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“NOT REGULARLY MUSICAL”: MUSIC IN THE WORK OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

By

VANESSA MANHIRE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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By VANESSA MANHIRE

Dissertation Director:
Marianne DeKoven

While the visual arts have long been a focus of inquiry in Woolf criticism, attention has only recently been drawn to the potential influence of music — a fact which is all the more surprising since in her letters Woolf claimed “I think of all my books as music before I write them” (*L6* 426) and discussed her desire “to investigate the influence of music on literature” (*L6* 450). Woolf’s acknowledged interest in interdisciplinary approaches to literature, her love of music, and her assumed position as a “common listener” rather than an expert, make her the ideal subject for a study of literary writing about music. This study has two overlapping focuses: Woolf’s thoughts about the relationship between music and literature, and the variety of ways in which she represents the activities of making and listening to music in her writings, both fiction and non-fiction. My dissertation argues that Woolf’s changing thinking about music affects both the form and content of her entire oeuvre.

Chapter One looks at Woolf’s early essays on musical topics, arguing that her investigations into the nature and status of music as an art form played an important part in the formation of her own literary project. Chapter Two focuses on her representations of women musicians and scenes of musical performance in her early fiction. Woolf’s depictions of music as a medium which appeals simultaneously to interiority and

exteriority indicate its direct influence on her development of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques. Chapter Three shows that the preponderance of criticism which dubs Woolf's novels "musical" in form actually ignores the vexed questions of voice and form implicit in Woolf's own novelistic representations of song: the lyric interruptions caused by such musical scenes serve not to symbolize, but rather to disturb, the idea of formal unity. Chapter Four looks at the increasingly complex figurations of music in Woolf's late work alongside the rhetoric of the English Folk Revival: Woolf both responds to new sound technologies and interrogates the vexed concepts of English history and national identity.

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Maisie Manhire.

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Introduction

'The Loves of the Arts': Woolf, Modernism and Music

Now let us talk of something interesting. I was going to say why dont you write a Common Reader review of music? Now consider that. Write your loves and hates for Bach Wagner etc out in plain English. I have an ulterior motive. I want to investigate the influence of music on literature. But there's not a book on music that gives me a hint—Parry all padding. What about Tovey? Too metaphysical. Ethel is the [the rest of this letter is lost]

Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 1940 (L6 450)

The aim that Woolf describes in the above letter — “to investigate the influence of music on literature” — is also my aim in this dissertation. Unlike the book Woolf asks her friend to write, however, my study is considerably narrower in scope: I want to investigate its influence on, and its varying role in, Woolf’s own work. Woolf’s characteristically modernist concern with the relationships between different art forms is also evident in her 1925 essay “Pictures,” which opens with a hypothetical tome called *The Loves of the Arts*, an exhaustive academic study of “the flirtations between music, letters, sculpture and architecture, and the effects that the arts have had upon each other, throughout the ages” (E3 243). Her use of the word “flirtations,” suggesting a dynamism on the part of the arts themselves which resists easy definition, is echoed in the 1934 essay “Walter Sickert: A Conversation,” where she claims that “[t]he arts flirt and joke and pay each other compliments” and addresses the aims and methods of artists across a range of media: “[a]ll great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain” (E4 74). Music is an important part of the interdisciplinary comparisons Woolf makes here, as well as of the more widespread fascination with synesthesia in early twentieth-century art and literature. In her essays, short fiction and novels, Woolf draws on a wide range of musical sources for both form and content, and her Paterian aesthetic

is emphasized in her statement in a later letter, “I always think of my books as music before I write them” (*L6* 426).¹

Woolf was hardly alone in taking music as a model for her work. The trope of music is common across a range of modernist media: it is a key subject in paintings by Picasso, Braque, and Kandinsky, for example, and visual artists often gave their work titles drawn from music.² In fact, taking music as an instructive ideal for all kinds of artistic innovation was something of a staple of the modernist period. Traditional equations between poetry and song were skewed in favor of music, and often instrumental music, as modernist poets professed the desire to work in new, abstract, and “musical” ways with language and meaning; likewise, novelists of the period turned to metaphors drawn from music — in particular, to such concepts as pattern and rhythm — to help them discuss their experiments with formal features like structure and temporality. In order to situate Woolf’s thinking about music within its contemporary context, therefore, it is worth sketching a brief background for modernist theorizations of music in relation to poetry and fiction before turning to the work of her immediate Bloomsbury peers.

Broadly speaking, early twentieth-century poets sought to reverse Alexander Pope’s neoclassical dictum that “[t]he sound must seem an echo to the sense.”³ Towards the end of the previous century, the French Symbolists had invoked music as a figure for their valorization of poetic form over meaning, sound over sense, and feeling over reason. To Paul Verlaine, for example, music stood for the potential power of poetry:

De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l’Impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l’air
Sans rien en lui qui pese ou qui pose...⁴

Stéphane Mallarmé's essay "Music and Literature" (1894) exemplifies the Symbolist movement's assertion of music's primacy over other arts: its inherent abstraction was an obvious model for their attempts to part language from its everyday conventions. While the movement is a direct descendant of Romanticism, the play with layout and typography in Mallarmé's poetry also created a radically new formal effect, one of simultaneity.⁵ Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), the first English work on the topic, played an important role in conveying these ideas to an Anglophone literary context. The French Symbolist movement had much in common with the Pre-Raphaelite movement in England; its ideas were taken up enthusiastically by Irish poet William Butler Yeats, who both assisted Symons with his book and wrote his own essay "The Symbolism of Poetry"; in addition, it exerted a strong impact on key figures associated with late nineteenth-century aestheticism, such as Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne, as well as the "decadent" poet Ernest Dowson.⁶

Symbolist poetry was also a key influence on F. S. Flint, who in turn introduced it to Ezra Pound. The imagist movement moved away from the work of the symbolist poets in its focus on concrete images and clear, sharp language; like the symbolists, however, Pound and Flint gave such priority to music in their manifesto "Imagisme" (1913) that its formal attributes constitute an explicit aim for the poet. While all three of the rules they set out for imagist poetry point towards the immediacy of musical expression, the last directly instructs poets to take music as a compositional ideal:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. ("A Retrospect," 3)

Pound's quotation of Eliot's assertion that "no *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job" reminds us that this third rule does not consist simply of a rejection of meter, but requires an attention to details of rhythm and structure (421).⁷ In "Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch" Pound describes what he sees as the ill-effects of the separation of

poetry and music: “poetry withers and ‘dries out’ when it leaves music, or at least an imagined music, too far behind it” (437). Condemning in no uncertain terms those poets he judges to be tone-deaf, Pound places a prescriptive emphasis on actual musical study: “Poets who are not interested in music are, or become, bad poets ... Poets who will not study music are defective” (437).⁸

While slightly less didactic — and freely admitting his own lack of technical knowledge of musical form — T.S. Eliot shares Pound’s idea that music should be a primary quality of poetry. He borrows musical terminology in many poem titles, such as “love song,” “prelude,” and “rhapsody,” and even invokes music as a direct structural equivalent for the poems in his “Four Quartets.” In his 1933 essay “Matthew Arnold,” Eliot defines the faculty that he called “the auditory imagination”: this is “the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to an origin and bringing something back seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality” (*The Use of Poetry* 111).⁹ The music of words, Eliot argues, arises not only from their sonorous effects and their relation to the other words in the poem, but also in relation to what is not in the poem — the associations gathered by language over time, not consciously articulated, yet immediately accessible to the “auditory imagination.” In his lecture “The Music of Poetry” (1942), he agrees with Pound that “a poet may gain much from the study of music”: here he not only reasserts the importance of rhythm and sound effects, but also stresses the potential of musical structure for the poet:

I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. I think that it might be possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies: the result might be an effect of artificiality; but I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize

itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself. The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter. It is in the concert room, rather than in the opera house, that the germ of a poem may be quickened.

(*On Poetry and Poets* 32)

“Four Quartets” itself takes up this emphasis on the issue of formal structure, both musical and poetic: “Only by the form, the pattern/ Can words or music reach/ The stillness.” While these lines immediately evoke Pound’s ideas of form, they also recall Woolf’s own claim in “Walter Sickert” that there should be a “zone of silence in the middle of every art.” Such invocations and representations of music within poetry itself had long been commonplace. Especially since Romanticism, poets had ascribed a heightened status to music: well-known examples range from Rilke’s “To Music” and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, to Thomas Hardy’s comprehensive knowledge of archaic ballads and musical forms, to the work of later poets such as W. H. Auden.¹⁰ The Symbolists, Pound and Eliot are of particular interest here because they theorize music’s relationship to poetry quite self-consciously and explicitly in their essays and manifestos.

Perhaps because of the widespread desire to make novelistic prose more similar to poetry, modernist writers of fiction also invoked music as a figure for their work. In the nineteenth century, Flaubert had sought to create fiction which could transcend the material, the real, and the conventional: “What I should like to do is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments, which would hold itself together by itself through the internal force of its style” (154). Writing about his composition of *Madame Bovary*’s fairground scene, he uses music as a descriptive metaphor, explaining that he wanted to capture “effects like those of a symphony” (199). Flaubert presents a mix of different voices to give the scene a sense of immediacy and simultaneity: the juxtaposition of direct speech from diverse registers of language has an effect of

orchestration similar to that achieved, for example, by Mallarmé. This contrapuntal and “symphonic” form allows the narrative voice to step back so that the confusion of the fairground stands on its own and the scene “hold[s] itself together by itself”; yet, as Woolf points out in “On Rereading Novels,” Flaubert as narrator could “never perhaps completely” disappear (E3 343).

Flaubert’s work was hugely influential, not only on French authors such as André Gide, Jules Romains, and Jean-Paul Sartre, but on modernist writers in general. Whether as formal analogy, descriptive mechanism, or explicit subject matter, the idea of music is almost an epidemic in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction.¹¹¹² In Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, music is important in both formal and thematic terms: the leitmotifs that make up the novel create a structural effect drawn directly from music, while Vinteuil’s violin sonata plays an important role in the novel’s plot. In his Preface to *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad uses a musical metaphor to evoke the effect he was aiming for in the novella: “That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that I hoped would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck” (4). Scenes of music can help create meaning or provide access to interiority: the performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is central to E. M. Forster’s *Howards End*, and D. H. Lawrence’s *Aaron’s Rod* includes a similar discussion of how the Romantic composer’s work ought to be played. In Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, as in Eliot’s “Four Quartets,” music provides a model for the larger construction of the literary work.

An example of self-consciousness about the “musicalization” of fiction can be found Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928), where novelist-within-the-novel Philip Quarles discusses the “musicalization” of fiction, “[n]ot in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound. [...] But on a large scale, in the construction. [...] The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. [...] More interesting show the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then

developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. [...] The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune.” In fiction, he argues, this musicalization can be achieved through attention to “themes,” “modulations” and “variations,” given “a sufficiency of characters, and parallel, contrapuntal plots” (408). As Pound and Eliot do for poetry, Huxley draws attention to music as an analogy for fiction not as a mere metaphor for beauty or inexpressibility. Rather, he is interested in the technical elements of composition, the formal and structural attributes of music which can be studied and translated into the medium of literature.

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Bloomsbury Group member E. M. Forster had also discussed the idea of musicalized fiction, particularly in his discussion of “rhythm” in the novel.¹³ Forster begins his analysis by addressing “the story,” which he calls “the highest factor common to all novels, and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different — melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form” (17). While story is found wanting because it “does not offer melody or cadence,” it nevertheless appeals to the ear rather than the eye, and “adds something because of its connection with a voice” (27). Forster considers in turn the elements of story, characters, and plot, as well as novelists of “fantasy” and “prophecy.” He then moves on to consider an aspect for which “there appears to be no literary word — the more the arts develop the more they depend on each other for definition” (102): he therefore decides to “borrow” the admittedly vague terms “pattern” and “rhythm” from painting and music respectively. His discussion of “rhythm” bears some resemblance to that of Huxley, who emphasizes the “organic relation” of parts to the whole in structures of theme and variation. Forster, however, dismisses the kind of “repetition plus variation” Huxley describes, calling it “easy rhythm in fiction” (113); he argues instead that there are two distinct varieties of novelistic rhythm. His musical example, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, opens with a

simple rhythm “ ‘diddidy dum’ which we can all hear and tap to,” yet “the symphony as a whole has also a rhythm — due mainly to the relation between its movements — which some people can hear but no one can tap to. This second sort of rhythm is difficult, and whether it is substantially the same as the first sort only a musician could tell us” (113).

Proust serves as Forster’s primary illustration of the first type, “easy rhythm,” in the novel. Even as he deems Proust’s fiction “chaotic” and “ill-constructed,” with “no external shape,” he claims that “it hangs together because it is stitched internally, because it contains rhythms” (113). The “little phrase” from the music of Vinteuil “crosses the book again and again, but as an echo, a memory; we like to encounter it, but it has no binding power” (114). While finding Proust’s descriptions of actual music “too pictorial for my own taste,” Forster stresses that “what we must admire is his use of rhythm in literature, and his use of something which is akin by nature to the effect it has to produce — namely a musical phrase.” (114). The “little phrase” sometimes means everything, sometimes means nothing, Forster contends: “this seems to me the function of rhythm in fiction: not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope” (115). Forster uses rhythm in this sense to refer to the literary use of the leitmotif, and points out that without the “waxing and waning” Proust gives it, the technique risks becoming trite: “Done badly, rhythm is most boring, it hardens into a symbol, and instead of carrying us on it trips us up” (115).

After his assessment of novelistic rhythm as leitmotif, Forster turns to “the more difficult question”: “Is there any effect in novels comparable to the effect of the Fifth Symphony as a whole, where, when the orchestra stops, we hear something that has never actually been played?” (115). This “second” type of rhythm refers to the overall formal shape of the work, and again emphasizes the idea of “relation” between parts and whole. Forster’s spatial metaphor of “three big blocks of sound” in Beethoven’s Fifth recalls Woolf’s oft-quoted description of the form of *To the Lighthouse* as “two blocks joined by a corridor”:

The opening movement, the andante, and the trio-scherzo-trio-finale-trio-finale that composes the third block, all enter the mind at once, and extend one another into a common entity. This common entity, this new thing, is the symphony as a whole, and it has been achieved mainly (though not entirely) by the relation between the three big blocks of sound which the orchestra has been playing. I am calling this relation “rhythmic.” If the correct musical term is something else, that does not matter; what we have now to ask ourselves is whether there is any analogy to it in fiction. (115-16)

While Forster admits defeat in answering his own question — “I cannot find any analogy” — he nevertheless sticks to his argument for an analogous relationship between music and literature: “Yet there may be one; in music fiction is likely to find its nearest parallel” (116).

With this parallel in mind, it is notable that the novel with which Forster opens his study, Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, is described in direct relation to music: “it has extended over space as well as over time, and the sense of space until it terrifies us is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music. After one has read *War and Peace* for a bit, great chords begin to sound, and we cannot say exactly what struck them” (26).

Returning to Tolstoy at the end of *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster concludes his argument in “Pattern and Rhythm” with the analogy of music as a figure for the “expansion” towards which the novelist should aim:

Music, though it does not employ human beings, though it is governed by intricate laws, nevertheless does offer in its final expression a type of beauty which fiction might achieve in its own way. Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom. Cannot the novel be like that? Is not there something of it in *War and Peace*? — the book with which we began and in which we must end. Such an untidy book. Yet, as we read it, do not great chords begin to sound behind us, and when we have finished does not every item — even the catalogue of strategies — lead a larger existence than was possible at the time? (116)

Despite Forster’s inability to provide concrete solutions to the problems he raises, music remains a very important formal analogy in his discussion of the work of the novelist. His

discussion of “rhythm” in the novel exceeds the more literal formal equivalence proposed by Huxley: the metaphor of expansion encompasses a larger-scale concept of form without implying the closure of a contrived technical pattern.

As well as Forster, Woolf’s immediate contemporaries included writers with significant musical expertise who were similarly attentive to its potential relevance to their literary work. Both James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield, for example, were accomplished classical musicians with extensive formal education. In Paris, Joyce gave up medical school for voice training, intending to pursue a concert career. His first published book was a volume of poetry titled “Chamber Music” (1907), whose “quality and distinction” Pound attributed to “their author’s strict musical training” (“Joyce,” *The Future*, May 1918). Joyce’s wide-ranging knowledge of music’s form and function, from classical to popular, is evident throughout his work, particularly in the encyclopedic scope of musical references and effects in *Ulysses* and the form of *Finnegan’s Wake*. Mansfield, a cellist, returned to London from New Zealand in 1908 in order to continue her musical studies, before turning decisively to writing two years later. Like Woolf, she made explicit comparisons between her writing method and that of music: she read her drafts aloud “just as one would play over a musical composition.”¹⁴ Both Joyce and Mansfield were seen as rivals by Woolf, whose relationship with Mansfield in particular was notably strained. When offered the opportunity to publish Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1918, the Hogarth Press turned down the novel;¹⁵ in the same year, however, they did handprint and publish Mansfield’s *Prelude* (1918).

Documentation of the Hogarth Press publication list, as well as the other professional activities of both Virginia and Leonard Woolf, provides some insight into the presence of music-related materials in their working lives. While it is impossible to know how much (or how closely) Woolf read the material published by the Hogarth Press, we can assume that she had at least a passing familiarity with it, if only from the labor-intensive process of setting type. As Peter Jacobs has noted, the Press brought out several

book-length publications on musical topics: Robert H. Hull's *Contemporary Music* (1927) and *Delius* (1928), Basil de Selincourt's *The Enjoyment of Music* (1928), and Thomas J Hewitt and Ralph Hill's two-volume *An Outline of Musical History* (1929). The 1920s also saw Hogarth publications of works well-known for their musical sound and structure: in July 1923, for example, Woolf wrote to Barbara Bagenal of her trembling hands after setting the whole of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" for printing (July 8);¹⁶ and in November 1926 the Woolfs published Gertrude Stein's lecture "Composition as Explanation" as part of their pamphlet series "The Hogarth Essays."¹⁷ The friendship struck up between Woolf and the composer Dame Ethel Smyth has been thoroughly documented by critics and biographers: Woolf did not actually meet Smyth until 1930, but she reviewed *Streaks of Life*, the second volume of Smyth's memoirs, in 1921, and had seen the premier performance of her opera *The Wreckers* in 1909 (E3 300n1). From 1926 to 1929, Leonard Woolf reviewed records for *The Nation and Athenaeum* in an unsigned column titled "New Gramophone Records." From 1939 to 1969, he also kept a meticulously detailed log of gramophone records that he (and until her death, his wife) listened to.¹⁸ He states in a letter that Virginia Woolf "was very fond of music and we used to listen to the wireless and gramophone — classical music — practically every night" (528).

When she pronounced in her essay on Sickert that "[t]he arts flirt and joke and pay each other compliments," Woolf might well have been talking about the Bloomsbury group itself. Within the group, there were ongoing informal discussions of the relationships between and influences across different media, in which Woolf took an active part. While Jacobs observes that music was the one area in which Bloomsbury had no real resident expert (though Sydney Saxon-Turner was a keen Wagnerian, and Adrian Stephen played the pianola), music nevertheless played a key part in such conversations as well as in the work of group members. In "Lecture Given at Leighton Park School," Vanessa Bell uses a synesthetic simile to describe the importance of form and color as her

primary artistic concerns: for example, she talks about striving to find “a grey as different from other greys as one chord in music is different from others” (156). On a less metaphorical level, too, interdisciplinarity was a characteristic feature of the work of the group. Duncan Grant’s “Abstract Kinetic Collage Painting with Sound” (1914), fifteen feet long and eleven inches high, was a notable mixed media experiment: it was intended to be displayed in continuous motion and with a musical accompaniment, the Adagio from Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 1.¹⁹ The Omega Workshop’s design collaborations included painted furniture, among which were musical instruments such as the harpsichord with a Roger Fry nude inside its lid. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant also designed a music room with the theme of Autumn for the Lefevre Galleries in 1932.

Among Woolf’s intimate circle within the group, Clive Bell and especially Roger Fry made important and controversial contributions to art criticism and to modernist theorizations of the arts in general. Bell, Woolf’s brother-in-law, outlines his formalist aesthetic in his 1914 book *Art*: “lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call “Significant Form”; and “Significant Form” is the one quality common to all works of visual art” (8).²⁰ Fry, also a de facto brother-in-law for Woolf, was a revolutionary figure on the British art scene: introducing his *Last Lectures*, Kenneth Clark calls him “incomparably the greatest influence on taste since Ruskin... In so far as taste can be changed by one man, it was changed by Roger Fry” (ix).²¹ Like Bell, Fry valued form over content in the visual arts; yet he was more attentive to what he calls “the emotional elements of design” (*Vision and Design* 34).²² His introduction to the catalogue of “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” imagines its artists addressing the Impressionists: “ ‘You have explored nature in every direction, and all honour to you; but your methods and principles have hindered artists from exploring and expressing that emotional significance which lies in things, and is the most important subject matter in art’ ” (quoted in Kapos 645). In the

“Retrospect” to his 1920 collection *Vision and Design* he explains that “I conceived the form of a work of art to be its most essential quality” and that “I conceived the form and the emotion which it conveyed as being inextricably bound together in the aesthetic whole” (294). Like both Bell’s attention to “relations of forms” and Forster’s stress on the “rhythmic” relationship between part and whole in the novel, Fry always emphasized the importance of the work of art as a formal relation: in “Some Questions in Aesthetics” (1926), he maintains that “our reaction to works of art is a reaction to a relation and not to sensations and objects or persons or events” (3).

Woolf seems almost to be echoing Fry, then, when she says that “Form in fiction is emotion put into the right relations” (L3 133). Innumerable critics have linked her work with Fry’s aesthetics;²³ Panthea Reid Broughton in particular argues the case for Woolf’s engagement with his ideas in the short stories collected in *Monday or Tuesday*, while Jacobs suggests that in *The Waves* Woolf “probably came closest to achieving the goal that Fry set” (230). Yet despite Fry’s undeniable influence on her work, Woolf did not simply translate Fry’s ideas into the medium of literature, as Allen McLaurin notes: “His co-operation with Virginia Woolf is more exciting than the mere sharing of certain opinions — they were both self-aware in their engagement with the problem of representation” (20). In her 1940 biography of Fry, Woolf notes the frequent occurrence of the word “rhythm” in his work (214).²⁴ As well as “rhythm,” a word which was crucial to Woolf’s own concept of literary composition, other key terms that recur in the work of both writers include design, harmony and balance. Fry’s interests were not restricted to the visual arts: in 1927 the Hogarth Press published his translation of Charles Mauron’s *The Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature*, and during the 1920s he had begun his translation of the poems of Mallarmé, difficult work which he discussed with Woolf. In *Roger Fry*, Woolf notes that “the arts of painting and writing lay close together and Roger Fry was always making raids across the boundaries” (208), yet regrets that “he never

found time to work out his theory of the influence of Post-Impressionism upon literature..." (172). Nevertheless, she argues, his unusual perspective was worthwhile:

As a critic of literature, then, he was not what is called a safe guide. He looked at the carpet from the wrong side; but he made it for that very reason display unexpected patterns. And many of his theories held good for both arts. Design, rhythm, texture — there they were again — in Flaubert as in Cézanne. And he would hold up a book to the light as if it were a picture and show where in his view — it was a painter's of course — it fell short. (240)

Despite these minor misgivings about Fry's approach to literary criticism, Woolf's diary makes reference to plenty of conversations with him about her current projects: of her *Monday or Tuesday* short stories, for example, Woolf records that Fry "thinks I'm on the track of real discoveries and certainly not a fake" (D2 109). Common to such exchanges between Woolf and Fry were discussions of the various aims and compositional methods of artists across different media, as Woolf notes in her diary for Thursday 22 November, 1917: "I said one could, and certainly did, write with phrases, not only words; but that didn't help things on much. Roger asked me if I founded my writing upon texture or upon structure; I connected structure with plot, and therefore said "texture." Then we discussed the meaning of structure and texture in painting and in writing" (D1 80). As Woolf suggests here, it is difficult to find the right vocabulary with which to discuss the arts in a comparative way: terms from one discipline must be transposed into that of another.

Yet the activity of "looking at the carpet from the wrong side" could prove surprisingly productive, as Woolf herself found. As is well documented, Woolf constantly sought new forms for the novel and disliked being tied down by strict generic classifications. As early as 1908 she wrote "I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes" (L1 356). On 27 June 1925, while working on *To the Lighthouse*, she thought about rejecting the word "novel" altogether: "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel.' A new ____ by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (D3

34). Diary entries from the following years, especially in this period after the publication of *Jacob's Room*, show her trying out a range of generic combinations to describe her work, from “prose yet poetry; a novel & a play” (D3 128), to “play-poem” (D3 139), “Essay-Novel” (D4 129), “biographical fantasy” (D4 180), and “a poet-prose book” (D5 276). Woolf’s repeated and explicit statements about her wishes to combine poetry, prose, and drama with non-fictional forms such as the essay and the biography suggest a lasting interest in what Werner Wolf has termed “intermediality.”²⁵ In her theorizations of what modern fiction ought to do, music often appears as part of a list of sensory impressions. In “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), for example, she describes a new kind of literature: “It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play” (E2 224). The writer must harness “the power of music, the stimulus of sight, the effect on us of the shape of trees or the play of colour” in order to dramatize “the extraordinary number of perceptions which have not yet been expressed” (228-29). In “Phases of Fiction” (1929), where she outlines a comprehensive theory of fiction, she describes a “desire for distance, for music, for shadow, for space” (E3 65).

More specifically, Woolf often invokes music — and rhythm in particular — in reference to the composition of her novels. While working on *To the Lighthouse* in 1926, for example, she writes to Vita Sackville-West:

Style is a simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can’t use the wrong words. But on the other hand here am I sitting after half the morning, crammed with ideas, and visions, and so on, and can’t dislodge them, for lack of the right rhythm. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. (L3 247)

Likewise, she claims that “writing is nothing but putting words on the backs of rhythm. If they fall off the rhythm, one’s done” (L4 303-04). Her comments about the style of *The Waves* repeatedly draw on the idea of music, even suggesting particular pieces of classical music as spurs to the novel’s composition. Woolf’s most explicit statement about

her writing's relationship to music, however, occurs in a letter dated almost a decade after the publication of *The Waves*. Bob Trevelyan's widow Bessie had written to Woolf praising her biography of Roger Fry and noting her impression of the book's musical structure. In reply, Woolf writes that Bessie has "found out exactly what I was trying to do when you compare [*Roger Fry*] to a piece of music . . . there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes." Like both Huxley and Eliot, she uses the terms "developments and variations" to explain the ways in which she worked with these themes "to make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter." The musical structure of *Roger Fry*, then, is quite intentional and deliberate. Yet, as Woolf points out, it is not the only one of her works that is self-consciously underpinned by the idea of music: "Its odd, for I'm not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them" (L6 426).

It is hardly surprising, then, that so many Woolf critics have found useful parallels in music. It is the predominant metaphor in critical appraisals of her narrative style. In his *Listener* obituary dated 10 April 1941, for example, Stephen Spender draws an extended musical analogy:

It is a well-known device of composers to take a theme and write variations on it. The same tune which is trivial in one light passage in a major key is profound in a minor key scored differently; at times the original tune seems lost while the harmonies explore transcendent depths far beyond the character of the theme; now the tune runs fleetingly past us; now it is held back so that time itself seems slowed down or stretched out. This musical quality is the essence of Virginia Woolf's writing. The characters she creates — Mrs Dalloway, Mrs Ramsay, Mr Ramsay — are well defined to be sure, but they are only the theme through which she explores quite other harmonies of time, death, poetry and a love which is more mysterious and less sensual than ordinary human love. (Majumdar 427)

In *The Interrupted Moment*, Lucio Ruotolo uses the metaphor of dance to describe the rhythmic elements of Woolf's style: "A choreography for Woolf's fiction inevitably develops from the rhythm of broken sequence. Those characters who join the dance create a new and constantly shifting pattern, sustained and nourished, I would argue, by a

succession of interruptions” (2). And in *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach discusses Woolf’s “polyphonic treatment of the image,” noting the effects of her associative methods of narration: “It is as though an apparently simple text revealed its proper content only in the commentary on it, a simple musical theme only in the development-section” (540-41). In fact, as Patricia Oudek Laurence has noted, it can be quite difficult *not* to deploy musical analogies when discussing the form of Woolf’s novels:

Larger musical structures beyond the sentence that support Woolf’s work are apparent in the metaphors of critics. For example, E. K. Browne observes in his discussion of *To the Lighthouse* that “the three parts of the novel are related somewhat as the three big blocks of sound in a sonata” (pp. 69-70); *The Waves* has been described as an opera, and *Between the Acts* as a musical drama or, perhaps more accurately, a melodrama; *Jacob’s Room* was described by Woolf herself as a “disconnected rhapsody” (*Diary 2*, p.179), and *The Voyage Out* as a “harlequinade” (*ibid.*, p.17). (185)

As Laurence argues, critics — like Woolf herself — draw heavily on music as a metaphor for the stylistic workings of particular novels, especially *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

Music can be a problematic metaphor with which to discuss literature, however. In a February 1932 review of *The Waves* in the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, Gabriel Marcel makes a protracted comparison with musical methods in order to draw attention to a fundamental formal difficulty faced by the novelist:

One thinks of a musician who, assigning one part to the flute, another to the violin, yet another to the violin cello or the harp, simply joins the parts together. I am quite aware that we cannot ask a writer to orchestrate the parts like a composer, who superimposes them, and that there cannot be any question of our being made to apprehend simultaneously the outpourings and lyrical asides of Bernard, Susan and Rhoda. But the fact that this is impossible reveals precisely the irrationality of lifting arbitrarily certain technical devices from among the structural resources of one art and transposing them to a quite different art. (Majumdar 295)

Marcel’s complaint here highlights a serious problem with ideas of intermediality or interdisciplinarity in the arts, one which confronts not only writers such as Woolf but also

their critics. As Laurence reminds us, and as Woolf's non-fiction writings on music also emphasize, broad comparisons between literature and music can quickly “become strained if identifications among them become too rigid or thoroughgoing, and in particular where critics fail to account for differences between media (185): critics, like writers, must therefore acknowledge and understand “the limitations of comparing a language-based novel with a musical form” (185). Moreover, to call a novel “musical” is in many ways evasive, implying a retreat into pure form or even mere decoration.

How then can we discuss music and literature together? This question has preoccupied both literary critics and musicologists over recent years. The rapid growth of critical interest in the relationships between music and literature, as well as in approaches to their analysis, led to the 1997 formation of a dedicated association for word and music studies.²⁶ Peter Dayan points to the fundamental issue of translation across media as “a first locus for the imbalance between musicology and literary criticism: writing on literature became literature; but writing on music could not become music, for obvious reasons — except in the sense that literature itself may be considered to be defined by its musicality” (ix). Calvin S. Brown's *Music and Literature*, often viewed as the “founding text” of musico-literary studies (Benson 5), attempts a comparative analysis of the two media. Following on from Brown's work, the idea of “intermediality,” as defined by Werner Wolf and others, aims to identify the ways in which literature can be defined as musical; yet it presents another problem in its creation of criteria for judging the “musical” achievement of a literary work.²⁷ It also tends to take “music” as a purely aesthetic category, thus ignoring the increasing range of questions brought to bear on music itself over the last twenty years in what has become known as the “new

musicology.”²⁸ In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, for example, Jacques Attali argues that music is a crucial signal of social and cultural change. “Listening to music,” he asserts, “is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political” (6). Critics such as Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert focus on the nineteenth century in applying the terms of literary and cultural studies to readings of musical texts; a wealth of criticism now exists which addresses the cultural history of music as well as its representations in nineteenth-century poetry and fiction.²⁹ The study of music in twentieth-century literature, while less established, is rapidly expanding.³⁰ It is complimented by the relatively new field of “sound studies,” which takes into account technological developments in the transmission, recording and reception of sounds, and offers new frames for analyzing the production and reception of music and other sounds within literary texts.³¹

In Woolf criticism specifically, while the visual arts have long been a focus of inquiry, attention has only recently been drawn to the potential influence of music or other art forms. To date, the most comprehensive account of musical references in Woolf's published and unpublished writings is provided by Peter Jacobs's essay “The Second Violin Tuning in the Ante-Room: Virginia Woolf and Music,” in Diane Gillespie's much-needed anthology *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*.³² Jacobs outlines the evidence of Woolf's musical knowledge and briefly charts its development in her work. While several critics have noted musical references, analogies, or parallels in individual novels, there is no full-length study which takes into account the shifting influence of music through Woolf's career or the wider range of conflicting sociocultural meanings attributed to music. Jane Marcus is perhaps the most influential critic of

musical analogy in Woolf's novels. Her studies provide groundbreaking interpretations of musical allusion in *Night and Day* and *The Years* in particular; but her insistent focus on specific works (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony*, Smyth's *The Prison*, and Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*) does not account for the changing questions Woolf asks about music.³³ In recent years, however, scholars have brought a wider range of critical approaches to Woolf's treatment of music and sound. Emma Sutton focuses on Woolf's engagement with classical music, especially in the implications of her repeated allusions to Wagner for her representations of both music and language; Emilie Crapoulet, herself a classically trained pianist, looks at Woolf's "musical" texts alongside contemporary musical compositions; Elicia Clements has both expanded upon earlier analyses of *The Waves* in relation to Beethoven and explored the implications of Woolf's friendship with Ethel Smyth on her notions of listening and community; Melba Cuddy-Keane and Bonnie Kime Scott look at Woolf's representations of sound and recorded music in relation to the technological innovations of the early twentieth century.³⁴

Woolf's acknowledged interest in interdisciplinary approaches to literature, her love of music, and her assumed position as a "common listener," rather than a musical expert, makes her the ideal subject for a study of literary writing about music.³⁵ My own approach, like Woolf's, is not so much musically specialized as it is informed by broader ideas of music, both as cultural practice and as a literary convention. As Benson puts it, "[f]iction serves as earwitness to the role of music in everyday life, a record of why, where and how music is made, heard and received" (4). This study has two overlapping focuses: Woolf's thoughts about the relationship between music and literature, and the changing ways in which she represents the activities of making and listening to music in

her writings, both fiction and non-fiction. In order to analyze Woolf's ideas of music as they change over time, her works are grouped loosely chronologically. Chapter One looks at three of Woolf's early essays which center on musical topics, "Street Music" (1905), "The Opera" (1909), and "Impressions at Bayreuth" (1909). My reading of the essays links Woolf's discussion of music with her developing identification as a professional writer, arguing that her investigations into the nature and status of music as an art form played an important part in the formation of her own literary project. In Chapter Two I turn to Woolf's early fiction, focusing on her representations of women musicians and scenes of musical performance in *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), and "The String Quartet" (1921). I suggest that Woolf's depictions of music as a medium which appeals simultaneously to interiority and exteriority indicate its direct influence on her development of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques. In Chapter Three, I show that the preponderance of criticism which dubs Woolf's novels "musical" in form actually ignores the vexed questions of voice and meaning implicit in Woolf's own novelistic representations of song. Focusing on singing and listening figures in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931), I argue that the lyric interruptions caused by these musical scenes serve not to symbolize, but rather to disturb, the idea of formal unity. Chapter Four looks at the increasingly complex figurations of music in Woolf's late work alongside the rhetoric of the English Folk Revival. In *The Years* and "Craftsmanship" (both 1937), *Between the Acts* and "Anon" (1941), Woolf both responds to new sound technologies and interrogates the vexed concepts of English history and national identity.

- 1 Readers have often thought of Woolf's books as music *after* she writes them. For contemporary musical responses to Woolf and her work, see Marshall and Rudikoff. As well as such well-known examples as the Indigo Girls' song "Virginia Woolf," Joan La Barbara's *Woolfsong* was performed as an opera-in-progress several times between 2004 and 2006, and the band Princeton (who appeared at the 2009 Woolf conference in New York) have released an EP called *Bloomsbury*. Likewise, there have been countless adaptations of Woolf's own writings, such as Dominick Argento's 1975 song cycle *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Libby Larsen's 1993 opera *Mrs Dalloway* (premiered in Cleveland in 1993), or most recently Katie Mitchell and The Company's production *Waves* (2006), a multimedia staged adaptation of the novel, which relies heavily on music and other sound effects.
- 2 Kandinsky in particular, an accomplished musician, developed complex theories of the relationship between art and music. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910) he distinguishes between composition which is "melodic" and that which is "symphonic," arguing that "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul" (32). He even claimed to be literally synesthetic: apparently when he saw color, he heard music.
- 3 "An Essay on Criticism," line 365.
- 4 This is the opening stanza of "Art poétique," translated by Martin Sorrell as follows:
 Lets hear the music first and foremost
 And that means no more one-two-one-twos...
 Something more vague instead, something lighter
 Dissolving in air, weightless as air. (123)
- 5 Kirby-Smith argues that in many ways "Symbolism is perfectly continuous with Romanticism" (269-70); Butler, by contrast, stresses Mallarmé's innovations: "we are encouraged to read the poem on different spatial and conceptual levels, as if it were an orchestral score" (5).
- 6 See also Yeats's essay "The Symbolism of Poetry": "when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion" (quoted in Kirby-Smith 268).
- 7 This line is passed back and forth between the two poets: Pound quotes here it in a review of Eliot in *Poetry* magazine (1917), and Eliot quotes it again in his introduction to Pound.
- 8 Daniel Albright quotes Pound on the decline of both music and poetry since antiquity: "music and poetry had been in alliance . . . that the divorce of the two arts had been to the advantage of neither, and that melodic invention had declined simultaneously and progressively with their divergence" (Foreword to Caughie, *Mechanical Reproduction* vii). Woolf adopts a similar stance (and at the same time parodies it) in "Street Music."
- 9 Eliot's concept of the "auditory imagination" resembles Woolf's argument in "Street Music" about music's ability to exert a primitive power over its listeners' subconscious.
- 10 See for example W. H. Auden's paired poems "The Novelist" and "The Composer" (1938): while the novelist must learn "How to be plain and awkward" (180, l.7) "All the others translate: [. . .] From Life to Art by painstaking adaption,/ Relying on us to cover the rift;/ Only your notes are pure contraption,/ Only your song is an absolute gift." (181, ll. 1, 5-8).
- 11 See Melnick, who argues that "the notion of a musicalized literature is a self-conscious element and source of creative ferment occupying the imagination of modern writers to a degree beyond even the Renaissance interest in the link between poetry and musica humana" (13).
- 12 Direct "musical" structuring of a text on the part of the author does not always equal a correspondingly "musical" experience for the reader, however. As David Lindley points out, "though musical structures offered a stimulus to ways of organizing language, the works are not themselves therefore "musical" in any straightforward way. Pursuit of an analogy has a liberating effect upon writers, but the connection with music remains, for the reader, an indirect and intellectual one" (1009).
- 13 Like Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, *Aspects of the Novel* had its genesis in a lecture series delivered at Cambridge: the Clark Lectures ran from January to March 1927 and were published in November of that year. David Dowling sees Woolf and Forster as sharing a particular aesthetic as "Bloomsbury novelists." Forster's *The Story of the Siren* was published by the Hogarth Press in 1920 (and six other works of his would follow). See also Hoffman and Ter Haar on the relationship between *Howards End* and *The Waves*.
- 14 See for example Mansfield's description of the style of "Miss Brill":

It's a very queer thing how craft comes into writing. I mean down to details. Par exemple. In Miss Brill I choose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I choose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on that day at that very moment. After I'd written it I read it aloud — numbers of times — just as one would play over a musical composition — trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill — until it fitted her.

Don't think I'm vain about the little sketch. It's only the method I wanted to explain. I often wonder whether other writers do the same — If a thing has really come off it seems to me that there mustn't be one single word out of place, or one word that could be taken out. That's how I AIM at writing. It will take some time to get anywhere near there. (Letter to Richard Murray, January 17, 1921; L4 164-65).

Woolf uses a similar technical analogy to describe writing in her diary: "It strikes me that in this book I *practise* writing; do my scales; yes & work at certain effects" (D2 319; Fri 17 Oct 1924)

- 15 This was in part due to difficulties finding a printer who would take on the project, because of the text's obscenity.
- 16 The Hogarth Press had also published Eliot's *Poems* in 1919.
- 17 See DuPlessis, "Woolfenstein."
- 18 Most entries are for Beethoven, Mozart, and other canonical figures from Austro-German classical repertory.
- 19 This ambitious project was realized in 1974 by the Tate Gallery (and exhibited again recently in the 1999 "Art of Bloomsbury" exhibition).
- 20 As Hussey points out, "Clive Bell wrote of his appreciation of music as "pure form" and, as Woolf had met him six years prior to writing the letter quoted above, it is reasonable to suppose that such ideas were current in conversations among her friends" (*Singing* 64).
- 21 Fry organized the controversial Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912, and founded both the Grafton Group and the Omega Workshops in 1913. His essay collections *Vision and Design* (1920) and *Transformations* (1926) were followed by monographs on Cézanne (1927), Matisse (1930), French art (1932) and British painting (1934); he later became the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge.
- 22 This quotation is from "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909); in the same essay Fry argues that music "of all the arts supplies the strongest stimulus to the imaginative life, and at the same time has the least power of controlling its direction" (23)
- 23 See for example McLaurin, Dowling, Guiget, Reid; more recently, Gillespie's *The Sisters' Arts* and Goldman's *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* extend the analysis to include Vanessa Bell.
- 24 As C. Ruth Miller has observed, "'[r]hythm' was such an integral term in Roger Fry's aesthetics (as in Forster's) that Clive Bell departs from his argument in *Art* to acknowledge it: 'I will never quarrel with that blessed word "rhythm"'" (51).
- 25 Wolf first defines this term in *The Musicalization of Fiction* (35-50); see also "Intermediality Revisited."
- 26 Based in Graz, Austria, the International Association for Word and Music Studies "aims to coordinate the manifold activities in the field and to provide an international forum for musicologists and literary scholars with interest(s) in interart/intermedial studies, crossing cultural boundaries and expanding traditional disciplinary categories" (see website: <http://wordmusicstudies.org/>).
- 27 See Benson, who points out that this approach gives rise to "an unnecessary preoccupation with the question of verification: exactly how do we establish that such-and-such a text is musical and how might this allow us to evade the ever-present danger of the impressionistic metaphor. The resultant typologies, most extensively displayed in the work of Werner Wolf, have been impressive, but to my mind, severely limiting — and not a little ironic, given the shift away from, or at least increased self-consciousness towards, positivist methods in much contemporary musicology" (5).
- 28 See Cook, especially chapter 6.
- 29 See for example work by Temperley, Weliver, Fuller & Losseff, and especially Da Sousa Correa.
- 30 See Benson and Bucknell.
- 31 See for example Corbin, Johnston, Gitelman, Kittler, Kahn.
- 32 As well as music and the visual arts, the collection also includes essays on dance, photography, and cinema.
- 33 Tracy Levy's "The Murmur Behind the Current: Woolf and the Blues" faces a reverse problem: the argument operates by inference only, linking the narrator of *A Room of One's Own* with African-American female blues singers of the 1920s.

- 34 Crapoulet's short monograph *Virginia Woolf: A Musical Life* has just been published as part of Cecil Woolf's Bloomsbury Heritage series; Sutton's book on Woolf and classical music is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press; Clements is working on a book project entitled *A View to the Whole Symphony*.
- 35 As Gillespie notes, this may have been a slightly disingenuous tactic on her part: "Where the other arts were concerned, Woolf consistently, and somewhat defensively, represented herself not as a specialist, but as a layperson: a common viewer, a common listener" ("Introduction," *Multiple Muses* 1).

Chapter One

“Brilliant, Beautiful and Absurd”: Music, Place and Authority in the Essays of Virginia Stephen

Music critic Cornetto De Basso — better known as George Bernard Shaw — declared in 1893 that “people who are not musicians should not intrude into opera-houses: indeed, it is to me an open question whether they ought to be allowed to exist at all” (217). Despite the hyperbolic nature of Shaw’s remark, it nevertheless serves as a useful reminder of the major changes that turn-of-the-century London saw in both the institutions of music and their cultural associations.¹ During the late 1800s, large concerts and recitals grew more and more popular, melodrama gave way to realism and society drama, and music’s role in the theater diminished accordingly. The establishment of the Promenade concerts sought to promote the works of English composers; the predominantly European repertory of the opera house at Covent Garden drew crowds from a range of social backgrounds, as did the cosmopolitan variety of the rapidly expanding music hall; and Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic operettas drew on a combination of musical registers and sources, all the while exploiting their materials for parody. In its increasing accessibility to a broader public, music was thus an important part of the culture of the city.² Shaw’s vocabulary of intrusion highlights serious issues of spatial and social regulation which are key to turn-of-the-century writings about music, listening, and aural territories.

The young Virginia Stephen was just the kind of “intruder” by whom Shaw claims to be so bothered.³ Beyond the token amount of rudimentary instruction deemed an appropriate part of Victorian girlhood, she had no classical training; yet she had a keen interest in music, regularly attending both opera and a wide range of concerts, and her earliest forays into professional writing include several short essays on musical topics. As she points out ironically in “The Decay of Essay-Writing” (1905), moreover, expertise is largely unnecessary for a critic: “You need know nothing of music, art, or literature to

have a certain interest in their productions, and the great burden of modern criticism is simply the expression of such individual likes and dislikes — the amiable garrulity of the tea-table — cast into the form of essays” (*E1* 26). Stephen’s own attitudes to music, therefore, are informed by both a range of experience and a little education; most importantly, they draw on prevailing ideas of music’s place within the culture of the early years of the century.

This chapter focuses on Virginia Stephen’s non-fiction writing about music. I look at three early essays, “Street Music,” “The Opera,” and “Impressions at Bayreuth,” all dating from before “human character changed” in 1910 (*E1* 320). These essays share a focus on the place of music, both in the literal sense of its location and in terms of broader questions of its social function and status as an art form. Music on the streets threatens to displace the fixed communities of London domesticity because it vexes conventional spatial boundaries and moves beyond them, offering possibilities for mobility and innovation; at the opera house, social divisions are simultaneously elided by the shared experience of musical performances and thrown into relief by disagreements over interpretation; and the Bayreuth festival prompts an exploration of music’s constant movement between the general and the particular, and its simultaneous solitary and communal appeal. Stephen’s essays on music not only trace important shifts in the cultural meanings attached to music, but are also important in the development of her own writing. Her investigation of music’s place in city life — from the street to the specialized contexts of conventional performance, and including the attitudes which accompanied these various settings — informs her growing self-consciousness about her work. Likewise, her questioning of music’s place within the arts — its formal properties, its potential to communicate extralinguistic meaning, and its relationship to language more generally — provides her with formal models for her own aims as a writer.

“Music in the air”: “Street Music” and the place of the artist

In a diary entry dated 30 January 1905, Virginia Stephen records that she “wrote all the morning at a paper which may, with luck do for Leo [Maxse]. It is about Music! – naturally depends more upon the imagination than upon facts” (D1 229-30). More than just a characteristic dismissal of her own lack of musical expertise, this statement also refers to the mercurial quality of music itself, whose meaning depends more upon the imagination of the hearer than on determinable fact.⁴ In the brief essay she mentions here, Stephen considers the place of music “in the air” (31), outside the controlled space of the concert hall or private house. She takes this conceit as the point of departure for a paradoxical discussion of the changing status of the artist in turn-of-the-century London. Seemingly a piece of light entertainment, “Street Music” engages directly with the spate of nineteenth-century complaints about street noise, while also responding to established traditions of writing about music: Stephen questions its capacity to create meaning and evaluates its status as an art form.

One of Virginia Stephen’s first published pieces of writing, “Street Music” appeared in the *National Review* in 1905. The essay was composed in the first month of that year, shortly after the Stephen brothers and sisters had moved from their Hyde Park Gate childhood home to set up house in the noisier, less established Gordon Square. Having been advised to avoid the noise and stress of the city after suffering a breakdown in 1904, Virginia Stephen moved later than her siblings. When she arrived in Bloomsbury, then, she was entering the public life of the city in more ways than one: as she put it in a letter to Nelly Cecil, she was “a lady in search of a job,” looking for ways to support herself through her writing (L1 168). Her first publication, in December 1904, was an unsigned book review in the *Guardian*, payment for which is recorded in January 1905; in early 1905 she had a piece rejected by the *Times Literary Supplement*; and she began teaching evening classes at Morley College in January 1905. The *National Review* was a right-wing journal whose editor was married to Kitty Maxse, a family friend.

Stephen's concerns about the article itself and about her own status as a professional writer can be traced through a series of diary entries. She feels "doubtful" after finishing it (*D1* 230), "bothered some" by Violet Dickinson's criticism (*D1* 232), and surprised and relieved when the response is positive: "A letter from Leo: delighted to accept my charming article - which is a load off my mind - To be refused by a friend would have been most uncomfortable, & I had made up my mind to expect it" (*D1* 238). When the proofs arrive, she records a sense of disbelief: "So perhaps he means it" (*D1* 239); and on receiving her five-pound cheque for the piece, she feels vague discomfort: "seems ridiculous overpayment for barely two mornings [sic] work, & I wish it were better" (*D1* 244). "Street Music," then, is very much the work of an apprentice writer, negotiating the literary marketplace and tailoring her writing for publication in a conservative journal: the essay's constant shifts of tone and witty paradox mask its more subversive social criticism.

In its opposition of entrenched Victorian propriety with the seemingly uncontrollable movement of street musicians, "Street Music" reflects the Stephen children's desire to do away with outdated models of domesticity in favor of a more flexible set-up for their community of family and friends. As the opening sentence makes clear, the music of street players upsets conventional residential settings: " 'Street musicians are counted a nuisance' by the candid dwellers in most London squares, and they have taken the trouble to emblazon this terse bit of musical criticism upon a board which bears other regulations for the peace and propriety of the square" (*E1* 27). Rather than being silenced by this rule, however, street musicians simply ignore it. Their music vexes conventional spatial boundaries and moves beyond them. Locked square gardens and high brick walls cannot keep out its sound: it "disturbs the householder at his legitimate employment, and the vagrant and unorthodox nature of such a trade irritates a well-ordered mind" (28). The free movement of music thus threatens the sanctity of the Victorian house, and likewise destabilizes its restrictive codes of domesticity and privacy:

“vagrant” street music, placed in direct contrast to the order and stasis of domestic life, is deemed an “unorthodox” and “illegitimate” employment.

Such complaints about street musicians’ aural invasion of domestic space were not uncommon. In *Victorian Soundscapes*, John M. Picker traces a history of writings about what came to be known as the “organ nuisance” in nineteenth-century London. Focusing on the key figures of Carlyle, Babbage, Bass, Dickens, and Leech, he notes that battles over street noise were “conceptually as well as concretely territorial” (45). In their concern with demarcating and policing auditory space against the rogue attacks of street musicians, he argues, these complaints reveal an overlapping set of nineteenth-century preoccupations: “first, defending the purity of English national identity and culture against the taint of foreign infiltration; second, upholding economic and social divisions between the lower classes and middle-class professionals; and third, protecting the frail, afflicted bodies of (English, middle-class) invalids from the invasive, debilitating effects of (foreign, lower-class) street music” (45). In her exploration of the “vagrant and unorthodox nature” of street music, therefore, Virginia Stephen is drawing on an established tradition of writing. As a starting point, she mimics late Victorian complaints over the noise of street musicians, addressing the range of cultural concerns Picker identifies as typical; yet as she develops her argument, she also reframes these issues within broader philosophical contexts in order to explore the social place of both art and the artist.

In “Street Music,” as in nineteenth-century complaints, the threat to domestic order posed by street music is compounded by the fact that most of the musicians are foreign. As Picker points out, while the most common focus of grievances against street musicians was the Italian organ-grinder, Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) lists musicians from all over the British Isles, Europe, the United States and India (46). When she describes “the stout Teuton and the swarthy Italian,” therefore, Stephen is drawing on a shorthand vocabulary of ethnic stereotypes familiar to

her conservative audience (27). In addition to vague generalized fears about immigration as a potential danger to English national identity, racism directed at street musicians highlights an anxiety specific to English musical culture. Although London had always been an important center for classical music, no English composer had been deemed great since the death of Purcell in 1695. In 1895, the manager of the Queen's Hall, Robert Newman, set up the Promenade concerts, a series of popular classical music performances still popular today. Conducting the orchestra was the 26-year-old Henry J. Wood, who sought to counter widespread conceptions of England as "Das Land ohne Musik."⁵ Through the fledgling institution of the Proms, Wood brought large amounts of new music to a broad cross-section of the London public; to his predominantly young audience, he actively promoted the works of English composers such as Parry, Stanford, and Elgar. The establishment of the Proms was an effort to reinstate English music against the predominance of foreign composers and performers in late nineteenth-century London.⁶ There is perhaps an implicit parody of such nationalist educational impulses in Stephen's statement that "The German band gives a weekly concert as regularly as the Queen's Hall orchestra; the Italian organ grinders are as faithful to their audience and reappear punctually on the same platform, and in addition to these recognised masters every street has an occasional visit from some wandering star" (27).

In "Street Music," then, Stephen is concerned not only with the eccentric figure of the foreign musician, but with the relationship between English culture and artistic expression more generally. She wonders if the two have become almost mutually exclusive: "Artists of all kinds have invariably been looked on with disfavour, especially by English people, not solely because of the eccentricities of the artistic temperament, but because we have trained ourselves to such perfection of civilisation that expression of any kind has something almost indecent — certainly irreticent — about it" (28). Self-control and self-consciousness are depicted as particularly English characteristics, so that the unconstrained movement of the wandering street musicians is placed in direct contrast

with the reserved demeanor of the middle-class residents of the London squares. The principal social threat of the arts, Stephen suggests, is that they give voice to interiority and thereby risk a loss of control: “Few parents, we observe, are willing that their sons should become painters or poets or musicians, not only for worldly reasons, but because in their own hearts they consider that it is unmanly to give expression to the thoughts and emotions which the arts express and which it should be the endeavour of the good citizen to repress” (28).⁷

This uneasy opposition between expression and repression, Stephen argues, is what prompts socially standardized divisions between high and low culture. The idea of expression is more palatable when it is brought under a kind of social control, working within established contexts as part of a clear code of cultural value. As she points out, the dismissal of the artist as a socially unacceptable figure is contradicted by the overwhelming adulation and respect paid to successful artists: “though we are not comfortable in the presence of artists we do our best to domesticate them” (29). Such domestication of music can be seen most clearly in the nineteenth-century cult of the pianoforte: “The whole of rhythm and harmony have been pressed, like dried flowers, into the neatly divided scales, the tones and semitones of the pianoforte” (30). Flower pressing is a Victorian feminine pastime (in *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, it is Peter Walsh’s primary memory of Clarissa’s aunt Helena Parry [162]). By invoking this image, Stephen emphasizes not only the characterization of piano playing as a domestic and feminine activity, but also nineteenth-century obsessions with classification. If the “pressing” of movement fixes in place neat divisions which do not allow for experimentation, the education of the English middle classes is restricted to “what it is safe for them to know of music” (30); but the irregular and unpredictable movement of street musicians defies such classification and confirms widely-held suspicions that music is “dangerous” and “intoxicating” (30).

Despite its abstract expressive power, however, music is also something material: the apparent freedom of the street musicians does not rule out the fact that they work for money. Stephen admits that not all street music is of the highest level: “Music, to be successful in a street, must be loud before it is beautiful” (28). She invokes the social divisions between high and low musical culture in her description of the upstairs-downstairs model of the Victorian house: “[musicians] certainly live on something more substantial than the artistic satisfaction of their own souls; and it is therefore probable that the coins, which it is beneath the dignity of the true lover of music to throw from the drawing-room window, are tendered at the area steps. There is an audience, in short, who is willing to pay for even such crude melody as this” (27). Yet at the same time as acknowledging material need on the part of these foreign artists, and even as she mocks the quality of their performances, Stephen wants to recoup a separate aesthetic space for them and validate their work as art for art’s sake. She repeatedly claims that to pay street musicians at all for their art seems unworthy. After giving one violinist a penny, she feels “the copper, though rags make it acceptable, was, as it is to all who love their work, a perfectly incongruous payment” (28); she remembers following another old man who “literally played himself from Kensington to Knightsbridge in a trance of musical ecstasy, from which a coin would have been a disagreeable awakening” (28); and she surmises that “music that takes possession of the soul so that nakedness and hunger are forgotten must be divine in its nature” (28). By making the activity of street musicians into purely artistic expression rather than material need, Stephen sets in place a romanticized version of reality.⁸

As well as addressing such issues of national culture and class identity, nineteenth-century complaints about street music aimed to protect a particular group of workers from the destructive effects of city noise. Picker’s analysis focuses on the attitudes of middle-class urban professionals such as artists and writers, who worked at home, and for whom the issue of space was a key concern. His chapter title, “The

Soundproof Study: Victorian Professional Identity and Urban Noise,” refers to Thomas Carlyle’s construction of a soundproof room in response to his hatred of street noise. The late nineteenth century, Picker argues, was a period of transition which “elicited heightened professional insecurity, as authors, artists, and the like attempted to form and protect their collective identity” (53). Because they worked at home, within the space of the domestic, they “needed to fight aggressively to mark their territory as professionals” (54). The professionalized body was overwhelmingly characterized as vulnerable, sick, and under attack (64). While Florence Nightingale noted the disturbing effects of unnecessary noise on both the ill and the healthy, nineteenth-century writers and artists painted themselves as suffering invalids subject to an uncontrollable onslaught of noise: as Picker puts it, “[b]arrel organs preyed on their middle class victims through the involuntary faculty of hearing” (65). The noise complaints, therefore, illustrate “a growing need to consolidate a group identity, combined with an aggressive desire for separation along lines of nation, class, and body” (80).

Virginia Stephen might be seen as sharing the position of the urban author working at home, and in particular that of the author as invalid. In January 1905, when she wrote “Street Music,” she was still recovering from her recent breakdown, and had only recently resumed the activity of work: “Rather amuses me to write, since I have been ordered not to write for my brains [sic] health” (*D1* 229-30). Stephen ventriloquizes the concerns of nineteenth-century professionals in “Street Music,” yet her constant use of irony allows her to bypass their assumption of authority. She borrows the terms of conventional arguments against street music while omitting the value judgements which were previously attached. Where the earlier writers sought protection from street music, and defined their own identity against that of street musicians, Stephen switches perspectives, seeking the meaning of street music as an art form and identifying with the musicians themselves. Like the nineteenth-century authors discussed by Picker, Stephen’s workplace was the home; unlike them, however, she viewed street music and noise not as

an annoying distraction, but rather as a productive soundtrack to her professional work. Shortly after moving to Gordon Square in 1904, for example, she writes favorably of the “sounds of wheels and voices” in the city, placing them in direct comparison with the noises of the country (*D1* 217). As Picker notes, part of the problem of identity for nineteenth-century writers was reconciling feminized domestic space and masculine professionalism; Stephen’s attitude, by contrast, recalls that of Jane Carlyle, who — unlike her husband — was quite unbothered by having to work through noise (55). For Stephen, then, the street musician does not stand in opposition to her own work as an artist; rather, it provides a figure of sympathetic identification through which she can explore the social place of artists in general.

Of course, the question of the social status of the artist was hardly invented by the Victorians. As well as responding to relatively recent discussions of the place of art raised by the street music debate, Stephen’s essay takes its place within a longer philosophical tradition. Music in this essay is more than a simple nuisance: Stephen takes the kind of complaints discussed by Picker as a departure point from which to investigate the character of musical expression more generally. Her exploration of the contradictory aspects of the art form takes up questions which have been at the heart of writing about music for centuries. Although she was not a trained musician herself, she read ancient Greek and was aware of historical traditions of writing about music and the other arts. In order to react against the entrenched Victorian social codes encapsulated by the views of the street music crusaders, she turns to social and political thought dating from as far back as antiquity. The ironic innovation of “Street Music” lies in Stephen’s replacement of the fading authority of the Victorians not with new theories of the arts, but rather with reference to well-established ideas of the relationship between music, the arts, and civilization.

Stephen exploits the doubleness inherent in music, typically characterized as both divine and threatening.⁹ She ventures that street music reflects the continuing

presence of pre-Christian gods in the modern world: while contemporary writers and artists seek traces of pagan influence in pastoral settings, in fact the old pagans “are working their charms in the midst of us ... Certainly I should be inclined to ascribe some such divine origin to musicians at any rate, and it is probably some suspicion of this kind that drives us to persecute them as we do” (29). In her association of music with both godlike status and persecution, she draws on a commonplace of classical ideas of music. The pleasures and dangers of music were enumerated by Plato and Aristotle according to the ideals laid out by Pythagoras. Following mathematical principles, music embodied the idea of universal harmony, the divine “music of the spheres.” This abstract and unheard harmony was conceptualized as a force of proportion: earthly music contained within it the potential to approach the higher state of perfection it attempted to reproduce. Nevertheless, the ancients most often viewed music as inferior to other art forms when evaluating its place within the city-state. In the *Republic*, Plato addresses music as servant to the words it accompanies, viewing it as a means to an end within a social context. Legitimate music is useful in political and social terms, but needs to be strictly regulated and observed: when he exiles the modes which are not deemed conducive to good moral character, he seems aware that music possesses expressive power not only as an illustration of a text but as an end in itself. Likewise, Aristotle claims that the musical practitioner is of much lower status than the free man who listens and judges, and who is able to understand the principles manifested in the music. From Plato’s exiled modes to nineteenth-century restrictions on street music, therefore, writings about music over the years are marked by patterns of control and exclusion.

Stephen’s essay directly addresses the questions of status that are a consistent focus of philosophical approaches to music over the years. Writing about music tends to form part of a comparative approach to aesthetics more generally, defining and arguing for its place within a hierarchy of the arts. Critics appraise literature, music, sculpture and painting in terms of their various contributions to education and character formation, their

ability to reproduce nature and lived experience, and their use value. Along these lines, music is usually evaluated in extreme terms: it is most often located at the very top or bottom of such scales of value. Stephen echoes Aristotelian ideas of the role of imitation in the arts as she addresses the relationship between different art forms: “For if the stringing together of words which nevertheless may convey some useful information to the mind, or the laying on of colours which may represent some tangible object, are employments which can be but tolerated at best, how are we to regard the man who spends his time in making tunes? Is not his occupation the least respectable - the least useful and necessary - of the three?” (29). Rhetorically, Stephen is ventriloquizing conventional Victorian opinions here: neither useful nor necessary, music is inferior not only to the work of writers and painters but even to mundane domestic activity.

Yet Stephen ultimately adopts a Romantic attitude, placing music at the top of the hierarchy of the arts. Music’s lack of direct representational content is no longer condemned as useless, but rather exalted: “It is certain that you can carry away nothing that can be of service to you in your day’s work from listening to music; but a musician is not merely a useful creature, to many, I believe, he is the most dangerous of the whole tribe of artists. He is the minister of the wildest of all the gods, who has not yet learnt to speak with human voice, or to convey to the mind the likeness of human things. It is because music incites within us something that is wild and inhuman like itself — a spirit we would willingly stamp out and forget — that we are distrustful of musicians and loath to put ourselves under their power” (29). Music is dangerous because it threatens to awake something wild in the listener’s self: it appeals directly to the imagination in a way that is “wild and inhuman,” primitive and pre-verbal. By characterizing music as something that has “not yet learnt to speak with human voice,” Stephen highlights its instinctive and pre-linguistic appeal.

Here she draws on a broad tradition of inquiry into the relationship between music and language, stemming from eighteenth-century arguments about nature and

culture. To Jean-Jacques Rousseau, music does not simply imitate language; rather, music and poetry were one in a mystical past. When the unity of language and music was lost, both decayed from their common origins: language developed into a rational system, and music's expressive range was diminished. Nevertheless, for Rousseau, music's inarticulate but impassioned appeal is more potent than that of words, appealing as it does to feeling and instinctual immediacy rather than to an intellectual tradition of rational thought. In *Rameau's Nephew*, Denis Diderot likewise discusses music as a language of emotion, defining the *cri animal* as a strong, instinctive cry of passion. Both Rousseau and Diderot argue for the primacy of melody, the line of which expresses the uncontrolled emotion of this spontaneous cry, over harmony, which they dismiss as an unfortunate product of civilization based in artifice rather than nature. Similar ideas of this "natural" voice of music can also be seen in British Romantic poetry: in Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," for example, the song of the highland girl possesses a strange and untranslatable meaning more profound than what can be expressed solely through language.

More recently, such notable Victorian social anthropologists as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer had also paid attention to music's role in the development of language, concentrating like Rousseau and Diderot on the expressive properties of music as something natural and emotional. In establishing its connection to the origins of language, however, Spencer and Darwin sought to counter Romantic notions of music as a transcendent language: their positivist approach fixed music as part of an evolutionary history of language, giving it a developmental role and trying to standardize and naturalize it as a form of communication. In "The Origin and Function of Music" (1857), for example, Spencer asserts that "variations of voice are the physiological results of variations of feeling. It follows that each inflection or modulation is the natural outcome of some passing emotion or sensation; and it follows that the explanation of all kinds of vocal expression, must be sought in this general relation between mental and muscular

excitements. [...] Hence, a priori, loud sounds will be the habitual results of strong feelings” (310). For Spencer, music is a codification of such inevitable emotional associations, and as such, possesses standardized and legible meanings: “song employs and exaggerates the natural language of the emotions — it arises from a systematic combination of those vocal peculiarities which are the physiological effects of acute pleasure and pain” (312). The problem of legibility, in fact, was a key component of nineteenth-century English music: the predominance of program music in Victorian England stands in direct contrast to Romantic valorizations of illegibility and mystery. Parlor pieces like the formulaic “Battle of Prague” rely on readable associations between sound and meaning; likewise, the use of “melos,” standardized musical motifs, to suggest particular emotions in nineteenth-century melodrama seems a logical and scientifically validated step.¹⁰

Darwin, like Spencer, is no great fan of the unreadable; yet he does admit a certain degree of mystery into his analysis of music’s role in human life. In *The Descent of Man*, for example, he states that “neither the enjoyment nor the capacity of producing musical notes are faculties of the least direct use to man in reference to his ordinary habits of life” (317) and notes that music is therefore “amongst the most mysterious” abilities of human beings. Yet he quickly invokes a developmental model to dispel such mystery, noting that musical abilities are present even in the “most savage” races (“though in a very rude and as it appears almost latent condition”), and that a little education can quickly produce accomplished performers: “The musical faculties, which are not wholly deficient in any race, are capable of prompt and high development, as we see with Hottentots and Negros, who have readily become excellent musicians, although they do not practise in their native countries anything that we should esteem as music” (317). (Given the focus on education as imitation here, it is no surprise that Darwin turns next to a discussion of similar abilities in parrots). The kind of musical education Darwin

outlines here is exactly the learned artifice that Rousseau is arguing against and that Stephen is deploring in contemporary England.

When Stephen pronounces that “it is certain that you can carry away nothing that can be of service to you in your day’s work” (29), then, she is mimicking the attitudes of thinkers such as Darwin: music’s meaning cannot be clearly defined because it imparts no tangible “fact” to its listeners. Gillian Beer has noted not only the value Woolf placed on Darwin’s work, but also her “scepticism about developmental narratives” (19, 13). In “Street Music” Stephen rejects both Darwin’s developmental model of music and the more recent complaints of its degeneration, replacing them with what Beer has called an “awareness of the simultaneity of the prehistoric in our present moment” (17). Yet she shares with both Romantic and Victorian thinkers the idea that music is a universal ability present in all cultures, a natural gift that pre-exists the effects of civilization:

It may be indeed that the sense of rhythm is stronger in people whose minds are not elaborately trained to other pursuits, as it is true that savages who have none of the arts of civilisation are very sensitive to rhythm, before they are awake to music proper. The beat of rhythm in the mind is akin to the beat of the pulse in the body; and thus though many are deaf to tune hardly any one is so coarsely organised as not to hear the rhythm of its own heart in words and music and movement. It is because it is thus inborn in us that we can never silence music, any more than we can stop our heart from beating; and it is for this reason too that music is so universal and has the strange and illimitable power of a natural force. (30)

Where Stephen differs most from the above-mentioned philosophers of music is in her focus on rhythm as the fundamental musical ability. Despite their opposing agendas, Rousseau and Diderot, Spencer and Darwin all invoke the primacy of melody as a musical language; Stephen, however, turns to rhythm, a “natural force” as basic and involuntary as that of the human heartbeat. She disregards melody’s ability to communicate emotion and concentrates instead on rhythm as a more immediate embodiment of feeling. Moreover, the equation she draws between “the beat of rhythm in the mind” and “the beat of the pulse in the body” stresses the importance of interiority

and imagination over outward expression. For Stephen, as for Rousseau, education actually detracts from our awareness of music, rather than enhancing it: the “savages” she discusses here are “sensitive” to rhythm in ways that our “civilized” culture is not.

The potential danger carried by music, then, is its appeal to rhythm and the body, which return us to what is basic, biological, and instinctive. Music therefore threatens our ideas of civilization: “To be civilised is to have taken the measure of our own capabilities and to hold them in a perfect state of discipline; but one of our gifts has, as we conceive, so slight a power of beneficence, so unmeasured a power of harm, that far from cultivating it we have done our best to cripple and stifle it” (30). Stephen argues that this danger is what has restricted musical education. Because melody has been standardized and sanitized, it is an unthreatening aspect of music, predictable rather than spontaneous:

The safest and easiest attribute of music — its tune — is taught, but rhythm, which is its soul, is allowed to escape like the winged creature it is. Thus educated people who have been taught what it is safe for them to know of music are those who oftenest boast of their want of ear, and the uneducated, whose sense of rhythm has never been divorced or made subsidiary to their sense of tune, are those who cherish the greatest love of music and are oftenest heard producing it. (30)

Fear of the “winged creature,” the free movement of rhythm, accounts for our failure to educate people in music itself, and explains “the way in which music is taught and presented by its ministers” (30). The “ministers” of musical education seek to set in place conventional and formulaic responses to music, based in ideas of discipline and civilization which have little to do with the real power of music.

The recurring vocabulary of religion in “Street Music” emphasizes the control of access to an art seen as simultaneously sacred and profane, as well as highlighting issues of the ownership of culture more generally. While musicians are dangerous characters — “possessed,” “pagans” and “heathens” — they may also be of “divine origin,” “the very gods themselves or their priests or prophets on earth” (29). Just as those who struggle to control the “intoxicating draught” of music are termed “ministers,” the figure of the

musician is described as “minister of the wildest of all the gods” (29). Rather than upholding the rules of civilization, however, these “ministers” threaten to undo it:

We look upon those who have given up their lives to the service of this god as Christians regard the fanatic worshippers of some eastern idol. This arises perhaps from an uneasy foreknowledge that when the pagan gods come back the god we have never worshipped will have his revenge upon us. It will be the god of music who will breathe madness into our brains, crack the walls of our temples, and drive us in loathing of our rhythmless lives to dance and circle for ever in obedience to his voice. (29-30)

Such “uneasy foreknowledge” reminds us that our ideas of civilization are tenuous and fragile. The superficial rules of civilization are always vulnerable to the rupture threatened here: instead of the “discipline” and “repression” Stephen discusses, the power of the god of music will eventually prove irrepressible. In its invocation of primitivist arguments and depiction of a communal loss of control, this passage seems to prefigure such events as the riots provoked by Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring” in Paris in 1913.

Stephen sets up a basic opposition between social harmony and embodied rhythm. Going beyond Romantic valorizations of the individual voice of melody over the social force of harmony, here she argues that rhythm is universal because it is based in the body. Yet the central paradox of “Street Music” is that rhythm can also create harmony. Despite our learned resistance to music, its power over human movement is familiar to us in certain sanctioned contexts, such as “the strange sight of a room full of civilised people moving in rhythmic motion at the command of a band of musicians” (30-31). Yet “the vast possibilities that lie within the power of rhythm” could potentially be as revolutionary as “when man first realised the power of steam,” Stephen points out:

The barrel-organ, for instance, by reason of its crude and emphatic rhythm, sets all the legs of the passers by walking in time; a band in the centre of the wild discord of cabs and carriages would be more effectual than any policeman; not only cabman but horse would find himself constrained to keep time in the dance, and to follow whatever measure of trot or canter the trumpets dictated. This principle has been in some degree recognised in the army, where troops are inspired to march into battle to the rhythm of music. (31)

The light-hearted tone of this passage conceals its swift movement from comical to slightly disturbing images — opening with the very street musicians who were dismissed as a “nuisance” at the start of the essay, expanding their influence via the image of the band as law enforcement controlling large-scale public movements, and culminating in the much broader political force of an army’s movement in war. What is instinctive and uncontrollable, Stephen notes, can actually be instrumental in creating and maintaining social control.

Stephen, therefore, is working with the metaphor of harmony in two ways. On the one hand, she sees ideas of social harmony and propriety as damaging, linking them with restrictive Victorian codes of domesticity and privacy: for example, she has little patience for claims that street music “irritates a well-ordered mind” (28). Yet on the other hand, she praises the kinds of patterns that music can create, stressing that harmony can lead human minds to an awareness of a higher level than normal perception. This double-take is clearest when she makes an explicit link between music and writing as art forms:

... when the sense of rhythm was thoroughly alive in every mind we should, if I mistake not, notice a great improvement not only in the ordering of all the affairs of daily life, but also in the art of writing, which is nearly allied to the art of music, and is chiefly degenerate because it has forgotten its allegiance. We should invent — or rather remember — the innumerable metres which we have so long outraged, and which would restore both prose and poetry to the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed. (31)

The majority of complaints over street music place blame squarely on “degenerate” music for placing the other arts, particularly writing, under threat. To Stephen, by contrast, the risk comes from the opposite direction: writing itself is “degenerate,” and has become so specifically because it has lost its close relationship to music. Her focus on productive relationships between different art forms is characteristically modernist, and the cross-disciplinary focus on rhythm anticipates such works as E. M. Forster’s 1927 study *Aspects of the Novel*. But she is not arguing that a closer relationship between literature and music would be something new: on the contrary, her substitution of

“remember” for “invent” stresses the impulse to turn back to an original unity between the arts.

Despite her insistence on the primacy of rhythm, however, Stephen is quick to point out that it does not work in isolation: she argues that an awareness of rhythm becomes a catalyst for melody and harmony in turn. Her praise of “the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed” in the above passage points us towards her rewriting of the classical model in which music is subordinate to words. Putting rhythm at the top of the scale, followed by tune and harmony, she argues that “those actions which by means of rhythm were performed punctually and in time, would now be done with whatever of melody is natural to each” (31). She makes similar judgements to Plato’s in her imagination of the ideal city state: if aesthetics form the basis for social life, the result serves as a model of civil society. Conversation, for example, “would not only obey its proper laws of metre as dictated by our sense of rhythm, but would be inspired by charity, love, and wisdom, and ill-temper or sarcasm would sound to the bodily ear as terrible discords and false notes” (31). While music provokes no such social concord in contemporary London, it is nevertheless capable of creating the momentary illusion of harmony: “We all know that the voices of friends are discordant after listening to beautiful music because they disturb the echo of rhythmic harmony, which for the moment makes of life a united and musical whole” (31). With the phrase “rhythmic harmony,” Stephen collapses the distinction between embodied rhythm and social harmony, and suggests a return to the classical idea of a universal yet unheard harmony, a divine force of proportion which we continually strive to access:

... it seems probable considering this that there is a music in the air for which we are always straining our ears and which is only partially made audible to us by the transcripts which the great musicians are able to preserve. In forests and solitary places an attentive ear can detect something very like a vast pulsation, and if our ears were educated we might hear the music also which accompanies this. Though this is not a human voice it is yet a voice which some part of us can, if we

let it, understand, and music perhaps because it is not human is the only thing made by men that can never be mean or ugly. (31).

Stephen's conception of "rhythmic harmony," then, is more than just a social metaphor. When rhythm is "thoroughly alive in every mind," it can lead to a more meaningful harmony, rather than merely catering to superficial ideas of order and control.

The final paradox of Stephen's argument in "Street Music" reverses the questions of order addressed at the opening of the essay. Acknowledging that music disturbs order, she also claims that it creates order. Rhythm, rather than harmony, is what creates social harmony, since its universal, uncivilized appeal is what effects the greatest civilization of human behavior. This paradox is a commonplace of music criticism: music's simultaneously hypnotic and untameable power both creates and challenges patterns of unity and community. In Stephen's closing image of a quasi-Victorian musical philanthropy, then, street music serves a noble, even didactic, purpose:

If, therefore, instead of libraries, philanthropists would bestow free music upon the poor, so that at each street corner the melodies of Beethoven and Brahms and Mozart could be heard, it is probably that all crime and quarreling would soon be unknown, and the work of the hand and the thoughts of the mind would flow melodiously in obedience to the laws of music. It would then be a crime to account street musicians or any one who interprets the voice of the god as other than a holy man, and our lives would pass from dawn to sunset to the sound of music. (31-32)

Yet Stephen's ironic social programs actually eliminate the very wild, dangerous and inhuman attributes of music which she argues provide it with its irresistible appeal. Classical music in fact wipes out all the difference and replaces it with a very uniform, almost hypnotic sense of order. The reversal of agency implied by this passage — the poor no longer produce music, but rather have it "bestow[ed] upon" them — echoes the rhetoric of nineteenth-century social reform (for example that of General William Booth, for whom one of her Duckworth half-brothers worked).¹¹ For her essay's conservative audience, then, Stephen provides a familiar social and educational agenda; yet the bulk of

her argument, by contrast, suggests that street musicians themselves can educate their upper-class audiences more than they might expect.

Stephen's essay can be seen as an early example of a widespread change in the value attributed to street music and popular art forms. The anti-street-music movement did have its victories: it was instrumental in bringing about the Bass Act of 1864, which placed restrictive controls on street musicians.¹² Yet as Picker points out, it unwittingly provoked a "backlash of romantic nostalgia that undermined the effectiveness of the act" (77). Citing such texts as Symons's "The Barrel-Organ" and Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady," Picker points out that modernist writers and artists "ultimately appropriated and aestheticized [street music] as a voice and symbol" (79). For nineteenth-century writers, street music and other street sounds were deemed an intrusive nuisance; for modernist writers, however, "city noise no longer worked against art, as Victorians had perceived it, but, ironically, within it" (79). "Street Music," therefore, tracks an important transition in popular ideas of music and sound, at once looking back at attacks on street music and anticipating nostalgic attitudes to it. In addition, the essay reveals key differences in the self-definition of Victorian and modernist writers. Nineteenth-century writers, as Picker has shown, were interested in clear social recognition for their work as a legitimate profession: in *Victorian People and Ideas*, Altick writes that "the typical Victorian poet or prose writer felt himself at home in his time ... [T]he Victorian writer did not look upon himself as a misfit or outcast" (280). Stephen, by contrast, sees the eccentric figures of street musicians as both appealing and threatening, and makes them stand for artists in general. This move reflects the shifting meanings attributed to artistic work: modernist writers identified themselves as being somehow outside of the prevailing social currents, and music offered possibilities for the mobility and innovation that they hoped to create in literature.

In identifying with rather than distancing herself from street musicians, therefore, Stephen sheds light on her own position as a writer. As Susan Squier notes, "Street

Music” touches on several issues of key importance to the young writer as she faced the first publications of her work, among them “the possibility of hostile criticism, the effect upon an artist of an extensive education, and payment for artistic production” (44).

Virginia Stephen both was and wasn’t part of the London literary establishment. While her family provided useful connections to the powerful men of late Victorian world of letters (affording her easier access to publication, for example), she was also trying to define herself as a young woman beyond the bounds of Kensington society. While James King claims that the essay reflects a “growing identification ... with society’s outcasts” (105), Squier notes a more “ambivalent identification with urban ‘outsiders’ on the one hand and ‘insiders’ on the other” (46). She reads “Street Music” alongside the later essay “Street Haunting,” in which Woolf alternately inhabits the roles of washerwoman, publican, dwarf and street singer “without fully relinquishing her middle-class, male-identified stance” (46). In Stephen’s defence of the street musician, Squier sees an analogy to the situation of women writers which she describes as “eloquent if unspoken” and “buried, possibly unconscious” (44, 47). The question of gender is indeed a curious absence in “Street Music.” Apart from a single mention of “men and women who scrape for the harmonies that never come” (28), the figure of the musician is always male, as is “the householder at his legitimate employment” (28). While this is partly attributable to the conventional nature of “Street Music,” which relies on generalization to make its argument, it stands in stark contrast with the accomplished, if non-professional, female musicians to appear in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, as well as with Woolf’s later, more reflective first-person essays. Yet the essay’s affirmation of the outsider figure of the street musician anticipates the position of several female artist characters in Woolf’s later work, among them *To The Lighthouse*’s Lily Briscoe, *The Waves*’s Rhoda, *The Years*’s Rose Pargiter, or Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts*.

In its tonal ambiguity and paradoxical argument, “Street Music” provides an early example of what Beer points out about Virginia Woolf’s attitude to the Victorians: “[t]hey

are internalized, inseparable, as well as held at arm's length. They are mimicked with an art of parody so indebted to its material that it sometimes ... seems at a loss to measure the extent of its own subversion or acquiescence" (93). While the essay addresses — and even embraces — the disturbance of decorum and convention represented by street music, it remains, as Squier puts it, "decorously conventional in voice and viewpoint" (46). "Street Music" tackles the problem that is never directly addressed by the anti-noise crusaders, yet which is implicitly present in all their complaints: music is threatening precisely because it is powerfully attractive and appeals to involuntary emotion. For Stephen, therefore, music can work as an analogy for the invisible dangers posed by the imagination. The doubleness inherent to the essay's argument reflects Stephen's growing sense of herself as a writer: while she may be toeing the line, she is also potentially subversive.

"One of the oddest of all worlds": Opera at Covent Garden and Bayreuth

In "The Opera" and "Impressions at Bayreuth," both published in 1909, Stephen describes music within more conventional contexts for public performance. The groups she analyzes in these essays are opera audiences, first at the Royal Opera House in London and then at the Wagner festival in Bayreuth, Germany. She reverses the idea of music threatening to trespass on the space of the private house: the opera house is music's own space, and the audience — its willing listeners — become guests in the temporary world it creates. In her attention to the makeup of the audience, however, Stephen continues her consideration of the social codes associated with listening. Most importantly, both essays address the issue of artistic form and explore the relationship between literature and music. In "The Opera" Stephen does not oppose writing and music, but investigates the lost "allegiance" between the two arts she identifies in "Street Music" (31). Just as she privileges music over libraries in the earlier essay, in "Impressions at Bayreuth" she discusses the impossibility of translating the emotions

expressed by music into the medium of language. As a prescriptive meditation on music as a model for literature, the essay can be read as a manifesto: Stephen's elevation of music over words highlights its important influence on the development of her own writing.¹³

"The Opera" appeared in *The Times* on 24 April 1909, to mark the opening of the Royal Opera Season on 26 April. The opera house at Covent Garden, Stephen writes, brings together a huge variety of people, who may be arranged into clearly demarcated groups which span a range of classes as well as musical tastes. Stephen suggests that the opera-going community actually thrives on such extreme differences of opinion: "No one, of course, is satisfied; but then universal satisfaction could only be obtained if we all thought alike" (269). The opera house therefore effects the very mixing of social classes so insistently rejected by the square-dwellers in "Street Music." The audience, brought together by the music yet remaining divided both in musical taste and by classed boundaries in the auditorium, shares the incongruous and unreal nature of the opera house itself. The primary difference between "The Opera" and "Street Music," of course, is in the question of place: in contrast to the involuntary responses to sound described in Stephen's earlier essay, the opera constitutes a well-defined space for performance and reception. As a context for music, then, the opera house implies more agency on the part of the audience: where "Street Music" addresses the ways in which we *hear* music, "The Opera" questions our habits of *listening* to it.

The bulk of Stephen's essay is a light-hearted attempt to categorize and caricature a range of representative opera fans. Just as in "Street Music," the essay opens with conflict and disagreement about what people expect music to do. The season program's "ambiguous state of mind" provides "hints" from which "we may arrange the public in groups" as follows: "There are numbers who prefer Traviata to Walküre; there are some who disapprove of opera altogether, but, go, cynically enough, for the sake of what they term its bastard merits; and there is a third party which opposes Gluck to Wagner" (269-

70). Without attempting to resolve these contradictory approaches, Stephen concentrates on the last long-running dispute, since it constitutes real differences of opinion about opera as an art form: “each side takes the Opera seriously, and finds fault with its rivals’ theory of the art” (270). Disagreements about the relative merits of Wagner and Gluck, Stephen argues, “may throw light upon other divisions in the public mind” (270). To address the question of what people want from music, therefore, she sketches the general characteristics of each group, briefly outlining their various operatic preferences and connecting these with broader differences of opinion on the role of music and the arts in general.

The major difference between Gluck and Wagner operas, Stephen notes, is in their respective representations of the emotions. Gluck’s music deals with abstract and generalized emotions that are “far from ordinary experience” and “cannot be referred to the experiences of a particular person” (270). Rather than being expressed in relation to language, or being “essentially dramatic,” these emotions are highly stylized and “express themselves more fittingly in movement and colour than in speech” (270). The music corresponds so closely to the emotions that it no longer merely illustrates them; rather, “they seem to be caused by the music itself” (270). Stephen continues her synesthetic description of Gluck’s music to invoke an image of formal totality: “the mysterious shapes, dances, and exquisite melody which here come miraculously together produce a perfect whole of which the parts seem to embody a beauty which we could realise by no other means” (270). Such a description suggests that Gluck enthusiasts’ paramount concern is opera’s formal unity: language, story, and actors are less important than the overall impression of beauty created by the music. The music of Wagner operas, by contrast, “excites the strongest sympathy” in its listeners by following extremities of real human emotion: “not only does he express human emotions with far greater closeness than Gluck, but these emotions are of the most pronounced character; they flash out in men and women, as the story winds and knots itself, under the stress of sharp

conflict” (270). Although the Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* prioritizes the synthesis of the arts, Stephen sees Wagner’s operas as less of a “perfect whole” than Gluck’s: she wonders about “some cleavage between the drama and the music” which causes us to be alternately “swept away” and “dropped” by the listening experience (270). Unlike the perfect formal unity of Gluck opera, she suggests, Wagner’s music deploys both form and content in order to provoke its listeners’ identification with the characters.

It is primarily this emphasis on identification with real emotion, Stephen argues, that makes Wagner by far the most popular opera composer. Wagner fans are not conventional listeners: “his story and his characters appeal to people who would never listen to music in a concert-room. They find a Wagner opera much the same as a play, but easier to follow, because the emotions are emphasised by the music. They find the men and women much like themselves, only with a wonderful capacity for feeling things” (270-71). She goes on to satirize typical Wagner audiences, who can themselves be divided into subgroups:

Strange men and women are to be found in the cheap seats on a Wagner night; there is something primitive in the look of them, as though they did their best to live in forests, upon the elemental emotions, and were quick to suspect their fellows of a lack of ‘reality,’ as they call it. They find a philosophy of life in the operas, hum ‘motives’ to symbolise stages in their thought, and walk off their fervour on the Embankment, wrapped in great black cloaks. There are further the scholarly Wagnerians, detecting ‘motives’ by the flash of their electric lamps, and instructing humble female relatives in the intricacies of the score. And finally there is the true enthusiast, who may include or reject all these reasons for admiring his master, but declares that the opera as he wrote it is the last and highest development of musical art. (271)

Stephen pokes fun at the pretensions associated with opera, from those passionate disciples who want to “live” the emotions found in the drama, to the academic scholars who reduce the music to dry theory and technicalities. Even those within the Wagner camp, it seems, have disparate approaches to the operas themselves. Theodor Adorno paints a similar picture of opera audiences in his essay “The Natural History of the

Theatre" (1931-33), claiming that enthusiasm and expertise are "two mutually exclusive extremes": "In the gallery we find the irrepressible enthusiast, naively worshipping the tenor from the land of smiles, sitting next to the starving expert who unremittingly follows the inner parts in the score of Tristan. Both stand outside the ranks of the average opera-goer who feels offended by intimate knowledge and excessive emotion in equal measure" (68).

Stephen's essay, like Adorno's, emphasizes the ways in which audience members' varying responses to opera illustrate the different demands they make from it as an art form. Immersion in the world of opera takes on a range of contradictory meanings for those who are particularly invested in music, drama, or the other components of the genre. For some operagoers, the combination of drama and music in Wagner is simply "not music" (270): Stephen admits that although identification with the characters' emotions is the primary attraction for many Wagner lovers, "this very quality repels others" (271). In the mad scene from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, for example, the last thing the audience is looking for is "real men and women with passions like our own" (271). Rather, attendance can be motivated by a desire for escapism into the otherworldly extravagance of operatic spectacle: "the combination of exquisite clothing, madness, melody, and death is irresistible. It is just the world for men and women who are by nature or calling of a shrewd practical disposition in the daytime. The ideas are simple but highly romantic, and they are set out with the utmost luxury" (271). Likewise, for many devotees of Italian opera, the plot and staging are little more than vehicles for the vocal display of individual arias: for them, opera is "merely the occasion for a number of beautiful airs, without any dramatic connexion, upon which the prima donna lavishes all her skill" (271). And for Gluck fans, personal identification is not as important as entrance into the formal perfection and emotional abstraction of opera.

Such a range of attitudes towards the meaning of opera highlight its status as a composite genre which brings together a range of other art forms. The disagreements

Stephen lists here, for example, allude to well-worn arguments about the relative importance of music and libretto in opera.¹⁴ While her essay repeatedly raises questions of what opera is about, why we watch and listen to it, and what it is good for, Stephen provides no concrete answers. She acknowledges, however, that the diversity of opinions mirrors the indefinable nature of opera, finally proclaiming it an all-encompassing spectacle rather than a generically distinct art form in itself: “These are but a few points of view, but the variety seems to show that there is, at any rate, no general idea as to the true nature of the Opera, and that those who believe it to be a serious artistic form are much in the minority” (271). While such a conclusion may seem evasive, it is appropriate for the tone of the essay, which functions largely as a sort of pre-season trailer. Yet in her earlier discussion of Wagner, Stephen does briefly address the difficulties of responding to the mixed status of opera, in a passage that provides the essay’s key description of the process of listening. While taking music as part of the overall spectacle of opera, she also zooms in on features particular to music: “Music (it may be) raises associations in the mind which are incongruous with the associations raised by another art; the effort to resolve them into one clear conception is painful, and the mind is constantly woken and disillusioned” (270). Such difficulty, she suggests, is what makes Wagner opera inaccessible to some music lovers. It can also be extended to a discussion of opera more generally: because music works through abstract impressions (as she has argued with reference to Gluck, for example), it is not always compatible with the effects of language or dramatic structure. The “associations in the mind” raised by music are not always comfortable, and resist any real synthesis between the different art forms involved in opera as a whole.

Stephen concludes by turning back to the opera house itself, the place which somehow encloses all the viewpoints she has discussed in her essay. All in all, she argues, the appeal of the opera is about much more than simply the particular work to be performed:

The words ‘The Opera’ alone call up a complex vision. We see the immense house, with its vast curved sides, its soft depths of rose colour and cream, the laces hanging down in loops from the boxes, and the twinkle of diamonds within. We think of this: of the hum and animation when the pyramid of light blazes out and all the colours move; and of the strange hush and dimness when the vistas of the stage are revealed and the voices mingle with the violins. (271-72)

As Stephen points out, the phrase “The Opera” suggests the atmosphere and architecture of the place as much as, if not more than, the art form. Just as her essay serves to stir up interest in the coming season, the above passage evokes the anticipation of the performance. Combining “hum and animation,” “moving” colors, “hush and dimness,” “vistas,” “voices,” and “violins,” her description has the synesthetic effect of the music mentioned earlier, using color and sound to conjure up a sense of emotion. Here both the space and the audience take on a performative character of their own: even before the opera begins, the opera house is already creating the temporary world of the spectacle. It becomes a world within itself, whose atmosphere seems to elide all the differences in interpretation: “Undoubtedly the great dome which has risen so pompously among the cabbages and slums shelters one of the oddest of all worlds – brilliant, beautiful, and absurd” (272). This final sentence doubles the incongruous nature of the opera: it encompasses both artistic form, in its mix of genres, and spatial context in the Opera House’s location at Convent Garden, the old trading market for flowers, fruit and vegetables. On several levels, then — real and unreal, music and drama, arts and commerce, and above all in its comically diverse audience — the opera effects a blending of worlds.

Stephen addresses this operatic mixing of worlds at greater length in “Impressions at Bayreuth,” written later the same year. An ardent Wagner fan, she might have caricatured herself as the “humble female relative” being instructed in how to listen — in this case by her brother Adrian and their friend Sidney Saxon-Turner, with whom she travelled to Germany in August 1909 to attend the Bayreuth Opera Festival. A review of

sorts, the essay picks up on Stephen's concerns in "The Opera" with the difficulties of listening and the idea of translation between aural and linguistic media. In "The Opera" Stephen addresses the unique mixing of worlds that takes place within both opera and the opera house; in "Impressions at Bayreuth" she extends this discussion to the ways in which the world of opera interacts with the outside world, as well as looking more closely at opera's combination of music and language on a formal level. Stressing music's constant movement between the general and the particular, its simultaneously individual and communal appeal, she turns her attention to the relationship between form and content in music: asking how we create meaning from aural impressions, she touches on the possibilities offered by music as a model for novelistic work.

The essay opens with a familiar question: how can we talk about music? Stephen points out that the difficulties inherent in listening are only compounded by attempts to discuss music's effects: "the art itself is so much alive that it fairly suffocates those who try to deal with it" (288). Not only does music have completely different critical traditions from those of literature, but contemporary music contains much more innovation than contemporary writing: "A critic of writing is hardly to be taken by surprise, for he can compare almost every literary form with some earlier form and can measure the achievement by some familiar standard. But who in music has tried to do what Strauss is doing, or Debussy?" (288). While literature can't escape its past, music is free to be challenging and new. Likewise, the absence of an accepted critical heritage gives much broader scope to the critic's task: "This lack of tradition and of current standards is of course the freest and happiest state that a critic can wish for: it offers some one the chance of doing now for music what Aristotle did 2000 years ago for poetry" (288). Even leaving aside such grand ambitions, to review music is to try and recapture impressions which are by definition momentary: "It is criticism of a single hour, in a particular day, and tomorrow the mark has faded" (288). Music thus most often ends up

either “taken for granted” or overshadowed by such circumstantial details as “the prima donna’s cold” (288).

After outlining the difficulties inherent in attempts to write about music, Stephen sets up a strategic modesty topos. Far from Shaw’s light-hearted dismissal of “people who are not musicians” as unworthy to “intrude” into opera houses, she suggests that there is a valid place for the response of the ordinary listener: “There is only one way open thus for a writer who is not disposed to go to the root of the matter and is yet dissatisfied with the old evasions - he may try to give his impressions as an amateur” (288). The position of the “common listener” — characterized by a love for and engagement with music rather than formal training — is what Stephen adopts as her own. But it is also that of many in the Bayreuth audience:

they have a secret belief that they understand it as well as other people, although they seldom venture an opinion; and, at any rate, there is no doubt that they love music. If they hesitate to criticise, it is perhaps that they have not sufficient technical knowledge to fasten upon details; a criticism of the whole resolves itself into vague formulas, comparisons, and adjectives. (289)

Not in possession of received codes of response, common listeners rarely put forward their opinions or impressions. The initial problem of “Impressions at Bayreuth” resembles Roland Barthes’s opening gambit in “The Grain of the Voice” (1972).

According to Barthes, in both critical and conversational attempts to discuss music, “the work (or its performance) is invariably translated into the poorest linguistic category: the adjective. Music is, by a natural inclination, what immediately receives an adjective” (267). Like Barthes, Stephen focuses on language’s inability to interpret music. Yet the audience’s “secret belief” in their own understanding equates comprehension of music with neither technical education nor linguistic interpretation. Stephen implies here, as in “Street Music,” that music’s power over its listeners is primarily pre-verbal.

Rather than caricaturing or categorizing the Bayreuth audience members, however, Stephen focuses on the music’s unifying effect upon them. This audience, of

course, is far from the motley bunch who attend Covent Garden: it is a notably homogenous group of opera devotees who can afford to travel to the Continent. Yet the vocabulary of religion invoked in “Street Music” returns in her description of them as “pilgrims ... from distant lands” (289). They are brought together by the music they all love, which creates “an impression of largeness and ... of an overwhelming unity” (289). The intensity of their listening — they “attend with all their power” and “scarcely stir” — is matched by a singularity of response: “when a stick falls, there is a nervous shudder, like a ripple in water, through the entire house” (289). Music is thus given physical embodiment via the shared affect of the audience, on whom it imposes an almost tangible weight: “During the intervals between the acts, when they come out into the sun, they seem oppressed with a desire to disburden themselves somehow of the impression which they have received” (289).

The intervals seem to offer the “oppressed” audience a brief opportunity to “disburden” themselves of music’s effects. Such imagery recalls Stephen’s description of listening in “The Opera” as a “painful” process in which the mind is “constantly woken and disillusioned” (270). Here in Bayreuth, the audience also feel music as a “weight upon the mind” (289), and in the breaks, they try to relieve it by looking at the surrounding countryside: “One may sit among rows of turnips and watch a gigantic old woman, with a blue cotton bonnet on her head and a figure like one of Dürer’s, swinging her hoe” (290). Yet just as Stephen cannot help viewing agricultural labor through the frame of painting, the world contained by the walls of the “great bare house” spills out into the “empty country” outside:

if one thinks at all, it is to combine the simple landscape with the landscape of the stage. When the music is silent the mind insensibly slackens and expands, among happy surroundings: heat and the yellow light, and the intermittent but not unmusical noises of insects and leaves smooth out the fold. (290)

During these “strange intervals in the open air,” rural Bavaria is easily transformed into another stage. Stephen notes the details of light and shade which alter the scene, paying

attention to the found music of everyday sounds and the “curiously decorative effect” of figures walking down the avenue. In each interval, then, there is “another act out here also” (290). And just as the “real” world is endowed with theatrical effect, so the outside world enters the opera house: bats fly on to the stage and little white moths “dance incessantly” over the footlights. The two worlds, therefore, both alternate and interact, “as though a curtain were regularly drawn and shut again” (290).

As with the pageant scenes in the posthumously published *Between the Acts*, Stephen’s account of the opera festival draws attention to the unstable boundaries between life and art. Her depiction of ordinary noises and events in artistic terms is comparable to the innovations of modern music: composers like Debussy and Strauss (those she mentions at the start of the essay) rejected the storytelling conventions of nineteenth-century program music, making self-conscious use of atonality and everyday sounds in order to rethink what counted as art. Stephen seems to replace the mimetic rules of Victorian realism with the tenets of fin-de-siecle aestheticism, such as the third doctrine of Oscar Wilde’s dialogue “The Decay of Lying” (1889): “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (1082). Her self-conscious blending of the worlds of art and life in “Impressions at Bayreuth” recalls Adorno’s description of the theatre as structure in “A Natural History of the Theatre,” where he writes that the shape of the theatre creates and preserves a complete, artificially enclosed world: “The dome has long since closed over the theatre and now reflects the sounds coming from the stage, barring a view of the sky” (67). The Bayreuth setting disturbs the idea of such a closing-off between art and world, since the outside world literally gets inside the dome of the opera house. More than merely asking what qualifies as art, then, “Impressions at Bayreuth” initiates a characteristically modernist consideration of the place of art in the world (and of the world in art). Rather than prescribing distinctions between art and life, Stephen focuses on their effects on each other, particularly as they are mediated by the audience. The heightened perception afforded by the immediate experience of the opera makes the

audience look at ordinary life in new ways. Where “Street Music” takes music out of place by removing it from its conventional contexts for performance, “Impressions at Bayreuth” shows that even in this most conventional of contexts, opera effects a kind of displacement on its audience’s subjectivity. Stephen imaginatively maps the work of art on to the world outside, binding it up in the overall effect of the opera so that it becomes part of the aesthetic spectacle.

In this way, Stephen expands upon the Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, rewriting it to include features other than the artwork itself. While she repeatedly stresses the “completeness” of Wagner opera, and praises the way in which it “remains with us” after the work itself is over (290), she admits that features wholly external to the work of art can also form a crucial part of opera’s effect. The “completeness” of *Lohengrin*, for example, is marred by the Bayreuth setting: “An opera house which shelters such a troop [of knights and ladies] should be hemmed in by streets with great shop windows; their splendour somehow dwindles away and falls flat in the empty country” (291). Far from being formally untouchable, the work of art is affected by the conditions of its performance. *Parsifal*, which Stephen holds as Wagner’s greatest achievement, even seems to envelop those conditions within itself: “How much of the singular atmosphere which surrounds the opera in one’s mind springs from other sources than the music itself it would be hard to say. It is the only work which has no incongruous associations” (290). It is important to note here that Stephen does not simply hold up perfection of form as an aesthetic goal: rather, she holds it in tension with an equally productive sense of formal confusion. She makes repeated use of the word “incongruous” to describe associations raised by music in both “The Opera” and “Impressions at Bayreuth” (270, 290), and describes the process of “bringing the different parts together” (289) as wrought with problems. Yet ultimately, she claims, these are minor details compared with the overall impact of the music: “Nevertheless, although they are great, these difficulties scarcely do more than disturb the surface of a very deep and perhaps indescribable impression.

Puzzled we may be, but it is primarily because the music has reached a place not yet visited by sound” (289). This “place not yet visited by sound” is the space of the listener’s imagination, which is forced into activity as it responds to the music.

What enables music’s creation of this “indescribable impression” for Stephen, and differentiates it most clearly from the other arts, is its particular temporality. In her discussion of opera’s emotive effects, she focuses primarily on music’s formal qualities. Audience members experience it as it unfolds in time; there is no going back to re-listen, as one might re-read or re-view. Music thus prompts a clear synchronicity of feeling amongst audience members, on whom its effect is immediate: “the music is intimate in a sense that none other is; one is fired with emotion and yet possessed with tranquillity at the same time, for the words are continued by the music so that we hardly notice the transition” (289). In this phrase, Stephen is revising Wordsworth’s theory of the genesis of poetry, set forth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798): “I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” (611).¹⁵ Just as the Romantics valorized music as a paradigm for poetry, Stephen too takes it as an exemplary model of what art should aim to do. But unlike poetry or prose, music does not require the mediating quality of retrospection in order to express emotion: in Stephen’s phrase, the audience is simultaneously “fired with emotion” and “possessed with tranquillity.” For the opera audience, therefore, what Wordsworth calls “recollection” of emotion is not only unnecessary, but also largely unattainable.

For Stephen, therefore, music’s primary advantage over language lies in this immediacy. While she points out that operatic music “translates” emotions, she argues that it does so not as a simple illustration of the accompanying words. Rather, it acts as an emotional catalyst, taking direct and profound effect on its audience: “It may be that these exalted emotions, which belong to the essence of our being, and are rarely expressed, are those that are best translated by music; so that a satisfaction, or whatever one may call

that sense of answer which the finest art supplies to its own question, is constantly conveyed here” (290). The emotions awoken by music, then, are not everyday feelings; rather, they are “exalted,” essential, and rare. Music’s ability to access such abstract emotions, which normally remain hidden, lends it a quasi-mystical power. Whereas in “The Opera” Stephen opposed the abstraction conveyed in Gluck to the real human emotion of Wagner, here she suggests that the best opera is able to combine the two. In portraying the Knights’ desire for the Holy Grail, then, Wagner’s music combines “the intense emotion of human beings” with “the unearthly nature of the things [the Knights] seek” (289). Music provides the ideal medium through which to convey this Romantic combination of earthly and unearthly, human and divine. The resulting “completeness,” “satisfaction” and “sense of answer” thus denote a fleeting perfection of form that can only be achieved by music.

With this in mind, Stephen returns to her essay’s opening question: how ought one to write about music? Is it even possible to reproduce music’s “translation of emotions” in the medium of words? Using language to talk about music automatically breaks the fragile formal totality it embodies. And since it involves the translation of something which is already itself a translation, it is further removed from the original sensory experience. Stephen admits that writing about music is by nature both subjective and impressionistic: “No one, perhaps, save a writer properly versed in the science, can decide which impressions are relevant and which impertinent, and it is here that the amateur is apt to incur the contempt of the professional” (291). Yet after outlining the inevitably flawed idiosyncrasies of critics’ grounds for judgement in both painting and literature, she goes on to show a degree of contempt for the professional music critic as well:

[...] one has only to read the descriptive notes in a concert programme to be led hopelessly astray. Apart from the difficulty of changing a musical impression into a literary one, and the tendency to appeal to the literary sense because of the

associations of words, there is the further difficulty in the case of music that its scope is much less clearly defined than the scope of the other arts. (291)

The imagery of directed and controlled movement in the phrase “led hopelessly astray” suggests that conventional music criticism steers listeners away from the space of the imagination, thus denying their own intrinsic responses to the music.

At the same time, however, Stephen acknowledges that the very act of listening to music already involves another “translation of emotions”: just as program notes mislead people, music itself tends to run away with its listeners. As in “Street Music,” she focuses on music’s limitless range of interpretative possibilities, which makes it both attractive and also potentially dangerous. She figures listening as a process of exuberant movement which gives free rein to the individual imagination:

The more beautiful a phrase of music is the richer its burden of suggestion, and if we understand the form but slightly, we are little restrained in our interpretation. We are led on to connect the beautiful sound with some experience of our own, or to make it symbolise some conception of a general nature. Perhaps music owes something of its astonishing power over us to this lack of definite articulation; its statements have all the majesty of a generalisation, and yet contain our private emotions. Something of the same effect is given by Shakespeare, when he makes an old nurse the type of all the old nurses in the world, while she keeps her identity as a particular old woman. (291)

Stephen reflects here on how music takes hold of its audience. Its suggestive formal effect automatically gives agency to listeners, forcing them to be actively involved in the process of creating meaning. Despite its “appeal to the literary sense,” what distinguishes music as an art form and sets it apart from literature is its “lack of definite articulation.” In effect, therefore, she is paying Shakespeare the highest possible compliment by implying that his characterization approaches music’s “astonishing power over us.”

What makes music so overwhelmingly powerful for Stephen is this ability to appeal simultaneously to both a sense of “generalisation” and “private emotions” in its listeners. Like Shakespeare’s nurse, it draws on stock responses (for example, those evoked by the ancient modal system or, more recently, melodrama and program music) while also allowing for the specific responses of individual listeners (including

extramusical associations). The feelings provoked by music, therefore, are “equally diffused and felt for one object in common” (289). Because it creates a temporality sense of totality through shared experience, while also allowing for — and even demanding — individual interpretation, music is a model art form; and by creating meaning independently of language, it also highlights the novelistic problem of how to represent interiority. Music, unlike the novel, has no obligation to represent anything: it is not charged with the illustration of emotion, but can nevertheless both convey and create it in its listeners. As such, it provides an attractive if impossible mandate for the task of the writer.

Stephen thus leaves her readers with an unsolved problem of communication. Unable to represent the music itself, she can only describe its effects, which makes her “miserably aware how little words can do to render music” (291). Music, by contrast, can serve as an effective illustration to language, as she points out in “The Opera.” But it need not be confined to this role, and in fact offers an alternative to the ordering mechanism of language: music can provide relief from the cumbersome burden of words. Stephen thus depicts listening as a cathartic process: “When the moment of suspense is over, and the bows actually move across the strings, our definitions are relinquished [sic], and words disappear in our minds. Enormous is the relief, and yet, when the spell is over, how great is the joy with which we turn to our old tools again!” (291). The process of listening thus reconfigures our attitudes to language: from the suspense preceding the magic of the performance to the relief it entails, language is transformed from restrictive shackles into familiar and welcome tools. A single sentence towards the close of the essay can be seen as Stephen’s attempt to use the “old tools” of language to represent the experience of listening to opera at Bayreuth:

These definitions indeed, which would limit the bounds of an art and regulate our emotions, are arbitrary enough; and here at Bayreuth, where the music fades into the open air, and we wander with Parsifal in our heads through empty streets at night, where the gardens of the Hermitage glow with flowers like those other

magic blossoms, and sound melts into colour, and colour calls out for words, where, in short, we are lifted out of the ordinary world and allowed merely to breathe and see—it is here that we realise how thin are the walls between one emotion and another; and how fused our impressions are with elements which we may not attempt to separate. (292)

As in “Street Music,” Stephen uses spatial imagery to emphasize the questions of control surrounding different forms of art. She opposes the ideas of definitions, limits, boundaries, and regulations — all associated with assigning meaning and also with demarcation of space — with vocabulary of movement which challenges that strictness and authority. Thus straight lines of spatial demarcation are replaced with verbs of motion implying sensory experience and changes of state. The sentence effects a synesthetic chain of constant transformations: music “fades” and gardens “glow” so that “sound melts into colour, and colour calls out for words.” In “Street Music” Stephen discusses music’s ability to move beyond tangible walls; here she notes that it also transcends the “thin ... walls between one emotion and another.”

Yet immediately after this impressionistic reverie, which opens out of itself over and over again like a succession of musical phrases — and manages to avoid the trap of the adjective almost entirely — Stephen makes a strangely abrupt about-face and closes with the kind of music criticism she initially dismisses, a prosaic summary of the problems with the performances: “that the orchestra was weak, that there were few great singers, and that the prompter whispered incessantly” (292). In keeping with the essay’s pose as an anti-review, she declines to furnish further details. Her final lackluster admission that, on the whole, the operas were rather disappointing undercuts the synesthetic effects of the earlier sentence and reminds us that the music’s “spell” has been broken. As if acknowledging the bluntness of the “old tools” of language, she highlights the inadequacy of language in descriptions of music, since it reduces the experience to dry technicality and rumor (like the example of the “prima donna’s cold”). It is worth noting here that only a few years later, Stephen’s reactions to Wagner had undergone a complete reversal. Using characteristic imagery of movement and stasis, she writes to Ka

Cox in May 1913 that she now feels quite unmoved by the spectacle: “Oh, the noise & the heat & the bawling sentimentality, which used once to carry me away, & now leaves me sitting perfectly still” (L2 668). Despite such an extreme change in her estimation of Wagner, however, the closing passage was cut from the subsequent reprinting of the essay in *Books and Portraits* (292n1). In its revised version, then, the essay no longer retreats into the judgement of particular performances, but instead ends with an impressionistic point about the enjoyment of music’s effect. This move avoids assessment or evaluation of the specific event and clarifies the essay’s focus on the movement of music within the space of the imagination.

On one level, then, “Impressions at Bayreuth” might be seen as no more than a stylistic exercise by a young writer. Such a view may be suggested by Stephen’s letter to Vanessa Bell written during her 1909 trip to Germany, in which she explicitly states that she sought to recreate the impressions evoked by the opera. Explaining that it “slides from music to words almost imperceptibly,” she complains that she cannot replicate it: “I have been niggling at the effect all the morning, without much success” (L1 502). Yet “Impressions at Bayreuth” is not just a technical study; it also has the makings of an artistic manifesto. In its valorization of sensory experience, play with synesthesia, and elevation of music over language, the essay bears marked resemblance to Joseph Conrad’s well-known Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, published a decade earlier:¹⁶

Fiction — if it at all aspires to be art — appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the color of

painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music--which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to color, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage. (224-25)

Stephen shares Conrad's emphasis on the importance of appealing to the senses in art, in order to access what he calls the "secret spring of responsive emotions" of the audience. Just as Stephen describes music's "spell" on its listeners, Conrad repeats the phrase "magic suggestiveness," first mentioned in his essay as the characteristic effect of music, to describe the goal of the writer. Both writers valorize music as "the art of arts," and see language by contrast as an old, overused and tired medium. Conrad argues that "temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion" but that it responds to the "subtle and resistless power" of art; likewise, Stephen considers music's double appeal to both "generalisation" and "private emotions," noting that its "irresistible power" is in part due to its "lack of definite articulation." Both Stephen and Conrad thus suggest that meaning in art can only be achieved by appealing directly to the senses: Stephen's praise of the way that music allows the audience "merely to breathe and see" even seems like an echo of Conrad's famous phrase "It is above all to make you see."¹⁷

Stephen's invocation of music as a model for literature, then, is part of a broader modernist vein of inquiry about the role of the arts in general and the aims of the novelist more specifically. Like Conrad's use of music in the Preface, where he is explicitly stating his aims as a writer, Stephen's attitude towards music in "Impressions at Bayreuth" is what Pater might term "aspirational" (156). By the end of her essay, she has turned around its opening question to give it a very different focus: rather than asking how to write about music, she asks how writing itself can be more like music. Music provides her with a model for the task of the writer because it offers a means of representing what can't be denoted neatly in words: not only expressing individual

emotion, it also accesses the Pythagorean concept of universal unity. In awe of Wagner's combination of music and language, Stephen wants to reproduce the effect in writing, using language in new ways in order to represent something that goes beyond language: what "Impressions at Bayreuth" advocates, to borrow Conrad's words, is "complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance."

Both Stephen and Conrad invoke music as a figure for innovation with the potential to reinvigorate the "old" and "defaced" medium of language. As they redefine the aims of artistic work, they endow both language itself and their own positions as authors with a new sense of self-consciousness, characteristic of the modernist genre of the manifesto. Just as Stephen stresses music's exemplary novelty, Daniel Albright has pointed out that music was the vanguard of modernism (2): it is no coincidence that two of Ezra Pound's best-known pronouncements are "make it new" and "compose in the sequence of the musical phrase." Perhaps surprisingly, then, the musical subject matter of these three essays seems to become increasingly canonical: while the street is an unorthodox (and even illegal) context for music, both Covent Garden and Bayreuth are entirely orthodox settings for the highbrow staple of opera. Yet at the same time, Stephen's tone shifts in the opposite direction, moving from the conservative wit of "Street Music" to the more daring, self-assured and impressionistic style of "Impressions at Bayreuth." In "Street Music" her argument is safely grounded in paradox, enabling her to remain evasive in terms of authorial viewpoint; in "The Opera" she catalogues others' opinions but seems to avoid drawing any conclusions of her own; but in "Impressions at Bayreuth" she refigures her position, abandoning the posture of reviewer and claiming an authority emphatically not dependent on expertise. Despite the sense of being Adrian and Saxon's "apprentice listener" that is evident in Stephen's letters documenting the trip, in "Impressions at Bayreuth" she invokes her own position as a non-authority as something provocative. Instead of trudging through a conventional account of the operas themselves, she broadens her inquiry to ask how music takes effect on its listeners and

how literature might do the same. In its replacement of the outdated models of authority charted in both “Street Music” and “The Opera,” therefore, “Impressions at Bayreuth” reflects Stephen’s growing formal and artistic self-consciousness.

These three early essays are the only non-fiction pieces in which Virginia Stephen takes music as a primary topic. But as she embarked upon her career as a fiction writer, Woolf continued to develop her interest in the place of music, both within society and in relation to the other arts. On Saturday February 13, 1915, while in the midst of revising *The Voyage Out*, she records her experience of attending one of the Proms:

We wrote, and after luncheon L. went to the Library, & I went to a concert at the Queen’s Hall. I ran into Oliver Strachey, standing very like a Strachey in the Hall, because he dislikes sitting inside waiting for the music. I got by luck a very good place, for the Hall was nearly full--& it was a divine concert. But one of the things I decided as I listen[ed] (its difficult not to think of other things) was that all descriptions of music are quite worthless, & rather unpleasant; they are apt to be hysterical, & to say things that people will be ashamed of having said afterwards. They played Haydn, Mozart no 8, Brandenburg Concerto, & the Unfinished. I dare say the playing wasnt very good, but the stream of melody was divine. It struck me what an odd thing it was -- this little box of pure beauty set down in the middle of London streets, & people, looking so ordinary, crowding to hear, as if they weren’t ordinary after all, or had an ambition for something better. Opposite me was Bernard Shaw, grown a whitehaired benevolent old man, & down in the orchestra was Walter Lamb, shining in his alabastrine baldness like a marble fountain. I was annoyed by a young man & woman next me who took advantage of the music to press each other’s hands; & read ‘A Shropshire lad’ & look at some vile illustrations. And other people eat [sic] chocolates, & crumbled the silver paper into balls. (D1 33-34)

A notable feature of this passage is its characterization of Shaw’s bombastic Cornetto de Basso, the mocking arbiter of entry to concert halls, as a harmless and friendly figure, a “whitehaired benevolent old man.” More broadly, it also points to some important features of musical culture around the turn of the century, during the period of these essays’ composition. Classical music was becoming more accessible to a broader public, and Woolf’s attentiveness to the make-up of the audience reminds us of the questions of social status attached to such concerts. While she does not adopt Shaw’s gatekeeper

posture, she identifies the socially important individuals present and is irritated by the distracting behavior of others in the crowd. Woolf's description of the audience as "ordinary people" who listen "as if they weren't ordinary after all, or had an ambition for something better" both indicates her Romantic valorization of music as an art form and also echoes the Victorian notion of the arts possessing an innate educational potential. She stresses the disparity between what is contained within the architectural structure of the concert hall — the "divine" melody — and the unremarkable London context that surrounds it. The "little box of pure beauty" thus comes to stand for the place of the abstract and aesthetic within the everyday urban world: for Woolf, as these three essays attest, music signals a figurative space of interiority and the imagination, which can resist social regulation.

As she listens, Woolf comes to a characteristically self-conscious realization about music. Her reluctance to evaluate the individual performance is typical; but she also asserts in this passage that any writing about music is bound to be problematic. After this blanket condemnation, she avoids describing the music itself, instead just listing what she heard and repeating her statement that it was "divine." Woolf's admission here that it is hard to concentrate solely on the music also highlights the porous nature of the listening experience, a quality that is inevitably missing from conventional accounts of music: rather than existing within a realm of pure form, music — much like language — works largely through association. But even if describing music is a pointless endeavor, the activity of listening itself, as she argues in all three of the essays discussed here, is undoubtedly productive. Virginia Stephen's essays on music reveal key elements in her thinking about the work of the novelist as well as the role of the arts. Music's inexplicable nature helps her reject the notion of a single authoritative voice in favor of a more dialogic argumentative and narrative style. While seemingly unthreatening, even decorative, music also contains the potential to be subversive. Taking music as a model for her own writing, therefore, Woolf aims to reactivate what she sees as its old, lost

allegiances to literature: the character of the musician becomes an important analogy for her own work as a writer.

- 1 See Bashford and Langley, who argue that “it makes sense to view the end of the nineteenth century in musical and cultural terms as coinciding with the watershed of the first World War, rather than with the death of Victoria” and that London was “a preeminent European music centre at the time whose cultural complexity and historical significance are only now being recognized” (vii).
- 2 For an account of the changing social codes of nineteenth-century musical audiences, see Johnson.
- 3 In this chapter I will follow Hermione Lee's example and use Woolf's maiden name, under which these early essays were published.
- 4 Benson identifies a sort of musico-literary modesty topos, whereby writers insist upon “professions of inadequacy” when discussing music, as a common phenomenon. See for example the following statement from Derrida: “'music is the object of my strongest desire, and yet at the same time it remains completely forbidden. I don't have the competence, I don't have any truly presentable musical culture. Thus my desire remains completely paralyzed. I am even more afraid of speaking nonsense in this area than in any other' ” (quoted in Benson 3).
- 5 For more on this idea, see Bashford and Langley.
- 6 The continuing “Last Night of the Proms” tradition of Union Jack facepaint, Rule Britannia and Parry's Jerusalem attests to this fact. Yet it is important to remember that Wood was not blindly patriotic: he also introduced London audiences to non-English composers such as Sibelius and Schoenberg.
- 7 James King argues that this essay attacks “an attitude towards art and literature which embodies many of the views of Leslie Stephen, who did not wish Thoby to become a writer because it was unmanly” (104-05).
- 8 In fact, as Picker notes, many street musicians ran what amounted to aural protection rackets, relying on the fail-safe strategy that their music would create enough annoyance for them to be paid to leave the area (46).
- 9 As Katz and Dahlhaus point out, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, whereby music was “essentially both strictly rational as well as excessively irrational” (3), is a traditionally recurring idea in the philosophy of music.
- 10 Of course, there is an ambiguity involved in such equations: if emotions can be naturalized, they can also be staged.
- 11 In this respect, Stephen's argument has strange affinities with Haweis's *Music and Morals*; for more on Haweis, see Picker.
- 12 Picker quotes from Shaw's mock Bass Act and notes “a certain wistfulness for what had once been considered a nuisance” (78).
- 13 Hussey points out that when these two articles were written, “Woolf had been working at “Melymbrosia” for about two years; it was another six before this was published as *The Voyage Out*” (*Singing* 65).
- 14 Perhaps the most well known work in this context, Strauss's *Capriccio*, did not premier until 1942; its refrain “Prima la Musica, e poi le Parole” is drawn from an 18th-century opera text by the Abbate Casti, which was set by Antonio Salieri in 1786.
- 15 Wordsworth continues: “the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins” (611). Stephen's archaic spelling of the word may be seen as highlighting its allusion to Wordsworth.
- 16 The Preface dates from 1898: it appeared with the fifth magazine instalment of the novel, but was suppressed with its publication in book form. Like Stephen, Conrad describes the spectacle of a peasant working in order to discuss the work of art: “Sometimes, stretched at ease in the shade of a roadside tree, we watch the begin to wonder motions of a laborer in a distant field, and after a time, movements of his languidly as to what the fellow may be at. We watch the body, the waving of his arms, we see him bend down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. It may add to the charm of an idle hour to be told the purpose of his exertions. If we know he is trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, we look with a more real interest at his efforts; we are disposed to condone the jar of his agitation upon the restfulness of the landscape; and even, if in a brotherly frame of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength--and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way--and forget. And so it is with the workman of art.” (225-26)

- 17 Hussey notes that “Woolf greatly admired Conrad’s writing, particularly his earlier works, and wrote several reviews of his books” (60). *The Nigger of the Narcissus* is among the works she discusses in “Mr Conrad: A Conversation” (for the “Nation and Atheneum” on occasion of Dent’s uniform edition of Conrad in 1923).

Chapter Two

“The Worst of Music”: Music, Space and Narrative in Woolf’s Early Fiction

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come – of course, not so as to disturb the others – or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fräulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is "echt Deutsch"; or like Fräulein Mosebach’s young man, who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach: in any case, the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings. It is cheap, even if you hear it in the Queen’s Hall, dreariest music-room in London, though not as dreary as the Free Trade Hall, Manchester; and even if you sit on the extreme left of that hall, so that the brass bumps at you before the rest of the orchestra arrives, it is still cheap.

E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910)

In perhaps the best-known literary depiction of a musical performance, Forster covers a range of responses to music and musical meaning through the Schlegel family’s different ways of listening to Beethoven. Mrs Munt’s embodied reception of the music’s rhythm is tempered by her consideration of the other audience members; Tibby’s learned but dry attitude reduces the music to technicalities ("the drum steadily beating on the low C" is "unforgettable," he tells his aunt [30]). Fräulein Mosebach and her young man are more aware of extramusical features of the performance: her insistence on Beethoven’s Germanness suggests the nationalist ownership of culture which surrounds the work of art itself, while he can think only of the person sitting beside him. Helen’s thought processes lead her to turn musical phrases into a romantic narrative – to her mind, the music makes "a tangible statement, which could never be superseded. The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning" (27). The visual images which represent her stream-of-consciousness response to the Beethoven, heroes and goblins, recur throughout the novel as structuring motifs.

Margaret Schlegel, however, is given a different response to the symphony: rather than turning the sound into something else – mathematics, narrative, cultural capital – she "can only see the music." Forster's description of Margaret as audience to the Beethoven is characteristically understated: it is a short, simple phrase, hidden between the fuller descriptions of other characters' rather convoluted methods of listening. What Margaret responds to is "music itself," as Forster describes it in his later essay "On Not Listening to Music." Her reception of the music is thus quietly privileged, because she does not need to incorporate extramusical material to translate music into another medium.

It is striking, however, that Forster uses the verb "to see" when describing Margaret's experience of music. While the idea of "seeing" music connotes a kind of immediate understanding which does not require the complex thought of concentrated listening (note Forster's title "On *Not* Listening to Music"), it also performs its own translation in that it denotes the sense of sight rather than hearing: though musicians, instruments, notation, and audience may be the visible apparatus of musical performances, you do not literally "see" music. Forster's language in this passage problematizes the relationship between music and the other arts. As the Schlegels walk home with the clerk Leonard Bast (painstakingly educating himself in classical music in order to "acquire culture" [31]), they take up this question, arguing over the relationship between different art forms. Margaret asks "What *is* the good of the Arts if they're interchangeable? What *is* the good of the ear if it tells you the same as the eye?" (30). She lays the blame on the shoulders of Wagner, whom she calls "the real villain": "He has done more than any man in the nineteenth century towards the muddling of the arts" (31).

In the description of the Beethoven performance and the discussion which

follows, Forster raises questions about music which were under much debate around the turn of the century, from its social role to its relation to the other arts, a "muddling" which modernist writers drew upon and increased. Like Forster (an acknowledged influence on her early work), Woolf explores the changing social roles of music as well as its ability to communicate extralinguistic meaning – as Margaret Schlegel puts it in *Howards End*, "music is in a very serious state just now, though extraordinarily interesting" (31). Just as in her early essays on musical topics, "Street Music," "The Opera," and "Impressions at Bayreuth," in her early fiction as well Woolf reacts against late Victorian assumptions about the roles of music, raising explicit questions about the ambiguous nature of music as an art form, institution, and expressive medium.

In her earliest novels, often termed her "apprentice works" (Dick 182), Woolf engages directly and critically with the social and literary norms of late nineteenth-century society.¹ In both her novels and short fiction of this period, she places explicit emphasis on music and musical scenes as subject matter from which to build this critique. Tracing the development of her thinking about music from about 1910 to 1921, this chapter investigates the ways in which Woolf uses music to problematize the relationship between the external world and the world of the mind. Following Pater's idea of music as embodying the perfect relationship between form and content, Woolf draws on music as a vehicle for the exploration of language: its movement becomes an analogy for the kind of narrative mobility she aims to create in her fiction. I begin with readings of her first two novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), focusing on their representations of women musicians and scenes of musical performance as well as Woolf's questioning of music's representational capacities. Finally I turn to the

experimental short story "The String Quartet" (1921), looking at music's role as a model for the representation of interiority. Woolf's development of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques, I suggest, owes much to her thinking about the effects of both playing and listening to music, a shared social experience but one which simultaneously allows for the individual movement of the imagination.

"A Tune One Could Dance to": Music and Mobility in *The Voyage Out*

In *The Voyage Out* (1915), Woolf employs ideas of music, space, and movement to explore the compromised role and social position of the woman artist. Using metaphors of architecture, geometry and patterning, she creates visual images of both public space and social divisions which emphasize the contradictory freedoms and restrictions associated with the movement of travel. By invoking these spatial and structural images to describe music, she highlights its ephemeral nature and questions its capacity to communicate meaning. Rachel Vinrace's performance of music suggests the potential for individual and unorthodox movement; yet in its reception, music's movement is repeatedly reinscribed within existing social structures. Rachel's illness breaks down such social and representational codes. It is no more intelligible than music: rapid association and disjunction represent the radical movement of delirium, without any real possibility of survival. Music in *The Voyage Out* is thus an ambiguous figure of mobility which works to underscore the uneasy relationships between individual and community, and between eccentric movement and established social patterns.

Rachel Vinrace's restricted education and sheltered existence are that of the majority of girls in Victorian households, including Woolf herself.² As one of very few

interests open to her, Rachel's piano playing is a consuming passion; yet because it is a solitary activity, it cuts her off from the wider world and places her within the realm of the domestic. A key object of bourgeois culture, the piano was a marker of the private space of the family home. In identifying Rachel so strongly with the piano, therefore, Woolf draws on a stereotype of Victorian femininity common in nineteenth-century literature: she is one of many "heroines at the piano," trained in the "required accomplishments of genteel society" (Burgan 42).³ Rachel's real skill as a pianist differentiates her from the hordes of parlor performers; but she is otherwise uneducated and naïve.⁴ When Terence Hewet asks whether the vote matters to her, she replies: "'Not to me,' [...] 'But I play the piano . . .'" (197). Music makes Rachel isolated and apolitical, lets her avoid forming opinions, and becomes a vehicle for retreating from the real world:

To feel anything strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly perhaps but differently. It was far better to play the piano and forget all the rest. ... It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. Reality dwelling in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about, one could accept a system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily to other people, without often troubling to think about it, except as something superficially strange. Absorbed by her music she accepted her lot very complacently, blazing into indignation perhaps once a fortnight, and subsiding as she subsided now. (29)

While music is affective, giving Rachel an outlet for expressing emotion, it also functions as a means of therapeutic repression, letting her avoid "feel[ing] anything strongly." It enables her to dismiss interactions with other people or engagement with the social world: the evocation of vague and ineffective movement in the phrase "things went round and round" signals Rachel's lack of knowledge and direction. Her lack of a public life at once enables her musical skills and lets her interest in music develop into a barrier against the world at large, "one of her safeguards against the world" (DeSalvo 93).

The responses of other characters to Rachel's absorption in her piano playing are telling, less in relation to Rachel's own life than to their respective social agendas. While

Mr. Dalloway considers music an ideal domestic pastime (56), his wife is ambivalent about its social role. At dinner on board ship, she expounds her theory that artistic pursuits are incompatible with social responsibility, in confused rhetoric complacently echoing that of Victorian social reformers: “ ‘I go out into the streets and the first child I meet with its poor, hungry, dirty little face makes me turn round and say, “No, I *can’t* shut myself up — I *won’t* live in a world of my own. I should like to stop all the painting and writing and music until this kind of thing exists no longer.” ’ ” (36). When she exhorts Rachel to be less attentive to music and realize that “the world is *crammed* with delightful things!,” however, she is more concerned with socializing than social work (50, 16). The potential dangers of music, Clarissa argues, lie in its aesthetic pleasure and emotive power: she thinks music is not “altogether good for people,” because it is “[t]oo emotional, somehow” (39). Clarissa’s objection to music’s ability to create a “little world of one’s own” (36) poses an opposition not only between aesthetic and political worlds, but also between individual emotion and received communal codes of sociability. While Terence, the would-be novelist, is attracted by “the impersonality which it produced in her” (275), for Clarissa, the excessive interiority of music signals Rachel’s lack of participation in the social rituals of the marriage market.⁵ Although Rachel is hardly aggressive or rebellious in social settings, her self-expression through music is nevertheless judged as a potential threat to domesticity and community. Her family suspects her of being rather too devoted to her music. Willoughby grumbles “ ‘A little less of *that* would do no harm’ ” (77), and finds his daughter’s lack of practical knowledge exasperating, reminding her that “ ‘music depends upon goats,’ ” (16). Aunt Bessie worries that all her practising will “spoil” her forearms and damage her marriage prospects (13). Helen Ambrose’s disapproval of Rachel’s excessive piano playing is for quite different reasons: she “offered books, and discouraged too entire a dependence upon Bach and Beethoven and Wagner” because she wants her to learn to think, and thus avoid becoming a mere piano-playing domestic decoration (113).

Just as Helen wants to broaden Rachel's horizons, the novel's title suggests movement away from familiar structures and surroundings. Travel is figured as liberating and stasis as restrictive; yet the spatial divisions, partitions, and geometric shapes in the novel often negate movement and reinscribe the social delineations of "home." London, where "eccentricity must pay the penalty" (3), is described in geometrical terms suggesting stasis and enclosure. The city is a "mass of streets, squares, and public buildings," whose constant movement is frustrated by its narrow streets and squares (5). Travel, then, is a grand and liberating movement away from the small-scale scuttling action associated with London and civilization. As the Euphrosyne departs the city, its importance dwindles along with its size, so that it is reduced to a "circumscribed mound" (11) with "square buildings and oblong buildings placed in rows like a child's avenue of bricks" (6); England, too, takes on characteristics of entrapment, as "a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned" (24); and entire continents become "wrinkled little rocks" (24). By contrast, the ship is a free agent, "an inhabitant of the great world, [...] moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources" (25). Its mobility liberates the travellers from the usual shapes and routines of their lives: "They were free of roads, free of mankind, and the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all" (20).

The flimsy divisions on board ship stand in for the corresponding relaxation of the social codes of London life. The thin partitions between rooms suggest that social hierarchies are flexible during transit (44): Rachel's landing-like room, for example, possesses "nothing of the shut stationary character of a room on shore" (11). Once the travellers arrive in Santa Marina, however, such codes are continually reinforced. St. John Hirst categorizes people into clearly defined groups— "'You could draw circles round the whole lot of them, and they'd never stray outside' " (97)—and the "invisible chalk-marks" he describes prove accurate markers of social strata (137). One such charmed circle, Mrs. Parry's drawing-room, symbolizes the shared background of some

of the travellers: “They who had had no solidity or anchorage before seemed to be attached to it somehow, and at once grown more substantial” (134). Tenuous connections between people grow firmer once they are confirmed as belonging to the same social class. Woolf’s descriptions of social and spatial structures in *The Voyage Out* emphasize the paradoxical tensions between the freedom of movement and its accompanying restrictions. Because it is psychologically destabilizing, total mobility is perceived as a threat, and familiar structures are set in place.

The mobility of travel is an entirely new experience for Rachel. Her twenty-four years have been spent living with her aunts, ignorant and isolated; since Richmond is “an awkward place to reach,” she has few friends (27). Her movement is reduced to “hundreds of morning walks around Richmond Park” (28), and her days are routinely timetabled: “[t]hese divisions were absolutely rigid, the contents of the day having to accommodate themselves within the four rigid bars” (197).⁶ Having been brought up in this limited sphere with its strict rules, Rachel is unused to social interaction, and awaits the arrival of Helen and Ridley as if they represent another physical restriction, “a tight shoe or a draughty window” (6). But as the sea voyage proceeds, she takes pleasure in the increasing scope of experience it offers, finding “her small world becoming wonderfully enlarged” (73). She is forced to confront a barrage of unfamiliar ideas: Helen’s words “hewed down great blocks which had stood there always” (72). The “great blocks” obstructing her thoughts recall the child’s bricks of London, and Rachel now reconsiders her upbringing: “she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever” (72). Travel, for Rachel, suggests exhilarating freedom: “The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed in to Rachel’s mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living” (75).

Until this point, the only kind of movement available to Rachel has been

metaphorical: that offered by music. In representing music in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf expands on the links between imaginative space and architectural structures drawn in her early essays, using spatial and structural images to stand in for interiority. Just as Rachel's music books lying on the ground become "two jagged pillars on the floor" (112), her playing lets her enter a world of her own:

... she was deep in a very difficult, very classical fugue in A, and over her face came a queer remote impersonal expression of complete absorption and anxious satisfaction. Now she stumbled; now she faltered and had to play the same bar twice over; but an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building. She was so far absorbed in this work, for it really was difficult to find how all these sounds should stand together, and drew upon the whole of her faculties, that she never heard a knock at the door. It was burst impulsively open, and Mrs. Dalloway stood in the room, leaving the door open, so that a strip of the white deck and of the blue sea appeared through the opening. The shape of the Bach fugue crashed to the ground. (48-49)

For Rachel, music constructs both literal and figurative worlds. Woolf draws a connection between physical and mental space: the imaginative space of interiority is defined by imagery of architecture, and the sounds which "stand together" begin to take on a concrete existence. But when the private space of Rachel's room is disrupted, the world of her music also disappears.

Music's movement does not always imply an isolated retreat into interiority, however. The world created by Rachel's music can be shared with her listeners, who collectively imagine the movement of a Bach piece in clear lines of architecture: "They sat very still as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. Then they began to see themselves and their lives, and the whole of human life advancing very nobly under the direction of the music" (153). This response not only recalls Richard Dalloway's "vision of English history, King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law" (34), but in this particular context — British subjects listening to European classical music in South America — it also

suggests the cultural aspects of the colonial project as Dalloway describes it: “Unity of aim, of dominion, of progress. The dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area’ ” (55).⁷ Moreover, music’s captivating effect can also initiate less orthodox movement. The violinist at the hotel dance can “make a tortoise waltz” (137), and possesses the mystical powers of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, drawing listeners to him like rats (138).

The fluidity of music at the dance causes the invisible social circles to change shape, intersect, and even break up: the waltz effects movement “as though the room were instantly flooded with water ... The eddies seemed to circle faster and faster, until the music wrought itself into a crash, ceased, and the circles were smashed into little separate bits” (139). The flood simile recalls Rachel’s earlier identification with “the spirit of the sea” through her music (49); and the imagery of invisible circles moving in space makes literal music’s ability to appeal simultaneously to individuals and to a wider audience. The free movement of the dancers suggests a corresponding reworking of social conventions. Although dance is organized into types and highly stylized geometric patterns, as Mr Pepper notes (150), when the dance is officially over, the formulaic restrictions of conventional dances give way to improvisation and spontaneity in both music and movement: as Rachel reflects, perhaps anticipating the social adjustments she is expected to make immediately following her engagement, “[a]ny good tune, with a little management, became a tune one could dance to” (152). Helen scorns those who move only according to the rules: “ ‘They ought to let themselves go more!’ [...] ‘They ought to leap and swing. Look! How they mince!’ ” (146). After the hired musicians leave, when someone complains that what Rachel plays is “not a dance,” she exhorts the guests to “invent the steps” in a “great round dance” which includes everybody in its

giant circle — what Helen calls “ ‘the dance for people who don't know how to dance!’ ” (152). Some dismiss such free dancing as a “romp” (152); others cast aside their inhibitions and revel in the intoxication of movement. For a fleeting moment, the scene provides a model of community in its combination of free individual movement with that of the larger group.

By contrast, when Rachel plays a difficult piano piece that experiments with form, her individual movement becomes threatening. Woolf again employs metaphors of movement through spatial and architectural structures to represent music, depicting it in terms of painstaking and arduous motion on Rachel's part: “Up and up the steep spiral of a very late Beethoven sonata she climbed, like a person ascending a ruined staircase, energetically at first, then more laboriously advancing her feet with effort until she could go no higher and returned with a run to begin at the very bottom again” (275). This kind of music, which modifies and challenges conventional forms, seems to pose a particular threat to the established social order, particularly in terms of the gap it creates between performer and listeners. Terence's changing reactions to Rachel's playing illustrate the gendered assumptions he inevitably attaches to artistic work and to her possession of an independent interior life. He initially feels attracted to Rachel's “free” nature (231) and draws an analogy between his writing and her music as artistic projects; yet after their relationship is formalized by their engagement, he begins to skew the analogy. Rachel's music, he claims, interferes with the progress of his own writing, and so he asks her to stop playing and get on with the perfunctory feminine chore of correspondence. Terence's disapproval of Rachel playing the Beethoven sonata highlights his suspicion of music that stresses the interiority of the performer.⁸ He makes it clear that he does not want to deal

with difficult music which is emphatically a solo performance, and which engages Rachel's attention completely, rather than existing as mere background or accompaniment: " 'I've no objection to nice simple tunes—indeed I find them very helpful to my literary composition, but that kind of thing is merely like an unfortunate old dog going round on its hind legs in the rain' " (276). This attitude also hints at a growing unease with her musical performances: even as he is pleased to show off her accomplishments, he is also envious of their recognition.⁹ Despite his professed interest in others' lives, Terence likes music "in its place:" he expects Rachel to sacrifice solitary movement in favor of social convention.

As Terence is aware, Rachel's expertise in music stands in direct contrast with, and even caters to, her lack of linguistic facility.¹⁰ While Rachel always sings when she's alone (159, 199), when obliged to interact with others she has trouble giving voice to her thoughts. She stammers and handles words awkwardly, as if they are "possessed of shapes like tables or chairs" (113). She reads words aloud "to make herself believe in them" (115) and thinks in sounds: Terence's name, she tells him, is "'like the cry of an owl' " (206). For Rachel, music creates instant communication: it " 'says all there is to say at once' " (196), and freely expresses what the fixed nature of words cannot: "nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for" (29). Music is not merely a means of emotional escape; it contains logical systems whose meanings she understands. Rachel's difficulties with language and with finding a voice to express herself are inevitably problems of gender; but Woolf troubles what might be a simple opposition of language and music as masculine symbolic and feminine semiotic systems. Rachel can express her mind through music because it offers

her an ordering principle which is not hampered by the awkward articulation of words. While language is a foreign system for her, she can easily explain to Terence the complex structural codes followed in music: “Rachel took his stick and drew figures in the thin white dust to explain how Bach wrote his fugues” (207). Just as Rachel thinks of music as expressing what is left unsaid, Terence also wants to write about the things people don’t say, and capture something of the interior life which has always gone unrepresented. In a draft passage which does not appear in the published version of the novel, as DeSalvo points out, Rachel begins to change her ideas about language: “in poetry they found common ground. Rachel owned that she had never realised that people said what they felt in writing” (141).¹¹

Such problems of translation become apparent in *The Voyage Out* not only between artistic media. Just as Rachel’s piano playing highlights the compromised social position of the woman artist, music in *The Voyage Out* also suggests that representational codes of any kind are not translatable across cultures. The English cannot understand the music of the Santa Marina locals, but they try to interpret it according to their own ideas of performance and reception, erasing the obvious questions of music’s class implications and varied social functions. When Helen and Rachel wander through the streets of the town to “see life,” they observe that “an old cripple was twanging his guitar strings, while a poor girl cried her passionate song in the gutter” (89). In direct contrast with such romanticization of music is the fact that it is also a practical and economic necessity: while Rachel plays the piano for pleasure, for the local musicians, who look “pale and heavy-eyed,” “bored and prosaic” at the dance, it is little more than a chore (151). Music and language are conflated in figurations of foreign speech as unrepresentable song, at

once sad and strangely menacing. On the ascent of Monte Rosa, the native guides break into “queer wavering songs” (119), and the natives at the village speak a “harsh unintelligible cry” which slides into a “low and melancholy note” (269).¹² Both Rachel’s own playing and the translation of foreign languages into music suggest that music is more than just a comfortably universal aesthetic experience. Music is not pure form without meaning; and it does not have the same function or resonance across contexts or cultures; rather, its multiple significations are at once liberating and anxiety-provoking. While music suggests an unlimited capacity for expression and mobility, this capacity often proves little more than illusory.

Rachel’s illness reframes the vexed issues of music and mobility raised in *The Voyage Out*. Images of enclosure and lack of movement signify impotence and paralysis throughout the novel. After Mr. Dalloway kisses her on board the ship, Rachel dreams she is trapped in a vault-like tunnel, lying “still and cold” as if dead (68); relaxing on the ground at the picnic, Terence appears dead (133); and physical movement is Rachel’s “only refuge” when uneasy (245). Rachel’s sickness traps her within her body, confusing both time and space in its irregular movement. Terence feels that life itself has “come to a standstill” (316), and Rachel knows she is seriously ill because “the song that someone was singing in the garden stopped suddenly” (310). Time lurches erratically: “a few minutes would lead from broad daylight to the depths of night” and yet the “interminable” nights seem to last forever (312). Moving blinds are terrifying, walls change shape and become transparent, and the room shifts uncontrollably (319, 327). Nurse McInnis tells Rachel to lie still (312), but her mind escapes, “flitting round the room” in a succession of moving images: “Now they were among trees and savages, now

they were on the sea, now they were on the tops of high towers; now they jumped; now they flew” (328, 322). Her hallucinations include visions of “little deformed women sitting in the archway playing cards” (313), “the old woman with the knife” (314), and an “old woman slicing a man’s head off with a knife” (320). These unsettling dreams draw together details from various scenes in the novel—the hotel staff killing chickens, the squatting native woman in the Amazon village’s arched wooden huts (269), and the threat of sexual violence in the earlier dream’s animal-like man. Rachel’s hallucinations are fragmentary and incongruous, and the language used to convey the indescribable nature of her illness is at odds with the largely conventional narrative style of the novel as a whole. It resembles the progression of unrelated thoughts in listening to music as noted in “The Opera”: “the effort to resolve them into one clear conception is painful, and the mind is constantly woken and disillusioned” (270).¹³ During her illness, Rachel’s room is both the private space of the imagination and the restricted space of domesticity. Throughout the novel, the movement of music dramatizes the tension between these two forces in Rachel’s vexed subjectivity. In the novel’s final scenes, it becomes clear that this tension cannot be resolved for Rachel.

In *The Voyage Out*, then, Woolf makes music a metaphorical equivalent for very real contrasts between the solitary and the social, between individuals and their communities, and between interiority and exteriority. The novel’s imagery of music, in both its varying representations and its ultimate non-representability, works to underscore these problems. Woolf manipulates the spatial metaphors which pervade the novel to configure music itself as a figure for movement. She invokes the three-dimensional structures of geometry and architecture to portray music as a plastic art, implying its

ability to move not only through literal space but also within the figurative spaces of human feeling. The multiple resonances of music in *The Voyage Out* make it an analogy for Rachel's limited social mobility, as well as for the mobility of individual thought, and ultimately for the mobility Woolf goes on to create through language. Rachel's last reported thought is her wish to be alone (328), which recalls both her social unease and her daydream of being "a Persian princess far from civilization, riding her horse upon the mountains alone, and making her women sing to her in the evening" (142): she desires both the individual mobility suggested by music and the communal experience of shared singing, in a daydream of the kind of paradoxical society of outsiders Woolf will later describe in *Three Guineas*. Rachel Vinrace cannot survive the conflict between her individual art and the social demands of domesticity; yet in charting her struggle, Woolf employs the idea of music to pose a provocative challenge to conventional models of communication and representation, an issue she will continue to explore.

From Mozart to Music Hall: Worlds of Music in *Night and Day*

After the death of Rachel Vinrace, Woolf's fiction ceases to tackle the relationship between music and literature so directly.¹⁴ Nevertheless, music continues to be of thematic importance in *Night and Day* (1919), and takes on two seemingly contradictory functions in the novel. While the plot highlights the ways in which music is embedded in social grids of meaning, the language of the novel explicitly foregrounds metaphors of music as creating the possibility of seeking new patterns and meanings. On the level of content, musical scenes in the novel work as static visual tableaux which illustrate the meaningless social rituals of the nineteenth century: classical music is an example of the

domestic performance Woolf seeks to expose as restrictive and obsolete. The music hall, by contrast, with its modern, urban mix of registers and styles is figured as a site of imaginative potential. Yet even as she uses descriptions of music to represent the set forms and patterns of Victorian society, Woolf also draws heavily on images of music to represent thought and communication, using music as a key metaphor for the movement of the mind. Music's dual nature in the novel thus exemplifies the tensions between social settings and the individual construction of meaning that are at the heart of Woolf's development of new models of narration.

Where *The Voyage Out* initially suggests music as a potential model for mobility, *Night and Day* casts it as a conservative, backward-looking pursuit: the novel's music-loving characters are those whose values remain stuck in the nineteenth century. Katharine Hilbery, the novel's protagonist, has been called "Rachel Vinrace's opposite" (Dick 179): she has "no particular liking for music" (260), and it is just one of the requisite feminine accomplishments she tries to resist. Her cousin Cassandra Otway, by contrast, is a piano-playing ingenue: her playing is a normative social activity that fits squarely within the drawing-room marriage market. Cassandra's brother Henry is also a musician: he plays both piano and violin, has half-finished an opera, and makes a patchy living teaching provincial young ladies (96, 180).¹⁵ Musicianship is thus figured as a somewhat ludicrous relic of Victorian society—an appropriate part of general education, desirable for a young woman, yet not a proper profession for a gentleman. William Rodney, Katharine's suitor, is an amateur musician who takes classical music as a stable marker of class and culture. A Mozart opera score is always open on his piano—*Don Giovanni* early in the novel, and later *The Magic Flute* (65-66). He sees the arts as

ennobling cultural capital capable of regulating emotion, even citing music as one of the few civilizing influences preventing him from emigrating (64-65).¹⁶ Music thus plays an important part in his courtship of Cassandra, whom he figures as a well-bred animal, “some inimitably graceful species of musical mole” (260).¹⁷ Since the Hilbery parents also see music as part of an idealized domestic femininity, it even helps to temper their disapproval on Cassandra’s engagement to William. Mr Hilbery’s anger is soothed by her offer to play (465); and Mrs Hilbery is easily swayed: “I was a little grudging at first, but, after all, she plays the piano so beautifully” (446).¹⁸

Night and Day depicts music, then, largely as an old-fashioned and static social rite. As such, it plays an important part in deploying the contrasts between the novel’s two couples: if Cassandra and William’s relationship is both propped up and encumbered by the social niceties and heavy furniture of Victorian domesticity, Katharine and Ralph are drawn together by their shared impulse to move (427). Although their initial meeting is in the “very remote and still” Cheyne Walk drawing room (8), their private friendship is continually worked out in incongruous and usually public places. Walking and talking together, they march down the Strand, meet at Kew, wander the city at night. Woolf depicts the development of their relationship with a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, both literal and figurative: they undertake difficult negotiations between public and private, ideal and real, questioning what love, work, and marriage mean in a changing world. Cassandra and William, by contrast, are almost always inside, since “according to William’s code it was considerably more damning to be seen out of doors than surprised within” (422). Their courtship is largely confined to tableaux set in domestic interiors, and their relationship seems to Katharine and Ralph as an uncomplicatedly conventional musical

scene: "the melody of Mozart seemed to express the easy and exquisite love of the two upstairs" (394).

Musical interludes are not the only episodes in *Night and Day* which read like staged scenes. Full of theatrical spaces and tableaux, the novel's action moves by means of stage whispers and overheard conversations. The Hilberys' afternoon tea parties, the Denhams' dining room, and Mary Datchet's political meetings, are all contrasting scenes of social performance for invited audiences. The Cheyne Walk residence, in particular, is a theatrically designed spectacle of upper-class life: "an orderly place, shapely, controlled — a place where life had been trained to show to the best advantage" (40). Areas within the house are partitioned off into staged spaces of privacy: the portrait of Richard Alardyce is ritually unveiled for visitors; the "relic room" contains museum-like displays (the poet's slippers, for example, left under his desk as if still in use); and even the telephone is slightly offstage, in an "alcove on the stairs ... screened for privacy by a curtain of purple velvet" as if to allow for quasi-theatrical asides (288). Any such privacy, of course, is illusory: as the only daughter of this household, Katharine is the reluctant performer of a series of circumscribed roles in "the great make-believe game of English social life" (193), from Kensington hostess to granddaughter of the famous poet, highbrow tour guide, and biographer's assistant. Her "years of training in a drawing-room" make it possible for her to divorce appearance from reality and "adopt a manner of composure" (271); during "the ceremony of ancestor-worship" (297), her speech about her grandfather's manuscripts is so well rehearsed that it seems automatic: "[s]he paused for a minute, and then went on, as if these spaces had all been calculated" (13). To Cassandra the voices in the drawing-room before a dinner are "like the tuning-up of the

instruments of the orchestra" (320), an excitement which soon gives way to a "a more subdued desire merely to watch and to whisper" (324). And while Ralph feels jealous of "the actors in so great a drama as that of Katharine Hilbery's daily life" (271), Katharine mocks the notion of herself as dramatic heroine: "'At twelve my horses turn into rats and off I go. The illusion fades. But I accept my fate. I make hay while the sun shines'" (328).

Such explicitly theatrical imagery reflects the novel's concern with social control: private life is figured as a spectacle constantly judged by real or imagined audiences. Katharine anticipates continual commentary on her actions from a kind of self-censoring Greek chorus, "a collection of voices in the air" (290), and even thinks from the perspective of someone watching her: "if some one opened the door at this moment he would think that they were enjoying themselves," she thinks, "and instinctively she laughed, and said something to increase the noise, for the credit of the house presumably, since she herself had not been feeling exhilarated" (7). Mrs Hilbery watches Katharine and Ralph "as if a scene from the younger generation were being played for her benefit" (18), and after surprising Katharine and William talking behind a curtain (300), withdraws "as if she forced herself to draw the curtain upon a scene which she refused all temptation to interrupt" (304). And in the theatrical denouement of the marriage plot, Cassandra overhears Katharine and William's conversation: "the curtains hanging at the door of the little room parted, and Cassandra herself stepped forth. 'I have overheard every word!' she exclaimed" (383). Quite literally waiting in the wings, she becomes Katharine's fortunate understudy, taking over her cousin's unwanted role as traditional romantic lead. Such recurring episodes of overhearing, eavesdropping, and spying in *Night and Day* can be read as a direct commentary on the stifling atmosphere of

the Victorian family home. Katharine's aunts, for example, seek her help to enforce familial standards of propriety and social control in persuading her cousin Cyril Alardyce to marry the mother of his children (111). For Katharine, the need to fulfill publicly sanctioned roles and the sense of constant surveillance quashes private thought and the possibility of movement. Woolf paints traditional domestic interiors as repressing individual interiority, since the space of the home is marked by performance — a chore rather than a choice — and by public roles rather than privacy.¹⁹

Held up against such constraints, however, is Woolf's description of the couples' expedition to a music hall performance. Shortly beforehand, Mary Datchet has considered such an entertainment as a means to reassert her choice of work over love: she finds herself "tempted to spend the first instalment of her freedom in some dissipation; in the pit of the Coliseum, for example, since they were now passing the door. Why not go in and celebrate her independence of the tyranny of love?" (417). Just as Mary thinks of the music hall as a "dissipation," a sense of slight risk is involved in this outing, neither a highbrow cultural event like William's concerts, nor the bourgeois spectacle of exclusive domestic performances. Katharine joins the men to "instruct" her cousin in "the peculiar delights of an entertainment where Polar bears follow directly upon ladies in full evening dress, and the stage is alternately a garden of mystery, a milliner's band-box, and a fried-fish shop in the Mile End Road" (423-24). Here the local, specific and familiar are fused with the exotic, general, and even ridiculous. The working-class labor of the hat shop alternates with "ladies in full evening dress," and the literary and melodramatic connotations of the "garden of mystery" are juxtaposed with the mundane commercial work of the East End fish shop. Even as a mere idea, therefore, the music hall already

stands in for variety and mobility: Woolf highlights its idiosyncratic blend of registers, tones, classes, and contexts within a single sentence.

Although the narrator notes that for the two couples "the programme that night ... fulfilled the highest purposes of dramatic art" (424), Woolf's own attitude to the music hall—as to popular culture more generally—was varied at best.²⁰ But the music hall scene in *Night and Day* is not fraught with divisions of class and taste. In fact, it constitutes a rare moment of communal identification, so that the music hall is figured as a site of change and possibility. As if picking up on the theatrical imagery that pervades the novel, the scene is elaborately framed as a staged spectacle: "[t]he reds and creams of the background, the lyres and harps and urns and skulls, the protuberances of plaster, the fringes of scarlet plush, the sinking and blazing of innumerable electric lights, could scarcely have been surpassed for decorative effect by any craftsman of the ancient or modern world" (424). Although the setting is so richly detailed, the staged spectacle is described only briefly, and in terms of the music which accompanies it: "[t]he hall resounded with brass and strings, alternately of enormous pomp and majesty, and then of sweetest lamentation" (424). Woolf turns her attention instead to the composition of the audience. Like the audience in "The Opera," it is divided spatially into social classes, whose respective appearances initially reflect those distinctions: "bare-shouldered, tufted and garlanded in the stalls, decorous but festal in the balconies, and frankly fit for daylight and street life in the gallery" (424). Yet as spectators, the entire audience becomes part of the spectacle they are watching:

But, however they differed when looked at separately, they shared the same huge, lovable nature in the bulk, which murmured and swayed and quivered all the time the dancing and juggling and love-making went on in front of it, slowly laughed and reluctantly left off laughing, and applauded with a helter-

skelter generosity which sometimes became unanimous and overwhelming.
(424)

The music hall audience undergoes a transformation from a set of hierarchically defined groups into a communally unified entity. Woolf's language effects the same kind of movement, from the previous sentence's tripartite comparison—stalls, balconies, galleries—to the long, expansive description of the audience's reaction to, and participation in, the spectacle. The paratactic piling-up of verbs of motion, for example, repeats the triple structure of the sentence before, but without distinguishing between audience groups: "murmured and swayed and quivered." By extension, the performers' "dancing and juggling and love-making" seems also to include the spectators.²¹ The changing subject matter of the program is thus mirrored in the "helter-skelter generosity" of the audience. Although the shared emotion can be "unanimous and overwhelming," it demands no loss of individual interiority, but rather effects a kind of sublimation into the "huge, lovable nature" of the group, the shared identity of an urban collection of strangers. Neither the characters themselves, nor Woolf as narrator, attempt to translate the performances into an explainable extramusical meaning.²² The music hall thus functions as the kind of imaginative space figured in Katharine's daydreams: "a place where feelings were liberated from the constraint which the real world puts upon them" (131).²³

This musical "moment of being" is also notable for its evocation of a kind of communal embodiment through its emphasis on physical feeling and movement. Here the female body is not objectified as it is, for example, in William's vision of Cassandra playing the flute or Ralph's impressions of Katharine's looks. Although William watches the women as they watch the performance, here he reacts to their expression of genuine emotions — Katharine's "abandonment" and Cassandra's "astonishment" (424). Their shared position as spectators allows them a break from the performance of correct social roles. As the audience as a whole murmurs, sways, and quivers, the music hall scene is

one of the most physical passages in *Night and Day*, a novel marked by the absence of physicality and sexuality. Despite the scene's lack of specific focus on particular characters, it is nevertheless a sensual process where the physicality and movement of the audience expresses a corresponding unity of thought and experience. In its very generality, it is possibly the least complicated identification between characters in the novel, and certainly one of the most positively framed moments in the book.

In its plot trajectory, then, *Night and Day* moves in an arc from the confined setting of the Victorian family house to the mixed settings of the streets and urban life in London. The novel's treatment of music might also represent such movement—from the classical model of Mozart, with its emphasis on a private, enclosed aesthetic world, to the music hall, with its sense of popular culture, variety, and the modern. For the most part, music in *Night and Day* is depicted as an empty social convention, as Victorian and immovable as the bulky piano; yet Woolf's deployment of language drawn from music in the novel works to the opposite effect. Metaphors of music are used self-consciously to draw attention to questions of form and meaning, and to problematize the relationship between the world of external reality and the interior world of the imagination. As an analogy, then, music provides a potential means for movement between these two worlds.

In the context of the staged drawing-room scene, both Woolf's narrator and her characters explicitly invoke the idea of harmony in terms which emphasize social convention. The house in Cheyne Walk is "made to appear harmonious" (40) by the efforts of the women of the family, figured as an activity of defensive listening. When Ralph appears at the opening afternoon tea, Katharine wonders how she will be able to "keep this strange young man in harmony with the rest" (9); Mrs Hilbery is sensitive to silence in the drawing room "as of a dumb note in a sonorous scale" (11); and Katharine even wonders whether voices on the telephone will "combine" or "strike a dissonance" with her surroundings (288). Such willed creation of harmony, however forced and artificial, also highlights the older generation's unwillingness to respond to new or

problematic ideas. When Mr Hilbery avoids discussing Cyril, his black sheep nephew, for example, Katharine thinks "How superficially he smoothed these events into a semblance of decency which harmonized with his own view of life!" (101). Likewise, when Katharine tells her that she and Ralph are thinking of living together without marrying, Mrs Hilbery "ran over these phrases as if she were trying chords that did not quite satisfy her ear" (447), and concludes that the idea, like Katharine's beloved mathematics, is "dreadfully ugly" (448). The concept of classical harmony thus comes to stand in for the seamless surfaces of social performance, whose creation involves concealing anything which deviates from it.

Yet at the same time, musical imagery also functions to foreground individual perceptions and emotions, and Woolf makes it a metaphor for the mental transformation of the everyday: more than simple emotional expressiveness, music sets in process the movement of the imagination.²⁴ Half-listening to Ralph talk about plants, Katharine feels "[f]or weeks she had heard nothing that made such pleasant music in her mind. It wakened echoes in all those remote fastnesses of her being where loneliness had brooded so long undisturbed" (307).²⁵ Likewise, amidst the "stir and cheerfulness" of central London, Ralph is struck by the sight of Katharine: "immediately the whole scene in the Strand wore that curious look of order and purpose which is imparted to the most heterogeneous things when music sounds; and so pleasant was this impression that he was very glad that he had not stopped her" (120). Rather than the carefully contrived harmony of the Hilberys' social world, this is a chance moment suddenly imbued with significance, a quasi-cinematic scene complete with its own soundtrack. Its "order and purpose" is not premised on surface sameness; nor does it erase the "most heterogeneous things" that make up the scene. Ralph attributes the characteristic emotive and expressive powers of music to Katharine herself, making her a personification of music. Later, he finds that "[h]is sight of Katharine had put him queerly out of tune for a domestic evening" (120), because his imaginative impression of her, at odds with the reality of

mundane familial interaction, breaks the surface of social harmony.

The similes of echo and pattern employed here also invoke the idea of temporality. While Ralph's idealized musical image of Katharine momentarily transforms a city space, his absorption in its intangibility fades and cannot be recaptured: "Like a strain of music, the effect of Katharine's presence slowly died from the room in which Ralph sat alone. The music had ceased in the rapture of its melody. He strained to catch the faintest lingering echoes" (356). Music's immediacy can lend a temporary transcendence and emotional significance to even the most ordinary space. But because it moves over time, the transformation—like the sound itself—is always over as soon as it happens. The "lingering echoes" suggest the incompleteness of aural memory: you can never turn back to a moment and listen again. Woolf thus holds the classical metaphor of stable, controlled harmony (in a musical score, figured in vertical terms) in tension with Romantic notions of melody, temporality and expressiveness (something which moves horizontally on a score). Listening involves a struggle to hold on to the illusion of meaning; music presents a problem, rather than a triumph of form.²⁶

Woolf extends this equation between music and the movement of thought to descriptions of the secret pleasures of Katharine's interior life, mathematics and astronomy.²⁷ In their shared emphases on proportion and harmony, both disciplines are inextricably tied to traditional theories of music: from classical geometry onwards, the idea of the music of the spheres has represented music's abstract and intangible qualities. While Cassandra performs music, Katharine's interests represent its philosophical origins. Through the abstraction of intellectual work, she finds both escape from social performance and access to a world of Platonic ideals (41). The stars let her enter "a dream state" where "dwelt the realities of the appearances which figure in our world; so direct, powerful, and unimpeded were her sensations there, compared with those called forth in actual life. There dwelt the things one might have felt, had there been cause; the perfect happiness of which here we taste the fragment; the beauty seen here in flying

glimpses only” (131). The “flying glimpses” and “fragments” are momentary reminders of a real, yet inaccessible “perfect happiness” which resembles the classical notion of divine harmony, an abstract contemplative music unable to be heard by the human ear.²⁸

Through the stars and mathematics, Katharine gains access to a world of imagination characterized by images of movement through space and time. Literal movement provokes a similar “dream state.” As many critics have noted, she finds productive space for private thought in walking anonymously through the city, comes to moments of vision almost by accident, and has trouble “waking from the trance into which movement among moving things had thrown her” (85).²⁹ Her solitary walks also let her transcend the particulars of her own situation and trace out a kind of pattern: her “rapid walk along the dreary streets of South Kensington” enables her to formulate “some kind of arrangement of life,” an overview within which she thinks of herself and her friends as “scattered among the crowd,” part of a wider group (292). To describe Katharine’s travels through the city, Woolf uses metaphors of sound to bind together physical movement with that of the imagination. The city’s irregular and unpredictable movement is figured as a river, the noise of which is imbued with a paradoxical sense of purpose:

The great torrent of vans and carts was sweeping down Kingsway; pedestrians were streaming in two currents along the pavements. ... The deep roar filled her ears; the changing tumult had the inexpressible fascination of varied life pouring ceaselessly with a purpose which, as she looked, seemed to her, somehow, the normal purpose for which life was framed; its complete indifference to the individuals, whom it swallowed up and rolled onwards, filled her with at least a temporary exaltation. The blend of daylight and of lamplight made her an invisible spectator. (408)

Rendered invisible by the half-light, she is at once part of public life and somehow removed from it, standing beside the “stream” as if deciding whether or not to join it. As in the music hall scene, Woolf’s focus moves away from the “domestic streets of Chelsea” (408) towards a specifically urban area of London. Identity is divested into a

positive impersonality: individuals are “swallowed up” and “rolled onwards” by the currents of the city, becoming part of its fluid and anonymous community. The scene’s emphasis on movement and variety again recalls the music hall: struck by the “inexpressible fascination of varied life pouring ceaselessly,” Katharine stands “unobserved and absorbed” in the “deep roar” and “changing tumult” of the city itself.

In descriptions of Mary Datchet, Woolf explicitly invokes music to link the movement of the body with that of the mind. As Mary departs a difficult social interaction planning to “think out” her relationship with Ralph, she finds “her mind uncomfortably full of different trains of thought. She started one and then another. They seemed even to take their colour from the street she happened to be in” (158). Far from the “exaltation” Katharine’s walks offer, Mary is overcome by fugue-like confusion: ideas multiply and elude her control, directed by the external stimuli of the city. She is subject to the affective power of particular locations, from Bloomsbury and Holborn to the “great misty square of Lincoln’s Inn Fields,” and of city sounds such as the “belated organ-grinder” which “[sets] her thoughts dancing incongruously” (159).³⁰ Later in the novel, music changes from an unwanted influence on thought into a welcome one. Framing listening to music as a simile for walking in the city, Woolf draws a direct parallel in their shared effect of setting the imagination in motion:

Strange thoughts are bred in passing through crowded streets should the passenger, by chance, have no exact destination in front of him, much as the mind shapes all kinds of forms, solutions, images when listening inattentively to music. From an acute consciousness of herself as an individual, Mary passed to a conception of the scheme of things in which, as a human being, she must have her share. She half held a vision; the vision shaped and dwindled. She wished she had a pencil and a piece of paper to help her to give a form to this conception which composed itself as she walked down the Charing Cross Road. But if she talked to any one, the conception might escape her. Her vision seemed to lay out the lines of her life until death in a way which satisfied her sense of harmony. It only needed a persistent effort of thought, stimulated in this strange way by the crowd and the noise, to climb the crest of existence and see it all laid out once and for ever. Already her suffering as an individual was left behind her. (241)

This associative process, with its “infinitely swift and full passages of thought,” is “full of effort” for Mary, but exhilarating nevertheless. “The crowd and the noise” allow her, like Katharine, to escape the bounds of her individual life and become anonymous in relation to the city spectacle; likewise, her thoughts move from her own situation to a broader abstract pattern in a “curious transformation from the particular to the universal” (243). In describing Mary’s “conception of life in this world,” Woolf combines visual and aural references to stress motion: even as it “compose[s] itself” and satisfies Mary’s “sense of harmony,” it “shape[s],” “dwindle[s],” and threatens to “escape.” In this way Woolf rewrites the ideas of “composure” and “harmony,” previously figured as limiting and static, into the kinesthetic representation of Mary’s interiority.

Such passages, which aim to capture the movement of the mind, reflect the beginnings of the fictional project Woolf outlines in “Modern Fiction,” first published like *Night and Day* in 1919. *Night and Day*’s narrative style is far from impressionistic; yet from Mary’s “trains of thought” to Ralph’s “dot with flames around it” (457) and Katharine’s “something about flames” (468), the novel constantly foregrounds the world of impressions. Like mathematics, astronomy, and walking in the city, music provokes the “flight of the mind” and provides glimpses of the world of the imagination. Of course, Woolf herself referred to *Night and Day* as a novel of “non-being”: following the structural lines of the conventional marriage plot, its moments of vision remain isolated.³¹ Yet the novel’s formal conventionality is highly self-referential.³² In its treatment of various conventional oppositions—traditional vs modern, individual vs society, even literature vs astronomy—the narrative constantly draws attention to questions of form. And as the characters discover, form does not always have a straightforward meaning or function; it can also be used strategically. After the confrontation between Katharine, William and Cassandra, the three try to conceal their improper behavior with the comfortable forms of familiar daily structures. In particular, Cassandra’s piano playing creates an effective formal distraction which “lull[s] Mrs and Mrs Hilbery into the belief

that nothing unusual had taken place”:

Cassandra opened the piano directly, and did her best to create an atmosphere of unmixed beauty. At the sound of the first notes Katharine and Rodney both felt an enormous sense of relief at the licence which the music gave them to loosen their hold upon the mechanism of behaviour. They lapsed into the depths of thought. Mrs Hilbery was soon spirited away into a perfectly congenial mood, that was half reverie and half slumber, half delicious melancholy and half pure bliss. Mr Hilbery alone attended. He was extremely musical, and made Cassandra aware that he listened to every note....[Rodney] stayed a moment longer by the window than was, perhaps, necessary, and having done what was needed, drew his chair a little closer than before to Katharine's side. Under cover of some exquisite run of melody, he leant towards her and whispered something. (386-87)

On one level, this performance has a pacifying, almost soporific, function; yet at the same time, her parents' absorption in the drawing-room recital screens off the private communication between Katherine and William, providing cover for him to let her know that Ralph is waiting outside the house.

Until this point in the novel, domestic scenes of musical performance have been part of the very “mechanism of behaviour” which constrains the characters; yet Cassandra's deceptively simple display of form now provides a curtain behind which such formal constraints can loosen. Rather than reaffirming the boundaries of domestic space, it enables the world outside to permeate them. Here music works to two distinct effects. For Mr and Mrs Hilbery, perhaps, music might temper threats to social propriety: as in melodrama or silent movies, the musical soundtrack informs the plot, creating — even exploiting — particular and predictable emotional effects. For Katharine and William, however, music is not soothing. It opens up a space for private thought and then allows for the productive discords of argument and action. Katharine's feelings of alarm, mystery, and agitation oppose, rather than reflect, the form of the music (387-88). The focus of the scene shifts from the form of the performance to the thought and action of the audience. The theatrical imagery of the novel changes direction: instead of being compelled to perform in compliance with audience expectations, the characters become

aware that form can also be used consciously and strategically to obscure unorthodox action and development.

While musical content in the novel stresses the emptiness of conventional formal display, the language of music works as a metaphor for thought and suggests the possibility for new kinds of narration. It provides an answer to Katharine's questioning of the "perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect, and without essential change?" (314-15). Woolf's self-conscious deployment of musical imagery in *Night and Day* suggests that she saw in music the potential for such movement between the worlds of thought and action, external reality and interiority. The movement of music, therefore, provides her with an important analogy for the kind of mobility she goes on to create in language.

“ — it's difficult this — ”: Listening and Narrative in “The String Quartet”

The radical change of style between her first two novels and the short stories collected in *Monday or Tuesday* reflects Woolf's concern with finding new ways to represent the life of the mind. As early as 1908 she had written of her ambition to “re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes” (L1 356); in 1917 she commented “I daresay one ought to invent a completely new form. Anyhow its very amusing to try with these short things” (L2 167); in 1919 she described “one of those slight distastes which betokens a change of style. [...] Shall I always feel this quicksilver surface in my language; & always be shaking it from shape to shape?” (D1 311); and in early 1920 she wrote that she had “arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel” with “no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright

as fire in the mist" (D2 13). In "The String Quartet," the abstract and impressionistic nature of music offers Woolf not merely a useful analogy for the movement of the mind, but a potential form for depicting that movement. Where she had explored music from within largely conventional narrative means in both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, "The String Quartet" goes a step further, and uses music as a vehicle for a new kind of narration. The short story's setting, a concert in the outdated context Katharine Hilbery and Rachel Vinrace seek to escape, again emphasizes the superficial social rituals surrounding musical performance. Its narrative style, moreover, makes music more than just a descriptive mechanism: Woolf takes us inside the head of an audience member, putting into practice her aim of recording the flow of impressions through the mind. The narrative's fluid and allusive movement mimics that of music itself, which becomes both subject and structure of the story.

The story's experimental style recalls Walter Pater's famous dictum that "[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (156): for Pater, music was the ultimate art form because of its lack of materiality, its focus on the moment, and its fusion of form and content. In "The String Quartet" Woolf rejects conventional devices of narrative framing in order to create such effects of immediacy. A rare example of first-person narrative in Woolf's fiction, the story has neither a linear plot nor an anchoring omniscient narrator. With the title as its only contextual key, its structure follows the twists and turns of a listening mind, tracing the particularities of its responses to both inner and outer realities as they unfold. In exploring the relationship between these two realities, Woolf self-consciously exploits the very duality that limits music's role in her earlier novels. "The String Quartet," therefore, highlights the importance of Woolf's thinking about music to her development of new techniques for representing interiority.

The 1922 novel *Jacob's Room* is usually seen as Woolf's first serious experiment with stream of consciousness narration, while the short fiction, as Gillespie notes, is almost uniformly overlooked (116).³³ Woolf herself tended to give the stories

similar treatment, describing them in a 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth, for example, as “little pieces” which were “the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style [*Night and Day*]” (L4 231). It is not surprising then that until recently “The String Quartet” has met with little critical interest. Although Woolf notes in her diary that both Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry admired the story, and that T.S. Eliot singled it out for particular praise—an opinion which especially pleased her, given her disappointment in reactions to the collection—contemporary critical responses largely dismissed it as no more than a light formal experiment (D2 106, 125). In the Reid lectures he gave after Woolf’s death, E. M. Forster described the short stories as all form and no content: “Lovely little things, but they seemed to lead nowhere, they were all tiny dots and coloured blobs, they were an inspired breathlessness, they were a beautiful drowning or gasping which trusted to luck” (242). *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer Harold Child was less complementary in his judgement: “Prose may ‘aspire to the condition of music’; it cannot reach it” (Majumdar 88).

Among more recent critics, Woolf’s short fiction has received increased attention.³⁴ Given Woolf’s lack of musical expertise, however, some perhaps take her interest in Paterian aesthetics rather too literally.³⁵ While “The String Quartet” self-consciously foregrounds issues of form and narrative, it is more than merely a formal imitation of the music itself. Woolf probably had neither the musical knowledge nor the intention to carry out such a technical exercise. Rather than trying to reproduce the music’s form, she transposes its indeterminacy of meaning into linguistic play, while holding that indeterminacy in tension with the formal and controlled social setting of the concert. External descriptions and mundane social interchange are mingled with over-the-top romantic narrative and the fluid imagery and style of a prose poem, with the result that it is often difficult to distinguish between dialogue, interior monologue, and associative fragments of thought. In place of Avrom Fleishman’s interpretation of a linear thematic development with “concentric” and “circular” form, therefore, it is more useful

to turn to Tony Davenport's description of it as weaving together interior monologue and external detail to create "two-layered fiction" (166). Such constant shifts in perspective create a complex texture of meaning, as Gillespie points out: "Woolf counterpoints scraps of conversation with the feelings and corresponding images aroused by music" (141). The metaphor of counterpoint emphasizes Woolf's creation of the fictional effects of overlapping voices, simultaneity of action, and continual movement.

Illustrated with a woodcut by Vanessa Bell, "The String Quartet" was published in the 1921 collection *Monday or Tuesday*. The impetus for the story seems to have come directly from a private subscription chamber music series Woolf attended from 1918 to 1920, run by Bruce Richmond and usually held at Shelley House in Chelsea (D1 219). She explicitly describes her attendance at one such concert in March 1920 as work for this story: "I went up to Campden Hill to hear the S[c]hubert quintet – to see George Booth's house – to take notes for my story – to rub shoulders with respectability – all these reasons took me there, & were cheaply gratified at 7/6" (D2 24). As subscription concerts, these were held in private homes rather than public halls; for Woolf as a young woman, "rubbing shoulders with respectability" was a way to keep in tangential contact with the social milieu in which she had grown up.

Woolf's diary entries over this period read like a gossipy concordance to the story itself. Notably, her descriptions of the concerts focus more often on the audience than the music, returning repeatedly to one immediately striking feature: "the eternal, & insoluble question of clothes" (D1 220). After first attending the series, she notes, "How much the annual income of the audience amounted to, I should not like to guess; they wore a substantial part of it on their backs" (D1 220). She describes "the company" of a February 1919 concert as "decorous & fur bearing as usual," equating outward markers of status and wealth with corresponding—if less tangible—codes of social behaviour (D1 245). Such self-conscious codes could create impediments to listening: the social obligations of smalltalk, for example, hindered individual engagement with the music. On

her 38th birthday she went to hear Mozart and Beethoven in South Kensington: “I don’t think I did hear very much of them, seated as I was between Katie & Elena, & pitched headforemost into outrageous banter of the usual kind with the Countess” (*D2* 14).

Having made a clear choice to escape the outdated world of her childhood, Woolf was a borderline member of this society, and found its “amiability [. . .] disarming” (*D1* 251).

Upon meeting old family acquaintances at a concert, she records that “[a]ll expressed great surprise at seeing me, as if I were a strange bird joining a flock of the same species. I felt strange enough; but oddly familiar with their ways after the first” (*D1* 220). Only a month later, she depicts herself as “less than ever in touch with the gathering—as dusky, fur-clad & discreet as ever” (*D1* 251).³⁶

In “The String Quartet” Woolf addresses the issues of community and identification raised both in such diary entries and in her first two novels. The narrator figure, who seems to occupy an ambiguous position in relation to the rest of the audience, wonders at the ways in which superficial aspects of the evening’s entertainment interfere with individual listening: “If it’s all the facts I mean, and the hats, the feather boas, the gentleman’s swallow-tail coats, and pearl tip-pins that come to the surface—what chance is there?” (138). Clothing and propriety are again conflated in the audience’s uncomfortable concern with correct external appearances: “Why fidget? Why so anxious about the sit of cloaks and gloves—whether to button or unbutton?” (130). As much as clothing confirms the wearer’s inclusion in a particular social class, it also cements divisions between the members of the audience, “a hundred people sitting here well dressed, walled in, furred, replete” (139). Politeness rather than familiarity compels the narrator to speak with a relative: “the ties of blood require me, leaning forward, to accept cordially the hand which is perhaps offered hesitatingly—” (138). Like Woolf herself, the narrator is unwilling to identify with the homogenous upper-class group and reluctant to participate in the conversations around her.

Yet what unites the group is their shared anticipation of the activity of listening.

Before the concert starts, the narrator finds herself expecting an indefinable effect from the music: “I too sit passive on a gilt chair, only turning the earth above a buried memory, as we all do, for there are signs, if I’m not mistaken, that we’re all recalling something, furtively seeking something” (139). As in *Night and Day*, music is figured as a stimulus to the imagination; the search for a recalled “buried memory” suggests the philosophical idea of music as something mystical, echoing the Platonic ideal of classical harmony, like Katharine’s astronomy or Mary’s “vision.” The power to feel, attributed to the music hall audience in the previous novel, is now given to this homogenous, upper-class chamber music audience. The concert creates a temporary and provisional community of dispersed subjectivities: the audience members react to the same music in individual ways. Yet while the sense of shared emotion is liberating in the music hall scene, here even this common experience is figured as something “furtive” which remains hidden and must be inferred from “signs.” In “The String Quartet” Woolf highlights such contradictions: the narrative’s constant combination of outward form and inner feeling calls into question the relationship between the two.

The forced stasis that characterizes the audience as they sit and wait is thrown into relief by the narrative’s emphasis on movement. Moving between outer and inner realities, Woolf juxtaposes large-scale movement through the city with that within the individual mind. The story opens with a list of modes of travel that have brought the audience to the concert: “Tubes and trams and omnibuses, private carriages not a few, even, I venture to believe, landaus with bays in them, have been busy at it, weaving threads from one end of London to the other” (138). These “threads,” like those in *Mrs Dalloway*, at once suggest literal movement, connections between people, and the work of the narrative itself. But the threads of narrative in “The String Quartet” are so constantly moving that they are hard for the reader to follow, just as the narrator herself struggles to keep track of her thoughts and experiences:

If the mind's shot through by such little arrows, and—for human society compels it—no sooner is one launched than another presses forward; if this engenders heat and in addition they've turned on the electric light; if saying one thing does, in so many cases, leave behind it a need to improve and revise, stirring besides regrets, pleasures, vanities, and desires—if it's all the facts I mean, and the hats, the fur boas, the gentleman's swallow-tail coats, and pearl tie-pins that come to the surface—what chance is there?

Of what? It becomes every minute more difficult to say why, in spite of everything, I sit here believing I can't now say what, or even remember the last time it happened. (138)

In both subject matter and syntax, this question conveys a sense of the unpredictable movement of the mind. Woolf's characteristic use of both the word "if" and the dash illustrates the ways in which ideas are continually generated, interrupted, and left unfinished. Visual images jostle with abstract emotions and the vocabulary of contemporary physics in a dynamic narrative style recalling Mary Datchet's fugue-like interior monologue in *Night and Day*.

Woolf's kinesthetic narrative in "The String Quartet" extends her previous deployment of music as a figure for various kinds of movement. She creates a quasi-musical sense of motion to represent the associative process of thought:

Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches, and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy where—it's difficult this—conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round—free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up... How lovely goodness is in those who, stepping lightly, go smiling through the world! Also in jolly old fishwives, squatting under arches, obscene old women, how deeply they laugh and shake and rollick, when they walk, from side to side, hum, hah! (139)

As in *The Voyage Out*, music is equated with the fluid movement of water; the narrative style combines incomplete sentences, ellipses, and exclamations. The list of infinitives (or imperatives) opening the paragraph, the strings of present participles (washing, leaping, splashing, scraping, rushing, ascending, stepping, smiling, squatting), and the

rhythmic repetition, alliteration and internal rhyme (“Fountains jet; drops descend,” “round and round, round and round”) create a sense of immediacy and dynamism.

Woolf’s figuration of thoughts as swimming fish anticipates her later development of the fish as a metaphor for ideas and memory in *A Room of One’s Own* and “Professions for Women;” in the “jolly old fishwives, squatted under arches,” the passage also picks up key imagery from scenes of Rachel’s delirium in *The Voyage Out* (139). Chasing the fish of ideas, Woolf’s narrator is herself a “fishwife”: the mid-sentence aside “it’s difficult this” creates a self-conscious commentary on the process of catching and recording thoughts.

Such passages show Woolf’s narrator making music into language, and vice versa, without clarifying meaning. Yet other audience members feel an uncomfortable urge to translate music into words, as snatches of interval conversation show: “But the tune, like all his tunes, makes one despair—I mean hope. What do I mean? That’s the worst of music!” (138); “No, no. I noticed nothing. That’s the worst of music—these silly dreams. The second violin was late, you say?” (140). Unable to cope because its meaning is not immediately legible, some focus on technicalities, and others struggle to express their reactions to the music at all: “‘How—how—how!’ Hush!” (140). Here Woolf returns to the problem in “Impressions at Bayreuth” of “how little words can do to render music.” Music is figured as a kind of speech whose meaning is independent of language —“the words are indistinguishable though the meaning is plain enough” (141)—and listening to it spurs the narrator to find meaning in the immediacy of impressions: “the tongue is but a clapper. Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashes green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting” (140). Unlike the audience responses, the narrator uses language as a malleable, dynamic medium, to record the constant flow of thoughts through the listening mind. “The worst of music,” its untranslatable appeal to the senses and direct experience, is thus perhaps its most attractive feature for Woolf in

developing a new narrative style.

The immediacy of music in “The String Quartet” works as a catalyst for emotion and memory. Woolf draws on traditional connections between poetry and song, making her listener’s experience of the music enact the key features of elegy: it evokes a presence, mourns absence, and moves toward cathartic acceptance. The music’s “melancholy river” becomes a medium of communication with an unidentified second person, somehow present within it: “When the moon comes through the trailing willow boughs, I see your face, I hear your voice and the bird singing as we pass the osier bed. What are you whispering? Sorrow, sorrow. Joy, joy. (140). Sorrow and joy are “woven together, inextricably commingled” in this inaudible speech (140). But the “you” addressed here does not speak further; “the boat sinks” and the reverie collapses. What is left is a “dusky wraith” whose ghostly voice seems to speak directly to the listener:

For me it sings, unseals my sorrow, thaws compassion, floods with love the sunless world, nor, ceasing, abates its tenderness, but deftly, subtly, weaves in and out until this pattern, this consummation, the cleft ones unify; soar, sob, sink to rest, sorrow and joy. (140)

The disembodied voice of the music forces the listener to access emotion that has been locked away, embodying a sorrow which must be “unsealed,” an echo of the “buried memory” shared by the audience as they await the music. Yet it also gives rise to the comforting “compassion,” “love,” and “tenderness,” which weave together to form a “pattern.” As sorrow and joy “soar, sob, sink to rest,” music both provokes the difficulty of memory and provides consolation.

Given the story’s date of composition, these references to “buried memory” and “unsealed” sorrow can be read as an oblique commentary on society’s inability to mourn the collective losses of World War One. The only explicit reference to the war occurs during the pre-concert chit-chat: “ ‘But I knew you at once!’ / ‘Still, the war made a break —’ ” (138). In this fragment of conversation, the war is mentioned as if it is no more than a slight inconvenience to social life; yet as the defining event of the recent past, it is the

one experience that the audience unquestionably has in common. The listener's grief, as it is given voice by the music, is deemed unnecessary in an imaginary dialogue which implies that "all" is over and resolved:

Why then grieve? Ask what? Remain unsatisfied? I say all's been settled; yes; laid to rest under a coverlet of rose leaves, falling. Falling. Ah, but they cease. One rose leaf, falling from an enormous height, like a little parachute dropped from an invisible balloon, turns, flutters waveringly. It won't reach us. (140)

As the music fades, its cathartic effect is stalled. Social exchange smoothes over individual mourning, covering unanswered question with platitudes. The single rose leaf, which falls slowly but "won't reach us," implies only an incomplete resolution. Images of music in the story, moreover, suggest a soundtrack of war: "silver horns," "seneschals ... saluting the dawn," "trumpets" and "clarions" build up to the final alliterative and rhythmic "Tramp and trumpeting. Clang and clangour. Firm establishment. Fast foundations. March of myriads. Confusion and chaos trod to earth" (141). Jacobs describes these phrases as echoing the music itself in "highly rhythmical, alliterative verse of a mock Tennysonian kind" (244). I would suggest an alternative poetic source, however: Woolf's language here might allude to the martial music of John Dryden's 1687 poem "A Song for St Cecilia's Day," where "The trumpet's loud clangor/ Excites us to arms" (ll 25-26). Dryden's ode to the patron saint of music, like Woolf's story, pays respect to the overwhelming power of music, and in fact ends with an apocalyptic scene: "So, when the last and dreadful hour/ This crumbling pageant shall devour,/ The trumpet shall be heard on high,/ The dead shall live, the living die,/ And Music shall untune the sky" (ll 59-63). Such music stirs emotion rather than laying it to rest.

The "crumbling pageant" in "The String Quartet" is that of post-war London society. If human character changed in 1910, the years between 1914 and 1918 made irrevocable alterations to the city and its people. The aristocratic privilege of this audience was dwindling into empty social performance. In "The String Quartet," Woolf displaces the fading romance of aristocratic society into a romance narrative, conflating

literary and social conventions in order to undermine them. In her diary, Woolf records conversations at Chelsea concerts with Katie, Lady Cromer, who bemoans the decline of aristocracy with such phrases as “The end is coming. A la lanterne!” and “Civilisation is at an end” (*D2* 309). Woolf admits that she can’t help liking the spectacle of aristocratic society—“I’m critical, intellectually, of the aristocrats but sensually they charm”—yet she is aware of the outdated irrelevance of that way of life. She describes Lady Cromer as “letting fall sentences of curious remote force, as though she were on top of a mountain, or lost in a mist, as I can’t help feeling these aristocrats are” (*D1* 245) and speaking with a “humorous resignation which foretells a gallant death on the scaffold” (*D2* 309-10).

In “The String Quartet,” Woolf mimics such tones, using highly wrought literary diction to create melodramatic scenes of courtly romance. She transposes the mannerisms of aristocratic society into formulaic literary clichés. The “lovers on the grass” speak in the stylized language of Renaissance drama: “‘If, madam, you would take my hand—’/ ‘Sir, I would trust you with my heart’.” The passage immediately following is probably the most coherent in the entire story in terms of narrative style, not only outlining what happens, but paying considerable attention to the details of what everyone was wearing:

‘He followed me down the corridor, and, as we turned the corner, trod on the lace of my petticoat. What could I do but cry “Ah!” and stop to finger it? At which he drew his sword, made passes as if he were stabbing something to death, and cried, “Mad! Mad! Mad!” Whereupon I screamed, and the Prince, who was writing in the large vellum book in the oriel window, came out in his velvet skull-cap and furred slippers, snatched a rapier from the wall—the King of Spain’s gift, you know—on which I escaped, flinging this cloak to hide the ravages to my skirt [...]’ (140)

Despite its subject matter, this is a narrative of external action rather than interiority or emotion: its emphasis on the material relics of romance, the vellum book, velvet skull-cap and furred slippers, calls to mind the contemporary audience’s preoccupation with coat buttons. The juxtaposition of swashbuckling adventure with such banal concerns

works in ironic opposition to the repeated refrain of Dryden's poem, "What passion cannot Music raise and quell!" (ll. 16, 24). In "The String Quartet" Woolf affectionately parodies the obsolete trappings of both narrative and social conventions, making the romance of aristocracy into nothing more than a daydream of the past.

In its self-conscious layering of these different levels of experience, therefore, "The String Quartet" must be read as considerably more than an impressionistic imitation of musical form. While its evocation of the world of interiority responds directly to the movement of the music, the story is also concerned with the social world in which the concert takes place. In representing the interplay between these worlds, Woolf does not simply shift her focus from outer to inner realities; rather, as Rachel Bowlby points out in her discussion of "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," she creates "a different relationship between inside and outside in which the chaotic incoherence of mental 'ideas' is identified with the social 'crowd' " (7). Free indirect discourse, as Anna Snaith argues, is "one manifestation of Woolf's constant negotiations between public and private spaces, one of the stylistic ways in which her resistance to stasis and definition allowed her movement between public and private realms, between varying points of view" (87); and the extreme stream-of-consciousness style of "The String Quartet" not only moves between these two worlds but collapses them into each other. As the music draws to a close, distinctions between the two worlds remain blurred: "Back then I fall, eager no more, desiring only to go, find the street, mark the buildings" (141). This sentence is at once inside and outside the music: part of the imagined narrative the listener constructs as the music plays, it is also her self-conscious reaction to the moment the music ceases. The idea of "falling back" from music suggests music's momentary effect of the suspension of time, as well as the spatial movement of reluctant re-entry into the social world. In a diary entry during the period of writing the stories in *Monday or Tuesday*, Woolf notes of dinner with Oliver and Ray Strachey, "Oliver discussed music. She disapproves of abstract questions in a world where there are so many concrete ones [...]"

A strange life—to believe in that division between reality and unreality” (*D2* 81).

Because of its simultaneous communal and individual nature, music offered Woolf an ideal point of departure in her exploration of the overlapping categories of “reality” and “unreality.”

In a paragraph of “The String Quartet” subsequently deleted from a January 1921 draft, Woolf explicitly discusses music’s paradoxical power to move between “reality and “unreality,” bypassing social concerns and creating the momentary illusion of community:

I draw on my gloves with a sense of drawing on my body. There’s very little to be said after a slow movement by Mozart. Together we’ve been under; together when the last ripple laps to smoothness, wake up, remember, and greet each other.—But I don’t know. It’s simpler than that; more entire; more intense. Oh much more intense! Aren’t all the nerves still thrilling as if the bow had played on them? Isn’t one half out of body and mind, beckoned still to release, dance free, caught when the music stops, far from home? But there’s only one movement more, so for Heaven’s sake look at everything, faces, furniture, pictures on the wall, look through the chink in the curtain and see the branch in the lamp light. Collect every fragment in this lovely and exciting universe. Listen; communicate.

(*SF* 301)

In listening to the music the audience has undergone a shared experience of interiority, figured as the subconscious workings of a dream. The listeners “wake up” after having “been under”: music enacts a collective anesthesia, a trancelike sleep beneath the smooth surface of consciousness. As the narrator puts on her gloves, she feels she is “drawing on [her] body,” reemphasizing somatic experience and thereby redrawing the boundaries of her social self. This is a necessary effort, given her feeling of being “half out of body and mind, beckoned still to release, dance free, caught when the music stops.” The mind, not the body, dances “far from home” in the imaginative space of the music. Despite her claim that such music leaves “very little to be said,” the narrator cannot resist an extensive—if silent—apostrophe to the other listeners. Echoing the list of imperatives opening the music, she exhorts them to “look at everything ... Collect every fragment in

this lovely and exciting universe. Listen; communicate.” She urges her fellow audience members to pay attention to their impressions as they occur, to create moments of being. The closing words stress that listening itself, as a catalyst for the imagination, contains the potential for communication.

The above passage provides a direct commentary on music’s immediate emotional effects, but its use of conventional narrated monologue might give the reader a little too much explanation. Instead of the communication suggested in the deleted passage, the concert is followed by a mere two lines of dialogue, set apart from the body of the story: “ ‘Good night, good night. You go this way?’/ ‘Alas. I go that.’ ” (141). This brief final exchange — like *Night and Day*’s ending, a doorstep farewell — emphasizes the listener’s wish to preserve her individual experience, setting herself apart from the group with her solitary movement. By choosing not to spell out the listener’s experience, and leaving the narrative fragmentary, Woolf puts her reader in the position of the listener, who must “collect every fragment” in order to follow the story. Just as the listening mind shapes images and impressions and constructs threads of narrative, the reader must respond associatively to the style of “The String Quartet” in order to shape an individual version of the story. Listening thus becomes an analogy for both writing and reading as creative narrative processes.

As well as echoing the scenes of musical performance in both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, the story anticipates memorable scenes of listening in later works, which focus on individual characters as part of a crowd, such as Rhoda in *The Waves*, or the pageant in *Between the Acts*. In tracing the development of Woolf’s interest in music through her early fiction, we can see a marked shift of focus from the performance of music to its reception. This emphasis on the listening individual suggests that the creative power resides in the activity of listening, rather than the recital of music. “The String Quartet” can thus be seen as the culmination of Woolf’s changing deployment of the idea of music. In *The Voyage Out*, music is the subject matter for explicit social critique: it

initially suggests the possibility of autonomous life, but is repeatedly cast into patterns of restricted mobility. In *Night and Day*, music is both tired social ritual and suggestive descriptive analogy: musical scenes emphasize the power of such normative patterns, yet listening to music is employed as a key simile for the free associative process of thought. In “The String Quartet,” she expands on the metaphorical connections outlined in both novels, drawing on music’s double nature in order to play with the convergences and contrasts between external action and interior thought. Simultaneously solitary and social, music plays an important part in Woolf’s experimentation with narrative techniques for representing interiority and offers her new capabilities for language as an artistic medium.

- 1 See Beer, who stresses the complexity of Woolf's ongoing engagement with the nineteenth-century literary and cultural codes which had marked her upbringing: "Woolf did not simply reject the Victorians and their concerns, or renounce them. Instead she persistingly rewrote them" (94).
- 2 DuPlessis, for example, describes Rachel as "a mid-nineteenth-century girl heroine in a twentieth-century context" (117), while Laurence defines her time and place as "a Victorian household in Victorian England" (165).
- 3 Burgan's analysis includes such characters as *Vanity Fair*'s Amelia Sedley and *Middlemarch*'s Rosamond Vincy; a similar twentieth-century character is Kurtz's Intended in *Heart of Darkness*.
- 4 Cunningham calls her "the idealized Artist with a capital A – incompetent at and largely indifferent to everything except her art" (xi).
- 5 As Leppert notes, in the nineteenth century "[a] well-bred woman who took music seriously constituted a threat to social boundaries" (70); Rachel's music poses just such a threat. Burgan, too, points out that "women's music could be a disruptive rather than a harmonizing force in the home ... In some novels — especially in the latter half of the century — feminine musicians were likely to exhibit gifts that were self-proclaiming and unsettling in their aggressive display of energy" (43).
- 6 Woolf's vocabulary here recalls the "bars" of a music score, which indicate a similar division of time.
- 7 It also echoes such theories as that espoused by the Reverend H.R. Haweis in his turn-of-the-century bestseller *Music and Morals*, which figured music as a potentially redemptive force to be used in social education (the trend Woolf took issue with in "Street Music."
- 8 See Barthes, who argues that "[t]here are two musics (or so I've always thought): one you listen to, one you play. They are two entirely different arts, each with its own history, sociology, aesthetics, erotics: the same composer can be minor when listened to, enormous when played" (261).
- 9 As Leppert comments, in the nineteenth century "public 'display' directly challenged the very category 'woman': it was public, not domestic, and active, not passive; it deflected attention from her father or husband; it opened up the question who was managing the domestic economy while she performed, and so on" (67). In this respect, Terence is the model of the gendered attitudes to music noted by Leppert: "music is a problem precisely because the culture genders it as feminine; it is simultaneously a source of bliss to men and a threat to them" (147).
- 10 See Froula, who emphasizes Rachel's tendency to "retire into music as a transcendent language" (152).
- 11 For more on the conflicted relationship between music and writing, see Sutton, who outlines music's "oblique and complex relationship to modernity" in the novel (58): while music is associated with the past, Rachel's reading of fin-de-siècle literature spurs her to become more "modern" (60-61). Just as Rachel is "discreetly associated with modern art," *The Voyage Out* too is "more modern than it first appear[s]" (64).
- 12 Fleishman sees this more positively, arguing that Woolf represents the natives "with anthropologically sophisticated restraint but with suggestions of mysteriousness that point to a further dimension" (8).
- 13 In the chapter "Escaping the Alphabet: Decoding the Body and the Mind in *The Voyage Out* and *The Waves*" (123-69), Laurence calls the narration of Rachel's sickness "rhythmic" (145), and perceives "a particular energy in the descriptions of Rachel's fantasia – perhaps the best writing in this early, sometimes stilted novel" (166). Laurence argues that Rachel's sick room provides her with her only possible "place of creative possibilities" in the novel, functioning within a chain of confinement metaphors whereby the room, body, and mind become interchangeable: her sick room "is a musical room; it is a narrative room; it is a room of musical narration that contains Woolf's exciting descriptions of women's subjective states, which have the scent of disease as well as of health." (166).
- 14 Mark Hussey points out that after *The Voyage Out*, Woolf shifts her focus "from music to the literary canon," and subsequently "from art to the artist" (68, 59).
- 15 To Katharine, music is a symbol of the idleness and obsolete social display connected with Stogdon Hall (a house whose very name suggests the word "stodgy"). Henry refuses to go into business but "persisted, in spite of the disapproval of uncles and aunts, in practising both violin and piano, with the result that he could not perform professionally upon either. Indeed, for thirty-two years of life he had nothing more substantial to show than a manuscript book containing the score of half an opera" (194). "The uncongenial occupation of teaching the young ladies of Bungay to play upon the violin" (96, 180) is less an artistic vocation than a useful excuse to absent himself from family gatherings: "I'm not here, I'm at Bungay ... I'm giving a music lesson to Harold and Julia" (184). Woolf's characterization of Henry is far from Victorian literary representations of the music master as foreign, seductive, or dangerous; instead, he is merely lazy, giving "the impression that he had not yet found the cause which

suited his temperament" (183). Katharine also finds herself irritated by Cassandra's life, which seems to her "fantastic" and "frivolous": "now it was socialism, now it was silkworms, now it was music" (263). The characterization of the activity of music in *Night and Day* thus confirms Susan Squier's view that Woolf reverses the dichotomy of the classic city novel, "associating the city with honest work and virtue, and the country with worldly leisure and, if not vice, at least petty dishonesty" (78). While William works hard to increase his musical knowledge, for both Cassandra and Henry it is merely a pastime associated with boredom and inaction.

- 16 "There are one or two people I'm fond of, and there's a little good music, and a few pictures, now and then - just enough to keep one dangling about here. Ah, but I couldn't live with savages!" (64-65). William turns to rhythm and melody as a means to impose order on the confusion of his feelings: we see him "beating a kind of rhythm, as if he were marking a phrase in a symphony, upon the smooth stone balustrade of the Embankment" (63), "[humming] snatches of a tune out of an opera by Mozart" (64), "[picking] out the melodies in *The Magic Flute* upon the piano" (259), and "conducting" poetry as he reads, lifting his finger when the meter is about to change (129). Such rigid adherence to poetic and musical convention is mirrored by his fixed models of culture and behavior: as he tells Katharine, "I know I always seem to you highly ridiculous. But I can't help having inherited certain traditions and trying to put them into practice" (61). Katharine feigns interest in William's musical expertise merely because it lets her avoid the subject of their mutually unsatisfying relationship: "[m]usic was not a subject about which she knew anything, but she liked him to tell her things" (262).
- 17 Music, like marriage, is one of the inherited traditions which William sees as necessary for women's happiness. He places his impression of Cassandra in direct contrast to Katharine, whose lack of interest in music seems to him a "defect ... the more strange ... because, as a rule, the women of her family were unusually musical. Her cousin, Cassandra Otway, for example, had a very fine taste in music, and he had charming recollections of her in a light fantastic attitude, playing the flute in the morning-room at Stogdon House. He recalled with pleasure the way in which her nose, like all the Otway noses, seemed to extend itself into the flute, as if she were some inimitably graceful species of musical mole" (260). He is eager to educate her: "She ought to be given the chance of hearing good music, as it is played by those who have inherited the great tradition" (260). Katharine assists in this plan, inviting Cassandra to stay under the pretext that "[t]hey would go and hear some music together" (287). William's image of her "passionate, if untaught, appreciation of literature" and "melodious and whimsical" temperament is strengthened when she visits London, and he takes the cousins to "little galleries, and select concerts, and private performances" (260, 339).
- 18 Mrs Hilbery associates music clearly with the past and domesticity in romanticized narratives of her childhood. Remembering her father "singing up the stairs to the nursery," she "trill[s] out a famous lyric of her father's which had been set to an absurdly and charmingly sentimental air by some early Victorian composer" (108); likewise, nostalgic for "the old days in Russell Square," she envisions "the chandeliers, and the green silk of the piano, and Mamma sitting in her cashmere shawl by the window, singing till the little ragamuffin boys outside stopped to listen" (92). Music becomes part of the furniture in an idealized domestic tableau, enchanting and ennobling the "little ragamuffin boys" outside (with the opposite effect to the "disturbing" sounds of street musicians in Woolf's earlier essay). Just as Katharine feels burdened by her family's obsession with "musical sentences" and the expressive properties of literature, she recognizes her mother's urban pastoral vision of music as one of her "romances which had generally no likeness to the truth" (34).
- 19 In *Night and Day*, not only domestic and family groups, but seemingly any organized groupings of people are problematic — even the supposedly progressive young people who meet at Mary Datchet's room to hear William's talk on Elizabethan poetry. Again, theatrical imagery comes into play: as Ralph remarks, "It's like a room on the stage" (44). And the group hardly constitutes a community:

between twenty and thirty people [...] found seats for the most part upon the floor, occupying the mattresses, and hunching themselves together into triangular shapes. They were all young and some of them seemed to make a protest by their hair and dress, and something sombre and truculent in the expression of their faces, against the more normal type, who would have passed unnoticed in an omnibus or an underground railway. It was notable that the talk was confined to groups, and was, at first, entirely spasmodic in character, and muttered in undertones as if the speakers were suspicious of their fellow-guests. (46)

When they begin to talk, the sound is figured as violent: "its hurry of short syllables, its sudden pauses, and its sudden attacks, might be compared to some animal hubbub, frantic and inarticulate" (50). The

conversations generated remain a backdrop for the discussion between Mary and Katharine, who are set apart from the general chorus. The speakers remain an indistinguishable group, which Mary says is " 'exactly like a flock of sheep' " (52). Woolf's suspicion of organized political societies like this one is well documented. She describes attendees at a Fabian Society meeting, for example, as resembling each other in their efforts to be different: "full of earnest drab women, who are thought 'queer' at home, & rejoice in it; & of broad nosed, sallow, shock headed young men, in brown tweed suits. They all looked unhealthy & singular & impotent" (D1 26). The arrangements of people in *Night and Day* share this emphasis on homogeneous outward appearance rather than individualized thought or interiority. In such a social setting, where the rules are unfamiliar (or non-existent), Katharine at first finds it threatening to have no assigned part: she admits that the crowd makes her feel "melancholy" and she has the sensation of "feeling her way among the phantoms of an unknown world" (52). The novel as a whole reflects Katharine's discomfort with all kinds of social groupings, from outdated and class-bound drawing-room scenes, represented by the Hilbery house, to more modern public gatherings organized around arts and politics.

- 20 Part of the music hall's appeal to Woolf was its "variety show" aspect, its mixing of different registers of music and comedy: she disliked narrative or dramatic numbers, preferring the shorter "turns" or character pieces. But in their criticism of both the staged spectacle and its spectators, Woolf's descriptions of music hall performances illustrate her characteristically ambivalent relationship with the lower classes. In a 1915 diary entry, for example, she notes "we are going to a Hall — an unheard of dissipation"; but continues "I know we shall both feel, when its over, 'really a good read would have been better' " (D1 19). Ascribing the music hall and its audience a certain kind of community and authenticity, she simultaneously distances herself from it, at once noting its "incredible, pathetic stupidity . . . (for surely we could have risen higher, & only politeness made us laugh)" and admitting it was "the queer English humour; something natural to the race, which makes us all laugh; why I don't know; & you can't help feeling its the real thing, as, in Athens one might have felt that poetry was" (D1 144). By contrast, her account of the forced performance of patriotism at a wartime concert of classical music reveals a failed appeal to communal feeling: "they played a national Anthem & a Hymn, & all I could feel was the entire absence of emotion in myself & everyone else" . . . "an appeal to feel together is hopelessly muddled by intervening greatcoats & fur coats" (D1 5). After seeing the Russian Ballet's *Carnaval*, which followed a recital of popular music and music-hall turns, she takes on a consciously ambiguous subject position, figuring the audience themselves as spectacle: "What a queer fate it is — always to be the spectator of the public, never part of it" (D1 222).
- 21 For analysis of the novel's deployment of triple structures of plot and narrative, see Marcus.
- 22 This impression of communal feeling stands in direct opposition to Katharine's hatred of discussing emotion: explaining to Ralph that she hates books, she asks "'Why do you want to be for ever talking about your feelings? That's what I can't make out. And poetry's all about feelings — novels are all about feelings' " (135).
- 23 Woolf's depiction of the music hall as oppositional or novel is anachronistic. Victorian music hall became less controversial as it was increasingly frequented by middle class audiences; the characters' sense of adventure is therefore bound by perspective (in this respect we might also note that the decision to go there is made by Ralph and William "taking counsel fraternally over an evening paper" (423). As Booth points out, by this time the music hall was more fashionable than radical (11). Such a valorization of the music hall as representative of the popular was a common literary trope, however: see Faulk. Middle-class cultural tourism, along with a less romantic description of music hall audiences, is given in George Bernard Shaw's article (as Cornetto di Basso), "Music Hall," of 18 Oct 1889: "As to the general question of the quality of music-hall entertainment, I have nothing to say about that. I am not a representative of the true music-hall public, which consists partly of people whose powers of imaginative apprehension and attention are too limited to follow even the most incoherent melodrama, and partly of people who like to sit smoking and soaking in lazy contemplation of something that does not greatly matter" (224-25).
- 24 In this respect, Woolf relies on a well-known Romantic topos: the "soft floating witchery of sound" in Coleridge's "Eolian Harp," for example, makes human minds "tremble into thought" (ll 20, 46).
- 25 Woolf uses similar language of echo and absence to describe the companionship of her own relationship with Leonard: "one's personality seems to echo out across space, when he's not there to enclose all one's vibrations. This is not very intelligibly written; but the feeling itself is a strange one — as if marriage were a completing of the instrument, & the sound of one alone penetrates as if it were a

- violin robbed of its orchestra or piano" (D1:70).
- 26 Such problems of communication are tempered by Woolf's borrowing of another nineteenth-century image, the Paterian flame, which she employs as a leitmotif suggesting interiority, immediacy and connection. Pater describes interiority as a world of "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them" (218); the goal of human life, then, is to gain full awareness of these impressions as they happen, "[t]o burn always with this hard, gem-like flame" (219). In figuring the interior lives of both Katharine and Ralph, especially Ralph's favorite mental image of a dot surrounded by flame, Woolf draws directly on Pater, echoing his language and imagery. Marcus reads the flame leitmotif as Woolf's feminist reworking of the sacred flame of Sarastro's temple in Mozart's opera, in a reading of the novel's structure as reflecting "the initiation, quest and journey myths of *The Magic Flute*" (*Languages* 29).
 - 27 The opposition between literature and science is Katharine's, not Woolf's: in the importance of astronomy and popular scientific discourse to Woolf's aesthetics, see Henry.
 - 28 This unhearable music is something of a standard Romantic topos: see for example Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter"
 - 29 Restricted by the atmosphere of the Victorian house, Katharine feels most at home on the street, where the work of her mind is given impetus by actual physical movement—both that of her own body and the external movement of the city itself. Her travels around London constitute what Nord calls the "struggle to escape the status of spectacle and become a spectator" (12). Woolf develops these ideas of urban spectatorship and interiority further in her 1927 essay "Street Haunting." See Bowlby, esp. "Women, Walking, and Writing," Nord, and Squier.
 - 30 Marcus connects the representation of city space in *Night and Day* with Ralph Vaughan Williams's "London Symphony," which stresses the emotional effects of place in its auditory tour of London.
 - 31 The novel is overwhelmingly criticized for its rigid adherence to the traditions of nineteenth-century realism and social comedy. Contemporary reviews emphasized its conventionality of form and narrative structure: E. M. Forster called it "strictly formal and classical" and "an exercise in classical realism" (241), and in its most well-known review, Katherine Mansfield compared it to an Austen-like traditional English novel, finding it oddly old-fashioned, "as if World War One never happened" (82). In her introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition, Julia Briggs calls it "the most consistently neglected of Woolf's novels" (xii), and charts Woolf's own conflicting statements about the writing of *Night and Day*, noting her retrospective dismissal of it (in letters to Ethel Smyth during the 1930s, for example) as a therapeutic exercise in convention for its own sake. Most readings of the novel locate what little critical interest the novel offers in questions of political content, placing it in direct contrast to the more experimental short stories Woolf was writing at the same time.
 - 32 As Briggs points out, "Woolf endows it with that self-consciousness peculiar to Shakespearian comedy or Mozart opera, so that the comic unwinding draws attention to its own artifice" (xviii).
 - 33 "With some exceptions, critics slight Woolf's short works, dismiss them as early experiments that prepared the way for the major novels, or treat them as respites from more serious work" (116)
 - 34 A line from "The String Quartet" provides the title for the most comprehensive study of Woolf's writing in relation to music, Jacobs's essay "The Second Violin Tuning in the Ante-Room: Virginia Woolf and Music."
 - 35 Wolf, for example, focuses on the story as a formal echo of the music itself, judging it as a successful example of what he calls "musico-literary intermediality." Likewise, Fleishman sees the story as "perhaps the most elaborate and independently interesting form among Woolf's short stories" but "constructed so clearly as an exercise in form per se that it cannot be considered among the most important tales" (66). While Fleishman describes the story's form as A-B-C-B-A, Jacobs identifies it as a "straightforward bithematic A-B-A-B-A-B-A scheme" (244). In "Beyond the Boundaries of Language," Crapoulet reads the story as exploring both "the entire spectrum of the ways music makes meaning" (207) and "the shortcomings of the verbalisation of music" (212), but bases much of her argument on the idea that Schubert's Trout Quintet is the "real piece behind the story," and not Mozart as often assumed (207-08). She seeks to read the story alongside the music, claiming that "it is relatively easy to decode from the highly descriptive dream-sequences the corresponding musical features of the piece" (209).
 - 36 As Melba Cuddy-Keane points out, the wireless was to give Woolf access to another option, the "private listening experience": "When invited to the home of Lady Londonderry to listen to contemporary composer and conductor Nadia Boulanger, Woolf, because she 'cant bear music mixed

with peerage,' chooses to listen on the wireless instead [L6 301]' ” (76).

Chapter Three

“The Strangeness of Song”: Music, Form and the Lyric in Woolf’s “High Modernist” Novels

*What was she seeking through millions of pages, in her old plush dress,
and her wig of claret-coloured hair, with her gems and her chilblains?
Sometimes one thing, sometimes another, to confirm her philosophy that
colour is sound — or, perhaps, it has something to do with music. She
could never quite say, though it was not for lack of trying.*

Jacob’s Room (1922) ¹

Jacob’s Room’s unfortunate Miss Marchmont, who sits in the British Museum Reading Room trying to elaborate a confused Kandinskyesque theory of synesthesia, is hampered not only by her inability to pin down the constantly shifting relationships between the arts in order to describe them, but also by the inefficacy of words in attempting such a description. Her predicament rather resembles that of Woolf critics in addressing the style of the novels written during the later 1920s, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931). Although music no longer features as primary subject matter by the time of these novels, it is explicitly invoked by both Woolf and her critics as an analogy for formal effects in fiction as well as for the compositional process itself: as Woolf herself notes a decade later, “I always think of my books as music before I write them” (*L6*: 426). Yet it is all too easy to suggest that music is important to these novels on a formal level alone: Woolf’s manipulation of voice, sound, and song indicates that she is still turning to the idea of music as a means of political critique. Woolf’s representations of music — and of singing in particular — in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* occur largely outside the received settings of public performance: their unexpected contexts make them difficult to interpret, both for Woolf’s characters and for the external reader. Song in these three novels is overwhelmingly associated with marginalized figures — foreign, working-class, or insane people — and even of non-human beings and inanimate objects. Scenes of music become moments of lyric interruption in Woolf’s narratives: they create effects of distancing and alienation

which undercut the idea of music as merely a descriptive metaphor, restricted to the realm of the aesthetic.

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E. M. Forster uses explicitly musical terms to discuss the lyrical novel:

the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction is bound to give us a shock. How will song combine with the furniture of common sense? we shall ask ourselves, and shall have to answer 'Not too well': the singer does not always have room for his gestures, the tables and chairs get broken, and the novel through which bardic influences has passed often has a wrecked air, like a drawing-room after an earthquake or a children's party. (86)

Forster's designation of "prophecy" is restricted to four writers — Emily Brontë, Melville, Dostoevsky, and D.H. Lawrence — yet the terms of his discussion seem relevant to the increasingly lyrical nature of Woolf's novels in the late 1920s.² This chapter looks at the ways in which music, sound and listening are figured in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, and especially at passages where we see (at times almost literally) the problem Forster identifies, "the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction." Woolf is attentive to both modern urban noises and those of the natural world, from the bells of London's clocks or the "strange high singing" of the aeroplane in *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, to the sounds of the waves and the chorus-like birdsong which recur in *The Waves*. Yet in each of these novels, it is not simply the unexpected, impersonal and mechanized noises of the modern aural landscape that create a sense of "strangeness" around the idea of song. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the inescapability of song comes to represent trauma for Septimus Warren Smith, and the beggar woman who sings to herself presents a challenge to intelligibility for both the novel's characters and its readers. In the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs McNab, the charwoman, sings as she cleans the Ramsays' house. We hear only fragments of her song, and her distorted crooning is identified with the physical forces gradually overtaking the house. In *The Waves*, the "musical" layering of voices and narrative styles is tempered by

the interludes' communal sounds of waves and birds, and aural motifs are used to identify the novel's voices. Rhoda seeks epiphany through music, looking to find in it a solidity of structure and signification; yet music is not liberating in any real sense, as her suicide proves. In all three novels, therefore, there is a clear disjunction between the broader idea of musical form (so often employed in critical discussions to denote unity) and the moments of lyric interruption created by Woolf's representations of actual music.

Singing “without any voice”: Music in *Mrs Dalloway*

In marked contrast to both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, *Mrs Dalloway* was not greeted as a “musical” novel by contemporary reviewers. More recently, however, critics have used metaphors of music to describe the novel's meticulously crafted formal structure, focusing primarily on its echo-like repetition of themes: their discussions of the novel often employ the terms of poetic analysis, focusing on formal effects more often associated with verse than with prose narrative.³ But as well as the overall patterns created on the level of form, sound also works thematically within the novel to create immediate connections between characters. Sound and music in *Mrs Dalloway* are employed as aural prompts to make narrative transitions from one mind to another. The bells of Big Ben and the other clocks of London, for example, often anthropomorphized as song or speech, are heard by different people across the entire city; these temporal markers remind us of the artificial patterns of everyday life, stressing the predictable rhythms that control the relations between people over space and time.⁴ Clarissa Dalloway always feels “a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense” before Big Ben strikes: “First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (4); later, she notes the “strange” effect of Big Ben striking the half hour:

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were

attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go — but where? (127)

Here Clarissa thinks of sound as an attachment, a string which both joins people and guides them, so that the old lady is “forced” into action by the sound of the clock. Sound thus takes on spatial form, becoming part of the novel’s web imagery. In *Mrs Dalloway*, sound is a vehicle for exploring the relationships between characters, whether friends or strangers: its immediacy instantly creates what Clarissa thinks of as the “odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to” (153).⁵

Even predominantly visual connections between people, such as the motorcar and the aeroplane, first register as auditory disturbances. While choosing flowers, Mrs Dalloway and Miss Pym are interrupted by the noise of a “pistol shot” or a “violent explosion” (13, 14):⁶ it leaves “a slight ripple” among the passers-by (17), and the establishments on St. James’s Street seem “to return the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral” (18). Shortly afterwards, “the sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd” (20). As the members of that crowd watch the plane together, the world becomes “perfectly silent” until its “peace,” “pallor,” and “purity” is broken by the sound of bells striking eleven (20, 21). The sound’s movement in space also sustains the viewers’ attention, coming back in and out with the plane as it disappears and reappears, before “fad[ing] up there among the gulls” (21). In both cases it is this invasive element of sound, with its implicit echoes of the noises of war, that initially provokes the reaction of looking.⁷

Mrs Dalloway is a noisy novel: figurations of city sound as music take precedence over mentions of music itself. Clarissa lists classical music among her perceived non-accomplishments: “she could not think, write, even play the piano” (122); the “very bad poet” Jim Hutton also thinks of her as rather insensitive to the arts: “About music she was

purely impersonal. She was rather a prig” (176). Yet she does respond emotionally and intellectually to music and sound: her “secret deposit of exquisite moments” includes everyday noises like those “of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling” (29), and “faint sounds” allow her to gauge “the very moment, the very temper of her house” (38). Music also prompts some of her rare moments of sensuality: “And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or the fact that she was older, or some accident— like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men feel. Only for a moment; but it was enough” (32). For Clarissa, this “strange . . . power of sounds” takes strongest effect not in the conventional contexts of music, but rather when she hears the rhythmical music of urban noise. As she walks through London, she encounters the city almost entirely in auditory impressions: “In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar, the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplanes overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment in June” (4). Clarissa appreciates the unpredictability and momentary power of sound, its “strangeness.” Her experience of the cacophony of London as a positive and productive confusion is echoed in the meditations of her daughter Elizabeth as she walks along the Strand:

She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good. The noise was tremendous; and suddenly there were trumpets (the unemployed) blaring, rattling about in the uproar; military music; as if people were marching; yet had they been dying—had some woman breathed her last and whoever was watching, opening the window of the room where she had just brought off that act of supreme dignity, looked down on Fleet Street, that uproar, that military music, would have come triumphing up to him, consolatory, indifferent. (138)

For both Elizabeth and Clarissa, the “uproar” of city sound is full of potential. Its reassuringly random and impersonal nature frees them both from the social expectations

of their time, as seen in Elizabeth's equation of the words "consolatory" and "indifferent."⁸

Music in *Mrs Dalloway* is more than just a transformative metaphor for city sound, however. On one level, it seems to function as a symbol of social harmony, an element of the "sense of proportion" advocated by Sir William Bradshaw. We can see this normalizing aspect of music in the novel's references to the music hall.⁹ Far from the novelty and subversion it seemed to represent in *Night and Day*, the music hall is by now no more than a tiredly conventional middle-class distraction. Peter Walsh plans to go to the Dalloways' party in part to ask Richard "what's being acted? And music. . . . Oh yes, and mere gossip" (161); when he regrets attending, he tells himself he should have stayed home and read a book or gone to a music hall instead (167); and at the party, a guest laughingly refuses to tell Clarissa the "stories of the music hall stage" that are entertaining a cluster of men (175). Part of the initial cure prescribed for the shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith is that he attend the music hall in order to jolly up his spirits and reassert his masculinity: "When he felt like that he went to the Music Hall, said Dr. Holmes. He took a day or two off with his wife and played golf. Why not try two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime?" (90). For Holmes, the music hall is a mundane men's club, as sensible as physical exercise and sleeping pills, and as English as the game of cricket — an equation Septimus's wife Rezia recalls while walking in Regent's Park:

"Look," she implored him, pointing at a little troop of boys carrying cricket stumps, and one shuffled, spun round on his heel and shuffled, as if he were acting a clown at the music hall.

"Look," she implored him, for Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket — that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband. (25)

Despite the lighthearted nature of both this image and the music hall's program, their juxtaposition with Holmes's prescriptive ideology here gives the "troop" of cricket

players more sinister associations, aligning them with the boys in uniform Peter Walsh finds himself falling into step with as he walks up Whitehall:

A patter like the patter of leaves in a wood came from behind, and with it a rustling, regular thudding sound, which as it overtook him drummed his thoughts, strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing. Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England. (51)

The immediate effect of this strict rhythm on Peter suggests the larger-scale impact of World War One on British society. Both the music hall and cricket seem like harmless notions of masculinity; yet both are inextricably bound with the military rigor which simultaneously encourages and denies the horror of war responsible for Septimus's psychological state.

The ideology embodied by such patriotic troops recalls the parodic social agenda outlined in "Street Music." Just as Peter unwittingly finds his thoughts "drummed" into line here, the psychiatrist Sir William Bradshaw's belief that "health is proportion" aims to create an uncanny conformity and social harmony: "Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion" (99). Sir William thus personifies the British imperial project, whose power is always concealed behind a benevolent face: we are reminded that his goddess, "Proportion, divine proportion" (99), has "a sister, less smiling, more formidable" in the goddess Conversion (100). Even the clocks on the street are converts chanting Bradshaw's mantra: "Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion" (102). Yet music repeatedly makes Septimus lose his sense of proportion, so that he is excessively moved by "a barrel organ or some man crying in the street": "

‘Lovely!’ he used to cry, and the tears would run down his cheeks ... And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames!’ (141). Ironically, Doris Kilman’s conversion relies on a similar loss of control: “whether it was the music, or the voices (she herself when alone in the evening found comfort in a violin; but the sound was excruciating; she had no ear), the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her head had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously, and gone to call on Mr. Whittaker at his private house in Kensington” (109). Miss Kilman’s tearful reaction to music, unlike Septimus’s, is socially sanctioned because it can be brought into line with the comforting chorus of Christianity.

While the regularity of clocks or marching can suggest proportion, the majority of city noise is inevitably random: for Septimus, ordinary sounds are imbued with extraordinary associations and forced into patterns which do not exist. Sights turn into illegible secret codes, as for example in his reaction to the signwriting plane: “So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty” (17). He tries to resist such signs by avoiding visual impulses: “But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more” (22). Septimus cannot shut his ears, however: as a physical sensation, sound is inescapable, and one cannot simply elect not to hear it. As his wife repeats the word “Look,” hoping to focus his attention on simple everyday sights, he cannot help hearing something else entirely: “Look,” the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind” (25). Whenever he shuts his eyes, sound becomes destabilizing: “directly he saw nothing the sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of people seeking and not finding, and passing further and further away. They had lost him!” (128). In an effort to impose order upon his mental world, therefore, Septimus tries to frame his reactions to sound in scientific terms. A woman reading the letters written by the plane provokes a synesthetic confusion which he refigures as a scientific

breakthrough:

“K . . . R . . .” said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say “Kay Arr” close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke. A marvellous discovery indeed — that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life! (22)

The human voice here takes on a tangible aspect, becoming a kind of textured music which gives rise to supernatural abilities. Septimus conflates science and religion as if directly parodying such “priest[s] of science” as Sir William Bradshaw (94): “Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—” (22-23). The precise regularity implied in the idea of a “sense of proportion” remains Septimus’s bewildered aim: his psychosis is Bradshaw’s “exacting science” gone askew (99).

Far from the ease and levity of the music hall or the stability implied by the idea of proportion, then, sound and music are anything but comforting: for Septimus, in fact, song comes to both represent and enact trauma. His frightening and fragmentary thoughts are most often prompted by music and sound, and in particular by real or imagined song: as E. M. Forster puts it, Septimus “hears behind the chorus the voices of the dead singing” (Majumdar 174). The voices he hears are always concealed “behind the chorus” of real sound and of social convention, so that sight and sound are never quite aligned: voices speak behind screens (81); the dead “sing behind rhododendron bushes” (130); Evans sings behind trees in Regent’s Park and behind screens in the Smiths’ flat (70, 124). Song thus functions to haunt Septimus, as a kind of aural memory which he alone is forced to hear. Even the most mundane birdsong seems to convey hidden meanings:

A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life

beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (24-25)¹⁰

Rezia's statement "It is time" takes on concrete form, multiplies, and rearranges its parts into a prophetic ode:

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself— (69-70)

Septimus sings to himself and is answered by Evans in a call-and response duet. The idea of the dead waiting in Thessaly "till the War was over" confuses time, making past, present and future all simultaneous. The haunting quality of this antiphonal song is intensified as sound is given shape: the branches part, Septimus sees Evans in the form of Peter Walsh walking towards him, and he cries out to stop him, for he "cannot look upon the dead" (70).

For Septimus, then, sound and music set in motion a psychotic synesthesia which is at times jubilant and at times disturbing. In another context, such as a concert performance, these associations might seem like the normal wanderings of the listening mind — and indeed, Woolf's earlier invocations of musical synesthesia are predominantly positive — but Septimus's uncontrollable thoughts are far from escapist daydreams:

Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sounds which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twisted round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him — the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house. (68)

Septimus's reaction to the penny whistle in the traffic noise is characteristically confused.

The overfiring activity of his mind again makes music “visible” to him, so that it takes on physical qualities, banging against rocks and growing in columns. Despite his continued attempts to “reason out” the process of listening, he cannot distinguish what is real from the incoherent narrative the sound provokes in his mind. Septimus transforms urban noise into a pastoral setting, turning the public “anthem” of a car horn into the plaintive piping of a shepherd boy. As inaccessible as the Greek birdsong and the voices of the dead in Thessaly, this pastoral music underscores his inability to reconcile the fallen world of his pre-war innocence with the indifferent clamor of postwar society. “This boy’s elegy ... played among the traffic” thus mourns not only Evans’s death but also the loss of meaning in his own life.¹¹ Both provoking and intensifying Septimus’s delusions, song highlights the disjunction between his inner and outer worlds, making clear his alienation from the society which expects his seamless reintegration. He is associated with regular sounds only after his death and only through the impressions of others. Some comfort is afforded Rezia by the rhythmical noises she hears: “The clock was striking — one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself” (150). The final sound Septimus hears as he dies, the uncannily regular “thud, thud, thud in his brain” that Clarissa imagines (184), is his only available way of achieving “proportion.” In the case of Septimus, then, music emphasizes disconnection and lack of communication. Far from the liberating impersonality it offers Clarissa and Elizabeth, or the sense of communal experience suggested by the novel’s aural imagery of connection, it serves only to underline the dissonance between his experience and the social demands of postwar London.

The street song of an old beggar woman, by contrast, is a focus of connection in *Mrs Dalloway*.¹² The lengthy passage describing the old woman’s song stands out as one of the moments least modified by individual minds within the novel: unusually here, the perspective of the omniscient narrator predominates over the movement between different characters’ points of view. The song is described first as a sound which

interrupts Peter Walsh's thoughts, "a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning" (80); it is then universalized as "the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth" (80); next, it takes on physical form as a "tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing" (81); and finally her skirt makes this shape recognizable as a "battered old woman" (81). The narrative skips over Peter's own reaction to the woman, instead layering aural and visual impressions: its focus moves swiftly from a basic sensory perception, to an impersonal and disembodied voice, through similes of inhuman shape and form, before making a more particular social identification of the singer. Likewise, the description of her song itself alternates between several distinct styles: the repetition of the illegible quasi-phonetic syllabic couplet "*ee um fah um so/foo swee too eem oo*," indirect speech which paraphrases the text she "croons" (81), and finally direct quotations of the song lyrics (82). Yet even knowing the "story" of her romantic song, with its tale of lost love, does not remove its strangeness or make it more comprehensible for listeners or reader.

From a purely external point of view, the old woman is quite clearly a beggar, a "battered old woman with one hand exposed for coppers the other clutching her side" (82). Both Peter and Rezia take pity on her: Peter gives the "poor creature" a coin, while Rezia sympathizes with the "poor old wretch" (82). Both of their impressions, however, are at odds with the "invincible thread" of the sound itself (82), which rises into the air "cheerfully, almost gaily" (82), and Rezia comes to find cathartic potential in the "ancient song": "this old woman singing in the street 'if some one should see, what matter they?' made her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be right" (83).¹³ Septimus alone remains unaffected by the old woman's song, seeming not to register it in the slightest.¹⁴ Yet on a larger and more public scale, her song actually enacts Septimus's own reworking of city noise into pastoral elegy: it makes a typical urban scene into something

rural and regenerative. Despite its incongruous setting, opposite Regent's Park Tube station on a pavement "crowded with bustling middle-class people," the old woman's song creates a strange sphere of privacy, making the passers-by vanish "like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring" (82). While the woman herself has a tangible physical presence, she is most important as a voice: her body is primarily an organic conduit for the "ancient song" which "bubble[s] up" through it (81). Like Evans, no less, she is a voice from beyond the grave:

... still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp stain. (81)¹⁵

Garvey notes the levelling effect of the water imagery in this passage, whereby the song seems to communicate immediately what Septimus cannot.¹⁶ It momentarily reverses what Elizabeth Abel has identified as the novel's "progression from a pastoral female world to an urban culture governed by men" (42). In both its imagery and its effects, therefore, the description of the old woman's song is typical of the classical elegaic tradition, with its "roots in ancient fertility rites," that pervades throughout *Mrs Dalloway* (Froula 126). As Froula argues, "Woolf jettisons plot for the elegy's inward work of mourning and voices communal loss as a polyphony of private griefs" (130): this scene, then, is emblematic of the overall function of elegy in *Mrs Dalloway*.¹⁷

In a novel so specific, even relentless, in its demarcation of time (note its working title *The Hours*), the old woman's song seems to stop the clocks: characteristically of elegy, it obliterates time. Shifting the temporal focus for both its listeners and the reader, the communal natural voice embodied by the street singer moves from interrupting Peter's misogynist frustrations with Clarissa, his endless reviewing of scenes from the past, to providing Rezia with a sense of optimism for the future. The old woman herself is

figured as immortal, untouched by time: having stood there “through all ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth” (81), she “would still be there in ten million years” (82). The repeated metaphor of the “rusty pump” returns us, like Peter, to the past (81, 82): it recalls the broken fountain at Bourton, which dribbles water as Clarissa refuses his proposal (64).¹⁸ The song’s lyrics also indicate the simultaneity of the past in the present moment.¹⁹ The woman sings of an ideal of eternal love “which has lasted a million years”: while she walked “millions of years ago” in “some primeval May” with her centuries-dead lover (81, 82), she nevertheless looks to the future as she imagines the end of time: “there on her high burial place which the last rays of the sun caressed, for then the pageant of the universe would be over” (81).

In “Repetition as the Raising of the Dead,” J. Hillis Miller identifies the old woman’s song as “Allerseelen” by Richard Strauss (lyrics by Hermann von Gilm).²⁰ This identification of the “hidden” Strauss song emphasizes the problem of musical meaning in the novel. The song is far from legible: presumably Woolf would not have expected her readers to identify it easily, if at all. The incongruity of this highbrow art song sung by a derelict beggar woman highlights the different registers of culture within the novel and within London society; yet the song itself erases such distinctions and reduces “civilisation” to a single level, that of trodden-under leaves (82). The “primeval” syllables of the song create an initial atmosphere of strangeness around it, one which persists even when the paraphrased and quoted lyrics go some way toward providing it with a story of a kind. Moreover, the narrator’s repeated insistence on the song’s meaninglessness — its “absence of all human meaning” (80) — seems at odds with the abundance of meaning ascribed to the scene. Because of its ability to bypass language, music is an ideal vehicle for such problematization of meaning.²¹ At Clarissa’s party, Mrs Hilbery speaks vaguely of a similar sense of wordless communication: “she didn’t know their names, but friends they were, friends without names, songs without words, always

the best” (191). Woolf’s account of this particular “song without words” can be seen as a gesture which highlights our unspoken connections with others, the anonymous “friends without names.” Like Septimus’s singing, the old woman’s song seeks some kind of communal meaning: even if such meaning cannot be adequately expressed through language, nevertheless hers becomes a universal voice which speaks for us all.

The importance of the old street singer’s voice thus draws attention to larger questions of voice in *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf and her characters pay significant attention to the timbre of voices — from the frailty of Clarissa’s to the distinctive “caress” of Sally’s — as well as to their effects on different listeners.²² Human voices are rendered strangely mechanical, as for example when Peter becomes a metronome repeating Clarissa’s “Remember my party!”: “speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour” (48, 54). Mechanized voices, by contrast, are personified, sometimes even attributed more agency than those of the novel’s characters. Big Ben’s “great booming voice” (49) is like a “young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, [...] swinging dumb-bells this way and that” (48): Clarissa finds its voice “so solemn, so just,” unlike the “late clock” which sounds “volubly, troublously” as it comes “shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends” to remind her of “all sorts of little things besides” (128). Peter identifies this clock, St. Margaret’s, with Clarissa herself: “her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality” (49). After the silence following Big Ben’s chimes, which makes him feel “hollowed out, utterly empty within,” the sound of St. Margaret’s strikes him as “something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest” (50). The anthropomorphized voices of the novel’s clocks dramatize tensions within the minds of the characters who hear them, so that the sound is imbued with questions they are already considering: the ways in which characters map sound on to their experience reveals more than what they self-consciously think or say.²³

The most striking voices in *Mrs Dalloway*, however, are the singing voices of two

relatively marginal and anonymous figures, a psychotic man and an old beggar woman. The only other singing character in the novel is Joseph Breitkopf, the old man whose renditions of Brahms “without any voice” at Bourton are met with giggles from the young people (154). Why then is such importance attached to these other singers, both of whom are also figuratively “voiceless”? While Septimus is constantly being talked about, spoken both to and for by Rezia and his doctors, his own voice is constantly quashed and silenced: when directly questioned by Bradshaw, he can only stammer in reply (98), and he becomes increasingly unable to express what is happening to him.²⁴ In order to give voice to his experience, then, he resorts to ventriloquizing various disembodied voices, ranging from the distorted “dictations” purportedly from the Prime Minister to his duets with the dead Evans. Singing seems to be one of the only ways in which Septimus can attempt to give shape to events: while it employs ordinary language, it simultaneously avoids the narration of his own story in denotative terms. Unlike this mishmash of competing voices, heard by Septimus but unrecognized by anyone else, the eternal nature of the old woman’s song suggests a communal natural impersonal voice. The scene can perhaps be read as an aural counterpart to the passage describing the visions of the “solitary traveller” (57-58). Like the old woman’s song, the solitary traveler’s reverie is narrated largely without recourse to particular characters’ perspectives; there, however, the narrative focus is predominantly visual, as seen in the repeated phrase “such are the visions.” While the pathetic aged body of the street singer is clearly at odds with the “giant figure” of the woman envisioned by the solitary traveller, what she sings approaches the universal scale suggested by the giant woman: thus the “visions” of the solitary traveller sequence are parallel to the “voice” of the street song.²⁵

From the unrest of Septimus’s psychotic mind to the catharsis of the old woman’s universal love song, therefore, singing is a source of both alienation and identification in *Mrs Dalloway*. On a simple level, song lets both characters and narrator express what is not directly spoken: it emphasizes what Clarissa calls the “unseen part of us” which

“might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . .” (153). It is this indirect aspect of singing, its ability to effect a kind of “haunting” like the voices heard by Septimus, that helps Woolf build connections between different minds, times, and places. If Septimus’s lyric moments cannot be resolved into a coherent narrative, the old woman’s carries a narrative within it. The songs of both Septimus and the old woman thus highlight the work of the narrative voice in the novel. Something of the elegaic timelessness that characterizes these songs is half-recognized by Elizabeth Dalloway in the city’s “military music” and “uproar,” an impersonal voice which draws people and their lives into itself over time:

It was not conscious. There was no recognition in it of one’s fortune, or fate, and for that very reason even to those dazed with watching for the last shivers of consciousness on the faces of the dying, consoling. Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in, year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on. (138)

This universal, impersonal voice, like that of the narrator, serves to reconcile the disparate voices of the novel, bringing them together both spatially and temporally. The dynamics of song in *Mrs Dalloway* therefore underline the antiphonal structure of the book: its alternating and echoing voices create a sense of call and response between characters across both space and time.

“Between a croak and a song”: music in *To the Lighthouse*

From the earliest stages of its composition, Woolf describes the three-part form of *To the Lighthouse* in intermedial terms: on 27 June 1925, she notes that “the sea is to be

heard all through it” (D3 34), and in her diary of 6 August 1925 she draws a picture to represent the “two blocks joined by a corridor” (Dick 48). Perhaps because of this explicitly imposed structure, the novel's form has been discussed extensively; critics employ musical metaphors at great length in these discussions, if sometimes merely as convenient adjectival shorthand.²⁶ The form of *To the Lighthouse* is often read as elegaic, in that its repetitive and restorative structure gives shape to grief: Lily's completion of her painting in the final scene, just as the Ramsays reach the lighthouse, is thus read as a unifying gesture which might stand for the work of the novel as a whole. Yet as Woolf notes in her diary of 20 July 1925, the impulse behind her formal experimentation in the novel was directed towards breaking, rather than perfecting, the unities of form. She describes her efforts towards “this impersonal thing, which I’m dared to do by my friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design. That passage (I conceive the book in 3 parts. 1. at the drawing room window; 2. seven years passed; 3. the voyage) interests me very much. A new problem like that breaks fresh ground in one’s mind; prevents the regular ruts” (D3 36).²⁷ Musical form is used as a simile for formal perfection in critical analyses of *To the Lighthouse*; the novel's characters rely on musical metaphors to express both social relationships and abstract ideas; yet representations of sound and music within the novel, like Woolf's own reflections on its formal innovation, tend to be geared towards breaking unity, destroying harmony, and reworking conventions of form.

The idea of unifying form is key to Woolf's characterization of Mr Ramsay, who figures his highly abstract intellectual endeavors in terms of the arrangement of sound into music and language. According to him, human thought is equivalent to two rational

and fixed systems of organizing sounds, “like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet [. . .] ranged in twenty-six letters all in order” (39-40). Both systems regulate and codify the human voice, distancing it from the body through the visual medium of written language or the regularly pitched intervals of the piano.²⁸ Mr Ramsay's voice in the novel is similarly removed from his own direct experience: almost every time we hear his voice directly in this novel, he is quoting poetry — and most often canonical and disaster-laden poetry at that.²⁹ Yet he wants to preserve a paradoxical sense of privacy for “this delicious emotion, this impure rhapsody of which he was ashamed, but in which he revelled” (31). In practice, then, despite the emphasis on orderly progression suggested by the piano and alphabet images he favors, Mr Ramsay is also drawn to another kind of music, this “impure rhapsody” which defies such rational divisions. As James finds, his father's very presence destroys order and effects a jarring discord: he hates “the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother” (43). Mr Ramsay's feelings are a focal point in the novel, a driving force for both him and the other characters: his frequent tantrums illustrate his lack of control, and he turns to poetic form as an attempt to contain the untidiness of emotion.

Just as such imposed patterns of sound (both real and figurative) provide Mr Ramsay with a sense of order, sonic repetition also works more positively in *To the Lighthouse* in Woolf's invocation of the recurring rhythms which underlie family life. Listening out for her husband's voice, Mrs Ramsay waits for “some habitual sound, some regular, mechanical sounds,” and on hearing him resume his recitation she is “soothed once more, assured again that all was well” (20). Mr Ramsay's words, cut off from their

referents, become ordering sounds that do not rely on the rational divisions implied by the keyboard and the alphabet. To Mrs Ramsay's ears, this "something rhythmical," the mix of speech and chanting "between a croak and a song" (20), resembles the comforting monotony of her own recital of poetry as she puts the children to sleep: "She could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam's mind [. . .] more monotonously, and more rhythmically and more nonsensically" [. . .] "more and more mechanically" (132). The calming lullaby effect of her words, more important for their sound than for their meaning, is echoed on the level of the sentence. The narrator, like Mrs Ramsay, makes words into objects, which can be "seen" in the spatial metaphor of the words "speaking in Cam's mind" (96).

The lullaby scene illustrates the ways in which both poetry and music can bypass the usual meanings of language. The connection between these two lyrical modes is made more explicit at the end of the dinner party scene, when Mr Ramsay and Augustus Carmichael together recite Charles Elton's "Luriana Lurilee" (127-28).³⁰ Looking at the window while the others talk, Mrs Ramsay finds "the voices came to her very strangely, as if they were voices at a service in a cathedral, for she did not listen to the words" (127). She then recognizes the musical qualities of her husband's speech: "she knew it was poetry from the rhythm and the ring of exaltation and melancholy in his voice" (127). Again words are detached from denotative meaning and figured as solid objects: "The words sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves" (127). And she draws a direct parallel with music in terms of the question of meaning: "She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by

her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things” (127). This reaction is not confined to Mrs Ramsay: everyone at the table is listening “with the same sort of relief and pleasure that she had, as if this were, at last, the natural thing to say, this were their own voice speaking” (128). But the scene “was vanishing forever as she looked, and then... it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past” (128). The moment of harmony created here shares the temporality of music: it becomes the past even as she looks at it.³¹

For Mrs Ramsay, the activity of listening is a way of preserving moments and rhythms so easily lost. Attentive to others, by listening she maintains the predictable rhythms of family life: “The house seemed full of children sleeping and Mrs. Ramsay listening; of shaded lights and regular breathing” (80). Using sound to gauge the atmosphere of the house, she works constantly to sustain the precarious social balance within the family. For example, when she no longer hears the “gruff murmur” of the men talking, her thoughts are interrupted:

this sound, which had lasted now half an hour and had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her, such as the tap of balls upon bats, the sharp, sudden bark now and then, ‘How’s that? How’s that?’ of the children playing cricket, had ceased; so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, ‘I am guarding you — I am your support’, but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow — this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (19-20)

Here Woolf stretches a single sentence into an impressionistic, textured soundscape. This chaotic “scale of sounds,” as Mrs Ramsay experiences it, is something very different from Mr Ramsay’s keyboard and alphabet, with their emphasis on division and order; the physical and tangible effects of sound here also bring back the idea of the body which is missing from both images. The word “scale” shares the other images’ suggestion of regularity and balance, but the rhythm here is more organic: the sounds themselves are “irregularly broken” and “pressing on top of” Mrs Ramsay, so that the word “scale” in this context is more suggestive of random accumulation than of controlled measurement.³² Several words in this sentence recur repeatedly through all the sections of the novel (examples include “monotonous,” “measured,” “repeat” and “murmur”). The build-up of the various words and sounds in this scene becomes a reassuring white noise, so that what interrupts Mrs Ramsay is not any particular sound itself, but rather its absence: when the men stop murmuring, her protective aural blanket begins to unravel. Now that “the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach” is no longer “obscured and concealed” by the other sounds, it becomes a conscious focus for Mrs Ramsay’s thoughts. The sudden change in her reaction to the noise of the waves, which she transforms from “some old cradle song” to “a ghostly roll of drums,” stresses her sensitivity to the emotive power of sound. From one minute to the next, its repetitive rhythm can go from being a “consoling” refuge, like the lullabies she sings to her children, to a threat as “remorseless” as the war sounds to follow in the next section of the novel.³³ In this respect Mrs Ramsay’s response to the waves also reflects the ideas of nature that are constantly called into question in *To the Lighthouse*: sound and rhythm provoke pathetic fallacy.³⁴ The description of the rhythm as “irregularly broken” could equally be applied

to Woolf's narrative strategy here, particularly on the level of syntax. There is no uniformity or predictability attached to this portrayal of sound, no impulse toward "harmony."³⁵

Not only is Mrs Ramsay a careful and sensitive listener to actual sounds and rhythms, but she also thinks of herself as a listener in less literal terms. Music becomes an important metaphor in her own figuration of her marriage, which she thinks of as a carefully cultivated harmony: "Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give to each that solace which two different notes, one high, one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine" (46).³⁶ Yet as she turns back to what she is doing and the "resonance" of this chord fades, she is "discomposed" by feeling "finer than" Mr Ramsay: "all this diminished the entire joy, the pure joy, of the two notes sounding together, and let the sound die on her ear now with a dismal flatness" (47). Notably, Mrs Ramsay uses the same simile in relation to the children's tale she reads to James, "reading and thinking, quite easily, both at the same time; for the story of the Fisherman and his Wife was like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody" (66). Here her thoughts and her voice are explicitly figured in contrapuntal terms, as two lines of melody which must co-exist and inform each other.³⁷ Several critics have noted the importance of Woolf's invocation of the tale of the Fisherman and his Wife. As a "gentle" accompaniment to her thoughts it suggests the ways in which her own place as a wife is informed by the power dynamics of this misogynist story;³⁸ at the same time it highlights the tenuous and fragile nature of that harmony is of which she strives to keep hold. Other characters also use musical metaphor to describe human relationships: by the time the trip

to lighthouse finally takes place, for example, both James and Cam are all too aware of Mr Ramsay's ability to keep "in tune" at will (186-87).³⁹ Such musical analogies in *To the Lighthouse* thus serve as metaphors for a kind of social awareness which must be learned — and learned by women in particular.

Representations of actual music in *To the Lighthouse* are predominantly gathered in its central section, "Time Passes," the lyrical "corridor" between the novel's "two blocks" of narrative. Noting that this section caused her "more trouble than all the rest of the book put together," Woolf herself describes it as the repository for the novel's lyricism: "The lyric portions of *To the Lighthouse* are collected in the 10-year lapse and don't interfere with the text so much as usual" (*D3* 106-07). Woolf's idea of lyric as "interfering" with narrative here is telling — and the preponderance of critical descriptions of "Time Passes" in musical terms such as "interlude" or "rhapsody" show the extent of its challenge to traditional novelistic form.⁴⁰ "Time Passes" moves quickly over the span of a decade, touching on world war, death and physical decay as well as tackling more philosophical questions, such as Andrew Ramsay's description of his father's work — "think of a kitchen table when you're not there." In her diary of Friday April 30, 1926, Woolf wrote of "Time Passes," "here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing — I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to" (*D3* 76). Woolf's representations of music and sound in this section are central to the figuration of what is unknown, unexpected, and uncontrollable, and help create the effect of there being "nothing to cling to."⁴¹

Music, silence and sound are key to Woolf's indirect treatment of war and military

action in “Time Passes.” Here Woolf “both inscribes and eclipses the First World War” (Snaith 76); and she uses sound as an important tool in doing so. She deploys the contrasts between seemingly “natural” sounds, such as the wind and waves, and those associated with mechanization and technology. When there is nobody left to listen to the sounds of the winds and the waves, Mrs Ramsay's uneasy reverie about the harshness of nature comes to mind:

Listening (had there been anyone to listen) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself. (153-54)

Here Woolf makes chaos into something primarily audible. The immediate focus on listening and the parenthetical statement following it both stress the absence of Mrs Ramsay, the constant listener of “The Window.” As in the passage quoted earlier, Woolf's layered imagery of sound creates a sense of unrest even within nature itself: here its sounds are barbaric, violent, and random, emphasizing the lack of discernible patterns in nature over time.⁴² Likewise, the playful, musically named “airs” which explore the house on the first night of “Time Passes” ask vaguely threatening questions: “Were they allies? Were they enemies? How long would they endure?” before “desist[ing]” and giving off an “aimless gust of lamentation” (144, 145). The explicitly military vocabulary associated with these invading airs, “advance guards of great armies,” can be read as foreshadowing the violence to come (147). The questioning airs seem harmless, and cannot disturb “the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity” which characterizes the abandoned house (148); but in the build-up to the novel's first explicit reference to

military action, the same formulation is repeated, substituting “silence” for “peace”:
 “there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling” (152). The “thud of something falling” is itself a solid object which “drops into” the silence: this unidentified sound thus stands in metonymically for the bombs, air raid sirens, lights, and other frightening noises of war. By contrast, the bracketed statement which follows — “[A shell exploded.(...)]” — is simply noted in a declarative sentence, as if an historical footnote to the preceding auditory images (152).⁴³
 In visual images of war, such as the “silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship” or “a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea,” the very lack of noise is sinister, and suggests a response in aural terms: “something out of harmony with this jocundity, this serenity” (152). Woolf's references to war are thus characterized not only by disruptions to silence but also by the disruptive power of silence itself.

When describing noises related to war in “Time Passes,” Woolf also relies on metaphors of music. In a simile of the mechanics behind the piano keyboard, she traces a line from the war back to Mr Ramsay's intellectual project: “ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the teacups” (152). Just as Mrs Ramsay's earlier reverie juxtaposes the “cradle song” with the “roll of drums,” here the sounds of war are compared with the controlled and “measured” sound of the piano, that figure of bourgeois music. The repeated shocks of the sounds of war thus quietly and methodically destroy the domestic scene: in the concealed workings behind the piano's neat surface, something much more sinister is taking place. Inanimate objects are given voice, for example in the image of glasses tinkling as an operatic soprano, “as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud

in its agony that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too” (152). Sound is again associated with violence in the extended description of the shawl falling loose from around the skull in the children’s room: “once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro. Then again peace descended” (148). As the shawl exposes the animal skull, the comfort of domesticity gives way to the literal presence of death, and in a phrase suggesting both pastoral and battlefield, “the empty rooms seemed to murmur with the echoes of the fields and the hum of flies” (145). Woolf connects the war with the familial and social violence which is an undercurrent of the first section of the novel;⁴⁴ the indirect allusions to classical music contribute to this continuity.⁴⁵

A less elevated form of music, working-class popular song, is the focus of part 5 of “Time Passes,” which describes the charwoman Mrs McNab. Our first introduction to her, at the end of part 4, echoes the implicit violence discussed above: she returns to the house “tearing the veil of silence with hands that had stood in the wash-tub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle” (142).⁴⁶ A similar stress on physical movement characterizes part 5 as a whole, which centers on her singing as she cleans. Mrs McNab's song is explicitly identified as coming from out-of-date music hall repertory. But far from Woolf's earlier imaginings of the music hall as a site of transformative potential, the reference to it in this context suggests neither the liberatory space it promised in *Night and Day* nor the cheerfully mundane men's club it was held up as in *Mrs Dalloway*. Here it seems to be little more than a marker of class.⁴⁷ Reduced to a “sound,” a “dirge” which is “mumble[d] out,” the song now appears to have little connection with its music hall

origins: in this passage it is transmitted far from that performative public space, in a domestic setting overrun by the natural world, via the distorted crooning of an old woman.⁴⁸

Yet the narrative's stress on Mrs McNab's movements while she sings almost constitutes a parodic performance of a staged dance. Mrs McNab is not as physically strong as might be implied by the "tearing" hands and "grinding" boots which herald her entrance. Her dance is made up of a series of difficult and ungainly physical movements, choreographed by the repetitive syntactical patterning of the narrative: she "lurch[es]," "roll[s] like a ship at sea," "clutch[es] the banisters and haul[s] herself upstairs and roll[s] from room to room," before performing the various tasks of her work, "lurch[ing], dusting, wiping," "creaking and groaning on her knees under the bed, dusting the boards," before "pulling herself up" again. She displays some of the self-consciousness of a performer, "aimlessly smiling" as she carries out "the old amble and hobble," and is very aware of her own body. "[L]eering sideways at her swinging figure" as she works, she repeatedly turns to look at her reflection in the mirror, so that "again with her sidelong leer which slipped and turned aside even from her own face, and her own sorrows, [she] stood and gaped in the glass," and as she "[looks] sideways in the glass" she manages to "twist her face grinning." These repeated narrative twists and turns make Mrs McNab at once performer and audience of her music-hall number.⁴⁹

The delivery of Mrs McNab's song is thus more striking than its content, which remains unknown. Although the song is "something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps, had been hummed and danced to," the narrator tells us, "now, coming from the toothless, bonneted, care-taking woman, [it] was robbed of

meaning, was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again.” In some ways it is the purportedly omniscient narrator who has “robbed” Mrs McNab's song of its meaning, by translating it and setting in its place a series of similes which interpret what the old woman “*seemed* to say”: despite being “bowed down . . . with weariness,” she smiles “*as if*, after all, she had her consolations, *as if* indeed there twined about her dirge some incorrigible hope” (emphases mine). The narrator reads Mrs McNab's body rather than her song: like Joseph Breitkopf in *Mrs Dalloway*, then, Mrs McNab is in effect “singing without any voice.” The effect of her wordless song recalls the “aimless gust of lamentation” offered by the wandering “airs,” and her questioning, like theirs, of “how long shall it endure?” identifies her with the physical forces gradually overtaking the house: her song itself makes less sense than the birds singing in Greek.

Again we see Woolf turning to the idea of the lyric as a means of representing a lower-class figure: music provides a means by which she can ventriloquize other voices and languages, rather than attempting to represent their voices. Much ink has been spilt discussing Woolf's representations of working-class characters, and her invocation of music's non-representability might be seen as evasive in this context.⁵⁰ But Mrs McNab's reappearance later in “Time Passes” complicates her portrayal in part 5. Part 7 of this section of the novel is entirely focused around Mrs McNab, using interior monologue to present her voice and memories more directly. She thinks about the Ramsays, at times quite critically (“never wrote, never came, and expected to find things as they had left them, ah, dear!”); and in particular, she remembers Mrs Ramsay. The phrase “she could see her,” with some minor variations, is repeated four times within this passage. These

visual memories are given an aural counterpart as twice she remembers Mrs Ramsay saying “ ‘Good-evening, Mrs McNab.’ ” The first, more generalized memory is signalled by the words “she would say” which follow it; and the substitution of the simple present tense “she said” in her second memory almost seems to bring the dead woman back to life: “faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing-table, across the wash-stand, as Mrs McNab hobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening” (156).⁵¹ Although this passage ends with descriptions which return Mrs McNab to her laboring body and the reader to a limited viewpoint — “She creaked, she moaned. She banged the door” — nevertheless this representation of her human, partial, subjective voice gives her more agency than in the earlier portrait.

In part 9, Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast work together to prepare the house for the Ramsays' arrival. The women are introduced in impersonal and ambivalent terms that at once ascribe them significant power and yet recall the narrator's dismissive attitude to Mrs McNab in part 5: “But there was a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched; something not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting. Mrs McNab groaned; Mrs Bast creaked” (158). The repetition of the words “leered,” “lurched,” “groaned,” and “creaked” leads into a passage marked by the sounds arising from the physical efforts of their labor: “Attended with the creaking of hinges and the screeching of bolts, the slamming and banging of damp-swollen woodwork, some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place, as the women, stooping, rising, groaning, singing, slapped and slammed, upstairs now now down in the cellars, Oh, they said, the work!” (159). The sheer amount of noise

in this sentence, with its abundance of present participles, is excessive — creaking, screeching, slamming, banging, stooping, rising, groaning, singing, slapped and slammed — and the word “singing” is not differentiated from the other items in the list. In this respect the songs of the cleaning women are equated with the involuntary noises of objects such as hinges and doors: as they “creak” and “moan,” Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast are made into inhuman objects “not highly conscious,” just like the image of the “rusty pump” used for the old singing woman in *Mrs Dalloway*. Yet they also talk to each other, especially during their tea-breaks when they take the Ramsays' places in their private rooms: “Glibly, jovially,” Mrs McNab “un[winds] her ball of memories” as she sits in the nursery, “wantoning with her memories” and telling stories of the Ramsays (160). Both women's thoughts are also represented here, and not entirely unsympathetically, despite the narrative distancing revealed by the language used.⁵² While their own voices may be far from “dignified ritual or solemn chanting,” it is they who work “slowly and painfully” to “[stay] the corruption and the rot,” “rescue” items from “the pool of Time that was fast closing over them,” and save the house from “[plunging] to the depths to lie on the sands of oblivion.”⁵³ In part 9, then, Woolf creates an unceasing counterpoint between the colloquial language of the cleaning women, the mechanized and inhuman noise of their work, and the shifting tone and abstract diction used by the narrator to describe what they are doing.

In her depictions of the two charwomen, and especially of Mrs McNab, Woolf gives up her stated aim of “giving no people's characters” in “Time Passes.” But to what extent can Mrs McNab really speak — or sing — for herself?⁵⁴ As Anna Snaith points out, Woolf's use of free indirect discourse “allows for two points of view, the narrator's

denigrating of Mrs McNab as unthinking, part of a mass, and Mrs McNab's own presentation of herself as an individual, working for the Ramsays, but with her own vision, memory, imagination and anger" (78). The representation of Mrs McNab's own thoughts (for example, her thoughts of the Ramsays, or her memories of their parties) thus negates the earlier narrative assumptions about the meaning of her song. In setting up these competing voices within the narrative, Snaith argues, Woolf "shows the necessity of letting Mrs McNab speak for herself, and the impossibility of an omniscient narrator. She is exploring the problematics of incorporating the voices on the margins and of representing multiple perspectives" (79). The figure of Mrs McNab thus represents the limitations of narrative itself.

As several critics have suggested, earlier drafts of "Time Passes" might provide us with a fuller picture of Mrs McNab's role in the novel.⁵⁵ Woolf's typescript makes it clear that Mrs McNab does have something to say:

But Mrs McNab was none of these. She was no skeleton lover, who voluntarily surrenders and makes abstract and reduces the multiplicity of the world to unity and its volume and anguish to one voice piping clear and sweet an unmistakable message. The inspired, the lofty minded, might walk the beach, hear in the lull of the storm a voice, behold in some serene clearing a vision, and so mount the pulpit and make public how it is simple, it is certain, our duty, our hope; we are one. Mrs McNab continued to drink and gossip as before. She was toothless almost; she had pains in all her limbs. She never divulged her reasons for opening windows and dusting bedrooms, and singing, when her voice was gone, her old silly song. Her message to a world now beginning to break into the voluntary and irrepressible loveliness of spring was transmitted by the lurch of her body and the leer of her smile and in them no less than in the bleat of lamb and the bud of cowslip were the broken syllables of a revelation more confused but more profound (could one have read it) than any accorded to solitary watchers, pacing the beach at midnight, and receiving as they stirred the pool, revelations of an extraordinary kind. (*TTLH* ed. Dick 219)

This passage emphasizes the futility of narrative gestures towards abstraction, unity, and clarity. Although her voice is "gone," Mrs McNab sings her "old silly song" without

explaining herself. In the published version of “Time Passes” the narrator’s assumptions about Mrs McNab are not explicitly questioned, despite their being couched in simile. But in this draft, the aside “could one have read it” allows the narrator to admit — even to highlight — the very illegibility of Mrs McNab’s “confused” yet “profound” revelation, with the “broken syllables” of its message hidden in her song and its associated movements.⁵⁶ Where the final version of “Time Passes” reduces Mrs McNab to a singing body and rewrites her song, the draft emphasizes the meaning contained in her the “old silly song.”⁵⁷ Her unheard song thus resembles “the voice of the beauty of the world,” which comes “through the open window,” [. . .] “murmuring, too softly to hear exactly what it said — but what mattered if the meaning were plain?” (162). While the watchers pace the beach in search of revelation, this voice, like Mrs McNab, does not wait for an audience to listen: “gently then without complaint, or argument, the voice would sing its song” (162).

Woolf’s portrait of Mrs McNab thus complicates conventional literary notions of song. Romantic representations of song usually stress it as an “artless” and unmediated phenomenon. Jane Marcus explores the ways in which Woolf uses song in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* to stress the “semiotic bubble of the origins of art in women’s voices” (*Languages* 11). Yet as De Gay argues, Woolf adds the important dimension of agency to the Wordsworthian figure of the borderer: although Mrs McNab is a “lower-class figure capable of inspiring the viewers to deeper thoughts” she is not simply a figure who spurs others to revelation: she is also “an agent for restoring the domestic and the ordinary” who has “the power to think and remember, and to re-create other people in her own imagination” (118, 121). The restoration work carried out by Mrs McNab — of

the house and of memory — both recalls Mrs Ramsay's “making of the moment something permanent” and anticipates Lily's final “vision.”⁵⁸ All three women, one at the heart of each part of the novel, carry out form-giving work, each in their different ways seeking “the unification or bringing together of disparate things, of the 'discomposed' ” (Bowlby 73).

Yet the impulse towards unity is figured as a problem in *To the Lighthouse*, and the very notion of harmony is repeatedly undermined throughout the novel.⁵⁹ In “The Lighthouse,” Lily Briscoe reworks the metaphor of harmony established by Mrs Ramsay in “The Window.” Earlier, she thinks of the Ramsays as the embodiment of an easy natural music: “The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them” (55). Trying to consider what is essential about the older woman, she tries to “start the tune of Mrs Ramsay in her head” (58). By comparison with Mrs Ramsay, Lily thinks of herself as unable to create “harmony”: “she could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness of her mind” (165). But Lily soon finds herself “in one of those habitual currents which after a certain time forms experience in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them” (180), and thus comes to realize that “[t]he sight, the phrase, had the power to console” (209). That consolatory power surpasses meaning as her internalized voice of discouragement becomes paradoxically enabling: “can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously” (226).⁶⁰ The repetitive rhythm of these phrases creates a productive background noise, becoming a current which bears her along; the recurrence of the words “murmured” and “monotonously,” both associated earlier with Mrs Ramsay's listening, reinforces the “echo” Lily becomes aware of: “For in the rough and tumble of daily life, with all those

children about, all those visitors, one had constantly a sense of repetition — of one thing falling where another had fallen, and so setting up an echo which chimed in the air and made it full of vibrations” (226). Lily sets in place a positive sense of repetition and rhythm which replaces the more static idea of harmony.⁶¹

Of the song of the airs in “Time Passes,” the narrator comments that “it seems impossible that . . . we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth” (108); the moments of harmony created by Mrs Ramsay do not “last for ever after” (142); and as Bowlby notes, “it could be argued that the moment of unity, the apparently resolved triple sequence of times collected together in the completion of Lily Briscoe's picture, only emphasizes all the more strongly the underlying lack of harmony in 'human relationships', as in the art or institutions which attempt to cover over their 'inadequacy' ” (74). Harmony is thus figured as a problem, not a straightforward ideal, as the soundscape at the end of “Time Passes” suggests:

And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dis severed yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dor beetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last, in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls. (161)

Although this passage stresses the ear's repeated attempts to harmonize these sounds into a pattern, the words “strain” and “falters” create a sense of effort and dissonance about the sounds which are “never quite heard.”⁶² Woolf's representations of music and sound *To the Lighthouse* are centered around the difficulties of listening. The narrative voice

does not synthesize these sounds, but instead asks the reader to respond actively to the “intermittent music” of individual voices over space and time.

“Other people's voices, singing the same song”: music in *The Waves*

It was while writing *The Waves* that Woolf met Dame Ethel Smyth, and mockingly recorded her subsequent wish to “burn my pen and take to music.” She makes music's importance very clear in letters and diary entries which describe the writing of the novel: it plays a direct and explicitly acknowledged part in her compositional process.⁶³ In a letter to Smyth, for example, Woolf describes her attempts at a “rhythmical” effect in prose: “Though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction, and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw the reader” (L4 204); and a few days later, she notes in her diary that “this rhythm (I say I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm and not to a plot) is in harmony with the painters” (D3 316). In language recalling Flaubert's aim at a “symphonic effect,” she draws attention to music's ability to synchronize rather than synthesize: “I should like to write four lines at a time, describing the same feeling, as a musician does; because it always seems to me that things are going on at so many different levels simultaneously” (L5 315).⁶⁴ Her diary also reveals a particular musical accompaniment to the composition of *The Waves*: in June 1928, she records “I do a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas” (D3: 139); and most famously, in December 1930 she writes “It occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech and end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes and having no further

break.” (D3 339).⁶⁵

As is immediately apparent from the remarks of both critics and Woolf herself, *The Waves* is the most obviously analogous to music of all Woolf's novels. Both within the novel itself, and in Woolf's notes on its composition, music (and especially the work of Beethoven) is self-consciously and repeatedly invoked as a metaphor for form. As a result, from contemporary responses to the novel to more recent analyses, critics have been unrestrained in their use of musical terms to describe the unconventional form and layered narrative style of *The Waves*.⁶⁶ The interweaving of narrative voices has given rise to a multitude of readings which use music as more than an adjective, and analyze the novel's use of music as a structuring aesthetic, often by drawing parallels with particular musical works. Several critics have explored the implications of Woolf's explicit references to Beethoven's influence on her composition of *The Waves*;⁶⁷ others have suggested illuminating connections to composers not explicitly named by Woolf, such as Arnold Schönberg, whose development of serial music might parallel Woolf's innovations in narrative.⁶⁸ It is undoubtable that the novel owes much to such musical influences and can be read fruitfully against musical texts, but my intention here is not to trace connections to actual musical sources. Rather, I want to look closely at representation of sound, song, and listening in relation to Woolf's own comments about this novel's innovations in narrative style.

Woolf's letters and diary entries during the composition of *The Waves* show the self-consciousness of her writing project, and her changing ideas as to how that project might be realized.⁶⁹ In 1929, discussing the novel's imagined style, she stresses that rather than being selective and spare in shaping her narrative, she wanted to do quite the

opposite: to be radically inclusive, and capture every detail of experience. She expresses this aim in the scientific metaphor of “saturating every atom”:

The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry – by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novelists? that they select nothing? The poets succeeding by simplifying: practically everything is left out. I want to put practically everything in: yet to saturate. (D3 209)

While this image of saturation is quite opposed to impressionistic ideas of music, it recalls the directness and simultaneity of Rachel Vinrace's idea that music “says all there is to say at once.” As many critics have noted, Woolf's manipulation of sound effects forms an important part of the effect of “saturation” in *The Waves*.⁷⁰ Woolf herself was pleased with what she had achieved, calling it “my first work in my own style!” (D4 53).

Where she used free indirect discourse in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, in her “play-poem” *The Waves* Woolf turns to what she calls in August 1930 “a series of dramatic soliloquies” (D3 312). Rather than letting the narrative move in and out of characters' minds on the level of the sentence, here we are given direct and unmediated access to their thoughts. But the thoughts are presented as if spoken aloud, and framed by very traditional markers of direct speech (for example, “said Rhoda” or “said Bernard”): this is quite deliberate, as Woolf aimed at the effect of a “gigantic conversation” (D3 285). Such apostrophic direct speech in the present tense makes Woolf's six voices resemble the first-person speakers often found in lyric poetry.⁷¹ These effects of immediacy and present-tense perception are key aspects of music and the listening experience, as Woolf had both discussed in her early essays and dramatized in

works such as “The String Quartet.” The relationship between the voices of the novel was a key formal problem facing Woolf: “The thing is to keep them running homogeneously in & out, in the rhythm of the waves. ... Can they be read consecutively? I know nothing about that.” (D3 283). In this way, the novel's chant-like voices themselves approach the state of singing: it tests the limits of polyphony and becomes what Paul Ricoeur calls “no longer a novel at all but a sort of oratorio offered for reading” (97).⁷²

Woolf herself uses the term “interludes” to describe the italicized passages which frame the soliloquies of the six voices: “the interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge and also to give a background — the sea; insensitive nature — I don't know” (D4 34). The interludes are Woolf's solution to the question she raises in her early imaginings of the novel: “Could one not get the waves to be heard all through? Or the farmyard noises? Some odd irrelevant noises” (D3 236). They are “acutely aural” in their repeated focus on both the rhythm of the waves and the communal voice of the birdsong chorus (Clements 167).⁷³ They appear to follow a more traditional narrative style, with an impersonal omniscient narrator tracing the movement of the sun and sea through the course of a single day. Yet Woolf sets up an insistent repetition of words and images, which recur not only between the interludes, but also in the soliloquies, creating the effect of a “dense *inner* intertextuality” (Cuddy-Keane 88). The rhythmic sounds of the waves thus create a sense of menace and inevitability within nature which resembles that suddenly felt by Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*: their thuds are compared, for example, to “logs falling” (24), “*turbaned warriors [...] with poisoned assegais*” (64), “*the concussion of horses' hooves on the turf*” (92), and “*a great beast stamping*” (128). Sometimes the waves are made into mere objects, like the falling logs; yet at other times

they are given human agency and emotion: “*The waves breaking spread their white fans far out over the shore, sent white shadows into the recesses of sonorous caves and then rolled back sighing over the shingle*” (202). The final interlude is a single line: “*The waves broke on the shore*” (256). This bare final statement of fact, without sensory emphasis, stresses the continuity of nature as well as its indifference to the human world.

The birds too, in their continual coming together and parting, both reflect and predict the interactions to follow between the novel's voices. Both their movements and their song alternate between unity and separation, stressing the process of self-definition against or in accordance with others. The emphasis of the first interlude is on pure sound without meaning: “*One bird chirped high up; there was a pause; another chirped lower down. [...] The birds sang their blank melody outside*” (6). Later interludes are more descriptive:

The birds . . . now sang a strain or two together; wildly, like skaters rollicking arm-in-arm, and were suddenly silent, breaking asunder. (23)

In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that bush, now sang together in chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky. They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this instant. Also they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they turned high in the air. (62)

As the novel's characters age, the birds become less concerned with singing in unison:

. . . the birds sang in the hot sunshine, each alone. One sang under the bedroom window; another on the topmost twig of the lilac bush; another on the edge of the wall. Each sang stridently, with passion, with vehemence, as if to let the song burst out of it, no matter if it shattered the song of another bird with harsh discord. . . . They sang as if the song were urged out of them by the pressure of the morning. [...] Now and again their songs ran together in swift scales like the interlacings of a mountain stream whose waters, meeting, foam and then mix, and hasten quicker and quicker down the same channel, brushing the same broad

leaves. But there is a rock; they sever. (93-94)

At times the birds also follow conventional paths which parallel those of human lives: romantic love is figured in the birds' "passionate songs addressed to one ear only" and parenthood in their "[b]ubbling and chuckling" as they build their nests (127). As well as the final interlude, the single sentence about the waves, there is another interlude without birdsong: here the description of the birds is focused completely on their movement and provides no sound (156).

These external descriptions, both of the sounds of the waves and especially those of the birds and their song, combine to function as a collective and anonymous voice which Rowena Fowler has suggested is modelled on Greek chorus.⁷⁴ Singing their alternately unified and separate lines of melody, and moving between concord and discord, the birds play out tensions between communal and social expression to which the six voices also respond. Figures of music in the soliloquies underscore these tensions. Choral singing is part of the public life of the children at school, something which Louis finds comforting both at the time and in memory: " 'It is difficult not to weep as we sing, as we pray that God may keep us safe while we sleep, calling ourselves little children. When we are sad and trembling with apprehension it is sweet to sing together, leaning slightly' " (21, 195). Neville too, remembers childhood in auditory images, such as the organ that " 'moans in the chapel' " (51). The ringing of bells suggests the conformity encouraged by public institutions like church and school— as Susan notes, " 'here bells ring; feet shuffle perpetually' " (46). Bernard explicitly figures the sounds of the external world and of public life as a chorus: " 'I hear through it far off, far away, faint and far, the chorus beginning; wheels; dogs; men shouting; church bells; the chorus beginning' "

(22).⁷⁵

The idea of the chorus is explicitly invoked throughout the novel in reference to the homogenous and undifferentiated group of “boasting boys,” characterized by recurring images of shared songs which bolster its authority and easy social power. Going “ ‘in a vast team to play cricket,’ ” Louis notes, they drive off “ ‘singing in chorus’ ” (39). He longs to be able to join the singing in this milieu to which he does not belong: “ ‘Peeping from behind a curtain, I note the simultaneity of their movements with delight. If my legs were reinforced by theirs, how they would run! If I had been with them and won matches and rowed in great races, and galloped all day, how I should thunder out songs at midnight! In what a torrent the words would rush from my throat!’ ” (40). Neville too notes the beauty of the “ ‘powerful young men . . . listening to the gramophone’ ” (69); Bernard, who is at times part of their group, describes them in less idealized terms, “ ‘shouting hunting songs over the way . . . smashing china . . . like a torrent jumping rocks, brutally assaulting old trees . . . with splendid abandonment’ ” (77); The boys' chorus does not allow for the irregular individual movement enjoyed by the birds: Bernard notes them “all turning their heads the same way” (77). As he reflects years later at the dinner scene before Percival leaves, such groups persist: “ ‘there are some here tonight, dining together, correctly dressed, before they go off in perfect concord to the music hall’ ” (114). The “perfect concord” of sporting song recalls Dr Holmes's insistence that Septimus need only play cricket and attend the music hall. There are undertones of entitlement and cruelty beneath the cheerful songs of the chorus: its beautiful boys are bullies, who pull the wings off butterflies (77).⁷⁶

In direct opposition to the songs of the undifferentiated chorus is the association

of each of the novel's six voices with particular motifs of song and sound, key components of the synesthetic style of *The Waves*.⁷⁷ As in *Mrs Dalloway*, sounds can work as aural triggers to memory, but without the disturbing effect they have for Septimus. The varying auditory perspectives of the six characters and the range of sonic registers within which they operate — from the noise of cattle and wind to dance music, the rhythms of prose and the buzz of the telephone — also call into question our ideas about what constitutes music. Susan, for example, who admits herself that she is not musical, is associated primarily with country sounds. She identifies with birdsong as part of the rural scene she knows and claims as her own: “ ‘mine are the flocks of birds’ ” (83). Yet even such seemingly unchanging country sounds contain within them memories of city noise and relation to other people: ‘I think of Jinny; of Rhoda; and hear the rattle of wheels on the pavement as the farm horses plod home; I hear traffic roaring in the evening wind’ ” (86); “ ‘I hear traffic in the brush of the wind down the lane, and broken voices, and laughter, and Jinny who cries as the door opens, “Come, come!” ’ ” (148). Like Mrs Ramsay, Susan is characterized by the lullaby, with its repetitive insistence upon the possessiveness of motherhood. Focused only on her child, she sings her way through seasons and years: “Sleep, sleep, I croon, whether it is summer or winter, May or November. Sleep I sing — I, who am unmelodious and hear no music save rustic music when a dog barks, a bell tinkles, or wheels crunch upon the gravel. I sing my song by the fire like an old shell murmuring on the beach” (147). Her constant verbal repetition of the contrasting phrases “I love” and “I hate” becomes her “recurrent refrain” in the novel (Beer 249).

In contrast with the solid and stable figure of Susan, Jinny is characterized by

sensuality and by the movement and colour of dance, “the body’s imagination” (150). She is impulsive and lives for the present moment, driven by the constantly moving rhythm of the body: “ ‘But the pulse drums so in my forehead, behind my eyes, that everything dances — the net, the grass; your faces leap like butterflies; the trees seem to jump up and down. There is nothing staid, nothing settled in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph’ ” (38). Arriving at the dance, she feels “ ‘the momentary pause; the dark moment. The fiddlers have lifted their bows [. . .] There is the swishing sound of cloaks falling in the hall. This is the prelude, this is the beginning’ ” (86-87). As well as echoing “The String Quartet” here, Jinny’s impressions of the dance itself recall the intersecting circles and water imagery of the hotel dance scene in *The Voyage Out*:

‘We yield to this slow flood. We go in and out of this hesitating music. Rocks break the current of the dance; it jars, it shivers. In and out, we are swept now into this large figure; it holds us together; we cannot step outside its sinuous, its hesitating, its abrupt, its perfectly encircling walls. Our bodies, his hard, mine flowing, are pressed together within its body; it holds us together; and then lengthening out, in smooth, in sinuous folds, rolls us between it, on and on. Suddenly the music breaks. My blood runs on but my body stands still. The room reels past my eyes. It stops.’ (88)

Music for Jinny is thus far from an abstract art: its sensuous nature stresses embodiment and physical connection rather than interiority. Her love song is represented by repeated single syllable refrains, both the cry of “Come, come!” that Susan remembers and the “Jug, jug, jug” of the nightingale: “ ‘Now let us sing our love song — Come, come, come. Now my gold signal is like a dragon-fly flying taut. Jug, jug, jug, I sing like the nightingale whose melody is crowded in the too narrow passage of her throat’ ” (150).⁷⁸

While Jinny sings, Neville is constantly listening, on the alert for sounds that indicate human connection (or more often its frustrations). The mechanical, inhuman

noise of the ringing telephone becomes a repeated aural emblem of his loneliness: “ ‘I snatched the telephone and the buzz, buzz, buzz of its stupid voice in your empty room battered my heart down, when the door opened and there you stood’ ” (153); “ ‘if the telephone buzzes and buzzes in your empty room, I shall then, after unspeakable anguish, I shall then — for there is no end to the folly of the human heart — see another, find another, you’ ” (155). While an overheard “ ‘sob on the stair late at night’ ” signals the end of an end of someone else's relationship (153), he longs for the sound of footsteps on the stairs outside to disturb the “ ‘cheep, cheep, cheep’ ” of the fire in his room: “ ‘Then I hear the one sound I wait for. Up and up it comes, approaches, hesitates, stops at my door. I cry, “Come in. Sit by me. Sit on the edge of the chair.” Swept away by the old hallucination, I cry “Come closer, closer” ’ ” (171). Despite turning to the intellect as his refuge from the world, he is a failed poet:

‘These papers in my private pocket — the clamour that proves that I have passed — make a faint sound like that of a man clapping in an empty field to scare away rooks. Now it has died down altogether, under Susan’s stare (the clapping, the reverberation that I have made), and I hear only the wind sweeping over the ploughed land and some bird singing — perhaps some intoxicated lark. Has the waiter heard of me, or those furtive everlasting couples, now loitering, now holding back and looking at the trees which are not yet dark enough to shelter their prostrate bodies? No; the sound of clapping has failed.’ (181)

His work has never received the recognition or applause implicit in the sound of clapping he repeatedly seeks, in part because he cannot reconcile rhythm and language: “ ‘Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have laid dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again. [. . .] Words and words and words, how they gallop — how they lash their long manes and tails, but for some fault in me I cannot give myself to their backs’ ” (70).⁷⁹

Bernard is so strongly associated with story and language that his voice always

translates sounds. His first aural impression in the novel, for example, employs a visual simile to synesthetic effect: “the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide” (7). Later, he reverses the intermedial metaphor, so that words themselves become birds: “‘They flick their tails right and left as I speak them,’ said Bernard. ‘They wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks, now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together’ ” (16-17).⁸⁰ There are echoes of Woolf’s own position as a writer in his attempts to imitate Byron’s style: “ ‘Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain (the rhythm is the main thing in writing)’ ” (67). He is concerned with the shape of stories, with sequence, order and rhythm, but after Percival’s death he no longer feels part of the rhythm of the external world: “ ‘I note the rhythm, the throb, but as a thing in which I have no part, since he sees it no longer’ ” (130). Bernard thinks of himself as a minstrel figure, a storyteller from an earlier age who travels and sings: “ ‘I pass from house to house like the friars in the Middle Ages who cozened the wives and girls with beads and ballads. I am a traveller, a pedlar, paying for my lodging with a ballad’ ” (186).

The characters of both Louis and Rhoda are fundamentally connected with music, sound, and listening. This auditory focus is apparent from the very start of *The Waves*. Where the other four characters’ first statements all begin “ ‘I see’ ” and describe visual phenomena, our first introductions to both Louis and Rhoda are formed of aural impressions: “ ‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down’ ” (6); “ ‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps’ ” (6).⁸¹ Birdsong immediately connects Rhoda’s perception with the world of the interludes; similarly, the beast that Louis hears here is

used to describe the waves in subsequent interludes. Both Louis and Rhoda are acutely aware of sensory impressions and uncomfortably self-conscious. Bernard thinks admiringly of them both as not needing other people: “ 'The authentics, like Louis, like Rhoda, exist most completely in solitude. They resent illumination, reduplication' ” (99). He himself, by contrast, is “incapable of the denials, the heroisms of Louis and Rhoda” (115). In this respect they are almost interchangeable: “Rhoda, or it may be Louis, some fasting and anguished spirit, passes through and out again” (169).

Louis's awareness of his different-sounding voice reminds him of his colonial origins: he constantly makes mention of his Australian accent. He tries to counter such insecurity by gesturing towards concreteness, connection and embodiment: signing his name feels “clear-cut and unequivocal” (142), and he is “ 'half in love with the typewriter and the telephone' ” (143). When he states that “ ‘I like to hear the soft rush of the lift and the thud with which it stops on my landing and the heavy male tread of responsible feet down the corridors',” (144), we are reminded of the “great beast” that is our first impression of him in the novel. Even responding to visual images, Louis is repeatedly haunted by this sound:

‘The bird flies; the flower dances; but I hear always the sullen thud of the waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps.’ (49)

‘I am the ghost of Louis, an ephemeral passer-by, in whose mind dreams have power, and golden sounds when in the early morning petals float on fathomless depths and the birds sing. I dash and sprinkle myself with the bright waters of childhood. Its thin veil quivers. But the chained beast stamps and stamps on the shore.’ (57)

As well as this repeated image, Louis is characterized by other sounds which emphasize violence and disconnection: “ 'Children, our lives have been gongs striking; clamour and boasting; cries of despair; blows on the nape of the neck in gardens’ (33).

Rhoda, a figure of disembodied and alienated interiority, is most strongly linked with the singing voice.⁸² As soon as her voice speaks, its immediate focus is on separation from the group: “ ‘The birds sang in chorus first,’ said Rhoda. ‘Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom window alone’ ” (8). She is unable to express herself formally: “ ‘I am not composed enough, standing on tiptop on the verge of fire, still scorched by the hot breath, afraid of the door opening and the leap of the tiger, to make even one sentence. ’ ” (91-92).⁸³ Rhoda perceives the others as embraced by form: “ ‘you stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society; where I have nothing. I have no face’ ” (191); their voices sound to her “ ‘like trees creaking in a forest’ ” (191). The distance between her interiority and the external world is too large a gap to bridge: “ ‘A wind ruffles the topmost leaves of primeval trees. (Yet here we sit at Hampton Court.) Parrots shrieking break the intense stillness of the jungle. (Here the trams start.) The swallow dips her wings in midnight pools. (Here we talk.)’ ” (191).

Just as Rhoda and Louis are introduced as listeners, their sensitivity to aural experience stands out throughout the novel. After her death, Louis thinks of Rhoda as someone “with whom I shared silence when the others spoke” (174). As they listen together to the “ ‘roar of London’ ,” Louis notes how the separate sounds are all “ ‘merged in one turning wheel of single sound’ ” (115-16); and at the dinner to farewell Percival, they are both aware of a fundamentally threatening presence, figured in primitivist terms of “dancing and drumming” which resemble both the sound of the waves and Woolf’s discussion of the dangers of rhythm in “Street Music”:

‘Horns and trumpets,’ said Rhoda, ‘ring out. Leaves unfold; the stags blare in the thicket. There is a dancing and a drumming, like the dancing and drumming of naked men with assegais.’

‘Like the dance of savages,’ said Louis, ‘round the camp-fire. They are savage; they are ruthless...’ (120)

This odd exchange of primitivist images is set apart from the rest of the text in parentheses, as if to emphasize the separation of Louis and Rhoda within the broader social group: they see themselves as “conspirators, withdrawn together” in their shared awareness of death (120). The dance of the savages here recalls Louis's earlier reconfiguration of tea shop noise as a waltz:

I am conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair. If this is all, this is worthless. Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricots and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. The average men, including her rhythm in their rhythm (“I would take a tenner; for it blocks up the hall”) take their greens, take their apricots and custard. Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. Yet I am not included.’ (80)

Louis figures the waltz in terms of “unbroken” and “complete” harmony, continuity, and rhythmic integration. It is a rhythm in which he is “not included,” and towards which he is ambivalent, distancing himself from the “average” or the “common mainspring” despite his stated wish to be covered by “the protective waves of the ordinary” (80). He sees the others as “aimless” and the rhythm as “cheap and worthless.” The ordering rhythm of this social waltz is set directly against the kind of “song” that Louis and Rhoda listen for when they are alone at Hampton Court: Louis asks Rhoda “What song shall we hear now . . . What song do we hear?” (196-97) and she replies ‘What song do we hear — the owl’s, the nightingale’s, the wren’s? [. . .] Not a sound, not a movement must escape

us' ” (197).

Music is linked with a more positive sense of order when Rhoda goes to a concert after Percival's death.⁸⁴ Seeking a means by which to give form to her experience, she initially considers a trip to a museum or Hampton Court to “'recover beauty, and impose order upon my raked, my dishevelled soul' ” (138). The set-up of the concert she attends instead is startlingly similar to the opening of “The String Quartet” in its focus on external details of dress and appearance and the awkward conventions of listening. The audience of this afternoon performance are “somnolent,” “decorous” and “portly”; having eaten “beef and pudding enough to live for a week without tasting food,” they sit down “swaying and opening programmes, with a few words of greeting to friends” (138). Notably, Rhoda identifies with this anonymous group: where she usually speaks in terms of “I” and “they,” here she uses “we” to describe the audience as a whole. Yet the group is not figured positively: first they are parasites who “cluster like maggots on the back of something that will carry us on,” before turning into passive objects “like walruses stranded on rocks, like heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea, hoping for a wave to lift us, but we are too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies between us and the sea. We lie gorged with food, torpid in the heat.” A singer rescues the audience from this situation.⁸⁵

'Then, swollen but contained in slippery satin, the seagreen woman comes to our rescue. She sucks in her lips, assumes an air of intensity, inflates herself and hurls herself precisely at the right moment as if she saw an apple and her voice was the arrow into the note, “Ah!”

‘An axe has split a tree to the core; the core is warm; sound quivers within the bark. “Ah!” cried a woman to her lover, leaning from her window in Venice. “Ah, ah!” she cried, and again she cries “Ah!” She has provided us with a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry? (138-39)

The woman's song is given an immediate sense of action through its figuration as both an

axe and an arrow; yet almost immediately, its power is negated. The singer's five repetitions of the syllable "Ah!" are followed by Rhoda's own repetition — "a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry?" — which questions the ability of the solitary voice to create meaning. By contrast, the "beetle-shaped men . . . with their violins" create meaning that goes past the "'like' and 'like' and 'like' " Rhoda struggles with (139). Unlike the overheard and unheard songs in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, this song is performed in a conventional context for listening, but it does not reach its listeners; here it is instrumental music rather than song which has the most profound effect.⁸⁶ In Rhoda's response to the instrumental music, Woolf returns to the geometrical and architectural imagery which characterized music in *The Voyage Out*:

There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling-place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation.

As for Rachel Vinrace, musical form provides Rhoda with a refuge from the external world. And as for the music hall audience in *Night and Day*, Woolf suggests that the shared experience of music temporarily erases distinctions between people. Rhoda's feeling that "we are not so various or so mean" leads to a sense of epiphany: "The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates understanding. Wander no more, I say; this is the end. The oblong has been set upon the square; the spiral is on top' " (139). Yet this figure of formal perfection throws Rhoda into the urge for movement: she leaves midway through the concert and sets out for Greenwich: " 'I will fling myself fearlessly into trams, into omnibuses' " (140). Even as it suggests connection with other people, at the same time music seems to create a sense of

physical self for Rhoda: where in the past her “intense abstraction” has made her afraid to cross a puddle, now on falling into a man in Regent Street, she is “not injured, . . . not outraged by the collision” (172, 140).

Rhoda's makes repeated references to the “structure” and “dwelling-place” suggested by the music. The geometrical images of square and oblong recur as she remembers her response to the music: “ ‘Then in some Hall I parted the boughs of music and saw the house we have made; the square stood upon the oblong. “The house which contains all” ’ ” (176). She achieves the same momentary transcendence in response to the architecture of St. Paul's: “ ‘The still mood, the disembodied mood is on us,’ said Rhoda, ‘and we enjoy this momentary alleviation (it is not often that one has no anxiety) when the walls of the mind become transparent. Wren’s palace, like the quartet played to the dry and stranded people in the stalls, makes an oblong. A square is stood upon the oblong and we say, “This is our dwelling-place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside” ’ ” (196). Yet the fact of her suicide proves that such formal unity is inevitably only fleeting.

The ending of *The Waves* gave Woolf much trouble: “How to end, save by a tremendous discussion, in which every life shall have its voice — a mosaic [. . .] I do not know” (*D3* 298).⁸⁷ Bernard's final soliloquy brings together the common voices of the interludes, the birdsong and the waves, with the aural imagery of the other characters' voices. Just as Woolf herself describes her own Beethoven-induced epiphany for how to end the novel, so too Bernard, her novelist-within-the-novel, invokes the heroic figure of the great Romantic composer as he uses a range of musical models for his own synthesizing work (216-17). Bernard echoes Rhoda's response to the concert “A cry. Just

a cry. And what is a cry?" in his own frustrated query " 'A phrase. An imperfect phrase. And what are phrases?' "(186). Tired of "ridiculous, flamboyant, beautiful phrases . . . of stories, . . . of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground!" he longs instead for some "little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement" (204). Thinking of Percival provokes two distinct and opposing aural desires: he wants both a "wild carol . . . what is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense" (208) and also a "lullaby . . . capable of singing him to rest" (209).

The novel's six voices of subjective interiority are defined, and constantly redefined, in relation to undifferentiated communal songs, the shifting chorus of the birds and the deafening chorus of the boasting boys. Bernard is drawn to both of these groups: "while I hear one or two distinct melodies, such as Louis sings, or Neville, I am also drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song" (211). But finally, in place of the song of both birds and boys, Bernard turns to the figure of the orchestra:

"Faces recur, faces and faces—they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble—Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole—again like music. What a symphony with its concord and its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be" (220)

The image of the symphony allows Bernard to synthesize the various melodies of the different voices' subjectivities, figured here as musical instruments.⁸⁸ The symphony includes both concord and discord, to give what Clements calls "the *effect* of completion." Critics have read this harmonizing tendency as Woolf's own: Cuddy-Keane, for example, argues that "the fragmented, discontinuous, polytextural music conveys a

wholeness, a comprehensiveness, that embraces the communal life of the universe” (90).

Yet despite the momentary impressions of wholeness created by Bernard's soliloquy or Rhoda's musical “dwelling-place,” the achievement of such wholeness seems ultimately elusive.⁸⁹ Where song itself is reduced to “just a cry,” instrumental music provides a momentary model of formal unity which seems to provide answers in response to this cry. Rhoda cannot carry that model away and impose it to give shape to her life; yet Bernard's final soliloquy returns to “a howl; a cry” in a valiant attempt to create form in the face of death (254).⁹⁰ Bernard's impulse to be part of “other people's voices, singing the same song” initially seems to suggest conformity, sameness, and single-voicedness (240); yet Bernard's awareness of and incorporation of other voices into his own song can recast it as a more positive model of inclusive polyvocality.⁹¹ When praised for her creation of characters in the novel, Woolf says “I meant to have none” (*D4* 47), and as Bernard recognizes early in the novel, “ ‘The human voice has a disarming quality — (we are not single, we are one)' ” (58).⁹² Moreover, in the final soliloquy's addresses to an unidentified “you,” like the insistence on active listening in “The String Quartet,” *The Waves* demands the reader respond actively to it as it unfolds.⁹³

In the holograph notes for *The Waves*, Woolf describes her own writing in terms that echo both Lily Briscoe's and E. M. Forster's: “I have never been able to 'see' for long; hence I only make phrases. That the novel changed when the perspective changed: And I'm not a preacher” (quoted in Transue 134).⁹⁴ If Woolf is “not a preacher,” is she a “prophet,” to use Forster's term for the lyrical novelist who shocks with the “strangeness of song”? Lawrence Kramer states that “[i]n its traditional definition, song is a form of synthesis. It is the art that reconciles music and poetry, intonation and speech, as means

of expression” (125). Yet in these three novels, song's function is far from synthetic; its strangeness is closer to the superstitious ritual repetition in which the lyric originates.⁹⁵

Woolf's singing characters — Septimus, the street singer, Mrs McNab, even Rhoda — are all alienated, whether by class, sex, war or madness. Like Yeats's “Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop,” or Shakespearean Fools, they are outsider figures who exist outside the usual forms of meaning, and tell us something through the “strangeness” of their song. The passages describing singing characters in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* anticipate the lyrical style of *The Waves*. Both Septimus and the street singer disrupt traditional narrative with their lyrical outpourings; Mrs McNab is an unheard prophet, complete with her ruined house and destroyed furniture; and in *The Waves*, as Raymond William points out, there is nothing left but the lyric: “All the furniture, and even the physical bodies, have gone out of the window, and we are left with voices and feelings, voices in the air” (306). Yet this shift to the lyric does not make Woolf the apolitical writer that Williams would turn her into. Songs have long been included in drama to political effect, for example in the plays of Shakespeare or the ballad-operas of Gay and Brecht (Lindley 1008). In *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, as in theatre, songs interrupt and encapsulate the dramatic action: Woolf uses lyric moments to freeze both time and plot. In *The Waves* she moves completely into the realm of the lyric. As she argues in “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” “[o]n all sides writers are attempting what they cannot achieve” ... “forcing the form they use to contain a meaning which is strange to it” (E3 429). The figure of song thus provides her with new ways of creating meaning in narrative.

As Laurence points out, Woolf is often viewed as “a modernist manqué because of

her search for harmony in fragmentation” (218). An example of such misleading critical assumptions about Woolf’s attitude to harmony can be seen in *Fullness of Dissonance*, where Daniel Melnick addresses the issue of “musicalized fiction” in the modernist novel. Arguing that “it is modern fiction’s aim and struggle to imagine fully the fictive world to which the lyric cry of modernist poetry testifies” (133), Melnick defines modernist “dissonance” as follows:

Dissonance is, then, the form narrative achieves when modern novelists undertake to musicalize fiction. It is, to alter Pater, the condition to which modern narrative aspires. Its yearning for a transcendence absent here and now is tragically parodied by Mann, and its promise of a fictive, healing play and abundance is comically affirmed by Joyce. An encompassing, dissonant structure of “irreconcilability” — this complex sense of simultaneous potentiality and negation, promise and absence — is to be perceived in each page of modern narrative. (10-11)

Melnick excludes Woolf from the select group of writers whose fiction he deems to have achieved such dissonance. In a dismissive metaphor of traditionally feminine handwork, he claims that while she “laces her fiction with musical references,” she ultimately seeks an ideal of formal harmony which does not move sufficiently beyond aestheticist ideas of the beautiful:

Woolf’s overt idealization of music as a Paterian, finally mythic solace and escape, clashes profoundly with the distress of consciousness her musicalized narratives covertly and actually reveal. Her fictional project is affected by a lack of awareness of its own promised power; the potential outpourings of consciousness — Bernard’s and the others’, or in the Joyce-influenced *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa’s and Septimus’s — are partly blocked by the restraints of her class-bound range and narrative sensibility and by the self-deception or at least confusion in her essential narrative strategy: Woolf would valorize a mannered aesthetic harmony which in actuality has vanished from her time and art. (103-04)

Yet in these three novels (and in later works, most notably *Between the Acts*), Woolf’s treatment of music actually exemplifies the very distress of consciousness against which Melnick claims it clashes — and it does so quite self-consciously. By placing song in the mouths of such marginal figures, and providing only partial and fragmentary narrative

responses to it, she uses music to problematize the whole idea of narrative voice. In constant tension with the concept of overall novelistic form as unified or “musical,” as well as with what Melnick calls “mannered aesthetic harmony,” the actual musical scenes within the novels thus cause moments of lyric interruption. Where it could be argued that her earlier essays and novels exhibit a more idealized or Paterian concept of music, her work of the 1920s and beyond develops that concept into something much more complicated: the real disjunctions between supposedly musical form and actual musical content are more jarring or “dissonant” than Melnick's dismissal suggests.

In the opening of the 1927 story “Moments of Being: 'Slater's Pins Have No Points,” Fanny Wilmot thinks that her music teacher Julia Craye, seems to live “in the cool glassy world of Bach fugues” (*SF* 215).⁹⁶ The story goes on to disrupt the surface of that world and undermine the very idea of pure form. The effect of Fanny's initial impression, which erases the complexities of Julia's life, resembles that of critics such as Melnick, who impose the concept of idealized harmony on to Woolf's work.⁹⁷ In all three of the novels discussed in this chapter, Woolf's representations of music actually stress the problematic nature of harmony rather than idealizing it. Images of harmony are repeatedly used to describe flattening, politically implicated forces of convention: the clocks in *Mrs Dalloway*, the alphabet and piano keyboard in *To the Lighthouse*, and the boasting boys in *The Waves* all serve to show Woolf's alertness to the damaging and negative aspects of such normative patterns. By contrast, Woolf's depictions of singing and listening characters emphasize the lack of reconciliation between their “strangeness of song” and the wider chorus. Her scenes of music thus at once point out the flaws in such ideas of universalizing harmony, and gesture towards an alternative ideal of

harmony that might encompass the “infinite discords” of experience.

- 1 p.99; see also 102
- 2 He classes Woolf, along with Sterne, as a “fantasist.” Woolf’s essays from this period are generally regarded as blueprints for Woolf’s own “high modernist” novels. “Women and Fiction” (1929) and “Phases of Fiction” (1929) both outline her vision of the kinds of books to be written in the future. “The Narrow Bridge of Art” she argues that the new novel should be “written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted” (20).
- 3 Robert Humphrey, for example, has called *Mrs Dalloway* a “superb example” of sonata form, arguing that Woolf employs “tangible patterns . . . to provide harmony” (99-100). Patricia Laurence uses terms drawn from musical analysis to argue that “[t]he musical and emotional form of *Mrs Dalloway* . . . might be charted as “lark,” spatially upward movement (high pitch), and “plunge,” downward movement (low pitch), with Mrs Dalloway and Septimus representing the lark and the plunge of theme. Pitch, voice and space create the overall harmonic ordering of the novel” (178). J. Hillis Miller also sees this rising and falling movement as crucial to the structure of the novel, arguing that it requires “two opposite but similar movements, Septimus’s plunge into death and Clarissa’s resurrection from the dead” (201). Valentine Cunningham stresses the importance of detailed verbal repetition to these patterns: “this novel is laced tightly together, like a poem, by repeated i.e. rhyming, words, phrases, names, all passed along, in an epidemic of verbal influenza as strong as the post-War influenza pandemic which seems to have left Mrs Dalloway physically weak, from one person’s head to another’s, from paragraph to paragraph, page to page, episode to episode” (xvi). Christine Froula likewise identifies the novel’s “finely elaborated order,” its structures of repetition and refrain, as Woolf’s modernist version of the “rigorous formal mechanics of elegaic temporality”: “Meter, rhyme, repetition, refrain, repeated questions, procession, and ceremony: all serve to divide, order, pace, tame, channel the mourner’s chaos of feelings” (127).
- 4 See Cuddy-Keane, who argues that “although the clock of Westminster and the airplane are not electronic media, Woolf’s precise representation of them *through sound* reflects the new aural sensitivity coincident with the emergence of the gramophone and the wireless” (71)
- 5 In this respect sound stresses what Gillian Beer calls “those impersonal intimacies of juxtaposition and association which usually go unrecorded” (53); Miller likewise argues that the novel investigates “not so much the depths of individual minds as the nuances of relationship between mind and mind” (177).
- 6 As many critics have noted, the sound of the Prime Minister’s car backfiring echoes the “pistol shot” associated with the start of World War One, on an earlier fine June day.
- 7 Beer stresses that this plane is emphatically not a war plane (162); even so, the initial sound carries at least the memory of such a threat with it, given *Mrs Dalloway*’s 1923 setting. Beer also draws helpful distinctions between the car (hierarchy, sound moves) and the plane (flattens distinctions, sound fades).
- 8 It is important not to read Elizabeth’s impressions of city sound in uniformly positive terms, however. As Bowlby points out in “Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway’s Daughter,” Elizabeth cannot be taken simply as representative of the potential achievements of the next generation of young women (69-84). The vocabulary used to describe Elizabeth’s reactions to sound here bears out Bowlby’s argument: like her mother, she hears “triumph” in London’s noise, and her delight in the “geniality and brotherhood” of the hubbub recalls the Harley Street clocks which “genially and fraternally” ring out the establishment rules.
- 9 For a discussion of *Mrs Dalloway* and the music hall, focused on the figure of Marie Lloyd, see Hoff.
- 10 As many critics have noted, in this aspect of Septimus’s psychosis, Woolf drew on her own experience of birds singing in Greek when she was ill (see *Moments of Being* 162). Froula points out the further elaboration of this idea in Woolf’s earlier draft of the novel: “In *The Hours* Septimus, like Woolf’s “mad . . . me,” hears nightingales sing Greek, Philomela’s incestuous violation retooled to his war experience: “Evans was a Greek nightingale . . . & now sang this ode, about death . . . ‘And so I reached Greece’; where he joined the poets, in Thessaly” (*H*, 66)” (152).
- 11 See Sacks’s point that the death the elegy mourns is always the elegist’s own (quoted in Froula 131).
- 12 In *Virginia Woolf A to Z*, Mark Hussey points to a source for this scene recorded in Woolf’s diary: “‘An old beggar woman, blind, sat against a stone wall in Kingsway holding a brown mongrel in her arms & sang aloud. There was a recklessness about her; much in the spirit of London. Defiant’ [*D2* 47]” (174).
- 13 Johanna X. K. Garvey describes their different reactions as follows: “while Peter hears something ‘weak’ and ‘shrill,’ lacking in human (i.e. male) meaning, Rezia perceives the enormous power

- embodied in the female voice" (63).
- 14 As Garvey puts it, Septimus "experiences the semiotic in an intense manner and seems incapable of passing between it and the symbolic realm" (65): while he all too often loses his grip on the symbolic, this rare moment of communal access to the semiotic remains strangely inaccessible to him.
 - 15 In fact, as Froula points out, her song comes from "a mouth which seems the archetype of all graves" (162n.48)
 - 16 She argues that it "floods the seemingly solid and hierarchized space of London, just as it interrupts and drowns out the voice of Peter, representative of masculine power and order" (64).
 - 17 Like Elizabeth Abel, Froula links the treatment of pastoral elegy in the novel with the untimely death of Sylvia Parry, Clarissa's sister (132).
 - 18 See also the same "rusty pump" image in *Jacob's Room* (67).
 - 19 cf. "A Sketch of the Past": "The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully for the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else. . ." (98).
 - 20 Op. 10, no. 8 composed 1885. Notably, Jacobs does not list Strauss among Woolf's favorite composers: the stress placed upon this song in *Mrs Dalloway*, however, proves that it is a mistake to read Leonard's "listening log" as a definitive record of Woolf's musical tastes. As both Miller and Froula point out, the manuscript of *The Hours* contains a partial draft translation of the song, presumably by Woolf herself (H 98 and passim; Froula 38n.48). Miller claims that this scene is a "buried . . . clue to the way the day of the action is to be seen as the occasion of a resurrection of ghosts from the past" (189). Providing a translation of the lyrics in full, he imagines a dialogue between the quoted and paraphrased lyrics and those left unspoken within the novel: "The parts of the song not directly echoed in *Mrs Dalloway* identify it as a key to the structure of the novel. 'One day in the year' is indeed 'free to the dead,' 'Allerseelen,' the day of a collective resurrection of spirits" (190). *Mrs Dalloway*, Miller argues, "has the form of an All Souls' Day" in which characters from the past "rise from the dead" (190). The "odd and apparently irrelevant" pages describing the song, therefore, are in fact important in their invocation of the repetition which underlines the entire novel: "The power of narrative not just to repeat the past but to resurrect it in another form is figured dramatically in the action of the novel" (189, 213).
 - 21 Beer argues that this song "burrows beneath language and difference" and "takes us back past language to a semiological cradle-land surviving into the present" (56, 53). C. Ruth Miller also notes that this "meaninglessness" may be a formal strategy on Woolf's part: "Perhaps words can approach the condition of music and painting when they restrict themselves to the most basic of human conditions, when they abandon all sophistications and refinements and are concerned only with unanalysable instincts. The old crone's 'ancient song' in *Mrs Dalloway*, which is almost impossible to decipher, 'of love — love which has lasted a million years' may be such an approximation" (53-54).
 - 22 Clarissa, Peter and Sally all remember "old Joseph Breitkopf" at Bourton, singing Brahms "without any voice" (35, 154, 182). One of Sally Seton's most attractive features, her "beautiful voice which made everything she said sound like a caress" (35), is what later identifies the unknown Lady Rosseter at the party: "That voice! It was Sally Seton!" (171). Clarissa's own voice, by contrast, sounds "frail and thin and very far away" as she calls to Peter to remember her party; drowned out by "the roar of the open air," it is "overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking" (48).
 - 23 See Bowlby on the "voices" of the bells: "St Margaret's more doubtful ring could be seen as either complementary (the trivial following the serious, both making a well-tuned ensemble), or lightly mocking (the second bell sounding a gentle mimic), or challenging, by disrupting and detracting from his univocal, authoritative announcement" (78-79); "Whereas Septimus Smith is the extreme 'case' of someone who has lost all contact with the external, common orders of daily life and daily time, Clarissa is questionably situated like St Margaret's, neither within nor without, somewhere between utter differing and absolute conformity. She is close enough to sound or seem as if she simply echoes established authority, and distant enough for her chimes to verge on an expression of doubt or an ironic doubling" (79)
 - 24 See Garvey: "Linguistic alienation results when the individual is denied communication on his own terms" (65).
 - 25 These passages are like more extreme versions of what Robin Gail Schulze calls "moments of mind-time" in *Mrs Dalloway*: "Periodically throughout the book, Woolf throws off the control of causal plot

and retreats into moments of mind-time where the flow of events ceases. During segments of mind-time, Woolf sets various time streams loose at once, either in the mind of one character, who retreats into internal soliloquy, collapsing past, present and future, or in the simultaneous perspectives given by several characters recording a single moment. The result of either technique is that plot time stands still; Woolf replaces conventional chronological narrative with a simultaneous internalized expression of 'life going on'." (8)

- 26 Contemporary reviews of *To the Lighthouse* invoked musical analogies to both positive and negative ends. Writing in the *New York Times* in May 1927, Louis Kronenberger calls "Time Passes" "a superb interlude" but argues that the novel's third section "seems to sound in the minor what the long first portion sounded in the major": "this final portion of the book strikes a minor note, not an intentional minor note which might still in the artistic sense be major, but a meaningless minor note which conveys the feeling that one has not quite arrived somewhere, that the story which opens brilliantly and carries on through a magnificent interlude ends with too little force and expressiveness" (Majumdar 196). In the *Spectator* of the same month, Rachel A. Taylor compares the novel's musicality with that of Symbolist poetry: "Cadences are heard that never violate the rhythm of prose, yet chime aerial and strange as the rhythm of verse. In the ghostly second part, where the perishing life of the house sighs away, the lamenting style, with its lilted-in refrains, and its bitter tragic parentheses, in some passages chants heavily and dreamily like the prose litanies of Mallarmé" (Majumdar 199). In the *Monthly Criterion* (July 1927), Orlo Williams describes "Time Passes" as "a rhapsody where ten years pass away in a kind of incantation, broken by rather abrupt snapping of threads in parenthesis" (Majumdar 205). Williams's impression of the novel echoes the interdisciplinary language of Woolf's own discussions of her aims in writing: "this is the work of the poet, the painter, the musician, not of the dramatist nor, as I believe with Mr Wyndham Lewis, essentially of the novelist" (Majumdar 204).

After Woolf's death, critics assessing her work retrospectively also employ musical metaphors in their analyses of *To the Lighthouse*. In his 1941 Rede lecture on Woolf, E. M. Forster addressed the novel's musical structure: "*To the Lighthouse* is in three movements. It has been called a novel in sonata form, and certainly the slow central section, conveying the passage of time, does demand a musical analogy" (16). B. G. Brooks's December 1941 review article in *Nineteenth Century* also suggests musical equivalents for the novel's formal effects, noting its "further use of rhythm and echo" and "massive blocks ... interspersed with quick movements involving staccato jerks, which extend among the minor characters" (456). Brooks goes on to draw a useful comparison between Woolf's innovations in prose and those of contemporary composers:

To the Lighthouse adds further complexities of both style and subject-matter. Here one has the feeling that there is some attempt to rival the modernist musicians. Like Debussy, or Ravel, or Stravinsky, she takes some trivial theme of the sophisticated present, and gives it a mock splendour by parading it in the pomp and ceremony of Victorian or Edwardian event, all the time with an undercurrent of irony, and yet retaining a delightful sense of the fragile poetry of the whole, from the very contact of the human element" (Majumdar 457).

More recently, Charles Isherwood repeatedly invokes music in his *New York Times* review of a 2007 stage adaptation of *To the Lighthouse* at Berkeley Repertory Theater: "Adding music to Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* would seem to be a classic case of taking coals to Newcastle. The book is already music in prose, a symphony in three movements that evokes in words rather than notes the rich flux of thought and feeling that shapes human experience, indeed that constitutes much of it."

- 27 See Dick: "the first of Woolf's long fictions to have a clearly defined, externally imposed structure, a structure which, as we have seen, was in her mind from the time that she first began to plan the book. It is divided into three named parts, each of which is composed of numbered sections. This triadic structure supports and supplements an expanding and contracting rhythm which informs the narrative on every level. 'The Window,' which covers the afternoon and evening of a single day, moves to slow time; in 'Time Passes,' which begins with the characters preparing to fall asleep and ends with an awakening, ten years pass within the space of a few pages; time slows again in 'The Lighthouse' as Mr Ramsay, Cam, and James spend the morning sailing to the lighthouse and Lily spends the same hours completing her picture. Time expands, contracts, and then expands again, just as throughout the book the characters' thoughts expand outward and then contract within as their attention shifts from the world and the people around them back to themselves." (xxiv-xxv)
- 28 See Bowlby 63-65, who emphasizes these images "undermining of the main line of the simile" - "tacit

conflation of the repetition and the sequence” (65)

- 29 Citing statistics given in Leaska's study of the representation of consciousness in *To the Lighthouse*, Zwerdling points out that Mr Ramsay is undermined by our lack of access to his thoughts: “Mr Ramsay barely gets a word in edgewise [in terms of psychic life]. 'The energies of his splendid mind' are eclipsed by the thoughts of his dependents. He is often the focus of their attention and therefore remains of central importance, but their frequently hostile judgments of him erode his authority in the novel” (197). In a chapter section entitled “Looming white space versus unbroken black,” Daniel Ferrer discusses the Scott memorial at the South Pole, with the inscription “to seek, to find, and not to yield” in relation to Mr Ramsay's “daydreaming of himself as a polar explorer, dying heroically before he attains his goal” (56ff).
- 30 Although Charles Elton's “Luriana Lurilee” was not published until 1945, Woolf was familiar with the poem from hearing Lytton Strachey repeat it (Elton was a friend of the Strachey family). (L6 321, quoted in Dick 185n93)
- 31 Note also the synesthetic perception here: this largely aural memory is described in visual terms.
- 32 Woolf's early draft notes indicate that this scene with its build-up of fragmentary aural impressions was part of her concept of the novel from the very start:
“She was lapsing into pure sensation — Seeing things in the garden.
The Waves breaking. Tapping of cricket balls.
The bark 'How's that?'
...
She feels the flow of sensation — & how they are
made up of all different things — (what
she has just done) & wishes for some bell to
strike & say this is it. It does strike.
She guards her moment. (MS Appendix A, Dick 44-45, 47-50)
- 33 This contrast between being immersed in a rhythm, as Mrs Ramsay is initially, and being outside it in a position of detached analysis, illustrates what Beer identifies as a central problem of the novel: “In *To the Lighthouse* the fictitiousness of the separation between object and subject, the question of where to draw the line, is passionately explored, not only by the painter, Lily Briscoe, but by the entire narrative process” (30).
- 34 See Beer: “The sound of the waves is heard throughout the book, sometimes louder, sometimes softer, but always there to remind us of the expanse of the world beyond the human, in the face of which all attempts at signifying and stabilizing are both valiant and absurd” (43).
- 35 As in *Mrs Dalloway*, sounds serve as transitional objects between the individual mind and the broader world, as Mrs Ramsay notes quite self-consciously: “Always, Mrs Ramsay felt, one helped oneself out of solitude reluctantly by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight” (75). The “long steady stroke” of the lighthouse, for example, gives her thoughts a focus through its repetitive movement: “it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that — 'Children don't forget, children don't forget' — which she would repeat and begin adding to it” (73-74). Sound becomes a bridge between thought and action, one which Mrs Ramsay also uses as a metaphor for self-regulation: “giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking — one, two, three, one, two, three. And so on and so on, she repeated, listening to it, sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper” (96-97). This willed re-setting of her rhythm, figured in aural terms, as well as her repetition of key phrases, are quite similar to Mr Ramsay's “phrase-making” (which she herself dislikes).
- 36 Bowlby on harmony: “The image of perfect complementarity and reciprocity between the sexes shows itself to mask a basic disunity of parts that in fact do not fit, either within her or between the two of them” (73).
- 37 Note Woolf's use of related images: (1) in a diary entry describing her own marriage: “as if marriage were a completing of the instrument, & the sound of one alone penetrates as if it were a violin robbed of its orchestra or piano” (D1 70); (2) in describing her own “making up tunes” while others speak, in a later letter to Ethel Smyth (see Clements).
- 38 Susan Dick notes that Woolf quotes from the Margaret Hunt translation of the story in *Grimm's Household Tales* (George Bell and Sons, 1884), 1, 78-85 (182n.35). Jane Lilienfeld argues that “The wave falls through her reading to her son the tale of 'The Fisherman and his Wife', which aptly suggests

- the price of concealing the flaws in the Ramsays' marriage. " .. "Mrs Ramsay recognises her enjoyment of her kingly rights" (Marcus *New Feminist Essays* 157). Beer links the style of the novel's third section with this story: "The assertiveness, stylism, the hyperbole of linguistic desire, have parallels with that haunting figure, Grimm's fisherman's wife, whose story Mrs Ramsay reads to James. And the grossness of the wife's demands has links also with the eagerness of the human to dominate the non-human [...]" (44).
- 39 "though they only caught a word here and there, they were conscious all the time of their father — how he leant forward, how he brought his voice into tune with Macalister's voice; ... So James could tell, so Cam could tell (they looked at him, they looked at each other), from his toss and his vigilance and the ring in his voice, and the little tinge of Scottish accent which came into his voice, making him seem like a peasant himself, as he questioned Macalister..." (186-87). Like their mother, James and Cam (whose own interactions operate defensively through quick looks and unspoken agreements) are attentive to the details of their father's interactions with others; even Mr Ramsay himself is more self-conscious in his efforts than in the earlier part of the novel.
- 40 As Stella McNichol puts it, "Time Passes" opens with "an elaborate virtuoso rhapsody on the theme of darkness" (107).
- 41 Cuddy-Keane addresses the spatial relations of sound and silence in "*To the Lighthouse* and the Diffusion of Sound" (85-87): "It is of course impossible to empty sound totally of metaphoric content and that is part of Woolf's point. An aural drama is played out among sounds of activity (the bird, the ship, the man, the dog), the sound of stasis (the silence), and the sounds of decay (the floorboard, the shawl)" (Caughie, *Mechanical Reproduction* 86).
- 42 McNichol reads this passage, alongside Yeats's "The Second Coming," as apocalyptic (110).
- 43 See Zwerdling on the strategic implications of this silence: "The anonymity, the parenthetical dismissal, the futility of this death are all intended to act as antidotes to the poison of the martial myth" (275).
- 44 See Tratner, who argues that "Woolf connects World War One with the repression and tensions within European families, a view she developed at length in *Three Guineas*" (50); see also Levenback, who analyzes Woolf's telescopic treatment of World War One in relation to the language of war used in the General Strike, which took place immediately before the writing of "Time Passes."
- 45 The bracketed statement which ends the sixth section of "Time Passes" suggests a similarly uncomfortable equation between the war and aesthetics: "[Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success. The war, people, said, had revived their interest in poetry.]" (153)
- 46 Moore suggests this "heralds the breaking up of the cultural myth of middle-class security and safety" (79).
- 47 Pamela Transue has connected this portrait of "witlessness, humour, persistency itself" with Eliot's essay on Marie Lloyd in their shared representation of the lower classes. Marina MacKay argues that this passage highlights a problem with the novel's setting, arguing that this is one area where the "perfunctory nature of the Skye-St. Ives substitution really matters. A real Mrs. McNab—drinking in pubs, attending music halls, bearing illegitimate children—could not have existed in the notoriously remote and fundamentalist Hebrides of a century ago; a real Mrs. McNab would not even have been a native speaker of English. [. . .] the presentation of Mrs. McNab as a Cockney drudge (very noticeable to this Hebridean reader) shows with unsettling clarity that Woolf was so little interested in the working classes that she assumed poor people to be the same anywhere" (241-42).
- 48 Rowena Fowler sees Mrs McNab as a choric figure: "In *To the Lighthouse*, an elderly Scottish woman replaces the elders, attendants and serving women of the Greek tragic chorus. 'Time Passes' thanks to her doddering and pottering presence and her wordless song, which is both contemporary and timeless" (232). Bonnie Kime Scott sees the song positively: "This music serves as an extension of McNab's indomitable character, and bears some promise of renewal, as she works to restore the crumbling Ramsay summer home, and even of the 'reactivation' of art theorized by Benjamin" (103).
- 49 As Froula puts it, the old woman "performs a music-hall number for her own pleasure" (156). Caughie uses just this image in pointing out that the age of mechanical reproduction creates a new relation between artist and audience: "Letters to the editor allow the newspaper reader to become an author; newsreels and documentaries turn pedestrians into actors; listening to the gramophone and radio, housewives and cleaningwomen do the Charleston with their chores. "The distinction between [artist] and public," writes Benjamin, becomes merely functional" (Caughie *Mechanical Reproduction* xxiii)
- 50 Where critics such as Marcus see her as a politically-engaged Marxist thinker, many others agree with

- Hermione Lee that she is “so distant from her working class characters that she describes them as half-witted troglodytes” (xxv). As Allen McLaurin points out, Woolf seems to represent old singing figures, such as Mrs McNab and the beggar woman in *Mrs Dalloway*, as “uncritical” creatures who are “in accord with nature” (187). Jane Marcus was one of the first to discuss the incongruity between the idea of song and the “crippled and twisted body of the working-class woman” from which it comes (17). Yet in the portrait of Mrs McNab, to borrow Marina MacKay’s words, “Woolf tries to go beyond Forster’s conventional salt-of-the-earth treatment of the rural peasantry”; and as Jane DeGay stresses, though Mrs McNab may be “treated with the full force of Woolf’s class prejudices,” she is “not simply a pitiable, comic, antithesis” to the watchers on the beach (118).
- 51 As Gabrielle McIntire has argued, “her ruminations anticipate the nostalgic ambivalences of James, Cam, Lily and Mr Ramsay in the final section of the book” (140).
 - 52 Mrs Bast, as Kate Flint points out, thinks “in conversational clichés, without even the linguistic dignity of a properly placed comma” (322).
 - 53 MacKay points out that Mrs McNab’s function is not only caretaking but “custodial,” since she preserves the memories of the place while restoring it; McIntire goes so far as to call her “heroic” (140).
 - 54 Many critics have found fault with Woolf’s representation (or lack thereof) of her interiority: Caughie, for instance, argues that she is “given a narrative voice ... yet denied narrative *agency*” (“Returning to the Lighthouse” 315). Critical positions are divided on Woolf’s representation of Mrs McNab’s interiority. Snaith’s summary is helpful: “Pamela L. Caughie argues that ‘it is Woolf’s very *narrative* that cannot accommodate Mrs McNab except by robbing her of meaning, agency’. She believes that Woolf wants to harmonize the narrative, which fails to acknowledge that, while a text can include varied voices, they will not necessarily cohere. Bette London also feels that Mrs McNab has been appropriated, that the narrator ‘domesticates’ her and speaks for her.” (77); she concludes that “[t]o fail to see Mrs McNab’s work in the house as visionary, as vital, is to denigrate the work that Tratner claims Woolf is celebrating” (78). See also Emery, Zwerdling, and Hussey, *A to Z*.
 - 55 Lee notes that the manuscript places “more emphasis on the endurance of the working classes, like Mrs McNab, in wartime” (xxv). In the margin of the holograph draft, Woolf has written a note as if to address Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast: “ask them what the war had been about -- did they know?” (Davies 22), perhaps indicating more engagement with the position of these working-class characters.
 - 56 Lee reminds us that even “the most spontaneous-sounding lyrical passages have all been much laboured over” and “Unfinished phrases and loosely written passages are condensed, lyricized and made rhythmical” (xxvii).
 - 57 See De Gay, who argues that Woolf’s draft gives Mrs McNab “a mystic or visionary dimension of her own” (117).
 - 58 Froula claims that by substituting Mrs McNab’s face in the mirror “where was once Mrs Ramsay’s,” Woolf makes her into “a grotesque parody of Mrs Ramsay (as is Lily in her littleness and insignificance)” (155). Moore reads this substitution in more positive terms as demystification: “Woolf deconstructs the perfectly remembered image of Mrs Ramsay, and reconstructs a model of survival in the persistent and humorous Mrs McNab” (63). Note too the repetition of the phrase “It was finished” which signals the end of both Mrs McNab’s work and Lily’s painting.
 - 59 De Gay notes that this idea of divine underlying harmony is something Woolf self-consciously invokes in relation to the nineteenth-century ideals upheld by her father (114).
 - 60 Likewise, Cam Ramsay, on the lighthouse trip at much the same time, murmurs “‘We perished, each alone,’ for her father’s words broke and broke again in her mind” (189).
 - 61 Patricia Laurence argues that counterpoint is a structuring principle in the novel: “*To the Lighthouse* reveals a pattern of counterpoint or alternation between absence and presence, men and women, father and mother, life and death, sound and silence” (179). Stella McNichol comments on the novel’s meticulous structure, noting that the conversation about the weather for lighthouse trip makes up “almost the entire verbal exchange for nearly a third of the novel. In reading the novel, however, one is almost unaware of it. It threads its way through the text as a leitmotiv does in a musical composition” (101).
 - 62 While McNichol reads this passage as containing “a new urge towards a harmonizing presence” (112), I agree with Cuddy-Keane, who points out that the focus here is “not a constructed pattern of meaning” but “the process of perception,” which “is ongoing and changing.” (86). She argues that the passage “inscribes a tension between the relational and discontinuous nature of the sounds, between unity and dispersion, and the effort to make the first of these dominant is either defeated or resolved by the

ensuing silence” and stresses that “expressing this tension *through sound* keeps the narrative focused on the primacy of sense perceptions” (87).

- 63 As Clements points out, “The novel’s metanarrative material . . . speaks so frequently about the art form of music that the connection is viable regardless of any explicit comments about her writing process” (“Riding” 4).
 - 64 Beer argues that in *The Waves* Woolf employs “chords” — the layering of voices simultaneously in time, instead of Victorian-style chronological cause and effect.
 - 65 She continues, “This is also to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates . . . and personality: and defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion.”
 - 66 Contemporary criticism of *The Waves* emphasized the novel’s prose-poem qualities and was divided in the extreme about the efficacy of its style. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson wrote to Woolf “Your book is a poem, and as I think a great poem” (Majumdar 271). Gerard Bullett pronounces Woolf “a metaphysical poet who has chosen prose-fiction for her medium,” arguing that “it is precisely by a series of significant images, both visual and aural, that she seduces one’s immediate attention; and the spell is reinforced by the exquisite cadences of her prose” (Majumdar 269). An anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* goes a step further, adopting a Paterian tone in its praise of the novel: “Its substance is not to be divided from its form; the form has been evoked by the essence — for substance seems too ponderous a word for the gleaming, darting drops of light which these lives are, as one sees them” (Majumdar 263-64). In the *New York Times Book Review*, Kronenberger likewise highlights the primacy of the novel’s form: “[t]his prose, this imagery, is not in other words a medium, but an end in itself” (275). While admitting his reservations about the novel’s overall success, he notes its “seductive form” (275), calls its characters “six imagist poets” (Majumdar 275) and claims that “[i]n spirit, in language, in effect, *The Waves* is — not a poetic novel but a poem, a kind of symphonic poem with themes and thematic development, in prose” (274). In *The Nation*, Gerald Sykes is not so charitable in his assessment, stating that “[a]nyone will perceive that the matter did not necessitate the form of *The Waves*. The form was born simply of restlessness, whim, a desire for novelty”; he dismisses the novel’s “virtuosity” as a meaningless “torrent of imagery because the imagist tap has been left running” (286). Kronenberger’s concept of *The Waves* as “symphonic poem” is taken up in more detail by Gabriel Marcel in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (February 1932). Complaining that the orchestration of music is something a novelist cannot achieve, Marcel finds the novel’s method of alternating soliloquies “tiresome” because of the similarity between its voices: “If only Virginia Woolf had managed to individualise the tone of the six alternating voices so as to render them as distinct for our mental ear as that of an oboe or a horn!” (Majumdar 296).
- The unconventional structure of *The Waves*, and in particular Woolf’s use of leitmotifs and repeated phrases, also provoke figurations of its style in quasi-religious and vaguely mystical terms. Calling the novel’s sections “movements,” the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer draws a parallel between its structure and that of plainsong chant: “[t]his incisive and unflagging prose is as rapid as verse, and the utterances follow one another with a sort of rhythmical incantation. Sometimes they are frankly antiphons, and one always has that sense of a response; the book moves to that measure” (Majumdar 264). Reviewing the novel in *Action*, Harold Nicolson writes “[i]t expands the lyrical note which lurks always as the undertone to her writings into something antiphonal, sacerdotal, vatic” (Majumdar 266). Frank Swinnerton, however, is less impressed by what he calls “a series of rhapsodies, linked and contrasted”: he finds that “the incessant chanting effect grows monotonous” (267). In the *Week-end Review*, L.P. Hartley compares the novel’s impersonality to that of music: “it is the printed page that speaks; phrases and sentences of perfect beauty, strains seraphically free from taint of personality” (Majumdar 272). An anonymous *Times Literary Supplement* review of *Between the Acts* also refers to the “high, pure song and poignant harmonies” of *The Waves* (Majumdar 441). In a letter to her sister, Vanessa Bell discusses elements of the novel’s form in relation to her own work as a painter; yet she also turns to a musical metaphor drawn from the text itself in giving her own highly personal impression of *The Waves* as an elegy for their brother Thoby: “if you wouldn’t think me foolish I should say you have found the ‘lullaby capable of singing him to rest’ ” (367; 15 october 1931).
- 67 Drawing a connection between the novel’s form and that of late Beethoven quartets, David Dowling throws around the terms cadenza, fugue and coda in quick succession but fails to elaborate on the connections he suggests (186-88). Gerald Levin’s “The Musical Style of *The Waves*” is grounded in formal analysis in order to establish music as a stylistic parallel for Woolf’s work in the novel; yet as

Clements points out, he focuses his study on a book Woolf may or may not have read, J. W. N. Sullivan's *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (1927). Elicia Clements extends the work begun by Levin in a close analysis of the work Woolf was listening to as she wrote *The Waves*, Beethoven's late String Quartet in B-flat Major, Opus 130, and specifically its original final movement, the *Grosse Fuge*, Opus 133. In her discussion of the "increased polyphonic textures" of both works, she uses a model of intersection rather than influence.

- 68 Robin Gail Schulze, for example, points to a convincing correspondence between Woolf's writing and modernist serial music in her 1992 article "Design in Motion: Words, Music, and the Search for Coherence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Arnold Schönberg." Schulze uses formal analysis to draw important parallels between Woolf's literary practice and Schönberg's musical practice, investigating the social and cultural implications of "musical" modernist form in literature without straining to make an argument about direct influence. In her study of the implications of Woolf's interest in the Russian ballet, Evelyn Haller connects the stomping of the "great beast" in the novel with the music of Stravinsky: she argues that "Woolf appears to have composed the soundscape of *The Waves* from the physiologically imperative pulsations of Stravinsky's music" (205). Turning to an earlier musical source, Di Gaetani argues that despite the composer not being named in *The Waves* (as opposed to in *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Years*), Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen* is nevertheless an important structural and symbolic point of reference in the novel and "give it a mythic dimension that it would otherwise lack" (124).

In *The Language of Modern Music* Donald Mitchell quotes a note in the program for the 1912 Queens Hall world premier of Schönberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra whose terms are coincidentally apposite to a discussion of *The Waves*:

This music seeks to express all that dwells in us subconsciously like a dream; which is a great fluctuant power, and is built upon none of the lines that are familiar to us; which has a rhythm, as the blood has its pulsating rhythm, as all life in us has its rhythm; which has a tonality, but only as the sea or the storm has its tonality; which has harmonies, though we cannot grasp or analyze them nor can we trace its themes. All its technical craft is submerged, made one and indivisible with the content of the work. (40)

- 69 In 1929 she describes the novel's "vague yet elaborate" form (D3 259), and her search for "some device that is not a trick" by which to narrate it (D3 257).
- 70 As Dowling puts it, the novel is "saturated with sound but girded with design" (188); McNichol likewise argues that "[s]he has so saturated the novel with poetry that it almost ceases to be a novel" (119). For a stunningly detailed close reading of the ways in which Woolf uses sound effects in the novel, see Stewart.
- 71 Transue notes that this functions to suspend time, so that "actions *seem* past, while the awareness is present and important" (137). She argues that "Woolf's innovative use of the 'pure present' also suggests a feminist revision of the masculine mode of perception" (138); Dowling, by contrast, views it as "a version of the dramatic monologue as practised by T. S. Eliot in such poems as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,'" and goes to far as to claim that "Eliot is, in fact, the presiding genius of this novel" (176).
- 72 See Laurence: "These different voices leave the reader not only with the perception of individual minds but also with a sense of the opera of this novel — the centrality of voice. But these are not spoken voices as many critics claim; they are voices of different tones sounded from different aspects of being: sensation, perception, intellect, memory, imagination. Our attention is directed towards the music and collectivity of seven voices, seven aspects of being, a construct of a higher order." (202). Jane De Gay describes the novel as "profoundly polyphonic" on a further level: "its prose enfolds many earlier texts in a variety of subtle ways: quotations are absorbed very deeply into the fabric of the novel, with very few being offset or placed in quotation marks; there is much paraphrasing of famous texts; and well-known literary moments (like the mysterious laughter in *Jane Eyre* [W, 207]) are replayed as part of the characters' experiences." (160)
- 73 Clements argues that the interludes are related to the short story "The String Quartet" in both their shared imagery and their similar inseparability of form and content: "These acutely aural interludes, then, frame and bridge the movements of the larger inter-chapters, surrounding the soliloquies with musicalized language. Ultimately, such passages are also integrated into the final soliloquy so that they are no longer separate" (168).
- 74 Woolf has already linked birdsong with Greek in *Mrs Dalloway*; Rowena Fowler points out that Woolf

- saw two performances of Greek plays at Cambridge, set to music by Hubert Parry. She argues that “Woolf weaves the choric voice most closely into her text. The novel is all chorus, transcending the choric style of any individual Greek dramatist” (232).
- 75 See Cuddy-Keane, who argues that this urban noise is a continuation of the birdsong: “the chorus of the natural world, which dominates the children’s perceptions, expands, as they grow older, to include the mechanized voice of the city” (88).
 - 76 This detail anticipates the argument of *Three Guineas*; see also Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*.”
 - 77 Laurence describes the contrasting sounds of the 3 female voices in musical terms: “Susan’s voice is like a lullaby” “Jinny’s voice, inviting, contains staccato notes of action combined with sentences flowing with desire” “Rhoda’s voice is dream-like” (202)
 - 78 Hussey points out that this phrase is an allusion to the Fire Sermon portion of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, which in turn alludes to Ovid’s story of Procne and Philomela; it is also conventional Elizabethan slang for sexual intercourse (*A to Z* 355)
 - 79 This recalls Woolf’s own statement in her letter to Vita Sackville-West that writing is “putting words on the backs of rhythm” (*L4* 303-04).
 - 80 Bernard explicitly connects the birdsong of the interludes with the voices of the novel: “‘We who have been separated by our youth (the oldest is not yet twenty-five), who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked (I am engaged), or perched solitary outside some bedroom window and sang of love, of fame and other single experiences so dear to the callow bird with a yellow tuft on its beak, now come nearer’” (105).
 - 81 Clements connects this triple beat with the structure of Beethoven’s Grosse Fuge: “Although threes are prevalent throughout the novel, Louis’s three-patterned stamp, stamp, stamp, marks out a surprisingly similar rhythm to the one that dominates the Presto and trio” (170).
 - 82 Hussey says Rhoda is “[a]t the furthest extreme of unembodiment of all Woolf’s characters” (*Singing* 16); Clements points out that she is “repeatedly associated with singing, a solo and solitary voice” (173).
 - 83 On the connections between Percival and Wagner’s *Parsifal*, see Marcus, DiGaetani and Sutton. Rhoda resembles Rachel Vinrace in her lack of security through language: this stands in direct contrast to Katharine Hilbery’s “composure” in *Night and Day* as well as the repeatedly invoked idea of composure in *The Waves*: Bernard thinks Louis and Neville are “composed” (25), while Louis thinks Bernard looks “composed” (25)
 - 84 Albright includes this passage in his anthology *Modernism and Music*, introducing it thus: “Woolf evokes music by finding geometric metaphors to convey a sense of deep patternedness. When Rhoda hears the concert soprano, she hears expression of emotion; but when she hears the violinists, she experiences something poised and classical, an intuition of a music not written by Beethoven or any other human being — the music we are, instead of the music we write. Perhaps this is the Modernist equivalent of the music of the spheres, no longer something transcendent, but immanent in our lives.” (50).
 - 85 Clements has suggested this singer performs in a music hall, but I think she is singing classical art songs. Her posturing before singing, with its “air of intensity,” and the fact that she shares the program with a string quartet, as well as the hall’s location near Regent Street, suggests that this is a more highbrow concert hall.
 - 86 See Levin: “Rhoda seeks the meaning of Percival’s death in the music of a quartet which states ‘what is inchoate’ by giving feeling a structure. Percival’s death — the dissolution of hard reality into abstraction and indistinctness — allows her to retreat into fantasy and engage in it fully. Music is, like the sea, the single experience (the fin, the wave) seen in distant water, general experience sustaining the individual, the patterns that define single sounds and tonalities, the solvent of single moments and experiences.” (168)
 - 87 This aspect of the novel makes it an obvious choice for adaptation: as Cuddy-Keane notes, in 1933 Woolf’s cousin Virginia Isham proposed to work on a version for radio broadcast (87-88); note also the recent success of Katie Mitchell and company’s 2006 play *Waves*, devised from the novel, in which the self-conscious construction of sound effects and visual images were as important to the staging as the actors speaking their lines.
 - 88 See Cuddy-Keane: “In the final episode, Bernard hears sounds previously auscultated by Louis, but hears them as continuance and repetition. The sounds of the modern city articulate for him the ancient

- voice of the world, a kind of twentieth-century music of the spheres, extending beyond the realm of rationality and logic into a prelinguistic communal consciousness” (CK 89)
- 89 Pamela Transue argues that “[the] dialectic between vision and the compulsive but ultimately futile attempt to articulate it [. . .] forms one of the central tensions of *The Waves*” (128).
- 90 In this respect, Harper argues, *The Waves* is “essentially a later version, more artful and sophisticated, of the story of *The Voyage Out*: the ontologically insecure must die so that the transcendent consciousness of the artist may take control” (247n14); he goes so far as to identify this pattern of ending in all Woolf’s novels (249).
- 91 In this aspect, Woolf’s work illustrates, or prefigures, the use of musical metaphors in the works of later theorists of the novel, Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. Lukács defines the novel as a form which relies on “dissonance” rather than totality, unity or harmony. Bakhtin’s theorization of heteroglossia is also cast in musical terms, as polyphony or orchestration: the novel for him is a multitude of dialogized voices, voices which do not rest in harmonized cadences but move constantly between fleeting consonance and unresolved dissonance.
- 92 As Goldman puts it, “To talk of separate people in *The Waves* is perhaps to miss the point” (186).
- 93 Woolf called the novel “too difficult: too jerky: too inchoate altogether” (L4 294) and “fundamentally unreadable” (L4 357), yet as Hussey points out, it was an immediate commercial success (*A to Z* 356). Critics have also addressed the idea of difficulty in relation to the novel: Leaska argues that to claim “anything more than a partial and imperfect understanding of *The Waves* is to run the risk of ridicule” (159), while Beer points out that even in major recent studies of Woolf’s works, critics tend to avoid the book or give it comments ranging “from the cautious to the downright hostile” (80).
- 94 Unsigned holograph notes dated June 15 1930 – Jan 30 1931.
- 95 “The earliest recorded evidence of lyric poetry suggests that such compositions emerged from ritual activity accompanying religious ceremonies and were expressive of mystical experience” (Princeton Encyclopedia 715)
- 96 This story is first mentioned as Woolf is finishing work on *To the Lighthouse*: “as usual, side stories are sprouting in great variety as I wind this up: a book of characters; the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater’s, ‘Don’t you find that Barker’s pins have no points to them?’ ” (D3 106).
- 97 As Snaith stresses, “many of Woolf’s earlier critics who search for unity are unwittingly going against her commitment to change, about which she was prophetically unequivocal: ‘No critic ever gives full weight to the desire of the mind for change’ (D4 145). Although she did, at times, search for unity, or for the transcendent moment of vision, as Herbert writes, she was ‘deeply skeptical of its possibility’.”

Chapter Four

“That was the Music”: Music, History and Recording in Woolf's Late Work

The very fabric of life now, she thought as she rose, is magic. In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying — but how it's done, I can't even begin to wonder. So my belief in magic returns.

Orlando (196)

Over Woolf's own lifetime, the possibilities for recording and broadcasting music were extended to an extent previously unthinkable: Edison invented the phonograph just a few years before her birth, the widespread popularity and availability of recorded music increased sharply during her teens, the BBC made its first broadcast on November 14, 1922, and the period from 1920 to 1940 was a “revolutionary era for development of sound technologies” (Cuddy-Keane 72). Like Orlando, Woolf was interested in the seeming “magic” of new technologies — their abilities to move people and voices across time and space. Her diaries and letters record numerous examples of listening to the wireless, as well as to recorded music after the Woolfs' purchase of an Algraphone in 1925 (D3 42). In the Monk's House Papers at the University of Sussex is a card catalogue containing records of the Woolfs' listening habits. The cards are small — about 5 by 5 inches — and covered in tiny, crabbed handwriting, which lists the music they heard on their own records and on the BBC, starting in 1939 and continuing after Woolf's death in 1941. This listening log provides an invaluable resource for Woolf scholarship, a sort of “aural history” of her last few years; yet as other documents show, despite Leonard Woolf's meticulous record-keeping, Woolf also listened to a lot more than his card catalogue suggests.¹ The listening diary thus illustrates the inevitably incomplete and partial nature of historical records in general.

In *Orlando*, Woolf uses music to mark historical change in more ways than one. The music of a Renaissance masque heralds Orlando's transformation into a woman: after bells, bugles and rustic music accompany his falling into a trance, the figures of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty sing and dance together “with gestures of grief and lamentation” before giving way to the blast of trumpets pealing “Truth! Truth! Truth!” (84-87). Music is also implicated in the creeping damp which characterizes the nineteenth century: as such changes lead from “artificial flowers to mantelpieces, and mantelpieces to pianofortes, and pianofortes to drawing-room ballads, and drawing-room ballads (skipping a stage or two) to innumerable little dogs, mats, and china ornaments, the home — which had become extremely important — was completely altered” (147).² Just as it both effects and illustrates change in *Orlando*, music in Woolf's late work plays a crucial part in her interrogation of the disparate ways in which we mark and record historical change.³ Its representations highlight the vexed status of the aesthetic within national and literary histories. In these texts, Woolf incorporates a much wider range of musical registers, from folk song to jazz, and looks at the ways in which sound is both transmitted and recorded. In her 1937 radio address “Craftsmanship,” she mimics the rhetoric of the English Folk Revival in order to undercut its construction of a seemingly pure line of English cultural history; in *The Years* (1937) music serves both to illustrate the passage of time and to highlight the work of memory; and in *Between the Acts* (published posthumously in 1941) Woolf draws on everything from traditional song to experimental music to unsettle not only the audience of Miss La Trobe's avant-garde historical pageant, but also the reader of the novel. As Orlando's biographer remarks, “it is a difficult business — this time-keeping; nothing more quickly disorders it than contact with any of the arts” (200).

“The Lady's Gone A-Roving”: “Craftsmanship” and the English Folk Revival

As many critics have noted, Virginia Woolf's reworking of the Ballad of the Queen's Marys in *A Room of One's Own* functions to make a point about the suppression of women's voices.⁴ The timing of this speech—at the height of the English Folk Revival—suggests that the submerged ballad might also serve as a critique of the revival's ideology and its implications for women's voices. The folk revival's stress on authentic Englishness, tradition, and collective amateur anonymity, for example, gives added relevance to Woolf's suspicion that “Anon [. . .] was often a woman” (45). In Woolf's only recorded radio broadcast, the 1937 address “Craftsmanship,” she takes up the question of historical and linguistic change, arguing that words need not retain the “purity” of their original meaning, but rather actually gain associations and texture as a result of varying usage across different places and times. Her discussion of the unpredictability, dynamism and agency of words takes aim at purists like the folk revivalists, refuting their rhetoric by parodying their very language. In its emphasis on the continually shifting and subjective nature of meaning, therefore, “Craftsmanship” is a recording about the impossibility of recording.

The English folk revival stressed the importance of traditional English music and sought to record and recreate folk culture more generally. As Georgina Boyes explains in *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival*, the revival worked in response to perceived threats to English racial and cultural superiority: she points out that “the prevalence of German music in the concert hall [to which I'd add the range of international influences on the music hall] was as insidious a symptom of national decline as the reported refusal of middle-class women to undertake their allotted

role in the maintenance of empire by producing large families” (24). Cecil Sharp, the leading figure in the folk revival, saw international influences as a threat to the integrity of English national character. “Our system of education,” he argued, “is, at present, too cosmopolitan; it is calculated to produce citizens of the world rather than Englishmen” (135-36). In language which echoes the nineteenth-century complaints about street music Woolf tackles in her 1905 essay, he claimed that foreign music assaulted English ears with its “alien sounds, or sounds fugitive and flashy, or pretty and insincere, or ugly and downright harmful” (139). And in opposition to these threats, traditional folksong was thought to contain values which would work to rebuild English cultural identity. Sharp saw folk music as a potential “purifying and refining influence” for the nation (xxi), claiming for it a unique status as “not the composition of the individual and, as such, limited in outlook and appeal, but a communal and racial product, the expression, in musical idiom, of aims and ideals that are primarily national in character” (xx).

The 1898 founding of the Folk Song Society emphasized the “purity” of folk music in contrast with the “tawdriness” of contemporary urban music. In his inaugural address to the society, the composer Sir Hubert Parry took up this subject directly: “the modern popular music [. . .] is made with a commercial intention out of snippets of musical slang. And this product it is which will drive out folk-music if we do not save it [. . .] old folk-music is amongst the purest products of the human mind. It grew in the hearts of the people before they devoted themselves so assiduously to the making of quick returns” (quoted in Boyes 25). Parry’s definition of “true” folksong, containing “no sham, no got up glitter, and no vulgarity,” nothing “common or unclean” (24), sets in place a new ideal of English music — and by extension an ideal of English character. The folk movement aimed to educate according to such an ideal, and its programs are described in

explicit contrast to the songs of the music hall. Sharp's outline of a program of education builds those contrasts into direct competition: "[f]lood the streets [. . .] with folk-tunes, and those, who now vulgarize themselves and others by singing coarse music-hall songs, will soon drop them in favour of the equally attractive but far better tunes of the folk. This will make the streets a pleasanter place for those who have sensitive ears, and will do incalculable good in civilizing the masses" (137).

Ralph Vaughan Williams, writing in 1934, highlights the folk revival's evolutionary and evangelical zeal, telling us that "Parry had applied the Darwinian theory of evolution to music, and had proved the necessity of folk song" (Sharp v).⁵ The evolutionary mode of Sharp's thinking can be seen in his description of rural music as the survival of the fittest: he claims that "town songs have never taken root in the country; they have been ousted in the struggle for existence by the superior and more permanent attributes of the peasant song" (111). But in fact the song-recorders tended to erase any interactions between traditional and new musics: Vaughan Williams, for example, actually excised from his collections those songs which displayed the influence of popular urban music. In *Music Ho! Modern Music in Decline* (1934), Constant Lambert describes English folk music as "both unbearably precious and unbearably hearty," conjuring up "the hideous faux bonhomie of the hiker, noisily wading his way through the petrol pumps of Metroland, singing obsolete sea chanties with the aid of the Week-End Book" (154). As his parody illustrates, the folk revival was a constructed culture industry: the imaginary Englishness of its pastoral peasant classes was largely for the benefit of nostalgic city-dwellers.

The invented traditions of the folk revival, then, tended to ignore working-class traditional music as it actually existed. Moreover, as Edward Lee has pointed out, some

urban merchants actually preserved old folksongs for selling—and ironically it was these merchants that the folk revivalists most deplored, seeing their own idea of the authentic folk as an antidote to such corrupt commercialism. Sharp’s idea of the common people, of course, was nothing if not selective: “they form an exceedingly small class—if, indeed they are to be called a class at all—and are to be found only in those country districts which, by reason of their remoteness, have escaped the infection of modern ideas” (4). Work songs, such as street sellers’ cries, were not always included in definitions of folk music, which were most often created by establishment figures and academic collectors. The largely imagined rural folk culture, those paradoxically rare “common people,” could not be seen as coexisting with the urban squalor and commercialism against which the folk movement was established. They are the polar opposite of Woolf’s “common reader,” who is emphatically not free from the taint of modern life.

Where proponents of the Folk Revival advocated the reconstruction (if not invention) of English national traditions—what Boyes calls the “imaginary village” of pastoral ritual and morris dancing on the green—Woolf, by contrast, pays more attention to a wider range of contemporary musical registers. Scenes of urban music recur throughout her work, from “Street Music” to the violet sellers and barrel organ players in *The Years*. As shown in Chapter Three, Woolf, like the revivalists, turns to song to represent lower-class figures. In *Mrs Dalloway*, she recasts the revival’s idealized pastoral scene within contemporary, dirty, commercialized London in the figure of the singing old woman, the “rusty pump” who burbles out a love song by the tube station. It is this voice, described without nostalgia, that Woolf invokes to speak more genuinely for a mass of people, rather than a rarefied version of bygone days. And in “Time Passes,” Mrs McNab’s performance of the old music hall song takes place as she cleans the Ramsays’

abandoned holiday home. These singers are old working-class women; they are solitary figures but in public contexts — paid domestic work and the street. One is singing a seemingly private song for commercial purposes, and the other sings contemporary urban music in a private performance; yet in both of their unreadable and almost disembodied voices there is the suggestion of an organic connection to the land. Woolf thus gives us a very different idea of mass popular music and the “common people” than that of the folk revival, which stressed that traditional English music was performed only by men: these singing figures complicate its clear-cut (and artificially imposed) divisions between urban and rural, folk music and the music hall, and individual and communal voices. And in her late works, she further undercuts the revival’s ideas of a knowable or pure folk music tradition.

“Craftsmanship” was originally broadcast on the BBC on 29 April 1937 as part of a series of talks entitled “Why Words Fail Us.” A version of the talk was published in *The Listener* on 5 May of that year, and Leonard Woolf also included it in the posthumous essay collection *The Death of the Moth* (1942).⁶ The fragment of the talk which remains, held in the National Sound Archive at the British Library and now also widely available on disc and online, is the only surviving recording of Woolf’s voice, and unfortunately, according to Quentin Bell, “a very poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and too flat; it is barely recognisable” (*VW2* 200). Several critics have addressed Woolf’s ambivalence towards the institutional power of the BBC.⁷ Leila Brosnan notes the irony of Woolf’s privileged position in relation to the potentially democratizing art form of the radio (164-65); Bonnie Kime Scott looks at passages from Woolf’s diary which discuss the “coercive” combinations of music and speech in broadcasts such as the announcement of the General Strike (102); and Cuddy-

Keane in particular emphasizes that it was a “public utility subject to state control,” telling the story of how Woolf nearly had to sit on a BBC Committee for correct pronunciation (77-78).

In the case of “Craftsmanship,” however, the BBC appears to have issued very few official constraints concerning the subject matter for the talk (Brosnan 165). And almost before she has even introduced her topic, Woolf begins to undermine it, stating that there is “something incongruous, unfitting, about the term 'craftsmanship' when applied to words” (198). Invoking the authority of the dictionary as something “to which we always turn in moments of dilemma,” she foregrounds the two meanings of “craft,” the straightforward idea of making and the trickier idea of cunning. She immediately decides, therefore, to change the title of her talk, replacing it with an alternative, “A Ramble Round Words,” complete with the image of a decapitated hen to illustrate the talk without its title. This reluctance to settle on a single name can be seen as a direct response to the cataloguing impulses of the revivalists, who set in place fixed copy-text versions of songs rather than acknowledging the existence of multiple variants; likewise, the word “ramble” not only emphasizes the circuitous nature of Woolf’s argument (like the dead hen, she says, it “runs round in a circle till it drops dead”), but also refers specifically to walking in the English countryside, and thus to that aspect of the culture industry which valorized rural over urban settings.⁸ Woolf argues that words’ associations, both literary and more general, are what makes them interesting. Language, therefore, is not only allusive, but elusive: “as we say them, the words shuffle and change” (199). In response to this problem, we invent a “language of signs”: Michelin and Baedeker direct our travels using gable and star symbols rather than words (200). Pushing such solutions to their extremes, she imagines a more radical shorthand which will do away with words

entirely, so that “we may look forward to the day when our biographies and novels will be slim and muscular” (201).

After dismissing words as lacking in usefulness, but praising their ability to tell the truth, Woolf addresses the allusive properties of language directly, taking as her first examples the three-word mechanized text “Passing Russell Square” which appears on the “illuminated signboard” on the tube platform, and the printed warning within the train carriage “Do not lean out of the window” (199). Yet after outlining the associations of the phrase word by word to prove that “one sentence of the simplest kind rouses the imagination, the memory, the eye and the ear,” she goes on to admit that “[t]he moment we single out and emphasize the suggestions as we have done here they become unreal; and we, too, become unreal — specialists, word mongers, phrase finders, not readers. In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river” (202). Words can tell the truth because language has been proven to last over time: “the only test of truth is length of life, and since words survive the chops and changes of time longer than any other substance, therefore they are the truest” (201). Yet the very idea of “truth” is complicated by the “suggestive power of words”: “Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations — naturally. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries” (203).

Words, Woolf complains, are “the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most unteachable of all things” (204). In thus giving words more agency than the people who use them, Woolf complicates the notion of language as a straightforward or transparent system of meaning.⁹ Likewise, she complicates questions of gender: as Brosnan argues, in its shifting subject positions, linked focuses on gender and language, and disruption of

traditional binary oppositions, “Craftsmanship” is “a commentary on and model for the exploration and creation of a gendered subjectivity in writing” (168). And much of Woolf’s representation of these “irreclamable vagabonds” of words is couched in gendered terms (206). In addressing our inability to use words effectively, she repeats the phrase “words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind” before posing another question:

And how do they live in the mind? Variously and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love, and mating together. It is true that they are much less bound by ceremony and convention than we are. Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words, if they have a fancy. Indeed, the less we inquire into the past of our dear Mother England the better it will be for that lady’s reputation—for she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid. (*DM* 205)

Brosnan makes a convincing case for “Craftsmanship” as a response to the abdication crisis caused by the relationship between King Edward V and Wallis Simpson, noting the text’s stress on figures of marriage and gendered sexuality (167).¹⁰ Reading “Craftsmanship” in its historical context, she argues, enacts “a dialogue between contemporary history and Woolf’s prose, manifest at the level of metaphor and imagery, which renders many of the phrases and allusions in the essay politically charged puns and satirical jibes” (167). Yet the implicit satire of Woolf’s broadcast is not confined to the abdication crisis alone: it also calls into question the very idea of correct Englishness which would define the broadcaster for decades to follow. Brosnan identifies the “great emphasis on the ‘r’ of roving clearly audible in the sound recording” as “quite possibly an attempt to allude to the exploits of Mrs Simpson and the cultural references contained in the essay” (168); it might also be read — or, in this case, heard — as directly mocking the archaic diction and affected accents associated with the Folk Revival.¹¹ The idea of linguistic movement invoked in this parodic folksong refrain emphatically rejects the

static authenticity upheld by Parry and Sharp. Woolf dismisses such notions of purity as restrictive, and their institutionalization as ultimately ludicrous: “[words] do not like to have their purity or their impurity discussed. If you start a Society for Pure English, they will show their resentment by starting another for impure English” (204-05). In place of the specter of “pure Mother England,” which stands in for the dubious authenticity of invented traditions, Woolf invokes an enabling and productive figure of contamination and movement in the lady who has “gone a-roving.”

“Half remembered, half foreseen”: music and memory in *The Years*

“I want a chorus. a general statement. a song for 4 voices” wrote Virginia Woolf in November 1934, wondering how to end her latest novel (D4 236).¹² That novel went through a succession of drafts and of working titles: *The Pargiters*; *Here & Now*; *Music*; *Dawn*; *Sons and Daughters*; *Daughters and Sons*; *Ordinary People*; *The Caravan*; *Other People’s Houses*; and finally, its 1937 publication title, *The Years* (D4 6n8; Hussey AZ 387). In *The Years*, Woolf invokes the temporal and spatial movement of music, one of those working titles, to register historical and social change. Repeated motifs of music and sound serve as taglines which both draw together and differentiate the historical settings. The various locations of music in *The Years* — opera house, ballroom, private home, street — mark both the stifling atmosphere of the Victorian family house and the movement over time from this restrictive domesticity into wider urban contexts.

Patricia Laurence argues that the year 1937 marks a drastic change in Woolf’s treatment of silence and sound, from Romantic notions of “harmony of vision” to a bleaker sense of discord and fragmentation: “After, perhaps, *The Years*, silence became a signal of a different organization of being, and we are now subject to a modern ‘music’ of

interruptions, abysses, and gaps” (16). Keeping this idea in mind, I want to focus on the relationship between the “background” music and the lyric moments in the novel, between the impersonal music of the chapter openings and the individual songs. While what Laurence calls a “harmony of vision” can be seen in Woolf’s generalized descriptions of music – particularly in the more abstract passages – such harmony is glaringly absent from the representation of particular songs, which foreground the interruptions and gaps pointed to. Underscoring this contrast is Woolf’s manipulation of the complex temporality of music: it both creates a sense of historical continuity *and* foregrounds the present moment. But the particular songs in *The Years*, which provoke individual memories, signal the fragmentation of perspective and temporality, and highlight a lack of communication or meaning.

The Years is divided into eleven chapters of uneven length. Each section is marked by the calendar year — from 1880 to the present day — and each one opens with a descriptive passage setting the scene.¹³ Many critics have likened these passages to the interludes in *The Waves*; and Woolf herself saw their function in similar terms, writing in her diary that she had found a way to “bring in interludes – I mean spaces of silence and poetry and contrast” (D4 332). Since the opening passages foreshadow the material in each section, I’d like to borrow Jane Marcus’s musically-derived term and call them “overtures” (60). These overtures look back as well as forward, however: as well as signalling the new, they repeat and return to the material of earlier time periods, thus creating narrative continuity and coherence over the novel’s broad temporal scope.¹⁴ While the overtures share the rhythmic and cyclical nature of the interludes in *The Waves*, they are also much less abstract and more insistent on details of season, time of day, and place, which mark historical change. In her important work on *The Years*, Marcus

demonstrates its affinities with a range of musical texts: in its emphasis on cyclical repetition it resembles Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, and it shares specificity of time and place with two musical works of the 1930s, Ethel Smyth's *The Prison* and Ralph Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony* (60). Like the *London Symphony* in particular, *The Years* takes the city as both backdrop and principal character, and combines high and low culture to do so. Alexander emphasizes Woolf's deployment of the contrasts between "vulgar music" and "serious music, the large sound of Wagner, for example, or the highly refined, abstract form of the quartet" (189-90). And Perry Meisel has argued that the "omnipresence of anonymous street singers, organ grinders, and musicians" accentuates the "common life" (206).

The many instances of music and sound in the overtures provide a means by which to explore that "common life." They illustrate the ways in which, as Kate Flint puts it, "between 1880 and 1937 —the calendar span of *The Years*— the sounds of the city changed" (181): human and animal noise give way to the increasingly mechanized noise of cars and aeroplanes. What remains constant in these extracts is their emphasis on a wider outside world rather than the domestic interiors of the Pargiter family homes. While some of the extracts mention particular parts of London by name, others are more abstract and general, moving freely from generalized pastoral scenes to urban landscapes. Each section of the novel makes an opening move that can be compared to a filmic technique – from large to small-scale, from general to specific, starting outside with a *mise-en-scene* before zooming in to particular locations and points of view – interiors of both buildings and characters. These extracts, then, create a kind of background music or soundtrack: they explore the interplay between human music, city noise, and the elements themselves.¹⁵

In the novel's opening section, the "uncertain spring" of 1880, the noises of traffic, musicians, and birdsong all compete:

The stream of landaus, victorias and hansom cabs was incessant; for the season was beginning. In the quieter streets musicians doled out their frail and for the most part melancholy pipe of sound, which was echoed, or parodied, here in the trees of Hyde Park, here in St James's by the twitter of sparrows and the sudden outbursts of the amorous but intermittent thrush. The pigeons in the squares shuffled in the tree tops, letting fall a twig or two, and crooned over and over again the lullaby that was always interrupted. (1)

Nature here imitates art, rather than vice versa, as the street musician's sound is "echoed, or parodied" by birds in the city parks. And art is itself vulnerable to nature in its transmission, as the next overture, dated October 1891 shows: here the wind and mist mute the sounds of both East End street merchants and suburban organ grinders (71). In these early overtures, then, music is not privileged as any kind of transcendent language (as is hinted at in *The Voyage Out* or in the early essays on music, "Street Music," "The Opera," and "Impressions at Bayreuth"). It is not instant communication. In fact, we are very rarely presented with anybody actually *listening* to music: it remains very much part of the background. Likewise in the action of these early sections of the novel, which take place predominantly inside (both at Abercorn Terrace and in Oxford), there is very little music to be heard. Milly reports to her father that Delia has had a music lesson (12),¹⁶ and a "splendid gust of music" blows through the mourners at Mrs Pargiter's funeral (68); but music in these chapters mostly follows the overtures' emphasis on the impersonal external noises of the city, its shuffling leaves and bells, pigeons and paperboys, including their cries announcing the death of Parnell (89).

In the 1907 overture, however, the "eternal waltz" tune "After the Ball" comes to the foreground, standing in for the decadence of Edwardian England as well as for the increasing interchange between different social groups:

From behind crimson curtains, rendered semi-transparent and sometimes blowing wide came the sound of the eternal waltz – After the ball is over, after the dance is done – like a serpent that swallowed its own tail, since the ring was complete from Hammersmith to Shoreditch. Over and over again it was repeated by trombones outside public houses; errand boys whistled it; bands inside private rooms where people were dancing played it. (100)

The music's initial movement, in and out of open windows, is echoed by its popularity across various sectors of London society and through different registers and media – played by bands and on trombones, whistled and danced to, thus transcending divisions of class and place. While Martin himself barely listens to the waltz, he finds it “exciting to talk to a girl with bare shoulders, to a woman iridescent with green beetles wings in her hair in a manner that the waltz condoned and half concealed under its amorous blandishments” (100-101). The music itself is thus given agency, its “amorous blandishments” becoming instrumental in his seduction scene. Waltz music recurs throughout the 1907 section, as Sara Pargiter, trying to read in her bedroom, hears it from a neighboring garden: “[t]he dance music interfered with everything. At first exciting, then it became boring and finally intolerable” (104).¹⁷ While the 1910 overture includes no sound, the section itself ends with another street cry of death — this time that of the King (147).

The 1914 section, which takes place before the start of the war, is immediately reminiscent of *Mrs Dalloway* in its play with the measurement of time and the contrasts between the city and the country settings:

It was a brilliant spring; the day was radiant. Even the air seemed to have a burr in it as it touched the tree tops; it vibrated, it rippled. The leaves were sharp and green. In the country old church clocks rasped out the hour; the rusty sound went over fields that were red with clover, and up went the rooks as if flung by the bells. Round they wheeled; then settled on the tree tops.

In London all was gallant and strident; the season was beginning; horns hooted; the traffic roared; flags flew taut as trout in a stream. And from all the spires of all the London churches — the fashionable saints of Mayfair, the dowdy saints of Kensington, the hoary saints of the city — the hour was proclaimed. The air over London seemed a rough sea of sound through which circles travelled. But

the clocks were irregular, as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pauses, silences. . . . Then the clocks struck again. (172)

In the country, not only the clock sound but the “burr” of the air itself “vibrates” and “ripples” like an Aeolian harp (172). In the city’s “rough sea of sound,” street music is no longer audible: it seems to have been drowned out by mechanized sound, the “irregular” clocks and “gallant and strident” traffic. The section closes with a return to the rural setting and to Romantic conceptions of sound, as Kitty, now Lady Lasswade, listens to the music of the earth on her country estate: “A deep murmur sang in her ears – the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased” (213-14).

The opening sentence of the 1917 section, however, creates a stark contrast to such a scene. While Kitty manages to escape clock time and listen intently to the minutiae of the natural world, this scene describes a clock which seems to have stopped: rather than vibrating, the air is frozen. All street noise and unnecessary sound has stopped: “A very cold winter’s night, so silent that the air seemed frozen, and since there was no moon, congealed to the stillness of glass spread over England” (214). The silence of World War One has taken hold, and only a searchlight “ray[ing] around the sky” breaks the darkness (214). This opening even creates a syntactic contrast with the other overtures: the long incomplete sentence slows down the pace of reading, and the lack of a main verb increases the sense of an “unoccupied perspective” created by the impersonal narration (Banfield 220). Yet this section which opens with silence — Eleanor’s fellow bus passengers are so quiet that they look “cadaverous” (214) — also contains a cacophony of threatening sounds. At a family dinner party, Sara mockingly sings “God Save the King” to commemorate and criticize North’s departure for the front (219), and

Maggie and Sara's childhood memories of their mother — memories set to that same waltz music and now hummed by Eleanor “'hoity te, toity te, hoity te' ” — are interrupted by the “long-drawn hollow sound” of an air-raid siren wailing (221) and the “dull boom of a gun in the distance” (222) which gets closer and closer until the “clear flute-like note” of the bugles sounds out (225). The 1918 section collapses urban and rural settings back into one: “Sounds coming through the veil – the bleat of sheep, the croak of rooks – were deadened. The uproar of the traffic merged into one growl. Now and then as if a door opened and shut, or the veil parted and closed, the roar boomed and faded” (231). The intermittent sounds of this booming and fading roar suggest the ongoing effects of the war itself, the end of which is witnessed only by Crosby, the Pargiter family's old servant, who can hear no real difference: “The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed” (233). The novel's final section, “Present Day,” is almost entirely visual, and includes no descriptions of sound in its emphasis on the color and glowing light of sunset (234).

In these chapter openings, then, music and sound are used to set a scene, building both a sense of continuity and change over time. As Flint notes, “[c]ity noise, for Woolf, implies continuity: even the interruptive sounds that so annoyed her contemporaries and forebears can be assimilated, like fragments of urban archaeology, into a broader continuum, whether diachronic or synchronic” (187). Where the scenes of music described in the overtures provide a kind of public background music, specific musical texts within the novel function as private mnemonics for individual characters. Music spurs memories of former times, working less by rhythm or repetition than by forcing the past and present into immediate juxtaposition. Banfield emphasizes the structural divisions in *The Years* “between the shifting points of view within chapters ... and the

impersonal descriptions of the chapter openings” (220). I think that the representations of music in the novel play out in a similar way, highlighting the gaps between what we might think of as background music and featured songs: the overtures set up an overall rhythm, and the individual songs disturb that rhythm by looking back. In scenes where characters listen to particular pieces of music, the relationship between music and memory is brought most clearly into focus.

The novel’s most extended reference to a particular musical text, in the 1910 section, describes Kitty (now Lady Lasswade) attending a performance of her favorite opera, Wagner’s *Siegfried*, at the Royal Opera House. Here the music itself is part of a complete staged spectacle, which seems to be more like a relic of a dead or dying high culture than the “brilliant, beautiful and absurd” world Woolf described in “The Opera”: men and women look “uncomfortable and self-conscious” as they walk through the Covent Garden markets, and Kitty herself thinks “it’s ridiculous to come out in full evening dress at this time of day” (139). While the handsome boy who shares her box seems to know “exactly what the music means” (141), Kitty finds that the presence of Edward distracts her into thinking of other things: “The music made her think of herself and her own life as she seldom did. It exalted her; it cast a flattering light over herself, her past” (141). The unifying impulse of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* seems to be invoked as Kitty reshapes her own life to the sound of the opera. Yet rather than anything approaching the mythic narratives of totality suggested by the work itself, Kitty tries to locate a sonic memory from a particular time and place which eludes her. The sounds of hammering as Siegfried re-forges the fragments of his father’s sword trigger her reminiscences of an incident from her youth in Oxford when she visited the Robson family. Kitty can’t even remember the details of the visit, but her efforts to do so

nevertheless leave her feeling surer as to her own past decisions (142).¹⁸

Just as opera has extramusical associations for Kitty, provoking a series of fragmentary memories, the movement of sound across time and space is also signalled in *The Years* by popular and anonymous songs such as lullabies and nursery rhymes. For Eleanor and Martin Pargiter, the childhood songs sung by their nursemaid Pippy recur in different contexts, conflating their past and childhood memories with their current lives. In “Things,” Rachel Bowlby looks at the reappearance of objects from the family house at Abercorn Terrace in unlikely places, arguing that “They stand as parts for whole, for the family domestic environment from which they have been separated, and also for the time remembered as a long-forgotten and buried past of childhood, but now abruptly, and partially, returned” (102). Bowlby’s words are equally applicable to the recurrence of childhood nursery rhymes for Eleanor and Martin Pargiter: like the objects, the songs’ recurrence marks change and the passage of time. But what makes the memory of songs different from the objects themselves is their intensely personal and subjective nature: while friends or other members of the family may see pieces of furniture or paintings in new domestic arrangements, the scenes of remembering songs are restricted to the experience of single characters. In 1891 Eleanor is interrupted in her work when she hears a familiar tune playing outside:

A barrel-organ was playing up the street. ‘Sur le pont d’Avignon’ she hummed in time to it. How did it go? – the song Pippy used to sing as she wiped your ears with a piece of slimy flannel?

‘Ron, ron, ron, et plon, plon, plon,’ she hummed. Then the tune stopped. The organ had moved further away. (71-72)

And Martin remembers the nursery rhyme about the King of Spain's daughter twice, first in 1908 and again in 1914:

It’s a grimy, it’s a sordid end, he thought; I used to enjoy going there. But he disliked brooding over unpleasant thoughts. What’s the good of it? he asked

himself.

‘The King of Spain’s daughter,’ he hummed as he turned the corner, ‘came to visit me...’

‘And how much longer,’ he asked himself, pressing the bell, as he stood on the door-step of the house in Abercorn Terrace, ‘is old Crosby going to keep me waiting?’ The wind was very cold. (114)

He took his hat and stick and went out into the street. He would walk part of the way to the City. ‘The King of Spain’s daughter’ he hummed as he turned up Sloane Street, ‘came to visit me. All for the sake of. . .’ He looked into the shop windows as he passed. They were full of summer dresses; charming confections of green and gauze, and there were flights of hats stuck on little rods. ‘. . . all for the sake of’ he hummed as he walked on, ‘my silver nutmeg tree.’

But what was a silver nutmeg tree he wondered? An organ was fluting its merry little jig further down the street. The organ moved round and round, shifting this way and that, as if the old man who played it were half dancing to the tune. A pretty servant girl ran up the area steps and gave him a penny. His supple Italian face wrinkled all over as he whipped off his cap and bowed to her. The girl smiled and slipped back into the kitchen.

‘. . . all for the sake of my silver nutmeg tree’ Martin hummed, peering down through the area railings into the kitchen where they were sitting. They looked very snug, with teapots and bread and butter on the kitchen table. His stick swung from side to side like the tail of a cheerful dog. Everybody seemed light-hearted and irresponsible, sallying out of their houses, flaunting along the streets with pennies for the organ-grinders and pennies for the beggars. Everybody seemed to have money to spend. Women clustered around the plate-glass windows. He too stopped, looked at the model of a toy boat; at dressing-cases, shining yellow with rows of silver bottles.

But who wrote that song, he wondered, as he strolled on, about the King of Spain’s daughter, the song that Pippy used to sing him, as she wiped his ears with a piece of slimy flannel? She used to take him on her knee and croak out in her wheezy rattle of a voice, ‘The King of Spain’s daughter came to visit me, all for the sake of...’ and then suddenly her knee gave and down he was tumbled onto the floor. (172-73)

Susan Squier has explored the implications of the songs remembered by both Eleanor and Martin. She argues that Eleanor’s song, *Sur le Pont d’Avignon*, with its bridge image and emphasis on “discontinuity, change, and movement” ... “embodies women’s in-between social position, as they moved from the private home to the public world” (176). Martin’s song, by contrast, leaves behind such irregular movement: Squier sees it as “a type of personal hymn to money and power” (173). She is right to point out the gendered nature of the songs Pippy sings to each of the children, though I think it is also important to note the ironic function of Martin’s song: for all his self-valorizing, he is

sexually unsuccessful in a number of scenes in the novel. It is also important to look at the ways in which characters' memories of these songs are represented. Both Eleanor and Martin remember them as invested with specific repetitive action, time, and place – the domestic past of their childhood. And they both seem to remember the “piece of slimy flannel” (72, 173) almost more than the singer herself, Pippy, who remains strangely absent. But there's also a key difference in the siblings' initial impulses to memory, which reiterates the contrasts drawn by Squier. Eleanor, who's inside writing household accounts for her father, hears a barrel organ playing “her” song, and sings along, forgetting the words, until the music moves away, so that her memory of the song is more about a frustrated interaction with the outside world than with her own sense of self: returning to her work, she seems firmly trapped within the domestic world. Martin, however, uses his song as a way of shutting out unwanted interactions and making the world fit into patterns as he sees fit. Walking through London alone, he bolsters his movement by humming the song, using it to override an “unpleasant thought” in the 1908 extract; and its repetition in the 1914 scene, along with his complacent sense that everybody seems “light-hearted and irresponsible,” gives him the sense of self-worth and self-importance described by Squier. His concern with the question of the song's authorship and his judgmental attitude towards others, in the second extract, show his insistent focus on the individual self. And in fact he ignores the other music being played on the same street, singing his own song over its “merry little jig.” After going out to lunch with his cousin Sara, Martin starts to hum his song yet again: “He began to hum his little song – and then stopped, remembering that he was with someone” (179). Song is associated very much with a sense of sonic privacy for Martin, one which Eleanor cannot access.

While Martin only sings when he's alone, Sara Pargiter is constantly singing to herself. For example, she will improvise a quasi-refrain in response to another character's words, or she will perform a little song at the piano for her sister by way of telling her what she did that day. In a radical refusal of ordinary communication through denotative language, she sings rather than speaking, creating meaning through connotation and allusion. When asked direct questions, she does not answer but simply repeats refrains such as "Go search the valleys; pluck up every rose'," or hums in time to the music she plays (126, 133, 144). Robert L. Caserio argues that Sara is an "updated Shakespearean fool" whose "deranged" form of speaking "make[s] over what is narrative in content into a batty lyric whose content appears to be a strain of quoted utterance" (77-78). In this respect, he argues, she functions as a "live emblem of all the characters' self-fracturing, of the narrative's fractured and haphazard instancing of politics, of history, and of reality, too" (77). Yet even as she avoids communication, she bemoans its lack, asking "What's the good of singing if one hasn't any voice?" (143).¹⁹ Sara is a talented mimic, unsettling others, and her songs also hint at a more direct mockery of recent convention: sitting "hunched on the music stool, but not playing," she almost parodies the Victorian figure of the heroine at the piano (143).

The piano in the early sections of *The Years* remains the silent furniture of domesticity, fixed in place and mute: it is covered with domestic paraphernalia or baby clothes (151), but rarely played. Yet in Sara and Maggie's flat, Sara's piano playing is only one of a cacophony of sounds in constant competition:

The shabby street on the south side of the river was very noisy. Now and again a voice detached itself from the general clamour. A woman shouted to her neighbour; a child cried. A man trundling a barrow opened his mouth and bawled up at the windows as he passed. There were bedsteads, grates, pokers and odd pieces of twisted iron on his barrow. But whether he was selling old iron or buying

old iron it was impossible to say; the rhythm persisted; but the words were almost rubbed out.

The swarm of sound, the rush of traffic, the shouts of the hawkers, the single cries and the general cries, came into the upper room of the house in Hyams Place where Sara Pargiter sat at the piano. She was singing. (126)

Through the thin walls, professional musicians practice their scales and the sounds of music cannot be avoided: North, who finds London “deafening” on his return from Africa (235), listens to “the voice of the singer deliberately ascending the scale, as if the notes were stairs; and here she stopped indolently, languidly, flinging out the voice that was nothing but pure sound” (238). This singer and the trombone player who strikes up in the street below sound like “two people trying to express completely different views of the world in general at one and the same time” (241).

Woolf's emphasis on music's ability to move between the outside world and the private sphere of the domestic is made literal in the novel's closing section, “Present Day,” where the cockney children's “discordant” and jarring song takes place at a family gathering. This final section of the novel, which notably does *not* open with music and sounds, brings into direct tension the sounds of the outside or public world with the interiority signalled by particular songs in the novel. The children's song synthesizes the two kinds of music in *The Years*, drawing together both street cries (so often associated with death) and the individual songs and performances that characterize different members of the Pargiter family. What was previously background music is now brought into the foreground as “outside” music is ushered into the drawing room, and where song so often prompts memory, here it looks very much to the unknowable sense of the future:

They stared at her but remained silent. They had stopped eating. They were a centre of a little group. They swept their eyes over the grown-up people for a moment, then, each giving the other a little nudge, they burst into song:

Etho passo tanno hai

Fai donk to tu do,
 Mai to, kai to, lai to see
 Toh dum to tuh do—

That was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognizable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune. They stopped.

They stood with their hands behind their backs. Then with one impulse they attacked the next verse:

Fanno to par, etto to mar,
 Timin tudo, tido,
 Foll to gar in, mitno to par,
 Eido, teido, meido—

They sang the second verse more fiercely than the first. The rhythm seemed to rock and the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. The grown-up people did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous.

They burst out again:

Chree to gay ei,
 Geeray didax. . . .

Then they stopped. It seemed to be in the middle of a verse. They stood there grinning, silent, looking at the floor. Nobody knew what to say. There was something horrible in the noise they made. It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless. (327)

Like the violet sellers and organ grinders of the overtures, the children are singing for money, but their song is a command performance: Martin tells them to “sing a song for sixpence!” and slips them coins as they leave (326-27). So even as they are invited in, they are set apart from the cosy domestic context and reminded that they do not belong within it. The fact that the singers are children also resonates with the memories of childhood songs which recur throughout the novel. Sung in the small hours of the morning, its “rocking” rhythm works as an anti-lullaby: rather than being sung by parents in order to placate (or by Pippy the nursemaid, in the case of the Pargiters), it is sung *to* adults, and it disturbs them. The narrative becomes collective and impersonal, and no longer shifts between the individual perspectives of different characters. The repeated “they” pronoun stresses the children's difference from the group of party-goers, who are

now seen from the children's perspective as “the grown-up people” (327). There is defamiliarization on both sides, as every detail is narrated almost excruciatingly slowly.

Like contemporary modernist music, perhaps, the unfamiliar language and form of the children's song resist ingrained habits of listening, so that nobody knows “whether to laugh or to cry” at something “so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless” (327). But this discord is not ultimately threatening: rather, its nonsense words suggest a kind of ugly beauty, negating the soporific effects of conventional music and highlighting the potential for new kinds of meaning.²⁰ The ending of the novel has been read as optimistic, yet the class implications and distancing suggested by the reception of the song might prevent it from being the “chorus” or “general statement” that Woolf sought to achieve. While Patrick ushers the children off saying “that's very nice, that's very nice” (327), others assume their incomprehension is because of the singers' Cockney accents (328); and all Eleanor can do in response to its “hideous noise” is ask the one-word question, “Beautiful?” (328). The cockney children's “unintelligible” song thus shows the kind of linguistic play and productive impurity of sound which Woolf evokes in “Craftsmanship.” Like Sara's singing, it looks to the past and the future, and encompasses public and private life, the family home and the street, the aesthetic and the commercial. In this way, the children's song can be seen as replacing the outdated Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: rather than aiming at integration, it encompasses a world which remains fragmented.²¹ As Caserio puts it, “[t]he idea of an art that looks and sounds like Sara — parodic, wacky, annoyingly silly, and irrelevant — is shadowed forth as the hope of the political and historical world, even as it looks like its unworldly, unaccountable opponent” (79). In this respect the effect of the children's song is typical of Woolf's Janus-like modernism, which looks to the ancients for its novelty. As the biographer-narrator

remarks in *Orlando*, “what more terrifying revelation can there be than that it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another” (195). Following immediately after Eleanor's urge to create something solid out of a moment in time, the children's song seems to fulfill her wish: “She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding” (326).

In a letter to Stephen Spender after the novel's publication, Woolf outlines her intentions in the historical scope of *The Years*:

what I meant I think was to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts: envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere; Compose into one vast many-sided group at the end; and then shift the stress from present to future; and show the old fabric insensibly changing without death or violence into the future—suggesting that there is no break, but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern; of which of course we actors are ignorant. And the future was gradually to dawn.” (L6 116).

Woolf's comments about pattern here recall the terms of Eleanor's daydream at the party: “Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?” (282). In *The Years*, Woolf problematizes the unifying patterns associated with the shaping narratives of history.²² In its representation of historical change, as well as in the recurring motifs of song and sound employed to illustrate the workings of memory, the figure of music suggests glimpses towards such unity, and thus plays a crucial part in chronicling *The Years*.

“See the hidden, join the broken”: Music in *Between the Acts* and “Anon”

Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, published after her death in 1941, interrogates the concepts of national identity and literary history in presenting the reader with both Miss La Trobe's pageant and the Pointz Hall audience's responses to it.²³ Music and sound — from traditional rhymes to jazz to God Save the King to the “music” of a plane flying overhead — forge connections between the listeners while also pointing to the fragile nature of community, as the broken gramophone reminds us: “[t]he gramophone gurgled Unity—Dispersity. It gurgled Un . . . dis . . . And ceased” (124). Woolf explores mechanization's impact both on communication and on community, using music to examine what happens to voices when they are preserved through different spaces and times. From the concealed voices speaking through the megaphone to the repeated “chuff-chuff” noise made by the gramophone, music in *Between the Acts* is often quite literally “hidden” and “broken”: but far from being an uncritical or decorative accompaniment to the action, it is instrumental in Woolf's questioning of the ways in which the fragments of history are recorded and interpreted. The ideas of generic disruption and continuity raised in Woolf's essay “Anon” are played out here in the interactions between La Trobe, her audience, and the history of the Pointz Hall area. In *Between the Acts*, then, Woolf uses the ideas of music, machinery and folk culture to trace lines of tension between interiority and exteriority, concord and discord, and the organic and the mechanical. The novel works primarily through the alternation of different voices, whether they be human, non-human, or quotations from literary texts, to create what Patricia Laurence has called “the anxious counterpoint of a modern musical composition” (180).

Between the Acts is concerned from the very outset with English history. Its pastoral setting is immediately emphasized, yet made prosaic, in the opening discussions

of the county council's plans for a cesspool (1); Giles Oliver points out the history of the chosen site: "From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars" (1). The Olivers, who have been at Pointz Hall "only something over a hundred and twenty years," are viewed as relative newcomers compared with the area's "old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall" (3). Yet their own family history is also made visible within the house, with its portraits and displays such as the "watch that had stopped a bullet on the field of Waterloo" (3). Lucy Swithin's favorite reading, "An Outline of History," takes us back even further, to the days when "the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by the channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanadon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend" (4). The novel thus immediately sets up a network of interconnected ideas of historical recording: while the primeval forest with its almost mythical animal inhabitants now belongs to the realm of reading and of the imaginary, the traces of more recent inhabitants are visible on the land (when viewed from the modern apparatus of the aeroplane), local history is recorded in the cemetery, and more recent family history is displayed more immediately within the house.²⁴

Sight is very much the privileged sense in these opening discussions of history; yet, as Lucy Swithin's book reminds us, plenty of historical fact remains invisible. *Between the Acts* is also concerned with the means by which different histories are valued, ignored, or concealed. The seemingly unchanged description of the local area in

an eighty-year-old guidebook suggests that “1860 was true in 1939” (19), but this equation ignores historical change which is not immediately legible. At Pointz Hall, for example, the former chapel is now a larder, complete with the possible existence of “a concealed passage where once somebody had hid” (19). Characters seek to provide concrete evidence of their personal histories. When Mrs Haigh talks about being from Liskeard, she says there are “graves in the churchyard to prove it” (1); while the Olivers “couldn't trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years,” the Swithins “were there before the Conquest” (18); the watch from Waterloo seems to belong to the butler rather than one of the Olivers themselves (3); and one of the portraits is not an ancestor, but merely “a picture” (21-22). Before the pageant has even begun, therefore, history has already been conflated with performance, as in the scene where Isa considers Mrs Manresa: “Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see. But not her life history. That was only scraps and fragments to all of them (23). Mrs Manresa's mysterious background is thought to include Tasmanian birth and mid-Victorian scandal, but her story is only known through “gossip,” and stalled gossip at that (24). Because oral history is unwritten, it can remain invisible, and thus defies the idea of provable origins that is given such importance in *Between the Acts*.²⁵

The Pointz Hall pageant brings into question the varying ways in which history is narrated. It is very much a part of yearly local ritual, so that even the exchange of words between Bart and Lucy is like bells chiming in a regular and predictable sequence: “Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather” (13). The genre of the pageant-play most often calls to mind an uncritical last-night-at-the-Proms brand of performative patriotism, with a linear and episodic presentation of local history culminating in the

audience joining the cast to sing God Save the King. Yet as Jed Esty explains in *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*, the pageants of the 1930s differed in crucial ways from the invented tradition of the Edwardian pageant plays, founded in 1905 by Louis Napoleon Parker and originating, like the Folk Revival, “from a milieu of late-Victorian preservationist movements” (57). Where Parker held that pageants should end with the seventeenth century, explaining that they were “designed to kill... the modernising spirit” (Esty 59), the 1930s pageant plays changed tack significantly: their focus was national, rather than local, and urban authors such as E. M. Forster and T. S. Eliot, both friends of Woolf, sought to present audiences with more avant-garde versions of the genre which encompassed a wider time span, often moving as far as the present day. As Esty points out, they dramatized history in ways that confirmed their audience's sense of Englishness.²⁶ Miss La Trobe's rural pageant is more national than local in its reversal of the earlier pageants' aim of restoring pastoral ideals: instead of driving out corrupting urban influences, it consists largely of city scenes and sounds, its gramophone record entitled “London Street Cries—a potpourri” exemplifying its mixing of genres and registers. Its version of history is less linear than that of Richard Dalloway's “vision of English history, King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law” in *The Voyage Out* (34), and it is a far cry from Sharp's notion of the “great tradition that stretches back into the mists of the past in one long, unbroken chain” (xviii). As Michele Pridmore-Brown puts it, Miss La Trobe “selects and abstracts a version of England's imperial history from an official history that is already an abstraction” (410): she presents a series of episodic plays from different time settings, some abridged and altered so that the plot is not always clear. Like Woolf herself, Miss La Trobe, is less concerned with dramatic conventions such as plot than with new ways of creating strong

responses in her audience: as Isabella notes, “The plot was only there to beget emotion [. . .] There was no need to puzzle out the plot. Perhaps Miss La Trobe meant that when she cut this knot in the centre?” (56). In the village context, Miss La Trobe is certainly an outsider artist figure, yet when viewed within the context of 1930s pageant experiments, her attempts to be unsettling and innovative are perhaps less unusual than at first appears.²⁷

Critics have suggested a range of potential real-life models for Miss La Trobe, Woolf's pageant auteur; one name that is always mentioned is that of Woolf's friend and admirer, the composer Dame Ethel Smyth.²⁸ Miss La Trobe's wide-ranging use of music in the staging of her pageant, and her self-consciously contrapuntal layering of spoken, sung, recorded, and even natural sounds, certainly suggest a musician as a model. She employs music throughout her pageant, as both framing device and part of the action, and to varying effect. Tunes are played on the gramophone to cover set and costume changes; music's “summoning” causes the audience to assemble after the interval (74); and between scenes the chorus sings refrains about the cyclical repetition of the seasons, “*Digging and delving, ploughing and sewing*” (77), as they pass “in single file in and out between the trees” (78). Miss La Trobe also turns to music to illustrate the historical periods represented by each dramatic episode. In the Elizabethan drama, the gramophone's tune “reel[s] from side to side as if drunk with merriment,” the village idiot Albert sings a song like that of a Shakespearean fool, and “all together,” the actors “bawl” a song about “*a babe in a basket*” which ends the scene (53-54). In the pageant's Age of Reason, the “merry little tune” about Damon and Cynthia that introduces the pastoral tableau is imperfectly echoed in the reduced Restoration comedy, when Sir Spaniel sings mockingly to Lady Harpy Harraden, “*What favour could fair Chloe ask that Damon*

would not get her?” (80). The nineteenth-century panorama is full of music which parodies the period: a full chorus sing “*O has Mr. Sibthorp a wife?*” (104-05), before a pair of heavily gendered duets, “Eleanor and Mildred” singing “I’d be a Butterfly,” followed by Arthur and Edgar with “Rule Britannia” (106). Finally, at the close of the Victorian play, when the main characters have disappeared “to convert the heathen,” Mr Budge the publican, dressed as a policeman, introduces “‘Ome, Sweet ‘Ome” and speaks along with it to usher in the next interval (106-07).²⁹

Yet despite Miss La Trobe's careful selection and ordering of these specific musical extracts, music and sound prove vulnerable to the immediate context of their delivery: much of the music in *Between the Acts* goes unheard, and listening is repeatedly frustrated. Just as the literary references in the novel are always slightly misquoted, both the actors' lines and the gramophone's music during the pageant are often carried away by the wind. When the stage is empty, for example, Miss La Trobe seeks to “continue the emotion” of the scene with song, but as the “breeze [blows] gaps between their words,” the audience can hear less and less of the script: “in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came” (87). Miss La Trobe can only gesticulate, shake her fist, and shout “‘Louder! Louder’ ” at her actors (86); and the unlikely *deus ex machina* that ends up saving her is a chorus of lowing cows: “the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment . . . The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion” (87). Over the course of the pageant, too, the gramophone's seemingly magical ability to “summon” the audience wanes: “‘Lavender, sweet lavender, who’ll buy my sweet lavender’ the tune trilled and tinkled, ineffectively shepherding the audience. Some ignored it. Some still wandered. Others stopped, but

stood upright” (97).

Woolf constantly draws attention to the role of the hidden gramophone and its various noises, whether part of Miss La Trobe's plan or otherwise. The sound of the gramophone “buzz[ing] in the bushes” means that the very beginning of the pageant is brought into question: “Was it, or was it not, the play? Chuff, chuff, chuff sounded from the bushes. It was the sound a machine makes when something has gone wrong” (47). And this “chuff, chuff, chuff” noise is repeated another thirteen times before the end of the pageant, as well as the “tick, tick, tick” of the gramophone needle. The potential problems inherent to the gramophone as medium are also highlighted by sounds like the “preliminary premonitory scratching” as “a needle scraped a disk” (121). It is also a form of transmission that is highly susceptible to human error, as shown by the “hitch” which occurs when the megaphonic voice orders the audience to “listen to the gramophone affirming” : “The records had been mixed. Fox-trot, Sweet Lavender, Home Sweet Home, Rule Britannia — sweating profusely, Jimmy, who had charge of the music, threw them aside and fitted the right one — was it Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart or nobody famous, but merely a traditional tune?” (116).³⁰

The majority of criticism addressing Woolf's treatment of music in *Between the Acts* focuses on the novel's representation of the relatively new technology of the gramophone, seeing it either as an instrument of conformity, or as potentially subversive. Woolf's well-known invocation of the gramophone in *Three Guineas* figures mechanical reproduction as negative because of its unthinking perpetuation of political conservatism:

If we encourage the daughters to enter the professions without making any conditions as to the way in which the professions are to be practised shall we not be doing our best to stereotype the old tune which human nature, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is now grinding out with such disastrous unanimity? ‘Here we go round the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree, the mulberry

tree. Give it all to me, give it all to me, all to me. Three hundred millions spent upon war.' (59)

In this extended simile, Woolf juxtaposes traditional song with the modern technology of recorded music to criticize the unchanging acceptance of existing social structures. The problems inherent in the “old tune” are compounded by the “disastrous unanimity” of the means of its transmission, the broken gramophone.³¹ At the end of *Three Guineas*, when she urges her readers to “listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets,” the sound of the gramophone itself is aligned with the bark of guns, as part of the ideological apparatus set in direct opposition to the human sound of the “voices of the poets” (143). Yet the perceived gulf between human and mechanized voices was not so wide: Woolf herself was critical of “the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain” that “dominates” the work of the younger generation of poets such as Auden and Spender (*E2* 175). And even those “voices of the poets” which predate mechanical reproduction were also potentially dangerous. Elsewhere in *Three Guineas*, for example, the figure of traditional music (here transmitted by human voices almost unconsciously, without the help of the gramophone) suggests a similarly uncritical valorization of the past: “we must cease to hang over old bridges, humming old songs” (28); “we are not here to sing old songs or to fill in missing rhymes. We are here to consider facts” (77). Woolf’s ambivalence about the use of technology is clear in *Three Guineas*, yet it is not simply the modern mechanical registers of music that she holds to blame: the gramophone as medium is no more sinister than the supposedly organic and natural form of folksong in its repetition of out-of-date messages.

The “disastrous unanimity” with which the gramophone repeats the “old tune,” however, is a feature directly addressed in *Between the Acts*. As it plays a repetitive

pastoral tune between scenes, for example, the gramophone seems to perform an aural hypnosis not only on the audience, but on the landscape itself, with the choreographed movements of cows joining in: “The gramophone, while the scene was removed, gently stated certain facts which everybody knows to be perfectly true” (83); “The view repeated in its own way what the tune was saying” (83); “The cows, making a step forward, then standing still, were saying the same thing to perfection” (84). The gentleness of the gramophone in stating its “facts” is ironic, given the tune’s invocation of Eve, nymphs and shepherds in an idealized scene of toil rewarded: Giles Oliver commutes from Pointz Hall to work in the city although he would prefer to farm (28). The audience’s response to the song is uncannily unified and uncritical: “Folded in this triple melody, the audience sat gazing; and beheld gently and approvingly without interrogation” (84). Pridmore-Brown explores the ways in which the gramophone’s ability to create the fascist idea of “acoustic communion” is used by Miss La Trobe as a “tool for controlling the audience” (410-11); but she points out that Miss La Trobe “deliberately uses her gramophone to adulterate the messages of authority, thus interrupting what can be considered the imperialism of perfect communication” (411). This stress on the noise of the gramophone is thus a political move, which makes audible “the constructedness of the audience’s unity and dispersal” and encourages “acts of personal interpretation — that is, of particularized (noncollective) listening” (412).³²

The emphasis in *Between the Acts* on the possibilities and problems of listening, and the tensions the novel draws between collective and particularized responses, are also addressed in Woolf’s essay of the same period “Anon.” Her 1940 diary shows an almost seamless transition between the completion of the first draft of *Between the Acts* and the composition of “Anon.” On November 22 she writes, “[h]aving this moment finished the

Pageant — or Poyntz Hall? — (begun perhaps April 1938) my thoughts turn well up, to write the first chapter of the next book (nameless). Anon, it will be called” (D5 340). Together with the second chapter, “The Reader,” which also survives in draft stage, these works were to make up a collection of essays tentatively titled *Reading at Random* or *Turning the Page*: Brenda Silver suggests that this book was intended to be the third book of *Common Reader* essays Woolf had been planning, and Hussey describes it as “a critical history of English literature that would involve a turning inside-out of the established methods of writing literary history” (142). In “Anon,” an essay with marked parallels to Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller,” Woolf starts to historicize the development of English literature, focusing on its origins in oral and aural traditions, and on its affinities with music, the visual arts, and the stage.³³ Since Nora Eisenberg’s early work connecting these essay drafts with Woolf’s last novel, and especially after their 1975 publication, it has become a critical commonplace to read these texts together: not only are they read as “companion pieces” (Moore 172), but as Hussey remarks, “[t]he language of her various creations of this period is often so similar that a line quoted is hard to identify as coming from the memoir, novel, or the history” (142).³⁴ The questions of communal expression and an active audience that pervade *Between the Acts* are made the explicit focus of Woolf’s argument in “Anon”:

The voice that broke the silence of the forests was the voice of Anon. Someone heard the song and remembered it for it was later written down, beautifully on parchment. Thus the singer had its audience, but the audience was so little interested in his name that he never thought to give it. The audience was itself the singer: “Terly, terlow” they sang and “By, by lullay”: filling in the pauses, helping with a chorus. Everybody shared in the creation of Anon’s song, and supplied the story. Anon sang because spring has come; or winter is gone; because he loves; because he is hungry or lustful; or merry or because he adores some god. Anon is sometimes man; sometimes woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors. He has no house. He lives a roaming life crossing the fields, mounting the hills, lying under the hawthorn to listen to the nightingale. (382)

The anonymous and androgynous voice Woolf discusses here, as Silver describes it, might be similar to Miss La Trobe's ambitions for herself as an artist: "an outsider capable of cutting through the layers of social convention in order to tap the reservoir of shared emotions hidden beneath" (26). Yet in the description of the audience as "itself the singer," Woolf also sets in place an ideal of communal expression like that whose lack she mockingly bemoaned in "Street Music": more than just a voice which speaks for the masses or states like the gramophone's pastoral song "certain facts which everyone knew to be true," the emphasis on audience in "Anon" also exemplifies a model of active listening, of participation in literary production, rather than mere passive consumption "without interrogation" (84).

The idea of the arts seeking to express communal experience and emotion is something Woolf returns to repeatedly throughout her writing career. In *A Room of One's Own*, for example, she argues that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (98), and stresses the importance of "the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we lead as individuals" (117). In *Moments of Being* she takes a similar stance against the Romantic ideal of the individual author:

behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (72)

Woolf's impulse in these extracts, and most especially in the song she discusses in

"Anon," is not unlike that of the folk revivalists in its desire to look to the past origins of

artistic, musical and literary forms, as well as in its stress on the community out of which the anonymous voice speaks without individuation. But what she doesn't share with the revivalists is the accompanying ideological baggage — what she calls in her letter to Smyth the “padding” of Parry's writings on music (*L6* 450). In the depiction of Miss La Trobe's pageant in *Between the Acts*, Woolf explores the universal need to give form to experience through art, but she does not advocate the erasure of the contemporary and the cosmopolitan which the revival attempted in its bid to reimagine traditional forms and rituals.³⁵

The ideas of communal expression discussed in “Anon” are dramatized through Miss La Trobe's pageant in *Between the Acts*: just as Anon is a singer rather than a poet, Woolf uses the immediacy of music as a primary tool for exploring the audience's responses to the play. Towards the end of the pageant, murmuring lines of poetry after the intervention of nature, the “voice that was no one's voice,” Isa thinks to herself that “the little twist of sound could have the whole of her” (112). Isa's small observation here suggests the scope of music's power over its audience, and emphasizes the novel's focus on auditory experience. Eisenberg reads music in *Between the Acts* as an attempt to return to the unification of music and language, the original song of “Anon.” Music in the essay, she argues, “is shown to be a great, vital force, preceding and overpowering language” (261). And it is true that in many of the pageant scenes in *Between the Acts*, music seems to have the same prelinguistic unifying power over its audience, so that alongside their individual concerns they feel an “inner voice” saying “How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony?” (74).³⁶ Music seems to silence particular thoughts about the office, the shop, and the phone, replacing then with a heightened state of enhanced perception:

For I hear music, they were saying. Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. Look and listen. See the flowers, how they ray their redness, whiteness, silverness and blue. And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabing, their green and yellow leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still. (75)

The question of whether music can really serve to “see the hidden, join the broken” is returned to repeatedly in *Between the Acts*. Eisenberg's reading of music in the novel as “encourag[ing] a recognition of the unity of all things” (258), however, ignores both the existence of scenes of musical distancing within the novel and the imperialistic implications of the particular texts which provoke the audience's singing.³⁷ At the opening of the pageant, for example, Mrs Manresa feels alienated from the words of the prologue and the music which accompanies it: “There was a vast vacancy between her, the singing villagers and the piping child” (48). And it is predictable public anthems and “pompous popular tune[s]” (49) which provoke reactions of seeming unification: as a stout lady starts to “beat time with her hand on her chair,” the humming Mrs Manresa is “afloat on the stream of the melody” (49). And although she is united with the stout lady at this moment, she is hardly a representative figure of the common people: “Radiating royalty, complacency, good humour, the wild child was Queen of the festival” (49). As audience members sing along to Rule Britannia and beat time to God Save the King (79), therefore, they may be momentarily unified but they are not spurred to “see the hidden, join the broken”; they respond to music in an unthinking, mechanically sentimental way (closer to that represented by the gramophone in *Three Guineas*). In these examples, music does not so much “wake” the audience as soothe them into what Pridmore-Brown calls “a tranquilized complacency” (413).

What does “wake” the audience members, forcing them to listen actively rather

than simply react, is Miss La Trobe's use of music and sound in less familiar and conventional ways. Just as the play's opening is unclear when the gramophone chuffs, in the pageant's final scene, "Present Day. Ourselves," the absence of music creates tension: "All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music. The horns of cars on the high road were heard. And the swish of trees. They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine" (110). As many critics have noted, Miss La Trobe's theatrical experiment — her script at this point reads "ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows etc." (111) — seems like a prescient version of John Cage's experiments in music and sound later in the twentieth century.³⁸ Here, the audience's reactions to the silence seem to confirm the hypothesis outlined in *Orlando*: "That silence is more profound than noise still wants the confirmation of silence" (118). Miss La Trobe's aim to write "a play without an audience — *the* play" seems to her to have failed because reality is "'too strong'" (111).³⁹ Where the cows came to her rescue earlier, this time a rain shower, "sudden and universal," steps in to fill the gap (111). In "Anon," Woolf describes the loss of ambiguity as the work of the "chronicler" Harrison "sees the present against the settled, recorded past. The present looks degenerate, raw, against the past" (Silver 385). Miss La Trobe's audience feel the same problem at this point in the play, and again when they are faced with the entire cast holding looking glasses, and find it "distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair" (114).

Music is an important part of this defamiliarizing strategy. But it works less through new forms of music than through the constant repetition of familiar fragments from the pageant. The lines from the nursery rhyme "Sing a song of sixpence" which recur throughout the play now give way to a cacophony, as the tune stops and changes to

“something half known half not” (113). But it does not stop there: as the tune keeps changing, the audience feels unsettled by the modern music:

The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. Fox-trot was it? Jazz? Anyhow the rhythm kicked, reared, snapped short. What a jangle and a jingle! Well, with the means at her disposal, you can't ask too much. What a cackle, a cacophony! Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. Such an outrage; such an insult; And not plain. Very up to date, all the same. What is her game? To disrupt? Jog and trot? Jerk and smirk? Put the finger to the nose? Squint and pry? Peak and spy? O the irreverence of the generation which is only momentarily — thanks be — “the young.” The young, who can't make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole. What a cackle, what a rattle, what a yaffle — as they call the woodpecker, the laughing bird that flits from tree to tree. (113)

In this passage, Woolf refers to a range of familiar and unfamiliar musical categories, none of which seem to have clear definitions.⁴⁰ The annoyed responses of the audience become part of the “cackle” and “cacophony” of the pageant at this point, and Woolf uses parodic poetic effects to make them part of the music.⁴¹

As well as the cacophony of modern music which so upsets the audience, when the cast reappear with their mirrors, they continually speak over each other: “each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts” (114). As in “Craftsmanship,” Woolf draws attention to words' slippery nature and their ability to change meaning over time and space.⁴² This final fractured tableau is a complex composition for silence, sound, spoken and sung voices. Its layering of history, literature and culture recalls another Benjamin image, the Angel of History, who looks back at the “storm of progress,” an accumulation of wreckage, catastrophe and disaster.⁴³ As De Gay notes, the ensemble performance in this scene “gathers a mosaic of quotations which have not formed a part of the play, none of which is attributed” (209), so that the audience and the reader are faced with the same half-recognition as that provoked by unidentified pieces of music.⁴⁴ As the audience try to make sense of these phrases and fragments, they are drowned out

by the address of a single voice, which asserts a “megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking affirmation” (115). When the gramophone plays a final tune, therefore, the audience is afforded some relief by the music's ability to hold within itself both harmony and dissonance:

Like quicksilver slidings, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder. To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs. (117)

Pridmore-Brown notes the importance of the specific technical diction Woolf uses here:

“filings magnetized” refers to the actual movement of the gramophone's needle, so that the audience is described as physically bound to the gramophone in “a unity constituted of forces in opposition, forces of repulsion and dispersion that, on a different level, become forces of attraction and cohesion” (418). As seen in this image, any unity in *Between the Acts* is always momentary, and made up of different and largely disparate elements. In her diary of 26 April, 1938, Woolf writes of her aim to represent many voices in *Between the Acts* without reducing them to a single voice: “'I' rejected: 'We' substituted: to whom at the end shall there be an invocation? “We” . . . the composed of many different things . . . we all life, all art, all waifs & strays — a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole — the present state of my mind?” (D5 135).

When the Reverend Streatfield tries to summarize the meaning of the pageant, then, he can only gesture towards its representation of such a “rambling capricious but somehow unified whole.” He makes a valiant attempt, stating that “To me at least it was

indicated that we are members of one another. Each is part of the whole [. . .] We act different parts; but we are the same” before handing over the responsibility to the audience: “I leave that to you. I am not here to explain” (119). After he pauses, as if he hears “some distant music,” his appeal for contributions to the church fund is interrupted, this time not by cows or rain, but by the ominous noise of planes in the sky above: “The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. *That* was the music. The audience gaped; the audience gazed. Then zoom became drone. The planes had passed” (119-20). Having seemingly lost his “command over words,” Mr Streatfield is stuck with an “awkward moment” as he tries to find an appropriate end to the pageant. Because Miss La Trobe “wishes to remain anonymous,” the traditional form of the pageant as part of a local festival is at risk, so that “every sound in nature was painfully audible” (120). Relief finally comes from the hidden gramophone once more, as the audience all join in singing “God Save the King,” in a scene which returns them to the comforting unity of conventional form (121). Music and sound serve varying purposes in engaging the audience in *Between the Acts*. As Esty points out, Miss La Trobe's experiments with music “seem designed to reduce the distinctions between two models of the artist's vocation, one in which the artist imposes unity on a fragmented audience and one in which the artist ritualistically evokes or channels unity from an audience that already possesses it in the form of group identity” (96). Yet Miss La Trobe is not in control of the sounds of nature (cows, birds, rain), nor of the unnatural sounds of the planes; and even the gramophone, which “dismiss[e]s” the audience (122) and always seems to get the last word, cannot hold on to the unity its final song “triumph[s], yet “lament[s]” (123): “The gramophone gurgled *Unity —Dispersity*. It gurgled *Un . . . dis. . .* And ceased” (124).

While they are largely anonymous — their words are most often not attributed to the voices of named speakers, and of the few audience members who are named, we know nothing more than their fragmentary responses to the play — the pageant audience is emphatically not a unified group of mass identification. Miss La Trobe emphasizes that they are “scraps, orts and fragments” even as she bids them “listen to the gramophone affirming. . . .” (116); although she constantly foregrounds and manipulates music's unifying effect on its audience, she also “deliberately and repeatedly refuses her audience the comfort of fixed identities and emotions” (Pridmore-Brown 415). The same actors play different parts in the play, and at times the same parts are even played by different actors, as for example in the figure of England represented by girls of different ages. Even as Miss La Trobe thinks audiences are “the devil” (111), she also “[feels] everything they [feel]” (111). She watches their reactions to the play as it unfolds, and listens to their voices in the intervals between the acts, so that the relationship between performer and audience is reversed: “Over the tops of the bushes came stray voices, voices without bodies, symbolical voices they seemed to her, half hearing, seeing nothing, but still, over the bushes, feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices” (94). She literally holds a mirror up to the audience in the “Present Day” procession (113-15), and exhorts them to “break the rhythm, and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. Ourselves” in her final address (115); yet the audience have already become part of the pageant in their singing and misquoting during the performance, and the reader is invited to watch the spectacle of their intermission interactions as much as the acts of the play itself.⁴⁵

The pageant audience at Pointz Hall is therefore quite different from that of earlier staged drama as Woolf discusses it in “Anon,” where she argues that “[i]f we could

measure the effect of the audience upon the play we should have a hold which is denied us upon the play itself" (395). This audience is anything but silent. The narrative records their varying impressions both during and after the pageant, as they try to establish the meaning of what they have just seen. Just as Woolf noted of the immediacy of music in "Impressions at Bayreuth," the immediate experience of the staged spectacle fades into the imperfect recollections of individual memories, as people try to interpret the pageant. Ettie Springett "tuts" to herself as she watches: "She liked to leave a theatre knowing exactly what was meant" (102); likewise after the pageant a nameless voice says "I must say I like to feel sure, if I go to the theatre, that I've grasped the meaning . . . Or was that, perhaps, what she meant?" (200). Many audience members question not Miss La Trobe's meaning, but the "accuracy" of her episodic presentation of history: "What's history without the army?" Colonel Mayhew asks after the nineteenth-century playlet (98), and when the pageant is over, another spectator asks "Why leave out the army if its history?" (122). Moving away from the play itself, the audience begins to discuss politics: "things look worse than ever on the continent. And what's the channel, come to think of it, if they mean to invade us? The aeroplanes, I didn't like to say it, made one think. . ." (123). These questions highlight the fact that what counts as "history" is only defined and given form retrospectively: here the army is at once defined as part of the past, as "history," and tacitly acknowledged in relation to current political events. When Mrs Swithin describes the Victorians as "'[o]nly you and me and William dressed differently,'" William Dodge replies "'You don't believe in history'" (108); and the pageant's layering of fragments from its various historical periods does seem responsible for her having "lost her place" in her *Outline of History* (135). Woolf's sense of historical change, as represented in *Between the Acts* by both Miss La Trobe's pageant and the broader context within which

it is performed, is vexed. Sharp's unbroken chain is hinted at in the pageant audience's musically-inspired urge to "see the hidden, join the broken," but it is quickly enough replaced by the "scraps, orts and fragments" of the present moment, which reflect a more complicated and dynamic sense of history, one which is not a simple narrative of facts, but rather encompasses all the "echoes, memories, associations" discussed in "Craftsmanship."⁴⁶

In Woolf's late years she was increasingly concerned with the social and political role of the artist, as well as with the related question of the role of her readers.⁴⁷ In "The Reader," the second chapter of her projected history of English literature, Woolf turns her attention to the form of the play as compared with the novel: "There is a long drawn continuity in the book that the play has not. It gives a different pace to the mind. We are in a world where nothing is concluded" (429). The immediacy of the audience's responses to the play were not available to Woolf herself as a novelist: as she says in "Anon," with the advent of print culture, "The playwright is replaced by the man who writes a book. The audience is replaced by the reader. Anon is dead" (398).⁴⁸ But in *Between the Acts* Woolf evokes the very lack of continuity attributed here to the play, combining the "different paces" of the two genres through the inclusion of Miss La Trobe's pageant (and the separate plays it in turn contains) within the novel.⁴⁹ The form of both the unconventional 1930s pageant-play and the novel itself insist on an active reader. Listening to music has been a suggestive figure for reading for Woolf from such early pieces as "Impressions at Bayreuth" to the essay "Anon," begun as she was revising *Between the Acts*. Formal experimentation and political engagement are not mutually exclusive, as Beer reminds us: "If 'Anon' provides a history of art's segregation from broad social power and meaning, *Between the Acts* imaginatively reverses that history"

(103). And it is in the novel's combination of new musical registers and technologies that this reversal primarily takes effect. After the pageant, one audience member wonders "Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord . . . Ding dong, ding" (124). While there is plenty of discord in *Between the Acts*, it is not solely machine-created. Woolf shows that mechanical reproduction, or even the threatening zoom and drone of the planes passing overhead, does not erase the "song making instinct" discussed in "Anon" (373); rather, its defamiliarizing effect can actually provoke a return to the active and engaged audiences of the past. At the end of the novel, Woolf collapses the discord and reconciliation of Isa and Giles's own personal drama into the inevitable cyclical repetition of history: "Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace" (136). While the evening is equated with prehistory as "the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks," *Between the Acts* closes on an optimistic note, making Isa and Giles into actors opening a new scene: "The curtain rose. They spoke" (136). And even the controlling figure of Miss La Trobe is not herself the author of the musical and literary texts she weaves into her pageant: rather, she is their engaged audience, and reworks them into a new form.

Woolf's first reference to *Between the Acts*, in her 1937 diary, shows her again invoking images of music to describe her projected narrative method: "I saw the form of a new novel. Its to be first the statement of the theme: then the restatement: & so on: repeating the same story: singling out this & then that: until the central idea is stated . . . but all the scenes must be controlled, and radiate to a center" (D5 114-15). In *A Room of One's Own* she turns to a musical metaphor of formal unity to illustrate the unsettling effect of new kinds of writing on readers: "while Jane Austen breaks from melody to melody as Mozart from song to song, to read this writing was like being out at sea in an

open boat” (85). Like the changing meaning of words over time in “Craftsmanship” and the incomprehensible children's song in *The Years*, both the audience's responses to the pageant and our reading of the novel are similarly discomposing. Woolf puts her readers “out to sea” and demands that they piece together the “scraps, orts and fragments” that they see and hear, and exert their own agency in giving shape to their own fractured experiences as they read. Not only do we respond, like the Pointz Hall audience, to Miss La Trobe's pageant itself, but we must also respond in turn to that internal audience's range of disparate responses. This kind of active reading allows for the revision of conventional ideas of history.⁵⁰ Woolf's skillful manipulation of the effects of music — its emotive appeal, its range of registers and contexts, and our varying attempts to record it over time and space — forces her readers to listen and respond in new ways to the “old tunes” of both narrative and history.

- 1 Bonnie Kime Scott provides a useful summary of the contents of Leonard Woolf's listening catalogue: "Beethoven and Mozart commanding the most cards, and Bach, Handel, Haydn, and Schubert all well represented" (101). Leonard Woolf was notoriously fastidious, for example taking down such expenses as 2p for bread rolls in a notebook he carried with him: his record-keeping is simply astounding. But Woolf's own diaries and letters often refer to what music they heard outside the home, for example at concerts and other performances; and inevitably there is plenty of other music that must have gone unrecorded. It is equally possible, of course, that she might *not* have listened to every item on his list.
- 2 In a technological and musical anachronism, the nineteenth-century Orlando is repulsed by the "cascades of involuntary inspiration" that make her into a human Aeolian Harp "inspired" by the very thought of marriage: "she became conscious . . . of an extraordinary tingling and vibration all over her, as if she were made of a thousand wires upon which some breeze or errant fingers were playing scales. Now her toes tingled; now her marrow. She had the queerest sensations about the thigh bones. Her hairs seemed to erect themselves. Her arms sang and twanged as the telegraph wires would be singing and twanging in twenty years or so" (155). As she is broken by the spirit of the nineteenth century, her response to this vibration changes accordingly: "those twanglings and tinglings which had been so captious and so interrogative modulated into the sweetest melodies, till it seemed as if angels were plucking harp-strings with white fingers and her whole being was pervaded by seraphic harmony" (159).
- 3 See Dusinberre on Woolf's description of teaching history at Morley College in 1905 and trying to make the subject matter "real" for her students (19-20).
- 4 See for example Isobel Grundy, who calls the Maries ballad "a masterpiece of significant naming, generally unnoticed" and claims that "Virginia Woolf assumes this knowledge in her readers": "One cannot read this book aright without knowing the ballad that these names come from. It is not necessary to know that 'Friendships Gallery' had specifically linked the popularity of the name Mary with the power of the Church, nor that this ballad has transferred itself from a Scots girl at the Court of Russia to the Maries of Mary Queen of Scots; it *is* necessary to know the story: how female comradeship is about to be broken and the speaker ('me', Mary Hamilton) hanged for the murder of the baby who resulted from her seduction by the king.

Yestreen the Queen had four Maries
The night she'll hae but three;
There was Mary Seaton, and Marie Beaton,
And Marie Carmichael, and me. (215-16)
- 5 Vaughan Williams was married to a cousin of Woolf's, but she did not know him well. On October 19, 1937, she wrote to Ethel Smyth "And is Vaughan Williams a great composer? If so, why does he sound so very dull? A very adorable man I gather" (L6 183-84); Ethel replies "I have heard lovely things of his but he lapses very easily into dullness (L6 183n.3).
- 6 As Brosnan points out, the text of this talk itself refuses to be pinned down: "Craftsmanship' exists, therefore, in a number of different formats: the actual broadcast in 1937, the fragment of recording preserved in the National Sound Archive, its original publication in *The Listener*, its republication as part of a collection of essays (*The Death of the Moth*, Leonard Woolf's edition of *Collected Essays* and Rachel Bowlby's edition of Woolf's selected essays), and its future republication as part of Andrew McNeillie's complete scholarly edition of Woolf's *Collected Essays*. This complex textual existence testifies to the heterogeneous cultural and literary dimensions that characterise the products and production of Virginia Woolf as an essayist and journalist" (163-64).
- 7 See especially Brosnan, Cuddy-Keane, Scott.
- 8 There are also sexual connotations implicit in the related Dutch verb "rammelen."
- 9 As Maria Di Battista points out, Woolf depicts herself as "a writer whose relationship to words strikes us as either so advanced or so primitive as to confound any settled view we might have of her" (*Cambridge Companion* 127).
- 10 Brosnan points out that the talk, broadcast a mere fortnight before the coronation of George VI, was "delivered in the midst of the period of crisis in which the medium of the broadcast itself was part of the representation and construction of that crisis" (167); she also cites Woolf's diary, which describes listening to King Edward's radio broadcast "All the life had been withdrawn to listen, to judge. [...] Finally he wound up, God Save the King with a shout; after which I heard his sigh go up, a kind of whistle. Then silence. Complete silence. Then Mr Hibbert saying. And now we shut down. Good night everybody. Goodnight; & we were tucked up in our beds" (D5 43-4).

- 11 In this respect, Woolf subtly enacts a re-reading of a supposedly “pure” folk-song text in a similar manner to Marie Lloyd’s lewd performance of a Tennyson poem during her trial for indecency.
- 12 In this huge novel, Woolf wanted to encompass both “fact” and “vision,” to combine the narrative styles of *Night and Day* and *The Waves*. Many critics have discussed the process of the novel’s composition, from its early drafts as the essay-novel *The Pargiters* to its final published form. Writing and revising the novel took several years and “caused her agony” (Batchelor 60).
- 13 Mark Hussey notes that Woolf added these lyrical passages very late: they do not appear in the galleys (AZ 388).
- 14 Many critics have stressed the novel’s “rhythmical” structure – Jean Alexander describes it as possessing a “musical intelligence” through repetition and rhythm, and Marcus points out that it is “about repetition as well as repetitive in style” (38).
- 15 See Tratner, “Why isn’t *Between the Acts* a Movie?” (Caughie, *Mechanical Reproduction* 115-34)
- 16 In the earlier version of the “essay-novel,” Woolf gives more detail on these music lessons, making a political point, probably drawn from the experience of Ethel Smyth, out of Delia’s desire to go to Germany and learn “to write music seriously” (18-19). Woolf’s portrait of the sisters’ violin teacher Signor Morelli also highlights the difficulties facing women who wanted to study music: he is “a sad little man with great pouches under his eyes, who lived in Maida Vale and supported his old mother, not, as he had once hoped, by his glorious operas — they were never played — but by teaching young ladies the violin. How he hated teaching young ladies the violin. It was sheer waste of time. ‘They don’t practise — they take up a violin, and they put it down,’ he said, in Italian, to his old mother, as they twisted the macaroni round their forks, after these dreadful lessons. The Signora was an excellent cook. ‘How is it that you women can be so musical; and yet, why is it that no woman has ever been a great composer?’ Giuseppe would ask when the Signora had played him into a good temper after the meal. She played admirably.” (29)
- 17 As many critics have noted, in this scene Woolf reworks a passage from her 1903 journal entitled “A Dance in Queen’s Gate” (*Passionate Apprentice* 164-67).
- 18 Noting that “[t]he primal emotions and natural settings of *Siegfried* are worlds away from the society Kitty lives in, the upper classes in the London of 1910,” DiGaetani argues that *The Years* “uses Wagnerian allusions rather as *The Voyage Out* did, as a means of characterizing an age, a social class within that age, and particular people as well” (125).
- 19 Sara’s refusal of the signifying system of ordinary language parallels Woolf’s own desire not to bolster the existing patriarchal system by taking part in it (seen for example in her refusal of the offer of an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Liverpool University while writing *The Pargiters* [D5 206]).
- 20 In this respect it resembles the phrase “Rattigan Glumphoboo,” part of Orlando’s “cypher language,” by means of which “a spiritual state of the utmost complexity might be conveyed in a word or two without the telegraph clerk being any the wiser” (185).
- 21 Squier reads this song and its singers as exemplifying the novel’s “double urban character”: “like the city from which it springs, it is neither static, conclusive, nor coercive. Rather, inspiring questions, it moves people to turn to each other for the answers” (179). Fowler reads it as a chorus, “a kind of raucous prophecy, a blend of Greek and nursery rhyme, fragments, as Amy Richlin [268] has described them, ‘not only of an ancient tongue, but of a future tongue’ ” (231).
- 22 Caserio argues that “[h]er narrative solicits — by means of its chronological procedures and of its very title — the status of history. But something in the nature of chronicle — an unpatterned heaping up of things at random — overtakes history in *The Years*, and overtakes the historian’s and the novelist’s investment in the intelligible unity of both” (71). He stresses that any such pattern in *The Years* is problematic, and turns to the repeated almost-music of pigeons to illustrate his point:

One can adduce the periodic repetition of a nursery rendition of the sounds made by pigeons — ‘Take two coos, Taffy. Take two coos . . .’—a formula intoned by Kitty to herself in 1880, by Eleanor to herself in 1891 and then again in 1910, by Sara to her sister Maggie, also in 1910, and by Kitty to herself again in ‘present day’ (c.1930). This is what unifies the diverse characters of Eleanor, Kitty, and Sara and unifies the narrative: a refrain, on the verge of nonsense, whose recollection is shared but unconscious. Dr. Peggy Pargiter thinks: “Sharing things lessens things? Give pain, give pleasure an outer body, and by increasing the surface diminish them . . . ‘sharing’ is a bit of a farce” (Y 352ff). So is unity or totality in Woolf’s novel. (70-71).
- 23 After finishing the novel, Woolf noted in her diary, “I am a little triumphant about the book. I think its an interesting attempt in a new method. I think it is more quintessential than the others. More milk

- skimmed off. A richer pat, certainly a fresher than that misery *The Years*. I've enjoyed writing almost every page" (D5 340); but shortly before her death, she wrote to John Lehmann saying "I've read my so called novel over: and I really don't think it does. It's much too slight and sketchy." She asks him to read the manuscript and give a casting vote, but believes it would be "a mistake from all points of view to publish it" (L6 482). nov 23 1940
- 24 Batchelor points out that the novel's working title *Pointz Hall* identifies it with the "strong tradition of English writing, the Condition of England novel set in an English country house" (132); he argues that Woolf "appropriates," "revises" and "transforms" that tradition to make *Between the Acts* a novel about writing itself (133).
 - 25 Characters are repeatedly introduced in terms of their pasts and their geographical origins: someone wonders of Miss La Trobe, "With that name she wasn't presumably pure English. From the Channel Islands perhaps?" (35).
 - 26 "The pageant-play experiments in question aimed not just to rehearse the tropes of Merrie Englands but to gauge the vitality of native rituals. As a village rite, the pageant could produce a pastoral, apolitical, and doughtily cohesive version of national identity. It seemed to be a vessel of inherited folk consciousness, the midsummer day's dream of an entire community. Moreover, it was perfectly suited to the tenets of English civic nationalism, likely to promote and express just enough collective spirit to bind citizens together but not to trip over into the frightening power of fascist mob fever. At a time when the masses began to assert themselves on both the literary and political stages of Europe, the English pageant-play was refitted to perform insular and interclass harmony." (55)
 - 27 Pridmore-Brown's description of Miss La Trobe as "Woolf's self-reflexive artist figure, an outsider but not a stranger to the social world of Pointz Hall" (410) recalls Woolf's own social position at the time of writing the novel: while now permanently resident at Rodmell, she distanced herself from the local community even as she took part in town activities (see for example her diary entries on the frustrations which accompanied her part in organizing lectures by Vita Sackville-West and Angelica Bell to the Women's Institute).
 - 28 Clements quotes a 1930 letter from Woolf to Smyth in which she remarks that she is "building up one of the oddest, most air hung pageants of you and your life" (L4 214).
 - 29 While "Home Sweet Home" was a popular Victorian parlor song, dating from 1823, in the early twentieth century it was quite often associated with American music rather than English, partly because of its use in film soundtracks.
 - 30 This questioning of the tune's composer also emphasizes the idea of authorship: the tune is either anonymous or the work of a heroic composer figure. Esty points out that "[t]he confusion— never resolved — between individual composer and traditional tune allows the text to make clear its own ambivalent division between a modernist ideal of the artist's individual sensibility and an emergent investment in the creative consciousness of the folk" (100).
 - 31 Like Cuddy-Keane, I don't think this represents "a hostility to technology per se" (75). But I do not agree with her contention that "Woolf's representation here relates specifically to the poor sound reproduction of the early machines" (75). As well as that, the "stuck needle" indicates a machine which is broken and repetitive, and is a figure for social paralysis and complacency.
 - 32 See also Scott and Cuddy-Keane for more on the gramophone's role in the novel.
 - 33 For discussions of *Between the Acts* which take up the novel's treatment of English tradition in terms of voice, language, and community, see Beer; Bowlby 146-59; Briggs; Hussey; Laurence 170-213; Leaska.
 - 34 Moore argues that "in both Woolf is looking for a link between past and future which will transcend the emptiness of the present moment. In *Between the Acts* she fails to find the link, but in *Anon* she, at least, imagines it" (172).
 - 35 Several critics argue that Woolf's 1930s work moves towards ideas of art that are based firmly in local and national forms which erase the cosmopolitan. Ann Fernald, for example, sees Woolf's late writing as less radical than her earlier work in its treatment of the linked ideas of literal and imaginative travel: "While persisting in her pacifism and her valuation of wandering, Woolf retreats from both internationalism and female traveling in these works: the minstrel, the commuter, and even the poet, *Anon*, all seem to be male" (82). For Fernald, Woolf's retreat from the works of Hakluyt "suggests that her anti-imperialism was, at the end of her life, more isolationist than cosmopolitan. In *Between the Acts*, actual travel is neither a transatlantic voyage nor a ramble across London but a wearing commute to a country house. Imaginative travel is not through space but across time: it is not Hakluyt who inspires, but the mastodon" (84). Esty too sees Woolf as retreating from cosmopolitanism and

- metropolitanism in *Between the Acts*, in favor of a redefinition of national tradition: "Seeking to express a troubled half-love for England, Woolf presents an *uncertain performance* of — rather than either a thorough ironization of or a complete identification with — nationalism" (93).
- 36 Lucy Swithin's image of a "gigantic ear" seems to gesture towards a similarly unifying Christian model of harmony in its reworking of the idea of the music of the spheres: "Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves — all are one. If discordant, producing harmony — if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus — she was smiling benignly — the agony of the particular sheep, cow, or human being is necessary; and so — she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance — we reach the conclusion that *all* is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall" (108).
 - 37 Eisenberg reads this as a unifying gesture in which Woolf and Miss La Trobe succeed in recreating the world of "Anon": "So too in *Between the Acts*. 'The chorus' of villagers fills in for Anon's old audience. And the actual audience on the lawn at Pointz Hall helps out as well, singing in the jangle and din of 'Present Time,' humming, murmuring, sharing in the emotion. The warm anonymous, singing world offers hope to a world stiffly bound with names and words" (261).
 - 38 See Cuddy-Keane 91-92, Laurence (189), Hussey.
 - 39 Pridmore-Brown argues that "In these moments, the audience must make meaning out of randomness, an act that in informational terms constitutes self-organization. In these unauthored moments, the rift between the symbolic and the real is most salient" (416).
 - 40 See in particular De Gay on jazz.
 - 41 J. Hillis Miller sees this moment as crucial to the novel: "It may be that the most important moment in *Between the Acts*, truest to Woolf's sense of life, is not the final harmonious melody on the gramophone, but the next to the last tune, with its broken harshness and its mocking grating singsong rhymes and half-rhymes" (221). Beer notes Woolf's mix of registers, both of music and of language, to end the pageant without a "grand finale": "In part, the effect is a tribute to music which alone, and briefly, can make things whole" (133).
 - 42 See Beer: "The fascination with words, their depth and instability of reference, their capacity to survive into new circumstances, their interplay of allusion, is central to Woolf's examination of community" (131).
 - 43 In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin invokes Klee's *Angelus Novus* to describe the "storm of progress": "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (257-58).
 - 44 De Gay identifies many sources: Stevenson, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Blake, Dante, and nursery rhyme, and notes that "The passage calls to question the idea of origins, making it extremely problematic for anyone to claim ownership of literature or to seek to appropriate it for particular ends: the words of famous poets, none of whom is identified, are placed alongside those of anonymous others, and also alongside silences, for the scene is studded with ellipses, resulting in a dense collage which refuses to yield a unified story" (209).
 - 45 As Pridmore-Brown puts it, "to the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* — a permanent and totalizing work of art orchestrated by an artist figure who, through rhythm, rhyme, and charismatic lure, imposes form on the raw energy of the masses — Woolf opposes a pluralistic politics of location" (419).
 - 46 Esty draws a useful contrast between Woolf's last two novels in terms of their respective versions of history: "In formal terms, the pageant's recursiveness and repetitiveness forestall narrative progress. Where *The Years* labored to show history unfolding in narrative terms, *Between the Acts* uses the pageant to recast history as heritage — as the rehearsal of familiar gestures, songs, and scenes. (96). To use Beer's words, Woolf presents "a resourceful history that jettisons ideas of development, discovers the remote past in the present moment, celebrates and mocks 'Englishness' and family life — and knows passion in all its improbability" (125).
 - 47 Silver stresses that "the importance of the audience to the writer became poignantly clear to her as her own sense of isolation increased" (360). Likewise Esty notes that between *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* Woolf shifts her emphasis "from private production ('I have had my vision') to collective reception ('I have made them see')" (106). The figure of music has functioned throughout Woolf's work as a connection between these two modes.
 - 48 This interest in the immediacy of audience responses appears quite ironic, given her well-documented disabling fears on the publication of every one of her books (see Bell, Lee and other biographies).
 - 49 John Lehman notes this idea of discontinuity in *Thrown to the Wolves*, where he describes *Between the Acts* as "filled with a poetry more disturbing than anything she had written before, reaching at times the

extreme limits of the communicable” (101).

- 50 As Clements put it, “the apperceptive listener of the novel . . . hears differently because he or she listens to *all* of the voices in the text” (63); Hussey, too, points out that “The classical, linear sequence of time — the prevailing view of history — is superseded in the act of reading, which is a performance of memory and imagination” (31).

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Curriculum Vitae

Vanessa Manhire

Education

1991-1996	University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand BA (Hons) 1994 MA 1996
1996-2009	Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick PhD 2010

Principal Employment

1997-2001	Teaching Assistant/Part-Time Lecturer Rutgers University English Department
2002-2006	English Language Trainer Richard Lewis Communications, Munich
2002-present	Freelance editor and translator
2008-2009	Manufacturing Controller, English Language Teaching Cambridge University Press
2009-present	Production Controller, English Language Teaching Cambridge University Press

Publications

“Constructions of Instruction: Didacticism in Fay Weldon’s *Letters to Alice, on First Reading Jane Austen*.” *Deep South* 2:1 (Autumn 1996).
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