



‘An individual, not an echo’: Identity and Expression in the Early Vocal Works of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)

Hannah Millington
BA, MA, PGCE

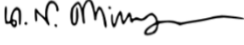
Thesis submitted to Dublin City University, Ireland
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Theology, Philosophy and Music

Primary Supervisor: Dr Róisín Blunnie
Secondary Supervisor: Dr Barbara Dignam

March 2024

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:  (Candidate) ID No.: 19214391 Date: 22.03.2024

In Memoriam

Damian Millington (1948–2009)

Viv Millington (1948–2016)

Acknowledgements

I moved to Dublin and began my PhD journey in September 2019, armed with my enthusiasm and a few tentative connections in Ireland. When the Covid pandemic hit six months later, I, like people all the world over, was reminded of the importance of human contact and the nourishment we derive from everyday interactions. As I began refining my research topic, I became increasingly aware that I was studying a woman who, over the course of her life, developed an intricate social network that fuelled her both personally and professionally. Moreover, many of these relationships seemed to influence her creatively and thus impact the direction of her compositions. In a similar vein, my thesis was shaped by the context in which it was written; the confinement necessitated by the pandemic emphasised the importance of my own community and further encouraged me to explore Ethel Smyth's.

I have benefited from the support of a widening group of friends and colleagues during my four years of study. First and foremost, I would like to thank my indefatigable supervisor, Dr Róisín Blunnie, whose unwavering faith, good humour, and encouragement kept me buoyed throughout. I am also grateful to Dr Barbara Dignam and Dr Gabriel Flynn for their presence on my supervisory panel; the discussions that we had over the course of my PhD greatly enriched the final product. My thanks to Professor John O'Flynn for his insights during my mid-point progression, and to Dr Laura Anderson, Dr Adam Behan, and Dr Wallis Seaton for reading and offering feedback on my writing at various points in time. Heartfelt thanks are also due to Professor Lorraine Byrne Bodley for offering to read the thesis when it was nearing completion and for deepening my thinking in a number of areas.

This research could not have been carried out had I not been awarded a scholarship by Dublin City University. I am grateful to Dr Nicole Grimes, Dr Matt Lawson, and Dr Alessandra Pallida for encouraging me to apply and for their assistance as I developed my application. I offer sincere thanks to those who interviewed me for the scholarship and supported my vision for the project, and to the university for funding it. To the librarians and archivists at the British Library, Dublin City University, Queen's University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, and University College Dublin, I extend my appreciation. I owe a debt of gratitude to Starr Brewster for granting me permission to use the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Harry Brewster in my research, and to Eve Lecky for facilitating remote access to these materials at the Brewster Archive. Equal thanks are due to Ethel Smyth's estate for allowing me to quote from letters that Smyth wrote to Edith Somerville. Access to these primary sources enriched my thesis immeasurably and enabled me to offer a much deeper exploration of Smyth's life and music.

Over the course of my PhD, I have had the joy of collaborating with scholars who are similarly interested in the lives of women in music. Dr Leah Broad and Dr Amy Zigler have been wonderful Smyth allies, and I am thankful to them for sharing their knowledge so willingly. It was a pleasure to speak alongside them both on our panel at the Third International Conference of Women's Work in Music in September 2021. I am likewise grateful to Dr Orla Shannon and Dr Laura Watson in this regard and for their insightful contributions to our session at the Royal Musical Association's 57th Annual Conference, also in September 2021. In a similar vein, I offer my thanks to Dr Joe Davies and Dr Yvonne Liao for the opportunity to contribute to the richly innovative Women in Global Music Network that they established in 2021. I am also grateful to John Andrews for the invitation to attend the premiere recording of Smyth's opera *Der Wald* in January 2023, which is an experience I shall not forget.

I have had the good fortune to belong to the Society for Musicology in Ireland since 2019, which has helped me to grow as a scholar and forge new connections across Ireland. I extend my sincere thanks to the two Councils with which I worked, first as the part-time administrator (2020–21) and then as the elected Student Representative (2021–24). While it was a huge privilege to work with everyone on these Councils, I would especially like to acknowledge for their warmth and gentle mentorship Presidents Professor Lorraine Byrne Bodley (2015–21) and Professor John O’Flynn (2021–24); Dr Damian Evans, Dr Wolfgang Marx, Dr Maria McHale, Professor Denise Neary, Dr Aidan Thomson, Professor Harry White, and Dr Bryan Whitelaw.

During 2020 I was involved in the establishment of the Dublin Musicology Collective for Graduate Welfare, offering me the chance to join forces with a number of fellow PhD students in an attempt to forge stronger inter-university links. The friendships that flourished from this initiative have nourished me greatly and so I offer my warmest thanks to Anika Babel, Dr Adam Behan, Rachel Duffy, Dr Eleanor Jones-McAuley, Dr Patrice Keegan, Conor Power, and Alison Shorten. Having friends at varying stages of their academic careers has greatly aided my PhD journey and I am deeply thankful to Dr Laura Anderson, Professor Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Freya Dasgupta, Laura Sheils, Dr Bryan Whitelaw, and Dr Clare Wilson for their friendship, unfaltering support, and immense kindness. *Go raibh míle maith agaibh.*

I reserve my final thanks for those who put up with being left behind when I moved to Dublin. Heartfelt thanks to Holly Williams, for her eternally cheerful texts. To Viv and Rex Canham, for saying ‘when’ rather than ‘if’ every time I spoke of wanting to cross the water. To Dr Nicola Blacklaws and Anna Holdsworth, for the consistency of their friendship, which offered me a safe harbour on even the darkest Covid days. To my family — Jules, Nik, and Elliot — for the airport runs, their belief in me, and everything in between. I offer my love and gratitude to you all. This thesis is dedicated to my late aunt and uncle, Viv and Damian Millington, who would have really enjoyed hearing about Ethel Smyth and her fascinating life.

Dublin, August 2023

List of Publications and Presentations

Publications

Millington, Hannah, “‘1910’: Ethel Smyth’s Unsung Suffrage Song’, *The Musicology Review*, 10 (2021), 55–76

Presentations

‘Shoulder to Shoulder with the Suffragettes: Dame Ethel Smyth and “The March of the Women”’, Joint SMI and ICTM-IE Postgraduate Conference, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, 17–18 January 2020

‘A Song with its Story: Dame Ethel Smyth and “The March of the Women”’, Dublin City University Seminar Series, 10 February 2020

‘Shoulder to Shoulder with the Suffragettes: Dame Ethel Smyth and “The March of the Women”’, Musical Women in Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century Conference, Royal Northern College of Music, 24–26 February 2020

‘Dreaming of the Emerald Isle: Ethel Smyth’s Irish Influences’, SMI Plenary Conference, University College Dublin, 29–31 October 2020

‘Renunciation and Redemption: Ethel Smyth’s Mass in D’, ‘Women Are Not Born to Compose’, Female Musical Works from 1750 to 1950 Conference, Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini, 27–29 November 2020

“‘1910’: Ethel Smyth’s Unsung Suffrage Song’, Joint SMI and ICTM-IE Plenary Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 27–30 May 2021

‘Autobiographical Approaches to Ethel Smyth’s Vocal Works’ (Panel Session), The Third International Conference on Women’s Work in Music, Bangor University, 1–3 September 2021

‘Meet and Greet: Women’s Networking Strategies in Twentieth-Century Ireland and England’ (Panel Session), 57th Annual Conference of the RMA, Newcastle University, 14–16 September 2021

Pre-concert talk on Ethel Smyth and her Mass in D for The Tailleferre Ensemble and Stowmarket Chorale, 19 March 2022

‘Unearthing Ethel Smyth’s *The Song of Love*, Op. 8’, SMI Plenary Conference, TU Dublin Conservatoire, 8–10 June 2023

Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
List of Publications and Presentations	v
Contents	vi
List of Abbreviations	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Music Examples	x
Abstract	xi
Introduction: An Individual, Not an Echo	1
Smyth in Context	1
Exploring Smyth's Early Period: Identity and Expression	15
Chapter 1: The Biography of an Autobiographer	23
1.1. Introduction	23
1.2. Smyth the Writer	24
1.3. Biographical Sketch	30
1.3a. Childhood and Youth (1858–77)	31
1.3b. The Leipzig Years (1877–85)	37
1.3c. In The Desert (1886–90)	45
1.3d. A New Course (1891–1909)	48
1.3e. Politics and War (1910–20)	55
1.3f. Post-War (1921–44)	60
1.4. Conclusion	67
Chapter 2: German Influence and the Art Song	72
2.1. Introduction	72
2.2. Education, Influences, and Identity	74
2.3. Leipzig Circles: Singing in the Salon	83
2.4. Smyth and the Art Song Tradition	88
2.5. Poetic Choices: <i>Lieder und Balladen</i> , Op. 3 and <i>Lieder</i> , Op. 4	92
2.6. Text Setting, Narrative, and Drama	95
2.6a. Op. 3, No. 2, 'Der verirrte Jäger'	98
2.6b. Op. 3, No. 5, 'Schön Rohtraut'	102
2.6c. Op. 4, No. 4, 'Nachtreiter'	106
2.6d. Op. 4, No. 5, 'Nachtgedanken'	109
2.7. Conclusion	112
Chapter 3: The Song-Child of Love	115
3.1. Introduction	115
3.2. The Herzogenbergs and The Brewsters	119
3.2a. Unearthing The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: 1884–85	120
3.3. Creating Songs from Sorrows: 1887–88	124
3.3a. Constructing <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8: Structure and Source Text	128
3.4. Reading <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8 Biographically	131
3.5. Conclusion	142
Chapter 4: Renunciation and Redemption	145

4.1. Introduction	145
4.2. Smyth and Religion: Childhood and Youth (1858–77)	150
4.3. Early Sacred Settings (c. 1882–84)	153
4.4. The Mass in D: Motivations and Mother Figures	157
4.5. Smyth’s ‘Munich Mood’ and Beyond	165
4.5a. The End of Orthodox Belief	172
4.6. Conclusion	177
Conclusion: Other Sides of Ethel Smyth	181
Summary of Findings	181
Implications for Further Research	188
Bibliography	191

List of Abbreviations

Publications by Ethel Smyth

<i>ITR</i>	<i>Impressions That Remained</i> , 2 vols, 3 rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920)
<i>SOL</i>	<i>Streaks of Life</i> (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921)
<i>BOB</i>	<i>A Final Burning of Boats, etc.</i> , (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928)
<i>FP</i>	<i>Female Pippings in Eden</i> , 2 nd edn (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933)
<i>ATWO</i>	<i>As Time Went On</i> (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936)
<i>WHN</i>	<i>What Happened Next</i> (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940)

List of Tables

Table 3.1. A breakdown of <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8 indicating the source text for each movement	130
Table 3.2. A comparison of Chapter 5:2 with the sung text in <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8, Movement II	133
Table 3.3. A comparison of Chapter 8:6 with the sung text in <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8, Movement VIII	140

List of Music Examples

Example 2.1. 'Der verirrte Jäger', bars 1–3	98
Example 2.2. 'Der verirrte Jäger', bars 20–23	99
Example 2.3. 'Der verirrte Jäger', bars 34–43	100
Example 2.4. 'Schön Rohtraut', bars 1–4	103
Example 2.5. 'Schön Rohtraut', bars 13–20	104
Example 2.6. 'Nachtreiter', bars 11–15	107
Example 2.7. 'Nachtreiter', bars 23–27	108
Example 2.8. 'Nachtgedanken', piano part, bars 1–4	110
Example 2.9. 'Nachtgedanken', bars. 45–49	111

Abstract

Hannah Millington

‘An individual, not an echo’: Identity and Expression in the Early Vocal Works of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944) was a British composer, writer, and social activist who made significant contributions to many musical genres, from vocal, chamber, and piano works, to operas and larger choral compositions. This thesis examines the vocal and choral works of Smyth’s early period (1877–1891), which are often overshadowed by her operas and the songs from the middle of her career (1892–1914). By looking beyond Smyth’s identity as a suffragette and operatic composer, and considering her life and musical output before these tropes became prevalent, the thesis provides a more nuanced account of the early part of her career. In doing so, it highlights the importance of these vocal and choral works and their impact on Smyth’s compositional trajectory.

Beginning with Smyth as a writer, the thesis considers how her autobiographical publications have influenced the direction of scholarship and shaped our interpretation of her life and music. It also presents a revised biographical sketch of the composer, re-evaluating aspects of her identity and elucidating how Smyth’s social network influenced her compositions. Chapter Two addresses her earliest published song collections — the *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 (c. 1877) — exploring the impact of Smyth’s musical education and social network in Leipzig. Musical readings of her *Lieder* show that these songs are early examples of her interest in narrative and drama, a compositional trait that she would develop throughout her career.

Chapter 3 presents the first study of Smyth’s eight-movement cantata, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888), reclaiming a severely neglected work. This chapter investigates for the first time the context surrounding *The Song of Love* and a biographical reading of the cantata suggests that it may be read as an expression of her feelings for the writer and philosopher Henry Bennet Brewster (1850–1908). Drawing on unpublished correspondence, this interpretation of the work foregrounds her relationship with Brewster and offers a broader sense of her sexual identity than is typically given. Finally, Chapter 4 investigates Smyth’s relationship with religion within the context of her *Mass in D* (1891), examining the potential motivations behind the work’s creation. An alternative reading of the *Mass* suggests that Smyth may have composed it as an act of redemption, widening the biographical lens through which the work is often viewed.

Introduction: An Individual, Not an Echo

‘I do entreat you not to aim at uniformity in matters of thought and feeling. The first and last rule, whichever sex you belong to, is: *Be yourself*; an individual, not an echo.’¹

Smyth in Context

On 21 January 1931, Dame Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf addressed members of the London and National Society for Women’s Service on the topic of how women might succeed in musical and literary professions.² While Smyth’s speech was never published, there are two existing versions of the one delivered by Woolf. An abridged edition appears in *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (1942) and a longer transcription can be found in *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of ‘The Years’* (1977); this latter version shows a number of revisions, including a portion of text concerning Smyth that was rewritten for the final speech.³ Woolf begins by comparing herself to the composer, stating, ‘I feel rather like an idle and frivolous pleasure boat lolloping along in the wake of an ironclad.’⁴ After this self-deprecatory aside, Woolf’s effusive description of Smyth highlights the degree to which she regarded her as a champion of women’s rights. In the earlier version of her speech, Woolf wrote:

She is of the race of pioneers[,] she is one of the ice breakers, the gun runners, the window smashers. The armoured tanks, who climbed the rough ground, drew the enemies [*sic*] fire, and left behind her a pathway — not yet smooth and metalled road — but still a pathway for those who come after her. Thus [...] we honour her not only for being a musician and a writer, but also for being an armoured tank. I never know whether to be angry that such heroism was needed, or glad that such heroism was shown.⁵

Her combative language places Smyth at the heart of the action, depicting her as a front-line warrior charged with ensuring safe passage for those who followed. Woolf retained the essence of this draft for the final version of her speech, in which she softened the military imagery:

¹ Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden*, 2nd edn (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933), p. 126.

² For further reading on this topic, see Evelyn Tsz Yan Chan, *Virginia Woolf and the Professions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³ Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942); Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of ‘The Years’*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: New York Public Library, 1977).

⁴ Woolf, *The Pargiters*, p. xxvii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

She is of the race of pioneers, of pathmakers. She has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who come after her. Thus we honour her not only as a musician and as a writer [...] but also as a blaster of rocks and a maker of bridges. It seems sometimes a pity that a woman who only wished to write music should have been forced also to make bridges, but that was part of her job and she did it.⁶

By describing Smyth as such, Woolf aimed to illustrate that women in music were still making their mark, whereas in literary circles she believed that ‘the way was cut long ago. I have no doubt that I owe a great deal to some mute and inglorious Ethel Smyth’.⁷ In drawing attention to her work — as a musician, writer, and social activist — Woolf was trying to ensure that Smyth did not suffer the same fate as her literary predecessors. Moreover, the imagery of felling trees, blasting rocks, and building bridges sharply contrasts with the ‘mute and inglorious’ figure, emphasising Smyth’s difference and the significance of her contribution to the field.⁸

Smyth also drew attention to this perceived disparity between the musical and literary worlds in her 1928 letter to *The Musical Times*, ‘The Hard Case of the Woman Composer’.⁹ Smyth declared that ‘nothing can prevent a woman from writing a book, and once she has found a publisher nothing can stop the public from reading that book’.¹⁰ She remarked that songs are almost as easily published, meaning that women are more likely to succeed with smaller forms. Contrastingly, ‘[with] the larger forms of the art, music depends entirely on the good offices of conductors and committees. And these can, and do, withhold from the public the chance of hearing works they see no good reason for producing’.¹¹ In this letter, Smyth highlights the existence of the musical middlemen who hindered the progress and success of aspiring composers — particularly women — who wrote large-scale works.¹² In her later volume, *Female Pippings in Eden* (1933), Smyth remarked on the impact of negative critical reviews of musical works. She argued, ‘if the critics dislike your book, there is nothing to hinder people from ordering it and judging for

⁶ Ibid., p. xxvii–xxviii. This quotation inspired the title of the bilingual volume *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth (Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth)*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010).

⁷ Ibid., p. xxviii.

⁸ Woolf’s speech resonates with Edith Somerville’s unpublished eulogy of the composer, in which she describes Smyth as a ‘standard-bearer’, ‘Crusader’, and a ‘Fighter’. See *Another Side of Ethel Smyth: Letters to her Great-Niece, Elizabeth Mary Williamson*, selected and ed. by Caroline E. M. Stone (Edinburgh: Kennedy & Boyd, 2018), p. 374.

⁹ Ethel Smyth, ‘The Hard Case of the Woman Composer’, *The Musical Times*, 69/1026 (1928), 736. Also see Chapter III, ‘Literary and Musical Careers Contrasted’ in *Female Pippings in Eden*, pp. 14–18.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 736.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 736.

¹² Elsewhere, Smyth described these gatekeepers as the ‘Machine’ and the ‘Faculty’. See ‘The Opera Fiasco’ in *Streaks of Life* (London, Longmans: 1921); *FP*, p. 15.

themselves'.¹³ Conversely, musical works could not so easily be heard and critiqued by individuals, meaning that the opinions of the press held greater sway in musical spheres.

These observations are reflective of Smyth's own experiences and the works addressed within this thesis. The publications discussed in Chapter 1 highlight that, unlike her career as a composer, Smyth's path as a writer was not hampered by her sex or characterised by negative critical reviews, thus illustrating the point she made in 'The Hard Case of the Woman Composer'. Chapter 2 demonstrates how her *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 (both c. 1877) benefitted from regular performances in her friends' homes and were published early in her career. Yet, despite her best efforts, Smyth's eight-movement cantata, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888), remained unperformed and unpublished during her lifetime, not receiving its world premiere until 8 May 2023. Chapter 3 investigates some of the potential reasons why Smyth struggled to interest conductors in this ambitious work and considers how its neglect has affected the cantata's place within her output. Similarly, her Mass in D (1891) — explored in Chapter 4 — suffered a thirty-one-year hiatus between its first performance and its revival in 1924, exemplifying the difficulty she had in gaining support for her large-scale works.

Smyth wrote about the challenges faced by women in music on several occasions, including in her miscellaneous volumes *Streaks of Life* (1921) and *Female Pipings in Eden*. While some of Smyth's declarations are problematic — such as her assertion that 'up to now there have been no great women composers' — many of her observations on the limiting nature of nineteenth-century women's musical education ring true.¹⁴ In *Female Pipings in Eden*, her most overtly feminist book, she argues, 'there is not at this present moment (1933) one single middle-aged woman alive who has had the musical education that has fallen to men *as a matter of course, without any effort on their part*, ever since music was!¹⁵ Smyth often expresses her views with a degree of hyperbole, yet a desire for equality with her male counterparts pervades much of her writing. Derek Hyde goes as far as to suggest that Smyth was the first "professional" woman composer in England whose main aim was that her music and its performance be received on equal terms with that of male composers'.¹⁶ As will be shown throughout this thesis, the gendered criticism that Smyth encountered over the course of her career reinforced the notion that belonging to the 'unfortunate class' of 'lady composers' often had a negative impact on her reception and

¹³ *FP*, p. 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Derek Hyde, *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), p. 153.

impeded her progress.¹⁷ However, rather than be deterred by the difficulties she faced, Smyth continually strove to overcome them. When asked to address the pupils of an all-girls school, Smyth broadened her scope and spoke about qualities often encouraged in women, including sentimentality and conformity. She suggests that even if ‘the illustrated Press’ promote uniformity in matters of appearance, women should not allow their minds to be similarly influenced.¹⁸ She averred:

But what I really do want to drive home is, that, even if your moral courage fails you in the matter of externals [appearance], I do entreat you not to aim at uniformity in matters of thought and feeling. The first and last rule, whichever sex you belong to, is: *Be yourself*; an individual, not an echo.¹⁹

This policy was one to which Smyth subscribed throughout her life; it did not always lead to the smoothest path, but her unapologetic individuality is arguably one of the reasons why Smyth has not been lost from history and why she continues to provoke interest.

Through her impassioned publications and her involvement with the Women’s Suffrage Movement, Smyth was increasingly regarded as a fierce advocate for women’s rights. Her political activism began in 1910 when she joined the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her eldest daughter, Christabel, in 1903.²⁰ Smyth had initially been reluctant to join the suffrage cause, stating, ‘I left England in 1908 [...] to find a refuge from the turmoil of the fight for Votes for Women ... As a composer I wanted to keep out of it. It seemed to me incompatible with artistic creation’.²¹ The question of how to combine art and politics was something that she grappled with, and even when she had decided to contribute to the WSPU, she evidently felt that the two should be kept separate. Reflecting on her decision to join, she recalled, ‘Before a fortnight had passed it became evident to me that to keep out of the movement, to withhold any modicum it was possible to contribute to the cause, was as unthinkable as to drive art and politics in double harness’.²² Yet, in joining the WSPU, Smyth did just that. Many of the works that emerged from this period — including her *Songs of Sunrise* (1910)

¹⁷ *FP*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰ Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, eds., *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 2.

²¹ Quoted in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1959), p. 144.

²² *FP*, p. 192.

and *The Boatswain's Mate* (1913–14) — reflect her involvement with the suffrage cause and unify art and politics: the two facets of her life that she had considered incompatible.²³

Smyth's involvement with the Women's Suffrage Movement left a lasting impression on her identity, affecting how she has been depicted in historical and contemporary narratives and influencing the direction of scholarship to date. Elizabeth Wood's publications on Smyth's political activism and suffrage works have become a cornerstone of the research into this period of her life.²⁴ More recently, in an attempt to untangle Smyth's contradictory autobiographical accounts of this time, Marleen Hoffmann has examined how Smyth portrayed to her readers her involvement with the WSPU and her ability to compose while she was committed to the cause.²⁵ Elsewhere, researchers have focused on Smyth's relationship with Emmeline Pankhurst, as in Rachel Lumsden's biographical reading of her song, 'Possession' (1913), or Christopher Wiley's exploration of Smyth's links to Surrey.²⁶ Read in conjunction with her chapter on Emmeline Pankhurst in *Female Pippings in Eden*, this research helps to deepen our knowledge of how Smyth contributed to the suffrage cause and interacted with members of the WSPU. The potential feminist undertones of Smyth's fourth opera, *The Boatswain's Mate*, have also provoked interest.²⁷ Naturally, there are thematic overlaps in the literature and threads concerning Smyth's sexuality, her public image, and the critical reception of her works are woven throughout.²⁸

²³ Unless otherwise stated, the dates given for Smyth's works refer to the date of composition rather than publication. See the list of works compiled by Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), pp. 373–81.

²⁴ Elizabeth Wood, 'Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music', *The Massachusetts Review*, 24/1 (1983), 125–139; 'Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage', *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/4 (1995), 606–43.

²⁵ Marleen Hoffmann, "It seems to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters". Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music' in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 186–204.

²⁶ Rachel Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us': Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and 'Possession'", *Feminist Studies*, 41/2 (2015), 335–370; Christopher Wiley, 'Ethel Smyth, Suffrage, and Surrey: From Frimley Green to Hook Heath, Woking', *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network*. Special Issue: 1918–2018, 2/11 (2018), 11–18.

²⁷ Christopher Wiley, 'Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera' in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 169–185; Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Changing with the Times: Ethel Smyth's Operatic Odyssey', *Context: Journal of Music Research*, 19 (2000), 81–86. Trevor Rand Nelson briefly remarks on *The Boatswain's Mate* — 'her most patently feminist opera' — in his thesis, 'The Dissident Dame. Alternative Feminist Methodologies and the Music of Ethel Smyth' (unpublished Master's thesis, Michigan State University), p. 58.

²⁸ For further reading on Smyth and suffrage, see Amanda Harris, "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the "great liberative war of women": An English Musical Feminism' in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 70–84.

This attentiveness to Smyth’s involvement with women’s suffrage reflects a broader trend within the literature of focusing on the middle period (1892–1914) of her career, which encompasses her time with the WSPU and the creation of her first four operas: *Fantasio* (1892–94), *Der Wald* (1899–1901), *The Wreckers* (1902–04), and *The Boatswain’s Mate* (1913–14). Elizabeth Kertesz’s frequently cited doctoral thesis on the reception of Smyth’s Mass and first four operas offers a wealth of information on these works, as does Rachael J. Gibbon’s similarly focused study.²⁹ Of the four aforementioned operatic works, *Fantasio* has received the least scholarly attention, perhaps due to the absence of a published score or recording.³⁰ Regarding Smyth’s second opera, Aidan Thomson has situated *Der Wald* within its critical context in England and examined Smyth’s stylistic links to Wagner, whereas Amy Zigler has focused on the work’s reception following its American premiere by the Metropolitan Opera in 1903.³¹ Addressing it from a more sociological perspective, Judith Lebiez has explored the opera’s representation of female power and Smyth’s subversion of conventional gender roles.³² While the world premiere recording of *Der Wald* is forthcoming, a staging of this opera is long overdue.³³ Recordings of *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain’s Mate* are readily available and there is more

²⁹ Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000); Rachael J. Gibbon, ‘The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005).

³⁰ Elizabeth Wood discusses *Fantasio* in ‘The Lesbian in the Opera: Desire Unmasked in Smyth’s *Fantasio* and *Fête Galante*’ in *En travesti: women, gender subversion, opera*, ed. by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Also see Wood, ‘Sapphonic’ in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and lesbian Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 27–66. Cornelia Bartsch discusses the inclusion of Smyth’s Lied ‘Nachtreiter’ (Op. 4, No. 4) in performances of *Fantasio* at the Weimar Hoftheater in 1889 in her chapter ‘Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth’s *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4’ in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 177–216.

³¹ Aidan J. Thomson, ‘Decadence in the Forest: Smyth’s *Der Wald* in its Critical Context’ in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 218–249; Amy Zigler, “‘What a splendid chance missed!’: Dame Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* at the Met”, *The Opera Journal*, 54/2 (2021), 109–163. Also see John Yohalem, ‘From The Metropolitan Opera Archives: A Woman’s Opera at the Met. Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* in New York’, *The Metropolitan Opera Archives*, (n.d.) <<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/imgs/DerWald.htm>> [accessed 29 June 2023]

³² Judith Lebiez, ‘The Representation of Female Power in Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* (1902)’, *The German Quarterly*, 91/4 (2018), 415–424. For further reading on *Der Wald*, see Nancy Gisbrecht, ‘An Examination of the Operatic Environment in Which Ethel Smyth Composed and Its Effect Upon Her Career’ (unpublished MA thesis, University of Southern California, 1980); Carl Johnson, “Ethel Smyth: The Only Woman Composer Ever to be Heard at the Met,” *American Music Teacher*, 31/3 (1982), 14–17; Eugene Gates, “‘Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don’t: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 31/1 (1997), 63–71.

³³ *Der Wald* was recorded in January 2023, conducted by John Andrews and performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Singers alongside soloists Robert Murray, Natalya Romaniw, Clare Barnett-Jones, Morgan Pearse, Andrew Shore and Mathew Brook. Resonus Classics are due to release the recording in the Autumn of 2023. In March 2023, The Opera Makers directed a performance of the opera at the Holy Sepulchre Church, London.

literature on these works, reflecting the importance of being able to hear the music under study. Kathleen A. Abromeit's research on *The Wreckers* offers an insight into its early performance history and Thomas Beecham's involvement in the opera's English productions.³⁴ Suzanne Robinson provides an engaging enquiry into the legal, moral, and religious themes explored in *The Wreckers*, situating these issues within the Edwardian context from which the work emerged.³⁵ Shifting the focus from England to Europe, Elizabeth Kertesz considers *The Wreckers* in relation to French opera.³⁶ In addition to the literature cited above, *The Boatswain's Mate* has tended to emerge within surveys of Smyth's life and works and is less frequently studied than its immediate predecessor.³⁷

Beyond the operatic works, scholars have begun to examine Smyth's vocal output from this middle period, which includes 'Hey Nonny No' (1910), her suffrage *Songs of Sunrise*, and the collections, *Three Moods of the Sea* (1913) and *Three Songs* (1913). While these pieces are discussed in Elizabeth Wood's 'Performing Rights' article, other scholars have addressed specific songs within each collection, notably '1910' from *Songs of Sunrise* and 'Possession' from *Three Songs*.³⁸ Her *Three Moods of the Sea* are markedly absent from the literature and Robin Hull's description of these 'seldom heard' songs is as accurate in 2023 as it was when he wrote his article in 1944.³⁹ Smyth's earlier collection of four French text settings from 1907 has been similarly overlooked, receiving the greatest attention from Kathleen Dale in her critical study of Smyth's music, which appears as an appendix to Christopher St John's biography of the composer.⁴⁰ However, Dale's suggestion that Smyth made 'a disappointingly small practical contribution to the recitalist's repertory' exemplifies her tendency to diminish some of Smyth's achievements, which may have contributed to the limited scholarly interest in her vocal output.⁴¹ As evidenced above, the

³⁴ Kathleen A. Abromeit, 'Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers*, and Sir Thomas Beecham', *The Musical Quarterly*, 73/2 (1989), 196–211.

³⁵ Suzanne Robinson, 'Smyth the Anarchist: "Fin-de-Siècle" Radicalism in "The Wreckers"' *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 20/2 (2008), 149–79.

³⁶ Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Ethel Smyth's "The Wreckers": a Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera', *Studia Musicologica*, 52 (2011), 485–497.

³⁷ See, for example, Wood, 'Performing Rights'; Eugene Gates, 'Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't' and 'Dame Ethel Smyth: Pioneer of English Opera', *The Kapralova Society Journal*, 11/1 (2013), pp. 1–9. Edward J. Dent offers a favourable summary of *The Boatswain's Mate* in 'English Opera', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 52nd Sess. (1925–1926), (1926), 71–88. John Caldwell remarks on Smyth's noteworthy contributions to opera in the early 1910, with particular reference to *The Boatswain's Mate*, in 'Later Victorian Music and the "English Musical Renaissance", 1870–1914' in *The Oxford History of English Music, Volume 2: c. 1715 to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 246–322.

³⁸ Hannah Millington, "'1910': Ethel Smyth's Unsung Suffrage Song', *The Musicology Review*, 10 (2021), 55–76; Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us'".

³⁹ Robin Hull, 'Dame Ethel Smyth', *Tempo*, 7 (1944), 12.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Dale, 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study' in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 288–304.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

literature on Smyth's early operas significantly outweighs that dedicated to her songs; this may also reflect the tendency for researchers to focus on her large-scale works rather than smaller forms. Published in 1959, Dale's survey remains the most comprehensive overview of Smyth's output as a whole and is consequently still used as a point of reference. While it lacks the objectivity and academic rigour of more recent publications, it offers details on most of Smyth's works and is a useful starting point for those interested in her music. An updated survey would greatly enrich the existing literature on Smyth's works and may highlight lesser-known pieces within her output.

The emphasis on Smyth's suffrage and operatic output has drawn attention to a significant period in her life, highlighting her contributions to the field of opera, raising awareness of her political activism, and influencing perceptions of her identity. However, the wealth of literature on the middle period of Smyth's life contrasts with the amount of research addressing her early (1877–1891) and late (1920–1938) periods. Smyth wrote fewer compositions during the latter part of her life, which was likely due to difficulties with her hearing that worsened during the First World War.⁴² In addition to her final two operas — *Fête galante* (1921–22) and *Entente cordiale* (1923–24) — Smyth wrote two other large-scale works during this period: a double concerto for violin and horn (1926) and a choral symphony entitled *The Prison* (1929–30).⁴³ She also composed a set of *Variations on Bonny Sweet Robin (Ophelia's Song)* (1927) for flute, oboe, and violin or viola, and a fanfare named *Hot Potatoes* (1930). Two further works, which can be connected to her friendship with the Irish writer Edith Somerville, are the part-song 'Dreamings' (1920) and the organ piece 'Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air' (c. 1938). Despite this healthy body of works, the existing literature is primarily concerned with *The Prison*.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Wood's research into Smyth's deafness offers a comprehensive overview of the music of her late

⁴² Pneumonia and pleurisy almost took Smyth's life in November 1918, which further increased her hearing difficulties. See Elizabeth Wood, Elizabeth Wood, 'On Deafness and Musical Creativity: The Case of Ethel Smyth', *Musical Quarterly*, 92/1 (2009), 33–69 (p. 34).

⁴³ For research on the double concerto see Mary Lee Keays, 'Tooting her own horn: Dame Ethel Smyth's Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001).

⁴⁴ Amy Zigler, "'Perhaps what men call a sin': An examination of Ethel Smyth's *The Prison*" in *Women Composers in New Perspectives, 1800-1950: Genres, Contexts and Repertoire*, ed. by Mariateresa Storino and Susan Wollenberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 213–34; Jürgen Schaarwächter, 'A British Choral Symphony? Ethel Smyth's *The Prison* in Context', *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 250–59; Kate Schau, "'This Is No Leave Taking": Autobiography and Legacy in Ethel Smyth's *The Prison*" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Oregon, 2022). *The Prison* is also examined by Edith Ann Copley in 'A survey of the choral works of Dame Ethel Smyth with an analysis of the Mass in D (1891)' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1990).

period; Wood also explores the potential reasons behind Smyth's decision to focus on arranging earlier works and creating large-scale compositions during this time.⁴⁵

Similarly to her friendship with Emmeline Pankhurst, Smyth's relationship with Virginia Woolf has been a subject of study. The two women met in 1930 and in the introduction to the fourth volume of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Nigel Nicolson suggests that 'Virginia's letters to Ethel Smyth were the most intimate she wrote at this period, because they were the most self-revealing'.⁴⁶ It is arguably this intimacy, which is visible to contemporary readers due to the publication of Woolf's letters and diaries, that invites enquiry. Suzanne Raitt suggests that their correspondence, and Woolf's tendency to question Smyth about her life, was 'part of a serious intellectual endeavour as well as an emotional, and possibly erotic, one'.⁴⁷ Raitt's reading of this relationship as being both maternal — Smyth was twenty-five years older than Woolf — and romantic resonates with later interpretations of the composer's relations with figures such as Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Mary Benson, and Mary Ponsonby.⁴⁸ Questions of sexuality and autobiography are also present in Christopher Wiley's studies on Smyth and Woolf, which consider their lesbian and feminist identities central to the interpretation of their works.⁴⁹ In contrast, Elicia Clements focuses solely on the intellectual aspect of their engagement, exploring how their conversations influenced Woolf's artistic ideas concerning 'subjectivity, difference, and community'.⁵⁰ Clements demonstrates how these ideas are brought to the fore in Woolf's novel *Between the Acts* (1941), whose protagonist, Miss La Trobe, bears a resemblance to Smyth.⁵¹

Conversely, Smyth's relationship with Edith Somerville has received limited attention, perhaps due to her being less well-known than women such as Emmeline

⁴⁵ Wood, 'On Deafness and Musical Creativity'.

⁴⁶ Nigel Nicolson, 'Introduction' in *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Collected Letters IV, 1929–1931*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), p. xvii.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Raitt, 'The tide of Ethel: femininity as narrative in the friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf', *Critical Quarterly*, 30 (1988), 3–19.

⁴⁸ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Christopher Wiley, "'When a Woman Speaks the Truth about Her Body': Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography", *Music & Letters*, 85/3 (2004), 388–414; 'Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and "The First Woman to Write an Opera"', *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–295.

⁵⁰ Clements, Elicia, 'Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction', *College Literature*, 32/3 (2005), 51–71.

⁵¹ For further reading on Smyth's influence on Woolf's writing see Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), pp. 602–03; Blanche Wiesen Cook, "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs*, 4/4 (1979), 718–39 (p. 51); Claire Davison, 'Non-census feminism?—Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf and the 'Burning of Votes Boats, etc.', *Études Britanniques Contemporaines* [online], 58 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.9281>>.

Pankhurst or Virginia Woolf. Smyth and Somerville met in 1919 and were friends until Smyth's death in 1944; much of their extensive correspondence is held at Queen's University Belfast as part of the Somerville and Ross Collection.⁵² Biographical accounts of the relationship between Smyth and Somerville have been largely subjective, with Gifford Lewis's substantial volume on Somerville presenting a disparaging and often homophobic representation of their friendship.⁵³ Louise Collis's biography on Smyth is likewise problematic in its portrayal of the Irish writer, which suggests that Smyth had to 'educate the totally inexperienced and ignorant Edith in matters of sex'.⁵⁴ Using archival material held at Queen's University Belfast, Sean O'Toole provides a more nuanced assessment of Smyth's connection to Somerville, yet there is scope for a more substantial exploration of their twenty-six-year relationship.⁵⁵

Smyth's sexuality and her engagement with (often high-profile) women are reoccurring themes within the existing literature. As the summaries above demonstrate, much of this research falls into the later period of Smyth's life, but a corresponding strand focuses on her relationships with women in the earlier part of her career. The most significant of these connections was the one she formed with the musician and composer Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, who Smyth met while she was studying in Leipzig. Relationships such as these are interesting not only from a biographical perspective but also because they often significantly influence her music, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. Elizabeth Wood interprets Smyth's attachment to Herzogenberg as a romantic one, a stance which is echoed in the work of scholars such as Sophie Fuller, Martha Vicinus, and Cornelia Bartsch.⁵⁶ Beyond her sexuality, other facets of Smyth's early musical output have received some attention, including her two Lieder collections, selected chamber works, and the Mass in D. Collectively, these works date from approximately 1877 to 1891, a period during which Smyth was learning her craft as a composer and exploring a variety of forms. At no other point in her career did she produce as much music as she did during this time, which saw her composing songs, solo works for piano

⁵² Smyth's friendship with Somerville is addressed in more detail in Chapter 1, section 1.3f.

⁵³ Gifford Lewis, *Edith Somerville: A Biography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber & Co. Limited, 1984), p. 160.

⁵⁵ Sean O'Toole, 'The Letters of Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 1918–1921: A Chronicle of Desire', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 29 (2020), 253–280.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Wood, 'Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts' in, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1993), pp. 164–83; Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States 1629–Present* (London: Pandora, 1994); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*; Cornelia Bartsch, 'Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 177–216.

and organ, sonatas, chamber pieces, and large-scale orchestral and choral compositions. The smaller forms are representative of what was expected of women during the late nineteenth century and reflect the tuition she received at the Leipzig Conservatory and from Heinrich von Herzogenberg. However, her attention to salon music during 1877–88 was likely heavily influenced by her social circles in Leipzig and her use of music as a networking tool; as Chapter 2 demonstrates, her Lieder were especially important in this regard.

In addition to Kathleen Dale's critical study addressed above, her article on Smyth's 'prentice work' offers a valuable insight into the composer's early output with specific reference to the Ethel Smyth Collection now housed at the British Library, London.⁵⁷ However, the list of works Dale provides only details the 'principal items' and therefore is not a comprehensive catalogue.⁵⁸ Certain comments, such as her assertion that 'the piano pieces are of little interest except as curiosities' may have deterred researchers from pursuing some of these works.⁵⁹ There are a sizable number of completed solo piano pieces that are under-studied within Smyth scholarship, despite commercial recordings and scores becoming available between 1996 and 2003.⁶⁰ In the liner notes for her recording of Smyth's complete piano works, Liana Serbescu remarks on the composer's deviation from normative compositional practices. Serbescu highlights that the Four-Part Dances (1877–80) 'do not form a traditional Baroque Suite, as they are not in the same key and also do not follow the normal order of contrasting dances'.⁶¹ Similarly, Smyth's decision to entitle the second of her Four Canons (1877–80) 'Nocturne' is unconventional; the *cantabile* lyricism typically associated with works bearing the name is at odds with the contrapuntal style of the composition.⁶² These departures from tradition may be taken as evidence of weaknesses in Smyth's knowledge of musical forms but they could also indicate her individuality and desire to push the boundaries of expectation.

Amy Zigler has examined several of Smyth's chamber works from the 1880s, addressing their biographical context and reception before analysing each piece, offering a

⁵⁷ Kathleen Dale, 'Ethel Smyth's Prentice Work', *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–336.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 333. Ean-Ju Lee's dissertation is a notable exception; see 'A Stylistic Analysis of Ethel Smyth's Sonata Cycle Works for Solo Piano and Chamber Works with Piano' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Houston, 2008).

⁶⁰ Ethel Smyth, *Complete Piano Works: Sonatas, Individual Piano Pieces, Variations*, ed. by Liana Gavrilă-Serbescu (Wiesbaden: Brietkopf & Härtel, 2003). *Ethel Smyth: Complete Piano Works*, perf. by Liana Serbescu (CPO, 999327-2, 1996, on CD).

⁶¹ Serbescu, liner notes to Ethel Smyth, *Complete Piano Works*, p. 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

comprehensive account of the works under study.⁶³ Her later discussion of Smyth's Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1887) considers its literary and autobiographical undertones; here she draws on unpublished correspondence between Smyth and the writer and philosopher Henry Bennet Brewster to deepen her initial reading of the sonata.⁶⁴ More recently, Elizabeth Vysin has addressed Smyth's cello sonatas, offering a musical analysis of these works alongside a social and feminist commentary.⁶⁵ This research on Smyth's chamber works is a welcome addition to the scholarship regarding her early period, yet other facets of her output during these years await further study. Sarah M. Moon's doctoral thesis on Smyth's organ music, for example, situates her compositions within their broader context and examines stylistic and performative aspects of these works.⁶⁶ While Moon's research is the first comprehensive account of Smyth's organ music, it demonstrates that there is ample scope for further enquiry in this area. Cornelia Bartsch's research on Smyth's two Lieder collections — *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 (c. 1877) — is similarly unique in its focus on her art songs. Bartsch's readings of the Lieder suggest that Smyth chose the poetic texts for their personal resonances, yet these works are largely overlooked within Smyth scholarship and in literature addressing nineteenth-century art song.⁶⁷ As Chapter 2 shows, although her Lieder output may be small, they exhibit her engagement with the German art song tradition, offer an insight into her early years in Leipzig, and reflect her desire to fit in with her new social network. Studying these works aids in understanding how Smyth began to develop her creative identity as an English composer learning her craft in Leipzig.

In contrast to the limited literature on the small-scale works of Smyth's early period, her Mass in D has benefitted from greater interest, reflecting its importance within her oeuvre. The Mass was a pivotal work for Smyth and marks the point at which she turned her attention towards opera, a medium that she would direct considerable time,

⁶³ Amy Zigler, 'Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Florida, 2009).

⁶⁴ Amy Zigler, "'You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell': Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth's Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877)", in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Vysin, 'The Cello Sonatas of Dame Ethel Smyth: A Musical Analysis with Social and Feminist Commentary' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hartford, 2023).

⁶⁶ Sarah M. Moon, 'The Organ Music of Ethel Smyth: A Guide to its History and Performance Practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2014).

⁶⁷ Cornelia Bartsch, 'Schön Rohtraut und das Sattelpferd. Lyrisches und biographisches Ich in Ethel Smyths Liedkompositionen der 1870er Jahre' in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 121–152 and 'Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 177–216.

energy, and resources to throughout her career, particularly during the middle part of her life. As such, the Mass can be seen as the culmination of Smyth's early — and more experimental — period. Although there is stylistic variety in Smyth's subsequent works, her focus on operatic and solo vocal pieces suggests that, by the time she reached the middle of her career, she had discovered the area of composition that she most wanted to pursue. With her formal education and the influence of her teachers behind her, Smyth may also have felt able to compose more freely and for the performing forces to which she had gravitated since penning her first songs.

The Mass has been the focus of several doctoral theses: Edith Copley and Linda J. Farquharson both offer analyses of the Mass in D, addressing its structure and musical themes, whereas Robert Marion Daniel considers it from a performance perspective.⁶⁸ Elizabeth Kertesz's aforementioned study examines the Mass's critical reception in England and Germany and Rachael J. Gibbon explores the gestation of the work, suggesting that the encouragement of Hermann Levi may have played a less significant role than Smyth implies in *As Time Went On* (1936).⁶⁹ Aside from these theses, surprisingly little research focuses on the Mass in D and that which does is dated.⁷⁰ Two notable twentieth-century musicologists and music critics commented on the Mass: Richard Terry described the 1925 performance of the work at the Royal Albert Hall as 'an event of national importance', declaring, '[t]hat a work of such freshness and vigour should have been turned down by our ancestors of the 'nineties is a sardonic commentary on the intelligence of that epoch'.⁷¹ Donald Tovey also wrote favourably about the work in the fifth volume of his *Essays in Musical Analysis*, although with less effusiveness than Terry.⁷² First published in 1937, these essays developed from programme notes written by Tovey and Smyth is the only woman featured in the seven-volume series, which attests to both the significance of the Mass and Smyth's reputation in the United Kingdom during the first half of the

⁶⁸ Edith Copley, 'A survey of the choral works of Dame Ethel Smyth with an analysis of the Mass in D (1891)' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1990); Linda J. Farquharson, 'Dame Ethel Smyth: Mass in D' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1996); Robert Marion Daniel, 'Ethel Smyth's Mass in D: a performance study guide' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, 1994).

⁶⁹ Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass'; Gibbon, 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth'. This latter point is addressed in greater detail in Chapter 4, section 4.5a.

⁷⁰ The Mass is often mentioned within literature focusing on other aspects of Smyth life and works, but it is rarely considered on its own. See, for example, Christopher Wiley, 'Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and "The First Woman to Write an Opera"' and 'Ethel Smyth, Suffrage and Surrey'; Eugene Gates, 'Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't'; Kathleen A. Abromeit, 'Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers*, and Sir Thomas Beecham'.

⁷¹ Richard Terry, *On Music's Borders* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1927), pp. 56–60 (p. 56).

⁷² Donald Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis. Volume V: Vocal Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). Also see Sydney Grew, 'Ethel Smyth's Mass in D', *The Musical Times*, 65/972 (1924), 140–41.

twentieth century. Discussions of the Mass also appear in the biographies about Smyth written by Christopher St John and Louise Collis, but these publications rely heavily on Smyth's memoirs, and while useful introductions to the piece and its biographical context, do little to extend the discourse.⁷³ This thesis expands on existing research and seeks to offer new perspectives on the work and its gestation.

Smyth's ten published books are an invaluable resource for those interested in her life and works. They offer a first-hand account of her career and her perspective on a range of topics, from the limitations of women's musical education to the state of the English opera scene. These volumes are accessible and written in a style designed to entertain and engage; she wrote for readers she described as 'Mr. and Mrs. Everyman': members of the public who may be interested in her as a societal figure as much as a composer.⁷⁴ As a result, the volumes are not comprehensive accounts of her music and details concerning the inspiration or creative process behind a work are scarce. As Chapter 1 elucidates, Smyth's books have greatly influenced the direction of scholarship and how researchers have approached her music. This is clearly reflected in the literature, as many of the works that Smyth discusses in detail — particularly in her chronological memoirs, *Impressions that Remained* (1919), *As Time Went On*, and *What Happened Next* (1940) — have received the most scholarly attention. These are typically larger compositions, and her discussions exemplify the challenges she faced in attempting to secure performances of her more ambitious works. *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 is a notable anomaly to this trend; aside from two brief references, Smyth overlooks her cantata in her memoirs, which has led to a similar attitude within scholarship. Furthermore, Smyth less frequently addresses her smaller forms, such as songs or sonatas, and these pieces have become under-explored aspects of her oeuvre. This thesis highlights several of Smyth's small-scale works, including her *Lieder* collections, *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* (c. 1882–84), and *Short Chorale Preludes* for organ (1882–84, rev. 1913). It also touches on the Serenade in D and her *Overture to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* (both 1889), the two orchestral works from Smyth's early period that receive limited attention within existing scholarship.

⁷³ Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber & Co. Limited, 1984); Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959). Also see Dale, 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study'.

⁷⁴ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), pp. 1–2.

Exploring Smyth's Early Period: Identity and Expression

The principal aim of this thesis is to examine Smyth's early vocal works through a biographical lens, enabling a deeper understanding of her identity and her use of music as an expressive tool. In doing so, it contributes to the limited existing literature on her early period and brings several key works to the fore, underscoring the importance of starting at the beginning of Smyth's musical output to gain a deeper insight into her compositional trajectory. Chapters 2–4 address Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, and *Mass in D* respectively. By investigating the wider personal and social context of these works it is hoped that readers may also benefit from a richer biographical account of Smyth's life, which is needed due to the dated and subjective nature of the biographies published by St John and Collis. While the thesis often takes the details she presents in her memoirs as a starting point, it draws on additional primary sources where possible to supplement the historical narrative. Smyth was writing for a public audience, which influenced the stories she told and the self-image she chose to portray. As a result, it can be beneficial to look beyond her published autobiographical accounts and examine materials that are contemporaneous with the events or works under study. Typically, these documents were penned without the public reader in mind, reflecting a less self-conscious — and arguably more authentic — Ethel.

Smyth was a voracious letter writer and unpublished correspondence is used extensively throughout the thesis to build a more detailed picture of the biographical context surrounding the works examined.⁷⁵ These materials are of particular use when addressing aspects of Smyth's life or music that are under-represented within her publications as they help to contextualise the works. The letters that she wrote to her mother, for example, present a more detailed picture of how the nineteen-year-old composer responded to her new home in Leipzig. They also highlight how her experiences and attitudes were shaped by her social circle. Smyth's criticism of the Conservatory is one instance of this, as the enthusiasm that she expresses for the institution in her letters home was later dampened by Heinrich von Herzogenberg, and it is this negative opinion that she conveys in her memoirs. Similarly, Smyth's published account of her romantic relationship

⁷⁵ This unpublished correspondence includes the letters that Smyth wrote to her mother in the late 1870s and early 1880s, which are housed in the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek in Leipzig. While Smyth provides excerpts of some of these letters in her memoirs, they are rarely given in their entirety and the material she chose to exclude can often be of interest. Correspondence between Smyth and Harry Brewster, which is held at the San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive in Florence, is also drawn on within the thesis. Where appropriate, letters between Smyth and Edith Somerville from the Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection at Queen's University Belfast are also referred to. However, as these letters date from 1918, they are less relevant to the time period under study.

with Harry Brewster understates its significance, but the use of their unpublished correspondence within the thesis allows for a more nuanced understanding of their connection and its impact on Smyth's musical output. By drawing on this material, the thesis actively seeks to broaden the scope of the biographical lens through which the musical works are viewed.

Where appropriate, Smyth's diaries are used as an additional source of information. However, as she did not start keeping a diary until around 1919, their contents are less relevant to this thesis. Amanda Harris has argued that the diaries Smyth kept in later years were increasingly public artefacts to be shared with friends and used in the preparation of her memoirs,⁷⁶ meaning that she was likely writing with a greater awareness of her self-image and the cultivation of her public persona. The newspaper articles that Smyth wrote also date from later in her career and are largely beyond the scope of this study, but excerpts are included at relevant points within the thesis. Quotations from the press more broadly are frequently used within this study to elucidate how critics and audiences responded to her music, which offers another perspective. These critical responses do not always correlate with Smyth's retrospective account of the work's reception, thus demonstrating the value of drawing on a range of sources.

Chapter 1 examines how Smyth's literary output has shaped our understanding of her life and music and the degree to which it has influenced the direction of research. Crucially, it highlights the importance of approaching Smyth's memoirs with a heightened awareness of her agenda as an author who was crafting her public image through her autobiographical writing. The chapter also presents a substantial biographical sketch of the composer, which is fundamental to the thesis and its exploration of how Smyth's personal life influenced her music. The biographical account investigates Smyth's early musical interests, showing how her childhood education sparked an enthusiasm for music that she kindled for several years before she was able to embark on her studies in Leipzig. The revised biographical sketch also introduces many of the key figures in Smyth's life, which contributes to a more detailed understanding of how her networks and friendships had an impact on both her professional success and personal well-being, influencing the direction of her music and shaping her identity as a composer.

Chapter 2 considers Smyth's German education and her relationship with her 'spiritual home'.⁷⁷ Identity is a constant theme within the existing scholarship and Smyth's

⁷⁶ Amanda Harris, 'Recomposing Her History: The Memoirs and Diaries of Ethel Smyth', *Life Writing*, 8 (2011), 421–431 (pp. 425–26)

⁷⁷ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), p. 13.

position as an English composer educated in Leipzig not only influenced the music she wrote but also affected how she was perceived by critics. Situating her Lieder within their compositional context allows us to see how Smyth engaged with the German art song tradition as a means of assimilating into her new environment and forging connections that would enable her to progress as a composer. Many of these friendships, such as those she cultivated with Elisabeth and Heinrich von Herzogenberg, Elisabeth and Adolf Wach, or Mary and Conrad Fiedler, evolved into more meaningful relationships over time. Additionally, Smyth's Lieder provide the opportunity to examine what her settings of German poetry reveal about her interest in creating dramatic works that facilitated storytelling. Musical readings of four of Smyth's Lieder exemplify her approach to text setting and demonstrate that even at the start of her career she was exploring how to convey a narrative within her vocal works, whether as a means of emotional expression or as a way of taking a political or social stance. This compositional trait became more pronounced during her middle period with the creation of works such as *The Wreckers*, *The Boatswain's Mate*, or her *Songs of Sunrise*, yet Smyth had been imbuing her music with autobiographical undertones since childhood.⁷⁸ Musical examples are interspersed throughout these readings to highlight the ways in which she depicts the texts and the drama contained therein. They are also used to illustrate how Smyth's Lieder relate to those composed by her Austro-German predecessors — such as Schulz, Reichardt, Zelter, and Schubert — and situate her within the German Art Song tradition.

Chapter 3 presents the first study of Smyth's eight-movement cantata, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, which has been largely overlooked within the existing literature.⁷⁹ As her first large-scale choral and orchestral work, this significant composition offers an insight into an experimental period of Smyth's career. Moreover, it forms a link in the chain of her development as a composer, connecting her songs, chamber, and orchestral works to the Mass and subsequent operas. *The Song of Love* was composed in 1888 following a tumultuous period in her life during which she became estranged from Elisabeth ('Lisl') and Heinrich von Herzogenberg and Harry and Julia Brewster. Her break from the Herzogenbergs and Brewsters is a topic to which she frequently returns within her memoirs, yet Smyth focuses more on the loss of Lisl's friendship than her separation from Harry, causing her relationship with him to appear less significant.⁸⁰ The romantic nature

⁷⁸ This idea is addressed further in Chapter 4.

⁷⁹ For existing literature featuring *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, see Kathleen Dale, 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music' and 'Ethel Smyth's Prentice Work'; Elizabeth Wood, 'The Lesbian in the Opera'; Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass.'

⁸⁰ See Chapter 3, section 3.2.

of their attachment, his status as a married man, and Smyth's desire for privacy may have deterred her from giving a fuller account of their history. However, it has resulted in a tendency for scholars to overlook the importance of their connection.

Drawing on unpublished correspondence between Smyth and Harry Brewster, this chapter attempts to untangle the complex web of relationships that connected Smyth to the two families, exploring her feelings towards Lisl, Julia and Harry in an attempt to offer a more balanced picture. This reappraisal of Smyth's relationship with Harry Brewster is an important part of the thesis's aim to broaden scholarly understanding of the composer's identity, as overlooking the significance of their connection results in an imbalanced view of Smyth's sexuality. Furthermore, the biographical reading of *The Song of Love* suggests that the work may have been created as a tribute to her relationship with Harry and as a way of expressing in music what she was unable to articulate publicly. As Chapter 3 is fundamentally concerned with how Smyth adapted the narrative of the Song of Songs to better reflect her own story, the text is considered in greater depth than the music. In doing so, the chapter aims to explore the autobiographical undertones present within *The Song of Love*, demonstrating that Smyth's textual choices can be seen to relate to details contained within her correspondence with Harry Brewster. A detailed analysis of the music is beyond the scope of the study, but key musical features are highlighted to give the reader a flavour of Smyth's text setting. This was a conscious choice and one made with an awareness that there is currently no commercially available score or recording to which to refer. Thus, offering an overview rather than focusing on specifics seemed more advantageous to the reader wishing to gain a sense of the work as a whole.

Chapter 4 questions how religion shaped Smyth's life. Despite a small yet significant body of text settings created during her early period, she is not a composer usually associated with sacred works. Consequently, the Mass in D can be perceived as an anomaly within her output, its creation attributed to her admiration for her Catholic friend, Pauline Trevelyan. Seeking to broaden the discourse surrounding Smyth's motivations for writing the Mass and move beyond the Trevelyan-centric perspective, this chapter addresses Smyth's Anglican upbringing to better situate her position on religion. It demonstrates how she responded to and chose to express her attitudes towards women, marriage, and independence, showing that despite her progressive thinking and her desire to liberate women from societal constraints, Smyth's sense of morality and propriety was a Christian one. Its guiding force is especially evident in her behaviour during her

relationship with Harry Brewster and her reaction to the religious resurgence she experienced shortly before composing the Mass in D.

After addressing Smyth's early sacred settings, the chapter examines the biographical context surrounding the Mass, suggesting that her relationship with three key mother figures may have contributed to her need to repent for past mistakes. Although Smyth had declared that she needed to renounce music and think less of herself in order to be happy, she opted instead to compose a large-scale sacred work. Smyth's motivations for composing the Mass are the central focus of this chapter, which suggests that the Mass's composition may have been a cathartic process driven by a desire for redemption and forgiveness from the trio of mother figures significant to her at that time. Rather than offering a musical analysis of the Mass or focusing on its critical reception,⁸¹ the chapter examines the potential reasons behind the work's creation. This approach aims to offer a deeper understanding of the biographical context surrounding the Mass and a more nuanced account of Smyth's relationship to religion. The chapter concludes by examining how Smyth's relationship with religion changed after she had completed the Mass and found that she could not align her life as an artist with the teachings of the church. In doing so, the chapter challenges the notion that religion ceased to be part of Smyth's life after she composed the Mass, arguing that her autobiographies indicate an ongoing dialogue with religion throughout her life.

By approaching Smyth's music biographically, this thesis aims to offer readers a richer understanding of the circumstances surrounding the works addressed. The notion of 'read[ing] "through" music in order to try to understand its world'⁸² resonates strongly with the purpose of this study, which focuses on specific works from the early part of Smyth's career to try to understand what the music she created during this period might say about the world from which it emerged and Smyth's place within it. The thesis takes inspiration from a variety of sources that consider music hermeneutically, addressing questions concerning creative impetus and motivation; the impact of historical context; and the importance of social networks. Instrumental here are publications concerning Lieder and

⁸¹ See footnotes 68–73 of the present chapter for other scholarly approaches to Smyth's Mass in D.

⁸² Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges, 'Introduction' in *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 1–10 (p. 3).

the relationship between music and literature,⁸³ the role of women in music,⁸⁴ and gender and sexuality.⁸⁵ Smyth's identity as a writer is also a central concern, and by engaging with her memoirs, the thesis questions the extent to which autobiographical writing influences research and reception. It builds on studies carried out by scholars who have sought to problematise aspects of Smyth's auto/biography, such as Amanda Harris in her work on life writing and the Smyth-Brewster correspondence.⁸⁶ Amy Zigler and Sean O'Toole have been similarly influential in their use of letters to reappraise representations of Smyth's relationships. Furthermore, the biographical readings within the thesis follow the precedent set by scholars such as Cornelia Bartsch, Judith Lebiez, Rachel Lumsden, Christopher Wiley, and Elizabeth Wood. Their research demonstrates that Smyth's ability to imbue her music with autobiographical meaning opens a window into her life and the broader context of the work.

In its scope, the thesis is designed to provide readers with an insight into the early period of Smyth's career so that these significant yet under-explored works may be better known and situated within her output. Each of the chapters engages with four interconnected themes: identity, narrative and drama, music as a means of expression, and religion. As the overview of the existing Smyth scholarship demonstrates, identity is a central concern within the field, ranging from Smyth's position as a late-nineteenth-century middle-class woman to her image as a German-educated English composer. Similarly evident is her interest in narrative and drama, most clearly demonstrated by her operatic works. However, as will be shown throughout this study, Smyth's fascination with storytelling and her desire to convey narratives musically is a trait that developed during her childhood is present across her oeuvre. Her identity as an autobiographer contributes not only to the first two themes outlined here but also to her use of music as a means of expression. This idea is addressed in depth in Chapters 3 and 4, which examine in detail

⁸³ Deborah Stein and Robert Spillman, *Poetry into Song: Performance and Analysis of Lieder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Edward F. Kravitt, *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Lorraine Byrne Bodley, *Schubert's Goethe Settings* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2003); James Parsons (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, eds., *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

⁸⁴ Laura Seddon, *British Women Composers and Instrumental Chamber Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Rhiannon Mathias, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Women's Work in Music* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022).

⁸⁵ Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁸⁶ Amanda Harris, 'Recomposing Her History' and 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94.

the compositional context of two of Smyth's large-scale choral works to illustrate how key figures in her life influenced her music. Considering Smyth's output from this angle greatly enhances our understanding of the music, giving it new life and offering fresh perspectives. Smyth's religious preoccupations are also brought to the fore to facilitate a deeper enquiry into how her relationship with religion changed over time, casting a light on a neglected aspect of Smyth's biography and reframing traditional approaches to her Mass in D.

Considering Smyth's output from a biographical perspective enhances our understanding of how the world she inhabited influenced her music. It also results in a greater awareness of how her gender affected her career as a composer; critical responses to Smyth's music are one just example of this, as their reception often reflected societal attitudes towards women at the time. Although Smyth may have objected to being labelled a 'woman composer', her gender was fundamental both to how she was regarded and — perhaps more importantly — how she wished to be perceived. As Ernest Newman posits in the introduction to the 1946 Knopf edition of *Impressions that Remained*, 'particularly in the final thirty years or so of her life, [Smyth was known] only as a woman with an obsessing grievance — the frustration of a woman in a man-made world'.⁸⁷ These frustrations are an important consideration and they feed into the four interconnected themes outlined above. Smyth *was* a woman and her gender *did* have an impact on who she was and the music she composed.⁸⁸ The works addressed within this study are explored with that in mind, not as a way of confining Smyth but in order to recognise all that she achieved in a world where the odds were stacked against her.

Collectively, the music examined within the thesis demonstrates the richness of Smyth's early output and serves to highlight how much can be gained by studying the music from this period, which not only reflects her experience as a student in Leipzig but also foreshadows the direction of some of her later works. It reappraises her identity from various angles, including those pertaining to her gender, sexuality, and religious

⁸⁷ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. viii.

⁸⁸ For further reading on women, music, and gender, see for example: Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge, 2012); Sophie Fuller, 'Grace, Betty, Maude and Me: 30 Years of Fighting for Women Composers' in *The Routledge Handbook of Women's Work in Music*, pp. 9–18 and *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States 1629–Present* (London: Pandora, 1994); Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Derek Hyde, *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998); Diane Peacock Jezic, ed., *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found*, 2nd edn, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1994).

preoccupations, and examines how she used music as an expressive tool. The thesis revises and revivifies facets of Smyth's biography throughout to elucidate the connection between her life and music, offering a more comprehensive portrait of this vitally important composer.

Chapter 1: The Biography of an Autobiographer

‘But the real interest, if any, lay in the human happening, Mass and Opera being merely pegs on which to hang what is called “close-ups” of Balmoral and Berlin; so there was little danger of boring Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, who, with their families, are the public I really write for.’¹

1.1. Introduction

For a researcher interested in women who compose, Ethel Smyth is a relatively accessible case study, benefitting from published scores, recordings, biographies, and scholarly research. Those curious about Smyth’s life are also able to draw upon her published memoirs, which help readers to gain a sense of the person behind the music. Her autobiographical writing has had a significant impact on perceptions of the composer, influencing the direction of the research and the interpretation of key events in Smyth’s life. However, as Susan Youens has remarked, ‘with any testament, we must be aware that the self is always *made*’.² Smyth’s publications are evidence not only of the self that she shaped and presented to the public but also of the context within which they were written, which should be taken into account when they are used as a source of information.

Following Amanda Harris’s assertion that approaching the memoirs uncritically overlooks her agenda as a writer, this chapter begins by exploring how Smyth the autobiographer has affected our perception of Smyth the composer.³ It does not seek to discredit Smyth’s version of events, rather it aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the works under study and the context surrounding their creation. Primary sources, including correspondence and diaries, can offer additional insight into the composer’s thoughts and feelings at the time of writing, which in turn may lead to a greater understanding of her music. Moreover, looking beyond the memoirs also offers the opportunity to explore music that Smyth did not address in detail, such as her two early collections of *Lieder* (c. 1877) and her unpublished cantata, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888).

Relationships were a vital part of Smyth’s life and are central to this thesis as a whole.⁴ Jill Halstead’s observation regarding the community behind musical creation is

¹ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), pp. 1–2.

² Susan Youens, ‘Der Mensch ist zur Geselligkeit geboren’: Salon Culture, Night Thoughts and a Schubert Song’ in *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 167–183 (p. 169).

³ Amanda Harris, ‘The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth’, *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94 (p. 73).

⁴ I use ‘relationship’ and ‘friendship’ interchangeably throughout the thesis. Romantic relationships are indicated as such.

especially relevant to Smyth, who often needed the financial or practical support of others to secure performances of her works:

[T]he creation and dissemination of music cannot be undertaken by an individual in isolation: they are brought about only by the cooperation and contribution of a wide variety of individuals and institutions which operate within accepted social parameters. [...] By moving beyond the myth of the great artist working alone and by acknowledging the role of socially constructed systems both in present-day musical life and throughout musical history, we come to appreciate the importance and influence of our social system.⁵

The ‘accepted social parameters’ and ‘socially constructed systems’ within which Smyth operated had an impact on her career in a variety of ways, from her early musical education in Leipzig, to the suffrage protests that resulted in her *Songs of Sunrise* (1910).⁶ Fundamental to the musical readings presented in this thesis is the question of how the individuals within Smyth’s social circle may have influenced — or become associated with — her compositions, particularly those with whom she had a strong friendship or romantic attachment. Consequently, the biographical sketch in the second half of this chapter introduces key figures in Smyth’s life and highlights the importance of her musical networks, thus providing a foundation for later chapters.

1.2. Smyth the Writer

Between 1919 and 1940 Ethel Smyth published ten books, all of which are largely autobiographical. The two-volume *Impressions that Remained* (1919), *As Time Went On* (1936), and *What Happened Next* (1940) are memoirs detailing Smyth’s life from childhood through to 1908.⁷ Her three essay collections — *Streaks of Life* (1921), *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, (1928) and *Female Pippings in Eden* (1933) — reflect her opinions on topics such as women in music, the opera industry, and gendered music criticism.⁸ Within these volumes she also offers accounts of several figures, including the composers Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) and Augusta Holmès (1847–1903); the theatre manager Lilian Baylis (1874–1937); Empress Eugénie (1826–1920), widow of Napoleon III; and Queen Victoria (1819–1901). A significant portion of *Female Pippings in Eden* is given over to Smyth’s recollections of

⁵ Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p. 139.

⁶ Unless otherwise stated, dates refer to the date of composition rather than publication. See the list of works compiled by Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), pp. 373–81 (p. 375).

⁷ *Impressions that Remained* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919); *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936); *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940).

⁸ *Streaks of Life* (London, Longmans: 1921); *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928); *Female Pippings in Eden* (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933).

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928). While the suffrage leader is the focus of the narrative, the anecdotal nature of Smyth’s writing also allows the reader to gain some insight into her own involvement in the women’s suffrage movement, which occurred after the timespan of her final completed memoir.⁹

The remaining four publications are more eclectic but nevertheless autobiographical. *A Three-Legged Tour in Greece* (1927) records Smyth’s visit to the country with her great-niece, Elizabeth Williamson, in 1925.¹⁰ *Beecham and Pharaoh* (1935) is a two-part volume; the first half a portrait of Thomas Beecham (1879–1961) and the second half an autobiographical sketch of Smyth’s ‘Flight into Egypt’ during the winter of 1913–1914.¹¹ Vita Sackville-West’s (1892–1962) assertion that ‘All Ethel’s books are about Ethel, from one point of Ethel’s view or another’¹² holds particular weight in this instance, although the opening pages suggest that the nature of this book had as much to do with the publisher as with Smyth.¹³

In *Inordinate (?) Affection: A Story for Dog Lovers* (1936) Smyth details the canine companions she had during her life and who appear throughout her memoirs.¹⁴ Her penultimate publication, *Maurice Baring* (1938), is a biography of the writer, with whom she was friends for many years.¹⁵ Considered collectively, Smyth’s books highlight not only the diversity of her interests — which encompassed sports such as golf, tennis, and horse riding, in addition to the arts and literature — but also the value she placed on developing and maintaining friendships. As a result, they reflect her desire to convey the details of her life rather than provide an account of her music; insights into her compositional process, for example, are scarce. The epigraph at the opening of this chapter gives some indication as to why Smyth chose not to focus on her music in her publications; in offering “‘close-ups’ of Balmoral and Berlin’ for ‘Mr. and Mrs. Everyman’, she seems to imply that the typical reader of her books would have a greater interest in her stories concerning the places she visited and notable figures she met than in her compositions.

⁹ At the time of her death Smyth was in the process of writing a fourth instalment, entitled *A Fresh Start*. The manuscript of this incomplete book is held at the University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Research Center).

¹⁰ *A Three-Legged Tour in Greece (March 24–May 4, 1925)* (London: William Heinmann Ltd., 1927). Elizabeth Williamson was the granddaughter of Smyth’s eldest sister, Mary Hunter.

¹¹ *Beecham and Pharaoh* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1935).

¹² Vita Sackville-West, ‘Ethel Smyth, the writer’ in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* by Christopher St John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), pp. 245–250 (p. 249).

¹³ *Beecham and Pharaoh* begins: “‘I like the idea”, said the publisher, “of a book in two parts; the first to be a study of the arresting personalities you have known; the second autobiographical, dealing with any portion of your life that specifically interested or amused you.”’ The publisher went on to suggest Beecham as the subject of the first half of the book (p. 3).

¹⁴ *Inordinate (?) Affection: A Story for Dog Lovers* (London: The Cresset Press, 1936).

¹⁵ *Maurice Baring* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938).

These publications have greatly aided those seeking to learn more about Smyth and have influenced the scholarship to date. The wealth of journal articles, book chapters, and edited volumes addressing Smyth invariably rely on the narrative she conveys in her memoirs. Understandably, this is most evident in the biographies about the composer, which were published by Christopher St John (1959) and Louise Collis (1984).¹⁶ As Amanda Harris has observed, this tendency to lean on Smyth's publications 'has resulted in a portrayal that is not sufficiently critical of the agenda behind these self-portraits'.¹⁷ It can also result in the perpetuation of myths and misconceptions, such as the Mass in D being regarded as Smyth's first large-scale vocal work.¹⁸ Moreover, Harris's comment reinforces the fact that Smyth was fully aware that she was writing for a public audience and cultivating a public-facing image of herself through her publications; her decision to include or omit details was likely influenced by her intended readership.

The period in which her books were published would also have had an impact on what she chose to appear in print; her relationships with women, for example, are one such area in which Smyth was more evasive with the details. Elizabeth Wood argues that 'it was hazardous, if not impossible, for any writer openly to proclaim her lesbianism'¹⁹ when Smyth's memoirs were published, which may have had an impact on how she decided to portray her relationships with women.²⁰ Similarly, Suzanne Raitt remarks that Smyth would have been aware of the trial surrounding Radclyffe Hall's (1880–1943) lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which was banned under The Obscene Publications Act 1957.²¹

¹⁶ Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber & Co. Limited, 1984); Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959). Gwen Anderson wrote a shorter, 28-page publication entitled *Ethel Smyth: The Burning Rose: A Brief Biography* (London: Woolf, 1997), which offers an introduction to the composer as part of the Bloomsbury Heritage Series. Interestingly, Anderson suggests that 'so little is written of her music that it is easy to dismiss it as only a side light to her career as a *bonne-vivante*, writer of a fine autobiography, and a friend-to-the-famous' (p. 6). More recently, Smyth was included in Leah Broad's four-composer biography *Quartet: How Four Women Changed the Musical World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023).

¹⁷ Harris, 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence', p. 73.

¹⁸ This is addressed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Wood, 'Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts' in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1993), pp. 164–183 (p. 165).

²⁰ Virginia Woolf's published correspondence suggests that the women discussed lesbianism in private, for example. In September 1930, Woolf wrote to Smyth: 'What other subject had I in mind to write about? Lesbianism? That's [*sic*] your theme; I await illumination anxiously.' See *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Collected Letters IV, 1929–1931*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), p. 222.

²¹ Suzanne Raitt, 'The tide of Ethel: femininity as narrative in the friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf', *Critical Quarterly*, 30 (1988), 3–19 (p. 14). Following the trial, a destruction order was issued and existing copies of Hall's book were destroyed. It was not until 1959 that the book was published again in England. For more on this topic, see Leigh Gilmore, 'Obscenity, Modernity, Identity: Legalizing "The Well of Loneliness" and "Nightwood"', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4 (1994), 603–624; Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: William Borrow & Co., 1985).

The success of Smyth's books was an important factor in keeping her in the public eye and reviews of her memoirs can be found in newspapers at the time of publication.²²

While Smyth's memoirs are an invaluable resource, Harris's research demonstrates that an overreliance on published material can result in an uncritical stance.²³ In addition, it tends to overlook the large body of unpublished sources — including letters, diaries, and manuscript scores — housed in archives in the UK, USA, and Europe.²⁴ Given the inconsistencies that creep into Smyth's autobiographical writing, the letters and diaries can aid in piecing together the chronology of events as well as offering insight into her perspective at the time. It is clear that Smyth used these materials herself when writing, and *Impressions That Remained*, *As Time Went On*, and *What Happened Next* include letter sections that she uses to support the overall narrative. Letter excerpts are also included within her reflections on Henry ('Harry') Bennet Brewster (1850–1908) and Emmeline Pankhurst in *Female Pippings in Eden* (1933), which give the reader a flavour of their respective correspondence. However, it is worth considering both the broader context and specific content of the letters, in addition to how they relate to the image of herself that Smyth wanted to convey to the public.

Accessibility is the principal barrier for researchers wishing to explore Smyth's letter collections and diaries. Martha Vicinus's assertion that '[o]nly a few letters survive outside of those she chose to edit and publish'²⁵ highlights the misconceptions that can arise through a lack of accessibility, as there are copious letters by Smyth held in libraries and archives around the world.²⁶ However, the wide dispersal of these materials has the potential to impede research as it can be challenging to know where specific sources are held.²⁷ Limited digitisation of materials and the lack of finding aids can further exacerbate

²² Derek Hyde goes as far as to suggest that her writing 'brought her to a wider public than her music did'. See *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), p. 155.

²³ Also see Amanda Harris, 'Recomposing Her History: the Memoirs and Diaries of Ethel Smyth', *Life Writing*, 8/4 (2011), 421–431.

²⁴ Amy Zigler offers a detailed account of where archival material be found on the website dedicated to Smyth. See 'Archival Material', *Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)*, (n.d.) <<https://www.ethelsmyth.org/music/music-manuscripts/>> [accessed 3 February 2022].

²⁵ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 126.

²⁶ Smyth's letters can be found in locations such as the British Library, McMaster University, New York Public Library, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina, and Yale University. There are several larger collections, such as the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Henry Bennet Brewster at San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive, Florence; the letter between Ethel Smyth and Edith Somerville, which are housed at Queen's University Belfast as part of the Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection; and the letters that Smyth wrote to her mother, held at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Hochschulbibliothek in Leipzig.

²⁷ Notably, the Hochschule für Musik und Theatre in Leipzig has digitised 57 letters from Smyth's Leipzig years (1877–1887) and Queen's University Belfast has digitised c. 460 of the c. 760 letters between Smyth and the Irish writer Edith Somerville (1858–1949).

this issue, as scholars may not know what sources are contained within a collection. While some institutions allow individuals to request copies of the materials for free, others charge for the service, and some of the collections may only be viewed in person. Without the time or financial means to travel to these archives, scholars are often reliant on Smyth's memoirs or on primary source material used in previous research, thus limiting the scope of enquiry. As indicated in the introduction, Smyth cultivated a friendship with Virginia Woolf during the 1930s; Woolf makes for a useful point of comparison, as her diaries and letters have been published and are therefore more readily used in scholarship.²⁸ If similar materials were as accessible to those studying Smyth, more comprehensive research may emerge.

The composer's letters and articles featured in the press are another under-explored source of information. These were printed in newspapers such as *Votes for Women*, *The Suffragette*, *The Scotsman* and *The London Mercury* and shed light on her perspective on women's rights, the role of women in music, and public tastes in opera.²⁹ Some of these were developed for later publication, as was the case with her six-part series on English opera that appeared in *The Evening News* in June 1920 and was later expanded in *Streaks of Life*.³⁰ Like her correspondence and diaries, these newspaper pieces are useful for gaining a clearer sense of Smyth's perspective at the time of writing, although it is important to remember that they were produced with a public audience in mind.

Since Harris's article was published in 2010 additional scholarship based on primary source materials has further enriched the discourse.³¹ Rachel Lumsden has explored some of the letters between Smyth and Emmeline Pankhurst in her study of the composer's song 'Possession' (1913), which was dedicated to the suffrage leader.³²

²⁸ See for example, Suzanne Raitt, 'The tide of Ethel: femininity as narrative in the friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf', *Critical Quarterly*, 30 (1988), 3–19; Christopher Wiley, 'Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and "The First Woman to Write an Opera"', *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–295; Rachel Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us': Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and "Possession'", *Feminist Studies*, 41/2 (2015), 335–370.

²⁹ Smyth's letter contributions to *Votes for Women* include 'Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc', 30 December 1910, p. 213; 'Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc', 14 July 1911, p. 670 and her articles include 'Better Late Than Never', 18 November 1910, p. 99; 'Women and Idealism', 22 September 1911, p. 808. For *The Suffragette* she contributed 'Venus, the Bishops, and a Moral', 1 May 1914, p. 57. A letter from Smyth appears in *The Scotsman* under their regular column 'Music and Musicians', 15 March 1928, p. 12. The newspaper also mentions her article for *The London Mercury* in 'Music and Musicians' on 10 November 1927.

³⁰ Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Ethel Smyth's "The Wreckers": a Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera', *Studia Musicologica*, 52 (2011), 485–497 (p. 487, fn. 11).

³¹ Harris situates her stance with reference to existing scholarship and observes that Elizabeth Wood and Christopher Wiley in particular identify the need to look beyond Smyth's published memoirs. See 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence', p. 75. Harris further contributed to this area of research in 'Recomposing Her History: The Memoirs and Diaries of Ethel Smyth', *Life Writing*, 8 (2011), 421–431.

³² Rachel Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us': Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and "Possession'", *Feminist Studies*, 41/2 (2015), 335–370.

Correspondence is also the focus of Sean O’Toole’s article on Smyth and Edith Somerville (1858–1949); this is the first publication to solely address their relationship and contributes a more balanced perspective than has previously been articulated in their respective biographies.³³ Similarly, Amy Zigler uses letters between Smyth and Harry Brewster and his wife, Julia (1843–1895) to inform her reading of the composer’s Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1887).³⁴ Zigler explores the inscription from Dante’s *Inferno* that appears in the third movement of the sonata. She connects this to a reference to a character in the poem — Francesca da Rimini — found in correspondence between Smyth and Harry Brewster in 1887, and analyses how the music can be seen to reflect the character’s story.

Scholars addressing the critical reception and performance history of Smyth’s works have also made use of newspaper and magazine articles. These materials supplement the composer’s own accounts of how her music was received and add nuance to existing perspectives on the pieces under study. Elizabeth Kertesz has examined the ‘cosmopolitan’ nature of *The Wreckers* (1903–1905) and the reaction of English, French, and German audiences.³⁵ Opera is also the focus of Amy Zigler’s investigation into the American reception of *Der Wald* (1899–1901), which was performed by the Metropolitan Opera in 1903. Smyth’s USA premiere was especially notable as *Der Wald* was the first work composed by a woman to be performed by the company; this remained the case until Kaija Saariaho’s *L’Amour de loin* (1999–2000) was performed in 2016.

Furthermore, newspapers can aid in building a more comprehensive overview of the pieces that Smyth does not mention in her memoirs. Newspaper articles enabled a fuller history of ‘1910’ — the second piece in Smyth’s suffrage collection, *Songs of Sunrise* — to be presented and provided details regarding the wider context, its critical reception, and subsequent neglect.³⁶ Smyth’s tendency to focus on her larger works in her writing reflects her desire to raise awareness of the difficulties she faced in trying to secure performances of her music; smaller works met less resistance and so are more often overlooked. In supplementing her narrative with carefully selected letters, reviews, and anecdotes, Smyth reinforces the notion that she encountered such issues because she was a woman.

³³ Sean O’Toole, ‘The Letters of Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 1918–1921: A Chronicle of Desire’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 29 (2020), 253–280.

³⁴ Amy Zigler, “‘You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell’: Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth’s Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877)”, in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275. Also see Zigler, “‘Perhaps what men call a sin’: An examination of Ethel Smyth’s *The Prison*” in *Women Composers in New Perspectives, 1800-1950: Genres, Contexts and Repertoire*, ed. by Mariateresa Storino and Susan Wollenberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 213–34.

³⁵ Kertesz, ‘Ethel Smyth’s “The Wreckers”: a Cosmopolitan Voice’.

³⁶ Hannah Millington, “‘1910’: Ethel Smyth’s Unsung Suffrage Song”, *The Musicology Review*, 10, (2021), 55–76.

However, Kertesz posits that, ‘the vexed question of how Smyth’s sex influenced reception of her music [...] is complex and multi-faceted, much more so than is suggested by Smyth’s claims of discrimination’.³⁷

Considered collectively, this growing body of research highlights the benefits of moving beyond the narrative conveyed by Smyth. Using primary source materials adjusts the depth of field and brings alternative perspectives into sharper focus. Moreover, many of Smyth’s works invite readings that take the broader context into account and may encourage researchers to investigate potential autobiographical undertones. This approach is not without its difficulties; the desire to interpret a work in a certain way could result in a biased reading. However, as shown by the scholarship addressed in this section, careful consideration of the primary source materials can lead to a fuller understanding of Smyth’s music and the ‘human happening’ that surrounded its creation.³⁸ Correspondingly, this thesis explores a selection of Smyth’s early vocal and choral works and uses primary source material to shed light on the compositional context from which they emerged. Although Smyth addresses the Mass in D in her memoirs, she provides little information about her two *Lieder* collections or *The Song of Love*, further necessitating the need to delve into the archives for details concerning their creation.

1.3. Biographical Sketch

While a complete biographical account of Ethel Smyth is beyond the scope of the present study, this section provides a comprehensive overview. In alignment with the broader concerns of the thesis, the biography highlights a number of threads woven throughout Smyth’s life. Firstly, the fascination with music that influenced her actions from a young age and evolved into a successful career. Secondly, the networks and friendships that Smyth built over the years, which nourished her both professionally and personally. Finally, the interests and preoccupations that motivated Smyth to compose the music that she did. This overview provides a basis for further discussion in subsequent chapters, which consider key works in Smyth’s oeuvre through a biographical lens and in relation to the wider context of her life.

Like its predecessors, this biographical sketch uses Smyth’s memoirs as a starting point. It draws on the published biographies, incorporates wider literature, and uses primary source material to add further depth. It becomes easier to refer to unpublished

³⁷ Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2001), p. 12.

³⁸ *ATWO*, p. 1.

material, such as diaries and letters, as Smyth's life progresses. However undervalued she often felt, awareness of her growing success and recognition as a composer may have encouraged her to save these materials for posterity, or even for future self-reflection.³⁹

1.3a. Childhood and Youth (1858–77)

Ethel Smyth was born on 22 April 1858 to Emma (*née* Struth) and Colonel John Hall Smyth. Her father served in the Bengal Artillery and the first three Smyth children — Alice, Johnny, and Mary — were born in India. Shortly before Ethel's birth, the family moved to England so that John could take up a new post as commander of the Royal Artillery at Woolwich. During the years that followed, the Smyths steadily grew in number with the births of Nina, Violet, Ellinor ('Nellie'), and Robert. As the family got bigger, so did the houses they occupied; first Bourne House in Bexley, then Sidcup Place from 1861.⁴⁰ After John was appointed commander of the Royal Artillery at Aldershot in 1867, the family moved to Frimhurst, a substantial house in Frimley Green, Surrey, where Smyth resided until her father's death in 1894.⁴¹

In her memoirs, Smyth speaks affectionately about her childhood and recounts many of the adventures she had with her siblings. Mary, two years older than Ethel, was equal parts friend and rival and features heavily in these recollections. 'There were plenty of rows', Smyth notes, 'but as a matter of fact we were devoted to each other.'⁴² This mix of affection and good-natured argument is typical of many of Smyth's youthful tales and characterised many relationships throughout her life. Fortunately, the houses at Sidcup and Frimley both provided ample space for the Smyth children to spread out and ease the schoolroom quarrels. After John retired in 1872 and bought Frimhurst, the house was extended, and a lawn-tennis court added. More horses were acquired, and cows, chickens, and rabbits joined the menagerie.⁴³ Outdoor activities were commonplace, and Ethel developed a fondness for horse riding, tennis, and golf, which were to become life-long interests.

As was often the case in middle class families during the Victorian era, the Smyth children were educated at home by a series of governesses. These women never stayed

³⁹ Amanda Harris suggests that Smyth 'exercised more conscious control' over the contents of her later diaries, indicating that they may have been 'intended as historical documents which might aid future researchers in understanding her life'. See 'Recomposing Her History', pp. 424–25.

⁴⁰ Leah Broad, *Quartet*, p. 24.

⁴¹ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), I, pp. 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 85–87.

long and Ethel's suggestion that they lacked 'the faintest notion of making lessons either pleasant or profitable' implies that these early years were not especially engaging.⁴⁴ As Louise Collis remarks, 'the general did not subscribe to the new-fangled idea that girls should study the same subjects as boys', which was seemingly reflective of his broader attitude towards the role of women.⁴⁵ Consequently, Ethel and her sisters received tuition in French, German, music, sewing, and sketching; skills that would aid in securing suitable husbands and help them in their expected role of wife and mother.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, when Ethel and Mary were sent to boarding school in 1872, they received more comprehensive schooling; literature, history, mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry were taught alongside French, German, music, and drawing.⁴⁷

It is clear from these reminiscences that Ethel and her siblings were exposed to music from an early age. Their mother, Emma — known as 'Nina' — was a pianist and a capable sight reader who sang well in her youth.⁴⁸ Nina's influence is evident in Smyth's recollections of her childhood, which include singing duets with Mary while they lived in Sidcup; listening to her mother sing and play piano at Frimhurst; and Ethel's habit of 'composing chants and hymns' that she performed with Mary at dinner parties.⁴⁹ Despite this trickle of anecdotal evidence, Christopher St John, suggests that '[m]usic does not seem even to have been among her major interests until the memorable day when at the age of twelve she heard a Beethoven sonata for the first time'.⁵⁰ This introduction to the world of 'classical music' was courtesy of one of Smyth's more successful governesses: 'a new victim' for the schoolroom who had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory.⁵¹ From this point on, Smyth notes, 'was my true bent suddenly revealed to me, and then and there conceived the plan [...] of studying at Leipzig and giving up my life to music'.⁵² This story has become a central part of Smyth's biographical narrative, exemplifying her single-minded determination.

Smyth's plan to study abroad took a further seven years for her to action. Her father, who was vehemently opposed to her going, was the primary obstacle. The Smyths' social circle did not include any artists, Ethel reflected later, which patently fuelled John's

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁵ Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁷ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *ITR*, I, p. 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 61, 80, 83.

⁵⁰ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 6.

⁵¹ *ITR*, I, p. 85.

⁵² Ibid., p. 85.

concern for his daughter's welfare. 'It is no exaggeration', Smyth suggests in *Impressions That Remained*, 'to say that the life I proposed to lead seemed to him equivalent to going on the streets'.⁵³ Thus, between 1870 and 1877, Smyth had to bide her time, seizing the musical opportunities on offer and hoping that her persistence would pay off.

When she and Mary exchanged their governess for boarding school, Ethel soon found herself at the heart of their Sunday services:

By this time I undertook the music in our afternoon home services on Sundays as a matter of course, composed, and made the girls learn, chants and hymns, which bore the names of adored units in the choir—my old system—and generally imposed myself musically.⁵⁴

Smyth's reference to these early compositions highlights a reoccurring link between music and the church, and she observes that music was 'connected in my mind [...] mainly with religion—a well-known English malady'.⁵⁵ It also reflects a tendency to inscribe in her music autobiographical undertones, which she continued to do throughout her life.⁵⁶ While Smyth's compositional style evolved and moved away from Church music, the link between music and religion is still evident in many of her mature works.⁵⁷

This anecdote also conveys Smyth's early independence and a clear sense of her self-assurance. As St John remarks, '[t]he high opinion she had of her musical gifts must have been a help to being faithful to it in spite of discouragement'.⁵⁸ Smyth's tenacity — a trait seemingly developed in her youth — helped her not only to execute the Leipzig plan but was fundamental to her eventual success as a composer. Yet her memoirs indicate that this determined self-belief was touched with loneliness, particularly during her school years. The sense of Smyth's non-conformity and her tendency towards passionate emotion caused her to be branded 'the Stormy Petrel'.⁵⁹ Her assertion that 'somehow I was of different stuff to the boys and girls I associated with' highlights her sense of difference and isolation.⁶⁰ Moreover, the musical ability in which she so firmly believed seemingly went unnoticed in Putney, where 'there was no one to help me into the path I afterwards found

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁵⁶ This compositional trait is considered throughout Chapters 2–4.

⁵⁷ Smyth set religious texts in a number of her works. See, for example, the chorales she composed between 1882–1884, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, and her Mass in D. Her suffrage collection, *Songs of Sunrise*, also has a religious undertone.

⁵⁸ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *ITR*, I, p. 94.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

for myself with so much difficulty'.⁶¹ Here, she received music tuition from a composer — 'poor Herr A. S.' — whose works did not live up to the music of Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann, with which she was becoming increasingly familiar.⁶² Herr A. S. was evidently not the kind of teacher she desired, and these recollections suggest that Smyth felt alone in her passion for music and her conviction to study abroad until she left the boarding school in 1875.

That summer, her two elder sisters were married: Alice to Harry Davidson and Mary to Charles Hunter. However, the joint celebration was overshadowed by the impending death of their brother Johnny, whose protracted illness following a riding accident claimed his life shortly after his sisters' weddings.⁶³ Smyth recalls being the only family member at Frimley Church as everyone else was gathered around Johnny's bedside. This was a monumental loss for the family, particularly Ethel's mother, who doted on her oldest son. Thus, within the space of a few weeks, Ethel became the eldest child in the household. She was seventeen and still firmly fixed on the idea of studying in Leipzig, although she confesses to having 'trifled with other ideas, such as marriage, travel, becoming a Roman Catholic, or even a nun'.⁶⁴ As Smyth is rarely considered to be an overtly religious composer, this latter idea may seem out of character, but something about the 'religious life' having 'scope for limitless passion' seemed to resonate with Smyth's personality.⁶⁵

Having left school, Smyth was in need of a new music teacher. The arrival at Aldershot of Alexander Ewing (1830–1895) — composer of 'Jerusalem the Golden' — proved timely. Being familiar with the hymn tune from Church, Smyth 'took it on trust that at last I was to meet, not a poor musical hack like Herr A. S., but a real musician'.⁶⁶ Ewing's wife, Juliana ('Judy'), was a children's author, and became friendly with the Smyth family.⁶⁷ Judy captivated Ethel and once Alexander heard of her musical talent he was apparently keen to hear her compositions. His encouragement at this point in Smyth's life was arguably as vital as the earlier input of the Leipzig-educated governess and gave her the validation that she had been seeking. Ethel recalls that her father was less enamoured by

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁷ Juliana Horatia Ewing (*née* Gatty) (1841–1885) was an English author. Smyth suggests that Ewing's book *Jackanapes* (c. 1879) was inspired by her brother Robert's 'adventures at [...] Frimley Fair'. See *Impressions*, p. 111. For further information on Ewing, see Horatia Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing and her Books* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885).

Alexander's enthusiasm, but with her mother's support, she was able to accept his offer to teach her harmony.⁶⁸

The 'Ewing epoch' was relatively short, but still important for Smyth's early development as a composer.⁶⁹ In addition to teaching her harmony and critiquing her compositions, Alexander further broadened her musical horizons. He introduced her to the music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) via *Lohengrin* and *The Flying Dutchman*; sent her a volume of Robert Schumann's (1810–1856) *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker* (*Collected Writings about Music and Musicians*); and encouraged her to consider Franz Liszt's (1811–1886) orchestration.⁷⁰ The letters from Ewing that Smyth included in *Impressions* give further insight into their discussions concerning Brahms, Clara Schumann (1819–1896), and Goethe (1749–1832). Despite his position in the army, Alexander was an artist at heart, and it is evident, even from this selected correspondence, that he and Ethel connected deeply due to their shared interests. He was twenty-eight years her senior, and while he assumed the role of musical mentor, he seemed to treat her largely as his equal.

However, the apparent ease of this friendship — and Smyth's carelessness with her letters — brought their lessons to an abrupt end. John took issue with a note from Alexander in June 1876 wherein he expressed the view that musicians were held back by less artistic individuals, who 'torture and hamper us, and jar our souls'.⁷¹ Given John's reluctance to send Ethel to Leipzig, Alexander's letter must have seemed dangerously inflammatory reading for his daughter. The Ewings left Aldershot shortly after and Alexander's letter in April 1877 offers a sense of his feelings on the loss of his friend and pupil:

I, too, have a good many friends of sorts, some new and some old. But one thing is certain; there is not one, nor can I suppose there will ever be, who can oust you from your place. It would have to be a second you to do so, and a second you does not exist. Now, my dear child, I must bid you good-bye, for the time. *Au revoir* I hope and believe it only is. We won't forget each other, nor all the brave old times when we laboured together.⁷²

As Smyth omits her responses to Ewing the reader is left with a one-sided correspondence, which makes it difficult to gain a sense of how she interacted with him or evaluate the language she used in her letters. However, her comment that their friendship offered 'the comfort of at last feeling "the breath of kindred plumes about my feet"' implies that it was

⁶⁸ *ITR*, I, p. 111.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 138.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷² Alexander Ewing to Ethel Smyth, 20 April 1877. Quoted in *ITR*, I, pp. 147–148.

important to her.⁷³ Ewing had seemingly opened a window onto a tantalising new world, further increasing Smyth's determination to study in Leipzig.

Alongside her musical activities between 1875 and 1877, Smyth was mostly following the course expected of a young middle-class woman. She spent time visiting her elder sisters, attended dances, and socialised with respectable families. In 1876 she paid her first visit to Ireland, and it was here that she encountered William Wilde (1852–1899) — the brother of Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). The pair met in Bray where Smyth was staying, accompanied by the Hon. Mary Southwell and her husband, Sir Evelyn Wood. William was apparently smitten with Ethel and he proposed to her on the journey back to England; they were secretly engaged for a few weeks, but Smyth's memoirs indicate that the romantic interest was one-sided. His ardent letters followed her home, urging her to keep their promise a secret, but it was soon called off. Smyth's one and only engagement lasted less than three weeks, and she never saw William again.⁷⁴

Soon after this tryst with Wilde, Ethel came out to society and she attended the customary balls designed to introduce young women to prospective husbands. Smyth quickly realised that the ballroom — the 'ante-chamber of matrimony' — was not simply a space for dancing, and that she, as a woman with no desire to marry, was an outsider once more.⁷⁵ However, she countered these social obligations with a rigid adherence to her Leipzig plan, occasionally travelling to London to see concerts. Allies such as Mary Schwabe often chaperoned Smyth to these events, although she was not beyond taking matters into her own hands and making her way to London independently. In February 1877, Smyth heard Brahms's music for the first time, an event she describes as a 'half-milestone in my journey'.⁷⁶ His *Liebeslieder Walzer* were sung by Thekla Friedländer (c. 1845–?), Auguste Redeker (1853–?), George Henschel (1850–1934), and an unnamed fourth singer.⁷⁷ She recalls, 'that day I saw the whole Brahms [...] his genius possessed me there and then in a flash. I went home with a definite resolution in my heart'.⁷⁸

⁷³ *ITR*, I, p. 114. This is a reference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Love-Sweetness', which appears in his sonnet sequence *The House of Life*. See Rossetti, *Poems* (London: F. S. Ellis, 1870).

⁷⁴ It is difficult to corroborate this story beyond Smyth's own recollections. On 7 April 1891 she wrote to Harry Brewster while she was travelling by sea and stated: 'I think this is one of the first goodnights I have ever had on the sea (except the memorable one when I was 16 coming back from Ireland [...] & got engaged to that horrid Irishman – Oscar Wilde's brother!)', pp. 1–2. Smyth was actually 18 at the time.

⁷⁵ *ITR*, I, p. 119.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Following a heated discussion that evening, Smyth ‘determined to make life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go [to Leipzig] for their own sakes’.⁷⁹ Fortunately, a number of family friends came to Ethel’s aid and supported her plan, which helped to persuade her father. Mary Schwabe, whom Smyth described as ‘a radical’, was among these musical advocates; Emily Napier, with ‘rebel blood in her veins’, also joined the Leipzig cause.⁸⁰ John eventually relented, and the singer Thekla Friedländer, whom Smyth had met in London earlier that year, arranged lodgings with her aunt. The battle finally won, Ethel set off for Leipzig with her brother-in-law, Harry Davidson, on 26 July 1877. A new chapter was about to begin.

1.3b. The Leipzig Years (1877–85)

Once settled in the home of Friedländer’s aunt, Frau Professor Heimbach, Davidson left Smyth to her new city. Her memory of that first morning of freedom evocatively conveys her excitement: ‘[I] began life in a state of wild enthusiasm that transformed the little round rolls into manna, the thin coffee dear to Leipzigers into nectar’.⁸¹ Smyth’s first letter to Nina is crammed with writing and headed with ‘LEIPZIG!!’ underlined three times. She exclaims, ‘I am mentally wallowing in one thought and one only, i.e. “Here I am”!! And I have only just begun to realise that fact’.⁸² After spending so many years longing to study music on the continent, it was clearly a surreal feeling for Smyth to finally be in the country.

Through Friedländer and her family, Smyth started to make connections. She had arrived before her classes at the Conservatory began, but music was a key component in the lives of her new Leipzig friends. Friedländer invited Smyth on a family holiday to the Thuringian Forest in August and Smyth wrote to her mother to tell her about ‘the great baritone’, George Henschel (1850–1934), who met them at the station. Her admiration is evident in her description of him and the prospect of the group music-making that would ensue:

As he always sang in London with the two [Friedländer and Redeker] they are all great friends and we shall have simply the loveliest music to be had anywhere all

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 154.

⁸² Ethel Smyth (ES) to Nina Smyth (NS), 28 July 1877, p. 1. The correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Nina Smyth referenced throughout this chapter is from collection ‘A, VI. 5/17: [Briefe]’ held by the Hochschule für Musik und Theater ‘Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Hochschulbibliothek, Leipzig, Germany. The letters contained within this collection have been digitised by the University of Dresden and can be viewed online at <<https://katalog.slub-dresden.de/id/0-165646716X>> [accessed 19 June 2023].

the 2 or 3 weeks we are here — for Henschel was brought up to be a pianist & plays splendidly. He is a regular genius — and his compositions are lovely — I hear he whistles and draws most beautifully — but shall soon see for myself — as at 10 o'clock we are going up there [...] to do music.⁸³

The frequent underlining, use of dashes, and the effusive inventory of Henschel's talents convey Smyth's excitement for the new world that she was inhabiting. Later in August she writes again about Henschel, telling her mother that '[h]e thinks more of my talent than even I did!! & has written about me to Brahms — (with whom he was almost brought up) & Simrock.'⁸⁴ Henschel's high opinion of Smyth endured, and in his own reflections of this trip he expresses an equal admiration, remarking, '[n]one of us knew what in her to admire most: her wonderful musical talent [...] or her astonishing prowess in athletic feats of agility and strength'.⁸⁵ He goes on to describe her as 'the most remarkable and original woman-composer in the history of music', further reinforcing his respect for her.⁸⁶ As external validation was especially important for Smyth during this period, the news that Henschel had mentioned her to Brahms and the publisher Friedrich Simrock (1837–1901), meant that she started her studies on a high.

Despite having longed to study at the Leipzig Conservatory, Smyth's memoirs indicate that her experience at the institution was uninspiring. Her teachers — Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), Salomon Jadassohn (1831–902), and Louis Maas (1852–1889) — apparently did not live up to her high expectations and she found their lessons farcical and dull.⁸⁷ Many of her classmates were at the conservatory to gain teaching qualifications, which was a different path to the one Smyth had chosen.⁸⁸ Ever since those early chants and hymns, composition was her primary focus and she worked on developing these skills as she matured. Before leaving England she had composed at least one Lied, entitled 'Schön Rohtraut', and by September 1877 had completed her first piano sonata, which she announced to her mother with aplomb:

The great Sonata is finished!! That is, I am putting a touch or two to the last movement (a Rondo), but by my next lesson on Wednesday all will be ready. Maas is very complimentary about it — & I myself am pretty well satisfied with the latter movements — more because I feel now I am getting into working easily on the harness of form than because I think the Sonata itself particularly good.⁸⁹

⁸³ ES to NS, 5 August 1877, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁴ ES to NS, 22 August 1877, pp. 7–8.

⁸⁵ George Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1919), pp. 175–176.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁸⁷ *ITR*, I, pp. 164–165.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁸⁹ ES to NS, 23 September 1877, p. 3.

Evidently, Mass's approval meant enough for the nineteen-year-old Smyth to report on at the time, and she speaks of her teachers with admiration in the letters she wrote during her first few months in Leipzig. Her later criticism of the institution was likely influenced by her widening social circle of musicians.

In addition to the Friedländers, there were other families who welcomed Smyth to Leipzig and showed interest in her music. She was quickly immersed in musical gatherings and concerts, allowing her not only to hear new and well-known works but also providing the opportunity to share her own compositions. The Röntgen family were significant in this regard; Thekla Friedländer took Smyth to meet them in September 1877 and the composer considered this to be her 'introduction to the Leipzig music world'.⁹⁰ Engelbert Röntgen (1829–1897) was the concertmaster of the Gewandhaus Orchestra and his family often played chamber music together. For Smyth, their home held 'the concentrated essence of old German musical life', and she noted that 'without a moment's hesitation the whole dear family took me into their bosom'.⁹¹ The Röntgens' artistically rich household was an ideal environment for Smyth to share her music and gauge how it was received. She formed a particular friendship with the eldest daughter, Johanna (1857–1926), and valued her critical opinion.

Outside of the Conservatory and her friends' homes, Smyth attended as many performances as she could, which exposed her to lots of new music. Whereas in England her trips to London had been infrequent, sometimes requiring her to stow away and borrow money for the train, in Leipzig she had a world of music on the doorstep.⁹² She describes the Gewandhaus and her experience of hearing music there with reverence:

We now revel weekly in a Gewandhaus concert — & anything like the perfection of a Beethoven Symphony given by that orchestra and conducted by Reinecke you cannot imagine. There is something in the building of the concert room that has much to do with [it].⁹³

She also refers to the seats that were 'handed down from father to son', which limited the availability for those without a subscription.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, these concerts clearly inspired Smyth and gave her 'a fresh impetus' to create her own music.⁹⁵ In October 1877 she was

⁹⁰ *ITR*, I, p. 160.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁹² In *Impressions*, Smyth details her method of borrowing money from local tradesmen with whom her father had business in order to buy a train ticket to London. See volume I, pp. 124–125.

⁹³ ES to NS, 21 October 1877, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁵ ES to NS, c. 7 December 1877, p. 1.

‘practising [piano] five hours a day at least’ and working diligently on her compositions.⁹⁶ During the week she had lessons in singing, piano, harmony, composition, and counterpoint, attended choir and ensemble classes, and on Fridays, she took part in the *Abendunterhaltung* — an evening performance of students’ work.⁹⁷ She explained to her mother that her busy schedule meant that every hour must be accounted for and that time off to meet friends or attend concerts had to be made up. The tone of these Leipzig letters conveys Smyth’s excitement for her new life and her determination to be successful.

Whereas Smyth’s contemporaries studying at the Royal Academy of Music — figures such as Rosalind Ellicott (1857–1924) and Dora Bright (1862–1951) — would have been familiar with Austro-German repertoire, Smyth had a greater opportunity to meet the composers behind the latest music. Early in 1878 Brahms came to Leipzig to conduct his newly composed second symphony and Henschel introduced Smyth to him. Notably, this event marks the first mention of two key figures of Smyth’s time in Leipzig: Heinrich and Elisabeth (‘Lisl’) von Herzogenberg. Brahms stayed with the Herzogenbergs when he visited Leipzig and Smyth had heard about Lisl from friends, as she notes in *Impressions*:

Meanwhile, in whatever set I might happen to find myself, three names were constantly on all lips, uttered with respect, admiration, or devotion, as the case might be. Hitherto for various reasons I had met none of these evidently remarkable personalities; then [...] in the course of a single week Livia Frege, Lili Wach, and Elisabeth von Herzogenberg swam into my orbit.⁹⁸

All three women were to play an important role in this period of Smyth’s life, but Elisabeth (1847–1892) became a particularly significant part of her Leipzig world. Following their first meeting in February 1878, Smyth developed a friendship with the Herzogenbergs, becoming a daughter figure for the childless Lisl. The couple had heard about Smyth in much the same way that she had heard of them and both were quick to praise her musical talent. Heinrich (1843–1900) was a composer and while he was impressed with her abilities, felt that the teaching she was receiving was insufficient.⁹⁹ His influence at this juncture was pivotal for Smyth, who accepted Heinrich’s offer of tuition and withdrew from the Conservatory that summer.

Smyth’s letters home during the spring of 1878 convey a sense of constant activity. In addition to her lessons, she was regularly socialising with several musical families,

⁹⁶ ES to NS, n.d. October 1877, p. 2.

⁹⁷ ES to NS, 21 October 1877, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁸ *ITR*, I, p. 188.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

singing with the Bach Verein, and taking opportunities to travel when they arose. Unsurprisingly, this exertion took its toll on Smyth and she suffered from ill health during the first half of 1878. In May, heart palpitations caused her to collapse at a birthday party at the Klengels' — another musical family she knew — and Lisl hurried her home. Over the following fortnight Lisl nursed Smyth, further strengthening their friendship and the familial bond that had begun to develop between them. Smyth's letter, dictated to Lisl and sent to her mother, highlights this sentiment. The postscript, written in pencil by Smyth, is far longer than the excerpt given in *Impressions* and offers a sense of Lisl's level of care:

Mother darling, — The person who has written my letter to you and nursed me through this illness more like a mother than anyone else is Frau von Herzogenberg — The night the illness came on she was there [...] she came with me [...] took me home in a cab — put me to bed & since then has nursed me — She wanted to be with me at nights but that the doctor wouldn't allow her — so I had a nurse for the nights & have her still. She[,] Frau v[on] H[erzogenberg], comes at 8 o'clock — cooks my cocoa — spreads my bread & butter & leaves me at 8pm — [The] Herzogenberg[s] were leaving Leipzig yesterday — have however postponed their departure on my account (she has a husband worthy of her) as she was so sympathetic to me as sicknurse. [...] What she has been to me I can't quite tell you and I have known her hardly three months.¹⁰⁰

Smyth's addendum, clumsily written in a child-like hand, is littered with dashes in place of punctuation. While this tendency is common in her correspondence, it is more pronounced in particularly emotional letters; tiredness or haste may also have been a contributing factor here. However, it is clear that Lisl's nursing made an impression on Smyth and increased her affection for her new friend.

For the next seven years, Smyth became what she described as a 'semi-detached member of the Herzogenberg family', noting that 'wherever they were bidden I was bidden too'.¹⁰¹ As a result of this close association, Smyth's musical network grew and she came into contact with musical families and established composers. In 1879 she strengthened ties with Elisabeth ('Lili') Wach (1845–1910) — daughter of Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) — and her husband; met Edvard Grieg (1843–1907); and spent Christmas with the Fiedler family, who were friends of the Herzogenbergs.¹⁰² The works that Smyth composed during her Leipzig years reflect the environment in which she was living and include several Lieder; piano sonatas, variations, canons and inventions; organ preludes and fugues; and chamber works, notably string quartets. These forms were well suited to

¹⁰⁰ ES to NS, 19 May 1878, pp. 9–10. Also see *ITR*, I, pp. 241–42.

¹⁰¹ *ITR*, I, p. 258.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 271; 281.

the musical gatherings in which she found herself and the families with whom she socialised; the Röntgens, for example, seemed especially willing to play works through for her.¹⁰³ As Chapter Two elucidates, Smyth's Lieder played an important role during the first few years that she was in Leipzig, helping to raise awareness of her music and build connections.

During this period Smyth divided her time between Leipzig and Frimhurst, returning to the latter for the summer months. This gave her the opportunity to spend time with family and enjoy time outdoors, sometimes to the detriment of her studies. However, in 1882, Smyth decided to winter in Italy and put some of her musical theory into practice. She spent the summer working with the von Glehns on some of her chamber music, before travelling to Switzerland to visit the Wachs.¹⁰⁴ There, a mountaineering holiday was cut short due to a knee injury and she left to meet the Herzogenbergs in Venice. After a brief stay, Smyth travelled to Florence and sourced lodgings for the duration of her visit. Although Smyth arrived in the city not knowing anyone, she soon introduced herself to the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921) and his wife Irene (1846–1921), who were friends with the Herzogenbergs and the Fiedlers. Adolf was 'deeply musical' and the couple's six children were all artistically inclined, so Smyth quickly felt at home in their company.¹⁰⁵

The second family that Smyth met in Florence — Harry and Julia Brewster — were soon to hold as much significance as the Herzogenbergs. Julia was Lisl's sister and Smyth had heard a lot about this reclusive couple: 'super-humans [...] [who] lived in an Ivory Tower, knowing not a soul in Florence except the Hildebrands'.¹⁰⁶ In these early weeks of their friendship, Smyth's attention was more firmly fixed on Julia and she found Harry difficult to connect with. Not long after she arrived in the city, Harry left to go lion hunting in Algeria; Smyth suggests that he left because he had developed feelings for her and needed to put distance between them.¹⁰⁷ However, in the family biography, the Brewsters' grandson suggested that the trip had as much to do with their marital problems as with Smyth.¹⁰⁸ In the meantime, Smyth settled into life in Florence. The knee injury that

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 160; 258.

¹⁰⁴ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), II, p. 53. Smyth was likely referring here to Mary Emilie ('Mimi') von Glehn, whose family lived in Sydenham. See Valerie Langfield, 'The Family von Glehn' in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 3, ed. by Peter Horton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 273–291.

¹⁰⁵ *TTR*, II, p. 61.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ *ATWO*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Brewster, *The Cosmopolites: A Nineteenth-Century Family Drama* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), p. 109.

she had sustained in Switzerland continued to plague her, but she recalls that her ‘work forged ahead as never before’ and there was much music-making in the spring of 1883.¹⁰⁹ Her friendship with the Hildebrands grew and she spent time with Julia, although her visits were limited to once per fortnight.¹¹⁰ Then, after four months in Africa, Harry returned and Smyth’s initial dislike began to soften. Her friendship with the Brewsters now better established, Smyth agreed to return to Florence after her summer at Frimhurst.

Before going home, Smyth visited the Bavarian town of Berchtesgaden where the Herzogenbergs were building a house.¹¹¹ There was also a ‘mud-cure’ nearby that Smyth thought might help her injured knee, which still had not healed.¹¹² She spent time sketching, but the highlight of her trip was the chance to spend time with Clara Schumann. Her memoirs highlight the importance of this meeting, where they apparently bonded over their mutual friendship with the soprano Livia Frege (1818–1891) and Schumann’s enthusiasm for Smyth’s ‘Prelude and Fugue for Thin People’. She notes that Schumann was determined to study the work, which was later ‘dedicated to her, title and all, by special request’.¹¹³ As one of the few women composers that Smyth knew, Schumann’s support must have been particularly welcome. When they had met in October 1878, Smyth had written to her mother to tell her of the ‘blissful conversation’ they had had, hoping that when Brahms returned to Leipzig in January 1879 she might ‘see more of that grand woman’.¹¹⁴ Smyth stayed with Schumann in Frankfurt en route from England to Munich in December 1883, suggesting that the affection was mutual.

After a summer at home and an autumn of travelling, Smyth finally returned to Florence early in 1884. This was a significant year for her, both professionally and personally. In January her String Quintet in E, Op. 1 was performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus and published by C. F. Peters the same year.¹¹⁵ While Smyth had worked on

¹⁰⁹ *ITR*, II, p. 70.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 74. It is difficult to verify the accuracy of this claim. In a letter to Brahms in December 1883, Clara Schumann wrote of Smyth, ‘I am surprised at the progress she has made and even if she has no originality as a composer, I cannot help feeling respect for such ability in a girl’. It is possible that in an effort to encourage Smyth, Schumann expressed an interest in ‘Prelude and Fugue for Thin People’, prompting Smyth to dedicate it to her. See *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, vol. II, ed. by Berthold Litzman (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 86.

¹¹⁴ ES to NS, n.d. October 1878, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁵ Lisl informed Brahms that ‘Abraham [of C. F. Peters] is publishing a string quintet of Ethel’s’ in November 1883, *Johannes Brahms: The Herzogenberg Correspondence*, ed. by Max Kalbeck, trans. by Hannah Bryant (London: John Murray, 1909). Also see the list of works compiled by Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), pp. 373–81 (p. 375).

several chamber works since 1880, she had only finished four and none had received a public performance.¹¹⁶ Lisl's letter to Smyth the following day reinforces the predominantly private world in which her music had so far been heard:

Yesterday was a great day, but until we saw how the public would like it the motherly hearts of Lili [Wach] and myself beat horribly. One doesn't really enjoy the work of someone dear to you at a public performance [...] and my real pleasure was at the rehearsal on Saturday [...]. At the concert I was oppressed by a feeling almost of shame for the work of art thus laying bare its soul — specially [*sic*] in the C# minor movement, when I felt as if you were undressing before the horrid Leipzig public.¹¹⁷

Lisl's letter conveys the trepidation that she felt at this event and the importance of a positive reception from the audience. Her maternal protectiveness of Smyth is also evident; their friendship by this point was arguably at its strongest and most meaningful, with Lisl calling Smyth 'my child' in her letters and signing off, 'Your mother'.¹¹⁸

In Florence, Smyth spent an increasing amount of time with the Brewsters and grew closer to the couple. She had established a firm friendship with Harry and by the spring of 1884 Smyth's affection for him was evident. She wrote to a friend:

Speaking for myself, what with comparing notes about mankind, morals, art, literature, anything and everything, what with the laughter and fighting and utter good comradeship, I have never had such a delightful relation with any man in my life.¹¹⁹

Smyth's realisation that she had romantic feelings for Harry marked the start of a turbulent period in her life. She reports being unaware of Harry's attraction during her previous visits, noting that they had 'gradually come to realise that our roots were in the same soil'.¹²⁰ Once their feelings had been admitted, Smyth, Harry, and Julia were faced with the decision of how best to proceed.

The Brewsters had an unconventional approach to marriage, which was based on the premise that either party was free to leave if they tired of the relationship or fell in love with someone else.¹²¹ This ideal proved challenging in practice, and neither was

¹¹⁶ In differentiating between public (e.g. the Leipzig Gewandhaus) and private (e.g. musicians' homes) performance spaces I do not seek to devalue the opportunities offered by the latter. Rather, I aim to highlight the importance of Smyth's music being heard by a wider audience than in those more intimate gatherings, thus helping her to build her reputation in the public sphere.

¹¹⁷ *ITR*, II, p. 117.

¹¹⁸ *ITR*, II, pp. 117–120.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63. Harry Brewster (1909–1999) describes the marriage in similar terms, stating that the Brewsters referred to their marriage as a regency. See *The Cosmopolites*, p. 108.

comfortable ending the marriage. Collis suggests that Harry ‘did not feel it possible to abandon one whose world he had ruined’.¹²² Lengthy discussions ensued, with Harry proposing a *manège à trois*, ‘a quasi-bigamous arrangement whereby Ethel and Julia would each play a complementary role reflecting two different sides of his personality and fulfilling the psychological needs of all three’.¹²³ Neither woman was comfortable with this proposition; Julia felt that Harry’s feelings would dissipate, and Smyth struggled to see how she could do anything but stop communicating with Harry. She did not want to hurt Julia or compromise her own principles. She left Leipzig for Frimhurst in the summer but continued corresponding via letter.

Consequently, 1884 and 1885 were fraught years as Smyth and the Brewsters tried to reach a consensus. Lisl, who had initially been supportive of Smyth and understood the difficulty of the situation, ultimately sided with her sister. Her decision to sever contact with Smyth in the summer of 1885 caused significant distress on both sides. The Herzogenbergs had been ‘the corner stone’ of Smyth’s life since she moved to Leipzig and the loss of their friendship was keenly felt.¹²⁴ Smyth returns to this part of her history repeatedly in her memoirs, describing the break with Lisl as ‘an event that shaped my whole existence’, one on which she spent much time reflecting.¹²⁵

1.3c. *In The Desert (1886–90)*

In the space of a few months, Smyth had lost the Herzogenbergs and the Brewsters; as she neatly summarises in *Impressions*, ‘I burned my boats and went into the Desert’.¹²⁶ This image of a barren landscape encapsulates the bleak outlook with which Smyth seemed to view her future. Nevertheless, the music that she wrote over the next five years shows her developing as a composer, and Chapters 3 and 4 explore how the emotional turbulence of this period may have influenced two of her largest works to date: *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888) and her Mass in D (1891). In 1887, Smyth completed two sonatas in A minor, one scored for piano and cello (Op. 5) and another for piano and violin (Op. 7). Two years later, she wrote her first orchestral works and made her English debut at the Crystal Palace with her Serenade in D (1889), conducted by August Manns in April 1890. Her *Overture to Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra* (1889) followed six months later.¹²⁷

¹²² Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, p. 50.

¹²³ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 118.

¹²⁴ *ITR*, II, p. 125.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹²⁷ Bennett, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 375–376.

Smyth remained at Frimhurst until September 1886, but the environment was ill-suited to composition and she decided to visit Conrad Fiedler (1841–1895) and his wife Mary (1854–1919) who were staying in Engelberg.¹²⁸ The Fiedlers had become good friends with Smyth since they met in the late 1870s and Conrad advocated for Smyth within the Leipzig circles from which she now felt estranged. However, Mary's loyalty seemed less secure and when they left Engelberg for Berlin — now home to the recently relocated Herzogenbergs — Mary was swayed by Lisl's version of events. Their letter exchanges were clearly difficult for Smyth who, faced with the prospect of losing two more friends, responded 'bitterly' to their correspondence.¹²⁹ However, Conrad's letter from January 1887 suggests a greater understanding of the situation than Smyth credited him with:

I see no way out of it [the situation with Lisl] but that you find strength to close with the past, and instead of wearing yourself out seeking the solution of an insoluble problem, devote your energies to new aims. Not that I would have you cut out of your existence such an important part of your inner life as your friendship with Frau von H[erzogenberg] has been through all these years — that is impossible; but it seems to me you must sink it, like a treasure you possess, in the deepest part of your soul, there to be kept safe till the changes of life, or circumstances themselves, bring it once more to the surface.¹³⁰

Regardless of Conrad's sympathetic advice, her contact with the couple petered out for a time.

Over the next few years Smyth continued as before, dividing her year between Leipzig and England with brief sojourns in between. Frimhurst did not lend itself to composition, partly because of how her personality clashed with that of her mother's. Her attempts to work at the house to try and ease Nina's loneliness were thwarted by their arguments; Smyth recalls that, '[b]y the summer of 1889 I knew that if my musician's soul was to be saved I must get back to my spiritual home, Germany, particularly as none of the musical world in my own country appeared to have any use for me'.¹³¹ Smyth's comment also highlights the challenges she was beginning to face as an English composer with a German education and network. Her status as a woman likely contributed to the difficulties she encountered, particularly during this early part of her career when there was

¹²⁸ Conrad Fiedler was a notable nineteenth-century art critic. After Conrad's death, Mary married the conductor Hermann Levi in 1896. See Imogen Fellingner, 'Levi, Hermann' in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 14 (1985), pp. 396–397 <<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118865900.html#ndbcontent>> [accessed 12 May 2023].

¹²⁹ *ITR*, II, p. 149.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹³¹ *ATWO*, p. 13. Regarding her relationship with her mother also see *Impressions*, vol. II, pp. 195–197.

still a significant amount of gender bias, as evidenced by the critical responses to her music that appeared in the press following her English debut.

Rather than return to Leipzig, Smyth travelled to Munich in the autumn of 1889 in the hope of resuming work. Despite her desire to get away from Frimhurst, Smyth was less settled in her 'spiritual home' than she had been previously. She began working on a piece for August Manns, who had heard one of her string quartets over the summer and invited her to send him an orchestral work for performance the following year.¹³² Smyth had been working on her orchestration skills ever since she met Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) in 1888 and he suggested she attend concerts 'with the sole object of studying orchestral effects' in order to improve her sense of 'colour'.¹³³

Given the instability in her social circle and the continued unhappiness Smyth experienced during this period, she was likely grateful for new connections. At a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Smyth saw the Trevelyan family, whom she had met at her sister Mary's home during the summer.¹³⁴ This chance meeting in Munich, and the friendship that ripened over the following weeks, was a welcome diversion for Smyth, who must have been glad to see people who were outside of the Herzogenberg circle. 'Although the strange dread of the future never left me', she reflected, 'the company of friends such as these made all the difference for the time being'.¹³⁵ She dispatched the score of her *Serenade in D* to Manns in November and joined the Trevelyans on a trip to the spa town Bad Wörishofen.¹³⁶ Smyth held Lady Frances Trevelyan (1838–1907) in high regard, but it was her daughter Pauline (1862–1897) for whom she felt the most affection.

After returning from Bad Wörishofen in mid-December, the Trevelyans left for Cannes and Smyth began searching for new lodgings in Munich.¹³⁷ She describes this point as 'the worst nightmare' of her life.¹³⁸ The break from the Herzogenbergs and the Brewsters, her generally poor health, and the end of her trip with the Trevelyans brought Smyth to breaking point. Breaking her habit of wintering elsewhere, Smyth returned home for Christmas in 1889 in a state of emotional and physical exhaustion. She carried a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418–1427), a book left behind by Pauline that acted as a catalyst for Smyth's religious resurgence, which was to influence her life and music over

¹³² *ITR*, II, p. 204.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 168. For further discussion on this topic, see Chapter 2, section 2.2.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

the next eighteen months.¹³⁹ Chapter Four explores this period in greater depth, addressing Pauline's connection to Smyth's Mass in D and Smyth's religious preoccupations more broadly.

In January 1890, her *Serenade* received its premiere at the Crystal Palace. Smyth notes that, '[t]he result of the production of the *Serenade* was that other works of mine were now accepted for performance without difficulty, and suddenly, to my delight, I found that the power of work had come back'.¹⁴⁰ Given the barriers to performance that Smyth continued to face over the course of her career, this statement seems strikingly optimistic and inaccurate. Nevertheless, she began working on the Mass with a new sense of purpose, influenced by her continued study of *The Imitation of Christ* and other religious texts. The premiere of the *Serenade* also reunited Smyth with Harry Brewster, who attended the performance. Their contact between 1887–1889 had been sparse and confined to letters, but by December 1890 they resumed a more regular correspondence and commenced what Smyth described as 'the beginning of a new life'.¹⁴¹

1.3d. *A New Course (1891–1909)*

While this fresh start was evidently a source of happiness for Smyth, heartache was not far behind. On 13 January 1891 her mother died following a short illness, which was another emotional upheaval for the composer. Smyth's memoirs indicate that, despite their arguments, their relationship was strong and Nina supported her daughter's chosen career. Smyth recalls that after her mother's death, 'a deep sense of relief was mingled with my sorrow', and the loss brought her close to a breakdown.¹⁴² In February, she went on holiday with her elder sister, and Smyth's description that Mary 'bore off what remained of me to Algeria' seems to encapsulate the debilitating impact of her mother's death.¹⁴³

In the spring of 1891 a letter arrived from Empress Eugénie, a friend of Smyth's since 1883.¹⁴⁴ She invited the composer to stay with her in Cap Martin when Mary returned

¹³⁹ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Burlington Library Edition (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., n.d.).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁴³ *ATWO*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ The Empress fled to England after the defeat of her husband, Louis Napoleon, in 1870 and settled in Kent. Their son, the prince imperial, joined her soon after and Louis followed after his release from prison in 1871. In c. 1880 she moved to Farnborough Hill, which was near the Smyth's home in Frimley Green. For more on the Empress, see Harold Kurtz, *The Empress Eugénie: 1826–1920* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964); Pamela Pilbeam, 'Eugénie (1826–1920), empress of the French and exile', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006, < <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/74853> > [accessed 6 May 2022].

to England in April, and Smyth accepted.¹⁴⁵ Their friendship deepened over the following weeks and the Empress returned Smyth's affection with a loyalty that was to endure over the course of their friendship. Smyth was happy at Cap Martin and the Empress, she later reflected, 'helped me both directly and indirectly in my career as a musician as much as anyone I have ever known'.¹⁴⁶ This environment was better suited to composition than Frimhurst and she worked on her new mass, writing enthusiastically to Harry Brewster about the product of her religious resurgence. As Chapter Four demonstrates, the Mass in D emerged from a tumultuous period in Smyth's life, during which she was attempting to find strength and meaning in the aftermath of loss and bereavement.

By that autumn, Smyth had completed the Mass and had begun work on orchestrating the piece. Over the next eighteen months, her friendship with the Empress proved vital, helping Smyth to secure a premiere for her new work at the Royal Albert Hall in 1893. Queen Victoria had lent the Empress one of the properties on the Balmoral estate, and during her visit in October 1891, Smyth played parts of the Mass in D to the Queen. The support of several figures whom Smyth met during this visit greatly aided her in persuading Sir Joseph Barnby (1838–1869), conductor of the Royal Choral Society, to reconsider his earlier hesitancy to perform the work.¹⁴⁷

In January 1892, Smyth received the unexpected news that Lisl had died. Despite resuming contact with Harry in 1890, Smyth had remained estranged from Julia and Lisl and was unaware that the latter had been unwell. The last time she had seen Lisl was in May 1885, not knowing when she waved her off from Leipzig station that they would not meet again.¹⁴⁸ Smyth had longed for reconciliation, recalling that at the time of Lisl's death:

I now realised that, apart from my work, what I had chiefly been living for all these years was to see my lost friend again. There is a sensation of bleeding to death inwardly that has ever since been associated in my mind with no other form of sorrow, however bitter, but only with the flickering of a secret and passionately cherished hope.¹⁴⁹

Smyth's return to the situation with the Brewsters and the Herzogenbergs in *As Time Went On* reinforces its personal significance. The fact that Smyth severed contact with Harry in an attempt to repair her relationship with Lisl further highlights the depth of her affection for her Leipzig 'mother'. Lili Wach, who wrote to Smyth shortly after Lisl's death,

¹⁴⁵ *ATWO*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.

¹⁴⁸ *ITR*, II, p. 109.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

remarked that ‘the silence she has taken with her to the grave [...] is bitter and seems incomprehensible, one of the many tragedies of life against which it is useless to rebel’.¹⁵⁰ Given that Lisl was Julia’s sister, Lili’s comment regarding the incomprehensibility of Lisl’s stance seems reductive and overlooks both Lisl’s familial loyalty and the significant distress Julia would have experienced during the breakdown of her marriage. However, Lili likely sought to console Smyth in this letter and may have also wished that the situation between her two friends could have been resolved.

After Lisl’s death, Smyth felt at liberty to correspond with Harry more freely. ‘What rankled most with Ethel’, Brewster’s grandson opines, ‘was that Lisl should have been allowed to die without her [Smyth] knowing that she was seriously ill, without there having been a possibility of their coming together [...] and saying goodbye’.¹⁵¹ Her belief that Lisl’s family played a part in withholding the news of her illness probably influenced her decision to write to Julia. She notes:

Therewith once more the bottom fell out of my world. But one thing was now certain; from this hour a new course should be steered. I forthwith wrote a letter to Julia [...] [and] I told her that for years I had striven to repair as well as I could the harm I had unwittingly done her [...]. And now, thanks to her implacability, the thing of which I had ever lived in dread had happened — Lisl had died without even sending me a word of farewell. “From henceforth,” I wrote, “I mean to fashion my life as I choose, not giving you a thought”¹⁵²

Although Smyth received no reply, her actions were not without their repercussions. Mary Benson (1841–1918), with whom Smyth had been close since they met in 1886, disapproved of ‘the dethronement of Julia’ and the resumption of contact between she and Harry.¹⁵³ The Benson family, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, had been important for Smyth after the break from the Brewsters and the Herzogenbergs. She developed a strong friendship with Mary — who may be regarded as another of Smyth’s mother figures¹⁵⁴ — and her daughter Eleanor, the latter of whom died from diphtheria in 1890.¹⁵⁵ After Smyth decided on a ‘new course’ following Lisl’s death, visits and communication with Mary were temporarily suspended.¹⁵⁶ Thus, in gaining Harry, Smyth

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁵¹ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 231.

¹⁵² *ATWO*, p. 44.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ Smyth’s mother figures are addressed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.

¹⁵⁵ Martha Vicinus has explored the potentially romantic relationship that Smyth had with Mary and Nelly Benson. See *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 134–142 For further detail on Mary Benson, see pp. 88–98.

¹⁵⁶ Smyth notes that her difficult relationship with the Archbishop contributed to this decision. See *ATWO*, p. 45.

lost another friend and confidant. Martha Vicinus has emphasised the link between emotional upheaval and creativity in Smyth's work, suggesting that she 'found at great cost that only when disagreements — winds of jealousy, discord, and misunderstanding — swept through her intimate relationships could her music flourish'.¹⁵⁷ This notion is especially evident when *The Song of Love* and the Mass in D are considered within their compositional context.

With the Mass complete, Smyth continued to shape her ideas for her first opera, *Fantasio* (1892–94). She also travelled and socialised with many of the friends she had developed over the preceding years; Pauline Trevelyan, Harry Brewster, Empress Eugénie, and George Henschel feature prominently in her reflections of this time. Her friendship with Lady Mary Ponsonby (1832–1916) also flourished during this period.¹⁵⁸ She recalls:

[T]he development of the bond with H.B. [Harry Brewster] and the dawn of my friendship with Lady Ponsonby, these relations being the mainspring of my emotional and intellectual life during the years that followed, dwarfed everything else.¹⁵⁹

Smyth dedicates a chapter to Ponsonby in *As Time Went On*, detailing their first meeting in the mid-1880s and the friendship that grew between them.¹⁶⁰ Similarly to her 'enthralled' and 'rather tempestuous' relations with the Bensons, Smyth and Lady Ponsonby often clashed over their differing opinions.¹⁶¹ 'Though she was dearer to me than any woman in the world,' Smyth notes, 'never in my life, except perhaps with my mother, have I ever had such elemental rows with anyone as with Lady Ponsonby'.¹⁶² However, Smyth's memoirs do not suggest that she saw heated disagreements as a negative aspect of a relationship, rather that they were a by-product of intellectual engagement and her passionate personality. Furthermore, the number of meaningful friendships that Smyth cultivated reflects her belief 'that no one human being can satisfy all the needs of another'.¹⁶³ The richness of Smyth's social circles, and the depth of her affections for key individuals throughout her life, underscores the nourishment that she derived from such relationships.

The death of her father in 1894 and of Julia Brewster in 1895 brought about further change in Smyth's life. Her father's death followed a series of strokes and a steady

¹⁵⁷ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁸ Lady Ponsonby's nephew, Maurice Baring, became another close friend of Smyth's in subsequent years.

¹⁵⁹ *ATWO*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁰ See 'Lady Ponsonby: A Study', pp. 83–108.

¹⁶¹ *ITR*, II, p. 193.

¹⁶² *ATWO*, pp. 97–98.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128.

decline in health; Smyth reflected on having ‘hated him as a young girl for opposing my musical dreams’, but her stance softened with age.¹⁶⁴ Frimhurst, which had been the family home since 1867, was sold and Smyth moved into a cottage that she christened ‘One Oak’.¹⁶⁵ She remarked that her time at Frimhurst with her father had been happy, ‘but life in a house of my own was a perpetual intoxication’.¹⁶⁶ Despite the years she had spent abroad since 1877, Smyth had never rented an entire house before and her anecdotes convey the excitements and challenges of her increased independence.¹⁶⁷

As elucidated above, at several points in Smyth’s memoirs she makes reference to events that proved pivotal, such as the death of Lisl or her reunion with Harry. Julia’s death provoked a similar statement in *What Happened Next*, which she describes as ‘a bolt from the blue that changed the colour of my future life’.¹⁶⁸ While Smyth’s flare for drama — evident throughout her memoirs — adds interest to the narrative, it also helps to signpost key moments of change in her life. Even though she and Harry had had increasing contact since 1891, the death of Julia freed Smyth from further moral ambiguity.¹⁶⁹ As Harry’s grandson later noted, ‘for all her eccentricities and unpredictable actions, [Smyth] lived in a spirit of propriety, convention, and respectability’ that was a product of her late-Victorian upbringing.¹⁷⁰ This liberation, however, ignited ‘matrimonial bickerings’ between Smyth and Harry, who had opposing views on the subject.¹⁷¹ In 1877 she had written to her mother that, ‘[the reason] why no women have become composers is because they have married & [...] made their husband and children the first consideration’.¹⁷² Evidently, her stance had not changed in the intervening years and, regardless of her love for Harry, she was unwilling to marry him. By 1896, he seemed to have accepted Smyth’s decision and reportedly suggested that to marry would be ‘a conventional conclusion tagged on for the satisfaction of the upper gallery’.¹⁷³

In between their marital discussions, over the next ten years Smyth and Brewster worked together on *Fantasio*, *Der Wald*, and *The Wreckers*. The operatic scene in England was even less penetrable than the choral, so Smyth focused her attention on Germany

¹⁶⁴ *ATWO*, p. 283.

¹⁶⁵ Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), p. 69.

¹⁶⁶ Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ See ‘A Fresh Start and Two Portraits’ in *Streaks of Life*, pp. 69–92 and ‘Chapter I’ in *What Happened Next*, pp. 5–21.

¹⁶⁸ *WHN*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁹ Smyth’s morality is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁷⁰ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 265.

¹⁷¹ Letter from Harry Brewster to Smyth quoted in *WHN*, p. 23.

¹⁷² ES to NS, 22 August 1877, pp. 8–9.

¹⁷³ *WHN*, p. 30.

from the outset. As St John remarked, Smyth was more likely to have her works performed ‘in Germany, with its fourteen opera houses, than in England where, with the exception of Covent Garden, there were none’.¹⁷⁴ The libretti for *Fantasio* and *Der Wald* were both written in German, while *The Wreckers* was penned in French under the title *Les Naufrageurs*. The reason for this linguistic shift was twofold: Brewster had recently published *L’ame pâïenne* (1902), his first book in French, and André Messager (1853–1929) had recently been appointed director of the Royal Opera House.¹⁷⁵ Messager’s support of French music caused a change in the repertoire at Covent Garden, and Smyth and Brewster evidently hoped to capitalise on this with their third opera. The subsequent interest of Emma Calvé (1858–1942) must have made the possibility of a Covent Garden premiere an exciting prospect for Smyth, who had thought of the soprano when writing the part of Thirza.¹⁷⁶ However, these plans fell through and Smyth took the opera first to Brussels, where it was rejected due to pre-existing programming commitments, and then to Leipzig. Back in her spiritual and educational home, Smyth had better fortune; the libretto was translated into German by John Bernhoff and the work was premiered as *Strandrecht* at the Neues Theatre on 11 November 1906.

The opera was well received, but Smyth was dissatisfied. The director, Richard Hagel, had made several cuts to the opera, turning ‘the third act into an incomprehensible jumble’.¹⁷⁷ Following the premiere, Smyth requested that the cut sections were reinstated, but Hagel’s refusal caused her to remove all of the scores from the orchestra pit and promptly leave for Prague, thus prohibiting further performances of the work. This seems like an especially rash decision of Smyth’s part, who would no doubt have been aware of the significant issues that her behaviour would cause. However, the severity of her actions demonstrates that she was unwilling to sacrifice the quality of her work for popularity. In a letter published in the *Leipziger Tageblatt* Smyth explained her actions, acknowledging that while she was fortunate to have her opera performed, the cuts were unsanctioned and she felt compelled to speak out. ‘It is possible that Herr Kappellmeister Hagel’s revision corresponds to some tastes better than the original, which will be performed in Prague before long’ Smyth wrote, ‘but my work it is not’.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 89.

¹⁷⁵ Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, p. 84–85.

¹⁷⁶ *WHN*, p. 258. For more on Smyth and Calvé, see Elizabeth Wood, ‘Sapponics’ in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 27–66.

¹⁷⁷ *WHN*, p. 269.

¹⁷⁸ The full letter is quoted in Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2001), pp.

In her study of the critical reception of Smyth's first four operas, Kertesz highlights the unstable position Smyth held in England and Germany and the repercussions this had on performance opportunities.¹⁷⁹ Charles Reid's gendered observation about Smyth's efforts to secure interest in *The Wreckers* nevertheless offers a sense of her struggle:

For five years Ethel Smyth, wearing mannish tweeds and an assertively cocked felt hat, had been striding about Europe, cigar in mouth, trying to sell her opera *The Wreckers* to timorous or stubborn impresarios.¹⁸⁰

In describing her as wearing 'mannish tweeds' Reid seems to conjure the image of a woman playing dress up, cajoling the 'stubborn [male] impresarios' with behaviour designed to mirror their own. The challenges she encountered in trying to garner support for *The Wreckers* fed into those connected to music printing, as publishers were unwilling to accept operatic works that had not been scheduled for performance.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Smyth's dedication to the genre was by this point secure, as evidenced by the three further operas she went on to compose: *The Boatswain's Mate* (1913–14), *Fête galante* (1921–22), and *Entente cordiale* (1923–24).

In 1908, change was on the horizon once more. The death of Harry Brewster in June of that year was another devastating blow for Smyth. Harry had experienced bouts of ill health since the winter of 1907 and was diagnosed with liver cancer the following spring. Despite his illness, Brewster travelled to London for a concert performance of the first two acts of *The Wreckers*, which took place at the Queen's Hall. There was also a chamber music concert in Paris where her work was favourably received, as she recalled in *What Happened Next*: 'Never had music written by me been understood *en bloc* by the whole Press in this fashion!'¹⁸² Harry was elated by her success. When she returned to England on 5 June they travelled to his daughter Clotilde's home, where he died eight days later with Smyth by his side.¹⁸³

In the midst of their most emotionally turbulent period, Harry had written to Smyth and stated, 'I believe in your best self and I know that I bring it out, which makes

111–112. Smyth had also rejected plans for a smaller arrangement of *Fantasio*, 'setting a precedent' as Kertesz remarks, 'for future situations where she would rather lose a performance opportunity than see her music cut' (p. 90).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 5–6.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Reid, *Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography* (London: Readers Union, 1962), p. 82.

¹⁸¹ Smyth describes 'going from publisher-pillar to publisher-post' in her quest to have *Fantasio* printed. See *WHN*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁸² *WHN*, p. 312.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 314.

me think that you almost owe it to me not to let yourself be beaten by life'.¹⁸⁴ Smyth was not beaten by those difficult years, nor by his death, but continued on in her characteristically resolute fashion. She was soon to embark on a new, politically-motivated venture, infusing her works with the feminist themes of the Women's Suffrage Movement.

1.3e. *Politics and War (1910–20)*

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Smyth's reputation as an operatic composer had become a central part of her identity, helping her to become a more established figure in England. The award of an honorary doctorate from Durham University in 1910 further raised her public profile, bringing her to the attention of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).¹⁸⁵ WSPU member, Lady Constance Lytton, wrote to Smyth that year to gauge her opinion on suffrage and militancy.¹⁸⁶ Smyth's initial response to Lytton was never sent, a fact for which she was grateful when she changed her stance on the issue. Smyth was in Venice at the time and staying with the writer Hermann Bahr and his wife Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, a successful soprano.¹⁸⁷ Bahr was apparently surprised at Smyth's 'confession of indifference tinged with distaste and [...] ridicule' regarding the Women's Suffrage Movement, prompting him to comment:

[T]he militant movement is the one really alive issue in England... perhaps in Europe, and your Mrs. Pankhurst is in my opinion the most astounding personality that even England—a country that is forever turning out new types of genius—has yet produced.¹⁸⁸

Bahr's observation appeared to cause Smyth to reconsider her attitude towards the movement and she attended a WSPU meeting two weeks later, meeting leader Emmeline Pankhurst for the first time.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Harry Brewster (HB) to Ethel Smyth (ES), 10 October 1887, p. 1. Unless otherwise stated, the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Harry Brewster referenced throughout this chapter is held at the San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive in Florence.

¹⁸⁵ Smyth also received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University in 1926.

¹⁸⁶ *Female Pipings in Eden*, 2nd edn (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933), p. 191.

¹⁸⁷ Anna Bahr-Mildenburg (1872–1947) was a successful soprano who came to the attention of the Hamburg Opera in 1895. After an impressive audition, Bernhard Pollini (1838–1897) cast her in several roles, including Brünnhilde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Her performance sparked a mutually fruitful working relationship with the company's conductor, Gustav Mahler, and Bahr-Mildenburg worked with the Hamburg Opera until 1916. See Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Bahr-Mildenburg [née Mildenburg von Bellschau], Anna*, Grove Music Online, 2001, <<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01784>>.

¹⁸⁸ *FP*, p. 191.

¹⁸⁹ Smyth was listed 'among those who accepted invitations' to a WSPU meeting hosted by Lady Brassey on November 1, 1910. Based on Smyth's reflections in *Female Pipings in Eden*, it is likely that this is the first meeting that she attended, given that Emmeline Pankhurst had been on a tour of Scotland and Ireland until October. She also reflects that at the time she made her decision to join the WSPU, she 'was deep in musical

‘Before a fortnight had passed, Smyth remarked, ‘it became evident to me that to keep out of the movement, to withhold any modicum it was possible to contribute to the cause, was as unthinkable as to drive art and politics in double harness’.¹⁹⁰ The question of how to combine art and politics was something that she seemed to grapple with, but within the month Smyth had settled her musical affairs and decided that she would give two years to the WSPU, after which she would return to composing.¹⁹¹ It is evident from her writing that she felt that her career would need to put on hold while she contributed to the movement, yet many of the works that emerged from this period — including her *Songs of Sunrise* (1911) and *The Boatswain’s Mate* — reflect her involvement with the suffrage cause and unify two facets of her life that she had considered incompatible.

Smyth’s most detailed reflection on this period is found in her chapter on Emmeline Pankhurst in *Female Pipings in Eden*. This sizable tribute to the suffragette spans from their first meeting in 1910 to Pankhurst’s death in June 1928 and offers insights into Smyth’s involvement with the WSPU. As Elizabeth Wood observes, Smyth ‘bent her individualism to the common yoke, and devoted her speaking, writing, and leadership talents to the cause’.¹⁹² Smyth also used her status and connections as a composer to secure an audience with individuals who were otherwise reluctant to speak to suffragettes.¹⁹³ Smyth’s most notable contribution to the WSPU was the composition of the suffrage anthem ‘The March of the Women’, which appears as the first piece in her *Songs of Sunrise* collection.¹⁹⁴ Smyth officially presented the song to the WSPU in 1911 at a meeting where Emmeline Pankhurst spoke of women who had ‘come out and risked even their reputation’ for the suffrage cause.¹⁹⁵ She named Smyth as one such individual, thanking her for the March and stating, ‘no one could feel as deeply as I do the gratitude for her services to the women’s cause’.¹⁹⁶ Joining the WPSU at this point in her career, ‘when headway

undertakings’, which needed to be completed before she could devote her time to the movement. See ‘A Drawing Room-Meeting’, *Votes for Women*, 11 November 1910, p. 84 and *Female Pipings in Eden*, pp. 191–92.

¹⁹⁰ *FP*, p. 192.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191. Smyth spent closer to three years with the WSPU, having joined in November 1910 and left in the summer of 1913.

¹⁹² Elizabeth Wood, ‘Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 24/1 (1983), 125–139 (p. 129).

¹⁹³ See, for example, her discussion concerning her meeting with a Cabinet Minister’s wife in *FP*, pp. 204–206.

¹⁹⁴ For a comprehensive overview of Smyth’s suffrage works, see Elizabeth Wood, ‘Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women’s Suffrage’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/4 (1995), 606–43.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Stifled in Holloway’, *Votes for Women*, 27th January 1911, p. 272. ‘The March of the Women’ was first presented on 21st January 1911 to celebrate the release of prisoners held at Holloway Prison. For further details about this event, including the full programme, see ‘The Prisoners’ Welcome’, *Votes for Women*, 20 January 1911, p. 254.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Stifled in Holloway’, p. 272.

[was] being made at last', was a courageous move for Smyth, whose reputation as a composer was arguably more precarious than that of her male counterparts.¹⁹⁷ Friends questioned her decision to become involved with the movement; even forward-thinking women such as Empress Eugénie rejected the militant tactics of the WSPU.¹⁹⁸

Smyth's relationship with Pankhurst grew over the years that she dedicated to the WSPU and the suffrage leader became another significant figure in her life. Smyth's descriptions of Pankhurst in *Female Pippings* are full of praise and admiration, conveying an impression of her feelings towards the suffragette. Similarly, in *Beecham and Pharaoh* Smyth reflected on having become 'united by ties of close friendship to the leader of the militants, Mrs. Pankhurst, for whom my respect and admiration were — and are — as profound as any sentiment I have ever entertained'.¹⁹⁹ Their commitment to the suffrage cause and their similarly determined approach to life clearly enabled the two women to bond, although friction developed later in their relationship, causing a three-year silence from 1921–24 and a rift from which they never recovered.²⁰⁰

By 1913, Smyth's attention was turning away from the 'suffrage whirlpool' in which she'd been living and back towards composing.²⁰¹ Opera was on her mind once more; she had found 'a very remarkable libretto' by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and was also contemplating setting John Millington Synge's *Riders of the Sea* (1904).²⁰² Interest in Synge's play and desire to research keening took her to Ireland in September, and she later travelled to Vienna where there were plans for a concert of her suffrage works. However, this was not quite the clean break that Smyth needed and she recalled being 'begged to give interviews, write articles, and speak at meetings' while staying there.²⁰³ Thus, in order to put greater distance between herself and the suffrage movement, Smyth decided to travel to

¹⁹⁷ *ATWO*, p. 297.

¹⁹⁸ *SOL*, p. 58.

¹⁹⁹ *Beecham and Pharaoh*, pp. 79–80.

²⁰⁰ Smyth's criticism of Emmeline's eldest daughter, Christabel, was a contributing factor to this breakdown in relations. She also appeared to cause offence by supporting a proposed Testimonial Fund, which was designed to provide Emmeline Pankhurst with financial support. See *FP*, p. 246 and pp. 254–255 respectively.

²⁰¹ *ATWO*, pp. 105–106. The difficulty of seeing her friends suffering — physically as well as emotionally — for the cause also contributed to Smyth's decision to leave the WSPU. See *Beecham and Pharaoh*, pp. 80–81.

²⁰² For Smyth's reference to Hugo von Hofmannsthal's libretto see 'Dr. Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall', *The Suffragette*, 29 August 1913, p. 802. It appears that Smyth stayed with Hofmannsthal while she was staying in Vienna that autumn, which may be where she acquired the libretto. See *Beecham and Pharaoh*, p. 178.

²⁰³ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 163. St John quotes a passage from a draft of Smyth's unpublished and incomplete autobiography *A Fresh Start* that she started in 1941. This manuscript is part of the Ethel Smyth Collection at the University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Research Center).

Egypt.²⁰⁴ Here, she settled to work not on Hofmannsthal's libretto or a setting of Synge's play, but on her own adaptation of William Wymark Jacobs's *The Boatswain's Mate* (1905).²⁰⁵

Although lighter in character than her previous operas, *The Boatswain's Mate* nevertheless carries serious undertones and can be seen to reflect her feminist stance.²⁰⁶ Smyth reportedly chose Jacobs's play for its humour, but St John argues that 'it is hard to believe that she was not aware of the opportunity it gave her for showing the courage, resourcefulness and efficiency of her sex'.²⁰⁷ The attributes of the female lead, Mrs Waters, have been connected to Smyth and Emmeline Pankhurst, but would have been characteristic of many of the women committed to the movement.²⁰⁸ *The Boatswain's Mate*, which is more closely aligned to the English comic opera tradition and the works of Gilbert and Sullivan than her earlier operatic outputs, has become one of Smyth's most popular works.²⁰⁹

When Smyth left Egypt in May 1914 she returned to her operatic home, travelling to Vienna and Germany to try and secure a first performance of her new work. The publishers in Vienna were receptive and in Frankfurt she managed to arrange a performance of *The Wreckers* and a premiere for *The Boatswain's Mate* in spring 1915. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the first world war meant that Smyth's carefully laid plans soon crumbled, but she turned back to England and found an ally in Thomas Beecham, who produced the premiere of *The Boatswain's Mate* in January 1916.²¹⁰ Kertesz observes that Beecham's 'commitment to English opera composition was demonstrated by productions of Stanford's *The Critic*, Liza Lehmann's *Everyman* and also *The Boatswain's Mate*', which launched the latter half of the 1915–16 season.²¹¹

Outside of the concert hall, the war was progressing. Smyth became a radiographer and spent time in Italy and France between 1915–18, temporarily putting her work on

²⁰⁴ This idea came from her friend Sir Ronald Storrs, who worked for the British Foreign Office. He suggested that she go to Helouan to recover from her time with the WSPU. See *Beecham and Pharaoh*, pp. 98–99.

²⁰⁵ *The Boatswain's Mate* appears in Jacobs's short story collection *Captains All* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905).

²⁰⁶ For a critique of this perspective, see Christopher Wiley, 'Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera' in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose, pp. 169–185.

²⁰⁷ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 164.

²⁰⁸ St John draws comparisons between Mrs Waters and Smyth; see *Ethel Smyth*, p. 164. Elizabeth Wood connects the female lead to Pankhurst in 'Performing Rights' (p. 628).

²⁰⁹ In a letter to Emmeline Pankhurst in 1913, Smyth describes the lyrics as 'mostly comic verses a very long way after W.S. Gilbert'. See *Beecham and Pharaoh*, p. 116.

²¹⁰ Beecham invited Eugène Goossens to conduct the premiere but it was Smyth who held the baton on opening night, perhaps due to Goossens's lack of experience in conducting opera. See Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas', p. 130.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

hold. However, this break from composing sparked creativity of another kind and she turned her attention to writing her first autobiography. She later reflected on the harrowing conditions from which she sought distraction:

Locating bits of shell, telling the doctor exactly how deeply embedded they are, and watching him plunge into a live though anaesthetised body the knife that shall prove you either an expert or a bungler, is not a music-inspiring job, but writing memoirs in between whiles was a delightful relief.²¹²

Smyth's hearing issues also played a part in her decision to embrace writing as a means of expression. She had started experiencing difficulties with her hearing in the early 1890s, which intensified following her services during the first world war.²¹³ Wood notes that after the war ended, Smyth 'accepted that if her hearing loss progressed and made deafness inevitable, she would have to recast herself more as a writer than a musician'.²¹⁴

Unsurprisingly, Smyth's life after the war was shaped differently, yet key themes continued to reoccur. Friendship was one such *ritornello*, and in 1919 she met the Irish writer Edith Somerville, with whom Smyth corresponded until her death in 1944. Smyth first wrote to Somerville in 1918 having read her book *Irish Memories* (1917), an autobiographical account of the lives of Somerville and her cousin and co-author, Violet Martin (1862–1915), better known as Martin Ross. Somerville began writing the memoir two years after Martin's death and combined her own work with pre-existing material written by Martin.²¹⁵ Smyth complimented Somerville on various aspects of the book, including her comments 'about friendships & women who live by their brains.'²¹⁶ Over the course of their friendship the two women exchanged hundreds of letters and discussed a variety of topics, from literature and music to politics on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Smyth quickly became attached to Somerville; while she describes the writer as 'her friend' in *Female Pippings in Eden*, their unpublished letters evidence Smyth's romantic attraction to Somerville. From as early as December 1919 Smyth was characteristically expressive, writing, 'you have all my happiness in your keeping – don't forget that'.²¹⁷

²¹² *ATWO*, p. 1.

²¹³ Elizabeth Wood notes Smyth first becoming aware of hearing issues in 1891, and again in 1899. Smyth's hearing loss was gradual, with a severe illness in November 1918 causing greater damage. See 'On Deafness and Musical Creativity: The Case of Ethel Smyth', *Musical Quarterly*, 92/1 (2009), 33–69, (p. 34).

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹⁵ Gifford Lewis, *Edith Somerville: A Biography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 292. Lewis notes that 'Edith did not feel that she was writing alone, but with the help and guidance of her subject', aided by the medium Jem Barlow (p. 291).

²¹⁶ Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 15 July 1918, MS 17/878/2/1, p. 5. Unless otherwise stated, the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Edith Somerville referenced throughout this chapter is from the Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection at Queen's University Belfast.

²¹⁷ Smyth to Somerville, 20 December 1919, MS 17/878/2/29, p. 6.

Further declarations of Smyth's affections can be found in her letters over the following months, becoming more ardent after they returned from a trip to Sicily in 1920.²¹⁸ In May Smyth wrote, 'I wish I could make you understand what a difference it makes to me — to express some part, at least, of unsayable things. It takes half the dull ache, or the fierce ache — as the case may be — out of the present moment — when I have lost you and haven't yet found myself.'²¹⁹ As Somerville's letters from this period were destroyed, it is impossible to ascertain precisely how she responded to Smyth. However, Smyth's letters, which grow more heated and show an increasing frustration at Somerville's lack of interest in pursuing a romantic relationship, indicate that her feelings were unreciprocated.²²⁰

Her frequent trips to Ireland during the two years after the war ended is reflected in Smyth's sole composition from this time. 'Dreamings' (1920) is a setting of a poem of the same name by the Irish poet Patrick MacGill (1889–1963) and is scored for SSA voices.²²¹ While this work was published at the time, no public performance was recorded, perhaps due to Smyth's preoccupation with her hearing. Her ears continued to cause issues and she sought various treatments in Paris in the hope of rectifying the problem.²²² While she waited for an improvement, Smyth spent time arranging earlier works, attending performances of her music, and writing *Streaks of Life*, which she completed in 1920. Smyth's hearing would continue to be a problem for the rest of her life, but between 1920–38 she composed a further seven works, including two operas and her final large-scale work, *The Prison* (1929–30).

1.3f. Post-War (1921–44)

1922 was an important year for Smyth, who was included in the King's honours list and awarded a Damehood. Newspaper reports from this time describe Smyth superlatively, as evidenced by *The Westminster Gazette*:

“The most musical human being, except Wagner, that he had ever met,” was an abbreviated appreciation of Dr. Ethel Smyth, given a year or two ago by one of the foremost exponents of modern music.

Dr. Smyth has for some time been recognised as, without a doubt, our leading woman composer, and the honour which she has now accepted is but a tardy recognition of talents of no usual order.²²³

²¹⁸ Smyth reflects on this trip in *Female Pipings in Eden*. See 'A Sicilian Reminiscence', pp. 180–183.

²¹⁹ Smyth to Somerville, 22 May 1920, MS 17/878/2/45, p. 4.

²²⁰ For more detail on their friendship, see Sean O'Toole, 'The Letters of Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 1918–1921: A Chronicle of Desire', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 29 (2020), 253–280.

²²¹ 'Dreamings' appears in MacGill's second poetry collection *Songs of a Navy* (Windsor: P. MacGill, 1911).

²²² Wood, 'On Deafness and Musical Creativity', p. 35–36.

²²³ 'Dr. Ethel Smyth: Famous English Composer Honoured', *The Westminster Gazette*, 2 January 1922, p. 9.

The newspaper also highlights her suffrage involvement and describes her as ‘the first woman to compose a grand opera’ — an inaccurate yet often-reported claim.²²⁴ Other publications remark on her achievements, expressing the view that ‘women have done little in the world of music, as creators’ but that Smyth ‘took up work in a field that her sex had left untilled’.²²⁵ Elsewhere, the tone is more contradictory, emphasising Smyth’s success but remarking on her lack of recognition in England:

Dame Ethel Smyth [...] has the distinction of being not only the greatest British composer, but the greatest woman composer of the world. So far there has been little recognition of her work in England, although the opera “The Boatswain’s Mate” has undoubtedly had a good run. War conditions, however, prevented the work from reaching the wider public, which was then engaged in graver occupation.²²⁶

Given that Smyth often felt that her work received insufficient recognition, she may well have agreed with the newspaper’s sentiments. The war unquestionably curtailed performance opportunities and presented the composer with a new set of challenges.

It was also during this year that Smyth returned to Germany as she had been asked to write an article on the country post-war.²²⁷ This was her first visit since 1914 and she met with many old friends, including Joanna Röntgen, Adolf Wach (Lili had died in 1910), and his daughter Mirzl.²²⁸ Collis comments on Germany’s collapsed economy and the resultant poverty, drawing connections between what Smyth was witnessing and what Edith Somerville was experiencing in Ireland, where the political situation was unstable.²²⁹ Their friendship was tested during this period of unrest and Smyth felt frustrated by Somerville’s family commitments. Although they continued to correspond on good terms, their letters became more infrequent as time passed and visits to their respective homes decreased.

The following June, Smyth’s new one-act opera *Fête galante* was premiered in Birmingham, with a performance in London a week later. The press commented on ‘the unusual, if not unique, privilege of [the opera] first being played for a run in the Provinces’.²³⁰ Smyth’s diary records her having conducted ‘the first three shows’ in

²²⁴ Christopher Wiley addresses this misconception in ‘Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and “The First Woman to Write an Opera”’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–295.

²²⁵ ‘Music and the Woman’, *Montrose Standard*, 13 January 1922, p. 3.

²²⁶ ‘Topics of the Hour’, *Westminster & Pimlico News*, 13 January 1922, p. 1.

²²⁷ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 204.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²²⁹ Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, p. 170.

²³⁰ ‘Woman Composer’s New Opera’, *The Vote*, 15 June 1923, p. 6.

Birmingham, much to the annoyance of the ‘local conductor’.²³¹ When it arrived in London, the work was conducted by Percy Pitt and paired with *The Boatswain’s Mate*, but some critics felt that *Fête galante* would have made more of an impression if it had been performed first.²³²

1924 also saw the revival of Smyth’s Mass in D, which had never received a second performance after its 1893 premiere. Henry Wood (1869–1944) had included the work on the programme for the 1923–24 season before he resigned from the Birmingham Choral Society in 1923. Similarly to August Manns, Wood was an advocate for British composers, women musicians, and a supporter of Smyth’s works, which also led to their inclusion at the Proms.²³³ Adrian Boult, who took over from Wood in Birmingham, retained the planned programme and conducted the Mass on 7 February. In her diary, Smyth describes this event as a ‘glorious resuscitation’ of the work, which was ‘beautifully sung but execrably accompanied by the Birmingham Orchestra’.²³⁴ This entry also makes clear that the performance was designed to coincide with an article entitled ‘A Burning of Boats’, which would enable her to ‘get the truth off my chest about the sort of contest my life has been’.²³⁵ St John objected to Smyth’s assertion that her work had suffered because of her sex, suggesting that some of her male contemporaries also struggled to gain recognition. She writes:

On the contrary, interest in [her music] was stimulated by the publication of her books. The number of performances it got during the twenties does not fit in with her complaints that it was neglected through male prejudice.²³⁶

As Smyth was in her sixties during the 1920s, St John’s assertion arguably minimises the obstacles to publication and performance that she faced over the course of her career.

Between a busy schedule and her hearing difficulties, Smyth struggled to find time to compose between 1923–24. However, by November 1924 she had finished her last opera, *Entente cordiale*, and Curwen had agreed to publish it.²³⁷ This one-act ‘post-war comedy’ featured a libretto by which she described as being ‘based on fact’.²³⁸ Two student

²³¹ Quoted in St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 182.

²³² ‘A Woman’s Opera: Dame Ethel Smyth’s “Fête galante” at Covent Garden’, *The Daily News*, 12 June 1923, p. 3.

²³³ For more on Wood’s contribution to the Proms, see David Cox, *The Henry Wood Proms* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1980).

²³⁴ Quoted in St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 184.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184. For the original article, see ‘A Burning of Boats’, *London Mercury*, 9 (1924), pp. 381–390. Smyth later developed this piece in *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, pp. 3–54.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²³⁷ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 188.

²³⁸ *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 234.

productions took place at the Royal College of Music in July 1925 and the overture and intermezzo no. 8 were included in a Proms concert later that year.²³⁹ When the public premiere took place in Bristol in October 1926, Smyth conducted the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in ‘four excellent performances’.²⁴⁰ Reviews were mixed; Bristol’s *Western Daily Press* described the opera as being ‘full of life and vivacity, with charming melodies’, whereas the *Illustrated London News* suggested that the ‘defects of the libretto are multiplied and made more conspicuous by the music’.²⁴¹ Smyth later commented on its lack of public recognition in *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*²⁴²

Personally, the late 1920s saw another shift in Smyth’s significant relationships with the appearance of Vita Sackville-West. Their friendship fell into a familiar pattern of letter writing and frequent visits, reminiscent of the connections Smyth had enjoyed with Edith Somerville, Lady Mary Ponsonby, and Mary Benson. Vita’s reflection on the composer, included in St John’s biography, highlights the voraciousness of Smyth’s correspondence and her commitment to friendship:

[Her letters] run into thousands and easily into a thousand words apiece [...]. How she found the time remains a mystery, when you consider her other activities: her music, her books, her dashes backwards and forwards across Europe, her quarrels, her political interests involving an occasional interlude in prison, her love affairs, her friendships [...]. Her friendships alone would have provided a full-time job for the average person.²⁴³

Although Vita’s final observation could be interpreted as a criticism, it also reflects the importance of Smyth’s social life, which was a fundamental part of her ‘full-time job’ and fed into her compositional process. Connections were key and by the time Smyth celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday, her friends included figures such as Thomas Beecham, Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf, and Vera Brittain.²⁴⁴

Virginia Woolf, whom Smyth met in February 1930, was to be her last notable friendship. Nigel Nicolson, editor of the multi-volume *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, remarks:

It is surprising that they had not met before. They knew many people in common, including Vita, and each had long been interested in the other’s work and

²³⁹ Smyth arranged the intermezzo into a standalone piece entitled *Two Interlinked French Melodies*, which was published in 1929. Kathleen Dale describes it as having lived a ‘vigorous life of its own’ in concerts. See ‘Appendix B: Ethel Smyth’s Music’ in St John, *Ethel Smyth*, pp. 288–203 (p. 291).

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁴¹ ‘Bristol Opera Season’, *Western Daily Press*, 21 October 1926, p. 7.

²⁴² *BOB*, p. 201.

²⁴³ Vita Sackville-West, ‘Ethel Smyth, the writer’ in, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* by Christopher St John (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), pp. 245–250, (p. 246).

²⁴⁴ *ATWO*, p. 287.

personality. Virginia had attended at least two performances of Ethel's music, and [...] had also read with admiration the successive volumes of Ethel's autobiography.²⁴⁵

In Smyth's first letter to Woolf she confessed, 'I have often suppressed a wish to write and tell you part of what I feel about *A Room of One's Own*'.²⁴⁶ Woolf's reply expressed similar sentiments and she added, 'I am very glad you liked my little book. It was rather a wild venture, but if you think there is something in it, I am satisfied'.²⁴⁷

Their friendship developed with rapid intensity. 'I don't think I have ever cared for anyone more profoundly', Smyth recorded in her diary, noting that, 'for 18 months I really thought of little else'.²⁴⁸ Smyth made similar pronouncements about individuals such as Mary Ponsonby, Lisl, Harry, Pauline Trevelyan, and Edith Somerville, which seems indicative of her capacity for love. The intensity of her affections clearly caused Woolf some alarm; she described feeling like she had been 'caught by a giant crab' when Smyth, 'an old woman of seventy one', fell in love with her. This slightly mocking tone is characteristic of Woolf's tendency to be dismissive of the composer in her letters to others.²⁴⁹ Conversely, Woolf's correspondence to Smyth reflects the intimacy of their friendship, and as Nicolson observes, she 'wrote to Ethel about matters that hitherto she had scarcely mentioned to anyone'.²⁵⁰ Despite their differences in age and character, their friendship appeared to prosper until Woolf's death in 1941.

In 1931, Smyth's last large-scale work was performed. *The Prison*, a symphonic cantata based on Harry Brewster's book of the same name, was premiered in Edinburgh on 19 February.²⁵¹ It was well received, with *The Scotsman* highlighting the success of the choir and orchestra 'under the composer's inspiring direction'.²⁵² A London performance followed five days later, conducted by Adrian Boult at the Queen's Hall. The London press were similarly complimentary and Smyth celebrated at a party hosted by Lady Rosebery.²⁵³

²⁴⁵ Nigel Nicolson, 'Introduction' in *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Collected Letters IV, 1929–1931*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), p. xiii.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, p. 175.

²⁴⁷ Woolf, *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p. 131.

²⁴⁸ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 222.

²⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf to Quentin Bell, 14 May 1930, *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p. 171. This tendency is particularly pronounced in her letters to Vita Sackville-West, with whom Woolf had a romantic relationship. In addition to the volumes of Woolf's published letters, see *Love Letters: Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville West* with an introduction by Alison Bechdel (London: Vintage, 2021).

²⁵⁰ Nicolson, *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p. xvi.

²⁵¹ Henry Bennet Brewster, *The Prison: A Dialogue* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891).

²⁵² "'The Prison': Dame Ethel Smyth's Symphony", *The Scotsman*, 20 February 1931, p. 8.

²⁵³ Woolf's attendance at this party evidently caused her significant distress. In a letter to Smyth on 11 March she wrote of her suffering, of which Smyth was seemingly unaware. See *A Reflection of the Other Person*, pp. 297–298 and 301–302.

Smyth had described *The Prison* as her ‘H.B. Requiem’ and the philosophical nature of Brewster’s book — in which a prisoner contemplates and prepares for his imminent demise — clearly sparked her imagination. During its composition she wrote to her great-niece, Elizabeth Williamson:

I am in a sort of trance of work... am just now on “There is nothing that is yours but a name” a sort of soft rather crackly dance (tambourines even going)[.] I see Odysseus[’s] ghost — also the wraiths of the prostitutes who danced in Hey Nonny — dancing in a mist — fainter and fainter I get — I must go back to them.²⁵⁴

Although *The Prison* is not an operatic work, Smyth evidently still approached it from a dramatic perspective. It was her last significant composition; due to continued ill health and hearing loss, she published only a short fanfare and an organ prelude during the remainder of her life.²⁵⁵

For Smyth as a writer, the 1930s was a fruitful decade and saw the publication of five books: *Female Pippings in Eden* (1933), *Beecham and Pharaoh* (1935), *As Time Went On* (1936), *Inordinate (?) Affection: A Story for Dog Lovers* (1936), and *Maurice Baring* (1936). Smyth’s penultimate book is a biography of the author Maurice Baring (1874–1945), whom she first met in 1893.²⁵⁶ Baring was the nephew of Lady Ponsonby, and over the course of her career became one of Smyth’s closest friends. He supported her as a composer and a writer, encouraging her to maintain the ‘colloquial style’ of her memoirs, the last of which was published in 1940.²⁵⁷

Hearing loss was at the heart of Smyth’s focus on writing during this period, as evidenced by a diary entry from Edith Somerville in October 1934:

Found Ethel [at Coign] looking well, but her knee inflamed and in bandages. She has got very deaf (and her voice is terribly resonant, consequently.) However she

²⁵⁴ Ethel Smyth to Elizabeth Williamson, 1 August 1930, quoted in *Another Side of Ethel Smyth: Letters to her Great-Niece, Elizabeth Mary Williamson*, selected and ed. by Caroline E. M. Stone (Edinburgh: Kennedy & Boyd, 2018), p. 127. She refers here to one of her earlier works, *Hey Nonny No* (1910, rev. 1920). For the requiem reference, see p. 38.

²⁵⁵ Her final published work, *Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air*, appeared in 1939 but it is possible that the work was written in 1920s. The inspiration for the work came via Somerville, who wrote to Smyth in June 1921 and included two ‘Irish tunes’ from her new hymn books. She identified one of these by name and wrote, ‘Some day I wish you would make a little study for the organ of ‘The Soul’s Desire.’ (I can hear your ferocious refusal, but I don’t care a pin.)’ Smyth’s Prelude is undoubtedly the ‘little study’ that Somerville requested, as the first six bars of ‘The Soul’s Desire’ reoccur throughout the piece. See Somerville to Smyth, 13 June 1921, MS 17/878/1/39, p. 3 in the Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection at Queen’s University Belfast.

²⁵⁶ Smyth, *Maurice Baring*, p. 1.

²⁵⁷ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 219.

was in good spirits. She is writing further “Impressions that Remain”, and declares she has quite given up her music.²⁵⁸

Somerville’s comments on the composer’s deafness are echoed in accounts by Woolf, sometimes with condescension:

I have old Ethel Smyth who stumps in for what she calls ten minutes. Its [*sic*] really two hours; all one long harangue, to which I listen because she’s stone deaf, and her trumpet doesn’t [*sic*] work, but what does that matter, since she has a supreme belief in her own divine genius and if you get her off on that [...] there’s no need to answer.²⁵⁹

Records such as these suggest that Smyth’s increasing deafness, and the behaviour it prompted, was challenging for friends to negotiate. Yet given her sociability — not to mention her profession — this loss of hearing must have been hard for Smyth to bear. It is possible that her publications came to represent a medium in which she could express herself without feeling or causing the frustration that she must have experienced in conversation.

Smyth’s health continued to decline and in 1942 she had a fall during the night that required a stay in a nursing home. Although she made a recovery and was able to return to her house in Woking, she needed a nurse thereafter. St John notes that during her final years she ‘ran true to form’ and continued to make new friends, as well as contributing to various BBC broadcasts that would have helped to keep her part of the public consciousness.²⁶⁰ Consequently, while Smyth believed that she had ‘never yet succeeded in becoming even a tiny wheel in the English music machine’, her death in 1944 was widely reported.²⁶¹ The news made the front page of *The Birmingham Mail*, who stated that, ‘Dame Ethel Smyth, the world’s most notable woman composer, died at Woking, Surrey, during the night, aged 86’.²⁶² Elsewhere, the press commented not only on her career as a composer and writer, but also on her role as a suffragette. The headline of *The Western Daily Press* — ‘Death of Dame Ethel Smyth: Once Conducted with a Toothbrush’ — highlights the continued ripple-effect of Smyth’s political involvement and its impact on

²⁵⁸ See Notes on Edith Somerville’s diaries by Muriel Curry, MS 17/874/4, Volume 1 in the Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection, Queen’s University Belfast. Situated in Woking, Surrey, Coign was Smyth’s home from 1910–1944.

²⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf to Janet Case, 12 June 1937, *Leave the Letters till We’re Dead, The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI, 1936–1941*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1994), p. 135.

²⁶⁰ St John, *Ethel Smyth*, pp. 239–240.

²⁶¹ *ATWO*, pp. 288–289.

²⁶² ‘Dame Ethel Smyth: Death of Greatest of Woman Composers’, *The Birmingham Mail*, 9 May 1944, p. 1.

her identity.²⁶³ She was likewise followed by the label of ‘woman composer’, although repeated references to her being the ‘greatest’ in this category indicate that this was reflective of the language used during the period and was not meant pejoratively.²⁶⁴

Personal reflections give a more nuanced view of the composer. The poem written by Vita Sackville-West on the day of Smyth’s death, which was printed at the start of St John’s biography, captures her fight for recognition and equality in a male-dominated world.²⁶⁵ Somerville had written a piece about Smyth for *The Times*, which did not arrive in time for publication. Her eulogy, later sent to Smyth’s niece, conveys Somerville’s admiration:

A standard-bearer has fallen. Ethel Smyth has gone, and a long and splendid life of effort and achievement has ended.

She was a Crusader to whom a Cause in difficulties never appeared in vain. A Fighter, gallant and unfailing. [...] A perfectly delightful companion, both sympathetic and argumentative, with a gift for friendship which made nothing of the differences of age, or opinion or position. Like the seeker for river-gold who shakes the water in the cradle and lets the worthless part be washed away, so was she content to harvest only the treasure.²⁶⁶

1.4. Conclusion

The obituaries that appeared following Ethel Smyth’s death highlight the extent to which she was known and respected by the end of her career. While she — like countless women before her — suffered from neglect in subsequent years, she left a legacy that is gradually being recognised, reclaimed, and reconsidered for twenty-first-century audiences. An ever-growing body of Smyth scholarship reflects the interest in her life and works, which continues to broaden the discourse and deepen our understanding of this ‘standard-bearer’ for music in England. Appreciation for Smyth’s music is further evidenced by the increased availability of commercial scores and recordings that help to bring her works to a wider audience. In recent years, there have also been more performances of her music; audiences had the opportunity to hear works by Smyth in five concerts during the 2022

²⁶³ ‘Death of Dame Ethel Smyth: Once Conducted with a Toothbrush’, *The Western Daily Press*, 9 May 1944, p. 4.

²⁶⁴ See ‘Death of Dame Ethel Smyth’, *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 9 May 1944, p. 2; ‘Obituary: Dame Ethel Smyth’, *The Belfast Newsletter*, 10 May 1944, p. 4; ‘Dame Ethel Smyth: Death of Famous Woman Composer, Militant Suffragist’, *The Scotsman*, 10 May 1944, p. 4.

²⁶⁵ See St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. xiii.

²⁶⁶ The full eulogy is quoted in *Another Side of Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Caroline E. M. Stone, p. 374.

BBC Proms season, including the first Proms performance of her Mass in D.²⁶⁷ This increased attention on Smyth's music in 2022 was undoubtedly connected to the production of *The Wreckers* at the Glyndebourne Festival earlier in the year, which was considered 'epoch-making', 'theatrically and musically [...] gripping' and, notably, 'the first opera by a female composer to be performed at the festival'.²⁶⁸ The significance of this achievement is reminiscent of the landmark production of *Der Wald* by the Metropolitan Opera in 1903.²⁶⁹ Almost eighty years after her death, Smyth is still managing to be the first woman to be performed at prestigious events and venues.

Reviews of Glyndebourne's production were broadly positive and were unified in conveying a narrative of neglect, yet comparative language often weakened the praise offered. Similarly to twentieth-century reviews, some critics highlighted Smyth's influences, citing composers such as Brahms, Wagner, and Debussy. The question embedded within these observations is how Smyth — as a woman — measures up to her male predecessors and contemporaries. In the *Evening Standard* Barry Millington argued:

Despite the revolutionary nature of Smyth's material, her music remains largely tonal, indeed melodiously so. There are clear references to Bizet, Massenet and Wagner, a Debussyan seascape at the opening of Act 2 and some positively post-Wagnerian harmonies later in the same act (Korngold or even Schreker came to mind). Yet the score, flawed and lacking cohesion as it is, seems eclectic rather than derivative.²⁷⁰

Millington appears to shy away from complimenting Smyth directly. Her 'largely tonal' music is misaligned with the revolutionary narrative; her references to the work of her male predecessors are obvious; the score is 'flawed and lacking cohesion'. That Smyth's music is 'eclectic rather than derivative' seems to save it from being disregarded completely.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ 'Performances of Ethel Smyth at BBC Proms', *BBC*, (2022) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/events/composers/39167298-62b9-4a1c-ac0d-2c203ede6fb3>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

²⁶⁸ Barry Millington, 'The Wreckers at Glyndebourne review: Thrilling production of Ethel Smyth's grossly neglected, pioneering work', *Evening Standard*, 23 May 2022 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/music/the-wreckers-glyndebourne-opera-review-ethel-smyth-b1001697.html>> [accessed 25 May 2022]; Richard Morrison, 'The Wreckers review — an imaginative revival of a wild forgotten opera', *The Times*, 22 May 2022 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-wreckers-review-glyndebourne-opera-t6r3x66cb?>> [accessed 25 May 2022]; Tim Ashely, 'The Wreckers review — Glyndebourne bring Smyth's rarity to vivid and passionate life', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2022 <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/may/22/the-wreckers-review-glyndebourne-festival-ethel-smyth?>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

²⁶⁹ It is possible that *Der Wald* was also the first opera composed by a woman to be performed at Covent Garden in 1902. See Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875—1918* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 82–83.

²⁷⁰ Millington, 'The Wreckers at Glyndebourne review', para. 7.

²⁷¹ For a more overt comparison between the unknown and the 'canonic', see William Hartson, 'Glyndebourne Festival Review: The Wreckers 'dramatically just doesn't work'', *The Express*, 27 May 2022 <

While the language used in contemporary reviews is less gendered than in historical sources, it can be seen to reinforce Smyth's assertion that 'a critic's first and last thought in connection with [a woman's] work is her sex'.²⁷² Smyth's achievements as an operatic composer are sometimes acknowledged and then undermined, as in David Nice's review. While he suggests that Smyth's ability to compose a 'grand opera [...] at a time (the early 1900s) when circumstances made such a thing near-impossible' is praiseworthy, his review abounds with criticism. He considers *The Wreckers* to be 'big-hearted, energetic and massively flawed', a work in which Smyth failed to employ the tritone 'with the subtlety of Debussy'.²⁷³ Nice makes reference to Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* — which *The Wreckers* is often considered to foreshadow — and emphasises Smyth's deficiency:

Glyndebourne has assembled a magnificent cast and the usual chorus of young future stars relishing its presence as a pre-Grimesian Borough, delivering the hate and the fury as if they were up to Britten's level (they aren't, and in any case we're talking about 1906 rather than 1945, but in the moment manner triumphs over matter).²⁷⁴

In reviews such as these there is a sense that the critic is focused on defining what Smyth's music is not, rather than finding merit in what it is. Not only is this approach reductive, it also has the potential to discourage audiences from attending and decreases the chance of future performances. Positive press and the assurance of good financial return are arguably even more vital now than they were in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as music directors are under increased pressure to diversify the repertoire while not alienating audiences with a preference for old or 'canonic' favourites.²⁷⁵ If critics continually reinforce the idea that Smyth's music tries — yet fails — to be as good as that of better-known composers, people may be less inclined to attend performances, particularly those with a high ticket price.

In addition to these performances, Smyth has benefitted from new recordings of her works, including *The Boatswain's Mate* (2016), *Fête galante* (2019), the Mass in D (2019),

<https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/theatre/1617202/Glyndebourne-Festival-review-the-Wreckers-Mozart-Marriage-of-Figaro> > [accessed 30 May 2022].

²⁷² SOL, p. 242.

²⁷³ David Nice, 'The Wreckers, Glyndebourne review - no masterpiece, but vividly sung and played', *The Arts Desk*, 22 May 2022 <<https://theartsdesk.com/node/88172/view>> [accessed 30 May 2022] (para 1; 3; 6 of 8).

²⁷⁴ Ibid., para. 5.

²⁷⁵ This was evident in Glyndebourne's programming, which included Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Puccini's *La bohème*, and operas by Handel, Donizetti, Poulenc alongside *The Wreckers*.

The Prison (2020), and *Der Wald* (forthcoming, 2023).²⁷⁶ The accessibility of these resources means that listeners can more readily access — and form their own opinion of — her music, which aids in raising her public profile. 2020 also saw the release of an album featuring her posthumously published String Quartet in C Minor (1881), composed during her early period.²⁷⁷ The recording of *The Prison* made headlines when it won a Grammy award for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album, which was the first time the award had been won by a historic female composer.²⁷⁸ Smyth’s growing list of firsts reflects not only her success but also the challenges faced by women in music throughout history. Her Grammy award and Glyndebourne’s production of *The Wreckers* are undoubtedly cause for celebration, but they further evidence the historical tendency for women to be overlooked. Moreover, while the industry is gradually becoming more diverse and inclusive, there is also a risk of tokenism. Writing in 1928, Smyth highlighted the difficulty in building interest in works that receive ‘[t]wo performances; then a couple of years’ pause’,²⁷⁹ which remains relevant in contemporary society and resonates with the cultural tendency to revert to all-male programming. Glyndebourne’s 2023 programme is just one example of this, which featured operas by Stravinsky, Mozart, Poulenc, Britten, and Handel.²⁸⁰

Equally pertinent is Smyth’s assertion that ‘tradition is the outcome of continuity’, as, without repeated performances, under-represented works do not become part of a tradition that is built on continuity and are thus at risk of being lost.²⁸¹ Fortunately, the

²⁷⁶ *Ethel Smyth: The Boatswain’s Mate*, Nadine Benjamin, Edward Lee, Jeremy Huw Williams, Lontano Ensemble, cond. by Odaline de la Martinez (Retrospect Opera, RO001, 2017, on 2 CDs); *Ethel Smyth: Fête galante*, Charmian Bedford, Carolyn Dobbin, Felix Kemp, Simon Wallfisch, Mark Milhoer, Alessandro Fisher, Dame Felicity Lott, and Valerie Langfield (Retrospect Opera, RO007, 2019, on CD); *Ethel Smyth: Mass in D & Overture to ‘The Wreckers’*, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, cond. by Sakari Oramo (Chandos, CHSA5240, 2019, on CD); *Smyth: The Prison*, Sarah Brailey, Dashon Burton, cond. by James Blachly (Chandos, CHAN 5279, 2020, on CD). *Der Wald* was recorded in January 2023, cond. by John Andrews, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Singers alongside soloists Robert Murray, Natalya Romaniw, Clare Barnett-Jones, Morgan Pearse, Andrew Shore and Mathew Brook. Resonus Classics are due to release the recording in the Autumn of 2023.

²⁷⁷ *Rendezvous: Leipzig*, The Maier Quartet (dB Productions DBCD197, 2020, on CD).

²⁷⁸ Patrick Mason had received a nomination for a recording of Amy Beach’s songs in 2006. See ‘Patrick Mason’, *Grammy.com*, n.d. <<https://www.grammy.com/artists/patrick-mason/4365>> [accessed 25 May 2022].

²⁷⁹ *BOB*, p. 189.

²⁸⁰ ‘Festival’, *Glyndebourne.com*, n.d. <<https://www.glyndebourne.com/festival/>> [accessed 10 July 2023].

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190. For further reading on diversifying the canon, see Leah Broad, ‘Without Ethel Smyth and classical music’s forgotten women, we only tell half the story’, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/02/ethel-smyth-classical-music-forgotten-women-canon-composition>> [accessed 30 May 2022]; Jo Buckley, ‘Diversifying the repertoire: why it’s vital – and how to do it’, *Gramophone*, 8 February 2022 <<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/blogs/article/diversifying-the-repertoire-why-it-s-vital-and-how-to-do-it>> [accessed 30 May 2022]; John Andrews, ‘A pleasure, not a duty: performing (a few) more works by women composers’, *Making Music*, 7 March 2022 <<https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/news/pleasure-not-duty-performing-few-more-works-women-composers>> [accessed 30 May 2022].

increase in the number of performances and recordings of Smyth's works indicates that interest is growing, which may mean that more of the music that has historically been neglected is published, recorded, and regularly performed. The world premiere of *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, which took place on 8 May 2023 at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, is evidence of this revival of Smyth's music.²⁸² The premiere was instigated and organised by Angie Wyatt, an undergraduate student at Oxford University, which also reinforces the importance of including music by women in educational curricula. If Wyatt's newly edited and typeset score is published and the work is recorded, this will further increase the commercial availability of the music and increase the chance of future performances.

However, as this chapter suggests, awareness of Smyth is often bound up with her published memoirs, meaning that there is still the potential for certain time periods musical works to be overlooked in favour of those that Smyth addresses in her writing. As a result, aspects of her identity — such as her reputation as an operatic composer or her contributions to the women's suffrage movement — have affected our perceptions of the composer. This is exemplified by the performances and recordings addressed in the closing section of this chapter, which highlights the emphasis on Smyth's operatic works in particular. Consequently, there is a need not only for a deeper exploration of the composer's early vocal and choral works, but for a revised and modernised biography that broadens the dialogue and moves beyond the image of Smyth as a toothbrush-wielding suffragette. In the chapters that follow, key compositions from Smyth's pre-operatic and pre-suffrage periods are addressed in order to shed light on these works. The biographical readings are designed to build on existing scholarship — as well as on Smyth's own publications — to give a fuller account of the music and the context in which it was composed. Smyth's observation that 'unperformed music cannot hope for records' applies equally well in reverse: unrecorded music cannot hope for performances.²⁸³ This written record offers insight into some of Smyth's compositions in the hope of inspiring further publications, performances, and recordings of her works.

²⁸² For further details see Chapter 3, fn. 4.

²⁸³ *FP*, p. 296.

Chapter 2: German Influence and the Art Song

‘But I often think, I wish Mother could see me here – not at home in England – where every musical composing goose is a swan – but here – where the very air we breathe is music and every friend a critic’.¹

2.1. Introduction

In the narrative of Ethel Smyth’s life, two countries dominate: England and Germany. The former, one to which she laid claim by birth and blood, and the latter by choice. Smyth’s decision to study at the Leipzig Conservatory was the first major step on her journey as a composer and it had a lasting impact on her career, affecting her life in various ways. However, the musical tuition that she received in Germany — first at the Conservatory and then from Heinrich von Herzogenberg — was only one facet of Smyth’s education. The social circles to which she belonged influenced the music she heard and, in turn, the music she created. As early as 1878, Smyth was attempting large-scale compositions, which attests not only to her own determination but also to the company she was keeping. Leipzig empowered and encouraged the aspiring composer, fuelling her conviction that the unconventional path she had chosen was the right one.

Given the importance of Smyth’s connection to Germany, this chapter explores her relationship with her ‘spiritual home’², highlighting her educational background, compositional influences, and broader social network to better understand how Smyth’s time in Leipzig affected her identity as a composer. This early period of Smyth’s life has received less scholarly attention than later years and the music that she composed during the 1870s and 1880s is likewise often overlooked.³ This neglect might be due to the high percentage of works that are either unpublished or incomplete sketches; the smaller scale

¹ Ethel Smyth (ES) to Nina Smyth (NS), Early February 1878, p. 5. Unless otherwise stated, the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Nina Smyth referenced throughout this chapter is from collection ‘A, VI. 5/17: [Briefe]’ held by the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, ‘Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy’, Hochschulbibliothek, Leipzig, Germany. The letters contained within this collection have been digitised by the University of Dresden and can be viewed online at <<https://katalog.slub-dresden.de/id/0-165646716X>> [accessed 19 June 2023].

² Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), p. 13.

³ For literature with a primary focus on this period see Kathleen Dale, ‘Ethel Smyth’s Prentice Work’, *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–336; Amy Zigler, ‘Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Florida, 2009) and “‘You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell’”: Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth’s Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877)’, in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275; Cornelia Bartsch, ‘Schön Rohtraut und das Sattelpferd. Lyrisches und biographisches Ich in Ethel Smyth’s Liedkompositionen der 1870er Jahre’ in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unsel (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 121–152 and ‘Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth’s *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4’ in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 177–216.

of many of the compositions from this period may be another contributing factor. In her study of Smyth's early output, Kathleen Dale's describes the music as 'prentice work', which seems to devalue Smyth's compositions from these formative years.⁴ However, as this thesis serves to illustrate, the pieces she composed during the early part of her career are worthy of study and represent a valuable part of her oeuvre. The exercises that she completed in Leipzig under Heinrich von Herzogenberg's tutelage provide an insight into her compositional foundations; the orchestral sketches show her attempting to tackle large-scale forms; and the chamber works reflect both her social circle and her education. Two of Smyth's earliest opuses — the *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 — date from this period, although the precise chronology of the ten songs is largely unknown. Some were likely composed while Smyth was still in England, but others may have been written after she had moved to Leipzig, as suggested later in this chapter. Smyth's desire to print her *Lieder* indicates that she valued them and considered the songs worthy of publication.

Smyth's *Lieder* played an important role during her first few years in Germany as she settled into her new, musically enriched life. Drawing on unpublished letters to her mother, this chapter examines how Smyth navigated the salon and used her songs as a networking tool, helping her to build connections that aided her growth as a composer. Her reflections show that the baritone George Henschel was generous in sharing his knowledge of song and clearly encouraged Smyth's efforts in this area. The *Lieder* were the first works that she sought to print and salons also gave her the opportunity to showcase her abilities as a composer to potential publishers. As this chapter elucidates, women who tried to publish their works without the validation of a male counterpart often faced additional challenges. Smyth's eventual success in this area reinforces the significance of her *Lieder* and demonstrates that even at the start of her career she was undeterred by rejection.

Smyth's deviation from societal norms is a familiar biographical theme, and her desire to study abroad to pursue composition and to tackle large-scale works are just two such examples. While she was by no means alone as a woman who composed *Lieder*, in doing so she was nevertheless engaging with a tradition that had evolved from the domestic *Hausmusik* into a genre associated with 'high' culture and increasingly public, male-dominated spaces. Consequently, in addressing Smyth's opp. 3 and 4, this chapter considers her connection to the art song tradition and discusses late nineteenth-century attitudes towards women and song. As became increasingly evident throughout Smyth's

⁴ Dale, 'Prentice Work'.

career, she was unwilling to be constrained by what was expected of her as a woman who composed and her Lieder contributions are an early indication of Smyth seeking equality.

Finally, this chapter turns to the specifics of Smyth's songs, addressing her poetic choices and exploring the narrative and dramatic aspects of selected texts. While some of the poems set in opp. 3 and 4 are quintessentially Romantic in their introspectiveness, others align more closely to the dramatic ballad and contain an overarching narrative that reflects Smyth's flare for storytelling. A reading of four of the Lieder explores Smyth's approach to text setting and the ways in which she sought to depict the poetic content musically. In doing so, it shows how her Lieder are part of a broader trajectory that led her to opera, a genre to which she committed considerable time, energy, and expense during the course of her career.

2.2. Education, Influences, and Identity

When Smyth arrived at the Leipzig Conservatory in September 1877, she did so with a clear intention: to compose. The frustration that she felt towards her peers, who were primarily focused on becoming teachers, highlights the singularity of her vision.⁵ There is no indication that Smyth ever considered a career as a teacher, or indeed as a performer. Composition was her principal focus and other musical activities — such as singing in the Gewandhaus choir or practising piano — supported the primary theme of her education. Many of Smyth's earliest Leipzig works show the influence of Bach, with whose music she became familiar through singing with the Bach Verein and her lessons with Herzogenberg. Under his instruction, Smyth produced canons, two-part inventions and suites for the piano, and preludes and fugues for the organ.⁶

⁵ This is addressed in Chapter 1, section 1.3b. See also, Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), I, p. 165.

⁶ See the list of works compiled by Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), pp. 373–81 (p. 374–75). Also see Rachael J. Gibbon, 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005) and Sarah M. Moon, 'The Organ Music of Ethel Smyth: A Guide to its History and Performance Practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2014).

Writing to Brahms in 1878, Elisabeth von Herzogenberg reported that Smyth ‘does the prettiest gavottes and sarabandes’.⁷ Her name appears frequently in the correspondence between Brahms and the Herzogenbergs, which correlates with Smyth’s description of herself as a ‘semi-detached member’ of the family.⁸ Brahms and Elisabeth refer to her as ‘our little English friend’ and ‘the dear “Miss”’, terms of endearment that help to convey Smyth’s acceptance within their social circle. The Herzogenbergs’ friendship with Brahms also meant that Smyth became well acquainted with his music through performances and by copying out or making piano transcriptions of his works.⁹ Her initial appreciation for Brahms’s music, ignited by his *Liebeslieder Walzer*, was further fuelled by exposure to him and his compositions.¹⁰ In letters home Smyth often uses Brahms as a signifier of quality, such as when she corrects her mother’s misconception:

My sonata was not played in the Gewandhaus but in the Evening weekly concerts in the Conservatorium! Perhaps in 20 years [*sic*] time I may – by special luck get something played in the Gewandhaus! It is only made composers, such as Brahms [...] who set a foot in that building.¹¹

Fortunately for Smyth, she only had to wait until 1884 to hear her String Quintet, Op. 1 at the prestigious Gewandhaus. Among the performers were two of her earliest Leipzig friends: Engelbert Röntgen and Julius Klengel.¹² Like the Röntgens, the Klengel family were musical and at her weekly visits Smyth reports being able to ‘mention anything I like — Brahms, Beethoven, Schumann — and there I hear it next time I go!’¹³ The ease of

⁷ Elisabeth von Herzogenberg to Johannes Brahms, 13 December 1878 in *Johannes Brahms: The Herzogenberg Correspondence*, ed. by Max Kalbeck, trans. By Hannah Bryant (London: John Murray, 1909), p. 71. While Elisabeth is primarily remembered as Brahms’s friend and musical confidant, she was also a competent musician and composer. She was initially taught by the organist Theodor Dirzka, then by Julius Epstein, professor of piano at the Vienna Conservatory, and briefly by Brahms. Eight of her piano pieces were published posthumously in 1892. For further details see the Preface to *The Herzogenberg Correspondence* and Antje Ruhbaum, *Elisabeth von Herzogenberg: Salon - Mäzenatentum - Musikförderung*, (Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Musik, 7), (Kenzingen: Centaurus-Verlag, 2009) <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-309311>> [accessed 20 July 2022].

⁸ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), I, p. 258. Smyth also recalls being called ‘the child’ in the Herzogenberg household (p. 192).

⁹ In December 1878, Elisabeth reported that Smyth is copying out the second of Brahms’s *Klavierstücke*, Op. 2. As well as hearing Brahms conduct his second symphony early in 1878, in October that year Smyth heard his Horn Trio, Op. 40, and Piano Quartet No. 3, Op. 60. In March 1882 she attended a ‘Brahms-concert’ conducted by Hans von Bülow and heard his first Symphony, the orchestral version of his *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, and his Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 15. See *The Herzogenberg Correspondence*, pp. 70; 67; 148. Smyth also made copies of his song ‘Botschaft’, Op. 47, No. 1 and the ‘Edward’ duet, Op. 75, No. 1; see the Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library.

¹⁰ These included works not yet published. See her letter to Nina Smyth from 1 May 1878, p. 5.

¹¹ ES to NS, 7 April 1878, pp. 4–5.

¹² Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 375.

¹³ ES to NS, n.d. February 1878, p. 3. The Röntgens and Klengels were related through marriage as Engelbert Röntgen married Friedericke Klengel. Their son Julius (1855–1932) became a successful pianist

access to new music must have been a heady contrast to Smyth's life in England. Marie Sumner Lott has highlighted the importance of music-making in the nineteenth-century home, remarking that '[s]tring chamber music, especially, fostered a variety of social interactions that helped to build communities within communities'.¹⁴ Smyth's entry to these groups was an important part of her compositional development while she lived in Leipzig, offering the opportunity not only to hear new music but also to have her own pieces performed.

In addition to composing, Smyth dedicated a considerable amount of time to practising piano during her first few years in Leipzig, which her doctor thought contributed to her bouts of ill health. She wrote to her mother in February 1878:

What he [the doctor] seems to think was very injurious to me was the practising 4 & 5 hours a day. He says that the cerebral excitement incurred by composition and working theory – must tell upon you physically – & that I might injure myself seriously by practising so hard. I replied that nearly all composers are virtuosic also[.] His reply is that they being men thats [*siz*] a different thing.¹⁵

It is clear from this letter that Smyth felt the need to be 'virtuosic' on the piano as well as being skilled at composition. However, on the doctor's advice she reduced her practice time and remarked that her hopes of 'becoming a piano virtuosa are dashed to the ground'.¹⁶ The doctor's perception of composers only being men, who were evidently considered more able to cope with 'cerebral excitement', likely influenced the advice he offered. His gendered comment also reinforces the unconventional path that Smyth was taking in embarking on a career as a composer. As Laura Seddon has observed, women who strove to be composers often found that the support they received from individuals was not mirrored in society.¹⁷ Furthermore, broader attitudes towards composition influenced their careers; Liza Lehmann (1862–1918), for example, focused on singing as she thought it more acceptable for a woman to perform than compose.¹⁸ Rosalind Ellicott (1857–1924), who had greater success than Smyth in gaining entry to the English choral scene, nevertheless struggled with being labelled a 'talented amateur' and had her *Dramatic*

and composer. See Rogier Starrveld, 'Röntgen, Julius (i)', *Grove Music Online*, (2001) <<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/omo/9781561592630.013.90000380678>>.

¹⁴ Marie Sumner Lott, *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music: Composers, Consumers, Communities* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), p. 4.

¹⁵ ES to NS, Early February 1878, p. 1.

¹⁶ ES to NS, n.d. February 1878, p. 2.

¹⁷ Laura Seddon, *British Women Composers and Instrumental Chamber Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p. 27.

¹⁸ Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States 1629–Present* (London: Pandora, 1994), p. 181.

Overture (1886) repeatedly rejected by London's Philharmonic Society, despite her success at the Gloucester Festival.¹⁹

Fortunately for late nineteenth-century women, societal attitudes were shifting, meaning that Smyth's generation of composers could access more opportunities than their predecessors. When Clara Kathleen Rogers (1844–1931) had attended Leipzig Conservatory in 1857 she was unable to study composition, although she did take classes in harmony and counterpoint.²⁰ 'I cannot help deploring,' Rogers reflected, 'that when I was a student in Germany there were no facilities accorded to women for learning orchestration, or, in fact, for obtaining any guidance whatsoever in original composition'.²¹ It appears that Smyth was the first woman admitted to Carl Reinecke's composition class, a fact which she reported to her mother with evident delight.²² The Scottish composer Helen Hopekirk (1856–1945), who attended the Leipzig Conservatory between 1876 and 1878, may have been admitted soon after, as research suggests that she received tuition from Reinecke around the same time.²³ Although Smyth does not mention meeting Hopekirk, the two women were taught by the same teachers and so their paths may have crossed, particularly given the small number of women who pursued composition. Hopekirk went on to have a successful career as a pianist and teacher and maintained an active interest in composition throughout her life.

The music that Smyth composed during her core Leipzig years (1877–85) shows her exploring different genres and developing her skills. In addition to her Bach-inspired works, chamber music occupied much of Smyth's attention during this period, which may have been stimulated by her friendship with the Röntgens and Klengels. Smyth started experimenting in 1878 and was not shy about sharing these early sketches. Her letters show how much she benefitted from being able to hear her works performed, as illustrated in a note to her mother in April that year, 'I'm going to the Klengels[] tomorrow to hear the first movement of my string quartette played. You can imagine how curious I am to hear it played! [...] probably it will sound differently to what I expect.'²⁴ Perhaps her assumption was accurate, for this work was one of many unfinished string quartets composed between

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 275. Fuller notes that Rogers was the youngest student the conservatory had ever accepted.

²¹ Clara Kathleen Rogers, *The Story of Two Lives* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1932), p. 81.

²² ES to NS, December 1877, p. 4.

²³ Pamela Fox, 'Hopekirk [Wilson], Helen', *Grove Music Online*, revised by Laurie Blunsom (2013) <<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2249777>>. Also see Hannah Roberts, 'A Stylistic and Performance Analysis of Selected Solo Piano Compositions by Helen Hopekirk' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2021).

²⁴ ES to NS, c. 8 April 1878, p. 2. Smyth frequently adopts the French spelling of quartet in both her private correspondence and published memoirs.

1878–1884. Friendship with these musical families was arguably as important to Smyth’s development as her more formal tuition.

Her first complete chamber work — the String Quartet in D minor — was first performed by the Röntgen family in 1880 at the home of Elisabeth (‘Lili’) and Adolf Wach. Smyth’s mother was visiting Leipzig and the performance took place on 2 June to mark Nina’s birthday.²⁵ The same year, Smyth completed a Trio in D minor for violin, cello, and piano; while the first public performance of this piece did not take place until 1985, it is feasible that the work was heard privately around this time. Kathleen Dale remarks that these early compositions show that ‘her inborn gift for music was exceptionally late in developing’ and describes the pieces as ‘immature’.²⁶ However, in a more extensive study of Smyth’s early chamber music, Amy Zigler finds the Trio in D minor and Sonata in C minor (1880) to be ‘well-crafted, consciously-conceived works composed with a thorough knowledge of Classical and Romantic music traditions’.²⁷ Dale’s stance reflects a tendency within Smyth scholarship to overlook or dismiss her early works, as evidenced by the wealth of research that focuses on her output from the Mass in D onwards. More attentive study of the music that Smyth wrote during her Leipzig period reveals her engagement with Baroque, Classical, and Romantic traditions, as well as an attempt to align herself with the composers she most admired and those respected within her social circle, namely Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms.

The influence of these figures can be seen in Smyth’s unfinished attempts at orchestral works composed during this period: her *Symphonie für kleines Orchester* in D and *Trage-komische Oüverture* in F.²⁸ Although incomplete, these pieces are indicative of Smyth’s ambition and her determination to approach larger forms, contrary to the societal expectation that she should write smaller, simpler works.²⁹ The single symphonic movement may have been inspired by Brahms’s second symphony in the same key and his *Tragische Ouvertüre*, Op. 81 (1880) could have sparked her similarly titled piece. Given the

²⁵ ITR, I, p. 285.

²⁶ Dale, ‘Prentice Work’, p. 336.

²⁷ Zigler, ‘Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth’, p. 104.

²⁸ There are no exact dates for the composition of these works but the symphonic sketch bears Smyth’s Leipzig address of ‘Salomonstrasse 19’, where she lived between 1878–1884. See Dale, ‘Prentice Work’, p. 331 and Bennett’s list of works in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 374. The manuscript score is held at the British Library. See the Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862.

²⁹ For further reading on gender and genre, see Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), Chapter 6: ‘Tradition and Genre’; Aisling Kenny, ‘Blurring the Gendered Dichotomies’ in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 12–27; Seddon, *British Women Composers and Instrumental Chamber Music...*, Chapter 2: ‘Women and Chamber Music’, pp. 41–55; Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

tragi-comic duality it is possible that Smyth had opera in mind when approaching her overture, but given her social circle at the time, this seems less likely.³⁰

Further evidence of the Romantic tradition is present in Smyth's early vocal works, particularly her two Lieder collections, addressed later in this chapter. Smyth composed songs throughout her career, drawing on a variety of sources for inspiration. Around 1882–84 she wrote her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes*; markings on the manuscript scores suggest that these were published but the edition has not been traced.³¹ Alongside the contemporaneous *Short Chorale Preludes* for organ, and her compositions during 1887–80, these songs show a conscious engagement with Bach's music.³² Dale's observation that Smyth's 'flair for counterpoint' was more natural than the harmony of her sonatas, seems to overlook her tuition in this area.³³ Although Smyth received harmony lessons at the Conservatory it is unclear how much tuition she received thereafter. The natural aptitude for contrapuntal techniques to which Dale refers may have stemmed from Smyth's greater practical experience of counterpoint gained through singing with the Bach Verein and completing the Bachian exercises set by Herzogenberg.

Orchestration was another area in which Smyth received limited instruction. When she met Tchaikovsky in 1888, he encouraged Smyth to further develop her orchestration skills, which he felt lacked 'colour'.³⁴ In *Impressions*, Smyth suggested that it was less a criticism of her than of the school of composition with which she aligned herself. She states:

He earnestly begged me to turn my attention at once to the orchestra and not be prudish about using the medium for all its worth. 'What happens,' he asked, 'in ordinary conversation? If you have to do with really alive people, listen to the inflections in the voices ... there's instrumentation for you!' And I followed his advice on the spot, [and] went to concerts with the sole object of studying orchestral effects.³⁵

³⁰ Smyth notes that her 'impulse towards opera [...] was checked' during her Leipzig years due to her social group. Exceptions were made for Mozart and Beethoven but Wagner and French opera were derided. See *ITR*, I, p. 272.

³¹ Smyth's *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* and *Short Chorale Preludes* are given greater attention in Chapter 4, section 4.3.

³² The *Short Chorale Preludes* were revised and published in 1913. An arrangement 'for strings and solo instruments' was also published around this time. See Bennett, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 375 and the Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 4686, British Library. Many of the pieces contained within MS 46861 draw on melodies from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, which she heard for the first time in April 1878.

³³ Dale, 'Prentice Work', p. 336.

³⁴ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), II, p. 168.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

However, like many women of this period, Smyth was largely self-taught in matters of orchestration and so it is likely that there were gaps in her understanding of how to write for larger performing forces.³⁶ In the United States of America, Amy Beach (1867–1944) taught herself harmony and orchestration in addition to other areas of musical style, form, and theory. Evidence of her learning process can be found in her manuscript workbooks from the late 1880s to the mid 1890s, which show Beach analysing orchestration in the works of other composers.³⁷ Due to a lack of archival material it is unclear whether Smyth’s approach to her own tuition was as meticulous as Beach’s, but she recalls filling ‘notebook upon notebook with impressions’ of the music she heard at concerts and so may have analysed works in a similar way.³⁸

Unsurprisingly, Smyth’s years in Leipzig left an impression on her identity as a composer, both stylistically and in with regard to her musical network. On a practical level, studying in Germany meant that many of Smyth’s contacts were based on the continent, which made it challenging for her to secure performances of her music at home in England. In Germany, Elizabeth Kertesz observes that ‘despite her music being known and appreciated by individuals, including many of high musical standing, Smyth did not feature prominently in the musical scene’.³⁹ As a young composer still learning her craft, the works that she wrote during this time — ‘sonatas and quartets hopefully composed and privately performed’ — were still relatively unknown, despite the fact that Smyth would have likely encountered music critics in these environments.⁴⁰ Kertesz has demonstrated how this lack of public presence also had an impact on German responses to her first three operas.⁴¹

When she finally made her English debut with her *Serenade in D* in 1890, the press was quick to claim Smyth as being English while also highlighting her German education.⁴² Critics were largely positive, although one scathing review in the *Norwood News and Crystal Palace Chronicle* felt that Smyth needed further tuition before her music appealed to audiences. The reviewer opines:

³⁶ Smyth was given a copy of Berlioz’s treatise on orchestration, *Grand traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration modernes* (1844), by Alexander Ewing during his brief tenure as her teacher. See *ITR*, I, p. 112.

³⁷ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 54–55.

³⁸ *ITR*, I, p. 168.

³⁹ Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000), p. 6.

⁴⁰ *ITR*, II, p. 9.

⁴¹ Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass...’, p. 6.

⁴² See, for example, ‘Crystal Palace Concerts’, *The Queen*, 3 May 1890, p. 590; ‘The Musical World’, *St. James’s Gazette*, 28 April 1890, p. 5; ‘Musical Gossip’, *The Cheltenham Looker-On*, 3 May 1890, p. 357.

Miss Smyth will have to study a bit more, at Leipzig or somewhere else, before she gains the ear of the musical public. Her style in this work is crude and crabbed. Its language is not clear. We do not understand what it means, or what it is intended to mean. Miss Smyth appears to be a lady who has been well taught — at any rate one who has had an opportunity of studying under good influences — but it does not seem as if in this work she had any ideas to express: *ergo*, she has not expressed any.⁴³

The writer is also critical of Smyth's conceptual understanding of a serenade, the work's four-movement structure, and 'the indiscreet demonstrativeness' of her friends.⁴⁴ The weak compliment that Smyth 'appears to be a lady who has been well taught' is quickly negated, and thus the serenade is used to evidence a lack of creativity or compositional talent. It is probable that Smyth's identity as a woman influenced the critic's response to her music, which is sharply contrasted by the glowing review of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 that follows.⁴⁵

Germanic influences in Smyth's music appear frequently in reviews of her operas. Critics are quick to connect her to Wagner and Brahms and suggest that her music is shaped by theirs. When *Der Wald* was performed at Covent Garden in 1902, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* noted that Smyth had lived in Germany for many years and that she 'was devoted to Brahms, whose influence is to be traced in the music of "Der Wald"'.⁴⁶ Similarly, *The Western Daily Press* felt that the opera was 'composed under the strong influence of Wagner'.⁴⁷ These two articles also highlight that *Der Wald* was the first opera composed by a woman to be produced at Covent Garden, perhaps by way of commendation. The following month, *The Referee* showed more definitive support for Smyth:

Heaven knows we have few enough great English composers of either sex; of the women, Miss Maud Valérie White and Miss Liza Lehmann are perhaps the most prominent. Miss Smyth seems to me to have written a work which is a supreme honour to her sex.

I have noticed that the writers upon musical subjects have accused this lady of copying the ideas of Brahms and Wagner. Well, at least she could not build upon sounder foundations. I have heard the opera twice, and my impression is that it is a work comparable, by analogy, with that of the lady who wrote under the pen-name of George Eliot. Strength, mingled with charm; melody with intellectual

⁴³ 'Mr. August Manns' Benefit Concert', *Norwood News and Crystal Palace Chronicle*, 3 May 1890, p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ The reviewer felt that Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2, performed for the first time at the Crystal Palace, was 'a work of dazzling brilliancy, with originality stamped in every bar'. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ 'Current Topics', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1902, p. 8.

⁴⁷ 'London Letter', *The Western Daily Press*, 19 July 1902, p. 6.

meaning. Who knows? “Der Wald” may prove to be the keynote of a new English school. In any case, it is a most notable achievement for one of Eve’s daughters.⁴⁸

In suggesting that Smyth built on the foundations of Brahms and Wagner — rather than copying or being influenced by them — the critic in *The Referee* gives Smyth greater agency. She is raised from an imitator to a developer of the artform. Moreover, by comparing her to George Eliot, the writer aligns Smyth with other women who strove to have their work critiqued independently of their sex. Like many of her literary counterparts, Smyth published her first works under ‘E. M. Smyth’ so that critics, directors, and performers would not know that the work had been written by a woman, thus increasing its chances of performance.

The different sides to Smyth’s emerging identity continued to influence the reception of her operas. When *The Wreckers* was premiered in Leipzig in 1906, an article entitled ‘A German Lady “British Composer”’, celebrated Smyth’s connection to the ‘Fatherland’:

Personally, I like Miss Smyth’s operatic work. It mixes up the two prevailing styles of Wagner and Brahms in a happy fashion, and has a certain mysticism about it. Miss Smyth was an acquaintance of the last-named master, and, in fact, is more intimately associated with German music and thought than with British — for which happy circumstance she has our heartfelt congratulations.⁴⁹

England’s reputation as being *das Land ohne Musik* is evident in both this review and that of *The Referee* quoted above. Here, Smyth’s association with Germany and two of its most notable composers was clearly cause for congratulation. Only one year before, the British periodical *Truth* had quoted an article in which Smyth was identified as being German, emphasising the strength of her connection to the country.⁵⁰

The examples given here demonstrate the extent to which Smyth’s education affected her representation in the press, blurring the boundaries between her Englishness and perceived Germanness. Furthermore, while the influence of Brahms and Wagner is rarely presented pejoratively, it nevertheless results in Smyth’s music being measured against theirs, rather than being celebrated in its own right. This aligns with broader views on women composers, as articulated in an article in 1905:

Why is it that, compared with men, women have achieved so little in music? [...] No doubt there have been numerous feminine composers of a certain talent. Among those living at the present time one could name not a few — Chaminade,

⁴⁸ ‘For Eve’s Daughters’, *The Referee*, 3 August 1902, p. 7.

⁴⁹ ‘A German Lady “British Composer”’, *The Bystander*, 21 November 1906, p. 373.

⁵⁰ ‘Music’, *Truth*, 5 January 1905, p. 46.

Maud White, Ethel Smyth, Liza Lehmann, Frances Allitsen, and others — who have done much clever work. But no one would think of comparing the most distinguished of these with even second rank composers of the opposite sex. Women have not only produced no Bach, no Beethoven, no Wagner; they have yet to furnish an equal of a Grieg, a Saint-Saëns, a Max Bruch.⁵¹

Not only does the author of this article demean women and their ‘clever work’, but they also scorn the men whom they consider inferior. Implicit within their suggestion that no one would compare women composers with men is the notion that women would fall short of the mark, even when measured against the ‘second rank’. That Grieg and Saint-Saëns — composers hailing from outside of Germany — were included in this list reinforces the prestige awarded to Austro-German repertoire. Ironically, the German libretto and the serious nature of *Der Wald* may have contributed to its neglect in England following its Covent Garden performance in 1902.⁵² In this context it seems that Smyth, despite her education and musical influences, was not quite German enough.

2.3. Leipzig Circles: Singing in the Salon

When Smyth was a student in Leipzig the question of identity appeared less contentious, and her letters home do not suggest that she was made to feel unwelcome as an Englishwoman studying abroad. On the contrary, in February 1878 Smyth told her mother, ‘[p]eople spoil me a good deal, & everyone after doing it says “I’m afraid you’ll get terribly spoiled — everyone talks of you and wants to know you!”’.⁵³ While it is challenging to ascertain the veracity of these comments, Smyth’s accounts suggest that her new network treated her with warmth and affection. As indicated in Chapter 1, there were various musical families with whom Smyth became friendly, including the Friedländers, Röntgens, Klengels, Wachs, Fiedlers, and Herzogenbergs.

Eduard and Emilia (‘Milly’) Brockhaus also played an important role in enriching Smyth’s network. Eduard (1838–1898) was the head of the Brockhaus publishing firm and his wife Milly (1854–1914) was a notable societal figure.⁵⁴ In *Impressions*, Smyth recalls Milly’s ‘intention to institute herself my mentor [...] and introduce me to the World’; this

⁵¹ ‘Music’, *Truth*, 29 June 1905, p. 49.

⁵² For further on the reception of *Der Wald*, see Aidan J. Thomson, ‘Decadence in the Forest: Smyth’s *Der Wald* in its Critical Context’ in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unselde (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 218–249; Judith Lebiez, ‘The Representation of Female Power in Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* (1902)’, *The German Quarterly*, 91/4 (2018), 415–424.

⁵³ ES to NS, Monday February 1878, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Annemarie Meiner, ‘Brockhaus, Eduard’, *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 2, 1955, <<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116552115.html#ndbcontent>> [accessed 10 July 2022].

mentorship was the key to many homes in Leipzig and likely encouraged a favourable reception when Smyth was presented. Her letters home also suggest that her friendship with Milly became familial in these early months:

But the figure who in every way tries to fill the place of Mother to me — who interests herself for me and gives herself more trouble on my account than I can describe to you [...] — is Frau Eduard Brockhaus of whom I shall always speak as ‘Frau Doctor’ (her husband is a B.A). Through her I have an *entrée* to the best houses in Leipzig and ‘move in the circles’ (vide Calverley!) after a fashion that would delight Herr Schloesser’s heart!!⁵⁵

This relationship deserves greater recognition within the context of Smyth’s Leipzig years, given Milly’s dual identity as mentor and mother-figure. Although she was not ‘adopted’ by the Brockhaus family as she was by the Herzogenbergs — perhaps because they had several children of their own — Milly was nevertheless important to Smyth. Moreover, their home was a site of social gathering and musical entertainment, at the heart of which Smyth often found herself.

Seemingly central to these evenings were Smyth’s songs. ‘Schön Rohtraut’, which she composed before moving to Leipzig, was the piece that she recalled using to ‘sing myself into musical circles’.⁵⁶ Later published in her *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3, ‘Schön Rohtraut’ is likely Smyth’s earliest art song and one that seemed to please her new audiences.⁵⁷ On the evening when she first met Lili Wach in February 1878 she reported:

I sang about 12 songs of my own! one after the other and got more petting even than usual!!! For the whole company was musical, &, as usual in such cases – too glad to welcome a new ‘Collegin’ [female colleague]. Frau Wach was too nice and begged me to come and see her as soon as ever I could, so did some people [the Herzogenbergs] I’ve been dying to know for ages but hadn’t met before.⁵⁸

This evening took place in another of Leipzig’s notable salons, hosted by the soprano Livia Frege. A description in *The Musical Times* from 1896 of Frege’s home being ‘the headquarters of musical life in Leipzig’ underscores the centrality of her societal position.⁵⁹ ‘Many a young musician’, Smyth later reflected, ‘used to be given a preliminary canter at Frau Livia’s house before a select audience’.⁶⁰ Her remark conveys the sense of the

⁵⁵ ES to NS, 7 December 1877, p. 2–3.

⁵⁶ *ITR*, I, p. 122.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵⁸ ES to NS, Late February 1878, p. 1–2.

⁵⁹ ‘Hans von Bülow in His Letters’, *The Musical Times*, 37/637 (1896), 155–57 (pp. 155–56).

⁶⁰ *ITR*, I, p. 190.

nurturing environment in which she shared her music: an ante-room to more public (or publicised) spaces.

Late-nineteenth century Leipzig was an important European city for music-making and salons such as those held by Frege would have been common. These were vital sites not only for younger composers like Smyth but also for more established figures. Elisabeth and Heinrich von Herzogenberg were important players in promoting Brahms's music in Leipzig during the 1870s, which was needed after the critics slated his performance of his First Piano Concerto, Op. 15 at the Gewendhaus in 1859.⁶¹ As Karen Leistra-Jones highlights, the Herzogenbergs 'had cultivated social and professional connections among the city's musical elite, eventually assuming a central role'.⁶² Like Frege, the Herzogenbergs hosted fellow musicians and composers in their home and advocated the music of their friends; Smyth gained powerful allies when she was welcomed into their midst and benefitted from their connections.

Undoubtedly buoyed by the support she received in these salons, Smyth frequently performed her songs at social gatherings during the spring of 1878. While recovering from a bout of illness in April 1878, Milly had to intervene to stop Smyth overexerting herself. The young composer wrote to her mother:

I went to a musical entertainment yesterday evening at the mother of Brahms's other great friend and, in spite of a little cough, did a great deal of singing, till I was forcibly removed from the piano by Frau Brockhaus, who wouldn't allow me to do anything more.⁶³

These evenings were clearly important sites for developing connections and receiving feedback on her music. In their study of nineteenth-century musical salon culture, Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges observe that:

[An] often-cited appeal of the bourgeois salon was that it not only facilitated fruitful encounters between thinkers, artists, writers and musicians of different genders, and social and educational backgrounds, but that it tolerated different degrees of musical (or other) proficiency.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Karen Leistra-Jones, 'Leipzig and Berlin' in *Brahms in Context* ed. by Natasha Loges and Katy Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 33–43 (p. 34). For more on Brahms's social circles, see Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), particularly pp. 112–114, and Paul Berry, *Brahms Among Friends: Listening, Performance, and the Rhetoric of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶² Leistra-Jones, 'Leipzig and Berlin', p.36

⁶³ ES to NS, 8 April 1878, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges, 'Introduction' in *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 1–10 (p. 5).

To Smyth, as an outsider who was still adjusting to life in a new city and a composer learning her craft, the inclusivity of these evenings would have been a central part of her development. Additionally, the variety of people with whom she was interacting was likely helpful for cultivating her sense of belonging within the musical community. Lorraine Byrne Bodley's observation that salons could offer 'a unique forum for the development of the self' and were spaces where women could escape from prejudice, reflects the intellectual and social enrichment that Smyth gained from her new environment.⁶⁵ This is evidenced by Smyth's desire for her mother to see her 'not at home in England – where every musical composing goose is a swan – but here [in Leipzig] – where the very air we breathe is music and every friend a critic'.⁶⁶ Smyth's comment illustrates her impression of the difference between the two countries and the opportunities which she could access. Furthermore, it highlights how learning often took place outside of educational institutions and demonstrates that musical gatherings could serve as sites of informal training.⁶⁷

One of the additional advantages of attending salons and soirées was the opportunity to meet publishers. In March 1878, Smyth wrote to Oscar Hase at Breitkopf & Härtel with a view to publishing some of her songs, later visiting their premises on 9 April. Hase, Smyth related to her mother, was well known to her and had already heard her perform many of her songs in various Leipzig homes.⁶⁸ Consequently, Hase agreed to 'take the risk and print them', although not before outlining some of the challenges she faced. Smyth reported:

⁶⁵ Lorraine Byrne Bodley, 'In Pursuit of a Single Flame: Fanny Hensel's 'Musical Salon'' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 45–59 (p. 48). Bodley's observation relates to the salons hosted by Jewish women in Berlin earlier in the century. However, through her association with the Mendelssohns, Livia Frege can be connected to the salon culture that Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Fanny Hensel helped to maintain and develop. A similar atmosphere may well have permeated the social gatherings held by other musical families with which Smyth was acquainted.

⁶⁶ ES to NS, Early February 1878, p. 5.

⁶⁷ The musical life of nineteenth-century Berlin has received more scholarly attention than Leipzig, which is surprisingly under-studied. For scholarship on the early- to mid-nineteenth century see Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Nineteenth-Century Leipzig and Birmingham* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Jeffrey S. Sposato, *Leipzig After Bach: Church and Concert Life in a German City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Several German-language sources exist on Leipzig during this time, including, Alfred Dörrfel, *Geschichte der Gewandhausconcerte zu Leipzig* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1884); Emil Kneschke; see *Das Königl. conservatorium der musik zu Leipzig, 1843-1893* (Leipzig and New York: Internationale verlags- und kunstanstalt (A. Laurencic), 1893) and *Zur Geschichte des Theaters und der Musik in Leipzig* (Leipzig: F. Fleischer, 1864). Rudolf Wustmann and Arnold Schering's *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909) considers Leipzig until 1800. Publications such as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* also offer an insight into the musical world of nineteenth-century Leipzig.

⁶⁸ The letter Smyth received from Breitkopf & Härtel on 16 March indicates that Oscar Hase had heard some of the songs at the home of Julius Klengel. For the full letter see Cornelia Bartsch, 'Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 177–216 (p. 183).

Well, he began by telling me that songs had as a rule bad sale — but that no composeress had ever succeeded, barring Frau Schumann & Fräulein Mendelssohn whose songs had been published together with those of their husband & brother respectively. He told me that a certain Frau Lang had written some really very good songs, but they had no sale.⁶⁹

Like Josephine Lang (1815–1880), Smyth did not have a spouse or famous male relation to support the publication of her songs. As Sharon Krebs argues, ‘the fact that [Lang], *without* the crucial male connection, was even mentioned by Oscar Hase is remarkable and attests to her renown in the nineteenth century’.⁷⁰ Hase’s comment about the saleability of the songs is also fundamentally linked to the gender of the composer, although Christopher Wiley has highlighted that Hase’s assertion is somewhat misleading, as a posthumous collection of forty songs composed by Lang appeared in print in 1882.⁷¹ Unfortunately, Hase’s tentative offer fell through and Smyth’s opp. 3 and 4 were eventually published in 1886 by Breitkopf & Härtel’s competitors, C. F. Peters. Cornelia Bartsch indicates that Smyth’s letters to C. F. Peters between 1885–87 ‘show a significantly more experienced composer in contact with her publisher’, suggesting that Smyth’s youth and inexperience may have caused Breitkopf & Härtel to renege on their decision.⁷²

That Smyth persevered and secured the support of C. F. Peters attests to the significance of her Lieder within both a personal and wider social context. In performing ‘Schön Rohtraut’, Smyth used song as a tool, one which showcased her compositional talent, made her memorable to those in attendance, and paved the way for publication.⁷³ Although Smyth does not specify which songs she performed on any given evening, it is likely that the pieces published in opp. 3 and 4 were among them. Her Lieder may also have helped her to integrate with the musical community in Leipzig, as in setting German poets Smyth was indicating an allegiance with the country and culture that she revered.

⁶⁹ ES to NS, 9 April 1878, p. 1. Smyth also recalls being so surprised that Hase had agreed to print the songs that she asked for no fee.

⁷⁰ Sharon Krebs, ‘Josephine Lang’s Reputation’, unpublished paper delivered at the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Musicological Society (online, 26 March 2022), 1–7 (p. 5).

⁷¹ Christopher Wiley, ‘Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and “The First Woman to Write an Opera”’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–295, p. 271. In *Josephine Lang: Her Life and Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Harald Krebs and Sharon Krebs highlight that while Lang’s publishing process was not always smooth, she was published by some of Europe’s most notable German-speaking firms: Haslinger, Breitkopf & Härtel, Kistner (p. 225). This indicates that there was enough interest in her music to make them appear profitable to these publishers (including Breitkopf), suggesting that Hase’s comment may not have been entirely accurate.

⁷² Bartsch, ‘Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction’, p. 184.

⁷³ *ITR*, I, p. 122.

2.4. Smyth and the Art Song Tradition

Smyth's engagement with the art song tradition reveals much about her early years as a composer. Her formative education, which began with the infamous governess and a book of Beethoven sonatas, placed Austro-German music at the forefront and presented an ideal for which to aim. Smyth could have chosen to attend the Royal College of Music in London, but her determination to study in Germany underlines her desire to inhabit the artistic world of composers such as Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms. This quest to operate on the same level as her male predecessors — arguably most evident in her operas — is already present in her earliest compositions. For in composing Lieder, Smyth aligned herself with a quintessentially German art form that carried an increasing prestige and an association with 'high' culture, from which women were often excluded.

Smyth had composed her first Lied while staying with her sister and brother-in-law, Alice and Harry Davidson in the winter of 1876–77.⁷⁴ As she was still trying to persuade her father to let her go to Leipzig at this time it is easy to imagine Smyth reading German poetry and setting it to music as a way of reiterating her conviction. In 'Schön Rohtraut', Smyth set a ballad by Eduard Mörike (1804–1875), one which depicts a princess who prefers hunting and fishing to spinning and sewing.⁷⁵ This figure, whose interests mirror Smyth's own, can be seen to reflect the young composer's desire to follow the path of her choice. As Bartsch has argued, the subversion of gender conventions found in this piece defies societal expectations of women in the nineteenth century and can be linked to Smyth's own unconventional trajectory.⁷⁶ Additionally, her decision to focus on German art song, rather than sourcing and setting English texts, can be seen as another layer of nonconformity: an act of defiance and a means of expression that further asserted her difference.

Smyth was not unique in composing Lieder; evidence that women were active contributors to the genre during the nineteenth century can be seen in the wealth of songs written by composers such as Luise Reichardt (1779–1826), Fanny Hensel (1805–1847), Johanna Kinkel (1810–1858) and Josephine Lang. Historically, women have been overlooked in Lieder surveys; *The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder* (1976) omits women entirely and the only women to appear in Richard Stokes's more recent *The Book of Lieder*

⁷⁴ *ITR*, I, p. 122.

⁷⁵ Smyth omits the hyphen from the title of Mörike's ballad — 'Schön-Rohtraut' — throughout the *Lied*.

⁷⁶ Bartsch, 'Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction', p. 186–188.

(2005) are Fanny Hensel, Alma Mahler (1879–1964), and Clara Schumann.⁷⁷ However, a considerable amount of scholarship has been carried out to give women the recognition that they deserve, including volumes dedicated to the songs of Kinkel, Lang, and Clara Schumann.⁷⁸ Broader studies addressing women’s contributions to the field have also been published, reclaiming their stories and greatly enriching our understanding of the essential role they played in the creation, performance, and reception of German art song throughout history.⁷⁹ This ever-growing body of research has done much to rectify their omission in literature, yet further study is still needed to deepen our understanding of how women engaged with music. Susan Wollenberg’s assertion that there is ‘still a considerable way to go’ in reclaiming women’s contributions to music is apposite here, as even contemporary scholarship can still be influenced by historic perceptions of value.⁸⁰ Smaller forms within a composer’s output are still often overlooked in favour of larger works, for example, as shown by the limited literature on Smyth’s Lieder or piano pieces.⁸¹

Women’s contributions to the Lied in the nineteenth century were linked to societal attitudes, as songs were considered an appropriate way of conveying ‘the idealized notions of the feminine character’.⁸² Furthermore, singing was seen as a socially acceptable means of expression for women and the creation of works that they could perform in the home was an extension of this perception. Sophie Fuller suggests that ‘in song, women found a genre which was capable of a direct and crystallised expression in music of feeling,

⁷⁷ Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder*, with English translations by George Bird and Richard Stokes (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1976); Richard Stokes, *The Book of Lieder* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005).

⁷⁸ Anja Bunzel, *The Songs of Johanna Kinkel* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020); Harald Krebs and Sharon Krebs, *Josephine Lang: Her Life and Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Stephen Rogers, *The Songs of Clara Schumann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁷⁹ See, for example, Marcia J. Citron, ‘Women and the Lied, 1775–1850’ in *Women Making Music*, ed. by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 224–48; ‘Part Three: The Romantic Period — Songs’ in *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found*, ed. by Diane Peacock Jezic, 2nd edn (New York: The Feminist Press, 1994); Beatrix Borchard, ‘Between Public and Private’ in *Women Composers in Germany*, ed. by Roswitha Sperber, trans. by Timothy Nevill (Bonn: Internationes, 1996), pp. 23–38; Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges, *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century*. Tammy Hensrud, Aisling Kenny, and Susan Wollenberg’s chapter, ‘Women Composers of Lieder: Selected Sources’, is an invaluable resource in highlighting the existing scholarship in this area. See *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 259–268.

⁸⁰ Susan Wollenberg, ‘“Where are We Now?”: Teaching and Studying Women Composers Post-Citron’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Women’s Work in Music*, ed. by Rhiannon Mathias (Oxford: Routledge, 2022), pp. 19–25 (p. 23).

⁸¹ See fn. 3 of the present chapter for literature on Smyth’s Lieder. Kathleen Dale touches on Smyth’s piano works in ‘Ethel Smyth’s Prentice Work’ and Lisa Hardy gives a brief overview in *The British Piano Sonata 1870–1945* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), p. 25–28. Both Dale and Hardy are dismissive of Smyth’s contributions to the genre and do not place value on these works.

⁸² Halstead, *The Woman Composer...*, p. 182.

ideas and emotions'.⁸³ Piano pieces were also favoured for their small scale and connection to the domestic sphere, as women's music making was still primarily confined to the home. Addressing nineteenth-century Britain, Jill Halstead draws attention to these genres in relation to women and highlights their contributions to the parlour ballad. 'This type of song', Halstead observes, 'was easily distinguishable from the high culture "art song" type and was considered the vocal equivalent of the character piano piece'.⁸⁴ The division between high and low culture connects to the discourse surrounding public and private performance and, by extension, to gender. Halstead continues:

Often the lyrical content of ballads reflected women's experiences and was based on socially or domestically relevant themes, so providing a much-needed outlet for the female perspective. The ballad's humble musical status also ensured that female composers could produce vast quantities of music in this genre without their creative work ever having to be recognised by the musical establishment.⁸⁵

As a consequence of this 'humble', private, and domestic status, women were not afforded the recognition of the male-dominated 'musical establishment' that would lead to increased public awareness. As a result, their contributions were often lost or overlooked unless they were part of a male narrative, as in the case of Clara Schumann or Fanny Hensel. Their respective connections to Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn have helped to keep them part of a dialogue from which many women were absent.⁸⁶

The songs in Smyth's opp. 3 and 4 align more closely with the art song than the parlour ballad of Smyth's home country. During the nineteenth century the Lied's status evolved from *hausmusik* of the home and salon to works considered worthy of the concert hall. Edward Kravitt's remark that by the *fin de siècle*, '[t]he public regarded the lied — especially Schubert's and Schumann's miniature miracles of lyricism — as revered national treasures' encapsulates the value placed on the genre.⁸⁷ Schubert had been instrumental in raising the profile of the art song and transforming it from a product of 'low' or 'popular' culture to one associated with the higher classes.⁸⁸ When Smyth was composing her Lieder,

⁸³ Sophie Fuller, 'Grace, Betty, Maude and Me: 30 Years of Fighting for Women Composers' in *The Routledge Handbook of Women's Work in Music*, pp. 9–18 (p. 11).

⁸⁴ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, p. 183.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁸⁶ In making this observation I do not seek to overlook the considerable amount of work that has gone into reclaiming these women and their music. Rather, I wish to highlight that women who are connected to a canonic male composer are less likely to drop out of the historical narrative, even if their contributions have not always been accurately recorded or appropriately credited.

⁸⁷ Edward F. Kravitt, *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 18.

⁸⁸ For more on this cultural shift, see Aisling Kenny, 'Blurring the Gendered Dichotomies' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 12–27; Lawrence Kramer, 'The Lied as Cultural Practice' in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 143–173.

the genre had acquired this elevated status and art songs were appearing in public concerts and curated *Liederabende* (song recitals) in addition to the more private salons.⁸⁹ As a consequence, ‘the Lied [...] took on something of the authoritative character associated, in the hierarchy of genres, with high-ranking, male-dominated, compositional forms’.⁹⁰ Thus, when women composed art songs, they were transcending the domestic sphere and engaging with a form that became integral to a historically masculine space: the concert hall.

Despite this shift, Smyth’s nostalgia for ‘the dear old Germany of Heine and Goethe’ also suggests an attachment to more intimate gatherings of like-minded people.⁹¹ She reiterates this when reflecting on the Röntgens and Klengels, who met ‘mainly for the pleasure of making music’, and praises the ‘intimate, [...] domestic, quality of music-making in those days’.⁹² The letters to her mother detailing musical gatherings at her friends’ homes further reinforce this idea, and Smyth does not indicate that she hoped her songs might be sung to a more public audience. Nevertheless, Smyth’s decision to publish her two Lieder collections shows that she wanted them to be accessible, perhaps envisioning that they would appear in other German homes. The sale of her music would have raised awareness of her as a composer and been financially beneficial; she repeatedly expresses the hope that the publication of her songs would help her to pay off clothing and medical bills.⁹³ Although Smyth received money from her parents it is clear that she wanted to live independently, and that the publication of her music would give her the ability to do so.

The difficulties posed by the industry, as expressed by Oscar Hase in 1878, underline the significance of her achievement in successfully publishing the songs in 1886. Furthermore, it clearly shows Smyth’s determination to avail of the same opportunities that were open to men, which became a hallmark of her career. As time went by, Smyth would lean on friends and relatives to help fund performances and the publication of her works. The musicality of her network in Leipzig would have influenced her understanding of how the industry operated and fuelled the self-belief that was at the core of her artistic endeavours.

⁸⁹ Kravitt, *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism*, p. 20.

⁹⁰ Aisling Kenny and Susan Wollenberg, ‘Introduction’ in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 1–8.

⁹¹ *ITR*, I, p. 151.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 162; 161.

⁹³ See Smyth’s letters to her mother from March and April 1878.

2.5. Poetic Choices: *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4

Aside from the brief mentions of ‘Schön Rohtraut’ in *Impressions*, Smyth provides no detail that might indicate the compositional chronology of the songs published in opp. 3 and 4, and her correspondence with her mother is similarly unrevealing. A letter sent from Thüringen in August 1877 indicates that six songs existed by the time that Smyth moved to Leipzig:

Yesterday we stopped at Weimar and went to see Schiller’s and Goethe’s houses, and then their coffins. It was awfully interesting. Everyone is so fond of ‘Rothraut.’ [*sic*] I am going to print it and the five others, and sell them if I can.⁹⁴

There is nothing in subsequent letters to identify the other songs, but references are made to her singing and the high praise she received. While on her trip she also visited the opera singers Hans and Rosa von Milde and was encouraged by Henschel to sing for those gathered:

Mother! I wish you had been there! They were astonished, they all came round and said it was ‘merkwürdig, wundervoll,’ and all afternoon when Henschel was strumming, as only *he* can strum, between the songs, he kept on coming back to the modulation at ‘Schweig’ still, mein Herz’ in ‘Rothraut’ [*sic*] which pleased him hugely. [...] The bliss of knowing that when I went on so about cultivating my talent I was not wrong!⁹⁵

This validation from ‘men who have lived among musicians all their lives’ was evidently important for Smyth’s confidence and it is clear that her new friends stimulated her creativity, as towards the end of August she records having ‘composed lots more’ songs under Henschel’s guidance.⁹⁶

In the ten *Lieder* that were eventually published in 1886, Smyth set poems by a number of German writers that abound with Romantic symbolism. Prominent in these poems is the wanderer figure, whose yearning to venture beyond the boundaries of his daily life takes us to ‘imaginary lands, often unfamiliar, vague, or murky’ that are traversed ‘in the darkness of the night, and in the amorphous world of dreams’.⁹⁷ Within these shifting landscapes, contrasting imagery creates a sense of uncertainty; life appears

⁹⁴ ES to NS, 5 August 1877, p. 7.

⁹⁵ ES to NS, 12 August 1877 quoted in *ITR*, I, p. 213. The description of Smyth’s music by Hans and Rosa von Milde as ‘merkwürdig’ (‘curious’) and wonderful suggests that they found her songs to be engaging and unexpected.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214; ES to NS, 19 August 1877, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Deborah Stein and Robert Spillman, *Poetry into Song: Performance and Analysis of Lieder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5.

alongside death, love is paired with loss, and joy ends in sorrow.⁹⁸ Smyth's engagement with Romantic poetry — and the specific poems she chose to set — reflects her appreciation for the music of her predecessors, particularly Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. The influence of Heinrich von Herzogenberg is also evident; as is discussed below, there are several instances where both he and Smyth set the same text.

Four of the five songs in Op. 3 are settings of poetry by Joseph von Eichendorff (1788–1857), who was a popular choice for nineteenth-century composers. Natasha Loges's suggestion that Eichendorff was 'probably the most beloved poet of Brahms's generation', whose writing continued to inspire 'well after the appeal of other Romantics had faded', highlights the longevity of his reputation.⁹⁹ The final piece in Op. 3 — 'Schön Rohtraut' — is a setting of a ballad by Mörike, a poet well known to those in Smyth's network and in society more broadly.¹⁰⁰ Robert Schumann's setting of the ballad was published in 1849 as the second piece in his *Romanzen und Balladen*, Op. 67, scored for a capella SATB choir. Smyth gives no indication of how she selected poetry to set, so it is unclear whether she knew about Schumann's song prior to composing her own. However, she was certainly familiar with his music before moving to Leipzig, as evidenced by her correspondence with Alexander Ewing, and might have come to Mörike's poetry through Schumann's compositions.¹⁰¹

Op. 4 is less homogeneous and features settings of poems by Georg Büchner (1813–1837), Ernst von Wildenbruch (1845–1909), Klaus Groth (1819–1899), and Paul Heyse (1830–1914) alongside Eichendorff. Smyth's textual choices in this collection show her deviating from tradition and choosing less frequently set poets. Büchner was a writer whose revolutionary and forward-thinking work can be seen to contrast the introspective world of Eichendorff.¹⁰² 'Tanzlied', which opens Op. 4, is taken from Büchner's play *Leonce und Lena* (1836), a satirical 'echoing fabrication' inspired by Clemens Brentano's comedy *Ponce de Leon* (1801).¹⁰³ Andrew Webber suggests that Büchner's 'real sense of Romantic

⁹⁸ For further reading on common themes and symbolism in Romantic poetry, see for example, Rufus Hallmark, *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Routledge, 2010); Berthold Hoeckner, 'Schumann and Romantic Distance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50/1 (1997), 55–132; James Parsons, "'My song the midnight raven has outwing'd': Schubert's 'Der Wanderer,'" D. 649 in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism* ed. by Siobhán Donovan and Robin Elliott, pp. 165–182.

⁹⁹ Natasha Loges, *Brahms and His Poets* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), p. 93.

¹⁰⁰ Mörike was friends with Robert and Clara Schumann and Joseph and Amelie Joachim, for example. See Loges's entry in *Brahms and His Poets*, pp. 299–306.

¹⁰¹ For correspondence between Smyth and Ewing, see *ITR*, I, pp. 137–148.

¹⁰² Clayton Koelb and Eric Downing, 'Introduction' in *German Literature of the Nineteenth-Century, 1832–1899*, ed. by Clayton Koelb and Eric Downing (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp. 1–19 (p. 7).

¹⁰³ Andrew Webber, 'The Afterlife of German Romanticism' in *German Literature of the Nineteenth-Century, 1832–1899*, pp. 23–43 (p. 28).

hauntedness' comes across in the play, despite his efforts to keep an 'ironic distance' from the subject.¹⁰⁴ As a consequence, the poem that Smyth set is still imbued with the Romantic imagery of love-induced pain, nature, and death, meaning that it is not out of place within the collection. Heinrich von Herzogenberg also set Büchner's poem, which was published in 1885 as 'Die Tänzerin' in *Drei Romanzen für eine Singstimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte*. It is possible that Smyth encountered Herzogenberg's song before publication and that his setting inspired her to compose her own, or that he encouraged her to set the text.

Wildenbruch is also not among the poets typically found in Lieder anthologies. The second song in Op. 4 is a setting of his poem 'Schlummerlied', which appeared in his 1877 publication *Lieder und Balladen*. Whether Smyth came across Wildenbruch before arriving in Leipzig is not clear; he wrote a number of plays and novels during the 1880s and 1890s and another poetry collection — *Dichtungen und Balladen* — was published in 1884.¹⁰⁵ The relative obscurity of both Büchner and Wildenbruch, alongside the publication dates of the latter's works, may suggest that Smyth was introduced to their poetry while in Germany. This would make 'Tanzlied' and 'Schlummerlied' two of her later Lieder, written after she moved to Leipzig.

Groth and Heyse, whose poetry Smyth set for the fourth and fifth songs in the collection — 'Nachreiter' and 'Nachtgedanken' — are more conventional choices.¹⁰⁶ While Groth was not a popular choice for composers, and as Bartsch has remarked, was not 'standard literature for an upper-class English lady', he is a less surprising choice given the context of Smyth's social circle. Brahms set numerous poems by Groth, some of which were published shortly before Smyth moved to Leipzig and others appeared in print around the same time as her opp. 3 and 4. Additionally, Brahms often set Heyse's poetry and held him in such high regard that in the 1870s and 1880s he hoped they could collaborate on an operatic libretto.¹⁰⁷ Heinrich von Herzogenberg also composed several

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ 'Wildenbruch, Ernst von' in *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, ed. by Henry and Mary Garland, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 984.

¹⁰⁶ 'Nachtgedanken' appears in the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, a book of Spanish folksongs and poems collected and translated by Emanuel Geibel (1815–1884) and Paul Heyse, published in 1852. Only Heyse's name appears on the score of Smyth's *Lied*.

¹⁰⁷ See Loges's entry on Heyse in *Brahms and His Poets*, pp. 198–205 and *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, ed. by Styra Avins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 446, fn. 25. Hermann Levi, who was to encourage Smyth's operatic endeavours, tried unsuccessfully to help Brahms and Heyse's potential opera come to fruition.

Lieder using his poetry, meaning that Smyth could have had access to it when she visited their home.¹⁰⁸

Archival material has yet to reveal which songs she invited Breitkopf & Härtel to publish in 1878, which makes it challenging to date those in opp. 3 and 4 precisely.¹⁰⁹ Smyth may have continued to write new Lieder in the intervening years and draw on sources more readily available to her in Germany, which could explain the greater diversity of poets within Op. 4. Of her five Eichendorff songs, two use poems already set and published by Herzogenberg, who may have influenced her textual choices.¹¹⁰ Similarly, it is possible that Smyth's 'Es wandelt, was wir schauen' (Op. 3, No. 4) inspired his setting of the poem, published in 1900.¹¹¹ Jory Bennett's list of Smyth's works indicates that opp. 3 and 4 were composed *c.* 1877; the inclusion of this date may be due to Smyth's reference to 'Schön Rohtraut' (Op. 3, No. 5) in *Impressions*.¹¹² However, considering Smyth's Lieder in their broader context and exploring her textual choices in greater depth implies that the songs were composed over a longer timeframe than is typically suggested.

2.6. Text Setting, Narrative, and Drama

In opp. 3 and 4, Smyth chose to express the poetic content of the texts set in various ways. Structurally, the Lieder range from the simple strophic settings of 'Vom Berge' and 'Schön Rohtraut' to the compact and through-composed 'Mittagsruh'. These pieces are closer in style to those of the Second Berlin School, composers such as 'Schulz, Reichardt, and Zelter' whose Lieder reflected the 'Northern German song tradition based on a simple, natural folklike expression'.¹¹³ Other songs are in modified ternary form and feature short piano interludes that aid in conveying the poetic imagery, as in 'Tanzlied' and 'Nachreiter'. The musical forms Smyth chose often correlate with the structure of the text or relate to its content, indicating not only a clear engagement with the poetry but also an awareness of

¹⁰⁸ See Heinrich von Herzogenberg, *Fünf Lieder für eine hohe Singstimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte*, Op. 30, No. 3, 'Weigenlied' (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1881); *Vier Gedichte von Paul Heyse für eine hohe Stimme mit Clavierbegleitung*, Op. 96 (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1897); *Sechs Mädchenlieder für dreistimmigen Frauenchor (Sopran, Mezzo-Sopran und Alt) mit Pianoforte*, Op. 98 (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1897).

¹⁰⁹ The manuscript scores of the songs published as opp. 3 and 4 are also undated.

¹¹⁰ These are 'Der verirrte Jäger' (Op. 3, No. 2) and 'Mittagsruh' (Op. 4, No. 3). The former appears in Herzogenberg's *Ballade von J. von Eichendorff für eine tiefe Stimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte* (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1865) and the latter in *Gesänge und Balladen*, Op. 44 (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1885).

¹¹¹ Herzogenberg's setting appears as 'Ergebung' in *Elegische Gesänge (Zweite Folge): aus dem Cyklus 'Auf meines Kindes Tod' von J. v. Eichendorff für eine Singstimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte*, Op. 104 (Leipzig: J. Reiter-Biedermann, 1900).

¹¹² Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 373–81.

¹¹³ Elliott Antokoletz, 'Sturm und Drang Spirit in Early Nineteenth-Century German Lieder; the Goethe-Schubert "Erlkönig"', *International Journal of Musicology*, 2 (2016), 139–147 (p. 140).

the art song tradition. Unsurprisingly, given his contributions to the genre, Schubert was one of the composers who inspired Smyth. She stated, ‘[a]ll my life his music has been perhaps nearer my heart than any other — that crystal stream welling and welling for ever’, which captures the depth of her appreciation with characteristic artistry.¹¹⁴ His songs are among the few she names in her memoirs, and she records singing his Lieder to her family — Nina seemed particularly fond of his music.¹¹⁵

While Smyth never set texts by Goethe, repeated references to him suggest that his writing also accompanied her throughout her life.¹¹⁶ During her initial months in Leipzig, she attended performances of plays by Goethe alongside those of Lessing and Schiller, and saw German translations of Shakespeare, Jean Racine, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca.¹¹⁷ In Thüningria in 1877, Henschel introduced her to Schubert’s ‘Gruppe aus dem Tartarus’ (D. 583, 1817) — a setting of a poem by Schiller — and Henschel’s performance prompted her to liken the singer to a god.¹¹⁸ Smyth’s interest in musical drama, which would flourish in her operas, may have been ignited by Schubert’s dramatic Lieder, such as ‘Erlkönig’ (D. 328, 1815) or ‘Der Tod und das Mädchen’ (D. 531, 1817).¹¹⁹ The operas Smyth attended while in Leipzig might also have acted as further stimulus and influenced her songs.¹²⁰

Although only ‘Tanzlied’ features text from a play, several of the poems that Smyth chose to set in opp. 3 and 4 convey a clear narrative and might be considered dramatic in content.¹²¹ ‘Der verirrte Jäger’ (Op. 3, No. 3) is from Eichendorff’s first novel *Ahnung und Gegenwart*; the poem features the folk trope of a lost hunter who is led astray by a deer and

¹¹⁴ *ITR*, I, p. 124.

¹¹⁵ *ITR*, II, p. 4. In her memoirs, Smyth mentions Schubert’s ‘Im Freien’ and ‘Du bist die Ruh’ (*ITR*, II, pp. 3–4), ‘Gruppe aus dem Tartarus’ (*ITR*, I, p. 156, addressed below), ‘Im Abendroth’ and ‘Die junge Nonne’ (*ATWO*, p. 106, 138). Given her appreciation for his music and her interest in both performing and composing art song, it is likely that Smyth had a more extensive knowledge of Schubert’s Lieder than the pieces she discusses.

¹¹⁶ Smyth repeatedly refers to Goethe in her memoirs and shows an awareness of his works. She had a particular fondness for *Faust* and one of Elisabeth von Herzogenberg’s nicknames for Smyth was Euphorion, taken from *Faust, Part II* (*ITR*, II, p. 11; *ITR*, I, p. 246). In a letter from July 1878, Lisl urges her to remain focused on her studies rather than ‘lying about in the fields with Goethe under your arm’, indicating Smyth’s attachment to the writer (*ITR*, II, p. 19).

¹¹⁷ *ITR*, I, p. 174.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹⁹ For further reading see Marjorie Wing Hirsch, *Schubert’s Dramatic Lieder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *Drama in the Music of Franz Schubert*, ed. by Joe Davies and James William Sobaskie (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2019). Susan Youens’s insightful chapter, ‘Reentering Mozart’s Hell: Schubert’s ‘Gruppe aus dem Tartarus’, D. 583’ may be of particular interest here (pp. 171–201).

¹²⁰ Even though Smyth suggests that her friends in Leipzig ‘were suspicious of music-drama’ and opera, she attended performances of Bizet’s *Carmen*, Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, Verdi’s *Aida*, Gounod’s *Faust*, and Delibes’s *Lakmé* in the late 1870s and early 1880s. For more on Smyth’s social circle and opera, see *ITR*, I, p. 272.

¹²¹ Cornelia Bartsch’s reading of Smyth’s two *Lieder* collections as a song-cycle further emphasises the narrative — and autobiographical — quality of the poetic texts she set. See ‘Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction’.

disappears into the woods, never to be seen again.¹²² As addressed above, ‘Schön Rohtraut’ (Op. 3, No. 5) depicts an unconventional princess and the page boy who loves her; they too hunt in the woods but return home unscathed. These songs are the only two ballads contained within Smyth’s opus and the texts align with Marjorie Wing Hirsch’s definition of the dramatic ballad, which follows a linear narrative trajectory.¹²³ While both feature first- and third-person perspectives, the narrator’s ‘emotions are concealed, making the narrative descriptive rather than introspective’.¹²⁴ Eichendorff and Mörike both offer glimpses of their protagonist’s feelings, but these do not detract from the overall narrative or slip into overt self-reflection.

Op. 4 does not contain any ballads, yet ‘Nachtreiter’ (No. 4) is plot-driven and exploits the familiar Romantic trope of the lost and lovelorn wanderer. The rider in Groth’s poem urges his horse on through the storm, bidding the animal to return him to his beloved. As in ‘Der verirrte Jäger’ and ‘Schön Rohtraut’, the poetic content could be staged and Smyth’s setting reinforces the drama of the text. Darkness also abounds in ‘Nachtgedanken’ (No. 5), wherein the restless sleeper is plagued by dreams that cause them to cry out for their mother. Heyse’s poem is more introspective and the narrative is less clear, but Smyth’s treatment of the text clearly illustrates the protagonist’s inner turmoil.

These early songs reflect Smyth’s flare for storytelling, which is evident in her writing and is expressed musically in many of her vocal and operatic works. As such, the Lieder exhibit a compositional trait that runs throughout her oeuvre and suggest that these early works provided an arena in which she could experiment with different techniques. Writing to Edith Somerville in June 1920, Smyth stated, ‘I do not write symphonies because I can do other things better’.¹²⁵ Her output suggests that these ‘other things’ may have been vocal rather than instrumental works; text-based compositions would have provided greater scope to convey a message or a story. They also would have played to her strengths, as orchestration was an area in which Smyth received limited instruction. While she wrote for orchestra over the course of her career, it was typically in the context of a vocal work such as her Mass in D (1891), operatic works, or *The Prison* (1929–30). The following musical readings of four of Smyth’s Lieder serve to highlight the ways in which she depicts the texts and the drama contained therein.

¹²² The poem is taken from Chapter 23 of Eichendorff’s *Abnung und Gegenwart* (Nürnberg: Johann Leonhard Schrag, 1815), p. 429.

¹²³ Marjorie Wing Hirsch, *Schubert’s Dramatic Lieder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 84.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 27 June 1920, MS 17/878/2/69/01, p. 1, Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection, Queen’s University Belfast.

2.6a. Op. 3, No. 2, 'Der verirrte Jäger'

Smyth's setting of her *Ballade*, 'Der verirrte Jäger' uses a largely through-composed setting to musically trace the narrative of the poem.¹²⁶ The fifth and final stanza is a modified version of the first, but the three inner stanzas contain greater variation in both the vocal part and the piano accompaniment. The first stanza of Eichendorff's poem is written from the hunter's perspective, indicated by the use of 'Ich', and his melancholy mood is reflected in the A minor tonality with which the song begins. The tempo marking at the start of the piece, *nicht zu rasch, aber unruhig*, stipulates that the piece should not be played too quickly but that a sense of restlessness ought be conveyed. Similarly to Schubert's Lieder, the piano figurations in some of Smyth's songs align with the poetic content and provide more than just support for the vocalist.¹²⁷ As such, 'Der verirrte Jäger' opens with a brief introduction that creates the feeling of movement, encouraging the listener to imagine the hunter's progress through the forest. The dotted crotchet and descending quaver figure (ex. 2.1) in this opening stanza has a buoyancy that may also reflect the leaping gait of the roe deer central to the poem.



Example 2.1. 'Der verirrte Jäger', bars 1–3

The poem's protagonist sounds his horn in the second stanza and calls out to his fellow huntsmen. The rising fourth found in the vocal line under 'Frisch auf!' and 'ins' Horn! frisch auf!' (bb. 20–23, ex. 2.2) evokes the sound of the bugle, with which Smyth would have been familiar due to her own hunting experiences. The piano part is dense in this stanza, with open fifths in the lower bass supporting an upper bass line and a lively quaver pattern in the right hand. Smyth's writing here conveys the excitement of the hunt and the tonality shifts accordingly; the presence of F# and C# is suggestive of D major, although

¹²⁶ Wing Hirsch identifies through-composed form as a dramatic trait in Lieder that deviates from the traditional strophic structure. See *Schubert's Dramatic Lieder*, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Lorraine Byrne Bodley observes that 'often the piano figuration is suggested by some pictorial image of the text. Yet Schubert's pictorial features are never merely imitative, but are designed to contribute to the mood of the song'. See *Schubert's Goethe Settings* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2003), p. 48.

this lacks cadential confirmation. A three-bar piano passage joins this stanza to the next, maintaining the jubilation of the preceding section. Descending quavers in the right hand (bb. 30–31) anticipate the following stanza, wherein the hunter is led deeper into the woods.



Example 2.2. ‘Der verirrte Jäger’, bars 20–23

In stanza three, the perspective shifts to an omniscient narrator. The lone hunter — seemingly separated from his fellows — is led by the roe into the green, woody night (*grüne Waldesnacht*).¹²⁸ The word ‘-nacht’ (b. 35) is accompanied by a quaver figure in the right-hand piano part, which starts high in the treble; its twinkling descent conjures the image of starry, nocturnal skies winking through the leafy canopy (ex. 2.3). Due to its connotations of dawn and sunrise, Eichendorff’s use of the word ‘Aurora’ in stanza two may indicate that the hunters are out early in the morning, and the mysticism of the forest is enhanced by the transition from night to day. By the end of the third stanza, the hunter has traversed vale and hill and is rewarded by the view. Smyth translates these lines as, ‘Through vale to trembling heights and hill / To scenes so dazzling bright’, which implies that the sun has risen while the hunter has roamed in the woods.

The second half of this central stanza contains the high point of the poem, both in terms of the hunter’s physical hilltop location and his emotional wonder at the view. Smyth depicts this by shifting the tonality towards the relative key of C major and uses a sweeping arpeggiated gesture (ex. 2.3) in the piano to convey a sense of height, space, and stillness. The vocal part rises and falls in a broad arc, outlining the tonic, dominant, and mediant of C major that may cause the listener to think that the hunter has overcome his earlier melancholy. However, Smyth uses the C major mediant as a pivot note in bars 43–47 to shift towards a darker tonality in preparation for the fourth stanza, and the introduction of D#, G#, and C# in bar 46 quickly interrupts the major sound-world.

¹²⁸ Throughout the four readings I draw on the texts and translations provided in the appendix to Cornelia Bartsch’s chapter, ‘Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth’s *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4’ in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, pp. 177–216 (pp. 209–216).

grü - ne Wal - des - nacht

Thal - un - ter schwindelnd und Berg

an - zu nie - ge - seh - ner Pracht, zu

nie - ge - seh - ner Pracht,

Example 2.3. 'Der verirrte Jäger', bars 34–43

Although Smyth uses chromatic notes to add colour throughout the Lied, stanza four strays furthest from the key signature. Dense chromaticism creates ambiguity that destabilises the tonal centre and reflects the hunter's mood. Another change in perspective allows the reader insight into the hunter's feelings: now he is troubled by the rustling forest and the thought of faraway friends. Smyth conjures the sound of the leaves with an undulating figure in the left-hand of the piano, which is bracketed by chromatic chords. She captures the hunter's isolation by keeping the right-hand piano part relatively sparse and maintaining a narrow vocal range, reminiscent of recitative delivery, which reinforces

the dramatic aspect of the ballad. Moreover, as Marie-Agnes Dittrich has observed, recitative ‘generally signals the arrival of a new situation or of comparatively stronger emotions’.¹²⁹ This resonates with both this stanza and the song’s final line, addressed below. After the action of the first three stanzas, the fourth encapsulates the quiet introspection of the Romantic period, embodied here in the lost, contemplative hunter, and Smyth’s understated setting enhances the sense of unease present in Eichendorff’s poem.

An eight-bar piano interlude follows the fourth stanza, which can be divided into equal halves. The first builds on the undulating figure used throughout the preceding stanza, but its continuity is interrupted by dotted minim chords and fermatas. Pauses appear three times in the eight bars, which underscores the sense of space and dislocation within the poem’s narrative. A *pianissimo* dynamic marking and the direction to play *una corda* in bar 62 enhances the image of the hunter pausing on the hilltop in contemplation, lost within himself and in his physical surroundings. In the second half of the interlude (bb. 62–65) the left-hand quaver figure recalls the vocal line of the first stanza, which also forms the basis of the last. A fermata is used again in bar 65 to separate the interlude from the final stanza.

The fifth stanza is marked *etwas langsamer* (a little slower) in keeping with the previous section but otherwise closely resembles the song’s opening, with the first two phrases mirroring those in stanza one. Unlike the start of the poem, Eichendorff shifts the perspective back to the omniscient narrator for the ending in order to reveal the dramatic twist: having followed the roe into the woods, the hunter was never seen again. The final two lines of the poem, which disclose the hunter’s fate, diverge from the melody of the first stanza. Similarly to stanza four, the vocal line uses a narrower range, making it seem more declamatory, and the final line is sung entirely on the note A. Here, the stasis of the vocal line emphasises that the hunter was never seen again while also reinforcing the A minor tonality to which the Lied has returned. Smyth raises the third in the final chord, creating a *tierce de Picardie* (b. 84) and easing the disconsolation of the poem’s ending. This subtle lift seems to question the narrator’s perspective, inviting the listener to further ponder the hunter’s fate.

¹²⁹ Marie-Agnes Dittrich, ‘The Lieder of Schubert’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. by James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 85–100 (p. 92).

2.6b. Op. 3, No. 5, 'Schön Rohtraut'

While 'Schön Rohtraut' is musically quite different to 'Der verirrte Jäger', the songs have similar narrative themes. Hunting is central to both texts: the protagonist in 'Der verirrte Jäger' pursues a deer and the page boy of 'Schön Rohtraut' pursues a princess; if the deer is considered a symbol of unattainable love, the similarities are further strengthened. However, the poems contrast in tone and the melancholic, contemplative hunter is balanced by the blithe, optimistic page boy. Smyth responds accordingly in her settings and captures in 'Schön Rohtraut' the humour of the page boy, who is delighted at having been able to kiss the princess. This one-sided tale of courtly love resonates with some of the Medievalist compositions of Schumann and Brahms, such as the latter's song cycle *Romanzen aus L. Tiecks Magelone* (Op. 33). However, rather than embarking on a heroic quest to win the princess's hand as in Ludwig Tieck's romance, Mörike's page boy is seemingly satisfied with the kiss, accepting the reality of his situation and the societal divide that separates him from his love.¹³⁰

Smyth's 'Schön Rohtraut' is a simple, strophic setting with a memorable vocal line that may have contributed to its popularity within her social circle. The Lied opens with a rocking crotchet and quaver figure in the left hand and dotted crotchet chords in the right (ex. 2.4), the latter of which forms the basis for much of the accompaniment throughout the piece. The key of E \flat major is reinforced by the piano — which maintains a tonic pedal for the first nine bars — and the vocal line is bookended by the tonic and dominant. Narratively, the major opening suits the first half of the stanza, where 'Fair Rohtraut' is introduced; the page boy wonders what the princess does all day if spinning and sewing are not what she likes. Mörike's poem contains many features associated with the ballad, including questions and refrains, that evolved from the folk-inspired *Kunstballade* (art ballad) in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹³¹ This is exemplified in the first stanza in particular, wherein questions about the princess are posed and answered. The second and eighth lines in each stanza are also refrains that provide structural consistency throughout the poem and likewise influence Smyth's setting of the text.

¹³⁰ Marie Sumner Lott, 'From Knight Errant to Family Man: Romantic Medievalism in Brahms's *Romanzen aus L. Tiecks Magelone*, op. 33 (1865–1869) in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism* ed. by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 38–62. Also see Jonathan Bellman, 'Aus alten Märchen: The Chivalric Style of Schumann and Brahms', *The Journal of Musicology*, 13/1 (1995), 117–135.

¹³¹ Francien Markx, 'Towards a German Romantic Concept of the Ballad: Goethe's "Johannah Sebus" and Its Musical Interpretations by Zelter and Reichardt' in *Goethe Yearbook 19*, ed. by Daniel Purdy (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), pp. 1–28.

Example 2.4. ‘Schön Rohtraut’, bars 1–4

In the second half of the stanza the perspective shifts, and the page boy, having learnt that Rohtraut prefers fishing and hunting, longs to accompany her. He cries, ‘O dass ich doch ihr Jäger wär! / fischen und jagen freuten mich sehr!’ (‘O that I was her hunting boy! / Fishing and hunting would be my joy!’) The emotion is further heightened in the closing refrain, in which the boy urges his heart to be still. Smyth captures the ache of his longing by subtly undermining the Eb major tonality by introducing Gb and Ab in bar 13, then Fb and Db in bar 17 (ex. 2.5). This move away from Eb major briefly darkens the mood in response to the narrative; Mörike’s text aids in keeping this tonal shift relevant in each iteration, as the second half of every stanza contains an element of unease, from wistful longing, to trepidation, to the memory of Rohtraut’s kiss. The final ‘mein Herz’ in bars 19–20 creates a perfect cadence on Eb major, thus returning the tonality to the home key in preparation for the two-bar segue into the next strophe, which mirrors the song’s opening.

O dass ich doch ihr Jä-ger wär! fi-schen und ja-gen freu-ten mich sehr! Schweig

still mein Herz, schweig still mein Herz.

Example 2.5. ‘Schön Rohtraut’, bars 13–20

There are a few subtle differences between the four strophes of ‘Schön Rohtraut’, primarily in relation to dynamics. The first and second are marked *mezzo forte* and the third and fourth *piano*, although a shift to *fortissimo* in bar 64 mimics the page boy’s rejoicing. He proclaims that even if Rohtraut became Empress — presumably by marrying an Emperor, rather than him — the memory of their kiss would temper any feeling of offence. Mörike’s poem does not suggest a happily-ever-after ending for the princess and the page boy but rather implies that they experienced something ephemeral. In strophes three and four, fermatas are also added to the final word of the seventh line: ‘Mund’ (b. 55) and ‘geküsst’ (b. 75) respectively. Given that these words both relate to their kiss — ‘Mund’ being ‘mouth’ and ‘geküsst’ the past participle of the verb ‘küssen’, ‘to kiss’ — the fermata elongates the moment, adding weight to its significance. After a final refrain, the Lied ends with an extended version of the opening crotchet and quaver figure; the dotted-crotchet chords in the right hand rise and fall over a two-octave span, remaining within Eb major and closing on a perfect cadence.

Smyth’s decision to use a strophic rather than a through-composed or ternary form was likely influenced by the text as the regularly placed refrains encourage such a setting. It was not uncommon for composers to set a ballad in this way; Johann Friedrich Reichardt’s

(1752–1814) version of ‘Erlkönig’ (1794) or Schubert’s ‘Heidenröslein’ (D. 257, 1815) are earlier examples of ballads rendered in a strophic setting.¹³² However, the disadvantage of setting the text in such a way was that the composer had to find other ways of depicting the progressing narrative. The repetitiveness of strophic settings meant that there was arguably a greater need for the song to be performed in a varied and engaging manner, something that Goethe made clear in relation to Reichardt’s setting of his ‘Jägers Abendlied’.¹³³ Addressing Reichardt’s ‘Erlkönig’, Francien Markx argues that:

The strophic form, besides emphasizing the structure of the poem, drives the events relentlessly and without delays towards the dramatic catastrophe at the end [...]. The choice of this strophic form prevented him, however, from translating important development, such as the increasing anxiety of the son, into music.¹³⁴

Mörike’s ‘Schön-Rohtraut’ does not have the dramatic intensity of Goethe’s text, but a narrative is still present, and Smyth’s strophic setting does not provide the opportunity to illustrate the text on a deeper level, as in ‘Der verirrte Jäger’. Rather, Smyth’s rendering captures the overall feeling of Mörike’s ballad with broader brushstrokes, meaning that the performative aspect would have been all the more crucial to its success. Beyond the ballad’s structure, however, there may be additional reasons why Smyth opted for such a setting.

Firstly, it may be useful to consider her age and compositional experience. If ‘Schön Rohtraut’ was one of her earliest Lieder, as the memoirs suggest, it is possible that Smyth was still refining her skills in this area. The first song in Op. 3, ‘Vom Berge’, is composed with a similar degree of simplicity and is described as a ‘Volkslied’; Eichendorff’s name does not appear on the score at all, which prompts the question of where Smyth encountered the original text. Secondly, ‘Schön Rohtraut’ was written for Smyth herself to perform, evidenced both anecdotally and by the vocal range, which suited

¹³² Schubert’s later ‘Ein altschottische Ballade’, D. 923 (1827), a setting of the Scottish ‘Edward’ ballad, is akin to Mörike’s ‘Schön-Rohtraut’ in its use of questions and refrains. For more on the evolution and distribution of this poem, see Philip Bohlman, ‘Herder’s Nineteenth Century’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 7/1 (2010), 3–21.

¹³³ As Lorraine Byrne Bodley highlights, Eduard Genast’s recollection of Goethe critiquing his performance of ‘Jägers Abendlied’ ‘reveals the value he placed on portraying the meaning of the poem in performance’. See *Schubert’s Goethe Settings*, p. 11.

¹³⁴ Markx, ‘Towards a German Romantic Concept of the Ballad’, p. 4. It is possible that Reichardt also overlooked the lure of the Erlkönig in his setting. Friedrich Förster recalls Goethe telling the seven-year-old Carl Eckert that, ‘as a ghostly king the Erlking can adopt any possible voice he likes and can sing first gently and enticingly, and then menacingly and angrily’. Reichardt either missed or failed to depict the Erlkönig’s changeability in his rendering of the poem. See Bodley, *Schubert’s Goethe Settings*, for the full quotation and further details on this topic (pp. 234–35).

Smyth's voice.¹³⁵ A strophic setting would have made the piece easier to play, meaning that Smyth could focus on performing the song and entertaining her audience. Moreover, Smyth never mentions being accompanied by anyone else, which suggests that she would have sung and played the piano at the same time. The largely diatonic writing and the tendency for the piano to double the vocal line — a feature also found in 'Vom Berge' — would have increased the performative ease of the piece.

Considered in this context, 'Schön Rohtraut' seems more closely aligned to the domestic and sometimes folksong-derived Lied of the first half of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, or indeed the ballads composed by women for performance in the home.¹³⁶ Jill Halstead's observation that these ballads would often 'reflect women's experiences and [were] based on socially or domestically relevant themes', is pertinent here.¹³⁷ On one level, 'Schön Rohtraut' deals with the theme of love, with its implication of marriage; on another, the song features a princess who prefers traditionally male-dominated hobbies. Thus, the song speaks not only to broader societal conventions but also to Smyth's own character traits.

In contrast to 'Schön Rohtraut', 'Der verirrte Jäger' points to a more mature Smyth who had benefitted from additional tuition and further exposure to Lieder. As elucidated above, the piece is more adventurous harmonically and the piano accompaniment depicts elements of the narrative in a more overtly expressive way. While a lack of archival evidence currently makes it challenging to date the songs in opp. 3 and 4 precisely, those in the latter collection seem to show Smyth developing her compositional skills and moving away from more traditional strophic settings.

2.6c. *Op. 4, No. 4, 'Nachtreiter'*

Klaus Groth's 'Der Nachtreiter' comprises five pairs of rhyming couplets, which Smyth divides into modified ternary form. The Lied begins with a flourishing four-bar introduction that establishes the key of E major. In bar 5, the accompaniment shifts to an arpeggiated figure in the left hand with staccato quaver chords in the right, which creates a bouncing rhythm that seems to mimic a rising trot. The first couplet depicts the rider embarking on his journey, bareback and without a bridle, plucking a whip from a willow

¹³⁵ Smyth was a mezzo-soprano but sang alto in the Bach Verein and tended to sing the alto line when performing alongside Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, who was a soprano. See Smyth's letter to her mother in *ITR*, I, p. 238 and ES to NS, 19 April 1878, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Edward F. Kravitt's chapter on 'The Ballad and the Kinderlied' is useful for contextualising nineteenth-century ballads, including the art ballad. See *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism*, pp. 124–141.

¹³⁷ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, p. 183.

tree along the way. These opening lines of the poem are sung to an almost identical melody; there are minor pitch differences between bar 7 and the second iteration in bar 10, but otherwise bars 8–10 mirror bars 5–7.

In bar 11, the accompaniment is subtly altered and raised in pitch. The staccato quaver chords become rolled crotchet chords, which seem to hold a shimmering quality that could reflect either the night-time scene or the falling rain suggested by the poem. Chromaticism is introduced in bar 11 and the E major tonality is destabilised as the rider describes the dark, stormy night. Smyth initially seems to redirect the tonal centre towards the relative minor, but in using A#, B# and E# accidentals in bars 11–14 she suggests a C# major tonality. As the couplet ends in bar 15, the harmony moves from I–i (ex. 2.6), which confirms and then immediately undermines this major shift. While this creates ambiguity, it matches the rider’s boastful declaration that his horse is ‘the finest’ (‘mein ist das beste Pferd’) and makes the transition to C# minor in bar 16 all the more arresting.

Example 2.6. ‘Nachtreiter’, bars 11–15

Bar 16 marks the start of the B section, which features the central third couplet from Groth’s poem and a transitory five-bar piano passage. The thundering triplet accompaniment reinforces C# minor as the new key and suggests galloping as the rider

tells the horse to stretch its hooves and fly like the wind. Smyth conveys this sense of flight in the second half of the line by using an arpeggiated gesture in the piano which moves in contrary motion (bb. 19–20). The quavers that have dominated the vocal line until this point are exchanged for crotchets; consequently, the vocal line seems to slow down as the accompaniment drives forward. This aligns with the rhythm of riding, as the faster the animal moves, the smoother it feels for the rider. In the second line of the couplet, the rider asks the horse to carry him through the storm to his beloved. While the first half of this line (bb. 21–22) bears a resemblance to the start of the previous one (bb. 17–18) the second half — with reference to the beloved — changes completely. A harp-like gesture, with its angelic connotations, is marked *dolce* and this accompanies the image of the rider’s love (ex. 2.7). Smyth’s repetition of ‘bis zum liebsten’ (‘to my beloved’) underlines the importance of his quest, which is further stressed by the melismatic writing.

The musical score for 'Nachtreiter', bars 23–27, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'bis zum lieb - - - sten, bis zum' and is marked *dolce*. The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, marked *cresc.* (crescendo) and *descresc.* (decrescendo). The second system continues the vocal line with 'lieb - - - sten Kind.' and features a piano accompaniment marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *grazioso*. The piano part includes a harp-like texture and a *rit.* (ritardando) marking.

Example 2.7. ‘Nachtreiter’, bars 23–27

The five-bar piano passage (bb. 27–31) that follows the third couplet serves to redirect the tonality back to E major and convey a sense of time passing as the rider undertakes his journey. By bar 32, the home key has been reinstated; the four-bar introduction is a direct repeat of the Lied’s opening bars, and the melody of the fourth couplet mirrors that of the first. The momentum of the first A section is thus matched in its modified restatement and the rider, having arrived at his destination, climbs in through the window. However, unlike the ballads by Eichendorff and Mörike, Groth’s poem does

not allow the reader to observe their reunion or the repercussions of the rider's unconventional entrance. Instead, the closing couplet focuses on the protagonist's freedom and the sight of birds plucking fruit from their cherry tree. In the context of the poem, the birds could be seen to represent freedom and the tree the natural world to which the rider aligns himself by riding bareback. Smyth modifies the ending of the section, raising the pitch of the accompaniment from the second half of bar 43 — perhaps to suggest the birds high up in the tree — yet retaining the rhythm. The couplet's last line is melodically and rhythmically similar to its first iteration (bb. 13–15) but omits the chromaticism, remaining in the key of E major until the I–IV–I close (bb. 46–48), which suits the buoyant mood of the text.

2.6d. Op. 4, No. 5, 'Nachtgedanken'

'Nachtgedanken' deviates somewhat from the three plot-driven Lieder examined so far, but the text contains elements that recall the dramatic ballad, including refrains and direct address. The poem's protagonist, trapped in a cycle of dark thoughts, sleeplessness, and nightmares, repeatedly cries out to his mother. The refrain, 'O Mutter / kommen und wecken mich, kommen und gehen' ('O Mother / [they] come and wake me, come and go') appears in each stanza, reinforcing the repetitiveness of his thoughts. Like 'Schön Rohtraut', 'Der verirrte Jäger', and 'Nachtreiter', 'Nachtgedanken' evokes a specific setting, conveys the passage of time, and contains multiple personae. If the poem is considered from a dramatic perspective, the protagonist's unanswered calls suggest that his mother is an offstage character whose centrality to the overall narrative is embedded within the aforementioned refrain: she is made present by her absence. In 'Nachtgedanken', Smyth employs techniques similar to those in 'Der verirrte Jäger' and 'Nachtreiter' but uses them to depict the internal world of the protagonist rather than the external landscape. Her setting of the song suggests that she sought to aurally illustrate the poem's emotional content to a greater extent than in the other introspective songs contained within the two collections.

Like 'Nachtreiter', Smyth composed 'Nachtgedanken' in a modified ternary form with a short piano interlude between sections B and A¹. The original poem comprises an opening two-line stanza followed by four of eight lines, but Smyth modifies the structure and makes it more conducive to an ABA setting. Her altered version retains the five-stanza form but is made up of four four-line stanzas that enclose a central two-line stanza. As with 'Der verirrte Jäger' and 'Nachtreiter', the Lied begins with a four-bar introduction.

The arpeggiated figure (ex. 2.8) in the left hand continues unbroken throughout the first stanza, reflecting the swirling thoughts at the heart of the poem. The right hand is equally repetitive but its off-beat placement causes it to stand out, and the jarring quality of the figure seems to evoke the protagonist repeatedly being woken by his thoughts. C# minor is articulated as the home key within this stanza and is reinforced by the 3-5-1 ending to the vocal line in bars 23–24.



Example 2.8. ‘Nachtgedanken’, piano part, bars 1–4

Smyth heightens the sense of unease in the second stanza, which begins on the upbeat to bar 27. Here, triplet semi-quavers create momentum as the protagonist describes his dreams passing by; Heyse’s use of the verb ‘jagen’ (to hunt) in his translation conveys the manner in which the restless sleeper is pursued by his subconscious. Smyth uses more chromaticism and shorter note values in both the piano and the vocal part of the first half of this stanza, which increases the restlessness of the song. From the end of bar 31, the vocal line is elongated, stressing the second two lines of the stanza in which he likens his bed to a ‘cradle of struggle’, a ‘peaceless site of war’. Smyth’s decision to accompany these lines with a densely chromatic piano part and a crescendo underlines the emotional intensity of the text.

In section B (bb. 45–60) the piano accompaniment shifts markedly and the right-hand semiquavers drop out, leaving a sparser, chordal texture in its place. While the song is still firmly situated in C# minor, the mediant dominates the first half of this central stanza. The recitative-like vocal line revolves around E₄, with a brief leap to C#₅ for the ‘O Mutter’ refrain (ex. 2.9), which is marked *sforzando*. The second half of the stanza is similarly static and is centred around the dominant, closing on G#₄ in bar 56. Smyth’s setting of the middle stanza, with its textural reduction and narrow vocal range, contrasts with the restless motion of the preceding section. The protagonist expresses that he is frightened by shadows and despite repeated pleas, he is still alone with his fear. This emotional diminution is mirrored in Smyth’s setting of the text and the pared-back accompaniment.

Example 2.9. ‘Nachtgedanken’, bars. 45–49

A five-bar piano interlude connects section B to the modified A¹, which begins in bar 61 with the same introduction heard at the song’s beginning. Aside from a few minor pitch differences in the vocal line, bars 65–77 directly repeat 5–17. In the fourth stanza, the restless sleeper weeps over his striving for false happiness; while at times his torments die away, at times they live. The return to the Lied’s opening material further reinforces the endless cycle that the protagonist experiences and the similarity of the poetic context means that Smyth’s setting is equally well-suited in this second iteration. While the vocal line is modified in the second half of the stanza (b. 78–84), the piano accompaniment mirrors the opening stanza and thus retains the sense of symmetry.

After the prevailing darkness of the first four stanzas, the fifth offers a glimmer of hope. The protagonist briefly reflects on a happier dream, to which Smyth alludes by raising the E⁴ to E[#] in the vocal line (b. 86) and introducing A[#] and B[#] in the piano to further suggest the tonic parallel key of C[#] major. However, like his happiness, this major inflection is fleeting and the reawakening of his sorrow is expressed by a return to the tonic. The accompaniment to the final line — ‘kommen und wecken mich, kommen und gehen’ (bb. 96–102) — is similar rhythmically to the song’s opening, which adds to the unity and the cyclic nature of the narrative. There is no indication in the poem that the protagonist’s suffering will end but the chromaticism and major inflections in the final 10 bars create uncertainty. As in ‘Der verirrte Jäger’, Smyth ends the piece with a *tierce de Picardie*, a gesture that seems at odds with the poetic content but might be considered a more hopeful close. Perhaps upon waking the protagonist will be freed from his turmoil and begin the day anew.

Like the other three songs addressed in this section, ‘Nachtgedanken’ provides an insight into how Smyth approached text setting and the degree to which this was influenced by the poetic content. The Lieder discussed here are unified by their sense of narrative, which Smyth sought to illustrate musically, aligning her with others who also sought to achieve greater equality in the relationship between words and music. Concerning the poems and dramatic ballads of the nineteenth century, Jane K. Brown remarks that there was the potential for ‘every poem [to become] an implicit drama staged within the mind’, which resonates with many of the poems Smyth set in opp. 3 and 4.¹³⁸ Brown continues:

It is hard to think of poems written between about 1770 and 1870 that do not open up an interior stage and thus transform song into a domesticated opera that can be performed in the privacy of the home, or in the sanctuary of the self.¹³⁹

That Smyth gravitated towards the stage, whether interior or exterior, is demonstrated in her output from her Lieder onwards. From song she progressed to chamber works, which paved the way for orchestral pieces, such as her Serenade in D and *Overture to Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra* (both 1889). These can be seen to foreground the two large-scale works scored for choir, soli, and orchestra — *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 and her Mass in D — that predate her operas. These six works provided a platform on which Smyth could fully realise her abilities as a storyteller and dramatist, moving beyond the expectations of the opera-shunning social circle to which she had belonged in Leipzig. Towards the end of her life, Smyth composed *The Prison* (1929–30) and returned to the cantata, a genre that she first explored in her Op. 8 in 1888, thus bringing her back to those formative years in Germany. Considered within this compositional trajectory, the Lieder hold even greater significance within her oeuvre and deserve to be recognised as such.

2.7. Conclusion

Smyth’s Leipzig of the 1870s — ‘where the very air we breathe is music and every friend a critic’ — was a city of inspiration and intellectual cultivation. The years that she spent there allowed her to experience music in a way that she never had before; composers were not simply names on scores, but living people who told poor jokes, flew into rages, or doubted their own abilities.¹⁴⁰ Irrespective of where Smyth went in her career, her musical

¹³⁸ Jane K. Brown, ‘In the beginning was poetry’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, pp. 12–32 (p. 21).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Smyth details her aversion to Brahms’s jokes, Clara Schumann’s fiery temper, and Grieg’s self-deprecation in *Impressions that Remained*. See vol. I, chapter XXIV and vol. II, chapters XXX and XXXVIII respectively.

foundation was a German one, influenced by the education she received and the social circles to which she belonged. The music that she composed during her Leipzig years reflects her use of music as a networking tool and demonstrates the extent to which she was composing for the people around her. Crucially, these works also allowed her to explore different genres, develop her skills, and receive feedback from performers that would have helped her to shape future compositions. Each of these aspects allowed Smyth to grow as a composer and had an impact on the works that followed, making it even more important to explore this period of her life in greater depth.

As this chapter highlights, Smyth's identity was affected by her time in Germany and critics quickly picked up on her continental influences. The unconventionality of her career choice marked her as different and her decision to study in Leipzig emphasised this further and had an impact on how her music was received. Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 are arguably the earliest examples of this cultural overlap, composed at a time when she was drawn to the allure of Germany and seeking to fit in in her new environment. Reflecting in 1936, Smyth articulated the difference she perceived between Germany and England and recalls feeling estranged from her own country:

Quite apart from personal difficulties, and for subtler reasons than sex, I felt like a stranger; [...] I, who had won cognisance of the part played by music in the lives of average Germans, from mediatised Princes to hotel porters; who had learned the meaning of passionate unqualified devotion to the ideal of which music is the soul and vestment. [...] Of this spirit I perceived scant traces in England.¹⁴¹

For Smyth, the cultural and artistic differences between the two countries were pronounced and England continually fell short of the German ideal. Her connection to Germany was weakened only by the outbreak of World War I, yet her association with the country endured and remains a central part of her narrative. By exploring Smyth's time in Leipzig, this chapter gives a greater sense of the world she inhabited and considers the long-term impact it had on her identity as a composer.

In situating Smyth's *Lieder* within their compositional context, this chapter uses the songs as a lens through which to explore her social circles, highlighting how she used her *Lieder* as a networking tool. Smyth engaged with a variety of notable figures while she lived in Germany and was undoubtedly influenced by the musical spheres in which she turned. The letters she wrote to her mother during her first few years in Leipzig suggest that, in part, she won the affection and admiration of her social circle through the intimacy

¹⁴¹ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), p. 297.

of the Lied. Moreover, her engagement with this genre reflects her desire to compose on an equal platform to men and aligns her with contemporaneous women who also contributed to Lied repertoire in the late nineteenth century. As the chapter indicates, Smyth's textual choices were often conventional — such as her setting of Eichendorff — but she also explored less well-known poets, highlighting her desire to echo the music of her predecessors while also making the songs her own.

Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 foreground *The Song of Love* and *Mass in D* addressed in Chapters 3 and 4, which were composed in the years following her core Leipzig period. As shall be shown throughout this thesis, her interest in using music to communicate a message, whether personal or societal, is a thread that is woven throughout her oeuvre, from these early Lied to her final large-scale work, *The Prison*. By refocusing attention on the formative part of Smyth's career, this chapter examines how the music she composed while in Leipzig can be seen to connect to what she created in subsequent years, thus giving a broader sense of her compositional trajectory.

Chapter 3: The Song-Child of Love

‘I shall seek myself in the Song of Solomon. Or perhaps our child is born already?’¹

3.1. Introduction

The Song of Love, Op. 8 was Ethel Smyth’s first attempt at a large-scale choral work, scored for soli, chorus, and orchestra. The eight-movement cantata was composed during 1888 and predates the piece that has been regarded as her first foray into large-scale composition: the Mass in D (1891).² This misconception likely arises from Smyth’s description of the Mass as her ‘first big choral work’ in addition to the cantata’s obscurity within Smyth’s output.³ This has been exacerbated by the work never having been published and only receiving its world premiere performance in May 2023.⁴ As a result of its inaccessibility, existing literature on *The Song of Love* is scarce and the work is typically given only a fleeting mention.⁵ However, considered within the context of Smyth’s oeuvre, the cantata represents a link in the chain of her development as a composer, connecting her songs, chamber, and orchestral works to the Mass and subsequent operas. It also offers an insight into Smyth’s use of music to convey a narrative and as a means of expression. As such, *The Song of Love* is long overdue consideration within the context of Smyth’s life and works.

The late 1880s and early 1890s were a period of experimentation for Smyth as she refined and extended her skills. Around the same time that Smyth was working on *The Song of Love*, she was also composing her Serenade in D, a four-movement orchestral piece that

¹ Harry Brewster (HB) to Ethel Smyth (ES), 5 October 1887, pp. 3–4. Unless otherwise stated, the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Harry Brewster referenced throughout this chapter is held at the San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive in Florence.

² See, for example, Judith Lebiez, ‘The Representation of Female Power in Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* (1902)’, *The German Quarterly*, 91/4 (2018), 415–424 (p. 416); Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000), p. 44.

³ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), p. 167.

⁴ The premiere took place at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford on 8 May 2023 and was organised by the Alternative Canon Project. The performance was conducted by Alice Knight and featured soloists Steph Garrett (soprano) and Archie Inns (tenor). A non-commercial recording of the work was released via YouTube on 21 July 2023: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FttLjihLcgM>> [accessed 20 August 2023].

⁵ For existing literature featuring *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, see Kathleen Dale, ‘Appendix B: Ethel Smyth’s Music: A Critical Study’ in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 288–304 and ‘Ethel Smyth’s Prentice Work’, *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–336; Elizabeth Wood, ‘The Lesbian in the Opera: Desire Unmasked in Smyth’s *Fantasio* and *Fête Galante*’ in *En travesti: women, gender subversion, opera*, ed. by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 285–305; Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass’. Although she does not address the work, Kathleen A. Abromeit includes *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 in the list of works at the end of her article, ‘Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers*, and Sir Thomas Beecham’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 73/2 (1989), 196–211 (pp. 209–211).

she wrote following a conversation with August Manns.⁶ Manns was the director of the popular Crystal Palace concert series and an invitation to have an orchestral work performed was an opportunity that Smyth could not afford to miss. Undeterred by her limited experience with orchestral composition, Smyth began work in earnest and made her English debut with the *Serenade* in April 1890.⁷ Six months later, Manns premiered her *Overture to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra*, further increasing her public profile in her home country. Both orchestral works received a predominantly warm reception, with the *South London Press* declaring, '[The overture] is one of considerable merit, and, in conjunction with the serenade for orchestra [...] stamps her as a composer of great ability, whose works are sure to meet with a hearty welcome'.⁸

However, securing a performance of *The Song of Love* was more challenging. Smyth makes two references to *The Song of Love* in her memoirs, both of which are used to illustrate the difficulties she had in gaining support in England. Her success at the Crystal Palace concerts did not provide Smyth with immediate entry to England's concert halls and she struggled to interest conductors in *The Song of Love* and, later, the *Mass in D*. In *As Time Went On* (1936), she reflects on the 'innocent optimism' of her letters from this time, which record the assurances offered to her by figures such as Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) and Hubert Parry (1848–1918).⁹ The excerpts offered by Smyth indicate that she was under the impression that her cantata would be performed at choral festivals in Leeds and Worcester in 1890, but these opportunities did not materialise. She notes, 'what staggered me most was the contrast between English music life as it was in the final decade of the last century and the real thing as I had known it in Germany'.¹⁰ Smyth had highlighted this perceived dichotomy before and had remarked on the lack of support she felt from her English contemporaries. In *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.* (1928) she stated:

Though it was obviously a mistake of mine to think that England is Germany, where good work can always get a hearing, still the all-powerful Hubert Parry was among my friends; so too was [Arthur] Sullivan. Yet it never seems to have occurred to either of them that to help a young English talent, even though an outsider, *might* be the duty of those who handle ropes!¹¹

⁶ *ITR*, II, p. 204. Tchaikovsky also influenced Smyth's interest in orchestration, which is discussed in greater length in Chapter 2, section 2.2.

⁷ Two unfinished orchestral sketches survive from her Leipzig years: the *Symphonie für kleines Orchester* in D and *Trage-komische Oïnverture* in F. See Chapter 2, footnote 27.

⁸ 'Dramatic and Musical', *South London Press*, 25 October 1890, p. 10.

⁹ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹ *BOB*, p. 18.

Despite being an English composer, her German education had lent Smyth the air of an outsider, and while she was eager to make her mark in her home country she struggled to find conductors who would perform her works. Before approaching Stanford and Parry, Smyth had written to the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1888 to ask whether she might show *The Song of Love* to the committee. This letter highlights Smyth's inexperience, particularly at its close where she notes that her chamber music 'has been played twice in the Serial Chamber Concerts of the Gewandhaus at Leipzig—and also at Stuttgart. I tell you this as I have no connections & musical friends in England to speak for me'.¹² Smyth's naivety and lack of contacts likely contributed to the disinterest shown by the Royal Philharmonic Society, who did not programme Smyth's music until its 1909 performance of her overture to *The Wreckers*.¹³ She met with a similar reception when she attempted to interest musical directors involved in the Three Choirs Festival, which typically adhered to somewhat regimental — and male-dominated — programming.¹⁴ Smyth found these events exceptionally difficult to penetrate, suggesting, 'it would be easier for me to scale the walls of Holloway Prison than to get a footing in those nurseries of Choral Art, our provincial Festivals'.¹⁵

Further reflecting on her attempts to secure a first performance of *The Song of Love* and a second outing for her Mass, she noted:

It took me a couple of years or more fully to grasp the situation, to realise the utter hopelessness of getting either a second performance of the Mass or a first performance of anything whatsoever. [...] Only the other day I unearthed in my loft a cantata I had forgotten the existence of (but my sisters remember it) called 'The Song of Love,' for Soli and Chorus, and on it is scrawled in pencil 'No go! Stanford can't or won't see! Never again will I trouble one of that crew.' I remember his making some wise remarks on orchestration and he wasn't exactly snubby; only devoid of all interest, and wholly indisposed to give me a run through. The date of that opus is 1895 [*sic*], and not a soul knows one note of it; but [...] if I live it shall be known ere long, if only to illustrate my main argument.¹⁶

Stanford's rejection of the cantata and his 'wise remarks on orchestration' seem reflective of Christopher St John's suggestion that Smyth 'was born at least twenty years too soon

¹² Quoted in Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas in England and Germany' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000), p. 70.

¹³ Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass', p. 70.

¹⁴ For further reading on the Three Choirs Festival, see Anthony Boden and Paul Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival: A History*, New and Revised Edition (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2017); Donald Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival* (Wokingham: Osborne Heritage, 1999).

¹⁵ *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

for the merits of her music to be immediately recognized by her contemporaries'.¹⁷ St John's comment, which was made in relation to Smyth's Mass, is equally applicable to *The Song of Love*. The Mass is conventional in comparison to the cantata, which features varied keys, dense chromaticism, and an unusual choice of text. By overlooking *The Song of Love* within Smyth's oeuvre, we miss the opportunity to explore a significant work from an important and experimental period in her career.

As is the case with many of her earlier compositions, Smyth provides little information in her memoirs about the inspiration behind *The Song of Love* or when she started working on it. Consequently, it is necessary to piece together evidence from the broader biographical context detailed in her publications and draw on unpublished sources, such as her correspondence with Harry Brewster. To deepen scholarly understanding of *The Song of Love* and the period from which it emerged, this chapter provides an overview of Smyth's relationships with Elisabeth and Heinrich von Herzogenberg, and Harry and Julia Brewster. The breakdown of these relationships during 1884–85 was a source of pain for Smyth and she returned to the topic several times in her memoirs to explain the situation and its emotional impact to her readers.

The Song of Love was the first work Smyth completed after the break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs and the central section in this chapter examines how Smyth may have used the work to express her feelings for Harry. It also compares the public-facing account of their relationship during this period, outlined by Smyth in her memoirs, with the more complex reality suggested by their unpublished correspondence. Issues surrounding the societal and familial expectations of Smyth as a woman, as well as the question of morality, were integral to Smyth's relationship with Harry Brewster, influencing both her behaviour at the time and how she later chose to portray the situation in her publications.

The final section delves into the previously unexplored area of Smyth's textual choices for *The Song of Love*. As a setting of extracts from the Song of Songs, the cantata draws on the Old Testament and reflects Smyth's engagement with the Bible. However, her treatment of the text suggests that she was more interested in using the poem to create her own narrative than in offering a faithful portrayal of the source text. A biographical reading of the cantata demonstrates how it can be interpreted as a tribute to her relationship with Harry Brewster and a way of expressing in music what she was unable to articulate publicly. This interpretation of *The Song of Love* draws on the Smyth-Brewster

¹⁷ Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), p. 87.

correspondence and situates the work within its broader context to examine the work's biographical — or autobiographical — undertones.

3.2. The Herzogenbergs and The Brewsters

During the 1880s, the Herzogenbergs and Brewsters were central figures in Smyth's life. She had assumed the role of a surrogate daughter to the Herzogenbergs since 1878 and spent time with Julia and Harry Brewster in Florence after meeting them in 1883. Consequently, the turbulence of 1884–85 was exacerbated by her ties to the two households and the familial bond between Elisabeth and her sister Julia. After Smyth and Harry acknowledged their feelings for one another and told Julia, there were fraught discussions concerning how the trio should proceed. The correspondence between Smyth and Harry provides insight into their conversations and differing perspectives, which are explored throughout this section.

Allegiances were tested during the course of these negotiations, and, most significantly for Smyth, Elisabeth ('Lisl') had to choose whether to side with her sister or her friend. The bond that had flourished between Smyth and Lisl was arguably one of the strongest relationships that Smyth formed during her adult life, evidenced in both the narrative of her memoirs and the letters she includes within these volumes.¹⁸ When it became clear that she stood to lose Lisl's friendship over her relationship with Harry, Smyth attempted to cut ties with him, and in *Impressions* she indicates that all communication ceased. In reality, the situation was less clear-cut; with the exception of 1886, they exchanged letters each year to try and re-establish whether it was permissible for them to correspond.¹⁹ Smyth's concern for Julia's welfare, in addition to her hope of reconciliation with Lisl, were the two primary barriers to her resuming contact with Harry.

Smyth's autobiographies have been fundamental to the interpretation of her relationships with the Herzogenbergs and Brewsters. The frequency with which she refers to this period in her life stresses the long-term impact of the breakdown of relations and reinforces her portrayal of events. Smyth addresses the situation in *Impressions that Remained*, *As Time Went On*, and *What Happened Next*. Her description of autobiography as 'an unfolding' is especially apt regarding this facet of her life, as while the most comprehensive account of the period is found in *Impressions*, the other volumes provide supplementary

¹⁸ Smyth includes letters from Lisl in both volumes of *Impressions That Remained*. The location of the original letters from Lisl is currently unknown.

¹⁹ A more detailed overview of this period in Smyth's life is given in Chapter 1, section 1.3b.

details each time she unfolds the narrative.²⁰ Typically, her relationship with Lisl is foregrounded in her reflections; Harry is often a secondary theme, which can give the impression that their relationship was less significant. However, the context within which Smyth was writing may have influenced her narrative. Presented as a mother-figure and friend, Lisl was a more socially acceptable attachment than Harry, a married man with whom she was contemplating an affair. Nevertheless, Smyth's record of events has influenced the research to date and has resulted in a potentially imbalanced portrayal of her relationships with Lisl, Harry, and, more noticeably, Julia.²¹ This chapter aims to redress the balance and present a fuller picture of Smyth's connection to these figures.

If Smyth underplays the intensity of her relationship with Harry Brewster in her memoirs, their correspondence tells a different story. Approximately two thousand letters are held in a private archive in Florence, Italy, which is owned by the Brewsters' great-grandson.²² Although the archive is very receptive to those wishing to use the collection for research purposes, the letters have not been fully digitised and there is no easily accessible catalogue or finding aid. As Amanda Harris observes in her article on the Smyth-Brewster correspondence, the limited access to these materials has resulted in neglect,²³ meaning that this important primary source has not been fully utilised.²⁴ This chapter draws on the collection housed at the archive to further explore Smyth's situation with the Brewsters and consider how she may have used *The Song of Love* as a means of expression.

3.2a. *Unearthing The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: 1884–85*

After realising that they loved one another, Smyth and Harry faced the difficult decision of how to move forwards. In *Impressions*, Smyth recounts how she, Harry and Julia discussed whether she and Harry could remain friends, and this contentious topic was one of

²⁰ *ATWO*, p. 10.

²¹ Amanda Harris offers a concise overview of how Smyth's relationship with Harry Brewster has been portrayed in existing literature. See 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94 (pp. 73–79).

²² This is the San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive in Florence, which includes letters between Ethel Smyth, Harry Brewster, and Julia Brewster.

²³ Harris, 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence', p. 72.

²⁴ Besides Harris's article, the most extensive use of the correspondence is found in *The Cosmopolites: A Nineteenth-Century Family Drama* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), written by the Brewsters' grandson, who is also called Harry Brewster. Rachael J. Gibbon, 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005). Amy Zigler, "'You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell': Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth's Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877)", in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275 and "'Perhaps what men call a sin": An examination of Ethel Smyth's *The Prison*' in *Women Composers in New Perspectives, 1800-1950: Genres, Contexts and Repertoire*, ed. by Mariateresa Storino and Susan Wollenberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 213–34.

frequent debate in 1884–85. Smyth described it as her ‘obvious duty’ to permanently sever contact with Harry, but it seems that this course of action was discussed at length.²⁵ She writes:

The point under discussion was whether my policy of cutting the cable was appropriate to this particular case, whether it would not be to the advantage of all three of us (which was H. B.’s contention) that he and I should continue friends—not necessarily meeting, but at least corresponding.²⁶

This account correlates with their unpublished correspondence. Harry’s letters from this period are often persuasive and convey a sense of certainty that a solution can be found without causing anyone pain. He writes both philosophically and assertively to try and demonstrate how he, Julia, and Smyth can coexist in harmony, suggesting in June 1884, ‘I will do neither you nor her nor myself any harm and I will work out and achieve all my desire’.²⁷ In his book about the family, the Brewsters’ grandson — also called Harry Brewster (1909–1999) — described this idealised arrangement as *ménage à trois*, which neither Julia nor Smyth was willing to accept.²⁸ Nevertheless, Harry pursued this line of argument for the greater part of 1884–85, evidently hoping that both women would eventually capitulate.

While *Impressions* and *As Time Went On* offer the greatest insight into this period, Smyth states that she feels unable to reveal the intricacies of the situation.²⁹ Her affection for Julia is one facet that she does not cover in depth, yet her letters show the extent to which it influenced her behaviour towards Harry during the second half of the 1880s. She writes to him in July 1884 to convey her sentiments:

My love for Julia is one of the deepest richest experiences of my life – it comes next after my love for you & is so mixed up in that last that I can’t separate the two – & as yet I know that passion would never lead me astray – I can repeat to you your words to me from the bottom of my heart “I don’t want to love you unless I love you nobly” – & to forget Julia would be a bad beginning. But now you see, there is no chance of that, don’t you? Since my last I told you that my determination to be silent not only for a year – but for always – (until she tells me I may speak –) is born solely of my love to her.³⁰

²⁵ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), II, p. 126.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁷ HB to ES, n.d. June 1884 (4), p. 5.

²⁸ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 119.

²⁹ *ATWO*, p. 10. Also see *ITR*, II, where Smyth remarks ‘it is not my story alone’ (p. 127).

³⁰ ES to HB, 16 July 1884, pp. 2–3.

In their correspondence from 1884–85, Smyth’s actions seem to be governed by her respect for Julia and a desire to protect her from harm. It was Julia with whom Smyth first became friends and in her letters to Harry there is a pervading sense of loyalty towards his wife; she did not see how they could continue to be friends — or indeed lovers — without hurting Julia. The letters also highlight her discomfort at the thought of continuing to communicate without Julia’s blessing. Furthermore, it is apparent that Smyth feared damaging Julia’s health, as she expresses in a letter in August 1884:

Her physical strength cannot hold out thro[ugh] all her big noble soul asks of it – Lisl thinks her health is giving way – I feared so sometimes in B[erchtesgaden] from the look of her face & you know she would rather die than give in – Alas I wish you could un-love me if this is to be the price of your love – I wish I had never known what love is – I cannot care for love or life if it kills her[.]³¹

Smyth’s affection for Julia, which is less evident in her published memoirs, is also overlooked by Harry Brewster in *The Cosmopolites*. His assessment of their relationship suggests a lack of understanding on Smyth’s part and he argues that ‘[s]he saw Julia as the unbending dialectician as well as the possessive wife who would keep her husband imprisoned in an ivory tower of metaphysical disquisition’.³² In describing Julia as ‘an unreasonable, not to mention inconvenient, opponent’ to Smyth, Brewster overlooks the genuine affection she felt for Julia.³³ He concedes that Smyth’s moral compass kept her behaviour ‘beyond reproach’ until Julia’s death in 1895, but seems eager to negate their relationship based on his perception of their differences and Smyth’s supposed lack of understanding.³⁴

The Smyth-Brewster correspondence from this period adds nuance to this perspective, giving the impression of two people torn between love and duty. In addition to her concerns regarding Julia, Smyth also had qualms about how society would regard her if the Brewsters’ marriage were to break down. As a woman from an upper-middle-class family, Smyth was uncomfortable with the idea of destroying a marriage or becoming someone’s mistress. Harry wrote to try and reassure her, suggesting:

What others think of you will depend on the footing I can establish between Julia and myself. If I were to break her heart and abandon my children etc. you would

³¹ ES to HB, 9 August 1884, p. 5.

³² Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 263.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265. In Smyth’s publications there are instances where she describes Julia as surprising or difficult to understand, yet the correspondence between her and Harry suggests that she had a clearer understanding of Julia’s thoughts or feelings during the latter half of the 1880s. Given Harry Brewster’s use of the letters in *The Cosmopolites*, his stance on their relationship seems reductive.

meet with a hard judgement, one which no man in his senses has a right to bring on the woman he loves. If I can make her understand what I believe to be the truth and if we are “graceful” in our behaviour all that will be said of you will be: a strange girl in a strange history.³⁵

Harry’s closing comment seems to imply that if he succeeded in persuading Julia to see things from his perspective, then Smyth would not be blamed for the Brewsters’ marital issues. As a ‘strange girl in a strange history’, Smyth would become a curious addendum to their story; a minor character rather than the villain whom society shuns.

Still more important to Smyth was the opinion of Lisl, who by 1885 was increasingly pulled by familial ties. The letters quoted in *Impressions* evoke Lisl’s distress; she calls Smyth ‘child of my sorrow’ and suggests ‘if I loved you less how little I should suffer’.³⁶ However, in August 1885, a letter arrived from Lisl indicating that her loyalties had shifted and now lay firmly with her sister. Consequently, their communication ceased after September 1885, and Smyth would spend the next seven years hoping for a reconciliation that would never come.³⁷ She believed that Lisl’s family and close friends Irene and Adolf Hildebrand, and Mary and Conrad Fiedler, brought about her change of heart.³⁸ In *The Cosmopolites*, Harry Brewster suggests that Smyth was ‘incensed by the fact that she had not been presented with an ultimatum: either Lisl or Harry’.³⁹ Moreover, the perceived interference of the Hildebrands prompted Harry to demand that Julia cut ties with them and the Fiedlers and move to France to live with him, where he had been staying since August 1884. In return, he promised to keep his relations with Smyth platonic.⁴⁰

In late November 1885, the Brewsters’ marriage collapsed under the strain. The couple signed a ‘treaty’ to give them both greater freedom and Julia took primary custody of their children, Clotilde and Christopher.⁴¹ When writing to Smyth earlier in the month, Harry remarked that they would soon be able to ‘meet openly’ and his letter conveys a sense of liberation,⁴² yet she was still uncomfortable with the situation with Lisl and Julia. On 5 December Smyth expressed herself categorically:

³⁵ HB to ES, 27 November 1884, p. 10.

³⁶ *ITR*, II, p. 129.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–33.

³⁸ In *The Cosmopolites* Harry Brewster implies that Irene Hildebrand may have had less involvement than Smyth suggests. See p. 127.

³⁹ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 128.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128. An English translation of the ‘Traité de Florence, 22 Novembre 1885’ can be found on p. 129.

⁴² HB to ES, 2 November 1885, p. 3.

No – it cannot be – can never be. I have been too mistaken – have sinned too deeply.

By all you feel for me I entreat you not to answer this – never to write to me again – nor try to see me... Try to understand each other – to get nearer each other than you are now – you cannot do that merely by offering sacrifices.

And do this for me – the one thing I may ask and do ask you to do – cut your life for ever from mine.⁴³

Given her involvement in the breakdown of their marriage, it appears that Smyth's guilt was too great to enable her to continue corresponding with Harry. The hope of reconciliation with Lisl undoubtedly influenced her response; ultimately, it was the death of Lisl in 1892 — rather than of Julia in 1895 — that gave Smyth the freedom to resume her correspondence with Harry and begin meeting him again.⁴⁴ In *Impressions*, she describes herself as a 'thief of my friend's goods', and the reference to sin in the letter above further reinforces the sense that Smyth was guilt-stricken at the outcome of her relationship with Harry. Chapter Four elucidates how this remorse fed into her religious resurgence in 1889 and influenced her decision to write the Mass in D.⁴⁵

3.3. Creating Songs from Sorrows: 1887–88

After a hiatus of twenty months, Smyth and Harry Brewster began writing to each other once more.⁴⁶ In their letters from August and September 1887, it is apparent that their feelings were largely unchanged, yet so too were matters between Julia and Harry. Brewster tried to reopen negotiations and persuade Smyth that they could meet and correspond, but she seemed adamant that continued silence was the only option. Brewster's initial letter suggests that he wanted to act freely, regardless of the consequences. He writes, 'I am ready if you are. I have not got rid of my longing for you and cannot love myself with the taste of hypocrisy in my mouth'.⁴⁷ He wanted to meet with Smyth before travelling to America, implying that he would have things to say to help her see things from his perspective:

⁴³ ES to EB, 5 December 1885, quoted in Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 130.

⁴⁴ *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 3. By this stage, it appears that Smyth was angry with Julia for concealing Lisl's illness and not offering the opportunity for Smyth to say goodbye before she died. See *ATWO*, p. 44.

⁴⁵ See sections 4.4 and 4.5.

⁴⁶ Much like Smyth's memoirs, Harry Brewster's *The Cosmopolites* suggests that there was a five-year gap (December 1885 to December 1890) 'during which time they neither saw nor wrote to each other' (p. 219). The Smyth-Brewster correspondence at the San Francisco di Paola / Brewster Archive indicates that they did correspond from 1887 onwards, albeit less consistently than in 1884–85.

⁴⁷ HB to ES, 23 August 1887, p. 1.

I shall also have things to say to you which will temper practically the apparent ruthlessness of our decision but theoretically let us put it as high treason and accept it as such. Do you recollect our old discussion at Florence: “Can one do wrong knowingly?” You said yes and I said no. You were right. I accept and devise to do wrong.⁴⁸

Following his separation from his wife, Brewster seemed reluctant to allow his marital ties to be a barrier. However, Smyth’s stance remained constant, and her response a week later demonstrates the strength of her conviction. She writes:

Yes, I am the same – and for that very reason also unchanged in my views of what is right – & what wrong – & as certain as I was in Florence that being able to distinguish, I must choose; & that choosing, there is only one possible choice for me – As long as any human tie binds you to Julia – to Julia, who has turned out so human – there can be no bind but a silent one between you and me. There is nothing in me that would sanctify treason – & as long as your tie to Julia exists, any intercourse with you is treason. If I gave into you I should be wronging you & myself.⁴⁹

Smyth refers to Brewster’s children in this letter and encourages him to fight for custody, rather than comply with the restrictions outlined in the treaty. The children were a concern for Smyth and added another layer of complexity to the situation that weighed on her sense of morality. She continued:

Do you not see how “putting an action theoretically as high treason & accepting it as such” would mean the loss of my sanctity? I have hardly ever wavered, for more than an hour or two together, in this view – Julia’s harshness towards me, her cruelty (which just now when [Heinrich von] Herzogenberg is so terribly ill seems to be almost incredibly cold-blooded) in separating me & Lisl, has sometimes made me look less seriously on what I nevertheless feel to be treachery; & the thought of such a feeling playing a part in one’s actions & claiming to modify this guilt is particularly hideous to me.⁵⁰

The following month, she suggested that if she behaved improperly, it would ‘break my father’s heart’ and cause her to ‘become a lasting thorn’ in her sisters’ sides.⁵¹ The handful of letters Smyth and Brewster exchanged in October 1887 are full of emotive language: treason, treachery, pain, and sorrow abound in their writing. Brewster’s letter on

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 4–5.

⁴⁹ ES to HB, 30 August 1887, p. 1. In this letter, Smyth also points out that she predicted Julia’s responses in 1884 better than Harry, which suggests an understanding of Julia that is at odds with Harry Brewster’s assessment of their relationship in *The Cosmopolites*. His assertion that Smyth ‘was unable to perceive in her [Julia] and comprehend the passionate wife, the desperate lover behind the wall of reserve, the thinker, mediator, worshipper, sinner and poet which made up her complex personality’ arguably lacks nuance (p. 265).

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 4–5.

⁵¹ ES to HB, 25 September 1887, p. 7.

5 October conveys resignation as he describes himself as having to ‘stay by my regiment’ — Julia, Clotilde, and Christopher — and sacrifice being with Smyth.⁵² However, this letter also implies that they might capture in art what they could not achieve in reality. He writes:

We both know that it is foolish to try to talk sorrow away; yet you speak and speak rightly of a vein of optimism; for that too is a voice in us we cannot get rid of. The expression it takes in me, and I would like the same in you, is this (I can say it now since you like my book): it may turn out that we shall have achieved one way, less materially than we thought, the union we longed for. And this substitution of thought to flesh which would be dupery to men of action and is dupery to us in so far as we participate in their nature, may be the heavy price that those must pay who are destined to enter into eternity through art. I was barren and should have remained so without you. If you do not say the same of me now, you will some day. I shall seek myself in the Song of Solomon. Or is our child born already?⁵³

Brewster appears to suggest that their union and the act of transforming ‘thought to flesh’ — or thought into action — may be achieved in a work of art. This proposition seems to be connected to his book, *Theories of Anarchy and Law: A Midnight Debate* (1887). He had previously informed Smyth that it had been ‘completed more for you and as a commentary to make myself clear to you than for any other purpose’, and may therefore be connected to their relationship despite its broader philosophical content.⁵⁴ This book emerged from what his grandson described as a ‘tormented period’ during which Harry Brewster was ‘tied to his wife [...] yet he was desperately in love with another woman at the same time’.⁵⁵ More explicit is the mention of the Song of Solomon and Brewster’s question concerning their child. This comment suggests that they had discussed a potential work — ‘our child’ — based on the text. Considered in light of this, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 may be read as an expression of their love and the union that they were unable to achieve in 1887–88.

After October 1887, Smyth and Brewster lapsed into silence until December 1888. In response to a conversation about marriage that she had with his sister, Kate de Terrouenne, Smyth wrote to Brewster on the topic.⁵⁶ Part of this letter has been lost, but in the first few pages Smyth reiterates her position on marriage and declares, ‘If I were to

⁵² HB to ES, 5 October 1887, p. 2.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

⁵⁴ HB to ES, 19 September 1887, p. 4. In her memoir of Harry Brewster, Smyth also suggested that he wrote *Theories and Anarchy and Law* ‘partly in the hope of making his point of view intelligible to her [Julia] in the only language she understood—that of metaphysics’. See *Female Pipings in Eden*, 2nd edn (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933), p. 97.

⁵⁵ Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 171.

⁵⁶ Smyth had met Brewster’s sister in Florence and the two formed a friendship that seemed to survive her break from the Brewsters. She went to stay with Kate in the Sologne in November 1888 and spent time hunting. See *ITR*, II, p. 181.

marry, for the first time I sh[ould] deserve your pity'.⁵⁷ While she expected no answer, Brewster's reply on 21 December clarified the comment that had prompted Smyth to write; he also made reference to two of her compositions: 'I should so like to hear the Song of Solomon, or the Serenade, or something!'⁵⁸ It is possible that the second half of Smyth's letter contained a reference to these works as she mentions the Serenade again in her answer on 27 December. Between October 1887 and December 1888, *The Song of Love* had clearly gained enough substance for Brewster to express an interest in hearing it, but the work is absent in Smyth's reply. Their brief eight-letter exchange between December 1888 and January 1889 returns to the question of correspondence, and once again they agree that they cannot 'correspond without fraud or violence' and must focus on their work instead.⁵⁹

In *As Time Went On*, Smyth remarked, 'Did not Heine say, "Out of my great sorrows I make little songs"—the moral of which is: better put your past tragedies to some sort of use!'⁶⁰ While Smyth was lamenting the cost of producing *The Wreckers* when she evoked Heine, it seems that the idea of drawing on sorrow for inspiration resonated with the composer earlier in her career. *The Song of Love*, which occupied Smyth's time during 1888, provided her with the opportunity to convey a narrative and express her feelings for Brewster in a socially acceptable way. If they had discussed the Biblical text, as their correspondence suggests, the cantata offered Smyth the chance of creating a piece of music that held hidden meaning for them both. Furthermore, it indicates an interest in collaboration, which they would later harness for Smyth's first three operas: *Fantasio* (1892–94), *Der Wald* (1899–1901), and *The Wreckers* (1902–04).

In addition to her relationship with Brewster, other factors may have encouraged Smyth to turn to the Bible as a source of inspiration. In 1886, she developed a friendship with Mary Benson, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and their children. The Bensons were a religious family and her conversations with them led to 'a renewed interest in the Anglican position'.⁶¹ While Smyth had yet to go through the religious resurgence of 1889, her memoirs suggest that the Benson family — as well as that of her brother-in-law, Harry Davidson — prompted enquiry into this area.⁶² At this time, Smyth was still trying to adjust to life without Lisl or the Brewsters, and she described herself as a 'broken, utterly

⁵⁷ ES to HB, 19 December 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁸ HB to ES, 21 December 1888, p. 3.

⁵⁹ HB to ES, 9 January 1889, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *ATWO*, p.294. For Heine's poem, see his *Buch der Lieder* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1827), p. 139.

⁶¹ *ITR*, II, p. 185.

⁶² See *ITR*, II, pp. 184–185; *ATWO*, pp. 15–16.

defeated being’, ‘not the authentic Ethel Smyth’.⁶³ Having worried in 1885 that she might never work again, composing became a focal point in the years that followed. Reflecting on 1892, Smyth remarked that she ‘had learned that the only cure for sorrow is ceaseless work’; it may be she also used composition as a coping mechanism while writing *The Song of Love*. During 1888, Smyth dedicated herself to its creation, choosing this challenging period of her life to embark on her largest work to date.

3.3a. *Constructing The Song of Love, Op. 8: Structure and Source Text*

The Song of Love is an eight-movement cantata scored for soprano and tenor soli, chorus, and orchestra. In the abridged volume, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, Jory Bennett gives a performance time of 45 minutes, although there is no record of a premiere or private rendition of the piece in his list of Smyth’s works.⁶⁴ Two manuscripts are housed at the British Library in London: a piano and vocal score and a full score, both of which offer some indication of the work’s gestation and where it was composed. The cover of the piano and vocal score bears an almost illegible address written in red pencil, but ‘Villiers’, ‘Loiret’, and ‘France’ can be made out; to the side of this Smyth wrote, ‘This gives the date as 1888’.⁶⁵ Kate de Terrouenne and her husband lived at Villiers and Smyth visited the couple in November 1888 while she was working on her first orchestral work. She wrote to Brewster, ‘Even Kate’s presence two floors below me helped on the Serenade, because I am fond of her’.⁶⁶ Smyth’s note on the score suggests that she was also at work on *The Song of Love* at this time. The full score appears to have been composed (or completed) at her family home in Frimhurst, as stated in Smyth’s handwriting on the opening page.

Both manuscripts give the title in English with the German underneath and the text is provided in both languages throughout. Given that Smyth’s connections in the music world were largely based in Germany at this time, she may have thought that offering the work in German would increase its chances of performance. The letters to the Royal Philharmonic Society, Stanford and Parry, discussed earlier in this chapter, indicate

⁶³ *ATWO*, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), p. 376. As indicated at the opening of this chapter, *The Song of Love* has since received its premiere performance. On the piano and vocal manuscript score there are rehearsal markings in red pencil and notes that seem to pose questions about the music, although they are difficult to decipher. On the first page of movement VII in the full score, there is a note concerning the horn part. The writer states, “‘B alto’ could not play the note on page 113 without great distress to the player and the audience’. This does not seem to be Smyth’s handwriting but indicates that the movement may have received a performance of some kind. See Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862, British Library, p. 160 (originally numbered p. 111).

⁶⁵ Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862, British Library.

⁶⁶ ES to HB, 27 December 1888, p. 2.

that Smyth also tried to interest conductors in England but was unsuccessful. The work's size may have been a deterrent, as the cost of producing a cantata by a little-known composer would have been a risk for the organisers of the Three Choirs Festival. Only Smyth's Serenade in D and her *Overture to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* had been publicly performed in England by 1890, meaning she was an unknown quantity when it came to choral compositions.

In *The Song of Love*, Smyth selected specific verses to set to music, choosing text from five of the eight chapters in the Song of Songs.⁶⁷ The Song of Songs — also known as Solomon's Song or the Song of Solomon⁶⁸ — is commonly interpreted as either a poem detailing the love between two individuals or as one concerning the love between God and his followers. Marvin H. Pope suggest that '[i]n proportion to its size, no book of the Bible has received so much attention' or been the object of such 'divergent interpretations'.⁶⁹ The latter reading was a reaction to the passionate language used in the poem; David Carr contends that 'Jews and then Christians, confronted with such erotic material in the heart of the canon, reread the Song as a song of love between God and God's people'.⁷⁰ In *A Feminist Companion to The Song of Songs*, Athalya Brenner argues that 'such allegorical interpretations are secondary readings' which are 'linked to the problem of sex and gender, their dichotomy and combination'.⁷¹ The female voice present in the poem has encouraged feminist readings of the text, and Brenner highlights the possibility that some, if not all, of the poem may have been authored by a woman, thus offering 'opportunities for discussing female culture [and] its reclamation'.⁷²

However, interpreters of the Song of Songs have not always enjoyed such freedom. Carr observes that '[t]hose who read the Song correctly as a song of love were brutally persecuted'.⁷³ Censorship also extended to reading and accessing the poem, as underlined by women's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her publication *The Woman's Bible: The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*. Stanton remarks that 'Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read this book [the Song of Songs] until they were thirty years old,

⁶⁷ Chapters 1, 6, and 7 are omitted.

⁶⁸ While this book is often translated as The Song of Solomon in English the title is The Song of Songs in the original Hebrew. See *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible: King James Version*, ed. by Spiros Zodhiates (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1984), p. 828.

⁶⁹ Marvin H. Pope, *The Anchor Bible: Song of Songs, Volume 7C: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), p. 89.

⁷⁰ David Carr 'Gender and the Shaping of Desire in The Song of Songs and its Interpretation', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 119/2 (2000), 233–248 (233).

⁷¹ *A Feminist Companion to The Song of Songs*, ed. by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1993, reprinted 2001), p. 30.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷³ Carr 'Gender and the Shaping of Desire', p. 234.

when they were supposed to be more susceptible to spiritual beauties and virtues than to the mere attractions of face and of form'.⁷⁴ While Smyth's engagement with the Bible may not have been as closely controlled as this, in setting verses from the poem, she was nevertheless engaging with an unconventional and controversial text, which demonstrates a familiarity with the Bible that extends beyond her studies growing up or her attendance at Church.

The verses that Smyth chose to set do not follow the Biblical order, suggesting that she was more interested in conveying her own narrative than offering a faithful interpretation of the poem. As shown in table 3.1, Smyth's textual selections are rich in natural imagery, conjuring blossoming flowers and ripe fruit, which can be connected to health and fertility. The love expressed in the chosen verses suggests sweetness and purity; the woman is described as a 'dove', symbolic of love, freedom, and peace; she is 'undefiled' and has 'ravished' her beloved's heart with her eyes alone. Smyth's choices also retain the idea of the woman searching for her beloved, aided by the watchmen and the daughters of Jerusalem, although the latter go unnamed in *The Song of Love*. Read biographically, the verses Smyth set can be seen to correlate with aspects of her relationship with Harry Brewster, as the following section demonstrates.

Table 3.1. A breakdown of *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 indicating the source text for each movement⁷⁵

Movt.	Source Text: The Song of Songs <i>N.B. Smyth does not always set the verse in full and sometimes changes the word order. The portion of text set is shown below as it appears in the King James Version of the Bible.</i>	Chapter and Verse
I	Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away	2:13
	For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone	2:11
	The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land	2:12
	The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell.	2:13
II	Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.	5:2
III	O my dove [...] let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.	2:14
	Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.	4:9
	O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, [...] let me hear thy voice.	2:14
	Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.	4:7
IV	I sleep, I sleep but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me.	5:2

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton in *The Woman's Bible: The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*, ed. by Dale Spender (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985), p. 100.

⁷⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, references to the Biblical text throughout this chapter are taken from The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1995), pp. 751–756.

	I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone [...] I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.	5:6
	I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets, and [...] I will seek him whom my soul loveth.	3:2
	The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, See ye him whom my soul loveth?	3:3
V	What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?	5:9
VI	My beloved is mine, and I am his.	2:16
	I sat down under his shadow with great delight.	2:3
	He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.	2:4
	His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.	2:6
	This is my beloved, and this is my friend.	5:16
VII	Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense?	3:6
	Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.	8:6
	Who is this is this that cometh [...] leaning on her beloved?	8:5
VIII	Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods down it.	8:7
	For love is strong as death [...] the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.	8:6
	Set me as a seal upon thine heart.	8:6

3.4. Reading *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 Biographically

The Song of Love opens with excerpts from Chapter 2 of the Song of Songs, in which the woman is speaking about her beloved and describing how he visited her home, encouraging her to come out into the garden. In the verses Smyth set, the man is speaking to the woman but it is the woman who is recounting the story, imbuing the narrative with two voices. The man encourages his beloved to ‘come away’, assuring her that the winter is behind them and spring awaits. The verses evoke a sense of transition from one state to another; the rainy season has morphed into one of new beginnings and the imperative ‘come away’ indicates that the man wants the woman to join him. This image of exchanging a bleak landscape for a happier one and being reunited may have resonated with Smyth, who was unable to be with Brewster at this time. Their letters between August and October 1887 show that there was no possibility — unless they committed ‘high treason’ — of them being together, which is reinforced by their lack of communication during most of 1888.⁷⁶ In contrast, the lovers in the Song of Songs seem to live in an idealised world, unencumbered by the troubles with which Smyth and Brewster grappled.

The first movement is the longest in the cantata. It is 250 bars long and scored for an SATB chorus and an orchestra comprising 2 flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 2

⁷⁶ ES to HB, 30 August 1887, p. 4.

horns in E, 1 in D, a trombone in E; timpani, and strings.⁷⁷ The cantata begins with the bassoons and horns, with the trombone entering in bar 3 and strings in bar 4. The woodwind join this instrumental introduction in bar 15 before the altos introduce the chorus in bar 27. Despite the fact that the verses appear to come from the man's perspective, the text is sung by the chorus rather than by a soloist, which contrasts with some of the other movements. This may reflect the duality of the voices present in the poem, as addressed above. Alternatively, Smyth may have wished to deviate from the narrative of the source text by using the chorus instead of a soloist. It becomes unclear who is speaking and thus who is encouraging their beloved out into the garden.

Smyth uses a range of keys and time signatures throughout the work, which, as Kathleen Dale highlights, contrasts with the dominance of D major in her later Mass.⁷⁸ The first movement has a tripartite structure and follows an E-C-E tonal trajectory, shifting from common time, to 3/4 and back again. Similarly to the opening, the middle section (b. 76–185) starts with a 23-bar instrumental passage that precedes the choral entry, which is led by the sopranos with 'for the flowers appear...' in bar 99. Likewise, when the music returns to E major and the *tempo primo* for the final section (187–250), part of the opening material is briefly restated. The repetition of 'arise' in the STB voices and 'lo[,] the winter is past' in the alto part further reinforces the sense of the movement returning to where it began, echoing the seasonal cycle implied in the text. The movement ends with the man's entreaty to 'come away'.

In movement II, Smyth sets a direct quotation spoken by the man in Chapter 5:2. On the surface, the text of movement II seems unrelated to movement I, but they are linked through the story the woman is telling. In Chapter 5, similarly to Chapter 2, the woman recalls a scene in which the man knocks at her door and encourages her to 'Open to me, my sister, my love...'. In this verse, as in many others in the Song of Songs, the woman is speaking to the Daughters of Jerusalem. However, in Smyth's setting, she isolates the man's speech from the verse and obscures the broader context of the poem. Audiences listening to *The Song of Love* would need to be familiar with the Biblical text in order to place the vocal line within the poem's narrative. This exemplifies Smyth's use of the Song of Songs as a device to tell her own story and table 3.2 shows how Smyth's setting differs from the Biblical text.

⁷⁷ Bar numbers refer to the full manuscript score, which has been used for this reading. See the Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862, British Library.

⁷⁸ Kathleen Dale, 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study' in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth*, pp. 288–303 (p. 296).

Table 3.2. A comparison of Chapter 5:2 with the sung text in *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, Movement II

The Song of Songs, Chapter 5:2	Sung Text in <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8, Movement II
I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.	Open! Open to me, my love, open to me. Open! For my head is fill'd with dew and my locks with the drops of night. My sister, my undefiled, open to me, my undefiled.

The scene described in Chapter 5:2 is reminiscent of an event Smyth described in *As Time Went On*, when Brewster arrived at her door in Leipzig during the winter of 1884 to try and convince her that they should continue corresponding. He argued that Julia was waiting to see if their relationship was genuine and lasting, which could not be proven if they stopped writing to one another.⁷⁹ Smyth's letter to Brewster following this incident reiterates her stance on the matter:

Harry, it is all wrong – I am all wrong – It was unpardonable of me to write to you as I did last time – disloyal to Julia & to my better self[.] [...] You know I cannot care for or marry anyone else, that tho[ugh] you may never claim me I belong to you & to no one else. But otherwise what have I to wait for since I know the world will go the other way round before I could be yours with joy[.] [...] And so for the sake of my work which is drowned in longing for you – for the sake of everything and because you love me, give me no further sign of your existence except a word now to tell me you promise & to say I have not pained you by asking this concession.⁸⁰

That Smyth would not give in to Brewster is evident in this letter, yet so too is the love they felt for each other. It shows that she was adamant that they must stay apart, yet given her feelings for Brewster it is possible that, on some level, Smyth wanted to relent. Furthermore, in selecting Chapter 5:2 for the second movement of her cantata, and scoring it for tenor solo, Smyth may have been trying to convey the persistent singularity of Brewster's viewpoint. The repetition of 'my undefiled' might also point to the nature of their relationship, which was seemingly unconsummated until 1895.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *ATWO*, p. 9. See also, Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 122–123.

⁸⁰ ES to HB, 26 October 1884, p. 1–3. Amy Zigler also addresses this meeting in her chapter, "You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell": Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth's Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877)", in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275.

⁸¹ Amanda Harris offers a comprehensive overview of the scholarly perspectives on Smyth's more intimate relations with Brewster. See "The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth", *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94.

Movement II is significantly shorter than movement I at only 78 bars long. The strings dominate the musical texture, providing a short 12-bar introduction that begins *pianissimo* and quickly builds to *fortissimo*. Smyth creates a sense of urgency within the first half of the movement by using a faster tempo and short note values; the fast semiquaver passages seem to evoke the man's desperation as he pleads with her to open the door. The strings repeatedly shift from *arco* to *pizzicato* throughout the movement, which creates an interesting timbral contrast in such a short movement. The other instruments are used sparingly, typically only playing for 3–4 bars at a time and often paired with another instrument from the same section. Smyth does not indicate a key change in this movement, although it does shift in metre from 6/8 to 2/4 in bar 47 as the line 'For my head is fill'd with dew...' begins. As is common to the work as a whole, Smyth pairs the change in time signature with a new tempo marking, as she also often does with changes of key. The temporal reduction from *allegro molto (quasi presto)* to *allegro moderato* (b. 47) increases the poignancy of the rest of the text, illustrating Smyth's sensitivity to its meaning.

Chapters 2 and 4 are the focus of the third movement, which is also scored for solo tenor, reflecting the male perspective of the text. The excerpts Smyth selected from 2:14 continue the tale begun in the first movement, but this time the man's voice is the one we hear as he expresses his desire to see the face of his 'dove'. There is an abundance of affectionate language in this movement and in 4:9 the man tells his beloved, 'Thou hast ravished my heart [...] with one of thine eyes'. This chapter has been described as 'an erotic crescendo', although Smyth's poetic choices do not convey the full extent of its emotional intensity; 4:9 is as passionate as *The Song of Love* gets.⁸² The movement ends with three iterations of 'there is no spot in thee' (4:7), which, following an admiring description of her features, might suggest that he believes her to be physically perfect. However, this verse may also be read as an indication of the woman's moral purity as well; Smyth could have wanted to reiterate this idea as she struggled with the ethical implications of her relationship with Brewster.

The woodwind section opens this 194-bar movement, providing a short introduction before the solo tenor entry at bar 7. Initially, only the cellos and double basses support the voice from the string section, but the violins and violas filter in from bar 13. The orchestration is fuller in this movement, which Smyth utilises to build tension and drama from bar 35, when repetitions of 'thou hast ravished my heart' (4:9) begin. The timpani also has a more active role than in the previous movement, perhaps designed to

⁸² J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 157.

reflect the rapidly beating heart. When Smyth returns to the text of 2:14 in bar 108, the mood shifts and a fluttering quaver figure in the flute appears alongside the man's plea to his beloved 'dove' with the comely countenance. Final vocal phrase, 'no spot on thee' ends on an A — the highest note sung in the piece — and fades from *piano* to *pianissimo* (bb. 164–171). The orchestra then swells quickly to *fortissimo* (b. 176) before a gradual *diminuendo* brings the music back to a *pianissimo* chord I in A major to close.

Movement IV is the first time in the cantata that the woman's voice is heard and the vocal part is scored for solo soprano. Smyth returns to Chapter 5:2 for the opening, setting the line of text preceding the one she used for the second movement: 'I sleep, but my heart waketh...'. The woman is woken by her beloved and she rises to greet him, but finds him gone. Smyth then shifts to Chapter 3, vv. 2–3, wherein the woman goes out into the streets to search for the man and is found by the watchmen. She asks the men whether they have seen 'him whom my soul loveth', but in *The Song of Love*, no answer is given. Smyth does not set the fourth verse, which provides the resolution to the story and details the woman finding her beloved.

The combination of the verses Smyth set in movement IV creates a sense of unease; the dreamworld from which the woman wakes carries connotations of uncertainty and the sudden absence of her beloved calls into question the reality of the situation. Did she only imagine him coming to the door? The lack of resolution in the narrative not only keeps the listener poised but also seems to reflect the uncertainty in Smyth's own life at the time of the work's composition. Her repeated attempts to cut ties with Brewster invariably failed when one of them made contact with the other, creating a cycle of absence and presence. The tone of Smyth's letters often points to the emotional toll that the situation had on her and the uncertainty of movement IV may point to the mental turmoil she experienced.

Smyth depicts this darker and more changeable world through the use of a D minor tonality. She introduces the movement with the cellos playing *con sordino* and *pianissimo* (bb. 1–8) and quiet dynamics pervade the opening, which also features solo passages for the oboe (bb. 8–12) and bassoon (bb. 10–14). The quietness is maintained throughout the initial vocal entry — 'I sleep...' — at bar 38, which coincides with a slight rise in tempo from $\text{♩}=80$ to $\text{♩}=88$. Smyth increases the intensity further when the soprano sings 'but my heart waketh' (b. 48), with the orchestra marked either *subito forte* or *subito fortissimo*, emphasising this sudden change. This contrasts with the return to *pianissimo* for the next vocal phrase, where she describes her beloved asking her to 'open to me'. The

woman's restlessness is further illustrated by the use of triplets and a wide tessitura in the vocal line (bb. 45–58). While the complexity of the line could deter performers, Smyth's vocal setting demonstrates her sensitivity towards the text and the emotion contained within the verses she set. Dale's observation that *The Song of Love* 'is a forerunner of the composer's music-dramas' is exemplified here, as Smyth captures the drama of the woman's tale in her setting of the text.

The fifth movement is singular within the cantata in its vocal scoring for a TTBB chorus. Textually, it is linked to movement IV as the text Smyth sets (5:9) is connected to the image of the woman searching for her beloved. Verses 2 and 6 from Chapter 5, in which the woman wakes and hears the man knocking at her door, and subsequently finds him gone, were heard in movement IV. In verse 8, which Smyth does not set, the woman asks the Daughters of Jerusalem to help her find her beloved and verse 9 is their response. Here, they ask how they will be able to differentiate her partner from any other man they encounter while they search, and in the following verses, the woman describes him in a similar manner to his description of her in Chapter 4. Despite the poem's narrative, Smyth chooses to score the movement for male voices rather than a chorus of women, indicating that her own narrative or artistic choices are of greater importance to the composition than the Song of Songs.

The message conveyed in 5:10–16 is that the man is unique, an idea that echoes Brewster's position in Smyth's life. Based on her memoirs and the available evidence, it would seem that Brewster was the only man with whom Smyth was romantically involved. She tells him in September 1887, 'The thing is you interest me more than anyone else' and later opines, 'you have no idea how unlike other people you are'.⁸³ In addition to the literal meaning of the 5:9 text, it also seems to ask why the beloved is so special to the woman, a question that may have occurred to Smyth in relation to Brewster. Of all the men with whom she could have fallen in love, it was a married man to whom she was drawn, which caused her pain, loneliness, and moral difficulty alongside the positive aspects of their relationship. The repetition of the verse 9 text throughout the movement, particularly the opening phrase — 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' — appears to pose the question: why him?

In contrast to the preceding movements, the voice (bass I) enters on the first bar, seeming to stress the urgency of the question. Marked *piano*, the vocal line begins on the

⁸³ ES to HB, 25 September 1887 and 1 January 1889 respectively. While the latter quotation likely postdates her completion of *The Song of Songs*, it aligns with sentiments expressed elsewhere suggesting that Smyth found him to be a singular individual.

submediant of D minor and rises from Bb⁴ to Bb⁵ before descending to F⁴. The bassoon and cello parts double the vocal line, creating a sonorous eight-part melody that is accompanied by most of the orchestra. The upper strings, absent until the staggered tenor entry in bar 7, feature prominently for the remainder of the movement. The timpani have an active role and Smyth uses the instrument to underscore the dramatic intensity of the poem. Coupled with the frequent homorhythmic texture that occurs throughout the piece, the timpani's ominous rumble helps to create the urgent atmosphere of a unified search. This sense of haste resonates with that of the second movement, which likewise features only a single verse. Movement V is also relatively short at 108 bars long and, like its predecessor, maintains the uneasy key of D minor.

The response to the unanswered question — why him? — emerges in the sixth movement. Again, Smyth draws extensively on Chapter 2 (verses 3, 4, 6 and 16) in addition to Chapter 5 (verse 16). The movement is bookended by two thematically linked texts: ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his’ (2:16) and ‘This is my beloved, and this is my friend’ (5:16). J. Cheryl Exum suggests that in 2:16 the woman is declaring, ‘[o]ur relationship is exclusive and mutual: he is mine and I am his’.⁸⁴ For Smyth and Brewster, exclusivity and mutuality were not an option because of Brewster’s marital status. However, their sense of belonging to one another, articulated so clearly by Smyth in the letter quoted above — ‘though you may never claim me I belong to you and to no one else’ — bears resemblance to the verses she selected from the Song of Songs. Furthermore, the inclusion of the word ‘friend’ suggests that Smyth sought to reinforce this essential aspect of their relationship and the value she placed on the social and intellectual engagement that was, and would ultimately continue to be, at the core of their connection.⁸⁵

Movement VI is scored for soprano solo and orchestra, with the addition of a solo violin. Like most of the previous movements, it begins with a short orchestral interlude, which is led by the bassoons, horns, and upper strings played *pizzicato*, and accompanied by a sustained A in the double basses. These instruments drop out as the solo violin enters in bar 3, along with the clarinets and third horn, creating a sparse texture over the first 19 bars. The vocal line, which joins in bar 10, begins with short quavers but, as it unfurls, elongates into dotted minims and crotchets that contrast with the rapid quaver figure in the

⁸⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, p. 130.

⁸⁵ On 6 August 1884, Smyth wrote to Brewster, ‘I love you so as my friend as well as in that you are my lover’, which further reinforces the importance of their friendship.

solo violin. As the movement progresses, the texture becomes denser and the violin is replaced by the string section as a whole.

While the movement opens in D major, a key change is indicated in bar 36 and the tonality shifts to F-sharp major. This move to a distant key is paired with an increase in tempo and the flutes and clarinets lead the orchestra into the vocal entry at bar 40. Momentum builds in this central section of the movement (bb. 36–70), which focuses on text from Chapter 2, vv. 3–4, reaching its climax in bar 68 just after the *stringendo* direction indicated in bar 67. The introduction of D- and A-naturals in bars 65–66 and the key change in bar 67 implies a return to D major. Bar 71 is marked *tempo I* and sees the return of the vocal melody from the movement's opening; the soprano is also re-joined by the solo violin and the upper strings, played *pizzicato*. Above, the first flute plays a flowing quaver figure and the bassoons provide a dominant pedal; dotted minim and crotchet chords in the clarinets further reinforce the D major tonality. However, at the end of the vocal phrase — ‘...and I am his’ — Smyth naturalises the F-sharp, and adds a G-sharp, creating a D minor chord with an augmented fourth that destabilises the tonality.

Although the movement ends with a chord I in D major, Smyth uses chromatic inflections to create a sense of ambiguity throughout. Equally surprising tonal shifts are found in the seventh and eighth movements of *The Song of Love* and Smyth's tendency to undermine the tonality is characteristic of the work as a whole. The cantata is more experimental than the Mass in D (1891), which Smyth began composing the year after *The Song of Love* was completed. In addition to the constant chromatic inflections, the vocal lines in *The Song of Love* are less lyrical and more disjunct, suggesting that she was writing with professional singers in mind. It may be that the feedback she received from friends, or colleagues whom she tried to interest in the work, influenced her decision to be more conservative when she approached her next choral composition. With its rich history and innumerable musical settings, the sacred text might also have shaped her stylistic choices.

The penultimate movement in *The Song of Love* features verses taken from Chapter 3 and, for the first time, Chapter 8. In 3:6, the Daughters of Jerusalem ask, ‘Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense?’ Here it is implied that it is the woman's beloved in his ‘Solomonic guise’⁸⁶ who is carried on his litter ‘out of the wilderness’. Similarly, in 8:5, the daughters enquire, ‘Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?’ This time, it is assumed that it is the woman who is seen emerging, arm in arm with the man. The first

⁸⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, p. 248.

image, obscured by smoke and a sense of mystery, contrasts with the second where the couple is united and they emerge from the wilderness together. The reason for this change in state appears to lie in the central portion of text.

Between these two thematically linked verses, Smyth inserts an extract from 8:6: ‘Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm’. Exum describes the verse’s opening as ‘the preface to the affirmation of love’s power’,⁸⁷ which comes in the second clause: ‘for love is strong as death’. However, Smyth reserves this portion of the verse for the final movement, thus saving one of the poem’s central messages to the end of the work. The image of setting a seal upon another connects to the idea of wearing a seal as an act of love and as a symbol of identity.⁸⁸ In 1884, Smyth expressed the desire for Brewster to have something that he could wear, ‘something that you could often have about you like my dear belt’.⁸⁹ In response, Brewster told Smyth:

Now you send me your photos and your tie and as many more things as you can spare which have been near you. As for some little things which I can always have with me — well say a match box. Can I send you a brooch? [...] Or if that will not do what then? I want you to choose.⁹⁰

The idea of the seal expressed in the *Song of Songs* resonates with this exchange between Smyth and Brewster, who each wished to carry or wear something belonging to the other. However, the seal’s function as an identifier is at odds with the secrecy implied by the correspondence between Smyth and Brewster, who were grappling with the public-facing implications of their relationship. The items they suggested are small enough to be concealed or worn without attracting attention, meaning that these symbols of affection would more easily remain a secret. In contrast, the couple in *The Song of Love* is transformed by this act of identification. Having set the seal ‘upon thine arm’, they are freed from the smoky obscurity; no longer merely an onlooker, the woman is now able to walk alongside her beloved. This symbolic transformation seems to express in art the union that Smyth and Brewster were unable to achieve at that time.

The seventh movement features solo soprano and tenor lines in addition to the chorus and orchestra.⁹¹ Beginning in B-flat minor, the movement opens with an orchestral introduction before the choral entry in bar 23, where the contrapuntal texture creates the

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

⁸⁹ ES to HB, 6 August 1884, p. 6.

⁹⁰ HB to ES, 10 August 1884, p. 13.

⁹¹ At the top of the full score, Smyth has written ‘Chorus or Quartett?’ suggesting that she may have considered having a smaller group sing the choral part.

sense of many voices speaking at once, all clamouring for answers to the question, ‘who is this...?’ In bar 80, the soprano and tenor solo sing together for the first time, and their entry — ‘set me as a seal...’ — is sung in unison over the choral part, which continues with text from 3:6. This entry also coincides with a key change to C major, which is confirmed in bar 86 as the soprano and alto choral parts take over the vocal line (8:5). Visually, the movement appears to end in bar 93 as Smyth restates the instrumentation, time, and key signature on the following page in the same way that she does at the start of every other movement.⁹² However, the solo soprano and tenor entry in bar 94 adds another 12 bars of music, with the final crotchet occurring on beat one of the first bar of the final movement, which is marked ‘Schluss Chor VIII’ at the top of the score. This is the only instance in the cantata where one movement dovetails into the next.

For the work’s finale, Smyth remains with Chapter 8 and chooses verses that convey the idea of love’s endurance. The movement opens with text from 8:7 — ‘many waters cannot quench love...’ — before returning to 8:6 and the clause that was not included in the previous movement: ‘for love is strong as death’. This is a central message in the Song of Songs and the one with which Smyth’s cantata concludes. From this verse, she omits the reference to jealousy, meaning that the ‘vehement flame’ described in the subsequent clause appears instead to relate to love. Table 3.3 compares the verse text with the sung text in *The Song of Love*; the emphasis is placed on Smyth’s first phrase, which is repeated throughout the movement.

Table 3.3. A comparison of Chapter 8:6 with the sung text in *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, Movement VIII

The Song of Songs, Chapter 8:6	Sung Text in <i>The Song of Love</i> , Op. 8, Movement VIII
Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.	For love is strong as death: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Set me as a seal upon thine heart.

The frequency with which Smyth and Brewster broke off and resumed their correspondence during 1884–1890 reflects the strength of their connection and the longevity of their relationship. In *Impressions*, Smyth suggested that in 1884, ‘Harry Brewster and I [...] had gradually come to realise that our roots were in the same soil—and this I think is the real meaning of the phrase to complete one another—that there was between

⁹² In the full score, this page is numbered 127 (174 in the old numbering).

us one of those links that are part of the Eternity that lies behind and before 'Time'.⁹³ This retrospective description of their relationship not only conveys the depth of their connection but is also imbued with a timelessness akin to the idea of love being as strong — or as everlasting — as death. While Smyth could not have known what would happen in subsequent years as she composed *The Song of Love*, her cantata can nevertheless be read as a testament to her relationship with Brewster and a signifier of hope for their future.

In a similarly cyclic nature, the last movement of *The Song of Love* bears a resemblance to the first. The tripartite structure returns, although this time it follows an E-D-E tonal trajectory and the major ending correlates with the poem's uplifting message. Smyth retains the soprano and tenor duet of movement VII but alters the scoring, passing the text between the chorus and soloists to create a more distinct textural contrast. The six vocal parts do not sing at the same time until the very end of the movement (b. 198). Smyth's scoring of the solo voices is also different in the eighth movement; typically, one of the soloists leads the melodic line and the second voice is introduced part-way through before the two finish together. This seems to reinforce the idea that the couple, having overcome adversity, are ultimately unified in their declarations of love's strength.

As indicated above, Smyth places the textual emphasis on the line 'love is strong as death' and there are two key climaxes within the movement that further reinforce the message. The first occurs towards the end (bb. 97–117) of the middle section (bb. 59–125), where all parts are accented and largely homorhythmic and the narrow range of each line lends the text a declamatory feel. In bar 105, a *fortississimo* marking — the loudest dynamic used in the cantata — is maintained over the word 'death' for four bars. The *dim. and rall. poco a poco* (b. 109) marking decreases the intensity as the phrase is repeated and drawn out over eight bars of semibreves. The second significant climax (bb. 153–83) alternates clusters of descending quavers with dotted crotchets and minims to interrupt the sense of forward motion. Although Smyth shapes the music in the final section (bb. 184–226) it does not build to a similar level of intensity and the cantata is drawn to a quiet close. Interestingly, she employs similar techniques for the finale as she did for the first climax, including homorhythmic texture and narrow range, but uses longer note values and a slower tempo to elongate the melodic line and reduce the momentum. Smyth's text setting at the cantata's close seems to evoke a mood of quiet contemplation rather than jubilation, reflecting the poignance of the text.

⁹³ *ITR*, II, p. 126.

3.5. Conclusion

In its entirety, the Song of Songs may be read as a celebration of romantic love. J. Cheryl Exum argues:

Death is as strong as love, and lovers, flesh-and-blood ones, do not live forever. The Song is acutely aware of this fact, but rather than mourn the transience of love, in an act of resistance to it, the Song seeks to immortalize love by celebrating love in the here and now—not the love of two individuals, for the Song’s lovers stand for all lovers, but the enduring vision of desire they embody.⁹⁴

However, in selecting specific verses from the poem for *The Song of Love*, Smyth created her own narrative that not only celebrates love but also acknowledges its challenges. The work’s opening, with its plea to ‘come away’, immediately evokes a persuasive dialogue between two lovers, which is further supported in the second and third movements. Here, the man entreats his beloved to open the door and allow him to look upon her face, for she has ‘ravished’ his heart and he yearns to be near her. These sentiments echo those expressed in many of the letters in the Smyth-Brewster correspondence in which they convey their feelings for one another. As explored throughout this chapter, these letters often present a dichotomy between what they feel and how they want to act, and what they must do to align with societal expectations. As a woman, Smyth was arguably under greater pressure to conform to these expectations than Harry Brewster and, as has been shown, her sense of social propriety influenced her behaviour.

These conflicted selves are most present within the fourth, fifth, and seventh movements of Smyth’s cantata, wherein the woman wakes to her beloved knocking at the door but finds that he has gone by the time she answers. The searching that follows creates a sense of uncertainty, which is reinforced by the relentless questioning in movement V: ‘What is thy beloved...?’ Similarly, the unknown identity of the figures emerging from the wilderness in movement VII unsettles the adoring tone of the preceding movement. Smyth’s decision to include these verses suggests that she wanted to conjure a sense of restlessness, interrupting the declarations of love and affection with an unnerving undercurrent. While this may correlate with the challenges present in her own relationship with Brewster, it also points to Smyth’s inclination towards storytelling and imbuing her music with autobiographical undertones. This compositional trait is present throughout her oeuvre, from her Lieder to her operas, her suffrage songs to her choral symphony, *The Prison* (1930).

⁹⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, p. 251.

As this chapter demonstrates, *The Song of Love* is worthy of study in its own right, yet it is also a valuable work to explore as part of a body of works that exemplify Smyth's flare for drama. The tendency to overlook the cantata within Smyth's output narrows the scope of scholarly enquiry and deprives readers of the opportunity to know the work. While a detailed analysis of the music is beyond the scope of this study, the biographical reading within this chapter aims to introduce researchers to *The Song of Love* and situate it within its compositional context. The examination of the text highlights for the first time the verses Smyth chose to set and suggests how her textual choices may be connected to her relationship with Harry Brewster. This interpretation considers the various narratives contained within the Song of Songs and demonstrates how Smyth's deviation from the Biblical structure is evidence of her desire to convey her own story. Moreover, if *The Song of Love* is the 'child' to which Brewster referred, then it can be considered an artistic representation of their union and a lasting testament to their relationship.

When Brewster died in 1908 at the age of fifty-seven, Smyth was by his side.⁹⁵ They had been friends for a quarter of a century, collaborated on three operas, and exchanged thousands of letters. Although Smyth lived for another thirty-six years and continued to compose and form new relationships, Brewster's presence lingered. In *As Time Went On*, Smyth considered him 'still [in 1936] the pivot of my existence inasmuch as whenever confronted with doubts and difficulties of a certain kind, I involuntarily ask myself, "What would Harry have said?"'.⁹⁶ The message with which *The Song of Love* ends — 'love is strong as death' — seems not only to signify the strength of their love in 1888 but also to foreshadow the longevity of their relationship. Their final 'collaboration' was *The Prison*, a setting of Brewster's philosophical text of the same name published in 1891, on which Smyth began working in 1929.⁹⁷ Considered in this light, Smyth's first and last large-scale choral works — *The Song of Love* (1888) and *The Prison* (1930) — might both be regarded as emblems of her long-lasting relationship with Harry Brewster. In writing *The Prison*, Smyth returned to where she started, with an experimental work scored for two soloists, chorus, and orchestra. The premiere recording of *The Prison* (2020) was awarded a Grammy in 2021, making Smyth the first female historical composer to receive such an acknowledgement.⁹⁸ Now that *The Song of Love* has been 'unearthed' from the metaphorical

⁹⁵ *WHN*, p. 315.

⁹⁶ *ATWO*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Henry Bennet Brewster, *The Prison: A Dialogue*, with a memoir of the author by Ethel Smyth (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), p. 13.

⁹⁸ Amy Zigler, 'Smyth Wins a Grammy', < <https://www.ethelsmyth.org/smyth-wins-a-grammy/> > [accessed 6 February 2023].

loft of the British Library, it is to be hoped that further performances will be arranged so that the work may finally receive the recognition it is due as Smyth's first large-scale choral work.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ I refer here to Smyth's reflection on *The Song of Love* in *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, 'Only the other day I unearthed in my loft a cantata I had forgotten the existence of' (p. 18).

Chapter 4: Renunciation and Redemption

‘I give in and I am ready and longing to try and learn there is another refuge and strength than human love and my own powers.’¹

4.1. Introduction

The late 1880s and early 1890s were important years for Smyth’s development as a composer. In 1890, the successful premieres of her Serenade in D and *Overture to Antony and Cleopatra* (both 1889) helped to increase public awareness of her music, and the works were largely well received by the press. However, they did not grant her immediate entry into other venues and Smyth continued to encounter difficulties when she attempted to secure performances of her music. Her first large-scale choral work, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888), remained unperformed and unpublished within her lifetime, yet Smyth was undeterred, as evidenced by her next composition: the Mass in D (1891).² As a setting of a common liturgical text, Smyth’s Mass was a more conventional work than *The Song of Love* and, theoretically, should have been better suited to the English choral festivals than its predecessor.³ However, Smyth struggled to gain support; she had yet to develop a reputation in this area of composition and the Mass was a risk. ‘A huge and complicated choral work is not a convenient item in a concert season’, she later admitted, identifying one of the barriers to performance.⁴

Consequently, it was at the Royal Albert Hall in January 1893 that the Mass received its premiere, financed by Smyth’s friend Empress Eugénie and conducted by Sir Joseph Barnby. In *As Time Went On*, Smyth recalled Barnby’s uncertainty over the work:

He [Barnby] afterwards confessed it was not till the last rehearsal that he discovered what he called ‘an iron rod’ running through music that hitherto had struck him as disjointed, over-exuberant, and unnatural. Anything so different to the ‘Three Choirs’ outlook and technique would inevitably seem all that to an English Choral conductor of the early ‘nineties—at least until he got accustomed to it.⁵

Smyth’s reflection indicates that her compositional style differed from that of the composers typically favoured by the Three Choirs festival — figures such as Arthur

¹ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), II, p. 222.

² For details of the premiere performance of *The Song of Love*, see Chapter 3, fn. 4.

³ Smyth suggested in *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green, 1921) that the Mass in D may have been more successful if she had chosen an Old Testament subject, which is ironic given that *The Song of Love* is based on the Old Testament Song of Songs. See p. 110.

⁴ *SOL*, p. 109–10.

⁵ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green, 1936), p. 166.

Sullivan and Hubert Parry⁶ — which had an impact on how it was received. In studying the reception of the Mass in D, Elizabeth Kertesz has highlighted discrepancies between Smyth's estimation of the response to the work.⁷ In *Streaks of Life* (1921), Smyth reports an enthusiastic reception from the public and the press, whereas in *As Time Went On* (1936), she suggests that 'the Press went for the Mass almost unanimously—some with scorn, some with aversion'.⁸ These contrasting accounts underline the issues that may be encountered when Smyth's autobiographies are used to try and capture an accurate record of events.

Although Kertesz argues that 'the critics made allowance for a young and inexperienced composer', there is still evidence of the gendered critique that reflected societal attitudes towards women composers.⁹ *The Queen* — 'The Lady's Newspaper' — remarked:

If in her ambitious effort Miss Smyth has not met with complete success, she has certainly gone a long way towards its attainment. The Mass is a very remarkable production for a female composer. It is written with earnestness and power, it is distinguished occasionally by great impressiveness and considerable devotional feeling, and the hand of the skilled musician is traceable in every number. [...] [S]he, it is true, now and then over estimates her powers, a grandeur and loftiness of expression being at times essayed which are only partially realised; but when Miss Smyth writes within her means [...] she is heard to great advantage.¹⁰

The Country Gentleman reviewed the Mass in a similar vein, praising Smyth for her achievements but suggesting that her efforts fell short of the mark:

She is, I think, the first female composer who has ventured on a Mass, and in many respects she may be said to have succeeded; yet it is probable that in a few years' time she will regret she did not wait for additional strength and experience before attempting to scale the apex—so to speak—of serious music. Her fugal passages are decidedly weak, and the device of transferring the "Gloria" to the close of the Mass is inexcusable.¹¹

⁶ Anthony Boden and Paul Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival: A History*, New and Revised Edition (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2017). Edward Elgar (1857–1934), who became a central figure in the history of the Three Choirs Festival, made his debut at the 1890 Worcester Festival with his overture, *Froissart* (1890) (p. 151). Boden and Hedley state that Elgar was 'destined to become the first name in English music' (p. 125). In contrast, Smyth is only mentioned as having had her music performed. Her Quartet in E minor appeared in an all-British chamber concert in 1921, marking the first time that her music was heard at the festivals (p. 199).

⁷ Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas in England and Germany' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000), pp. 79–80.

⁸ *SOL*, p. 109; *ATWO*, p. 172.

⁹ Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass', p. 80.

¹⁰ 'Music and Musicians: Royal Albert Hall', *The Queen*, 28 January 1893, p. 146.

¹¹ 'The County Gentleman', *Sporting Gazette*, 21 January 1893, p. 73.

As a composer still at the start of her career, criticism such as that in *The Country Gentleman* must have been disheartening to Smyth.¹² She may also have felt disappointed by the implication in the *Illustrated London News* that her friendship with Empress Eugénie, a neighbour ‘with unlimited influence’, provided ‘the magic key that opened the doors of the Albert Hall’.¹³ The critic further undermined and devalued the Mass, suggesting that while it was ‘very clever composition, [it] was not in the remotest degree likely to win popular favour’.¹⁴

These responses to the premiere of the Mass contrast with many of the retrospective accounts given in the press when the work was revived in 1924.¹⁵ *The Diss Express and Norfolk and Suffolk Journal* suggested that Smyth was ‘among the most eminent composers of her time, and easily at the head of all those of her own sex’. The newspaper quotes from Smyth’s entry in *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1910), edited by J. A. Fuller-Maitland, and states:

It is still true, of course, that “the most striking thing about it was the entire absence of qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it was virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colouring of the orchestration.”¹⁶

This review not only highlights the extent to which Smyth had become part of the public consciousness in the intervening years but also demonstrates the shortness of the press’s memory. No longer relegated to the realms of a woman composer who grasped at but failed to achieve success, by 1924 Smyth was considered a preeminent musical figure

¹² The critic’s objection to the placement of the Gloria overlooks the fact that, in the Book of Common Prayer, the Gloria appears at the end of service. This dates to 1552 when the order of the service was amended. The 1662 edition of the book was used well into the mid-nineteenth century, which demonstrates that while Smyth may have been influenced by the Trevelyans’ Catholicism, her setting of the Mass more closely aligns with her own Anglican upbringing. See Margaret S. Scheele and D. H. Turner, ‘The Book of Common Prayer, 1662’, *The British Museum Quarterly*, 25/3 (1962), pp. 63–66.

¹³ ‘Music’, *The Illustrated London News*, 28 January 1893, p. 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁵ The 1924 revival took place in Birmingham on 7 February and in London on 8 March under the baton of Sir Adrian Boult. Kertesz notes that Smyth’s sister, Mary Hunter, paid the choristers’ travel expenses and ‘Mary Dodge guaranteed against loss’, which highlights Smyth’s constant need for financial support from her wider network of (largely women) supporters. See ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass’, p. 82, fn. 120.

¹⁶ ‘A Notable Musical Revival’, *The Diss Express and Norfolk and Suffolk Journal*, 7 March 1924, p. 3. See also J. A. Fuller-Maitland, ‘Smyth, Ethel’ in *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by J. A. Fuller-Maitland (New York: Macmillan, 1910), vol. 4, p. 490.

whose ‘virile, masterly’ — read: *masculine* — music was celebrated.¹⁷ Christopher St John’s assertion that Smyth ‘was born at least twenty years too soon’ for her music to be admired in the early 1890s is evident here; only after thirty-one years of silence were the merits of the Mass in D recognised.¹⁸

Had Smyth been less faithful to her own style, or if she had composed a smaller and more easily performed work, she may have received a warmer reception in 1893. Yet an examination of the context surrounding the Mass helps to identify the events that prompted its creation. Foremost in the narrative that Smyth conveys in *Impressions that Remained* (1919) is meeting Pauline Trevelyan and her family in 1889. The Trevelyans were devout Catholics and Smyth’s admiration for them is evident in her writing.¹⁹ Smyth’s emphasis on Pauline — to whom she dedicated the Mass — has led to the work being interpreted as one inspired by Pauline and the religious resurgence that Smyth experienced in the two years that followed their meeting. However, the broader biographical context surrounding the Mass suggests that there may have been additional factors that motivated Smyth to compose a sacred work at this time. The breakdown of relations with the Brewsters, the loss of Elisabeth von Herzogenberg’s friendship, and Smyth’s turbulent relationship with her mother triggered an emotional period in her life during which she sought refuge in religion and wrote her Mass in D. Collectively, these events encourage a more nuanced exploration of the work than has previously been offered in Smyth scholarship.²⁰

Reading the Mass as a work inspired solely by Pauline Trevelyan can also cause it to appear as an anomaly within Smyth’s output, implying that she had no interest in composing sacred works before or after the Mass. This idea is exacerbated by the fact that

¹⁷ This idea contrasts with the 1893 response to the work in the aforementioned *Illustrated London News*, which opined, ‘the most melodious and delicate—we should, perhaps, have written more feminine—portions of the new Mass are those which are the most grateful alike to performers and listeners. The “Benedictus” is absolutely beautiful, and had Miss Smyth’s claims to distinction rested upon this number alone she would, in the opinion of many, have been entitled to a leading space among composers of the sex’ (p. 126). Here, the implication is that if Smyth had composed in a more feminine manner throughout, she would have been one of the leading *women* composers.

¹⁸ Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), p. 87.

¹⁹ *ITR*, II, pp. 209–11; 216–19.

²⁰ See Edith Copley, ‘A survey of the choral works of Dame Ethel Smyth with an analysis of the Mass in D (1891)’ (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1990); Robert Marion Daniel, ‘Ethel Smyth’s Mass in D: a performance study guide’ (unpublished DMA thesis, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, 1994); Linda J Farquharson, ‘Dame Ethel Smyth: Mass in D’ (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1996). Elizabeth Kertesz, ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and first four operas in England and Germany’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000). Rachael J. Gibbon also addresses the Mass in relation to Smyth’s first opera, *Fantasio*. See ‘The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005).

Smyth does not fully address *The Song of Love* in her memoirs or, indeed, any of the sacred works she composed while studying in Leipzig. Limited research on the works predating the Mass or on Smyth's engagement with religion has further compounded this impression,²¹ yet several of Smyth's earlier compositions indicate an interest in sacred music and *The Song of Love* is evidence of Smyth's consideration of the Bible as a textual source. Moreover, a careful reading of her memoirs suggests that her beliefs were not as transient as is often indicated in literature that considers the Mass a product of fleeting religious fervour.²²

This chapter broadens the discourse surrounding Smyth's Mass in D by examining her relationship with religion and highlighting earlier works that indicate an interest in sacred settings. Furthermore, it studies the wider biographical background of the Mass and considers Smyth's emotional state in the years following her break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs. It addresses her relationships with key mother figures in her life and suggests how they may have contributed to her desire to repent for past mistakes. This facilitates a deeper reading of the motivations behind Smyth's Mass in D and indicates that the work may reflect the broader context from which it emerged, providing an outlet for Smyth's feelings and serving as an act of redemption.

²¹ For existing literature on *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, see Chapter 3, footnote 5. Kathleen Dale offers an overview of Smyth's output, including several works predating the Mass in D, in 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study' in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 288–304 and 'Ethel Smyth's Prentice Work', *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–36. Sarah M. Moon's doctoral thesis addresses Smyth's *Short Choral Preludes* (c. 1882–84) within the context of her organ music; see 'The Organ Music of Ethel Smyth: A Guide to its History and Performance Practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2014). References to religion typically crop up in relation to Smyth's Mass in D but are not the sole focus of the research. See, for example, Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass' or Trevor Rand Nelson, 'The Dissident Dame. Alternative Feminist Methodologies and the Music of Ethel Smyth' (unpublished Master's thesis, Michigan State University, 2016). Religion and morality are also explored in connection with *The Wreckers* (1902–04). See Kathleen A. Abromeit, 'Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers*, and Sir Thomas Beecham', *The Musical Quarterly*, 73/2 (1989), 196–211 or Suzanne Robinson, 'Smyth the Anarchist: "Fin-de-Siècle" Radicalism in "The Wreckers"' *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 20/2 (2008), 149–79.

²² Suzanne Robinson suggests that 'In the early 1890s [while she was composing the Mass in D], Smyth was going through a religious phase, spurred by her love for Mary Benson'; see 'Smyth the Anarchist', p. 163. Derek Hyde states, 'It was a result of her meeting and friendship with Pauline Trevelyan, who was a devout Catholic, that Ethel turned to religion'; see *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), p. 159. Similarly, Amy Zigler opines that 'A sudden interest in Catholicism inspired her to write the *Mass in D*'; see 'Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Florida, 2009), p. 322. Observations such as these are not uncommon and by drawing attention to them I seek not to disagree with the authors, but to highlight a tendency towards simplification. These statements suggest that the primary inspiration behind the Mass and her interest in religion was her friendship with women such as Mary Benson or Pauline Trevelyan, rather than stemming from her own beliefs.

4.2. Smyth and Religion: Childhood and Youth (1858–77)

On the surface, Smyth's memoirs do not seem to be overly concerned with religion. However, a more careful reading of these publications reveals details regarding Smyth's upbringing in an Anglican household and offers glimpses of her thoughts on religion as her life progressed. Her anecdotal writing style includes stories that further contextualise her stance on faith, but as this chapter will demonstrate, these comments are sometimes contradictory, making it challenging to gain a clear sense of her perspective. Smyth's first two-volume memoir, *Impressions that Remained*, gives an account of her life until 1891 and is the publication most relevant to childhood and youth. *Streaks of Life* (1921) and *As Time Went On* (1936) will also be drawn on when addressing the Mass later in this chapter. Beyond the memoirs, there are limited primary sources that deepen knowledge of Smyth's early life; letters to her mother during her time in Leipzig offer little on the topic of religion, for example. However, the Smyth-Brewster correspondence provides some insight into Smyth's thoughts on religion while she was working on the Mass.²³

Smyth's reflections on her childhood indicate that she was raised in a moderately religious household. In the first volume of *Impressions*, the chapters dedicated to her parents detail their personalities and preoccupations, giving a sense of how Smyth was raised. These recollections suggest that Smyth's father was a religious man; in addition to leading the family prayers at home, he was actively involved in their local church and would read the Lessons at the Sunday service.²⁴ Smyth illustrates this by quoting the rector, Mr Basset, who described General John Hall Smyth in 1894 as 'a constant attendant' of the church who read the Lessons 'for many years' and 'took an active part in the welfare of the parish' after his retirement from the army.²⁵ By contrast, Smyth's depictions of her mother Nina reveal little in the way of religious sentiment or activity. Rather, Smyth focuses on her mother's personality, interests, and strengths, noting that she was someone who was 'meant for social life' and 'adored entertaining'.²⁶ Smyth further asserts that although 'she had the warmest of hearts', 'her moods were many and her passions violent', which correlates with later descriptions of their fractious relationship.²⁷

Like many middle-class families of the period, the Smyth family attended church on Sundays.²⁸ They would often call on neighbours in the parish and Smyth notes a societal

²³ See section 4.5a.

²⁴ *ITR*, I, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

expectation that those with the means to do so would give garden or dinner parties; these glimpses into her early life suggest an upbringing where the Church and community were important.²⁹ However, Smyth also highlights behaviour which seemed unchristian, with particular reference to a ‘childless, middle-aged, and tightly married couple’ who were seemingly ostracised by the community because they did not fit in.³⁰ She states that, ‘I, as a child, often wondered how this sort of thing squared with the Christian charity talked about in the pulpit’.³¹ Her comment indicates that even at an early age, Smyth was conscious that the thoughts and actions of those with religious values did not always align. It also suggests that she objected to unequal treatment, an issue to which she returned throughout her life. Smyth’s descriptions of her childhood abound with further references to religious activity, from the yearly Church Festivals to her uncle preaching on Christmas Day, and a trip to a bazaar where she heard a speech by the Evangelist Lord Radstock.³² Smyth recalls that his uninspiring pronouncements made her and her siblings ‘hate religion for the time being’.³³

Smyth’s depictions of her early life, such as those addressed above, convey a sense of changeability regarding religion and an enquiring approach to the Church’s teachings. When she took her first Communion, she ‘believed, as young people will believe [...] that now my troubles were over’.³⁴ However, this idea was quickly dismissed and Smyth suggests that ‘if even a small modicum of one’s early fervour can be retained [...] one must be thankful’, indicating that she did not approach religion with the level of devotion that she would later admire in Pauline Trevelyan.³⁵ Nevertheless, many of Smyth’s comments are imbued with positivity and suggest that she valued aspects of her Christian upbringing. Reflecting on her early education, she places value on Biblical knowledge³⁶ and the Sunday services she attended at school facilitated her first forays into composition. She recalls instructing her peers to sing the ‘chants and hymns’ she wrote and named after her ‘passions’.³⁷ Her ‘passions’ were taken from a list of girls and women ‘to whom, had I been

²⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

³¹ Ibid., p. 57.

³² Ibid., pp. 73–75.

³³ Ibid., p. 76. Granville Augustus William Waldegrave, third Baron Radstock (1833–1913), was a ‘philanthropist and evangelist’, involved with the 1860s and 1870s revivalist network. See Harold H. Rowdon, ‘Waldegrave, Granville Augustus William, third Baron Radstock (1833–1913)’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://www-oxforddnb-com>> [accessed 21 April 2020].

³⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 95. She attributes this to Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, part III, chapter VIII. This book and its influence on Smyth are addressed later in this chapter.

³⁶ *ITR*, I, p. 92.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

a man, I should have proposed', showing that Smyth imbued her musical works with autobiographical undertones from an early age.³⁸

Smyth also seemed to gravitate towards the idea of a higher power having an influence over her present state.³⁹ This appeared particularly important during the years she attended school, where Smyth was often unhappy due to not fitting in with her peers. She notes being 'ambitious, wilful, torn by storms of anger, despair, and love, feeling that somehow I was of different stuff to the boys and girls I associated with'.⁴⁰ Yet religion gave some respite: 'I had fits of religion, and like all people of a certain temperament had always been prone to incoherent, anguished prayer, after which I knew peace for a while'.⁴¹ Her 'fits of religion' point to a sense of increased religious activity and periods of heightened belief. Furthermore, the peace to which Smyth refers is raised again in later discussions regarding her religious resurgence in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Smyth's upbringing in a religious household had an impact on various aspects of her life, particularly regarding the role of women and the expectations of her family. As Arlene Young highlights, '[a]t the beginning of the Victorian period, to be a middle-class woman was to be a dependent – a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother'.⁴² Informed by religious teachings, these expectations set clear boundaries on behaviour and perceptions of femininity and masculinity.⁴³ While Smyth came of age during the middle of the Victorian period when attitudes were slowly changing, it was still expected that she would marry. However, the dinners and balls she attended after having been presented to society did not fill her with enthusiasm and she resisted the idea of marriage. She asked, 'Being a self-sufficing person, who didn't want to cling to or be clung to except in the way of dancing, what was I doing in this ante-chamber of matrimony, the ball-room?'⁴⁴

This progressive thinking was evidence of Smyth's desire for independence, a trait traditionally discouraged in young Victorian women. Carol Dyhouse observes that '[f]rom early childhood girls were encouraged to suppress (or conceal) ambition, intellectual courage or initiative – any desire for power or independence'.⁴⁵ In opting to focus on

³⁸ Ibid., p. 68. Also see her description of her 'Geister Sonata', in which she sought to capture a meeting with the soprano, Marie Geister (1836–1903) (*ITR*, I, pp. 176–78, 222, 230).

³⁹ This idea is explored in greater detail in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

⁴⁰ *ITR*, I, p. 94.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴² Arlene Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), p. 3.

⁴³ Sue Morgan, 'Introduction' in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, ed. by Sue Morgan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1.

⁴⁴ *ITR*, I, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

music rather than marriage, Smyth was resisting the Christian ideals of her parents and of society more broadly. Yet having been brought up in an Anglican household, it appears that she was unable to part from her faith entirely, and the sacred compositions that she wrote during the early years of her career suggest that she was interested in creating religious works. Whether they were composed as a mode of self-expression or as a means of developing her skills, these pieces are some of Smyth's earliest works and ones which she felt warranted publication.

4.3. Early Sacred Settings (c. 1882–84)

Smyth is not a composer typically associated with sacred music, which prompts enquiry into why she wrote the works that she did. Although some of her later compositions deal with religious themes — most notably her opera *The Wreckers* (1902–04) — her sacred music is confined to the early part of her career. These include her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* (c. 1882–84); a collection of *Short Chorale Preludes* for organ (1882–84, rev. 1913); *The Song of Love*, Op. 8 (1888); a wedding anthem for choir and orchestra (c. 1900); and her Mass in D (1891).⁴⁶ With the exception of the Mass, these are some of Smyth's lesser-known works. Of the part-songs, only 'Komm, süsßer Tod' is commercially available as a score and recording — released in 2019 and 2023 respectively⁴⁷ — whereas scores of all five organ preludes can be purchased from Novello. A recording of the first prelude, 'Du, O schönes Weltgebäude!', was released in 2019 but the remaining four have yet to be made.⁴⁸

Smyth revised the chorale preludes for publication with Novello in 1913,⁴⁹ which suggests that she considered them worthy of preservation and not simply compositions from her 'prentice' days.⁵⁰ This contrasts with the self-deprecating tone of the note she wrote on the manuscript of *The Song of Love* — 'Kept as an amusing first attempt' — but

⁴⁶ Composition dates are taken from the list of works compiled by Jory Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), pp. 373–81.

⁴⁷ 'Komm, süsßer Tod' is available in *Multitude of Voyces: Sacred Music by Women Composers*, Vol. 1 SATB (Salisbury: Multitude of Voyces C.I.C, 2019). A recording appears on the album *Traces* by SANSARA, cond. by Tom Herring (digital release, 2023), <<https://www.sansarachoir.com/traces>> [accessed 15 August 2023].

⁴⁸ Ethel Smyth, 'Du, O schönes Weltgebäude!' on *Pax Britannica: Organ music by Victorian and Edwardian composers* performed by Robert James Stove (Ars Organi, 2019).

⁴⁹ The *Short Chorale Preludes* were also arranged and published as *Four Short Chorale Preludes for Sectional Orchestra* in 1913 and received their first public performance at the Queen's Hall Prom on 29 August 1923. Smyth conducted the Queen's Hall Orchestra on this occasion. There are no details of first performances of the *Five Sacred Part-Songs* or *Short Chorale Preludes* in Bennett's list of works. See *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 375.

⁵⁰ I refer here to Kathleen Dale's article, 'Ethel Smyth's Prentice Work', *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–36.

the scale of these organ works may also have contributed to her decision to publish them.⁵¹ Conversely, the score for the wedding anthem that Smyth composed around 1900 has been lost and the text she chose to set is also unknown.⁵² In contrast to her works still in manuscript form, which require interested parties to engage with archives and typically find alternative means of hearing the music, the Mass in D has received far greater recognition. Multiple recordings exist, and the vocal score is available for online download via the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP) / Petrucci Music Library, thus increasing its accessibility.⁵³

In keeping with her autobiographical writing style, Smyth did not provide information on the compositional context surrounding these early works pre-dating the Mass. Nor did she mention performances at social gatherings, as with her chamber music.⁵⁴ Consequently, it is unclear what drew her to the chorales that underpin her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* and *Short Chorale Preludes*, but it is likely that she was influenced by her lessons with Heinrich von Herzogenberg and the time she spent singing with the Bach Verein in Leipzig.⁵⁵ In her thesis on Smyth's organ music, Sarah M. Moon observes that 'only two of the chorales [found in the *Short Chorale Preludes*] exist in an English hymnal by the publication date of 1913', which suggests that Smyth was guided by her German education when she composed them earlier in her career.⁵⁶ She may have been drawn to the chorales because of her familiarity with them, but it is also possible that the sacred texts appealed to her.

While Moon's comprehensive study of Smyth's organ music reveals much about the *Short Chorale Preludes*, the *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* have yet to be fully explored. The manuscript scores held at the British Library imply that Smyth also hoped to print these pieces; they are numbered in blue pencil and two of the songs have '(print)' written next to their title.⁵⁷ This is notable given the quantity of musical sketches contained

⁵¹ Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862, British Library.

⁵² Bennett in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 376.

⁵³ Ethel Smyth, 'Mass in D major', *International Music Score Library Project / Petrucci Music Library*, (n.d.) <[https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_D_major_\(Smyth%2CEthel\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_D_major_(Smyth%2CEthel))> [accessed 22 May 2023].

⁵⁴ See, for example, Smyth's letter to Nina Smyth from c. 8 April 1878, in which she states, 'I'm going to the Klengels[?] tomorrow to hear the first movement of my string quartette played' (p. 2). In *Impressions that Remained*, she also refers to 'sonatas and quartetts hopefully composed and privately performed' (II, p. 9).

⁵⁵ The collection of Smyth's early vocal works contains four-part chorale exercises based on Bach's St Matthew Passion from 1879 in addition to drafts and the manuscript scores of her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes*. See the Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library.

⁵⁶ These were 'Erschienen ist der herrlich' Tag' and 'O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid'. See Sarah M. Moon, 'The Organ Music of Ethel Smyth', pp. 52–53.

⁵⁷ Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861. Bennett's list of works indicates that the *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based On Chorale Tunes* were published but the edition has not been traced. See *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 375. Ref collection

within the collection that do not bear similar markings. Most of these pieces show Smyth trying out ideas, completing contrapuntal exercises, and redrafting part-songs and chorales. Of the numbered manuscript scores for Smyth's *Five Sacred Part-Songs*, the first three contain dynamic markings and are written on the same paper; No. 2, 'Kein Stündlein geht dahin' starts on the same page on which No. 1, 'Komm, süsßer Tod' ends.⁵⁸ These details suggest that the first three part-songs were composed or notated at a similar time; the pages are torn, stained, and folded in places, implying a greater age. Conversely, the paper of the final two songs is irregularly sized and shows significantly less wear; the horizontal stave lines are also more consistent and the fifth song looks to have been written out using a broader nib.

The origin of the tunes on which the part-songs are based further supports the idea that they may have been composed in two groups: 1–3 and 4–5. Two of the scores marked for printing indicate where Smyth sourced the tune; 'Komm, süsßer Tod' states that the 'melody [is] by Bach', presumably BWV 478. The first three songs in the set were published in Georg Christian Schemelli's *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* (1736) to which Bach is thought to have contributed.⁵⁹ While the date of the *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* could make it seem an unlikely source, Smyth's inscription on the third part-song suggests otherwise. 'Lüneburg G.B.', written in the top right-hand corner of No. 3, 'Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille', almost certainly refers to the *Lüneburgisches Gesangbuch* (1686) in which it appears.⁶⁰ There are several versions of this chorale within Bach's catalogue of works, but it is BWV 460 that bears the greatest resemblance to Smyth's part-song and the melody in the *Lüneburgisches Gesangbuch*. Notably, this is also the version that appears in Schemelli's *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch*, making this an even more likely point of reference for Smyth.

Songs four and five — 'O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid' and 'Erschienen ist der herrlich' Tag' — do not appear in either song book.⁶¹ As a textless setting, the latter appears in Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*, the first complete edition of which was published in 1845,

⁵⁸ On the manuscript score, Smyth writes the title as 'Kom süsßer Tod' with a macron above the letter 'm' to indicate that the letter should be doubled. She omits the umlaut over the 'u' in 'süß' but includes it within the song's text. I have standardised the spelling throughout and included the comma in the title, as it appears in the printed version available in *Multitude of Voices: Sacred Music by Women Composers* and in Bach's song of the same name. See fn. 47 of the present chapter.

⁵⁹ The three songs appear in Schemelli's *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1736) as follows: No. 647, 'Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille' (p. 444); No. 868, 'Komm süsßer Tod' (p. 591); No. 869, 'Kein Stündlein geht dahin' (pp. 591–92). For further reading on Bach's contribution to the *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch*, see Robin A. Leaver, 'Letter Codes Relating to Pitch and Key for Chorale Melodies and Bach's Contributions to the Schemelli "Gesangbuch"', *Bach*, 45/1 (2014), pp. 15–33 (pp. 25–30).

⁶⁰ *Lüneburgisches Gesangbuch*, ed. by Caspar Herrmann (Lüneburg: Johann Stern, 1695), p. 907.

⁶¹ For an overview of this piece (BWV 629), see Russell Stinson, *Bach: The Orgelbüchlein* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 116–17. A two-bar fragment of 'O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid' (BWV AHN. 200) is also included in the *Orgelbüchlein*, but the complete BWV 404 seems a more likely source.

edited by Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847).⁶² Smyth may have encountered this volume, which became one of the ‘cornerstones of the organ repertory’,⁶³ while she was studying in Leipzig or when she received tuition on the organ in 1886 from Sir Walter Parratt. Smyth’s two part-songs are thematically linked through their connection to Easter, which may suggest that she composed them around the same time. The text of ‘O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid’ includes the lines, ‘God the Father’s only Son / Now lies buried yonder’ in reference to Good Friday.⁶⁴ Similarly, ‘Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag’ addresses Christ’s resurrection. Smyth included versions of these chorales in both her *Five Sacred Part-Songs* and the *Short Chorale Preludes*.⁶⁵ Moreover, when she revised the organ pieces for publication in 1913, she also arranged them for strings and solo instruments, implying that she was keen for the compositions to be heard. The preludes were performed in this format at the Queen’s Hall Prom concert on 29 August 1923.⁶⁶

In addition to being her teacher, Heinrich von Herzogenberg was the director of the Bach Verein in which Smyth sang and his appreciation for the composer stimulated Smyth’s own interest in Bach.⁶⁷ Like his student, Herzogenberg wrote a part-song version of ‘O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid’, which was published as the third piece in his *Vier Choral-Motetten*, Op. 102 (pub. 1898). As it is unclear precisely when Smyth or Herzogenberg composed their respective songs, it is difficult to suggest which came first or whether one inspired the other. Johannes Brahms, to whose music Smyth was frequently exposed while in the Herzogenberg household, may also have influenced her choice of chorales. Brahms was an enthusiastic advocate for Bach with ‘a formidable knowledge’ of his music,⁶⁸ which was apparent during the informal recitals he gave when visiting friends.⁶⁹ An organ prelude and fugue based on ‘O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid’ (WoO 7) also exists within Brahms’s repertoire. Barbara Owen notes that Elisabeth von Herzogenberg owned a treasured holograph of Brahms’s prelude that Smyth may have seen before the piece was published in 1882.⁷⁰

⁶² Stinson, *Bach: The Orgelbüchlein*, p. 156.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁶⁴ Catherine Winkworth, ‘O Darkest Woe,’ from the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), p. 448.

⁶⁵ See Jory Bennett’s list of works in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 374–75. ‘O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid’ and ‘Erschienen ist der herrlich’ Tag’ are the only chorales that appear in both collections.

⁶⁶ Bennett notes that the manuscript score for the arrangements has been lost. See *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 375.

⁶⁷ *ITR*, I, p. 202.

⁶⁸ Russell Stinson, *The Reception of Bach’s Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 127.

⁶⁹ *ITR*, I, p. 266.

⁷⁰ Barbara Owen, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 75.

These part-songs and organ preludes, which comprise Smyth's earliest sacred settings, can easily be connected to her environment. Given that she lived a short distance away from Bach's *Thomaskirche* and was educated by Herzogenberg, it is unsurprising that part of her education in Leipzig focused on chorales, preludes, and fugues.⁷¹ Limited biographical information surrounding these early pieces makes it challenging to know whether Smyth's religious beliefs also encouraged her to compose sacred works. That music and religion were fundamentally linked during her youth does not necessarily mean that they continued to be so when she began her studies in Leipzig, but this cannot be discounted.⁷² As demonstrated in Chapter 3, her unpublished correspondence with Harry Brewster and the details contained within her memoirs invite deeper enquiry into the potential motivations behind *The Song of Love*. This is also true for her second large-scale sacred work: the Mass in D.

4.4. The Mass in D: Motivations and Mother Figures

Several women feature prominently in Smyth's life around the time that she began working on the Mass in D. A number of these women were mother figures for the composer; Elisabeth ('Lisl') von Herzogenberg had embraced the Smyth as a surrogate daughter soon after she arrived in Leipzig, and Mary Benson offered her much-needed friendship when she later became estranged from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs. Smyth's fractious relationship with her mother may have encouraged her to seek out other women who could offer maternal support, yet it was her family home to which Smyth returned at the end of 1889 when she found herself at a crisis point. Collectively, this trio of mother figures affected how Smyth responded to this low point in her life and contributed to her desire for forgiveness, thus influencing her decision to compose the Mass.⁷³

Due to the Herzogenbergs' centrality in Smyth's life in Leipzig, the severance of contact affected her deeply. In 1886, Nina wrote on her daughter's behalf to establish whether she and Lisl might reconnect. Smyth notes that Lisl's response, 'a singularly beautiful letter [...] is mainly an entreaty to my mother to see, that not her own will and

⁷¹ Owen also notes that the composition of chorale preludes and fugues was part of the curriculum at the Leipzig Conservatory. See *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms*, p. 74.

⁷² Smyth remarked that, during her youth, she 'had taken to composing chants and hymns, music being connected in my mind [...] mainly with religion—a well-known English malady' (*JTR*, I, p. 83).

⁷³ Pauline Trevelyan and Empress Eugénie also gave their friendship and support during this difficult period. Given their difference in age, the Empress may be considered another mother-figure, but as she supported Smyth in practical and financial ways — such as providing her with a place to work and paying for the Mass in D to be printed — her role differs to that of the other women addressed here and will be considered in more detail in the subsequent section.

action but Fate stood—and must always stand, given the circumstances—between us’.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Smyth clung to the idea that she might be reconciled with her friend.

Reflecting on a discussion with Harry Brewster in 1890, Smyth recalled:

I begged him not to press [Julia Brewster] for more, for I was still hoping that the day of reconciliation with his sister-in-law, Lisl von Herzogenberg, might yet dawn; Lisl [...] the matchless musician whom I loved more than anyone in the world, whose charm, beauty, and tenderness sometimes haunt me even now in dreams...⁷⁵

The strength of Smyth’s affection for Lisl is clearly demonstrated here, as is her enduring hope that they may rebuild their friendship in time. In *Impressions*, Smyth’s reflections and her letter to Nelly Benson suggest that the difficulty of the situation with Lisl directly contributed to the emotional breakdown she experienced in the winter of 1889.⁷⁶

Smyth’s passionate language — and the distress caused by the loss of Lisl’s friendship — has prompted some scholars to interpret their relationship as romantic. Martha Vicinus describes the two women as sharing an ‘eroticised mother-daughter love’ and Elizabeth Wood considers their relationship to be ‘homoerotic’.⁷⁷ Moreover, Wood regards Smyth’s narrative surrounding her relationship with Harry a ‘subterfuge—a more conventional, if scandalous, heterosexual plot in which Lisl is eclipsed by Harry Brewster—[which] effectively denies the lesbian’.⁷⁸ This stance is problematic as it oversimplifies Smyth’s sexuality and devalues her relationship with Brewster. As Leah Broad argues, ‘Ethel was inexact about her own sexuality and avoided labelling herself’.⁷⁹ Being cognisant of this fact when addressing Smyth’s sexuality can help to prevent an overly narrow definition.

In contrast to Wood, Amanda Harris argues that Smyth’s relationship with Harry Brewster can be seen as ‘a coherent part of her identity rather than a disruption to an

⁷⁴ *ITR*, II, p. 147.

⁷⁵ Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green, 1940), p. 3. Smyth’s proclamation that she loved Lisl ‘more than anyone else in the world’ echoes her later description of Lady Mary Ponsonby as being ‘dearer to me than any woman in the world’ (p. 97).

⁷⁶ *ITR*, II, pp. 219–23.

⁷⁷ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 127; Elizabeth Wood, ‘Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth’s Contrapuntal Arts’ in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1993), pp. 164–83, p. 173.

⁷⁸ Wood, ‘Lesbian Fugue’, p. 171.

⁷⁹ Leah Broad, *Quartet: How Four Women Changed the Musical World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023), p. 20. Christopher Wiley also highlights that Smyth ‘never made her lesbianism explicit’ in her memoirs; see, ‘When a Woman Speaks the Truth about Her Body’: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography’, *Music & Letters*, 85/3 (2004), 388–414 (p. 402).

otherwise clear-cut lesbian identity'.⁸⁰ Implicit within Harris's research is an acknowledgement that sexuality is a spectrum and that it is reductive to confine Smyth to one end of it. Furthermore, when Wood focuses on Smyth's passionate language, she seems to overlook the period in which it was written. In the section of her book dedicated to women's friendships, Sharon Marcus observes that 'Victorians routinely used startlingly romantic language to describe how women felt about female friends and acquaintances'.⁸¹ As a result, what may be interpreted as romantic to a contemporary reader may not necessarily have carried the same meaning for the writer. In the case of Smyth and Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, there is insufficient evidence to make a definitive claim about the nature of their relationship. The location of the correspondence between Smyth and Lisl is unknown, but access to this material may provide future scholars with a clearer insight into how the two women felt about one another. What is clear from the available evidence is that Smyth loved Lisl and that the loss of her friendship was deeply felt.

In the aftermath of her separation from the Herzogenbergs, Smyth remarked that 'life had to be begun afresh'.⁸² While Lisl's absence left an irreparable hole in her circle of friends, Mary Benson's presence helped ease some of Smyth's unhappiness.⁸³ She and her husband Edward, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had several children with whom Smyth also became friends. Eleanor (Nelly, 1863–1890) was her closest companion from the younger generation and the pair frequently corresponded.⁸⁴ Smyth remarks that her 'relations with the Benson family [...] were rather tempestuous, most of us being more or less aggressive and cocksure'.⁸⁵ However, these clashes of personality and perspective seem to have been good-natured and would likely have felt familiar to Smyth as a member of a large family. She describes Mary as a 'mainstay of my life' from 1886, suggesting that her friendship offered some stability during a period of uncertainty.⁸⁶

Religion was a frequent topic of conversation for the two women, and it is possible that these discussions contributed to Smyth's interest in religious matters, which were

⁸⁰ Amanda Harris, 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94 (p. 77).

⁸¹ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 32.

⁸² *ITR*, II, p. 125.

⁸³ Smyth wrote to Lady Mary Ponsonby, 'but for Mrs Benson, I sh[ould] never have got over one bit of my life: the few months succeeding that farewell letter of Lisl's'. Quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 131.

⁸⁴ Martha Vicinus highlights that Smyth wrote over one hundred and fifty letters to Eleanor over the course of a year. See *Intimate Friends*, p. 134. I have retained the spelling that Smyth used when referring to Eleanor, or Nelly; Vicinus opts for Nellie.

⁸⁵ *ITR*, II, p. 193.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

arguably at their peak as she was composing *The Song of Love* and the Mass in D.⁸⁷ Chapters XXXIX and XL in *Impressions* offer some of the most explicit insights into Smyth's perspective on religion during 1888 and 1889. She reflects, '[t]hrough my intercourse with Mrs. Benson and the Windsor Davidsons tended to a renewed interest in the Anglican position, my views on religion had remained as before'.⁸⁸ She then goes on to state, 'As a matter of fact I simply disbelieved in God'.⁸⁹ If taken at face value, this declaration might be used to evidence a lack of religious belief; however, other comments in her autobiographies indicate faith. The contradictory nature of some of Smyth's writing increases the difficulty in building a clear picture of her stance on the subject, but it is evident that the Bensons stimulated her thinking in this area.

A later remark foreshadows the comments she made in relation to Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, which she read at the end of 1889. While addressing her relationship with the Benson family, she notes:

People who only admit one view of moral law—that of the Church—can hardly mix at bottom with those who see life through an artist's eyes; not at least unless artistic kinship is there to bridge the gulf between them. When I first knew the Bensons—the time at which I was closest to them—the artist was in abeyance, and though I was not a believer our outlook was more or less the same; but even then the dissimilarity of grain made itself felt.⁹⁰

Smyth's observation that when she 'first knew the Bensons [...] the artist was in abeyance' is key, as it implies that she was closest to them and their way of thinking while her artistic side was suppressed. This idea reoccurs when she expresses her difficulty in adhering to the teachings in *The Imitation of Christ*, which is explored in greater detail later in this chapter.⁹¹

Mary Benson had a caring temperament and often spent time dispensing advice to her friends; Smyth opined that 'her master passion was undoubtedly the cure of souls'.⁹² Martha Vicinus, who offers a detailed account of Mary's life and her struggles with sexuality, explores her 'evol[ution] from an unhappy wife to a powerful mother-confessor

⁸⁷ Smyth discusses her relationship with the Benson family in detail in *Impressions that Remained* (II, pp. 188–95) and her friendship with Mary in *As Time Went On* (pp. 15–21). Suzanne Robinson suggests that Smyth's 'religious phase' was 'spurred by her love for Mary Benson'. See 'Smyth the Anarchist: "fin-de-siècle" Radicalism in "The Wreckers"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 20/2 (2008), 149–179 (p. 163).

⁸⁸ *JTR*, II, pp. 184–85.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁹¹ See section 4.5a.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

who drew women to her'.⁹³ Although Vicinus implies that Smyth grew frustrated at having 'to share this mother with too many other needy young women', she likely benefitted from Mary's counsel after her separation from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs. The advice she gave to Smyth reflected her religious beliefs and the moral code to which she adhered, which caused issues when Smyth renewed her correspondence with Harry Brewster in 1890. Mary could not condone a potentially adulterous relationship; Smyth went as far as to suggest that, to Mary, 'nothing less than my eternal salvation was at stake'.⁹⁴ It would appear that Smyth's decision to renege on her decision to part from Harry went against Mary's counsel. There is a hint of bitterness in Smyth's later reflections in *As Time Went On* and the letters she includes from Mary Benson's son, Arthur, indicate that she was hurt by Mary's response to Brewster's reappearance. In April 1892, Arthur writes:

Cannot you look on the 'condemnatory' attitude as but one more of the limitations that surround my people[?] [...] Cannot you say to yourself 'they criticise my attitude to nature and religion, *as they would define them*—and our definitions are not the same?'⁹⁵

It seems that time was needed for Mary Benson to accept Smyth's decision to resume contact with Harry. Another letter from Arthur, written three months later, ends:

I think the thing [is] best let alone, at present: my mother is not happy about it I know: she is puzzled and distressed: but I do not think she will change her attitude—and indeed it would not be natural: I think you had better give them up altogether for a while, and see if you miss them out of your life.⁹⁶

The Bensons played an important role during this unsettled period but the rift over Brewster caused a change in their relationship. Two years before relations cooled, she encountered another family who featured prominently within the context of the Mass in D: the Trevelyans.

While Smyth had initially retreated to Frimhurst after her break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs, her family home was ill-suited to composition and she gradually began travelling more.⁹⁷ In the summer of 1889, a visit to her sister, Mary Hunter, brought Smyth into contact with the Trevelyan family.⁹⁸ In contrast to the Bensons, the 'Trevelyans'

⁹³ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 88. Vicinus identifies romantic elements in many of Smyth's relationships with women, including her mother, Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Mary Benson, Nelly Benson, and Lady Mary Ponsonby. See pp. 88–98; 126–34, 134–42.

⁹⁴ *ATWO*, p. 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁹⁶ *ITR*, II, p. 70.

⁹⁷ Chapter 1, section 1.3c provides a more detailed overview of Smyth's movements during 1886–90.

⁹⁸ *ITR*, II, p. 209.

attitudes towards the arts were more closely aligned to Smyth's and two of their six daughters had also studied music in Germany.⁹⁹ When their paths crossed again in Munich later that year, she joined them on a trip to the spa town Bad Wörishofen and cultivated a friendship with the eldest daughter, Pauline.¹⁰⁰ Smyth's writing suggests that Pauline's devotion to Catholicism, her 'saintliness', and otherworldliness were points of fascination, and she recalls feeling that Pauline was 'a visitant from another planet lent to this world for the time being'.¹⁰¹ After returning from Bad Wörishofen, the Trevelyans left for Cannes and Smyth began a laborious search for new lodgings in Munich.¹⁰² She describes this point as 'the worst nightmare' of her life, a time at which she was 'ill and morally at the end of my tether'.¹⁰³

Smyth had embarked on her trip to Munich with some trepidation, stating, 'it is not easy to make a fresh start when your heart is aching, your health indifferent, and your conscience ill at ease—for the thought of my mother gave me no rest'.¹⁰⁴ Martha Vicinus's assertion that Smyth's 'mental and emotional health depended upon the fostering care of someone who could appreciate her ambition' is pertinent here.¹⁰⁵ Smyth likely found the Trevelyan family to be encouraging companions whose artistic temperaments gave her the support she needed as she made a 'fresh start' in Munich.¹⁰⁶ However, when they left for Cannes, Smyth was alone once more and brought low by the experience. She wrote to Nelly Benson, highlighting the powerful impression that their commitment to God had left on her and detailing her deteriorating mood:

I'm glad and thankful that I went there [to Bad Wörishofen] for that stay has revealed to me certain things about myself. Seeing what the Trevelyans' relation to God and the world is, loving Pauline at once almost as I did (I swear to you chiefly because of that but also because of herself), feeling so broken-hearted when they went away, finding my vaunted strength and calm gone, coming back to this miserable lodging... all this brought about a crisis.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 209. For further information on the Trevelyan family, see Charles Mosley, *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage, 107th edition, 3 volumes* (Wilmington: Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd., 2003), volume 3, p. 3933.

¹⁰⁰ *ITR*, II, p. 213.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰⁵ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁶ Lady Frances Trevelyan (1837–1907) was a minor mother figure in Smyth's life at this time; she describes her admiration for Lady Trevelyan in *Impressions that Remained* (II, p. 218).

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Nelly Benson dated 21 December 1889, quoted in *Impressions that Remained*, II, p. 221.

Smyth's letter is of particular value as it was written at the time rather than thirty years later, meaning the feelings she conveys are raw and unaltered.

During this crisis, Smyth had returned to the hotel where the Trevelyans had stayed and collected a book that Pauline had left behind. The volume was *The Imitation of Christ*, which seemed to catalyse Smyth's religious resurgence.¹⁰⁸ In her letter to Nelly, she continues:

I felt I was going mad, losing control [...]! Then this book came back and I feel as if I had purposely been driven into my last entrenchments. I give in and I am ready and longing to try and learn there is another refuge and strength than human love and my own powers.¹⁰⁹

The influence of the Trevelyans — Pauline in particular — and the arrival of the book appeared to reignite and fuel the religious sentiments of her youth. Reflecting on the event in *Impressions*, Smyth recalls poring over *The Imitation of Christ* on Christmas Eve and into the early hours of the following day. The proclamation that follows provides a key to understanding why Smyth sought refuge in religion at this point in time. She states:

Now all was clear to me; I had always thought of myself, and nothing else... of what I had to achieve in life, of what my duty to myself was... always myself. No wonder I had failed; no wonder all I had touched, no matter with what excellent intentions, had turned to dust and ashes; no wonder that even Lisl was lost to me and that I had gone into the Desert in vain... Now my path was clear... music must be thrown overboard too; there was only one road to happiness, renunciation.¹¹⁰

This desperate declaration helps to convey the depth of Smyth's anguish at the time and points to the events that brought her so low. Furthermore, it makes clear that it was not simply the influence of the Trevelyans and her affection for Pauline that brought about this religious resurgence. Rather, it was triggered by a desire to find comfort during a time of deep unhappiness that was fuelled by the events of the preceding years.

Beyond the emotional weight of her break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs, Smyth was also struggling with her relationship with her mother. In *Impressions*, Smyth includes several letters from Nina spanning from September 1886 to June 1888. While the tone of these letters is broadly positive, there are references in each that indicate that Nina

¹⁰⁸ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Burlington Library Edition (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., n.d.).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222. In the letter, Smyth detailed how she lost the book shortly after collecting it from the hotel and then she advertised for its return. She told Nelly that the book came back 'almost like a message from him whom the book is about' (p. 221).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

missed her daughter and wanted her home. The last letter ends, ‘I shall, we all shall, be so overjoyed to have you *really* with us, *here!* Nearer our hearts you cannot be, but there is something in feeling tangibly that you are!’¹¹¹ Smyth’s recollections suggest that these repeated entreaties from her mother caused her guilt, which peaked during her aforementioned ‘crisis’ and contributed to her desire to renounce music.

After spending the summer of 1888 at home, Smyth changed her plans to return to Leipzig and remained in England to keep her mother company. She recalls ‘realising her feelings so wrought on mine that I determined to try a winter in England’, indicating that her mother’s feelings wore on her own and that returning to Leipzig may prove difficult for both of them.¹¹² However, her attempts to work at Frimhurst were thwarted by the noise and Nina’s presence. Her depiction of this time is especially vivid and it highlights the volatile nature of both mother and daughter:

Thus the constant presence of a violent spirit, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, such as my mother’s, was devastating; all the more so because, loving her, I was harrowed by the spectacle of her moral suffering and maddened by constant scenes in which my violence equalled hers and was the subject of bitter remorse afterwards.

Throughout the autumn of 1888 right on to the summer of 1889 I think she was going through some slow, painful moral crisis—perhaps the final realisation that [...] she was an old woman’.¹¹³

The difficulty of this period influenced Smyth’s intention to spend the winter of 1889 in Germany, where she would encounter the Trevelyans.

As indicated above, the apprehension with which Smyth embarked on her trip to Munich was influenced by her feelings towards her mother. She clearly felt that she would be more productive away from home even though the thought of Nina’s loneliness ‘weighed tons on my heart’.¹¹⁴ This contributed to Smyth’s response to *The Imitation of Christ*; her self-reproaching comment to Nelly Benson that, ‘I had always thought of myself, and nothing else’, can be linked to her relationship with her mother.¹¹⁵ In addition to the guilt Smyth felt for her involvement in the Brewsters’ marital issues and her distress at losing Lisl’s friendship, these emotions surrounding her mother seemed to further prompt a desire for guidance from a higher power. Having read *The Imitation of Christ*,

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 176. Emphasis in the original. The collection of letters can be found on pages 173–76.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 177. Smyth notes that her brother Bob’s departure would render the house empty of children, the prospect of which Nina Smyth found difficult.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 195–96.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

Smyth immediately decided to travel back to England and to begin her journey on the road to ‘renunciation’.¹¹⁶ Too tired and ill to read, she recalls carrying the book on her journey home like a talisman: ‘but for that amulet I could never have reached home.’¹¹⁷

The three mother figures addressed in this section can all be seen to contribute to the wider context surrounding Smyth’s *Mass in D*, indicating that her decision to compose the work was motivated by more than Smyth’s admiration for Pauline Trevelyan. When she lost Lisl’s friendship, Smyth felt that she ‘should never again work’, yet she gradually returned to composition, as the existence of *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, *Serenade in D*, and *Overture to Antony and Cleopatra* shows.¹¹⁸ Mary Benson’s friendship offered some stability and further stimulated Smyth’s thinking on matters of religion and morality. The Trevelyan family provided Smyth with an artistic embrace as she embarked on what she believed to be a new chapter in her life, inspiring her creatively and boosting her emotionally. Yet when she found herself in crisis, it was the family home to which she fled. Smyth’s love and concern for her mother was a determining factor in her decision to return to England, intent on changing her ways and renouncing music. However, inspired by *The Imitation of Christ* and fuelled by guilt and remorse, Smyth was soon to find herself immersed in composing her next large-scale work.

4.5. Smyth’s ‘Munich Mood’ and Beyond

Smyth describes her religious resurgence as her ‘Munich mood’, noting that ‘for the next eighteen months in spite of arduous work, at the bottom of my soul was one thought only — Christ’.¹¹⁹ This preoccupation eased some of her negative feelings towards Lisl, whose silence had embittered Smyth during the intervening years.¹²⁰ Similarly, she found relations with her mother to be much improved and her home life more harmonious as a result.¹²¹ Musically, her English debut in 1890 with the *Serenade in D* helped to reignite Smyth’s desire to compose as she felt herself to be ‘at peace’, which was perhaps more conducive to creative work.¹²² However, this eighteen-month period was not entirely untroubled and

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 134. In 1892, Smyth told Lady Mary Ponsonby that after she had received Lisl’s final letter, ‘music slipped so utterly out of my reach that I might be pardoned for thinking it gone forever’. See Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 131.

¹¹⁹ *ITR*, II, p. 228.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 228.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 229; *ATWO*, p. 14.

¹²² Ibid., p. 228.

there is evidence to suggest that the Mass's composition may have been a cathartic process, one driven by a desire for redemption.

In January 1891, Smyth's mother suffered a short illness and died. Reflecting on her death, Smyth states, 'I was glad she had been saved the pain of knowing that the hope I lived on would never be fulfilled' — the hope being a reunion with Lisl.¹²³ Despite their fractious relationship, the death of her mother clearly had an impact on Smyth as she recalls being close to a breakdown in early February.¹²⁴ As a result, Mary Hunter decided to take her sister to Algeria in the hope that a holiday would improve her health; from there, Smyth went to stay with Empress Eugénie at Cap Martin.¹²⁵ After the heartache of losing her mother, Smyth welcomed this change of scene and was happy during her stay with the Empress, who became a lifelong friend and staunch supporter of Smyth over the years that followed.¹²⁶

Smyth's 'Munich mood' was at its peak during this time and her letters to Harry Brewster convey her religious enthusiasm. A comment from Easter 1891 suggests that Smyth may have been considering how to unite music with her renewed faith, influenced as it was by the events of the preceding years. She recalls writing to Brewster, 'What a Mass I will write some day. *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi...* What words! What words!'¹²⁷ That Smyth chose to quote this section of the liturgical text, which addresses Christ and asks for mercy for past sins, might suggest that it held some significance to her. Perhaps she felt that the words reflected her intention to be more conscious of others, or to be forgiven by those she had hurt. Smyth's desire for reconciliation with Lisl, for instance, implies that she hoped that her past actions might be forgiven. Central to Smyth's self-critique was the idea that she needed to be less selfish, which propelled her decision to renounce that which she had previously prioritised: music and her career.¹²⁸

Smyth and Brewster did not see eye to eye on religious matters or, initially, about Empress Eugénie. Responding to Brewster's criticism of the Empress, Smyth describes her admiration for her friend:

The thing I care for about her chiefly is, [...] she knows how to fall — not only so as to impress lookers on but she has let life teach her, in her later years, lessons she failed apparently to learn in her youth, and I cannot tell you how that dignified

¹²³ *ATWO*, p. 23.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25; 37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹²⁸ *JTR*, II, p. 225.

submission to or rather acceptance of ~~fortunes~~ fates [*sic*] blows touches & impresses one.¹²⁹

It is possible that the Empress's response to life's challenges had an impact on how Smyth chose to react to her own, potentially affirming her decision to compose the Mass. The creation of the work opposed Smyth's resolution to renounce music, yet in doing so, she may have been attempting to process the emotional turmoil of 1885–89, equipped with her renewed faith. The conductor Hermann Levi (1839–1900) went as far as to argue that '[b]ut for the Lisl tragedy she could never have written it [the Mass in D]', which reinforces the extent to which he perceived Smyth's emotional state to influence the work's composition.¹³⁰ This also resonates with the reading of *The Song of Love* offered in Chapter 3, which may be interpreted as an expression of Smyth's feelings for Harry Brewster that she could not articulate publicly.¹³¹

While she returned to Frimhurst in the winter of 1889 with the intention of abandoning music, this decision had been a challenging one. Writing to Brewster shortly after her mother's death, Smyth recalled an observation from Pauline Trevelyan, which illustrates the difficulty of the situation in which Smyth had put herself:

Hardly three weeks ago, Pauline Trevelyan, who has been much here, and was adorable with mother, suddenly said to me as we were walking across a London square: 'Ethel, you are good to your mother.' Then I knew that she had seen what others did not see, how the whole thing was cutting into my flesh, sapping my strength, making me *have* to be untrue to my music—that she guessed how all my strongest prayers and endeavours were about that.¹³²

¹²⁹ Ethel Smyth (ES) to Harry Brewster (HB), 6 September 1891, p. 7. In his response on 20 September, Brewster shifted his stance and described her as 'charming and remarkable, not frivolous, so I withdraw my epithet' (p. 6). Unless otherwise stated, the correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Harry Brewster referenced throughout this chapter is held at the San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive in Florence.

¹³⁰ *ATWO*, p. 222. Kathleen Dale also argued that '[t]he intensity of feeling which characterised her own human relationships, as well as her whole outlook on life, distinguishes the majority of her more important compositions, most especially those she wrote while under the spell of some outstanding emotional or spiritual experience'. See 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study' in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 288–304 (p. 290–91).

¹³¹ Other scholars have offered (auto)biographical readings of some of Smyth's later vocal works, such as *Possession* (1913) and *Laggard Dawn* (1910), both of which have been considered in relation to Smyth's friendship with the suffragette, Emmeline Pankhurst. See Rachel Lumsden, "'The Music Between Us': Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and 'Possession'", *Feminist Studies*, 41/2 (2015), 335–370 and Elizabeth Wood, 'Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage', *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/4 (1995), 606–43. Amy Zigler has also addressed autobiographical elements in Smyth's Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1887); see "'You and I will be like the monk Danke meets in hell": Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth's Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1887)' in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, and Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–75.

¹³² *ITR*, II, p. 247. Emphasis in the original.

Her reference to music and prayer suggests that Smyth was struggling with her decision to cease composing and was trying to find a way to reconcile religion and art. Thus, in finding that she could not turn away from music, Smyth directed her attention towards a large-scale sacred work that would become symbolic of a time in which she hoped to be forgiven by several key figures in her life, including Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Mary Benson, and, for different reasons, her mother, Nina. As such, the Mass may be regarded a musical record of Smyth using religion to come to terms with her guilt and grief; a work created in a spirit of atonement.

It is possible to identify in the music Smyth's internal battle of renunciation, repentance, and redemption. In September 1891 while she was composing the Mass, Smyth wrote to Brewster, 'My Sanctus is fine — such obstinate shouting positive angels — & yet they begin & end so quietly'.¹³³ The image of shouting angels contrasts with conventional portrayals of these celestial beings and seems to evoke Smyth's tendency towards drama. A later critic evidently heard some of this passion in the Mass as they remarked, 'she truly moves us and even awes us with her peremptory hammering at the gates of heaven'.¹³⁴ However, between the shouting angels and 'peremptory hammering', some listeners felt that Smyth had overlooked the true meaning of the text. The Archbishop of Canterbury was said to have 'remarked afterwards that in this Mass God was not *implored* but *commanded* to have mercy' and, of the *Christie Eleison*, that 'orders [had been] issued in an extremely peremptory manner'.¹³⁵ Smyth's authoritative tone was evidently not to the liking of all, and for some, the religious sentiment was insufficiently apparent. Even Donald Tovey, in whose *Essays in Musical Analysis* Smyth's Mass appears alongside works by composers such as Bach and Beethoven, was unsure that she had captured the liturgical spirit. He declares:

There is no religiosity about it; and the prayers of the Kyrie and Agnus Dei are far from expressing a mood of resignation. But the music is throughout, like Spinoza, God-intoxicated; and, while it certainly does not acquiesce in the belief that in this best of all possible worlds everything is a necessary evil, it expresses an all-pervading joy in the things told by the text.¹³⁶

Rather more critical was George Bernard Shaw's 1893 review of the work, in which he remarked that in the 'not so very solemn' Mass, 'the decorative instinct is decidedly in front

¹³³ ES to HB, 13 September 1891, p. 2.

¹³⁴ 'Ethel Smyth's Mass at Birmingham', *The Musical Times*, 65/973 (1924), 256.

¹³⁵ *ATWO*, p. 172. Emphasis in the original.

¹³⁶ Donald Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis. Volume V: Vocal Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 235.

of the religious instinct [...] [and] the religion is not of the widest and most satisfying sort'.¹³⁷ Collectively, these comments suggest that Smyth did not manage to strike the right tone in her liturgical text setting, perhaps due to her lack of experience in this area of composition or her limited immersion in the world of sacred music.

However, it appears that some of Smyth's critics overlooked the intended purpose of the Mass in D in their estimation of the work. There is no suggestion that Smyth intended the Mass to be performed as part of a religious service, but rather in the concert hall, as reflected by the venue of the premiere.¹³⁸ Writing shortly after the Mass's revival in 1924, musicologist and critic Richard Terry addressed the difference between a mass composed for concert performance and one written for use in a liturgical setting. In doing so, he contrasted Smyth's Mass in D with the later G Minor Mass (1921) of Vaughan Williams and highlighted the composers' expressive aims. He remarks:

[B]oth composers approach the text of the Mass from a different angle—Dame Ethel using it as an expression of personal and individual emotion, and Vaughan Williams employing it as a corporate presentment of the liturgical idea. [...] Dame Ethel's Mass approximates to those of Mozart, Beethoven, and the rest of the German followers of the Viennese School; Vaughan Williams's is in the manner of Palestrina and Byrd and the rest of the liturgical composers. Dame Ethel treats her text with the same freedom as a composer would treat any other *libretto*; Vaughan Williams observes all the liturgical rules laid down for the treatment of that text.¹³⁹

Terry's comments are notable not only for aligning Smyth with the Austro-German school of composition but also for suggesting that she treated the mass text like a libretto, which reinforces the dramaticism of the work.

Additionally, the compositional style of the Mass differed from that of Smyth's English contemporaries and predecessors; Julian Rushton observes:

In England, the cathedral and collegiate tradition carried a unique strand of musical tradition into the twentieth century [...], its practice exemplified a widespread tendency, also apparent in Mendelssohn and the revival of Bach and Handel, to confirm its own roots by looking back beyond the immediately preceding generation to earlier periods.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ George Bernard Shaw, 'Miss Smyth's Decorative Instinct', *The World*, 25 January 1893 in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw, Shaw's Music, The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes*, ed. by Dan H. Lawrence (London: Max Reinhardt, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1891), II, p. 790–91.

¹³⁸ Smyth saw an affecting performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in 1889. She notes, 'Probably because of my then state of mind it seemed to me I had never heard it before; the terror of a certain veiled, rushing passage for violas and 'cellos at the thought of *sin, death, and judgement*, ... the wild triumph of the trumpet call flaming out of it... how it haunted me in the hours to come!' See *ITR*, II, p. 201.

¹³⁹ Richard Terry, *On Music's Borders* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1927), p. 58.

¹⁴⁰ Julian Rushton, 'Music and the Poetic' in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. by Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 151–177 (p. 154).

Rather than looking back, Smyth was looking forward. Rushton notes that Catholic music from nineteenth-century composers such as Hector Berlioz (1803–1869) exhibited ‘a tendency to dramatise by an affective response to the text [which] brought church music closer to the theatre’.¹⁴¹ At the same time, the ‘Austro-German tradition of liturgical text-setting, exemplified by Haydn, Beethoven, Cherubini, Weber, Schubert and Bruckner [...] embraced a more poetic response to the text’.¹⁴² Smyth’s Mass might be seen to draw on these two stylistic tropes, bringing together Berlioz’s dramaticism and the poeticism of the Austro-German composers that Rushton identifies.

The identification of dramatic elements in the Mass in D supports the idea that Smyth’s creation of the work was emotionally driven, providing an outlet for feelings both personal and spiritual.¹⁴³ Moreover, rather than attempting to imitate the works of earlier composers, Smyth chose her own course, and one that foreshadowed the operas to which she would soon turn. George Bernard Shaw’s criticism that the Gloria of Smyth’s Mass ‘began exactly like the opening choruses which are now *de rigueur* in comic operas’ demonstrates that she was already starting to use operatic techniques in her music.¹⁴⁴ This departure from convention seems to have caused discomfort for some listeners attending the premiere in 1893. Yet a letter that Smyth sent to Brewster in March 1892 — in which she describes Hermann Levi’s enthusiastic reaction to the Mass in D — indicates that German attitudes towards her text setting may have been more favourable. Once more, Smyth seemed to be a victim of her dual musical identity as an English composer with a German education.

The conductor Hermann Levi played an important role in the work’s 1893 premiere and corresponded with members of the English royal family to advocate for Smyth’s work. Her letter to Brewster is worth quoting at length as it not only captures early responses to the Mass but also highlights the network of supporters needed for a first performance. She writes:

Levi wrote to Princess Christian to say, in a few words, that the Mass is a splendid work — that he knows of no German composer of today who could write a better — that it is the duty of my friends to get it done, & well as soon as may be. Princess

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 154. Smyth was familiar with Berlioz’s treatise on orchestration, which may suggest that he influenced her compositional style. See *ITR*, I, p. 112.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁴³ In an interview with Richard Terry, Smyth reportedly agreed that the Mass in D was not liturgical in a conventional sense but that ‘it was written under the stress of a strong religious impulse. I felt that the words of the Mass best expressed what I wanted to say.’ See *On Music’s Borders*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁴ Shaw, ‘Miss Smyth’s Decorative Instinct’ in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw, Shaw’s Music*, pp. 790–91.

C., like a brick, sent this letter to [Joseph] Barnby – & he wishes to produce Mass at Albert Hall in an extra concert in June!! Think of this! Novello will then publish (he will do that anyway) and – at a bound I shall be in the front of the front rank. All this however hinges on whether the Queen will consent to come – or else the Empress [Eugénie] – as B[arnby] must have a full house & nothing else will draw. Chorus of 800!! Think of it!! My fate will be sealed in a few days! Barnby was wild at the Mass. It is pleasant to be so fearfully respectfully treated!! Levi writes to me as ‘Wunderkind’ – Barnby says [...] that this Mass beats anything that has ‘been produced on English soil’ – But he says, as to its pleasing at once – that is an open question – for he says it is more ‘advanced’ than Brahms & Dvorjak [*sic*] put together (!!!)¹⁴⁵

Levi’s response to the work suggests that Smyth’s setting of the liturgical text was less of an issue to German listeners. Sir Joseph Barnby — director of the Royal Choral Society — appeared to come around to the Mass once it had received Levi’s endorsement, but his initial reaction had been less enthusiastic and he was cautious about programming a work by ‘unknown composers’.¹⁴⁶ Implicit within Barnby’s description of the Mass being ‘advanced’ is the idea that its perceived progressiveness might prevent the Mass from being ‘pleasing at once’ to listeners hearing it for the first time.¹⁴⁷ Given the work’s neglect after its premiere, Barnby’s observation was not inaccurate.

Later critical responses to the Mass in D are more favourable and Smyth seems to be forgiven for transgressing the boundaries of convention. Kathleen Dale asserts that:

From the point of view of musical style the Mass is dateless. Although employing all the resources of classical music and acknowledging the leadership of Beethoven, it is profoundly individual in its conception and carries conviction by the passionate sincerity of its inspiration.¹⁴⁸

Tovey also points to the influence of Beethoven, remarking that although Smyth’s text setting differs entirely from her predecessor’s *Missa Solemnis*, it is done ‘impressively, with tremendous emphasis; but without trace of eccentricity or paradox’.¹⁴⁹ While Smyth’s

¹⁴⁵ ES to HB, 12 March 1892, p. 3. Smyth refers here to the fifth child of Queen Victoria, Princess Helena (1846–1923), who was married to Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein. The report of Barnby being ‘wild at the Mass’ contrasts with her description in *As Time Went On*, where she suggests that the work ‘had struck him as disjointed, over-exuberant, and unnatural’ (p. 167). Elizabeth Kertesz suggests that Barnby may only have accepted the work ‘because of pressure from above’, which reinforces the importance of Smyth’s network of influential friends. See ‘Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass’, p. 78.

¹⁴⁶ *ATWO*, pp. 60–61.

¹⁴⁷ Brewster wrote to Smyth about this shortly after the premiere and sought to reassure her of the work’s merits. He remarks, ‘As for the effort being apparent, what have they not said of Brahms and Wagner? Original work generally seems strained. The path to receive it is not yet worn in the brain and the listener exteriorizes his own effort and credits it to the work The mythological instinct. I am sure your mass has its faults; so have you; but it is strong and sweet as yourself’. 28 January 1893, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Dale, ‘Appendix B: Ethel Smyth’s Music’ in St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, p. 296.

¹⁴⁹ Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, V, p. 236.

desire to be ‘an individual, not an echo’¹⁵⁰ might have been a barrier to the Mass’s success in the early 1890s, it was a distinguishing feature of her personality and a hallmark of her career, which went from strength to strength in the years following the Mass’s premiere.

4.5a. *The End of Orthodox Belief*

Smyth’s reflections on the Mass in D suggest that the work not only provided an opportunity for her to express her feelings, but that its completion marked the end of the ‘Munich mood’. She notes in *Impressions*:

Into that work I tried to put all there was in my heart, but no sooner was it finished than, strange to say, orthodox belief fell away from me, never to return; and ridiculous as it seems, the fact that Thomas à Kempis would have condemned Shakespeare’s [*sic*] Sonnets had a great deal to do with it. [...] I held, and still hold, that it is impossible to reconcile the teaching of the ‘Imitation’ with many of the circumstances of an artist’s life... or with many of the movements of his soul.¹⁵¹

Smyth’s comments indicate that she felt that there were aspects of her life that were incompatible with the religious teachings outlined in *The Imitation of Christ*.¹⁵² This echoes her earlier statement regarding the Benson family, to whom she had felt closest when ‘the artist was in abeyance’, implying that her adherence to orthodox teachings was impeded by her life as an artist.¹⁵³ Smyth also addresses her shifting beliefs in *As Time Went On*, where she declares that ‘writing the Mass seemed to have sweated religious, or at least dogmatic fervour out of me’.¹⁵⁴ These references to her turning away from ‘orthodox’ or ‘dogmatic’ practices suggest that while the period of religious intensity may have come to an end, her beliefs had not. Rather, they would not be defined by orthodox doctrines and could consequently take their own course. Smyth’s references to her thoughts on religion after she completed the Mass are more infrequent and less specific, yet they do not disappear entirely from the narrative of her life.

There may be additional reasons why Smyth’s orthodox belief dissolved as the Mass was completed. The death of her mother removed the pressure to remain at home and her passing might also have eased some of the guilt that Smyth felt about focusing on

¹⁵⁰ I refer here to Smyth’s assertion in *Female Pipings in Eden*: ‘I do entreat you not to aim at uniformity in matters of thought and feeling. The first and last rule, whichever sex you belong to, is: *Be yourself*, an individual, not an echo’ (p. 126).

¹⁵¹ *ITR*, II, p. 238–39.

¹⁵² Harry Brewster went as far as to describe *The Imitation of Christ* as ‘an unhealthy dangerous book’. See Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 223.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 193. See section 4.4 of the present chapter.

¹⁵⁴ *ATWO*, pp. 211–12.

her career rather than her family.¹⁵⁵ Drawing on the Smyth-Brewster correspondence, Rachael J. Gibbon has highlighted Smyth's challenging relationship with her mother, suggesting that 'Nina stifled Smyth's personal expression [...] causing Smyth impatience, misery and nervousness'.¹⁵⁶ After her mother's death, Smyth was no longer pulled in two opposing directions or obliged to put her own wishes to one side to try and accommodate or care for Nina. Consequently, she may have felt that she could return to her chosen path without the 'agonising remorse' triggered by her mother's loneliness, which in turn might have lessened her need for religious guidance.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, Smyth's reunion with Harry Brewster could have contributed to her change in perspective. Smyth was glad of their renewed correspondence, but Brewster did not share her views on religion and it became a frequent topic of debate.¹⁵⁸ She recalls that he looked on her 'mood of renunciation' with 'special abhorrence', which aligned with his broader anti-Church stance.¹⁵⁹ Smyth's frustration with Brewster comes across in her letters to him while she was composing the Mass; she appeared to find his closed-mindedness particularly vexing. In September 1891, she writes:

We are all stupid in some spot [and] I think your spot is anybody's religion but your own – How you contrive, seeing that most of the foremost intellectuals adhere to some form of dogmatic faith – i.e. subscribe to something they can't understand but can assent to – how you contrive, I say, to be so exceedingly bored by & and inimical to anything of the sort, I really don't know[.]¹⁶⁰

Despite this, Smyth felt that the Mass might help Brewster to understand her perspective as she noted, '[I] have shown my Mass to Manns who I can see is much impressed and — he is going to give it [a performance]. [...] I think this will do more to reconcile you, perhaps, than anything — I mean if you could hear it — to my "new opinions"'.¹⁶¹ Although critics may have felt that the Mass lacked religious spirit, this comment indicates that the work was intended to convey her beliefs at the time of composition.

¹⁵⁵ Even though Smyth enjoyed greater freedom, Frimhurst continued to be her primary home in England until her father's death in 1894.

¹⁵⁶ Rachael J. Gibbon, 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005), I, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁸ In *The Cosmopolites*, Harry Brewster remarks that the pair discussed religion in 'an affectionately combative spirit, with both H.B. and Ethel striving to convert each other to their perspective positions, he the pagan pluralist [...] and she the Episcopalian Anglican' (p. 220).

¹⁵⁹ *ATWO*, p. 39. Smyth also remarks that Harry Brewster detested the Church (p. 37), which is reflected in a letter from this time where he states, '[i]f there is one thing in the world I have dread of, it is the Church'. See Brewster, *The Cosmopolites*, p. 221).

¹⁶⁰ ES to HB, 6 September 1891, p. 12.

¹⁶¹ ES to HB, 6 September 1891, p. 13.

Brewster's issues with Christianity apparently stemmed from a lifelong aversion to its teachings, some of which resonate with Smyth's initial reaction to *The Imitation of Christ*. He responded to her:

The word [Christianity] was branded into my brain as with a hot iron when I was a child, with the same meaning: detachment, *renouncement*. Well I have no need for that article; I am superabundantly rich in it by instinct. If I want any doctrine at all it is one of expansion and joy — which I should be inclined to call paganism.¹⁶² If you call it Christianity I reply that we are using the same word to signify two opposite things; whence it would seem that the word has no meaning at all. It seems to be a sort of adverb, like 'very', that can accompany any quality. In so far as it accompanies beautiful masses I want as much of it as I can get; when it accompanies propositions given as statements of fact I beg to dispense with it, and when it accompanies conscience nursing I turn against it.¹⁶³

Given that Brewster rejected the idea of renouncement, it is unsurprising that they disagreed, as this was a driving force behind Smyth's religious resurgence. He acknowledged that religion was an important tool for some, conceding, 'I understate the need people have of religion for their immediate use', but he disliked the notion of being told what to think or how to act, which conflicted with his philosophical mindset and broader attitudes towards life.¹⁶⁴ His letter ends:

Oh how easily I understood the turns and twists of you in your heathen student days! So inquisitive, so thoughtful, so rebellious and so good. Where is the fun if you have found truth or have only got to ask the Church for it? If I had found truth I would sit down and cry. It is the moulding of thought into endless forms, the intelligence of innumerable anatomies, not the possession of one you fancy superior to others, that is the living poem. But then you have your music. I must hear that mass.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Martha Vicinus cites an interesting diary entry from Mary Benson's son, Arthur, after his mother's death. He writes, 'Mama was an instinctive *pagan* — hence her charm — with the most beautiful perceptions and ways.' Vicinus notes, 'Ben [Mary Benson] was not a pagan, of course, and would have been horrified to be labelled one, but perhaps her wholehearted acceptance of people made her seem free from the taint of Edward's debilitating religion'. In this context, 'paganism' seemed to denote a less constrained form of religious practice, yet one that was separate from Christianity. See "The Gift of Love": Nineteenth-Century Religion and Lesbian Passion' in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain*, ed. by Sue Morgan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 73–88 (p. 85).

¹⁶³ HB to ES, 20 September 1891, p. 8. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Harry Brewster's publications reflect his interest in philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, and morality. See, for example, *The Theories of Anarchy and Law: A Midnight Debate* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1887); *The Prison: A Dialogue* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891); *The Statuette and the Background* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896). Brewster had started writing *The Prison* around the same time Smyth was composing *The Song of Love* and he wrote to tell her in December 1888: 'I am hard at work now at a new book which I hope will please you' (21 December, p. 4). Smyth set portions of the text in her last large-scale work, *The Prison*, which was published in 1930 and premiered the following year. See the 1930 edition of Brewster's *The Prison* with a memoir of the author by Ethel Smyth (London: William Heinemann Ltd.)

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

Within this letter exchange is the implication that Smyth's Mass in D could express something that words alone could not. Moreover, Brewster aligns music with language and thought, suggesting that the Mass might convey meaning through sound as well as through text:

I am sure it will turn out that you will put the best part of your religion in sound [...]. Sound is a more mysterious and deeper thing than thought. Does your music precede [*sic*] from your notes or are your notes there because you have to exteriorize a certain structure of sound? Well thoughts are just the notes of the spoken voice. It is all music of a different kind.¹⁶⁶

Combined with the difficulty Smyth had in aligning her artistic life with the teachings of the Church, her intellectual debates with Brewster may have influenced her change in perspective. Nevertheless, Smyth and Brewster were still interested in exploring these topics musically, as evidenced by their collaboration on Smyth's first three operas.¹⁶⁷ This new direction was pivotal for Smyth and she began conceptualising her first operatic work, *Fantasio* (1892–94) shortly after completing the Mass.¹⁶⁸ She wrote to Brewster in December 1891 and expressed her desire to find a book on which to base a comic opera.¹⁶⁹ He suggested a number of French texts, all of which Smyth rejected in favour of Alfred de Musset's (1810–1857) *Fantasio* (1834). Gibbon suggests that Smyth's interest in composing a one-act opera 'may have stemmed from a lack of self-confidence in attempting a full-scale opera, or from a disinclination to write another large work after her Mass'.¹⁷⁰ Gibbon overlooks *The Song of Love* in her thesis, but considering the work within the broader context of the Mass adds weight to the reasons she proposes. After composing two emotionally driven large-scale sacred choral works, Smyth may well have welcomed the light relief of *Fantasio*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶⁷ Smyth's third opera, *The Wreckers* (1902–4), features a libretto by Brewster and is their most explicit exploration of religious and moral themes.

¹⁶⁸ Kertesz notes that Smyth spent considerable energy trying to secure additional performances of the Mass in D, playing the work 'for conductors and committees in Munich, Amsterdam, Cologne, Leipzig and Halle' during 1893–94. After repeated rejections, Smyth decided to focus all her energy on *Fantasio*. See 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass', p. 81.

¹⁶⁹ ES to HB, 21 December 1891, p. 5. In *As Time Went On*, Smyth states that, after hearing her Mass in D, Hermann Levi told her, "You must at once sit down and write an opera" (p. 47, emphasis in the original). However, Rachael J. Gibbon highlights that Smyth had already begun planning her first opera in December 1891, which was two months before she showed the Mass to Levi. Gibbon further notes that Smyth does not relay Levi's comment to Brewster, suggesting that he may have had less of an influence on her decision to compose an opera than her memoirs indicate. See 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005), I, pp. 30–36.

¹⁷⁰ Gibbon, 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth', I, p. 33.

Despite the short duration of Smyth's religious resurgence, this period of her life made a lasting impression. Reflecting on it, she states:

H.B., [Harry Brewster] [...] used to infuriate me in after life by attributing this particular development [her religious resurgence] to influenza; but if that be the explanation what matter? Who shall fathom the Divine plan? Only this I will say, that at no period in my life have I ever had the feeling of being saner, wiser, nearer truth. Never has this phase, as compared to others that were to succeed it, seemed overwrought, unnatural, or hysterical; it was simply a religious experience that in my case could not be an abiding one.¹⁷¹

Smyth's sentiments here reinforce the significance and positivity of her 'religious experience'. It could also be argued that Smyth felt 'saner, wiser, [and] nearer truth' during this period because she was being guided by a sense of morality that came from an external source. Rather than battling with her own conscience, Smyth used the doctrines of the Church to guide her actions, and her shift towards more compassionate and selfless behaviour can be seen as redemptive.¹⁷² The Mass, as a product of this period, is bound up in that process. Additionally, Smyth's reflection — written many years later — highlights her continued belief in a 'Divine plan' and further indicates that her religious faith remained after the completion of the Mass. This is usually overlooked in discussions of the work that overemphasise the fleeting nature of Smyth's interest in religion.

The tendency to confine discussions about Smyth's faith to the Mass in D stems from her memoirs. Aside from the details she provides about her childhood, religion is not a primary theme within her writing and references to it can be missed. However, there are comments throughout her publications that offer insights into her relationship with religion — especially Christianity — throughout her life. These range from her immersive reading of religious texts, which prompted her to declare that '[e]verything narrows, of course to the supreme question: how can you best save your soul?', to her praise of the Anglican Church's 'elasticity'.¹⁷³ When she joined the Women's Social and Political Union in 1910, she struggled with the Church's attitude towards women's voting rights, and in a speech delivered at a girls' school, she argued that women had developed '*a slave-habit of mind*—[an] inevitable result of æons of mental and spiritual subservience'.¹⁷⁴ When Smyth's memoirs are read with religion in mind, comments such as those cited here rise to the fore,

¹⁷¹ *ITR*, II, p. 239.

¹⁷² Harry Brewster argues in *The Cosmopolites* that consideration of her family and 'religious scruples' prevented her from entering into a more intimate relationship with Brewster in the early 1890s while Julia was still alive (p. 227).

¹⁷³ *ITR*, II, p. 234; *BOB*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁴ *ITR*, II, p. 189; *FP*, p. 129.

implying that she frequently grappled with her faith and the teachings of the Church.¹⁷⁵ The struggle to reconcile the life that she desired to live with the moral, societal, and familial expectations with which she was surrounded, is an undertone that is present in much of her writing.

4.6. Conclusion

Ethel Smyth considered her Mass in D to be one of her finest pieces, stating in 1921 that she would ‘never do anything better’.¹⁷⁶ Despite the uncertainty of its early reception, the Mass is now one of her most well-known works, benefitting from multiple recordings, an easily accessible vocal score, and an increasing number of performances.¹⁷⁷ In composing this work, Smyth was continuing to push the boundaries of what was expected of her as a ‘woman composer’. The Mass in D was not only a large-scale and ambitious work but also one in which she tried to express her individuality, infusing the music with the dramatic flair that led her to compose six operas. Furthermore, placing the Gloria movement at the end of the Mass was unconventional within the Roman Catholic liturgy, and while flouting tradition was ‘inexcusable’ to some listeners, it further evidences Smyth’s determination to follow her own course.

The singularity of Smyth’s personality is echoed in the literature surrounding the Mass, which sees the work as an anomaly within her output. As this chapter argues, this perception has arisen due to a largely uncritical acceptance of the narrative Smyth conveys in her memoirs, particularly regarding the influence of Pauline Trevelyan, which has resulted in a tendency to overlook the broader context of the work. In doing so, scholars have missed an opportunity to explore several facets of Smyth’s life that may have contributed to her decision to compose a large-scale sacred piece at this time. These

¹⁷⁵ None of Smyth’s later works are as overtly religious as the Mass in D or *The Song of Love*, yet references to God arise in the text of her suffrage collection *The Songs of Sunrise* (pub. 1911). As has already been mentioned, *The Wreckers* (1902–04) explores religious themes and one of her last compositions, *Prelude on a Traditional Irish Air* (pub. 1939), is based on the hymn ‘The Soul’s Desire’. This latter piece was an organ composition requested some years before by the Irish writer, Edith Somerville, with whom Smyth became friends in 1918. See Edith Somerville to Ethel Smyth, 13 June 1921, MS 17/878/1/39, p. 3, Somerville and Ross Manuscripts collection, Queen’s University Belfast.

¹⁷⁶ SOL, p. 110.

¹⁷⁷ Smyth received a particularly high number of performances in 2022, which coincided with the inclusion of *The Wreckers* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera (21 May–24 June). The Mass was included in the BBC Proms concert season on 20 August 2022 and performed by choral societies such as the Stowmarket Chorale (Stowmarket, U.K., 19 March), Cathedral Choral Society (Washington D.C., U.S.A., 13 March), and the Camberwell Chorale (Melbourne, Australia, 9 October). This momentum continued into 2023 and the Mass was performed by the Bard Festival Chorale (New York, U.S.A., 27 January), Northampton Bach Choir (Northampton, U.K., 18 March), Preston Cecilian Choral Society (Preston, U.K., 18 March) Seattle Pro Musica (Seattle, U.S.A., 20 May), Romsey Choral Society (Romsey, U.K., 1 July). This increase in performances indicates a growing interest in Smyth’s music.

include Smyth's relationship with religion; her other sacred settings, including the part-songs and organ preludes that she composed as a student in Leipzig; and the influence of key figures in her life during the 1880s and 1890s.

Existing literature on Smyth's engagement with religion is scarce, yet the exploration of this theme within this chapter demonstrates that her enquiring approach to Christianity began early. Studying Smyth's childhood is important as it shows that although she often questioned the Church's teachings, she turned to religion in times of need during her youth, deriving peace from prayer and experiencing periods of heightened belief. As this idea reoccurs within the context of the *Mass in D*, addressing the early part of Smyth's life enriches our understanding of how she leaned on Christian teachings during difficult periods. Moreover, it indicates the degree to which her Anglican upbringing influenced her first compositions as a child and highlights how attitudes towards women within Smyth's home environment were shaped by the Church. Pursuing a career in composition was a progressive idea and one that reflected her desire for independence.

Similarly overlooked in relation to the *Mass in D* are Smyth's early sacred settings, including her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes* (c. 1882–84) and her collection of *Short Chorale Preludes* for the organ (1882–84, rev. 1913). As this chapter illustrates, Smyth valued these pieces, which is evidenced not only by the revision of the organ preludes in 1913 but also by the markings on the part-song manuscript scores, indicating that she intended to print them. Combined with the neglect of *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, dismissing these pieces as products of Smyth's education in Leipzig perpetuates the notion that the *Mass* is singular within Smyth's output. In bringing Smyth's early sacred settings to the fore, this chapter serves to remind readers of the existence of these pieces, which are part of a small yet significant body of sacred works in Smyth's oeuvre.

While Smyth may not have addressed all of her music within her memoirs, these volumes abound with anecdotes and reflections about her life. In drawing on Smyth's autobiographies, this chapter acknowledges their significant value but also attempts to offer a more nuanced account of the circumstances surrounding the *Mass*'s creation by weaving the narratives in *Impressions that Remained*, *Streaks of Life*, and *As Time Went On* into a more comprehensive biographical overview. Crucially, it also notes discrepancies within Smyth's memoirs and, where possible, supplements her reflections with sources contemporaneous to the events described, such as letters and newspapers, to paint a clearer picture. The intention is not to discredit Smyth's narrative, but rather to cast a light

on aspects of her biography that might be overlooked in relation to the Mass due to the way she conveys the story in her memoirs.

The three mother figures addressed in this chapter — Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Mary Benson, and Nina Smyth — each played an important role in Smyth's life and are central to the wider context of the Mass. This chapter demonstrates how Smyth's connection to each of these women may have contributed to the creation of the work. The complexity of Smyth's feelings surrounding her relationship with Lisl had a significant and lasting impact on her life, contributing to the crisis Smyth experienced in Munich in 1889. Mary offered moral and religious guidance in addition to a caring friendship, the stability of which Smyth needed after her break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs. As her mother, Nina was a constant presence in Smyth's life; their turbulent relationship and Nina's loneliness troubled Smyth more as she aged. The pressure to accommodate her mother, combined with her ongoing hope of reconciliation with Lisl, contributed to her intention to renounce music. By exploring Smyth's relationships with these women, this chapter offers a deeper biographical reading of the Mass that draws attention to contributing factors that may have motivated her to compose the piece. Consequently, it moves beyond Smyth's friendship with Pauline Trevelyan while also acknowledging its significance.

The 'Munich mood' in which Smyth composed the Mass in D was a powerful one, reflective of the emotional intensity of the preceding years. In leaning on the teachings of the Church, Smyth returned to a coping mechanism developed in her youth, seeking guidance from a higher power as she dealt with her internal battle of renunciation, repentance, and redemption. Smyth's loss of orthodox belief is often accepted without question because of her statement in *Impressions* and her attitudes towards religion after this point are under-explored. This chapter separates the notion of orthodox teachings from the concept of belief and illustrates that Smyth struggled to align her life as an artist with the doctrines of the Church. Her pronouncement in *Impressions* was not an indication that she suffered a complete loss of faith and her autobiographies suggest an ongoing dialogue with religion throughout her life. This chapter also explores her correspondence with Harry Brewster to exemplify their contrasting perspectives on the topic, which may have contributed to her shift in perspective.

As a landmark work, Smyth's Mass in D is a significant part of her oeuvre, and when it is considered in relation to her earlier sacred settings — most notably her *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes*, *Short Chorale Preludes*, and *The Song of Love* — it

assumes even greater importance. These works are illustrative not only of Smyth's interest in religion but also of her desire to compose on an equal platform to men. The part-songs and organ preludes hark back to Bach; the cantata reflects her desire to break free from smaller-scale works; and the Mass in D shows Smyth refining her skills and pushing against the boundaries of expectation. Moreover, the vocal works can be seen to convey a message and this use of music as a communicative or narrative tool is a hallmark of Smyth's career. The Mass was a watershed moment for Smyth; she would not return to composing a large-scale vocal work with orchestral accompaniment until the end of her career. Yet the Mass and its immediate predecessor, *The Song of Love*, form a vital link in the chain of her compositional trajectory, symbolising how far she had come and how far she had the potential to go.

Conclusion: Other Sides of Ethel Smyth

'I see no life for myself without you, left alone with the unutterable longing for your companionship as well as your love'.¹

Summary of Findings

Ethel Smyth had lived for over half a century before she joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1910. Following the performances of her first three operas, her reputation as a composer was growing and she entered the political arena at an important point in her career. Friends reportedly expressed their concern at her decision to join the militant group, yet once Smyth had made up her mind she seemed determined to contribute to the cause. The potential for raising her public profile may also have influenced her stance, particularly once she had decided that she could continue composing. A concert featuring her suffrage works at the Queen's Hall in London in April 1911 gained many favourable reviews that would have brought her to the attention of readers with an interest in music. One critic reported:

Woman [*sic*] generally must be grateful to Dr. Ethel Smyth for having removed a long-standing reproach from the sex! It has been told against us from all time that there has never been a great woman composer; woman [*sic*] may have been successful in other of the arts, we were told; but in music she had no place. Dr. Smyth has changed all that. [...] Dr. Smyth has not found the pathway to fame a smooth one; but her success is now well assured.²

While the 'pathway to fame' that Smyth had travelled had been circuitous and potholed, joining the WSPU did not hinder her progress. Rather, it placed her — and her music — under a spotlight. Her association with the movement was so strong that it was still a focal point for journalists reporting on her death in 1944, over thirty years after she had left the WSPU. The *Daily Mirror* stated, 'Out of the movement for women's suffrage [...] came some of the finest music ever written by a woman. The woman was Dame Ethel Smyth, a leading figure in the fight for women's rights'.³

¹ Ethel Smyth to Harry Brewster, 12 July 1884, p. 8, San Francesco di Paola / Brewster Archive. The title of this chapter is a reference to *Another Side of Ethel Smyth: Letters to her Great-Niece, Elizabeth Mary Williamson*, selected and ed. by Caroline E. M. Stone (Edinburgh: Kennedy & Boyd, 2018). These are the only letters to have been published in a stand-alone volume and, like this thesis, were designed to show a side of Ethel Smyth that is not found in her auto/biographies.

² 'Ladies Column, Dr. Ethel Smyth', *The Hendon and Finchley Times*, 14 April 1911, p. 8.

³ 'Women's suffrage inspired her: greatest woman composer once had toothbrush baton', *The Daily Mirror*, 10 May 1944, p. 2. Like many of the obituaries following Smyth's death, this article foregrounds her identity as a suffragette and refers to Sir Thomas Beecham's recollection of Smyth conducting 'The March of the Women' with a toothbrush from her cell window in Holloway Prison. (See 'Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)', *The Musical Times*, 99/1385 (1958), 363–65). The contemporary press often takes a similar approach; see for

As addressed in the introduction, this perception of Smyth has continued to influence how she has been studied and depicted in the years since her death. Similarly, her dedication to opera has also been the focus of study and is a prevalent theme within the existing literature. Smyth is often hailed as a suffragette and as an operatic composer and her identity has been largely shaped around these two aspects of her career, which has narrowed the focus and resulted in an incomplete representation of who she was. Yet Smyth composed a considerable amount of music before she penned her first opera or joined the WSPU. By looking at the early part of Smyth's life and career, this thesis offered an insight into her formative years, examining an under-explored period in Smyth's history to enrich our understanding of the composer. It also revealed another side to Smyth, showing how she used music as an outlet for her emotions, using her compositions to express feelings that were challenging to articulate in other ways.⁴

Smyth was a deeply social person, as evidenced by her ten published books with their tales of 'human happening' that surround the musical events she describes.⁵ In a similar vein, this thesis approaches Smyth and a selection of her works with the human in mind, seeking to better understand both her creative motivations and her relationships with key figures in her life. As shown throughout the study, her engagement with people such as Elisabeth and Heinrich von Herzogenberg, Harry and Julia Brewster, Mary Benson, and Pauline Trevelyan had a significant impact on her experiences, interests, and compositional output. By taking a biographical approach and supplementing Smyth's recollections with primary source material, the thesis seeks to offer a more nuanced account of these relationships and considers how they may have influenced her creative process. Crucially, it also approaches Smyth's publications critically and examines what she chose to omit — both musically and personally — to deepen our knowledge of these aspects of her biography and oeuvre. Given the autobiographical nature of much of Smyth's music, the thesis demonstrates the importance of situating her works within their compositional context and highlights how much can be gained by taking such an approach. Moreover, it shows that the music from her early period (1877–1891) is as worthy of study as that dating from her middle (1892–1914) or later (1920–1938) years. Neglecting the

example, Imogen Tilden, "She's badass': how brick-throwing suffragette Ethel Smyth composed an opera to shake up Britain", *The Guardian*, 19 May 2022
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/may/19/suffragette-ethel-smyth-opera-the-wreckers>>
[accessed 22 May 2023].

⁴ Smyth's expressivity is addressed in more detail below.

⁵ Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), pp. 1–2.

works composed during the early part of her career results in an incomplete picture of Dame Ethel Smyth; of the woman and her music.

Chapter 1 began by exploring how Smyth the autobiographer has affected our perception of Smyth the composer. The availability of her memoirs makes them an accessible starting point for those seeking to learn more about her, but they have heavily influenced interpretations of her life and works. In addressing Smyth's output as a writer, the chapter considered the extent to which her portrayal of events was shaped by how she wished to be seen by her readership. Her cultivated self-image reflected societal attitudes at the time of writing and had an effect on how she chose to represent aspects of her life, including her sexuality and her relationship with Harry and Julia Brewster. Following Amanda Harris's assertion that approaching the memoirs uncritically overlooks her agenda as a writer,⁶ this chapter examined the literature that has taken a more critical stance and utilised primary source materials to build a more comprehensive picture than the one offered by Smyth. It also highlighted what sources are available to those researching her and considered how accessibility issues may have limited the scope of scholarly enquiry, thus contributing to the over-reliance on her published books. In compiling a fresh biographical sketch of the composer, the thesis used Smyth's memoirs as a starting point but also drew on existing literature and, where possible, primary source material to broaden the narrative. Although the thesis is primarily concerned with the early part of her life and career, the substantial biographical sketch took the reader from Smyth's birth in 1858 to her death in 1944. While it was beyond the scope of the thesis to provide a complete biographical account, Chapter 1 aimed to offer an overview that situated Smyth within her socio-cultural context and highlighted several thematic threads central to her life and to the thesis more broadly. These included her early interest in music, her networks and friendships, and the preoccupations that motivated her as a composer. As a revised and updated biography of Ethel Smyth is needed to bring our understanding of the composer into the twenty-first century, the sketch was designed not only to enhance the reader's understanding of Smyth's life but also to invite further dialogue about how we write about her history.⁷

⁶ Amanda Harris, 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94 (p. 73).

⁷ As indicated in the introduction, the existing biographies by Christopher St John (1959) and Louise Collis (1984) lack the objectivity and academic rigour of contemporary publications, which weakens our understanding of Smyth and perpetuates misconceptions. The lack of referencing is a particular limitation of both volumes as it poses issues regarding the traceability of sources and calls their validity into question.

Chapter 2 focused on Smyth's connection to Germany, which began when she left England to study at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1877. The years she spent on the continent had a profound effect on Smyth as she began her career as a composer; initially, she received musical tuition from teachers at the Conservatory and then from Heinrich von Herzogenberg. However, she also learned from her environment and the social circles to which she belonged offered an informal education on both a musical and personal level. As outlined in the introduction, this formative period in Smyth's life has received limited attention within the existing literature. Consequently, Chapter 2 examined Smyth's relationship with Germany and highlighted her educational background, compositional influences, and broader social network. The unpublished correspondence between Smyth and her mother, Nina, was used to offer an insight into the composer's reaction to her new city and the people she met. The letters also showed how Smyth's attitudes towards her education at the Leipzig Conservatory shifted over time; the criticism she offers in *Impressions that Remain* contrasts with the admiration and excitement conveyed in her correspondence of 1877–78. These materials helped to give a fuller sense of the nineteen-year-old Smyth who went to Leipzig full of enthusiasm and ambition.

In addition to its consideration of her education and musical influences, the first part of the chapter offered an overview of how her time in Germany affected Smyth's identity as a composer. This theme reoccurs throughout her career, particularly in relation to her reception by the press.⁸ By exploring Smyth's social network, Chapter 2 foregrounded the figures with whom she engaged and who, by extension, influenced her musical output. Her *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4 reflect her desire to inhabit the artistic world of composers such as Schubert and Brahms, whom she and her new friends admired. Although she later chose to exert her individuality, her engagement with the art song tradition shows Smyth echoing her Austro-German predecessors, aligning herself with an art form that carried an increasing prestige and an association with 'high' culture. An examination of these Lieder highlighted how Smyth set the texts she selected, expressing the poetic content in a manner that reflected the tradition to which she responded. It also demonstrated that Smyth's interest in narrative and drama — most clearly evidenced in her operatic works — was already present in her earliest published

⁸ See for example Elizabeth Kertesz, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas in England and Germany' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000); Aidan J. Thomson, 'Decadence in the Forest: Smyth's *Der Wald* in its Critical Context' in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 218–249; Amy Zigler, "'What a splendid chance missed!': Dame Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* at the Met', *The Opera Journal*, 54/2 (2021), 109–163.

songs. In refocusing attention on the formative part of Smyth's career, Chapter 2 investigated how the music she composed during that time can be seen to connect to what she created in subsequent years, thus giving a broader sense of her compositional trajectory.

Chapter 3 cast a light on one of Smyth's lesser-known works, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, and examined how she may have used the cantata to express her feelings for Harry Brewster. It drew on two thematic threads from the preceding chapters: Smyth as an autobiographer and how she used music to convey a narrative. Whereas her Lieder are governed by the poetic form, *The Song of Love* is more experimental; her text setting may relate to both the original Biblical poem and Smyth's autobiographical reworking of the story. To foreground *The Song of Love* within the discussion for the first time, Chapter 3 offered a detailed exploration of Smyth's relationship with the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs in order to put the work in context. This reappraisal of the complex web of relationships connecting Smyth to the two families was informed by unpublished correspondence between Smyth and Harry Brewster, which facilitated a more nuanced account of their relationship. In keeping with Smyth's memoirs, which tend to focus on her admiration for women, Smyth's connection to Brewster is often overlooked within existing literature. Thus, in highlighting the significance of her connection to Harry Brewster, Chapter 3 aimed to reclaim this part of Smyth's history so that contemporary audiences may approach her life and music with a greater understanding of who she was as a person. The cantata was the first composition Smyth wrote after the break from the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs, an event that had a significant impact on her emotional state and her musical output. Smyth's construction of the narrative and aspects of the cantata's composition — such as the use of remote keys, frequent time signature changes, and disjunct vocal lines — can be seen to reflect the difficulty of that period in Smyth's life and the raw emotion that birthed *The Song of Love*. Furthermore, studying the cantata enriches our understanding of her next large-scale choral work, the Mass in D. The biographical context surrounding *The Song of Love* fed into the crisis that ultimately resulted in the Mass, which makes it even more vital that the importance of Smyth's first large-scale choral work is recognised.

Chapter 4 addressed the Mass in D as part of a broader exploration of Smyth's relationship with religion, which has been under-examined within the literature to date. It challenged the perception that Smyth's Mass is an anomaly within her output by highlighting her early sacred settings, including the *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale*

Tunes (c. 1882–84) and her collection of *Short Chorale Preludes* for organ (1882–84, rev. 1913). By bringing these works to the fore, this chapter served to remind readers of the existence of these pieces, which are part of a small yet significant body of sacred works in Smyth's oeuvre that includes *The Song of Love* and the Mass in D. She gives this latter composition a significant amount of attention in her memoirs and provides a sense of the impetus behind its creation. However, Smyth's emphasis on Pauline Trevelyan within her narrative has led scholars to overlook the broader context of the work, missing an opportunity to explore facets of Smyth's life that may have contributed to her decision to compose a large-scale sacred piece at this time. Consequently, the reading of the Mass presented in Chapter 4 looked beyond Smyth's friendship with Trevelyan and considered other influences, including her Anglican upbringing, attitudes towards religion, and her relationship with three key mother figures: Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Mary Benson, and Nina Smyth. The chapter argued that when the Mass is situated within its biographical context, it can be regarded as more than a product of Smyth's brief interest in Catholicism and her friendship with Pauline Trevelyan. Rather, it was a work composed during a low point in Smyth's life, where she turned to religion as a source of comfort and strength, mirroring habits she developed during childhood. This new interpretation of the motivations behind Smyth's Mass suggested that its composition may have been a cathartic process, which was driven by a desire for redemption and fuelled by guilt stemming from the situation with the Brewsters and Herzogenbergs and her challenging relationship with her mother. A deeper exploration of Smyth's engagement with religion — both before and after she wrote the Mass — revealed that while her orthodox belief may have waned after its composition, her autobiographies indicate an ongoing dialogue with religion throughout her life. This biographical reading of the Mass aimed to broaden the discourse on Smyth's relationship with religion and probe the narrative presented in her memoirs, offering deeper insight into the potential motivations behind the work's creation.

Collectively, these chapters address questions that fall under four interconnected themes: identity, narrative and drama, music as a means of expression, and religion. Identity is a central part of Smyth scholarship, encompassing ideas about who Smyth was as a woman, friend, and daughter; as an English composer educated in Germany; and as an individual who loved both women and men. This thesis not only engages with each of these aspects but also questions how Smyth saw herself, as her perception of who she was undoubtedly influenced the version of Ethel Smyth found on the pages of her memoirs. By approaching her writing with a critical eye and supplementing her autobiographical

accounts with primary source materials, the thesis aims to build a fuller picture of Smyth's fascinating life. It also strives to illustrate that a deeper understanding of her biography significantly enhances our interpretation of her musical works, inviting us to investigate both the unknown and the more familiar aspects of her oeuvre. These questions regarding identity feed into those concerning Smyth's interest in narrative and drama; readers do not need to delve too deeply into her publications to discover her distinctive voice as a storyteller compelled to capture the dramatic side of everyday life. Starting with her Lieder — some of her earliest published music — the thesis highlights that Smyth was exploring how to convey a dramatic narrative through music before her career had even started. The six operas in her output represent one facet of this compositional trait; knowing about the music that preceded these works leads to a greater awareness of the factors that shaped their creation. *The Song of Love* and the Mass in D exemplify this, as the latter work was less experimental than its predecessor and set a more conventional text; the resistance Smyth had encountered when attempting to interest musical directors in *The Song of Love* likely influenced how she approached the composition of the Mass in D. Yet these two works can both be seen to foreshadow the dramaticism of her operas and so form a link between the songs, chamber, and orchestral pieces of her early period to the staged works of her middle and late.

Smyth's expressivity is equally apparent in her writing — published works and unpublished sources alike — and her compositions. Evidence of her using music as a means of expression can be found throughout her career, from her Lieder and early large-scale choral works to her operatic and suffrage output. Vocal music offered Smyth the opportunity to convey a message, ranging from the intimate realm of the heart to the public sites of protest. From its outset, this thesis questions how Smyth used music in this manner and what her works might reveal. While acknowledging that compositions can be interpreted in many ways, the readings within this study offer new perspectives on Smyth's music. The thesis shows that *The Song of Love* may be seen as an expression of her feelings for Harry Brewster, a creative outlet that gave her scope to say what otherwise had to remain unsaid. Similarly, it argues that the Mass in D might be regarded as a musical record of Smyth using religion to come to terms with her guilt and grief; a work created in a spirit of atonement. Finding refuge in religion was central to Smyth's decision to compose a sacred work at this time, and by addressing Smyth's engagement with religion, the thesis enhances our understanding of how she leaned on Christian teachings during difficult periods to find comfort and strength. This contests existing views on Smyth's faith and re-

evaluates this aspect of her biography to bring her into sharper focus for twenty-first-century audiences.

Implications for Further Research

Smyth's music tells us more than just who she was as a composer; it tells us who she was as a person. In making connections between her music and biography, this thesis explores aspects of Smyth's life and output that are often overlooked in order to revivify this larger-than-life figure. Looking beyond what is known, or challenging the narratives presented to us is a vital part of scholarly enquiry, and applying this to Smyth's memoirs allows us to critique her writing with an awareness of the context from which it emerged to add nuance to the accounts she gave. It also offers an opportunity to explore other sides of her identity, broadening the scope to give a clearer sense of who she was. This thesis makes extensive use of materials beyond those published by Smyth, including letters, diaries, and newspapers, which greatly enrich the dialogue and offer details to supplement Smyth's own accounts. By drawing attention to these resources, the thesis aims to illustrate how much can be gained by utilising them so that others may be inspired to do likewise. The publication of Smyth's letters or diaries would improve accessibility to these materials and increase the likelihood of them being used in scholarship.

It is hoped that by focusing on the early period of Smyth's career, this study will encourage researchers to approach it with a renewed appreciation for the music that she composed during this time. The examination of her *Lieder und Balladen*, Op. 3 and *Lieder*, Op. 4, *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, and Mass in D serves to illustrate the significance of these works and highlight the diversity of Smyth's early output. A wealth of under-explored musical material from this period is still waiting to be examined and given appropriate recognition within Smyth scholarship, including complete works, such as her Serenade in D, or incomplete sketches.⁹ In casting a light on a selection of Smyth's early compositions and drawing attention to others, the thesis aimed to raise awareness of and promote interest in this area of the field. Further contributions may increase our understanding of Smyth's formative years and help us to consider how her musical voice evolved over time.

The music explored in this study dates from *c.* 1877 to 1891, a fourteen-year period in which Smyth developed her skills as a composer and explored different styles and genres. Consequently, the compositions that she produced during this time offer variety for those looking to perform her works. Despite their size, the Lieder are not often heard

⁹ These materials can be found within the Ethel Smyth Collection at the British Library.

in concert halls and deserve to be better known. The Alternative Canon Project, who organised the premiere performance of *The Song of Love*, has demonstrated what can be achieved with enough time, determination, and financial support. If the typeset score edited by Angie Wyatt is published, additional performances and a commercial recording of the cantata may follow suit, thus bringing the work to a wider audience. In offering the first detailed account of the context surrounding *The Song of Love*, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the work and promotes further research in this area. Similarly, the biographical reading of the Mass in D invites scholars and performers to reappraise the historical narrative surrounding the composition and consider the story that they wish to tell when they are in a position to do so.

Vita Sackville-West's poem, written for Ethel Smyth on the day of her death, conveys a familiar narrative and encapsulates much of the composer's spirit. In it, Smyth is described as a woman who 'fully lived' and held to her beliefs.¹⁰ The final stanza reads:

You were marked out to meet a violent end;
You should have matched the violent young men,
Stormers of evil in all elements,
Earth, water, air, and in the daring mind.
They were your peers; their life, their death, were yours;
Not in a Surrey Villa, of old age,
Where you who greatly lived have gently died.¹¹

Sackville-West echoes Virginia Woolf's 1931 speech in her combative language and Smyth is once more cast as a fighter, although one who meets a gentler end than her perceived peers. Much like the image of Smyth the stone-throwing suffragette, these portrayals celebrate her strength of mind and character and draw out her vitality. However, what is often missed is Smyth's sensitivity: the depth of her emotional reservoir, and the vulnerability that came with being a 'wild welcomer [...] of love'.¹² Faced with the prospect of losing Harry Brewster in 1884, Smyth told him, 'I see no life for myself without you, left alone with the unutterable longing for your companionship as well as your love'.¹³ This heart-sore Smyth is not the woman with whom we are typically presented, yet it was a core part of who she was and, as this thesis demonstrates, had an impact on her compositional output. Christopher St John's suggestion that 'Ethel's rich and varied experience of life

¹⁰ Vita Sackville-West, 'To Ethel, May 8th 1944' quoted in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. xiii. The final line of the poem seems reminiscent of a couplet found in Alexander Pope's 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady': 'Is there no bright reversion in the sky, / For those who greatly think, or bravely die?'

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹³ ES to HB, 12 July 1884, p. 8.

found its most complete expression in her music¹⁴ is especially pertinent here, at the close of a thesis that is fundamentally concerned with how Smyth used music as a means of expression. The works addressed throughout this study exemplify her expressivity, reflecting not only her courage and determination but also her sensitivity. It is hoped that readers may come away knowing more about this facet of Smyth's personality and the works it influenced, thus helping them to see beyond the suffragette.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 243.

Bibliography

Unpublished Correspondence & Archival Material

‘A, VI. 5/17: [Briefe]’, Hochschule für Musik und Theater, ‘Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy’, Hochschulbibliothek, Leipzig, Germany. The letters contained within this collection have been digitised by the University of Dresden and can be viewed online at <<https://katalog.slub-dresden.de/id/0-165646716X>> [accessed 19 June 2023]

Correspondence between Ethel Smyth and Henry Bennet Brewster, San Francisco di Paola / Brewster Archive, Florence

Royal Philharmonic Society Archive, RPS MS 364, ff. 69–70, British Library, London

Somerville and Ross Manuscripts, Correspondence from Edith Somerville to Ethel Smyth, MS 17/878/1, Queen’s University Belfast

—— Correspondence from Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, MS 17/878/2, Queen’s University Belfast

—— Notes on Edith Somerville’s diaries by Muriel Curry, MS 17/874/4, Queen’s University Belfast

Manuscript Scores

Smyth, Ethel, *Five Sacred Part-Songs Based on Chorale Tunes*, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library, London

—— *Lieder*, Op. 4, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library, London

—— *Lieder und Ballden*, Op. 3, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library, London

—— *Short Chorale Preludes*, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXII, Add MS 46861, British Library, London

—— *The Song of Love*, Op. 8, Ethel Smyth Collection, Vol. XXIII, Add MS 46862, British Library, London

Published Scores

Smyth, Ethel, *Complete Piano Works: Sonatas, Individual Piano Pieces, Variations*, ed. by Liana Gavrilă-Serbescu (Wiesbaden: Brietkopf & Härtel, 2003)

—— *Lieder und Ballden, Opus 3* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1886)

—— *Lieder, Opus 4* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1886)

—— *Mass in D*, vocal score, revised edition (London: Novello, 1925)

Books and Chapters

Anderson, Gwen, *Ethel Smyth: The Burning Rose: A Brief Biography* (London: Woolf, 1997)

Baker, Michael, *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: William Borrow & Co., 1985)

Bartsch, Cornelia, 'Cyclic Organization, Narrative, and Self-Construction in Ethel Smyth's *Lieder und Balladen*, op. 3 and *Lieder*, op. 4' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 177–216

Berry, Paul, *Brahms Among Friends: Listening, Performance, and the Rhetoric of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Boden, Anthony and Paul Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival: A History* (New and Revised Edition); Donald Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival* (Wokingham: Osborne Heritage, 1999)

Borchard, Beatrix, 'Between Public and Private' in *Women Composers in Germany*, ed. by Roswitha Sperber, trans. by Timothy Nevill (Bonn: Internationes, 1996), pp. 23–38

Brahms, Johannes, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, ed. by Styra Avins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

— *Johannes Brahms: The Herzogenberg Correspondence*, ed. by Max Kalbeck, trans. By Hannah Bryant (London: John Murray, 1909)

Brenner, Athalya, ed., *A Feminist Companion to The Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1993, reprinted 2001)

Brewster, Henry Bennet, *The Prison: A Dialogue* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891)

— *The Prison: A Dialogue*, with a memoir of the author by Ethel Smyth (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930)

— *The Statuette and the Background* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896)

— *The Theories of Anarchy and Law: A Midnight Debate* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1887)

Brewster, Harry, *The Cosmopolites: A Nineteenth-Century Family Drama* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994)

Broad, Leah, *Quartet: How Four Women Changed the Musical World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023)

Brown, Jane K., 'In the beginning was poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. by James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 12–32

Bunzel, Anja, *The Songs of Johanna Kinkel* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020)

- Bunzel, Anja and Natasha Loges, *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019)
- Byrne Bodley, Lorraine, 'In Pursuit of a Single Flame: Fanny Hensel's 'Musical Salon' in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Aisling Kenny, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 45–59
- *Schubert's Goethe Settings* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2003)
- Citron, Marcia J., *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000)
- 'Women and the Lied, 1775–1850' in *Women Making Music*, ed. by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 224–48
- Collis, Louise, *Impetuous Heart: The story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber & Co. Limited, 1984)
- Cox, David, *The Henry Wood Proms* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1980)
- Dale, Kathleen, 'Appendix B: Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study' in Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 288–304
- Davies, Joe and James William Sobaskie, eds., *Drama in the Music of Franz Schubert* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2019)
- Dittrich, Marie-Agnes, 'The Lieder of Schubert' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. by James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 85–100
- Dörffel, Alfred, *Geschichte der Gewandhausconcerte zu Leipzig* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1884)
- Dyhouse, Carol, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge, 2012)
- Eichendorff, Joseph von, *Abnung und Gegenwart* (Nürnberg: Johann Leonhard Schrag, 1815)
- Exum, J. Cheryl, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011)
- Fischer-Dieskau, Dietrich, *The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder*, with English translations by George Bird and Richard Stokes (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1976)
- Fried Block, Adrienne, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Fuller, Sophie, 'Grace, Betty, Maude and Me: 30 Years of Fighting for Women Composers' in *The Routledge Handbook of Women's Work in Music*, pp. 9–18
- *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States 1629–Present* (London: Pandora, 1994)

- Fuller-Maitland, J. A., 'Smyth, Ethel' in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by J. A. Fuller-Maitland (New York: Macmillan, 1910), vol. 4, p. 490
- Gatty, Horatia, *Juliana Horatia Ewing and her Books* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885)
- Garland, Henry and Mary Garland, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Geibel, Emanuel and Paul Heyse, eds., *Spanisches Liederbuch* (Berlin: Besser, 1852)
- Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- Hallmark, Rufus, *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Routledge, 2010)
- Halstead, Jill, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016)
- Hardy, Lisa, *The British Piano Sonata 1870–1945* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001)
- Harris, Amanda, "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women': An English Musical Feminism' in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 70–84.
- Heine, Heinrich, *Buch der Lieder* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1827)
- Henschel, George, *Musings and Memories of a Musician* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1919)
- Herrmann, Caspar, ed., *Lüneburgisches Gesangbuch* (Lüneburg: Johann Stern, 1695)
- Hoffmann, Marleen "'It seems to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters'". Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music' in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose, pp. 186–204
- Hyde, Derek, *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998)
- Jacobs, William Wymark, *Captains All* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905)
- Jezic, Diane Peacock, ed., *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found*, 2nd edn, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1994)
- Joannou, Maroula and June Purvis, eds., *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)
- Kempis, Thomas à, *The Imitation of Christ*, Burlington Library Edition (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., n.d.)

- Kneschke, Emil, *Das Königliche conservatorium der musik zu Leipzig, 1843-1893* (Leipzig and New York: Internationale verlags- und kunstanstalt (A. Laurencic), 1893)
- *Zur Geschichte des Theaters und der Musik in Leipzig* (Leipzig: F. Fleischer, 1864)
- Koelb, Clayton and Eric Downing, eds., *German Literature of the Nineteenth-Century, 1832–1899* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005)
- Kramer, Lawrence, ‘The Lied as Cultural Practice’ in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 143–173
- Kravitt, Edward F., *The Lied: Mirror of Late Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)
- Krebs, Harald and Sharon Krebs, *Josephine Lang: Her Life and Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Langfield, Valerie, ‘The Family von Glehn’ in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 3, ed. by Peter Horton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 273–291
- Leistra-Jones, Karen, ‘Leipzig and Berlin’ in *Brahms in Context* ed. by Natasha Loges and Katy Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 33–43
- Lewis, Gifford, *Edith Somerville: A Biography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005)
- Loges, Natasha, *Brahms and His Poets* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017)
- Lott, Marie Sumner, ‘From Knight Errant to Family Man: Romantic Medievalism in Brahms’s *Romanzen aus L. Tiecks Magelone*, op. 33 (1865–1869)’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism* ed. by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 38–62
- *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music: Composers, Consumers, Communities* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015)
- MacGill, Patrick, *Songs of a Navy* (Windsor: P. MacGill, 1911)
- Marcus, Sharon, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)
- Markx, Francien, ‘Towards a German Romantic Concept of the Ballad: Goethe’s “Johannah Sebus” and Its Musical Interpretations by Zelter and Reichardt’ in *Goethe Yearbook 19*, ed. by Daniel Purdy (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), pp. 1–28
- Morgan, Sue, ‘Introduction’ in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, ed. by Sue Morgan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)
- Mosley, Charles, *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage, 107th edition, 3 volumes* (Wilmington: Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd., 2003), volume 3

- Musgrave, Michael, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)
- Owen, Barbara, *The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Parsons, James, “‘My song the midnight raven has outwing’d’: Schubert’s ‘Der Wanderer,’” D. 649 in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism* ed. by Siobhán Donovan and Robin Elliott, pp. 165–182
- Pieper, Antje, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Nineteenth-Century Leipzig and Birmingham* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
- Pope, Marvin H., *The Anchor Bible: Song of Songs, Volume 7C: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977)
- Reid, Charles, *Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography* (London: Readers Union, 1962)
- Rodmell, Paul, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875—1918* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013)
- Rogers, Clara Kathleen, *The Story of Two Lives* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1932)
- Rogers, Stephen, *The Songs of Clara Schumann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *Poems* (London: F. S. Ellis, 1870)
- Rushton, Julian, ‘Music and the Poetic’ in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. by Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 151–177
- Sackville-West, Vita, ‘Ethel Smyth, the writer’ in *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* by Christopher St John (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 245–250 Shaw, George Bernard *The Bodley Head*
- Schaarwächter, Jürgen, ‘A British Choral Symphony? Ethel Smyth’s *The Prison* in Context’, *Felsen sprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 250–259
- Schemelli, Christian, *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1736)
- Schumann, Clara, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, vol. II, ed. by Berthold Litzman (New York: Vienna House, 1973)
- Seddon, Laura, *British Women Composers and Instrumental Chamber Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013)
- Shaw, George Bernard, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw, Shaw’s Music, The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes*, ed. by Dan H. Lawrence (London: Max Reinhardt, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1891)

Smyth, Ethel, *Another Side of Ethel Smyth: Letters to her Great-Niece, Elizabeth Mary Williamson*, selected and ed. by Caroline E. M. Stone (Edinburgh: Kennedy & Boyd, 2018)

—— *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, 1936)

—— *Beecham and Pharaoh* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1935)

—— *Female Pipings in Eden*, 2nd edn (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933)

—— *A Final Burning of Boats, etc.*, (London: Longmans, 1928)

—— *Impressions that Remained*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, 1919)

—— *Inordinate (?) Affection: A Story for Dog Lovers* (London: The Cresset Press, 1936)

—— *Maurice Baring* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938)

—— *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton with a list of works by Jory Bennett (London: Faber & Faber, 2008)

—— *Streaks of Life* (London, Longmans: 1921)

—— *A Three-Legged Tour in Greece (March 24–May 4, 1925)* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1927)

—— *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940)

Sposato, Jeffrey S., *Leipzig After Bach: Church and Concert Life in a German City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

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

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, *The Woman's Bible: The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*, ed. by Dale Spender (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985)

Stein, Deborah and Robert Spillman, *Poetry into Song: Performance and Analysis of Lieder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Stinson, Russell, *Bach: The Orgelbüchlein* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999)

—— *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Stokes, Richard, *The Book of Lieder* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)

Terry, Richard, *On Music's Borders* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1927)

Thomson, Aidan J., 'Decadence in the Forest: Smyth's *Der Wald* in its Critical Context' in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, ed. by Cornelia

- Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld (Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2010), pp. 218–249
- Tovey, Donald, *Essays in Musical Analysis. Volume V: Vocal Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937)
- Vicinus, Martha, “The Gift of Love’: Nineteenth-Century Religion and Lesbian Passion’ in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain*, ed. by Sue Morgan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 73–88
- *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- Wiley, Christopher, ‘Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: reconsidering *The Boatswain’s Mate* as feminist opera’ in *Women’s Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen*, ed. by Christopher Wiley and Lucy Ella Rose, pp. 169–185
- Wing Hirsch, Marjorie, *Schubert’s Dramatic Lieder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Winkworth, Catherine, “O Darkest Woe,” from the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006)
- Wollenberg, Susan, “‘Where are We Now?’: Teaching and Studying Women Composers Post-Citron’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Women’s Work in Music*, ed. by Rhiannon Mathias (Oxford: Routledge, 2022), pp. 19–25
- Wollenberg, Susan and Aisling Kenny, eds., *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015)
- Wood, Elizabeth, ‘Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth’s Contrapuntal Arts’ in *Musicology and Difference. Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1993), pp. 164–183
- ‘The Lesbian in the Opera: Desire Unmasked in Smyth’s Fantasio and Fête Galante’ in *En travesti: women, gender subversion, opera*, ed. by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)
- ‘Sapphionics’ in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and lesbian Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 27–66
- Woolf, Virginia, *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942)
- *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Collected Letters IV, 1929–1931*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994)
- *Leave the Letters till We’re Dead, The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI, 1936–1941*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1994)

—— *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of 'The Years'*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: New York Public Library, 1977)

Wustmann, Rudolf and Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909)

Youens, Susan, “Der Mensch ist zur Geselligkeit geboren’: Salon Culture, Night Thoughts and a Schubert Song’ in *Musical Salon Culture and the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 167–183

Young, Arlene, *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019)

Zigler, Amy, “Perhaps what men call a sin”: An examination of Ethel Smyth’s *The Prison* in *Women Composers in New Perspectives, 1800-1950: Genres, Contexts and Repertoire*, ed. by Mariateresa Storino and Susan Wollenberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 213–34

—— “You and I will be like the monk Dante meets in hell”: Literary References and Autobiography in Ethel Smyth’s Sonata and Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1877), in *Nineteenth-Century Programme Music: Creation, Negotiations, Reception*, ed. by Jonathan Kregor (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 253–275

Zodhiates, Spiros, ed., *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible: King James Version* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1984)

Journal Articles

Abromeit, Kathleen A., ‘Ethel Smyth, *The Wreckers*, and Sir Thomas Beecham’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 73/2 (1989), 196–211

Anon., ‘Ethel Smyth’s Mass at Birmingham’, *The Musical Times*, 65/973 (1924), 256

Antokoletz, Elliott, ‘Sturm und Drang Spirit in Early Nineteenth-Century German Lieder,: the Goethe-Schubert “Erlkönig”’, *International Journal of Musicology*, 2 (2016), 139–147

Beecham, Thomas, ‘Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)’, *The Musical Times*, 99/1385 (1958), 363–65

Bellman, Jonathan, ‘Aus alten Märchen: The Chivalric Style of Schumann and Brahms’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 13/1 (1995), 117–135

Bohlman, Philip, ‘Herder’s Nineteenth Century’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 7/1 (2010), 3–21

Carr, David, ‘Gender and the Shaping of Desire in The Song of Songs and its Interpretation’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 119/2 (2000), 233–248

Cook, Blanche Wiesen, “Women Alone Stir My Imagination”: Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition’, *Signs*, 4/4 (1979), 718–39

Dale, Kathleen, ‘Ethel Smyth’s Prentice Work’, *Music and Letters*, 30/4 (1949), 329–336

- Davison, Claire, 'Non-census feminism?—Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf and the 'Burning of Votes Boats, etc.', *Études Britanniques Contemporaines* [online], 58 (2020)
<<https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.9281>>
- Dent, Edward J., 'English Opera', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 52nd Sess. (1925–1926), (1926), 71–88
- Gates, Eugene, 'Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 31/1 (1997), 63–71
- Gilmore, Leigh, 'Obscenity, Modernity, Identity: Legalizing "The Well of Loneliness" and "Nightwood"', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4 (1994), 603–624
- Grew, Sydney, 'Ethel Smyth's Mass in D', *The Musical Times*, 65/972 (1924), 140–41
- Harris, Amanda, 'Recomposing Her History: The Memoirs and Diaries of Ethel Smyth', *Life Writing*, 8 (2011), 421–431
- 'The Smyth-Brewster Correspondence: A Fresh Look at the Hidden Romantic World of Ethel Smyth', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 72–94
- Hoeckner, Berthold 'Schumann and Romantic Distance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50/1 (1997), 55–132
- Hull, Robin, 'Dame Ethel Smyth', *Tempo*, 7 (1944), 12
- Johnson, Carl, "Ethel Smyth: The Only Woman Composer Ever to be Heard at the Met," *American Music Teacher*, 31/3 (1982), 14–17
- Kertesz, Elizabeth, 'Ethel Smyth's "The Wreckers": a Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera', *Studia Musicologica*, 52 (2011), 485–497
- Lebiez, Judith, 'The Representation of Female Power in Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* (1902)', *The German Quarterly*, 91/4 (2018), 415–424
- Leaver, Robin A., 'Letter Codes Relating to Pitch and Key for Chorale Melodies and Bach's Contributions to the Schemelli "Gesangbuch"', *Bach*, 45/1 (2014), pp. 15–33
- Lumsden, Rachel, "'The Music Between Us": Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst and "Possession"', *Feminist Studies*, 41/2 (2015), 335–370
- Millington, Hannah, "'1910": Ethel Smyth's Unsung Suffrage Song', *The Musicology Review*, 10 (2021), 55–76
- O'Toole, Sean, 'The Letters of Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 1918–1921: A Chronicle of Desire', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 29 (2020), 253–280
- Raitt, Suzanne, 'The tide of Ethel: femininity as narrative in the friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf', *Critical Quarterly*, 30 (1988), 3–19

Robinson, Suzanne, 'Smyth the Anarchist: "Fin-de-Siècle" Radicalism in "The Wreckers"' *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 20/2 (2008), 149–79

Scheele, Margaret S. and D. H. Turner, 'The Book of Common Prayer, 1662', *The British Museum Quarterly*, 25/3 (1962), pp. 63–66

Smyth, Ethel, 'The Hard Case of the Woman Composer', *The Musical Times*, 69/1026 (1928), 736

Wiley, Christopher, 'Ethel Smyth, Suffrage, and Surrey: From Frimley Green to Hook Heath, Woking', *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network*. Special Issue: 1918-2018, 2/11 (2018), 11–18

——— 'Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and "The First Woman to Write an Opera"', *The Musical Quarterly*, 96 (2013), 263–295

——— "When a Woman Speaks the Truth about Her Body": Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography', *Music & Letters*, 85/3 (2004), 388–414

Wood, Elizabeth, 'On Deafness and Musical Creativity: The Case of Ethel Smyth', *Musical Quarterly*, 92/1 (2009), 33–69

——— 'Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage', *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/4 (1995), 606–43

——— 'Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music', *The Massachusetts Review*, 24/1 (1983), 125–139

Zigler, Amy, "'What a splendid chance missed!": Dame Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* at the Met', *The Opera Journal*, 54/2 (2021), 109–163

Unpublished Theses & Conference Papers

Copley, Edith Ann, 'A survey of the choral works of Dame Ethel Smyth with an analysis of the Mass in D (1891)' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1990)

Farquharson, Linda J., 'Dame Ethel Smyth: Mass in D' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1996)

Gibbon, Rachael J., 'The Early Operas of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944): Genesis, Performance, Structure', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2005)

Gisbrecht, Nancy, 'An Examination of the Operatic Environment in Which Ethel Smyth Composed and Its Effect Upon Her Career' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Southern California, 1980)

Keays, Mary Lee, 'Tooting her own horn: Dame Ethel Smyth's Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001)

Kertesz, Elizabeth, 'Issues in the critical reception of Ethel Smyth's Mass and first four operas in England and Germany' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000)

Krebs, Sharon, 'Josephine Lang's Reputation', unpublished paper delivered at the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Musicological Society (online, 26 March 2022), 1–7

Lee, Ean-Ju, 'A Stylistic Analysis of Ethel Smyth's Sonata Cycle Works for Solo Piano and Chamber Works with Piano' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of Houston, 2008)

Moon, Sarah M., 'The Organ Music of Ethel Smyth: A Guide to its History and Performance Practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2014)

Rand Nelson, Trevor, 'The Dissident Dame. Alternative Feminist Methodologies and the Music of Ethel Smyth' (unpublished Master's thesis, Michigan State University, 2016)

Robert Marion, Daniel, 'Ethel Smyth's Mass in D: a performance study guide' (unpublished DMA thesis, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, 1994)

Roberts, Hannah, 'A Stylistic and Performance Analysis of Selected Solo Piano Compositions by Helen Hopekirk' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2021)

Schau, Kate, "'This Is No Leave Taking": Autobiography and Legacy in Ethel Smyth's *The Prison*' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Oregon, 2022)

Vysin, Elizabeth, 'The Cello Sonatas of Dame Ethel Smyth: A Musical Analysis with Social and Feminist Commentary' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hartford, 2023)

Zigler, Amy, 'Selected Chamber Works of Dame Ethel Smyth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Florida, 2009)

Newspapers (1890–1944)

'Bristol Opera Season', *Western Daily Press*, 21 October 1926, p. 7

'The County Gentleman', *Sporting Gazette*, 21 January 1893, p. 73

'Dame Ethel Smyth: Death of Famous Woman Composer, Militant Suffragist', *The Scotsman*, 10 May 1944, p. 4

'Dame Ethel Smyth: Death of Greatest of Woman Composers', *The Birmingham Mail*, 9 May 1944, p. 1

'Death of Dame Ethel Smyth', *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 9 May 1944, p. 2

'Dr. Ethel Smyth at Queen's Hall', *The Suffragette*, 29 August 1913, p. 802

'Dr. Ethel Smyth: Famous English Composer Honoured', *The Westminster Gazette*, 2 January 1922, p. 9

'Dramatic and Musical', *South London Press*, 25 October 1890, p. 10

'A Drawing Room-Meeting', *Votes for Women*, 11th November 1910, p. 84

'A German Lady "British Composer"', *The Bystander*, 21 November 1906, p. 373

'Crystal Palace Concerts', *The Queen*, 3 May 1890, p. 590

'Current Topics', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1902, p. 8

'For Eve's Daughters', *The Referee*, 3 August 1902, p. 7

'Ladies Column, Dr. Ethel Smyth', *The Hendon and Finchley Times*, 14 April 1911, p. 8

'London Letter', *The Western Daily Press*, 19 July 1902, p. 6

‘Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc’, 30 December 1910, *Votes for Women*, p. 213
 ‘Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc’, 14 July 1911, *Votes for Women*, p. 670
 ‘Mr. August Manns’ Benefit Concert’, *Norwood News and Crystal Palace Chronicle*, 3 May 1890, p. 5
 ‘Music’, *The Illustrated London News*, 28 January 1893, p. 126
 ‘Music’, *Truth*, 29 June 1905, p. 49
 ‘Music’, *Truth*, 5 January 1905, p. 46
 ‘Music and Musicians: Royal Albert Hall’, *The Queen*, 28 January 1893, p. 146
 ‘Music and the Woman’, *Montrose Standard*, 13 January 1922, p. 3
 ‘Musical Gossip’, *The Cheltenham Looker-On*, 3 May 1890, p. 357
 ‘The Musical World’, *St. James’s Gazette*, 28 April 1890, p. 5
 ‘A Notable Musical Revival’, *The Diss Express and Norfolk and Suffolk Journal*, 7 March 1924, p. 3
 ‘Obituary: Dame Ethel Smyth’, *The Belfast Newsletter*, 10 May 1944, p. 4
 ‘“The Prison”: Dame Ethel Smyth’s Symphony’, *The Scotsman*, 20 February 1931, p. 8
 ‘The Prisoners’ Welcome’, *Votes for Women*, 20th January 1911, p. 254
 ‘Stifled in Holloway’, *Votes for Women*, 27th January 1911, p. 272
 ‘Topics of the Hour’, *Westminster & Pimlico News*, 13 January 1922, p. 1
 ‘Woman Composer’s New Opera’, *The Vote*, 15 June 1923, p. 6
 ‘A Woman’s Opera: Dame Ethel Smyth’s “Fête galante” at Covent Garden’, *The Daily News*, 12 June 1923, p. 3
 ‘Women’s suffrage inspired her: greatest woman composer once had toothbrush baton’, *The Daily Mirror*, 10 May 1944, p. 2

Smyth, Ethel, ‘Better Late Than Never’, 18 November 1910, *Votes for Women*, p. 99
 ——— ‘Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc’, 30 December 1910, *Votes for Women*, p. 213
 ——— ‘Miss Ethel Smyth, Mus. Doc’, 14 July 1911, *Votes for Women*, p. 670
 ——— ‘Music and Musicians’, *The Scotsman*, 10 November 1927.
 ——— ‘Music and Musicians’, 15 March 1928, *The Scotsman*, p. 12.
 ——— ‘Venus, the Bishops, and a Moral’, 1 May 1914, *The Suffragette*, p. 57
 ——— ‘Women and Idealism’, 22 September 1911, *Votes for Women*, p. 808

Digital Sources

Andrews, John, ‘A pleasure, not a duty: performing (a few) more works by women composers’, *Making Music*, 7 March 2022

<<https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/news/pleasure-not-duty-performing-few-more-works-women-composers>> [accessed 30 May 2022]

Ashely, Tim, ‘The Wreckers review — Glyndebourne bring Smyth’s rarity to vivid and passionate life’, *The Guardian*, 22 May 2022

<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/may/22/the-wreckers-review-glyndebourne-festival-ethel-smyth?>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

Broad, Leah, ‘Without Ethel Smyth and classical music’s forgotten women, we only tell half the story’, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2020

<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/02/ethel-smyth-classical-music-forgotten-women-canon-composition>> [accessed 30 May 2022]

Buckley, Jo, ‘Diversifying the repertoire: why it’s vital – and how to do it’, *Gramophone*, 8 February 2022 <<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/blogs/article/diversifying-the-repertoire-why-it-s-vital-and-how-to-do-it>> [accessed 30 May 2022]

‘Ethel Smyth, “Mass in D major”’, *International Music Score Library Project / Petrucci Music Library*, (n.d.) <[https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_D_major_\(Smyth%2C_Ethel\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_D_major_(Smyth%2C_Ethel))> [accessed 22 May 2023]

Fellinger, Imogen, ‘Levi, Hermann’ in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 14 (1985), pp. 396–397 <<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118865900.html#ndbcontent>> [accessed 12 May 2023]

Hartson, William, ‘Glyndebourne Festival Review: The Wreckers ‘dramatically just doesn't work’’, *The Express*, 27 May 2022 <<https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/theatre/1617202/Glyndebourne-Festival-review-the-Wreckers-Mozart-Marriage-of-Figaro>> [accessed 30 May 2022]

Kurtz, Harold, *The Empress Eugénie: 1826–1920* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964); Pamela Pilbeam, ‘Eugénie (1826–1920), empress of the French and exile’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006, <<https://doi.org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/74853>> [accessed 6 May 2022]

Meiner, Annemarie, ‘Brockhaus, Eduard’, *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 2, 1955 <<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116552115.html#ndbcontent>> [accessed 10 July 2022]

Millington, Barry, ‘The Wreckers at Glyndebourne review: Thrilling production of Ethel Smyth’s grossly neglected, pioneering work’, *Evening Standard*, 23 May 2022 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/music/the-wreckers-glyndebourne-opera-review-ethel-smyth-b1001697.html>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

Morrison, Richard, ‘The Wreckers review — an imaginative revival of a wild forgotten opera’, *The Times*, 22 May 2022 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-wreckers-review-glyndebourne-opera-t6r3x66cb?>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

Nice, David, ‘The Wreckers, Glyndebourne review - no masterpiece, but vividly sung and played’, *The Arts Desk*, 22 May 2022 <<https://theartsdesk.com/node/88172/view>> [accessed 30 May 2022]

‘Patrick Mason’, *Grammy.com*, n.d., <<https://www.grammy.com/artists/patrick-mason/4365>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

‘Performances of Ethel Smyth at BBC Proms’, *BBC*, (2022) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/events/composers/39167298-62b9-4a1c-ac0d-2c203ede6fb3>> [accessed 25 May 2022]

Rowdon, Harold H., ‘Waldegrave, Granville Augustus William, third Baron Radstock (1833–1913)’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://www.oxforddnb-com>> [accessed 21 April 2020]

Ruhbaum, Antje, *Elisabeth von Herzogenberg: Salon - Mäzenatentum - Musikförderung*, (Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Musik, 7), (Kenzingen: Centaurus-Verlag, 2009) <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-309311>> [accessed 20 July 2022]

Shawe-Taylor, Desmond, *Babr-Mildenburg [née Mildenburg von Bellschau], Anna*, Grove Music Online, 2001 <<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01784>> [accessed 25 Jan 2021]

Tilden, Imogen, ‘She’s badass’: how brick-throwing suffragette Ethel Smyth composed an opera to shake up Britain’, *The Guardian*, 19 May 2022
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/may/19/suffragette-ethel-smyth-opera-the-wreckers>> [accessed 22 May 2023]

Yohalem, John, ‘From The Metropolitan Opera Archives: A Woman's Opera at the Met. Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* in New York’, *The Metropolitan Opera Archives*, (n.d.)
<<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/imgs/DerWald.htm>> [accessed 29 June 2023]

Zigler, Amy, ‘Archival Material’, *Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)*, (n.d.)
<<https://www.ethelsmyth.org/music/music-manuscripts/>> [accessed 3 February 2022]

—— ‘Smyth Wins a Grammy’, *Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)*, (n.d.)
<<https://www.ethelsmyth.org/smyth-wins-a-grammy>> [accessed 6 February 2023]

CDs and Recordings

Ethel Smyth: The Boatswain’s Mate, Nadine Benjamin, Edward Lee, Jeremy Huw Williams, Lontano Ensemble, cond. by Odaline de la Martinez (Retrospect Opera, RO001, 2017)

Ethel Smyth: Complete Piano Works, Liana Serbescu (CPO, 999327-2, 1996)

Ethel Smyth: Fête galante, Charmian Bedford, Carolyn Dobbin, Felix Kemp, Simon Wallfisch, Mark Milhoer, Alessandro Fisher, Dame Felicity Lott, and Valerie Langfield (Retrospect Opera, RO007, 2019)

Ethel Smyth: Kammermusik & Lieder, Vol. 4, Kelvin Grout, Maarten Koningsberger, Friedemann Kupsa, Anna Silova (Troubadisc, TRO-CD01417, 2012)

Ethel Smyth: Mass in D & Overture to ‘The Wreckers’, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, cond. by Sakari Oramo (Chandos, CHSA5240, 2019)

Ethel Smyth: The Song of Love, The Alternative Canon Project Orchestra and Choir, Steph Garrett, Archie Inns, cond. by Alice Knight (Non-commercial release)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FttLjihLcgM>> [accessed 20 August 2023]

Rendezvous: Leipzig, The Maier Quartet (dB Productions, DBCD197, 2020)

Smyth: The Prison, Sarah Brailey, Dashon Burton, cond. by James Blachly (Chandos, CHAN 5279, 2020)