

# Introduction

## *The State of Music-Literature Studies*

Though Victorian England was known as “the land without music,”<sup>1</sup> any reader of Victorian literature knows that this was hardly the case. Novels throughout the century are brimming with scenes at the piano, allusions to songs, and musical characters. This study grows out of a personal interest in music and recurrent ruminations about how and why Victorian culture valued this “inconsequential” aesthetic. Reading Victorian novels, especially those by George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Elizabeth Gaskell, I realized how often music plays an *integral* part in the period’s fiction. Several publications of the late 1980s suggested that music concerns were of increasing value to literary studies: a 1986 *Victorian Studies* issue (30.1) was devoted to Victorian music-literature connections; Emily Auerbach considered the motif of the musician in her 1989 *Maestros, Dilettantes, and Philistines: The Musician in the Victorian Novel*; and Beryl Gray’s 1989 book *George Eliot and Music* was one of the first full-length studies to closely analyze a single author’s engagement with music. Aware that literature and music are interlocking disciplines, Robert K. Wallace, in the introduction to his *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (1983), called for more interdisciplinary studies, noting that “historians of music and literature have tended to work in isolation from each other” (3). Indeed, if Victorian authors embraced music so thoroughly in their novels, any study of Victorian literature is incomplete without an examination of this “other” aesthetic. Interdisciplinary studies, specifically between literature and music of the period, are vital.

Despite the central need for such studies, these books, the journal, and a handful of articles on the music motifs in various Victorian novels seemed to be the extent of critical inquiry into the topic. Further, I was not completely satisfied with critics’ typically New Critical approach of examining music only as an internal thematic device in fiction, especially true of Auerbach’s and Gray’s books. Likewise, Wallace’s books *Jane Austen and Mozart* and *Emily Brontë and Beethoven* explore the almost uncanny similarities between

structure and form of Classical and then Romantic musical and literary works, respectively, but without credible grounding in any sociohistorical context or influence.<sup>2</sup> Realizing that Victorian authors were also participating in larger social understandings of music when employing music motifs, I wanted to historicize the prevalence of music in literary works.

Although cultural studies has opened up music to theoretical inquiry,<sup>3</sup> scholars have still tended to approach Victorian music without benefit of post-structuralist theory. Important to me was an analysis of class and gender assumptions as they impinged on the age's musical institutions. Indeed, some musicology texts of the mid- to late 1980s promised a Marxist sensitivity by such titles as *The Singing Bourgeois* (Derek Scott, 1989); *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914* (Dave Russell, 1987); and *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain* (Ian Watson, 1983).

However, while these texts pursue some of the middle-class attempts to control lower-class aesthetics, they fail to pursue the fluidity of power that passed between classes using and reacting to the politics of music; nor do they explore the many gender implications of classist music. Martha Vicinus's *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (1974) is more culturally informed than most books on popular music, but its primary focus is working-class *literature* and thus its musical focus is restricted to balladic *texts*. Richard Leppart's *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (1993) does an amazing job of exploring the cultural impact of gender, economics, and voyeurism on music performance through several centuries; however, Leppart does close readings primarily of the visual arts' responses to music, not literary responses. Phyllis Weliver's *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860–1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (2001) is a fascinating examination of the scientific theories underlying Victorian musical ideologies—including mesmerism, evolution, and language acquisition—and the resulting influence on depictions of musical women by various Victorian novelists (including George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Dickens). Though I regret that the book was not available earlier in my own research, still, Weliver focuses on the science of music and does not study specific musical pieces and history as I do. Another book published after my own was essentially completed—*Ballads, Songs, and Snatches: The Appropriation of Folk Song and Popular Culture in British Nineteenth-Century Realist Prose* by C. M. Jackson-Houlston (1999)—does useful research on folk song allusions in various novels by Scott and, to a lesser extent, Gaskell and Hardy. But because Jackson-Houlston's

study is more “materialist-historicist” (10) and less focused on musical movements and gender issues, her ultimate arguments are quite different from mine.

Music–Victorian literature studies have continued unabated since the late 1990s,<sup>4</sup> but what my book contributes to this newer scholarly influx is consideration of gender alongside class as I examine music idealization—and literature’s response to it—in a larger musical-historical, sociopolitical context.

### *The Politics of Music in Victorian Culture*

Making a crucial break from other music-literature studies, I examine Victorian literature in light of cultural ideologies of music. My study positions music of the nineteenth century as a charged site of cultural struggle insofar as it was promoted as both a transcendent corrective to social ills and a subversive cause *for* these ills. Terry Eagleton (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 1990) argues that although aesthetic “taste” is traditionally defined against political agendas, it nevertheless has been used to wield great power over individuals’ emotional, sensual, and personal tastes. Yet few cultural studies critics have applied this argument to Victorian music. I argue that music educators, intellectual writers, and social reformers of the period constructed music’s unparalleled, other-worldly etherealism. Then, paradoxically, they promoted music (such as spiritual and domestic music) as a *practical* corrective to foster patriotism, morality, spirituality, and domestic tranquility: musical aesthetics becomes political.

The construction of music as influential and political, however, was complicated in three basic ways. First, even the most innocuous song *texts* immediately imposed political ideologies upon the music; more blatant texts, such as protest songs, unabashedly promoted political agendas. Second, even non-textual music faltered when the *music* itself generated “inappropriate” emotions in the auditors—emotions of rapture, of sensuality—quite apart from the spiritual lyrics used, a situation even St. Augustine in the sixth century feared. Finally, because public music was experienced solely through live performances, with performers being *viewed* by auditors throughout the nineteenth century,<sup>5</sup> “artificial” display and “immoral” sensuality also threatened music’s “sublimity.” This triangular paradigm of the text, music, and spectacle of music performance forms the cornerstone of my theoretical approach.

Because I employ a musicological-critical approach on several levels, music historians are a vital part of this study’s intended audience. Musicologist Susan

McClary comments in her influential *Feminist Endings* (1991) on the lack “of any sort” of criticism in music studies; she asserts that “music has been and continues to be almost entirely exempted from criticism as it is practiced within other humanities disciplines” (19–20). In response, some theoretical works on music have appeared.<sup>6</sup> Though I cannot claim the expertise of a musicologist, I can claim insight as a cultural critic and take up McClary’s call to bring criticism to music studies. In fact, I substantiate my readings of literary texts with explications of such musical-historical phenomena as the Methodist hymn tradition, the pastoral tradition in music, the nineteenth-century cult of the musical superstar (such as Liszt), and the changing approach to folk song collection that culminated in the turn-of-the-century Folk Song Revival. Anxieties about music’s sensualism or politics become evident, I argue, especially within these larger musical movements which promoted “ethereal” music of some kind.

In addition, I look closely at individual musical works, from the pastoral operas invoked by Eliot to the popular ballads invoked by Gaskell. Like Lawrence Kramer, I proceed on the assumption that “works of music have discursive meanings . . . definite enough to support critical interpretations comparable in depth, exactness, and density of connection to interpretation of literary works and cultural practices . . . [and] that these meanings are produced as a part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations” (*Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900*, 1). While examining text and symbolic meaning in pastoral-opera arias and popular ballads, then, I also place these musical works in the larger nineteenth-century cultural nostalgia for rural music, whether of the “high-brow” pastoral tradition or the oral folk song tradition.

### *Victorian Novelists’ Engagements with Music*

The literature of the period reflects, refracts, and alters this intensive aesthetic struggle and, thus, this book is primarily for the literary scholar. Purposefully, I consider fiction’s engagement with music rather than poetry’s. Poetry is typically cited as the closest literary equivalent to music,<sup>7</sup> but in this study I am interested less in literature’s mimetic engagement with music than in its sociohistorical engagement with music, best accomplished through fiction’s ability to provide prose commentaries and verbal “recreations” of actual social practices. I view the novel in a Bakhtinian sense as a site able to engage social struggles and entertain multiple conflicting “languages” (heteroglossia) wherein music becomes an equally vibrant language within the liter-

ary text. For example, Thomas Hardy's numerous poems invoking musical people or instruments do not engage the dilemma of folk song practices in rural England nor present another language of meaning nearly to the extent that musical scenes in his novels do; thus, in chapter 6 I focus exclusively on his fiction.

Though much of the literature of the period is rich with musical scenes and themes, and therefore deserving of further study, in this book I focus most intently on the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. These writers consistently present complex engagements with music, frequently alluding to actual song texts in their novels. This latter practice sets them apart from many novelists, making them vital participants in the century's intense adulation and criticism of specific musical works and composers. Because political implications of song texts are integral to my approach, I investigate the textual and sociohistorical significance of actual songs and musical scores used by these three authors. With authentic musical texts in hand, I show the subversive power of music often obscured or exposed by these three writers, as when Gaskell expurgates political messages from the ballads cited in her novels or when Hardy highlights the sexual implications of folk songs in his novels.

Because these writers cite extant songs, we can begin to see patterns and recognize musical genres familiar to Victorian audiences. In fact, I will organize my chapters not only chronologically by author, but also by the genre or genres most commonly invoked by that author. All of the genres I study—domestic ballads, spiritual works, the pastoral, classically composed works, and folk songs—were revered by Victorian audiences as wholesome, uplifting aesthetics in contrast to bawdy drinking songs, music-hall spectacles, and the like. Gaskell honors domestic music—hymns, popular airs, folk songs appropriated for the parlor—by focusing on the emotions of the music despite contemporary collectors' neglect of traditional tunes. Eliot, with her musical dexterity, is able to implement different genres in each of her novels: hymns in *Adam Bede*, the pastoral genre in *The Mill on the Floss*, and classical concert music (operatic, symphonic, and solo works) in *Daniel Deronda*. In each, she challenges the idealization of such lofty musical genres by revealing class and gender disparities residing within the social tradition of each genre. Hardy responds to the increasing and changing valorization of English folk songs at the end of the century by revealing many of their bawdy qualities. Indeed, the higher the idealization, the farther these genres had to fall, and I play with this phenomenon throughout this study. Like Jeffrey Kallberg, writing in *Chopin*

at the *Boundaries*, I have thus “rejected the notion that genre functions only as a classificatory category located solely in compositions . . . [and] adopted instead an understanding of genre as a communicative concept shared by composers and listeners alike, one that therefore actively informs the experience of a musical work. Constructing genre as a social phenomenon requires an investigation into the responses of the communities that encountered a particular genre” (32). In other words, each musical genre brings about its own set of assumed emotional responses, in which the community at large will likely participate. My interest lies in how authors shared in these assumptions of genre, yet quite regularly complicated the assumptions. Thus, by comparing Gaskell’s use of music with Victorian constructions of domestic ballads; *Adam Bede* with the Victorian debt to Methodist hymnody; *The Mill on the Floss* with the nineteenth-century’s complex representations of pastoral music; *Daniel Deronda* with the cult of musical superstars; and Hardy’s use of folk music with the Folk Song Revival, I am concurrently exploring authorial engagements with music, and society’s engagements with specific musical genres.

Elizabeth Gaskell attended concerts in Manchester and supported her daughters’ musical pursuits; her daughter Marianne was especially accomplished as a pianist. Though teeming with music, Gaskell’s novels have rarely been studied from a musical vantage point. Hardy has been recognized by various critics as having been vitally influenced by the rural music of his native Dorset; with the exception of chapters in Emily Auerbach’s and Jackson-Houlston’s books (already mentioned) and Karen Davis’s thoughtful article on musical thematics, “A Deaf Ear to Essence: Music and Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*” (*JEGP* 89.2 [1990]), however, few critics have studied his novels critically in the context of this musical culture.

Eliot especially was a gifted musician and music enthusiast all her life, and her conscious incorporation of music in so many of her novels led Percy Young to suggest that “[w]ithout George Eliot there would be missing the musical life of the period.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Eliot was extremely fond of music, as her letters attest. She was a gifted pianist, studying piano in school and turning to it throughout her adult life as an emotional ballast. Music was integral to her relationship with George Henry Lewes, with whom she sang duets and hosted musical soirées. They also avidly attended music concerts and operas, and she especially admired the music of Handel, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn. Because Eliot was one of the century’s most musically informed writers, the bulk of my study focuses on her complicated depiction of idealized music.

Eliot scholarship, in contrast to that of the other two authors, has not

been void of critical examination of her novels' musicality. Various key articles on George Eliot and music, by William J. Sullivan, Shirley Frank Levenson, and others,<sup>9</sup> culminated in Beryl Gray's *George Eliot and Music* (1989), a comprehensive examination of Eliot's relationship to music in her personal life and in three of her novels: *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*. I will invoke these influential studies at various points throughout my own study. But what sets these studies apart from mine is their scrutiny of musical allusions as a means only to an end: a New Critical approach whereby music acts as an internal agent leading to a better understanding of the structure and thematics of Eliot's novels themselves. Gray's argument typifies this approach: recognizing that "the ability to listen . . . invariably symbolises George Eliot's most cherished moral virtue: the capacity for human sympathy" (x), Gray argues that

The music that 'arches over' her own work greatly illuminates her own artistry. . . . Without it, *Middlemarch* would not have fully achieved its Shakespearean cohesiveness, nor would the seemingly irreconcilable realms of *Daniel Deronda* have been reconciled. . . . [Further.] the more attentive we are to the use of voice, of natural sounds (and silences), of different musical categories and attitudes, and of musical metaphor, the more powerfully apparent is the unity that is still critically often denied the novel [*The Mill on the Floss*]. (xi)

Thus, an important difference between my study and Gray's is the theoretical approach: I argue that Eliot, critically aware of the musical climate of her age, writes not in a vacuum—using music and composers as simply literary motifs and metaphors to structure her novels, as Gray argues—but intentionally and even unintentionally engages the larger, social debates on the aestheticism, spirituality, and consumerism of music. Invoking specific musical works throughout her novels, Eliot is thus invoking specific musical genres which themselves invoke volatile class and gender issues through text specificities and historical realities. Another difference between my study and Gray's is our selection of novels: I consider *Adam Bede* whose musical subtext has not been investigated in a sustained way by Gray or any other critic. Further, because I am interested in broader musical "types" and in focusing on Eliot's direct confrontation with idealized genres like sacred, pastoral, and concert music, I do not examine *Middlemarch* which is only sparsely filled with specific musical allusions and these do not invoke a central genre. (I do acknowledge Gray's fine chapter exploring Eliot's uses of

music in *Middlemarch* to depict character and foreshadow romance.) Further, the newly published *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860–1900*, by Phyllis Weliver, also contains fine chapters on Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*, but whereas I will invoke Darwin to explain Hardy, Weliver's approach in these chapters is to examine the theories of Darwin, Sully, Rousseau, and Schopenhauer as vital influences on Eliot's literary imagination. Instead, I consider musical genres and extant musical pieces in my exploration of Eliot's social and musical consciousness. If nothing else, however, the various studies of Eliot and music convincingly demonstrate Eliot's immense reliance on music in her fiction-writing and thus the need for more study.

### *Considerations of Class and Gender in Victorian Music-Literature Studies*

Class considerations are incredibly important to this study. Post-structuralist critic Henry Klumpenhouwer argues for a "Marxist poetics of music," in fact, because music is "yet another locus where classes square off against each other. . . . [M]usic—in its own terms—facilitates, mediates, and shapes both fundamental and special confrontations between social classes";<sup>10</sup> indeed, as I suggest in chapter 1, music *defined* social classes in many ways. Building on the writings of Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams, and critics specific to the music field, such as folk scholar A. L. Lloyd, I examine the musical opportunities afforded people based on their socioeconomic status, from ownership of musical instruments to attendance at musical concerts, issues especially integral to Eliot's fictional class strata. Less-recognized but equally problematic are the middle-class appropriations of working- and rural-class aesthetics, a phenomenon both Gaskell and Hardy reflect in their novels. In fact, I point out how, in some ways, Gaskell participates in such appropriations by using song allusions in upholding middle-class propriety, while Hardy fights class prudery, reinstating the crudeness found in authentic folk song texts throughout his own scenes of music-making.

But perhaps the most important aspect of this study is its feminist implications of the Victorian musical scene. As I began this project, I continued to be curious as to why musical encounters so often focused on women in romantic situations; why scenes couched in praise of women's abilities often terminated in praise of women's bodies. As a consequence, this book is highly informed by feminism. Feminist criticism constantly urges us to examine how

any institution, including an aesthetic one, may be gendered. Such critics as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, and Margaret Homans have revealed the oppressive limitations faced by women with literary aspirations and abilities. They have also suggested the ways that women writers have created their own literary modes and motifs to appropriate patriarchal constructs to their own ends. These ideas likewise apply to the art of music since women were oppressed within musical institutions yet appropriated what music opportunities were most readily available to them. To a lesser extent, my study has also been influenced by French feminism: by Luce Irigaray's and Kaja Silverman's plays with vision and voice; by Catherine Clément's critical examination of how opera kills off or "undoes" women.<sup>11</sup>

Though feminists have been exploring Victorian literature for years, Victorian music is a newer terrain for them. Mary Burgan, in "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction" (in *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music*, ed. Nicholas Temperley, 1989), begins an examination of women in Victorian literature but her scope is limited, as the title implies, to literary portrayals of women's piano-playing in a domestic sphere. Only occasionally does she discuss the cultural challenges and limitations brought to bear on women prevented from taking music into the public sphere. Further, many feminist critics have tended to focus only on *Daniel Deronda's* Alcharisi as the paradigm of the suppressed female artist, sometimes even justifying this relegation on moral grounds. In response, I show how most women were "assigned" the role of domestic musician; the few who attempted to enter male-dominated, professional music spheres faced resistance. Many Victorian writers suggest the domestication of women necessary to uphold idealized music, though women recuperated some power from their socially designated roles, seducing men with their musical art (as Becky Sharp does) or developing their own feminine codes with their song lyrics (as Gaskell's women do). On the other hand, Eliot and Hardy are mostly critical of societal pressures that contain emotional or ambitious women musicians. Eliot is particularly sensitive to the double standards women faced within religious, pastoral, and concert music genres.

A major theme I explore in my chapters on Eliot's novels, then, is how her many female musicians beyond Alcharisi were both discouraged from public careers *and* restricted within the realm of domestic music, including Gwendolen Harleth. The visual implications of performed music had particular resonance with the female woman performer, as Rosemarie Bodenheimer's study, "Ambition and Its Audiences: George Eliot's Performing

Figures,” *Victorian Studies* 34.1 (Autumn 1990) skillfully demonstrates. Though Bodenheimer’s focus on *music* is limited, her article is nevertheless an influential one for me since it reaches beyond thematics to investigate socio-feminist tensions about performance in Eliot’s fiction. I pick up where Bodenheimer left off in considering vision as a major theme in my consideration of gender. Indeed, socially enculturated not only to excel in but to embody the ideal of “ethereal music,” domestic women musicians were nevertheless *seen* in very sensual, superficial ways by their audiences, with both “ethereal” and “sensual” constructs reducing any power women might glean from their roles as musicians. So, for example, when Dinah Morris’s male followers convert her spiritual hymns into sensual songs, her agency as minister is greatly reduced, a phenomenon I pursue in my third chapter.

### *The Importance of Studying Nineteenth-Century British Music*

All three of the key writers I discuss wrote during the Victorian period, and I focus on this place and time for various reasons. First, though the Continent was alive with both music consumers and composers, the Victorians, though not void of composers (as convincingly argued by Nicholas Temperley in various studies), tended to be—or perceived themselves to be—on the creative fringes. Thus, the English are distinct from many European countries (Germany, Italy, even Russia) by being self-defined admirers, not creators, of “great” music for most of the century. This distinction, if not amounting to the Victorians’ pure objectivity, certainly heightened their passion for European music into a cultural frenzy much needing study.

Further, I focus on the nineteenth century to the exclusion of earlier and later centuries. Music historians generally agree that the nineteenth century was climactic for various reasons. Not only did it produce musical giants whose popularity continues to expand geographically and generationally (consider the popularity of Beethoven in Japan today, for instance), it also saw the beginnings of musicology as we know it: a self-reflexive look to music as an art and as a tradition. Further, this period greatly increased music’s intense relationship with mass consumerism, in contrast to the earlier patronage system; this overt reliance on fame and money had a profound effect on how musicians promoted themselves and their art. A final distinction in capping off this period for me is that this was the last century to define music consistently in visual terms; indeed, not until the widespread use of the phonograph and radio after the turn of the century were people ever able to be divorced from

the musicians creating the music—and thus music was always a visual as well as aural spectacle. This phenomenon had far-reaching implications.

I am well aware, however, that many of the claims I make about music's superstar powers were often true of earlier periods and, for that matter, even our own. For that reason, I tend to define the "Victorian period" in looser terms, coming closer to musicology's typical periodization of the Romantic period as 1790–1910. As a consequence, I hope to suggest that the fluidity of culture defies periodization and that musical creations of centuries past continue to have their own existence in future periods. Therefore, I read nineteenth-century novels alongside eighteenth-century hymn texts because the latter continued to play a formidable part in the lives of church-going Victorians. Likewise, Victorian novelists reacted to even the stirrings of trends that did not manifest themselves in critical commentary until the twentieth century, such as the Folk Song Movement whose genesis can be traced to the folk song-collecting impetus of mid-century. If the period's genesis and closure are in dispute, though, few people will doubt the power of the age that produced Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner; even the Victorians knew they were enjoying an epoch never before experienced. Writes a reviewer for *North British Review* in the mid-1850s:

Music seems to be the art of our era. Its indefinite character leaves great freedom to the activity of the individual imagination. It is able to express our modern ideas in their comprehensiveness and generality. The most subjective of arts, it is the best suited to give a voice to that spirit of isolation and individuality which is the characteristic feature of our times. It is therefore the only art in which we not only equal, but far surpass all bygone ages.<sup>12</sup>

For their own self-acknowledged musical superiority alone, we need to study the Victorians' musical climate and its immense impact on society and culture.

Chapter 1 introduces the musical climate of the Victorian period, both in society and in literature. I first examine Victorian constructions of music's spirituality, beginning with Carlyle's Schopenhauerian idealizations and including the propaganda of music educator Joseph Mainzer and folk song collector Cecil Sharp. I then complicate this idealization by showing the rarely acknowledged tensions that occurred as the same society that promoted music and music education as a moral corrective concurrently feared the political rebelliousness, sensuality, and commodification often associated with

this music (factory owners promoting music education to “enculturate” workers only to have these workers appropriate songs as union rally cries, for instance). Frequently, I invoke and discuss a few literary texts to exemplify authors’ immense interest in these tensions in Victorian musical culture.

Chapter 2 examines how Elizabeth Gaskell authenticates the idealization of music of various middle-class folk song collectors when she depicts domestic music-making, particularly of folk ballads, strengthening communities of women. This is in contrast to the consumerism, sexuality, and “threatening” individualism of urban music-making in her novels. Gaskell promotes music as a woman’s art, and her women are empowered through folk music-making as they use coded lyrics to evoke female experience. Gaskell chooses to locate power in women’s community, then, rather than in individual politics, which explains her deletion of politically rebellious lyrics from actual folk songs she quotes. Gaskell thus reflects the Victorians’ dilemma of honoring inspirational music yet avoiding those moments when it threatens social proprieties.

Eliot’s anxieties concerning idealized religious music in her first novel, *Adam Bede*, are the focus of chapter 3. Eliot overtly honors the Methodist hymn tradition through her preacher, Dinah Morris, yet then shows how easily her hymns fall prey first to the town’s secular appropriation and then to her own as she converts hymns into love songs for Adam. By equating the ease of this appropriation with that of Methodism’s own conversion of love songs into hymns, Eliot suggests the unstable nature of religious texts and emotions, reflecting a common anxiety of the Victorians.

Chapter 4 examines the pastoral music genre as invoked in Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*. Here, Maggie Tulliver is depicted as a model pastoral musician who uses her music emotively and naturally. Betrayed by her class and gender, however, she is eventually overwhelmed by the middle-class aesthetics of Lucy and Stephen, who position the pastoral tradition firmly within a class system (not Nature) and women like Maggie as objects (not subjects) of pastoral love songs. Critical of this process, Eliot thus indicts the pastoral tradition in both literature and music as ultimately class-based and elitist.

*Daniel Deronda* is Eliot’s harshest critique of the period’s music, as I argue in chapter 5, specifically of its musical superstars exemplified by the Liszt-like Herr Klesmer. Reading against the grain, I argue that Gwendolen Harleth dares to suggest the sexual appeal and financial rewards of the concert star she hopes to become. Herr Klesmer thwarts her ambitions, not for her lack of talent as he claims but for her pragmatic views of music, which threaten the myth of the humble (and male) “musical-genius.” Eliot’s anxieties about the

sexism and consumerism of concert music have larger ramifications for a society completely caught up in concert-going and star worship.

Chapter 6 shows that late in the century, Hardy became increasingly critical of middle-class appropriation and bowdlerization of rural folk songs, a trend existing when Gaskell was writing and which gathered force by the end of the century with the Folk Song Revival. Hardy's fiction—with its focus on bawdy music-making and its subsequent tragedies due to middle-class prudish suppression—helped to generate more sympathy for lower-class aesthetics, influencing such revivalists as Cecil Sharp. Ultimately, however, the Folk Song Revival was probably most influential in appropriating lower-class music to redeem England's lost musical heritage, a trend quite antithetical to Hardy's own beliefs.

Because Victorians' music relied on words, and words carried easily altered, ideological meaning; because spectacle was an innate part of all music transmission, not just in opera or music halls; and because musical passion was biological and sensual as much as it was spiritual, the century's idealization of music faltered. Specifically, the issues of words, spectacle, and emotion undermined the constancy and superiority of patriotic, spiritual, cultural, and domestic music. As chapter 1 suggests, the tensions of musical performance haunted many of the performers and critics of the period bent on idealizing this “purest” of art forms, and literary writers exhibited these musical anxieties throughout their works even while seeming to uphold the idealizations of their society.

As one of the most privileged art forms of the Victorian period, music became a forum for debating the role of art in society. Victorians constructed music as a spiritual solution to social struggle. Yet depictions by writers such as Eliot and Hardy suggest that music was only a palliative, soothing a society and allowing it to avoid unseparable issues of national identity, rural-urban tensions, sexuality, religious controversy, consumerism, and gender demarcations. This book attempts to recover some of the uneven constructions of this vital Victorian aesthetic.