Women composers and their critics in the era of first-wave feminism: gender and the classical music canon in Britain, 1850-1950

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ABSTRACT

> Of Mlle. Germaine Tailleferre one can only repeat Dr. Johnson's dictum concerning a woman preacher, transposed into terms of music. 'Sir, a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.'
>
> Cecil Grey, (1927)[1]

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discriminatory gender ideologies in Western art music paved the way for critics to attribute both merits and shortcomings of women's compositional works to their gender. 'Feminine music, which women were expected to cultivate exclusively, was by definition graceful and delicate, full of melody, and restricted to the small forms of songs and piano music. Masculine music, by contrast, was powerful in effect and intellectually rigorous in harmony, counterpoint, and other structural logic.'[2] Qualities such as 'charm' and 'grace' were qualified as feminine traits, while masculine-perceived traits were considered superior, and the highest praise a music critic could offer. By depicting women's music as inferior, critics used discriminatory gender ideologies to justify its omission from the canon. To date, however, scholars have not directly investigated how reviews of the time impacted the reception of women composers in Britain, nor how they influenced the presence of their music in today's concert halls. Furthermore, few studies have considered the roles of women themselves as critics over this period. Were female music critics employed during the late nineteenth century, and, if so, how did their reviews compare to those of their male counterparts?

[1] Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 246.
[2] Carol Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 223.

This paper addresses the questions posed above, exploring how the critical establishment's use of gendered analysis may have impacted a woman composer's creativity. In addition, this research examines the gendered aspects of their reception, concentrating on Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I demonstrate how reviews written by male critics often differed greatly from those by female critics, while simultaneously addressing the similarities within them. As a case study, in this thesis, I evaluate unpublished archival documents of two upper-middle class women composers, who lived in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), and Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979).

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Ethel Smyth and Rebecca Clarke were influential pioneers in their field; now they are ghostly presences in our music histories, on the margins of the classical canon. By elucidating the complexities of gender dynamics within Western art music, this research fosters deeper insight into the legacy of gendered analysis, presents new perspectives on the creative output of these composers, and cultivates new knowledge by resurrecting their extraordinary stories and their music for posterity. Exploring how critics' use of gender-coded analysis may have confined the creativity of women composers enables us to better interpret the music of these revolutionary women, enriching our understanding of their work and ensuring a brighter future for their music in our concert halls.

My primary sources include a significant collection of unpublished diary entries, interview tapes, memoirs, typescripts, musical scores, and letters written by Smyth and Clarke. I examine the digital archives of *The Musical Times*, *Gramophone*, The *Guardian*, *The Times*, and the *BBC Proms Performance Archive* to trace how music critics shaped the reception of Smyth's and Clarke's creative output. I focus on the use of gendered analysis within reviews on Clarke and Smyth, elucidating the way female critics held them up as an example intended to inspire, characterising them as 'exceptions', however, that same description was simultaneously used by male critics to discourage women from entering the arts.

The first chapter will provide a historical background of both Smyth and Clarke, focusing on how the composers navigated discriminatory gender ideologies. I analyse two thematic areas: 1) authoritarian power structures within their families, and; 2) patriarchal structures within their respective musical educations. Chapter two will present reviews written by both male and female

members of the critical establishment in Britain, who were reviewing Clarke's and Smyth's creative output. This chapter will investigate the critical establishment's use of gendered analysis when reviewing the music of these composers, and will focus on the ways in which the reviews differed depending on the critic's gender. The roles of Smyth and Clarke as advocates for women in the arts will also be considered. Chapter three will present a balanced analysis of historical sources available on Smyth and Clarke, focusing on the performances of their music and on those who championed their work. I frame my discussion of these sources around a gradual erasure of Smyth and Clarke from the historical record and reflect on how this has contributed to their absence from our concert halls today.

Musical Beginnings and The Fight for Education

Dame Ethel Smyth

Standing outside London's parliamentary buildings on March 6, 1930, an elderly woman draped in a silk doctoral robe wielded her baton. She began to conduct the Metropolitan Police Band's performance of *The March of The Women*, the official anthem of the Women's Social and Political Union, which she had composed in 1910. It was Dame Ethel Smyth. The *March* was no longer being heard at a rally, nor from inside a prison, but at the unveiling of A. G. Walker's statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, a militant champion of women's suffrage, whose forty-year campaign and whose work with the WSPU (which she had founded in 1903) led to the success of the Equal Franchise Act, which granted British women equal voting rights in 1928. Between 1908 and 1909, Pankhurst was jailed three times, then rearrested and released a further twelve times throughout 1913, under the Prisoners Act, by which hunger-striking prisoners were freed and reincarcerated once they regained their strength. Thus, it was a tearful, hard-won, and emotional day for the women gathered to watch the unveiling of Pankhurst's statue, while listening to Smyth's *March* 'played by the very men who had once arrested them.'[3]

The academic cap and gown worn by Smyth that day were representative of women's changing status in Britain, as it was not until 1878 that the University of London became the first institution in the U.K. to begin awarding degrees to women. By 1910, Smyth had become one of

[3] Leah Broad, *Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2023), 2.

just three women in England to obtain a doctorate in music. For Smyth, this day was particularly meaningful, not only due to her being 'the most militant of Suffragettes,'[4] arrested for bricking windows in protests alongside Pankhurst, but also because Smyth and Pankhurst had been the closest of friends, and possibly lovers.[5] Though Smyth had always been discreet on the subject of her intimate relationships and private life, her first volume of *Impressions that Remained*, disclosed that 'wild passions for girls and women a great deal older than myself made up a large part of my emotional life, and it was my habit to increase the anguish of love fancying its object was prey to some terrible disease that would shortly snatch her from me.'[6] Subsequently, Smyth's friend, writer Virginia Woolf, revealed that 'Ethel used to love Emmeline' and that 'they shared a bed.'[7]

Ethel Mary Smyth was born on April 23, 1858, and was the fourth of eight children born to Colonel (later to become Major-General of the Royal Artillery) John Hall Smyth and Emma Struth Smyth, a descendent of Sir Josias Stracey, the fourth baronet of Norfolk.[8] Smyth's father was one of fourteen children, a 'fine, soldierly looking man – and in all costumes the picture of a gentlemen.'[9] Preoccupied by the injustice of women being voteless, he advocated for the enfranchisement of women, 'a theory no one else in the world took seriously.'[10] Smyth's mother was educated in France. 'Extraordinarily un-English,'[11] Emma – or 'Nina,' as she was known, was a linguist, and besides French, she spoke Italian, German, Spanish, and Hindustani. An accomplished pianist and singer, Nina's voice 'would have melted a stone.'[12] Smyth described her mother as one of the most naturally gifted musicians she had ever known.[13]

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[4] 'Police Band Plays Suffragettes' War March', *Daily Mail*, 7 Mar. 1930.
[5] Broad, *Quartet*, 3.
[6] Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* Vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), 22.
[7] Virginia Woolf to Quentin Bell, 3 Dec. 1933. Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *The Sickle Side of The Moon. The letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. 5:1932-1935* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), 256.
[8] Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959),1.
[9] Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 35.
[10] Ibid., 36.
[11] Ibid., 45.
[12] Ibid., 48.
[13] Ibid.

Naming her brother, Johnny, as her role model growing up, Ethel characterised her tastes as 'essentially boyish.'[14] She was more daring, more adventurous than the others, a rule breaker, referred to as 'the stormy petrel'[15] by her mother. Fascinated by the family pigs, she either rode them around the courtyard or bribed the farmers to allow her to watch their slaughter. This behaviour was deeply upsetting to Johnny, who considered such sights a 'male privilege.'[16] Smyth explained that the scolding which followed the incident was utterly unnecessary, as for many months after, she would turn green at the sound of any pig squealing.[17] Smyth's memoirs are striking in their repulsion by any activity perceived as feminine:

> It will surprise no one to learn that I didn't care much for dolls, but strange to say Mary was in the same case. Of course, we had dolls, but they spent most of their time in strict quarantine, it being our habit to inflict on them long illnesses supposed to be infectious and yet to require no nursing. The fact that they bored us was too revolutionary to be faced, so we had to find some plausible reason for ridding ourselves of their hated company. [18]
>
> I hated outdoor parties, because one was dressed up at an unseasonable hour and had to behave like a little lady; also, as happened later in the long struggle for the vote, the males, who were unable to do without us in private life, cold-shouldered us in public, and it may be imagined how a tomboy would resent this.[19]

Within *Impressions that Remained*, Smyth discussed being the only one of the six Miss Smyths to be severely thrashed: the punishment for stealing barley sugar, yet denying the theft. Barring this incident (which involved her father's use of grandma's two-and-a-half-foot long wooden knitting needle with a knob on one end,)[20] there is no evidence to suggest that Smyth's parents were strict disciplinarians. Ethel described her father as 'the least cruel of men.'[21] When discussing the incident, she wrote that it left no wound in her memory and that it was the only punishment that ever had an effect, as she then dreaded being hurt.[22]

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[14] Ibid., 10.
[15] Ibid., 11.
[16] Ibid., 15.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 20.
[19] Ibid., 21.
[20] Ibid, 17.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 18.

While girls Smyth's age focused on their needlework, darning stockings, placing clean linen back into drawers, and the development of other such skills that would someday present useful on the marriage market, Smyth's childhood instilled in her a lifelong passion for lawn tennis, golf, and hiking. She was equally passionate about riding and hunting, which was difficult, as all the above was forbidden at the boarding school she and her sister Mary attended in Putney. On the subject of marriage, Smyth viewed it as a restriction of freedom and never expressed the desire to be a mother. Devoting her attention almost exclusively to women and often becoming infatuated with her female classmates, family friends, or her governesses, she compiled a list of 'over a hundred girls and women to whom, had I been a man, I should have proposed.'[23] She described them as her 'passions.'[24] Virginia Woolf, Smyth's last great 'passion,' described being the object of Smyth's affections comparable to 'being caught by a giant crab,'[25] however they cared deeply for one another and remained close until Woolf's death in 1941.

Smyth's education was conventional for a middle-class Victorian young woman. Following private tutoring at home under a succession of governesses, she was sent to boarding school in Putney. Smyth showed no prodigious musical talent until the age of twelve. The arrival of a new governess who had studied at the Leipzig Conservatorium, or the 'new victim,'[26] as Smyth called her, became a turning point in her musical education. Smyth summarised the entire governess system as 'monstrous' and 'unworkable,' and governesses themselves as 'quite invariably without the faintest notion of making lessons either pleasant or profitable.'[27] However, the course of Smyth's future seemingly changed the moment her new governesses played her a Beethoven Sonata. Inspired to set her sights on a musical career, Smyth described the experience

[23] Ibid., 68.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Virginia Woolf to Quentin Bell, 14 May 1930. Nicolson, *Letters* Vol. 4, 171.
[26] Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 85.
[27] Ibid., 68.

as ‘the first mile stone on her road’ and later recalled ‘I then and there conceived the plan, carried out seven years later, of studying in Leipzig and giving up my life to music.’[28]

Smyth’s greatest obstacle was the lack of her father’s approval. He viewed artists as ‘people who are out to break the ten commandments.’[29] In his view, music was a frivolous, effeminate pastime suitable only for the domestic drawing room, and simply not an appropriate career path. While this was a continuous source of conflict within the Smyth household, Ethel would sneak off to London to attend classical concerts. This became an unfading source of inspiration, urging her to continue her battle. Slipping away across the fields and traveling third class from the Farnborough train station, she once snuck away to hear the music of Johannes Brahms. This was a Saturday Popular Concert, which featured Brahms’s *Liebeslieder Waltzes*. Stunned by his genius, the music kindled a fire within her. She grew more certain of her future in Leipzig, and, following endless attempts to overcome her father’s resistance, settled upon a new tactic: ‘I quite deliberately adopted the methods used years afterwards in political warfare by other women, who having plumbed the depths of masculine prejudice, came to see this was the only road to victory.’[30] Smyth refused to attend dinner parties, go out riding, attend services at Church, or speak to anyone, spending most of her days locked in her bedroom, and set upon making ‘life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go for their own sakes.’[31] In due course, her father’s opposition weakened. Subsequently, various terms of surrender began to be discussed, and, finally, worn down by his daughter’s determination, he conceded. Overcoming her first important fight against the traditional notions of women’s status in music, Smyth set off for Leipzig on July 26, 1877, embarking on the happiest epoch of her life. She was nineteen.

[28] Ibid., 85.
[29] Ibid., 124.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Upon arriving in Leipzig, Smyth seemed baffled by the lack of musical enthusiasm among the students at the Conservatorium. She did, however, thoroughly enjoy attending Gewandhaus concerts, the Opera, and occasionally receiving some heartwarmingly hopeful feedback on her work. The Röntgen family's recognition of Smyth's talent was instantaneous and they were delighted by the compositions Smyth chose to share with them. Herr Koncertmesiter Röntgen was the leader of the Gewandhaus orchestra. Upon hearing the theme in the rondo of Smyth's first pianoforte sonata, he declared it to be 'so pure and fresh that one could almost swear it was Mozart.'[32] Smyth expressed the effect this type of feedback had on her in a letter to her mother, written in 1877:

> The bliss of knowing that when I went on so about cultivating my talent I was not wrong! For though I felt it myself, I sometimes doubted whether it was only for a woman, and an Englishwoman living in a not musical circle, that I was anything particular in music - whether such talent as I have deserved to have everything else put aside for it. And now I know it does deserve it!
>
> Don't think, mother darling, that this makes me lose my head, that I fancy I have only to put pen to paper and become famous. It is just this: men who have lived among musicians all their lives, who have been hand in glove with Schumann and Mendelssohn, and are so with Brahms and Rubinstein, say they seldom saw such a talent, in a woman, *never*, and I can but tell *you* all this. I know though that years and years, perhaps, of hard work are before me, years in which little or nothing I do shall be printed – this I have resolved on – and in which I shall be nobody, and at the end of which is *perhaps* a laurel crown awaiting me in the shape of a name! But the end is worth the uphill struggle, and if application and hard steady work can do anything I ought to get it.[33]

Despite Smyth's declaration professing that the acknowledgement of her talent had not turned her head, she was extremely critical of the indifferent and superficial atmosphere distilled by her masters at the Conservatorium, describing Carl Reinecke's composition lessons in conjunction with Jadassohn's counterpoint and theory as 'rather a farce.'[34] 'Unable to conceal his polite

[32] Ethel Smyth to Emma 'Nina' Smyth, 21 Dec, 1877. All letters ES to ENS at Hochschule für Musik and Theatre, Leipzig.
[33] Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 214.
[34] Ibid., 164.

indifference to our masterpieces' and being a composer 'who turned out music by the yard without effort or inspiration,'[35] Reinecke did not meet her expectations.

Nine months later, Smyth wrote another letter to her mother explaining her first experience with the Breitkopf and Haertel publishing company:

> Just imagine what a goose I am. I went to Breitkopf and Haertel – the music publishers *par excellence* in the world. The nephew, who conducts the business, Dr. Hase, I know very well and he is quite one of the most charming men I ever met. But you know how unpleasant it is to do business with a personal friend! Well, he began by telling me that songs had as a rule a bad sale – but that no composeress had ever succeeded, barring Frau Schumann and Fräulein Mendelssohn, whose songs had been published together with those of their husband and brother respectively. I played him mine, many of which he had already heard me perform in various Leipzig houses, and he expressed himself very willing to take the risk and print them. But would you believe it, having listened to all he said about women composers, and considering how difficult it is to bargain with an acquaintance, I asked no fee! Did you ever hear of such a donkey![36]

This was not the first, nor the last time Smyth encountered gender-based prejudices within her work. She knew that women's creative output did not sell. She also understood that publication was a significant hurdle for any aspiring composer who was not born white, middle-class, and, above all, male. Another notable example was Smyth's initial encounter with Johannes Brahms. She described him as a 'fatherly' and 'kind' figure, but also stated that 'after a very slight acquaintance, I guessed he would never take a woman-writer seriously.'[37] Upon one occasion, without her permission, Smyth's close friend Lisl (Elisabeth, the daughter of Smyth's private composition tutor, Heinrich von Herzogenberg) decided to show Brahms a fugue Smyth had written:

> …and when I came in and found them looking at it, he began analysing it, simply, gravely, and appreciatively, saying this development was good, that modulation curious, and so on. Carried away by surprise and delight I lost my head, and pointing out a constructive detail that had greatly fussed Herzogenberg – the sort of thing that made him call me a bad pupil – asked eagerly: 'Don't you think if I feel it that way I have a right to end on the dominant?' Suddenly the scene changed, back came the ironic smile, and stroking his moustache he said in a voice charged with kindly contempt: 'I am quite sure, dear child, you may end when and where you please!' … There it was! He had suddenly remembered I was a girl, to take whom seriously was beneath a man's dignity, and the quality of the work, which had I been an obscure male he would have upheld to anyone, simply passed

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 236.
[37] Ibid., 267.

> from his mind. Now let us suppose a publisher had been present – what would have been the effect of this little scene on a budding inclination to print for me later on? And does the public realise that unless it is published music cannot possibly get known?[38]

Smyth criticised Brahms' attitude towards women, however there was always mutual respect shared between them, and he did occasionally pass on a compliment regarding her work (mostly when he was not aware she had composed it). She described her greatest success with Brahms, when 'piqued by his low estimate of my sex, I wrote a little sarcastic poem, the last verse of which ran:

> As the great Brahms recently proclaimed,
> '*A clever woman is a thing of naught!*'
> So let us diligently cultivate stupidity,
> That being the only quality demanded
> Of a female Brahms admirer![39]

Smyth summarised her time at the Conservatorium writing 'whatever the defects of my environment may have been, in it I learned the necessity, and acquired the love, of hard work, as well as becoming imbued with a deep passion for Bach, which I think is in itself an education.'[40] An education such as this was a rarity, not accessible to most women at the time. The exclusion of women from advanced theory and composition classes had become normalised in all the greatest European conservatories. Established in 1843 by Felix Mendelssohn, The Leipzig Conservatorium became the world's most prestigious music institution of the nineteenth century. The faculty, which included Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann, attracted students from all corners of the globe. All male students, that is, for whom composition and theory classes were compulsory. Women, however, were taught only an abbreviated theory curriculum, and composition was omitted altogether. [41] Most European conservatoires carried this practice into the early twentieth century.

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 268.
[40] Ibid., 273.
[41] Leonard Milton Phillips, *The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843–1881* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1979), 128.

The autobiographies of Clara K. Rogers and Ethel Smyth illustrate an important timeline, as Rogers attended the Conservatorium in 1857, but was barred from studying composition, for, as she explained, 'there was no composition class for my sex, no woman composer having yet appeared on the musical horizon, with the exception of Fanny [Mendelssohn] and Clara Schumann.'[42] Smyth, however, was more fortunate. Braking through the culturally ideological limitations of the time, she became the first woman at the Conservatorium permitted to join Reinecke's composition class in 1877.[43] Women composers studying in other German institutions recounted their exclusion from advanced theoretical instruction for an even longer period. A notable example is Mabel Daniels, who, despite her early training in the subject, became the first woman to be accepted into a score-reading class at the Royal Munich Conservatory in 1902, and even then, 'only grudgingly.'[44] Daniels revealed that advanced theory classes rejected all female students until 1897:

> You know that five years ago women were not allowed to study counterpoint at the conservatory. In fact, anything more advanced than elementary harmony was debarred. The ability of the feminine intellect to comprehend the intricacies of a stretto, or cope with double counterpoint in the tenth, if not openly denied, was severely questioned.[45]

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge did not grant degrees to women until 1920,[46] thus the Royal Academy of Music, Britain's oldest music conservatoire, became a refuge for the English women who were unable to study music abroad. From its inception in 1822, the Royal Academy was coeducational. Regardless of gender, all students received the same training.

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[42] Clara K. Rogers, *Memories of a Musical Career* (Norwood, Mass.: The Plimpton Press, 1932), 108, quoted in Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870*, 271n54.
[43] Smyth, *Impressions that Remained,* 164.
[44] Mabel Daniels, "Fighting Generalizations about Women," [excerpted from her *An American Girl in Munich* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1905)], in Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 219–22.
[45] Ibid., 220.
[46] Evelyn Alice Sharp and Emily Ross Daymond, Oxford's first two female graduates, received their degrees in 1921. Elsie Baron Briggs, though she had fulfilled the requirements for the Cambridge B.Mus. in 1915, was not granted the degree until 1927. For an account of women's struggle to acquire university degrees in nineteenth-century England, see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, "Women and Degrees at Cambridge University, 1862–1897," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 117–45.

Institutional gender prejudices impacted the creative output of many women composers. Since the majority were barred from taking music theory, thus ill-equipped to produce large-scale works, they directed their creativity to solos, duets, religious songs, and ballads.[47] Many became accomplished composers of parlour music, however this contributed to the perpetuation of discriminatory gender ideologies, forging an image of the women composer as the composer who was only capable of writing small-scale, 'lesser' works.[48] Marcia J. Citron stated that 'reviewers regularly made a gender/genre association and as a result invariably cast negative aspersions on pieces in smaller forms.'[49]

Philosopher, politician, and civil servant John Stuart Mill championed equal rights for women, highlighting that the absence of women composers of the first rank was due to women being hindered by their lack of education in music theory. 'Women,' he expressed, 'are taught music, but not for the purpose of composing, only of executing it. Even [a] natural gift [for composition], to be made available for great creations, requires study, and professional devotion to the pursuit.'[50]

Creativity is no unexplained gift of genius or talent. Fostered through institutional, educational, and parental support; great genius is created, not born. This is important to consider when posing the frequently asked question of *why there have been no great women composers*? The answer lies not in the nature of personal genius, but in what is forbidden or encouraged by our educational and social institutions. As declared by the art historian Linda Lochlin, 'The fault, dear brothers, lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education - education understood to include everything that

[47] Nineteenth-century parlor music is discussed in detail in the following: Dereck Hyde, *New Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth Century English Music*, 3rd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 65–84; Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 72–142.
[48] Tick, *American Women Composer*, 76.
[49] Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *Journal of Musicology* 8, no.1 (Winter 1990): 110.
[50] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986), 78–79.

happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs and signals.'[51]As seen in the case of Smyth, paternal support was crucial in the face of patriarchal exclusions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women artists frequently rebelled against their paternal authorities. A woman opting for a career at all, much less for a career in the arts, required unconventionality, courage, and rebellion.

Smyth, however, was truly unusual for her time. Succeeding against institutional exclusion and social inequalities while her voice was continuously excised from the historical record,[52] she battled for a place in the canon and fought to remain important for posterity. Smyth became the first woman to receive a damehood for composition, the first woman to have her work performed by New York's Metropolitan Opera, and the first to openly challenge gender prejudices within musical institutions. As a suffragette and an activist, she was arrested for property damage and roused choruses of imprisoned women to sing her *March of the Women*, while conducting from her jail cell with a toothbrush. She demanded that her creative output not be judged based on her gender. Fortunate to be 'embraced as an eccentric and not institutionalised as a lunatic,'[53] perhaps Smyth was blessed with some luck. Nonetheless, she fought her way into Leipzig's theory classes just as she fought her father to get there. Her creative output was a revelation, one that produced generations of feminist activists, initiating a revolution in the canon that is still ongoing. Furthermore, she was not the only female voice calling for change in Britain's patriarchal world of composition.

[51] Linda Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2021), 30.
[52] Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats,* 37.
[53] Broad, *Quartet,* 5.

Rebecca Clarke

Rebecca Helferich Clarke was born on August 27, 1886, in Clematis Cottage, located in Harrow-on-the-Hill. That same year, Smyth was working on her *Lieder & Balladen, Op.3*; a petition calling for women's suffrage had just been rejected by Parliament; and Kitty Marion, singer, actor, and soon to become England's most dangerous Suffragette was emigrating Germany for England.

Warning all those who may want to read about her, Clarke wrote 'no auto biography ever tells the truth.'[54] This is particularly problematic, as the vast imbalances and contradictions within the sources available on Clarke already make piecing her life together the job for a musical detective. My research on Clarke is predominantly comprised of her memoir (her autobiographical work *I had a Father Too, or, The Mustard Spoon*), personal conversations with her remaining family (her great-nephew-by-marriage, Christopher Johnson, to whom she left her estate), and her diaries. Clarke wrote the memoir in her eighties, and it remains to be the only source for her childhood and student years. Her corpus was curated with great care, and along with the memoir, the scores, jewellery, and various pieces of furniture inherited or purchased while she was on her international tours, Clarke left her belongings to family.[55] All the pieces left behind by Clarke represent an elegant, worldly, reserved woman; guarded, and mindful of how much of herself she revealed to the world.[56]

Clarke's mother, Agnes, was described as reserved and unobtrusive.[57] Very fond of gardening, she kept to herself, creating an impression of someone innocent, yet eager.[58] The

[54] Rebecca Clarke, *I had a Father Too: or, The Mustard Spoon* (unpublished manuscript, privately held by Christopher Johnson), introductory note, verso. All material from the memoir quoted courtesy of Christopher Johnson.
[55] Broad, *Quartet*, 18.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Clarke, *I had a Father Too*, 21.
[58] Ibid., 11.

name, Rebecca, was given to Clarke by her father, Joseph, as it had been in the New England's side of their family for over two hundred years. Her father saw himself as a 'traveller, inventor, and a thinker, who swept Agnes up into his story.'[59] Cycling around Europe on boneshaker bicycles, sailing the Black Sea, and getting his name into the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for swimming across the Dardanelles, he was an adventurer. 'Can it be wondered at,' reflected Clarke, 'that Mama, growing up in her quiet home in Germany, followed everything he did – and thought it all extremely romantic?'[60] Once they were married and started living in England, the domesticity of Harrow made Clarke's father anxious and agitated, while the lack of stable full-time employment led to financial hardship for the family. United by music, Clarke's mother was 'quite a serviceable pianist and could read anything at sight.'[61] They had been gifted a grand piano and though it occupied the entire sitting room, Clarke recalls that 'nothing mattered as long as they could go on singing duets together, as they had during their engagement days in Munich.'[62]

Her father was a strict disciplinarian. He frequently implemented physical punishment, beating all his children, including Clarke's brothers Hans and Eric, born in 1887 and 1890. Being the naughtiest and the oldest of her siblings, Clarke was beaten more than the others, sometimes for misdemeanours as insignificant as biting her nails:

> Oh, those whippings – how I dreaded them. I would make any excuse, tell any lie, to escape them. But when I heard Papa calling 'Rebecca!" (instead of Becky or Buckskin, as in happier moments) I knew I was in for it. And then, bathed in tears, my drawers let down, I had to lean across the hated red Paisley quilt on Papa's bed while he applied the "steel slapper" – an architect's two-foot rule. He had a terrifying way of giving it a few preliminary whizzes through the air, to get his hand in, and each time I cringed with fear. Later, even worse, he discovered that a strip of linoleum was more effective.
>
> Hans and Eric of course also had their share. But Hans never told lies to get out of it. He was too proud. And Eric, even when quite small, seemed able to shrug things off in a way I never could. I was a coward. For years my nails were examined every Sunday morning by Papa; I had started the habit of biting them. And if they were not satisfactory (and they never were, in spite of bitter aloes in the daytime and bags tied over my hands at night) I

[59] Broad, *Quartet*, 71.
[60] Clarke, *I had a Father Too*, 8.
[61] Ibid., 10.
[62] Ibid.

> was doomed to another session with the steel slapper, while Mama waited helplessly at the door and cried.[63]

Acquiring a powerful airgun, Clarke's father amused himself by firing at stray cats. If no cats were in sight, he used his children's legs as target practice. Clarke believed it was not meant as punishment, yet recalls her legs being covered in blue bullet marks, as her father was a good shot.[64] Although she explored various arguments to rationalise his harsh treatment, this abuse left its mark, and she never forgot nor forgave the authoritarianism that derived from her father's views on male dominance.

Clarke and her brother Hans were started on violin at the age of eight and seven. She recalls that the lessons were meant only for Hans. Her being 'only a girl,' Clarke described being sent along to absorb anything she could.[65] Clarke's mother monitored the daily practice, aiming for fifteen-minute sessions each day. She held a watch to see the time and would provide a handkerchief when Clarke's tears would inevitably begin to overflow onto her chinrest.[66] There was certainly no foretelling that music would become her all-consuming passion, as Clarke struggled with her behaviour in lessons, which would often result in yet another whipping session:

> I often wonder how children can endure the unnatural position they have to screw themselves into for learning to play the fiddle – let alone the horrible sounds they hear themselves making. At our weekly lesson, I tried to stave off the evil hour by chattering and asking all sorts of irrelevant questions. Mr Cave got rather tired of this, and one day he said "Now, Rebecca, you may have one question- just one. Ask anything you like, and then keep quiet."[67]

Clarke's first true musical awakening happened during a trio practice with her mother and father, as they all performed a movement by Swan Hennessy titled *Night*. Clarke described that moment as one that stirred many emotions in her, so much so that she burst into tears. The session was followed by a scolding for not finishing the piece to the end. Clarke expressed that her father was

[63] Ibid., 26.
[64] Ibid., 33.
[65] Ibid., 39.
[66] Ibid., 40.
[67] Ibid.

probably 'quite pleased at my show of feeling and would most likely boast about it later behind my back; which made me resolve never to give him the chance.'[68]

'School,' Clarke recalled, 'was not a happy time.'[69] She was 'incessantly talkative and quite the tomboy, which earned her the disapproval of many teachers.'[70] In one report, Miss Colbeck, Clarke's primary school teacher, wrote that 'Rebecca would do well to cultivate a quieter and more ladylike manner.'[71] Clarke, however, had no interest in complying and was eventually expelled, being thrown into home schooling, guided by her mother.

Her father loved organising quartet sessions for the family. The quality of practice improved as Clarke and her brother got older. Subsequently, a large music room was built into the house, and, eventually, a substantial chamber music library formed within it. Though Clarke did not allow for her father's insidious cruelty to define her, she longed to be away from his punishments, whippings, and the ever-present feeling that she was doing something wrong. Acceptance into the Royal Academy of Music was the goal. Her mother accompanied her entrance exam and Clarke was successfully accepted into the Academy at sixteen.

Studying violin under Hans Wessely, Clarke also took harmony classes with Percy Miles, a family friend who happened to teach at the Academy. She felt Wessely was 'stern and sometimes unkind,'[72] but thoroughly enjoyed her time at the Academy and found London enchanting. She was awe-struck and greatly inspired by the composition students surrounding her, whose names she was already familiar with from various concert programmes. 'It never crossed my mind that later on, in my professional life, I should become acquainted with these gods.'[73] Regarding her own composition lessons, Clarke wrote 'once a week I climbed the narrow twisting stairs that led to the top of the old building to take my harmony lessons with Percy Miles.

[68] Ibid., 68.
[69] Ibid., 79.
[70] Broad, *Quartet*, 80.
[71] Clarke, *I had a Father Too,* 47.
[72] Ibid., 115.
[73] Ibid., 116.

For some reason, I sometimes felt a little shy when I was with him. But harmony was my favourite subject and I took it very seriously.'[74] Clarke's harmony improved quickly. This was a crucial first step on the long road to composition lessons. She also dedicated many hours to the violin each day, becoming the recipient of a bronze and silver medal for her playing during her first and second years at the Academy.

Clarke never went beyond her silver medal. Following an unexpected marriage proposal from her harmony teacher, Mr. Miles, her father precipitously removed her from the Academy. Though her initial reaction was 'one of complete panic'[75] and she managed to escape her professor's proposal, the incident certainly hindered her career, as she was withdrawn from the Academy in 1905. Having completed only two years of study, Clarke lost access to her violin lessons, the orchestral practice, and her harmony lessons, in conjunction with all the vital connections she was creating within the Academy. Though Clarke's father disregarded the idea of a musical career, claiming that her only purpose in life was to 'make some good man happy,'[76] having tasted the life of a musician, Clarke knew her true path was professional performance and composition. Much like Smyth, when faced with paternal opposition years prior, Clarke would escape to St James's Hall in London to attend concerts. Though thirty years apart, they would have both heard similar programmes – Beethoven, Bach, Brahms. Her head filled with music and her boldly dissonant ideas eagerly waiting to be written on paper, she buried herself in composition.

Clarke's father discredited her work, exclaiming she had 'the temperament of a genius but no genius.'[77] He did, however, send her music to Sir Charles Stanford, a renowned composer and professor of composition at the Royal College of Music. The College had only been established thirty years prior, yet England's most promising musical figures were students there,

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 117.
[76] Ibid., 144.
[77] Clarke, *I had a Father Too*, 152.

including Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. Some weeks later, Clarke became the first woman enrolled to study under Stanford. Per his recommendation, she switched from violin to viola, as it placed her 'right in the middle of the sound.'[78] Thriving under his tutelage and now in high demand as an instrumentalist, the switch became a pivotal point in her career.

At home, the emotional abuse persisted. When Clarke's *Danse Bizarre* won an exhibition prize, covering two semesters of her third-year fees, her father, enraged that the full year had not been covered, refused to pay for the final semester. The fees were anonymously secured by the head of the Royal College during Clarke's studies, Sir Hubert Parry, yet Clarke's increasing independence incensed her father further, and some months later she was kicked out of her home for good. The impact of her father's abusive behaviour as a developmental force in her upbringing should not be overlooked. In her response, Clarke showed defiance, viewing her acts of rebellion as the establishment of her own identity, independent of her family unit. Leaning on her loyal friendships, she began to build the necessary connections needed to survive, eventually establishing herself enough to earn a living as a performer. Perhaps she felt more conflicted than her memoir lets on, however, within it, Clarke portrays her father's actions as a push towards independence, intensifying her desire to seek out liberation. Furthermore, Clarke's relationship with her mother convolutes the narrative of Clarke's childhood being completely dominated by her father, as Agnes provided the family with companionable, peaceful memories, in what was otherwise an abusively turbulent household.

Shortly after Clarke started living alone, The *Nora Clench Quartet* invited her to audition for their recently vacant violist position. Successful, Clarke became a member of her first all-woman ensemble. As women were prohibited to play in professional orchestras, chamber music groups created vital career-building opportunities. May Mukle, the cellist in Clarke's new quartet, was an active participant in many rallies organised by the WSPU, often marching for suffrage to raise awareness around gender equality. She became Clarke's lifelong friend and perhaps it was

[78] Ibid., 158.

her inspiration that led Clarke to perform at an event organised by the Women Writers' Suffrage League in January 1911. The event was attended by both Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, while the music performed was composed and conducted by Dr. Ethel Smyth.[79] When the newly formed Society of Women Musicians held their inaugural meeting in July 1911, Clarke was one of many musicians gathered to support the SWM's vision. She later voiced that 'music has nothing to do with the sex of the artist. I would sooner be regarded as a sixteenth-rate composer than be judged as if there were one kind of musical art for men and another for women.'[80] In 1913, Henry Wood selected Clarke as one of only six women to join the string section of the Queen's Hall Orchestra. These were the first women to be employed by a professional orchestra in England. The NUWSS's weekly newspaper proudly published an article on their significant accomplishment, featuring the photographs of all six women, exclaiming that 'Sir Henry's innovation will do much to vanquish prejudice and win a fair field for women throughout the musical world.'[81] Clarke may not have intended to be a suffragette, nor a feminist pioneer; however, she was setting an important example, viewed as an activist and an inspiration.

It is no coincidence that both Clarke and Smyth were from middle class families. The incalculable number of social and financial obstacles faced by women composers during this period resulted in working-class women's exclusion from the profession altogether. The expenses of musical tuition made the profession inaccessible, whereas the upper classes were restrained by social expectations. Although Clarke and Smyth were disadvantaged by their gender, their class and race provided relative power and privilege. The obstacles faced by these women were substantial and should not be minimised. However, drawing solely on their hardships, setbacks, and limitations, while reducing their lives to a litany of insurmountable obstacles does not do justice to the empowering, creative ways in which they trail blazed through the societal

[79] Broad, *Quartet*, 148.
[80] W.H. Haddon Squire, 'Rebecca Clarke Sees Rhythm as Next Field of Development,' *Christian Science Monitor*, December 9, 1922.
[81] 'Women in Orchestras,' *The Common Cause*, October 24, 1913.

limitations imposed on them. Breaking traditional bonds and discarding of time-honoured practices, these women forged their careers in the male-dominated world of composition, against all the odds.

Gatekeepers of the Canon

The Gender Paradox

Written in 1885, Camille Saint-Saëns's essay on harmony and melody provides an illustrative example of the rhetoric that was used by the critical establishment on the topic of women composers at the time. 'Women,' he wrote, 'are strange when they dabble seriously in art. They seem preoccupied above all else with making you forget that they are women and display an excessive virility, without realising that it is precisely that preoccupation which betrays the female.'[82] Another notable example, previously quoted in the prologue, was written by Cecil Grey, a music critic who worked for *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *The Morning Post*. When discussing the music of Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983), Grey stated that 'Of Mlle. Germaine Tailleferre one can only repeat Dr. Johnson's dictum concerning a woman preacher, transposed into terms of music. Sir, a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.'[83] Discussed in one of the founding texts of feminist literary criticism, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Grey's quote remains a testimony to how critics used discriminatory gender ideologies to justify women's omission from the canon.

German conductor and pianist, Hans von Bülow (1830–1894), discussed his views on women's creative potential in music, exclaiming that 'reproductive genius can be admitted to the

[82] Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et melodie*, 3d ed. (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 228.
[83] Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 246.

pretty sex, but productive genius unconditionally cannot…There will never be a woman composer, at best a misprinting copyist… I do not believe in the feminine form of the word "creator."'[84] Furthermore, reflecting the prevailing consensus of nineteenth-century male society at large, German music historian, Emil Naumann, declared that 'music is the most masculine of all the arts, for art essentially depends on the creative idea. All creative work is well known as being the exclusive work of men.'[85]

Women composers were critiqued for 'being true to their sex if their music exhibited supposedly feminine traits, yet derided as attempting to be masculine if their music embodied so-called virile traits.'[86] Susan McClary has encapsulated this gender paradox thus: 'The music that has been composed by women has often been received in terms of the essentialist stereotypes ascribed to women by masculine culture: it is repeatedly condemned as pretty, yet trivial or – in the event that it does not conform to standards of feminine propriety – as aggressive and unbefitting a woman.'[87] McClary argued that 'music theorists and analysts quite frequently betray an explicit reliance on metaphors of gender ("masculinity" vs. "femininity") and sexuality in their formulations.'[88] This chapter explores how the gender paradox manifested in different aspects of Smyth's and Clarke's personal and professional lives, drawing on McClary's pioneering work on music's gendered semantics, in conjunction with Marcia J. Citron's influential output on the role criticism has played in the exclusion of women composers from the musical canon.

Smyth made her first professional debut as a composer of chamber music. Her E-Major String Quartet received its first performance at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on January 26, 1884, while her A-Minor Sonata for violin and piano was premiered there in 1887. Neither of the works

[84] Quoted in Pamela Susskind, introduction to Clara Wieck Schumann, *Selected Piano Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 7.
[85] Emil Naumann, *The History of Music*, trans. F. Praeger, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1886), 2:1267. Original German edition published 1880–1885.
[86] Marcia J. Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *Journal of Musicology* 8, no.1 (Winter 1990): 109.
[87] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18.
[88] Ibid., 10.

were a critical success, however, and the critics described the sonata as music 'devoid of feminine charm and therefore unworthy of a woman.'[89] This was Smyth's first encounter with critics evaluating her music based on its appropriateness to her gender. Smyth subsequently sent the Sonata to Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), in the hope that the violinist would perform it in London. Joachim's response was expressed in a letter to Smyth, in which he stated that 'In spite of talent here and there, many a clever turn, and a certain facility, candour compels me to say that both works [Smyth had sent a String Trio with the Sonata] seem to me failures – unnatural, farfetched, overwrought and not good as to sound.'[90] Although Joachim's response to Smyth does not directly mention her gender, gender-based criticisms nonetheless circulated within Joachim's social and professional networks. For example, while Joachim was working as the director of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik in 1881, he received a letter from Ernst Rudorff, his deputy director. The letter included the following passage:

> [Women] add nothing to the orchestra performances; indeed, I am more and more convinced by the last few rehearsals that the weak and uncertain playing of the young girls not only does no good at all but actually makes the sound indistinct and out of tune .... They should not be trained to become orchestra players as such anyway. It is bad enough that women are meddling in every possible place where they don't belong .... At the very least, we have to make sure that orchestras will not have men and women playing together in the future.[91]

Although it is not clear whether or not Joachim shared these views, the directness and tone of the letter appear to reflect previous discussions between the two men, indicating that Joachim was surrounded by those who dismissed the notion of women having creative ability.

Contrasting with Joachim's dismissal of Smyth's Sonata, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky expressed a positive view. In his memoirs, Tchaikovsky wrote that 'Miss Smyth is one of the comparatively few women composers who may be seriously reckoned among the workers in this

[89] Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained* (Brousson Press, 2011), vol. 2, 162.
[90] Christopher St John, *Ethel Smyth* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), 54.
[91] Letter from Ernst Rudorff, deputy director, to Joseph Joachim, director of the Berlin Konigliche Hochschule für Musik, 18 December 1881. Cited in Nancy B, Reich, "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class," in *Musicology and Difference*, (London: University of California Press, 1993): 144.

sphere of music…She had composed several interesting works, the best of which, a violin sonata, I heard excellently played by the composer herself. She gave promise in the future of a serious and talented career.'[92] Smyth first met Tchaikovsky in Leipzig. Playing a significant role in her creative journey, Tchaikovsky brought Smyth's attention to the deficiency in her training, as she had received no formal instruction in orchestration. Thus, Smyth began to study it on her own.[93] By 1889, she had completed two orchestral works: a four-movement *Serenade*, and her *Overture to Anthony and Cleopatra*. On April 26, 1890, the *Serenade* was premiered at a Crystal Palace concert in London, conducted by August Manns (1825-1907).

This was an important landmark in Smyth's career, for it was both her orchestral debut and the first public performance of her music in England.[94] George Bernard Shaw, the music critic of *The Star*, dismissed Smyth's *Serenade*: 'First there was a serenade by Miss Smyth, who wrote the analytic program in such terms as to conceal her sex, until she came forward to acknowledge the applause at the end. No doubt Miss Smyth would scorn to claim any indulgence as a woman, and far from me be it to discourage her righteous pride … I am convinced that we should have resented the disappointment less had we known that our patience was being drawn on by a young lady instead of some male Smyth. It is very neat and dainty, this orchestral filigree work; but it is not in its right place on great occasions at Sydenham.'[95] Smyth's *Overture to Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra* was also premiered in Crystal Palace that year. Shaw's review read: 'When E. M. Smyth's heroically brassy overture to Anthony and Cleopatra was finished, and the composer called to the platform, it was observed with stupefaction that all that tremendous noise had been made by a lady.'[96]

[92] Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984), 44.
[93] Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 168.
[94] Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 227.
[95] George Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Head Shaw: Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Rheinhardt, 1981), vol. 2, 54.
[96] Shaw, *Shaw's Music*, 558.

Following the first performance of Smyth's *Mass in D* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra in 1893, Smyth wrote that 'the press went for the Mass almost unanimously,'[97] as a critic for the *Morning Post* reflected on being 'amused to see a lady composer attempt to soar in the loftier regions of musical art.'[98] Another review, written by Fuller Maitland, stated that the 'Mass placed the composer at the head of all those of her own sex. The most striking thing about it was the entire absence of the 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.'[99] Maitland reveals that Smyth's creation was a success; therefore, in his view, she had composed like a man.

In pursuit to secure its performance, Smyth took the Mass to numerous conductors across England and Germany. While many expressed interest, all arrangements of the performance had fallen through until Joseph Barnby (1838-1896), conductor of the Royal Choral Society finally programmed it, having initially hesitated due to the difficulties of promoting the works of unknown composers. Reflecting on this, Smyth wrote that 'I am quite certain that in 1893 it will have displeased the Faculty - subconsciously of course - that what is called masculine, i.e. strong music, should have been written by a woman.'[100] When speaking of 'the Faculty,' Smyth was 'not referring to the public, a bi-sexual crowd which is quite differently attuned, but to … an exclusively male body consisting of conductors, other people of influence, and the Press.'[101] On March 11, 1903, Smyth's *Der Wald* became the first opera by a woman to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The *Musical Courier* of March 18, 1903, featured a review of the work:

> Not as the music of a woman should Miss Smyth's score be judged. She thinks in masculine terms, broad and virile…. Her climaxes are full-blooded and the fortissimos are real. There is no sparing of the brass, and there is no mincing of the means that speak

[97] Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 172.
[98] Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: W. Kimber, 1984), 63.
[99] J. A. Fuller-Maitland and H. C. Calles, 'Dame Ethel Smyth,' in *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musician*s, 5th Edition, ed. Eric Blom (London: MacMillan,1954), 860.
[100] Smyth. *As Time Went On*, 175.
[101] Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats. Etc.* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928),12-13.

> the language of musical passion…. The gifted Englishwoman has successfully emancipated herself from her sex.[102]

The reviews considered above demonstrate by way of Smyth's personal example the prejudices facing women composers of the time. The image of 'greatness' and 'genius' was invariably and irrevocably portrayed as male. Through their creative output, women composers began to displace the traditional, male-oriented notion of 'genius,' thus challenging its perpetually strong foothold in music criticism. Christine Battersby has examined gender bias in her deconstruction of 'genius,' postulating that ideologies surrounding genius and creativity dismissed the possibility of women as creators. As Battersby writes, 'This rhetoric praised 'feminine' qualities in male creators but claimed females could not - or should not – create,'[103] while women who succeeded in male-dominated fields of creation were described as 'unsexed phenomena.'[104] Deeply entrenched prejudices do not dissipate with ease. Furthermore, those who hold privileges, hold them tightly, regardless of how marginal the advantage involved. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century critics viewed the increase of women's creative output with apprehension and hostility, believing that it would inevitably lead to a rapid decline in compositional standards. Thus, the myths around women's innate creative inferiority were persistently propagated.

English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, visited Smyth in Holloway Prison, in 1912. His account of the event is one of the most frequently quoted stories about her:

> I arrived in the main courtyard of the prison to find the noble company of martyrs marching round it and singing lustily their war-chant while the composer, beaming approbation from an overlooking upper window, beat time in almost Bacchic frenzy with a toothbrush.[105]

He described Smyth as 'without question the most remarkable of her sex that I have been

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[102] "A New Opera in New York," *Musical Courier* 46 (18 March 1903), 12.
[103] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 1.
[104] Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; reprinted from the original 1925 edition), 305.
[105] Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime: Leaves from an Autobiography by Sir Thomas Beecham*. (London: Hutchinson & Co Publishers Ltd, 1944), 117-8.

privileged to know,' having 'fiery energy and unrelenting fixity of purpose … [She] was not the easiest of colleagues, and her frequent efforts at direct action…hindered rather than forwarded the aim which everyone wanted just as much to attain.'[106] Beecham had played a crucial role in organising performances of Smyth's opera, *The Wreckers*, having once described the work as 'one of the three or four English operas of real musical merit and vitality.'[107] He championed Smyth's work, proclaiming that the opera had 'a distinctive quality that separates it from the rest of English music. The vigour and rhythmic force of portions of *The Wreckers* … equal anything of the kind written in my time, and hand in hand with these characteristics go a high emotion and delicate sentiment wholly free from rhetoric or bathos.'[108] Peculiarly, however, Beecham made an indirect reference to Smyth's work in 1944 in *Vogue's First Reader*, which was published the year that Smyth died. Although Smyth's name was not mentioned, Beecham likely wrote with Smyth in mind when he proclaimed that the increased visibility of women composers had brought music to 'a state of hopeless decadence. There are,' he continued, 'no women composers, never have been and possibly never will be.'[109] While Beecham enjoyed being provocative, this statement speaks to the significance of prejudice against women's creativity at the time. It is important to remember that Beecham was highly placed amongst British and international musical circles, and that such a statement would have been conveyed in apparent disregard of composers such as Smyth, Rebecca Clarke, Elizabeth Maconchy, Amy Beach, Ruth Crawford, Dorothy Howell, Cécile Chaminade, and many others. In addition to Beecham's awareness of Smyth's work being played internationally at leading opera houses at the time, he would have also known that Rebecca Clarke's work was receiving recognition, being frequently programmed at the Wigmore Hall, in addition to Clarke's Viola Sonata having received the first-place tie with Ernest

[106] Beecham, *A Mingled Chime*, 117-8.
[107] Thomas Beecham, "The Position of Women in Music," in *Vogue's First Reader*, introduction by Frank Crowninshield (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1944): 416 - 420.
[108] Beecham, *A Mingled Chime*, 85.
[109] Beecham, "The Position of Women in Music," in *Vogue's First Reader*, introduction by Frank Crowninshield (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1944): 416.

Bloch's Suite for Viola and Piano at the Berkshire Festival, in 1919.

The critical reviews of Clarke's creative output echo comments made regarding Smyth's gender-coded traits. Reflecting on an all-Clarke recital given in London's Wigmore Hall, in October 1925, the following reviews further illustrate how critics attributed both merits and shortcomings of women's compositional works to their gender:

> 'The concert of Rebecca Clarke's compositions left me with the impression of remarkable alertness and quite masculine vigour.'
>
> (*Musical News and Herald*, 31 Oct, 1925)

> 'Rebecca Clarke, whose recital of compositions took place at Wigmore Hall, is as all women composers, largely reflective of preceding masculine creations. She has, however, real feminine personality in such things as her 'Lullaby' for piano and viola, and a truly feminine bent towards the grotesque and intricate in 'Grotesque' and 'Chinese Puzzle.''
>
> (Cardiff *Western Mail*, 24 Oct, 1925)

Illustrating the preconceptions male critics exhibited in regard to women's creative output, the *Western Mail* review claims that Clarke writing outside of the 'feminine,' is an attempt to assimilate masculine models, with the critic suggesting that only in her smaller forms is it possible for Clarke to express her 'real feminine personality.' These reviews offer an important insight into the cultural and intellectual climate Clarke faced, as critics focused on the novelty of a woman composer rather than the value in her work:

> 'Miss Clarke is fully the equal of several of the known young men of music. She launched out on her piano trio in a spacious way and carried the enterprise through without flagging.'
>
> (*Daily Mail*, Oct, 1925)

> 'Women composers usually write songs well, and with one or two outstanding exceptions do little else. Rebecca Clarke reverses the process. Her instrumental compositions are full of music and poetry of thought expressed with real technique and intellectual control.'
>
> (Special from Monitor Bureau, London, 30 Oct, 1925)

> ‘How remarkable is it that our women composers are so much more virile in style than some of our young men. Miss Rebecca Clarke, from whom we had an evening’s music last night at the Wigmore Hall, has a strong right arm. (We speak figuratively, of course.) She can lay down the foundation of a big chamber work like her piano trio heard last night, with all the emphasis of a Liszt and carry on with the sturdiness of a John Ireland of Frank Bridge. Naturally she knows the methods of all of these composers and of others, but being still quite young, she has not quite assimilated all their impressions.’
>
> (A WOMAN COMPOSER – Miss Rebecca Clarke at the Wigmore Hall, *The Star*, 22 Oct, 1925)

One recurring theme connecting the reviews is the gendered language used to criticise women for performing outside of the realm of the ‘feminine’, casting their femininity into question by elucidating that ‘intellectual control’ and ‘vigour’ are unusual characteristics for women composers. The *Western Mail* review portrays Clarke as a composer attempting to replicate preceding ‘masculine creations.’ This is a strange fact to highlight, of course, as there were few other role models at the time. Furthermore, the critic patronisingly attributes the perceived weakness of Clarke’s work to her being ‘still quite young.’ Clarke was thirty-nine at the time. The *Daily Mail* review exudes a sense of wonder at Clarke’s ability to carry out her trio ‘without flagging,’ a condescension fully unrelated to the composition and one that would never be applied to the work of a man.

Although such reviews would receive condemnation today, they demonstrate a centuries-old bias, perpetuated by male critics and their failure to produce objective reflections of women’s creative output. Critics often turned to cultural stereotypes, focusing on the search for feminine and masculine traits, or the performing female body, either to sexualise or ridicule. A review of the *Wiener Damen-Orchester*, published in 1874 in *The New York Times*, stated ‘The orchestra presents a *coup d’œil* attractive enough to compel the sternest critic to lay down his pen, supposing he may have anything unkind to say. But, happily, the Viennese ladies, with their uniformity of pretty costumes and (may it be added) their uniformity of pretty faces, are no mere

pretenders.'[110] Notably, this condescendingly grudging praise makes use of the male pronoun for 'the sternest critic,' emphasising the authority of his male gaze. Another review reflecting on a chamber music concert given by the *British Society of Women Musicians*, in April 1950, criticised Bridget Fry's *Cinq Chansons du Moyen Age* for 'coquetry', while reviewing Ann Hamerton's *Three Night Songs* as 'Fauré-esque'.[111] Equating women's work to 'coquetry', an adjective associated with seductive, frivolous behaviour, while summarising their music solely as imitative of another male composer, are both tendencies illustrative of women's music being subjected to gendered analysis and condescending praise.

In an interview with Robert Sherman, organised in honour of Clarke's ninetieth birthday, Clarke reflected on the 1919 Coolidge festival, when her Viola Sonata had tied with Ernest Bloch for the winning prize:

> And when I had that one little whiff of success that I've had in my life, with the Viola Sonata, the rumour went around, I hear, that I hadn't written the stuff myself, that somebody had done it for me. And I even got one or two little bits of press clippings saying that it was impossible, that I couldn't have written it myself. And the funniest of all was that I had a clipping once which said I didn't exist, there wasn't any such person as Rebecca Clarke, that it was a pseudonym…for Ernest Bloch! Now these people have got it most beautifully mixed – I thought to myself what a funny idea that when he writes his very much lesser works that should take pseudonym of a girl, that anyone should consider this possible![112]

Though the story is riddled with gender-based prejudices on behalf of the critics, the interview also provides important insight into Clarke's self-image. Responding to the allegations of her non-existence with humour, Clarke displays her playful, assertive, and confident character.

The use of gendered language continued to be commonplace within reviews of Smyth's creative output. In 1967, Percy Young wrote that 'Ethel Smyth, a robust character distinguished for her suffragette activities, studied in Leipzig and developed a style that was both masculine and Teutonic.'[113] When discussing *The Wreckers* in 1988, Nigel Burton described 'its

[110] Unsigned, 'The Viennese Ladies' Orchestra', *The New York Times* (27 July 1874), 6; cited in Julie C. Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 134.
[111] Unsigned, 'Society of Women Musicians', *The Times* (3 April 1950), 2.
[112] Liane Curtis, "A case of identity: rescuing Rebecca Clarke," *The Musical Times* 137, (May1996): 15.
[113] Percy Young, *A History of British Music* (London: Ernest Benn, 1967), 539.

predominant quality' as 'masculinity,' noting that it was 'an evaluation which might have displeased Smyth.'[114] Smyth addressed the presence of such rhetoric in England's art criticism through an article published by the *English Review* in 1916:

> When will our men rid themselves of this sex-obsession—so graceful in the adolescent, so hideous in old gentlemen at club windows, but, to say the least of it, out of place in art criticism? You see it at its most rampant in connection with music; if a work is too long it is feminine discursiveness (as if men were always brief and to the point, good Heavens!); if snappy and abrupt it is woman's impatience; but if direct, lucid, and strong, "these are qualities we do not as a rule look for in women." … There is literally no end to the nonsense talked on this theme. Someone regretted the other day that up to now women had failed 'to reveal the secret of her sex' in her art: a phrase, I say it again, that could not have been coined out of England. 'That's all very well,' I hear someone say, 'but up to now where are the great women composers?' My answer is that as long as we are kept out of the rough and tumble of musical life you won't have many.[115]

The gender paradox was simultaneously apparent for women working in journalism at the time. Marcia J. Citron observed that the critical establishment had been 'overwhelmingly male,'[116] and thus male discourse had formed the basis of professional criticism. This resulted in the absence of female role models for aspiring women critics, and the absence of a female point of view within reviews. It is important to note that my research for this paper had initially not investigated reviews written by women critics, due to the assumption that none existed. This assumption, however, was inaccurate.

The Feminist Press and Women as Critics

The expanding rail network, the invention of telegraphy, power driven printing machines, and the development of new illustration methods all led to a dramatic increase in newspaper circulation in Britain, in the 1840s.[117] Reductions on newspaper taxes, otherwise known as 'taxes

[114] Nigel Burton, "Art Music: Opera 1865-1914," in *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, ed. by Nicholas Temperley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 355.
[115] Ethel Smyth, "England, Music, and—Women," *The English Review* 22 (1916): 195.
[116] Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and The Musical Canon* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 181.
[117] For information on production and distribution, see Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

on knowledge,'[118] made all periodicals drastically cheaper, while the 1855 abolishment of the newspaper tax led Britain into a new era of free trade in newspapers. The unprecedented increase in journal output during the 1860s and 70s culminated in the emergence of a mass press within the final two decades of the century, as the 'unceasing thirst for copy implied by so much expansion indisputably helped to create music critics.'[119] This evolution generated a new trend in women's journalism. Newspaper advertisement begun targeting middle-class women as consumers. Motivated editors proceeded to hire female journalists, engaging them to write about fashion, domestic issues, and society gossip to fill the pages designated for female readers.

Despite some women actively working in journalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women critics were a rarity prior to the Second World War. Regardless of gender, most critics remained unidentified due to the respected tradition of British press anonymity. Certain journalists used pseudonyms, but until the 1880s, the majority never signed at all.[120] The gradual emergence of women as critics directly paralleled their position in mainstream journalism. In 1858, editor Bessie Parks founded the first feminist British periodical, with her as the principal editor. Established and edited with the help of Barbara Bodichon, the *English Woman's Journal* became the first magazine to be published by an organised feminist network in England. It was written by women for women. Published monthly between 1858 and 1864, the periodical dealt with issues surrounding women's employment and gender equality. Furthermore, The *Victoria Press*, named after Queen Victoria, was established in 1860 by Emily Faithfull, along with other feminist activists, advocating for the employment of women in the printing field. In 1892, *The Times*, appointed Flora Shaw as their first woman on permanent staff,

[118] Laura Hamer, *The Gender Paradox: Criticism of Women and Women as Critics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 158.
[119] Ibid.
[120] See Oscar Maurer, Jr, 'Anonymity vs. Signature in Victorian Reviewing', *Studies in English*, 27 (1948), 1–28; and Mary Ruth Hiller, 'The Identification of Authors: The Great Victorian Enigma', in *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, eds. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (New York: Modern Language Association, 1978).

while Emilie Peacocke became the first full-time woman reporter active on Fleet Street.[121] In 1948, Joan Chissell became the first female music critic to be employed by *The Times*.[122] She continued working for the newspaper until 1979. In 1997, Fiona Maddocks succeeded Andrew Porter as the chief music critic of *The Observer*, having also written for the *Evening Standard*, *The Times*, and *The Guardian*. Furthermore, she became the first music editor for *The Independent*, and the founding editor of *BBC Music Magazine*. As per the Census figures for England and Wales, in 1861, 145 women and 1525 men considered themselves journalists; by 1901, the number of women journalists had risen to 1,249, roughly nine percent of the total, and by 1931, the figure had increased to 3,213, around seventeen percent. By 1961, the proportion of female journalists stood at just over twenty percent.[123]

Most British feminist writers separated the politics of their writing from the documentation of the region's musical activity. A minority of feminist journalists reported on women as creators of music, while the radical feminist press frequently disregarded the arts as extraneous to the political struggle. However, within critical reviews on Clarke, there are some notable exceptions. A short unpublished article, written in 1933 by the female critic M. Scott Johnston, was drafted for a British newspaper magazine series, titled *Gallery of Modern Women*. Johnston describes Clarke as 'a rara avis.' She writes:

> Rebecca Clarke is unable to throw any light on the mystery of the scarcity of women composers. Nor for that matter can anybody else, beyond vague statements to the effect that feminine psychology was not designed to cope with abstract subjects. During the last six years, her Muse has been inactive, but now she hopes to settle down to her real ambition – the writing of a quartet. Being also a first-class viola player, Miss Clarke must do a great deal of rushing about. Besides playing in quartets with Suggia, Heifetz, Adila Fachiri, Mischa Elman, Thibaud, and May Mukle, she has played in England, America, China, Japan, France, Holland, Hungary, and Italy.[124]

[121] Laura Hamer, *The Gender Paradox: Criticism of Women and Women as Critics*, 286.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Sarah Lonsdale, "We Agreed that Women Were a Nuisance in the Office Anyway: The portrayal of women journalists in early twentieth-century British fiction" in *Journalism Studies*, (2013) 14:4, 461-475, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.718572.
[124] M. Scott Johnson, "Rebecca Clarke," *Gallery of Modern Women* (unpublished manuscript), 1933.

Consisting of four pages, the article provides detailed descriptions of what inspires Clarke as a composer, her use of the pseudonym *Anthony Trent*, her upcoming creative projects, and her history as a composition student at the Royal College. Johnston's writing illustrates a thoughtful balance between Clarke 'the composer', and Clarke 'the performer'. Nevertheless, it upholds traditional gender dualities of Universal versus Other. Describing Clarke as 'a rara avis – a woman composer', Johnston positions Clarke 'the composer' in the division of Other, which the average female reader may perceive as both an inspiration, and an anomaly.

Subsequently, a review by the female critic 'Lilith', written in response to an all-Clarke recital given in London's Wigmore Hall, in October 1925, provides an important comparison to two reviews discussed in the previous subchapter, written by two male critics, reviewing the same event:

> I think we ought to be rather proud of Miss Rebecca Clarke. To begin with, she is most pleasing to look at. Tall and very good-looking. But more important (or is it really less important to our sex?) she gave, with Myra Hess, Adila Facheri, May Mukle, and John Goss, a most interesting and most successful concert at the Wigmore Hall a week or so ago, the programme, which included songs, a viola sonata, and a piano trio, being made up entirely of her own compositions, she herself playing the viola. Very few women, or men either, can boast of having achieved that in company with such artistes as she had. Lady Dean Paul, I suppose, is the most widely known of our women musicians who perform their own works. Hers are all written under the name Poldowski.[125]

Through the removal of the empowered male gaze, a greater degree of objectivity was achieved in this review compared to the two written by male critics in the previous subchapter. Lilith acknowledges the authority of the male gaze and the objectification of women composers by the patriarchal subjectivity of the male critic, while her revision of Clarke's recital is filled with pride and admiration. She positions Clarke in an entirely different category to both her male and female counterparts, while highlighting that from the few women composers who perform their own music, Clarke is the only one to not use a gender-neutral pseudonym. However, holding Clarke up as an example intended to inspire, Lilith characterises her as an 'exception', a description simultaneously used by male critics to discourage women from entering the arts.

[125] "Lilith", "Silhouetted In The Mirror," *The Sphere*, November 7th, 1925, 185.

Such narrative upholds the concept of gender duality, with the Universal constructed as male and the Other as female. This concept has been particularly prevalent in the criticism that women composers have received, positioning women and their music in the category of Other.

The Englishwoman's Review was one of the first feminist periodicals published in England between 1866 and 1910. Its first editor was Jessie Boucherett, an English campaigner for women's rights, a promoter of the women's suffrage movement, and an advocate for the Married Women's Property Act. The founding objectives of *The Englishwoman*'s *Review* strove to represent the voice of both women and men, while promoting a feminist point of view.[126] The first issue of this monthly journal was printed in 1909, featuring an article by John Powell deploring the absence of English opera in England.[127] Powell failed to mention any English opera composers, overlooking Smyth's opera *Der Wald*, which had been performed in 1902 at London's Covent Garden. The following year, this was rectified in an article by Samuel Levy Bensusan, which named Smyth a part of the musical renaissance in England, praising her creative output. Bensusan subsequently published another article on the difficulties faced by women when attempting to enter the field of music.[128] This is an unusual example of a male critic writing for a feminist journal, in which the difficulties experienced by women composers are highlighted. *The Englishwoman's Review* scarcely featured articles on musicians, particularly following the outbreak of the First World War. However, in 1918, there were two notable exceptions, when articles by Ethel Smyth and musicologist Annie Patterson were published.[129] The paper had solicited a piece addressing women's emancipation from the point of view of a musician[130] and Smyth's article, *Women as Orchestral Players*, was demonstrative of *The Englishwoman*'s *Review'*s aspiration to illuminate and promote women in the arts.

[126] See *The Englishwoman*'s *Review* first issue in February 1909.
[127] John Powell (1909) Opera in England, *The Englishwoman's Review*, February, 79–86.
[128] S[amuel]. L[evy]. Bensusan (1910) Women and the Musical Profession, *The Englishwoman's Review*, September, 179–188.
[129] Annie Patterson (1918) Woman's Future in Music, *The Englishwoman's Review,* April, 22–23.
[130] Ethel Smyth (1918) Women as Orchestral Players, *The Englishwoman's Review*, March, 170–171.

This aspiration was equally evident within reviews published by *Time and Tide*, a British political and literary review magazine founded in 1920. Christopher St John was a female music critic working for the magazine, contributing weekly musical reviews for almost ten years. She was a leading literary figure in the woman's suffrage movement and became Smyth's literary executor/biographer upon her death. In a review of Smyth's works performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, St John introduced a correlation between Smyth's creative output and the fight for gender equality, describing her as the 'composer whom every fighter in the great liberative war of women calls by the name of 'Comrade.''[131] More support for women composers shown by female critics is seen in a theatre column written by St. John, in which she criticises dramatists for being 'constitutionally unprogressive,' arguing that 'they cannot conceal their hostility to socialists, pacifists, feminists, or any other disagreeable persons who refuse to bow the knee to long venerated sentiments and institutions. In plays, women who transgress from conservative values are almost always punished and/or reformed by the end.'[132] Due to St. John's contribution, *Time and Tide* became an ardent defender of women in the arts.[133] Another *Time and Tide* article discussing Ethel Smyth was published in 1921, titled *Personalities and Powers*. The author, Philippa Senlac, held Smyth up as an example intended to inspire women, accentuating that such 'exceptions' need not condemn most women to mediocrity: 'the contention of men that she [Smyth] is a brilliant exception has a sufficient critical germ of truth in it to rouse women's pride to make the exception less rare.'[134]

Extensive evidence illustrates women critics championing women composers. It would appear, however, that Smyth did not always follow suit. Her conscious distancing from other women composers may lead us to question our reading of her as an advocate for women in the arts. Christopher Johnson notes, for example, that Smyth almost never championed a woman

[131] Christopher St John, "Review," *The Suffragette*, June 27th, 1913, 612.
[132] Christopher St John "Review," *Time and Tide*, February, 1923, 114- 116.
[133] Spender, Dale, Ed. "Time and Tide Wait for No Man," London, *Pandora Press*, 1984, 24.
[134] Philippa Senlac. "Personalities & Powers". *Time and Tide*, January 21st, 1921, 57-58.

composer other than herself, and even then, rarely by name.[135] Smyth insisted on being evaluated on her own terms, and Christopher Wiley states that 'not wanting feminine allies who could potentially be considered weak, she viewed herself only as the precursor of a future chain of great composers.'[136] In her book *What Happened Next*, for example, Smyth postulates that no woman had written a work of the calibre of *The Wreckers.*[137] In a letter to Smyth written in 1940, Virginia Woolf reiterates this view, congratulating Smyth on being the first woman to succeed in an autobiography. Woolf writes 'Now why shouldn't you be not only the first woman to write an opera, but equally the first to tell the truths about yourself.'[138] However, Smyth's operas were not the first to be composed by a woman. The forgotten history of women's operas can be traced back to the creation of the genre in Italy at the turn of the seventeenth century. The first women composer of operatic works is believed to be Francesca Caccini (1587-1641). She was also a singer, a lutenist, a poet, and a music teacher of the early Baroque era.[139]

Sophie Fuller's research has unveiled many women composers in England who have been lost to history. Both Fuller and Smyth scholar Elizabeth Wood have argued that Smyth perpetuated the notion that she was the only woman composer of her era, 'playing no small part in the suppression of other women's achievements.'[140] Questioning Smyth's intentions, Wood writes:

> When she insinuates that the alluring Irish-born composer Augusta Holmès owed some of her fame to 'songs and seduction', and when she scarcely mentions other women composers in her musical and political tirades, I fear she echoes the very 'male machine' she had so properly attacked for its greedy, jealous prejudices against creative women.[141]

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[135] Christopher Johnson, "Grotesque," (unpublished manuscript), chapter 11.
[136] Christopher Wiley, "Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and The First Woman to Write an Opera," *The Music Quarterly*, 96, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 273.
[137] Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 277.
[138] Letter from Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 24 December 1940.
[139] Christopher Wiley, "Music and Literature: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and The First Woman to Write an Opera," *The Music Quarterly*, 96, 2 (Summer 2013), 268.
[140] Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States, 1629-Present* (London and San Francisco: Pandora, 1994), 18, 137, 141.
[141] Elizabeth Wood, "Music into Words," in *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about their Work on Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 81.

Smyth has been criticised for not doing enough to uplift and actively support other women composers. Her friend, writer Vita Sackville-West stated that '[Smyth's] letters and her books are all the same. They are HER. She might concisely have entitled her successive books ME ONE, ME TWO, ME THREE and so on.'[142] Perhaps Smyth viewed publication as a way of ensuring her own place in history. Virginia Woolf believed that she wanted to guarantee the correct representation of her career. Writing in her diary on 19 March 1931, Woolf stated: 'Ethel yesterday, very uneasy about her character, and possible misrepresentations. I think deluding herself about her own motives in countering reviewers: (purely for the sake of other musicians, women in particular: I've nothing to lose: have suffered neglect etc. all my life.'[143] Though there is a distinction to be made between Smyth's private awareness of women composers and the omission of their names from her public advocacy for women in the arts, there is also evidence to support that Smyth did, in fact, champion other women composers. Discussing why she wrote so many autobiographies, Smyth stated that 'I very definitely desire that women shall know how it was with me,' to remind others that 'they are not as alone as they perhaps believe; that we women have all travelled that road and are helping where we can.'[144]

At the unveiling of A. G. Walker's statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, Smyth conducted a Minuet by her younger contemporary, the thirty-two-year-old Dorothy Howell. Smyth promoted Howell's compositions, insisting that her music should be played at the unveiling, while Howell expressed concern that her work may 'let women down.'[145] Smyth's *A Final Burning of Boats* also contains an entire chapter dedicated to 'Augusta Holmes, Pioneer,'[146] in which Smyth

[142] Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 246.
[143] Anne Olivier Bell, ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, IV: 1931-1935*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), 14.
[144] Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats. Etc.* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928),15-16.
[145] Ethel Smyth to Dorothy Howell, 2 Jan, 1930. All correspondence and personal material relating to Dorothy Howell held at Dorothy Howell Trust.
[146] Ibid., 126.

acknowledges Holmes's suites for orchestra, her symphonic poems, her chamber music, and her opera.[147]

Paradoxically, however, Smyth does dedicate multiple lines to Holmes's appearance, describing her as 'physically entrancing,' and her head as 'too large.'[148] Reflecting upon Holmes's opera, Smyth describes the libretto as 'bad,' calling the music 'student's work,' and the plot 'conventional.'[149] Though this reflects the directness of Smyth's personality, it does, in fact, also mirror some of the gendered rhetoric used by male critics within reviews of Smyth's own work. A more complex reading of Smyth could explore the ways in which she may have internalised society's misogyny, which can be inferred from her comments on Holmes's appearance. In 1926, Smyth attended Adela Maddison's opera *Ippolita in the Hills.* Smyth's record of her views on Maddison's creative output explains the absence of Maddison from Smyth's public accounts. Following the performance, Smyth reviewed the work in a letter to Edith Somerville, describing it as 'the most awful thing I ever heard - & it was a great blow to me that it turned out thus – bad for women – bad for opera.'[150] Such harsh readings of other women composers may point to Smyth's fundamental concern for the value of women's art: due to the gendered pressures of society at the time, perhaps Smyth felt that only the very best art created by women could change public sentiment. Thus, only the best of art from women could be good for women overall.

Music critics wield great power. Their writing influences public opinion, thus shaping the reputation of a composer's creative output. Positive reviews may lead to repeated performances of works, thereby establishing those works within the canon, while negative reviews may squash a work, relegating it to limbo. While it is through the media that the public exposure of women composers and the promotion of the feminist movement was achieved, the criticism of women

[147] Ibid., 131.
[148] Ibid., 128.
[149] Ibid., 131.
[150] Letter from Ethel Smyth to Edith Somerville, 22 December,1926.

composers has been anything but objective and must be read through a gendered lens. The reviews presented in this chapter illustrate that criticism of women composers tended to be highly gendered, placing women in an unequal category to their male counterparts. Male critics trivialised and Othered women composers, while reviews of Clarke's and Smyth's creative output written by women critics appear to be more balanced. They focused on women composers as 'creators,' displacing the traditional, male-oriented notion of 'genius'. Furthermore, through the examples presented in this chapter, it is evident that a greater degree of objectivity is achieved within reviews written by women critics, simply through the elimination of the 'male gaze'. Nonetheless, it is important to note that reviews of women's creative output typically drew upon traditional gender dualities of Universal versus Other, rendering women's music as Other. This rhetoric was present in most reviews, regardless of the gender of the critic. Although it is evident that women critics did not trivialise women composers, they did Other them, depicting the status of women composers as exceptions to the rule. While female critics may have used this as a tactic to inspire women, that same description was simultaneously used by male critics to discourage women from entering the arts.

This chapter illustrated the degree of gender-based discrimination that Smyth and Clarke faced during women's prolonged struggle to be critically evaluated on equal terms with that of men. As my research has illustrated, many philosophers, conductors, educators, critics, and music scholars were imbued with the gender prejudiced perspectives of their day, and presented a decidedly biased view of women's creative output. This gendered criticism kept women composers on the margins of the profession, placing them in a double bind. Reflecting on this, Smyth resignedly wrote that 'The exact worth of my music will probably not be known till naught remains of the author but sexless dots and lines on ruled paper.'[151]

[151] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 54.

A Balanced Perspective

Support, Performances, and Breakthroughs

Following my analysis of the gendered rhetoric that haunted Smyth and Clarke throughout their careers, it is important to recognise the success they achieved despite the gendered criticism, the institutional exclusion, and the social inequalities discussed in previous chapters. The vast imbalances within sources available on Smyth and Clarke lead to a multitude of contradictions. Thus, to understand the complexity of their positions, we must address the obstacles they faced. But we must also focus on how Smyth and Clarke overcame these challenges and acknowledge those who championed and supported them in the process.

In November 1933, Smyth published *Female Pipings in Eden*, the fourth of her autobiographical volumes. In the opening pages, with specific references to conditions in Britain, Smyth addresses 'the fact that up to now there have been no great women composers.'[152] Smyth argues that 'as things are today, it is absolutely impossible in this country for a woman composer to get and to keep her head above water; to go from strength to strength, and develop such powers as she may possess.'[153] Smyth states that she 'has so far not met a single English conductor who would feel or act thus for the work of a woman. It is not in the breed. Of all this,' Smyth continues, 'the public knows nothing, and mildly says from time to time: 'Strange that there are no great

[152] Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* ([Rebecca Clarke's copy of the first edition] London: Peter Davies, 1933), 3-4.
[153] Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden*, 3-4.

women composers!''[154] As Smyth fought against continuous prejudice from the critical establishment, this rhetoric is representative of her ongoing fight for gender equality in the creative arts. Furthermore, her closest community was, in fact, female, and her chief comrades were women writers, artists, activists, and wealthy sponsors. She frequently had to finance the publication of her work,[155] and performances of her music rarely took place if they were not paid for by the composer herself, or, as often was the case, by her wealthy patrons, most of whom were women of pronounced feminist sympathies.[156] The women who were especially generous to Smyth in this regard were her sister Mary (Smyth) Hunter, the Empress Eugenie, and the American heiress Mary Melissa Hoadley Dodge.[157] It is, however, important to acknowledge that some of the statements from Smyth's *Female Pipings in Eden* appear anachronistic even for their own time, and divergent from facts. It would be ignorant to disregard the male figures who championed Smyth, particularly the English male conductors who, in fact, played an imperative role in women's fight for gender equality within the arts.

One of Smyth's principal reasons for writing *Female Pipings in Eden* was to lend promotional support to a festival organised in honour of her seventy-fifth birthday, projected for winter of 1933-34.[158] On October 16th, the following letter was published in *The Times* and other leading newspapers throughout the country (*Figure 1*):

Figure 1

To the Editor. *October 13th,1933.*

DEAR SIR,

Will you permit us to bring to the notice of your readers the suggestion which we made in a letter to *The Times* of May 4th that a Festival performance of Dame Ethel Smyth's "Mass in D" should be given by public subscription in the Royal Albert Hall with the

[154] Ibid., 32-33.
[155] Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959),191.
[156] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 19.
[157] Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1940), 279-80.
[158] Ibid., 36-37, 44.

Royal Choral Society, under the direction of Sir Thomas Beecham. The purpose of this performance is to do honour to a very distinguished composer who is also renowned for her literary achievements.

On January 3rd, the British Broadcasting Corporation are making a special feature in their Festival of a performance of Dame Ethel's "Prison" and one or two shorter works, also under Sir Thomas's direction.

It is hoped that the "Mass" may be performed on February 3rd, together with other of her works; thus making something of a Festival in the year in which she has attained the age of 75; but this Concert can only be given if sufficient support (£400 at least [comparatively £30,000 today]) is forthcoming from Dame Ethel's innumerable friends and admirers.

We commend the suggestion to all who appreciate the position Dame Ethel holds in English music and letters, and would ask that subscriptions should be sent to: –

THE COUNTESS OF ROSEBERRY, 38, Berkley Square, W.I ;
THE COUNTESS OF BALFOUR, Fishers Hill, Woking, Surrey ;
THE VISCOUNTESS RHONDDA, 32, Bloomsbury Street, W.C.I ;
THE LADY HOWARD DE WALDEN, Seaford House, 37, Belgrave Square, S.W.I ;
Or to the SECRETARY OF THE ROYAL CHORAL SOCIETY, Albert Hall, S.W.7 on or before December 15th.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

THOMAS BEECHAM.	DONALD TOVEY.
HENRY WOOD.	JOHN BARBIROLLI.
DAN GODFREY.	MALCOLM SARGENT.
RICHARD R. TERRY.	HUGH P. ALLEN.

Royal College of Music,
Prince Consort Road, S. Kensington, S. W. 7. [159]

Signed by seven of Britain's most prominent conductors, this influential letter prompted all of musical England to gather in celebration of Smyth. The festival spanned several months, with audiences listening to the BBC broadcasts of her works from home, crowding into the Queen's Hall in London to hear *The Prison*, or attending Sir Thomas Beecham's performance of her *Mass* at the Royal Albert Hall.

[159] Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* ([Rebecca Clarke's copy of the first edition] London: Peter Davies, 1933), 1-2.

Compiled by Myles Birket Foster in 1912, *The History of the Philharmonic Society of London: 1813-1912* provides a record of all the events that occurred during the hundred years of the existence of the Philharmonic Society in London, including composer's names, programmes, composition titles, and more. This record shows Smyth's work to have received many performances during the Philharmonic Society's 1909 season. The third concert of the season, conducted by Bruno Walter, featured Smyth's 'fine Overture to her Opera "The Wreckers" heard for the first time, as arranged for concert-performance by this talented composer.'[160] Bruno Walter returned to England to conduct the Philharmonic Society's second winter concert, repeating Smyth's 'successful Overture to "The Wreckers."[161] While, the third, and final concert of their 1909 season featured Smyth's *Chrysilla* and *Anacreontic Ode*. The songs were conducted by Smyth herself, and the performance became 'the first record of a *lady* conducting the Philharmonic Orchestra!'[162]

The leading Austrian musical review, *Der Marker*, contained an article by Bruno Walter on Smyth, featured in *The Times*, in December 1912. Walter wrote:

> I consider Ethel Smyth a composer of quite special significance, who is certain of a permanent place in musical history…Dr. Ethel Smyth's thematic charm proceeds in an essential degree from her womanliness, though her work is at the same time English through and through. Yet in her case the sex question is comparatively unimportant in the presence of a talent so strong, thematic invention so original, and a temperament so deep and warm. This I was glad to see recognised by the striking success she obtained with the Viennese public, and I believe also that her work is destined permanently to succeed, although its recognition, like the recognition of all true originality, only comes gradually and in the teeth of opposition.[163]

By that time, Smyth's *Solemn Mass* had been produced at the Royal Albert Hall in 1893, and her one-act opera *Der Wald* had been mounted at Covent Garden in July, 1902. *The Wreckers*, Smyth's opera in three acts, had been produced under the name of *Strandrecht* in Leipzig, in

[160] Myles Birket Foster, *The History of the Philharmonic Society of London: 1813-1912 A record of a hundred years' work in the cause of music* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912), 503.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., 504; emphasis in original.
[163] Bruno Walter, *The Times*, December 23, 1912.

November 1906, and it had since been performed in Prague.[164] By 1910, all of Smyth's major works had been performed, and in that year, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music by the University of Durham.[165] She was then fifty-two years old.

A critical review published in *The Times*, titled *A Post-War Opera*, described Smyth's *Entente Cordiale* as a work

> not to be dismissed with a few words of comment on a students' performance. Dame Ethel Smyth and all her works represent one of the chicest luxuries of modern British art, and the musical art of today at any rate can boast no superfluity of luxuries. It is an age of categories, and most of our conscientious composers are fully occupied on trying to work out their destinies in the particular category in which each has placed himself, or to which he has been told he belongs. One is a neo-modalist, another a rhythmic contortionist, a third a polytonalist. They rarely disappoint expectation. But Dame Ethel Smyth belongs to no category. All attempts to place her have failed, because she will never 'stay put.'[166]

Another critic in *The Times* wrote of Smyth as

> a splendid and gallant creature. Once she had entered the arena of art she fought – my word how she fought – and overcame the lions of prejudice one by one. No one ever more richly deserved her wreath of 'laurels.' It has been the fashion recently to say that she was a better writer than composer, but this is merely because the ordinary individual finds it much easier to understand a book of memoirs than a new musical composition. Her music was the very expression of herself, and her noblest work is the *Mass in D*.[167]

Another review of Ethel Smyth's *Mass in D*, written by the *Musical Times* critic, Sydney Grew, described the work as 'some of her finest music [expressing] some of her profoundest thoughts…All through the Mass it is made clear that the young composer has made music a sort of native language: she composes as easily as a good organist plays, and her declamation is excellent.'[168]

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[164] Unsigned, *The Musical Times*, July 1, 1908. Vol 49. Issue 785.
[165] Smyth later received honorary doctorates from Oxford University (1926) and St. Andrews University (1928).
[166] Unsigned, *The Times*, July 25, 1925.
[167] The Hon. Neville Lytton, *The Times*, May 11, 1944.
[168] Sydney Grew, *The Musical* Times, February 1, 1924 vol 65, issue 972.

In *A Final Burning of Boats,* Smyth dedicated an entire chapter to her friend, the British conductor and composer, Sir Henry Wood. Smyth wrote:

> His curiosity and unerring instinct as regards alien novelties are notorious, and one is always lighting on new proofs of the scope of his outlook. When I was writing the monograph on Augusta Holmes that forms a chapter of this book I asked him if he had ever come across any of her work? 'Why,' he answered, 'I once produced a symphonic poem of hers called "Irlande,"' adding that it was first rate and finely scored. That must have been a quarter of a century ago, and I wonder who but he would have had the curiosity in those days to examine a woman's work, let alone the courage, or shall we say the energy, to brush aside prejudice and perform it? This largeheartedness has never flagged, and I believe that every single concert-work of any importance written by a woman has been introduced by him (in my own case either by him or by some foreigner such as Nikisch or Walter)[169]

When discussing women in orchestras, Smyth stated that 'that place was won for them by Sir Henry Wood, the first conductor openly to acknowledge that they were an acquisition to orchestras.'[170] Wood led Britain's progress towards equal opportunity for players of equal ability, irrespective of gender, hiring six female violinists to become part of his Queen's Hall Orchestra in 1913. As mentioned in previous chapters, this list included Rebecca Clarke, and the women became the first in the world to join a professional orchestra alongside men. Wood proclaimed that he 'shall never conduct an orchestra without them in future, they do their work so well. They have great talent for the violin and wonderful delicacy of touch …They are sincere, they do not drink, and they smoke less than men. In the Queen's Hall, they have given a certain tone to our rehearsals, and a different spirit to our performances.'[171] Founder and chief conductor of the Proms for almost fifty years, Wood actively sought out women for his Queen's Hall concerts. He conducted his first Prom at the age of twenty-six, held at Queen's Hall on 10 August, 1895. Alongside his co-founder Robert Newman, Wood envisioned a series of concerts accessible to anyone, regardless of their income. Thus, in 1895, the standing tickets to a Proms concert cost only a shilling, just under a pound in today's money.

[169] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 80.
[170] St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, 192.
[171] From a speech by Henry Wood at Brighton (1921) in St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, 192.

Evidenced by the Proms Performance Archive, Wood continuously championed Smyth's work. Between 1915 and 1942, Smyth's Overture to *The Boatswain's Mate* was performed at the Proms concert series sixteen times. The work was played by the London Symphony Orchestra, The New Queen's Hall Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with Smyth herself conducting in 1915, 1921, and 1926, and Henry Wood conducting all the other performances. Smyth's Concerto for Violin and Horn was programmed at the Proms in 1927 (conducted by Smyth), 1928 (conducted by Smyth), 1932 (conducted by Wood), and 1939 (conducted by Wood), performed by the Henry Wood Symphony Orchestra, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Wood programmed the world premiere of Smyth's *Four Chorale Preludes* in 1923, which Smyth conducted in conjunction with the opera version of her *Fête Galante*. The ballet version of the work received its first concert performance at the Proms in 1933. Smyth conducted her *3 Moods of the Sea* at the Proms in 1929, and her *Two Interlinked French Folk Melodies* in 1930. Her *Mass in D* was performed there in 1930, while her *Lieder, Op. 4*, was programmed by Wood in 1930 and 1931. Wood programmed the *Overture* and *Intermezzo* from Smyth's *Entente Cordiale* in a 1925 Proms concert, with the Intermezzo receiving another Proms performance the following year. Smyth conducted both performances, while Wood conducted the premiere of the *Entente Cordiale Suite* at the Proms in 1935.

The Overture and the Prelude to Act II from Smyth's Opera, *The Wreckers*, was programmed yearly at the Proms between 1913 and 1927. It was then performed yearly between 1929 and 1933, and again in 1935, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1944, and 1947, with almost all performances conducted by Henry Wood. Smyth conducted the work for several productions during this period (1913, 1924, 1926); and following the death of Henry Wood in 1943, performances were given by Basil Cameron, and Adrian Boult in 1944 and 1947 respectively.

Based on the information held within the *BBC Proms Performance Archive*, this list provides important insight into how frequently Smyth's work was performed at the Proms during

her lifetime. Some other prominent performances of her music include the *Serenade* at the Crystal Palace in 1890, the *Mass in D* at the Royal Albert Hall in 1893, *Der Wald* at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in 1902 and at the Metropolitan Opera in 1903 (the first and only work to be presented at the Metropolitan Opera by a woman composer until 2016.) Furthermore, Smyth's Opera, *The Wreckers*, was first performed in Leipzig in 1906, then in Prague, and subsequently performed in London in 1909, 1931, and 1939. In recognition of her work as a composer and writer, Smyth was also made a Dame of the British Empire in 1922.

The purpose of the lists and reviews mentioned above is to present a balance to Smyth's description of the press and her statements on 'the Faculty' discussed in the previous chapters. While it is impossible to deny that many leading male figures within Smyth's circles adopted a misogynist attitude to her accomplishments as a composer and subjected her work to highly gendered criticism, it is possible to argue that it was neither as widespread nor as damaging to her prestige as she insisted time and time again. Although Smyth rarely mentioned them, it is important to acknowledge the multitude of positive reviews of her work, and the many members of 'the Faculty' who became her friends through their continuous support of her music throughout Smyth's lifetime.

Curiously, despite Smyth's compositions winning the admiration of many of her contemporaries such as Tchaikovsky, Bruno Walter, Thomas Beecham, Donald Tovey, Malcolm Sargent, and Henry Wood, the record of Smyth's creative achievements was swept into the dark and remote corners of music history after her death. Following the twenty-seven performances of Smyth's Overture to *The Wreckers* that were produced almost yearly between 1913 and 1947, there were no further performances of the work until Odeline de la Martinez conducted the world premiere of the full opera at the Proms in 1994. Its next performance was not heard at the Proms until Robin Ticciati conducted the work in 2022. Smyth's *Two Interlinked French Folk Melodies* have not been performed at the series since Sargent's rendition of them in 1958. Similarly,

following its last performance at the Proms in 1931, Smyth's *Lieder, Op. 4*, was not heard there again until 2022. Following sixteen performances of Smyth's Overture and the Second Act Prelude to her *Boatswain's Mate* between 1915 and 1942, the work was not performed at the Proms again until Jane Glover programmed it in 2018 with the BBC Concert Orchestra. It should also be noted that the second performance of Smyth's *Mass in D* came thirty years after its debut, suggesting that her music succumbed to a pattern characterising the reception of other women composers at the time: recognition during their lifetime followed by a dwindling reputation, fading due to the non-performance of their work.

This pattern speaks to historical forgetting, a powerful form of erasure, which robbed women of role models, leaving them 'going in circles, repeating the same 'breakthroughs', diverting valuable energy and resources from real progress.'[172] Discussing the historical exclusion of women from history, Smyth wrote:

> A musical authority recently wrote a book on English Opera, and as his brother is a good friend of mine, I was surprised at not getting a copy. But this surprise evaporated when I heard that in this book there is not the faintest mention of myself and the five operas of mine that have been produced since 1900 in England! Rather a feat of omission, surely! Now I am so used to this sort of thing, (as I remarked before) that although I could not help condoling with the author on the infirm state of his memory, this incident did not cloud for more than a passing moment the friendly feeling I have for a gentleman, whose views, though I know them but slightly, seem to me sound, and who has not only vision but a certain ardour that is sympathetic to me.[173]

Smyth does not name this book, its author, or his brother, and it has been difficult to identify the exact text she was referring to. However, St. John refers to the book as a 'comprehensive history of English opera.'[174] Although five of Smyth's six operas had been produced at the time of its publication, there is no reference to her in this book. St John specified that there was also no reference to Smyth in Cecil Gray's *Survey of Contemporary Music* published in 1924.[175] It was not until the publication of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians Fifth Edition* in 1954,

[172] Leah Broad, *Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2023), 10.
[173] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 37-38.
[174] St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, 190.
[175] Ibid.

that a book included the complete catalogue of Smyth's compositions. Until then, no accurate list of her creative output had existed.

Smyth noted that composer Dorothy Howell had not been mentioned in the third edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, published in 1927, suggesting that this was unlikely to change in the editions that followed.[176] Reflecting on women artists, Smyth observed that the British painter, Mrs Annie Louis Swynnerton was only belatedly made an Associate Member of the Royal Academy of Art (in 1922) and painter Laura Knight was often not on lists of contemporary artists.[177] She believed the omission of such women perpetuated the notion that women are incapable of success in the creative arts.[178] Thus, it is evident why Smyth recognised publication as a method of ensuring her own place in history.

Smyth was one of the first women to write about gender issues in the arts from an explicitly feminist standpoint. A prolific author, Smyth wrote eleven books, including three volumes of autobiography. She made innumerable broadcast speeches and wrote a colossal number of letters, often writing to the Press, her friends, and her family. Smyth's friendship with Virginia Woolf played an important role in the development of her writings on women and music. Between 1930 and Woolf's suicide in 1941, Smyth published *Female Pipings in Eden*, addressing the lack of women in the field of composition, and published *As Time Went On*, in which she wrote of her involvement in feminism. Woolf's influence reinforced Smyth's feminist rhetoric, while refining her manner of expression, as Smyth often consulted Woolf on her writing, sending manuscripts and seeking advice on matters of publishing. Smyth and Woolf shared the public platform at the London branch of the National Society for Women's Service in 1931, when they

[176] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 49. Despite Smyth's statement on future references to Howell in *Grove*, she does appear in the fifth edition of Grove (1954), but not in the sixth edition (1980).
[177] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 3, 10.
[178] Ibid. 10.

spoke on professions for women. Both Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard Woolf applauded Smyth's speech, encouraging her to publish.[179]

Smyth's strongest aspiration, however, was to be remembered for her music. In 1936, she wrote that 'It sometimes saddens me to think that during my lifetime I have had no chance of making myself musically known to my countrymen and women as I have done in books.'[180] Aware of the criticism she may receive, Smyth sought to demonstrate by way of personal example, and recorded many of the prejudices and obstacles facing women in the arts. Discussing her latest book, *A Burning of Boats*, Smyth wrote 'I think it will dish me, but do lots of good. Anyhow it is good to get the truth off my chest about the sort of contest my life has been.'[181]

Criticising Smyth's autobiographical approach, Woolf warned Smyth that she is 'on thin ice when [speaking] of the Gang. One feels you mean the word in a bad sense.'[182] Woolf wrote to Smyth, stating 'You will say, "Oh, but I must cite my case because there is no other." But my dear Ethel, your case is that there are a thousand others. Leave your own case out of it; theirs will be far far stronger. Enough. I only say this because? Well, I didn't write "A Room" without considerable feeling even you will admit; I'm not cool on the subject. And I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious, legendary.'[183] Smyth, however, did not think it possible to argue her case differently. In *A Final Burning of Boats,* she wrote:

> But enough. This temptation to pretend that women are non-existent musically, to ignore or damp down our poor little triumphs such as they are, is a microbe that will flourish comfortably, though perhaps surreptitiously, in the male organism, till there are enough women composers for it to die a natural death. Whereupon men will forget it ever existed. Have they not already forgotten their frenzied opposition to 'Votes for Women'?[184]

[179] Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 24 January, 1931. Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* Vol 4, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), 280.
[180] Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 303.
[181] St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography,* 184.
[182] Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 6 June, 1933. Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* Vol 5, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), 195.
[183] Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 8 June, 1933. Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* Vol 5, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), 195.
[184] Smyth. *A Final Burning of Boats*, 38.

In the last fifty years, women composers, women artists, women art historians, and women critics have changed the discourse in their field. When Smyth was experiencing historical erasure, she could not have been fully aware of her predecessors, as history books of that period simply did not include them. This would explain the reasons behind her excessive descriptions in their advocacy of masculine dominance in the art world, her vast exaggerations regarding the lack of performance her work was receiving, and her complete disregard of those within the male 'Faculty' who did in fact champion her work. During Smyth's lifetime, feminist art history did not exist. Much like other forms of historical discourse, it had to be constructed. Since then, feminist art history, art criticism, and the creation of gender studies have represented a crucial advancement for feminism and women's place in music.

Comparisons and Conclusions

Rebecca Clarke's views on women's struggle within the arts are found in her unpublished lecture notes from a speech she delivered in the United States in 1945, titled *The Woman Composer - Then and Now*. A substantial excerpt (given as *figure 2*) from Clarke's notes is reproduced below, which offers a rich insight into her perspectives on women's complex navigation of gender in musical contexts:

Figure 2

> I've been asked to speak about women composers: and I'm going to compare their position now – here in America – with what it used to be when I was a girl in England; and before that too.
>
> Now, there's one rather serious thing about women composers: there are so few of them. There always have been few of them, compared for instance with women writers. And I've never quite been able to see why. Perhaps in the old days people used to think it wasn't quite nice for a girl to compose! Perhaps they argued that composition is next door to improvising and improvising is first cousin to serenading ---and that should surely

be left to the men. In any case I do know that when I was a student a female composer was about as much of a freak as the bearded lady of the circus.

Of course in the old days even women who wrote stories tried to keep it dark. We all know how Jane Austen used to hide her manuscript under the blotting paper if she heard anyone coming. Or they would take men's names, like the Georges – George Eliot and George Sand.

The composers had another technique: they tried to palm their things off onto their men-folk: Fanny Mendelssohn is supposed to have written several of the songs published under her brother's name; and Clara Schumann, who insinuated some of her tunes into husband's work, (though she did ultimately get up to Opus 23 on her own.)

But most women weren't as lucky as that. (I must say, I'd hate to try it on with my husband!) So if they did compose anything it probably never saw the light of day.

Now, the first woman who really rebelled against all that was the English composer Ethel Smyth, who was born about ninety years ago. She was a great character, a born fighter, a suffragette and once actually in prison for it. She felt there was a prejudice against women's compositions – I think there was, too – and she fought tooth and nail against it, + made herself an awful nuisance.

Actually, her music was done pretty often. She had an opera put on at the Metropolitan, as well as at Covent Garden in London. But she was fighting for all the other women as well, and there's no doubt she made a big difference to my generation.

The only trouble was that she went on fighting after there was nothing left to fight for. I remember how disappointed she was when she once asked me if I hadn't had a lot of trouble getting my things done and I said I'd been pretty lucky on the whole. She thought one ought to have to fight.

The fact is that by the time my generation came along we weren't up against very much. In fact, I've sometimes thought there was a time when people were so anxious to be fair, that our compositions were sometimes played when they wouldn't have been if we'd been men. (Just as silly as the other way round, of course – but much more fun for us!)

All the same, I can remember some funny things too. Once I gave a viola recital in New York – it was in the Aeolian Hall, so that shows how long ago it was – and as viola pieces were so scarce I put in two or three of my own. But I thought it would look silly to have my name on the program too often so I invented the name "Anthony Trent" as composer of one of them – quite the worst one of the group, as a matter of fact. Well, the next day I discovered that the critics were very much interested in Mr Trent, but had almost ignored the pieces by Rebecca Clarke.

So a few years later, when my music was beginning to be published, I killed Anthony Trent – officially and with no regrets – and I've never been bothered with him since!

Generally speaking, women have done best in the smaller forms. There have been a lot of good song writers. The best, I think, was Poldowski – the daughter of the Polish violinist Wieniawski. Her songs are lovely, and one often hears them. Another

> very well-known woman was Mdme Chaminade; I don't know much of her music, I'm afraid, but it was played everywhere at one time, and she was so famous she had a bath-soap named after her!
>
> Well, now in America it seems to me that a woman really has equal chances with a man. One of the most successful teachers of composition here at present is the Frenchwoman Nadia Boulanger. And there are many composers – (Marian Bauer, for instance) - who help to keep up the standard.
>
> It's true that up to now there has not been a woman Bach or a woman Beethoven. Personally, I don't think it matters two straws who writes the music as long as we get it. But the soil is now prepared. And I can see no reason why we shouldn't some day have a really great woman composer.
>
> We don't know what her name will be. But I think she will come, and I think it's quite likely she may come from America.[185]

In this speech, Clarke addressed the many obstacles faced by women in the arts, highlighting multiple forms of gender discrimination experienced by women composers. Discussing her experience with pseudonym 'Anthony Trent,' Clarke introduces an important comparison between women composers and women working in literature at the time. Previous research has suggested that women in the arts concealed their identity to counter the prejudice against them, employing pseudonyms to gain performances and publication of their work. Citing the cases of Georges Sand and George Eliot, as well as Ethel Smyth (who signed her works with the gender-neutral E. M. for publication and performances of her music prior to her involvement with the suffrage movement), Marcia Citron writes that 'the fact that several women have felt compelled to conceal their femaleness and assume authorship under a neutral or masculine identity shows that gender prejudice has indeed been a very real issue.'[186] Clarke also raises the issue of genre, writing that 'women have done best in the smaller forms.' This is important, as the critics' hierarchy of genre placed greater value on large-scale works. Composition in such forms required education and access to the advanced harmony and theory classes, which, as discussed in the previous chapters, women were often barred from. Smyth's awareness of such

[185] Rebecca Clarke, "The Woman Composer – Then and Now." (Unpublished lecture, 1945).
[186] Marcia J. Citron, "Music, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," *Journal of Musicology* 8, no.1 (Winter 1990): 108.

genre hierarchy was partly responsible for her determination to compose in the large-scale genres of opera and choral music. Citron reflected that 'reviewers regularly made a gender/genre association and as a result invariably cast negative aspersions on pieces in smaller forms.'[187] Clarke recognises Smyth's achievements in her lifelong battle for equality of status between men and women composers, emphasising that Smyth 'no doubt made a big difference to [her] generation.' Clarke continues, stating that 'by the time [her] generation came along, [they] weren't up against very much,' presenting a rather different outlook to that of Smyth's.

Following my analysis of the gendered reviews on Clarke's creative output in the previous chapter, it is important to present a balanced perspective by examining other reviews that reflect the outlook Clarke presented in her speech. Based on other positive reviews and her broad popularity with audiences, Clarke's self-confidence in her view that she 'hadn't had a lot of trouble getting [her] things done' and that she 'had been pretty lucky' is compelling.

As discussed, Clarke's Viola Sonata had tied for first place in the prestigious Berkshire Festival's Chamber Music Competition in 1919, for which all entries had been submitted anonymously. The initial burst of publicity that followed this festival was incomparable to the promotional campaign that evolved around Clarke's music across the following four years. Being a performer proved vital to Clarke's success as a composer: she promoted her Viola Sonata by preforming it herself. Following her performance of the Sonata at the Aeolian Hall, Clarke found a 'wonderful notice' in the *Morning Post* that 'quite made [her] blush.':[188]

> Apart from the fact that it is admirably suited to the viola, [the Sonata] is notable for the modernity of its phraseology, the depth of its intellectual foundation, and the expressiveness of its terms. Its style is the happiest combination of British and French, German idiom being completely absent …It is the most striking work of the day for the viola, and takes a very high place amongst contemporary music. Possibly nothing could be more imaginative than the Vivace, certainly nothing more impressive than the Adagio; the end alone seemed abrupt. It was received with complete approval.[189]

[187] Citron, 'Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon', 110.
[188] Clarke, Unpublished Diary, June 1, 1920.
[189] Unsigned, "New Viola Music," *Morning Post* (London), June 1, 1920.

A review of Clarke's 1925 recital was published in *The Observer*, in response to a concert of Clarke's own compositions, featuring her Viola Sonata and her Piano Trio, alongside *Midsummer Moon*, her *Chinese Puzzle*, and her *Lullaby*, all written for violin. Critiqued by A.H. Fox Strangways, the paper's chief critic, the review read:

> Taking the compositions as a whole, one cannot but be struck with their high level in point, both of taste and skill. They are not good "for a woman"; they would be good for any man. They have the sort of power that comes from a steady preparation; they have an assured tread, and give evidence of strict self-criticism. The thought is clear and the invention alert; one kept wanting to know what would happen next.[190]

Clarke performed the Viola Sonata five times during the 1920-1921 season, twice in New York, and three times in London.[191] Between 1922 and 1923, she performed it twice in Florence,[192] once in Parma,[193] and once again in London,[194] where May Mukle premiered the cello version at the Royal Academy's Centenary Concert towards the end of the season.[195] When she had initially completed the Viola Sonata, in July 1919, Clarke wrote that she had 'Expected to hate it after all that work,' but after hearing a performance of it, she was 'really rather pleased with it.'[196] Three years later, she described being 'very thrilled'[197] to see the Sonata in print. Expressing confidence in her work, she recalled feeling 'so excited with [her Piano] Trio [she] could hardly sleep.'[198] When Ethel Cole and Gladys Green performed her song *Eight O'clock*, Clarke wrote that 'they liked it awfully. So did I!!'[199] Evidenced by the personal entries in Clarke's diaries, she was rather confident in her work and certainly does not present herself as a woman conflicted about her identity as a composer. I mention this, because in May 1996, when an article entitled *A case of Identity* took up Clarke's cause in the pages of *The Musical Times.*[200]

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[190] A.H. Fox Strangways, "Music of the Week," *The Observer* (London) October 25, 1925.
[191] Clarke, Diary, December 5, 1920; January 9, 1921; February 24, 1921; March 21, 1921; May 28, 1921.
[192] Ibid., April 26, 1922; April 29, 1922.
[193] Ibid., April 28, 1922; May 4, 1922.
[194] Ibid., June 3, 1922.
[195] Ibid., July 11, 1922.
[196] Diary, July 8, 1919
[197] Diary, January 12, 1922.
[198] Diary, January 29, 1922
[199] Diary, June 3, 1927
[200] Liane Curtis, "A Case of Identity: Rescuing Rebecca Clarke," *The Musical Times* 137, (May1996),

Christopher Johnson, Clarke's great-nephew-by-marriage, states that 'after a quick précis of Clarke's career, and a dramatic entrance by the patient herself - bathed in tears, drawers let down, bent over a quilt on her father's bed, ready for a whipping – the article point by point, item by item, moulded Clarke into what was fast becoming the Standard Model, [requiring women to partake in a single class of experience, which is invariably negative] even when the facts of her life and career plainly contradicted it.'[201] Johnson describes Clarke's professional training, on par with Holst, Vaughan Williams, Bridge, and a host of other luminaries, which he notes as a source of enormous pride for Clarke. Furthermore, he addresses Clarke's publications, emphasising that she never had a piece refused by publishers, and was a welcomed musical guest all around the world.[202] As a chamber musician, Clarke toured in France, Holland, America, Singapore, Japan, China, India, Malaysia and Indonesia, while being a member of several all-woman ensembles and creating her own, the *English Ensemble*, in 1927. Furthermore, Clarke was innovative in her programming, frequently placing put her own music alongside the works of Vaughan Williams, Ravel, Schoenberg, and Bloch.

Clarke's entry in the *1927 Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* was extensive, listing all her major works, including her Viola Sonata, her Piano Trio, her Cello Rhapsody, and a substantial list of songs. Although the reviews mentioned in the previous chapter did not prevent Clarke's widespread and lasting success during her lifetime, Clarke's full entry in the *1980 Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* simply read 'See James Friskin' (referring to Clarke's husband). Similar to the evidence presented on Smyth in the previous subchapter, historical forgetting was used to gradually excise Clarke's music from the historical record, which is now progressively beginning to reclaim its place in our concert halls.

15-21.

[201] Christopher Johnson, "Grotesque," (unpublished manuscript), chapter 11.

[202] Ibid.

Almost three millennia ago, Sappho exclaimed on behalf of all women in the arts: 'Someone, I tell you, will remember us, we are oppressed by fears of oblivion.'[203] Much remains to be done for women to be accepted as 'composers' as opposed to 'women composers.' This classification is as much of a historical construction as that of the 'great composer,' and continues to segregate women's creative output, rendering them a rarity, or an inferior class of creator. Nevertheless, as new musicological and historical studies of women composers continue to surface, many have answered Sappho's call to 'remember.' Prior to the 1980s, published books or articles on women composers were extremely rare. However, the past forty years have continued to witness a rising level of scholarship and a superlative increase of historical data on women. These developments have advanced the growth of feminist criticism in music, while both Ethel Smyth and Rebecca Clarke played a significant role as inspirations for this phenomenon. Smyth's *Female Pipings in Eden* 'does for women in music what Virginia Woolf did for women in literature; it gives women artists a myth of their own creative origins and urges them to struggle for possession of the past in order to forge the future. Ethel Smyth's Eve is the mother of music.'[204] Playing a vital role in the social and political life of her epoch, Smyth's writing represents a point of departure for feminist musicology, and her legacy has made the fight for equality an easier path for the women composers that followed.

In the face of strong opposition, Smyth and Clarke both embarked upon studying music when women had yet to achieve recognition as creators. While their music was subjected to highly gendered criticism and considered second-rate to that of men's owing to androcentric constructions of 'genius' and 'greatness', and while they both suffered from historical erasure rendering their work invisible after their death, Smyth's and Clarke's experiences were unique. Due to the historical tendency to forget and isolate women, it is important to accentuate the sheer number of successful women who surrounded Smyth and Clarke, and to nuance the notion that

[203] Cohen, *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers,* np.
[204] Jane Marcus, "Thinking Back Through Our Mothers," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 26.

they existed only within a man's world. In various significant ways, Smyth and Clarke shaped their world to become inclusive of women. Although these two composers were often 'the first' women to succeed in many crucial aspects of their field, there are also many important ways in which they were not 'the first' or 'the only.' Although Smyth was often considered the 'first woman to write an opera,'[205] it was in fact Francesca Caccini, whose opera *La liberazione di Ruggiero* was first performed in Florence, in 1625.[206] Furthermore, while Clarke was hailed as one of the first professional instrumentalists to play in an orchestra, violinist Catherine Plunkett performed on London's concert stages as early as the 1740s.[207] Smyth's and Clarke's legacy was a critical foundation for feminism and women's place in the arts, and for those of us committed to the ongoing, intersectional, and evolving task of writing on feminist art history, it is important to remember the giants whose shoulders they stood on, and the vast network they were a part of.

[205] Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 24 December, 1940. Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf* Vol 6, 1936-1941, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), 453.
[206] Leah Broad, *Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2023), 10.
[207] Ibid.

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