-8; Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984); and Gwen Anderson, *Ethel Smyth* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1997).

⁷ Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* (London: P. Davies, Limited, 1933); Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, Second Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1946); Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921).

⁸ Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings, With a New Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

framework for their application in the context of a single composer's work to bridge the gap between older and newer feminist methodologies. Each chapter of my thesis delves into a specific genre of Smyth's compositions, focusing on one or two works, allowing for each methodology used to be showcased at length. I am in no way arguing that these are the only analytical tools that can be used or possible connections that can be made in analyzing the music of Smyth or other feminist composers. Rather, I am calling attention to the ways in which biography, feminist approaches, and hermeneutics converge to provide a toolbox for other musicologists (as well as scholars across disciplines) to use in the analysis of music for the *fin-de-siècle*. By bringing together these analytical strategies, a greater understanding of Smyth's innovative music, particularly in relationship to politics and temporality, is easily evident.

In Chapter One, "Making Him More Perfect," I analyze Smyth's instrumental music in relation to nineteenth-century beliefs about gendered aesthetics. Musicologists and feminist scholars have already examined nineteenth-century beliefs about women's innately "inferior" creative abilities.⁹ I will combine with this investigation a study of the Romantic narrative, or *Bildungsroman*, in which, conventionally, a young man leaves home to overcome an obstacle of some kind before returning home to fulfill his romantic destiny. This obstacle, however, is frequently coded as feminine, making the *Bildungsroman* a specifically gendered conflict. Using narratologist Teresa De Lauretis's work on these issues, I explore how music employs similar

⁹ Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870-1900"; Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings, With a New Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002); Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon,"; and Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

narratological devices.¹⁰ As these stories can be observed in the purely instrumental music of a wide range of musicians, it is essential to tease out the reasons why female composers might use them, even as they might be considered subjugating to their sex. I investigate the feminist possibilities of a form that has been considered by many an exemplar of musical misogyny: sonata form.¹¹ While some could read Smyth's tendency of using the frequently overlooked minor-mode in her sonatas as a purely aesthetic selection, I argue that, in fact, the political ramifications of this choice are too large to be discounted as an unmarked musical decision.

"Feminism as Nationalism?," the second chapter of my thesis, focuses on Smyth's choral music and its relationship to late-nineteenth-century nationalist movements. Scholars across disciplines have written on nationalism, which is considered by many to be the dominant force in nineteenth-century politics.¹² To better understand the social and political work that Smyth's music does in the arena of women's suffrage, I approach her musical works from the perspective of a nation; indeed, I claim that she helped shape what I call a feminist nation. I show that Smyth's vocal music, intended both for political protests and the concert hall, critiques the

¹⁰ Teresa De Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative," in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 103-57; Teresa De Lauretis, "Semiotics and Experience," in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, ed. Teresa De Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 158-86; and Teresa De Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations on Representation and Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, ed. Teresa De Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 31-50.

¹¹ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 14-6.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2006); Anthony Gellner, *Theories of Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Erika Harris, *Nationalism: Theories and Cases* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1955); Umut Özkirmli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth & Company Limited, 1971); and Lois West, ed., *Feminist Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

patriarchy and the Western musical establishment, while attempting to enact lasting social change.

The last chapter, “Dame Smyth and the Sea,” concerns her most famous work, the 1906 grand opera *The Wreckers*. Victorian moral codes greatly influenced the lives of early feminists and female composers; although historians have addressed life in Victorian Britain extensively, musicologists have not adequately discussed this factor in the existing Smyth literature.¹³ Furthermore, the writing on morality tropes in opera is quite extensive, and can serve to contextualize Smyth’s strategies.¹⁴ I argue that she uses a number of morality tropes in her opera, such as the fallen woman, live burial, and cleansing rituals, as a way of complying with late-nineteenth century operatic conventions. However, when one considers the correlations between *The Wreckers* and Smyth’s biography, the work’s subversive tendencies become immediately evident. I conclude with a brief reflection on the implications of these new, intersectional modes of feminist musical analysis.

¹³ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Melanie Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman: A History of the Suffrage Movement and the Ideas Behind It* (London: Abacus, 2003); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990); and Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain, 1789-1837* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, Forward by Susan McClary (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Joseph Kerman, “Verdi and the undoing of women,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (March 2006): 21-31; Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Philip Brett, “Britten and Grimes,” in *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, ed. George E. Haggerty, intro. Susan McClary, after. Jenny Doctor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 11-33.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING HIM MORE PERFECT

What does it take to for a piece of instrumental music to be labeled “feminist?” Without the presence of text, culturally significant themes, or an explicitly stated narrative, in what ways can a composer undermine the patriarchy and create an artwork that promotes gender equality? In many ways, answering these questions is the next great hurdle in challenging musical misogyny. Students, critics, and casual listeners alike are able to detect discriminatory musical practices when laid out for them in clear terms: the woman gets married or dies at the opera’s end to diminish or extinguish the agency she expressed in the story. The rival love interest is written out of the tone poem to convey the superiority of the male protagonist, a simulacrum of the patriarchy. But without these clearly identifiable markers policing femininity or women’s desire, less informed listeners have a tendency to throw their hands to the sky and proclaim the work has no extra-musical context—simply music for music’s sake. Musical organization, however, is built upon conventions that communicate clearly, as film-goers can attest—film scores operate on just these conventions. Therefore, exploring musical structure can illuminate what an instrumental work seeks to communicate; if it subverts traditional norms, we can imagine that the piece has a political aim.

I begin by outlining the existing scholarship on the relationship between gender and formal musical analysis. In particular, scholars have found symmetry between well-known musical structures such as sonata form and narrative structures in literature. In this context, I show how Ethel Smyth’s chamber music denies the patriarchal logic of traditional musical forms.

While not nearly as well known or celebrated as her operas, Smyth’s chamber music provides a vital pool of information, as most were written during her preliminary years as an

active composer. By understanding her earlier works, it becomes possible to track the progression of her feminist politics, thus allowing a greater appreciation for her radical turn in later life. By analyzing Smyth's Sonata for Cello in A minor (1887), I showcase how she embedded extra-musical characteristics, with heightened gendered connotations, that push the piece from relatively tame to quite progressive.

Finally, I turn to the feminist possibilities of sonata-allegro form in minor modes. Through centuries of misogynistic rhetoric in music education and criticism, sonata form has accrued a large amount of complex, gendered baggage. While major-mode sonatas are understood as relying on the "masculine" primary tonal area transforming that of the "feminine" secondary tonal area, that is clearly not the case in the typical minor-mode work. In fact, when a composer uses the minor-mode, the feminine secondary area, I argue, can be seen "improving" the masculine. In this way, the form is more progressive, offering a pathway towards musical gender equality. While far from suggesting that all minor-mode sonatas are feminist, this chapter demonstrates a new look at the relationship between gender politics and musical form.

Gendered Aesthetics and Sonata Form: Opposing Goals or Common Ground?

Feminist theory came late to the field of historical musicology. Until the 1990s, academics relegated the plight of female composers, performers, and artistic subjects to the sidebars of our textbooks and the footnotes of our journal articles, if they were even discussed at all.¹ While

¹ There are some obvious exceptions. See Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 102-117; James Briscoe, "Integrating Music by Women into the Music History Sequence," *College Music Symposium* 25 (1985): 21-7; Diane Jezic and David Binder, "A Survey of College Music Textbooks: Benign Neglect of Women Composers," *The Musical Woman*, vol. 2, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Gottlieb, 445-69 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987); Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

scholars in literature, film, and visual art began to analyze works in their respective fields in relation to the growing feminist consciousness of the 1960s and 70s, music scholarship was slow to adapt. In the view of Sally Macarthur, this was in part due to the views of the “absolute” nature of music. She suggests, “Music has been slower to take up the idea that women’s music adopts aesthetic strategies different from those in men’s music. The major stumbling block, it would seem, has been the widespread belief that music—that is, ‘pure music’—is the most abstract of the arts.”² Particularly in the realm of instrumental works, many scholars considered music to be devoid of social content, not relating much at all to contemporary social and political climates.³ However, gendered rhetoric and expectations pervaded the world of music criticism. In 1973, Judith Tick chronicled the formation of sexual aesthetics in music and how they shaped the possibilities for female composers in the late nineteenth century. She described how female composers faced the burdensome task of combining their occupation as a composer with their maternal and homemaking duties as a woman; she continues, “therefore music written by women should and did express ‘femininity.’”⁴

² Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 12.

³ See Pieter C. van den Toorn, “Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 275-99; Milton Babbitt, “The Structure and Function of Music Theory,” *College Music Symposium* 5 (1965): 49-60; John Rahn, “Aspects of Musical Explanation,” *Perspectives of New Music* 17, no. 1 (April 1979): 204-24. This can also be understood in relation to musicology’s original formulation as a science—*musikwissenschaft*—making this social content not a proper arena of scientific inquiry.

⁴ Judith Tick, “Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870-1900,” *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 9 (1973): 110. See also Tick’s *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Composers expressed this femininity (also described as *Ewige Weibliche*, or eternal feminine) in all aspects of their music, including form, style, and emotive content.⁵ Of particular interest are the associations between gender identity and form. By the end of the nineteenth century, the European musical establishment came to recognize compositional structure and form as the true sign of musical greatness. Tick elucidates, “The ‘high class of compositions,’ that is, symphonies and operas, were masculine forms because they relied on structural thinking and their emotive content was broad and powerful.”⁶ It is this difficult double bind that the female composer of a century ago had to navigate: to achieve success they must champion form, but to master the intricacies of structure was, in a sense, to abandon their inherent feminine nature.⁷ It was also essential that they receive formal training, which was in general barred to them.⁸

All Western composers needed to comply, to some extent, with the demands of the musical establishment. This has been a central critique of the search for a definite feminist aesthetic: women composing music are made to work with styles, forms, and frameworks designed by their male counterparts. And while it is undeniably true that similarities will exist between music by male and female composers, many scholars, including Macarthur, believe that it is possible to find elusive, yet important, distinctions. She asserts,

⁵ The term “eternal feminine” derived from Goethe’s *Faust* and eventually was understood as the amalgamation of various female stereotypes into a single, standard simulacrum. For more information, see Matthew Head, *Sovereign Feminine: Music and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Sara Zamir, “The Principle of the Eternal-Feminine in Rossini’s *L’Italiana in Algeri*: Isabella as the Italian Super-Woman,” *Anuario Musical* 66 (2011): 165-80; Eva Rieger, “‘Love is the Essence of the Eternal Feminine’: Richard Wagner’s Concept of Femininity with Reference to Brünnhilde,” *Women & Music* 6 (2002).

⁶ Tick, “Women as Professional Musicians,” 112. Tick’s quotation comes from Arthur Elson, *Women’s Work in Music* (Boston, 1902), 246.

⁷ See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁸ Citron, “Women as Professional Musicians,” 105-6.

It is possible to detect an array of differences that exist between composers who are said to work in similar styles. It follows on this logic that while women's music may, perhaps, share features in common, it also displays many differences. Complicating this is the idea that women's music necessarily shares features in common with men's music. The critical point that needs to be considered here, however is whether there are more differences between men's and women's styles than there are within each of them.⁹

A woman's stance on these issues often relates to their politics; first-wave feminists supported the notion of essential differences between men and women, whereas later feminists hoped to downplay differences in an effort to promote sex equity.¹⁰ Finding differences, however, in the music of men and women has often been a way to legitimate the study of gender and music. Unfortunately, this search for definitive differences in which many musicians lose their footing—the divergences can be so minute that they can seem inconsequential or they can be used to reinforce sex and gender binaries.

One theory about a certain difference between “male” and “female” music is that compositions written by women (at least historically) have a tendency to be more cyclical than those by their male counterparts.¹¹ For centuries, successful art required teleology; the central character or musical theme must make progress towards a heroic goal, as in the literary genre of

⁹ Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music*, 19-20.

¹⁰ First- and Second-wave feminists would typically be placed in the first category—believing in definite distinctions. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books Ed., trans. Constance Borde and Shelila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). Third-wave feminists believe variance is typical See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, & Sexuality, with a New Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14-6.

the *Bildungsroman*.¹² The *Bildungsroman* is a story of maturation, both physical and psychological. Typically, a young man experiences some form of trauma during youth that forces him to leave home, only to return when he has reached adulthood.

Scholars have investigated the sexist nature of the *Bildungsroman*, as the protagonist is frequently male,¹³ and the force standing in his way is frequently depicted as female. While such obstacles might not be human, semiotician and critical theorist Teresa de Lauretis argues that it can stand in for the feminine.

In the mythical text, then, the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification (sphinx or dragon, sorceress or villain), is morphologically female—and indeed, simply, the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and “penetrates” the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.¹⁴

Even if a woman embodies the role of protagonist, her progress toward her goal—which have historically been coded as male—transforms her in a sense into a male protagonist, unless it

¹² See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia (New York: Verso, 2000); Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); James Hardin, ed., *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹³ See Laura Sue Fuderer, *The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990); Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century—Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf* (New York: P. Lang, 1986); Lorna Ellis, *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1999); Sarah E. Maier, “Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female *Bildungsroman* in Victorian Fiction,” *Literature Compass* 4, no. 1 (January 2007): 317-35.

¹⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, “The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations on Representation and Gender,” in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 43-4.

follows a more traditional teleology for women: attaining womanhood or motherhood.¹⁵ This narrative affirmed the longstanding belief that women's first and only obligation was to bear and raise children. Following the rise of modern feminism, many have challenged this claim on its discriminatory and misogynistic basis. However, these gender roles and subsequent attachment to narrative structures are far from modern.

These narratives for men and women date from ancient Greece and Rome. Critic Northrop Frye suggests that even though myths are fanciful and elaborate, their structure, in its most basic form, can be connected to most modern literature. He maintains that almost all literary examples can be traced back to mythological origins, just as you can reduce most visual arts to a collection of shapes.¹⁶ This makes the investigation of myths and their structure essential in any study of narrative. Following this logic that mythical forms are the basis of most modern narratives, we can thus conclude that De Lauretis's beliefs on female mythical characters holds true for female characters across all forms of Western narrative formulae. De Lauretis theorizes that the woman's triumphant journey takes her to a place where she can be saved by the man.

For the boy has been promised, by the social contract he has entered into at his Oedipal phase, that he will find woman waiting at the end of *his* journey. Thus the itinerary of the female's journey, mapped from the very start on the territory of her own body...is guided by a compass pointing not to reproduction as the fulfillment of *her* biological destiny, but more exactly to the promise made to "the little man," of this social contract, *his* biological and affective destiny—and to the fulfillment of his desire.¹⁷

¹⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative," in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 132.

¹⁶ Northrop Frye, "Third Essay — Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, with a new forward by Harold Bloom*, ed. Northrop Frye (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 134-5

¹⁷ De Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative," 133.

The patriarchal establishment's agenda in maintaining this status quo is quite obvious: by keeping women relegated to the role of simple child-bearers, it diminished the threat to the masculine position of power within ancient communities. So while the woman's maternal role was vital to survival, her wants, her needs, her aspirations, were all overlooked to keep the man's desires fulfilled. Thus, by only presenting these limited narratives for women, these fanciful structures act as forces of containment that both reflect their cultural context and continue to shape it.

The options for feminine rebellion against these conventions have been limited due to the convention of male protagonists and the acceptance and celebration of this convention by the aesthetic establishment. With this horizon of expectation, artists often worked within their constraints.¹⁸ Feminist creators aiming to subvert traditional narrative structures can allow the "Other" to succeed in their venture, or find a way of incorporating the goals of the protagonist and the "Other." No matter what tactic the creator takes in forming his or her work, by rebuking the establishment and its traditions, he or she opens him- or herself for heavy critique of aesthetic failure.

So what does this narrative function have to do with instrumental music? Feminist musicologists and theorists have extensively documented how desire plays out in the creation of musical forms, even if not obviously narrative in nature. Susan McClary argues throughout her groundbreaking work *Feminine Endings* that "tonality itself—with its process of instilling expectations and subsequently withholding promised fulfillment until climax—is the principal musical means during the period from 1600 to 1900 for arousing and channeling desire."¹⁹ And

¹⁸ With the rise of computers, the internet, and self-publishing, this truth has diminished slightly.

¹⁹ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 12.

while these gendered conventions are considered standard to many composers, with many to this day not considering the implications of accepting them blindly, McClary (rightfully) believes that this is exactly what makes these conventions so dangerous. For as “they simply are the elements that structure his or her musical (and social) world. Yet they are perhaps the most powerful aspects of musical discourses, for they operate below the level of deliberate signification and are thus usually reproduced and transmitted without conscious intervention.”²⁰ The habitual nature of these practices allows the music to “make sense” to the listener; in a very Butlerian sense, the repeated hearing of these standard tonal practices created this desire for tonal resolution that anyone with even a casual experience with music of the Western practice can recognize.²¹ And while the pioneering research of theorists interested in the way the brain understands and processes music has shown that there is at least some level of inborn understanding of the tonal process, one would be hard pressed to find those who deny the strengthening of this understanding with increased exposure to tonal music. Just as through years of reading literature with the same basic narrative structure, with continued exposure to the Western tonal system listeners come to expect and desire the typical harmonic progressions and resolutions—to witness this, simply play a major scale but stop on scale-degree 7 in the presence of trained musicians. The unease is palpable.

Now we turn to musical form and its relationship to feminist aesthetics. While formal organization is important to composers of all stripes, little debate exists as to which is the most important to master: sonata form. Theorists James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy affirm that

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999).

sonata form is the most important single-movement musical structure of the last 300 years.²² As standard as this form seems, any undergraduate theory student will be able to recall that many subtle variations to sonata-allegro form exist. However, for the purposes of the following analysis, Hepokoski and Darcy's "Type 3 sonata" will serve as the model; they offer the following basic description of the form:

The most typical sonata forms (what we call Type 3 sonatas) articulate an overall rounded binary structure. The two parts of this larger structure are, in modern terminology: (1) the exposition and (2) the development and recapitulation...the normative, Type 3 sonata consists of three musical action-spaces (again, the exposition, development, and recapitulation), laid out in a large A || BA' format.²³

Composers were tasked to learn this basic structure if their aim was to become a critical success; conservatories and composition teachers emphasized the mastery of sonata form—so much so that it can still be witnessed today in any undergraduate music theory sequence.

This focus on sonata form did not happen instantaneously. Hepokoski and Darcy argue that beliefs surrounding balance and discipline during the age of Reason brought about the sonata; they observe that the form can be understood as a kind of metaphor, standing in for the assumed actions of a just society. There is a clear logic to the procession of events in a sonata movement—introduction of the protagonist, grappling with an obstacle, subsequent victory after

²² James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14. See also Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: Norton, 1988); Gordon Sly, ed., *Keys to the Drama: Nine Perspectives on Sonata Form* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Robin Wallace, "Myth, Gender, and Musical Meaning: *The Magic Flute*, Beethoven, and 19th-Century Sonata Form Revisited," *Journal of Musicological Research* 19, no. 1 (1999): 1-25; Liane Curtis, "Rebecca Clarke and Sonata Form: Questions of Gender and Genre," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 393-429.

²³ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 16.

a struggle. In essence, it represents the perfect flow of events and actions.²⁴ And although the form was in widespread use since the days of Haydn, in a short period of time, sonata form became the norm and expectation for the first movement of multi-movement instrumental works, as well as a candidate for other movements, such as slow movements and finales.²⁵

In the nineteenth century, much of the form's importance (particularly in the minds of listeners and critics) can be traced to the legacy of Beethoven. Dahlhaus describes how following the success of Beethoven's *Eroica* (Symphony No. 3), contemporaries and later disciples alike were driven to model their works (and symphonies in particular) after the monumental piece. He surmises "[*Eroica*'s] novelty resided in a combination of monumental form and a 'teleological,' or goal-directed, structure that radically changed the traditional concept of theme."²⁶ This notion of teleology, again, invokes the *Bildungsroman*, which, not surprisingly, rose to prominence simultaneously with sonata form.²⁷ Even theorists who insist on the absolute nature of musical texts find merit in the narrative implications of sonata form. Hepokoski and Darcy posit "A sonata is a metaphorical representation of a perfect human action. It is narrative 'action' because it drives through a vectored sequence of energized events towards a clearly determined, graspable goal, the ESC [essential structural closure]."²⁸ And while their insistence on the

²⁴ Ibid., 15. The same argument has been made in relation to the development of the string quartet around this same time. See Christina Bashford, "Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 291-360.

²⁵ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 15.

²⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 152.

²⁷ See Sanna Pederson, "Beethoven and Masculinity," in *Beethoven and His World*, ed. Scott Burnham and Michael P. Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 313-31.

²⁸ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 253.

narrative nature of sonata form is refreshing coming from formalist music theorists, the language they use is troubling. If a sonata is a simulacrum of “perfect human action,” then what does a sonata that modifies the basic form in some way represent? Is a feminist who aims to subvert the patriarchal norm by slightly altering sonata form now forced to say that their action is less than perfect?²⁹ We will return to these questions at a later time, as Smyth grapples with these specific issues in her own use of sonata form.

In this discussion of form as it relates to feminist aesthetics, one must note the gendered associations of sonata form. McClary elucidates these associations:

In sonata, the principal key/theme clearly occupies the narrative position of the masculine protagonist; and while the less dynamic second key/theme is necessary to the sonata or tonal plot (without the foil or obstacle, there is no story), it serves the narrative function of the feminine Other. Moreover, satisfactory resolution—the ending always generically guaranteed in advance by tonality and sonata procedure—demands the containment of whatever is semiotically or structurally marked as ‘feminine,’ whether a second theme or simply a non-tonic key area.³⁰

These associations can be traced to the nineteenth-century German composer and music critic A. B. Marx. In describing the separate themes utilized in the expositions of sonata form, he noted that the second theme is “...of a more tender nature, flexibly rather than emphatically constructed—in a way, the feminine as opposed to the preceding masculine. In this sense each of the two themes is different, and only together do they form something of a higher, more perfect order.”³¹ McClary also maintains that although this gendered rhetoric did not appear until the nineteenth century, it should still be considered when considering earlier examples of sonata

²⁹ This also raises the question of what is “human” and what are “perfect actions” for this human? Can a woman and her action be considered in such a system, undoubtedly created and enforced by the white, hetero-patriarchy?

³⁰ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 15.

³¹ A. B. Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1845), as quoted and translated in McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 13.

form, as those earlier works drew on gendered operatic conventions.³² The terminology used to explain the separate themes is extremely vivid (McClary even calls it “cartoonish”). From opening “hammerstrokes” and sighing second themes, the idea of “strong” and “weak” is present, even if not stated unequivocally as “masculine” and “feminine.”³³ Of course, to most modern observers, this rhetoric seems anachronistic. And while the explicit nature of this gendered language has been toned down with the rise of feminism in the twentieth century, these associations remain. As musicians trained in Western art music, we have been told that the primary tonal area/theme must come to dominate the secondary tonal area/theme after a struggle. The Other must bend its will to the protagonist, or the masculine must overpower the feminine to obtain what he desires.³⁴

Ethel Smyth and Her Instrumental Music

Turning to Ethel Smyth, we must remember that her instrumental works are frequently forgotten and left out of the discussion of her musical output. This oversight emphasizes a number of qualities not unique to Smyth. Some of these works were never published, making the music more difficult to find. Also, the idea of a woman writing successful operas during this moment in music history is so exceptional (as many of the canonic works of the operatic tradition were penned during the same historical instant) that her operas became the only music worth noting.

³² Matthew Head has also documented the use of similar rhetoric during the eighteenth century. See his “‘Like Beauty Spots on the Face of a Man’: Gender in 18th-Century North-German Discourse on Genre,” *The Journal of Musicology* 13, no. 2 (Spring, 1995): 143-67.

³³ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 14.

³⁴ This rhetoric is slightly overstated in relation to current textbooks dealing with form. For example, the extremely common Stephen Kostka and Dorothy Payne *Tonal Harmony* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009) uses the term “reconfirm” to describe the action of the secondary theme in the recapitulation (page 345 of the sixth edition). However, Kostka and Payne also list “subordinate theme” as a synonym for secondary theme, recognizing the potential of theory teachers to use the terminology.

Other criteria, however, could also account for this omission. As she wrote a number of the instrumental works during her days as a student in Leipzig, some critics and musicologists have written them off as composition experiments and not pieces worth serious study or performance. Lisa Hardy, in describing Smyth's piano sonatas, muses that "...the piano sonatas are unlikely ever to be included in recitals as their style is too immature."³⁵ Kathleen Dale insists that these works are valuable in understanding the historical trajectory of Smyth's style, but that they are "unimportant as music."³⁶ Others have been quick to critique Smyth's tendency to deviate from standard formal conventions. As we have just seen, a proclivity towards formal subversion does not always mean that a composer (or any kind of artist, for that matter) is not skilled at their craft.

Smyth composed over forty-five instrumental works, though many of them are adaptations and arrangements of each other, or taken from parts of her operatic and vocal works. The completely original works consist primarily from her days at the Leipzig Conservatory, where she studied composition with Carl Reinecke. She was considered to be one of the top students during her short time there—in fact, she was the only woman in the history of the institution to be promoted to Reinecke's studio.³⁷ In these lessons, Smyth wrote a number of her instrumental works, including all of her piano sonatas, which were never published.³⁸ After leaving the conservatory, Smyth tended to focus her compositional energy toward music for the

³⁵ Lisa Hardy, *The British Piano Sonata: 1870-1945* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2001), 28.

³⁶ Kathleen Dale, "Appendix B. Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study," in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, by Christopher St. John (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1959), 290. This notion of "immature" works being invaluable has been traced to nineteenth-century beliefs. See Janet M. Levy, "Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings about Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 3-27.

³⁷ Ethel Smyth. *Impressions That Remained: Memoirs*, Second Edition (New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc., 1946), 204.

³⁸ Kathleen Dale, "Appendix B," 289.

voice. The instrumental music she wrote in this time was primarily for strings; of particular importance are her String Quintet in E (1883), as well as the Violin (1887) and Cello Sonatas (1880 and 1887). This focus on stringed instruments is particularly interesting considering that Smyth was only trained as a pianist. In my own listening to these works, I believe that Smyth was enamored with the timbral possibilities of string instruments, which perhaps could explain her abandonment of the piano as a solo instrument.

While Smyth was not trained as a performer on these instruments, these works are generally deemed more well rounded.³⁹ And while musicologists generally consider the formal construction of these sonatas to be more mature than the very early piano works, some still find something to be desired.⁴⁰ Describing these cello and violin sonatas, Dale notes that they “exhibit a surer sense of form.”⁴¹ However, she continues:

Ethel Smyth’s inborn feeling for musical construction was not acute. Her compositions in sonata form make the impression that she had to force herself into following accepted traditions. The two sonatas are not free from structural uncertainty, but they atone for it by melodic and rhythmic expressiveness, by beautiful colour-effects [*sic*] and interesting give-and-take between the soloists.⁴²

While Smyth recorded no commentary noting a dislike for formal restrictions, her vivacious personality possibly found the narrow constraints limiting, preferring to work in open forms, or modify the existing forms to fit her own inclinations.

In what follows, I examine the formal structure, as well as other musical characteristics, of the first movement of Ethel Smyth’s Cello Sonata—an appropriate selection for analysis for a

³⁹ Ibid., 292; and Amy Elizabeth Zigler, “Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth,” (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 2009), 246.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kathleen Dale, “Appendix B,” 292.

⁴² Ibid.

number of reasons. As this was not a school assignment, Smyth could have chosen to work in any form or style possible, but instead decided to compose within (and defy) the constraints of accepted sonata form. Furthermore, it contains traits and subversive elements that are present in her other instrumental works of the time.

Cello Sonata in A Minor, First Movement

Smyth composed her cello sonata in 1887; it was published as opus five under the name of E. M. Smyth, as a way of hiding her gender. Not much is known of the compositional history of the piece. The choice of writing a sonata for cello is not surprising, as string sonatas were (and are) common fare for beginning composers to gain a wide performance base and obtain recognition for their works. The sonata is in a standard three-movement layout of fast-slow-fast, with the first movement in sonata-allegro form. However, in this first movement, Smyth's navigation of tonal relationships suggests an ulterior motive that promotes gender equity.

The first movement opens squarely in A minor, with the first theme stated immediately in the cello (Figure 1.1). This first theme is filled with sighing motives; in the first measure, the melody rises from A to B, then quickly falling to E. At the same time, the cellist is supposed to use their dynamic prowess to crescendo and decrescendo, all in the span of a beat and a half. The melody then begins to gain momentum, ascending higher and higher, with each new precipice preceded by two sixteenth notes, either leading directly to the current peak, or falling shortly to create a minuscule leap to the top, all adding to the growing sense of melodic acceleration. Eventually, we reach the highest tone, an F, or submediant. This is unsatisfying to the listener, who craves the more settled sounding dominant instead. After pausing slightly on the F, the melody once again begins to whirl, before finally settling on the dominant after falling an octave

The image displays a musical score for Cello and Piano, measures 1-6 of Ethel Smyth's Sonata (A minor) for Violoncell und Pianoforte, Op. 5. The score is written in A minor (three flats) and common time (C). It consists of three systems of staves.

System 1 (Measures 1-2):

- Cello:** Measures 1 and 2. The Cello part begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F2, a quarter note E2, and a quarter note D2. The notes are beamed together and marked with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic.
- Piano:** Measures 1 and 2. The Piano part features a continuous eighth-note accompaniment in both hands, starting on G2 in the right hand and F2 in the left hand.

System 2 (Measures 3-4):

- Vc. (Violoncell):** Measures 3 and 4. The Cello part continues with a half note C2, followed by a quarter note B1, a quarter note A1, and a quarter note G1. The notes are beamed together.
- Pno. (Piano):** Measures 3 and 4. The Piano part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

System 3 (Measures 5-6):

- Vc. (Violoncell):** Measures 5 and 6. The Cello part begins with a half note F1, followed by a quarter note E1, a quarter note D1, and a quarter note C1. The notes are beamed together.
- Pno. (Piano):** Measures 5 and 6. The Piano part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

Figure 1.1. Ethel Smyth, *Sonate (A moll) für Violoncell und Pianoforte, Op. 5* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1887), Measures 1-6.

and ending with a half-cadence, at which point the melody is passed off to the piano.⁴³

In the most basic sense, this satisfies the requirements for the first theme of a sonata, though it is far from ordinary. First themes are heavily associated with masculine characteristics, but this one shucks those associations and instead adopts those that have become associated with the feminine, such as sighing motives and whirling melodies. Melodic sighs (as well as other musical expressions of physical gesture) are not only used as metaphoric expressions of actual sounds, but also are used to push the listener towards feeling those emotions as well.⁴⁴ Arnie Cox describes how even across a wide variety of instruments and performance strategies, human nature's push towards imitation makes us not only *hear* sigh motives, but those in turn make us want to *feel* that sigh as well.⁴⁵ Considering how one sighs when content or comfortable, as one might feel at home, it is not difficult to see how a sighing motive might be conceived as feminine. Subsequently, melodies that do not follow conventional musical rhetoric have been used to represent the feminine, as well as the damaged masculine. McClary described how in *L'Orfeo*, Monteverdi uses the traditional qualities of the feminine lament to showcase Orfeo's descent into madness, including flurried changes in speech patterns and key centers. This is a stark contrast to his former "rhetorical prowess," making the madness evident to all listeners.⁴⁶ Conversely, listeners expect declarative first themes in sonatas. By defying this convention, Smyth musically articulates that in some way, the masculine (or, at least the masculine in her

⁴³ Ethel Smyth, *Sonate (A moll) für Violoncell und Pianoforte, Op. 5* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1887). All further mentions of musical characteristics of the cello sonata come from this edition of the score.

⁴⁴ See Jeffrey Kallberg, "The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne," *Representations* 39 (Summer 1992): 102-33.

⁴⁵ Arnie Cox, "Hearing, Feeling, Grasping Gestures," in *Music and Gesture*, ed. Anthony Gritten and Elaine King (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 52-3.

⁴⁶ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 46.

cello sonata) is in some way damaged, or somehow altered from the patriarchy's view of the supreme position of the masculine.⁴⁷

After a brief transition period, Smyth introduces the second theme (Figure 1.2). In the key of C major, this theme aligns with the tonal progression of a minor mode sonata. Hepokoski and Darcy explain how from the start of the nineteenth century, most sonata form movements in minor modes feature a move from i to III. For example, a movement in C minor would move to E-flat major. Hepokoski and Darcy argue that to do otherwise would be downright mutinous.⁴⁸ After the turbulent first theme, Smyth's confirmation of standard tonal progression is not completely startling; as a young composer seeking publication and performance, a piece that flouted all expectations would not encourage her path towards musical success. The melody of the second theme is stated motivically in the piano, before the cello picks up the line, in full, in measure thirty-two. Unlike the melodic material used for the first theme, this melodic material conforms in many ways to the expectations of listeners. It is lyrical in nature—conjunct and lilting, due to the occasional triplet on either beat two or four. This not only recalls the pastoral topos, but the eternal feminine, heightening the gendered associations of this second theme. Tick, in describing the eternal feminine in music of the late nineteenth-century, uses the term “spontaneous,” which proves to be an apt expression for the sudden shift in tonal direction of this second theme.⁴⁹ After a brief flirtation with E-flat minor, the melody is stated for a second time in A-flat major, before eventually cadencing on C major to finish the exposition. E-flat minor, or the minor v of the larger work, would have been a possible tonal path for this secondary theme.

⁴⁷ For an example of a more conventional Primary Theme, see Mozart's Piano Sonata no. 7 in C major (K. 309), I.

⁴⁸ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 310.

⁴⁹ Tick, “Women as Professional Musicians,” 111.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a Cello and Piano. The first system is labeled 'Cello' and 'Piano'. The Cello part is in the bass clef, and the Piano part is in the grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The second system is labeled 'Vc.' and 'Pno.'. The third system is also labeled 'Vc.' and 'Pno.'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, ties, and triplets. The dynamics are marked with 'p' (piano). The key signature is A minor, indicated by the presence of natural signs on the F and C notes in the piano part.

Figure 1.2. Ethel Smyth, *Sonate (A moll) für Violoncell und Pianoforte, Op. 5* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1887), Measures 27-42.

Figure 1.2 (cont'd).

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line (Vc.) in the bass clef and a piano accompaniment (Pno.) in grand staff. The Vc. line has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The Pno. line has a complex accompaniment with a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic marking. The second system continues the Vc. line with a long note and the Pno. line with a simpler accompaniment.

Certainly the less traditional approach, it would have also been more difficult meet the long-term tonal obligations of a sonata form piece. The statement of the melody in A-flat major, or flat I, is a direction not frequently seen in sonata form works.⁵⁰ However, it serves the purpose of alluding to the route that the work will eventually take. Furthermore, it provides a pathway for a perfect authentic cadence to end the exposition in the original key of the second tonal area, C major.

Even though not the most conventional second theme, it does comply more with the gendered expectations than the first theme did. It is more lyrical and songlike than the primary

⁵⁰ While still not common, a relatively prevalent occurrence is a momentary flirtation with iii at some point in a III secondary theme. An example of this would the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata in C Minor, op. 13 (*Pathétique*), as described in Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 312.

theme and recalls the more accepted and celebrated qualities of the female sex that conventional second themes in sonata form embrace. And while some could explain the seemingly erratic tonal nature of the section as flighty or neurotic (less pleasing qualities unfortunately associated with femininity), I tend to see this as being more analogous to the charming, graceful nature that Tick describes.⁵¹ The sudden shifts in tonal center throughout this section seem to happen randomly, but it is clear that Smyth had a sophisticated plan to bring the work back to the secondary tonal center of C major. This attention to detail and clever navigation of musical relationships is an aspect of Smyth's musical style that, while noted in her operatic writing, is frequently forgotten or overlooked in discussions of her instrumental music.⁵²

The development section of this piece is standard: comprised of many tonal areas, as well as fragments of both the primary and secondary themes, expressed motivically, as a way of showcasing the maturation of the work. The first theme's sigh motives predominate in the development. As this section is considered to being analogous to the journey portion of the *Bildungsroman*, with the primary theme as the masculine protagonist, the preoccupation with the hero's feminine characteristics calls his authority into question. Furthermore, the sighing motive is reminiscent of a resolve towards stasis, a resignation towards inaction. Apathy is not something we want to see from our protagonist during the height of his musical journey. The secondary theme, however, is stated much more completely in the development. It is present in both its major- and minor-mode forms, alluding to the fact that the feminine might, in fact, be the more versatile of the gender roles, able to stand up to any and all obstacles that come in its way;

⁵¹ Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians," 111.

⁵² For example, Kathleen Dale describes her operatic writing much more favorably than her writing in other mediums: "Ethel Smyth's six works for the stage are more diverse in style and unequal in quality than are those in any other category of her mature production." Kathleen Dale, "Appendix B," 298.

this is particularly enlightening if the sonata is framed as a challenge between the masculine and the feminine. If a laodicean, masculine protagonist is put into conflict with a multifaceted, feminine object to conquer, it is not difficult at all to project an outcome different from the established patriarchal narrative.

At last, we reach the recapitulation of the work, where we will find out the fate of our masculine protagonist. It begins, as expected, with an almost *verbatim* statement of the primary theme, with the expected tonal center of A-minor. The transition toward the secondary theme is filled with the primary's sighing motive—all while this section is supposed to prepare the listener to witness the proof of the masculine protagonist's victory. And now we reach the moment of supreme choice in composing a minor-mode sonata: Hepokoski and Darcy explain that during the recapitulation of a minor-mode sonata using the i-III harmonic trajectory, the composer must decide which tonal area "wins." The secondary theme (earlier in III) can be presented in I, preserving the original mode, or in i, changing not only the mode of the piece, but "the entire character of the work." This second choice, however, more closely follows the path of a major-mode sonata.⁵³ Considering the subliminal, subversive nature of the work so far, one might expect Smyth to go with the tonic minor, with one (the masculine) "losing." However, she once again takes the more standard approach, and states the second theme in the tonic major, A major.

This could easily be read as a loss for the feminine, but it is not as simple as that. First, we have already seen that the secondary theme is a skillful melody, as it more closely aligns with the characteristics of its narrative gender. Next, the major mode has been considered the worthier

⁵³ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 312.

mode since the advent of tonality in the seventeenth-century.⁵⁴ So, in a sense, you have the faithful melody causing the transformation of the primary tonal center into a better version of itself. While not quite an explicitly feminist victory, there is undoubtedly a subversive quality in this course of action.

As the work draws to a close, the listener hears for the final time elements of both the primary and secondary themes. And while Smyth presents these themes in their respective tonal centers (A-minor and A-major), as the end approaches, the definitive mode slips further and further away. The ever-important scale degree three (for our purposes, C and C sharp) begin to appear fewer and fewer times, continually shifting between the two iterations when it does appear. The cello line ends with the sighing motive, using the tonic and the dominant—in a way, bucking a clear statement of the mode. However, there is a C sharp present in the low, soft piano chord, but even this tone is buried deep in a middle-voice, making it difficult to hear. While not completely throwing conventional harmony to the wind, it certainly makes the listener question what is typically stable at the end of a work.

What then is to be made of the narrative possibilities of this piece? While the work eschews some conventions of sonata form, it does comply with the basic premise of a minor-mode sonata. Hepokoski and Darcy describe the narrative possibilities of minor-mode sonatas as follows: “If we understand sonata form as a metaphor for an idealized but nonspecific human action..., minor-mode sonatas provide the means by which an initially negative state (the minor mode) is acted upon in order to seek to overturn it by means by means of major-mode

⁵⁴ See Carl Dahlhaus, *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality*, trans. Robert O. Gjerdingen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Joseph Yasser, *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (New York: American Library of Musicology, 1932); Richard Parncutt, “The Emotional Connotations of Major versus Minor Tonality: One or more origins?,” *Musicae Scientiae* 18, no. 3 (Sept. 2014): 324-53.

assertion...even though that quest might be unsuccessful.”⁵⁵ What Hepokoski and Darcy fail to explore are the gendered implications of this narrative path. While they never explicitly mention gender in relation to minor-mode sonatas, they do caution against overusing gender in analysis as there are atypical secondary themes (they give the example of fugal S-spaces). But they even pronounce how widespread these notions were in works post-1840.⁵⁶ While it is refreshing that theorists have begun to move past the troubling gendered consequences of sonata form, they do inform the historical nature of the so many pieces, so it is not a wise move to ignore them.

In Smyth’s Cello Sonata, the goal of the form is completed, with the primary tonal area being transformed from minor to major at the end of the work; but the primary theme can easily be seen as a flawed protagonist. It takes the secondary, “feminine” theme to reconstruct the primary tonal area and make it more perfect.⁵⁷ In this way, we have the feminine assisting the masculine on its journey. This reversal away from the “damsel in distress,” the man riding in on the white horse to save the helpless woman, is refreshing to say the least. Taken in conjunction with the ambiguous nature of the ending, the work is not promoting the dominance of the masculine over the feminine, or even the reverse. In fact, the subversive nature of the work is brought on by its egalitarian nature towards tonal relationships and thematic development. Yes, the goal of the sonata has been attained, but only through the assistance of the feminine. It is only by accepting the positive qualities that the feminine has brought to the work that the masculine can reach its goal.

⁵⁵ Hepokoski and Darcy, *Sonata Theory*, 306.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁷ Scott Burnham, alternatively, has suggested a Neoplatonic understanding of sonata form, arguing that theorist A. B. Marx believed that the secondary theme was actually used to complete the primary theme in a sort of union. See his “A. B. Marx and the gendering of sonata form,” in *Music theory in the age of Romanticism*, ed. Ian Bent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 163-86.

Should it be argued that all minor-mode sonatas are feminist in nature? Absolutely not. Many composers utilized the minor-mode in their pieces and to read feminist politics into all of these works would be too expansive. With Smyth, however, her inclusion of other rhetorical strategies that could be coded as feminine, such as sighing motives in the primary theme and the accomplished nature of the secondary theme, make a feminist reading of the work not only acceptable, but also preferable. While she was not officially involved in feminist politics at this point in her life, Smyth was completely cognizant of the ways in which gender was influencing her career as composer. Smyth actually seemed pulled to the minor-mode, as most of her published chamber works are in minor keys.⁵⁸ And while there is no articulated reason for this attraction, it is certainly worth noting.

The Feminist Possibilities of the Minor-Mode Sonata

A hermeneutic reading of musical narrative is far from renegade. In fact, it has become rather commonplace since the advent of “new” musicology in the late 1980s. Examples abound across musicological discourse, from McClary’s infamous “Beethoven as rape” analysis to the more conventional (and certainly less controversial) monographs by theorists such as Hepokoski and Darcy, Seth Monahan, and Byron Almén.⁵⁹ Judith Peraino went as far as using the *Bildungsroman* narrative to analyze rock and roll and various media surrounding the genre,

⁵⁸ Christopher St. John, “Appendix C. Ethel Smyth’s Compositions,” ed. Christopher St. John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 305. The published chamber works are the String Quintet in E Minor, Op. 1, Sonata for Cello in A Minor, Op. 5, Sonata for Violin in A Minor, Op. 7, String Quartet in E Minor, and the Trios for Violin, Oboe and Piano. All of these, aside from the Trios, are primarily in minor keys.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5, “Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman’s Voice in Janika Vandervelde’s *Genesis II*,” in McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 112-31; Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*; Seth Monahan, *Mahler’s Symphonic Sonatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

arguing that these male performers often undergo a transformation via the glorious sounds of electric guitar and drums.⁶⁰ So, what is the point of theorizing the possibility of feminist underpinnings within minor-mode sonatas?

Perhaps it is worth noting the customary role of music theory: analysis, not interpretation. Fred Maus eloquently described classical music's precarious position within both the academy and popular culture, asserting that male theorists have constructed the discipline in a scientific, positivist way. In doing so, those in power limited theoretical discourse, eliminating all sensual aspects of understanding music from academic conversation—which, in many ways, alienates a large number of subject positions.⁶¹ There is an unquestionable value to understanding music from a technical standpoint—speaking from personal experience, understanding how a piece “works” certainly can improve the performance of a composition. However, to get to the cultural relevance, it seems reasonable to interrogate musical works from a plethora of perspectives. Therefore, it appears that the understanding of minor-mode sonatas from a feminist perceptive is long overdue.

As previously outlined, minor-mode sonatas typically move from i to III in the exposition; in this tonal progression, the “masculine” primary theme is in a minor key, in opposition to the “feminine” secondary theme in major. So, in the recapitulation, the key centers need to be resolved in some way to settle the drama. In major mode sonatas, the secondary theme assumes the key of the primary; however, the minor mode is not that simple. If the secondary theme blindly acquires the primary tonal center, the entire theme's character would change.

⁶⁰ Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 228-9.

⁶¹ Fred Everett Maus, “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 264-93.

Frequently, composers (including Ethel Smyth) will have the secondary theme take on the center pitch, but maintain its major mode. In this way, the “feminine” theme *improves* the primary tonal area, moving it from minor to major, as the major mode is socially understood as superior to the minor.⁶² In essence, the feminine makes the masculine better, which some might say is a rather feminist statement.

For the sake of clarity, it should be reiterated: I am in no way suggesting that all minor-mode sonatas are feminist in nature. Rather, this is simply another way of appreciating the minor-mode sonata. This tactic is rather commonplace among other humanities disciplines. For example, literary scholars have explored alternative understandings of the *Bildungsroman* from the female point-of-view, or the scant examples where females are the protagonists to these tales.⁶³ Film theory and criticism and theory have also experienced a tremendous push towards understanding and critiquing films of all kinds from a feminist perspective.⁶⁴ These alternative understandings and theories about traditionally masculine dramas and forms can greatly inform our work as musicologists attempting similar feats. It makes sense to begin such work with perhaps the most infamous feminist composer.

⁶² See Jean Philippe Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique: A Facsimile of the 1754 Paris edition* (New York: Broude Bros., 1967); See also Susan McClary’s discussion of the social construction of musical affect, *Feminine Endings*, 19-24, as well as the works in note 53.

⁶³ See note 9.

⁶⁴ See Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul, ed., *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Sue Thornham, ed., *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Anneke Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); E. Ann Kaplan, “Global Feminisms and the State of Feminist Film Theory,” *Signs* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 1236-48; Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978).

Conclusion—What’s a Modern Listener to Do?

The use of the minor mode in sonata form is hardly revolutionary—for as long as tonality has existed, composers have been using minor modes for their affective qualities.⁶⁵ And due to these differences from the major mode, concessions must be made to allow the standard forms to exist. It is in these differences that Ethel Smyth was able to work, to compose pieces that complied enough with convention for her career to not be ruined, but with enough subversive qualities that it has taken over a century for us to understand the political underpinnings of her art. By understanding musical form as a toolbox for composers to utilize as they wish, and not a box they must fit into, a better understanding and appreciation of a composer’s works can be achieved.

This preceding hermeneutic analysis provides just one of the many possible ways feminism can be found in the music of Ethel Smyth. Gender has been read into music throughout time and, as musicologists, we are now becoming fully aware of these musical implications. It is through an understanding of these relationships between musical aesthetics and gender that more covert subversions of the patriarchy can be detected. Smyth’s life story itself points towards subtle protest: a musical English woman trained by and competing against the German male establishment. And while her class and racial privilege must be acknowledged, the hurdles she faced in the late-nineteenth century were still massive.⁶⁶ By working within the establishment, Smyth was able to create a personal niche where she was able to gain moderate success, which she was able to use later in her life to make more explicit pronouncements about gender equality.

⁶⁵ Katelyn Horn and David Huron, “On the Changing Use of the Major and Minor Modes, 1750-1900,” *Music Theory Online* 21, no. 1 (March 2015).

⁶⁶ See Citron, “Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon.”

In her cello sonata and other works like it, Smyth used accepted standards of form as a vehicle in which to embed feminist subversion. By composing melodies that did not meet listener and critical expectations on how primary and secondary sonata themes should sound, she was able to harness the vastly unexplored feminist potential of the minor-mode sonata. The primary (minor) tonal area in, in a sense, made *more* perfect through the assistance of the secondary (major) tonal area. In this way, the *Bildungsroman* narrative is thwarted and listeners are presented with a work that exists with a progressive sense of gender ideals. So while the chamber music of Ethel Smyth might not be as well known as her vocal and operatic works, they do deserve more recognition, for without the skills that she attained through the composition of these pieces, she might have not become such the force of a composer that she did.

CHAPTER 2

FEMINISM AS NATIONALISM?

Even a cursory search for musicological scholarship dealing with the long nineteenth century will undoubtedly yield numerous results concerning nationalism's impact on European composers. However, one seldom finds the simultaneous mention of an equally pressing and ambitious political campaign: first-wave feminism. While plentiful music scholarship exists on nationalism and feminism as separate entities, the combination of these two forces upon musical composition receives little attention. This fact becomes even more surprising when one considers the enormous overlap in the two movements' goals. Emerging research in history, political science, and gender studies has developed the concept of feminist nationalism.¹ This output shows that feminism and nationalism both work to liberate certain people from oppression, whether they are citizens of a nation seeking independence or women seeking freedom from the patriarchy. To bring these issues together in music scholarship, one might ask the following questions: How can a composer's resistance to the institutional subjugation of women be considered a nationalist project? And how might we see and hear the effects of these combined efforts in their music? Composer and feminist Ethel Smyth provides a superb case study for this inquiry. Her relationship to the British women's suffrage movement has been well documented; this coincided with her transnational musical experiences in an age of hypernationalism.²

¹ See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); *Feminist Nationalism*, ed. Lois A. West (New York: Routledge, 1997).

² Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (Winter 1995).

Furthermore, the confluence of these forces has not been noted in any of the existing Smyth literature.

I begin by charting the historical course of both nationalism and feminism in modern Europe, highlighting the intersections between the movements. Scholars and activists have argued that by improving the social and political conditions of women's lives, the nation's overall strength solidifies.³ Both feminism and nationalism also have strong ties to music because it may transmit ideas of identity and ideology. With these connections in mind, I propose the idea of the "feminist nation," a community of feminists, united by common goals and rhetoric, all working towards women's suffrage. This feminist nation fought against entrenched institutional misogyny, as evident in the patriarchal musical and governmental establishments that limited the young and determined Ethel Smyth's access to musical opportunities. As a composer highly dedicated to improving British women's lives, Smyth serves as an ideal case study to explore musical feminist nationalism. I investigate specific obstacles that Smyth attempted to trounce, with varying amounts of success, because of her marginalization within various communities. One can find evidence of these struggles in the works that Smyth composed at the height of her involvement with the British suffragette movement. Overall, I argue that she composed and campaigned for a feminist nation.

Smyth helped construct this feminist nation and shaped its aesthetic vision in a number of ways. One of her most obvious tactics involved composing protest music, particularly the feminist anthem, "The March of the Women," which served as a call-to-arms for members of the emerging feminist nation. Some other compositions not written specifically to campaign for

³ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313 (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

women's suffrage also demonstrate her feminist nationalism; such works include *Hey Nonny No*, a colossal work for chorus and orchestra about humanity's bacchanalian nature, written before Smyth's involvement with feminist groups. By challenging the status quo, Ethel Smyth worked to enact lasting political change. By drawing attention to these forces in Smyth's music, we can continue to see the historical value of women and other minorities' musical contributions to Western art music and to Western sexual politics.

Political Movements, Shared and Independent

Nationalism and feminism converge in important ways: specifically, those participating in the feminist crusade meet the definition of a nation. Feminists work as a community, united by a system of shared beliefs, values, and goals.⁴ In the introduction to a collection of cross-cultural essays on feminist nationalism, Lois West defines these movements as "social movements simultaneously seeking rights for women and for nationalists within a variety of social, economic, and political contexts."⁵ And while nationalist movements seek to unify a community,

⁴ See Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) and Erika Harris, *Nationalism: Theories and Cases* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) for superb analyses of the numerous individual theories of nationalism present in academia up until 2000 and 2009, respectively. There are two broad categories of nationalism theorists: primordialists and modernists. Primordialists, spearheaded by historical sociologist Anthony Smith in the 1970s, believe nationalism is an ancient phenomenon, unquestionably interwoven into society's fabric through ethnic groups. Members of a group share an intense bond that ties them together in ideology. See Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth & Company Limited, 1971). In sharp contrast, the modernists, exemplified by social anthropologist Ernest Gellner in the 1980s, believe in the recent development of nationalism that sought political legitimacy for groups tied together in some way (including, but not limited to ethnicity, education system, language, and culture) as they moved from an agrarian to industrial society. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

⁵ Lois West, "Introduction: Feminism Constructs Nationalism," in *Feminist Nationalism*, ed. Lois West (Routledge: New York, 1997), xxx. For a wide variety of cross-cultural explorations of Feminist Nationalism, see *Feminist Nationalism*, ed. Lois West (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Feminist Time Against Nation Time: Gender, Politics, and the Nation-State in an Age of Permanent War*, ed. Victoria Hesford and Lisa Diedrich (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

they typically do so at the expense of the female members. Anne McClintock reasons, “Despite many nationalists’ ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*. No nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state.”⁶ McClintock goes on to remind readers that any theory of nationalism will certainly contain a basis in gendered discourse, as gendered language is almost undoubtedly used to explain the power dynamics between nation-states. And while unfortunately many scholars have overlooked the relationship between nationalism and feminism, recent investigations into the intersections of gender, race, and class are proving fruitful in providing a greater understanding of the feminist/nationalist connection.⁷

In fact, understanding misogyny’s connection to colonialism is essential. In exploring the interrelation between native studies and Queer theory, Andrea Smith theorizes, “Since not all peoples are in a postcolonial relationship vis-à-vis the state, a binary analysis of the colonizer and the colonized can sometimes be helpful in highlighting the current conditions of settler colonialism that continues to exist today.”⁸ While women have not been colonized in the traditional sense of the word, the female sex’s historical subservience to men provides a useful comparison between these two situations. Indeed, the following analysis of the parallels between

⁶ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 353.

⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 355-7. For more on the intersectional nature of gender, race, and class, see Jean Ait Belkhir and Bernice McNair Barnett, “Race, Gender and Class Intersectionality,” *Race, Gender & Class* 8, no. 3 (2001): 157-74; Susanne Hochreiter, “Race, Class, Gender? Intersectionality Troubles,” *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 401-8; and Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸ Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 58.

feminism and nationalism must assume the contemporary binary relationship between “men” and “women.”

Contemporaries of the suffragettes and members of this first-wave of feminism were already aware of these links between feminism and nationalism. In her work *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf described the mental gymnastics women went through in finding their niche:

‘What does ‘our country’ mean to me, an outsider?’ To decide this she will analyze the meaning of patriotism in her own case. She will inform herself of the position of her sex and her class in the past. She will inform herself on the amount of land, wealth, and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present—how much of ‘England’ in fact belongs to her... ‘Our Country,’ she will say, ‘throughout the greater part of history has treated me a slave; it has denied me education or any share of its possessions...in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country.’⁹

Here, Woolf articulates the feelings of countless early feminists who came before her. She calls upon her sisters-in-arms to create a widespread community of feminists—or, what could be called the “feminist nation.”

Nationalism and feminism both gained strength at the end of the nineteenth century. Their goals of liberating communities from oppression in many cases are so similar that it becomes impossible to separate them in historical discussions. Thus, the feminist nation is born: a community of women, tied together by goals, rhetoric, and history and shaped by the politics of a particular place. In a sense, it operates as a nation within a nation. The feminists protesting during the *fin-de-siècle* had a primary objective: the political equality of the sexes. While the movement supported multiple agendas, the most prominent was that of women’s suffrage.¹⁰

⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), 107-9.

¹⁰ Melanie Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman: A History of the Suffragette Movement and the Ideas Behind It* (London: Abacus, 2003) provides a great, accessible introduction to the varied expressions of early feminist politics that led to the focus on women’s suffrage; in particular, see Chapter Eight, “The Challenge to Politics.”

Common strategies also unified first-wave feminists. Women frequently drew on long-held beliefs about the superior nature of female nurturing and morality, and argued that women, if given the chance as a political entity, could elevate their broader communities to new-found heights. Melanie Phillips calls attention to this fact: “The suffragists wanted to introduce female morality, and the virtues of the home from which it sprang, into the political sphere.”¹¹ Even those who bucked these limited views of women, opting for militant practices, still believed that subjugating women had a negative impact on all of humanity. Emmeline Pankhurst, a bellicose suffrage leader, asserted, “We women suffragists have a great mission—the greatest mission the world has ever known. It is to free half the human race, and through that freedom to save the rest.”¹² Vernacular print culture transmitted the history and events of the feminist nation in a similar fashion to that of other nationalist movements.¹³ Many of the suffrage organizations printed their own newspapers; for example, the Women’s Social and Political Union published *Votes for Women* to broadcast their beliefs to a wide readership across Britain.¹⁴ By

¹¹ Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman*, 155.

¹² Emmeline Pankhurst, *Votes For Women*, Oct. 18, 1912, quoted in Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman*, 243.

¹³ For more on the relationship between nationalism and vernacular print culture, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised Edition* (London: Verso, 2006). His construction of nation relies on shared systems of communication, through language and print culture, to bind a community so large that not everyone knows one another. While some historians and academics have viewed this idea of language in a very literal sense, others push to include alternate forms of discourse into the realm of “language,” such as artistic expressions, including music. Through these various “languages,” individuals who would have previously never had any form of contact with one other are able to share belief systems, values, and symbols that linked the “imagined communities.” Anderson reasons that Enlightenment thought overthrew three interlinked beliefs: the supremacy of a certain language to communicate religious truth, the otherworldly nature of monarchies and ruling classes, and connected nature of history and cosmology. Anderson falls into the modernist camp of nationalism theorists.

¹⁴ Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman*, 181.

amalgamating the campaigns of nationalism and feminism into one, to advocate for the feminist nation, these pioneering political women aimed to improve Britain for all.

However, these politicians deployed firm nineteenth-century views on sexual differences as the bases for their organizational tactics. As respect for the medical establishment grew, biological differences between the sexes (as well as other minority groups) became more and more common as evidence to support discrimination.¹⁵ Most academics today problematize the elementary category of “woman.” Modern gender theorists have argued that the creation of “woman” as a political category only reinforces the artificial gender binary. For example, Judith Butler writes, “without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, agreed-upon identity, those actions might well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of ‘women’ for whom the meaning of the category is permanently moot.”¹⁶ Later feminists would therefore work towards overthrowing the binary to avoid a “separate, but ‘equal’ status.”¹⁷ While today we might see the problems of strict gender binaries,

¹⁵ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 215-6.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999), 21.

¹⁷ Recent years brought about an explosion of literature discussing the problematic nature of the gender (as well as sex) binary system. This scholarship crosses disciplinary lines. See also Jenny L. Davis, Lal Zimman, and Joshua Raclaw, “Opposites Attract: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality,” in *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis, and Joshua Raclaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-12; Penelope Eckert, “The Problem with Binaries: Coding for Gender and Sexuality,” *Language and Linguistics Compass* 8, no. 11 (Nov. 2014): 529-35; Shiera S. el-Malik, “Rattling the Binary: Symbolic Power, Gender, and Embodied Colonial Legacies,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1-16; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Myra J. Hird, “Gender’s Nature: Intersexuality, Transsexualism and the ‘Sex’/‘Gender’ Binary,” *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 3 (2000): 347-64; Zachary Hozid, “Gender Identity ‘Disorder’?: A Critique of the Binary Approach to Gender,” *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry* 15, no. 2 (2013): 135-8; Ashley Tauchert, “Beyond the Binary: Fuzzy Gender and the Radical Center,” in *Unseen Genders: Beyond the Binary*, ed. Felicity Haynes and Tarquam McKenna (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 181-92.

the rigorous dichotomy between “man” and “woman” was firmly entrenched during the *fin-de-siècle* when these first feminists were campaigning for their fundamental equality, and it helped them become a distinctly visible and viable portion of the larger nation-state.

As with other nations, the feminist nation adopted an easily identifiable cultural canon. These include female-created, female-centric works of visual art and literature. Music is notably absent (at least in surface level investigations) from this nationalist movement. Despite a growing awareness of identity as nationalist and feminist movements began to take over Europe, sexism continued to linger in musical circles. Indeed, the distinct category of “woman” proved to be a stumbling block, rather than an opportunity to articulate specific political aims. Women would find it difficult to undermine centuries of ideas about women’s creativity, which had recently hardened as a result of the biological essentialism of the nineteenth century. Christine Battersby demonstrates that, historically, women who were able to produce works of great aesthetic value were considered “unnatural.” She continues, “A woman can have a powerful imagination only by being unsexed: by being a freak of nature; a kind of mental hermaphrodite.”¹⁸ Furthermore, in describing the Romantic genius, Battersby observes that, “the driving force of genius was described in terms of *male* sexual energies. On the other hand, the genius was supposed to be *like a woman*: in tune with his emotions, sensitive, inspired.”¹⁹

George Upton’s *Woman in Music* (1880) promulgates views about musical women on par with those of the musical establishment. Upton previously published a number of well-researched guidebooks to assist the city of Chicago (and the wider American public) in

¹⁸ Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 79. Battersby uses the current tense “can” as she is speaking from the perspective of one living in the Age of Enlightenment, having recently quoted William Duff (1732-1815), author of *Essay on Original Genius* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1767).

¹⁹ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 103.

understanding classical music; in the case of *Woman in Music*, he rode the wave of scientific discourse of biological differences between the sexes to explain the ways women had been involved in music up until that time. Upton positions the subject of the book (women involved in music) as a singular entity, thus inviting a unified narrative. By positioning the subject of the book as a solo body/narrative, any deviations from this standard accord are marginalized and situated as Others. Upton recounts a number of great female composers, such as Clara Schumann, though always underscoring their role in assisting their more important male composer family member.²⁰

Upton, furthermore, relies on faulty nineteenth-century science to argue that women only influenced music in a limited fashion, no more than muses to their great male partners as a result of their “deficient” intellect.²¹ He speculated that music “has every technical detail that characterized absolute science in its most rigid forms. In this direction woman, except in very rare instances, has never achieved great results. Her greatest performances have been in the regions of romance, of intuition, of poetical feeling and expression...”²² So while Upton was correct that women influenced Euro-American musical composition in limited ways, scholars are now aware that it had nothing to do with “women’s nature,” but rather it was the lack of

²⁰ George Upton, *Woman in Music* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1880), 135.

²¹ Mary Ann J. Feldman, “George P. Upton: Journalist, Music Critic and Mentor to Early Chicago” (doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, 1983), 297.

²² Upton, *Woman in Music*, 31.

opportunities presented to them.²³ This snapshot into outdated musical misogyny helps us understand the context in which the first true expressions of musical feminism emerged.²⁴

Ethel Smyth Connects the Movements

This perfect storm of political consciousness inspired one composer to seize upon these similar yet competing movements and tie them together through music; her unique history and position in English society gave Ethel Smyth a special opportunity. While she showed musical promise at an early age, she also quickly encountered the predictable roadblocks that many musical women faced. These barricades were partly a consequence of the bourgeois proscriptions for female musical amateurism, as well as the belief that women were incapable of genius. Smyth's father adamantly opposed her musical training, only allowing her to obtain professional training after she became an absolute terror to the entire Smyth family.²⁵ Even with this small victory under her belt, Smyth had to travel to Leipzig to obtain satisfactory musical training, as the English music education infrastructure continued to linger in its inadequate state at the time Smyth began

²³ Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990).

²⁴ I am also obligated to note that these views have not completely left Euro-American consciousness, as evidenced in Damien Thompson, "There's a good reason why there are no great female composers," *The Spectator: Culture House Daily Blog*, September 16, 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://blogs.new.spectator.co.uk/2015/09/theres-a-good-reason-why-there-are-no-great-female-composers/>. In this blog, Thompson, who is an associate editor of *The Spectator*, argues that many of the female composers currently studied in musicological texts should be ignored, as their music is of a lesser quality than their male counterparts. What Thompson fails to note is the supreme lack of access to training that was afforded to these women. Furthermore, his condescending tone is completely unwarranted and far from justified.

²⁵ Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 15.

her schooling in 1877.²⁶ This decision to procure a music education in Germany would influence her throughout her musical career, as her manner of composition did not fit in perfectly in the English or Germanic style.²⁷ After arriving in Leipzig, Smyth's vivacious personality, as well as her family's social standing in Britain, granted her access to the musical elite, though she was ever cognizant of her position as an outsider due to her sex.²⁸

Unfortunately for Smyth, the Leipzig Conservatory did not provide the education she hoped for. She found a large number of her professors completely uninterested in her compositions or her musical success. She described her composition lessons with Carl Reinecke as "rather a farce," and noted "the lack of [general] enthusiasm among [her] fellow students."²⁹ Not completely deterred, she left the conservatory after a year to study privately with composition teacher Heinrich von Herzogenberg. The composer and his wife continued to assist Smyth in broadening her circle of musical contacts, including names still remembered today such

²⁶ Smyth found music education in Great Britain unsuitable at this time and recalls that in her youth, the Leipzig Conservatorium was held in high esteem in Britain. See Smyth, *Impressions that Remained: Memoirs, Second Edition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 74. The Royal College of Music was not founded until 1882, leaving earlier talented musicians to travel to continental Europe to receive thorough musical training. There young musicians received greater public and private support, thus depriving Great Britain of much of their native musical talent. See Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940: Constructing a national music*, Second Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 23.

²⁷ Those composers who were trained outside of the British Isles, including Ethel Smyth, experienced pressure from the English musical elite (such as the composer Edward Elgar and critic George Bernard Shaw) to conform to the proper national style of composition, with emphasis on simplicity and elegance. Elgar, for example, called for an end of the worship of the German masters and that foreign influence was the cause of much of turmoil. Those who continued to write in a German style were less likely to be programmed or frequently received negative reviews. The two World Wars did not ease this situation, as critics and composers rejected the German continental music establishment. See Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940*, 137.

²⁸ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 16.

²⁹ Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 145-6.

as Johannes Brahms, Edvard Grieg, and Clara Schumann.³⁰ Even with her constantly growing catalogue of connections, Smyth observed that women still faced a number of major hurdles in the art music realm. It proved much more difficult for her to obtain public performances and publication of her works than her male colleagues. In her typical subversive manner, she turned to submitting a number of her works to publishers under the moniker “E.M. Smyth” as a way to hide her gender.³¹

Once Smyth began to secure performances and publications, the discrimination she had faced continued, though now from the more powerful music critics. As she was not afraid to work with large ensembles and styles traditionally allocated to male composers, critics often found ways to undermine her efforts to write ambitious, large-scale compositions. For example, George Bernard Shaw, reviewing her Mass in D (1893), wrote, “If you take an average mundane young lady, and ask her what service to religion she most enjoys rendering, she will probably... instance the decoration of a church at Christmas...Now I will not go so far as to say that Miss Smyth’s musical decoration of the Mass is an exactly analogous case, ...but...the decorative instinct is decidedly in front of the religious instinct all through.”³² Even when reviews were primarily positive, as they were for her Mass, critics consistently compared her works to those of male composers, and denigrated hers for containing a “sense of restlessness,” a common

³⁰ Sophie Fuller. “Smyth, Dame Ethel.” *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26038>.

³¹ Citron, “Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon,” 108. Examples of such scores include her Cello Sonata, Mass in D, *Fantasio*, and *Der Wald*.

³² George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw’s Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes, Vol. 2*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, the Bodley Head, 1981), 791.

feminine trait associated with the supremacy of passion over reason in women.³³ Smyth herself found this negative position toward female music professionals ridiculous, declaring, “The whole...attitude towards women in art is ludicrous and uncivilized. There is no sex in art. How you play the violin, paint, or compose, is what matters.”³⁴

Considering the numerous challenges that Smyth faced in her musical career, it should come as no surprise that she felt drawn to the suffragette movement. Similar to other historical movements, the British women’s suffrage movement encompassed over 400 discrete groups, which can be broadly categorized into two bodies. The first was the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, or NUWSS, which took a milder approach to advocacy, simply asserting women’s right to protest to gain their rights. In contrast, the Women’s Social and Political Union, or WSPU, offered the more militant wing of the suffrage movement. These devotees took a more active approach through the practice of civil disobedience and violence. However, members of the Pankhurst family led both of these organizations; Emmeline and her daughter Christabel aligned with the WSPU, while Emmeline’s other daughter, Sylvia, was active in the NUWSS.³⁵

³³ “Recent Concerts,” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*. January 28, 1893, 96-7. This passion was originally connected to the assumed supreme sexual urges that needed to be controlled within women though eventually became “understood” to be driven by the process of spontaneous ovulation and menstruation, discovered in the late nineteenth century. See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*; Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Thomas Laqueur, “Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology,” *Representations* 14, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Spring 1986): 1-41; Julie-Marie Strange, “‘I Believe It To Be a Case Depending on Menstruation’: Madness and Menstrual Taboo in British Medical Practice, c. 1840-1930,” in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 102-16.

³⁴ Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), 80.

³⁵ Elizabeth Wood, “Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women’s Suffrage,” *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 609-11.

Smyth first met Emmeline Pankhurst in early 1910, yet by September, Smyth resolved to dedicate the next two years of her life solely to furthering the cause of women's suffrage.³⁶ She even compared political activism to composing, confiding in a letter to Pankhurst, "Do you know your career is very much like the building up of...say an Opera. One knows exactly what the main trend is to be — & thinks out scenes — & begins. Then, as you work, come brilliant ideas... 'that's what I shall do' — you say with a thrill! Why — of course. And with joy unutterable you do it & it is the parent of the next thing."³⁷ While Smyth was involved in the suffrage movement in a number of ways, easily her most important contribution was composing overtly feminist music.

"The March of the Women"

Prior to Ethel Smyth's dedication to the cause of suffrage, many feminists did not value music's role in the movement. Elizabeth Wood affirms how "music—for many educated middle-class women in Victorian and Edwardian times an amateur and domestic accessory or adornment,

³⁶ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 146. While Smyth's zestful and domineering personality was initially off-putting to Pankhurst, they eventually developed a close personal relationship. This friendship between Smyth and Pankhurst remains drastically understudied; modern scholars tend to focus on her one heterosexual relationship with Henry Brewster or her various other lesbian relationships. Examples of this include Elicia Clements, "Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction," *College Literature* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 51-71; Amanda Harris, "The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 14 (2010), 72-94; Christopher Wiley, "Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and 'The First Woman to Write an Opera,'" *Musical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (2013), 263-95; Christopher Wiley, "'When a Woman Speaks the Truth about Her Body': Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography," *Music & Letters* 85, no. 3 (Aug. 2004): 388-414; Suzanne Raitt, "The Tide of Ethel: Femininity as Narrative in the Friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf," *Critical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (December 1988), 3-21; Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 165-83; Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology, 2nd Edition*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 27-66.

³⁷ Wood, "Performing Rights," 614.

something borrowed, rarely new — meant little more to suffrage organizers than the flowers arranged on a speaker’s platform or the feathers on her hat.”³⁸ This air of frivolity hardly discouraged a learned musician like Smyth, who immediately set out not only to compose music that would be of use to the suffrage movement, but also to inspire the suffragettes with music. To do so, Smyth had to compose a work that was accessible to the widest audience possible, while in no ways limiting WSPU’s message.

The melody for “The March of the Women” is derived from an Abruzzo-Italian folksong. While this foreign source for an English protest work might seem to undermine a nationalist project, Smyth sought extranational inspiration for many reasons. First, this region of Italy is noted for its hunting and military history. A number of Smyth’s works draw on bugle and hunting calls, with the march as no exception.³⁹ The appropriation of a martial topos makes sense considering that the WSPU was the militant branch of the suffrage movement in Great Britain. Also, by using a non-British source, Smyth highlighted the universality of their struggle. While the WSPU was fighting only for the voting rights of British women, the position of women throughout the world was on their mind, as evidenced by the similar rhetoric of “The March of the Women.”⁴⁰

“The March of the Women” is musically straightforward (See Figure 2.1). Set in the key of F, quadruple meter, and with a range of just over an octave, most members of the WSPU were able to perform the work with little difficulty. Following a three-measure introduction, the work

³⁸ Ibid., 612.

³⁹ Ibid., 619.

⁴⁰ *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race*, ed. Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (New York: Routledge, 2000) is a great exploration on the cross-cultural nature of British First-Wave feminism.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system includes a Voice part and a Piano part. The Voice part begins with a whole rest for three measures, followed by a repeat sign and the lyrics "Shout, Shout,". The Piano part starts with a *ff* dynamic, followed by a crescendo to *fff*, and then a *f* dynamic after a repeat sign. The second system features a vocal line with the lyrics "up with your song! Cry with the wind, for the dawn is break-ing. March, March," and a piano accompaniment. The third system continues the vocal line with "swing you a-long, Wide blows our ban ner and hope is wak ing. Song with its stor y" and the piano accompaniment, which includes a *mf* dynamic marking.

Voice

Piano

Shout, Shout,

up with your song! Cry with the wind, for the dawn is break-ing. March, March,

swing you a-long, Wide blows our ban ner and hope is wak ing. Song with its stor y

Pno.

Pno.

ff *fff* *f*

mf

Figure 2.1. Ethel Smyth, "The March of the Women," (London: The Women's Press, 1911.

Figure 2.1 (cont'd).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a vocal and piano piece. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The lyrics are: "Dreams with their glory Lo! they call, and glad is their word. For ward! hark how it swells, Thunder and freedom, the voice of the lord." The piano part features various chords, arpeggios, and dynamic markings like *f* and *ff*. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics "Dreams with their glory Lo! they call, and glad is their word. For ward!" and the piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal line with lyrics "hark how it swells, Thunder and freedom, the voice of the lord." and the piano accompaniment. The third system shows the piano accompaniment with a final *ff* dynamic marking.

System 1: Vocal line: "Dreams with their glory Lo! they call, and glad is their word. For ward!" Piano accompaniment: Treble clef, bass clef, dynamic *f*, triplets, and *ff* marking.

System 2: Vocal line: "hark how it swells, Thunder and freedom, the voice of the lord." Piano accompaniment: Treble clef, bass clef, dynamic *ff*, and *ff* marking.

System 3: Vocal line: (empty) Piano accompaniment: Treble clef, bass clef, dynamic *ff*, and *ff* marking.

holds to an AABA form and includes four stanzas. This repetition of melodic phrases contributes to the work's sense of simplicity. It conforms to the listener and singer's expectations of a march, possessing a steady and vehement beat. One must also not discount the association between the genre of the march and the martial topos, neither of which have typically been connected with domestic women until the suffrage movement. While most of the melody is conjunct, occasional arpeggiation imitates a military bugle call. Aside from these arpeggios, the most unique musical feature of this song is the diminished seventh in measure fifteen. It stands as the climax of the piece, with the E flat being the highest note in the work. Some singers complained that this middle stretch of the piece was too difficult, preferring the plainness of their previous marching song, "Women's Marseillaise." Nevertheless, Smyth never relented and defended the diminished seventh as being "peculiarly British."⁴¹ Elizabeth Wood also notes that the text setting at this diminished seventh asserts the sense of optimism that these women had towards their goal: "the effect Smyth achieves in lifting the voice to its highest note is one of openness, the unfolding power of 'voice' that I experience physically and acoustically as the upward reach in music's body that asserts the human body—the sonic 'call' and 'hope' of liberation by the sacrificial suffrage body from the marks of 'pain,' suffering, humiliation, and torture it has endured."⁴²

The poet Cicely Hamilton, one of the founders of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, composed the lyrics for "The March of the Women." However, she was not Smyth's first choice for this job; she approached a number of other noted English poets, such as John Masefield, G. K. Chesterton, and John Galsworthy.⁴³ No evidence remains as to why these men declined the

⁴¹ Wood, "Performing Rights," 619.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 151.

job, and while it remains a possibility that Smyth was searching for literary prestige to give the work wide appeal, one cannot deny that the lyric power of the work would have been diminished with words written by someone not directly involved in the fight for women's suffrage. The first stanza reads:

Shout, shout, up with your song!
Cry with the wind, for the dawn is breaking;
March, march, swing you along,
Wide blows our banner, and hope is waking.
Song with its story, dreams with their glory
Lo! they call, and glad is their word.
Forward! hark how it swells,
Thunder of freedom, the voice of the lord.

This stanza, like all of the lyrics, contain a number of strong action verbs, urging the suffragettes to “shout” and “cry” as a way of continuing to spread their message that “hope is waking” for the cause of women's voting rights. Women leaving the home and using their voices in the public sphere became a revolutionary charge against the status quo. Yet, the lyrics never directly reference the suffragette movement, which adds to the appeal of the song. Overt references to the women's movement could have alienated a wider public; these more general lyrics are accessible to anyone who has ever felt oppressed by an over-arching force, like those in emerging nationalist movements.⁴⁴

The close of stanza four also contains some very vibrant imagery, proclaiming “March, march—many as one./ Shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend.” The coalescing of the movement—“many as one”—aligns with the unifying practice of language with nation building. Benedict Anderson explains how the rise of vernacular print culture and the decline of Latin increased the nationalist potential of Europe. He explains, “...solidarities had an outermost

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Wood, “Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music,” *Massachusetts Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 131.

stretch limited by vernacular legibilities. To put it another way, one can sleep with anyone, but one can only read some people's words."⁴⁵ Hamilton employs unifying rhetoric which harkens towards this idea of linguistic harmony, leading to the ultimate union of ideals.

Prior to Smyth's composition of "The March of the Women," the WSPU was using an arrangement of the French national anthem, "La Marseillaise," with newly composed, explicitly feminist lyrics, aptly titled "The Women's Marseillaise." The use of this tune, however, was never a great fit for English feminists considering the sensitive historical relationship between England and France, even without the growing tide of English nationalism in the early twentieth century. So while some remained loyal to the old protest song, "The March of the Women" was welcomed with open arms. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were especially delighted and determined to give the work the greatest premiere possible. A small volunteer suffragette choir performed the work on January 21, 1911 at a special meeting of the WSPU. A number of imprisoned suffragettes were welcomed home at this meeting and the march promised to be a token of appreciation for these women, while harkening back to the long-standing tradition of welcoming kings and dignitaries with marches and other forms of glorious music.⁴⁶ The work, immediately distributed widely by the Women's Press, infiltrated the city, even making it as far as 10 Downing Street; Prime Minister Asquith's daughter, Violet, later recalled how Smyth, "got past the hall porter, ran upstairs, and thumped out her Suffrage March on the piano in our drawing room—just above the room in which the Cabinet was then in session down below. We caught her at it, flushed with triumph and achievement."⁴⁷ The work received its professional

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 77.

⁴⁶ Wood, "Performing Rights," 617.

⁴⁷ Violet Bonham-Carter, "Life in Number 10 Downing Street," broadcast on BBC Home Service, 31 May 1944, BBC-LP 15807, quoted in Wood, "Performing Rights," 618.

debut on March 23, 1911, which allowed the WSPU to reach a much broader audience, thus helping the movement financially. Smyth trained the choir and orchestra for weeks.⁴⁸ After processing to the stage of Royal Albert Hall, Emmeline Pankhurst presented Smyth with a baton. At the beginning of the performance, Smyth urged all who knew the song to join in; as almost everyone in the audience knew the song, the amateur choir produced a massive sound. Those in attendance were so pleased that the performance raised over 5,000 pounds, greatly increasing the war chest of the WSPU.⁴⁹

The success of the Royal Albert Hall performance spurred Smyth to arrange the march for as many different types of ensembles as possible, greatly increasing the work's practicality. The song has been appropriately described by Wood as "a propaganda song, no less: cheap, portable, and pocketable, a multipurpose commodity for the mass market."⁵⁰ Smyth and the WSPU even created a solfege guide to encourage the musically illiterate to learn the tune.⁵¹ This is a clear deviation from second-wave criticisms of the suffragettes, insisting that this earlier movement was only concerned with the needs of upper-class white women. In Victorian and Edwardian England, society dictated upper-class women's basic musical training to assist in their role as hostesses. While one had to have some level of means and status to be able to purchase the solfege guide, it did make learning the tune markedly easier than purchasing the more

⁴⁸ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 151.

⁴⁹ Wood, "Performing Rights," 617.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 618.

expensive sheet music, particularly for women of lower class status, who did not have the privilege of musical training in their youth.⁵²

This song shaped the movement, as many characteristic events of the WSPU involved this piece in some fashion. Perhaps the most famous that directly involved Smyth took place during her month-long stay at Holloway Prison. Smyth participated in a militant campaign, ordered by Emmeline Pankhurst herself, to smash windows at homes of politicians who opposed women's suffrage, which led to her arrest and imprisonment. When the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham paid Smyth a visit, he first came across a large group of suffragettes marching around the prison yard, with Smyth nowhere to be found. However, upon further inspection, Beecham spotted her leaning out of an upper window of the prison, beating time furiously with a toothbrush as a way of encouraging the dedicated marchers below.⁵³ It is through events like this that the Smyth's music shaped a community of feminists—the feminist nation. These unique tunes were employed to create a community of shared experiences; even those not present for this notorious event could envision it occurring when they heard “The March of the Women.”

This work was so important to Smyth that she appropriated it for her fourth opera, *The Boatswain's Mate* (1915). This opera stands out in Smyth's collection as not only her most patently feminist opera in terms of plot, but features a clear return to English styles. Prior to this, Smyth's operas were all in the grand tradition of Wagnerian German opera, with rich orchestration and no spoken dialogue. *The Boatswain's Mate*, however, follows the stylistic

⁵² For more information on the cross-class nature of First Wave Feminism, see Chapter Five, “Trade, Industry and Organization: Working-Class Women and Work,” in Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1994); Michelle Myall, ““No Surrender!”: The Militancy of May Leigh, A Working-Class Suffragette,” in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 173-87.

⁵³ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 154-5.

conventions of a ballad opera, a genre associated with Britain for centuries, and noted for its general appeal.⁵⁴ Curtis Price and Robert D. Hume describe ballad operas as comedic, typically farcical, plays in which popular songs have been integrated.⁵⁵ Smyth utilized the melody of the march in the overture for the opera. While typically an operatic overture borrows musical themes from the larger work to set the musical scene (Smyth's early operas are great examples of this), in the overture for *The Boatswain's Mate*, Smyth prominently features "The March of the Women" as a way of contextualizing the political tone of the opera.⁵⁶

Smyth begins the overture in a familiar way, presenting the melody of the march, not deviating much at all from the original protest work. Then, for the next three minutes, she develops melodic and rhythmic motives, extracted from the original melody, to create a sense of disturbance. Smyth uses a number of chromatic harmonies and sets melodic figures in minor modes to simulate the turbulence felt by suffragettes as they persistently worked for social and political equality. Finally, at its most distressed point, "The March of the Women" returns in a triumphant setting with the full orchestra—soprano voices carry the melody and a jubilant brass fanfare imitates conventional heroic music to push the piece to a dramatic conclusion, as if a choir of suffragettes was marching through the streets of London, singing, "we will fight to the end, we will prevail!" "The March of the Women," which never appears again in the opera, prepares the audience for the feminist experience they are about to undergo along with the

⁵⁴ For information on the history of Ballad Opera and Great Britain, see Suzanne Aspden, "Ballads and Britons: Imagined Community and the Continuity of 'English' Opera," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 122, no. 1 (1997): 24-51; and Douglas Franklin O'Keefe, "Ballad Opera, Imitation, and the Formation of Genre" (Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2007).

⁵⁵ Curtis Price and Robert D. Hume. "Ballad Opera." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01887>.

⁵⁶ Wood, "Performing Rights," 628.

opera's protagonist, Mrs. Waters, a character modeled after Emmeline Pankhurst. Even the smallest utterance of the march's melody would have alerted the audience that this work would be associated with women of determined character, fighting for what they believed was right, which coincides with the plot of Smyth's fourth opera, the story of Mrs. Waters's active deflections of marriage offers and other devious plots from potential suitors.

Hey Nonny No

"The March of the Women" was the most notable work associated with the WSPU and Ethel Smyth's feminist advocacy. Nevertheless, Smyth composed a number of other vocal works that expressed her voracious appetite for feminist change. She mostly wrote vocal music to support the feminist movement for two main reasons. The most obvious is for the text, which can most easily communicate her political aims. Purely instrumental works are able to convey messages about a wide variety of topics, but text can present these ideas in a much more accessible way. Secondly, while community building occurs through the process of creating any kind of music in groups, even untrained individuals can participate in the formation of song. Not only are all of the members of the ensemble reciting the same message, they are also reciting it in the same way. For these reasons, large choral unions sprang up around the German states during their struggle for unification during the nineteenth century. Carl Dahlhaus notes that these groups, typically amateur, mingled "companionship and music in equal measure."⁵⁷

Using the sense of community felt through the performance of mass choral works, Smyth influenced the cultural canon of the feminist nation. She not only employed the emerging feminist rhetoric of female moral superiority, but also referenced the vibrant historical canon of

⁵⁷ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 47.

English poetry. By pulling these separate but equal forces into a single musical work, Smyth composed *Hey Nonny No* (1910), a piece that fits very well into the aesthetic vision of the feminist nation (as it might be the only place where it fits in at all). The piece, written before Smyth dedicated her time to the WSPU, expresses clear feminist ideals musically and lyrically, thus invoking and strengthening the feminist nation.

The lyrics for the work come from an anonymous sixteenth century Christ-Church manuscript:

Hey nonny no,
Men are fools that wish to die.
Is't not fine to dance and sing
When the bells of death do ring?
Is't not fine to swim in wine
And turn upon the toe?⁵⁸

The text, which discusses the imprudent nature of the human race, uses the gendered term, “man,” as a stand-in for the entire human race. Historian Gerda Lerner has critiqued the use of “man” to stand in for all of humanity: “By making the term ‘man’ subsume ‘woman’ and arrogate to itself the representation of all humanity, men have built a conceptual error of vast proportion into all their thought. By taking the half for the whole, they have not only missed the essence of whatever they are describing, but they have distorted it in such a fashion that they cannot see it correctly.”⁵⁹ While Smyth was not connected with the WSPU at the moment of *Hey Nonny No*’s composition, she was still the most prominent female composer in Great Britain at

⁵⁸ Ethel Smyth, *Hey Nonny No* (London: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911).

⁵⁹ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 220. See also Ann Bodine, “Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular ‘They’, Sex-Indefinite ‘He’, and ‘He or She’,” in *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Deborah Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1998), 124-38; Teresa de Lauretis, “Semiotics and Experience,” in *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 158-86; Margaret Gibbon, “Language, Thought, and Reality: Feminist Perspectives,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Language*, ed. Margaret Gibbon (London: Longman, 1999), 33-58.

that time, so her setting of such a text certainly did not go unnoticed. No evidence suggests how Smyth first came across the poem, but interest in historical texts in the English language was alive and well at the start of the twentieth century, as another form of British nationalistic expression.

After the tutti introduction, with the full choir singing the phrase “Hey nonny no” repeatedly, the female voices state in an a cappella fashion, “men are fools that wish to die.” Smyth marked the statement “fortissimo” and meant it to be sung emphatically, marking each “hey” with an accent. After another round of “hey nonny no” by the men and orchestra, the women again repeat “fools that wish to die,” as if emphasizing their disdain for their masculine counterparts. In fact, throughout the whole piece, the men never sing that whole phrase without their female counterparts; when that line is sung by the tenors and basses, they are either accompanied by sopranos or altos, or the phrase is broken up, leaving off the word “men” (See Figure 2.2). In this way, the work supports feminist ideology. The women performing the work, as well as Smyth herself, are proclaiming their disdain for the bacchanalian nature of the human race, which the patriarchy controlled up until that time (and, some would argue, continue to control). By having the male performers, in a sense, overlook this fact, Smyth was strengthening her case that men and the establishment were not doing enough to make the world a better place for women.

The work also presents a number of stylistic idiosyncrasies that make it stand out compared to other English pieces from this time period, especially those that could be deemed nationalistic. Kathleen Dale describes the energy of the work as “dæmonic.”⁶⁰ She goes on to describe how the work stands on its own, far apart from other English choral works written

⁶⁰ Kathleen Dale, “Appendix B. Ethel Smyth’s Music: A Critical Study,” in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, by Christopher St. John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 291.

45 **Tempo di Valse pesante**

Soprano *f* Hey non-ny, hey non-ny,

Alto *ff* Men are fools... that wish to die. *p*

Tenor *ff* Men are fools... that wish to die. *p*

Bass *ff* Men are fools that wish to die. *p*

Piano *f* 3

51 hey non-ny.

mf dance...

mf non-ny, non-ny no.

f are... fools,

mf espress. marcato dim.

Figure 2.2. Ethel Smyth, *Hey Nonny No: From a Christ-Church M.-S. 16th Century for Mixed Chorus and Orchestra, Piano-Vocal Reduction* (London: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911), Measures 45-57.

during the fin-de-siècle: “stark and strident, an audacious blend of primitiveness and modernity, a dare-devil of a roisters’ song...The heavily accented *Tempo di valse* rhythm and the continual hammering-in of chords and melodic fragments containing bare augmented intervals create the musical atmosphere of utter abandon required by the words.”⁶¹ The works most frequently cited as being English-nationalist from this time period draws heavily on the pastoral topos, which this work clearly rebukes. And while this source material comes from the annals of English history, the words are set unconventionally for works from the Edwardian age.

This unconventionality, though, makes it a perfect piece to be included in the feminist nation canon. In upbraiding the hegemonically created aesthetic standards, a new, broader definition of acceptable beauty can be created by “Others” welcoming alternative standards. Elizabeth Wood reminds us that this work, in no way, fits the mold of a “feminine” piece of music, as it lacks “melodic lyricism, diatonic passivity, rhythmic regularity, and delicate or muted instrumentation.”⁶² Unfortunately for Smyth, however, this modernist bent did become the accepted style, just a few years later, after she modified her own style to fit better the tastes of the English public. Elizabeth Wood compares the raucous nature of the work to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, composed a mere three years later.⁶³ In modifying her aesthetic sensibility, Smyth’s music became accessible to a wider audience; this move undoubtedly had political motivations. By reaching a wider audience aesthetically, her feminist ideals became heard and known by a wider swath of population, spreading the ideals of the feminist nation.

⁶¹ Dale, “Appendix B. Ethel Smyth’s Music,” 298.

⁶² Wood, “Performing Rights,” 620.

⁶³ Ibid.

Regrettably, scholars and performers alike have neglected the work, in part due to its sheer difficulty. This piece falls into the unfortunate volume of Smyth's works that have yet to be recorded by professional ensembles, which is even more surprising considering the acclaim it received from a number of Smyth's more famous colleagues. Gustav Holst wrote to Smyth in 1921, complaining that the piece was too hard for his choir at Morley College to perform, continuing, "You really have made it a bit stiff! If it wasn't so jolly, I wouldn't mind. But the annoying part is that it is such good fun. Perhaps we can tackle it some day."⁶⁴ Percy Grainger was even more enthusiastic, writing after only seeing a half-finished score, "My only strong instincts about 'H. Nonny No' are, as I hope you already guess, *boundless delight* and admiration. I think it one of the most attractive things I have ever heard, original, moving and full of subtle grace and power; I simply long to see the finished score, and hear it done."⁶⁵ Coming from one of the most unique composers of the twentieth century, this clearly suggests that the work deserves more serious scholarly attention.

Conclusion—The Feminist Nation's Legacy

In her fifth volume of memoirs, aptly titled *Female Pippings in Eden* (1933), Smyth goes into fervent detail on the degradation and oppression of women creating music throughout history. She argues that at the time of creation, it was Eve who discovered music, causing Adam to say, "'Stop that horrible noise...besides if *any one's going to make it, it's not you but me.*'"⁶⁶ She understood that when Adam called Eve's compositions "noise," rather than "music," he was

⁶⁴ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 152.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁶ Ethel Smyth, *Female Pippings in Eden* (London: P. Davies, Limited, 1933), 3.

attempting to silence not only her music, but also her desire to give voice to her imagination.

Smyth continues in excess of fifty pages, discussing the state of women composers, arguing that men are the ones in charge of all musical institutions—the music schools, the critical presses, the orchestras, the publishing houses. These men do not see the concern of women composers and have no problem limiting women’s ability to enter into musical realms of power. In these memoirs, Smyth set herself as the hero; the one who would bring female composers to the forefront of English musical life. To do this, she harnessed two political storms gaining strength in Europe: the strong tide of nationalism and the growing gale of feminism. In an alternative reading of her working to use these independent movements for her own musical gains, new understandings of the long-ranging implications of Smyth’s career as a composer of vocal works can be drawn.

While differing from conventional understandings of feminist nationalism, it becomes clear that viewing the first-wave feminist movement as a form of nationalism provides scholars across a wide variety of disciplines with the tools to rationalize a number of theoretical hurdles that might come up. As a proud Englishwoman, she believed that the petty idea that women were not fundamentally equal to men should be abolished, and she labored toward this goal in the way she best knew: through the power of music. As can be seen in her choral music, the rebuking and redefining of stylistic conventions might come at the price of performances and critical acclaim, but the payoffs of inspired political change are astounding. Drawing upon the English desire to formulate a stronger art music establishment, independent from that of continental Europe, Smyth was not afraid to harness varied musical rhetorics to create a vocabulary to be utilized by suffragettes and feminists alike. Whether the mixing of the masculine march style with protest lyrics and slightly unusual melodic phrasing in “The March of the Women” or the rambunctious

rhythms and non-standard harmonic language with standard English poetry in *Hey Nonny No*, the effect is the same: the creation of new musical possibilities can be used to inspire political change.⁶⁷

Smyth's feminist music even had a lasting impact on the way modern individuals think of the suffragettes. The phrase "shoulder to shoulder," from "The March of the Women," was used to parody suffragettes in the 1964 Disney classic movie musical, *Mary Poppins*. In the film, Jane and Michael's mother, Winifred Banks, is depicted as involved in the WSPU and sings her own number at the beginning of the movie, titled "Sister Suffragette." Returning from a meeting of the WSPU, she tells the women servants of the house that they "should have been there," ignoring the fact that their employment to Mrs. Banks clearly kept them away from the meeting, even if they wanted to attend. She urges her servants to "cast off the shackles of yesterday! *Shoulder to shoulder* into the fray! [emphasis added]"⁶⁸ While this turn of phrase could very well be a coincidence, considering that the song goes on to mention Emmeline Pankhurst by name and mention the general goals of the WSPU and that they would use militant action to achieve them, that only solidifies the appropriateness of the phrase in the original lyrics. However, the most unfortunate detail is the negative image of feminism that this Disney classic promulgates; not only is Mrs. Banks shown as ditzy and oblivious, she spreads the ill-informed view that feminists "adore men individually [they] agree that as a group they're rather stupid."⁶⁹ This depiction, in a sense, reflects ideas about feminism and female-centered communities in the early

⁶⁷ See Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ *Mary Poppins*, directed by Robert Stevenson (1964; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

1960s—that women felt they knew more than their husbands, but were more than likely just bored.⁷⁰ And while this is certainly preferable to the modern stigmatized vision of the unshaven, man-hating feminist or the plethora of other anti-feminist strategies, it is still far from accurate.⁷¹

In some ways, we have achieved Smyth's goal of the full integration of the feminist nation into conventional art music. The alternative musical rhetorics Smyth employed have since become orthodox and female composers are beginning to receive the critical and public acclaim that they deserve. Now more and more women are winning major composition awards, making it easier for Smyth's goal—for music not to be judged on the basis of sex—to be accomplished.⁷² The key in the preceding statement is “easier,” as the music of female composers is still handled with a sense of tokenism in many cases, though hopefully to a lesser extent than Smyth felt in her day. As music of female composers moves from sidebar to mainstream in our musicological texts, our ability as scholars to make necessary judgments on the value of a piece of music, regardless of the composer's gender (or sexuality, race, ability, etc.) is strengthened. The value of a work is shifting for musicologists—from simply being an aesthetic masterpiece to respecting a composition for its potential to enlighten us about times, places, people, and ideas. Great headway has been made since the outset of Smyth's blending of feminist and nationalist movements to create a more equitable environment for female composers, though we have yet to reach her goal of this true equality. Through understanding the successes of those who came

⁷⁰ For reference, Betty Friedan's groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963) was published one year prior to the release of *Mary Poppins*. This work is frequently cited as sparking second-wave feminism.

⁷¹ For more on a variety of modern anti-feminist strategies, see Susan J. Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

⁷² Ellen Zwilich became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in music in 1983. Since then an additional five women have won the prize (three of those in the last six years). See www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Music.

before us, we might be better able to build on their achievements to obtain their exhaustive target.

CHAPTER 3

DAME SMYTH AND THE SEA

It is Saturday night and you have just found your seat in the opera house. The lights go down, the curtain rises, and for the next few hours, you witness an unfolding love story: the heroine has transgressed some line of civilized morality, and her lover does everything in his power to reform and save her. Maybe she changes a little, but it is still not enough—she sings her swan song and dies. The curtain falls and applause roars; justice has been served.

Care to venture a guess on which opera you just saw? Even if you dared to speculate, it would be nearly impossible to know for sure, since numerous canonical operas follow the same basic plot concerning the fates of immoral women. Through the centuries, such works have become standards in the repertoire, even though their portrayals of women are abhorrent and distasteful. Few works that have challenged the tragic destinies of immoral heroines remain in the repertoire; rather powerful operatic women frequently meet untimely deaths.¹ While some might claim aesthetic superiority for bulwarks of the canon, it is just as plausible that those works that violate accepted narrative and moral codes retire from the stage because they fail to conform to social expectations. That is, audiences expect plots to punish women for bad behavior. What, then, might we make of an opera that deploys conventional moral tropes, but does not use them in the standard ways? Can such a work both conform to traditional morality and simultaneously subvert it? Can such a maneuver be called feminist? If so, how can this strategy illuminate the interpretive possibilities of other works?

¹ This trend has been documented extensively in Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, foreword by Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Examples of these strong women who meet untimely deaths include those discussed by Clément, such as Carmen, Aida, and Elektra, in their eponymous works, as well as others not mentioned, such as Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth* and the title character in Richard Strauss's *Salome*.

In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions, using Ethel Smyth's opera *The Wreckers* (1906) as a case study. Smyth portrays Victorian views on women through a number of well-worn operatic tropes (the fallen woman, live burial, and cleansing rituals), all while using these narrative devices in innovative, subversive ways. I argue that by employing these images, Smyth fashioned an opera that would appear conventional to Victorian consumers, while simultaneously inspiring them to sympathize with the "Others," who become victims of one community's unethical traditions. In effect, this leaves the audience questioning a number of important beliefs, such as the supremacy of romantic love, the dominance of religion and the importance of unified communal thought. Aspects of Smyth's biography also illuminate how her own marginalization informs the construction of her characters and their tragic fates; her adulterous relationship with the opera's librettist, her lesbian identity, and experiments with religion all shed light on *The Wreckers*' social critique. By using a third-wave, intersectional, interdisciplinary feminist approach—drawing on literature, anthropology, political science, and sociology—to analyze this opera, we can better perceive Smyth's feminist critique of society and its oppressive and troubled morality.

Victorian Morality and First-Wave Feminism

To understand the many and varied moral contradictions in *The Wreckers*, one must first reckon with the state of English society at the end of the nineteenth century. This was a period of immense change for the British Empire, exemplified by the dichotomy between the classes, as well as the social pursuits of upper-class, first-wave feminists.

Until recently, many scholars viewed the Victorian Era (1837-1901) as a period that emphasized public and private discipline and decorum; it was considered the age of high

manners and civility.² Michel Foucault opens the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* with the assertion that the Victorians employed silence as their *modus operandi* with regards to sexuality.³ However, the upsurge in moral legislation and publication (most notably regarding sexual practices) seems to contradict this notion, for it reveals anxiety that the traditional, religious-based means to control sexuality was no longer enough. Philippa Levine comments that “In many respects, the state assumed the role played in earlier periods by the church; in its sanctioning of marriage and its pronouncements as to the grounds on which divorce is valid, in its defining forms of licit and illicit sexual behavior, in its treatment of prostitution, it was as much a moral governing body as religions had been in other ages or as they were in other cultures.”⁴ This shift in power from church to state was a telling and almost universal feature of nineteenth-century industrialization.

With the rise of modern capitalism and a unified system of wealth, control and structure were needed in spaces formerly left to the people. Great migrations from rural spaces to urban arenas marked huge shifts in the living practices for the English public. As life became centered upon amassing capital, rather than working simply for sustenance, new concerns dominated citizens’ minds. Prostitution, while having existed for ages, became much more visible and accessible, and with this came a marked rise in infectious diseases, sexually transmitted and

² See David Morse, *High Victorian Culture* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1993); Michael Patterson, *A Brief History of Life in Victorian Britain: A Social History of Queen Victoria’s Reign* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2008); George Malcolm Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Second Edition, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 2.

⁴ Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1994), 131.

otherwise.⁵ The Victorian era also saw the pathologizing of homosexuality and its condensation into an identity rather than an act.⁶ Lawmakers attempted to control these sexual practices in an effort to quell social unrest. Levine explains, “Marriage and divorce, venereal disease, prostitution, male homosexuality, contraception and incest all became areas of judicial attention in the late nineteenth century.”⁷

Emerging notions of biological essentialism supported these moral ideologies. As outlined in previous chapters, following the scientific revolution and the professionalization of medicine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men of science believed that biological difference precipitated the disparity in gendered norms and attitudes.⁸ One of the most telling features about this development in relation to Victorian morality is the marked shift in opinion on women’s sexuality. Throughout history, women were seen as the lustful sex, exemplified by Eve’s surrender to temptation at the time of Creation.⁹ Victorians viewed women in a very

⁵ See Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶ See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*; David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jonathan Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁷ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 128.

⁸ See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). The choice of phrase—“men of science”—is deliberate; while there were certainly publications by midwives and other women with knowledge of the human body, this output is nowhere near as vast as that of men. Furthermore, these women also began to lose authority during the rise of the medical establishment in the nineteenth century. See Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, Contemporary Classics Edition (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2010).

⁹ See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Bram Dijkstra, *The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

different light—ladies were encouraged to be naive in the bedroom and clean in the mind.¹⁰ This shift is easily connected to the rise of the bourgeois, capital-based society, in which women no longer predominantly worked alongside men in farming communities, as well as the epiphany that female orgasm was not essential for procreation.¹¹ In essence, a “sheltering” of women took place.¹²

These ever-strengthening views on the differences between the sexes led to the creation of separate sphere ideology. Simply put, it was assumed that men and women occupied different mental spaces, so they should control different physical spaces in the same regard. “Proper” families were structured in a way so that men ventured outside of the home to work; conversely, women were supposed to stay home and keep the house, as well as act as the moral standard-of-

¹⁰ See Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siècle* (New York: Viking Press, 1990); Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (New York: Universe Books, 1978); Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and The Politics of Sexuality c 1850-1940* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1994).

¹¹ See chapter two, “Destiny is Anatomy,” of Laquer, *Making Sex*.

¹² Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 129. See also Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain, 1789-1837* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007).

excellence for the family.¹³ The idea that the public world was unclean and capable of corrupting all but the strongest individuals brought about this change. As these strong individuals were undoubtedly men, it only made sense for women to stay home.¹⁴ By denying women's access to the public sphere, it became almost possible to deny the existence of their sexuality, making

¹³ This proper family structure is influenced greatly by class prejudice and privilege, as lower-class women were forced to seek employment outside the home as a matter of survival. See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, With a new introduction by Tristram Hunt* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010); Meg Gomersall, *Working-Class Girls in Nineteenth-Century England: Life, Work and Schooling* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 2007); Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Jürgen Habermas argued that this public/private sphere dichotomy—which emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—was essential in creating the ideal, modern form of democracy celebrated in the Western world. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, asst. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991). This theory, needless to say, has been heavily critiqued by feminist historians, bringing to light the hurdles that subaltern individuals had to conquer to genuinely enter the communal sphere. See Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor, "Sex and Skill: Notes towards a Feminist Economics," *Feminist Review* 6 (1980): 79-88; Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, preface to *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere*, ed. Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), ix-xv.

¹⁴ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 130. The 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* only added fuel to this fire, as many members of the British ruling class took up Darwin's theories and used them to advocate for what is now known as "Social Darwinism." Essentially, for social Darwinists, strong individuals should see their wealth and social status increase, with the inverse being true for the weak. See Piers J. Hale, *Political Descent: Malthus, Mutualism, and the Politics of Evolution in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 67. These notions have subsequently been linked to gender disparity, as well as eugenics, imperialism, and racism. See Jonathan Conlin, *Evolution and the Victorians: Science, Culture and Politics in Darwin's Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

them far easier to control and command. Furthermore, as the women were physically closer to the children through the act of childbirth, who better to see to their upbringing than the mother?¹⁵

These beliefs concerning Victorian women were closely tied to the religious culture of the day. Barbara Caine argues that, “For Victorian feminists, as for anyone else involved in Victorian public life, religious questions were ones of central importance...Their religious beliefs were central to their feminist commitment and provided the framework through which they could articulate their feminist beliefs.”¹⁶ The Church of England dictated religious life in Great Britain; although there were certainly other theological forces at play—most notably the Catholic Church—Anglicanism dominated the British way of living. Furthermore, like most Christian denominations, the Anglican Church practiced a sort of paradox by arguing the supreme equality of all souls, even though women were not offered uniform opportunities within the religion.¹⁷

¹⁵ Of course, this is only troubled by the longing for and fetishizing of the maid and governess throughout the middle and upper class. It became the marker of a well-off family to have another woman enter the home to look after the children, with this servant being under the control of the wife. For more information on the sexual fetishization of the working class in Victorian England, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), Chapter Three “Imperial Leather: Race, Cross-Dressing and the Cult of Domesticity”; Leonore Davidoff, “Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England,” *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 406-28. The fact that these governesses were from a lower social standing than the family that employed them, and thus—at least in the public eye—having a questionable moral background, was not an issue. See McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, Chapter Two “‘Massa’ and Maids: Power and Desire in the Imperial Metropolis,” and Chapter Four “Psychoanalysis, Race, and Female Fetishism”; Frank E. Huggett, *Life Below Stairs: Domestic Servants in England from Victorian Times* (New York: Scribner, 1977); Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Second Edition (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2009); Sue Hawkins, “From Maid to Matron: Nursing as a Route to Social Advancement in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 1 (2010): 125-43.

¹⁶ Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12.

¹⁷ Sue Morgan, “Introduction. Women, Religion and Feminism: Past, Present and Future Perspectives” in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, ed. Sue Morgan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2. For more on the relationship between women and various religious factions in Victorian Britain, see Sue Morgan, ed., *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, ed., *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (London: Routledge, 2010); Julie Melnyk, ed., *Women’s Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998).

The rise of the Evangelical movement was also a powerful force during the Victorian Era. With a focus on service and philanthropy, Evangelical organizations provided a place for women with an activist streak to work on improving their communities. In fact, at the end of the nineteenth century, close to seventy-five percent of English charitable organizations were controlled by Evangelicals.¹⁸ Church-going and philanthropic service also provided an opportunity for women to go outside of the home and socialize; while men had a variety of social clubs, those open to women were few and typically tied to a Christian organizations of some kind.¹⁹ Women used these consortiums not only to build social networks, but also give voice to their varied concerns about the moral degradation of English society.²⁰ These Victorian ladies spearheaded a variety of social reform movements across the British Empire, focusing primarily on issues of education, abolition, temperance, and curbing prostitution. These early campaigns for improving humanity proved to be formative experiences that inspired early feminists to push for their own civil and political equality.

One of the first and most important changes they aimed for was men's and women's equal opportunity for education. Numerous factors motivated this struggle. Primarily, education would give women the training necessary to be paid for work outside the home. Furthermore, it would provide them with the rhetorical tools to combat men's discrimination against them, while

¹⁸ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: History from the 1730s to 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 120.

¹⁹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 128.

²⁰ A superb recent depiction of this trend is the character of Lady Hyacinth in the 2013 musical comedy *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. At the start of the song "Lady Hyacinth Abroad," the title character laments, "If I'm ever to show my face in society again, I've got to find a new cause of my own." She is eventually convinced, by a family member trying to kill her, to open an orphanage in Egypt, a leper colony in India, and form a philanthropic mission to central Africa. Throughout this number, Lady Hyacinth proves that she is not so much interested in enacting social change; rather, it is about improving her public standing.

helping alleviate the boredom of domestic life.²¹ Through willful protesting, women slowly obtained spaces to learn, both by the establishment of women's schools and universities, as well as by being allowed to sit for exams at the major British universities.²² And while the state of girl's education around the world is hardly a resolved issue, the work of these early feminists fighting for education paved the way for other campaigns of social justice.²³

Abolition and temperance were also early feminist campaigns, as they had a direct bearing on their day-to-day lives. While slavery was abolished across most of the British Empire in 1833, its legacy remained vivid. Anti-Slavery Societies were some of the first groups in which women were allowed (and somewhat encouraged) to share their views.²⁴ Furthermore, the image of slavery was frequently used as a descriptive metaphor for the place of women in British society in the nineteenth century. In his 1869 polemic *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill opined, "Even if every woman were a wife, and if every wife ought to be a slave, all the more would these slaves stand in need of legal protection: and we know what legal protections the slaves have, where the laws are made by their masters."²⁵

²¹ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 26

²² Ibid., 54-6.

²³ This is clearly still a very pertinent issue, as evidenced by the winners of 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, Kailash Satyarthi of India and Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, who received the prize for their work on democratizing education worldwide. See Malala Yousafzai, with Christina Lamb, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

²⁴ See Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey, editors, *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Karen I. Halbersleben, *Women's Participation in the British Antislavery Movement, 1824-1865* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1993).

²⁵ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Dover Thrift Edition (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), 52.

Many early feminists saw temperance, or the push to limit the consumption of alcohol, as a way to reduce violence against women. Alcohol-induced assaults were frequent during the Victorian Era and, in many cases, women were powerless to do anything about it on an individual scale. Even taking away the threat of physical retaliation, women were economically dependent on their husbands, so leaving them was simply out of the question.²⁶ However, by supporting temperance or outright prohibition, women could not only protect their own well-being, but also that of fellow women.

Perhaps the most pressing moral issue to Victorian women was prostitution. The sale of sex was an easy way for young women to make money in London and other metropolitan areas, for it was one of the few occupations to all women, regardless of social standing or educational level. One of the problems faced in tackling this issue was that most individuals were more concerned with the men visiting the prostitutes than for the prostitutes themselves. Reformers viewed men as putting their moral and physical health in the hands of a woman with no concern for others; she was simply enjoying sinful pleasures, relaxing, and making a profit.²⁷ In this way, early reformers sought not so much to solve the problem, but to remove it from the public domain. Ben Wilson maintains, “The challenge was not to *cure* the problem, but to sweep it

²⁶ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 132. It is crucial to note that this is still the case today. For more information on the relation between early feminist campaigns and temperance, see Cynthia Belaskie, “Tying White Ribbons Around the World: Manchester’s Temperance Women and Late-Nineteenth Century Transnational Feminism,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 46-61; Ian Tyrrell, “Temperance, Feminism, and the WCTU: New Interpretations and New Directions,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 5, no. 2 (December, 1986): 27-36; Lisa Shawn Strange, “Fiction and Feminism: Women’s Voices in the Nineteenth-Century Temperance Movement,” *The Review of Communication* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 4-6; Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1994); Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).

²⁷ Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values*, 46-7. See also Dennis Grube, *At the Margin of Victorian Britain: Politics, Immorality and Britishness in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2013), Chapter 8, “‘Un-British’ Women: The ‘Problem’ of Prostitution.”

away to ‘darkness’ so that good, innocent young men would not be sucked into vice against their will.”²⁸ Later, when Jack the Ripper murdered several women, his actions actually supported antagonist attitudes to all women who expressed sexual knowledge—not only prostitutes, but also midwives, nurses, and other women with medical training.²⁹ While advertised as protecting women in danger, the lengths that men went to safeguard women actually just reinforced delineations of public and private space. Judith Walkowitz argues, “Whatever their conscious ethos, male night patrols in Whitechapel had the same structural effect of enforcing the segregation of social space: women were relegated to the interior of a prayer meeting or their homes, behind locked doors; men were left to patrol the public spaces and the street.”³⁰ There were only a limited number of advocates for the protection of prostitutes and other lower-class women for their own good. Feminists, such as Josephine Baker, argued that by closing brothels and throwing hundreds of women on the streets, the killer would have many more potential victims.³¹

Efforts to control prostitution eventually turned to the idea of limiting and regulating the practice to whatever extent possible to protect the health of the British nation, but eliminating the vice altogether seemed impossible. The Contagious Disease Acts (1864, 1866, 1869) were designed to combat venereal disease among British sailors and soldiers. Historian Alain Corbin argues that these acts, particularly the 1866 iteration, were modeled after the French system of

²⁸ Ibid., 222. Emphasis in the original.

²⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, “Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (Autumn, 1982): 561.

³⁰ Ibid., 563.

³¹ Ibid., 567.

combating prostitution.³² Even the name of the acts showcase Victorian unease about sexuality; writers and journalists used many parenthetical expressions in discussing the acts to clear up any ambiguity about their purpose.³³ In essence, the acts licensed sexual vice among British men, while controlling, regulating, and condemning women. By moving the regulation from men (particularly soldiers) to prostitutes, the patriarchy solidified their supremacy; male establishments, such as the military, encouraged this vital move. The 1857 report of the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army noted that while sexual ailments were more common among service members than the general public, the practice of recurrent genital exams bruised the egos of servicemen.³⁴ Furthermore, Walkowitz suggests that, “the acts also reflected a new enthusiasm for state intervention into the lives of the poor on medical and sanitary grounds.”³⁵ Thus, these laws easily fall into line with the trends of moral and social improvement movements of the Victorian era. While the acts eventually became the target of an extensive repeal campaign, these statutes greatly entrenched the views of prostitution in the long run.³⁶

³² Alain Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,” *Representations* 14, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Spring 1986): 209. Corbin’s article outlines the views on prostitutes in nineteenth-century France that brought about the toleration and eventual regulation of prostitution.

³³ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 70. Examples of these expressions include “Contagious Diseases (Women) Act” and “Contagious Diseases (Not Concerned with Animals) Act.”

³⁴ “Report of the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1857, XVIII, referenced in Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

³⁵ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 71.

³⁶ See Chapters Five and Seven, “The Repeal Campaign” and “Class and Gender Conflict Within the Repeal Movement,” respectively, of Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, for more information on the repeal campaigns. Only recently have certain European nations (most notably, Sweden) begun to target prostitution with the continued criminalization of *buying* sex, but not the selling of it. See Max Waltman, “Sweden’s prohibition of purchase of sex: The law’s reasons, impact, and potential,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 34, no. 5 (September-October 2011): 449-74.

In these many and varied ways, intersections of sexuality and morality were of chief concern among the Victorians, protestors, and lay-folk alike. Likewise, operas and other music dramas focused on morality, and had been shaping perspectives on these issues since the emergence of the genre in the seventeenth century. As we will see, operas take up the particular shibboleths of their time. Smyth's *The Wreckers* will address women's sexuality and power, as well as delicate distinction between religion and absolute morality.

Morality Tropes on the Operatic Stage

Moral judgments have taken a variety of forms on opera stages across the centuries; however, composers tend to reiterate only a finite number of these in relation to female behavior. Catherine Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* provides an introduction to the ways in which Western operas offer limited narratives about women: "there is no liberation. Quite the contrary; they suffer, they cry, they die...Not one escapes with her life, or very few of them do..."³⁷

Perhaps the most iconic trope of feminine unruliness is that of the fallen woman: it focuses on a woman of suspect morality, who in almost all cases experiences loss of not only virtue but also of agency. These losses are not replaceable; in very few cases is the woman allowed to regain her reputation.³⁸ The inevitable consequence of this fall from grace is death, and frequently her diseased morality will manifest in some sort of bodily affliction. Such depictions of illness embodies the belief that prostitutes were actually rotting from the inside out

³⁷ Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, 11. Clément has been criticized for her neglect of comic operas, as well as others where female characters are able to avoid being "undone." See Ralph P. Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?" in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 59-98.

³⁸ Gretchen Braun, "'Untarnished Purity': Ethics, Agency, and the Victorian Fallen Woman," *Women's Studies* 44, no. 3 (April 2015): 343.

from the excess of semen and other bodily fluids obtained through the course of their work. In essence, she is a living corpse.³⁹

This fallen woman provides a foil for a woman of proper decorum. Victorian men believed that women existed in two classes: pure women, appropriate for marriage, and women meant to be exploited only for sexual gratification.⁴⁰ Authors, librettists, and society simply reinvented the Madonna/Whore complex.⁴¹ Literary scholar George Watt reasons that for Victorian society, “Keeping the two worlds apart was essential for the preservation of the *status quo*. If a woman transgressed this represented a threat to the whole system—this threat could not be tolerated.”⁴² This menace must be eliminated, leading to the death or expulsion of fallen women across literary and operatic texts.

While several examples of the fallen woman exist in the operatic tradition, easily the most famous is Violetta in Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata* (literally, *The Fallen Woman*, 1863). As a courtesan, Violetta has tumbled so far from the path of proper morality that even opera’s strongest force—the bourgeois love of a man for a woman—is not enough to save her. Throughout the work, Violetta dreams of redemption, as a part of her unconscious aspiration for the heteronormative ideal. Violetta must die for her sins via consumption, symbolizing her bodily decay brought about by her wonton sex life.⁴³ In this way, she easily complies with the image of

³⁹ Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality,” 210-1.

⁴⁰ George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 8.

⁴¹ See Estela V. Welldon, *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood* (London: Karnac Books, 1988); Deborah Tanzer, “Real Men Don’t Eat Strong Women: The Virgin-Madonna-Whore Complex Updated,” *The Journal of Psychohistory* 12, no. 4 (April 1985): 487-95.

⁴² George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, 8.

⁴³ Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, 63-4.

the living corpse. Violetta receives a moment of relief in Act III when her beloved Alfredo returns to her, but she must complete her part of the social contract and perish for her licentiousness. Joseph Kerman says it best: “In the end, it is sexual promiscuity that kills her.”⁴⁴

Another image frequently associated with the fallen woman is that of the live burial. This extreme form of isolation provides a number of benefits to society: not only does it remove the fallen woman from the community, but it also warns women that immoral ladies almost inevitably die an excruciating death. In other words, it gives the audience the opportunity to experience the transgressive character’s regret. Gretchen Braun reasons, “Both live burial and the Victorian concept of sexual fall are characterized by complete social and psychic isolation without the cessation of consciousness. The shunned sexual profligate and the Gothic victim walled up alive in an underground cell are alike cursed with an intense awareness that their existence drags on although they cannot engage with the social world.”⁴⁵ This burial, in essence, acts as a prison, meant to tame the body and the mind.⁴⁶ Like the modern prison’s desire to warn and rehabilitate transgressors (or something like this), the goal of operas and novels that warned women of the consequences of “bad” behavior.⁴⁷

The canonical live burial in western European opera occurs in Verdi’s *Aida* (1871). For his betrayal of the Pharaoh, the warrior Radamès is sentenced to death by live burial. It is only after the tomb has been sealed that he realizes that his beloved Aida hid herself in the vault so

⁴⁴ Joseph Kerman, “Verdi and the undoing of women,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (March 2006): 23.

⁴⁵ Gretchen Braun, “‘Untarnished Purity,’” 348-9.

⁴⁶ Literary examples of live burial include Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Premature Burial” (1844), “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Emily Jolly’s *Witch-hampton Hall: Five Scenes in the Life of its Last Lady* (1864), and, to an extent, vampire stories, exemplified by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

⁴⁷ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

they could die together. While not the standard fallen woman, Aida has violated the standards of sexuality by inspiring Radamès to ignore his socially more acceptable lover Amneris, the Pharaoh's daughter; his love for Aida also causes his undoing, encouraging his treasonous acts. So, for her seduction, Aida must die; in opera, women who use sexuality to control men must be punished.

Another closely tied trope of morality would be that of purifying the sinful. Cleansing rituals can be found among numerous religious beliefs across time and place. However, Victorians held the rite of Christian baptism in the highest regard. While the sacrament has been far from stable throughout history, the general practice involves washing an individual with water to symbolically remove their sinful deeds in the eyes of the Christian God; it is also used to signify the individual's acceptance into the Church, as well as their devotion to God's will.⁴⁸ The practice arose from the biblical story in which Jesus Christ underwent the ritual, with the help of John the Baptist.⁴⁹ In fact, this ritual washing arose from various practices within Judaism.⁵⁰ Within the British Evangelical revival during the early nineteenth century, baptism became a central issue.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Galatians 3:27-8 (King James Version) reads, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." By undergoing the rite of baptism, one renounces all identity categorizations in complete subservience to the Christian God.

⁴⁹ See Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-23 (King James Version) for full recounting of the story.

⁵⁰ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 33.

⁵¹ In particular, the Evangelical movement was concerned with aspects of free will and when an individual is able to give his or her being fully to the Christian God. Should an infant, who does not understand religion, be baptized? A colonial subject? For a detailed explanation of these debates, see David M. Thompson, *Baptism, Church and Society in Modern Britain: From the Evangelical Revival to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005).

With this immense concern over baptism during the Victorian Era, fetishization and commodification of washing and cleanliness simultaneously became widespread across the British Empire. Almost any fictional or real image of an upper-class home featured a maid or servant dressed in white, meant to symbolize the level of physical cleanliness of the home. Furthermore, the nineteenth century saw the advent of daily washing, on top of the typical weekly bath among middle- and working-class individuals, thus raising society's standards of cleanliness.⁵² As with many products during this height of the industrial revolution, soap became a commodity, marketed with specific brands and campaigns, all arguing that their product would clean with the most intensity. These advertisements frequently employed before and after imagery as a way of showing the effectiveness of the products. The before image would often in some way recall "lower" beings, from animals to people that the Victorians dehumanized.⁵³ Anne McClintock observes that class and racial prejudice motivated these advertising choices: "What could not be incorporated into the industrial formation (women's domestic economic value) was displaced onto the invented domain of the primitive, and thereby disciplined and contained."⁵⁴

This notion of discipline and containment, briefly mentioned by McClintock, serves as an important reminder about the true meaning of cleansing rituals. While typically described in

⁵² Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Second Edition (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 122-3. See also Julia Twigg, *Bathing: The Body and Community Care* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁵³ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 214-6. For example, Monkey Brand Soap used images of lower primates to represent those in need of a good bath. Pears Soap, conversely, used a black child that, when washed with their soap, became pure white.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 216. Chapter Five of McClintock's book, "Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising," provides a fascinating analysis on the implications of soap advertisements across the British Empire. See also Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (London, Verso, 1990). In other words, these advertisements, greatly offensive to modern eyes, also had the effect of contributing to the continued devaluation of perceived "women's work."

relation to the service they provide the impure, they also serve the social function of taming anything (or anyone) that the dominant society sees as dangerous or out of order. Mary Douglas's influential monograph *Purity and Danger* describes this phenomenon across a wide swath of cultural contexts. In describing the connections between pollution, morals, and rites of purification, she asserts, "...the whole complex of ideas including pollution and purification become a kind of safety net which allows people to perform what, in terms of social structure, could be like acrobatic feats on the high wire...Easy purification enables people to defy with impunity the hard realities of their social system."⁵⁵ In other words, by simply removing from sight and mind what causes the dominant group unease, they are able ignore a multitude of issues with an easy scrub-down. The fact these purges can bring about grave instances of social injustice should not be understated.

As with the fallen woman, purifying and cleansing tropes abound across the operatic repertoire; however, the one most pertinent (and most widely known) is staged in Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (1945). After a long string of unfortunate circumstances in which Peter Grimes's young male apprentices are lost at sea, his community is convinced that he is a murderer, leading Grimes to kill himself at sea to assuage his neighbors' fears. Grimes's persecution throughout the opera is based solely on his outsider status from his community—his difference and separation from the community, intensified by the village's suspicions. Philip Brett wrote extensively on the homoerotic undertones in *Grimes* and a number of other Britten operas,⁵⁶ and has shown that Britten's own outsider status in the mid-twentieth century, not only

⁵⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo, with a new preface by the author*, Routledge Classics Edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 170.

⁵⁶ See Philip Brett, *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, ed. George E. Haggerty, intro. Susan McClary, after. Jenny Doctor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

as a homosexual, but also as an artist, a pacifist, and a pederast may have inspired some of his operatic characters.⁵⁷ While some could see the death of Grimes as analogous to baptism, as if the ocean that kills him is washing off his sins, it is perhaps more accurate to read this death as the expulsion of the “Other” by the dominant group—and perhaps just deserts for the loss of boys at sea. The village sees Grimes as a nuisance, a danger to their safety and the welfare of their children.⁵⁸ In the end, removing this hazard by any means necessary is less of a moral risk than allowing Grimes to remain in town.

While some have argued that Grimes’s death is a suicide, this is hardly the case.⁵⁹ Yes, in the most literal sense, Grimes does take his own life, but not until the torment he undergoes becomes utterly unbearable and ending his life becomes the only way out. In this way, the townspeople are not seen as responsible, as they themselves are not completing the act—Grimes is. This only adds to the level of moral superiority that the town feels (which, in turn, adds to the level of sympathy the audience is meant to feel for Grimes).⁶⁰ The entire opera can be reduced to

⁵⁷ Philip Brett, “Britten and Grimes,” in *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, ed. George E. Haggerty, intro. Susan McClary, after. Jenny Doctor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 26.

⁵⁸ For further discussion on the use of images of children for political purposes, see Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁹ Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 126.

⁶⁰ Until recently, all major denominations of Christianity have denounced suicide vehemently. In the last few years, however, some religious branches, including Anglicanism, have begun to allow religious funerals and rites of death for those who have committed suicide. See Christopher C. H. Cook, “Suicide and religion,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 204, no. 4 (2014): 254-5; Benno Torgler, “Suicide and Religion: New Evidence on the Differences Between Protestantism and Catholicism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 2 (June 2014): 316-40; Robin E. Gearing and Dana Lizardi, “Religion and Suicide,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 48, no. 3 (Sep., 2009): 332-41; Jonathan Petre, “Church of England to ‘legalise’ suicide in historic U-turn on funerals,” *DailyMail.com*, January 4 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2895832/Church-England-legalise-suicide-historic-U-turn-funerals-regard-taking-life-sin.html>.

a simple tale of the individual versus the group; Britten even remarked that the theme of “the struggle of the individual versus the masses” was close to his heart.⁶¹

These various morality tropes are certainly not the only ones at play in the operatic tradition. However, these images are those most closely linked to the forces at play in Victorian England. As we shall see, these kinds of conventional operatic punishments shape the outcome of Smyth’s opera.

The Wreckers

Before Smyth embarked on the composition of *The Wreckers*, she already commanded attention as the leading female opera composer of Britain, if not all of Europe. At the outset of her musical career, Heinrich von Herzogenberg (Smyth’s composition mentor once she left the Leipzig Conservatory) discouraged her interest in opera. Smyth’s strong will and her passion for drama, however, led her to compose a total of six throughout her life.⁶² Her first two operas, *Fantasio* and *Der Wald*, were small in stature; both are short comic operas, but were still generally well received. *Der Wald* was even produced by the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1903, cementing her place in history as the only woman, to this day, to have an opera performed at the Met.⁶³

The idea for *The Wreckers* arose after a visit to the Cornwall region of England. It is one of the most isolated locales in the British Isles: a peninsula on the southwestern tip of England,

⁶¹ “Music: Opera’s New Face,” *Time*, Feb. 16 1948, quoted in Brett, “Britten and Grimes,” 28.

⁶² Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1959), 30.

⁶³ Ibid., 103. In the 2016-17 season, the Metropolitan Opera plans on staging Kaija Saariaho’s *L’Amour de Loin* (2000). See Michael Cooper, “The Met’s Commissioning Program Is Starting to Bear Operas,” *NYTimes.com*, last modified Oct. 8, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/arts/music/the-mets-commissioning-program-is-starting-to-bear-operas.html?_r=0.

bordered by the Celtic Sea to the north and west, the English Channel to the south, and the River Tamar to the east. Its secluded, difficult to reach position resulted in a unique mythology of place.⁶⁴

Considering this remoteness from urban areas, yet proximity to water, the sea played a major role throughout Cornish history.⁶⁵ Helen Doe, Alston Kennerley, and Philip Payton reflect that, “Cornwall...is quintessentially a maritime region. Its maritime identity is deeply rooted in its history—and prehistory—but these in turn have been shaped by the geographical, geological and environmental milieu in which Cornwall exists.”⁶⁶ These characteristic features include dramatic, rocky cliffs, as well as long stretches of desolate, isolated coastline. Various images of the sea, the beach, and water in general have been linked as images in literature to evoke the female experience. Judith Hubback maintains:

The coast...is a reflection of the natural phenomena studied by scientists, and also a representation of the composite nature of women...The sea beckons people towards each other to meet on the active ‘beach’ of relationships, and beckons them to look outwards in the direction of the fascinating and unreachable horizon. It also calls them inwards in the direction of self-understanding.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See *Cornwall: The Cultural Construction of Place*, ed. Ella Westland (Newmill, UK: The Patten Press, 1997) for a variety of essays concerning various conceptions about Cornwall as a distinct geographical entity.

⁶⁵ See *The Maritime History of Cornwall*, ed. Philip Payton, Alston Kennerley, and Helen Doe (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2014).

⁶⁶ Helen Doe, Alston Kennerley, and Philip Payton, “Chapter 1: Introduction,” in *The Maritime History of Cornwall*, ed. Helen Doe, Alston Kennerley, and Philip Payton (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2014), 10.

⁶⁷ Judith Hubback, “Women, Symbolism and the Coast of Cornwall,” in *Cornwall: The Cultural Construction of Place*, ed. Ella Westland (Newmill, UK: The Patten Press, 1997), 106.

These complex interactions between person and place greatly impact musical works taking place by the ocean (and Cornwall in particular). In fact, Smyth went as far as declaring that the sea was the “great protagonist” of *The Wreckers*.⁶⁸

After simmering on the idea of a grand opera for a few years, Smyth contacted Francis Nielson, stage director of Covent Garden, to develop the basic structure of the work, after which Henry B. “Harry” Brewster composed the libretto.⁶⁹ Smyth and Brewster’s relationship has attracted scholarly attention in recent years, as it was Smyth’s only long-term heterosexual relationship, and he wrote libretti for several of her operas.⁷⁰ Their relationship was complicated; not only was it partly professional, but Smyth first became acquainted with Brewster via his wife, Julia, with whom Smyth was also infatuated for a time.⁷¹ However, no matter the intricacy, no one denies that Smyth’s relationship with Harry Brewster influenced her greatly. Amanda Harris even goes as far as asserting that Brewster’s progressive political stance urged Smyth to reevaluate her bourgeois views on women in favor of free love and same-sex desire.⁷² Smyth seems to grapple with these issues by manipulating standard operatic morality tropes in *The Wreckers*.

⁶⁸ H.B. Brewster, *The Wreckers (Les Naufrageurs): Cornish Drama in 3 Acts - Libretto* (London: C. Mitchell, 1909), 5.

⁶⁹ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 102. For more on the use of the sea as a trope in British music see *The Sea in the British Musical Imagination*, ed. Eric Saylor and Christopher M. Scheer (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ Brewster supplied the libretto for *Der Wald*, *The Wreckers*, and Smyth’s work for Chorus and Orchestra, *The Prison*. See Amanda Harris, “The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 14 (2010): 72-94.

⁷¹ Harris, “The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence,” 72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 77.

Smyth and Brewster asserted that *The Wreckers* was partially based in fact, citing “Heath’s ‘Account of Scilly’; Southey’s ‘Life of Wesley’; Journal of the R. I. of Cornwall, etc., etc.”⁷³ Stories of communities wrecking ships for profit are common in literary depictions of the Cornish region.⁷⁴ *The Wreckers* is set in an unnamed village in Cornwall, so isolated that they must plunder ships that wreck on the coast to survive. These actions have been sanctioned by God, according to the town’s preacher, Pascoe. However, one of the villagers has been lighting fires during the night to warn ships of the dangers of the rocky coast. As the opera progresses, we learn that Mark, a young fisherman, lights the fires. Mark is also deeply in love with the preacher’s young wife, Thirza. When Mark realizes that she returns his romantic feelings, he is willing to quit warning the passing ships; she, however, supports his actions and helps him ignite a bonfire before they begin to run away. Pascoe witnesses his wife commit this act of betrayal and collapses near the impromptu lighthouse. The attentive townspeople spot the preacher near the fire and, in turn, accuse him of setting it and call for his death. At the last moment, however, Mark and Thirza step forward and confess their guilt. The lovers are tied into a cave and left for

⁷³ H.B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 2

⁷⁴ See Simon Trezise, “The Smuggler and the Wrecker: Literary Representations of Cornish Maritime Life,” in *The Maritime History of Cornwall*, ed. Philip Payton, Alston Kennerley, and Helen Doe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2014), 318-28.

the tide to rise and drown them; for all intents and purposes, the town becomes judge and jury.⁷⁵

Smyth broke down this story into fifteen primary themes, indicating each in the libretto.⁷⁶

Smyth included a number of allusions to moral concerns and campaigns of the Victorian Era. In particular, she frequently pits individuals or small groups (e.g., Thirza and Mark) against the community. Like Britten's Peter Grimes, Thirza represents the individual scorned by society. In a way, the village is falling victim to a phenomenon known as groupthink. Simply put, groupthink is the tendency for a community of individuals to come to an irrational decision to obtain cohesion in action and harmony in discourse. The researcher most closely tied to this theory is Irving Janis, with his polemic *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*. He describes the phenomenon as "a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."⁷⁷

Elements of this collective decision-making echo throughout *The Wreckers*. First, at some point before the opera starts, the community developed the idea that it was acceptable to pirate and plunder ships as a method for sustenance. While the audience is not privy to this discussion,

⁷⁵ Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers: Lyrical Drama in three Acts, adapted from the Cornish Drama "Les Naufrageurs" by Henry Brewster* (Vienna: Universal-Edition A. G., 1916).

⁷⁶ H. B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 3-7. Utilized throughout the opera as leitmotifs, each of these themes is closely tied to specific emotions and characters. Coupled with the opera's lush orchestration and frequently declamatory vocal writing, it remains quite easy to link *The Wreckers* to the German operatic tradition in which Smyth was so well versed; traces of Engelbert Humperdinck and Richard Wagner abound throughout the work. The various leitmotifs act as a musical organizing tactic, which allows character relationships to be expressed in a straightforward way. Understanding these interpersonal connections is key to grasping the broader message of *The Wreckers*.

⁷⁷ Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, Second Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 9. This is a revised and enlarged edition of the original *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*.

it remains relatively obvious that the community is motivated by ill-advised morality. Second, when it is discovered that one of their own is violating this immoral policy, the village responds immediately with cries for this individual's takedown. In Act I, Scene 3, the village chorus declares, "Oh his track! Up and hunt him to death, the vermin!...When he is caught, o joy to hang him!"⁷⁸ Those who violate the consensus are an immediate danger and must be punished.

There are many other expressions of the troublesome moral codes enforced by the village that eventually condemns Thirza and Mark. One rather blatant example of Victorian morality expressed in *The Wreckers* is the conflicting views on alcohol and temperance. In the very first scene of the work, the town's tavern keeper, Tallan, remarks that the best way to keep religious fervor is to indulge in beer and wine, particularly on the Sabbath; while he is quickly rebuked by the villagers, Tallan is fast to respond that the religious authority, Pascoe, is far away. However, when the pastor overhears their drinking song at the start of the next scene, he scolds, "Well may such as ye hang your heads in shame. Heathen! Drinking on his very threshold! His Sabbath profaned! Oh fools!"⁷⁹ This exchange, as well as a number of other scenes throughout *The Wreckers*, demonstrates a vilification of religion and undermining of scriptural authority, hardly unexpected considering Smyth's complicated relationship with Christianity.

We can understand Smyth's use of society as the antagonist in *The Wreckers* when we consider her place as an outsider in Victorian society. Through her English upbringing, Smyth was familiar with the ins and outs of the Anglican Church. Smyth however questioned the moral authority of the church and society. Throughout her life, she entertained various encounters with

⁷⁸ Smyth, *The Wreckers*, 37-40.

⁷⁹ Smyth, *The Wreckers*, 26. (Act I, Scene 2). The libretto has these lyrics as "Well may ye hang your heads in silent shame!/ Are ye then heathen, that on God's own threshold/ Yea, on the Sabbath day I find ye drinking?/ O fools." The hypocrisy is elevated when we remember that Pascoe sanctions the plundering of ships for the village's profit.

Christianity—her flirting fascination with the Roman Catholic Church remains an emblematic example. In 1890, while in Munich, Smyth came to know a number of members of the Trevelyan family, where she became particularly infatuated with the daughter, Pauline, who was a devout Catholic. While Smyth never converted, she did find comfort in the formal ceremony of Catholic liturgy.⁸⁰ In fact, soon after Smyth left Munich, she penned one of her most important compositions, her Mass in D, a complete Catholic service, dedicated to none other than Pauline Trevelyan.⁸¹ Although this encounter with Catholicism was brief, it highlights Smyth's noncommittal feelings towards organized religion, which her characters demonstrate in *The Wreckers*. In this way, Smyth stood apart from many other early feminists, whose crusades were inspired and driven by religious fervor.⁸²

We now turn to the female protagonist, Thirza; although exemplifying many of the basic characteristics of a fallen woman, she actually embodies the opera's moral center. Notwithstanding the fact that her relationship with Mark is romantic (instead of simply lustful), she still withdraws from the bonds of marriage to find passion elsewhere. In actuality, the relationship she is leaving is with a man of God—in a sense, doubly condemning her eventual fate. While her persona is not overtly sexual, her main theme (Figure 3.1) is described as “a dreamy sensuous melody.”⁸³

Calling Thirza a complicated heroine is a titanic understatement; her attributes are myriad, embodying the “good” and the “bad,” which makes her a more pragmatic, three-

⁸⁰ St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 56-8.

⁸¹ Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra* (London: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1893), 1.

⁸² It is also essential to note that there were secular feminist campaigns in Britain in this same historical moment. See Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁸³ H. B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 4.



Figure 3.1. Ethel Smyth, “Thirza’s Theme,” from *The Wreckers (Les Naufrageurs): Cornish Drama in 3 Acts - Libretto* (London: C. Mitchell, 1909), 4.

dimensional character than the typical operatic villain. Thirza happens to be voiced by a mezzo-soprano—hardly the typical leading-lady voice type. Throughout opera history, mezzos are relegated to the roles of “witches, bitches, and britches,” casting them as outsiders along the lines of age, race, ethnicity, or morality. J. B. Steane speculates that the mezzo-soprano voice type “... suggests primarily a woman of rational disposition, a mature character, not a flighty soprano nor a gorgon contralto and not a star either.”⁸⁴ Mezzo characters are typically older than soprano roles, and are conventionally used as foils to the morally pure soprano counterpart.

Due to Thirza’s adulterous affair and her mezzo voicing, audiences are undoubtedly tempted to associate her with the most famous mezzo—or, even woman—in the operatic canon: the title character from Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*. She is understood as the summation of all the evils of nineteenth-century France: the “Oriental” other, the aberrant prostitute, the lawless villain. She tempts and teases without ever submitting, and for that she must pay. She stands in stark contrast to her soprano foil, Micaëla, a maiden in love with the soldier, Don José. Susan McClary reminds us, “Carmen does not surrender to [Don José’s] romantic plot: she proves incorrigible and returns back into circulation. Since he can neither possess nor rehabilitate her, Don José moves to match her ‘Realist’ mode: the strength of her unrepentant sexuality ‘forces’

⁸⁴ J. B. Steane, *Voices: Singers & Critics* (London: Duckworth, 1992), 35. See also Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

him to resort to violence.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, her musical logic is far from standard. Carmen’s musical output is filled with harmonic shifts, creating a sense of desire, for which Don José falls.⁸⁶

Much like Carmen, Thirza has a soprano foil in the character of Avis. Throughout *The Wreckers*, Avis is presented as petty and deceptive, flipping the script for the soprano/mezzo-soprano dynamic. She was the original object of Mark’s love, before he turned to Thirza, which sends the soprano into a jealous rage. In a fit of fury, she denounces Pascoe as the traitor (after he is “caught” lighting the fires), arguing that “It is he who betrayed us, but *she* [Thirza] sowed the seed,” highlighting Thirza’s apparent devious nature. When she eventually finds out that it was her beloved Mark who set the fires, she tries in vain to get him to revoke his confession, even claiming that he spent the night with her.⁸⁷ In Act III, Scene 1, she defiantly cries “I gave myself to Mark because I Loved him/ Too deeply to dread his score;/ Last night he came...and in my arms I held him/ Yea! til the break of dawn!”⁸⁸ In essence, she is willing to ruin her chaste reputation, claiming to have engaged in intercourse outside of marriage, all for an unfaithful suitor. Her reversal only underscores women’s purportedly fickle “nature.” In fact, there is far from one narrative dichotomy (Madonna vs. Whore) into which a woman may fall. Both women are flawed, which acts as a critique of the one-dimensional and acutely unrealistic nature of the Madonna/Whore divide in most operas.

⁸⁵ Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 41.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸⁷ H. B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

What muddles the waters, however, is the immense difficulty it takes to cast Thirza as an operatic villain. While Thirza leaves the sanctity of marriage, she does find love, not simply sexual exploits. In fact, her love for Mark is truer than her feelings for Pascoe. Smyth divulges no background information about Thirza's relationship to Pascoe, except for the intense animosity she feels towards him. Perhaps the marriage arose from convenience or was guided in some way by parental or social authority. If this is the case, Thirza, in choosing to leave with Mark, asserts her right to love and happiness. Thus, she is completing the heteronormative romantic paradigm, just in a roundabout way, having to break the law of God (and society) to do so. One can even perceive a homosexual subtext: Thirza leaps out of the closet to become the woman she really is. Considering Smyth's relative openness about her lesbian pursuits, being as "out" as one could be in the late-nineteenth century, one might imagine that sexual choice, not prescription, was an important issue for her.⁸⁹

We see how Thirza develops over the course of the opera by contrasting her entrance in Act I to the love theme used in her duet with Mark at the culmination of Act II (Figure 3.2). While her original theme weaves through chromatic leading tones and jumps throughout the orchestra's tessitura, the love theme, while rhythmically remarkable, is both diatonic and relatively conjunct, spanning no more than a minor sixth. While her romantic music seems more

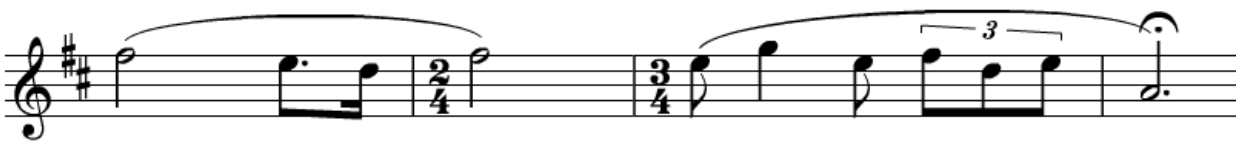


Figure 3.2. Ethel Smyth, "Love Theme," from *The Wreckers (Les Naufrageurs)*: *Cornish Drama in 3 Acts - Libretto* (London: C. Mitchell, 1909), 6.

⁸⁹ For more on Smyth's various lesbian relationships, see Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 164-83.

disciplined, Thirza is still far from a redeemed woman. She uses her love to control and bring about the destruction of a man; for this, she must be punished.

One can also see Thirza fulfilling a similar function to Violetta in *La Traviata*. The male leads in that narrative all have questionable moral fiber, so even with her sexual track record in mind, Violetta acts as the tale's ethical center; still, she must die due to limiting notions about women's sexuality. Likewise, Thirza is caught in this snare. So what happens to Thirza, the fallen heroine for whom the audience is supposed to cheer? She chooses personal happiness over social and religious regulation and, like all fallen women, she must then die—though, in this case, the punishment resists a straightforward analysis. She is not the one originally condemned—she and Mark step forward to take the place of Pascoe, who has been wrongly accused. In the simplest terms, this is suicide and martyrdom, as Thirza could easily have let Pascoe take the fall for her crimes. The couple's confession demonstrates an act of redemption, mirroring the Catholic confessional or the psychoanalyst's couch. Foucault documented the trend towards the disclosure of sexual practice in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. He argues that through the act of confession, control over the body was established. He offers, "One had to speak of [sex] as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum."⁹⁰ Through her confession this "deviant" in effect shows she is of such strong moral fiber that she willingly accepts the punishment for the "wrong" she did (even thought that wrong was saving sailors from plunder and death).

Thirza's death takes the form of a "suicide" by ocean—she and Mark are chained in a cave, where they drown as the tide rolls in. We will first tackle the image of the ocean and its

⁹⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 24.

significance before returning to the notion of suicide. This could easily be read as a metaphor for baptism, as if Thirza and Mark's sins are washed away by this great, moral, equalizing force. Douglas's theories of purification provide further insight into the meaning of these deaths. In the eyes of the village, Thirza and Mark are "dirty," unable to fit into the order of the village, and for this reason, they must be purged; the villagers even proclaim "Merciful Heaven, in our midst this sin! Avaunt [*sic*] thou shameless one, lest thou pollute us."⁹¹ Douglas observes that, "A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone."⁹² Gendered, anachronistic language aside, this statement accurately describes Mark and Thirza's condition. In saving sailors, they have crossed the socially constructed line of village morality. The ocean is not so much washing away their sins, but instead purifying the village of the sinners.

The location of death, a seaside cave, should not be discounted, either. In a way, this fallen woman is complying with the trope of being buried alive; in this instance, she is punished with her accomplice. Unlike the standard fallen woman trope in which only the woman dies, the man in this instance also perishes, acting as an indictment against the standard heteronormative romantic paradigm. It was Mark, and, in a broader sense, love, that got Thirza into this predicament, so he must face the consequences right along side her. The audience is aware of this dual charge, from the attestations of Lawrence, an esteemed community member, presiding over the "trial." After a reminder of the sentence of a previous turncoat, Lawrence solicits the opinion

⁹¹ H. B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 39. At this moment, they are speaking in the singular in reference to Thirza. In the next line, Avis demands the death of both Thirza and Mark: "Kill, kill them both...the traitor and his whore!"

⁹² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 140.

of the village: “Is it your will that this shall be the fate/ Of these, who have conspired against their brethren,/ Adulterers and traitors?”⁹³ This damning of love, heteronormative or otherwise, reminds the viewer of the many and varied negative repercussions that romance can have on an individual. This denunciation of desire should not come as a surprise, considering the difficult love triangle Smyth was navigating at the time of the work’s composition. However, it is equally plausible to understand the couple’s live burial as an act of assurance, letting the Others know there is a community for them out there, but one in which they will die for their otherness.⁹⁴ The audience is not privileged in knowing the lasting impact of the couple’s martyrdom on the village, which in many ways makes the death more troubling, as it is completely possible that the community does not recognize their own hypocrisy. This makes it necessary for the opera’s audience to enact a positive change on the world around them, urging the Victorian public to become a more inclusive crowd.

We must now return to the issue of Thirza and Mark’s death as suicide and martyrdom. While they are sentenced to death by the village, the lovers could have easily escaped. They chose their own fate, committing suicide by community. This only strengthens their moral authority, as their willingness to die asserts, in essence, their condemnation of the village or confirmation of its power. The couple can even be considered martyrs, though clearly not in the traditional religious sense. Instead, they are willing (and do) die in an effort to defend their view. This is crux of the opera: Smyth is asserting the position that just because one is an outsider and condemned by their peers, it does not necessarily mean they are wrong. They are simply different, or guided by different principles. In describing audience feelings at the end of *Peter*

⁹³ H. B. Brewster, *The Wreckers*, 39. The crowd replies in the positive, “’Tis our will!”

⁹⁴ Though, it must be acknowledged, how much assurance is there if both die?

Grimes (which features a similar moral condemnation via suicide), Hutcheon and Hutcheon admit, “we carry out of the opera house the work’s powerful indictment of an alienating and badgering society that we watched drive a man to his death. Grimes’s suicide acts as both an escape from that society—from which he wanted only the simplest of things—and an accusation against it.”⁹⁵ The finale of *The Wreckers* leaves audiences with similar feelings of guilt and culpability for the crimes they committed against Others, all while reassuring the audience that the framework of heteronormative love lasts, even into the moment of death.

Conclusion—The Scope Of It All

Many apparent contradictions lie within *The Wreckers*’s narrative that reflect a cognitive dissonance between Smyth’s personal views and her musical approach to Victorian morality. She clearly knew these tropes existed for a reason. Furthermore, it becomes unmistakable that she knew that a complete rebuke of tradition would lead her nowhere. As a musician working within the European art music establishment, pushing boundaries (at this time, at least) was not in vogue. Her gender in no way helped in this regard. A woman composing opera, on this scale no less, certainly ruffled some feathers. So by using these accepted and well-worn strategies, but modifying them for her own purposes, she was able to create a work that seems superficially conventional but is rather subversive, if not revolutionary.

Drawing on her life experiences as a lesbian, a female composer, an adulterer—in other words, an Other, looked down upon by Victorian society at large—Smyth constructed a work that made the personal political. The composer’s outsider status shaped *The Wreckers*, which offers another worldview. Ultimately, this helps musicologists and historians to develop a more

⁹⁵ Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying*, 140.

nuanced understanding of Victorian Britain, which has been characterized perhaps too rigidly as prudish. And while *The Wreckers* can certainly be enjoyed without an interdisciplinary analysis tying composer to opera, by doing so, one can achieve a much greater understanding of the work. Thus, we have to ask ourselves, what forgotten or glossed-over understandings of time and place are we missing by not applying alternative, third-wave, intersectional feminist modes of analysis to the works of composers of all stripes.

The Wreckers has an important legacy in the history of English opera. The use of *Peter Grimes* throughout this chapter is by no means only out of convenience, for these works have many striking similarities. While the harmonic framework differs wildly at times, the locales, imagery, and moral undertones throughout the work are immediately obvious to those who know both works well. Furthermore, prominent scholars have highlighted this connection. Writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Stephen Banfield remarks of *The Wreckers*, “But the opera’s greatest strength is its dramatic strategy, *strikingly prophetic of Peter Grimes...*”[emphasis added].⁹⁶ While the similarities are not to the level that claims of plagiarism should be cried, it is curious that perhaps the two greatest English opera composers wrote such converging works. Though, if you consider the connections between their lives, in relation to outsider status, perhaps it makes sense.

By highlighting the moral discrepancies in *The Wreckers*, the greater feminist potential of the work becomes evident. In fact, it becomes quite feasible to look at other operas and narrative musical works and find ways in which feminist readings are not only possible, but plausible. It is,

⁹⁶ Stephen Banfield, “*Wreckers, The*,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O002276>.

in essence, another application of an alternative feminist methodology quite appropriate for the analysis of music.

EPILOGUE

In short, the entry of gender issues into musicology has allowed for an extremely wide range of new areas of research. It is quite possible that gender has already ceased to be a principal focus in and of itself, as more and more scholars observe gender-related issues in their research as a matter of course. More important than the fact that musicologists now study gender or emotions or representations is the fact that they are finally dealing with musical content. Somewhere along the way, the discipline lost sight of cultural meanings, which had remained at the center of all other humanities. Without question, it is difficult to write or speak effectively about music, and our attempts always fall short of the experience of the sounds themselves. Yet our refusal to address meaning at all has made musicology an increasingly arid and esoteric field.

—Susan McClary¹

The shape of musicological discourse has changed greatly since McClary wrote those words in 2002, and even more so since *Feminine Endings*'s original publication over a decade earlier. Musicologists no longer wonder *if* gender and sexuality will be discussed at a conference, but instead, *how much* of a focus it will be. Even the tentative emergence of Ethel Smyth's operas onto the stage again reinforces the fact that times have and are continuing to change for the better.

Despite this good news, we still have a prodigious amount of work to accomplish. As the canon increases in diversity, it is now time for musicologists to embrace current intersectional modes of thinking to unpack the feminist potential of "rediscovered" pieces. As our colleagues across the academy embrace heterogeneous modes of analysis, it only hinders our progress as a discipline to not converse and learn from others in the humanities and social sciences. Music constantly interacts with people and cultures across the globe, making interdisciplinary inquiry essential for any forward-thinking musicologist.

¹ "Feminine Endings in Retrospect" in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, & Sexuality, with a New Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xviii.

Using the life and music of Ethel Smyth as a case study, through this thesis I have shown a variety of possible tactics and frameworks through which one can approach the works of a composer working in the *fin-de-siècle*. An intersectional approach revealed that Smyth was not only focused on the political rights of women, as typically assumed of first-wave feminists, but also that her concerns reached further. From her depictions of feminine struggle and triumph in minor-mode sonatas to the varied characterizations of women in relation to morality and religion, Smyth believed in and celebrated the varied and multiple manifestations of women. In essence, her music—texted, programmatic, and otherwise—embodies what many believe to be the goal of modern feminism: the encouragement of women, men, and individuals of all gender presentations to assert their agency and authority in determining the path of their lives. Specifically for Smyth, this involved making womanhood a viable and respected political, social, and cultural category of identity.

Furthermore, it is conceivable to use this thesis as a model for various frameworks of inquiry for a more diverse repertoire. Specifically, this interdisciplinary approach is quite illuminating in understanding “forgotten” works and pieces where musicologists have misunderstood their social and political ramifications, seeing them as simple and straightforward. It would be unwise to use nationalism as a lens of investigation towards musics composed before the advent of the modern nation, or to compare morality to Christian traditions in lands where Christianity is not a domineering force; however, by exploring historical trends and social agents across time and place, a scholar can achieve greater understanding of the cultural importance of music, but also nuance understandings of other fields as well. This thesis, for example, complicates the picture of Victorian sexuality.

There is no reason for musicology to continue being an “arid and esoteric field.”² If the life and music of Ethel Smyth can teach the world anything, it is that one should not be afraid to make a splash; she, in fact, hoped that others would find her life relatable and learn from her myriad experiences, and through them she created works that offered subversive narratives to critique too strict roles for women. She affirmed, “For I hold that the permanent quality of an artist’s work depends in some mystical manner on the genuineness and multiplicity of his [*sic*] points of contact with life...the indispensable foundation—in my opinion at least—is a very close touch with reality; a touch, moreover, that has to be constantly tested and readjusted as the years roll on.”³ Through staying abreast of feminist and queer discourses across the humanities and social sciences, as well as remaining genuine to our convictions regarding the equality of all individuals, musicologists can continue to enact enduring change in the world by virtue of lasting inquiry into the role of music in the construction and/or demolition of various systems of social injustice.

² Ibid.

³ Ethel Smyth, preface to *Impressions that Remained* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1946), xix.

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