

*SOUND AND SENSE IN  
BRITISH ROMANTICISM*

EDITED BY JAMES GRANDE  
AND CARMEL RAZ





## SOUND AND SENSE IN BRITISH ROMANTICISM

A radical re-imagining of the relationship between sound and sense took place in Britain in the decades around 1800. This new approach reconfigured sound as central to understandings of space and temporality, from the diurnal rhythms of everyday life in the modern city to the 'deep time' of the natural world. At the same time, sound emerged as a frequently disruptive phenomenon, a philosophical and political problem, and a force with the power to overwhelm listeners. This is the first book devoted to the topic and brings together scholars from literary studies, musicology, history, and philosophy through the interdisciplinary frameworks of sound studies and the history of the senses. The chapters pursue a wide range of subjects, from 'national airs' to the London stage, and from experiments in sound to new musical and scientific instruments. Collectively, they demonstrate how a focus on sound can enrich our understanding of Romantic-era culture. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

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# SOUND AND SENSE IN BRITISH ROMANTICISM

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## Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>List of Music Examples</i>	ix
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
<i>James Grande and Carmel Raz</i>	
1 William Hogarth: Looking and Listening for a Painting	17
<i>Lydia Goehr</i>	
2 Collecting Ballads, Historicizing Sounds: Appropriating Scottish National Music in the Eighteenth Century	39
<i>Maria Semi</i>	
3 Realising <i>The Enraged Musician</i>	60
<i>Oskar Cox Jensen</i>	
4 'A Strange Jingle of Sounds': Scenes of Aural Recognition in Early Nineteenth-Century English Literature	90
<i>Josephine McDonagh</i>	
5 The Sound of News: Affective Rhythm, Rupture, and Nostalgia	115
<i>William Tullett</i>	
6 The Resounding Fame of Fingal's Cave	136
<i>Jonathan Hicks</i>	
7 Echoing Sounds: What Was Poetry for Gilbert White?	154
<i>Courtney Weiss Smith</i>	
8 Mary Somerville's Sound Accomplishments	183
<i>Katherine Fry</i>	



9	Organizing Modernity: Henry Liston's Euharmonic Organ and Natural Tuning in Company India <i>Daniel K. S. Walden</i>	201
10	Stethoscopic Fantasies <i>Melissa Dickson</i>	224
	<i>Bibliography</i>	245
	<i>Index</i>	272

## Illustrations

- |     |  |         |
|-----|--|---------|
| 1.1 | William Hogarth, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> , 1741.   | page 18 |
| 1.2 | William Hogarth, <i>The Distrest Poet</i> , c. 1736.   | 29      |
| 2.1 | David Allan, <i>James Erskine, Lord Alva, and His Family</i> , 1780.   | 51      |
| 3.1 | Michael Angelo Rooker, <i>The Scene-Painter's Loft at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket</i> , c. 1785.  | 61      |
| 3.2 | George Cruikshank, 'The Beautiful Maid', 1811.   | 63      |
| 3.3 | Edward Rooker after Michael Angelo Rooker, 'The Horse-Guards', from <i>Six Views of London</i> , 1768.   | 75      |
| 3.4 | James Stow after George Jones, 'Interior of the Little Theatre, Haymarket', 1815 (detail), from a series published by Robert Wilkinson, 1825.                | 76      |
| 5.1 | Isaac Cruikshank, 'The Enraget [sic] Politician or the Sunday Reformer or a Noble Bellman Crying Stinking Fish', 1799.                                       | 126     |
| 7.1 | Image accompanying the echo measurement in Robert Plot, <i>The Natural History of Oxford-Shire</i> (1677), 17.   | 158     |
| 7.2 | Detail from letter from Gilbert White to Samuel Barker and Anne Barker, 30 March 1775.   | 167     |
| 9.1 | The keyboard and pedalboard for Liston's 'euharmonic organ'. Each of the keys is in natural tuning (or in technical terms, five-limit just intonation).      | 202     |
| 9.2 | St Andrew's Church in Tank Square, Calcutta, c. 1826, from James Baillie Fraser, <i>Views of Calcutta and Its Environs</i> , plate 13.                       | 206     |
| 9.3 | Farey's table of Liston's tuning system, from two perspectives, as described in Farey, 'On Mr. Liston's, or the Euharmonic Scale of Musical Intervals,' 443. | 213     |
| 9.4 | The connection between the European diatonic scale and the 'Indian scale' composed of twenty-two <i>śrutis</i> ,   |         |

- as per Captain N. Augustus Willard, William Jones, and J. D. Paterson. 215
- 9.5 Krishnaji Ballal Deval's 'Indian Harmonium,' from Henry Keatley Moore, 'Indian Harmonium,' patent application GB 15548, filed July 4, 1911, issued December 12, 1911. 217
- 9.6 A diplomatic transcription of G. S. Khare's diagram of the twenty-two *śrutis*. 217
- 10.1 Laennec-type monaural stethoscope, 1851–1900. 225
- 10.2 William Davey, *The Illustrated Practical Mesmerist, Curative and Scientific* (Edinburgh: William Davey, 1854), plate 2. 234



## *Music Examples*

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 3.1 Samuel Arnold and George Colman the Elder,<br><i>The Enraged Musician, a Musical Entertainment<br/>Founded on Hogarth</i> (London, 1789), 15–16,<br>bars 18–33 of the ‘Trio’. | page 72 |
| 3.2 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>18, bars 47–50 of the ‘Trio’.   | 73      |
| 3.3 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>28–29, bars 11–32 of ‘Knives to Grind’.   | 78      |
| 3.4 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>29, bars 39–46 of ‘Knives to Grind’.  | 79      |
| 3.5 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>28–37, bars 5–12 of the finale.   | 81      |
| 3.6 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>38–39, bars 38–49 of the finale.  | 82      |
| 3.7 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>39, bars 53–56 of the finale.   | 83      |
| 3.8 Arnold and Colman, <i>The Enraged Musician</i> (1789),<br>39–40, bars 62–76 of the finale.  | 84      |

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## *Introduction*

*James Grande and Carmel Raz*

Writing about the effect of inhaling nitrous oxide (laughing gas) in 1800, a young Humphry Davy described the experience by appealing to the ideas of the ‘immortal’ philosopher and physician David Hartley (1705–57). Likening the muscular actions induced by nitrous oxide inhalation to ‘common pleasurable feelings or strong emotions’, Davy ascribed the generation of these to what he called Hartley’s category of ‘mixed automatic actions’, wherein a ‘series of motions formerly voluntary, but now produced without the intervention of ideas: as when a person accustomed to play on the harpsichord, from accidentally striking a key, is induced to perform the series of motions which produce a well-remembered tune’.<sup>1</sup> Davy’s comparison of the involuntary actions generated via a chemical influence with the automatic actions undertaken by a musician at a keyboard forges a rather unusual connection between sound and sense: rather than deciding to make music, Davy’s performer is *compelled* to play after unintentionally striking a key. Here, mind and body are inextricably linked in what seems to be a misprision of Hartley’s famous analysis of the stages involved in learning to play at a keyboard in his *Observations on Man* (1749). For Hartley, the example of acquiring skill at a musical instrument constituted a supreme case of the transformation of increasingly complex and rational sequences of intentional mental commands into involuntary physical movements, that is, the kinds of actions he deemed ‘secondarily automatic’. For Davy, rather, the sound of the harpsichord was prior: mistakenly hitting a key activated this complex chain of actions, without the performer’s desire or volition.

Davy’s appeal to Hartley’s keyboard player to explain the effects of mind-altering substances on his person constitutes an evocative encounter between an older, rationalist worldview and an emerging Romantic one. In the last few decades of the eighteenth century, Hartley’s associationist model of mind – and its attendant neurophysiological hypothesis of vibrating nerves – was challenged and ultimately displaced by writers

who lacked the scientist's faith in the triumph of mind over matter and reason over sensory experience. Sound played a pivotal role in many reactions to post-Lockean empiricism, as vibration, harmony, rhythm, and resonance became widespread models for unconscious mental activity, 'sensible' affective response, sympathy, and shared sentiments, or 'common sense'. Metaphors of resonance and attunement took on central importance in accounting for the stark physical and emotional vicissitudes newly identified with the cult of sensibility. Often depicted in aural terms – from thrumming harps to howling winds, from babbling brooks to chirping birds – these sounds became synecdoches for profound human experiences that could never be adequately accounted for in empiricist terms. Indeed, even Davy noted that, on taking doses of laughing gas in quick succession, he felt 'as if composed of finely vibrating strings'.<sup>2</sup>

Seen in this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that Davy's keyboardist is subject to strange, incomprehensible forces, impelled by an accidentally struck key to execute a series of musical actions in a kind of trance-like state.<sup>3</sup> Sound here is equivalent to nitrous oxide: a stimulus that takes charge of the mind and turns the body into a corporeal puppet, a Romantic trope that would become ubiquitous in subsequent decades as mesmerism, somnambulism, and later hypnosis supplied new frameworks for large-scale social fantasies of automatism and a loss of control.<sup>4</sup> We can perhaps find in Davy's account a reflection of the contemporary zeitgeist: at the same time as the phenomenon of sound was being reimagined from various angles – scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic – the notion of the subject was likewise undergoing a rapid transformation.

Just as the ocularcentrism associated with the Enlightenment gave birth to the notion of the self as rational compounder of ideas, the understanding of a porous, Romantic subject attuned to their surroundings was inextricably linked with the sense of hearing. Ironically, much of this was, again, based on a misinterpretation of Hartley, whose philosophical psychology rested on a neurophysiological hypothesis known as the 'doctrine of vibrations', wherein he ascribed the mechanism of sensory perception to the transmission of infinitesimal vibrations, or vibrating particles, which mediated between the experiences of the external senses and the sensations aroused in the brain.<sup>5</sup> While Hartley emphatically insisted that the nerves themselves did *not* vibrate like musical strings, his heuristic was quickly folded into existing (and often quasi-mystical) discourses around sympathetic resonance.<sup>6</sup> Given this philosophical and physiological background – Robert Miles compares the stature of associationism and vibrating nerve theory in the eighteenth century to

the latter-day role of certain Freudian concepts<sup>7</sup> – the newly tenuous hold of sense on sound presented an epistemological challenge to many writers, one registered in scientific discourse as well as in literary and musical aesthetics. In the Romantic era, sound would emerge as a newly disruptive phenomenon, a philosophical and political problem, a force with the power to overwhelm the sensible subject.

The essays in this collection explore various approaches to the nature of sound and listening: one that emerged in Britain after the Hartleian notion that all sensation was comprised of various kinds of infinitesimal vibrations – whether material or electric – had coalesced into a submerged metaphor that underpinned nearly all accounts of human experience. Transformations in the domains of physiology, philosophy, and the arts reveal a radical re-imagining of the relationship between sound and sense during the decades around 1800. This new approach reconfigured sound as central to understandings of the natural versus the social, and helped to structure perceptions of time, from the diurnal rhythms of everyday life in the modern city to the ‘deep time’ of the natural world.

The contention of the present volume is that the specific circumstances that shaped understandings of the audible world in Romantic-era Britain present particularly compelling case studies for scholars interested in the reciprocal relationship between scientific, social, literary, and musical theories of sound. British culture in this period, moreover, significantly contributed to the formation of many of the foundational assumptions about sound and sense that still, for better or for worse, largely inform the world in which we live today. As a result, interrogating the ways in which historical actors in this period thought about a range of issues with and through sound can substantially enrich our view of Romantic-era British culture and its influence and afterlives. This helps to elucidate not only the role of sound in relation to ideas of the sensory and the Romantic and post-Romantic sensorium but also the bearing sound has on the realm of semantic meaning, on the ‘common sense’ tradition and the kind of rational good sense represented by Elinor Dashwood in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

Recent scholarship in the history of the senses has generally taken its cue from Marx’s 1844 suggestion that ‘the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present’.<sup>8</sup> According to this view, sensory experience is never innate or natural but always culturally constructed and historically determined. To take a case in point, the eighteenth-century sensorium is most commonly thought about in terms of the dominance of vision: ‘the eye’s clear eclipse of the ear’, as the

historian Leigh Eric Schmidt puts it, and ‘the decline of listening in the face of the ascendant power of vision in modern culture’.<sup>9</sup> In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), the foundational text of British empiricist philosophy, John Locke described sight as ‘the most comprehensive of all our senses’,<sup>10</sup> while in *The Spectator* (1712), Joseph Addison asserted that ‘our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses’.<sup>11</sup> Half a century later, the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid’s *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764) held that ‘Of all the faculties called the five senses, sight is without doubt the noblest.’<sup>12</sup> Nobility, delight, comprehensiveness: the power of vision elevated and expanded human experience of the world.

During the Enlightenment, sight was positioned at the apex of the hierarchy of the senses, and associated with the power of reason itself. Jonathan Sterne has characterised the deep-seated opposition between seeing and hearing produced by Enlightenment ocularcentrism as ‘the audiovisual litany’. According to this set of assumptions, vision is exterior, intellectual, and primarily spatial, tends towards objectivity, and offers the subject a perspective on the world. By contrast, hearing is interior, affective, and primarily temporal, tends towards subjectivity, and immerses the subject in the world. For Sterne, the audiovisual litany ‘idealizes hearing (and by extension, speech) as manifesting a kind of pure interiority. It alternately denigrates and elevates vision: as a fallen sense, vision takes us out of the world. But it also bathes us in the clear light of reason.’<sup>13</sup> Many of the most ubiquitous visual tropes for modern culture date from this period: think only of the panopticon, the *flâneur*, the spectator, or the gaze.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the rapt listener, losing themselves in the contemplation of (typically instrumental) music, is generally linked to Romanticism: and while German-language accounts of the overwhelming power of music are perhaps most familiar today – the outpourings of Wackenroder’s ‘art-loving friar’ or Hoffmann’s critical effusions – British sources report comparably powerful reactions to the music of Handel and Haydn (adjusted, of course, for the British temperament). An example of these new modes of absorption can be found in Charles Burney’s *Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in Commemoration of Handel* (1785), which reports that ‘such a stillness reigned, as, perhaps, never happened before in so large an assembly . . . The choral power of harmonical combinations affected some to tears and fainting; while others were melted and enrapt by the exquisite sweetness of single sounds’.<sup>15</sup>

The shifting hierarchies of the senses are inseparable from the history of aesthetics and consequently the changing relationships among the arts. In

many accounts, at some time around 1800, music went from being regarded as the lowest of the arts, owing to its lack of semantic meaning and clear mimetic function, to being held as the highest – and for much the same reason.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the absence of semantic coding was transformed from a liability to a source of aesthetic prestige: music was eloquent *because* of its lack of specificity. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge, perhaps the most influential mediator of German idealism in Britain, wrote in his notebooks, ‘The generic how superior to the particular illustrated in Music, how infinitely more perfect in passion & its transitions than even Poetry – Poetry than Painting.’<sup>17</sup> Much later in the nineteenth century, we find this sentiment echoed by Walter Pater, who famously declared that ‘all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’.<sup>18</sup>

These changing attitudes, which had an inevitable effect on the experience of musical listening, and indeed on auditory attentiveness more broadly, are prefigured in the aesthetic theories of the Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith, who praised instrumental music for its ability to ‘fill up, completely the whole capacity of the mind, so as to leave no part of its attention vacant for thinking of any thing else’.<sup>19</sup> In Britain, as on the Continent, the ‘problem of attention’ captured the imagination of artists, philosophers, and writers, giving rise to new theories about how one ought to read, listen, and behave.<sup>20</sup> The intense concentration now required for the contemplation of cultural productions – a desideratum hitherto largely associated with religious contexts – left the subject vulnerable to intrusion, particularly in the form of extraneous sounds (visual disruptions posed less of a problem, as the eyes could be averted). Accordingly, unwanted sounds would tend to be recategorised as noise, a trend perceptively foreshadowed in Hogarth’s renowned print *The Enraged Musician* (1741). By the last few decades of the eighteenth century, certain kinds of sounds – often those coded as new, lower-class, foreign – would come to be regarded as a perilous threat owing to their ability to overwhelm the mind: the materiality of their very vibrations forcing listeners, and thus their nervous systems, to resonate involuntarily in sympathy.<sup>21</sup> In certain ways, as John Picker has demonstrated, this trend would achieve its apotheosis in the Victorian era’s abhorrence of urban noise and campaigns against the scurrilous sounds of organ grinders and other street musicians.<sup>22</sup>

Our volume begins with a series of essays on audiovisual aesthetics and national identity. Lydia Goehr reads Hogarth’s *The Enraged Musician* – planned as the first of a triptych, but in practice complemented by only a single companion, *The Distrest Poet* – against the backdrop of strategies of

*paragone* and *ekphrasis* in order to investigate the depiction of the identities of the various characters in the image. In her contribution, Maria Semi places the late eighteenth-century vogue for collecting national airs within the universalising paradigms of Enlightenment conjectural history, showing how song collectors were at once inventing tradition and elevating a form of popular culture previously ignored by elites. Oskar Cox Jensen focuses on George Colman and Samuel Arnold's 1789 dramatisation of Hogarth's print as *Ut Pictura Poesis, or, The Enraged Musician*. Investigating the prompt copy of the play text, the published vocal score, and the Haymarket theatre space, Cox Jensen demonstrates how this hybrid work satirises national identity, drawing not only on Hogarth's print but also on the rich dynamics between actors, audience, and London street vendors.

The constantly shifting boundaries between noise and music lay at the heart of another late eighteenth-century interest, namely the relationship of music to the idea of place, a subject that had been brought closer by colonial, economic, and missionary ventures. In Britain, Charles Burney's accounts of his musical tours established the sounds of the Continent as a subject worthy of sustained exploration, while reports on the musical traditions of the peoples of China, India, North America, and the Friendly Islands were avidly read by travellers and armchair explorers.<sup>23</sup> At the same time and not unrelatedly, collections of national airs and melodies were becoming highly popular and commercially successful. Notable examples include Robert Burns's collaborations with James Johnson on *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803) and with George Thomson on *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* (1793–1818), Thomas Moore's work with Sir John Andrew Stevenson and Henry Bishop on *Irish Melodies* (1808–34), Lord Byron and Isaac Nathan's *Hebrew Melodies* (1815), and Felicia Hemans and John Parry's *A Selection of Welsh Melodies* (1822). These collections served many purposes; Celeste Langan has described their paradoxical status as products of print capitalism, 'imported from the periphery' to metropolitan drawing rooms.<sup>24</sup> In the context of burgeoning Scottish, Welsh, and Irish nationalism, collections of national song could act as the vehicles of anti-English sentiment but could also reinforce internal colonialism through the appropriation and commodification of cultural identity.

The sonic experience of place is the subject of our next group of essays. Experiences of travel and colonial encounter were frequently mediated through sound, which, to use Pierre Nora's phrase, appears as a privileged *lieu de mémoire* across a wide range of places and texts. Familiar noises, tunes, and timbres could act as soundmarks that anchored an individual's

memory (and ultimately identity) across vast temporal and geographical distances. In her contribution, Josephine McDonagh focuses on what she defines as ‘the scene of aural recognition’ – the uncanny sense of having heard something before, often at a considerable temporal or spatial remove – across a wide range of early nineteenth-century English literary texts. Focusing on key moments in Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannerling*, John Galt’s short stories, and Reginald Heber’s writings about India, McDonagh foregrounds the affective charge that sounds carry within migratory culture, often crossing the threshold between intelligible and unintelligible sound as subjects move between more or less displaced states. As a counterpoint, William Tullett’s chapter traces the role of the news-horn in structuring the temporality of the city of London, showing how the urban soundscape was refigured in this period by the development of communication networks and the different rhythms of newspaper and postal delivery. Jonathan Hicks, meanwhile, homes in on a very different location: Fingal’s Cave, on the Isle of Staffa, a site that inspired the imagination of visitors from Samuel Johnson to Felix Mendelssohn, the latter famously memorialising the place in his overture *The Hebrides* or *Fingal’s Cave* (1829–35). The specific acoustic properties of the cave were replete with meaning for visitors in this period, in large part thanks to the fascination exerted by James Macpherson’s Ossian poems celebrating the ancient Scottish king Fingal. The endless re-sounding of the cave in early nineteenth-century oral, print, theatrical, and musical culture, Hicks argues, represents a case study in Romantic resonance, one that is intensely material and often mundane, but that amounts to an alternative story about aurality and the mediation of sonic objects in this period.

Sound and sense could be united in sublime experiences such as those afforded by Fingal’s Cave, or merged in the memory through the echo of sounds long past.<sup>25</sup> Yet the Romantic era also saw a renegotiation of the relationship between the two terms, famously linked by Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), which mandates that ‘The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*’, restricting the former to a supplement of semantic meaning.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, this traditional privileging of sense over sound was long invoked in musical and literary debates: as late as 1777, James Beattie categorically proclaimed that ‘He who in literary matters prefers *sound* to *sense* is a fool.’<sup>27</sup> The gradual inversion, or at least disruption, of the relationship between the sound and sense and the role of this change in the production of knowledge is the subject of the next two essays in this volume. Focusing on the parson-naturalist Gilbert White’s deployment of poetry as an instrument of measurement by



shouting lines of classical verse to measure the echoes around the village of Selborne in Hampshire, Courtney Weiss Smith's chapter reveals unexpected ways in which poetry came to be thought about not only as an expressive medium but as a material object, a construction of sounds and syllables, embedded in the natural world.

The precise measurements enabled by Gilbert White's classical verses bouncing around the rural soundscape were, in a sense, complemented by other kinds of sounds travelling through very different settings. The proliferating print culture of the late eighteenth century saw a flowering of ambitious writings on music and sound by British musicians and men of letters. Essays on acoustics, music theory, and various forms of music encountered by travellers in Europe and beyond regularly appeared in mainstream publications aimed at the general public, outlets such as *The Gentleman's Magazine*, as well as in more specialist venues such as *The Musical World*. Attempts to bring innovative mathematical, philosophical, or psychological ideas to bear on acoustic phenomena as well as on questions pertaining to the organisation of pitch and rhythm appeared in many proceedings of various learned societies. The effervescent culture around music and sound also extended to female writers and musicians, a group which had rarely before had an opportunity to publish in the public sphere.<sup>28</sup> This flourishing popular interest in music theory dovetailed with a related fascination with the science of sound. Here, too, women writers made important contributions, as Katherine Fry demonstrates in her study of Mary Somerville's scientific rhetoric. Primarily concerned with dissemination, rather than invention, Somerville offers an alternative perspective on sound and science in nineteenth-century Britain, one that foregrounds the role of sound as an essential component of a Romantic philosophy of nature and the senses.

This new Romantic philosophy of nature relied in no small part on the burgeoning culture of new musical instruments, an enthusiasm that reached unprecedented heights in the early nineteenth century. As John Tresch has compellingly shown, musical 'machines' were steeped in the ideals and values of Romanticism, and indeed the careers of many artists, artisans, and natural scientists spanned both the fine arts and the sciences.<sup>29</sup> In Britain, distinguished inventors such as James Watt and Charles Wheatstone designed and manufactured musical instruments, and natural scientists including the polymath Thomas Young, the physicist John Robison, and the geologist John Farey senior regularly contributed major articles on sound, acoustics, and the tuning and temperament of musical instruments to journals and encyclopaedias. The 1820s and 1830s

saw the British public regularly enthralled with mysterious new musical devices: the glossophone, the celestina, the kaleidophone, and the 'enchanted lyre'.<sup>30</sup>

The scientific and the popular culture involved in the design, manufacture, and reception of musical instruments produced both novel sounds and new modes of listening, the subject of the last two essays in our volume.<sup>31</sup> In Britain, many of these novel instruments were intended not only to generate new timbres, but also to demonstrate creative solutions to long-standing dilemmas related to tuning, as most musicians in the country did not adopt equal temperament until well into the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. One example is Robison's invention of the instrument that would later, in 1799, be called a siren, a device that could be attached to an organ pipe to measure the precise flow of air required for a given pitch. Another is the euharmonic organ, an elaborate instrument devised by the Scottish minister and music theorist Henry Liston in 1810. This instrument is the focus of Daniel K. S. Walden's essay, which explores the adoption by St Andrew's Presbyterian Church of Calcutta of the euharmonic organ a mere seven years later. Working with sources in Britain and in India, Walden demonstrates how the reception of this unusual musical instrument, which offered a complex system of tuning that divided each octave into thirty-nine parts, participated in a specifically Anglo-Indian context in which Scottish and English colonists negotiated their relationship to British nationalism and empire.

An instrument that divided the octave into miniscule parts naturally encouraged listeners to develop a fine sensitivity to minute nuances of pitch. Other kinds of instruments made different demands. In her contribution, Melissa Dickson investigates the vernacular reaction in Britain to a new listening technology: the stethoscope, invented in France by René Laennec in 1816. Although this was not a musical instrument, the kinds of careful listening practices it demanded held considerable similarity with skills long honed within the musical domain. While the disembodied ear of the medical practitioner has been the subject of considerable study in the past few decades, most importantly by Jonathan Sterne, the experience of the people whose bodies were subject to auscultation is still to be explored. Taking this perspective, Dickson foregrounds the non-elite reception of an elite form of aural knowledge in examining how the deployment of mediate auscultation in medical contexts induced patient fantasies of super-sensory and extra-sensory hearing, as well as the penetrability and vulnerability of the human body.

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Two decades after Humphry Davy compared the experience of nitrous oxide to a harpsichord player, Thomas De Quincey published an account of opium addiction that has at its centre a strange and unexpected scene of enraptured listening:

I seldom drank laudanum, at that time, more than once in three weeks: this was usually on a Tuesday or a Saturday night; my reason for which was this. In those days Grassini sang at the Opera: and her voice was delightful to me beyond all that I had ever heard . . . The choruses were divine to hear: and when Grassini appeared in some interlude, as she often did, and poured forth her passionate soul as Andromache, at the tomb of Hector, &c. I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the Paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had.<sup>32</sup>

The combined effect of the drug and the performances of the Italian contralto Josephina Grassini (1773–1850) were for De Quincey the ultimate opium high. Indeed, in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, opium and opera are aligned as cultural commodities, at once exotic and domesticated within the ‘world city’ of early nineteenth-century London, a place of ‘mighty labyrinths’, human suffering, and waking nightmares.<sup>33</sup> This opium-fuelled opera-going appears as the expression of pure hedonism, the hyper-sensuous enjoyment of Grassini’s voice and the spectacle of the Italian opera.<sup>34</sup>

De Quincey insists, however, that music (much like opium) ‘is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it’. Far from being ‘purely passive’ to music, he argues, our response is shaped ‘by the re-action of the mind upon the notices of the ear . . . opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind generally, increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure’. De Quincey’s drug-taking is an experiment on the self, producing an altered or expanded sensorium that connects the music to a new understanding of his own life:

a chorus, &c. of elaborate harmony, displayed before me, as in a piece of arras work, the whole of my past life – not, as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music: no longer painful to dwell upon: but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction; and its passions exalted, spiritualized, and sublimed. All this was to be had for five shillings.<sup>35</sup>

These laudanum-influenced nights at the opera are both a way of exploring the workings of the mind and a relatively cheap, and endlessly reproducible, urban pleasure.

As the descriptions of altered states by Davy and by De Quincey suggest, the new experience of sound was predicated on an integrated conception of sensation and cognition. John Keats might famously have wished for ‘a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts’, but even for Keats this was qualified by his recognition that ‘a complex Mind . . . would exist partly on sensation partly on thought’.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, much writing of the period is characterised by an attempt to think through the senses: to explore the sensuous and somatic, thus challenging mind–body dualism. Isobel Armstrong has identified an emerging aesthetic in this period, shaped by Unitarian science and theology, which produced ‘a new mode of writing that reconciled extreme rationality with a celebration of the sensoria’.<sup>37</sup> In Coleridge’s poetry, for example, sound is used to convey a vision of a divinely energised and intelligible natural world. In ‘The Eolian Harp’ (1795), he poses the question, ‘what if all of animated nature / Be but organic Harps’ that ‘tremble into thought’ as the divine breeze blows over their strings? In later versions of the poem, this becomes a broader statement of ‘the one Life, within us and abroad . . . A Light in Sound, a sound-like power in Light’.<sup>38</sup> A slightly later poem, ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ (1797), culminates with the powerful final affirmation: ‘No sound is dissonant, which tells of Life.’ This might seem to be a distinctly eighteenth-century vision of a divinely animated natural world – heard if we listen hard enough – but it is echoed in the present day by ecologically attuned work in sound studies that has taken its cue from R. Murray Schafer’s evocative account of ‘the world as a macrocosmic musical composition’.<sup>39</sup>

Echoing Mary Douglas’s famous definition of dirt, noise has been characterised as sound out of place.<sup>40</sup> Over the past two decades, however, the nascent field of sound studies has directed attention towards a much wider range of sounds than those previously occupying cultural historians. Histories of noise, of silence, of specific modes of listening, and of particular soundscapes are increasingly set alongside the well-established narratives of musicology and literary studies. Sound studies now appears in some respects to be a fully fledged field, with its own scholarly institutions, yet by other metrics it still seems to be taking shape, its arrival continually heralded but never quite secured. As Jacek Błaskiewicz recently put it, ‘Will sound studies ever “emerge”?’<sup>41</sup> This may have something to do with the methodological uncertainty that still attends the sonic past. In the age of the digital humanities, and the tantalising possibility of the complete availability of the printed record, historical sounds represent an especially recalcitrant object of study. The digitisation of books, periodicals, and

printed ephemera has reshaped our histories of print media and our understanding of the Romantic period as a time of print proliferation, even 'print saturation'.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, any attempt to write a history of sound in an era before audio recording brings with it a formidable array of challenges. How did the relationship between sound and print change during these decades? Where can we locate the archives of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sound? What techniques of close reading or close listening does sound studies demand?

The present volume takes an interdisciplinary approach to these challenges, featuring essays from a range of perspectives, including literary history, musicology, social and cultural history, and philosophy. The essays pursue a broad array of topics, from communication networks to stethoscopic fantasies, melodious caves to vampire melodramas, astronomical treatises to euharmonic organs. In doing so, they attempt to reconstruct the ways in which subjects – both in Britain and abroad – could have regarded their identities as bound up with musical styles and genres, and as reflected in specific sonic dimensions such as timbre and temperament. Yet they are united by their engagement with the methodological challenges that sound poses to our understanding of the historical past.

The essays in this collection work with a heterogeneous idea of sound, one that encompasses and extends far beyond the ballads and bards that have haunted the Romantic imagination. Collectively, they demonstrate how a focus on sound can enrich our view of this period of British culture. In doing so, they invite us to contemplate the insights we obtain when we take a sound-studies approach to understanding questions of political and aesthetic representation, the experience of urban modernity and migration, and the mysteries of the human body and the universe.

### Notes

- 1 Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide: Or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and Its Respiration* (London: J. Johnson, 1800), 554. In *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), Hartley defines two types of motion: *automatic*, dependent on sensation, and *voluntary*, the result of ideas. *Originally automatic* actions include life-sustaining bodily functions, involuntary physical responses, and reflexes. Through association, these actions can transform into *perfectly voluntary* or *secondarily automatic*, and back again (the term 'mixed automatic actions' is Davy's own).
- 2 Davy, *Researches*, 544.

- 3 The example of the performer mistakenly striking a key could certainly also be understood as simply pertaining to the reactivation of muscle memory. However, it seems likely that the sound produced by the struck key provides the critical impetus for the subsequent execution of the musical piece: had the struck key not sounded, the performer would certainly not have felt compelled to continue playing.
- 4 See Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Carmel Raz, 'Talking to the Hand: The "Hysterical Epistemology" of the Migrating Sensorium', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72.2 (2019): 552–57.
- 5 This doctrine is laid out in the first chapter of his *Observations*; see David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 6th ed. (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1834), 1–72.
- 6 Hartley emphasises, 'For that the nerves themselves should vibrate like musical strings, is highly absurd'. Hartley, *Observations*, 8. On the literary reception of Hartley's ideas see e.g. Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (New York: Continuum, 2012). For an account of the broader musical context in which these ideas were expressed see Roger M. Grant, *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).
- 7 Robert Miles, *Anne Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 49.
- 8 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* [1844], trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959).
- 9 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 15.
- 10 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding: In Four Books*, 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Ding and Samuel Manship, 1694), 68.
- 11 Joseph Addison, 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination', *The Spectator* 411 (Saturday, 21 June 1712), in *The Spectator in Four Volumes*, ed. Gregory Smith, vol. 3 (London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1945), 276.
- 12 Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* [1764], 3rd rev. ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1769), 120.
- 13 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 25–49, at 30.
- 14 See Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- 15 Charles Burney, *Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in Commemoration of Handel* (London: Payne and Robinson, 1785), 40.
- 16 See e.g. Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), chapters 6 ff. Burney himself would memorably remark that 'music, considered abstractedly, without the assistance or rather the shackles of speech, and

- abandoned to its own powers, is now become a rich, expressive, and picturesque language in itself; having its forms, proportions, contrasts, punctuations, members, phrases, and periods'. Charles Burney, *General History of Music*, vol. 2 (London: The Author, 1782), 171.
- 17 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection* [1804], ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 58.
  - 18 Walter H. Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', *The Fortnightly Review* (October 1877): 526–38, at 528.
  - 19 Adam Smith, 'Of the Nature of that Imitation Which Takes Place in What Are Called the Imitative Arts', in *Philosophical Essays* (London: T. Cadell, 1795), 172. See also Carmel Raz, 'To "Fill Up, Completely, the Whole Capacity of the Mind": Listening with Attention in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Music Theory Spectrum* 44.1 (2022): 141–54.
  - 20 See e.g. Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Natalie M. Phillips, *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016); Nicholas Mathew, 'Interesting Haydn: On Attention's Materials', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71.3 (2018): 655–701.
  - 21 See, for example, James Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
  - 22 See John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
  - 23 Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Irvine, *Listening to China: Sound and the Sino-Western Encounter, 1770–1839* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
  - 24 Celeste Langan, 'Scotch Drink & Irish Harps: Mediations of the National Air', in *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*, ed. Phyllis Weliver (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 25–49, at 30.
  - 25 In his last essay, 'The Letter Bell' (1830), William Hazlitt depicts how a specific cue within the urban soundscape mediates between the individual and social: the sound of the passing letter bell 'not only fills the street with its importunate clamour, but rings clear through the length of many half-forgotten years', transporting Hazlitt back to his 'first coming up to town, when all around was strange, uncertain, adverse – a hubbub of confused noises, a chaos of shifting objects'. William Hazlitt, 'The Letter Bell', in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–34), vol. 17, 376–82, at 377.
  - 26 Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961), 195–326.
  - 27 James Beattie, *Essays on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism; on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind; on*



*Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition; on the Utility of Classical Learning* (Edinburgh, 1777), 498.

- 28 One such was the Scottish piano pedagogue Anne Young, who patented a complex musical board game in 1801 and published an accompanying theoretical treatise two years later. On Anne Young see Carmel Raz, 'Anne Young's Introduction to Music (1803): Pedagogical, Speculative, and Ludic Music Theory', *SMT-V: Videocast Journal of the Society for Music Theory* 4.3 (2018), [goo.gl/tX1e95](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1524080118000095); 'Anne Young's Musical Games (1801): Music Theory, Gender, and Game Design', *SMT-V: Videocast Journal of the Society for Music Theory* 4.2 (2018), [goo.gl/ZXR6Cv](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1524080118000067).
- 29 John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012).
- 30 On the celestina see Deirdre Loughridge, 'Celestial Mechanisms: Adam Walker's Eidouranion, Celestina, and the Advancement of Knowledge', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, ed. James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 47–76; on Wheatstone's 'enchanted lyre' see Melissa Dickson, 'Charles Wheatstone's Enchanted Lyre and the Spectacle of Sound', in *Sound Knowledge*, ed. Davies and Lockhart, 125–44.
- 31 See Emily I. Dolan, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 32 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 34 See Daniel O'Quinn, 'Ravishment Twice Weekly: De Quincey's Opera Pleasures', *Romanticism on the Net* 34–35 (2004), [www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2004-n34-35-ron824/009436ar/](http://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2004-n34-35-ron824/009436ar/).
- 35 De Quincey, *Confessions*, 45–46.
- 36 Keats to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gilttings, rev. Jon Mee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36–37. See Shahidha K. Bari, *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations* (London: Routledge, 2012).
- 37 Isobel Armstrong, 'Anna Letitia Barbauld: A Unitarian Poetics?', in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: New Perspectives*, ed. William McCarthy and Olivia Murphy (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 59–81, at 81.
- 38 On the influence of Hartley's psychological theories on this poem see Shelley Trower, 'Nervous Motions', in *Senses of Vibration*, 13–36. On the role of the Aeolian harp within nineteenth-century medical discourse and neuroscience, see Carmel Raz, "'The Expressive Organ within Us": Ether, Ethereality, and Early Romantic Ideas about Music and the Nerves', *19th-Century Music* 38.2 (2014): 115–44.
- 39 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* [1977] (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 5.
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*William Hogarth*  
*Looking and Listening for a Painting*

*Lydia Goehr*

**Absent Image**

William Hogarth produced two pictures: *The Enraged Musician* and *The Distrest Poet*. There was meant to be a third, a *painter* in some sort of mood. This essay reads the two pictures of 1736–41 to speculate about the absent third. What it finds in the two images, it finds in all of Hogarth's art: a wit of incongruity, ambiguity, and inversion. The wit supports a satire that, drawn loosely from virtue theory, addresses liberty and justice in a society of professions feared for their foreign taste and imposture. Asking to whom the moods belong, I answer first, to the musician and poet of title; but second, as spreading by ear and eye through the dramatic scene finally to reach the maker of the picture. Why does a painter show a moody musician and poet if not also to reflect on himself as a sibling artist? And if his mood is already implicated in the two pictures, wouldn't a third be redundant?

While drawing from recent scholarship, I focus more on the first readers of Hogarth's art: the likes of John Trusler, George Steevens, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, and Charles Lamb. They all contributed to authorizing the anecdotes regarding Hogarth's art and life as collected in the 1780s under the leadership of John Nichols, longtime editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The anecdotes were characteristic of an age that found *Hogarth moralized*. This did not automatically mean a reduction of his *moral pictures* to a *crass moralism* or *pedantry* regarding the true, the good, and the beautiful. To so reduce the pictures would be to miss the threaded lines of the satire, the micrology of the wit in the details, the shifting targets, the sea- and scene-changes of mood, prejudice, and perspective. Today, the formal architecture and furniture of Hogarth's pictures impresses more than the array and display of nasty prejudices regarding race, gender, and nationality. Nevertheless, because this age of liberty and wit took on prejudice itself as a core issue for modern

philosophy and aesthetic theory, there is purpose still to looking and reading in this period. What, I am asking in the background, can be rescued not by drowning out the prejudice or by hiding it from view, but by allowing the pictures to serve as a critical mirror for our own troubled times?

### Musician Inside and Out

Hogarth's picture of an *enraged* musician was described first off as a musician *provoked* (see [Figure 1.1](#)).

The provocation regards a well-garbed string player *arrayed with a coat decorated with frogs, a bag-wig, solitaire, and ruffled shirt*. He stands inside a well-to-do house not far but psychologically distanced from the street life



Figure 1.1 William Hogarth, *The Enraged Musician*, 1741. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

outside and below. Seeming to have leapt up in fury from his chair, he is said to allude to Apollo, leading one to expect that his instrument of well-tuned strings would issue harmonious sounds – were he only in a better mood. But perhaps he is also a more suspect idealizer, a Terpander who systematizes simple compositional rules or a Timotheus doing double duty in a noble house distantly related to the court of Alexander the Great.

He is anyway distracted by what comes from outside, and most pointedly by a wind player read as a satyr figure: a Marsyas, Pan, or Orpheus figure who has learned to dress in the *bedeviled* or *bohemian* garb of those branded indiscriminately as Jew, Italian, French, even German – in a land ruled by an Hanoverian king. Some describe the wind player as existing between *man and monkey* to connote the *mashing* associations of an *organ-grinding*. This fits the fact that he is not a *native* but an *outsider* of common descent, a pied piper of the low who has joined up with all the street traders known as the *criers* as they produce their *cris de Londres* with a foreignness that only more provokes the insider-musician. Yet the twist is that the housebound man of strings is no native either, but an Italian of educated taste. So what has his high-class rage to do with the low cues of the street scene? Might we read the picture-maker as expressing his own rage at a foreign taste spreading as the plague of all plagues over London – and on one house in particular?

That both the string and wind players are foreign was how, against the background of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, Hogarth commented on the dominance of Italian music on the English stage. The foreignness of the educated string player stands for the Italian music favored as the town's most recent taste, while the wind player, with his disturbing physiognomic complexion and clothing, stands for those who enter London as *improvisatori* and *virtuosi* – a procession of *rough travelers* with Italian contours. The social commentary addresses the impact of all that is foreign in the capital city: the atmosphere, say, of French airs and graces of pomposity from persons wanting nothing to do with the criers caricatured already by foreign artists living sometimes in London. Two caricaturists have been identified: a Dutch-born painter and engraver, Marcellus Laroon, for his *The Cries of London*, and a Venetian painter, Jacopo Amigoni, known, say, for his *Shoe-Black*. Borrowing from their images, Hogarth *shows* nothing in the picture as homespun. Italy, France, the Netherlands: The differences from abroad make no difference. What then makes the difference for the one inside the house who evidently wants nothing to do with what loudly confronts him right in front of his eyes?

Perhaps the insider fears an identity under a foreign branding: ‘I have disguised my foreignness as you have not’, he thinks with all the high-strung anxiety of the would-be assimilated, as he stares in horror at the piper – who retorts with his straight pipe: ‘Ha! So you think!’ The pathology and provocation born from fears of the foreign, where one musician looks at himself mirrored in the image of his enemy, leads to a broader hermeneutical point. Questions of indiscernibility are not resolved by fixing the figures in this scene with unique or singular identities. One might be tempted to do this with an exactness of reference and allusion to places and persons of the period. Yet naming names or engaging an iconographic exactitude detracts from how Hogarth’s wit moves through eye and ear to effect turns of mood and perspective on the identity of each individual. I take a cue from the German art historian Werner Busch who, following Lichtenberg, asks interpreters to keep the wit of the picture open to a productive ambiguity and not to close it down. The cue asks us to look, and then to look again, through the evident prejudice for a more subtle target of social satire: given a painter professing and confessing about the modern lives of siblinged artists.

### Who’s Who

*The Enraged Musician* is read by most according to an anecdote regarding a Mr. John Festin, declared *eminent for his skill in playing upon the German flute and hautboy, and much employed as a teacher of music*:

To each of his scholars [Festin] devoted one hour each day. ‘At nine o’clock in the morning,’ said he, “I once waited upon my lord Spencer, but his lordship being out of town, from him I went to Mr. V-n. It was so early that he was not arisen. I went into his chamber, and, opening a shutter, sat down in the window-seat. Before the rails was a fellow playing upon the hautboy. A man with a barrow full of onions offered the piper an onion if he would play him a tune. That ended, he offered a second onion for a second tune; the same for a third, and was going on: but this was too much; I could not bear it; it angered my very soul – “Zounds!” said I, “stop here! This fellow is ridiculing my profession; he is playing on the hautboy for onions!””

The anecdote pertains to one Pietro Castrucci, an Italian who, arriving in London with instruments and skill, discovered to his dismay a *lookalike* on the street: a Mr. Festin. But if Castrucci is the enraged virtuoso of the stringed instrument, then Festin is either the same person in a false identification or the flautist enraged at being mistaken for a hautboy player

blowing tunes for onions. So what we have now are two enraged musicians, or, better, one enraged figure compounded by contrary characteristics: of strings and wind.

Jeremy Barlow runs through all possible candidates for the identity of the enraged musician: the more, the better. The nineteenth-century Grub Street critic George Augustus Sala surmised that the enraged musician was either the great composer of foreign birth and native talent, George Frideric Handel (without his umlaut), or else the German composer Johann Christoph Pepusch. But then Sala turned to the war-cries as *les cris de Londres*, the main topic of his essay of 1892, as spreading across the scene with a 'Buy, Buy, Buy' of great consequence and even greater volume. This is my cue to stress the dividing line between the figure who stands quite alone inside the house and the entire *mob* chorus that *clatters* to produce all the *agonies* of an *auricular torture* that, with foreign spice, Charles Burney described as a *polissonnerie*. By the French term, Burney captured a marketplace of prosaic trade capable through translation of transformation. Everything foreign in this highly contested public sphere was re-spun to be homespun for a new British art. The result was a picture from Hogarth's English hand.

Barlow follows the juxtapositions of high and low terms between violin and fiddle, oboe and pipe in a shifty pattern between civilization and roughness. On the street, the pattern is spread out further through the suggested contrast of the secular dissonance of workers' tools with the claimed harmony of a sacred building's chimes and bells. Along with this comes the dialectic between industry and idleness which, sourced to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, reinforced the inequality of those who rested on rest days while others worked. The hoisted flag in the picture suggests the feast of May Day when, traditionally, in praise of the Virgin Mary, everyone danced around the maypole with red ribbons to make all things seem not as they ordinarily appear. But who dances in this picture? Certainly not the lone musician. If the day is given over to the criers, then it is the commoners who turn their daily labor into a play-within-a-play, their commonplace tools into instruments for a new musical art, and their street rage into a worker's hope for a new May Day tomorrow.

### All the World a Stage

A poetic epigraph accompanies the scene: *With thundering noise the azure vault they tear, And rend, with savage roar, the echoing air: The sounds terrific he with horror hears; His fiddle throws aside, – and stops his ears.* The first



overseers of Hogarth's art tell that the *adagios* and *cantabiles* of the string player have *procured him the protection of nobles* – suggesting that the enraged musician is not himself of the nobility but in the employ of a noble patron. Perhaps, however, the noble patron is only a would-be bourgeois gentleman who wants lessons in the divine science of music's principles. Still, who knows, since the patron is not on view. We read that the musician, before becoming enraged, wants to teach his principles through his practical skill on a well-tuned instrument in accord with the open crotchet-book on the music stand. Presumably then, the house, not being his, places him in some sort of waiting chamber. But why, if waiting to teach, is he so rattled by the racket in the marketplace? Does the waiting express his insecurity as a person of professions: that his position, even when or because protected by a patron, is highly precarious? Remember from the Festin report: *This fellow is ridiculing my profession*. Without social security, he is no person of property. Without property, is he a nobody who has become a somebody who can't look at himself in the mirror? Why can't the musician take a blind eye or assume a deaf ear to his surroundings?

Scholars like to identify the exact street address of the scene as St. Martin's Lane given the church shown and the buildings known. Again, the exactness matters less than the impression that something is awry in the street scene: a *modern architecture of this little Babel* that destabilizes a professional musician aspiring to the condition of harmony. The stringed instrument he is about to play or has already played is not played in this moment. The moment is of a significant interruption. Some see the musician as *shouldering* his violin and *flourishing* his fiddle-stick. But what is shown is the instrument perched uncomfortably on the window-sill with the bow only just about held, as both hands are raised to cover his ears. The ear covering suggests the musician's desire to stop the noise of a beggar's opera reaching him, as this opera is suggested by the smudged poster hanging on the outside wall of the house. The decayed poster, advertising the Sixty-Second Day of Gay's play by the comedians of the Theatre Royal, clues us into the present and even future state of the arts as daily played out on the walls of a stratified society. If Hogarth was putting on trial a stage that is now *all the world*, so, too, in his *The Enraged Musician*. While the insider musician glares at the outsider wind player, the street people cry for a London that can always put the king on trial. The bored parrot, perched on the street light of illumination, seems repetitively to screech out what he reads from the lower corner of the advertising poster: *vivat rex! vivat rex!* With a beggar's opera restaged on

the street, is this a poetic call for a justice through revolution or restoration, neither or both?

### Sound Drowning

When the inside musician opens the shutters, the amplified noise is said to *kindle* his rage. But with more air comes more combustion: The noise spreads like *the rush of many waters*. With the torrential waters, the noise fuses with the dirt, dust, mud, and blood from a market labor cut and bound by unpitched instruments: pots and pans, sticks and stones, hammers and knives. In the crowd, Gay's ballad singer stands with her *petrified* baby while holding up the sheet music for a late seventeenth-century lament: *The Ladies Fall*. A child nearby plays with a noisy rattle; another pees; a drummer boy beats out of time. A person of age plays a ram's horn that seems to lead another tradesman to cover his ears. The *hell-hounds* – the dog, horse, cat, and monkey – accompany the merchants and peddlers dealing at a high pitch and in a fog of dust – *Dust, ho!*

Beneath the window of the great house, the *crooked-nosed* wind player stands with his mouth instrumentally full. It is he who most catches the glare of the musician inside. He is described as blowing his horn with such force that the noise could shake *down the walls of Jericho*. This alludes to the ram's horn and trumpet of the Israelites and to the early ekphrasis for the ancient city of Thebes. After the harmonious string-playing of Amphion, the heavy stones, carried by his twin brother, jumped lightly into place to erect a city with firm walls. Today, however, in Hogarth's London, the winds of history persuade the bricks to run away as *paper bills* of *money* render the bricks pointless. Whistling between the cracks is Solomon's Proverb 25:28: *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls*.

### Lydian Measure

Another feast (*festin*) to feed Hogarth's picture is Dryden and Handel's 1697/1736 ode *Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music*. The *festin* for Cecilia rings out *Softly sweet, in Lydian measures*, soon to soothe the *soul to pleasure*. But who trusts a Lydian measure? The enraged musician *rapt in Elysium at the divine symphony* is *awakened from his beatific vision by noises that distract him*. The more the distraction, the more Milton's lines from *Paradise Lost* take hold: *An universal hubbub wild, Of stunning sounds, and voices all confus'd, Assails his ears with loudest vehemence*.

Echoing Genesis 4:21, Dryden addressed music's double way of *tuning* and *untuning* the skies and the earth: *His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.* For Alexander's feast, the old musician *Timotheus* was *placed on high amid the tuneful quire* while with *flying fingers* touched the lyre. All around, *the listening crowd* admired *the lofty sound*. In Alexander's court, Timotheus was hired to purge corporeal sickness and perverse habitudes of the brain – a hard daily labor: *he lost not any one hour in the day.* Taking *double pains*, he demanded *double compensation: first to unteach the court-nobles what they had been taught amiss, and then to instruct them aright.* The double pain drew from Horace first, and then from the witches' brew of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: *Double, double toil and trouble.* The *toil and trouble* was not, as usually it was, a mischievous wife, but a king engaged in a battle between honor and vanity: *Honour but an empty bubble; Never ending, still beginning.* With Alexander refigured as the modern monarch: the *ravish'd ears* assumed the *God* (Bacchus) to be affecting always *a nod.* Evermore vain, the king fought battles over and over again, convinced that the divine hand and presence was everywhere for him, *even in the hautboy's breath.* When, however, with *shrill notes of anger*, the *double double double beat* and *cries* were heard, *hark the foes come* – suddenly all was *exposed on the bare earth.* With downcast eyes, the king's mood descended to a melancholy so grave that Timotheus had now to soothe him: *Softly sweet, in Lydian measures.* With *breathing flute and sounding lyre*, the *soul* swelled to *rage* and kindled to *soft desire.* At this moment, the divine Cecilia descended as the *Inventress of the vocal frame.* With *Nature's mother-wit, and arts unknown before*, she drew an *angel down*, while old Timotheus *raised the mortal to the skies.* For the king who remained *uninstructed*, the old *aulete* won the prize. Whether the string player would now yield or share the prize with Cecilia was of no concern to her. She was named to be blind to the vanity of such rewards.

What, now, does Cecilia, as *Inventress of the vocal frame*, bring to Hogarth's picture? In writing his ode for St. Cecilia's Day, Dryden gave Cecilia the tuning fork: *from heav'nly harmony, this universal frame began . . . through all the compass of the notes it ran, the diapason closing full in man. . . . within the hollow of that shell that spoke so sweetly and so well.* Hogarth, made now into the *inventor of the picture frame*, took the vocal frame to turn a street noise to a silence of a music renewed. From a paradise lost to one regained, he used the patronage of a feminine figure to draw Dryden's poetic breath out of Milton's *tumult and confusion all imbroild in a discord with a thousand various mouths.* Despite the sweet reinvention, however, the irregular Lydian measure suggested

that his divining rod, once given to Bacchus and Moses, retained a cutting satiric point.

### Irregular Dance

Those who have looked at the May Day milkmaid in Hogarth's picture have said that if ever she caught anyone's attention, something perhaps sweet or good would come to the ear. She stands out from the others with a curvy naturalness of physique corresponding to the naturalness of her voice. Her voice is neither learned as an in-house music of strings nor acquired as a streetwise skill of suspect winds. But who is she and for what or whom does she sing?

In his 1753 treatise *The Analysis of Beauty Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste*, Hogarth did everything not to fix the ideas in the wrong pictorial way. He instructed those producing a visual *object of a great variety of parts* to let the *parts be distinguished by themselves, by their remarkable difference from the next adjoining*. The movement of parts in pictures is akin to that in *passages in musick* and *paragraphs in writing*. This way, *not only the whole, but even every part*, comes better to be *understood by the eye*. One moves one's eye around a picture, as in theatre or dance, cued best, he now added, by lines from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*: – *What you do, still betters what is done. – When you do dance, I wish you a wave o' the sea, that you might ever do nothing but that; move still, still so, and own no other function*. A wave of the sea promised a motion even in the stillness, but only, Hogarth maintained, if straitlaced academics ceased abusing classical principles to produce from ideas of fixity and clarity only a monotony. While the senses delight in sameness, the ear should not be fixed on a monotonous note nor the eye on a dead wall. Yet movement had its own constraint: While delighting in variety, crowds ought not to amount to gluttony. For crowding, Hogarth was reckoned a genius: no messy mass; no loss of design or composition. Hogarth, himself, described his picturing in terms of a (Dryden-like) shell, with its inner and outer surface, around which one walks in the imagination through its contrary perspectives. The eye was to follow the imaginary circular threads and spinning tops.

Hogarth brought the movement to a culminating line: the S-line of beauty. It gave curve and contour to the design, allowing the eye to wonder as though wandering along a winding serpentine river. But with the serpentine, we reach Eve's irregular approach to Adam, or his to her, to disorder the harmony that Hogarth found in the Cecilian achievements of

Renaissance painting and poetry as well as in the milk delivered by the Virgin Mary of May Day. From Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the *skillful steersman* on the boat who *wrought nigh river's mouth*, draws *his tortuous train, curl'd many a wanton wreath, in fight of Eve, to lure her eye*. The irregularity of the measures taken across the water has recently been read by Abigail Zitin as a turning of the *wanton wreath* to the *wayward* dance of a Gypsy, whose steps, like those of an Arabian horse, are in accord not with Apollo's classical principles but with a popular country dance which, from Milton, shows *mazes intricate . . . regular . . . when most irregular they seem*.

The S-line in *The Enraged Musician* that gives the curve to the milkmaid on May Day is put into the hands of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Cecilia, so that *the vocal frame* can breathe all sorts of passions into the *hubbub* of noises – *even*, as Dryden told, into the hautboy's pipe. As Dryden's Jubal strikes *the corded shell*, the *list'ning* brothers and sisters gather as the irregular maze turns to something musically beautiful. Of all the figures in the scene, only the insider musician cannot join in: So professing divine principles with covered ears, he alone makes no music. For the frontispiece of his *Analysis*, Hogarth placed the curved S-line and spinning shell into a stilled pyramid stabilized by the divine geometry from Isaiah 19:19–20. The carrying walls of the house give off a double perspective, inside out and outside in. As the musician's rage of title attaches to the insider, the man of profession cuts his own strings to become the butt of Hogarth's satire.

### Black Joke

When tunes were being traded for onions for a suspect commerce in London, so too the *Black Joke*. Typically *smutty*, the joke was filled with either a smelly excrement or the sticky substance of illicit sexual intercourse. Barlow notes this to track the constant *sex-for-money* exchange in Hogarth's design of social prostitution. So pervasive the spread of diseased sperm that the virgin was turned *white to black*, after which the outpouring of excrement forced *men of ev'ry profession* into the city sewer. In 1720, when the joke first found its way into print, it mocked the mathematician, surgeon, chemist, lawyer, and priest, each for preferring to *love a black joke and a belly so white* than to engage in honest labor. Onto the blacklist was then added the painter who artfully *penciled his strokes*, *If he had his own will, he'd paint nothing but jokes. But black jokes and bellies in white*. And then the musician who *from morning to noon, Singing no other song, playing no other tune, But the black joke and the belly so white: Both Handel and*

*Purcell*[l] for this he would flight, He'd sing it all day, and he'd strum it at night On the musical joke. From the black joke soon came the joke made white for the prudish, green for the youth who imbibed a *vino verde*, brown for the worn and miserly; and *red*, of course, for those enraged. It was an old color scheme, found already in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*, when the loss was felt in every part of the (civic) body.

Any failure to turn a black bile of melancholy to something white was said to owe to too many *wigged eminences* of *grey-hair* capitulating to flattery and applause. The applause was a *claptrap*, literally an air trapped by hands. But poetically, as Samuel Butler wrote in *Hudibras*, it was a double disease coming from a badly tipped pen(is), when Moses's law of circumcision and Socrates's laws of circumscription were misread to remove all differences among persons whatever the color and metal of their blood. The *original black joke*, sent from Dublin to London, refused to *blame the man* in favor of a *human nature* pulled, as in the *working* of a *joke* by a *rope*, to equalize across the globe the situation the same for *Prince*, *Priest*, or *Peasant*.

Attacking the democratizing tendency, Alexander Pope offered his *Imitations of Horace* in 1737 to forefront the black joke in a mock epic-epistle targeted at the insecurity of persons of professions, from professor to poet. Moving biblically between the fat and the lean, he addressed his patron – *Ad Augustus* – to condemn the leveling-out of culture when *aristocratic taste* merged with that of the *noisy mob*. The cacophony is at war with harmony. But when the harmony turns to a vanity, its *bark conveys on fame's mad voyage by the wind of praise*. The storm takes the steersman off course: *For ever sunk too low, or born too high!* Fearing the fall down the social ladder, he contemptuously flatters all the more while condemning the mob's *violent song*. Here, as in Hogarth's picture, the *noise* is key to who *gets* the wit and who *contracts* the disease. In the satirical rearranging of the social class structure, the wit inverts established hierarchies head-over-foot without aiming to democratize the result to an *all alike* and everywhere *the same*. If the song is to be rescued, a *farewell* must be bid *the stage*, where the *silly bard* grows fat, on the inside, while the crowd outside revels in the *remains* to mortify the Wit. It is a farewell to *the many-headed Monster of the Pit*, to the poet and to the crowd who, *while clatt'ring their sticks before ten lines are spoke, call for the farce, the bear, or the black-joke*.

In Hogarth's *Enraged Musician*, the call of the clattering crowd comes not only from the milkmaid but also from the knife and fork grinder, the *cutler* who concentrates on swiping his large chopping instrument back

and forth. (There were many cutting caricatures in this period of cutters and grinders.) One writer described Hogarth's cutter as eliciting *sparks of fire*. But to what point? If figured after Marsyas's flayer, his task would be to skew the wind player on behalf of the Apollonian string player. But wouldn't this make him a Judas, an executioner cutting down one of his own kind? Maybe he wants to slay the string player instead with an irregular rhythm for a harmony gone awry.

### Deafening Silence

Early readers of *The Enraged Musician* found a particular wit in Fielding's *quaint observation* that the *whole of this bravura scene is so admirably represented, it deafens one to look at it*. To be quaint was to be charming and old-fashioned. Fashions, old and new, were the target of the social satire. One thought from the Renaissance *paragone* is that if one covers one's ears, the picture's muteness is laid bare. The muteness is a limit and an advantage. When it is stressed that no visual medium can mechanically turn silence to sound, the visual medium is saved by its capability to express a divine silence without noisy interruption. But something else was on Fielding's mind. He wanted to drown out London's noisy cries, to become deaf to them, to release his recollection of Lisbon's *delicious . . . concord of sweet sounds of seamen, watermen, fish-women, and oyster-women*. Hearing something different in *memory*, he came to *see* something different in Hogarth's picture. The scene-change mattered the most.

When Hogarth's enraged musician covers his ears, he opens his eyes wide to the dirty city. Does he cover his ears to see more or less: as a wise seer or as an ass? Hogarth's point was for the scene to play out like a wordless *dumb show* akin to Hamlet's exposure of the impostor king. Deafening in mood and impact, the play-within-a-play was needed by persons of the highest rank who, in Fielding's terms, stubborn and enraged against the mob, remain oblivious to the social ills. Hogarth and Fielding, like Pope, take on the highest rank hiding behind the highest walls.

### Distressed Poet

We are not finished with the enraged musician, but it is time to bring the distress of Hogarth's poet to account (see [Figure 1.2](#)). Again, we turn to Pope's Horatian epistle to discover the *dear delight to Britons farce affords*, when the *farce*, once *the taste of mobs*, is now *of lords*. Figuring taste an eternal wanderer capable of flight, Pope invoked Apollo to judge the





Figure 1.2 William Hogarth, *The Distrest Poet*, c. 1736. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

fluctuations all around *from heads to ears, and now from ears to eyes*. He called then to the *luckless poet!* to stretch his *lungs to roar*, so that the *bear or elephant shall heed thee more*. But does the poet have any chance of out-sounding all the *throats the gallery extends*, as *all the thunder of the pit ascends*? Is the poet, titled for his distress, entitled to his suffering? Did Hogarth's sympathy lie with the distressed poet as with the enraged musician constantly to question the sympathy?

Hogarth's poet occupies an interior space, another waiting chamber. But for what is he waiting? He is young and lives high up in an impoverished garret. With a sloping roof, the space is described as a *Porridge-Island sky-parlour*. The poet sits at a table partially dressed as though on public view. His wig provides no security. He scratches his head, distracted from the muse but not by her. He tries but fails to write a poem in mock



homage to the *Grub Street Journall*, of which an issue lies on the floor. The title for his poem *Upon Riches* replaces a discarded title: *Poverty. A Poem*. He contemplates the uses and abuses of the wealth that being a poet professionally affords. His choice is Herculean: to strive for art's spiritual rewards or to secure his ascent up the social ladder by compromising hand and spirit. Were he only to follow the principles of poetry laid out in the books, he would find his way to the gold marked by a withered map pinned onto the wall: *A View of the Gold Mines of Peru*. But who places trust in such a map?

The interruption from the street is a single dismal demand of a milkmaid who wants to be paid. Having walked up many flights of stairs, no sweet concord comes from her lips. If there is an S-line in the picture, it is arguably drawn in the thread with which the poet's wife mends his ripped coat. One reader sees her sitting with all the silent and deafening poverty on display: the cracked plaster, the shattered glass, the uneven floor, the empty cupboard, bucket, and saucepan, the flameless logs, the hungry dog, and the baby who, with covered ears, cries out for all the great misery. But this reading little gels with the anonymous letter (though many suspect Hogarth's pen) sent to the editor of the *Grub-Street Journall*, which so coldly describes a penniless bard, not yet a man of profession, complaining of a disinheritance that has left him in dire need. *A bauling milk-woman at the foot of the stairs* usually raves *in Billingsgate*. Sitting on a *broken chair*, the wife *botches* the bard's *breeches*. A cat sits on the *thread-bare coat*. A bard sitting at his desk and *scratching his head* endeavors to *draw a few fustian verses from hard-bound brains*.

At the time of issue, George Steevens identified the poet described in the letter as Lewis Theobald, whom, in the same *Grub-Street* journal, Pope condemned as a bad plagiarizer or double falsifier of Shakespeare and Spenser. Regarding every line from Theobald's *The Cave of Poverty*, Pope had outmatched it. Rewriting *The Iliad* as *The Dunciad*, Pope had exposed the error in the entire Theobaldian *mischief of misery*, borrowing from Shakespeare's *comedy of errors* and from Ben Jonson's *comedy of humors*, where living by the prowl, and belly too, *wit* became the *true witness of the pen*. If there was poverty in the poet's belly, it was meant to feed a true invention as opposed to a digested line.

Recalling his youth, Hogarth offered anecdotes to show how a healthy rivalry among persons of professions could turn black-to-white to a useless envy of which the result would be a bad theft of another's property. He read in Gay's *Beggar's Opera* how *all professions berogue one another*, where *beroguing* fittingly caught out those who imitated to win contra those who

imitated to a good end. Some painted and some flattered the taste of the town's painters. Devoted in youth to portrait painting, he made no money. Rethinking his skill, he claimed modern portrait painting a common commerce on Today Street, an outdated manufacture, to which he would respond with a social portraiture of less cost in every sense to commoners. And the result? *Penny-prints* described as *composed pictures on canvas* or *serialized* engravings on *modern moral subjects*. Acknowledging prototypes from France, Italy, and the Low Countries, his low art would come to rank in Britain as of the highest class. One high class of foreign taste would be displaced by the taste of his own homespun British art.

Knowing *The Beggar's Opera*, Hogarth knew the risks of satirizing the establishment, of causing offense to well-bricked houses of art and entertainment: *Cautious and sage, Lest the Courtiers offended should be: If you mention Vice or Bribe, 'Tis so pat to all the Tribe; Each cries – That was levell'd at me.* Gay leveled these cries of London knowing that his Black Moll was sitting at her accounting table dispensing the terms of social and poetic justice. If the drama offered no harmonious settlement of marriage, it would leave criminals in danger of being either hung or transported. Standing between two lovers (art and success), whom or what did one choose? So would Hogarth's distressed poet make the Herculean choice easy for himself: to be or not to be a good plagiarist? This was the question on the table for every beggar playing a part in the opera and masquerades of the town.

Hogarth's image of the poet was accompanied by the usual pithy line and verse. One thought *was* to use lines from Samuel Johnson's 1738 poem *London*, written, from hunger, in sly homage to Juvenal's *Third Satire* about a city where, from *white to black*, foreigners *bankrupt* and *pollute*. The lines chosen read: *Since Worth, he cries, in these degen'rate Days, Wants ev'n the cheap Reward of empty Praise; In those curst Walls, devote to Vice and Gain, Since unrewarded Science toils in vain.* But these lines were erased in favor of lines drawn from Pope: *Studios he sate, with all his books around, Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound: Plunged for his sense, but found no bottom there; Then wrote and flounder'd on, in mere despair.*

### Mood and Mind Changes

Prefacing *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding declared Hogarth *ingenious: It hath been thought a vast Commendation of a Painter, to say his Figures seem to breathe; but surely, it is a much greater and nobler Applause, that they appear to think.* Combining *burlesque* and *caricatura*, Hogarth purged *spleen, melancholy,*

*and ill affections*. No bad mood was left monstrous or ridiculous if it gave way to a thought of something different and better. Fielding compared picturing with writing to proclaim genius the wit of incongruity, where contraries exposed the falsity and the truth of each side. Where, then, did the wit lie? Alone in the micrology of telling visual details. From something subtly or satirically seen could come something newly heard and newly thought.

Translating Hogarth's *Analysis* into German in 1753, Christlob Mylius repeated the already high estimation of Hogarth as showing everything as though speaking and in action. The action was crucial. Hogarth claimed himself to put every character on trial in a realism of caricature that, against all flat copying, enlivened the body and face. The physiognomic movement was theatrical and scenic in the sense of spreading the thought through the entire landscape so as not to exhaust the mood in a lone portrait of an individual.

In his 1790s *ausführliche Erklärung* (*descriptive explanation*) of Hogarth's art, Lichtenberg rejected the idea of merely chronicling the pictures. To do a picture justice was to engage ekphrasis – *Bildbeschreibung* – to bring the picture to life and mood (*Laune*). *What the artist has drawn or shown (gezeichnet hat) must now also be said (auch so gesagt werden)*.

Charles Lamb's 1811 essay published in *The Reflector* brought the early readings of Hogarth's art to exemplary expression. Hogarth's *genius* was Dryden's display of thoughtfulness in *even the oddest or lowest of faces*. The thoughtfulness was a turn of the ugliness of face to a beauty or grace, achieved by Lamb's *essaying* on Hogarth's art from *memory*. By this, Lamb meant what Fielding meant: the taking of a readerly distance from the crowded visual evidence to free up the imagination's movement of recollection and anticipation. Meeting the images *half way* liberated the free play of the mind necessary to grasp the wit, meaning, or sense, part to whole, in accord with Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* as a reworking of Homer's ekphrasis of Achilles's shield: *For much imaginary work was there, conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind . . . A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head, stood for the whole to be imagined*. Lamb declared the imagination the best weapon against an age *raging* after *classification and analysis*.

For his own ironically titled *Analysis*, Hogarth aimed to rescue *beauty* from scholars who footed the bill with predigested principles. What most do is show *everything distinct and full* because *they require an object to be made out to themselves before they can comprehend it*. Geniuses, contrarily, leave something wanting – not from a failure to finish but from respect for other minds to engage the artwork with a liberty of mind and imagination.

When Lamb then declared that every detail *tells*, the telling was not meant to reach a point of exhaustion or complete explanation. He used the *vulgar* word 'tells' to destabilize Hogarth's vulgar display of common things. What analysts condemned as *merely* vulgar, he aimed to rescue by appeal to Hogarth's *genius* for detecting what escapes *the careless or fastidious observer*: the *gradations of sense and virtue* that stop one feeling merely disgusted *at common life*. The gradation was not aimed at reaching a high place where *ideal forms of beauty* only increased contempt for what is *low*. The *ideal* was rather to remain *within* what was *real* to show in the form all the subtlety of line and contour.

Lamb recalled youthful impressions of having seen the *capital prints* of the Harlot's and Rake's progresses hanging on the walls of a great hall in an empty old house. Although the stately atmosphere had encouraged him to experience the prints as noble, he had come to see the nobility as immanent in the pictures wherever hung. To estimate Hogarth's art highly was to contradict those who equated the comic merely with a low intent, as though Hogarth intended only to raise a laugh. Risibility was not the *ruling tendency*, especially if it revolved into an equally crass seriousness. The essential turn was to find in the dirt and filth the sprinkled sense of a better nature, a holy water chasing away the contagion of the bad. Everything depended on *the habit of mind* and on changing the habit. Lamb recalled Juvenal and Shakespeare as exemplifying the change *upon paper* with a strength and masculinity then emulated by Hogarth in engraving *upon copper*. He remembered with pleasure hearing the reply of a certain gentleman on *being asked which book he esteemed most in this library*. Shakespeare, the gentleman replied – And next – Hogarth. Lamb now concluded: *His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meanings of words. Other pictures we look at – his prints we read*. The reference to *other pictures* was telling: for Lamb was reading Hogarth series-prints as others had not yet learned to read Hogarth's paintings or the paintings of others.

Of all the prints, Lamb selected *The Enraged Musician* as *exemplary*. No face was boring or merely riddled through with meanness or vice. Each countenance had a poetry and mood of *intense thinking, even*, he noted, the *Jew flute-player* and the *knife grinder*. Of what possible interest to viewers would it be for a painter to depict only an ugly and outcast figure? Wouldn't such depiction issue only a *vacancy*? He answered that the perfect crowdedness *unvulgarized* every subject in the scene, excepting, as I am adding, the lone musician who stands unchanged far from the madding crowd. Like the distressed poet or Dryden's king, the man,

secluded from all others, had become a man of too much profession and too little confession.

Consistent with his reading of the scene-changes and sea-changes of social taste and prejudice, Lamb refused the ideal standpoint, preferring to admit to his always *imperfect sympathies*. In a short essay on the *imperfection of intellect*, he confessed with *disarming candor* to not being able *to like all people alike*:

I confess that I do feel the differences of mankind, national or individual, to an unhealthy excess. I can look with no indifferent eye upon things or persons. Whatever is, is to me a matter of taste or distaste; or when once it becomes indifferent, it begins to be disrelishing. I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices – made up of likings and dislikings – the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies. In a certain sense, I hope it may be said of me that I am a lover of my species. I can feel for all indifferently, but I cannot feel towards all equally. The more purely English word that expresses sympathy will better explain my meaning. I can be a friend to a worthy man, who upon another account cannot be my mate or *fellow*.

The more Lamb saw the *unvulgarizing* of the countenance of a *Jew* or *Negro*, the more he expressed his fear of a mobile society of acculturation and assimilation that denied *natural* differences among peoples. He described the Jews who, amid all the *Christianizing proselytism*, failed to *conquer the Shibboleth* and celebrated each year those who *passed through the Red Sea*. He saw them as a *piece of stubborn antiquity*. Lamb's prime target, however, was the reader, the one who equalized truth to a leveled sameness through an abstraction of equality. Lamb threw the question on the table so central to his age and to all ages thereafter: whether *formalists* of equality who, as a *Religio Medici* mounting all claims *upon the airy stilts of abstraction*, could change the sentiments or habits so deeply embodied in us all. What formalism abstracts in philosophy, so as to float far above the streets, art brings down to effect changes of perspective and mood. What, he asked, stopped the formalists becoming proselytizers of equality; the unconverted theorists of a liberalism that, in abstraction, left all prejudices in place? The question as so formulated belonged to an age claiming liberty, equality, and universal toleration, an age attempting to justify a form of judgment untethered from the pre-judgment of raw prejudice.

In another brief essay, 'Blakesmoor,' Lamb proclaimed Ovid's verbal depictions less vivid than a tapestry visualizing Apollo's culinary coolness when divesting Marsyas of his skin. Did he really prefer images to Ovid's words? Or was he bringing attention again to Ovid as the true master of metamorphosis? In 'A Chapter on Ears,' he raged against the insufferable

modern music that made him want to cover his ears. Feeling like Odysseus before the sirens, he claimed *no ear for music*: no talent and little liking. His claim to be unlearned was strategic and borrowed: a defense of the unlearned ear to satirize the falsely learned ear! As Joseph Addison had written a century earlier: *Musick is not design'd to please only Chromatick Ears, but all that are capable of distinguishing harsh from disagreeable Notes. A Man of an ordinary Ear is a Judge whether a Passion is express'd in proper Sounds, and whether the Melody of those Sounds be more or less pleasing.*

Lamb claimed to be most insulted by the new purely instrumental music that expected him to listen as though a viewer in front of an *empty frame*: Why should he have to *make pictures* from scratch or invent *extempore tragedies to answer to the vague gestures of an inexplicable rambling mime*? Willing to go halfway, he refused to go all the way. In *short supply* (in every sense), he said, most house music today is empty and pompous in its monotonous repetition of gestures. Looking at the enraged musician, Lamb stood not with the high houses of music: They should, with his exaggerated thought, be silenced. Only by moving through the *purgatory of common-life sounds on the streets* did he reach his *conclusion* and, as he added, his *paradise*.

We know that wit is no excuse for the proliferation of prejudice, but what if wit serves a satire that, by confessing to the prejudice, exposes it in those who refuse to admit to it? May we read Hogarth's pictures as offering a satire on confession quite as much as on profession? To confess? To profess? Was this not the *to be or not to be* question in Hogarth's age, the question targeted at those least inclined to own up to the property of their home and mind?

### Falling Fortunes

So what of the distressed poet and enraged musician: Might their consciences be caught by the painter in a silent play-within-a-play? When the enraged musician was described by an early critic as *a master of heavenly harmony*, it was added that *to the evils of poverty he is now a stranger*. But if *now* a stranger, presumably he wasn't once. This is a most telling detail. The display before his eyes of everything foreign is made into a one-to-one confrontation with his former self. Opening the shutters to stare out in horror, he sees a hell of poverty, the wind player without a curing face or hand. His habit of mind has so fixed him that he cannot face the proverbial truth staring back at him: that fortune, like the stock-market, comes with no guarantee of lasting, and that it ill behoves a person of professions to

sit too securely on his Apollonian laurels. The fear of this enraged musician falling is matched by the distress of the rising poet. Placed into a pattern of youth and age, the painter redistributes the economy of wit with a poetic justice to suggest a poverty in *having* the wrong thing and a wealth in the having of *nothing*.

On November 24, 1740, London's *Daily Post* announced the publication of the *distressed* poet and the *provoked* musician, and that a *Third on Painting* would soon *complete the set*, but since its *subject may turn upon an affair depending between the right honorable, the Lord Mayor and the author, it may be retarded for some time*. No one thereafter specified the affair, although everyone assumed that it concerned something political, religious, or economic. Perhaps the promise was false: a subtle joke. The announcement was recorded for posterity by *A Microloger* in the 1783 review of John Nichols's 1782 'Original Anecdotes of Hogarth and Illustrations of His Plates,' published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The *Microloger*, in truth George Steevens, wrote that Humphry Parsons was at that time *Lord Mayor; but the business alluded to, not being in the city records, must remain obscure until someone who knows more about it than I do shall explain it*.

The 1740 announcement is suggestive enough for us to consider that the image was started but not finished; finished but lost; not started at all; or finished in a way contrary to expectation. Most who speculate on the missing third painting surmise that Hogarth would have drawn the mood from Johnson's poem *London: Where once the harass'd Briton found Repose, And safe in Poverty defy'd his Foes*. But which mood – a painter *harassed*, *defiant*, or in *repose*? My own suggestion is that the painter would have stood back to reflect on all the moods. Consider that having finished his *Enraged Musician* and *Distrest Poet*, Hogarth felt the full force of his satire of professions. Exhausted, he was not inclined to subject the painter to the same – knowing anyway that any image from his hand would be read as a self-portrait. What then to do: paint a happy painter? Or do nothing, knowing that, with every issue from his hand, he had already given away in telling details little pieces of his self? With no painting of the painter, did Hogarth not prove himself victorious in every battle for which he had drawn the battle lines over the landscape of social satire? Was not every one of his pictures an implicit portrait of a painter back-to-face with viewers and critics? Were there a picture to title, I would suggest *The Embattled Painter* for the painter who wryly smiles knowing that he cannot lose.

In 1745, Hogarth painted himself. Was this the unacknowledged third picture? He looks well fed and clad in a red coat, with ample tools for the



making of his art ready to hand. Neatly stacked books by Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift are visible, in front of which sits an adoring pug-dog seemingly always ready to listen to his master's voice. However, with the S-lined palette, this picture twisted a shaggy tail. For why paint himself as an Old Master painter in an Old Master painting and not as a modern engraver or printmaker? Was he aspiring to something he claimed to be against? Or was he mocking connoisseurs who expected self-portraits to look only like this? An X-ray reveals that Hogarth clothed himself first more formally and as out of date before opting for a more ambiguous dress. Many then note the final mockery in the micrology: the slight smile in the face; the painter sculptured as a dead bust on a table of still-life objects; the oversized dog. The micrology is all: Every detail is telling in every nook and cranny of this subtly reinvented picture plane.

But his later self-portrait in print suggests even more. It shows Hogarth sitting before this easel, drafting the antique muse of comedy. Begun in 1758 and reworked up to his death in 1764, it at first showed something obvious: a dog pissing on Old Master paintings. Hogarth deleted the dog, better to display his capability of industry without visual interruption. Leaning on the easel are books possibly about comedy, but there is no other furniture. Hogarth knew how to read these books and which books to read, as his distressed poet apparently did not. Even more, he uncrowded this late picture maybe to show that he alone, with nothing by way of everyday things, could (re)produce everything. The absence of furniture is mirrored in the outline of the painting, the sense that its colors, not yet there, are not needed, either because the painter has his ideal in mind or, better, because this painter knows how to give his life to etching even in black and white. In the painted version, the books are omitted altogether.

If, nevertheless, there is any residue of anxiety, it may be due to the memory of his being caricatured in youth by the academy of portrait painters who were painting successfully in the French, Italian, or Dutch style. Already around 1737, a cartoon attributed to Moses Vanderbank showed a distressed poet looking very like Hogarth sitting at his desk with hand on distressed brow as the bailiffs demand payment: *A Noted Bard Writing a Poem in Blank Verse to lay before Sr. R – on the great Necessity at this time for an Act of INSOLVENCY*. If then, with *The Distrest Poet*, Hogarth produced an oblique self-portrait of himself in youth, might we read *The Enraged Musician* as expressing his fear of becoming in age a portraitist *by the book*, quite as conventional as the elders self-satisfied to mock him in his youth?

Hogarth rendered the need for a third picture redundant. Everything he put into his enraged musician and distressed poet showed his hand at social satire. Everything foreign was brought home to spread the moods across the entire social situation of painting as a profession. The absent painting is present as unseen in every one of his pictures, a self-portraiture for a self that is carried by all the faces. Reinventing the picture plane, he turned the laughter to tears by showing musicians and poets doing nothing, as relying too much on the promise of divine inspiration, leaving as a result everyone else to make the world. To paint a painter not doing anything was more than a contradiction in terms: It was the final condemnation. Hogarth's first self-portrait showed a past master with a dormant palette; his final self-portrait showed the touch of his hand in the living brush. Looking at what is on display in Hogarth's satire only for its face value is to stop the ears from listening to what the pictures say. What is missing was there all along.

### Note

Bibliographic references, absorbed below in the general bibliography, may be followed up in the source for the present essay: Lydia Goehr's *Red Sea – Red Square – Red Thread: A Philosophical Detective Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Permission was kindly granted to reuse the material. The original was written, as here, without footnotes.

*Collecting Ballads, Historicizing Sounds  
Appropriating Scottish National Music in the  
Eighteenth Century*

*Maria Semi*

Sound, as a physical phenomenon, is measurable and quantifiable, and exists independent of culture in the form of vibrations. The human sensation of sound, however, is an entirely different matter. Once a vibrating sound wave is perceived by humans, it can become music or noise or go unheard altogether – an experiential phenomenon that depends on the culture, habitat, and environmental conditions which inform how one hears the physical world. As these conditions change over time, so too does the experience of interpreting sound. But sound leaves no trace, so in order to historicize it, we must rely on what people wrote about what they heard and what drew their interest and attention over time.

The eighteenth century ushered in profound changes to how people listened and what they listened to. The quest for universal values brought regional sonic diversity to the forefront of inquiries into issues of human diversity and national characteristics. Sound became one of many boundaries drawn between who was and who was not included in new definitions of national identity, and if we believe – with Homi Bhabha – that ‘the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing’, we can say that sounds conceived of as boundaries brought new forms of cultural presence.<sup>1</sup> Phenomena such as musical exoticism, the collecting of national airs, and aural tourism emerged from a cultural context that oscillated between universalism and particularism.<sup>2</sup> Collecting national airs, a central topic of this chapter, brought local aural phenomena into the global world through print and/or performance. For example, in the eighteenth century Scottish songs made their way to the Continent through print, songs from India made their way to Britain, first through private correspondence and subsequently through printing; a few specimens of national songs from around the world were included in the tables in Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire de musique* and Jean-Benjamin de Laborde’s 1780 *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne* dedicated its entire fourth book to ‘Chansons’, with special sections ranging from Gaelic songs to

Chinese ones.<sup>3</sup> Catherine Mayes states that ‘it was precisely during the decades around 1800 that the recognition and celebration of music as nation-defining flourished alongside detailed discussions of the essential characteristics of various national musics in contemporary writings. Yet the emerging importance of music to national identity at this time appears to be quite at odds with generic representations.’<sup>4</sup> Her point, discussed also by Bellman and Locke in their studies on musical exoticism, is that representations of the Other’s music (in Mayes’s article the ‘Other’ is Eastern Europe) are not accurate in their choice of the musical material and language. These representations hint at something that audiences could experience as ‘exotic’, but they always ‘tame’ the music of the others, making it ‘harmless’ to Western European ears.<sup>5</sup> However, one might wonder whether that does not hold true of any form of broad representation of the Other, especially when it needs to sell. The case of the publication of tunes in Scottish song collections, discussed in this chapter, reveals how this tampering with musical traditions was a practice common even within national borders.

In the words of Vicesimus Knox, the ballad in the eighteenth century was ‘rescued from the hands of the vulgar, to obtain a place in the collection of the man of taste. Verses which a few years past were thought worthy the attention of children only, are now admired for that artless simplicity which once obtained the name of coarsness and vulgarity.’<sup>6</sup> What did this process of ‘rescuing’ imply and how did it transform the oral ballad tradition? This chapter examines how local historical soundscapes became a focal point in the collection of national airs as Britain invented national traditions and defined national culture in the century after the Act of Union of 1707.<sup>7</sup> In particular, collectors found in local Scottish ballads certain ‘national properties’ of the unified kingdom. As Matthew Gelbart demonstrates, Scotland ‘lay at the heart of the first discussions in English of “national music”’,<sup>8</sup> and it is to Scotland that we will turn most of our attention.

This chapter begins by surveying key discussions surrounding the invention of Britishness, such as Hume’s reflections on ‘national characters’ and the Scottish Enlightenment practice of conjectural history. These discourses provide a foundation for understanding the Scottish ballad revival and the birth of the concept of oral culture that are discussed in the second part of this chapter. I argue that many of the phenomena which have been treated separately in academic writing share common roots, and that tracing those roots reveals how the meaning of aural practices and experiences such as listening to ballads changed over time. As part of this

process, once obscure records of local soundscapes found a new and powerful resonance in a nation inventing itself. The second part of the chapter will also address the problem of musical scores published in several ballad collections in light of questions pertaining to authenticity and tradition.

### History, Judgement, and Taste

The study of the sense of hearing was part of a larger change in eighteenth-century *episteme*. At the end of the seventeenth century the foundations for a new way of understanding the relationship between the senses, the physical world, and human perception emerged. The discussions unleashed by the Molyneux problem (would a person born blind and accustomed to recognize objects like a sphere or a cube by touch recognize them only by sight if surgery gave this person the ability to see?) led many philosophers to investigate the way in which sensations and ideas are generated. The interplay between objects as they existed in the physical world and the sensory experiences that informed human perceptions of them also became a focal point of philosophical inquiry, as did the relationship between sound and hearing, which was investigated in philosophical treatises on aesthetics, the arts, music, and medicine. A typical *crux* in these discussions arose when the difference among *tastes* was mentioned. If humankind was supposed to share the same mental faculties and body senses, and hence the same universal features, how could the diversity of regional and national tastes be explained?<sup>9</sup>

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the notion of *tabula rasa*, discussed by John Locke in the second book of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), informed British answers to this question: individuals were endowed with the same mental faculties, and the mind, prior to experience, was comparable to a blank sheet, devoid of content. The diversity of human tastes and preferences therefore emerged from habits, experience, and associations. Just as climate acted upon the passions of nations, so too did the environment shape the tastes and desires of individuals. Tensions soon emerged between such explanations for the origins of individual taste and the need to define standards of national tastes.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of his *Essay of the Standard of Taste* (1760), Hume admits that: 'Notwithstanding all our endeavours to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men, there still remain two sources of variation. . . . The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age

and country.’<sup>11</sup> The manners of the country, and especially its form of government, are key for Hume’s argument that the development of culture and the arts requires specific political conditions. Only once a nation has formed a government of laws could the arts and sciences develop. In his essay *The Sceptic* (1742), Hume goes back to the problem of the multiplicity of tastes:

nature is more uniform in the sentiments of the mind than in most feelings of the body, and produces a nearer resemblance in the inward than in the outward part of human kind. There is something approaching to principles in mental taste; and critics can reason and dispute much more plausibly than cooks or perfumers. We may observe, however, that this uniformity among human kind, hinders not, but that there is a considerable diversity in the sentiments of beauty and worth, and that education, custom, prejudice, caprice, and humour frequently vary our taste of this kind. You will never convince a man, who is not accustomed to ITALIAN music, and has not an ear to follow its intricacies, that a SCOTCH tune is not preferable.<sup>12</sup>

Hume suggests that if one’s ear has not been educated to the sophistication of Italian music, it will sound too intricate and therefore will not be a source of pleasure. His argument is emblematic of the transition from ideas of the ‘outer objectivity’ of beauty that held sway before the eighteenth century to the acknowledgement of inner human subjectivity that endows each person with the capacity for judgement and discernment based on their particular sensory experiences and environmental conditioning.

What I argue here is that by the eighteenth century not only had sensation become, as commonly acknowledged, a crucial element in matters of taste, but taste itself had acquired a prominent historical and cultural dimension.<sup>13</sup> Taste came to be understood as a process shaped by the power of national customs. This mode of understanding culture depended on the new-found prominence of historical studies, a prominence which made Hume state, ‘I believe this is the historical Age, and this the historical Nation.’<sup>14</sup> Authors such as Robertson, Ferguson, Hume, Smith, Kames, and Millar all contributed to the development of historical narratives where the analysis of social and economic factors and of the influence these had on political institutions and laws became crucial to the understanding of developing processes, lending their histories a peculiar and innovative flavour. These new historical discourses were informed by ideas about the development of civilization as well as by an extensive acquaintance with travel literature. Implicit in Hume’s remarks is the idea that the refinement of musical taste brought by civilization brings about

the transition from simple (and therefore more 'natural') tunes to complex (by which is usually meant Italian and especially polyphonic) music. These became common assumptions throughout the literate classes of Europe. Linked to this idea was the assumption that the diversification of tastes and cultures occurred more particularly in later historical stages, whereas the 'state of nature' must have been the same for the whole of mankind.<sup>15</sup> In this context, Hume's theories, as developed in his essay *Of National Characters*, were deeply influential, as was the British reception of Rousseau's writings. These ideas contributed to the birth of the concept of 'national musics', which flourished in the British (and especially Scottish) context and was canvassed extensively by German writers. Silvia Sebastiani characterizes the role of history in shaping Scottish Enlightenment ideas about human society as follows:

In ordering human societies on a continuum from savagery to civilization, diversity – of tasks and occupations, as well as characters – became a specific product of history . . . Nation gradually became a historical and cultural category, reserved to describe the political and social divisions of Europe: it came to be associated with a heritage of social customs and beliefs, linked to a political unit, which shapes the cultural variety of more advanced peoples. It is in the eighteenth century, then, that nations acquired the sense of linguistic and cultural communities, of 'imagined communities', as Benedict Anderson labels them.<sup>16</sup>

This view of history as a succession of stages soon gained its own name: conjectural history. Dugald Stewart described it as a history arising out of comparisons between 'our intellectual acquirements, our opinions, manners, institutions, [and] those which prevail among rude tribes'.<sup>17</sup> This new approach to history was inaugurated by Adam Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, which he delivered at Glasgow University in 1763.<sup>18</sup> It had an immediate impact on discussions of music history, producing a narrative of musical progress from simpler forms of monophonic music to the development of counterpoint and polyphony, where each of these musical stages was linked to a specific place in a civilizational hierarchy. Conjectural history destabilized classic understandings of ancient music, making it appear as the product of barbarous times: the music historian Charles Burney openly stated that had someone told him the extant pieces of ancient Greek music were actually the products of Cherokees or Hottentots he would have had no trouble believing it.<sup>19</sup> The ancient Greeks became a primitive Other, comparable to the newly discovered tribes of the South Seas.<sup>20</sup>

It was not just the ancient history of music that was reordered by this new approach to history. Contemporary Scottish Highland culture was



recast as a primitive Other in these new models of history. While ancient Greece could only be the subject of conjecture, music of the Highlands could be observed and studied as a window onto a primitive past, untouched by modernity. These variously labelled Others were supposed to be testimonies of the 'infancy of mankind', being located in an initial stage of civilization and, therefore, being nearer to the 'real nature' of humankind. This primitive relation to nature would find great cultural significance in light of the spread of Rousseau's ideas about civilization and the sublimity of ancient languages throughout Europe. Combined with the emergence of travel literature, British elites took great interest in the national past, and musical primitivism became a fashionable trend. While the popularizers of the latter 'sought out and privileged those societies in which they could perceive the qualities of natural men', it is also true that 'the motivation for such an engagement, and the sort of locations in which natural man was to be found, differed . . . across Europe and through the course of the century'.<sup>21</sup>

A key question of these inquiries into the characteristics of humankind in the 'natural state' or in the infancy of civilization was: what kind of music does such a man enjoy? Hume claimed that an unrefined man would not appreciate the intricacies of Italian music and would prefer a Scotch tune. This idea reflected the British belief the folk music of the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands was closer to the primitive, natural state of man. Primitivists across Europe sought out sources of simpler and hence more natural music that could be contrasted with the overly refined customs of national elites and the educated classes of Europe. Rousseau fought his battle against French music, grounding his critique in the specific musical properties of national languages, which he argued acted powerfully on their 'potential for melody', and across the Channel it was the music of Italy that became symbolic of a more natural music, which could please even an uneducated audience.<sup>22</sup>

In Britain, unlike France, Italian music came to symbolize luxury and 'effeminate refinement', and hence could not be discussed in Rousseauian terms: in Fergusson's poem 'On the Death of Scottish Music' the author decries how Italian 'sounds' have supplanted Scottish 'saft-tongu'd melody'.<sup>23</sup> One notion of Rousseau which gained wide currency was the idea that *simple* melody stood at the root of what was natural, and therefore universal, in music. But the precise identification of such natural melodies varied from country to country. In the words of Gelbart, Rousseau's 'search for simplicity and for supposed natural qualities in music, tied to his theorizations about its history, exerted a mighty influence on a

generation of scholars who were seeking to trace the common roots of humanity and uncover the universals of human nature buried beneath the veneer of modern civilization.<sup>24</sup> Gelbart continues to note that the claims of musical universalism, previously (as in Rameau's theory) based on the idea that music reflected a broad natural order, turned into the idea that music was natural to men in that it stood at the origins of language.<sup>25</sup>

Among scholars, *simple* thus became a meaningful yet ambiguous term for understanding folk music. Hume dedicated some thoughts to the subject in his essay *Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing*, which opens with a quotation from Addison: 'Fine writing consists of sentiments, which are natural, without being obvious.' The natural and the simple, therefore, are not synonymous with poverty of expression or with obviousness. Hume observes that it is not the nature of the subject that makes writing fine but the way it is handled: 'if we copy low life, the strokes must be strong and remarkable, and must convey a lively image to the mind'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, of simplicity and refinement, Hume prefers the former.

This longing for simplicity and nature found many outlets in the eighteenth century, but in the case of the intellectual thread we are following, there are at least three interconnected themes: simplicity indicated a closer relation to nature; a closer relationship to nature indicated a closer relation to natural ways of expressing emotions; and emotions found voice through poetry or song.

In Britain, modern theories of language identified writing and speech as two entirely separate domains.<sup>27</sup> According to Hudson, scholars 'began to recognize more clearly the special powers of speech not possessed by written language, a development that led to a deeper appreciation of so-called "primitive" language in non-literate societies'.<sup>28</sup> A new school of thought developed around the ideas of Rousseau and Thomas Sheridan which claimed that 'the propagation of literacy and print culture had destroyed the expressive force of speech, rendering it toneless and cold'.<sup>29</sup> These reflections provided a fertile soil both for intellectual endeavours, such as the one undertaken by Macpherson, who – in the words of Mulholland – created an 'oral voice' for the poet's speech,<sup>30</sup> and for a re-evaluation of popular songs. It was Scotland that spearheaded this new interest in the oral aspects of culture, political agenda, and the philosophical thought fuelling it: 'From Thomas Gray's "The Bard" (1757) to Macpherson's Ossian poems to the proliferating editions of ballad collections like Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), eighteenth-century Britain saw a remarkable upswell of interest in ancient bards, ancient poetry, and a newly compelling vernacular antiquity.'<sup>31</sup>

What I want to stress here is that elements of the British soundscape that had existed for centuries, such as ballads and songs, suddenly came to the forefront of national debates as they became symbols of a *culturally framed* soundscape in Britain. Ballads and oral culture were not a popular subject of polite learning prior to the eighteenth century, and McDowell has recently shown that ‘even as antiquarians, proto-folklorists, poets, and others valorized certain kinds of oral tradition that they viewed as quaint and harmless, literate hostilities toward other kinds of oral tradition did not change’.<sup>32</sup> But as ballads acquired a new cultural meaning, in light of their supposed insights into the origins and the making of national character and language, collective popular interest incorporated them as an active element of the contemporary soundscape. And when I use the term ‘collective’ I am not referring to only the learned world. For while ballad collecting was practised by many armchair scholars, others did real fieldwork;<sup>33</sup> as McAuley has emphasized, ‘for every collector who published a collection, there were other individuals who provided songs, airs, background information, or an entrée into the communities whose repertoires were being collected. These individuals tend to go unmentioned, seldom appearing anywhere.’<sup>34</sup> And it is not unlikely that a small Scottish hamlet receiving the visit of, say, a Walter Scott who came to listen to an old mother singing raised the curiosity and concern of those who became the subjects of such scholarly fascination. Being visited by song collectors could alter one’s own perspective on one’s singing traditions and could force a new kind of awareness on the people of the Scottish Highlands as their familiar songs were incorporated into the ‘oral tradition’ of a nation.<sup>35</sup>

Theories of perception, conjectural history, primitivism, theories of language, and interest in national origins all coalesced around the songs and ballads of Scotland and became a powerful piece of a conscious and deliberate process of national characterization. What is of interest here to the historian looking for forgotten soundscapes in search of the relationship between sound and sense is that the shared and sustained attention focused on the ballad tradition (and the fear and foreboding of its extinction) modified the way ballads and songs were integrated into polite discourse, and in turn this also altered the production and consumption of these popular genres.

### **Scottish Songs: From Streets and Performance to Collection and History**

As I hope to have demonstrated, simplicity became a virtue among those dissenting from the supposed effeminizing influence of civilization and

luxury.<sup>36</sup> Poetry and music were closely connected to the ideas of simplicity and nature through the medium of ‘song’, as songs, together with language, seemed to be elements shared by all human communities. As the century progressed and the interest in the natural conditions of humanity grew, so too did discussions about national songs. The music historian Charles Burney offers a revealing example in his travelogue *The Present State of Music in Germany*, in which he narrates an encounter with Lord Marischal (George Keith, c. 1693–1778), an exiled Jacobite:

as to music, he said, that I was unfortunate in being addressed to him, for he was such a Goth, as neither to know any thing of it, nor to like any music, but that of his own country bagpipes. On this occasion, he was very pleasant upon himself: here ensued a discussion of Scots music, and Erse poetry; after which, his lordship said, ‘but lest you should think me too insensible to the power of sound, I must tell you, that I have made a collection of *national tunes* of almost all the countries on the globe, which I believe I can shew you’. After a search, made by himself, the book was found, and I was made to sing the whole collection through, without an instrument; during which time, he had an anecdote for every tune. When I had done, his lordship kindly wrote down a list of all such tunes as had pleased me most by their oddity and originality, of which he promised me copies, and then ordered a Scots piper, one of his domestics, to play to me some Spanish and Scots tunes, which were not in the collection; ‘but play them in the garden, says he, for these fine Italianised folks cannot bear our rude music near their delicate ears.’<sup>37</sup>

This encounter is telling. National songs are here the object of polite conversation, but Lord Marischal seems to proceed cautiously, in order to see if his interlocutor, being ‘Italianised’, considers the topic worthy. The two men discuss the effects of music upon untutored ears: episodes relating to a Tahitian visitor to the Paris Opéra, to a Greek lady experiencing French and Italian opera for the first time, Scottish tunes and the *ranz des vaches* follow each other. Some of the noblemen and diplomats encountered by Burney in his tour around Germany told him they had made their own collections of national tunes, and Burney himself often asked his occasional informants to acquaint him with specimens of national music.<sup>38</sup> All these topics were related to the idea of an Other nearer to nature, as well as to the new taste for the picturesque. As Ian Woodfield notes:

Majestic scenery and extraordinary natural phenomena such as the Giant’s causeway in County Antrim were beginning to attract widespread attention. Unfamiliar cultures (including some like the Irish that had hitherto been treated with scorn) were increasingly perceived as fruitful sources of exotic experience. Even barbarity, when viewed by the inquisitive traveller from a

safe distance, could produce a kind of vicarious thrill. The most important musical expression of this movement came with the rapid growth of interest in ‘national airs’.<sup>39</sup>

The interest in these song collections came not only from inquisitive travellers looking for exotic experiences, but also from people interested in defining the cultural origins of their own nation. Cultural identity came to be defined by sounds and music as much as it did by clothing and eating.<sup>40</sup> John Lettice, in *Letters on a Tour through Various Parts of Scotland* (1792), criticized the attitude of Englishmen touring Scotland, writing, ‘We are all Britons from the land’s end to the Orkneys . . . ; and God forbid that *names or sounds*, affectation, illiberality or prejudice should prevent the natives of Kirkwall and Penzance from regarding each other, as Britons and fellow citizens.’<sup>41</sup> Names and sounds influenced the creation of a shared national identity, and recognizing a diversity of sounds – for here Lettice is primarily referring to language and accents – across the nation was necessary in inventing a shared British identity.<sup>42</sup>

A very famous example of sounds witnessing cultural identity is represented by William Hogarth’s *The Enraged Musician* (1741), in which he depicts the soundscape of London’s streets (see [Figure 1.1](#)). As Sean Shesgreen has observed, in designing this print Hogarth wanted to set his figures in a well-denoted, realistic London scene.<sup>43</sup> So well did Hogarth capture the noise that Henry Fielding joked that this print ‘is enough to make a man deaf to look at’.<sup>44</sup> In a solid house made of bricks, protected by a fence, we find the representative (significantly a male) of the art-music tradition: a trained musician playing the violin and reading his sheet music. The open window exposes the violinist to the sounds coming from the world outside. Stuck to the wall of the musician’s house we find a hint to another element of London’s official music life: ballad operas, a more socially inclusive form of opera than the Italian one. Ballad operas seem to feature here as a form of music in-between. They don’t belong to the interior of the house inhabited by the musician, but they still stick to its wall and find themselves behind the fence. The other figures of the picture are not protected by fences or walls. Among the purveyors of vocal mayhem we find two towering female figures: a street monger and a ballad hawker, the latter singing the ballad ‘The Lady’s Fall’ with a baby in her arms.<sup>45</sup> Ballad singers were common in London’s streets. As Georg Lichtenberg noted in 1770, they ‘form[ed] circles at every corner’.<sup>46</sup> Paula McDowell has stressed the importance of oral public discourse to popular political culture in London. In particular she has highlighted how forms of ‘oral advertising’ were ‘for the illiterate majority in England . . .

the most regular source of news. While printed texts could be confiscated and censored, oral political culture was almost impossible to control.<sup>47</sup>

Ballad singing was a typical female activity, with participants ranging from the London street ballad hawkers to field labourers and middle-class and aristocratic ladies.<sup>48</sup> All those women sang in different places, for different occasions and using different repertoires, but the soundscapes they contributed to were increasingly associated with the cultural shape of a unified Britain. Travel literature of the time demonstrated the pervasiveness of song culture across the kingdom. The travelogues of Johnson and Boswell – *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785), respectively – devote considerable attention to encounters with ballad singers of Erse songs.<sup>49</sup> The attention given to these local soundscapes by such elite writers demonstrates the pervasiveness of debates about primitive music and the universal characteristics of language. This trend was so overwhelmingly popular that the ballad traditions of small, remote places that had gone largely unremarked upon throughout history now entered the pages of best-selling travelogues.

In the polite pages of the *Spectator*, ballads were defined as emblems of ‘Perfection of Simplicity of Thought’ and as ‘Paintings of Nature’.<sup>50</sup> They were ‘not just sung from memory in the convivial setting of cottage fireside, but were also sold in the mean streets as the cheap goods of destitute beggars’,<sup>51</sup> being a literary genre enjoyed, performed, and consumed by every social stratum. But if Addison at the beginning of the century still felt the need to justify a literary discussion of ‘Chavy Chase’ in the *Spectator* by making parallels with the *Aeneid* and classical poetry, subsequent writers discussed ballads without feeling the need to bother the Ancients’ authority: the fact that ballads were ‘the favorites of Nature’s Judges – The Common People’<sup>52</sup> was sufficient ground to publish new collections. Collections, Steve Newman has argued, offered ‘a way to take advantage of the ballad’s circulation as a cheap commodity while framing it so that it remains tied to a common nationality. Constituting the ballad this way, authors begin to stage moments in which an elite mind is called through an encounter with popular song to know itself and its place in the nation.’<sup>53</sup> Of course, this process did not leave the ballad genre unharmed: ‘elite minds’ selected and purged the material that was destined to represent (supposedly ancient) marks of Britishness and proceeded towards the ‘civilizing’ of ballads.<sup>54</sup>

Tunes have long been part of this history, and Matthew Gelbart identifies Allan Ramsay as ‘one of the first to understand the potential of literary and musical material, and especially material shared at least partly

by the lower classes, for rallying people around a common identity'.<sup>55</sup> Leith Davis maintains that whereas early publications of Scottish music focused on the creation of a 'homogeneous sense of British culture with London as the cosmopolitan centre to the rustic (and disembodied) Celtic peripheries', later collections had a different political agenda, giving Scotland a powerful cultural role in the newly unified nation.<sup>56</sup> Once the Jacobite rebellions were mere memory and British unity was no longer under internal threat, underlining the nativeness and distinctiveness of Scottish music via its song culture enabled the periphery of the nation to gain prominence in the larger, multi-focal world of Britain.

As collections multiplied, a process of converting ballads' speech into writing formed. As noted by Stewart:

the notion that writing endows the oral with materiality is another facet of the collector's interest in establishing the ephemerality of the oral, an interest that puts the oral in urgent need of rescue . . . The external history of the ballad is thus inextricably bound up with the emerging notion of the ballad as artefact and the crisis in authenticity that results from the severing of this artefact from its performance context.<sup>57</sup>

Authenticity became a crucial issue among ballad collectors. By the second half of the century, this concern with authenticity led to changes in the practice of collecting ballads. Gelbart stresses that the Ossian debate accelerated a shift in the meaning of the ballad as a form of national music from being a 'popular culture shared across classes' to being a 'relic from the past, something representing an ancient and untainted stage of society, a domain in which "authenticity" was central'.<sup>58</sup> Ballad or song collections were not always printed with the tunes, and several notable collections (such as Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany*,<sup>59</sup> Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs*, Pinkerton's *Scottish Tragic Ballads*, and Burns's *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, which contained five songs) contained only the name of the tune to which the lyrics ought to be sung. Davis maintains that this kind of approach, 'instead of positioning the author as producer and the reader as consumer', required a reader from whom production was also expected, and that hence these examples do 'not represent a separation of oral and print cultures or of the musical and the poetic' but rather a 'dynamic interaction as a challenge to conventional printed poetry'.<sup>60</sup> This change marked a transitional phase in the process of 'endowing the oral with materiality'.

The ballad as musical, and not only literary, form still deserves closer scrutiny, but Una McIlvenna has emphasized – especially in her studies on



execution ballads – how ‘balladry’s refashioning of well-known tunes had the potential to create an aural palimpsest wherein a new version of a ballad was given added significance by association with earlier versions set to the same tune’.<sup>61</sup> The act of printing ballads and associating them with well-known tunes, only hinted at by the tune title, supplies additional evidence of a stage in which the culture needed to re-enact these songs was shared across classes. In the case of these collections, the problem of musical authenticity was completely avoided, but in the case of collections published with the tunes, authenticity became a problem which was at odds with marketing strategies: being faithful to the ‘simplicity’ of old songs would have meant publishing only their melodic line, without adding any bass line. But educated people who wanted to revive these songs in the context of familiar and social gatherings, such as the ones represented in the painting *James Erskine, Lord Alva, and His Family* by David Allan (1780; Figure 2.1), needed scores which provided fully written-out accompaniments, especially for the pianoforte, violin, or cello.



Figure 2.1 David Allan, *James Erskine, Lord Alva, and His Family*, 1780. National Gallery of Scotland.

Davies has stressed how the power of notation enforced uniformity in the songs: ‘the songs were presented with musical accompaniment by non-traditional instruments . . . or, in many cases, lyrics were omitted completely and only the title was retained. The process of printing also changed the relationship between music, musician, and audience implicit in the original performance of Scottish songs.’<sup>62</sup> The publications concocted by Urbani and Corri, who – being Italians – were of course peripheral to national interests and more focused on selling their collection, are examples of these types. In addition, in his *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice*, George Thomson presented a musical accompaniment for violin, cello, and pianoforte that was anything but ‘authentic’, although in a preface to an 1805 edition of his songs he ‘acknowledges that such accompaniments are not universally appreciated’.<sup>63</sup> Ritson, in an antiquarian move, made the most radical choice by not adding any bass lines to the airs. Mentioning his debt to earlier collections and to his friend the composer William Shield for the music, he takes a position in the debate about authenticity, stating that:

The base part, which seems to be considered as indispensable [*sic*] in modern musical publications, would have been altogether improper in these volumes; the Scottish tunes are pure melody, which is not unfrequently injured by the bases, which have been set to them by strangers: the only kind of harmony known to the original composers consisting perhaps in the unisonant drone of the bagpipe.<sup>64</sup>

The issue of faithful song transcription and the harmonization of melodies that were not originally conceived according to the tonal system begins to appear in the eighteenth century. Rousseau’s ‘Musique’ in his *Dictionnaire de musique* doubted the seeming uniformity of several specimens of ‘national music’: ‘We will note in these pieces a uniformity in the modulation that will make some admire the soundness and universality of our rules, and will make others doubt the understanding and faithfulness of those who have passed down these airs to us.’<sup>65</sup> And Shield, publishing the version of the *ranz des vaches* transcribed by Viotti (whom he names as ‘one of the greatest Violin Players who ever crossed the Alps’), seems even more aware of the problems of musical transcription, also in relation to rhythm, by endorsing and transcribing only this part of Viotti’s extended comment:

I have written the musick [of the *ranz- des vaches*] without marking any rhythm or measure: there are cases in which the melody ought to be unconfined, in order that it may be completely melody and melody only. Measure would but derange its effect. These sounds are prolonged in the space through which they pass, and the time they take to fly from one

mountain to another cannot be determined. It is not rhythm and measured Cadence that will give truth to the execution of this piece; it requires feeling and sentiment.<sup>66</sup>

It seems clear that as these questions of authenticity and originality emerged in relation to musical transcription, and as examples of music from distant lands made their way to European shores, doubts about the supposed ‘naturalness’ of European musical theory and an awareness of the link between musical theories and practices and notational procedures began to surface.<sup>67</sup>

The interest in ‘national songs’, which brought about the collection of national airs, found its full intellectual legitimization in the writings of Herder. Dealing with the ‘armchair scholars’ who regard popular songs as mere trifles, he says:

if they could but *experience more directly with the senses*, they would acquire the potential to see with the eyes and understand with the heart. They would know that what touches the people is the most important . . . . When one removes these songs from the paper on which they appear in order to reflect on their context, their times, and the vital ways they touched real people, one gains just a bit of the sense of how they might still resonate . . . . More recently, the Scots . . . sought again to awaken their poetry through re-sounding . . . . The language, sound, and content of the old songs shape the way a people thinks, thereby leaving its mark on the nation.<sup>68</sup>

The interest in the origin of civilization, and in the origin of one’s own culture, along with the new fashion for direct or mediated travel experiences, helped to put the relationship between sounds and senses into historical perspective, making them a *national* phenomenon. This process involved a shift in the estimation of the cultural value of popular ballads, and their presence in the aural landscape of eighteenth-century Britain also underwent significant changes. What I wish to stress in this chapter is that the processes of rescuing – standardizing, censoring, regulating, forging – mentioned by Knox at the beginning of this chapter were due to a shift in cultural perspective. This change transformed the ballad from an element of the historical soundscape, previously ignored by the refined classes, into an emblem of national culture, a unifying feature of a united kingdom. Ballads and songs have always been there. Inquiring collectors have not.

## Notes

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- 1 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* [1994] (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.
- 2 A subject of studies that has been thoroughly inquired, especially by authors such as Ralph Locke (*Musical Exoticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016; 'Aida and Nine Readings of Empire', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 3 (2006): 45–72, and many other articles); Jonathan Bellman (*The Exotic in Western Music*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998; *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993); Bennet Zon (*Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007; *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s*, ed. with Martin Clayton, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); and Matthew Head (*Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music*, Milton Park, Abingdon: Ashgate, 2000; 'Musicology on Safari: Orientalism and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory', *Music Analysis* 22 (2003): 211–30).
- 3 On the topic of the 'Hindostannie air' see Ian Woodfield, *Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The composer William Hamilton Bird published in 1789 the collection *Oriental Miscellany* with his own arrangements of the Hindustani airs.
- 4 Catherine Mayes, 'Eastern European National Music as Concept and Commodity at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century', *Music & Letters* 95.1 (2014): 70.
- 5 Nicholas Cook speaks of practices that 'by the end of the nineteenth century, had congealed into a musical lexicon of alterity (modality, pentatonic/gapped scales, parallel fourths/fifths, augmented seconds, and so on) as perfectly adapted to add decorative colour without impacting on the thoroughly Western structure beneath': 'Encountering the Other, Redefining the Self: Hindostannie Airs, Haydn's Folksong Settings, and the "Common Practice" Style', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire*, ed. Zon and Clayton, 14.
- 6 Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2nd ed. (London, 1779), essay 47, quoted in Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early-Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 26.
- 7 Standard reference here is to Linda Colley's seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
- 8 Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of 'Folk Music' and 'Art Music'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.
- 9 Although we have to stress that very often 'mankind' actually referred to propertied, white men.
- 10 It is no coincidence that this kind of tension is felt also in the ethical domain, as the realms of aesthetics (ante litteram) and morals were strictly connected

- and shared many core questions, such as the one under discussion here: the problem of diversity. On moral diversity in the British tradition of thought see Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 11 David Hume, *Essay of the Standard of Taste*, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1987), 243.
  - 12 David Hume, *The Skeptic*, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 163.
  - 13 On this process see my 'Civilization in Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Subject for Taste', in *Beyond Autonomy in Eighteenth-Century British and German Aesthetics*, ed. Karl Axelsson, Camilla Flodin, and Mattias Pirholt (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), 94–111.
  - 14 Hume to William Strahan, August 1770. Quoted in David Allan, 'Identity and Innovation: Historiography in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography*, ed. Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 307.
  - 15 Carey observes too that encapsulating diversity in a historical dynamic was a characteristic approach of Scottish Enlightenment writers: 'The strategy that eventually gained favour among Scottish writers was to recast difference as a product of history, conditioned by varying economic and social situations.' *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson*, 188.
  - 16 Silvia Sebastiani, 'National Characters and Race: A Scottish Enlightenment Debate', in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 187–205, at 188–89. See also Silvia Sebastiani, 'Race and National Characters in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: The Polygenetic Discourses of Kames and Pinkerton', *Cromohs* 8 (2003), [www.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/article/view/15686/14577](http://www.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/article/view/15686/14577).
  - 17 Dugald Stewart, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith', prefixed to Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), xli–lxix.
  - 18 See Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London: Penguin, 2010), chapter 5.
  - 19 Charles Burney, *General History of Music* (London, 1776), vol. 1, 103: 'I know not whether justice has been done to these melodies; all I can say is, that no pains have been spared to place them in the clearest, and most favourable point of view: and yet, with all the advantages of modern notes and modern measure, if I had been told that they came from the Cherokees, or the Hottentots, I should not have been surprised at their excellence. There is music that all mankind, in civilized countries, would allow to be good; but these fragments are certainly not of that sort.'
  - 20 These topics are developed in my article 'Writing about Polyphony, Talking about Civilization: Charles Burney's Musical "Corns and Acorns"', *Music & Letters* 103.1 (2022): 60–87.
  - 21 Dafydd Moore, 'The Ossianic Revival, James Beattie and Primitivism', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown, Thomas Owen

- Clancy, Susan Manning, and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 90–104, at 91.
- 22 ‘C’est de la mélodie seulement qu’il faut tirer le caractère particulier d’une musique nationale, d’autant plus que ce caractère étant principalement donné par la langue, le chant proprement dit doit ressentir sa plus grande influence.’ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), 4.
- 23 ‘Now foreign sonnets bear the gree, / And crabbit queer variety / Of sounds fresh sprung frae Italy, / A bastard breed! / Unlike that saft-tongu’d melody / Which now lies dead.’ Robert Fergusson, ‘Elegy on the Death of Scots Music’, in *The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson: With the Life of the Author by David Irving* (Glasgow: Chapman and Lang, 1800), 106–8, lines 49–54. In *Music as a Science of Mankind in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) I explore some of the political, nationalistic and sometimes homophobic reasons behind the criticism of Italian music.
- 24 Matthew Gelbart, ‘“The Language of Nature”: Music as Historical Crucible for the Methodology of Folkloristics’, *Ethnomusicology* 53.3 (2009): 365.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 David Hume, *Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing*, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 191.
- 27 Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), esp. chapter 8 by Nicholas Hudson, ‘Constructing Oral Tradition: The Origins of the Concept in Enlightenment Intellectual Culture’, 240–55.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 242.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 246.
- 30 See James Mulholland, ‘James Macpherson’s Ossian Poems, Oral Traditions, and the Invention of Voice’, *Oral Tradition* 24.2 (2009): 393–414.
- 31 Maureen N. McLane and Laura M. Slatkin, ‘British Romantic Homer: Oral Tradition, “Primitive Poetry” and the Emergence of Comparative Poetics in Britain, 1760–1830’, *ELH* 78. 3 (2011): 690. See also Leith Davis and Maureen N. McLane, ‘Orality and Public Poetry’, in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning, and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 125–32; and Maureen N. McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 32 Paula McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 16.
- 33 Think of the McDonald brothers’ collection *Highland Vocal Airs*, or later of Alexander Campbell, who set out on a tour to his own home country, Scotland, in 1815 funded by the Highland Society of Scotland to document his native music. His mission was to ‘collect unknown tunes and give them without improvement or alienation . . . record any historical notes connected with the tune, . . . note the location, informant and instrument upon which a

- tune was heard; and record the words that went with it.' Karen McAuley, 'Our Ancient National Airs: Scottish Song Collecting from the Enlightenment to the Romantic Era' (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 23.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 35 A link between ballads and 'oral tradition' was explicitly made by John Pinkerton in his 'Dissertation on the Oral Tradition of Poetry', the preface to his own collection *Scottish Tragic Ballads* (London: J. Nichols, 1781).
- 36 On the luxury debate in the eighteenth century, see M. Berg and E. Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- 37 Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, vol. 2 (London: Becket, Robson and Robinson, 1773), 121–22.
- 38 One notable example is his encounter with Schubart, which ended with a performance of 'national music': '[Schubart] was the first real great harpsichord player that I had hitherto met with in Germany, as well as the first who seemed to think the object of my journey was, in some measure, a national concern. . . . In the evening, he had the attention to collect together, at his house, three or four boors, in order to let me hear them play and sing *national music*, concerning which, I had expressed great curiosity.' *Ibid.*, 105–8.
- 39 Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*, 151.
- 40 An early witness of the imminent cultural change in the value attributed the songs as nation-defining is reported by Ruth Perry: 'Lord Seafield, Scotland's last lord chancellor, used a telling figure of speech to define what was being lost in the union with England and the disbanding of the Scottish parliament [i.e. after the Act of Union]. It was, he said nostalgically with a touch of bitterness, the end of "an auld sang." Ballads and songs had begun to represent some intangible but essential Scottishness.' Ruth Perry. "'The Finest Ballads": Women's Oral Traditions in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32.2 (Spring 2008): 85.
- 41 Quoted in Katherine H. Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland, 1770–1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 15.
- 42 About the 'language debate' in Scotland, see Charles Jones and Wilson McLeod, 'Standards and Differences: Languages in Scotland, 1707–1918', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning, and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 21–32. I thank James Chandler for the reference to Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 43 Sean Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast: The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 102–13.
- 44 Henry Fielding, *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (printed for A. Millar, 1755), 45, quoted in Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast*, 102–3.



- 45 For a study of this figure and her song see Tim Fulford, 'Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers: Ballad Singers and Ballad Heroines in the Eighteenth Century', *The Eighteenth Century* 47. 2 (2006): 309–29.
- 46 *Lichtenberg's Visits to England*, ed. Margaret L. Mare and W. H. Quarrell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 65.
- 47 Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83. Similar remarks are expressed for the French context, although in a later period, by Laura Mason in her *Singing the Revolution*: 'during the final decade of the eighteenth century, songs overleapt boundaries between politics, entertainment, and the market, to become one of the most commonly used means of communication of the French Revolution. Singing was a fluid and highly improvisational means of expression that moved easily between oral and print cultures.' Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2. See also Una McLivenna, 'When the News Was Sung: Ballads as New Media in Early Modern Europe', *Media History* 22.3–4 (2016): 1–17.
- 48 About the activity of ballad hawkers see McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, esp. 58–62. On ballad singers see Oskar Cox Jensen, *The Ballad-Singer in Georgian and Victorian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- 49 Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1775); James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London: Charles Dilly, 1785). For a refreshing interpretation of Johnson's *Journal* see McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral*, chapter 8, 'Conjecturing Oral Societies'.
- 50 See Joseph Addison, *Spectator* 70 (21 May 1711).
- 51 Fulford, 'Fallen Ladies', 309.
- 52 So in the words of James Johnson, in the preface to the second volume of his *Scots Musical Museum* (Edinburgh: James Johnson, 1788), iii: 'Ignorance and Prejudice may perhaps affect to sneer at the simplicity of the poetry or music of some of these pieces; but their having been for ages the favorites of Nature's Judges – the Common People, was to the Editor a sufficient test of their merit.'
- 53 Steve Newman, *Ballad Collection, Lyric, and the Canon: The Call of the Popular from the Restoration to the New Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 3. One has also, however, to be aware of the fact that this encounter of the elite mind with popular song also produced a selection in the type of popular song being admitted as worth conserving; see e.g. P. McDowell, "'The Manufacture and Lingua-Facture of Ballad-Making:" Broadside Ballads in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse', *The Eighteenth Century* 47.2 (2006): 151–78.
- 54 On this topic see Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 87–130.

- 55 Matthew Gelbart, 'Allan Ramsay, the Idea of "Scottish Music" and the Beginnings of "National Music" in Europe', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 9.1 (2012): 83.
- 56 Leith Davis, 'At "Sang About": Scottish Song and the Challenge to British Culture', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188–203.
- 57 Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 104–5.
- 58 Gelbart, 'Allan Ramsay', 104.
- 59 To which eventually, three years later, Ramsay added a volume with the tunes, with simple basses by Alexander Stuart.
- 60 Davis, 'At "Sang About"', 196.
- 61 Una McLivenna, 'The Power of Music: The Significance of Contrafactum in Execution Ballads', *Past & Present* 229 (2015): 47–89, at 49.
- 62 Davis, 'At "Sang About"', 189.
- 63 George Thomson, *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice. To Each of Which Are Added Introductory & Concluding Symphonies & Accompaniments for the Violin & Piano Forte, by Pleyel, etc.* (Dublin: Hime, 1795). See Claire Nelson, 'Tea-Table Miscellanies: The Development of Scotland's Song Culture, 1720–1800', *Early Music* 28.4 (2000): 613.
- 64 Joseph Ritson, *Scottish Songs* (London: J. Johnson and J. Egerton, 1794), 17, vii.
- 65 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Duchesne, 1768), 317 ('On trouvera dans tous ces morceaux une conformité de Modulation avec notre Musique, qui pourra faire admirer aux uns la bonté et l'universalité de nos règles, et peut-être rendre suspecte à d'autres l'intelligence ou la fidélité de ceux qui nous ont transmis ces Airs').
- 66 William Shield, *An Introduction to Harmony* (London, 1800), 119. The original French source for Viotti's transcription is Jean-François-Ange d'Eymar, *Anecdotes sur Viotti* (Geneva, year VIII [1799–1800]), 46.
- 67 Consider Charles Burney's observation on Chinese music, made in a letter to Raper in 1777: 'It seems, from the specimens of Chinese music with which I am favoured from your French correspondent, that to reduce it to European Intervals and Measure is a very difficult task; for by its wildness in these particulars, I am convinced that it is very different – and I suppose both can only be expressed in our Characters, à peu près.' *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney 1751–1784*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 234. The famous case of the 'Hindostannie airs', studied in particular by Woodfield, also provides interesting material for thinking about transcription as form of cultural appropriation. Nicholas Cook makes some very interesting remarks on the topic of musical 'transcription' of the 'Hindostannie airs' in 'Encountering the Other', 13–37.
- 68 Johann Gottfried Herder, preface to *Alte Volkslieder*, in *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism*, trans. Philip Bohlman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 27 ff.

*Realising* The Enraged Musician

Oskar Cox Jensen

When the painter Paul Sandby nicknamed his friend Edward Rooker's son, and his own pupil, Michael 'Angelo', his jest was well founded.<sup>1</sup> Michael Angelo Rooker became a fine artist with a particular interest in architecture and spent much of his life painting larger-than-life commissions that adorned public interiors. In 1779, aged thirty-three, he joined George Colman the Elder's company at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, as its scene painter. Rooker thus played a major role in the 1789 production *Ut Pictura Poesis, or, The Enraged Musician*, the afterpiece at the centre of this chapter. In what follows, I will introduce this drama in greater detail, before focusing on four key episodes: a satire on national identity in the first scene; the 'interruption' of the titular musician by cannons; the scene change that first reveals Rooker's re-creation of William Hogarth's famous image *The Enraged Musician*, and then populates it with performers; and the raucous finale, which realises that image in composed and choreographed action rather than in the frozen tableaux more familiar from the nineteenth-century stage. Taken together these passages pose valuable questions about the relationship between sound and sense that still resonate in the sound box of academic discourse. Above all, their realisation of *The Enraged Musician* in actual sound, rather than sight, gives the lie to what many interpreters of that image have claimed on behalf of Hogarth: that the rude vitality of indigenous street music will triumph over the unmanly artifice of elite foreign culture. But before getting to grips with *Ut Pictura Poesis*, I would like to begin with a drawing that Rooker executed some four years earlier: a fascinating self-portrait of the artist at work in his scene-painter's loft at the Haymarket, reproduced as [Figure 3.1](#).

This image is characteristic of Rooker's attention to perspective, while its structure is material: beams and ladders, foregrounding the mechanics of his craft. Objects such as the dog and the two-tier stepladder appear almost as if superimposed. Most curiously, Rooker has coloured the entire image with the exception of himself and his immediate equipment,



Figure 3.1 Michael Angelo Rooker, *The Scene-Painter's Loft at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket*, c. 1785. Pen and ink, grey wash, and watercolour, 37.6 × 30.3 cm. British Museum, London, no. 1861,0518.1138. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

drawing attention to the artifice in play. All that is colour (allowing the dog), he – he the real, not the depicted artist – sees before him. That which is uncoloured, he sees in imagination only: artist, tools, and canvas do not in reality form part of the scene, but stand outside it, in

order to bring the image into being. In a drawing concerned with exactitudes of scale and proportion, the fiction of the artist at work is conspicuously unfinished, unreal.

To draw attention to the levels of representation and reality at play here may seem gauche – yet it is what Rooker himself is doing in this meditation on his own role in the theatre, and in this preoccupation he was typical of the later Georgian theatre-maker or theatregoer. Venues specialised in forms of spectacle, from the horse ring at Astley's Amphitheatre to the aquatic tank at Sadler's Wells, where real cavalymen re-enacted battles and children manned model ships, each striving for verisimilitude and claiming authenticity while drawing attention to their skill at conjuring and make-believe.<sup>2</sup> Advances in stage machinery drove an obsession with mechanical effects from thunder to explosions that were increasingly associated with the emerging genre of melodrama from the turn of the century – a form that precipitated new approaches to the real.<sup>3</sup> The theatre even produced its own paratexts that played upon the relationship between the real, its dramatic representation, and its afterlife in domestic performance, in the form of elaborate song sheets published by the firm of Laurie and Whittle. These sixpenny editions of the lyrics of the latest stage hits were headed by vivid illustrations (which could be had in colour for a shilling) that realised the action of the song. Thanks to the boundless possibilities of the page, relative to the practical and financial constraints of the stage, these illustrations – which might be passed around and pasted into albums and commonplace books, but primarily served as imaginative aids to amateur singers – could depict the song's subject in greater and more involved detail than the original staging. Thus a song's famous singer might be drawn amid a full-scale battle, participating in a donkey race, being carried off by a flying devil, or – in the memorable example of John Liston's comic parody 'The Beautiful Maid' – chasing a cat across a devastated kitchen in pursuit of a stolen flounder (see [Figure 3.2](#)). Note in this last instance that, while the central figure is clearly Liston, who had a distinctive physiognomy, the artist George Cruikshank is able to transcend the capacities of the stage by including a real cat and perilous fire – elements no theatre manager would countenance. The illustration lacks the original's dimensions of musical sound and live action, but it has gained an exact equivalence of reality between the singer and their surroundings, and for the domestic re-interpreter it might facilitate an imaginative, though still ludic, engagement beneath and beyond that available in the theatre. Though the example I have given is comic, the potential for sympathetic engagement with passion, patriotism, or horror is manifest.





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### THE BEAUTIFUL MAID.

*As Sung by Mr. LISTON, with unbounded Applause, 1811; being a Parody on Mr. BRAHAM'S Song of  
"The Beautiful Maid."*

My fishmonger, he swore, that his soles were most dear,  
I trembled to hear what he said,  
For salmon and shrimps, 'twas a bad time of year,  
So I pitch'd on a beautiful maid;  
I brought home my beautiful maid—  
Here, cook, dress this beautiful maid,  
Go boil it,—don't spoil it,  
But see it well done—  
I'll dine on my beautiful maid.

But an ugly black cat, I speak it with grief,  
My delicate (it bit way-laid;  
The cook turn'd her back, and the long whisker'd thief  
Ran away with my beautiful maid!  
She claw'd up my beautiful maid!  
She clop'd with my beautiful maid!  
Oh! pussy, you hussey,  
Oh! what have you done,  
You've eat up my beautiful maid.

Figure 3.2 George Cruikshank, 'The Beautiful Maid', 1811. Hand-coloured etching, 30.1 × 25.7 cm (sheet). British Museum, London, no. 1865,1111.2060. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Even in a theatrical culture deeply interested in its own relationship to reality, these song sheets are remarkable in their mediation between the real and the imagined, especially since they are themselves each the material and visual scripts, or blueprints, of a sung and embodied musical performance.<sup>4</sup> As both the residue and (so long as the tune is known) the prompt for a fugitive sonic theatrical act, illustrated lyric sheets epitomise

the interplay of sound and sense. In this chapter, I interrogate that interplay further by focusing not on the image of a sung performance, but on the sung performance of an image: the 1789 production of what was billed on publication as ‘*Ut Pictura Poesis, or, The Enraged Musician, a Musical Entertainment Founded on Hogarth, Performed at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, Written by George Colman Esqr. [and] Composed by Dr. Arnold.*’<sup>5</sup>

While Hogarth’s *The Enraged Musician* (1741), reproduced earlier in the volume as [Figure 1.1](#), is one of the best-known artworks of the eighteenth century, a touchstone of sound studies, and the subject of entire monographs, its later staging remains obscure.<sup>6</sup> Before examining *Ut Pictura Poesis* in detail I would like to draw attention to two aspects of its production. The first is its collegial nature. While *The Enraged Musician*, though popularised by engravers such as John June, is attributable solely to Hogarth, theatrical pieces are necessarily more collaborative, and rarely is this more demonstrable than in the present case. Although the writer, cast, composer, and orchestra all figure, it is Rooker – the highest-paid member of Colman’s company, receiving twice the salary of Samuel Arnold, the composer, and £5 a week more than his Drury Lane rival Philip James de Louthembourg – who provides the link to Hogarth.<sup>7</sup> Rooker’s father and mentor Edward had worked extensively with Hogarth as an early fellow supporter of the Foundling Hospital, and Michael Angelo himself shared illustrative responsibilities with Hogarth for a complete edition of the works of Henry Fielding.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, there is much in Rooker’s previous work that suggests his influence, as well as Colman’s and Arnold’s, in shaping the afterpiece. My point is to demonstrate that so collaborative an art form as the theatre, relying on the mixed media of text, music, design, and so on, is created as well as performed by multiple figures. In this mixed creative process the senses of hearing and sight in particular influence each other, so that writer, composer, and painter interact in the generation of meaning, rather than providing discrete parts of a composite whole – which is realised, of course, only in performance.

The second aspect is the mutually constituted discourse between Hogarth’s image and the through-composed performance: between, in other words, elements of sight and sound. In staging what was already notorious as ‘the noisiest picture in English art’ – an image that Fielding claimed was ‘enough to make a man deaf to look at’ – Colman’s company created more than light entertainment, and the ways in which the drama probes the relationship between sight and sound, music and noise,



representation and reality, remain intellectually provocative.<sup>9</sup> I am not the first to be drawn to these provocations. Martin Meisel includes a brief analysis in relation to the evolution of theatrical realisations.<sup>10</sup> Tom Lockwood considers it as an afterlife of the work of Ben Jonson, since its plot is an explicit nod to Jonson's *Epicæne*.<sup>11</sup> Timothy Erwin's treatment is the most extensive, in the realm of aesthetic and formal literary discourse.<sup>12</sup> These discussions have focused less on the play itself than on the text – or rather *a* text, the published pamphlet containing the libretto. A forty-page reduction of the score for voice and domestic piano was also published, however, and has even been digitised by the British Library since the time of writing, and I will make use of both texts in imagining what the play's fifteen stagings may have been like.<sup>13</sup>

### Ut Pictura Poesis

*Ut Pictura Poesis* was a through-composed musical afterpiece in one act, and the last piece ever performed under Colman the Elder's name. It opened on 18 May 1789, just weeks before Colman's declining mental health necessitated his retirement. The entertainment fared better, proving the most successful afterpiece of the season and enjoying eight consecutive performances from the opening night and fifteen in total, in the last four of which it was the main item on the bill.<sup>14</sup> The papers also deemed it a success, noting that it was 'much applauded': the *Historical Magazine* judged the music as 'throughout pleasing and characteristic'; the *Universal Magazine* approved, in a nod to the Latin tag, that 'the poet has given a very entertaining personification of the ideas of the painter'; and the critic for the *European Magazine* allowed that 'the Drama has much merit as a composition'.<sup>15</sup> Nor was this praise occasioned by partiality to a particular actor. The cast was an ensemble one, lacking any exceptional stars. John Edwin junior, the gregarious son of a celebrated comic singer, read the prologue, while Elizabeth Bannister was probably the best known of the performers, the other main female part being taken by the young Mrs Plomer, with Maria Iliff, wife of an established member of the company, making her debut in the breeches role of the lover Quaver. The much-loved singer Georgina George, in her final London season, had a cameo as a milkmaid, while the apprentice composer William Reeve enjoyed the biggest notice of his career as the knife-grinder.

The plot, lifted from Jonson's *Epicæne* (a work much republished and commented upon in the later eighteenth century, and adapted by Colman himself in 1776), is as simple as most afterpiece plots.<sup>16</sup> Castruccio, the

titular musician, gives a singing lesson to his daughter Castruccina and her friend Picolina, which is interrupted by cannon celebrating a state occasion. Distressed, he sends the young women to discover what is happening. Outside his window, young Quaver convinces a milkmaid to carry a love letter to Castruccina. Next a knife-grinder, who knowingly cites *Epicæne* as a precedent, conspires with Quaver to throw Castruccio off guard, so as to give Castruccina an opportunity for elopement. Quaver serenades Castruccina, who agrees to marry him as soon as she can escape. Street criers assemble, enraging Castruccio; Quaver ascends a ladder to extract Castruccina; they are seen, but the mob prevents Castruccio from following, before the lovers return to taunt him as his cries are drowned by the tumult, at the height of which the curtain falls, a handwritten stage direction adding that the noise should continue 'some little time after'.<sup>17</sup>

Already we may perceive points of interest for the themes of this present volume. When we remember the Georgian theatrical preoccupation with reality and representation, it is noteworthy that the climactic realisation of the image does not end 'with the players freezing in position'.<sup>18</sup> Rather, as Meisel observes, it is alive with noise, music, and movement:

Animating the picture in Colman's theatre means giving life to the noise, noise that depends on motion, and the forms of a pictorial dramaturgy are not yet so overriding and unreasonable, not yet so attuned to the graphic visual image, as to ignore this necessity. Only the nineteenth-century theatre would be paradoxical enough, or simple enough, to try to give life and truth to such a picture by returning it to stillness and silence.<sup>19</sup>

Meisel draws attention to the dependency of noise (and music) upon motion: in giving diegetic voice to Hogarth's image, the performers must also give life in the form of bodily movement; with lungs and limbs. As a result, the 'picture' cannot be returned to the state of a fixed impression but must be observed over time in order for meaning to be generated by the performance of musical sounds.

This idea of the dependency of meaning upon movement plays out across the whole afterpiece, as the plot itself suggests a sequential reading of Hogarth's image, its successive episodes approximating to the eye's journey from left to right across the print.<sup>20</sup> Thus the drama opens with the musician at his work as the figure to which the eye is drawn. The first scene stages the confrontation between elite Italian music and simple native balladry that we may also read into Hogarth's juxtaposition, at left, of the literally elevated musician with the ballad-singer beneath him. The second scene brings us first the milkmaid at the picture's centre, and then the knife-grinder at its right, before concluding with a realisation of the

whole. Given that the critic for the *European Magazine* judged that ‘the story as told by the painter is adhered to . . . the Drama has much merit *as a composition*’, it seems plausible that this structure was a deliberate attempt to evoke, in performance, the effect of ‘reading’ the image from left to right before coming to a comprehension of the whole.<sup>21</sup>

This sequential engagement brings us back to Rooker.<sup>22</sup> As an illustrator of novels such as Fielding’s, Rooker was familiar with conceiving of a narrative as a series of discrete images, much as is offered by the passages of the play. Moreover, as a pupil of Sandby and a frequent depicter of street scenes himself, Rooker, like Hogarth, was steeped in the pictorial tradition of the London Cries. In a lineage stretching back through Sandby to Marcellus Laroon and to early Tudor woodcuts, the overwhelming cacophony of the London street would be divided into individual picturesque figures, each framed and annotated, creating visual order and category from what must, in reality, have been a rather intimidating confusion for respectable citizens.<sup>23</sup> In preceding the ensemble realisation with a series of cameos for individual street criers (the milkmaid, the knife-grinder), *Ut Pictura Poesis* in effect reprises the genesis of Hogarth’s original image: reassembling a motley multitude in rude response to an earlier sequence of individuated figures. Again, it is tempting to trace Rooker’s hand in this homage to Hogarth’s own antecedents.

The London Cries had a musical as well as pictorial precedent. Since the sixteenth century, composers had delighted in polyphonic settings of various street cries. Though this peaked in the later Tudor period, when elite musicians including William Cobbold, Richard Dering, Michael East, Thomas Ravenscroft, Thomas Weelkes, and most famously Orlando Gibbons all indulged in this rather condescending *jeu d’esprit*, the practice remained constant up to and beyond 1789.<sup>24</sup> By the later eighteenth century, much as Hogarthian commercial prints aimed at a middling audience had revolutionised the art market, so had humbler compositions in the form of catches or glees for domestic performance largely replaced the complex orchestral settings favoured by Gibbons and his peers.<sup>25</sup> Several of these musical editions were themselves illustrated. Once more, the interplay of musical and artistic traditions informed theatrical practice.

In *Ut Pictura Poesis*, this sensory multiplicity extends to a dizzying meta-conversation between creators and their creations. We are invited to consider a series of sequential relationships. These begin with the real street criers, and the musical and visual traditions of their representation. This in turn leads us to Hogarth’s celebrated intervention in those traditions, and a consideration of the performed drama as an engagement with

Hogarth. Here, different forms of media come into play: the published play text and score resulting from this drama; while the domestic performers of these paratexts were themselves conditioned by a familiarity with both illustrated song sheets and the ongoing corpus of ‘London Cries’ catches and glees. Ultimately, we return to the power dynamics between these different artists and performers and the real street criers, with whom the traditions began at least two centuries earlier, but who were still encountered in the streets outside the theatres and parlours where these performances were enjoyed. With this palimpsest in mind, it becomes something of a relief to follow the practice of illustrators, and turn from the jumbled whole to a consideration of discrete passages.

### ‘Nature must give way to Art’

Perhaps the greatest – or at least the most conspicuously reiterated – debate in eighteenth-century high culture was that of nature versus art. This dichotomy was often conflated, by no means consistently, with others, such as ancients versus moderns, and – especially in music – indigenous versus foreign. In the final case, while the latter could be German complexity or Italian ornamentation, the former was consistently native English simplicity, exemplified by the unadorned strophic ballad. This crude reduction of a vast scholarly topic is perhaps most apparent in the astonishing success of English ballad opera from the 1720s onwards – John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* is its exemplar – and it is this self-conscious celebration of rude English vitality that Hogarth enshrines in *The Enraged Musician*, made explicit by the inclusion, at far left, of a playbill for the original staging of *The Beggar’s Opera*.<sup>26</sup>

In making this an issue of national identity, both Gay and Hogarth had a precedent in Joseph Addison, who declared in 1711 that ‘There is nothing which more astonishes a Foreigner ... than the *Cries of London*.’<sup>27</sup> Erwin too reads *The Enraged Musician* as a national ‘manifesto’ that ‘promotes Britishness and British art. Much the same national difference was celebrated on the late eighteenth-century stage when George Colman the elder staged a one-act farce after upon [*sic*] the print.’<sup>28</sup> In taking the exceptional and unrealistic step of giving the ballad-singer in the street below the musician’s window a copy of the famous seventeenth-century ballad ‘The Ladies’ Fall’ that contains recognisable sheet music (eighteenth-century slip songs never included musical notation), Hogarth reinforces this point, ironising the status of ‘native’ music as ‘low’ and ‘foreign’ music as ‘high’. The incongruity of observing musical notation in

the street singer's hand turns aside from the wider contrast between elite 'musician' and street 'noise' to present instead a clash of differing legitimate musical cultures.<sup>29</sup> The ballad-singer, Hogarth implies, may be a fallen woman, but she is the most explicitly musical of the rude mechanicals in the street, and her simple, native, outdoor song endures when the artificial Italian violinist has been silenced.<sup>30</sup> Hogarth's judgement is clearly equivocal, as his portrait of the balladeer is far from sympathetic – yet this remains a warts-and-all victory for the crude English ballad.

In 'reading' Hogarth from left to right, *Ut Pictura Poesis* begins with a scene that re-creates this national confrontation in both its recitative and its songs. Curiously, its most obvious joke – the musician is called 'Castruccio' – is in danger of being missed in performance, as he is not named aloud until scene 2 (libretto, 10). While the name suggests that Colman associated the late composer Pietro Castrucci with Hogarth's image, it also carries connotations, to an English ear, of the 'castrato', a figure increasingly held up as the epitome of the unnatural in eighteenth-century music by English critics. The association is reinforced when Castruccio proceeds to sing 'Non temer bell' idol mio' entirely in falsetto (libretto, 5; score 9). This is followed by two contrasting recitals: Picolina, berated for introducing 'Tricks' and '*Extravaganza*' into her singing (libretto, 5–6), is again criticised for her ostentatiously florid performance (score, 10–12), full of extensive melismatic passages and ornamentation – which is, for good measure, a setting of Alexander Pope's lines:

Flutt'ring spread thy purple pinions,  
Gentle Cupid, o'er my heart!  
I a slave to Love's dominions,  
Nature must give way to Art.

(libretto, 6)

The nineteenth-century song scholar Charles Mackay reads these lines as a satire on the Georgian taste for insincere classical allusion and pastoral cliché<sup>31</sup> – a verdict confirmed in *Ut Pictura Poesis* when it is followed by Castruccina's performance 'in a different style' (libretto, 6) of the far simpler 'Alas and woe to Fanny' (score, 12–13). This two-verse song is praised as '*Divino!*' (libretto, 7) by Castruccio, unaware that its lyrics are at his expense, since their narrative of a daughter's heart being stolen away despite the efforts of her 'daddy' is a direct foreshadowing of subsequent events.

Ostensibly, this episode is a straightforward staging of musical national identities, in which the artful Italian is bested by the simple English. Yet

even at the level of text, this message is complicated: the play text criticises Picolina's excesses, not as Italian, but (rather bizarrely) as 'Antient British' and 'Welch' (libretto, 5–6), while Castruccio is laid open to the audience's ridicule not so much for his Otherness as for protesting too much in his attempts to assimilate. In overpraising Castruccina's ditty as 'the musick of the spheres!' (libretto, 7) Castruccio risks tipping into bathos. This is underlined by his subsequent couplet, with which he prefaces his attempt at a patriotic loyal ode:

England by me, like Italy, is priz'd;  
I'm here John Bull, because I'm naturaliz'd  
(score, 14)

To claim to be naturalised in recitative was self-defeating, since one of the hallmarks of English ballad opera, as championed by Gay, was to substitute spoken prose for recitative, in a challenge to the perceived artifice of through-composed Italian opera. Nor was this an antiquated distinction in 1789: it is worth noting that the Haymarket company staged *The Beggar's Opera* in the same season as *Ut Pictura Poesis*.<sup>32</sup> Further giving the lie to his claim, the ode itself (libretto, 7) is sung in a cod-foreign dialect – substituting 'vot' for 'what' and 'dis' for 'this', and featuring an imperfect grasp of grammar – that continually undercuts Castruccio's claim to Englishness. It appears as if Colman and Arnold are making a self-interested point here, sending up the foreign composers from Handel onwards (Castrucci, not incidentally, had been the leader of Handel's orchestra) who had prospered in London at the perceived expense of native talent.

Yet it is when we consider the passage as performance, rather than as text, that the ironies in this argument appear. Castruccio's falsetto aria 'Non temer bell' idol mio' was excerpted from a lyric by Metastasio that had been twice performed at the Haymarket itself in the previous decade, in settings by Giovanni Paisiello and Joseph Schuster, the latter of which appears to be the basis of Arnold's 1789 arrangement.<sup>33</sup> An approving review noted that 'The Italian air, "Non temer beli ido mio" [*sic*], (the composer of which we do not recollect) is well chosen, and in its new situation full of effect.'<sup>34</sup> And this was the crux: to succeed as an entertainment, there was no scope for Castruccio's aria or Picolina's piece to be written as deliberately poor or tasteless, since every number had to please its audience. While Colman's company might indulge in lightly nationalistic gestures and anti-Italian satire, it was in the business of performing Italian opera itself, and its audience – though it might protest otherwise – was evidently partial to Italianate music. Thus it became aesthetically as

well as commercially impossible to replicate Hogarth's total rejection of elite foreign music in a venue dedicated to its performance, an irony that blunts the edge of the satire.

One extensive review of the music epitomises this contradiction, managing both to endorse the preference for simple, native melody and to enjoy Italianate artifice – rather missing the point in the process. “Flutt’ring spread your purple pinions,” sung by Mrs. Plomer, is an attractive air, and conveys the words in a characteristic style. With the following melody, “Alas, and woe to Fanny,” sung by Mrs. Bannister, we are exceedingly pleased: its native simplicity renders it powerfully impressive, it gives an example of Thomson’s remark, “*Beauty, when unadorn’d, adorn’d the most.*”<sup>35</sup> The entire episode reveals both the limitations and the possibilities of dramatising Hogarth’s visual argument. Musical difference could be performed only up to a certain point, and what is described in recitative as abominable must pass in performance as pleasurable. In bending to these very limitations, *Ut Pictura Poesis* becomes instead a satire on the hypocrisy of a nationalistic discourse that decries the artificial and venerates the simple while being perfectly happy, in practice, to patronise both.

### ‘O Damn the cannon’

My second reading turns from this argument to an equally familiar trope of aesthetic criticism foregrounded by Hogarth: the distinction between music and noise. Castruccio is fated never to complete his loyal ode. He makes it through just eight bars of song before breaking off at the report of a cannon (score, 16), a fermata in the melody line indicating the interruption of the tune. In total gunfire occurs five times, the first three of which are shown in [Example 3.1](#). How are we to conceive of these ‘interruptions’? Most pragmatically, could a literal cannon have been used? A later nineteenth-century inventory of the Haymarket’s props list reveals ‘two rows of five small cannon, with covers’.<sup>36</sup> The greatest problem may have been that of timing. Military science was in the process of mastering the length of fuses, but in 1789, preceding the Napoleonic Wars, gunnery was less reliable than it would be for later battle music: for Tchaikovsky’s 1812 *Overture*, penned in 1880, or even for Beethoven’s 1813 *Wellingtons Sieg*.<sup>37</sup> It seems unlikely that the Haymarket was capable of firing five cannon with the precision required to detonate three beats into a bar of music. As to the risk of conflagration, such as when the Globe Theatre was engulfed in 1613 after a cannon malfunctioned, it is enough to note that a



**Maestoso**

Castruccio Castruccina  
& Picolina

each heart with Joy go pit a pat pit a pat all bliss. Oh Dia - va lo vat dat? Oh Dia - va lo vat dat? Such har-mo-ny to-day we see such

6 cannon 6 cannon 6

24 Castruccio

Har-mo-ny to-day we see Reign o - ver Thames... and Tweed and Shan-non

28

Sweet Loy - al - ty Sweet Loy - al - ty O Damn the Can-non oh damn the Can-non,

cannon 4 4

Example 3.1 Samuel Arnold and George Colman the Elder, *The Enraged Musician, a Musical Entertainment Founded on Hogarth* (London, 1789), 15–16, bars 18–33 of the ‘Trio’. British Library, London, music collections, E.100.b (3), [http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_100049121912.0x000001](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100049121912.0x000001) (accessed 19 January 2023).

month into the run of *Ut Pictura Poesis*, the opera house on the other side of the road was burnt to the ground. We are faced, on balance, with the probability of a percussive noise that the audience was asked to believe to be a cannon: something representational, theatrical.

This speculation prompts a more searching question: was this noise *musical*? The limitations of the piano reduction are plain here. Can we read anything into the fact that the shots are tuned, respectively, to G, E $\flat$ , and F? In this score, the sounds have been translated to the lower register of the keyboard, which in most cases would have been either a fortepiano or a harpsichord, neither of which could sound much like a cannon. In the first four instances, the shots are on the same note in the bass as that which precedes them, simply lowered an octave. While the fermatas suggest confusion, the logic of the notes suggests instead continuation: the cannon may halt Castruccio, but it interrupts neither the composition nor (in domestic performance) the accompanist. By the fifth instance, shown in [Example 3.2](#) (score, 18), the cannon is fully incorporated into the development of the music, harmonising with Picolina to form a B flat triad and not even putting Castruccio off his stride.

How this reduction relates to the staged performance is unclear, but it suggests a cannon that is integral, not antithetical, to the logic of the music. This is reinforced by the lyric, where the line ‘Thames and Tweed and Shannon’ sets up, indeed requires, the ensuing rhyme ‘Oh Damn the cannon’. The cannon fire is not only musical rather than noisy, it is practically poetry – a point underlined a generation later when the construction was echoed by the author (probably the Scottish poet Allan Cunningham) of ‘On the Birthday of Princess Victoria’, published in

The musical score for Example 3.2 consists of four staves. The first three staves are vocal parts, and the fourth is a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are:

- Castruccina**: I haste to O - bey you and I
- Picolina**: I haste to O - bey you and I
- Castruccio**: a - gain what a clat - ter go

The piano accompaniment includes a 'cannon' sound effect, represented by a series of notes in the bass register, with a dynamic marking of *ff* and a fermata over the notes. The score is in 6/8 time and features various musical notations, including rests, notes, and dynamic markings.

Example 3.2 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 18, bars 47–50 of the ‘Trio’.

the *Metropolitan Magazine* – an ode eerily like Castruccio's, containing the couplet:

While lads from Thames, and Tweed, and Shannon,  
Can guide the rudder, and level the cannon<sup>38</sup>

This is the first of several instances in *Ut Pictura Poesis* where what are described as extraneous discords, disturbing the music, are nothing of the sort, but rather necessary components of the whole, composed, choreographed, and controlled by those in charge of the entertainment. In a viable, formulaic stage production, it could not be any other way. When we speak of cannon, this musicalisation of 'noise' is perhaps banal, a mere anticipatory footnote to the later use of artillery as percussion in battle music. But with each reiteration, the dramatic irony takes on greater significance, especially as the drama moves towards a fuller evocation of Hogarth's image.

### ‘As in Hogarth’?

Following the meticulous ‘disorder’ of this trio, the scene ‘*changes to the outside of Castruccio's house, as in Hogarth*’ (libretto, 8), an effect indebted to the artistry of Rooker, the company's machinist as well as its scene painter.<sup>39</sup> Was Rooker acknowledging his own debt to Hogarth, from whom he had adopted the practice of dropping beggars and street vendors into his foregrounds? The most Hogarthian of all his street scenes, a view of Horse-Guards (Figure 3.3), even includes a playbill advertising a benefit performance of *As You Like It* for his own father, in a direct reference to the *Beggar's Opera* poster in *The Enraged Musician*.<sup>40</sup> Though none of Rooker's theatrical backdrops survive, his architectural views may give us a good impression of the effect: as was customary, Rooker would overlay such small-scale designs with a grid, the better to facilitate their scaling-up for the theatre.<sup>41</sup>

Rooker's career-long insistence on both populating his cityscapes with Hogarthian figures and ‘deflating’ his paintings of classical ruins by including modern labourers and farm animals, incurring the wrath of the ‘picturesque’ advocate William Gilpin in the process, all suggests that he, as much as the ailing Colman or Arnold, may have been the instigator of *Ut Pictura Poesis* – a reminder not to conceive of plays as single-authored works.<sup>42</sup> Yet far from playing to his strengths, the production of this backdrop – necessarily unpopulated, since its inhabitants were to be live actors – required Rooker to execute what was thus the least Hogarthian of



Figure 3.3 Edward Rooker after Michael Angelo Rooker, 'The Horse-Guards', from *Six Views of London*, 1768. Etching, 41.5 × 55.5 cm. British Museum, London, no. 1978, U.3601. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

all his street scenes. Nor could he exhibit his signature fidelity to perspective and proportion,<sup>43</sup> since the stage was different in aspect ratio from Hogarth's image (see Figure 3.4), while the addition of a balcony (libretto, 13) and the necessity of raising the window further above the area railings in order to allow clearance for a ladder (libretto, 15) entailed further deviations from Hogarth's design. Nonetheless, Rooker's re-creation appears to have been intended as a *coup de théâtre*, to judge by the scribbled marginal direction 'drop saloon to set stage, Rise' (libretto, 8), suggesting a secret dismantling of the indoor set to reveal Rooker's imitation when the curtain rose. It became a test of the audience's credentials, as well as Rooker's, to see if they knew their Hogarth well enough to recognise a scene thus unpeopled. The critic for the *Historical Magazine* appears proud to have passed, recording: 'A well-executed scene is introduced from the print, in which John Long, Pewterer [a street sign at the right of the original image], has a very conspicuous situation.'<sup>44</sup>

Before its climactic crowding, this theatrical street assumes a more generic status as backdrop for two theatrical duologues: the chance meetings of Quaver (Castruccina's lover) with first the milkmaid, and second



Figure 3.4 James Stow after George Jones, 'Interior of the Little Theatre, Haymarket', 1815 (detail), from a series published by Robert Wilkinson, 1825. Hand-coloured engraving, 30.5 × 22 cm. Public Domain.



the knife-grinder (libretto, 10, 12). Thus the riotous finale is anticipated with rather anti-Hogarthian vignettes, in which individual street criers are unnaturally excerpted from his teeming crowd. Indeed, the first of these meetings seems something of a misstep. While the *Historical Magazine* approved the milkmaid's song, the journalist stepped thoroughly out of the drama to do so: 'Miss George, who is returned from her long tour, had a very pretty ballad.'<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the *Analytical Review* demurred that "'Ye nymphs and sylvan gods," sung by Miss George, does not, in its melody, strike us as of equal merit with some others in the piece.'<sup>46</sup> The critic perhaps felt that the song's affected pastoral idiom (score, 26–27), while thematically appropriate for the milkmaid, was just the sort of artificial gesture that Pope's 'Flutt'ring spread thy purple pinions', performed in the previous scene, was designed to mock.

William Reeve's number as the knife-grinder, however, 'was much applauded'.<sup>47</sup> The song (Example 3.3; score, 28–29) returns us to the relationship between music and noise, with the street cry holding the same conceptual status as the cannon for many in the audience – or even ranking a little lower, being devoid of a ceremonial or martial connotation. That cry begins on one note, the dominant, but swiftly shifts to the tonic, gaining rhythm, before breaking into melody, modulating from G to D major, and assuming all the characteristics of song. The abrasive sound of the grinding wheel itself, included by Hogarth as perhaps the harshest noise in the whole image, is here made musical, played by an instrument of art rather than one of labour, as it 'whirrs' and 'fitzes'. The review of this published music conceded that 'the attempt in the accompaniment, at the expression of the noise of the wheel, is more successful than we could have expected'. Yet this musicality does not last (Example 3.4; score, 29), the grinder's distinctive melodic phrasing collapsing once again to the tonic, having been granted a temporary elevation to the aesthetic for only as long as the composer saw fit. Following on from the composed musical logic of the cannon, we are gaining a sense that, far from celebrating the defeat of elite music by street noise, Arnold's score in fact achieves the opposite.

### **'To discord you turn all my notes'**

This almost alchemical compositional command over the noises of the street, which to my mind prefigures the animation of household objects in Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797), culminates in the production's finale. Initially, we are given a clear distinction between music and noise:

**Allegretto**

Ad lib: a tempo

Knives to grind Sci sars to grind Knives pen knives to grind my good mas ter knives pen knives to

grind my good mas ter sweet Mis tress es sci sars to grind sweet Mis tress es sci sars to grind sweet Mis tress es sci sars to

grind. See fas - ter and fas - ter and fas - ter whirr... spins the

wheel fitz fitz fitz spar - kles the steel and I

*p*

*f* *p* T. S.  $\frac{6}{5}$

*f* *f p* *f p* *f p*  $\frac{6}{5}$

Example 3.3 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 28–29, bars 11–32 of ‘Knives to Grind’.



**Allegretto**

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Allegretto'. It consists of two staves: a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are: 'scis-sars or ra-zors or knives to grind Scis-sars or ra-zors or knives to grind knives or ra-zors to grind pen-knives or scis-sars to grind.' The piano accompaniment includes fingering numbers: 6, 7, 6, 7, 6/4, 5/3, 6/4, 5/3.

scis-sars or ra-zors or knives to grind Scis-sars or ra-zors or knives to grind knives or ra-zors to grind pen-knives or scis-sars to grind.

6 7 6 7 6/4 5/3 6/4 5/3

Example 3.4 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 29, bars 39–46 of ‘Knives to Grind’.

the street figures are directed as uttering ‘Cries, *without Musick*,’ (libretto, 14) contrasted with Castruccio’s protestation in sung recitative (score, 36):

Confound your noises! choke your throats!  
To discord you turn all my notes

The division is starker, in fact, than in Hogarth: according to the stage directions there is neither oboist nor ballad-singer among the crowd to challenge our ideas of what constitutes the musical. Nor is this perception of a musical Hogarthian street entirely an anachronism: John Ireland observed in his *Hogarth Illustrated* of 1793 that the image contains treble, tenor, and bass, which ‘must form a concert, though not quite so harmonious, yet nearly as loud, as those which have been graced with the royal presence in Westminster Abbey’.<sup>48</sup> Ireland’s wry comparison models what follows in the play: for once Quaver and Castruccina have escaped amid this expressly *unmusical* din, the chaos gains compositional sense and becomes a generically recognisable glee.

If we may trust to the reduction of the score, there are at least four stages of this glee that advance the reversal of what begins as music and noise. In [Example 3.5](#) (score, 37) Castruccio is interrupted by the milkmaid, whose cry of ‘milk below’, though in the same key, alters the rhythm. Castruccio’s response of ‘A constable’ adopts the rhythm that the milkmaid has introduced, and one level of difference is thereby eroded, with the musician influenced by the crier – echoed lyrically by the interdependence of the two in creating the rhyme of ‘know’ and ‘below’. Castruccio falls further in [Example 3.6](#) (score, 38–39), where in a triple exchange with the crier of ‘new Mackarel’ he moves from the defiant ‘Damnation Hell’ to the helpless ‘oh very well’. In the course of this defeat, his vocal line shifts from a strong contrast with the ‘Mackarel’ melody, to close engagement, finally capitulating to the extent that his ‘very well’ becomes indistinguishable from the insistent descending quavers, F♯–E–D, of ‘Mackarel’, the two running together in a Figaro-esque double repetition. Castruccio is suffering a worse fate than discord: he is losing his voice to the street concert hypothesised by John Ireland, and [Example 3.7](#) (score, 39) is the logical consequence. Rather than ‘confounders’ simply rhyming with ‘flounders’, the two are concurrent, with the longer ‘flounders’, pitched a third higher and thus, conventionally, forming the melody line to which Castruccio can merely supply the harmony, subsuming Castruccio’s impotent protestation and proceeding, by means of sing-song rhythm and intrusive C♯, to wrest musical control from the enraged musician. In the face of such eloquence, Castruccio relinquishes melody altogether, a total

Castruccio Milk be - low Milk be - low

O Curse your din you've shut me in but you shall know A Con - sta-ble a Con - sta-ble I

*p*

Example 3.5 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 28–37, bars 5–12 of the finale.

38

New Mack - a - rel new Mack - a - rel. new Mac - ka - rel new Mack - a - rel

Castruccio

Dam - na - tion Hell Dam - na - tion Hell Oh ve - ry

45

new Mac - ka - rel new Mac - ka - rel Mack - a - rel Mack - a - rel

well oh ve - ry well Oh ve - ry well ve - ry well vile

Example 3.6 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 38–39, bars 38–49 of the finale.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: a treble clef staff, a vocal line, and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The treble staff contains a whole rest followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4 with a natural sign, and a half note F#4. The vocal line has the lyrics: "Floun - ders Thames Floun - ders" and "Ye wret - ched ye wret - ched con - foun - ders By". The bass staff has figured bass notation: 6, 4, 6, 5, 3.

Example 3.7 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 39, bars 53–56 of the finale.

loss of identity and status shown in [Example 3.8](#) (score, 39–40). This musical narrowing, from phrase to scale to dogged repetition of the tonic, is hardly uncommon among the codas of finales, yet it seems fair to say that the generic device takes on fresh potency in this context. Castruccio is totally defeated by the sounds of the street – but *music* is not: not only do the cries gain in legible musicality, but the stage directions provide for the late arrival of recognisable instruments of a sort in ‘*the drums and marrow-bones and cleavers . . . drums playing, &c. a girl, with a rattle, little boy with a penny trumpet, old bagpiper, &c. as near as possible to Hogarth’s Print*’ (libretto, 17). One reviewer described this *coup de théâtre* not as pandemonium but as a ‘serenade . . . which completes the climax of Castruccio’s rage’ – a phrase implying that the street musicians usurp the articulation of musical and gestural meaning from the titular character.<sup>49</sup>

These late arrivals are brought on by Quaver, who has coordinated the whole affair: that is, the character whose name literally represents music is demonstrably responsible for the conducting of this performance. In kneeling front and centre (libretto, 17), Quaver and Castruccina deliberately disrupt the faithfulness of the realisation, insisting upon the addition of legible music to Hogarth’s original. Perhaps doubly legible, for if ‘Quaver’ stands for notation and thereby elite music, so might the image of united lovers stand for ‘harmony’ – a subtle visual pun entirely in accord with contemporary standards of wit. There is probably an additional allusion here: to the *Spectator*. Addison’s 1711 article on the London Cries, mentioned above, includes an extensive and satirical letter purporting to be written by one ‘Ralph Crotchett’, in which the said Crotchett outlines his absurd plans for regulating the cries into a harmonious musical system, offering himself as a ‘Comptroller-General of the *London Cries*’.<sup>50</sup>

62 NB. all the various cries join here, and continue to the end of the piece.

the ras-cals shall know to Bride-well they go vile Rep-tiles rude Roy-sters ye wret-ched Con-foun-ders the Ras-cals shall ras-cals shall know to Bride-well to Bride-well they

70 go vile Rep-tiles rude Roy-sters ye wret-ched ye wret-ched Con - foun-ders ye wret-ched Con - foun-ders ye wret-ched con - foun-ders to Bride-well ye go.

Example 3.8 Arnold and Colman, *The Enraged Musician* (1789), 39–40, bars 62–76 of the finale.

In Addison, as in Hogarth, the idea of imposing musical order on the street is exposed as absurd. Yet in *Ut Pictura Poesis*, Quaver – an updating of Crotchett who might even be seen as Arnold's on-stage avatar – is shown to be entirely successful in orchestrating just such a scheme.

### Interpretations

To venture such a reading on what might be purely technical grounds seems to go against the spirit of the play. Yet it is founded upon the Georgian fascination with levels of reality and representation with which we began. In Hogarth's *Enraged Musician* we see, and imagine we hear, street criers. For all the image's layers of metatextual coding and visual wit, we believe that the milkmaid – though she may also represent the urban pastoral, compromised innocence, a reference to Marcellus Laroon – is nonetheless a milkmaid. Yet in the play, she is Miss George, just as the various criers are Mr Mathews, Mrs Edwin, et al. (libretto, 1). Just as a mock sea battle at Sadler's Wells was in some respects less 'real' than a representation of the same thing on a Laurie and Whittle song sheet, so *Ut Pictura Poesis*, despite adding movement and sound to Hogarth's picture, remained less real, a verdict reflected in the reviewers' conventional insistence on praising named actors for their individual turns, rather than buying into the conceit. In such a context, the musical triumph was not that of the street over the elite composer, but that of Samuel Arnold, DPhil Oxon, governor of the Royal Society of Musicians, organist to the Chapel Royal and conductor of the Academy of Ancient Music, with the aid of the 'excellent band' in the pit acknowledged in the entertainment's prologue (libretto, 3).

Having gone this far, I – as a social historian – am tempted further. Since both image and afterpiece raise issues of status, class, and labour, we might critique the staging in the same terms, and read the company's musical triumph as won at the expense of the real, disenfranchised street criers outside the theatre. Far from shouting down the elite music taking place within, street criers had their cries – designed to attract custom for their labour and thereby to accrue capital at the rate of maybe a shilling a day – assimilated instead *into* that interior elite music, for the entertainment of a middling to elite audience paying between one and five shillings for the pleasure, this capital being accrued by the well-to-do company of the Haymarket. The cultural appropriation going on here (if we can call it that) serves an aesthetic as well as an economic function, however. For just



as the need to give pleasure to an opera-loving audience undermines Hogarth's criticism of Italian music in the first scene, so that same need to give pleasure undermines Hogarth's assumed defence of the rude indigenous music of the street. The real irony is that London's cultivated audiences far more closely resembled Castruccio than they did the gleefully demotic Quaver, and had the company served up an afterpiece of genuinely discordant London Cries, rather than a refined arrangement thereof preceded by some pleasant arias, that audience would itself have been enraged. While this consideration exposes the hypocrisy of the theatre-goers, we might temper this with a reflection that, for all their vaunted musical nationalism, these Londoners were rather more cosmopolitan in their tastes than they would have liked to admit.

The result is therefore a total inversion of Hogarth's ostensible argument: from the musical imitation of the knife-grinder's wheel to the overarching conceit, low commerce and mechanical labour are transformed into elite art; the disorderly world of the street tamed by the choreography of the indoor theatre; and reality sacrificed to representation. By this reading the conceit starts to resemble less Jonson's *Epicæne* than Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). In what may be more than coincidence, Rooker himself had illustrated a recent edition of that play, choosing for the frontispiece the celebrated opening scene in which a grocer and his wife interrupt 'the play', insisting that their apprentice be allowed to perform the part of Grocer-Errant.<sup>51</sup> In reality – as the audience knows full well – all concerned are actors in the company, and the interruption is fully scripted. Thus what pretends at subversion is elevated drama, swiftly assimilated into the literary canon.

Mention of the canon (a concept so familiar that I have seen scholars use its single 'n' when referring to the sort of guns that resound so tamely in the trio of *Ut Pictura Poesis*) brings me to my final reflection. I offer my methodology in this chapter – a round-the-houses chase after allusions and metatextual interplay, in and out of art, literary, musical, and theatrical criticism – as an attempt to grapple with the collegial, multi-authored, multi-sensory entanglements of late Georgian culture, a world in which works, careers, and modes of audience engagement were always essentially collaborative and miscellaneous.<sup>52</sup> Yet if my interest is in how the visual and the sonic, music and noise, and different members of a theatrical company combined to form a rich cultural discourse, is it not also the case that I have chosen to discuss this afterpiece – and that this afterpiece was

only conceived – because of its relation to an acknowledged masterwork by a canonical artist? In playing in the space that landmark works create for discourse, are we snubbing the great artist at his window, or ensuring that he remains there – a little out of countenance, perhaps, but still elevated, and far from enraged?

### Notes

I would like to thank both the Leverhulme Trust and the European Research Council for funding this research, and Rio Hartwell and the editors for their insights and advice.

- 1 Patrick Conner, 'Rooker, Michael [known as Michael Angelo Rooker] (1746–1801)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24065 (accessed 2 September 2019).
- 2 There is an extensive literature on this, much of it cited in my own treatment: Oskar Cox Jensen, 'Of Ships and Spectacles: Maritime Identity and the Politics of Authenticity in Regency London', in 'City, Space, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Performance', special issue of *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 46.2 (2019): 136–60.
- 3 Katherine Hambridge and Jonathan Hicks (eds.), *The Melodramatic Moment: Music and Theatrical Culture, 1790–1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), esp. Sarah Hibberd's chapter 'Scenography, *Spéculomanie*, and Spectacle: Pixérécourt's *La citerne* (1809)', 79–93.
- 4 Though remarkable, they are not of course exceptional, but simply the most exclusive and specific permutation of the common slip-song, a product sold and sung by the million in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- 5 George Colman the Elder, *Ut Pictura Poesis, or, The Enraged Musician, a Musical Entertainment Founded on Hogarth, Performed at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, Written by George Colman Esqr. [and] Composed by Dr. Arnold* (London, 1789).
- 6 See, for example, Jeremy Barlow, *The Enraged Musician: Hogarth's Musical Imagery* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
- 7 Patrick Conner, *Michael Angelo Rooker, 1746–1801* (London: Batsford, 1984), 123.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 9 Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast*, 113, and cited *ibid.*
- 10 Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 104–6.
- 11 Tom Lockwood, *Ben Jonson in the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41–42; Ben Jonson, *Epicæne, or The Silent Woman*, ed. Roger Holdsworth (London: Methuen Drama, 2014; first performance 1609).

- 12 Timothy Erwin, *Textual Vision: Augustan Design and the Invention of Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 122–29.
- 13 Samuel Arnold and George Colman the Elder, *The Enraged Musician, a Musical Entertainment Founded on Hogarth* (London, 1789), British Library, London, music collections (hereafter BL Mus), E.100.b (3), [http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_100049121912.0x000001](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100049121912.0x000001) (accessed 19 January 2023). I recommend consulting this alongside the chapter, as I am unable to reproduce all of its music.
- 14 Charles Beecher Hogan (ed.), *The London Stage, 1660–1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces*, part 5 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960–68), vol. 2, 1094–95, 1156, 1166.
- 15 ‘History of the Theatre’, *Historical Magazine* 1 (1789): 292; *Universal Magazine* 84 (May 1789): 268; *European Magazine* 15 (1789): 412.
- 16 George Colman the Elder (ed.), *Epicoene or, The Silent Woman. A Comedy, Written by Ben Jonson. As It Is Acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane. With Alterations, by George Colman* (London, 1776).
- 17 Colman, *Ut Pictura Poesis*, 17. Subsequent page references to the libretto and score are given in parentheses in the main text.
- 18 Erwin, *Textual Vision*, 129.
- 19 Meisel, *Realizations*, 106.
- 20 I am greatly indebted to James Grande for prompting this idea.
- 21 *European Magazine* 15 (1789): 412.
- 22 *Ibid.* My emphasis.
- 23 The tradition has many scholars: Shesgreen’s *Images of the Outcast* is a good introduction.
- 24 *Novello’s Part-Song Book. A Collection of Part-Songs, Glee’s, and Madrigals* (BL Mus F.280.b 1343 onwards) is an excellent compilation of many of these.
- 25 See for example ‘A Medley or the Cries of London’ (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Harding Mus. G 395 (10), 1775?); ‘A Set of London Cries for Three Voices’ (BL Mus E.207.c (4), 1777); John Blewitt, ‘The New Cries of London’ (BL Mus G.425.mm (39), 1800); John Parry, ‘Three Catches’ (BL Mus H.1653.l (33), 1811); P. J. Meyer, ‘The Cries of London’ (Bodleian Library, Harding Mus. K66, [n.d.]); and ‘A New Medley on the Several Cries of London’ (Bodleian Library, Harding A 1904 (35), n.d.). Samuel Arnold himself was responsible for ‘The Cries of London, a Favorite Song’ (Bodleian Library, Mus. 5c.63 (20), n.d.).
- 26 For a recent discussion, see Berta Joncus, *Kitty Clive, or The Fair Songster* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019).
- 27 Joseph Addison, in *Spectator* 251 (18 December 1711).
- 28 Erwin, *Textual Vision*, 122. Erwin goes on (122–23) to associate the title and subtitle of *Ut Pictura Poesis*, in their contrast of Latin tag and English familiarity, with Hogarth’s ‘modernist triumph over classicism’.
- 29 Search for ‘The Ladies Fall’ on the *English Broadside Ballad Archive* at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu> for numerous versions of the song accompanied by recordings and notation. Beware, however: the tune is a true earworm.

- 30 Ronald Paulson differs in locating 'natural' music in the milkmaid, again contrasted with the violinist's artifice, which I find wholly persuasive: I offer the explicit musicality of the ballad-singer's score as an additional rather than an alternative reading. Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, vol. 2: *High Art and Low, 1732–1750* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1992), 115.
- 31 Charles Mackay (ed.), *The Book of English Songs* (London, n.d. [c. 1840]), 20–21.
- 32 *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, part 5, vol. 2, 1156.
- 33 *Astarto; A Serious Opera: As Performed at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London, 1776), 40; *Demofonte; A Serious Opera: As Performed at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London, 1778), 24.
- 34 'Art. LXI. The Enraged Musician', *Analytical Review, or History of Literature* 5 (1790): 240.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Marcus Risdell and Vanessa Rogers, 'The 1871 Lease of the Theatre Royal Haymarket to John Baldwin Buckstone: An Extraordinary Document of Ordinary Theatre Business', paper given at 'The London Stage in the Nineteenth-Century World II', New College, Oxford (5–7 April 2018).
- 37 See Nicholas Mathew, *Political Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) for a relevant discussion of the latter piece.
- 38 'On the Birthday of the Princess Victoria', third stanza, in 'A Lady' (ed.), *Anecdotes, Personal Traits, and Characteristic Sketches of Victoria the First* (London, 1840), 233.
- 39 Conner, *Michael Angelo Rooker*, 125.
- 40 As observed *ibid.*, 22.
- 41 For an example, see Michael Angelo Rooker, 'Design for a Garden Scene', British Museum, London, no. 1964,1212.3.
- 42 Conner, *Michael Angelo Rooker*, 56, 62, 72.
- 43 Attested also in his obituary: [Henry Hakewill], 'March 3rd', *Gentleman's Magazine* 71 (May 1801): 480.
- 44 'History of the Theatre'.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 'Art. LXI.'
- 47 'History of the Theatre'.
- 48 John Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated*, 3 vols. (London, 1793), vol. 1, 123.
- 49 'History of the Theatre'.
- 50 Addison, in *Spectator* 251.
- 51 Conner, *Michael Angelo Rooker*, 121.
- 52 This is an argument developed more thoroughly throughout Oskar Cox Jensen, David Kennerley, and Ian Newman (eds.), *Charles Dibdin and Late Georgian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

*'A Strange Jingle of Sounds'*  
*Scenes of Aural Recognition in Early Nineteenth-Century*  
*English Literature*

*Josephine McDonagh*

'It is odd enough,' said Bertram, fixing his eye upon the arms and gateway, and partly addressing Glossin, partly as it were thinking aloud – 'it is odd the tricks which our memory plays us. The remnants of an old prophecy, or song, or rhyme, of some kind or other, return to my recollection on hearing that motto – stay – it is a strange jingle of sounds . . .'

(Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 247)<sup>1</sup>

**The Scene of Aural Recognition**

In a number of early nineteenth-century English literary texts, we encounter a scene that is so simple it may pass our notice: someone (a character, a narrator, an autobiographical witness) hears something (a song, a melody, a sequence of words) which they believe they have heard at least once before.<sup>2</sup> In itself it is an unexceptional event. But the scene of aural recognition, as I will call it, draws our attention because invariably it is one on which much else within the text hinges: the development of a character; the installation of a regime of feeling; and, in some cases, the entire plot. These scenes are deployed in different contexts and to various effects, yet their consequences are usually in excess of the intrinsic interest in them as events in themselves.

In this essay I explore some versions of this scene in texts that were published in the 1810s and 1820s.<sup>3</sup> Their operations and associations vary according to the genre of the text in which they occur. For instance, we will see that, in the novel, the scene has a peculiar charge where it is associated with the psychological development of characters. But this is not an element of the scene that is registered in theatrical renditions, where, in contrast, it functions as a prelude to musical spectacle. Despite such differences, the recurrence of similar scenes across a range of literary texts allows us to consider it as a trope that has its own conventions of

representation and patterns of allusion. One common feature, however, is that in different ways, the scene always depends on travel. That is to say, either the instances of hearing it presents, which provoke all-important and consequential memories of the past, have taken place at different locations, perhaps in different countries, and even on different continents from those in which they are published and assumed to be read; or else they trigger memories for a protagonist who has travelled abroad and returned home.<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that the larger significance of these scenes may lie ultimately not in the formal work that each carries out within their respective texts, but rather in the fact that the condition of their possibility lies in the extreme mobility of the text's protagonists.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, these scenes are intelligible in the context of the regimes of human movement that characterize these decades, when, responding to changes in the world economy, people across the world moved in larger numbers and spanned greater distances than ever before. It is against the backdrop of the fraught and often brutal contexts of early nineteenth-century mobility, therefore, including the new schemes for settler colonies through which thousands of Britons would travel to far distant destinations, sometimes displacing others as they went, that scenes of listening are imbued with meaning. Here I examine examples from various genres – a novel, a play, a travel narrative, a short story, a slave narrative, and a settler narrative – and ask how these seemingly simple scenes of attentive listening create such a complex and varied field of meaning.

Take, for example, an intriguing episode in chapter 41 of Scott's popular novel *Guy Mannering* (1815), in which sound and the memories that it triggers come to the fore. The protagonist, Harry Bertram, who was kidnapped as a small child, and who spent the intervening years in Holland and India, has by a series of unlikely coincidences returned to a spot where there are an ancient castle, a house, and an estate which, unbeknown to him, are both the place of his birth and the property that he should rightfully inherit. His captors have purposefully eroded his knowledge of this to the extent that he does not even know his true name. At this point, however, lost memories start slowly to return. As he regards the scene, and muses on the few scraps of knowledge about his early life that he retains, he stumbles on the villain Glossin, the current owner of the estate, who is also responsible for Bertram's father's death. Bertram overhears Glossin in discussion with a land-surveyor about renovations to the estate, which include plans to demolish the old castle. In a conversation which then ensues, Bertram begins a process of recovery, provoked by all the things that he hears: soundings of texts and songs.<sup>6</sup>

It begins when he reads out loud a motto on a coat of arms inscribed on the castle: 'Our Right makes our Might.' A faded recollection from childhood of 'an old prophecy, or song, or rhyme, of some kind or other' causes him to reach back into his memory, and recite:

The dark shall be light,  
And the wrong made right,  
When Bertram's Right and Bertram's might  
Shall meet on . . .

(Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 247)

As he struggles to complete the verse, rhyming words trigger recollections: 'Light . . . right . . . might', lead him to 'height', and eventually to 'Ellangowan's height', the name of the estate that is the place of his birth. Rhyme is a mnemonic, and, as such, a clue in a puzzle.

There are three points to note in this episode, each of which has significance beyond its immediate context. First is the way the scene foregrounds and frames the sense of hearing, or aurality, as no less than a proof of identity. Even though he has travelled thousands of miles, even though he has no idea from where he came, the fact that Bertram can remember a tune from his infancy confirms his true identity and authorizes his inheritance. It suggests that in a time of extreme travel, the memories that reside in one's sense of hearing will prevail, and provide essential continuity. The second point has to do with the particular nature of the sounds that trigger Bertram's memory. They are the organized sounds of music and poetic language: not the sounds of nature, or even the intonations of a particular voice, but rather purposeful and intentional sounds of a melody, a song, a metrical pattern or a rhyme; sounds, we might further observe, that can be transcribed, and written down. Their transcribability is crucial. The sounds that are presented here, on which so much attention is poured, are mediated by writing and the conventions of orthoepic transcription.<sup>7</sup> Third, and here perhaps most important in this particular scene, is that the recognition of sound is necessary for representing the processes of cognition: for remembering, knowing, and working out, both for the protagonist and for the reader. As becomes increasingly apparent as the scene proceeds, the revelations of both plot and character are presented to us as readers, and to Bertram as protagonist, as riddles in which organized sounds – in this case the sounds of words – supply clues to lost or hidden meanings.<sup>8</sup>

As we engage alongside Bertram in solving the sound-puzzle of his origins, we share with him the hermeneutic pleasures of reading and



listening. 'There are other rhymes connected with these early recollections', Bertram declares, much to his antagonist's annoyance. Alluding to one such rhyme, he remembers a ballad that 'I could sing . . . from one end to another, when I was a boy' (Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 247). Despite the attempts of his captors to suppress his remembrances of childhood, Bertram recalls that 'I preserved my language among the sailors, most of whom spoke English, and when I could get into a corner by myself, I used to sing all that song over from beginning to end – I have forgot it all now – but I remember the tune well' (Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 248). This is a cue for a song, the melody of which he performs on his flageolet – the flute he has brought from India and which he has already played in earlier scenes. Here, by another apparent coincidence, it initiates a musical reaction: 'the tune awoke the corresponding associations of a damsel, who close beside a fine spring about half-way down the descent . . . was engaged in bleaching linen. She immediately took up the song.' The term 'damsel' is an ironic reference to Meg Merrilies, the now elderly gypsy who supplies the song's lyrics: 'Are these the links of Firth, she said, Or are they the crooks of Dee, Or the bonnie woods of Warroch head That I so fain would see?' (Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 248). The words present a gazetteer of the Solway Firth, the estuary of the border region in which the Ellangowan estate is located, in ballad metre. The places that 'I so fain would see' are the places that Bertram now can see, the places that he rightfully owns, and which will be restored to him in the projected future of the novel.

It is an artful scene of listening and performance, presented as though it were a duet or an accompanied song; protagonists hear, recall, and respond. In earlier scenes in which Bertram plays his flageolet, music has a similar function of revealing him to others. In one, his playing reveals him to his lover, Julia Mannering, whom he met in India, but who is now, like he, returned to Britain. On a clandestine visit to her lakeside retreat, he plays a 'Hindu tune' (Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 89) on his flageolet in a ritual of illicit love making. The tune he plays identifies him to her, but it is also overheard by her guardian and reveals their secret assignation. Eavesdropping is a recurrent event in this novel; sounds breach the boundaries of intimacy and give people away. Overheard sounds help to move the plot along. The scene of flageolet playing discussed earlier, when 'a damsel' overhears Bertram playing not a Hindu tune but the Scottish ballad, establishes a connection between him and both his estate and the gypsy singer who cared for him when he was a baby. It confirms the secret knowledge of the narrative – that this is the same stolen infant Harry

Bertram, now an adult. For him, it is a moment of awakening consciousness; for Glossin, an intimation of his imminent defeat; and for readers, a pleasurable moment in the revelation of the plot.

The multiple functions of sound in the novel are thus showcased in scenes of aural recognition. Listing them makes it clear that sound is decisive in many of the fundamental elements of the novel. First, the novel's plot relies on the recognition of sounds. These are generally the sounds of music or poetry, the patterns or sequences which enable the narrative to perform hermeneutic tasks. Mysteries are presented – and solved – in aural form, as rhymes; or by the connections revealed by eavesdropping. Second, as a repository of memory, sound is a constituent in the formation of mobile characters who are psychologically consistent, even as they traverse continents. Finally, sound is constitutive of the narrative's setting. The experience of sound as it is represented here gives spatial dimensions, and material form, to the relationships between people. Intimate relationships are sealed through listening to sounds that hover on the threshold of public audibility; overheard sounds pose dangerous threats to person and property. The fragile limits of privacy are at once established and transgressed by sound; sound is an arena fraught with vulnerability, a danger zone. Sound creates the space of the novel's adventure.<sup>9</sup>

The extent to which the novel cedes its primary narrative functions to the operations of sound is remarkable. Of course, music and poetry are not literally sounded in the novel, but only presented as though they were. But the fascination with the possibility of hearing things places particular stress on the way in which the sense of hearing mediates between the internal psychology of characters – their capacities to hear, recognize, and remember – and the external sources of sound that stimulate them. The heard environment is all, and hearing the primary sense of navigation for the radically mobile subjects, like Harry Bertram, who inhabit the novel's world.

### Staging Aural Recognition

Scott's renovations of the novel genre were widely, and internationally, appreciated, and the extreme popularity of his novels, serving new readerships across the globe, was, as Anne Rigney has shown, a worldwide phenomenon at a time of expanding transnational connection.<sup>10</sup> *Guy Mannering* reflects this experience of transcontinental travel in its plot, which relies on episodes that took place in India in the past. Its readership was equally dispersed in its locations. Indeed, the emphasis that Scott

places on aurality, and its capacity to provide continuity in people's lives in the midst of extreme movement, may well have appealed to the thousands of early nineteenth-century migrants who were also enthusiastic readers of Scott's novels.

The particular and highly stylized forms in which he presents sound and hearing in *Guy Mannering*, however, seem to have their roots in the theatrical culture of the time. For Scott there was a strong affinity between novels and the performance cultures of the theatre. Passing references in the novel to actors and plays, and the inclusion of so many self-consciously theatrical scenes, indicate the closeness of these two media, the fact that for Scott, novel and stage co-existed in shared, or at least overlapping, representational cultures.<sup>11</sup>

The clearest expression of this was the common practice of transferring novels to the stage. All of Scott's novels were adapted for theatrical performance almost immediately after their publication, and *Guy Mannering* was no exception.<sup>12</sup> The novel's emphasis on sound and hearing, music and song, seems to have made it particularly amenable to adaptation, and it is noteworthy that virtually all the stage versions were musical performances, sometimes referred to as 'operas', with song, dance, and orchestral accompaniment as integral parts of the production.<sup>13</sup> The first adaptation, *Guy Mannering; or The Gypsy's Prophecy*, a musical drama authored by Scott's friend the well-known actor-playwright Daniel Terry, opened in London less than a year after the novel's publication. Many other adaptations followed, most of them based on Terry's script. In line with the practices of the day, touring theatre companies performed *Guy Mannering* in metropolitan and provincial theatres up and down the country, and it was also produced in continental Europe and America. Philip Bolton's meticulous research reconstructs the performance record of the play, suggesting that it contributed to the international dissemination of particular styles of performance and modes of consuming music.<sup>14</sup>

The capacious archive of texts that Terry's *Guy Mannering* generated – playbills, reviews, printed scripts, prints of scenes and characters, and sheet music<sup>15</sup> – provides plenty of evidence, if any were needed, of how closely print and performance were entwined at this moment. Yet within their shared terrain, the differences between the novel and the play are profound, and many of these are connected to the very different sensory environments in which they participated. In the drama the novel's plot is pared down, the cast of characters shrunk, and the settings reduced to a single and confined geographical spot. Instead of presenting a complex plot, detailed conjuring of sense of place, and psychologically convincing

characters, as the novel, *Guy Mannering* on stage entertained its audiences with a proliferation of music and dance, and a mélange of melodrama and farce. The play served a different purpose: it sought to stimulate its audience by constantly bombarding the senses through a quickfire succession of music and spectacle. And the print commodities that it inspired gave audiences the added promise that, with a script and score in hand, the pleasures of sensory stimulation might be prolonged in home performances.

Scenes in the novel that dramatized performance and listening, such as the scene of aural recognition discussed above, are drawn into the stage adaptation, yet take on a new significance. While the novel derives drama from the possibility that intimate scenes of listening might be overheard, here, in the theatre, overhearing is the baseline activity in which the audience is involved. In the musical drama, listening is what the audience does. When the drama is performed on stage, therefore, the breaching of privacy through eavesdropping is a peculiarly self-reflexive event, and although for the most part it passes unnoticed as simply part and parcel of the conventions of theatrical representation, sometimes there is a frisson around it, which draws attention to its ironies.<sup>16</sup> In the theatrical adaptation of *Guy Mannering*, as we shall see, moments in which private listening is breached tend to be followed by either the performance of songs or episodes of farce, which dispel, or distract attention from, the tension created by the intrusion of intimacy, through added music and laughter.

To understand this process, I turn to Terry's adaptation of Scott's scene of aural recognition discussed above. Terry retains the detail of Harry Bertram's musical memory as an element in the plot, but presents this not through a performance by Harry himself (as in the novel), but as relayed as a piece of information by Harry's long-lost sister, Lucy. The element of discovery associated with its revelation, which is key to the novel's rendition, is absent; rather than a clue in a puzzle to be solved through listening, Harry's memory is presented as a fact already known, a piece of information necessary for the onward motion of the plot. We might see this (evoking Roland Barthes) as a distinction between the hermeneutic (in the novel) and the proairetic (in the dramatic adaptation).<sup>17</sup>

Recently bereaved of her father, and now the guest of *Guy Mannering* and Julia, Lucy Bertram sings a 'lovely air' ('O Tell Me Love') which, she explains in her preamble, has been sung by her family 'from a very ancient period, . . . to soothe the slumbers of the infant heir'. '[L]ittle Harry . . . tho so young, . . . could sing it quite well.' What is more, this is not a secret, but common knowledge, for 'there is not a milk-maid on the estate, once ours, but can chant it, and knows its history' (Terry, *Guy Mannering*,

p. 39). This prepares us for a later scene, in which Harry, finding himself with Meg Merrilies in the gypsies' haunt, hears exactly the same tune, performed not by Lucy but by a 'gypsy girl'. The familiarity of the song puzzles Harry ('why those sounds thus agitate my inmost soul – and what ideas they are that thus darkly throng upon my mind at hearing them', he asks Meg), yet there is little mystery for members of the audience, who already know why. The significance of Harry's aural recognition is toned down. Now it is a cue for Meg's rhyming incantation: 'Listen, Youth, to words of power / Swiftly comes the rightful hour . . .', which ends with the couplet taken directly from the episode in the novel, 'When Bertram's right, and Bertram's might / Shall meet on Ellangowan's Height' (Terry, *Guy Mannering*, p. 61). It is a moment of high drama in the text, in which the performance of the actress, often the widely admired Sarah Egerton (who was not a singer – hence the oral incantation rather than musical performance of the lines), was frequently remarked by reviewers.<sup>18</sup>

By removing the riddle format, and the cognitive revelation that it provokes, the theatrical adaptation lays stress instead on the performance of song and poetry. The remembered song ('Oh Rest Thee Babe') is performed twice by different performers, the first time as a lullaby, the second time (according to the stage directions) 'much more wildly' (Terry, *Guy Mannering*, p. 60), perhaps as a dance.<sup>19</sup> Scenes of intimate listening therefore in the stage version serve principally as occasions for performances of more music, song, dance, and spectacle. This is a generative environment in which one song invariably triggers another. For example, the scene that directly follows Lucy's performance of Harry's lullaby involves a meeting of Julia and Harry, whom she recognizes by the sound of his Indian flageolet. This is another scene of aural recognition, and a provocation for more performance. Hearing 'the very air [her lover] taught [her]', Julia breaks out into song: 'Oh Tell me, love, the dearest hour' (Terry, *Guy Mannering*, p. 42), to which Harry replies from off stage before he enters her bedroom through the window, singing. The scene retains elements of the episode in the novel it adapts: a clandestine meeting between the lovers, introduced by the flageolet. But now the flageolet music is the prelude to a performance of what turns out to be not just one but a series of duets, including, in some productions, the appropriately named 'Echo' duet.<sup>20</sup> If it were not for the untimely interruption of Lucy's bizarre language tutor, Dominie Sampson, the duets, we assume, would continue.

Musical performances were among the main attractions of the drama, the principal commodities in a complex network of marketable items that

clustered around the play and circulated nationally and internationally. The songs themselves were often extracted and their scores printed as single pieces of sheet music, as well as in compendia of song. For example, both songs mentioned above appear in *The Universal Songsters; or Museum of Mirth* (London: Jones, 1829), a popular song collection of the time.<sup>21</sup> When published as sheet music, the songs promoted the actors who performed them, above their composers. 'Oh Rest Thee Babe', for instance, appeared with the long subtitle 'the celebrated ballad, sung by Miss Stephens, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in Guy Mannering to which is added the stanza, sung by Miss Carew, in the scene of the Gypsies' haunt, in the same play', their names preceding that of its composer, John Whittaker. The naming of the two actresses suggests that it is the performances of the song that are notable, perhaps for their virtuosity or the appeal of star actresses.<sup>22</sup> Members of the cast often added to the performance new songs by different composers, which sometimes had little or nothing to do with the play itself.<sup>23</sup> The play thus enabled performers to display their talents and to experiment in musical technique. When the famous tenor John Braham took the part of Harry Bertram at Covent Garden in December 1817, a reviewer in *The Ladies Monthly Museum* noted that he 'introduced a new style of singing': 'all those displays of rapid execution which used to dazzle and astonish, were entirely laid aside; the songs were sung without ornament, and two of them unaccompanied by the orchestra',<sup>24</sup> an innovation that was generally admired. The play foregrounded performance styles, and as each rendition of the play provided opportunities for singers to adapt the musical score, it helped to create a repertoire of popular songs and to establish a common musical taste, across the many venues in which it was performed, both in Britain and abroad.

The play thus participated in producing and disseminating a particular style of musical culture. As the sale of musical scores and scripts suggests, the consumption of music included amateur performance, a component of the fabric of friendly sociability and leisurely pastimes. But the play's concern with hearing extended also to the differentiations of sound created by spoken languages, familiar and foreign. This is a theme in the stage versions of the play. The reduced cast of characters meant that in stage adaptations, the language tutor, Dominie Sampson, a relatively minor character in the novel, has a more prominent role.<sup>25</sup> In both, he is a comic figure, notable for his ungainly appearance and absurd mode of dress, but on stage his importance is enhanced. In the scene recounted above, Harry and Julia's proliferating amorous duets are brought to an abrupt halt by the

sound of his footsteps. To conceal his illicit presence in Julia's bedroom, Harry disguises himself in the unlikely costume of an Indian pundit, there ostensibly to teach Julia oriental languages. His exotic persona mirrors that of Dominie: both are eccentric language tutors, and Harry's outlandish Indian outfit matches Dominie's outré appearance in its comic strangeness. The scene is a farce, in which the jokes revolve around the perceived comedy of obscure languages – the very idea of Indian languages is a joke in the play – and the sexual frisson created by the sight of Sampson's cumbersome body, accentuated by his ugly clothes (he is the only character in the play to be allowed a change of costume), and Harry's now racialized body in a pretty white woman's bedroom.

Believing that he has disturbed an Indian scholar hidden in Julia's chamber, Dominie Sampson addresses the disguised Harry, saying, 'Expound unto me, most learned Pundit, whether we shall confer in the Sanskrit of Bengali, in the Telinga, or in the Malaya language? Praise to the blessing of heaven of my poor endeavours, I am indifferently skilled in these three tongues.' In reality, Harry, of course, knows none of these languages, and so comedy is created by the thought that the gullible Sampson, assuming otherwise, might break out in a language that, to Harry as well as the audience, is 'Moorish gibberish'.<sup>26</sup> Harry's linguistic ignorance, his inability to speak, will give him away and reveal his true identity as Julia's suitor.

What is at stake in this scene is the idea of aural *mis*recognition. Not only will Harry *not* understand an oriental language of address, but in *not* understanding it, he will reveal himself to be a sexual interloper in a lady's bedroom.

This is a reversal of the scene of aural recognition. Just as Harry proves his *licit* identity by recognizing the gypsy's ballad, here, in *not* recognizing the sounds of Indian languages, he threatens to reveal his *illicit* identity as the illegitimate suitor of Julia. It is thus a key moment in the play's comedic structure. Just as the scene of aural recognition is disinvested of the psychological complexity that it is given in Scott's novel to become instead a trigger for producing the pleasures of theatrical consumption, so too this farcical scene of aural *mis*recognition produces theatrical effects – nervous laughter – making it an intrinsic element of the comedy.

### **The Scene of Aural Misrecognition: Unintelligible Sounds**

One consequence of this reversal is that it establishes a distinction between intelligible and unintelligible language sounds. Indeed, all the various



stages of these comic intersections depend on the assumption that no one – bar Sampson, and even he improperly – will understand an oriental language. While words and phrases in European languages are dotted liberally throughout the play to everyone's edification, Asian languages are irredeemably unintelligible, mere 'Moorish gibberish'. In asserting this, the play establishes a border between sounds that can be understood and those that simply cannot; a boundary of audibility and intelligibility that in this case also establishes the limits of legitimate intimacy, which both tutors of unintelligible languages threaten to exceed.

In the literary culture of the early nineteenth century, in a number of different kinds of texts, we start to see a soundscape emerge in which the boundary between intelligible and unintelligible sounds is accentuated and invested with social and cultural significance. In this formulation, it is not just that a distinction is made between sounds that are intelligible and those that are unintelligible, but that the difference between them, and the possibility of moving between them – crossing a kind of auditory boundary as it were – are identified as an event of special and intense psychological investment. It produces a particular ecology of sound in which humans oscillate between, on the one hand, understanding sound and being in the world, and on the other hand a peculiar state of estrangement derived from failing to understand sound and disassociating from the world.

One particularly clear example of this is found in a work by the Scottish novelist John Galt. Galt achieved fame in the 1820s for his regional novels set in Scotland, writing – in Ian Duncan's phrase – in Scott's shadow.<sup>27</sup> In a volume of short stories entitled *The Steam-Boat* (1822), Galt included a story, 'The Dumbie's Son', which explored the profoundly eerie effects that sounds produce for a subject to whom they are unintelligible. The eponymous Dumbie's son is the hearing-able child of deaf and dumb parents, who has been brought up in an environment in which, because of his parents' disabilities, sounds have no conventional meanings. Not only is he unable to understand spoken language, but he is equally confounded by the sounds of nature and the environment. Living in a sounded world that at the time he cannot interpret, even though his own aural faculties are fully intact, the child fails to understand the sounds of the most fundamental of social activities, and as a consequence, he is haunted by unintelligible sounds. The climax of the story is his account of his parents' funeral, in which the sound of soil falling on their graves is amplified to uncanny effect, a sonic sign of the profound isolation experienced by the uncomprehending child.

In Galt's case, the fascination with a sound world organized around concepts of intelligibility was likely to have been based in contemporary

discourses around hearing and hearing disabilities.<sup>28</sup> In his short story, the effects of not understanding sounds are internalized by the protagonist, and are projected onto readers, to become a source of uncanniness and fear. Yet the haunting effects are in part achieved through the story's retrospective frame: the narrator is the protagonist's adult self, so that his subsequent acquisition of language is assumed. The story explores an uncanny realm between understanding and not understanding sounds. As in the aesthetic of the sublime, it is the oscillation between these two states that is the cause of such profound uneasiness.<sup>29</sup> In Terry's drama, the oscillation between intelligible and unintelligible sounds is treated more lightly, as a moment of comedy, yet it is nevertheless the same transition that is the source of unease.

In Terry's drama, it is a comedy of foreign languages, and the jokes are to do with race. In the bedroom scene discussed above, intelligible sounds are those in English; unintelligible ones are marked as foreign, mere 'Moorish gibberish'. Disguised as an Indian, Harry is silent, and that is part of the joke. But the intriguing character of Dominie Sampson, whom the disguised Harry mirrors, also seems strangely foreign. Indeed, it is notable that the actor most frequently associated with the part in the 1810s and 1820s was the celebrated comic actor John Liston, familiar to audiences from a previous role as Henry Augustus Mug in George Colman's popular abolitionist play *The Africans* (1808). Liston's presence on stage, especially in a scene in which Dominie Sampson is mirrored by a pretend Indian, for many may have recalled the earlier play, which was known for the way it drew attention to the racialized otherness of enslaved people, particularly through Liston's character, Mug, a white man who had been enslaved.<sup>30</sup> The concept of racialized foreignness is extended in Terry's *Guy Mannering*, through the character of Dominie, to become associated principally with unintelligible languages, or 'gibberish' that can never be understood.

The jokes about oriental language learning were more topical and precisely local than may at first be apparent. On Leicester Square, in the close vicinity of Covent Garden theatre where John Liston played Dominie Sampson in eight performances of *Guy Mannering* between September 1818 and July 1819,<sup>31</sup> stood the London Oriental Institute, an educational establishment for young men preparing for a career in the East India Company. The institute's director was John Borthwick Gilchrist, a Scot by birth and an experienced orientalist scholar and educational entrepreneur, who in 1818 was contracted by the East India Company to teach oriental languages to company officials.<sup>32</sup> Gilchrist was

by then well known as the author of an array of instructional books on Indian languages used widely by British travellers to India. These included *Gilchrist's Guide*, which in 1820, in its third edition, went under the full title of *The Stranger's Infallible East-Indian Guide, or Hindoostanee Multum in Parvo, as a Grammatical Compendium of the Grand, Popular, and Military Language of All India. (Long, but Improperly Called The Moors or Moorish Jargon)*.<sup>33</sup> The long-winded title, its Latin terms, and its pedantic correction of the 'improper' name 'Moorish Jargon' (echoing Bertram's term 'Moorish gibberish'), recall *Guy Mannering's* comedy linguist, Dominie Sampson. We might speculate that among the audience of *Guy Mannering* were students from the Oriental Institute, who might have found the farcical scene in Julia's bedroom involving a fake tutor of Indian languages who considered oriental languages to be 'Moorish gibberish', and the inappropriate appearance of a pompous language teacher, Dominie Sampson, in a young lady's boudoir, especially funny.

Hindustani was the language that served as a lingua franca in the context of extreme multilingualism in India. According to Gilchrist, in a land where spoken languages were so many and diverse, and written languages doubly difficult because of their multiple writing systems, 'Hindoostanee', in his spelling, was the 'common medium by which natives in general, and many persons of various foreign nations settled in Hindoostan, communicate their wants and ideas orally to each other' (*Gilchrist's Guide*, p. xi). He saw it as a language of mediation, even among natives: 'where a native of Hindoostan wishes either to compose or to dictate anything to be translated from his own to another tongue, he constantly arranges his ideas, and explains his meaning in Hindoostanee' (*Gilchrist's Guide*, p. xiv). *Gilchrist's Guide* served as an introduction to the Indian experience of European travellers, providing a frame of reference and a vocabulary for everyday interaction. This particular edition included a 'simpler form' of instruction, a set of principles and exercises, grammatical charts, and glossaries, together with instructions on pronunciation, of words transliterated (*Gilchrist's Guide*, p. iii) into Roman script, because '[t]o insert the oriental letters' would be 'discouraging' to language learners for 'the intricacy of its characters' (*Gilchrist's Guide*, p. iv). Gilchrist had developed his linguistic expertise while serving in the British army in India, when he noticed the problems created by the inability of British officers to communicate with Indian soldiers. For him, Hindustani was the language of colonial command.<sup>34</sup> Thus in his guide he gives only English words in (transliterated) Hindustani translation, because, he reasons, a 'reversed vocabulary would rather prove embarrassing' for those 'whose ears cannot

discriminate sounds' (*Gilchrist's Guide*, pp. iii–iv). The use of the term 'embarrassment' is interesting here, as it suggests the acute discomfort and awkwardness (rather than inefficaciousness) of not understanding words: a kind of bodily shame, perhaps, that takes a sexual turn in Terry's play. In any case, a command required no verbal response, only action. For the British man in India, barking orders in Hindustani, there would be no shame in being simply unable to hear. This was a language for pronouncing, not listening; for commanding, not conversing; and India was a place imagined as a soundscape of gibberish overlaid with the semi-articulate sounds of Anglicized Hindustani command. Terry's jokes about Indian unintelligibility, and his soundscape that drew boundaries between intelligible and unintelligible sounds, were no whimsical invention.

### Musical Recognition: Reginald Heber in India

A traveller who used *Gilchrist's Guide* en route to taking up an appointment in India was Reginald Heber, the Bishop of Calcutta. Heber refers to the *Guide* in the introduction to his extremely popular travelogue *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay 1824–25. (With Notes upon Ceylon.) An Account of a Journey to Madras and the Southern Provinces, 1826, and Letters Written in India*, published posthumously in 1828.<sup>35</sup> On the voyage out, during the long hours on board ship, with *Gilchrist's Guide* at his side, Heber translated St John's Gospel into Hindustani and corrected and improved Gilchrist's translations of Indian poetry by introducing more complex metrical forms. As a gifted linguist, poet, and writer of hymns, Heber took an approach to language acquisition that was probably more sophisticated than that of the generality of Gilchrist's users. His account of his Indian travels after he has arrived is strewn through with constant remarks about the complexity of the linguistic environment he encounters, the many different languages that he hears, and the opportunities for mistranslation, deceit, and corruption that he fears they present.<sup>36</sup> In this context, music offers Heber a welcome retreat from complex problems of unintelligible words, a way of understanding sound that transcends the cultural particularities of language.

At a striking moment, Heber records hearing some begging boys singing songs that are like English ballads. From this episode we can see the way in which music and language interact for him: music is intelligible and reminds him of home, but the words in this case are unintelligible. As a whole, the *Narrative* presents a mix of ethnographic observation and

nostalgia for home and family. India is always seen through a haze of memories: rivers that remind him of the Thames, or mountains that are like Snowdonia. These memories are often filtered through literary examples, especially those taken from Scott's novels. But at this moment it is music that reminds him of home. This is a scene of aural recognition in the mode of Scott, but its valences in the alien landscape of India are somewhat different.

'A number of little boys came to the side of the river and ran alongside our vessel', he writes. They were

Singing an air extremely like 'My love to war is going'. The words were Bengalee and unintelligible to me; but the purport I soon found out, by the frequent recurrence of 'Radha,' to be that amour of Krishna with the beautiful dairymaid, which here is as popular a subject with boatmen and peasantry, as the corresponding tale of Apollo and Daphne can have been with the youth of Greece and Hellenized Syria. . . . Their mode of begging strongly recalled to my mind something of the same sort which I have seen in England. . . . Dear, dear England! There is now less danger than ever of my forgetting her, since I now in fact first feel the bitterness of banishment. In my wife and children I still carried with me an atmosphere of home; but here everything reminds me that I am a wanderer. This custom of the children singing I had not met with before, but it seems common in this part of the country. All the forenoon, at different villages, which are here thickly scattered, the boys ran out to sing, not skilfully, certainly, but not unpleasantly. The general tune was like 'My boy, Billy,' Radha! Radha! forming the rest of the burden.<sup>37</sup>

As in the scene in Scott's *Guy Mannering*, hearing this familiar tune stirs Heber's emotions. But in what might have been a moment in which a familiar tune soothed him, now its familiarity unsettles him even more. Everything he hears 'reminds me that I am a wanderer', itinerant, alone, foreign. In this instance, therefore, the scene of aural recognition is simultaneously one of *mis*recognition: the songs are like English songs, yet not them, and this ambiguity opens up a space of discomfort that is affecting for readers as well as for the author himself.

What is equally striking about this scene is the abundance of detail that it presents. The songs the boys sing resemble particular songs, which Heber names: 'My Love to War Is Going' was a popular anti-war ballad from 1790 by Amelia Alderson (Opie), with music composed by Edward Smith Biggs; 'My Boy Billy', a traditional ballad. The precision with which Heber records his observations delineates two parallel sonic worlds. While his sense of loneliness resides in the gap between them, the possibility of their coordination also serves as an aid to his cognition, helping him to

understand when his language competency fails him. The idea that there might be such coordination between songs of Asia and Europe extended the philological orthodoxies of the day, which sought to find comparisons across languages and mythologies to music.<sup>38</sup> Here Heber's comparative method enables him to understand the stories that the boys are singing: the Bengali story of Radha, he claims, 'corresponds' to the story of Apollo and Daphne in ancient Greece and Syria, and compensates for his inability to understand Bengali. Even though the 'Bengalee' words were incomprehensible to him, his knowledge of comparative mythology allows him to surmise the narrative of the songs that they sing, supplying knowledge through association rather than translation. In this extract, too, the stories and songs to which he alludes contribute to its effects. Apollo's frustrated love for Daphne is fitting because it resonates with his own feelings of acute loneliness, and reflects his experience of cultural dissonance. The reference to 'My Boy Billy', a courtship ballad in which in many renditions the woman is too young to marry Billy, fills the background with more references to frustrated connubial love. Throughout his prose, therefore, the sound of the songs and their associations wrap together complex indices of difference and similitude, which his narrative attempts to measure.

In Heber's variation on the scene of aural recognition, therefore, hearing the familiar song is both a means through which Heber can express the melancholy of travelling and a technique through which, as a comparativist scholar, he purports to understand the unfamiliar culture in which he is immersed. The sound of the song serves as a kind of pivot around which cultural differences and similarities turn. In this case, sound is like a doorway between two cultures. It acts as a threshold of equivalence, provoking Heber's memories of the past and of home and opening to him a strange culture through the familiar strains of home. As such it may be more like a trick door, in which entry into a new terrain is only imagined, a projection of his own culture. Likewise, the extent to which he is ever able to hear the sounds of India as they were heard by, for instance, the Indian beggar boys is definitely in question. While his ear is not 'embarrassed' by the sounds of languages that he does not understand, as Gilchrist fears to be the case, neither is it clear that he is able to 'discriminate' their sounds. Ultimately, it seems, Heber cannot 'hear' India.

In the radically alienating context of India Heber evokes sound as a way of making sense of the environments that he encounters. To do so, he draws on the scene of aural recognition as an available technology with which to do so. Like Harry Bertram in Scott's *Guy Mannering*, he finds

that the music of the ballad recalls to him memories of his past. It also helps him to understand the culture in which he finds himself through the methods of comparative mythology. But the insistence throughout on his foreignness, evoked especially by the unintelligible sounds of the Bengali language, layer over his attempts at cognition the overwhelming sense of despair at his own displacement. This is a complex soundscape which weaves together the two different regimes of hearing and cognition.

### Sound and Moving

Heber provides us with the clearest example among those that I have presented of the way in which the scene of aural recognition and its corollary, the scene of aural misrecognition, are techniques within each text's formal apparatus for imagining worlds in which its protagonists have crossed oceans and continents. What often seem to be casual events of hearing things are invested with associations that link them to the experience of transcontinental travel – whether in the context of international trade, colonialism, settler emigration, missionary endeavour, or even slavery. Within the complex dynamics of sounding, listening, remembering, feeling, hearing, not hearing, singing, laughing, making sense and non-sense that each text presents, we find compressed ways of thinking about a world in motion and the different people who traverse it. The recurrence of these scenes highlights the extent to which within these early decades of the century, literary culture had recourse to sound as a way of encoding a response to a world at a moment of incipient globalization.

This was, after all, a time of new demographic mobility, in which the movement of people was happening on a scale previously unknown.<sup>39</sup> In part, this was because new technologies, especially ships and printing presses powered by steam, began to speed up and extend transport and communications networks. But there were other factors too. The cessation of military hostilities following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 diminished barriers to international trade and stimulated the global traffic in raw materials and artefacts. Moreover, in Britain, returning veterans, and a postwar economic depression, provoked the British government for the first time actively to encourage the emigration of Britons to colonial settlements abroad. Together with the hundreds of thousands of independent migrants from Britain to America, emigrants to British colonies were part of a new trend of transnational movement that affected people in all corners of the world. Driven by new labour markets, people were compelled to move huge distances across oceans and continents,



sometimes in the pursuit of new and better lives and often because they had no choice.<sup>40</sup> In the midst of this massive demographic reshaping, sound played an important role. No matter how poor or how constrained, travellers of all kinds carried music, poetry, and song in their heads; the very language that they spoke and the songs that they sang were bonds with the places from which they had come. By hearing an accent, a migrant could recognize a fellow countryman; a ballad or a song could identify the region from where someone had come. Alongside the oral transmission of sounds, moreover, printed texts – books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and printed scores – tracked and amplified the movement of language and music within migratory flows.

Voice is expressive of more than a migrant's origins. In the fraught scenarios of migration, poetry and music were means through which travellers expressed the gamut of their emotions, from elation to despair. When a group of Gallic-speaking Scottish migrants arrived in Venezuela in 1825, for example, they danced a reel on board their ship, we assume to the shrill tune of a pipe.<sup>41</sup> But they quickly realized that their pipe would be drowned out by a cacophony of strange languages and musical instruments, and the unfamiliar and threatening sounds of the creatures of the tropical zone they had entered.<sup>42</sup> In the most extreme contexts of forced migration, the voice was the most poignant means of expressing human suffering. In slave narratives, the most brutal of all regimes of involuntary movement, human cries and shrieks provide an unremitting soundtrack to horrors endured. Mary Prince, the West Indian enslaved woman who published the narrative of her life in 1831, recalls that she was initiated into the extremities of slavery not when she was abused herself, but when she overheard the agony of her friend. She heard 'the cracking of the thong, and the house rang to the shrieks of poor Hetty, who kept crying out, "Oh, Massa! Massa! me dead. Massa have mercy on me, – don't kill me outright." This was a sad beginning for me.'<sup>43</sup> This is a different scene of aural recognition from those discussed so far, for sure, but one in which the knowledge and feelings conveyed by sound are no less profound. For Prince, the sound of slavery awakened her to the realities of her situation. Yet sound also helped to comfort her in the extremity of her pain. As a mobile medium for both expressing and soothing suffering, as well as articulating collective endurance, resistance, and possibilities for transcendence in the afterlife, enslaved people developed complex styles of music and performance. Ironically this made the transatlantic slave trade the basis of the most influential music migration of the modern era.<sup>44</sup>

Sound also operated as a means of conveying the violence involved in subduing subject people in accounts of settler colonialism. John Galt, the author of 'The Dumbie's Son', who was also an active colonist involved in a commercial colonization company which assisted British emigrants to Canada, heard in the sounds of the North American forests all the dangers that colonists faced: inclement weather, wild animals, a perilous terrain, and hostile natives, the dangers of which are intimated in the eerie soundscape of the forests. Silence is suddenly broken by 'deafening claps' of thunder, the 'whistling of a ball' of a gun, the 'piercing cries of a hawk' or the 'drumming of the partridge and the tapping of the woodpecker', the roaring of the distant waterfall. No wonder that he should present the process of colonial settlement as one that necessarily involved a kind of acoustic occupation: a regulation of the sound sphere through the pealing of bells, the singing of ballads, and the accents of Scottish speech.<sup>45</sup> For Galt, recognition of regional voices was a means to establish networks of influence across continents, a tool in the arsenal of devices necessary for building and governing a colony. Hearing a Scottish voice for him was a scene of aural recognition not unlike Scott's scene in *Guy Mannering* with which this essay opened. It indicates the wider applications of what appeared at first to be a simple literary trope. In this highly mobile world, sounds are fraught with emotions regarding the past and the future: fear, anxiety, pain, subjection, hope, nostalgia, rapacity, and a will to power.

In these decades, the movement of people was always a sonic event. As a consequence, the global distribution of musical styles and languages served as evidence of patterns of human migration.<sup>46</sup> Beyond this, however, attending to scenes of listening within literary texts reveals the way in which sound is caught up in a complex range of responses to the strangeness of place, the displeasures of displacement, and modes of relinquishing and grasping power in situations of colonization. I suggest that the significance of the scene of aural recognition in this phase of literary production is that it transfers to the literary domain an aural environment which has heightened significance in the migratory culture of the time. In the 1810s and 1820s, when the prospect of large-scale settler emigration was considered as something of a novelty, it marks a phenomenon that within the culture seems particularly troubled and unstable. By the late decades of the nineteenth century, when the spread of anglophone culture was taken by many to be a sign of the imperial triumph of, in Charles Dilke's term, 'Greater Britain',<sup>47</sup> the more fragile and changeable acoustic ecology of these decades would be a sound of the past.

## Notes

- 1 Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, ed. Peter Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Subsequent references are to this edition and noted by page number in the text.
- 2 From the rich literature on sound and listening, most useful to me has been Gautier, *Aurality*, for the complex way in which it understands sound as mediating between individuals and state in colonial societies. I am especially interested in the uses of sound in the social conditions of migration. For earlier discussions of some of the material, see chapters 1 and 2 of my *Literature in a Time of Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815–1876* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
- 3 On the increasing significance of sound for writers in the Romantic era, see e.g. James Chandler, 'The "Power of Sound" and the Great Scheme of Things: Wordsworth Listens to Wordsworth', and other essays in the collection '*Soundings of Things Done: The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era*', ed. Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Circles* (2008), <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/soundings/index.html>. In this essay I focus on texts written in the period from after 1815 to around 1830.
- 4 For a longer history of the returning native and the problems that the idea throws up, see Gillian Beer, 'Can the Native Return?', in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 31–54.
- 5 For that reason I have found a body of work on sound and migration particularly helpful when thinking through these issues, especially Tom Western, 'Listening in Displacement: Sound, Citizenship and Disruptive Representations of Migration', *Migration and Society* 3.1 (2020): 294–309, Josh Kun, 'The Aural Border', *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 1–21, and Nando Sigona, 'The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representation, Narratives and Memories', in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 369–82. My suggestion is that the print culture of the early 1800s frames the experience of listening in the liminal spaces created by mobility as complex sites in which to explore possibilities of dominating others and resisting domination. My interest is in the way in which printed texts provide recurrent instances in which these differentiated views are presented, and in the way in which these are evident in formal elements of media and genre. Helen Groth's 'Literary Soundscapes', in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 135–53, provides a helpful way of conceptualizing the relationship of texts to sounds: 'A literary soundscape can and should be understood as a distinct form of connecting with other sound worlds and media, . . . as a distinctive resonant patterning of words that recalibrates and interconnects with these media, as well as other forms and modes of hearing and sounding' (p. 147).

- 6 The landscape as presented by Scott is something like a ‘sonoric landscape’ as analysed by Richard Leppert: ‘Sonoric landscapes are both heard and seen. They exist because of human experience and human consciousness. Music . . . connects to the visible human body, not only as the receiver of sound, but as its agent or producer . . . The semantic content of music . . . [is] about the complex relations between sound and hearing as these are registered and as they mediate the entire experience of being.’ ‘Reading the Sonoric Landscape’, in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 409–18, at pp. 409–10. In *Guy Mannering*, the ‘portion of land’, Leppert’s ‘landscape’, is specifically the inheritable property of the Bertrams.
- 7 The issue of transcription was of interest in a number of fields in this period. For scholars of oriental languages, for instance, the related issue of transliteration was particularly vexed. See e.g. William Jones, ‘A Dissertation on the Orthography of Asiatick Words in Roman Letters’, *Asiatick Researches* 1 (1788): 1–56, who discusses the shortcomings of the Roman alphabet for transcribing Indian languages, and, more relevant here, the influential work of John Borthwick Gilchrist, *A Grammar of the Hindoostanee Language* (Calcutta: Chronicle Press, 1796); both are cited by Baidik Bhattacharya in ‘The “Vernacular” Babel: *Linguistic Survey of India* and Colonial Philology’, *Modern Philology* 118.4 (2021): 579–602. See also Javed Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), chapter 4. Related questions of transcription were also embedded in discussions about prosody and musical notation, such as John Thelwall’s work on elocution published between 1800 and 1820. See Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), chapter 5.
- 8 The inclusion of sound clues in *Guy Mannering* is comparable with the use of riddles and acrostics in novels of the same period, especially, e.g., Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816), in which word games play a prominent and complex part in the plot. On riddles in the form of the novel, see Frances Ferguson, ‘Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form’, in *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 231–55, and Jeanne M. Britton, ‘“To Know What You Think”: Riddles and Minds in Jane Austen’s Emma’, *Poetics Today* 39.4 (2018): 651–78.
- 9 On sound’s production of space, see Andrew J. Eisenberg, ‘Space’, in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 193–207.
- 10 Anne Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also chapter 1 of my *Literature in a Time of Migration*.
- 11 Much of the theatricality in Scott’s *Guy Mannering* revolves around the gypsy Meg Merrilies. See Peter Garside, ‘Picturesque Figures and Landscape: Meg Merrilies and the Gypsies’, in *Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape*

- and *Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 145–74.
- 12 Annika Bautz, “‘The Universal Favorite’: Daniel Terry’s *Guy Mannering; or, The Gypsy’s Prophecy* (1816)”, in ‘Walter Scott: New Interpretations’, special issue of *The Yearbook of English Studies* 47 (2017), pp. 36–57. For a calendar of performances, and bibliography of published and unpublished theatrical adaptations of Scott’s works, see H. Philip Bolton, *Scott Dramatized* (London and New York: Mansell, 1992). Barbara Bell details the significance of adaptations of Scott to a distinct theatrical genre which took off in Scotland from 1817. Scott adaptations were ‘performed by strolling groups or the local patentee, before they were seen in the capital’, sustaining an ethos of Scottish nationalist feeling through decades during which ‘political struggle was difficult’, before it passed back into the domain of ‘established politics’ in the mid-1850s. ‘The National Drama’, *Theatre Research International* 17.2 (1992): 96–108, at 97 and 107. On theatrical culture in England, see Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures, 1773–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). On the culture of stage adaptations more generally, see Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on Stage, 1790–1840* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
- 13 The censorship regime that regulated theatres during these decades, whereby only the official theatres were permitted to stage spoken dramas, meant that burletta, a ‘hybrid form of recitative musical and spoken declamation’, evolved in the non-patent theatres. Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution*, pp.18–19. See also Joseph Donohue, ‘Burletta and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Theatre’, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre Research* 1.1 (1973): 29–51. Full operatic adaptations of the novel, according to Jerome Mitchell, were uncommon. The most prominent, François-Adrien Boieldieu’s *La dame blanche* first performed in Paris in 1825, was based only in part on the novel. See Mitchell, *The Walter Scott Operas: An Analysis of Operas Based on the Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. 36–52.
- 14 Bolton, *Scott Dramatized*, pp. 56–139.
- 15 For a full listing of printed play texts, see *ibid.*, pp. 58–59. References here are to *Guy Mannering; or, The Gipsy’s Prophecy! A Musical Play by Daniel Terry, Esq. with Prefatory Remarks* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823), cited by page number. Bautz’s article ‘The Universal Favorite’ presents an informed discussion of the commodity culture that the play generated. On the visual print culture produced around the play, also see Garside, ‘Picturesque Figures’.
- 16 On intimacy and the theatre, see Alan Read, *Theatre, Intimacy, and Engagement: The Last Human Venue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 17 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970).
- 18 Mrs Egerton ‘could do everything but sing’. W. Oxberry, in *Oxberry’s Dramatical Biography*, 6 vols. (London: G. Virtue, 1825–27), vol. 4, p. 240.

- 19 I infer from the stage direction that ‘much more wildly’ means more quickly, and possibly more loudly, although neither tempo nor volume is indicated in either of the scores that I have seen: John Whittaker, *Oh! Rest Thee*, 3rd ed. (London: Button, Whitaker, ?1817), and *Oh! Rest Thee Babe, Rest Thee Babe* (Philadelphia: G. E. Blake, ?1816), [www.loc.gov/item/2015563269/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2015563269/).
- 20 See Bolton, *Scott Dramatized*, p. 57. The ‘famous Echo duet’ is taken from *America*, another musical play of the time, and is advertised as an attraction on some playbills.
- 21 Bautz, ‘The Universal Favorite’, pp. 45–46.
- 22 Indeed, ‘a gypsy girl’ played by Miss Carew is incidental to the plot.
- 23 Bautz, ‘The Universal Favorite’, p. 55.
- 24 *The Ladies Monthly Museum* 7 (January 1818): 47.
- 25 Bautz, ‘The Universal Favorite’, p. 49.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 27 Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). I explore in more detail Galt’s interest in hearing, which is sustained across his corpus, in *Literature in a Time of Migration*, chapter 2.
- 28 Galt’s story seems to share ground with the contemporary interest in so-called wild children, such as the ‘Wild Boy of Aveyron’, whose case was discussed by Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard in 1801. As Jonathan Sterne notes, the boy was found in the wild, and having lacked human contact, appeared to be deaf, even though his hearing was intact. Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 12. On early nineteenth-century understanding of deafness, see Malcolm Nicholson, ‘Having the Doctor’s Ear in Nineteenth Century Edinburgh’, in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), pp. 151–68. Today some children of deaf adults (or CODAs) identify as culturally deaf. See Rebecca Sanchez, ‘Deafness and Sound’, in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Snaith, pp. 272–86, at p. 273.
- 29 Esteban Buch, ‘The Sound of the Sublime: Notes on Burke as Time Goes By’, *SubStance* 49.2 (2020): 44–59, [10.1353/sub.2020.0009](https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2020.0009). hal 02952083.
- 30 Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representations of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39–42. On Liston’s career, see Jim Davis, ‘Liston, John (c. 1776–1846), Actor’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16770](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16770).
- 31 Bolton, *Scott Dramatized*, p. 65.
- 32 Katherine Prior, ‘Gilchrist, John Borthwick (1759–1841), Philologist’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10716](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10716).
- 33 Gilchrist’s credentials are emblazoned on the title page: ‘The Founder of Hindoostanee Philology and Author of Various works in that elegant and most useful Tongue, among the living Dialects of the Peninsula, all more or

- less intimately connected with this universally current Speech of British India, in their composition and Orthoepy.' *The Stranger's Infallible East-Indian Guide*, 3rd ed. (London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1820). All subsequent references are to this edition, abbreviated as *Gilchrist's Guide*, by page number. Bhattacharya situates Gilchrist's work in the history of colonial linguistics and assesses its importance in 'The "Vernacular" Babel'.
- 34 Cf. Bernard Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 16–56.
- 35 Heber died suddenly in April 1826 while touring south India. His death became a *topos* in sentimental poetry of the time. See e.g. L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon), 'The Death of Heber', in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [1838] (London, 1839), p. 58. *Narrative of a Journey* was edited by his widow, Amelia, and published with letters between the couple and other family members. The work was enormously popular, perhaps because it was framed as an example of conjugal love.
- 36 See e.g. his comments on a boy in a mission school, whose linguistic competence was such that his Indian teachers did not understand him. It 'opened [his] eyes to the danger . . . that some of the boys brought up in our schools might grow up accomplished hypocrites, playing the part of Christians with us, and with their own people as zealous followers of Brahma'. Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1828), vol. 1, p. 379.
- 37 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 136.
- 38 Although the discipline of comparative musicology did not take formal shape until the end of the nineteenth century, J. G. Herder's influential work on folk music established, from the 1770s, the contours for a comparative approach. Philip Bohlman writes that Herder 'navigated the discursive space between an ethnographic moment and a global moment', setting the terms for writing and thinking about folk music for the nineteenth century, in which the ballad had a prominent place. See Philip V. Bohlman, 'Johann Gottfried Herder and the Global Moment of World-Music History', in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 255–76, at p. 257.
- 39 Jürgen Osterhammel, in *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), chapter 4, 'Mobilities', surveys the unprecedented extent of world migrations in the nineteenth century.
- 40 In *Literature in a Time of Migration*, I follow the ways in which migration in this period took place under the sign of freedom, and discuss the vexed relationship that movement had to notions of freedom: see 'Introduction'.
- 41 Hans P. Rheimheimer, *Topo: The Story of a Scottish Colony near Caracas 1825–1827* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), p. 60, citing Archivo General de la Nación, Intendencia de Venezuela, vol. 281, 1825.
- 42 See Gautier's description of the confusing array of languages and sounds that travellers to Colombia and Venezuela would have encountered. See *Auralilty*,



- pp. 31–50. The group of emigrants, sometimes referred to as the Guayrans (after the name of the place at which they landed), did not stay long in Venezuela due to the difficulties they encountered. By a series of seeming coincidences, some of the group ended up in Guelph in Canada, invited by the novelist-colonist John Galt. Their story is told by Rheimheimer, and by Edgar Vaughan in *The Guayrians at Guelph in Upper Canada: Scottish Settlers for Canada from Venezuela. A Bureaucratic Problem in 1827*, Guelph Historical Society, 18 (Guelph: Guelph Historical Society, 1978–79).
- 43 Mary Prince and Thomas Pringle, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831), p. 6.
- 44 Cf. Paul Gilroy's seminal work on Black musical culture: 'Black Atlantic self-making and sociality can be explored through organised sound: music and song.' But he cautions, 'rather than caricaturing their confluence as a smooth, even flow of predictable interactions, accounts of its evolution should be able to accommodate fluctuations, detours, feedback loops and distortions'. Gilroy, "'Lost in Music": Wild Notes and Organised Sound', in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Snaith, pp. 170–89, at p. 171. See also Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 45 On music and discipline see e.g. Christopher Small, *Music, Society and Education* (London: Calder, 1977), chapter 1, 'The Perfect Cadence and the Concert Hall'. Between 1830 and 1832 in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, Galt published a series of foundation narratives about European settlement of North America, which he claimed were based on stories that he discovered while he was travelling in North America. All of them are violent stories about the regulation and, in some cases, annihilation, of native people. See e.g. 'The Hurons – A Canadian Tale', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (February 1830): 90–93; or 'Canadian Sketches. No. II: The Bell of St. Regis', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (April 1830): 268–70. I discuss these stories as part of a larger examination of Galt's interest in sound as a tool of colonization in chapter 2 of *Literature in a Time of Migration*.
- 46 Cf. Western, in 'Listening with Displacement', who points out that migration is a sonic process as much as a spatial one. Western describes a project working with refugee musicians in Athens as they occupy the city with their musical sounds. The notion that music makes audible a migratory past not only for those who travel, but for other audiences too – scholars, musicians, and museum visitors – makes musical performance a way of both recording and displaying migration histories. Two examples are the Library of Congress online article 'Songs of Immigration and Migration', [www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/historical-topics/songs-of-immigration-and-migration/](http://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/historical-topics/songs-of-immigration-and-migration/) and the excellent recent exhibition 'Paris–Londres: Music Migrations, 1962–1989' held at the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris, 2019.
- 47 The term is in the title of Dilke's *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867* (London: Macmillan, 1868).

*The Sound of News*  
*Affective Rhythm, Rupture, and Nostalgia*

William Tullett

In a letter to the *Morning Post* in 1864, a Londoner bemoaned the plague of street musicians, especially organ-grinders, and the threat they posed to the peace and quiet of the metropolis. The correspondent was particularly peeved that, despite laws regulating other aspects of the soundscape, street musicians had evaded legal entanglement:<sup>1</sup> ‘The trifling nuisances of old times, such as the dustman’s bell (and I believe even the muffin bell), the newsman’s horn, the cry of “sweep”, and many others have been prohibited. Why not forbid street music – or at least give the power, to any inhabitant within hearing to order the removal of the nuisance?’<sup>2</sup> As the grumbling author suggests, Londoners did not hear this nuisance as particularly novel, but found street musicians to be far worse than previous ‘trifling’ noises. In their complaints, Londoners located street music within a longer historical context and the soundscapes of their own memory. By the 1850s and 1860s some had lived long enough to witness the disappearance of the sounds of ‘old times’ from London during the early nineteenth century. News-horns, which had been the focus of complaints and the subject of various orders by the governing bodies of the City of London since the 1790s, were finally banned for good in the City of London and its liberties in 1833,<sup>3</sup> with the sweep’s cry outlawed a year later.<sup>4</sup> The thrust of this earlier legislation was then reiterated in 1839, when the Metropolitan Police Act banned both the dustman’s bell and the muffin-boy’s bell from London.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the postman’s bell – which had existed since the 1710s – was discontinued by the post office in 1846.

These disappearances might not seem surprising. Histories of urban soundscapes have frequently fixated on historical fights against noise. Both noise and sensitivity to unwelcome sound seem to have consistently expanded over time.<sup>6</sup> Yet from the vantage point of the 1860s, the disappearance of bells and horns was not celebrated but lamented. As an article in *Punch* reflected on the *Morning Post*’s curmudgeonly communication:

There is something to be said for the dustman's bell, the muffin-bell, the newsman's horn, and the cry of the sweep. These noises were occasional, temporary, not atrocious, and absolutely intolerable; and they were useful noises. The organ-grinder's noise . . . is of no use to anybody, affords no one much gratification, and only serves little to amuse the idleness of a few idiots.<sup>7</sup>

In this telling, it was not that professional Londoners wanted silence rather than noise; it was that street music was not useful or predictable. The key objection of one of street music's fiercest critics in the 1860s, Charles Babbage, was that it 'rob[bed] the industrious man of his time'.<sup>8</sup> Street music, unlike the bells and horns of Georgian London, did not bear news, act as a reminder, or proffer goods and services. The sounds of 'old times', as described in *Punch*, were helpful: their rhythmic, staccato presence in Londoners' lives meant that they were familiar and reliable, and helped structure the urban soundscape. This chapter focuses on one of these vanished sounds of Georgian London – the news-horn. We begin with its creation, from a coupling of postal practices and newspaper marketing. We then follow its life through eighteenth-century streets. Finally, we trace its eventual death at the hand of legislators and its powerful afterlife in the memories of Victorian Londoners.

In tracing the sound of the news-horn, this essay advances two arguments. Firstly, rhythmic temporality was central to how Londoners perceived the soundscape of their city in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This also structured how sounds made their way into texts. News-horns were central to the shifting temporalities of news in the eighteenth-century city. They were part of a series of sounds that created affective rhythms of anxious expectation for news and emotional release on its arrival. During the 1790s an evangelical insistence on silent Sundays and a mercantile concern for the clockwork sounds of business clashed with the quickening rhythms of wartime news. During the 1830s the news-horn disappeared altogether. It was at these points, when the news-horn's rhythms broke down, sped up, or clashed with other acoustic temporalities, that its sound resonated through the records of urban governance, magazines, newspapers, and satirical prints. Londoners described the quotidian urban soundscape when they were forced, like Henri Lefebvre's rhythm-analyst, to re-hear it outside their daily listening habits.<sup>9</sup> These moments help explain the functional utility of sound for eighteenth-century urbanites.

Secondly, the disappearance of the news-horn signalled a wider shift in London's sense-scape. Scholarship on Victorian views of their Georgian

predecessors has tended to focus on the positivity or negativity of their appraisals and forms of intellectual and literary influence.<sup>10</sup> The news-horn offers another story. It was implicated in a series of conflicts over the timeliness of urban sound that came to a climax during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. These conflicts, which resulted in much of the early nineteenth-century's legislative assault on horns and bells, produced a temporal rupture in London's soundscape. In the period from the 1830s to the 1860s, writers on London used this rupture to develop a distinction between the 'old' times of Georgian London, signified by the soundscape of the Napoleonic Wars, and the new London of the mid-nineteenth century. They described a shift from staccato, timely sounds to a buzzing, constant, and unpredictable noise. The disappearance of many temporal markers removed elements which had previously structured the urban soundscape.

The historiography of urban sound has tended to locate the birth of auditory modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Developments in acoustics, sound recording, and telephony and the arrival of the automobile all produced significant changes in the soundscape – defined as both sounds and ways of listening.<sup>11</sup> The implication is that the period that preceded the 1870s, before the technologizing of sound, was 'early' modern. Following the news-horn's trail offers a different story, in which Londoners located a profound sense of auditory change in the early nineteenth century that added to their sense of Georgian London's distinctiveness from its Victorian successor. The urban soundscape, still reverberating in the heads of mid-nineteenth-century writers, was one way in which Victorians were haunted by their Georgian past.

### **The Pastness of the Post-Horn's Present**

The news-horn was a relatively late arrival in eighteenth-century London, but it had some notable precedents. The most obvious of these was the post-horn. In the mid-sixteenth century the post-horn would have been blown only at the end of a town to clear the way for the speeding post-boy carrying official letters. Proclamations in 1583 and 1584 gave official protection to private letters in a public post, and the new public-ness of the post was announced by the more regular blowing of the post-horn and by the image of the horn itself. Post-houses were indicated by the sign of the horn outside the door.<sup>12</sup> Each post-boy was instructed to 'blow his horn so oft as he meeteth company, or passeth through a town, or at least thrice a mile'.<sup>13</sup> With the rise of the mail-coach from 1784 onwards the

post-boy's horn did not disappear but fell into the hands of the mail-coach guard. It continued to announce the arrival of news, and its constant sound on highways and byways warned other travellers to vacate the road as the mail-coach sped by.<sup>14</sup>

The association between the sound of the post-horn and news was already apparent during the seventeenth century. In the 1630s the post office arranged regular weekly dispatches from London,<sup>15</sup> and by the 1640s and 1650s posts departed twice weekly from the capital, bringing newsbooks with them.<sup>16</sup> The 1690s saw the tri-weekly post joined by a series of new tri-weekly papers, published on the morning of the post to make possible their swift circulation.<sup>17</sup> The intimate connection was recognized in the titles of papers: *The Post Boy*, the *Flying Post*, and *The London Post*. In the seventeenth century the Clerks of the Road began to use their franking privileges to send newspapers across the country free of charge, and by the mid-eighteenth publishers paid them to do so.<sup>18</sup> By the 1750s, the six daily London newspapers were matched by a daily postal network that stretched across the country.<sup>19</sup>

The post-boy's horn was thus an increasingly common sound on eighteenth-century roads and streets. But it could also be found on the printed page of newspapers, either in the masthead or indented at the beginning of the first article of an issue. In the 1640s a flurry of news-sheets contained large woodcuts of mounted post-boys blowing horns.<sup>20</sup> *The Post Boy*, *The London Mercury*, *The British Spy*, *The Middlesex Journal*, and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* are just a few examples of newspapers carrying images of horse-bound post-boys blowing their horns.<sup>21</sup> On the masthead of *The Old Post-Master* a bearded post-man blows his horn as he rides, with the words 'Great News' flourishing, upside down, from the end of his horn.<sup>22</sup> Even where the post-boy was absent, eighteenth-century newspapers still featured tubular sounds, in the form of Fame and her trumpet.<sup>23</sup> Fame stood in for the newspaper press in satirical prints, loudly trumpeting virtue and exposing corruption.<sup>24</sup> By the early eighteenth century the sound of the newspaper was that of the post-horn.

The post-horn is significant for an understanding of the relationship between news and time in the eighteenth century. The twanging horn compressed time and space in a way that made printed news feel more immediate. The potential for news-hawkers' cries to alter the affective atmosphere of the city could already be detected in the early eighteenth century, when it was lamented that 'a bloody battle alarms the town from one end to another in an instant. Every motion of the French is published in so great a hurry, that one would think the enemy were at our gates.'<sup>25</sup>

The same could be said of the post-horn. Newspapers frequently reported both the news and the manner of its travel. Reports of military victories and defeats were replete with postillions roving across the Continent and blowing their horns as they went.<sup>26</sup> The columns of military news started with phrases such as ‘This moment arrives . . . preceded by six Post Boys blowing their Horns.’<sup>27</sup> The sound of the post-horn put the reader in the action, collapsing two moments of news delivery – on English streets and at the scene of a battle – together. Yet the dating of accounts, frequently many days before the publication of the newspaper itself, also announced their anachronism: the sound of the post-horn beyond the reader’s home was both new and, by the time the reader had started reading the newspaper, already old. In an 1800 copy of a print from 1772, morning news-readers gathered near their village inn to read the morning paper, but the sign of the inn – the ‘Bugle Horn’ – gestured to the departed sound of news.<sup>28</sup>

The news-horn, on the page and on the street, indicated the ephemerality of print intelligence. This was amplified by comparisons between the post-horn and Fame’s trumpet. The British post-boy’s horn, like that belonging to Fame, was a long and thin instrument. In some early eighteenth-century newspapers, the placement of the post-boy with his horn and Fame with her trumpet on either side of the masthead encouraged comparison.<sup>29</sup> Fame herself was sometimes represented as akin to a post-boy, intruding on Time’s quiet with her trumpet and instructing him in the latest news.<sup>30</sup> Post-boys and post-horns were also portrayed as Fame’s messengers.<sup>31</sup> The creation of contemporary fame through advertising ‘puffs’ and the puffing of the post-boy’s horn offered the potential for further analogies,<sup>32</sup> and newsmen encouraged the comparison. Surviving New Year addresses, single sheets printed from the 1750s onwards for newsmen to distribute to their customers, were headed by images of Fame blowing her trumpet.<sup>33</sup>

The ephemeral echo of the news-horn represented the past-ness of the present that newspapers constructed. During this period Fame’s trumpet was frequently compared to an echo, ranging across continents and historical time.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the post-horn’s sound was an echo encoded in different forms, from military postillions to post-boy, to the woodcut and text on the newspaper’s page. This echo, an insistently historical record of time passed, reinforced the feeling of being caught between multiple temporalities that eighteenth-century news evoked.<sup>35</sup> Scholars have argued that the development of newspapers in this period created a new experience of time: a de-temporalized contemporaneity that separated present

from the past or future and divided history from news.<sup>36</sup> Yet the news-horn fostered an experience of news in which past and present were connected: it produced a feeling that individuals were living in and through history.

By the mid-eighteenth century the post-horn had developed an expectant rhythm of emotional anticipation and release,<sup>37</sup> and the horn's complex temporality reinforced the affective rhythms that it created. Hearing the instrument's signal induced a desire for news. In 1723 Joseph Addison wrote of being distracted 'by a Post-Boy, who winding his Horn at us . . . I shall long to see the next Gazette'.<sup>38</sup> The post-horn's absence created anticipation of its arrival. The labouring poet Mary Leapor, awaiting a response to the verses she had sent to London, was 'apprehensive of Fits at the sound of the Post-horn'.<sup>39</sup> Similar affective rhythms applied to the newspapers that post-boys carried. A description of the stereotypical country gentleman, who was 'anxious about the affairs of the nation', noted that he was 'miserable' three days of the week without news, but 'his spirits revive at the sound of the post-horn, when the mail brings him the London Evening Post'.<sup>40</sup>

The sound of the post-horn was a resonant container for emotion, filled by the anxieties and hopes of waiting readers and prospective writers, and produced an affective rhythm that was yoked to postal timetables. In 1795 a periodical correspondent asserted that 'the sound of the horn . . . is more delightful to my ear than the softest touches of music attuned by harmony'.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to Leapor's anxious waiting, here the post-horn's call was desirable and the anticipation described as positive. The precise emotions produced by the post-horn, when sounded and when silent, were not the same. However, they were part of the same *affective rhythm*. In *The Task*, Cowper portrayed the post-boy as a neutral vehicle for epistolary affect, 'indifferent whether grief or joy', whose 'twanging horn' both signified the post's appearance and ignited Cowper's reflection on its emotive potential.<sup>42</sup>

### The News-Horn Arrives in the Metropolis

During the 1770s the sound of news in towns and cities began to change as the post-horn was joined by – or rather *became* – the news-horn. The proliferation of newspapers in London created a competitive market for news. In 1772 John Bell, John Trusler, and Henry Bate joined together to publish the *Morning Post*. With the competition for readers high, newspapers had to distinguish themselves in new ways. From the beginning



Bell, Bate, and Trusler provided the hawkers of their new paper with horns, like those used by post-boys, which they would blow as they wandered the street selling their wares. Bate and Trusler even dressed up as the news-boys themselves on a visit to the Pantheon Masquerade in 1772.<sup>43</sup> By February 1773 other masquerade guests were mimicking the *Morning Post* costume: one Mr Dawes dressed as 'a Black Messenger to the Morning-Post' and 'blew his horn as much out of tune as the person he represented usually does in the street'.<sup>44</sup> By this time, the association between news-hawkers and the post-, now news-, horn was common metropolitan knowledge.

At first aggrieved newsmen attacked this innovation. After Bell, Trusler, and Bate dismissed them, the *Post's* printers Corral, Bigg, and Cox began to produce their own rival *Morning Post*. Corral, Bigg, and Cox felt particularly aggrieved by Bell's tactics. Before the 1770s the horn had been connected to the postal delivery of news rather than to hawking it on the streets. Those newspaper mastheads from the early to mid-eighteenth century that depicted news-hawkers rather than post-boys portrayed men walking and crying papers without the aid of trumpets.<sup>45</sup> Cox and Corral complained that Bell had hired 'a pack of vagabonds, clothed them like anticks, and sent them blowing horns about the town' and that, because of this, long-standing newsmen found themselves 'robbed in part of their daily bread and injured in their respective news-walks'.<sup>46</sup> Bell's innovations disrupted the perambulatory rhythms of newspaper selling.

Cox and Corral were eventually forced to change their title to *New Morning Post* in 1777.<sup>47</sup> But this was not before Bell responded to the competition by kitting out the *Morning Post's* news-boys with a new uniform to accompany their news-horns. In 1776 Horace Walpole witnessed the *Post's* hawkers in a show of strength on London's streets and 'concluded it was some new body of our allies, or a regiment newly raised'.<sup>48</sup> These liveried, trumpeting news-boys played on the existing connections of military postillions with domestic post-boys that had developed in earlier in the century. Yet now, rather than being linked to the post alone, they were let loose to roam the streets of London.

At first the complaints about the news-horns were few. The timing of their use, announcing the publication of the morning edition of the paper, fitted into the existing rhythms of the London soundscape. In 1776 one 'Momus' penned a letter from the perspective of a country-dweller who had moved to London. The gentleman's attempts at sleep were ruined by a series of morning sounds that began with bawling chairmen, followed by the dustman's bell, the chimney-sweep's cry, the milk-women's screams,

and the rattling of carriages. But it ended with ‘Morning-Post horn, which awakes as thoroughly as the last trumpet: in fact, it is the concluding argument to every attempt to sleep’.<sup>49</sup> While annoying for the country-dweller, for the urbanite the sound of the news-horn fitted into a recognizable daily rhythm of sounds.

In the late eighteenth century, Britain’s rapidly growing and increasingly mobile population created the context in which ever greater numbers of individuals were strangers, not just to each other but to the rhythms of their sensory surroundings.<sup>50</sup> Travelling ears were more likely than those of city dwellers to hear less intelligible soundscapes as offensive noise. Irritation at the post-horn was represented as the product of this mismatch. Of course, Momus was undoubtedly a Londoner writing for a metropolitan audience. He therefore had to imagine himself into the ears of a country visitor in order to describe the city’s sounds. This trope was not unusual. The 1814 *Something Concerning Nobody* played on the same joke. In a chapter on hearing, ‘Nobody’ goes on an extended trip to the country, but ‘upon his return to London’ he does not ‘relish the loud blasts from the horn of the newsman’, which ‘incessantly annoyed him’.<sup>51</sup> ‘Nobody’, that is to say no Londoner, heard the sound of the news-horn, since Londoners had quickly become used to its daily rhythms. Writers also deployed the same joke the opposite way around. When the stereotypical cockney ‘Timothy Trudge’ visited a country retreat, he thought that the birds were ‘bow bells a ringing’ and the ‘tanta-a-rara’ of the ‘hunter’s shrill horn’ was the ‘the horn boys, retailing newspapers’.<sup>52</sup> The misidentification of sound sources came from the confusion of country and city lives.

In the 1770s complainants about news-horns were represented as non-Londoners: either over-sensitive oddballs who failed to grasp the necessity of news-noise or country bumpkins who were unhabituated to its rhythms. In the 1774 play *The Choleric Man* the unusually angry Mr Nightshade – having affronted his family and every one of his country neighbours – visits his brother in the city. The play climaxes with an incident in which Mr Nightshade knocks a news-boy to the ground, after the latter has blown ‘a damn’d blast on his horn, point blank into my ear, flourishing his newspapers full in my face’. Nightshade’s interlocutors are incredulous – does he not know that circulation of news ‘as necessary to the city as the circulation of cash?’<sup>53</sup> In an attempt to reform his unruly passions Nightshade’s relatives pretend that the news-boy is dead and, in closing, the choleric man swears to reform his ways. In *Nightshade* there were echoes of Ben Jonson’s 1609 character Morose, another over-sensitive set of ears, who lived down a little alleyway that rumbling carts and London

cries could not reach.<sup>54</sup> Yet in Jonson's play *Morose's* auditory sensitivity was a side-line to the main plot. In *The Choleric Man* Nightshade's irritable listening provided the main moral lesson of the performance: that city life required the control of the passions and the senses.

### The Soundscape Out of Joint

By the 1780s the proliferation of newspapers (and the hawkers trumpeting them) had produced a soundscape defined by the constant sounds of news as more newspapers adopted the *Post's* advertising strategy.<sup>55</sup> Morning, noon, and evening all saw the publication of multiple papers and editions. Technically it was illegal to sell newspapers on Sundays, but from 1779 a range of Sunday newspapers emerged, and by 1812 there were eighteen such publications in London.<sup>56</sup> George Crabbe's 'The Newspaper', written in 1785 and republished in 1807, depicted an urban culture of news in which 'Post after post succeeds, and, all day long, / Gazettes and Ledgers swarm, a noisy throng', all sold by the 'rattling hawker' with his horn.<sup>57</sup>

The affective rhythm of news established in the first half of the eighteenth century escalated in the context of the war against Revolutionary France.<sup>58</sup> The sound of the mail-coach, bringing newspapers to the provinces, was described as a form of emotional contagion, linking the nerves of the body politic to the passions of subjects anxious for news.<sup>59</sup> News from the Continental conflict came thick and fast, and the sound of London's news-horns – accompanied by the hawkers' cries of 'Great News!' and 'Bloody News!' – intensified. The metropolitan soundscape was rendered ill at ease by war, and the sound of the news-horn was almost constant. The multitude of newspapers, with their many editions, fed off a metropolitan readership sensitized by war to the anxious affect of news. Before the 1790s the news-horn had been part of a eurythmic soundscape in which several interlinked sounds worked in tandem, but the war undid that balance. In 1828 a writer to the *Mirror of Literature* described the 1790s thus: 'newsmen's horns so far transcended the united noises of all other vociferations, that the magistrates of the city . . . found it necessary to legislate specifically against them. No other trade could gain a hearing, so incessant and obstreperous were their blasts.'<sup>60</sup> The temporal fixity of the news-horn was deteriorating. Yet by the mid-1790s, as the quotation above suggests, the news-horn was also creating a sense of arrhythmia within the London soundscape as its sound clashed with other metropolitan rhythms.

In 1796 news-horns suddenly appeared in the records of civic governance. The complaints surfaced in the annual wardmotes. By the mid-eighteenth century wardmotes had largely lost their earlier role in prosecuting urban nuisance, and from the 1750s onwards many wardmotes failed to present any nuisances at all. It was thus especially significant that in the presentments for 1796 several wards, hitherto almost completely silent on auditory nuisances, issued complaints about news-horns. The wards of Bridge, Castle Baynard, Cordwainer, Cornhill, and Cripplegate Within all offered complaints,<sup>61</sup> and the rash of presentments were reported in the newspapers.<sup>62</sup> The minutes and journals of ward and civic government are frustratingly silent on specifics, the actions on news-horns possibly being lost within generic references to nuisance.<sup>63</sup> However, two complaints reverberate from the civic documents. Both demonstrated the news-horn's arrhythmia-inducing influence. The first came from Cornhill: 'the practice of sounding horns by the hawkers of newspapers and other publications is . . . a serious evil to the merchants and traders who frequent the royal exchange which being the great centre of commerce should be particularly guarded from unseasonable noise and interruption'.<sup>64</sup> The staccato sound of the news-horn and the cries of 'great news' and 'bloody news' were antithetical to the soundscape cultivated in the Royal Exchange. This was a space of news, which was crucial to the negotiation of trade, credit, and insurance. But the sound of the exchange was a measured buzz and the 'busy hum of a hundred voices'.<sup>65</sup> Here trade relied on the direct oral transmission of news, contained in packets and letters from across the globe, from mouth to ear. The only interruption to this soundscape was supposed to come from the chimes of the exchange's clock. This clock, using four bells, struck the quarters and the hours, repeating the latter at the half hour. The tunes played by the chimes included the '104th Psalm', 'God Save the King', 'Britons Strike Home', and 'There's Nae Luck about the Hoose'.<sup>66</sup> These chimes located the Royal Exchange at the commercial centre of a Protestant, British, imperial London, and their sound helped manage the mercantile clock time on which business depended. The cries of 'dreadful news' dented the confidence in British imperial power that the chimes aimed to inculcate.

Not only was the sound of the news-horn untimely and interruptive; it was also a reminder of the unpredictability and unreliability of the news on which merchants and investors relied.<sup>67</sup> Public and mercantile credit depended on a constant performance of solidity and trustworthiness, a performance embodied in the workings and architecture of spaces such as the Royal Exchange and the nearby Bank of England.<sup>68</sup> Yet news-horns

required an anxious uncertainty for their advertising to work: they simply announced that news existed, not what it was.<sup>69</sup> The news-boys' patter worked by constantly asserting the novelty of their news and its great, bloody, or dreadful qualities. But these cries, like the news-horn, failed to tell listeners whether the news was truly fresh or what it portended. Some Londoners felt aggrieved by the news-boys who resold old papers as a 'second edition'.<sup>70</sup> News-boys were 'proclaiming "great and extraordinary news," when the papers they have for sale contain not a single article either of novelty or of interest'.<sup>71</sup> The sound of the news-horn no longer guaranteed the freshness of news. It therefore disrupted the circulation of intelligence on which the Royal Exchange relied.

Cornhill was not the only ward to complain: other wardmotes grumbled that news-horns 'do disturb the peace of the inhabitants and interrupt them in public worship on the Lords day'.<sup>72</sup> The inquest jury of Cripplegate Within sounded what was to become a keynote in attacks on the Sunday press. With the growth of the Sunday newspapers, the news-horn disrupted the solemnity of Sunday worship. In response to the wardmote's inquests, the Court of Aldermen ordered the Town Clerk to write to the Lord Mayor and request that he 'take such measures as his lordship shall be advised to put a stop to such evils and disturbances and punish all persons who shall be guilty of using news-horns'.<sup>73</sup> Later commentators suggested that – if not in Westminster then at least in the City of London – news-horns had been 'put down' in the late 1790s.<sup>74</sup>

Yet the news-horn continued to punctuate London's Sunday soundscape. In 1799 Lord Belgrave, William Wilberforce, and their evangelical allies unsuccessfully attempted to pass a bill in parliament that reinforced legal restrictions on Sunday newspapers. The evangelical press continued to complain that hawkers and mail-coaches blew their horns 'even during the time of divine service',<sup>75</sup> causing an 'offence to the feelings of all who retain any reverence for the sabbath, or any desire of observing it'.<sup>76</sup> Evangelical critics identified the central problem with regulating news-horns. The sound of the news-horn spread easily, making it even more difficult to control: 'every lad who can blow a horn has only to furnish himself with a quantity of the papers' and thereby 'add considerably to the profanation of the day'.<sup>77</sup> It was easier to attach noise to the longer list of neighbours' grievances against a particularly rabble-rousing establishment, but the frustratingly mobile news-boy presented a more difficult prospect.

For some readers this seemed an insignificant trifle. Satirists mocked evangelical concerns about the 'naughty newsmen . . . blowing the horn of sinfulness before them!'<sup>78</sup> The parliamentary proposals met with



Figure 5.1 Isaac Cruikshank, 'The Enraged [sic] Politician or the Sunday Reformer or a Noble Bellman Crying Stinking Fish', 1799. Hand-coloured etching on paper, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, 799.06.25.04. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

vociferous opposition, especially from Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who made a telling point about the hypocrisy of a parliament that legislated for a selective Sabbatarian silence by restricting news-horns but not 'routs, card-parties, concerts, &c.'<sup>79</sup> The satirists leapt on this double-standard. Isaac Cruikshank produced a print that riffed on Hogarth's *Enraged Musician*, swapping out the French musician for the evangelical politician as the new enemy of popular street culture (see Figure 5.1). Part of the problem with the news-horn was that its sound revealed the acoustic porosity of the built environment: it disturbed both the domestic quietude of the home and silent solemnity of church services. With the sash-windows of Grosvenor House wide open and a concert taking place inside, Cruikshank suggested that the noise of aristocratic sociability was just as loud and potentially disturbing to others as the sounds of news-hawkers.

Beginning in the 1810s, a creeping programme of legislation slowly enlarged the times and places in which the news-horn was declared illegal.



An 1813 act bolstering the powers of the Marylebone improvement commission enacted a penalty for anybody blowing a news-horn on any Sunday or religious holiday during the 'Time of Divine Service'.<sup>80</sup> An 1812 act amended this to include stagecoach and mail-coach horns.<sup>81</sup> An 1816 act for building a new parish church and chapel in St Pancras extended this prohibition in the parish to the whole of any Sunday or holiday.<sup>82</sup> The same provision then appeared in acts for building other new London churches.<sup>83</sup> By 1822 this provision had been extended beyond the sabbath to include 'any time'. This wider provision was included in a slew of subsequent improvement and church building acts. It was also included in later metropolitan police acts.<sup>84</sup> By the late 1830s the illegality of news-horns in much of the metropolis – indeed in many other towns and cities across the country – was an established fact.

The news-horns did not go quietly or without resistance. Newspapers reported problems with regulating newsmen. In Liverpool banishing horns led to people missing the newsmen and to accidents with mail-coaches that could no longer warn pedestrians of their passing: 'why', one local paper asked, did the authorities not 'control the excess – the nuisance – and not the good use of the horn?'<sup>85</sup> In Bristol the town council initially refused to censure newsmen for using their horns because those 'desirous of having a paper on their breakfast table must otherwise station a servant at the door to watch for the arrival of the newsman'.<sup>86</sup> Finally, in London a constable informed the inhabitants of Marlborough Street that 'if they blew a horn, then they would be liable to punishment; but they could not be punished for merely making a noise with their maxillary organ'.<sup>87</sup>

In 1828 one Londoner complained that 'in no respect has the liberty of the subject degenerated to such outrageous license, as in this very particular noise'. It was as if 'dissonance was a fundamental article of Magna Carta, and silence as unconstitutional as ship money'.<sup>88</sup> In one respect this author was right, since the freedom of speech – including the cries of hawkers – was more difficult to legislate against than the instruments of street musicians. In the 1840s and 1850s the implementation of legislation proved difficult with the policing resources then available.<sup>89</sup> The news-boys lost their horns, yet they carried on crying the news.<sup>90</sup>

### **The Sound of Old Times**

With the end of the Napoleonic Wars the news-horn continued to transform the feelings of its listeners, but now it exhibited a different relationship between temporality and feeling. The end of the conflict left



Britain already nostalgic for the 'battle-sound' of a time when the 'post-boy's horn the laurell'd record' told.<sup>91</sup> The news-horn held on until the late 1830s in many parts of the country, yet it came to be remembered as the sound of wartime and therefore of 'old times'. In the 1840s Henry Mayhew included the newspaper seller among the street criers described in his *London Labour and the London Poor*. One interviewee described the news-horn as the sound most representative of 'what is emphatically enough called the "war-time"'.<sup>92</sup> The disappearance of the news-horns that had 'announced ... the martial achievements of the modern Marlborough' was an indication that 'times are not as they were'.<sup>93</sup> With peace, the news-horn's sound became an antiquarian curiosity for amateur archaeologists, an artefact linked to a time 'during the war'.<sup>94</sup> When Thackeray evoked the anxious atmosphere of wartime London in the Napoleonic era he turned to 'the newsman's horn blowing down Russell Square about dinner-time'.<sup>95</sup> In the final 1850 version of *The Prelude* Wordsworth replaced the arboreal metaphor for rumour found in the 1805 version with the trumpeting newsman: 'in every blast' of the 'street-disturbing newsman's horn' the British had found 'a great cause record or prophecy' of France's 'utter ruin'.<sup>96</sup> By the late 1830s the horn's disappearance was not celebrated but lamented. In his survey of London Charles Knight lamented the loss of these arrhythmical sounds, since they had done 'something to relieve the monotony of the one endless roar of the tread of feet and the rush of wheels ... The horn that proclaimed extraordinary news, running to and fro' among peaceful squares and secluded courts, was sometimes a relief.<sup>97</sup> That relief was remembered, through the rose-tinted spectacles of Britain's victory in 1815, as a source of celebration rather than aggravation. Mayhew's interviewees in the 1840s still recalled the news-horn's sound on the streets that surrounded them, but by the 1860s their numbers were thin. Lost to the hearer, the news-horn was fixed in print: 'we see it only on the face of one of our weekly newspapers'.<sup>98</sup> Its sound no longer rebounded between the street and the printed page. The horn's echo lost the reverberating qualities it had acquired in the eighteenth-century culture of news, and by the end of the 1840s its sound had fallen into an irretrievable past.

### Conclusion: Generational Rhythms

The news-horn's history reveals much about the temporality of news and sound in the eighteenth-century city. An influential strain of historiography has posited that newspapers in this period created a modern sense of

contemporaneity that unified people across geographical boundaries in an elongated 'now', which was separated from past and present.<sup>99</sup> However, recent work has suggested that in fact news culture was decidedly *post-modern*, with its multitude of competing temporalities.<sup>100</sup> The news-horn fitted within this post-modern culture of news: its main effect was to rupture and re-arrange time. In this sense its sound might be described as sublime. Indeed, the cries that accompanied it – of 'great', 'extraordinary', and 'dreadful' news – shared their language with the affective vocabulary of Enlightenment aesthetics. In the late eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried Herder suggested that sublime sounds had the power to suddenly transplant individuals into different temporalities: 'all at once the thread of our thoughts and moments of time is torn apart'.<sup>101</sup> This was precisely the feeling that the news-horn conveyed as it blazed along the street and its blast interrupted the thoughts of passers-by.

The news-horn produced a feeling of temporal dislocation in its hearers, but the nature of that feeling shifted over time. Sensitization and habituation are fundamental in dictating what traces of the sensory past end up in the archive.<sup>102</sup> Yet linking individual habitus to wider shifts is a difficult task. Studies tend to do one or the other.<sup>103</sup> The case of the news-horn suggests that sensory historians might productively link the two through examining generations, the lifespans of sets of individuals, when considering processes of sensory change.<sup>104</sup> This chapter is also an argument for another way in which scholars might write more nuanced and convincing histories of the urban soundscape. In particular it has argued for the utility of rhythm and rhythm analysis for historicizing the senses and the city. Histories of listening have tended to draw on a fairly narrow range of narrative emplotments. One traces new sounds which encouraged new ways of listening: for example, amplification or the automobile.<sup>105</sup> At times this can come close to the auditory equivalent of technological determinism.<sup>106</sup> The other unveils how new modes of listening developed from beyond the realm of auditory culture. This represents auditory shifts as the consequence rather than the cause of change, the flotsam and jetsam produced by, for example, the rise of the middle class or the proliferation of print.<sup>107</sup> The two approaches share a tendency to reify older narratives, simply adding the senses to our appreciation of an entrenched period, event, or moment.

This chapter has offered another approach. To describe the news-horn's rise and fall as the fate of a novel sound or the product of a new way of listening would be inadequate. The sound had been heard on the highways and byways of England since the sixteenth century, and the affective

rhythms of listening it inculcated had existed since the late seventeenth century. What changed was the speed and durability of those rhythms. During the 1790s they sped up to such an extent that they broke down and came into conflict with the daily rhythms of the street, the weekly rhythms of the sabbath, and the busy hum of London's merchants and financiers. Long-existing sounds and rhythms of listening came into conflict. The result was the enforced disappearance of the news-horn from London's streets. A range of other sounds – from the sweep's cry to the postman's bell – followed. For those who had lived to see them disappear, what remained was a new London soundscape, characterized by a roaring blanket of sound.

### Notes

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*The Resounding Fame of Fingal's Cave**Jonathan Hicks*

The words were 'Ouwa Eehn'. Or that is what they sounded like to English ears when heard in the mouth of a Hebridean cave. This primal scene of Romantic aurality, documented as taking place on 13 August 1772 on the shore of the island of Staffa, is both familiar and strange: the 'discovery' of Fingal's Cave is a story now told many times over, its contours and connotations explored at length in a critical literature almost as old as the event itself.<sup>1</sup> Yet the importance of sound in this story has received relatively little attention. While Felix Mendelssohn visited the cave in 1829 and went on to write an overture in response to his experience, the question of how landscape (or seascape) is manifest in music is not my chief concern here.<sup>2</sup> Long before the arrival of a talented and sensitive composer, the auditory domain was already implicated in the description and popularization of Staffa's natural enigma. In elite and cheap print, on the stage and in concert performance, the representation of the cave nominated as 'Fingal's' entailed repeated acts of re-sounding. In this chapter I aim to show how, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the mythology and geology of this small and rarely populated island coalesced in a sonorous landmark that garnered fame across Britain and beyond, attracting boatloads of tourists as well as varied readerships and audiences. As an object of Romantic fascination, the fame of Fingal's Cave echoed far beyond Mendelssohn's manuscript. The cave's meaning accrued from the repeated and often banal reproduction of its supposed sublimity – a kind of sublimity that was continually propped up by discourses of genius and quasi-Kantian conceptions of nature.<sup>3</sup> I suggest that the case of this celebrity sea cave allows for a reconsideration of reverberant sound more generally as both a medium of signification and a metaphor for mediation. Such an approach runs counter to established theories of resonance in Romanticism and sound studies, which typically posit an analogy between acoustic vibration and poetic or philosophical imagination.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, I seek to develop a more material and mundane

conception of Romantic resonance. My argument calls attention to an almost unthinking repetition, wherein sound and sense are enmeshed in a process of meaning making that exceeds any individual human intellect. First, however, I explain how it was that Fingal's Cave came to be so famous.

### In Search of Staffa's Enigma

The best place to begin this story is just before the aforementioned beginning: Joseph Banks, the renowned botanist and veteran of Captain Cook's first voyage (1768–71), arrived on the island of Staffa in the evening of 12 August 1772, hoping to visit geological formations recommended to him by Mr Leach, an 'English gentleman' Banks had met, by chance, at a boarding house on the mainland.<sup>5</sup> The formations of which Leach spoke were 'pillars like those of the *Giant's-Causeway*' on the northern Irish coast, and the excitement among Banks's party was such that 'every one was up and in motion before the break of day'.<sup>6</sup> The observations Banks made that day – first published as an 'Account of Staffa' included in Thomas Pennant's *Voyage to the Hebrides* (1774)<sup>7</sup> – were famously full of wonder: 'we no sooner arrived [at the south-west part of the island] than we were struck with a scene of magnificence which exceeded our expectations'.<sup>8</sup> One measure of this magnificence was the semblance of natural architecture in the island's geology: as well as 'natural pillars' and 'natural colonnades', he observed an ample pediment' formed by the hills, 'which hung over the columns below'.<sup>9</sup> Banks expanded on this idea in a paragraph that would go on to provide some of the most quotable material in his much-circulated text:

Compared to this what are the cathedrals or the palaces built by men! mere models or playthings, imitations as diminutive as his works will always be when compared to those of nature. Where is now the boast of the architect! regularity the only part in which he fancied himself to exceed his mistress, Nature, is here found in her possession, and here it has been for ages undescribed. Is not this the school where the art was originally studied, and what has been added to this by the whole *Grecian* school? A capital to ornament the column of nature, of which they could execute only a model; and for that very capital they were obliged to a bush of *Acanthus*: how amply does Nature repay those who study her wonderful works!<sup>10</sup>

Being himself a good student of natural history, Banks tells the reader how he continued to explore the shoreline with his party until they arrived at the mouth of a now-famous cave. As above, it is the shock of the regular that characterizes his account: 'The mind can hardly form an idea more

magnificent than such a space, supported on each side by ranges of columns; and roofed by the bottoms of those, which have been broke off in order to form it.’<sup>11</sup> With each sentence a new detail is added to this well-formed picture: ‘a yellow stalagmitic matter [between the columns] . . . serves to define the angles precisely’; ‘the whole is lighted from without; so that the farthest extremity is very plainly seen’; ‘the air being agitated by the flux and reflux of the tides, is perfectly dry and wholesome’. It was at this point in the account of the cave that Banks and his company did the obvious: ‘We asked the name of it.’<sup>12</sup>

Banks offered the following answer to this apparently simple question: ‘Said our guide, the cave of *Fhinn*; what is *Fhinn*? Said we. *Fhinn Mac Coul*, whom the translator of *Ossian*’s works has called *Fingal*.’<sup>13</sup> This stylized reported speech stands out in Banks’s prose, as if the author were temporarily affecting a bardic register appropriate to his new-found knowledge. Certainly, Banks was among those willing to take pleasure in a site associated with Macpherson’s wildly popular Ossianic fragments: ‘How fortunate’, he exclaimed, ‘that in this cave we should meet with the remembrance of that chief, whose existence, as well as that of the whole *Epic* poem is almost doubted in *England*.’<sup>14</sup> Not all subsequent observers were as credulous as Banks and Pennant.<sup>15</sup> Among other things, Staffa became a touchstone for enlightened scepticism, with Dr Johnson and Boswell the most prominent unbelievers to pay the cave a visit. These travelling companions arrived in October 1773, which suggests that news of the cave had spread before the publication of Pennant’s book. Although poor weather prevented their landing on Staffa’s shore, as it had for Pennant the previous year, Johnson and Boswell nevertheless mentioned the island, albeit briefly, in their respective journals. In Johnson’s case, the tone is notably bathetic; he suggests that the locals were disenchanted by the place ‘so lately raised to renown by Mr. *Banks*’. As Johnson put it in another passage much quoted down the years:

When the Islanders were reproached with their ignorance, or insensibility of the wonders of *Staffa*, they had not much to reply. They had indeed considered it little, because they had always seen it; and none but philosophers, nor they always, are struck with wonder, otherwise than by novelty. How would it surprise an unenlightened ploughman, to hear a company of sober men, inquiring by what power the hand tosses a stone, or why the stone, when it is tossed, falls to the ground!<sup>16</sup>

Given that Johnson never set foot on Staffa, it is likely that the islanders of whom – or *through* whom – he speaks are fictitious.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of such journalistic ventriloquism was to advance an existing agenda. As Nigel

Leask observes, Johnson's critical views on the authenticity of Macpherson's 'found' poetry were well established by the 1770s. Banks's willingness to endorse a connection between the father of Ossian and the first fanciful cave he entered was, for Johnson, yet further proof of the wrongheadedness of so many of his otherwise well-educated contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> Leask points particularly to the work of Ian Duncan, who identified a 'metaphysical desertification' in Johnson's view of Scotland.<sup>19</sup> Staffa's treeless isolation certainly fits this bill, and it seems that Johnson preferred to imagine the island in terms of what it lacked, whether geological wonder or literary genealogy. What makes Johnson's view so pertinent to our purposes is that he pursued this sense of lack by elaborating the differences between print and oral traditions: 'Earse [Scottish Gaelic] was never a written language . . . there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a hundred years old . . . *Earse* merely floated in the breath of the people.'<sup>20</sup> On this point, to be clear, Johnson was quite wrong: there are a great many Gaelic manuscripts dating from as early as the eleventh century, including some from the Inner Hebrides; by the late eighteenth century it took a wilful act of misrepresentation to assert the illiteracy of the Gaelic language. Johnson's main aim, however, was to refute Macpherson's claims and indict those, such as Banks, who seemed to set too much store by what they thought they had heard their translator say. The offending words in this case were the ones quoted at the top of this essay, 'Ouwa Eehn', which Banks had noted in his private journal as the answer to his party's question about the name of the remarkable cave. For one reason or another these words – somewhere between a phonetic record and a souvenir in Gaelic style – are missing from the published version of Banks's account. The spelling of 'Fiuhn' in his journal entry was also partially Anglicised as 'Fhinn' by the time it reached Pennant's *Voyage*, even though the name was offered in that context as an article of Earse authenticity, one that had been translated, by Macpherson, as 'Fingal'.<sup>21</sup>

It seems Johnson was at least partly right: the signifiers *were* floating, and not only in the mouths of 'the people' but also in the pens and presses of the intelligentsia. By the turn of the nineteenth century the ambiguities and arguments surrounding the etymology of the cave's name had only increased, in no small part thanks to the intervention of the French geologist Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond. His *Voyage en Angleterre, en Écosse et aux Îles Hébrides*, published in 1797, included a lengthy footnote querying Banks's translation from the Gaelic.<sup>22</sup> Although it would be some time before the whole of Saint-Fond's work appeared in English, the burgeoning journal culture of the day was such that key sections of it were

excerpted in British publications before the decade was out. The first article in *The Critical Review* of September 1799, for instance, begins by noting that Saint-Fond 'visited Great-Britain in the year 1784; but his travels were not prepared for the press before 1792; and, after that time, the disturbances in France long prevented their appearance'.<sup>23</sup>

*The Critical Review's* commentary places Saint-Fond's work in the context of a growing body of scholarship on Staffa, including that by the Swedish clergyman Uno von Troil, who had travelled with Banks. We learn that Saint-Fond's unique contribution was triggered by a remark in Troil's account concerning the movements of air and water in the cave. Banks had made similar observations, but Troil's account went further by noting that 'Very far into the cave there is a hole in the rock, somewhat lower than the surface of the water standing in it, which makes a pleasing kind of noise on every flux and reflux of the tides.'<sup>24</sup> On this point, Saint-Fond begged to differ:

As the sea was far from being completely still, when I visited [the cave], I heard a noise of a very different nature every time that the waves, in rapid succession, broke against its bottom. This sound resembled that which is produced by striking a large hard body with great weight and force against another hard body in a subterraneous cavity. The shock was so violent that it was heard at some distance, and the whole cavern seemed to shake with it.<sup>25</sup>

Saint-Fond attempted to follow the sound to its source: 'a little below the basis which supported the organ-fronted colonnade', he observed, 'there was an aperture which formed the outlet of a hollow, or perhaps a small cave. It was impossible to penetrate into this cavity, but it may be presumed that the tremendous noise was occasioned by a broken rock, driven by the violent impetuosity of the surge against its sides.' The notion of natural architecture found in Banks's inaugural description of Staffa melds, in Saint-Fond's account, with the impression of a natural instrument: 'By the boiling motion of the water . . . it is evident that there are several other small passages, through which it issues.' If we substitute pipes for passages and (as Saint-Fond does in the following hypothesis) air for water, then the logic of his account is clear: 'when the sea is not sufficiently agitated, to put the imprisoned [*sic*] rock in motion, [it is not impossible] that air, strongly compressed by the weight of the water, which is in incessant fluctuation, should, on rushing out by the small lateral passages, produce a particular strange sound'. The cave, he remarks in conclusion, 'might then be truly regarded as an organ created by the hand of nature'. For Saint-Fond, this mechanistic account of a distinctive acoustic

environment is evidence in support of an etymological claim: the organ-like action of the water in the air in the cave's invisible passages 'would fully explain why the ancient and real name of this cave in the Earse language is, *the melodious cave*'.<sup>26</sup>

The mention of '*the melodious cave*' is where the footnote to Banks comes in. Saint-Fond confirms that the British naturalist was 'the first who gave to the cave of Staffa the name of the Cave of Fingal', but he also suggests that this designation was made in error:

I made inquiries to know what relation this cave had to the father of Ossian. I was assured [by unnamed informants that] the mistake was owing to the name being equivocal. The following is their explanation: The true name of the cave is *An-ua-vine*. *An*, the; *ua*, grotto, caver, cavern; *vine*, melodious. The name of Fingal, in the same language, is spelled and pronounced *fion* in the nominative. But the Earse nouns are declinable, and the genitive is *fine*: so that if one wished to express the cave of Fingal in the Erse language, he would write *an-ua-fune*' – In this case, the observation of Mr. Troil, on the agreeable sound which he heard issuing from the bottom of the cave, when the water rushed in, is valuable, and comes in support of the true denomination.<sup>27</sup>

By the time Saint-Fond's critique gained traction the name 'Fingal's Cave' was already sufficiently stable to shoulder a fair amount of scholarly doubt. Indeed, Saint-Fond's own title page referenced 'la Grotte de Fingal', which suggests he was fighting a losing battle. But the point with disputes like this is that they are never truly settled; they rather circulate in perpetuity, exhibiting bursts of energy now and then. Leask's recent intervention, for instance, casts doubt on Saint-Fond's linguistic claims.<sup>28</sup> But the same article also acknowledges that, regardless of whose 'version was correct, the name "Fingal's Cave" appeared on Stevenson's *Chart of the Coast of Scotland* in 1832 and remains on Ordnance Survey maps and tourist brochures to this day'.<sup>29</sup> I have neither the will nor the ability to contribute anything new on the subject of Gaelic grammar, but I would query Leask's suggestion that, in reporting the vibrations of the 'emprisoned rock', Saint-Fond was seeking to 'describe a verifiable natural (rather than a nebulous Ossianic) sublimity'.<sup>30</sup> My issue is with the 'rather'.

Even supposing the French geologist shared the scepticism of a Johnson or a Boswell (and I am not sure that he did), his adoption of musical imagery cannot help but blur the boundary between the natural and the cultural.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the opposition between nature and culture is always in the balance when Fingal's Cave is concerned. This much is evident in the elision of inorganic rock and organ-like construction. It is also apparent in



the practical impossibility, for so many writers at the time, of disentangling Earse and noise. This was partly a matter of linguistic incompetence: while plenty of Scots, especially in the north and west of the country, were conversant in Gaelic, most visitors from further afield had limited means of making sense of the language, at least when they heard it spoken. Listening to any language you do not understand is, to some extent, a sonic more than a semantic experience, and that tension between knowing and hearing is manifest in the discourse on Fingal's Cave.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the non-linguistic noisiness of the cave – whether caused by water in hidden passages or by some other physical mechanism – was entirely congruous with the reception of Macpherson's poetry, wherein allusions to Fingal (despite the fact that he was the heroic father and not the poetic son) licensed an array of rude instruments and novel sonorities.

This was written into the poems with numerous allusions to 'sounding shields' that might be struck in preparation for battle. And it continued in various stage works such as the 1791 ballet-pantomime *Oscar and Malvina*, for which London's Covent Garden theatre hired a piper named O'Farrell. Across the Channel, Jean-François Le Sueur's *Ossian, ou Les bardes* (1804) called for half a dozen harps to augment the Paris Opéra's orchestra. Two years later, Étienne Méhul's *Uthal* premiered at the Opéra-Comique with a string section devoid of violins. The sunken tessitura in this last example did not go down well with contemporary critics, but it was indicative of attempts to make audible the peculiar atmosphere of Ossianic lore.<sup>33</sup> We can find kindred attempts in ostensibly non-fiction sources. Take the example of the Swiss geographer Louis-Albert Necker de Saussure, who, after a period of study at Edinburgh University, followed in the footsteps of Saint-Fond, writing his own *Voyage en Écosse et aux Iles Hébrides* (1821). As you might expect, Necker had his own views – and his own pedantic note – on the etymological debate.<sup>34</sup> Yet this did not prevent him from enjoying a moment or two of wonder: 'Fingal, Ossian, and his bards may have once gathered under these vaults, the harmonious music of their harps accompanying the sound of their voices, and blending with the waves and winds, resonating in the cavities of the cave.'<sup>35</sup> Whether or not Fingal and friends ever gathered there, such fantasies were, for the most distinguished visitors in the early nineteenth century, not so far from reality.

In 1820, for instance, Walter Scott wrote to Joanna Baillie describing his time on the island:

I had become a sort of favourite with the Hebridean boatmen, I suppose from my anxiety about their old customs, and they were much pleased to see me get

over the obstacles which stopped some of the party. So they took the whim of solemnly christening a great stone seat at the mouth of the cavern, Clachan an Bairdh, or the Poet's Stone. It was consecrated with a pibroch [an artful pipe tune], which the echoes rendered tremendous, and a glass of whisky, not poured forth in the ancient mode of libation, but turned over the throats of the assistants. The head boatman, whose father had been himself a bard, made me a speech on the occasion; but as it was in Gaelic, I could only receive it as a silly beauty does a fine-spun compliment, bow, and say nothing.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the self-deprecating conclusion, this account of a dumbstruck Scott is emblematic of an ideal Romantic encounter with Fingal's Cave.<sup>37</sup> The author's inability to understand the speech in his honour does not impede his investment in the scene; on the contrary, it ushers the Gaelic oration into the elevated register of the pibroch, which resonates – echoically and poetically – with the ancient setting.

This is part of what I allude to in my title: the fame of Fingal's Cave can be said to have *re-sounded* with a play of affinities among speech and song, tune and tide, custom and cavern. With head bowed and lips closed, Scott responded to what he heard the only way he knew: with bashful silence. All the while, though, he was committing sufficient detail to memory so that he might reconstruct the scene for the next Anglophone reader. Listening, remembering, representing, resounding – therein lies at least part of the means by which Fingal's Cave found such remarkable fame. Time and again, the cave occasioned the transposition of sound heard into sound told. This process of repetition obviously pre-dated Scott's involvement, and it was not confined to Staffa. Boswell, for instance, reported the tradition that, on the adjacent coast of Mull, 'a piper and twelve men once advanced into [Mackinnon's C]ave, nobody can tell how far, and never returned'.<sup>38</sup> In this tale the lithic orifice swallowed the performer and his companions whole in order that the performance might endure by other means. The effect of the vanishing piper was thus not lessened by his disappearance; it was amplified and resounded with each telling. And as the story was retold and reprinted it acquired a familiar association, with later nineteenth-century editions of Boswell's *Journal* adding a footnote that identified a large flat stone towards the back of the cave as none other than 'Fingal's Table'.<sup>39</sup> Resonance, to repeat, is not only a property of the audible; it is an excitement both physical and psychic. Any old cave has a reverberant acoustic, but that is not the half of it. The anatomy of Fingalian fame is far more confounding: a mouth without a tongue, an organ without a maker, a cryogenic echo chamber for the preservation of heroic poetry. No wonder Scott was speechless.

### In Perpetuation of Romantic Resonance

Since 1772, this corpus of rock and wave and myth and melody has been caught up in the business of its own excess. Scott's written correspondence with Baillie is one small part of that. The sheer frequency with which the wonders of Staffa recurred on early nineteenth-century bills of plays, fairs, dioramas, exhibitions, lectures, and concerts is remarkable, yet it is also indicative of a broader culture of display in which many famous things, places, and events were repeatedly represented to paying publics.<sup>40</sup> Two examples will suffice here to make the point. Firstly, Charles Nodier's 1820 *mélodrame* *Le vampire* (adapted for the English stage, in the same year, by James Robinson Planché as *The Vampire; or, the Bride of the Isles*) begins with an overture 'expressing a storm' before the curtain rises on a dimly lit stage, which brightens to reveal 'a basaltic cavern whose long prisms end in unequal angles facing heaven . . . the cavern is strewn with tombs and diverse shapes, columns, pyramids, cubes of rough and clumsy workmanship'. For those who might not recognize this setting on sight, the first speech makes the mysterious location explicit: 'Of all the lugubrious scenes of the night . . . none fills me with such horror as the approach to the cave of Staffa.'<sup>41</sup> Unlike the Grand Tourist of Poldiori's 1819 short story *The Vampyre* – or the first French spin-off, Cyprien Bérard's 1820 novel *Lord Ruthwen* – Nodier's melodramatic villain (still named Lord Ruthwen) is drawn to Fingal's Cave, and this latest iteration of the age-old bridal rape fantasy plays out amid the supernatural landscape of Ossianic lore. Planché's memoirs imply that the suggestion to keep Nodier's Scottish setting came from the theatre manager; in a revised 1830s version of the same piece, after his conversion to historical accuracy, Planché decided that the drama was best played out in central Europe.<sup>42</sup> But for much of the 1820s the initial combination of place and genre proved remarkably successful. Heinrich Marschner's 1828 Leipzig opera *Der Vampyr*, for instance, was also set in Scotland, complete with cave and kilts.

A second example, from a composer compatriot of Marschner's, is the Mendelssohn overture I mentioned in passing in my introduction. Reporting on the 1832 London première, the *Athenaeum* commended the new composition, which 'strongly reminded us of Beethoven', but concluded by remarking that 'as descriptive music, it was decidedly a failure'.<sup>43</sup> It seems *The Hebrides* made a more positive impression on the critic for the *Spectator*: 'The only composition of the evening that excited any interest was MENDELSSOHN'S new Overture', he wrote, before embarking on a description of descriptive aesthetics: 'It is not the overture to an opera, but may be rather called the result of a visit to the Isles of

Fingal on a mind which embodies its conceptions of beauty and grandeur, of ideal as well as natural pictures, in music and which employs not the pencil, but the orchestra, as the means of imparting them.<sup>44</sup> The critic is quick to point out that such music requires a special sort of listener: whereas 'the mere rule-of-three musician' will be able to admire the composer's skill and accomplishments, he will 'fail to discern all the beauties of this beautiful composition'. In order to achieve this higher goal, the listener must do more than appreciate musical complexity:

he must, in imagination, visit the scenes which gave these creations birth, – he must call up the mountains and forests, the cataracts and glens of the Highlands, and, peopling this magnificent country with its native lords, hear the horn answering from hill to hill, and the busy gathering of its tribes, their stately march, their wild music, their impetuous onset; in a word, he must dwell in Highland scenery and Highland history, and then he will understand the process which originated the Overture to the Isles of Fingal, and realize its beauties.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, a review in the *Harmonicon* states that 'The idea of [*The Hebrides*] was suggested to the author while he was in the most northern part of Scotland, on a wild, desolate coast, where nothing is heard but the howling of the wind and roaring of the waves; and nothing living seen, except the sea-bird, whose reign is there undisturbed by human intruder.' Of course, Mendelssohn's 1829 trip did not take in the 'most northern part of Scotland' – Staffa belongs to the Inner Hebrides to the west of the mainland – but this is largely beside the point. What matters is that the self-appointed guardians of elite musical taste (*Harmonicon* writers very much included) used the available anecdotes of the composer's visit as an occasion to rehearse some semiotic theory:

So far as music is capable of imitating, the composer has succeeded in his design: the images impressed on his mind he certainly excited, in a general way in ours: we may even be said to have heard the sounds of winds and waves, for music is capable of imitating these in a direct manner; and, by means of association, we fancied solitude and an all-pervading gloom.<sup>46</sup>

The review goes on to note how the choice of key (B minor) was 'well suited to the purpose [of conveying all-pervading gloom]' and hails the 'vivid imagination' of 'one of the finest and most original geniuses of the age'. In sum, 'Works such as [*The Hebrides*] are like "angel's visits", and should be made the most of.'

Mendelssohn's piece appears to have been a lightning rod for debates about music's distinctive abilities to describe and transport. Yet, as much as I love the work in question, I must disagree with that last remark. Far

from being exceptional, Mendelssohn's overture was typical of the broader processes that I have been tracking in this chapter. In print no less than performance there are countless examples of similar iterations (or invitations to reiterate, if you will) that sought to bring something of Staffa to the threshold of a reader's or listener's perception. The volume of critical discourse Mendelssohn's music received, and the fixation on composerly creation it engendered, ought not to overshadow the other multifarious and analogous (if typically less prestigious) modes of encoding and resounding the awesome sense of Fingal's Cave. While it is common to rehearse the names of those lauded artists (poets, painters, composers, et al.) who made the trip to Staffa, as if their journeys were integral to its renown, I suggest that it did not take a genius to make Staffa famous. In fact, the way I understand the resounding fame of Fingal's Cave is almost anathema to genius.

My own use of the term 'resonance' departs from existing scholarship on sound in this period, which has been more centred on singular, creative subjectivity. The most obvious point of reference here is Veit Erlmann's influential account of the interdependence of listening and thinking.<sup>47</sup> Arguing against the assumption that sight is the privileged sense of enlightened philosophy, Erlmann elaborates the connections between reason and resonance in a series of case studies focusing on eminent scholars and scientists. He contrasts the vibrating string with the reflective mirror in order to explore the significance of the ear as well as the eye in the formation of modern subjectivity and sympathy. What emerges is a compelling thesis about the correspondence between sound and mind, a correspondence explored much earlier by M. H. Abrams in the context of Romantic poetry.<sup>48</sup> Like Erlmann, Abrams was concerned with exemplary thinkers, focusing on the relationship between the breath of wind and the poet's inspiration. More recently, Michael P. Steinberg has explored how music (more than sound) began to model a sense of rational subjectivity in the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> My sense of resonance encompasses more than individual subjectivity, however, and it is certainly not an attempt to model elite-level intellect. In fact, the sort of resonance I am interested in here could more readily be described as *mindless*.

To explore this further, let us return to Scott, whose own writing would soon become part of the repetitive discourse on Staffa. One mid-century *Treasury of Nature, Science, and Art*, for instance, began with the customary caveat about how the Ossianic title 'has been greatly doubted', observing that 'the name of the cavern is said to be "Uamh an Binn", – "Cave of Music"', before quoting Scott on 'the tremendous noise of the swelling

tide, mingling with the deep-toned echoes of the vault'.<sup>50</sup> To this prose were added the following lines from *The Lord of the Isles* (1815):

Where, as to shame the temples deck'd  
By skill of earthly architect,  
Nature herself, it seem'd would raise  
A minster to her Maker's praise  
Not for a meaner use ascend  
Her columns, or her arches bend;  
Nor of a theme less solemn tells  
That mighty surge that ebbs and swells,  
And still, between each awful pause,  
From the high vault an answer draws,  
In varied tone prolong'd and high,  
That mocks the organ's melody.

Nothing here is new: the fixation on natural architecture, the liquid rhythms of the tide, the double exposure of the basalt organ, the evocation of a sound that would never reach the ears of Scott's readers (at least not by the medium of vibrations in air). We have heard all this before. In ascribing a subtle yet ecstatic epiphany to the realm of aurality, Scott was repeating, or re-sounding, countless other ascriptions. These were not always scripted; they could just as well be acted, painted, notated, or debated. What matters is that Scott's melodious memory was itself a familiar tune. Every utterance repeats a precedent. Yet no precedent can claim priority, certainly not Banks's account, which relies on the metamorphic histories of stone and voice.

Indeed, the conventional sense of the originating Romantic imagination is not at the heart of this enquiry. The resounding fame of Fingal's Cave did not rely on the singular rush of creative genius so much as on 'ebbs and swells' (to borrow from Scott) or 'flux and reflux' (to return to the favoured terms of Banks and Troil). The sense of resonance I am seeking to describe is less a matter of invention than a process of perpetuation. We see this in another treasury-style text, this time from the 1870s, including yet another account of Fingal's Cave, 'sometimes called in Gaelic, Uamh an Binn – the Cave of Music, from a supposed hole in the rock, through which the water flows in and out with an harmonious sound'.<sup>51</sup> Here we find the familiar information sandwiched between entries on 'The First Marine Chronometer' and 'The Wonders of Steam Power', but the context is largely inconsequential. What matters is the sheer force of predictability and repetition.

Such ceaseless iterability of Fingalian trivia had already been remarked upon earlier in the century. In the first column of a spread for the *Penny*

*Magazine* in 1832 an anonymous writer notes that ‘most of the late accounts of [Staffa] . . . are in great part copied from one another’.<sup>52</sup> In a publication that specialized in amalgamating knowledge in order to ‘diffuse’ it to as wide a readership as possible, this observation was not necessarily meant as a rebuke. The point was not to be original or current but rather to *be* the current by which information extended its reach. By this measure, the 1830s article was a resounding success, since it featured the same conversation about the cave’s Gaelic name that would persist into the 1870s alongside the same paraphrase of Troil (in this case ‘a hole in the rock below the water . . . [which] makes a singularly agreeable sound on the flux and reflux of the tide’).<sup>53</sup> There was even a description of the ‘the echo of the measured surge as it rises and falls’, which was at once a gloss on the Troil paraphrase, a quotation (from the geologist John MacCulloch), and a metaphor for the fluid dynamics of fame.<sup>54</sup>

This is, I suggest, Romantic resonance in action. And once you get your ear in, the iterative re-soundings are unmissable, even irresistible. We know as much from contemporary commentary. ‘It is superfluous to attempt a description of the great cave’, suggested MacCulloch in a learned journal of 1814. ‘The language of wonder has already been exhausted on it, and that of simple description must fail in an attempt where hyperbole has done its utmost.’ In the same piece, the author betrayed his grumpiness about the mania for Fingal’s Cave by entreating his readers to consider the ‘Many other caves of less note [that] are to be seen in various parts of the cliff around the island’. Into these, he continued, ‘the sea breaks with a noise resembling that of heavy and distant ordnance’.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to the likes of Necker, MacCulloch would not be found (or at least not found in print) imagining a harmonious meeting of humans and their surroundings; his implicit aim was to amass observable data and to arrive at a fuller understanding of the geological formation of the island. However, the intention of the author is neither the beginning nor the end of the matter.

MacCulloch himself, in a passage quoted at the conclusion of the piece in the *Penny Magazine*, granted that ‘we shall be compelled to own it is not without cause that celebrity has been conferred on the Cave of Fingal’.<sup>56</sup> The tortuous syntax of this statement – both passive and coercive – is indicative, I think, of the nature of resonance and fame. MacCulloch knew that Staffa had the X-factor, and he knew he could not say why. That is the vanishing spot the big X marks. Or, if you prefer, the acousmatic lure of a sound without a source.<sup>57</sup> Saint-Fond got closest with his account of an ‘emprisoned rock’, but even this was axiomatically inaccessible: a conjecture, a placeholder, a fetishistic object of discursive and touristic attention.



The noisy-invisible thing at the back of the once-obscure cave nevertheless remains suggestive, in part because it testifies to the importance of aurality across multiple domains of Romantic knowledge and affect. But we already know that the Romantics liked to listen. What I find more provocative about Saint-Fond's hypothesis is the dynamic of inorganic agitation: whether or not it ever existed, his inert object of desire was the very model of dumb repetition. It required the reflective surfaces of basalt and paper and theatrical architecture to even register as an entity. Yet once it was lodged in the collective imagination, it stayed there for a good while, repeating and resounding ad infinitum. Somewhere in there is a parable of fame: an early, and highly successful, experiment in the energetics of mediation. Perhaps if you listen closely you still hear it – a lifeless, deathless knocking, a hostage to earthly fortune.

### Notes

I am indebted to many colleagues and friends for reading versions of this chapter at workshops in New York, Newcastle, and Aberdeen. It has been a pleasure to develop these ideas in such excellent company. Special thanks go to Amanda Hsieh for her late-stage input and allergy to obfuscation.

- 1 As we shall see, the day of discovery was quickly followed by a discourse of learned debate. For a recent contribution to the very same discourse, see Nigel Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies: Ossian and the Highland Tour, 1760–1805', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 2 (2016): 183–96. For an example of the discovery being brought into a narrative of Romanticism, see Christopher Thacker, *The Wilderness Pleases: The Origins of Romanticism* [1983] (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 173.
- 2 If the analysis of musical seascapes is your main concern, see Benedict Taylor's excellent essay 'Seascape in the Mist: Lost in Mendelssohn's Hebrides', *19th-Century Music* 39, no. 3 (2016): 187–222.
- 3 For a compelling, sound-centred account of such discourses, see Miranda Stanyon, *Resounding the Sublime Music in English and German Literature and Aesthetic Theory, 1670–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).
- 4 More on this below, but two key points of reference here are M. H. Abrams's essay 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', *The Kenyon Review* 19, no. 1 (1957): 113–30, and Veit Erlmann's monograph *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2014).
- 5 Joseph Banks, quoted in Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides, MDCCLXXII* (Chester: printed by John Monk, 1774), 299.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 299 and 300.
- 7 For more on Pennant's published tours, see Alex Deans and Nigel Leask, 'Curious Travellers: Thomas Pennant and the Welsh and Scottish Tour

- (1760–1820)', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 42, no. 2 (2016): 164–72. Deans and Leask are both contributors to [curioustravellers.ac.uk](http://curioustravellers.ac.uk), a web-based project including reproductions of Pennant's travelling maps alongside modern scholarly commentary.
- 8 Banks, quoted in Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, 300.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, 300–1.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, 301.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, 301–2.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 302.
  - 13 *Ibid.*
  - 14 *Ibid.* For a classic account of the popularity and controversy of Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, first published in 1760, see Fionna Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988). See also Howard Gaskill (ed.), *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London: Thoemmes, 2004).
  - 15 Pennant was clearly enthusiastic about Banks's account, and his text elsewhere related his own 'vision at Ardmaddie', which suggests a willingness to suspend disbelief. See Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies', 188.
  - 16 Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, new ed. [1775] (London: printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1791), 330–31.
  - 17 Johnson and Boswell did stay on Ulva with Lauchlan Macquarrie, the last chief of Clan MacQuarrie, who maintained a hereditary claim on Staffa until he was forced to sell in 1778.
  - 18 Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies', esp. 188–89.
  - 19 Ian Duncan, 'The Pathos of Abstraction: Adam Smith, Ossian, and Samuel Johnson', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39.
  - 20 Ronald Black (ed.), *To the Hebrides: Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and James Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), 209, quoted in Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies', 189.
  - 21 I thank Ralph O'Connor for noting that, while 'Fiuhn' is a decent Anglicized approximation of the Scottish Gaelic pronunciation of 'Fionn', the published spelling of 'Fhinn' makes little sense except as a Gaelic-looking decoration, since the 'fh' in Gaelic is a silent consonant in this context.
  - 22 Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond, *Voyage en Angleterre, en Écosse et aux Îles Hébrides . . .*, vol. 2 (Paris: H. J. Jansen, 1797), 59, note.
  - 23 Anon., 'Travels in England, Scotland, and the Hebrides . . . [review]', *The Critical Review* (September 1799): 1–14, at 1. Excerpts from the same work also appeared in *The Monthly Review* (March 1800): 239–47. And before either of these was available in English, readers could access excerpts of the French original in *The British Critic* (July 1798): 203–9. Each journal chose to include the etymological queries.

- 24 Uno von Troil, *Letters on Iceland* ... (Dublin: printed by G. Perrin, 1780), 276.
- 25 'Travels in England, Scotland, and the Hebrides ... [review]', 10–11.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 '[A]lthough the Gaelic genitive for "Fingal's Cave" is indeed "Uamh Fhinn", the initial "F" is silenced by lenition, whereas the initial consonant of "Uamh Bhinn" (the melodious cave) is pronounced as a "v". Banks's phonetic rendering of the cave's Gaelic name ("Ouwa Eehn") accurately transcribes it as it would have been spoken by a Gaelic speaker.' Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies', 185.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 The engravings of Staffa that Saint-Fond commissioned for his *Voyage* certainly emphasize the architectural, even theatrical aspect of the cave's entrance.
- 32 Conversely, the sound of a place name can reinforce a cultural association, as in Mendelssohn's remarks about another Hebridean island, Iona: 'there is truly', he wrote, 'a very Ossianic and sweetly sad sound about that name'. Sebastian Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family: From Letters and Journals*, 2nd ed., trans. Carl Klingemann and an American collaborator (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), vol. 1, 205. For a discussion of this remark in the context of Mendelssohn's broader interests in the Hebrides and beyond, see Matthew Gelbart, 'Once More to Mendelssohn's Scotland: The Laws of Music, the Double Tonic, and the Sublimation of Modality', *19th-Century Music* 37, no. 1 (2013): 3–36, esp. 22–23.
- 33 For musicological studies exploring the broad significance of Ossian in this period and after, see Gelbart, *The Invention of 'Folk Music' and 'Art Music'* and James Porter, *Beyond Fingal's Cave: Ossian in the Musical Imagination* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2019).
- 34 Louis-Albert Necker, *Voyage en Écosse et aux Iles Hébrides* ... , vol. 2 (Geneva: J. J. Pachoud, 1821), 301, note.
- 35 'Fingal, Ossian, et ses bardes se sont peut-être jadis assemblés sous ce voûtes, la musique de leurs harpes harmonieuses accompagnoit le son de leurs voix, et mêlée à celui des vagues et des vents, elle a peut-être plus d'une fois fait résonner les cavités de cette grotte.' *Ibid.*, 300–1. Translation my own.
- 36 Walter Scott, quoted in J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1838), 405.
- 37 The inverse of the ideal encounter was the tourist frenzy bemoaned by Wordsworth in "The Cave of Staffa" (1833), who found on the island "a motley crowd ... hurried and hurrying, volatile and loud."
- 38 James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson LL.D.* (London: printed by Henry Baldwin for Charles Dilly, 1785), 343.
- 39 See, for instance, James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson ... A New Edition, with Introduction and Notes, by Robert Carruthers* (London: H. Ingraham & N. Cooke, 1852), 263.

- 40 For snapshots of the appearance of Fingal's Cave in such contexts, see Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978), 213, 237, and 320.
- 41 'La scene se passe dans une grotte basaltique, dont les longs prisimes se terminent à angle inégaux ver le ciel . . . . L'enceinte de la grotte et semée de tombeaux de forme diverses, des colonnes, des pyramides, des cubes d'un travail brut et gossier.' MM. \*\*\* [Charles Nodier], *Le vampire, mélodrame en trois actes, avec un prologue, musique de M. Alexandre Piccini, décors de M. Ciceri* (Paris, 1820), 3. Translation my own. Planché's instructions are similar, referring to 'the Interior of the Basaltic Caverns of Staffa: at the extremity of which is a Chasm opening to the Air. The Moonlight streams through it, and partially reveals a number of rude Sepulchres.' J. R. Planché, *The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles, a Romantic Melo-Dram in Two Acts, Preceded by an Introductory Vision* (London: John Lowndes, 1820), 5. In keeping with the conventions of contemporary Parisian melodrama, Piccini's score was unpublished and is not known to have survived. For a discussion of the music in the London version, some of which was published, see Ryan D. Whittington, 'Music to Save an Audience: Two Melodramatic Vampires of 1820 and the Music That Betrays Them', in *All Around Monstrous: Monster Media in Their Historical Contexts*, ed. Verena Bernardi and Frank Jacob (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2019), 245–70.
- 42 James Robinson Planché, *Recollections and Reflections*, rev. ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1901), 26–27.
- 43 'Sixth Philharmonic Concert', *The Athenaeum: Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 238 (19 May 1832): 326. For more on the category of descriptive music in early nineteenth-century German musical thought and practice, see Richard Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 44 'The Philharmonic Concerts', *The Spectator* (5 May 1832): 15.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 'The Philharmonic Concerts', *The Harmonicon* 10, no. 6 (June 1832): 141–42.
- 47 Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*.
- 48 Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze'.
- 49 Michael P. Steinberg, *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- 50 'Fingal's Cave, Staffa', in *Treasury of Nature, Science, and Art, for the Young*, ed. William Anderson (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1853[?]), 114–17, at 114 and 117. The excerpt from *The Lord of the Isles* is taken from canto 4, stanza 10.
- 51 Anon., 'Fingal's Cave', in *The World of Wonders: A Record of Things Wonderful in Nature, Science, and Art* (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1874), 141–42, at 141.
- 52 Anon., 'Fingal's Cave', *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (15 September 1832): 236–38, at 236.

53 [Ibid.](#), 238.

54 [Ibid.](#)

55 J. MacCulloch, 'On Staffa', *Transactions of the Geological Society of London* (1814): 501–9, at 506.

56 Anon., 'Fingal's Cave', 238.

57 The most substantial recent study of the acousmatic – Brian Kane's *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) – begins with a discussion of a cave near the New Hampshire village of Moodus, a name 'Derived from the Wangunk term "Machemoodus", meaning "Place of Noises"' (1).

*Echoing Sounds*  
*What Was Poetry for Gilbert White?*

Courtney Weiss Smith

Echoes are resonant figures for what Mark M. Smith has called “historical acoustemology,” the study of how people heard in the past.<sup>1</sup> For Smith, echoes underscore the historicity of sound: they are “faded facsimile[s] of an original sound, a reflection of time passed.” They “invite[] a habit of listening that” encourages “us to locate origin (temporally and spatially).” But also, in returning sounds that are more or less faithful to their originals, echoes underscore the predicament of the historian of sound. Since we no longer have access to the ephemeral sounds of the past, only re-soundings, echoes raise the question: Could we ever hear a true or total echo of past sounds, “one that our listening ears” could “reliably hear and say, yes, *that’s* the sound” that past people heard, *that’s* the experience of sound that they had?<sup>2</sup> Smith encourages skepticism about “the retrievability” of sounds and “sonicity.” Even if we could somehow (impossibly) hear a faithful reproduction of the precise sound waves, we would still not be hearing *like* a person of the past, because experiences of sound are mediated by assumptions and meanings of their moment.<sup>3</sup> Echoes sound different according to where we stand, and Smith encourages historians to abandon the dream of immediate access to the sounds of the past and instead study textual “evidence and the sensory perceptions recorded by contemporaries” for “descriptions of what these sounds meant to the various constituencies of the time.”<sup>4</sup>

Echoes are also important figures for poetry. These figurations work a bit differently, raising a special set of issues about sound. As John Hollander put it, “the trope of echo . . . stand[s] for crucial questions about poetic language itself.”<sup>5</sup> In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Echo loses her power to speak words, except what she repeats back from her surroundings, and there was a tradition in her wake that rendered Echo “the daughter of air and language [*aeris et linguae sum filia*]” – a figure for how poetic voices exist in and interact with their landscapes.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, at least since Alexander Pope’s famous statement in his 1711 *Essay on*

*Criticism* that “The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*,” echoes have raised questions about the nature of language – about signifiers and signifieds, form and content, hearing and understanding.<sup>7</sup> Much recent work in sound studies pits itself against the so-called linguistic turn, but these tropings remind us that word-sounds are themselves corporeal phenomena, that poetic language can – complicatedly – re-sound other sounds.

Inspired by both Smith’s “historical acoustemology” and the poetics of echoes, this essay will explore how a particular person at a particular place and time apprehended particular sounds. Centuries before Smith’s writing about echoes, Gilbert White – famed naturalist, clergyman, and sometime poet – conceived of echoes as apt figures for thinking about the experience of sound and the work of poetry. Indeed, in deliberately linking echoes and poetry in his *Natural History of Selborne* (1789), White did two things with poetry that seem surprising to us now, two things that we might not expect him to have done given our usual ways of thinking about poetry. First, in his work as a natural historian, White used Latin poetry as an instrument to measure echoes – screaming out its syllables as he tried to mathematize the landscape. Second, in his own poetry and in his writings about English prosody and versification, White echoed Pope about sound echoing sense. Yet in quoting “the finest instance” of this in English, White incorrectly copied a passage from John Dryden featuring an echoing sound: White’s *mistranscriptions* actually *created* the prosodic effects that he praised. I will take seriously the logic motivating White’s engagement with echoes and with Latin and English prosody as I try to understand how Gilbert White thought about poetic sound and poetry itself.

Of course, the study of sounds past raises interesting methodological issues. Smith’s work insists we historicize even some of our most basic assumptions about the experience of sound – avoiding, for instance, an anachronistic privileging of vision over hearing.<sup>8</sup> My discussion of Gilbert White here will insist on a related methodological point: such anachronisms can be baked into the very categories through which we make sense of evidence. I am guided by exciting recent work in Historical Poetics, which asks us to think historically and skeptically about the “normative concepts that have been used to study and teach poetry.”<sup>9</sup> Our categories shape, structure, even warp how we understand the evidence in front of us. Another methodological claim here – inspired by Meredith Martin’s work in particular – is that scholars of poetry, intellectual history, and sound studies alike ought to engage more seriously with period prosodic writings, which richly show that historical categories for understanding sound, language, and poetics differed from our own.<sup>10</sup>



We today inherit a Romantic understanding of poetry that was forged in precisely the period this volume features: Poetry is *expressive*. But this understanding makes it hard for us to see other ways of thinking about poetry before (and alongside) the emergence and dominance of Romantic aesthetics. As I attend to White's echo play, I make the case for a rather different understanding of poetry available in the period: Poetry was language at its most material, featuring words that called attention to themselves as things, as sounds uttered and shapes printed on the page. Of course, White was not famous for his poetry or his poetic theory, and neither is especially original or distinctive for the period. This, however, makes his understanding of poetry all the more revealing of period thought. Trying to set aside our anachronistic assumptions and to recover the different ones structuring one eighteenth-century experience of sound, then: How did Gilbert White hear echoes, and what did poetry have to do with it?

### Measuring Echoes

Here's one surprising thing that White did with poetry and echoes: He used poetry to measure echoes. White was an empiricist who explored the landscape, the flora and fauna, the "life and conversation of animals" in his home parish of Selborne.<sup>11</sup> The result was a beloved, influential book – *The Natural History of Selborne* – that contained both scientific papers read before the Royal Society and landscape poetry. The book featured important ideas about ecology and came to stand, sometimes nostalgically, for a distinctively "English" way of small-town life. White studied the natural world of Selborne, including its soundscape, its echoes. As he explained in a letter to his fellow naturalist Thomas Pennant published in *Natural History*, Selborne is "so full of hollow vales and hanging woods, it is no wonder that echoes should abound"; "this district is," he explained, "a place of responses or echoes" (*Natural History*, 285, 224).

In the letter to Pennant, White wrote at length about one particular echo in the area, "a polysyllabical, articulate echo" capable of returning multiple spoken syllables (*Natural History*, 224–25). He studied, even experimented a bit with this remarkable echo. The best place to hear the echo was "one particular spot in the *King's-field*, in the path to *Nore-hill*, on the very brink of the steep balk above the hollow cart-way" – facing "the stone-built, tiled hop-kiln in *Gally-lane*" across the valley that returns the sound (*Natural History*, 226). White was interested in how far the sound traveled and how many syllables the echo returned. So, he

explained, he stood there and yelled out lines of Virgil's poetry: "*Tityre, tu patulae recubans*," he screamed, and all the ten syllables returned (*Natural History*, 225). Conjure the scene in your head. White must have spoken very loudly and very clearly to get syllables to travel over the 1,500 feet between the balk and the hop-kiln. And he must have spoken very quickly to be able to hear them once they did. There he was – the natural historian in the field, screaming out poetry.

To scholars in our times, this poetry reading has seemed curious, even a touch silly or charming, and it has confirmed our usual ways of reading White's book. He was an eighteenth-century naturalist, but, from where we sit, it is easy to make him a nature lover, his work more literature than science. *Natural History's* echoes often come up when readers make these associations: Virginia Woolf, for instance, talked about this echo when reminding us that "literature" is always there for White, "shading the landscape with its august laurel."<sup>12</sup> Robert Hardy offers a compelling reading of the echo experiment as a kind of metapoetics. The syllables White chose from Virgil are from the opening of one of Virgil's *Pastorals*, an address to a shepherd who is reclining under the spreading beech tree as he plays music and "teach[es] the woods to echo" the name "sweet Amaryllis." White, out in the woods making echoes, cleverly featured a pastoral figure who causes the woods to echo. As Hardy explains, White used echoes to "transform the voice of the poet into the voice of the landscape itself," "naturaliz[ing] the voice of art."<sup>13</sup> White's play with Virgilian echoes puts him into a literary tradition. Exciting scholarship of the past decade, however, shows that "Literature" and "Science" as distinct disciplines in the ways we understand them were only just emerging in 1778 when White wrote his echo letter and that natural history was an importantly "interdisciplinary or predisciplinary space" right through the Romantic period.<sup>14</sup> This is a case, I think, where our anachronistic assumptions of what poetry is – not science, not related to measurement in any fundamental way – make it hard to glimpse disciplinary figurations different from our own, to understand why White used poetry as a measuring tool.

White's decision to speak Virgil into his echo is informed by a "scientific" tradition. He repeats a measurement offered in Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxford-Shire* (1677).<sup>15</sup> Plot wanted to understand the movement of sound across distances and perhaps even reduce echo phenomena to a mathematical rule. As Plot explained, the Jesuit scholar Josephus Blancanus had proposed a rule: "no one syllable will be returned clearly" in less than "120 feet," and each additional echoing syllable required an

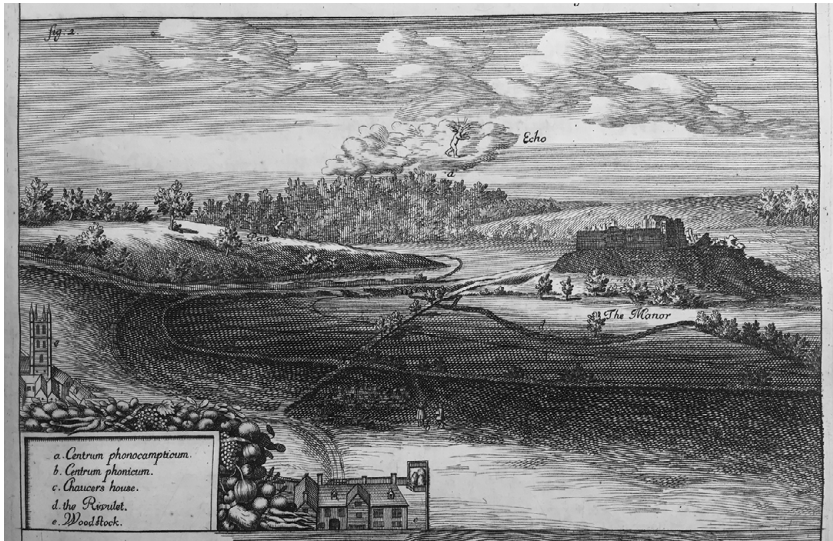


Figure 7.1 Image accompanying the echo measurement in Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Oxford-Shire* (1677), 17. Courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

additional 120 feet. Plot set out to test whether a polysyllabic echo in Oxfordshire confirmed this rule. For Plot's echo, "the true place of the Speaker, or *Centrum phonicum*," the "place whither" the echoes "are returned stronger, and more distinct than any other," was in a park in Woodstock, and the echo was created by the facing hill (see Figure 7.1). Standing at the *centrum phonicum*, Plot yelled lines of Ovid into the facing hills, and he heard nineteen syllables echoed back. The *centrum phonicum* was 2,280 feet from the hill, and there he could hear nineteen syllables. If 2,280 is divided by nineteen the answer is 120 exactly; "to [his] great satisfaction," Plot explained, Blacanus's rule stood.<sup>16</sup> Plot's *Natural History* was cutting-edge science in Restoration England. On its merits Plot was elected to the Royal Society and awarded positions as a professor of chemistry at Oxford and curator of the university's natural history museum, the Ashmolean. After Plot, many English natural historians also tried to measure polysyllabic echoes, and decades later another Royal Society member, William Derham, would publish a similar measurement – using Latin poetry – in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*.<sup>17</sup>

This history suggests that we should take seriously White's interest in using the poetry, not just as a comment on poetry, but as a tool for

quantifying the landscape. White understood himself to be furthering the scientific conclusions of this tradition. His findings upset the rule established by Plot and Blancanus. The *centrum phonicum* in “one particular spot in the King’s-field” was about 774 feet from the hop-kiln.<sup>18</sup> When White too yelled out verse and counted, this echo returned ten syllables, which is only “near 75 feet, to each syllable” (not the 120 feet of the rule). “Thus,” White concluded, “our measure falls short of” Plot’s “as five to eight” (*Natural History*, 226). Plot, however, had proposed the 120 feet rule but also recognized that “there must be a latitude allowed,” “according to the different circumstances perhaps of time, as well as place.”<sup>19</sup> White’s work confirmed the importance of such variables.

Such syllable counting thus served knowledge production. Why, then, did they do it with poetry? What are the assumptions that Plot and White held that made poetry useful? Certainly, for these classically educated men, poetry provided a ready-to-hand series of easily remembered syllables, and particular selections offered opportunities for cleverness. While White featured Virgil’s pastoral echo-maker, many other English naturalists used Plot’s choice, Ovid’s famous lines about Echo:

*Quae nec reticere loquenti,  
Nec prior ipsa loqui didicit resonabilis Echo.*

[She of the echoing voice, who cannot be silent when others have spoken, nor learn how to speak first herself.]<sup>20</sup>

Plot made his echo echo lines about Echo’s echoes. But the choices made by Plot and White were not motivated only by cleverness and ease of memory. There were also more fundamental considerations about the nature of poetry. Latin verse is organized by quantity, long and short syllables. Hexameter lines like Virgil’s and Ovid’s contain six feet, with the poet having some freedom to choose between spondaic feet (made of two long syllables, – –) or dactylic feet (a long syllable followed by two short ones, – ~ ~). In the eighteenth century, Latin verse’s quantities, the long and short syllables, were understood as basically standard time units. As one prosody manual explained the rule: “the Proportion, generally speaking, betwixt a long and short Syllable is two to one” – that is, a long syllable takes twice as long to pronounce as a short one.<sup>21</sup> As Joshua Swidzinski has shown recently, eighteenth-century thinkers “inherited from Classical tradition the view that number (or quantity) is an immutable property of language” as well as “the corollary that poetry, insofar as it measures language, offers the clearest glimpse of language’s numerical essence.”<sup>22</sup> We should also remember how numerical the period’s prosodic

vocabulary was: *quantity, measure, proportion* – poetry itself could be called *numbers*. Latin poetry’s quantities suited it to the task of measuring echoes. It made for a reliable timepiece.

The meter of the poetry was also significant. The echo measurers needed to say a lot of syllables quickly, so they could be ready to listen and count when syllables returned. Significantly, both Plot and White chose passages unusual for being composed almost entirely in dactyls (which feature short syllables). The seventeen syllables that Plot first heard back compose a hexameter line with five dactyls and a closing spondee:

- ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | - -  
Nec prior ipsa loqui didicit resonabilis Echo

According to the period’s understanding of quantity, these seventeen syllables, a full ten of them short, should take the same amount of time to pronounce as, say, just twelve syllables of spondees. White also chose a passage of what he explicitly calls “Quick dactyls” (*Natural History*, 225):

- ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | -  
Tityre, tu patulae recubans

This is three and a half dactyls. These ten syllables, six of them short, should take the same amount of time to pronounce as just seven long syllables. Plot and White thus seem to have chosen their verses to make possible both the precise quantification and the quick pronunciation crucial to the experiment. These natural historians understood poetry as a useful instrument for this project of measurement because of the numbered, measured nature of its durations.

Moreover, *prosody* was useful for this study of echoes in ways that have not been fully appreciated. As I stated, Plot ended by suggesting that there must be latitude in the 120-foot rule. In his wake English echo science featured extensive discussion of all variables impacting echoes – setting out an almost ecological vision of the fundamental interconnectedness of the material world. For Plot, the echo was impacted by all sorts of features of the landscape: its curves, its materials, its air quality. White eagerly amplified this part of Plot’s work: “weather and the time of day have a vast influence on an echo,” White points out, and his echo went “totally silent” when the “field between” was “planted as a hop-garden” (*Natural History*, 226, 228).

Crucially, the experimenters themselves were not excepted; their voices and eardrums were key variables, and prosodic language appeared frequently in these discussions. As an early encyclopedia put it, prosody

was the branch of knowledge “relat[ing] to Syllables,” “treating of their true Pronunciation in respect of Accent and Time.” It started from concern with particular qualities of letter sounds (*open, closed, liquid, mute*, etc.). These compose syllables, distinguished by “Time” (*long, short*) and “Accent” (*grave, acute, circumflex*).<sup>23</sup> Syllables combine into feet – including *dactyls* and *spondees* – and then into lines, which could seem “*smooth, or soft, or low, or rough, or rapid, or sonorous,*” or “agreeable to the Ear,” and so on.<sup>24</sup> Natural historians deployed this vocabulary, as they included the sensory qualities of words in their lists of variables impacting echoes. Plot proposed “that possibly there may be some sounds more agreeable to every *Echo,*” noting that his Woodstock echo differed from the one Francis Bacon had described, which would not return “the letter S,” “an interior and hissing sound.”<sup>25</sup> Natural historians after Plot only intensified this engagement with prosody. In Northamptonshire, John Morton found that he “cou’d not persuade” his echo “at any Distance whatsoever to say *didicit,*” so he rewrote Ovid’s line: he preserved its dactylic rhythms but “substituted” a more “open” vowel “Sound.”<sup>26</sup> In his 1708 *Philosophical Transactions* discussion of Plot’s measurement, William Derham drew in detail on prosody as he urged consideration of “the different audibility of sound, the grave or acute sound of the syllables themselves, or their length or shortness.” Derham compared the Ovid Echo line with what he called “the rough and long syllables” of a line that echoed poorly.<sup>27</sup> Prosody could provide a sensitive vocabulary for the material realities of word-sounds. Prosody helped these writers describe the variables that ought to be accounted for in the measurement.

White eagerly participated in this tradition. In addition to considering the landscape’s variables – the “weather,” the materials of hop-kiln, the crops in the field – White insisted the syllables themselves mattered. He demonstrated that the Selborne echo returned more syllables of dactyls than spondees. It returned ten syllables of “Quick dactyls”: “*Tityre, | tu patu | lae recu | bans.*” White compared this with another Virgilian passage, which features three spondees and a final long syllable:

-            - | -        - | -        - | -  
*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens*  
 [A monster frightful, formless, immense]<sup>28</sup>

Prosodically, this passage is highly unusual. In Latin verse, when a word ending with a vowel or an *m* occurs before a word beginning with a vowel, the syllable at the word end is elided. These words, then, are pronounced



as seven syllables, “*Monst-ror-ren-din-for-min-gens*.” Since both this and the Tityre passage contain three and a half feet, in theory they should take the same amount of time to pronounce (the two short syllables of a dactyl taking the same time as one long syllable of the spondee). One might expect to hear back all seven of the spondaic syllables. Yet, White reported, he “could perceive a return of but four or five” of the long syllables; the qualities of the syllables themselves impacted their movement through space (*Natural History*, 225).

White described the spondee syllables as not just “slow” but “heavy” and “embarrassed [*sic*]” (*Natural History*, 225). The corporeal realities here seem complex. These syllables, as spondees, are “slow” in themselves, and they seem to move more slowly through space, and fewer returned. Similarly, “heavy” refers to the syllables as things with quantities, but it is also a synonym for the grave accent with which they are to be pronounced. It might also refer to the syllable’s sluggish movements.<sup>29</sup> Samuel Johnson defined “embarrass” as “to perplex; to distress; to entangle.”<sup>30</sup> The “embarrassed” words are “perplexed” in themselves, characterized by obstacles to pronunciation: With the elisions, the sheer number of consonants packed into every syllable make them hard to read out (*Monst-rorr*). White repeated the word “embarrassed”: “hanging wood” is bad for echoes, for “the voice is at it were entangled, and embarrassed in the covert” (*Natural History*, 225). He acknowledged that syllables (embarrassed in themselves) find physical form only by being voiced and that voiced syllables can become embarrassed – entangled – by obstacles like trees. Syllables are material phenomena in a material world, with physical properties that interact complexly with the voice that actualizes them and the landscape they move across. Here, it was not only that a line’s prosodic features assisted the measurement. Prosodic theory was deployed for a science of sound, helping natural historians understand and talk about how the sensory qualities of words impacted their movements through the landscape.

So how did White – standing in a field in the 1770s – hear the echo? Because of his understanding of Latin poetry but also because of the “weather and time of day,” because the kiln stood just so, and because the intervening field had not yet been planted with hops, he heard ten syllables: “*Tityre, tu patulae recubans*.” White believed these were “Quick dactyls,” short syllables that took half as long to pronounce as the long ones. It is worth pointing out that, however he processed what he heard, White probably did not hear syllables that stood in such a precise time relation to one another. Eighteenth-century writers on prosody understood



that English pronunciation mangled Latin quantity: An “English Ear . . . distinguishes not the Time” in Latin feet, but “the accent alone.”<sup>31</sup> Derek Attridge’s work on early modern understandings of Latin has shown that, in spite of the fact that their pronunciations meant that English speakers could not reliably hear Latin quantity, there was a tradition of English pedagogy that taught quantity as “more important” and somehow “more real than a mere physical property.”<sup>32</sup> Did White appreciate how his English pronunciation upset the time measurements? Did he think of quantity as physical or ideal? Whatever the (possibly irrecoverable) complexities of his thinking here, White’s understanding of “measured” poetic word-things was *not* the same as ours.

Indeed, the very hearing of these syllables was structured by a different understanding of poetry from ours. Proceeding from a different understanding of the disciplines, White allowed poetry to stand in significant relation to truth and knowledge production. He believed, for one, that poems could contain empirical truths, could thematize them. As *Natural History*’s letter on echoes continued, White tested – by “experiment” – Virgil’s claim in the *Georgics* that echoes can hurt bees. White did not find evidence of injury, “yet,” he said, “I grant it is possible” that bees “may feel the repercussion of sounds.” Fittingly, White concluded the echo letter with what he described as a “lovely quotation, so finely describing echoes” from Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. If White’s “experiment” made him doubt the truth of Virgil’s claim, he endorsed Lucretius’s critique of superstitions about echoes. Poems were not merely pleasurable, and they did not necessarily express subjective states: They contained verifiable truths.

In addition to its themes, poetry in its very form retained a relation to knowledge production. White used poetry to measure echoes precisely, for poetry offered up language whose material properties he understood to be organized with numerical precision. And White turned to prosody to make sense of how syllables move, for prosody was the branch of knowledge focused on the material nature of syllables. We have trouble appreciating what White was doing with the echo because we do not share his understanding of what poetry is, of poetry’s relation to what we call science.

### “Rendering the sound an ‘echo to the sense”

This is all true of Latin, though: surely White had different ideas about English poetry – right? Most scholars today assume that English verse does not work through numbers and quantity, and usually associate it less with

truth and knowledge than with subjectivity and imagination. Did White share these assumptions?

There is a rich history of asking what poetry was in just the moment when White wrote, for this period saw the emergence of a new Romantic understanding of poetry. As M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* famously argued, earlier poets had aimed, mirror-like, to capture or reflect a truth located out in the world, but by the end of the eighteenth century a new understanding had emerged. Through the recovery of Longinus and the sublime, an emerging association of poetry with the primitive and instinctive, and the increasing popularity of lyric forms, people had learned to think of poetry as expressive and subjective.<sup>33</sup> Virginia Jackson offers a complementary history, wherein a variegated genre system (differentiating between, say, pastoral, georgic, and epic) was blurred over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and lyric – a rule-breaking catch-all of a category with investments in “subjectivity, passion,” and “organic unity” – became an “aesthetic ideal,” inspiring new reading practices.<sup>34</sup> As Jackson reminds us, we have inherited the ideas consolidated in this late eighteenth-century moment: We too tend to think of poetry as expressive, subjective, imaginative, *lyric*.

The stories we tell about changing understandings of art have a kind of momentum, so that it seems easy to assume that everyone in the late eighteenth century ascribed to the expressive theory that was only just emerging. And the fact that we have inherited these expressive ideas makes it even harder for us to see other ways of thinking about poetry in the period. Though minimal attention has been paid to White's own poetry or attitude toward poets, the scholars who have explored these issues mostly assume a Romantic understanding. Stuart Peterfreund notes, “Poetry for White is the record of a given poet's affective response to nature as experienced by means of passive observation,” a “vehicle for remarking and responding affectively” to nature.<sup>35</sup> Richard Mabey notes a tendency to assume that White just poured out words “from his heart” – his work “not so much the product of intelligence and hard work as of a fortunate gift, as singing is to the bird.” Mabey rejects these associations in recovering White's work as a naturalist, but – tellingly – not for his poetry. For White, he says, poetry acted as a “discreet escape valve” for emotions, and feelings of “loneliness and desolation” are expressed in descriptions of lonely landscapes.<sup>36</sup> Poetry as “affective response” or “escape valve” for feeling: These are Romantic understandings. But Mabey himself inadvertently highlights a mismatch between these assumptions and White's poetry, noting that a poem that White wrote during a brutal winter

“reveals no more about his feelings than that he was distressed enough by the weather to write *something* in verse.”<sup>37</sup> Even noticing that the poem does not express feelings in the ways he expects, Mabey doubles down on a statement that the purpose of writing the poem must have been to express such feelings.

Must it have been? In “The Naturalist’s Summer-Evening Walk,” a poem featured in *Natural History*, White does write four rather conventional lines (which themselves seem to echo James Thomson’s *The Seasons*) about an “affective response” to nature. The poem’s other forty lines, however, focus on describing nature in particular detail; it is anachronistic to center expressivity here. Moreover, in the mid-1770s, White wrote two intriguing letters to his nephew Samuel Barker, laying out his understanding of English prosody and poetics.<sup>38</sup> These letters say almost nothing about expressive subjectivity, and very little about poems we would consider lyric. Instead, White praised “just description and fine moral reflections” and cited epics and georgics, Thomson, Pope, Dryden, and John Milton.<sup>39</sup> Above all, White wrote at length about poetry as a technical craft that involves work with the materiality of language, with recalcitrant syllables that need to be arranged carefully. He discussed pauses and diction; he commented on alliteration and rhyme.

Significantly, he used echoes to think about the nature of English poetry. In his second prosody letter, White drew on Pope’s famous dictum as he praised “the power that masterly writers possess of adapting their numbers to their subject, or rendering the sound ‘an echo to the sense.’”<sup>40</sup> When White wrote in 1775, however, the dictum was controversial, as Samuel Johnson had famously critiqued Pope’s passage and argued that such sound–sense relations are often only the product of an eager reader’s “imagination.”<sup>41</sup> In his letter to Barker, White showed that he knew this critique – “you must remember that fanciful commentators have over-refined on this power, and have found numberless beauties of this kind which the authors neither perceived nor intended” – before insisting, *contra* Johnson, that English nonetheless “is very capable of being conducted to this perfection.”<sup>42</sup> White’s choice, in the letter, of the “finest instance” of English numbers also puts him in a tradition of echo poetics. Eighteenth-century commentators often thought about how sound enacts sense in passages explicitly featuring echoes. Even the sound-sense skeptic Dr. Johnson allowed that “Milton has very happily imitated the repetitions of an echo,” and prosodists dwelled on other echoing sounds in Milton.<sup>43</sup> In this context, it is intriguing that White chose to praise “old John Dryden’s translation of a simile” from Virgil – a passage that, in

Dryden's hands, emphasizes sound. The bird has "sounding Wings," and, as she moves to flight, "The Cavern rings with clatt'ring."<sup>44</sup> Sound should seem an "echo to the sense," and descriptions of echoing sounds were important places for poets to self-consciously work with word sounds.

White quoted and discussed these lines from Dryden twice – in the prosody letter to Barker and again in *Natural History*, where he praised Virgil for depicting the bird "in such engaging numbers" and Dryden for "render[ing]" this "so happily in our language" (*Natural History*, 113–14). In both places, however, White incorrectly transcribed certain details of the lines. And rather astonishingly, some of the most marked prosodic effects in the lines transcribed, some of the features that make them most effectively re-sound the bird's actions, are not in Dryden's original. They are actually produced by the *mistranscriptions*. In what follows, I trace the origins and contexts (deliberate or accidental, individual or collective) of these mistranscriptions in order to understand how White thought about poetry and echoes, how he heard poetry in the 1770s and 1780s.

Compare (1) Dryden's original, from the 1697 first edition of his Virgil translation, with (2) its appearance in the 1789 first edition of White's *Natural History*:

(1)

As when the Dove her Rocky Hold forsakes,  
Rowz'd in a Fright, her sounding Wings she shakes  
The Cavern rings with clatt'ring; out she flies,  
And leaves her Callow Care, and cleaves the Skies;  
At first she flutters; but at length she springs,  
To smoother flight, and shoots upon her Wings:<sup>45</sup>

(2)

As when a dove her rocky hold forsakes,  
Rous'd, in a fright her sounding wings she shakes;  
The cavern rings with clattering:– out she flies,  
And leaves her callow care, and cleaves the skies:  
At first she flutters:– but at length she springs  
To smoother flight, and shoots upon her wings.

(*Natural History*, 114)

Some of the changes are in accordance with period trends in orthography: White, like later editions of Dryden's translation, removed capitalizations and modernized spelling. Other changes – unattested in any Dryden editions – are probably best explained by assuming that White was writing

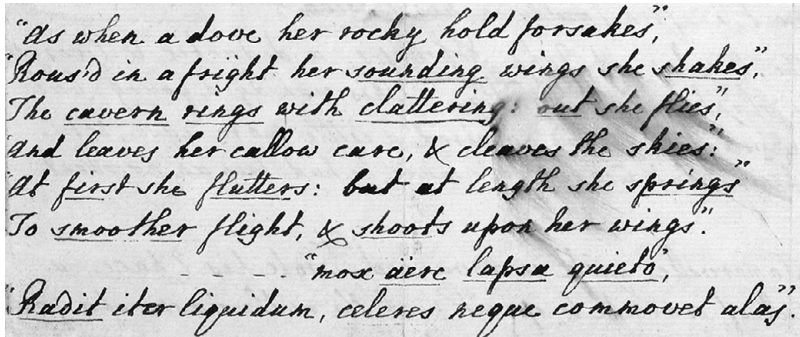


Figure 7.2 Detail from letter from Gilbert White to Samuel Barker and Anne Barker, 30 March 1775. John Rylands Library, Manchester, Eng MS 1306/9. Courtesy of The John Rylands Library. Copyright The University of Manchester.

the lines from memory. In his letter to Barker, where the lines appear transcribed in some similar ways (Figure 7.2), he explained, "though I have not seen" the Dryden passage "for these 20 years, I shall never forget" it "on account of its singular elegance."<sup>46</sup> As I will show, these changes also illuminate changing assumptions and preferences about poetry – as well as something fundamental about its sound play.

I focus on three significant changes to how the passage sounds. Most strikingly, White added a syllable to Dryden's line. Dryden had "The Cavern rings with clatt'ring" – that last word contracted so as to be pronounced in two syllables. Yet every time White wrote these lines he put "clattering," *clat-ter-ing* as three syllables. In his prosody letter, White was emphatic that "John Dryden is to me much the greatest master of numbers of any of our English bards." But this change suggests White thought about English numbers differently from Dryden. And it gives me pause: How *did* Dryden or White understand the nature of the English line? Did they understand its meter as I was taught to understand it, at the turn into the twenty-first century? I think not – and the complexities introduced by this small syllable act as a warning about ways in which anachronisms can be baked into our most basic concepts.

An introductory literature textbook today would tell students that lines like Dryden's are accentual-syllabic, organized into feet of stressed and unstressed syllables. The pentameter line consists of five feet, and in iambic

pentameter the dominant rhythm is that established by the iamb – a foot featuring an unstressed and then a stressed syllable (usually marked  $\sim /$ ). Poets, however, substitute different feet to create different rhythms: an iambic line might begin with a trochee ( $/ \sim$ ), or somewhere in the middle introduce a trisyllabic foot like an anapest ( $\sim \sim /$ ). A related line about echoes was discussed by many prosodists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: “And the shrill sounds ran ecchoing round the woods.”<sup>47</sup> According to the way students are taught prosody today, this line scans something like this:

$\sim \quad \sim \quad | \quad / \quad / \quad | \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad \sim \quad / \quad | \quad \sim \quad /$   
 And the shrill sounds ran ecchoing round the woods.

This is five feet in a basically iambic pattern, with several meaningful substitutions. Most notably, the fourth foot contains a trisyllabic substitution, an anapest, that adds an eleventh syllable to the line. This prosodic system involving feet and substitutions is useful for showing students what is happening in historical poems. But, as Meredith Martin has compellingly shown, “our fixed attention to this established, foot-based scansion has obscured a vast body of writing about other possibilities for English prosody.”<sup>48</sup> It is certain, moreover, that many English writers and readers between Dryden and White did not think of the English line in this way. The material nature of English poetry was an open, contested question, and we should be on guard for anachronisms in our assumptions about how poems work.

Take the issue of trisyllabic substitutions, for instance. Most late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century approaches to prosody did rule out – in theory at least – trisyllabic substitution, as when an iamb is replaced with an anapest (“ran ech | **o-ing round** |”). To understand why, we have to appreciate the extent to which ideas about English prosody were in flux in the period. English iambic pentameter as we know it can be traced back to the metrical practice of Geoffrey Chaucer. Eric Weiskott points out, however, that there is “a constitutive gap between the practice and theory of verse,” and in Chaucer’s wake his lines were understood and imitated in different ways: Did they involve merely a “count of ten syllables” or “the alternation of metrically unstressed and metrically stressed syllables”?<sup>49</sup> Paul Fussell’s magisterial *Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England* – still the best guide to the period between Dryden and White – shows that many took the former tack, denying that feet existed

in English verse.<sup>50</sup> The period's most influential prosody manual, Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry* (1702), declared: "The Structure of our Verses . . . consists in a certain Number of Syllables; and not in feet compos'd of long and short Syllables, as the Verses of the Greeks and Romans."<sup>51</sup> The language of feet, iambs, trochees, and such is borrowed from classical verse, where they involve quantity. But, as period writers recognized, English does not function like Latin, with long syllables supposedly double the duration of short ones. Thus writers like Bysshe understood English prosody as more like purely syllabist French prosody – based on numbers of syllables alone, with no regard to long or short, stressed or unstressed syllables. What we call pentameter was the "heroic" line, and it consisted of ten syllables, period. Others proceeded from a similarly fixed sense of the ten syllable line, though allowed that lines also involve alternating stresses, or accents, or tones, or even quantities – the precise nature of the emphasis was a recurring question for prosodists.<sup>52</sup> Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary* famously summed up this approach to syllabic and stress regularity. Writing heroic verse required "the arrangement of a certain number of syllables according to certain laws": for instance, "the accents are to be placed on even syllables," and in general lines are "more harmonious, as this rule is more strictly observed."<sup>53</sup> For both of these approaches, though, trisyllabic substitution made for "bad numbers" – eleven syllables where there should only be ten. An extra syllable is extremely noticeable and problematic if the line is defined in terms of fixed ten syllables.

Dryden's poetic practice is telling, in this context. Unlike some others in the period, Dryden did allow for feet, though his understanding of these was not identical to ours.<sup>54</sup> He was quite clear, though, that trisyllabic substitutions are to be avoided: The main "rule" in heroic verse is that the feet should "be disyllables; whether *Spondee*, *Trochee*, or *Iambique*, it matters not" – just not trisyllables.<sup>55</sup> One powerful strategy for avoiding this in practice was the poetic contraction, which was indebted to classical rules of elision. As Bysshe explained, some syllables must be "cut off" to avoid an "ill-Gaping," called "*Hiatus*," when "a Word ended in a Vowel, and the next began by one."<sup>56</sup> Thus, on the same page of the *Aeneid* translation, Dryden had "th'unwieldy" instead of "the unwieldy." Bysshe noted, too, that "nothing can be of more ease, or greater use to our Poets, than the retaining or cutting off a Syllable from a Verse, according as the measure of it requires." Many of Bysshe's examples involve syncope, where a sound is dropped in the middle of a word: as in "Am'rous" (two syllables)



or “endeav’ring” (three).<sup>57</sup> On the same page of the *Aeneid*, Dryden has eleven synopes, including “Rowz’d” and “clatt’ring.”<sup>58</sup>

Fussell brings together an ingenious array of evidence suggesting that “the contractions indicated by apostrophes in the poetic texts were actually read in oral delivery, and were intended by the poets themselves to be so read.”<sup>59</sup> For instance, the groundbreaking prosodist Samuel Say, writing in 1745, discussed this as a widespread practice. Say critiqued “the Greatest Part of Modern Readers” who, “accustom’d to a Smooth and Unvaried Uniformity of Numbers,” “reject every Syllable which they imagine to be Supernumerary” (i.e., more than ten) and “lay a strong Accent on every Even Syllable.” When faced even with that “shrill sounds” line, Say explained, such readers would scan and pronounce it as though it was perfectly regular:

~   /   ~   /   ~   /   ~   /   ~   /  
 “And THE shrill Sounds ran ecch’ing” round the woods.<sup>60</sup>

This is a deeply odd take on the line, privileging regularity almost above sense, but one produced by influential ideas about regularity and contraction.<sup>61</sup> Fussell also helpfully recovers how this “Uniformity of Numbers” (which was never as “Unvaried” as critics alleged) was understood in the period: Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century poets aimed not to mimic “natural” speech – as poets today often do – but to improve upon it, “raising” “phonetic materials” so that they corresponded with an ideal pattern, “improv[ing] . . . the irregularities of words in their state of nature.”<sup>62</sup> This practice seems strange to us post-Romantic readers, but it makes good sense within a poetic system that privileged materiality, artifice, and craft – a system where harmony was associated with pattern, and poetic language was meant to call attention to itself.

Still, I want to urge a bit of caution about the limits of what we can know about pronunciation and a poet’s prosodic intentions. In an edition of Dryden’s poetry, Paul Hammond pauses over contractions in the manuscripts: Given Dryden’s way with apostrophes, perhaps he “wanted syllables to be run together” – “slurred” – “rather than dropped completely,” Hammond suggests.<sup>63</sup> But, I wonder, how could we today know how Dryden wanted contractions to be read?<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Say’s comments remind us that the reader herself could “reject” syllables in pronunciation. And even Hammond acknowledges that “printed texts . . . do not follow Dryden’s contractions at all systematically.” Are the contractions in printed texts fictions or instructions? And, in any case, do they belong to Dryden, or the compositor, or the printer, or someone else

again?<sup>65</sup> There are limits to what we can know about how “ecchoing” sounded – in the 1690s, 1740s, or 1780s.

There is good evidence to suggest, though, that how they sounded did change over this period. Fussell shows that emerging Romantic prosody – more stably accentual and foot-based, open to trisyllabic substitutions – had important implications for contractions. Say, for instance, critiqued “ecch’ing” in order to offer his own scansion. He condemned the “Uniformity” of pronunciation for its “amazing Inattention” that “drop[s] the very Sounds, to which the whole Beauty of the Numbers is owing, and the happy Imitation of Nature itself.” It perverts these lines so that “they will neither be *shrill* nor *eccho* any longer.” Say himself suggested a reading of the line that preserved these sound effects:

˘ / — / / ˘˘ — ˘ —  
And the shrill sounds ran ecchoing round the woods.<sup>66</sup>

He happily allowed a trisyllabic substitution, that extra syllable (“ran eccho-ing round”) that has the sound mimic the thing described. In the decades following, prosodists became increasingly comfortable with the idea of trisyllabic substitutions, especially when they were made in attempts to adapt sound to sense. And people started un-contracting the syllables from earlier poets. As Fussell explains, “from the middle to the end of the eighteenth century, there was a great deal of confusion, in the minds of poets, readers, and prosodists alike, about the way the contractions should be dealt with.”<sup>67</sup> Readers often forgot or ignored the principles from which the early poetry proceeded, and guides for reading poetry insisted that every syllable should be pronounced. In 1775 (the year of White’s prosody letter), Thomas Sheridan recognized that, in the “shrill sounds” line, “advocates for the rule will say, that the vowel *o* in the word ecchoing ought to be struck by an apostrophe,” but Sheridan doubted that “any one” ever would have actually pronounced it thus: “Can any thing be more absurd than to omit a vowel in the writing, which cannot be omitted in the utterance?”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Fussell demonstrates, in the second half of the eighteenth century readers “instinctively seeking a rhythmical variety which” earlier “poets had never intended, were simply filling in the carefully placed apostrophes” (a practice that continues in modern readings of these poems).<sup>69</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, one prosodist could see very clearly what was happening. Peter Fogg wrote that some English versifiers had contracted words in their desire to “lay aside the trisyllabic feet” – “as when they write *recov’ry* for *recovery*.” Fogg pointed

out, however, that now “it frequently happens . . . that this artificial mangling is disregarded by readers of taste, who thus strike out real beauties in reading, which yet the poet never meant.”<sup>70</sup> Poems sound different in different moments, when read by different readers.

This is important context for Gilbert White’s extra syllable. Dryden’s “clatt’ring” is part of a ten-syllable line, which can be read as regular, with alternating emphases: “The **Cavern rings** with **clatt’ring**; **out** she **flies**.” White, however, un-contracted it: “The cavern rings with clattering;— out she flies.” Though it is impossible to re-hear his pronunciation, I think it likely that White would have pronounced the extra syllable, for he pointedly used similar effects in his own poetry. In “The Naturalist’s Summer-Evening Walk,” White invited his reader “To hear the clamorous curlew call his mate” — “clam-or-ous” adding an extra syllable just as the curlew would be making noise (*Natural History*, 69). Even more revealingly, he wrote:

While o’er the cliff th’ awaken’d churn-owl hung  
Through the still gloom protracts his chattering song;  
*(Natural History, 69)*

“Chat-ter-ing” here is a lovely three syllables mimicking the owl’s sounds, actually “protract[ing]” the owl’s sound by an extra syllable. This couplet also helps us see that White could have written “chatt’ring” if he had wanted it pronounced thus. The first line contains three contractions marked by apostrophes that require a bit of pronunciation gymnastics to keep the line to ten syllables: “While o’er the cliff th’ awaken’d churn-owl hung.” (Also twice in the poem before he wrote “chattering” without a contraction, White had contracted an *-ing* form — “dark’ning” and “deep’ning” — and White elsewhere did this, like Dryden, before an *r*: “shelt’ring,” “whimp’ring.”)<sup>71</sup> The three syllables of “chattering” create a significant, fitting sound effect, and White’s mistranscription of Dryden’s “clattering” similarly amplified the resonance of the dove sound.

But, writing during a moment of prosodic transition, did White subscribe steadily to the foot prosody usually taught today? I am not sure. Though White’s own eleven-syllable lines usually make sense as containing trisyllabic substitutions in foot prosody, his transcription of Dryden’s line is awkward to scan thus:

˘   / | ˘   / | ˘   / | ˘ ˘   / | ˘   /  
The cavern rings with clattering: - out she flies

Here, “er-ing;— out” would have to be an anapest interrupted by the line’s main pause; is this, thus scanned, the “finest instance” of English numbers?

White himself only ever emphasized the complexity of these issues: “It would be in vain to think of saying much here on the art of versification: instead of the narrow limits of a letter, such a subject would require a large volume.”<sup>72</sup>

The other two significant sound changes in White’s transcription have to do with the way the pauses are placed and thus with the passage’s imitation of motion. Even skeptics like Dr. Johnson allowed that the cadence of a line could be manipulated “so as very strongly to represent . . . the modes of external motion.”<sup>73</sup> In English, poets often manage motion effects by manipulating line endings. Where Dryden’s line is end-stopped – “at length she springs, / To smoother flight,” – White removed the punctuation. The resulting enjambment allowed the graceful motion to run over “smooth”-ly, as it were, into a line describing the flight: “at length she springs / To smoother flight, and shoots upon her wings.” White seems to have appreciated this enjambment particularly, for he imitated it repeatedly in his own poetry. Though most of the forty-four lines of “The Naturalist’s Summer-Evening Walk” are end-stopped, a full five of the seven enjambed lines dramatize bird or insect motion. For instance, White had the reader “mark the swift in rapid giddy ring / Dash round the steeple, unsubdu’d of wing” (*Natural History*, 69). Birds fly, exuberant, right through boundaries of the line ending.

Finally, White’s version moved the comma in the second line: Where Dryden’s translation had “Rowz’d in a Fright,” *Natural History* read, “Rous’d, in a Fright.” White’s prosodic comments on the nature of the English line help us understand this change. He explained that each English line has one pause, and he advised his nephew to use the central pause of a line to create effects of variety: “The great grace of poetry consists in a perpetual variation of your cadences: if possible no two lines following ought to have their pause at the same feet.”<sup>74</sup> Much of Dryden’s passage features such variation:

As when the Dove || her Rocky Hold forsakes,  
Rowz’d in a Fright, || her sounding Wings she shakes  
The Cavern rings with clatt’ring; || out she flies,  
And leaves her Callow Care, || and cleaves the Skies;  
At first she flutters; || but at length she springs,  
To smoother flight, || and shoots upon her Wings:

As marked, the third line has its break after seven syllables, the fourth line after six, the fifth line after five, and sixth line after four. Arguably, though, Dryden’s first two lines do have the pause at the same place, after four

syllables. There is a real parallelism here, underscored by the repetition of “her” and the similarity of sentence structures in the second half of each line. White’s transcription, however, added more “variation” to the passage with a very unusual, almost Miltonic pause after only one syllable: “Rous’d, || in a fright her sounding wings she shakes.” This moved pause makes the first and second lines sound different. It also emphasizes the abrupt surprise experienced by the bird when “Rous’d,” slamming emphasis onto that surprise and distinguishing it from the bird’s reaction, which takes longer to unfold over the course of the line than the cause that provoked it. Again White used related effects in his poetry. In fact, “The Naturalist’s Summer-Evening Walk” combined enjambment with an early pause to enact the way a swallow lingers, “Belated,” of an evening: “see the swallow sweep the dark’ning plain / Belated, to support her infant train” (*Natural History*, 69).

How exactly did the changes to Dryden’s verse happen? White’s faulty memory and personal tastes played a role, but we should also consider the many agencies that contribute to how a poem sounds. White could have found later Dryden translations with modernized capitalizations and even an enjambment before “To smoother flights”; this couplet seemed to many later readers to work better enjambed. Further, though the comma after “Rous’d” appears in the printed *Natural History*, both White’s manuscript and his handwritten letter to his nephew (Figure 7.2) give no comma in that line, so the reader would determine their own pause.<sup>75</sup> White’s prosody provides a compelling explanation for the logic behind an early pause, but this one may not be his: Did the compositor or printer add it? What happened in the print process?

These changes also show the influence of changing poetic tastes and understandings. If the early eighteenth century made art by working the materials of speech into harmonious patterns – only ten syllables per line, usually with a pause somewhere about the middle, lines rhymed in pairs, each line and each couplet end-stopped with punctuation – later writers increasingly valorized transgression of these constraints, using different choices in different lines.<sup>76</sup> What makes a poet was a “master of numbers” (to use White’s phrase)? Earlier, mastery involved bringing lines as close as possible to an almost mathematical pattern. By White’s moment, however, Dryden was a “master of numbers” because his poetry is full of “perpetual variation,” “finely adapted to the sense.”<sup>77</sup> *Natural History’s* mistranscriptions reflect these changes. One representative prosodist, William Belsham, publishing in the same year as *Natural History*, argued that the

English couplet “is capable of . . . a very great diversity in its pauses,” and that good poets “indulge[]” themselves “in the liberty of running one couplet into another,” which “add[s] wonderfully to the spirit, freedom, and energy.” He continued to make what was becoming a common move by the end of the century, preferring Dryden (who sometimes “indulges” in “liberty”) over Pope (who is more “polished and correct” but “adher[es] too closely to the rule”).<sup>78</sup> White made a similar move in his prosody letters, preferring Dryden’s “noble liberty” in rhyming to Pope’s “over exactness.”<sup>79</sup> White’s very preference for Dryden reflects the new importance of “variation” and “liberty” in prosodic thinking of the period.

Finally, there is the vexed issue of pronunciation. Say stated that some readers just “reject” syllables, and Sheridan decried the state of things when people “omit a vowel in the writing, which cannot be omitted in the utterance.” There are other questions about pronunciation too. For instance, in his letter White underlined nine words in this passage, including the two in the “Rous’d” line – presumably to denote italics, which in turn act as a prompt to emphatic pronunciation: how complicated the “sounding” is here! This underscores something fundamental about poetic sound: Many agencies shape a poem’s appearance on the page, and its printed sound shapes must necessarily be reenacted in the mind or mouth of a reader. There is a way in which every reading of a poem is itself an imperfect echo, not of the sense of the poem but of necessarily inaccessible word-sounds first sensed by their author. Indeed, echo is an apt figure for the ways in which author, poem, reader, and more all help shape a poem’s sound, the boundaries between these overlapping agencies blurring. Such ontological blurring was encouraged by period linguistic usage. *Echo could echo echoes*, and we have also glimpsed it in White’s Latin echoes, caused both by his Virgil-screaming but also the hop-kiln and the surrounding landscape.<sup>80</sup>

What was poetry for Gilbert White? If “The Naturalist’s Summer-Evening Walk” offers only brief, depersonalized feelings, its descriptions of nature use the material resources of language to mimic the sensory properties and behaviors of natural phenomena: swifts “in rapid giddy ring / Dash[ing] round the steeple,” “Belated” swallows, and owls’ “chattering song.” And when White sat down to write about poetry for his nephew, he wrote little about imagination and feelings but a lot about the craft of working with material syllables. Syllables must be counted, pauses placed, edges of lines and sentences arranged in relation to one another, sounds knit together across lines. In King’s Field, White assumed that Latin

poetry was language with an especially precise material organization and that prosody offered useful ways of discussing language's materiality; here he emphasized the ways in which English verse, too, offered up language at its most material. He thought about the word-stuff of English poetry in relation to world-stuff, using the resources of the one to re-sound the other.

It might be tempting to understand White as holding onto a traditional, backward-looking "mirror" approach to poetry, even as new expressive "lamp" understandings emerged. There is some truth to this, but it is not quite so simple. Stephanie Weiner has demonstrated that related energies are central to one tradition of the Romantic and post-Romantic lyric. John Clare (who admired White) and the twentieth-century poets whom Clare in turn influenced offer "a maximal assertion of mimetic fidelity" that actually "foreground[s] the linguistic and formal medium of poetry." Weiner argues that, though Clare's evocative descriptions work through a distinctively lyric dialectic between mind and world, scholars have often struggled to place him because they operate from an often impoverished understanding of the Romantic lyric itself, emphasizing only one half of its dialectic, "imagination, transcendence, and a subjective union with the world."<sup>81</sup> (Mabey's emphasis on feelings is a more reductive take.) Instead, it is useful to remember that what Weiner calls "Clare's lyric" shares with White's not-lyric a fascination with how poets use their materials – words – to capture something of our sensory experience of the world. Weiner quotes Attridge, who suggests that these effects activate what is "a characteristic response associated with the reading of poetry" – right across perhaps too-tidy divides of "lamp" and "mirror," English and Latin, lyric and not-lyric: "a feeling of intensified referentiality combined with (and inseparable from) a heightened awareness of the aural qualities of language."<sup>82</sup>

### Reverberating?

Mark M. Smith argues that echoes are apt figures with which to think about the historicity and irretrievability of sound, as well as the importance of our own positionality in experiencing it. For his part, participating in a rich tradition of poetic thinking about echoes, Gilbert White thought about how echoes demonstrate the close connections between words and the world. Syllables are material, and they bounce around material landscapes. They can also be arranged so that they share meaningful properties with material things: onomatopoeia-sounds but also qualities (heavy,



rough) and rhythms. A poem features a particular kind of word-things, whose inaccessible original sounds constantly echo, imprecisely, in the mouths and minds of readers. Like echoes, poetic sounds are made possible by multiple blurred agencies. The history of poetics, then, has at least this to offer to sound studies: Word-sounds are themselves corporeal phenomena, and poetic language can – complicatedly – capture something of other sounds.

My reading of White's echoes, moreover, highlights the ways in which assumptions baked into our category of "poetry" – that it is not science, that it is an unlikely instrument for measurements, that it has something to do with expressive subjectivity, that in English it involves feet and substitutions – can obscure what and how people heard. We should be wary of using understandings of lyric forged by Romantic poets, and anachronistically instituted as central to all poetry, to make sense of how and why someone like White engaged it. We should be wary of assuming even something as basic as how many syllables people of the past heard in particular lines. We can, however, try to recover their categories: What did "poetry" mean for them? How did it work, and how did this understanding impact their experience of sound?

In closing, I want to suggest that the categories through which we apprehend sounds have lively, fraught implications even beyond what we hear. "Poetry" is complexly linked up with ideas about nation, nature, and humanity itself. Consider the loaded language of White's prosodic writings. Triplets "add[] a "freedom to your expressions," and Dryden practiced "that noble liberty":<sup>83</sup> These words could not but have carried political resonances when White wrote them in 1775, in the run-up to the American Revolution. And think of White, delighted at hearing his English landscape returning those classical Latin syllables, nature itself seeming to confirm the ideological biases of his neoclassicism.

Understandings of poetry also crucially raise questions about what it means to be human – and not only in ways that turn on a lyric expressive subjectivity. White's material poetics resonate with Enlightenment philosophy of language, which often started from an insistence that words are a kind of thing. But if some of this philosophy made language the exclusive domain of humans, White instead thought constantly about the "conversation," "notes and language" of birds (*Natural History*, 240). Weiner's reading of Clare is again helpful. Romantic poetry often rendered the difference between sight and sound as one between rationality and emotion, but we should remember what "any ornithologist knows": Serious study of birds "involves listening: a birder can identify a bird by its call or

song, a true expert merely by the sound of its wings in flight.”<sup>84</sup> Bird sound was central to both White’s poetry and his natural history. In both, he used the resources of human linguistic materiality to capture something of what birds sound like: Land-rails say “crex crex,” he writes in *Natural History*, while the grasshopper lark is more “sibilous” (*Natural History*, 116). Ravens have both a “loud croak” and “a deep and solemn note” that – like Tityrus’s song – “makes the wood to echo” (*Natural History*, 241). Language is not the exclusive preserve of humans here, and poetry’s association with birdsong has less to do with instinctive emotive expression than with strategic use of vocal tracts to articulate and communicate.

Just as the sound of echoes is impacted by listeners themselves, White’s understanding of poetry was impacted by his understanding of himself, his language, and his place in a material world. Echoes are figures, too, for the ways in which our bodies, our landscapes, our words, and our ideas necessarily shape our experience of sound.

### Notes

- 1 Mark M. Smith, “Echo,” in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 55–64, at 55.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 3 Mark M. Smith, “Echoes in Print: Method and Causation in Aural History,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 2.3–4 (2002): 319.
- 4 Smith, “Echo,” 62.
- 5 John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 21.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 9. Hollander cites Ausonius.
- 7 Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961), 195–326, line 365. See my “The Matter of Language: or, What Does ‘The Sound Must Seem an Echo to the Sense’ Mean?,” *ELH* 87.1 (2020): 39–64.
- 8 Smith, “Echoes in Print,” 320–21. See also Bruce R. Smith, “How Sound Is Sound History? A Response to Mark Smith,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 2.3–4 (2002): 308, 312.
- 9 See “Historical Poetics,” [www.historicalpoetics.com/about/](http://www.historicalpoetics.com/about/).
- 10 See Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Meredith Martin et al., Princeton Prosody Archive, <https://prosody.princeton.edu/>; and Yopie Prins, “Victorian Meters,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89–113.

- 11 Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne* (London, 1789), 144. All other references to this work will be parenthetical, by page number.
- 12 Virginia Woolf, "White's Selborne," *The New Statesman and Nation*, September 30, 1939, 460.
- 13 Robert Hardy, "Gilbert White and the Natural History of Vergilian Echoes," *Classical World* 95.2 (2002): 163–69.
- 14 Noah Heringman, "Introduction: The Commerce of Literature and Natural History," in *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 7. On the disciplines, see Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and Joseph Drury, "Literature and Science in Enlightenment Britain: New Directions," *Literature Compass* 14.6 (2017).
- 15 Some of this material about Plot's echo experiment first appeared as a work-in-progress blog, "The Science of Prosody, circa 1677," in "Prosody: Alternative Histories," ed. Eric Weiskott and Natalie Gerber, *Arcade: Literature, the Humanities, & the World*, December 2018, Stanford University, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/science-prosody-circa-1677>. Thanks to Eric and Natalie for helpful feedback.
- 16 Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Oxford-Shire* (Oxford, 1677), 7–10.
- 17 William Derham, "Experimenta & Observationes de Soni Motu," *Philosophical Transactions* 313 (1708): 2–35; trans. as "Experiments and Observations on Sound," in *Memoirs of the Royal Society*, vol. 5 (London, 1740), 75–93.
- 18 White does not give the exact distance in feet, but he offers enough numbers for a reader to work it out.
- 19 Plot, *Oxford-Shire*, 11–12.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 7, quoting from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.357–58, trans. A. S. Kline.
- 21 John Brightland, *A Grammar of the English Tongue, with Notes*, 2nd ed. (London, 1712), 131.
- 22 Joshua Swidzinski, "Poetic Numbers: Measurement and the Formation of Literary Criticism in Enlightenment England" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2015), 24. I want to thank Joshua more generally for helping me think through many aspects of eighteenth-century prosodic thought.
- 23 Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, 2 vols. (London, 1728), s.v. "prosody."
- 24 *Ibid.*, s.v. "numbers."
- 25 Plot, *Oxford-Shire*, 11.
- 26 John Morton, *The Natural History of Northampton-Shire* (London, 1712), 358.
- 27 Derham, "Experimenta"; I quote from the eighteenth-century translation in *Memoirs of the Royal Society*, 92–93.
- 28 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.658.
- 29 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "heavy."
- 30 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755), vol. 1, s.v. "embarrass."

- 31 Samuel Say, *Poems on Several Occasions: and Two Critical Essays* (London, 1745), 107.
- 32 Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 76.
- 33 See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- 34 Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 160, 7. See also Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 826–34.
- 35 Stuart Peterfreund, "Clare, White, and the Modalities of Mediation," *The Wordsworth Circle* 27.3 (1996): 147.
- 36 Richard Mabey, *Gilbert White: A Biography of the Author of The Natural History of Selborne* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986), 8, 93, 96.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 38 Gilbert White, letters to Samuel Barker, November 3, 1774 and March 30, 1775, reprinted in *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, ed. Thomas Bell, 2 vols. (London, 1877), vol. 2, 105–7, 110–12.
- 39 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 112.
- 40 I quote directly from the letter manuscript here, for White is interestingly, unusually emphatic: Gilbert White to Samuel Barker and Anne Barker, March 30, 1775, The John Rylands Library, Manchester, Eng MS 1306/9.
- 41 Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 92, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 4, ed. W. J. Bate and A. B. Strauss (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 122.
- 42 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 110. Dr. Johnson argued that Pope borrows his beauties from Vida's Latin, but transplanted it into English, "a soil less adapted to its nature, and less favorable to its increase" (*Rambler* 92, 129).
- 43 Johnson, *Rambler* 94, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 4, 140. He quotes *Paradise Lost*, 2.787–89. See also Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*.
- 44 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.213–17; John Dryden, trans. *The Works of Virgil* (London, 1697), 335, lines 277–78. Interestingly, Dryden adds the sound thematics to a passage that, for Virgil, focuses on mimicking motion.
- 45 Dryden, trans., *The Works of Virgil*, 335, lines 276–81.
- 46 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 111.
- 47 In the nineteenth century, this line was credited to Milton, but its actual source is unclear.
- 48 Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, 5.
- 49 Eric Weiskott, "Before Prosody: Early English Poetics in Practice and Theory," *MLQ* 77.4 (2016): 476; Eric Weiskott, *Meter and Modernity in English Verse, 1350–1650* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 184. See also O. B. Hardison, *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

- 50 Paul Fussell, *Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England* (New London, CT: Connecticut College, 1954).
- 51 Edward Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry* (London, 1702), 1.
- 52 Richard Bradford, *Augustan Measures: Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Writings on Prosody and Metre* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), chapter 2.
- 53 Johnson, *Dictionary*, s.v. "Prosody."
- 54 See Bradford, *Augustan Measures*, 17; and R. D. Jameson, "Notes on Dryden's Lost Prosodia," *Modern Philology* 20.3 (1923): 241–53.
- 55 John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay* (London, 1668), 63.
- 56 Bysshe, *The Art of English Poetry*, 11.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 16; the examples are given over a discussion of several pages, 11–17.
- 58 Dryden, trans., *The Works of Virgil*, 335.
- 59 Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, 87 and chapter 3 generally.
- 60 Say, *Poems*, 130–31. Say only partially scanned this line, and my scansion here is meant to recapture the reading of the line Say critiqued.
- 61 Note that the awkward "ecch'ing" appeared, printed thus, in other eighteenth-century poems.
- 62 Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, 76.
- 63 Paul Hammond, *The Poems of John Dryden*, vol. 1: 1649–1681 (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), xix.
- 64 On Dryden's own (odd) reading habits, see Harold Love, "Roger L'Estrange's Criticism of Dryden's Elocution" *Notes & Queries* 48.4 (2001): 398–400.
- 65 I am grateful to Steven Zwicker for helping me think through this point.
- 66 Say, *Poems*, 131. This is not yet precisely our modern understanding of prosody, however; Say marks both accent (*l*) and quantity (–).
- 67 Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, 87.
- 68 Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (London, 1775), vol. 2, 3.
- 69 Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, 82.
- 70 Peter Fogg, *Elementa Anglicana; or, The Principles of English Grammar* (Stockport, 1796), vol. 2, 189–90, discussed in Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, 86.
- 71 White, "A Harvest Scene," in *Natural History*, ed. Bell, 503–4.
- 72 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 106.
- 73 Johnson, *Rambler* 94, 140.
- 74 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 106.
- 75 For the manuscript see Gilbert White, "Natural History of Selborne," digitized by Gilbert White and the Oates Collection, [www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/manuscript/](http://www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/manuscript/).
- 76 See Fussell, *Theory of Prosody*, chapters 4–5; Bradford, *Augustan Measures*, chapters 4–5; and Earl Wasserman, "The Return of the Enjambed Couplet," *ELH* 7.3 (1940): 239–52.
- 77 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 110.
- 78 William Belsham, "Remarks on English Versification," in *Essays, Philosophical, Historical, and Literary* (London, 1789), 226–27, 233, 229.
- 79 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 106.

- 80 For a more extended argument about echo as an apt metaphor for poetic sound, see my “The Matter of Language.”
- 81 Stephanie Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2, 7.
- 82 Derek Attridge, “Language as Imitation: Jakobson, Joyce, and the Art of Onomatopoeia,” *MLN* 99.5 (1984): 119, quoted and discussed in Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric*, 40.
- 83 White, letter to Barker, March 30, 1775, 106.
- 84 Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric*, 30. White himself privileges sound knowledge as he laments “Frequent returns of deafness,” which, he fears, “half disqualify me for a naturalist” (*ibid.*, 189).

*Mary Somerville's Sound Accomplishments*

Katherine Fry

In her 1798 treatise, *Practical Education*, the novelist Maria Edgeworth criticized the state of women's education at the turn of the nineteenth century, deriding 'hours spent stammering at a harpsichord' as a mere entryway to fashionable society or as a form of competitive display for matrimonial gain.<sup>1</sup> Without rejecting traditional recreations such as piano playing, drawing, and dance, she cautioned against what she perceived as an overestimation of superficial accomplishments at the expense of meaningful scientific knowledge:

Sentiment and ridicule have conspired to represent reason, knowledge, and science, as unsuitable or dangerous to women; yet at the same time wit, and superficial acquirements in literature, have been the object of admiration in society; so that this dangerous inference has been drawn almost without perceiving its fallacy, that superficial knowledge in women is more desirable than accurate knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Edgeworth's critique of 'female accomplishments' was a significant contribution to a growing critique of education that prioritized a rota of accomplishments over the life of the mind.<sup>3</sup> But whereas her criticisms exemplify debates taking place about the nature of 'accomplishments' and the domestic education of girls in the 1790s, they also point to the growing prominence of women as public intellectuals within this emerging knowledge economy.

Women writers certainly faced exclusionary assumptions and tactics in the professionalizing disciplines of both science and music. Yet they also played a key role in conveying knowledge to a wide readership and advancing an ideal of scientific education as a rational pursuit for both women and men.<sup>4</sup> The science writer and polymath Mary Somerville (née Fairfax) stands as a case in point. Somerville's early success owed much to a culture of scientific practice as a genteel accomplishment, one accessible to men and women in a range of settings beyond professional arenas. Born in



Scotland in 1780, Somerville moved to London with her husband in 1816.<sup>5</sup> From an affluent residence in Chelsea and through travel in France and Italy, she became an authority on advanced mathematics, astronomy, and experimental physics, while also pursuing her musical interests in opera and piano playing.<sup>6</sup> In her best-selling treatise *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* (1834), she sought to unify different branches of knowledge ranging from astronomy, optics, and electricity to acoustics and musical sound.

Following the first biographies of Somerville to appear in the late twentieth century, historians of science such as James Secord and Claire Brock have done much to uncover the tensions in her work as a female intellectual while integrating her achievements into mainstream histories of nineteenth-century science.<sup>7</sup> Somerville's *Connexion* has been analysed particularly for its contributions to optics, for its philosophical reflections on nature and astronomy, and for its relevance to Victorian debates about public education.<sup>8</sup> What is less often considered is that Somerville also drew on the latest experiments of the day to include two pivotal chapters on sound.<sup>9</sup> Somerville's work introduced the emerging field of acoustics to a mass readership. What is more, sound and music recur throughout her treatise as part of her broader project to draw connections between the physical sciences. Although her writing on sound was ultimately superseded by more specialist accounts later in the century, it was important in cultivating a public fascination with the possibilities of acoustical science and practices of listening within and beyond nineteenth-century London. Amid growing scholarly attention to interactions between histories of science and aurality, Somerville stands as a popular disseminator of philosophies of sound, rather than as an inventor, maker, and demonstrator of new theories and technologies. Rather than disparage her contribution on these grounds, however, this chapter interprets her writing on acoustics and its reception as an alternative to histories of seminal machines and experimental practices that privilege men as theorists of sound and hearing in modernity.

### Narrating the Science of Sound

In the context of an industrializing London, the quest to understand sound as an object of scientific knowledge was attracting new pioneers and audiences. As James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart have stated, 'concern for music and concern for science were often one and the same; the differences between "optical" and "auditory" inquiry, between "music"

and “science”, between what counted as “musical performance” and what counted as “scientific performance” were often difficult to define.<sup>10</sup> Such convergences were in many ways indicative of the physical sites of performance and exhibition characteristic of London’s urban expansion in the early decades of the century. Scientific establishments such as the Royal Institution, the Royal Society, and the Royal Polytechnic Institution functioned as lively spaces for public demonstration and spectacle alongside cultural venues such as the Hanover Square Rooms, the King’s Theatre, and Crystal Palace. At the same time, the blurring of musical and scientific performance depended upon the activities of individual protagonists known both for their insights into acoustical science and technology and for their wide-ranging interests across the arts and sciences. Recent scholarship has shown how sound and music were important preoccupations of male luminaries such as John Herschel, Thomas Young, Michael Faraday, and Charles Wheatstone – all of whom built their reputations as lecturers and demonstrators by establishing strong connections with London’s emergent scientific institutions.<sup>11</sup>

If urban institutions provided exhilarating public spaces of musical and scientific convergence, they nevertheless functioned in other ways as patriarchal sites of exclusion. In contrast to the array of public sites occupied by men of science, female intellectuals were restricted from lecturing in institutional spaces, and had to rely on printed media and informal social networks as a means to acquire and circulate knowledge. Unlike her male contemporaries, Somerville did not participate in institutional meetings and was never permitted to lecture in public.<sup>12</sup> Instead, she conveyed scientific knowledge in writing to a wider public of educated non-specialists. Her first book, *Mechanism of the Heavens* (1831), was a translation and explication of Pierre-Simon Laplace’s complex treatise on mathematical physics, *Mécanique celeste* (1798–1827). The translation was connected with the ambitions of the Whig politician and mathematician Henry Brougham, who sought to bring science to middle- and working-class people through the inexpensive publications of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Although Somerville’s *Mechanism of the Heavens* ultimately proved unsuitable for a general audience, she had prepared an introduction to Laplace’s treatise, a ‘Preliminary Dissertation’, in which she set out a non-mathematical context for readers unversed in advanced calculus and experimental physics. This would evolve into *Connexion*, which she completed during her stay in Paris in 1832 and was accepted for publication shortly after her return to London the following year.

In the context of acoustical science, Somerville can be read alongside other British and European thinkers who shared the liberal aspiration to communicate theories of sound and hearing to a mass readership, even as scientific disciplines became more specialized and fragmented. As Benjamin Steege points out in reference to Hermann von Helmholtz's *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen* (*On the Sensations of Tone*, 1863), the commitment to 'popular science' as a way of observing and interpreting everyday sensory experience coincided with the growth of modern acoustics as a highly technical branch of mathematical physics.<sup>14</sup> Even before Helmholtz's seminal treatise, John Herschel's 'Treatise on Sound' of 1830 prompted discussion about scientific cultivation and public understanding in Britain. Herschel's survey makes few concessions in its extensive use of technical language to outline the propagation of sound and the laws of vibration. In a lengthy review, David Brewster remarked that Herschel's treatise 'is fitted only for the perusal of the mathematical philosopher; and though the general reader will discover, here and there, portions which he is capable of understanding, yet he will find himself baffled at every step by profound views, and by the perpetual recurrence of mathematical formulae'.<sup>15</sup> Highlighting the disjunction between a minority in possession of high-level technical training and a growing readership of 'educated classes', Brewster went on to stress the need for 'a series of works on popular and practical science, freed from mathematical symbols and technical terms, written in simple and perspicuous language, and illustrated by facts and experiments which are level to the capacity of ordinary minds'.<sup>16</sup> Wasting no time in embarking on such a project, he devoted the remaining thirty pages of his review to providing his own 'popular account' of discoveries in sound by way of commentary on Herschel's treatise. Two years later, Brewster published his popular account of acoustics and musical automata in his *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (1832), wherein he employed straightforward description and diagrams to expose the mechanisms underlying 'magical' phenomena, including the production of sounds by musical instruments and automata.<sup>17</sup>

Despite her autodidactic background in advanced mathematics and Laplacian physics, Somerville followed Brewster in omitting algebraic formulae from her treatise. While she acknowledged that 'a complete acquaintance with physical astronomy can be attained by those only, who are well versed in the higher branches of mathematical and mechanical science', she also admitted that 'there is a wide distinction between the degree of mathematical acquirement necessary for making discoveries, and

that which is requisite for understanding what others have done'.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Brewster, who employed a tone of scientific conquest and rationalistic unmasking of the supernatural, Somerville's rhetoric used evocative description and metaphor to demystify the natural world while inspiring a sense of wonder at divine creation.<sup>19</sup>

In the opening pages of her discussion, Somerville illustrates the propagation of sound by way of an analogy with a field of corn set in motion by a gust of wind and marked by different-coloured bands. The oscillation of individual ears of corn stands in for the vibration of particles of air, while the ripples of the cornfield depict the transmission of sound waves in an equal direction:

A sudden blast depresses each ear equally and successively in the direction of the wind; but in consequence of the elasticity of the stalks and the force of the impulse, each ear not only rises again as soon as the pressure is removed, but bends back nearly as much in the contrary direction, and then continues to oscillate backwards and forwards, in equal times, like a pendulum, to a less and less extent, till the resistance of the air puts a stop to the motion. These vibrations are the same for every individual ear of corn. Yet as their oscillations do not all commence at the same time, but successively, the ears will have a variety of positions at any one instance. Some of the advancing ears will meet others in their returning vibrations, and as the times of oscillation are equal for all, they will be crowded together at regular intervals. Between these, there will occur equal spaces where the ears will be few, in consequence of being bent in opposite directions; and at other equal intervals they will be in their natural right position. So that over the whole field there will be a regular series of condensations and rarefactions among the ears of corn, separated by equal intervals, where they will be in their natural state of density. (*Connexion*, 150)

Here Somerville invokes Alexander von Humboldt's observations on the amplification of nocturnal sound as described in his *Ansichten der Natur* (*Views of Nature*). Recounting his expedition to the cataracts of the Orinoco river, Humboldt had attributed the intensified sound of water at night to changes in the density of the atmosphere. As Somerville points out, Herschel subsequently confirmed Humboldt's observations. But in writing with an ear towards urban life in the 1830s, Herschel had also attributed the augmentation of common sounds to the repose of night, which – he believed – heightened the auditory nerves in the same way as darkness makes the stars transparent (*Connexion*, 158). Continuing her tour of sonic discoveries, she elaborates on issues of intensity and pitch, detailing experiments on sounds inaudible to human ears by William

Hyde Wollaston and Wheatstone. She evokes Jean-Baptiste Biot's whispered conversations through the pipes of the Paris aqueducts, revealing how the force of sound does not decay in a tube as in open air. Turning to the specific phenomenon of music and the long-standing scientific fascination with musical instruments, she describes the laws of frequency underlying unison, consonant, and dissonant sound combinations as a basis for pleasure in musical beauty. She echoes Thomas Young in inferring that the scientific laws of frequency can be extended to justify a universal and natural human propensity for diatonic harmony. 'The pleasure afforded by harmony', she notes, 'is attributed by Dr. Young to the love of order, and to a predilection for a regular occurrence of sensations, natural to the human mind, which is gratified by the perfect regularity and rapid recurrence of the vibrations' (*Connexion*, 166).

At the centre of her treatise, Somerville documents modern acoustics as a burgeoning field preoccupied with observing and quantifying the vibration of bodies. She devotes considerable space to Ernst Chladni's experiments in revealing acoustic waves as geometric figures (*Connexion*, 168–69). She focuses on the various symmetrical arrangements of sand produced by the different modes of vibration, and alludes to the wider ongoing fascination with 'Chladni figures' in more recent acoustical science. Through close observation of Chladni's experiments, Wheatstone had shown how complex patterns could be understood according to a simpler set of basic geometric figures (*Connexion*, 170).<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Félix Savart's observations of sound patterns produced by fine sand had considered the implications of sympathetic vibration for detecting the effect of sound transmission on the atmosphere. Somerville recounts how the movement of sand on stretched parchment over a large glass tumbler can be made to follow the vibrations produced by a parallel plate set in motion, or by the notes of a flute played nearby. The technique can even be utilized – she notes – to detect inaudible and distant sounds, holding implications for refining siege warfare: 'by the vibrations of sand on a drum-head, the besieged have discovered the direction in which a counter-mine was working' (*Connexion*, 175–76, quotation at 176).

If Somerville foregrounds theories of vibration and the legacy of the 'Chladni figures', she also records new instruments of early nineteenth-century acoustics. Charles de la Tour's improved siren of 1819 was initially used for quantifying the number of pulsations in a second corresponding to any particular pitch, while Wheatstone's symphonion, concertina, and Aeolian organ applied vibrating metal springs to expressive effect (*Connexion*, 168). In the concluding pages of her survey, she credits

Wheatstone for providing some of the most progressive information on sound transmission and resonance. Wheatstone's experiments on solid conductors worked to connect instruments and soundboards in separate spaces, enabling audiences to hear a musical performance as reproduced without the presence of the players in front of them.<sup>21</sup> As Somerville puts this: 'The sounds of an entire orchestra may be transmitted and reciprocated by connecting one end of a metallic rod with a sounding-board near the orchestra, so placed as to resound to all the instruments, and the other end with the sounding-board of a harp, piano, or guitar, in a remote apartment' (*Connexion*, 177). Somerville incorporates Wheatstone's depiction of listening to a transmission of his orchestra through a soundboard as similar to viewing the detail of a distant landscape: 'compared with an ordinary band heard at a distance through the air the effect is as a landscape seen in miniature beauty through a concave lens compared with the same scene viewed by ordinary vision through a murky atmosphere' (*Connexion*, 177).

If Wheatstone's musical circuits could transmit sounds across geographical distances, Somerville concludes with the suggestion that parallel developments in the invention of speaking machines would one day carry sound across vast reaches of time:

From the singular discoveries of M. Savart on the nature of the human voice, and the investigations of Mr. Willis on the mechanism of the larynx, it may be presumed that ultimately the utterance or pronunciation of modern languages will be conveyed, not only to the eye, but also to the ear, of posterity. Had the ancients possessed the means of transmitting such definite sounds, the civilized world would still have responded in sympathetic notes at the distance of hundreds of ages. (*Connexion*, 179)

Of course, Somerville was not alone in imagining a utopian future of sound technology, one in which the reproduction and preservation of vocal utterance could link cultures and peoples across spatial and temporal divides. Herschel had similarly concluded his 'Treatise on Sound' with a section concerned with Savart's observations on the anatomy of the voice, and with Wolfgang von Kempelen's and Robert Willis's use of reed pipes and bellows in constructing 'talking engines' for the purpose of imitating vowel sounds. In documenting such discoveries, Herschel commented on what he saw as the wider limitations of written language in the context of modern trade relations and alluded to the possibility of capturing speech sounds in the form of a standardized phonetic alphabet. The task of preserving 'an exact correspondence between the writing and pronunciation', he argued, 'would be one of the most valuable acquisitions not only

to philologists but to mankind, facilitating the intercourse between nations, and laying the foundation of the first step towards a universal language'.<sup>22</sup> Somerville's aspiration to communicate knowledge of acoustics to new audiences was certainly in keeping with a liberal agenda to reach a mass public. Still, her historical narrative of sound innovations and imaginations of the future was equally implicated in the wider imperial project to elevate Western science in the service of 'civilizing' humanity on the model of Victorian progress.

### Acoustics Imprinted

While *Connexion* was by no means a straightforwardly popular work, it was widely praised in the British periodical press for its lucidity, elegance, and scope. William Whewell lauded Somerville's treatise for its bold attempt to counteract the modern tendency of the sciences towards 'separation and dismemberment'.<sup>23</sup> Aligning Somerville's work with the aims of the newly established British Association for the Advancement of Science (1831), Whewell used his review to moot the novel term 'scientist' as a fitting description of those individuals (including Somerville) who were engaged in observing and explicating the natural world in a manner that counteracted the pitfalls of specialization.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, many of Somerville's male critics were unable to resist categorizing her intellectual qualities and style according to ideological stereotypes. Even Whewell (one of her most positive reviewers) depicted Somerville as both a singular exception to what he saw as an overall scarcity of female authors capable of comprehending the sciences, and somehow exemplary of the 'female intellect' in general – which he demarcated as steered by emotion, feeling, and a sharpness of perception freed from practical implications.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the *Athenaeum* singled out the sections on sound in particular as the best in the book, suggesting that the treatise as a whole was 'at the same time a fit companion for the philosopher in his study, and for the literary lady in her boudoir; both may read it with pleasure, both consult it with profit'.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas Brewster had criticized Herschel's 'Treatise on Sound' for its intractability, he commended Somerville in the *Edinburgh Review* for conveying profound knowledge of the material world with rare elegance and without 'entering into minute details of facts, or diffuse explanations of phenomena, or tedious deductions of general laws'.<sup>27</sup> He went on, though, to doubt whether the treatise was 'sufficiently popular to initiate our fair countrywomen into a knowledge of the laws of the material



universe' and to level criticisms against the lack of diagrams and visual aids in the first edition.<sup>28</sup> As he saw it, Somerville's chapters on acoustics were most defective in this regard as they included no illustrations of the symmetrical patterns produced by the vibration of solid bodies. Implying a dissociation between sound as an aural phenomenon and as a visual trace, he argued that 'there is no branch of physics which addresses itself so agreeably to the eye, or appeals with such force to our wonder, as that of acoustic figures; and, connected as it is with the theory and practice of music, we must implore Mrs Somerville to give it, in another edition, a more favourable consideration'.<sup>29</sup> When Somerville came to publish the second edition of *Connexion* in 1835, she responded to this recommendation by supplementing her written text with diagrams and full-page illustrative plates, including several depicting Chladni's sound figures and their reconfiguration by Wheatstone.

By the late 1830s, Somerville's treatise found popularity through its serialization in new penny weeklies aimed at 'improving' middle- and working-class readers engaged in self-education.<sup>30</sup> *The Saturday Magazine* had been founded in 1832 under sponsorship from the missionary organization the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and reached a peak circulation of 80,000. In September 1837 it began its serialization of Somerville's text, not with extracts from the opening sections of the book as one might expect, but with an introductory segment from the chapters on sound. In this context, knowledge of acoustical science was interspersed with articles on 'exotic locales', elements of science and nature, references to art, composers, and musical instruments, and 'lessons in Christian evidence'.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, an earlier edition of the rival *Penny Magazine* from the same year had announced a new regular feature entitled 'Philosophical Experiments which, by means of Apparatus within the reach of every person, may be easily performed'.<sup>32</sup> The first in the series involved an explanation of acoustics, showing how the undulations of sound could be visualized as vibrating objects, as particles of dust in the light, or as figures of sand on plates of glass. The final 'home experiment' depicts Wheatstone's Kaleidophone, a popular ornament designed to reveal how acoustic vibrations of different pitches could produce geometric patterns of coloured light in the dark.

### Somerville's Sonorous Romanticism

It might be tempting, in view of this reception, to read Somerville's survey merely as exemplary of a well-worn narrative in sound historiography: that

of a growing propensity to objectify, commoditize, and visualize sound and hearing as characteristic of 'sonic modernity'. Beginning in the late eighteenth century (so this narrative goes), the growth of acoustics as a specialist branch of physics transformed the way sound was perceived; sound became a tangible object of close analysis and observation. Once this objectification took hold in Victorian 'aural culture', it provided the necessary conditions for the technologized sound world of the modern era. John Picker has suggested that authors such as Herschel, Brewster, Wheatstone, and Somerville marked a transition in perceptions of sound and listening between the Romantic and Victorian eras. These figures, he argues, sought to demystify the immaterial realms of sound and hearing, paving the way for innovations in sound reproduction later in the century. If Romantic poets and authors conceived of sound as a 'sublime *experience*', early Victorian popularizers of science established sound as a 'quantifiable and marketable *object* or *thing*'.<sup>33</sup>

In her survey of the fast-growing field of acoustical science for a mass readership, Somerville's tone of scientific progress certainly shifts from a focus on the acoustic properties of music and instruments towards vibration as a marker of sound in general. Yet to infer from her text (or from those of her contemporaries) a widespread shift in perceptions of sound and listening would be to exaggerate the causal impact of scientific theory on sensory experience, and to overlook the extent to which sound and music were integral to her broader philosophy of nature and the senses as connected and entwined. It seems ironic that the sections of Somerville's book on sound were extracted as individual items of 'useful knowledge', when her motivating premise was to advocate for the unity of the physical sciences. As she put this in her preface, 'the progress of modern science, especially within the last five years, has been remarkable for a tendency to simplify the laws of nature, and to unite detached branches by general principles' (*Connexion*, iv).

While Somerville does not offer a principle of unity, she presents connectivity as an implied possibility between different fields, citing developments in electromagnetism and sound–light analogy, and deferring to the idea of cosmic harmony as the work of divine creation. In her book, sound provides a recurring point of reference, as the embodiment of waves and undulations and as symbolic of the overarching theme of connection. In the introduction, she employs a sonic metaphor to illustrate the unity of the physical sciences, which she sees exemplified in astronomy.

Gravitation not only binds satellites to their planet, and planets to the sun, but it connects sun with sun throughout the wide extent of creation, and is

the cause of the disturbances, as well as of the order, of nature: since every tremor it excites in any one planet is immediately transmitted to the farthest limits of the system, in oscillations, which correspond in their periods with the cause producing them, like sympathetic notes in music, or vibrations from the deep tones of the organ. (*Connexion*, 2)

Somerville uses the Newtonian connection of gravity with the harmony of the spheres to frame her presentation of astronomy as the most 'sublime subject of study'. As she sees it, contemplation of the heavens takes one closer to the operation of divine principles, while at the same time showing their impenetrability: 'such pursuits, while they ennoble the mind, at the same time inculcate humility, by showing that there is a barrier which no energy, mental or physical, can ever enable us to pass' (*Connexion*, 2).

In her later chapters on sound, Somerville returns to the association of harmony and vibration with the movement of bodies. She begins with an explanation of sympathetic vibration between musical instruments, describing the effect of placing a sounding tuning fork on a pianoforte. Following further examples of musical and temporal correspondence, she reflects on the relevance of sympathetic vibration more generally for the larger theme of her book:

These forced oscillations, which correspond in their periods with those of the exciting cause, are to be traced in every department of physical science. Several instances of them have already occurred in this work. Such are the tides, which follow the sun and moon in all their motions and periods. The nutation of the earth's axis also corresponds with the period, and represents the motion of the nodes of the moon, and may be traced in the nutation of the lunar orbit. And, lastly, the acceleration of the moon's mean motion represents the action of the planets on the earth reflected by the sun to the moon. (*Connexion*, 173–74)

The moment of self-reference in this passage – where Somerville refers back to preceding examples already given in the work – shows the extent to which her idea of connection also operates on a rhetorical level. Indeed, commentators have noted the extent to which the sectional arrangement of the text is designed to show how knowledge in one area holds implications for ideas and concepts in another.<sup>34</sup> The chapters on sound are no exception, and their literal positioning at the centre of the work is significant: they occupy a pivotal position between the survey of astronomy and atmosphere on the one side, and the discussion of light, heat, and magnetism on the other. As if to justify this ordering of knowledge, the sections on light begin with the corresponding assertion that 'not only every thing we hear, but all we see, is through the medium of the

atmosphere' (*Connexion*, 180). This anticipation of analogy between sound and light suggests a further reference to Young – whose quest for relations between different fields led him to study acoustics as a foundation for his wave theory of light.<sup>35</sup> In the wake of Young's experiments, Somerville was able to reflect more broadly on the undulations of sound as a prior case from which to understand other senses. She suggests, for instance, that 'all the principal phenomena of heat may actually be illustrated by a comparison with those of sound' and that 'light, heat, sound, and the waves of fluids, are all subject to the same laws of reflection, and, indeed, their undulatory theories are perfectly similar' (*Connexion*, 260). She goes on to distinguish the medium of sound, describing its distinct physical properties through lyrical language reminiscent of her framing musical metaphor:

The propagation of sound requires a much denser medium than that of either light or heat; its intensity diminishes as the rarity of the air increases; so that, at a very small height above the surface of the earth, the noise of the tempest ceases, and the thunder is heard no more in those boundless regions where the heavenly bodies accomplish their periods in eternal and sublime silence. (*Connexion*, 260)

Somerville's text invites us to attend as much to her written style as to her theoretical positions and influences. This was the approach adopted by Maria Edgeworth, who singled out the above passage on the propagation of sound as exemplary of the scientific sublime. Remarking on the strange combination of pleasure, awe, and discomfort she felt on reading the words on the page, Edgeworth complimented Somerville on her simplicity of style, which she thought conveyed a philosophy of science as a devotional encounter with nature:

I can only assure you that you have given me a great deal of pleasure; that you have enlarged my conception of the sublimity of the universe, beyond any ideas I had ever before been enabled to form. The great simplicity of your manner of writing, I may say of your *mind*, which appears in your writing, particularly suits the scientific sublime – which would be destroyed by what is commonly called fine writing.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly Edgeworth experienced Somerville's text as more than merely an empirical explanation of the physical world, one that connected diverse branches of knowledge for the uninitiated reader. Beyond the dedicated account of acoustics at the centre of the book, references to music and sound emerge throughout the text – particularly, it seems, at moments when her writing starts to blur the boundaries between empirical

description and figurative display. In this sense, sound in *Connexion* is more than a material object, subject to elucidation and analysis; it is a literary theme central to the text's larger convergence of scientific writing with theology and poetry.

### Gendering the 'Audible Past'

Although Somerville went on to publish two further books (*Physical Geography*, 1848, and *Molecular and Microscopic Science*, 1869), *Connexion* emerged as one of the most widely read scientific texts of the Victorian era. As Secord has documented, the first edition sold some two thousand copies and over the next four decades the book went through a further nine editions, reaching readers in Germany, Italy, France, colonial India, South Africa, and America.<sup>37</sup> In the decades following its initial publication, Somerville bolstered the credibility of her treatise throughout its successive editions by diligently keeping up to date with the latest discoveries and inventions of the day. Already in the second edition of 1835, she was compelled to add a new preface, declaring that 'many parts have been altered, and much new matter has been added, in order to keep pace with the rapid progress of the physical sciences' (*Connexion*, iii). But whereas she revised and updated many aspects of her treatise, the substance of her discussion of sound remained largely unaltered in fundamentals. The tenth and final edition of *Connexion*, which was edited by Arabella Buckley, the science writer and former assistant to Charles Lyell, appeared in 1877, five years after Somerville's death at the age of ninety-one.

To a certain extent Somerville's survey of sound may have appeared anachronistic by the 1870s, as new understandings of sound and emergent technologies of sound reproduction emerged. The appearance of Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone* marked a seminal turn towards auditory perception and the physiology of hearing as the centre of acoustical research. New machines such as the Phonautograph and Phonograph superseded earlier aspirations for a 'talking engine' by shifting attention from the anatomy of the voice to the mechanisms of the human ear. Jonathan Sterne has depicted such developments as emblematic of a 'new sonic regime' that took hold in the mid-nineteenth century, one in which Alexander Graham Bell's Ear Phonautograph (1874) embodied a widespread orientation towards the mechanisms of the middle ear as the 'timpanic model' for sound reproduction technologies of the future.<sup>38</sup> It would be limiting, though, to evaluate Somerville's contribution to nineteenth-century sound science merely according to the narrative of

modern sound reproduction. Somerville's popularization of acoustics stands as an important model for the proliferation of knowledge about sound and listening in the Victorian public sphere more widely. Her reformist approach to scientific communication predated Helmholtz's liberal commitment to engage a broad non-specialist audience, and anticipated the later activities of the physicist John Tyndell, whose public lectures on sound at the Royal Institution helped to disseminate Helmholtz's theories. The appeal of Somerville's chapters on sound to a mass audience were indicative of a burgeoning engagement with the science of acoustics among Victorian readers and publishers – as was evident in later texts ranging from Sedley Taylor's *Sound and Music* (1873) and William Pole's *The Philosophy of Music* (1879) to scientific books aimed at children, such as Arabella Buckley's survey of sound at the centre of her book *The Fairy-Land of Science* (1878). Indeed, if Somerville's discussion of acoustics in *Connexion* stopped short of popularizing new theories of hearing later in the century, Buckley disseminated the latest understandings of sound and the ear by way of long-standing conversations of women's science writing that Somerville helped establish.<sup>39</sup>

Moving from sites of innovative scientific experiment and demonstration to a consideration of female popularisers of sound science might seem in some ways like a distraction from a current tendency of historians to unearth material histories of sound as mediated by technology in a period of rapid change. Yet an over-emphasis on technological invention and innovation in sonic artefacts also risks preserving an all-too-familiar binary: one in which men are cast as the producers and originators of knowledge about sound and hearing, while women play the part of audience members, listeners, and beneficiaries of acoustic discoveries.<sup>40</sup> Somerville does not conform to historical narratives of nineteenth-century music and science as centred on technological experimentation. But exploring the place of sound and hearing in women's science writing, and in their experience of acoustical science, provides another perspective on this shared disciplinary space, allowing for a variety of voices in the shaping of musical knowledge in this period.

## Notes

- 1 Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 522. On the role of music (and domestic keyboard performance in particular) within Enlightenment critical discourse on 'accomplishments' see Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1954; reprint, New York: Dover, 1990),

- 267–83; and Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770–1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151–79.
- 2 Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 551.
  - 3 Most notably, Mary Wollstonecraft had already criticized the limitations of domestic tutoring and boarding schools in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), remarking on the tendency to train the memory by way of 'exterior accomplishments' in music, drawing, and geography while neglecting the cultivation of rational understanding and independence of thought: *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, with Reflections on Female Conduct in the Important Duties of Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 25. In the 1790s, Wollstonecraft would go beyond her initial critique of accomplishments to propose an overhaul of the national education system as a whole, arguing for co-education of girls and boys according to a shared curriculum within state-sponsored day schools: *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792).
  - 4 Marina Benjamin, 'Elbow Room: Women Writers on Science, 1790–1840', in *Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Enquiry, 1780–1945*, ed. Marina Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 27–59; Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 95–166; Anne B. Shteir, 'Elegant Recreations? Configuring Science Writing for Women', in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. Bernard Lightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 236–55.
  - 5 For biographies of Somerville, see Elizabeth Patterson, *Mary Somerville and the Cultivation of Science, 1815–1840* (Boston: Thoemmes Press, 2004), 11–47; and Kathryn A. Neeley, *Mary Somerville: Science, Illumination and the Female Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45–85.
  - 6 J. M. W. Turner's unfinished painting *The Music Party* depicts an elegant yet indistinct circle of figures playing and listening to music within a lavish interior setting. The most prominent figure in the painting – the woman at the piano with her back to the viewer – resembles a fleeting drawing from Turner's Paris sketchbook of 1832. The sketch has been linked to Mary Somerville, who was also residing in Paris that year and was well acquainted with Turner. See [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-music-party-east-cowes-castle-no3550](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-music-party-east-cowes-castle-no3550) (accessed 29 December 2018).
  - 7 Claire Brock, 'The Public Worth of Mary Somerville', *British Society for the History of Science*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2006), 255–72; James A. Secord, 'General Introduction', in *Collected Works of Mary Somerville*, ed. James A. Secord, 9 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2004), vol. 1, xv–xxxix; James Secord, 'Mathematics for the Million? Mary Somerville's *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*', in his *Visions of Science: Books and Readers at the Dawn of the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107–269.
  - 8 Secord, *Visions of Science*, 107. Secord suggests that Somerville's text sits alongside other exemplary works of the 'reflective genre' of science writing



common in the 1830s, including John Herschel's *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*, Humphry Davy's *Consolations of Travel*, Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, and Charles Babbage's *Reflections on the Decline of Science*. This genre not only disseminated scientific content, but also popularized ideas about the moral purpose and potential of Western science in the modern world.

- 9 The foregrounding of the visual sense in contemporary commentary on Somerville's work is reflected in titles such as Secord's *Visions of Science* and Neeley's *Mary Somerville*.
- 10 James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart, 'Introduction: Fantasies of Total Description', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, ed. James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1–26, quotation at 4.
- 11 Wheatstone in particular emerges as a significant figure within the acoustic environment of early nineteenth-century London. Although he is best known for his contributions to the invention of the electric telegraph, musicologists and historians of science have suggested that Wheatstone's artisan background as a musical instrument maker and inventor of musical automata in the 1820s and 1830s holds wider implications for an understanding of the cultural and social meanings of acoustic artefacts and scientific objects. See, for example, Ellen Lockhart, 'Transparent Music and Sound–Light Analogy ca. 1800', in *Sound Knowledge*, ed. Davies and Lockhart, 77–100; Myles W. Jackson, 'Charles Wheatstone: Musical Instrument Making, Natural Philosophy, and Acoustics in Early Nineteenth-Century London', in *Sound Knowledge*, ed. Davies and Lockhart, 101–24; Melissa Dickson, 'Charles Wheatstone's Enchanted Lyre and the Spectacle of Sound', in *Sound Knowledge*, ed. Davies and Lockhart, 125–44; James Q. Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', in *Sound Knowledge*, ed. Davies and Lockhart, 145–74; Peter Pesic, *Music and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2014), 161–215; and Peter Pesic, 'Thomas Young's Musical Optics: Translating Sound into Light', in 'Music, Sound and the Laboratory from 1750–1980', ed. Alexandra Hui, Julia Kursell, and Myles W. Jackson, special issue of *Osiris*, vol. 28 (2013), 15–39.
- 12 See James Secord, 'How Scientific Conversation Became Shop Talk', in *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*, ed. Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 23–59.
- 13 In 1827 Brougham commissioned Somerville to produce an accessible translation and summary of Laplace's treatise. Although she completed the translation according to Brougham's terms, she had reservations about the possibility of popularizing Laplace's arguments. For a detailed account of Somerville's connection with Henry Brougham and the publication context of *Connexion*, see Secord, 'Introduction', in Somerville, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, ix–xvi.

- 14 Benjamin Steege, 'Popular Sensations', in his *Helmholtz and the Modern Listener* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16–42, esp. 18–19.
- 15 David Brewster, 'A Treatise on Sound, by J. F. W. Herschel', *Quarterly Review* (February 1831), 475–510, quotation at 476.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 476.
- 17 David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (London: John Murray, 1832), 149–67.
- 18 Mary Somerville, *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* (London: John Murray, 1835), 3. Hereafter cited as *Connexion* followed by page reference.
- 19 On Somerville's scientific language in *Connexion* and the influence of poetry, see Neeley, *Mary Somerville*, 5–10 and 101–29.
- 20 See Jackson, 'Charles Wheatstone', 105–11; Dickson, 'Charles Wheatstone's Enchanted Lyre', 129–33.
- 21 See Dickson, 'The Enchanted Lyre', 133–42; and Jackson, 'Charles Wheatstone', 113–21.
- 22 F. W. Herschel, 'A Treatise on Sound', in *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana, or, Universal Dictionary of Knowledge*, ed. Edward Smedley (London: Rest Fenner, 1830), vol. 2, 818.
- 23 William Whewell, 'Review of *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 15 (March 1834), 54–68, quotation at 59.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 26 *Athenaeum*, vol. 2 (1834), 6.
- 27 David Brewster, 'Review of *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*', *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 59 (1834), 154–71, quotation at 155.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 155–56.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 30 Secord, 'Introduction', xiv.
- 31 *The Saturday Magazine*, vol. 10 (September 1837), 118.
- 32 *The Penny Magazine*, vol. 6 (May 1837), 191–92. The *Penny Magazine* was founded by Charles Knight under the auspices of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and reached a peak circulation of 100,000.
- 33 Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, 10; see also Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 2–3 and 41–45.
- 34 See Neeley, *Mary Somerville*, 101–29; Secord, 'Mathematics for the Million?', 124–25.
- 35 Pestic, 'Thomas Young's Musical Optics', 29.
- 36 Maria Edgeworth, letter to Mary Somerville, 31 May 1832, in *Personal Recollections, from Early Life to Old Age, of Mary Somerville*, ed. Martha Somerville (London: John Murray, 1873), 204.
- 37 Secord includes a table listing the publication history of *Connexion*, including the number of copies printed and their prices, in 'Introduction', x.
- 38 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 33.

- 39 Arabella Buckley, *The Fairy-Land of Science* (London: E. Stanford, 1880), 124–49.
- 40 In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003), Jonathan Sterne is explicit about his bias towards ‘hearing elites’ in documenting the history of sound: ‘My emphasis on the very early moments of technologies and practices at times leads me to concentrate on a relatively small, elite (white, male, European or American, middle-class, able-bodied, etc.) group of people . . . [I focus] on hearing elites because they provide a wealth of documentation about the meaning of sound and listening – *qua* sound and listening – on which to build a study.’ *Audible Past*, 28.

*Organizing Modernity**Henry Liston's Euharmonic Organ and Natural Tuning  
in Company India**Daniel K. S. Walden***Nature vs. Culture**

Opinion was sharply divided about Reverend Henry Liston's euharmonic organ (Figure 9.1), the first musical organ capable of "perfect intonation" or "natural tuning," following its 1817 debut at the London firm of Flight & Robson. But as a critic writing under the pen name "Philo-Musicus" pointed out, there was one argument on which its fans and detractors agreed: that it was "contrary to all which might have been anticipated" that its first (and only) purchasers should be the Presbyterian congregation of St. Andrew's in Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> "Are there no Music-schools, or places for study among us," wrote the distinguished geologist, mathematician, and amateur music theorist John Farey Senior, "where the practicing of *correct singing*, and the *study of harmony* in all its curious combinations, by Composers for perfect Instruments, might be aided and safely guided by these improved instruments?"<sup>2</sup> Another critic, noting that the Church of Scotland had prohibited the use of organs in its churches since 1574, wondered why a passion for "harmonic improvement" would have seized a Presbyterian congregation in a "distant colony" before any Anglican church in Britain, where the organ was considered "almost as a necessary appendage to every polite Church or Chapel?"<sup>3</sup> A third reviewer wondered why no English scientists were moved by the prospect of an instrument whose principles "have been drawn (as all the soundest principles of every science have been,) from actual experiment."<sup>4</sup> British sensibilities "must surely be greatly vitiated," if no one in London cared for an instrument that could finally eradicate the "rattling and truly disgusting effects of *beats*" found in artificial temperaments, and restore the diatonic scale in all its natural glory.<sup>5</sup>

What was the euharmonic organ, and how did it mark an improvement over what came before? The answer lies in how it resolved one of the central predicaments of keyboard tuning. By the end of the eighteenth century, the standard keyboard had for practical reasons been fixed at

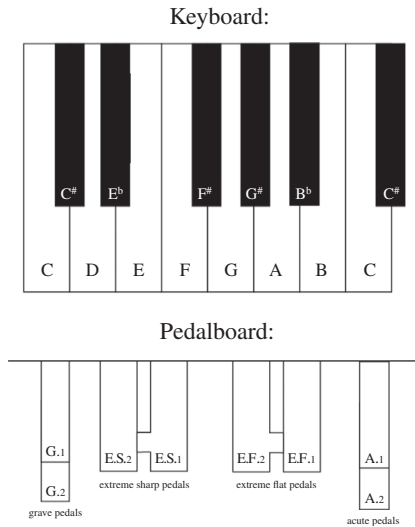


Figure 9.1 The keyboard and pedalboard for Liston's 'euharmonic organ'. Each of the keys is in natural tuning (or in technical terms, five-limit just intonation). Reconstruction by Daniel Walden.

twelve keys per octave, each corresponding to a different tone of the chromatic scale.<sup>6</sup> It was, however, impossible to tune these twelve keys so that every potential consonance – every species of fifth, fourth, third, and sixth – would be perfectly in tune. Tuners were thus forced to develop musical temperaments that could distribute the dissonance inherent in the twelve-note gamut in small enough increments across the entire system that it would be less perceptible overall. There was disagreement on the best way of doing this, but the consensus was that tuners should optimize the consonances of the simplest intervallic ratios between their two component tones: the octaves (2:1), fifths (next, at 3:2) and their complementary fourths (4:3), and major thirds (5:4). Some borrowed slivers from the fifths to keep the thirds natural; others borrowed from the thirds in order to preserve the fifths.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as the theorist John Holden noted in his 1770 treatise *An Essay towards a Rational System of Music*, every temperament was an artificial solution, and therefore flawed. It was impossible to banish entirely the dissonant wolves that emerged from imperfectly tuned fifths so long as the gamut remained fixed at twelve divisions of the octave. To be sure, “we ought to make all our fifths and fundamental great thirds good, if it could be done” – but as practical concerns prevented

increasing the gamut to more than twelve keys, "this is abundantly proved to be impossible."<sup>8</sup>

Liston, a Presbyterian minister by day and amateur music theorist by night, disagreed. Why not increase the gamut if a keyboard layout that was practical enough could be devised? His answer was a euharmonic organ that offered not just one, but three or more intonations for each pitch level. It provided a lower E to accord with the C as a perfectly tuned third, as well as a higher E to accord with the A in a perfectly tuned fifth, and so on, adding up to thirty-nine divisions of the octave. To avoid disorganizing the keyboard with extra keys, Liston added a rank of eight pedals that would automatically toggle the output of selected keys to the higher or lower intonations.<sup>9</sup> The result, he claimed, was an intuitive layout for all kinds of music: "admirers of elegant simplicity, who prefer the more sober and chastened compositions of the older school . . . cannot but be delighted with having the diatonic scale in its truth and purity, freed from the jarring beats inseparable from every tempered system," while "lovers of the chromatic and enharmonic . . . will find such sources of variety, and so wide a field laid open to them, as, I presume to say, the musical world have not at present any conception of."<sup>10</sup>

Few took Liston's proposal seriously. The critic A. F. C. Kollmann found the euharmonic instrument fussy to tune, overpriced, and impractical, as "young ladies who are not yet tall and strong enough to reach those pedals . . . are as good as being prohibited performing on that kind of instrument."<sup>11</sup> Anyway, he wrote, equal temperament was the more modern temperament: it was efficient and multivalent, as every tone could serve "in an almost infinite number of different capacities."<sup>12</sup> Thus, one E should be enough to serve as the perfectly tuned third of C *and* the upper fifth of A, *and* the upper second of D, and so forth. More "*simple and complete*," equal temperament opened up harmonic and melodic liberties that nature had foreclosed, and suited the "great desideratum of modern music, a *standard scale*" to which every instrument from around the world might one day tune.<sup>13</sup> Its fifths and thirds might not be perfectly consonant, but "like all other things in the world which are considered as perfect, it may be called *virtually* perfect, though not *strictly* so."<sup>14</sup> Natural tuning would reduce "the science of music to that state of *infancy*, where every note is considered only in one individual capacity, and not as a member of that grand compound, on which all the *simplicity* of a perfect doctrine of *harmony* and *modulation* depends."<sup>15</sup> For this reason, he concluded, natural tuning was actually an artificial system, as it was out of step with the "*nature* and purpose of our modern scale."<sup>16</sup>

Kollmann's arguments found more support, causing Liston to miss out on a coveted appointment to the Royal Philharmonic Society. As the musicologist Ellen Lockhart has argued, one of the reasons why Liston's arguments failed to stick in metropolitan London was that the vituperative arguments about natural and modern temperaments were connected to a broader shift in how the relationship between nature and culture was construed in turn-of-the-century Britain.<sup>17</sup> Liston's advocates championed the mutual imbrication of nature and music, in which musical culture would draw directly on the natural principles of consonance and resonance in devising tuning and temperament systems. Those on Kollman's side championed the separation of nature from culture, favoring the latter on the grounds of rationalization, systematization, and progressivism. Drawing on Bruno Latour, Lockhart maintains that arguments like Kollmann's were successful because European modernity was itself predicated on a similar separation of nature from culture.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Liston's natural tuning seemed outdated on arrival – a shibboleth, discordant with the modern times.<sup>19</sup>

But if London critics considered the euharmonic organ *passé*, why would the members of St. Andrew's in Calcutta have deemed it *au courant*? Were the colonial congregants simply behind the times when it came to tracking the developments of metropolitan London? This would be the wrong conclusion to draw. Historical records also show that many members of St. Andrew's were connected to the Scottish Enlightenment, and musical tastes in Calcutta were as modern as those in London; colonists could purchase British prints of the latest works of Corelli and Haydn months after their entry onto the market, and copies of Holden's *Essay* were printed in Calcutta.<sup>20</sup> Postcolonial scholars have also cautioned against provincializing the events of colonial cities by confining them to the waiting room of history.<sup>21</sup> If we instead begin with the presumption that the members of St. Andrew's were as up to date on what constituted the modern as their London counterparts, an alternative proposition emerges. Perhaps the euharmonic organ seized the attention of St. Andrew's because when viewed from the perspective of the missionary or the colonial agent, it seemed an effective instrument of modernity, rather than an instrument antithetical to the modern.

The following sections examine this proposition. First, I investigate how the organ was applied toward the modernization of the Presbyterian liturgy and why that was construed as an essential step in establishing the Anglo-Indian Presbytery on an equal footing with the Anglican Church of India. I draw on the writings of James Bryce, the Presbyterian chaplain of Bengal



who preached at St. Andrew's, as well as literature about the debate over the use of organs in the Presbyterian Church, to demonstrate how the purchase of the euharmonic organ was intended to recast the church as a progressive and modern institution. I show how the use of the euharmonic organ entailed significant changes in the ways the Presbyterian Church construed the relationship between sensation and reason, while also subsuming a Scottish religious and ethnic identity into that of the British. Next, I show how the instrument was intended to modernize the colonial Indian landscape immediately surrounding the church. I examine Bryce's theories of religious education and contemporary theories of tonal space and meter, and connect them to the arguments of the political historian Timothy Mitchell that colonial modernity is staged through acts of representation that project new configurations of time and space into existence.<sup>22</sup> The euharmonic organ, I suggest, was designed to represent musical space and time as *organized* in accordance with the topological and chronological propositions of colonial modernity. This capability of the euharmonic organ to create distinctively modern apprehensions of space and time – the insights of Latour and Lockhart notwithstanding – is what allowed Liston's supporters to defend its utility as an instrument of modernity. Finally, in the "Afterword" I reflect on how the fragility of this project was revealed a century later, when Indian theorists shifted the terms of what natural tuning represented and suggested that musical modernity had originated from Hindustani culture – not from European culture, or from a universal nature.

### Succumbing to Sirens

The inaugural service of St. Andrew's on March 12, 1818, marked a triumph for the Presbyterian community of Calcutta after years of struggle with the East India Company. Standing in the pulpit was James Bryce, who had been appointed the first Presbyterian chaplain of Bengal by an agreement between the Company and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Bryce had arrived in Calcutta five years earlier believing he had a writ from the Company to build a Scottish kirk, and had organized ambitious plans for the luxurious edifice shown in [Figure 9.2](#) at the center of Tank Square – the heart of the European district known as "White Town," adjacent to the Company's headquarters in the Writers' Building – outfitted with marble columns and flooring, a grand steeple, and an organ.<sup>23</sup> During its construction, he met obstacles at every turn. First the Company withheld support for two years; then Lord



Figure 9.2 St. Andrew's Church in Tank Square, Calcutta, c. 1826. From James Baillie Fraser, *Views of Calcutta and Its Environs*, plate 13. British Library, London, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections, X644(13).

Middleton, the Anglican bishop of St. John's of Calcutta, disputed the right of St. Andrew's to build a steeple, as that privilege had never before been granted in an English diocese.<sup>24</sup> The congregants of St. Andrew's were eventually able to convince the Company to approve the steeple on the ground that its absence would constitute "a mark of inferiority hitherto unknown" on the Presbyterian Church of India.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, they were quickly disabused of the idea that the Company might therefore consider them equals, as all of their requests to public officials for assistance with the relief from the 33,000 rupees of debt they had accrued in constructing the church were rejected. Upon its opening, Bryce was even more determined to prove that the Presbyterian Church should be recognized as the "Sister Establishment of the Church of England" in India, and that St. Andrew's was a national rather than Scottish regional institution, meaning it therefore deserved Company support for its efforts to "preserve the *British* character, amidst the temptations, with which public life in India is surrounded."<sup>26</sup>

Bryce did not voice these arguments in his inaugural sermon, which was dedicated to the role of preaching and "native education."<sup>27</sup> But appearing

behind him as he preached was the euharmonic organ, the mere presence of which communicated that St. Andrew's aimed to be taken just as seriously as St. John's down the road. Commissioned by the members of the church for a hefty fee of £4,000 – roughly the same amount as the kirk's debt – the euharmonic organ was the first musical instrument ever sanctioned by the Presbytery of Scotland, breaking with three hundred years of prohibitions on the use of instrumental accompaniments.<sup>28</sup> Back in Scotland, in fact, tempers were still running high from a recent dispute between the Presbytery and the congregants of St. Andrew's in Glasgow, who had petitioned to install an organ in their church, arguing that the centuries-long ban had quite literally “untuned the feelings of our country” and cemented for the Presbyterian faith a lamentable musical reputation.<sup>29</sup> Practice with an organ, the Glaswegian congregants urged, was essential to “advance the knowledge and the practice of psalmody” and “rescue our national character from the reproach of having almost entirely neglected the cultivation of sacred music.”<sup>30</sup> The anti-organists of the Presbytery of Glasgow denied their request on the ground that it would convert the church into a “concert-room.”<sup>31</sup> They insisted that the purpose of the liturgy was to lift the congregation “above the airy grandeur of sense” and into a realm of “*purified reason and religion*”; to comply “with the advocates of musical harmony of sound” would promote “discord in the church of Christ,” because it would substitute “for the discountenanced simplicity of that service, whose melodies can flow only from the heart, a vain and pompous combination of sounds.”<sup>32</sup> For anti-organists, the “day hath indeed dawned on a sensual and benighted world” when Presbyterians succumbed “to the syren sounds of sensual delusion,” and they deplored “the wafting of our holiest aspirations to heaven, through the medium of other sounds than those that can issue from the heart.”<sup>33</sup>

Bryce, however, managed to convince the Presbytery to make an exception, by appealing to both the exceptional situation of his parish and the properties of the euharmonic organ. Because the inventor of the instrument was himself a Presbyterian minister, it would represent Presbyterian leadership in two of the most important domains for the colonial enterprise – technology and the musical arts – and thus strengthen Bryce's efforts to earn from the Company greater respect and support. (It must also have helped that Liston opted for the same descriptors the anti-organists had used to describe what psalmody should sound like – “pure,” “simple,” “sweet,” “unornamented,” “solemn” – in characterizing the natural tuning of his instrument.<sup>34</sup>) Sure enough, the strategy paid off, as the possession of the instrument seemed to elevate the status of

St. Andrew's. The *Asiatic Mirror* of Calcutta reported its "sweetness of tone" as "unrivalled," and its ability to sustain "perfect harmony" ensured that all other choirs in India "would lose much by the comparison"; indeed, it continued, the whole "world is indebted to the Revd. *Henry Kiston* [*sic*]" for this "truly important and scientific improvement of that noble instrument," which adds so much "to the solemnity of the Service."<sup>35</sup> London critics celebrated "universal satisfaction" with the organ, and saluted the "liberal views and intentions of the Elders and Congregants" of St. Andrew's that had placed it among the "friends of harmonic improvements."<sup>36</sup> This positive praise soon led the kirk to commission Liston for a second instrument, a chamber organ (debt be damned!) with four additional tones and an extra foot pedal that would bring the gamut up to forty-three divisions of the octave. The Presbyterian Church no longer seemed musically regressive, and was now situated at the forefront of musical advancement, aligned with the Company's ambitions to transmit liberal values and cultural "improvements" to subaltern populations.

As the anti-organists might have feared, the presence of an organ at St. Andrew's did signal a change in the ways the physical senses were configured within the Presbyterian Church. Bryce was therefore also eager to suggest that its presence was not in contradiction with Presbyterian values, arguing that it would help the church accomplish its missionary goals. At the rhetorical highpoint of his sermon, after calling upon his congregants not to "relax in our exertions to instruct them [i.e., 'our Asiatic brethren'] in a religion capable of doing so much for the happiness of the human race," Bryce declaimed:

It is not in human nature to yield belief to the truths of revelation and not be affected by their sublimity, and melted into gratitude by their benevolence. As well may the healthy eye be acted on by the rays of light, or the ear by the vibration of sound, and yet no sensation be experienced by the percipient being to whom these organs belong.<sup>37</sup>

It could not have been lost on the congregation that Bryce had appealed (albeit metaphorically) to aural sensation, not reason, in outlining the goals of missionary work. The recital on the euharmonic organ moments later would have underscored the point. Indeed, in his later writings, Bryce would outline the objectives of missionary education in terms that indicated how the aural sensations provoked by the euharmonic organ would contribute to their mission – and in doing so, he would provide a rationale for understanding the organ as an instrument for modernizing the subaltern.

### Organizing India

Within a decade of his arrival in India, Bryce established himself as an authority on missionary education. Colonial perspectives on Indian education were roughly divided into two camps: the Orientalists on the one hand, who championed education in Indian subjects and languages, and, on the other, the group that would eventually follow Thomas Babington Macaulay, who aimed at fostering “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”<sup>38</sup> Bryce aligned himself with the latter in founding the Scottish Church College, the first pedagogical institution in India to teach exclusively in English. Its success was secured with the assistance of Ram Mohan Roy, an occasional presence in the congregation of St. Andrew's and a leading figure of the Bengali Renaissance who championed English education as a vehicle for Indian modernization.<sup>39</sup> With Roy's support Bryce was able to find numerous pupils on whom to practice his pedagogical theories, which he would eventually outline in series of tracts published in both India and England.<sup>40</sup>

Within these texts, Bryce synthesizes the objectives of the Church of Scotland and the East India Company: missionary education and modernization. He proposes that the two are alike in requiring “astonishing command . . . over time and space.”<sup>41</sup> Securing command over time in missionary education entails the overlay of a “Mosaic account of creation” onto the “Chronology of the Hindu schools.”<sup>42</sup> This was contrary to the arguments of some Orientalist scholars – “infidel philosophers,” he called them – who had come to argue that Vedic history was distinct from Biblical history, more ancient, and therefore more authoritative.<sup>43</sup> Bryce was adamant that once mythology, allegory, and superstition were subtracted from Vedic accounts, its temporality could be made commensurate with Christian eschatology – and thus, “so far from proving a weapon in the hands of the adversary, to shake belief in Christianity, [Vedic temporality] may be employed with the manifest good effect by the Gospel missionary, to establish the truth of the Religion which he seeks to make known to the Hindus.”<sup>44</sup>

Securing command over space involved measures to ensure that the message of modernity would have universal reach. It required cultivating both the arts and sciences, which facilitate “intercourse between the remotest countries of the world” and “increase the command of man over the elements of nature.”<sup>45</sup> Advances in communications and technological development could help missionaries diffuse “the blessings, which might

otherwise stagnate” across the entire Indian subcontinent.<sup>46</sup> The commands of time and of space were also mutually constitutive: controlling space involved disseminating the rubrics of unilinear developmentalism, while controlling time involved enfolding as much of India as possible into the domain of the Presbyterian Church. For Bryce, time and space were imbricated domains, with the control of both essential for the authority of church and Company.

In this sense Bryce’s arguments seem to affirm the assertion of the political theorist Timothy Mitchell that colonial modernity is constituted as a “particular relationship between space and time.”<sup>47</sup> Drawing first on Walter Benjamin, Mitchell contends that modern time is apprehended by “uniform, unfilled” time slots, such as those of the standard calendar, work timetable, and clock.<sup>48</sup> Appealing next to Benedict Anderson, Mitchell observes that these time slots are configured and expressed in spatial terms, as a successive sequence of empty moments laid onto an even unilinear trajectory. He then points out the consequence of this particular temporal–spatial relationship: the construction of contemporaneity and co-presence. The universal dissemination of modern time-keeping mechanisms through daily mass media and telegraphic communications ensures that people who once lived unconnected lives – because they operated from incommensurate maps and systems for keeping time – are made to feel as if they live within the same space (the universe) at the same moment (now). Another mechanism he identifies further reinforces this sensibility: representation. Representation refers for Mitchell not only to the making of images or meanings, but to “forms of social practice” – in many ways analogous to what media theorists call cultural techniques – “that set up in the social architecture and lived experience of the world . . . a distinctive imagination of the real.”<sup>49</sup> The map, for instance, represents the space of the nation as a “real and knowable totality.” The newspaper represents an ephemeral moment in a form that conjures simultaneity and is also archivable, so that any moment can later be made “available through a form of replay.” The theater, novel, and museum all represent “stage objects and characters to create simulations of a real world.” Representation is thus for Mitchell the “novel method of creating colonial modernity’s distinctive apprehensions of space and time,” creating “an effect we recognize as reality, by organizing the world endlessly to represent it.”<sup>50</sup>

What might we gain by analyzing the euharmonic organ alongside the map and newspaper as an instrument for representing colonial modernity? The musicologist James Q. Davies has previously argued that keyboards adapted for natural tuning played a role in constituting colonial space by

operating as a class of communication technology capable of “annihilating distances” between musical cultures separated by different tuning systems.<sup>51</sup> A natural tuning system, supposedly based on universal principles and therefore common to all, promised to facilitate forms of collaboration that were previously impossible. But in reality, he argues, instruments for natural tuning only entrenched the forces of colonialism, as the terms of the universal tonal space they afforded were inevitably dictated by Europe – rendering them what Davies calls “instruments of empire.”

But if modernity consists of the representation of a particular relationship to space *and* time, this explanation covers only half the story. A survey of writings by Liston and members of his circle helps fill in the remainder. In an entry on “Music” for the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, Liston claimed that the first organs had been used as a unison accompaniment for the liturgy.<sup>52</sup> Soon, musicians discovered harmony within its affordances, for “the facility which it furnishes of sounding several notes at once would soon lead to the observation of the agreeable effect” of octaves and fifths.<sup>53</sup> Choirs began to use harmonies as an accompaniment to the cantus firmus; this practice, in “a clear proof of [its] true origin,” was called *organizare* (*sic*), and the end result was called *organum*.<sup>54</sup> Organum then evolved independently of the organ into *discant*, once singers discovered that they could incorporate thirds into the pantheon of consonances; discant engendered psalmody, and thus (he claimed) harmonic practice was born. The standard organ thus exerted a “material influence on the progress of that art toward perfection” by engendering consonance, even if it could not keep up with later harmonic developments, as its restricted gamut of tones prevented use of both natural fifths and thirds.<sup>55</sup> The invention of the euharmonic organ would finally resolve that problem by affording both perfectly tuned consonances at once.<sup>56</sup>

In a series of articles for the *Philosophical Magazine*, John Farey picked up where Liston left off by demonstrating how the euharmonic organ represented the tonal network of consonant thirds and fifths for the listener *as* a type of space. This was not an entirely new observation; spatial metaphors and diagrammatic practices date back to ancient Greece, if not earlier. But the idea of representing tonal space emerged as a theoretical trope in full force during the eighteenth century, following the influence of Leonhard Euler and Johann Philipp Kirnberger.<sup>57</sup> Shortly before Farey, Charles Stanhope, 3rd Earl Stanhope, had presented his “Table of Successive Major Thirds,” which represented the twelve keys of the standard organ as chains of thirds locked in separate columns, on account of the dissonant “wolves” that emerged between their elements.<sup>58</sup> But as



Farey noted, the “happy discovery” of Liston’s tuning system was that once the number of keys was increased, one could extend Stanhope’s columns further, and alight upon new consonances between their elements that afforded the removal of barriers between them.<sup>59</sup> Farey was thus led “to the arrangement, of [Liston’s] extended scale . . . in a Table, composed of numerous small squares” – so numerous, at 612 and counting, that Farey did not try to represent it on the paper his article was printed on, but instead provided instructions to his readers on how to reproduce it.<sup>60</sup> On this diagram, represented in [Figure 9.3](#), one would discover that the euharmonic organ represented a tonal space that was uniform, homogeneous, networked, and barrier-free – in conformity with the topography of modernity.

Meanwhile Liston continued tracing how the organ played an instrumental role in creating modern musical time. Citing Burney, he explained that music before the invention of counterpoint consisted of melodies whose durations were held in “shackles” by the laws of prosody.<sup>61</sup> Franco of Cologne, he continued, had broken music free with the concept of *musica mensurata*, or “measured music,” in which individual rhythms were governed by a set of proportional rules that operated independently of the text to ensure proper counterpoint. And since counterpoint had been engendered by the organ, he argued, “clearly it is to the *organ* and *organizing* that measured music owes its origin.” The basic proportions of *musica mensurata* were moreover the same as those of organum and discant: 2:1 gave both the octave and the relationship between the imperfect long and the breve, 3:2 gave both the fifth and the relationship between *prolatio maior* and *prolatio minor*, etc. – revealing that the configurations of “organized” space and time were fundamentally isomorphic.<sup>62</sup> Measured music, he suggested, further engendered the concept of musical meter, conceived as an abstract grid of equidistant impulses that articulated an even and unidirectionally flowing time, and dictated the rate at which the proportional relations of *musica mensurata* unfold.<sup>63</sup> It was in representing metrical music that the organ bracketed off uniform and unfilled time slots, construing a temporality in conformity with modern time. Thus, according to Liston’s perspective, with each harmonized and metricized setting of one of the psalms, the euharmonic organ at St. Andrew’s would have created musical representations of modern space and time that were homogeneous, universal, uniform, networked, and unencumbered.

In this sense, the euharmonic organ contributed to Bryce’s main goal of missionary education – the seizure of command over space and time – and operated as an instrument of modernity no less than Kollmann’s equal-tempered organ or Mitchell’s map and census. What, however, sets it apart

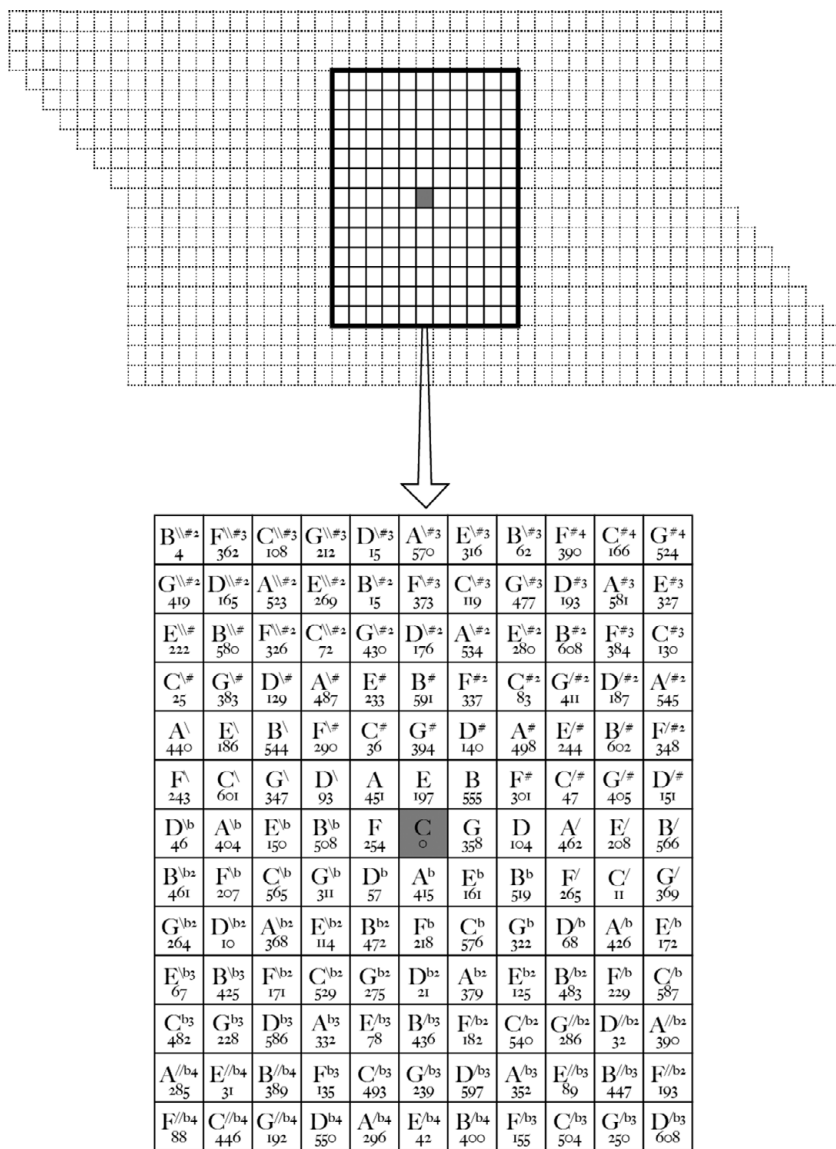


Figure 9.3 Farey's table of Liston's tuning system, from two perspectives, as described in Farey, 'On Mr. Liston's, or the Euharmonic Scale of Musical Intervals,' 443. The upper half of the image represents the entire table zoomed out; the lower half represents a closer look at a segment of the table that is eleven columns by thirteen rows large. Perfectly tuned fifths run from left to right, major thirds run from bottom to top. The numbers in the boxes on the lower half of the table indicate to which division of the octave into 612 parts they correspond.

from Mitchell's or Kollmann's instruments is its direct appeal to the aural sense. For Mitchell, representation is mostly configured as a visual and cognitive phenomenon; Farey's tonal space and Liston's organized time, however, appeal to both the visual and auditory faculties. For Kollmann, the equal-tempered organ required listeners to *de*-sensitize themselves to a certain degree of dissonance so that they could reap the benefits of a more "complete" musical system. The euharmonic organ was, however, built to *re*-sensitize "vitiating" ears, guiding the listener toward the apperception of a more "perfect" harmony attuned to the configurations of modern space and time. This would seem to confirm Walter Mignolo's contention that seizing control over sensory perception and the cultural valuation of sensory impressions – what he calls *aesthesis* – was just as important to colonialism as the seizure of control over the economy, politics, and epistemology.<sup>64</sup> Making subaltern subjects hear and valorize acoustical representations of modernity, in other words, was a musical prelude to the modernization of the colonies.

### Afterword: Shift and Displacement

The euharmonic organ was short-lived. Fewer than three years after the debut of the instrument, a report appeared in *Philosophical Magazine*:

The friends of harmonic improvements will regret to learn, that the liberal views and intentions of the Elders and Congregation of the Scotch Church at Calcutta, which induced them to purchase one of Mr. Liston's improved Organs, and to take out Mr. *John Alsager* as their Organist, are likely to be frustrated by the sudden death of that gentleman, from a stroke of apoplexy, which occasioned him to fall lifeless from his seat, while performing before the congregation!<sup>65</sup>

Bryce was in London on furlough when the incident occurred, meaning that St. Andrew's was suddenly left without its minister, organist, and organ, for no one else had learned how to play the instrument. Elders of the congregation, "despairing of the opportunity of quickly supplying Mr. Alsager's place," decided to "employ some organ-builder who is resident there, to cut down this fine and *unique instrument* into a common organ, having only 12 sounds in its several octaves."<sup>66</sup> Plans for a second chamber organ were shelved.

The abbreviated life of the euharmonic organ was largely due to the fact that it was a difficult instrument to learn and maintain. Yet there were likely other contributing factors, including that once natural tuning started to enter Anglo-Indian music-theoretical discourse, the terms of what it

represented quickly drifted in directions that would have made its retention at St. Andrew's untenable. The reason for this has to do with the nature of representation itself. As Mitchell explains, representation necessarily relies on processes of "shift, displacement, or contamination": "an image or simulation functions by its subtle difference from what it claims to simulate or portray, even if the difference is no more than the time lag between representations," or the time lag between the real of the present day and the future it intends to organize.<sup>67</sup> Such processes are moreover particularly vulnerable to acts of *misrepresentation* or misreading that stem from simple misunderstanding, intentional subterfuge, and just about anything in between.<sup>68</sup> A survey of Anglo-Indian music-theoretical discourse on natural tuning from the years after the installation of the euharmonic organ reveals how the dynamics of *misrepresentation* ultimately created substantial support for a new set of arguments that destabilized missionary and colonial projects for the instrument, by suggesting the true origins of organized musical space and time were not English and Christian, but Indian and Hindu.

The seeds for this argument were planted at the end of the nineteenth century, when Orientalist scholars including William Jones, Captain Augustus Willard, and J. D. Paterson began to suggest that the principles of natural tuning were latent in ancient Sanskrit theoretical texts that dated from long before Mughal and English colonization. What precipitated this argument was the discovery that these early sources seemed to propose a division of the octave into twenty-two microtonal units called *śrutis*. According to these authors, "Indian scales" of seven notes, not unlike the Western diatonic scale, were derived by grouping the *śrutis* into clusters of two, three, or four in the manner shown in Figure 9.4.<sup>69</sup> The three intervals comprised by these *śruti* clusters also seemed to them to correspond nearly exactly to the naturally tuned semitone, minor tone, and major tone, or the three smallest intervals between the individual steps of

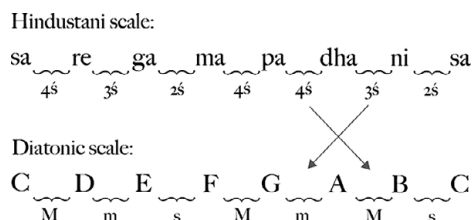


Figure 9.4 The connection between the European diatonic scale and the 'Indian scale' composed of twenty-two *śrutis*, per Captain N. Augustus Willard, William Jones, and J. D. Paterson.

the Western diatonic and chromatic scale.<sup>70</sup> None went so far as to try to prove that their ratios were equivalent – Paterson noted that the metaphysical slant of Sanskrit theory rendered “mathematical calculation out of the question” – but they left indications that natural tuning was a latent principle behind the structures of ancient Eastern theory.<sup>71</sup> The fact that Indian theorists had come closer to the principles of natural tuning than Greek theorists suggested to Jones that Indian music theory might actually be *ahead* of Western music on the unilinear developmental timeline, and could therefore serve as a resource for “improvements in our [i.e., European] musical system.”<sup>72</sup> He would ultimately argue (at least rhetorically) that the chauvinism of figures like Bryce was misplaced: “we are like the savages, who thought that the sun rose and set for them alone, and could not imagine the waves, which surrounded their island, left coral and pearls upon any other shore.”<sup>73</sup>

These arguments were soon taken up by Indian theorists such as Sourindro Mohun Tagore, who recognized within them the potential to reformulate the power dynamics of musical discourse. Tagore proposed that structural similarities between the Western diatonic scale and Indian “scales” could be traced back to shared origins in a system he called the “primitive Sanskrit Sharja-grāma.”<sup>74</sup> On the basis of this lineage, he suggested that Hindustani musicians held a privileged position as modern-day carriers of the ancient musical “learning and fame” that originated with “the early pioneers of civilization in the land of the rising sun.”<sup>75</sup> Thus he believed that the origins of the modern European understanding of natural tuning therefore extended back to ancient Indian learning. Several decades later, the Pune-based theorist Krishnaji Ballal Deval echoed these claims in proposing that India deserved the “palm of priority” for discovering natural tuning first, but went further in his claims that Hindustani musicians should protect themselves from the “mischief,” “evil,” and “disease” European instruments had wrought by importing equal temperaments.<sup>76</sup> To accomplish this task, he invented the “Indian Harmonium” shown in [Figure 9.5](#) with a full range of twenty-two keys in natural tuning per octave, designed to “arouse an interest in Hindu music amongst the civilized and rich nations of the West, so that they will have the benefit of having Aryan quarter or one-third tones (the want of which is so keenly felt in Europe).”<sup>77</sup> One of Deval’s colleagues, Ganesh Sakharam Khare, adopted diagrammatic techniques similar to Farey’s in order to represent the tonal space of the “Indian Harmonium” as shown in [Figure 9.6](#), further reinforcing the notion that the principles of modern organized tonal space were latent in ancient Indian texts.<sup>78</sup>

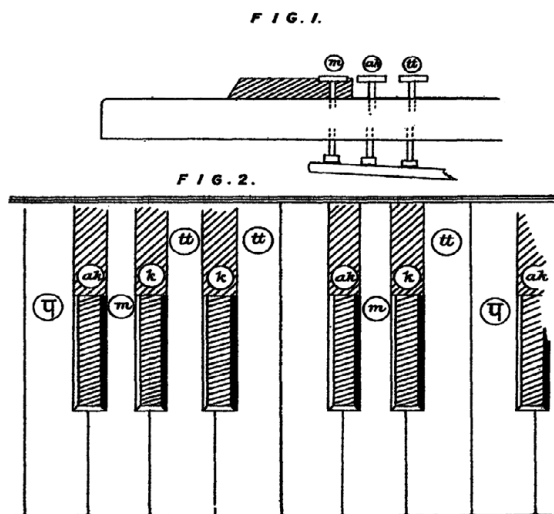


Figure 9.5 Krishnaji Ballal Deval's 'Indian Harmonium', from Henry Keatley Moore, 'Indian Harmonium', patent application GB 15548, filed July 4, 1911, issued December 12, 1911.

			$\frac{32}{25}$	$\frac{48}{25}$		
	$\frac{64}{45}$	$\frac{16}{15}$	$\frac{8}{5}$	$\frac{6}{5}$	$\frac{9}{5}$	$\frac{27}{20}$
$\frac{32}{27}$	$\frac{16}{9}$	$\frac{4}{3}$	<b>1</b>	$\frac{3}{2}$	$\frac{9}{8}$	$\frac{27}{16}$
$\frac{40}{27}$	$\frac{10}{9}$	$\frac{5}{3}$	$\frac{5}{4}$	$\frac{15}{8}$	$\frac{45}{32}$	
		$\frac{25}{24}$	$\frac{25}{16}$			

Notes:— Twelve notes usually sung are those in thick lines.

1	3
2	

Major chord is in the order of 1, 2, and 3.

	2
1	3

Minor chord is in the order of 1, 2, and 3.

- Horizontal lines left to right give fifths.
- "    right to left give fourths.
- Vertical lines top to bottom give major 3rds.
- "    bottom to top give major 6ths.
- Diagonals left to right ascending give major 3rds.
- "    "    descending give major 7ths.
- "    right to left ascending give Semitones.
- "    "    descending give major 6ths.

Figure 9.6 A diplomatic transcription of G. S. Khare's diagram of the twenty-two *śrutis*. As reproduced in Pandither, *To the Members*, 1918.

Thus, roughly ninety years after Liston's euharmonic organ had met its demise, the idea that an organ in natural tuning could serve as an effective instrument of modernity was revived – albeit with India displacing Europe as the prime agent of musical organization. The ethnomusicologist Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy has memorably labeled this branch of Indian music theory “Indo-Occidentalism,” and has taken figures such as Tagore and Deval to task for having “toadied” to colonists by facilitating the transfer of their organizational tools into Hindustani musical discourse.<sup>79</sup> Had he lived to see it, Bryce, who deplored the “infidel philosophy” of the Orientalist scholarship Tagore and Deval drew upon, would hardly have been much happier than Jairazbhoy to see such a shift in the development of music theory, given what it would have meant for the euharmonic organ in which his church had invested so much. Perhaps he should have considered more fully the implications of the insight from “Philo-Musicus” that the history of natural tuning develops in ways “contrary to all which might have been anticipated.”

### Notes

A note on orthography: For consistency, I use the historical Anglicized names of Indian cities (Calcutta, Bombay, etc.) rather than their modern spellings (Kolkata, Mumbai), unless I am referencing a modern bibliographic resource written after spelling conventions were adjusted.

- 1 Philo-Musicus, “A Further Account of the Exhibition and Harmonic Effects of the Rev. Mr. *Liston's* Large *Euharmonic Organ* with Compound Stops,” *Philosophical Magazine* 49, no. 228 (1817): 266–69, at 266. See also Philo-Musicus, “On the Exhibition and Harmonic Effects, of the Rev. Mr. *Liston's* *Euharmonic Organ*,” *Philosophical Magazine* 49, no. 227 (1817): 213–15.
- 2 John Farey, “Mr. Liston's Essay on Perfect Intonation,” *The Gentleman's Magazine* 84 (1814): 135–37, at 137. Italics in original.
- 3 Philo-Musicus, “A Further Account,” 266; Philo-Musicus, “On Mr. Liston's Enharmonic Organ,” *The Monthly Magazine* 43, no. 297 (1817): 295–96, at 295.
- 4 “Review of New Musical Publications: An Essay on Perfect Intonation, by the Rev. Henry Liston, Ecclesmachan, Linlithgowshire; Inventor of the Enharmonic Organ,” *The Monthly Magazine* 40, no. 276 (1815): 446–48, at 446.
- 5 Farey, “Mr. Liston's Essay,” 136; Philo-Musicus, “On Mr. Liston's Enharmonic Organ,” 295; Henry Liston, *An Essay on Perfect Intonation* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1812), x.
- 6 There were at least seven other keyboards in London with more than twelve divisions of the octave. See John Farey, “Further Remarks on the



- Rev. Mr. Liston's 'Essay on Perfect Intonation': and His Scale with 59 Notes in the Octave, and on Other Scales (Perfect and Tempered) for 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 24 Notes in the Octave Respectively, &c.," *The Philosophical Magazine* 39, no. 170 (1812): 414–23.
- 7 John Holden, *An Essay towards a Rational System of Music* (Glasgow: Robert Urie, 1770).
  - 8 *Ibid.*, 147 (§IV.95).
  - 9 Liston's instrument thus bore a resemblance to earlier instruments by Charles Clagget, William Hawkes, and David Loeschman that also featured foot pedals toggling between higher and lower pitch levels. See Patrizio Barbieri, *Enharmonic: Instruments and Music 1470–1900* (Rome: Il Levante Libreria Editrice, 2008), 60–68; Michael Kassler, "Stanhope's Novel Musical Instruments," in *The Music Trade in Georgian England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 433–50.
  - 10 Liston, *An Essay on Perfect Intonation*, x–xi.
  - 11 A. F. C. Kollmann, "Remarks on the Artificial Temperaments of Organs, and Piano Fortes, Invented by Mr. Hawkes, Mr. Loeshman, and the Rev. Mr Liston," *The Quarterly Musical Register* 1–2 (1812): 74–79 and 148–52, at 148. Although it was not so good for men either: "how perplexing the use of those pedals is, we have seen even in gentlemen" (149).
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 151.
  - 13 *Ibid.* Italics in original. In linking equal temperament with global standardization and rationalization, Kollmann foreshadows arguments in Max Weber, *The Rational and Sociological Foundations of Music* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958).
  - 14 Kollmann, "Remarks," 77.
  - 15 *Ibid.*, 151.
  - 16 *Ibid.*, 75. Italics are mine.
  - 17 Ellen Lockhart, "Lupus Tonalis," *Representations* 150, no. 1 (2020): 120–41.
  - 18 See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
  - 19 To many British critics, perhaps, but not to all. Interest in natural tuning (also known as "just intonation") continued throughout the nineteenth century, with new keyboards designed by Thomas Perronet Thompson, R. H. M. Bosanquet, and Colin Brown among others. See Barbieri, *Enharmonic*; Daniel K. S. Walden, "Emancipate the Quartertone: The Call to Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Music Theory," *History of Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2017): 327–44.
  - 20 Many thanks to Carmel Raz for pointing out the Calcutta publication of Holden's *Essay*. For a first-hand account of Anglo-Indian musical culture from the time, see "The State of Music in Calcutta," *Harmonicon* 1, no. 8 (1823): 111. Useful secondary sources include Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*.
  - 21 See for instance Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

- 22 Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1–34.
- 23 On "White Town" see Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).
- 24 The full story is recounted in Joseph Sramek, "Rethinking Britishness: Religion and Debates about the 'Nation' among Britons in Company India, 1813–1857," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 4 (2015): 822–43.
- 25 Clow and Members of the Church of Scotland in Bombay to Court of Directors, November 21, 1816, British Library, India Office Records F/4/624/15912; cited in Sramek, "Rethinking Britishness," 830.
- 26 Dr. James Bryce to Bengal Acting Secretary E. Malony, January 30, 1828, enclosed in Extract Bengal Ecclesiastical Consultations, February 7, 1828, British Library, India Office Records F/4/1077/29263; cited in Sramek, "Rethinking Britishness," 822; James Bryce, *A Sketch of the State of British India, with a View of Pointing Out the Best Means of Civilizing Its Inhabitants, and Diffusing the Knowledge of Christianity throughout the Eastern World* (Edinburgh: George Ramsay, 1810).
- 27 James Bryce, *The Preaching of the Gospel, the Efficient Means of Diffusing among Mankind a Knowledge of the True God. A Sermon Preached at Opening the Church of St. Andrew, in Calcutta, March 1818* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1818).
- 28 The monthly expense for maintaining the organist (300 rupees) and the tuning (50 rupees) also added up to 38 percent of the kirk's monthly budget – equivalent to the salaries of the singing master plus the church and vestry clerks combined. See British Library, India Office Records F/4/623/15904, F/4/624/15912, F/4/1077/29263, and F/4/1077/29264. On the exchange rate see P. R. Brahmananda, *Money, Income, Prices in 19th Century India: A Historical, Quantitative and Theoretical Study* (Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House, 2010).
- 29 *A Statement of the Proceedings of the Presbytery of Glasgow Relative to the Use of an Organ in St. Andrew's Church in the Public Worship of God* (Philadelphia: D. Hogan, 1821), 5.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 174, v.
- 33 *Ibid.*, iii–iv.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 37–38, 111, 118.
- 35 Hugh David Sandeman, ed., *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1816 to 1823 Inclusive*, vol. 5 (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1869), 251–52. That the *Asiatic Mirror* should have written a glowing review was no surprise, given that Bryce was its proprietor: see S. C. Sanial, "Early History of St. Andrew's Kirk, Calcutta," *Bengal Past & Present* 10 part 2, no. 20 (1915): 195–210.

- 36 "Intelligence and Miscellaneous Articles: Euharmonic Organ," *The Philosophical Magazine* 53, no. 253 (1819): 386–97, at 395; "Intelligence and Miscellaneous Articles: Euharmonic Organ at Calcutta," *The Philosophical Magazine* 57, no. 275 (1821): 228–32, at 230.
- 37 Bryce, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, 54–56.
- 38 T. B. Macaulay, "Minute on Education," in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed. W. Theodore de Bary, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 49; cited in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 124–25.
- 39 Roy is sometimes today referred to as the "father of modern India." See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 663–75.
- 40 James Bryce, *A Sketch of Native Education in India: Under the Superintendence of the Church of Scotland. With Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Hindus, as These Bear upon the Question of Conversion to Christianity*. (London: Allen and Co., 1839); James Bryce, *An Appeal in Behalf of Native Education in India, in Connexion with the School and Mission of the General Assembly in India* (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1855).
- 41 Bryce, *A Sketch of Native Education*, 2.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 136–37.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 137–38.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 1–2.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 47 Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," 13.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 17. See also Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. On cultural techniques see Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).
- 50 Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," 17–22.
- 51 Davies, "Instruments of Empire," 145–74.
- 52 Henry Liston, "Music," in *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, ed. David Brewster, vol. 14 (Philadelphia: Joseph and Edward Parker, 1832), 36–141.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 *Ibid.*, 129–39.
- 57 Leonhard Euler, *Tentamen novae theoriae musicae ex certissimis harmonicae principiis dilucide expositae* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1739); Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik aus sicheren Grundsätzen hergeleitet und mit deutlichen Beyspielen erläutert* (Berlin: C. F. Voss, 1771).

- 58 Lockhart, "Lupus Tonalis," 126.
- 59 John Farey, "On Mr. Liston's, or the *Euharmonic* Scale of Musical Intervals, Extended According to His Tuning Process, from 59 to 612 Notes in the Octave; Showing Thus, a Division of the Octave into 612 Equal Parts, or as Nearly So, throughout, as Experiments in Harmonics, or the Most Refined Musical Performances, Seem to Require," *Philosophical Magazine* 49, no. 230 (1817): 442–48, at 443.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Liston, "Music," 44.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 See Roger Grant, *Beating Time and Measuring Music in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 64 See for instance Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," *Social Text Periscope* (2013), [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_topic/decolonial\\_aesthesis/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_topic/decolonial_aesthesis/). See also Achille Mbembe's analysis of how European missionaries in the Congo used music as an instrument of "aesthetic indoctrination," in his article "Variations on the Beautiful in the Congolese World of Sounds," *Politique Africaine* 100, no. 4 (2005): 69–91.
- 65 "Intelligence and Miscellaneous Articles: Euharmonic Organ at Calcutta," 230.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," 23.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 Captain N. Augustus Willard, "Treatise of the Music of Hindustan," Sir William Jones, "On the Musical Modes of the Hindus," and J. D. Paterson, "On the Grámas or Musical Scales of the Hindus," in *Hindu Music from Various Authors*, ed. Sourindro Mohun Tagore (Calcutta: Babu Panchanun Mukerjea, 1875), 1–122, 123–60, and 173–90, respectively.
- 70 The last two of these were conflated by Western temperaments that compromised fifths and/or thirds.
- 71 Paterson, "On the Grámas," 179; Jones, "On the Musical Modes," 141–42 notes that when it however came to practice, Hindustani tuning seemed to him to be indistinguishable from Western tempered practice.
- 72 *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. Garland Hampton Cannon, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 759–60; cited in O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 63.
- 73 Quoted in A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), 79; cited in Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 3.
- 74 Rajah Comm. Sourindro Mohun Tagore, *The Musical Scales of the Hindus: With Remarks on the Applicability of Harmony to Hindu Music* (Calcutta: Bengal Academy of Music, 1884), 116–19.
- 75 *Ibid.* Tagore is referring specifically here to the Aryan populations hypothesized as a bridge between ancient European and Indian civilizations.

- 76 Krishnaji Ballal Deval, *Music East and West* (Pune: Arya Bhushan Press, 1908), 12; Krishnaji Ballal Deval, *The Hindu Musical Scale and the Twenty-Two Shrutees* (Pune: Arya Bhushan Press, 1910), 44.
- 77 Deval, *Music East and West*, ii–iii.
- 78 Rao Sahib M. Abraham Pandither [Pandithar], *To the Members of the Tanjore Sangeetha Vidya Mahajana Sangam and to the Delegate [sic] at the All-India Music Conference at Delhi: A Refutation to the Monogram on the Calculation of 22 Srutis of the Indian Musical Scale Arrived by Fifths by Mr. G. S. Khare of Kurundvad Bombay Presidency* (Tanjore: Lawley Electric Printing Press, 1918).
- 79 Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, "What Happened to Indian Music Theory? Indo-Occidentalism?," *Ethnomusicology* 52, no. 3 (2008): 349–77.

*Stethoscopic Fantasies**Melissa Dickson*

In Wilkie Collins's 1860 melodrama *The Woman in White*, Hester Pinhorn, an illiterate cook, recounts the mysterious events that have taken place in the villain Count Fosco's house since Lady Glyde fell ill. Hester reports:

The poor unfortunate lady fell out of one fit into another, and went on so till she was so wearied out, and as helpless as a new-born babe. We then got her to bed. Mr Goodricke went away to his house for medicine, and came back in a quarter of an hour or less. Besides the medicine he brought a bit of hollow mahogany wood with him, shaped like a kind of trumpet; and after waiting a little while, he put one end over the lady's heart and the other to his ear, and listened carefully.<sup>1</sup>

Although this fictional account was published more than forty years after the invention of the stethoscope by the French physician René Laennec in 1816, Hester does not refer to the object by name. Rather, she reacts to the instrument as though it is unknown to her, a curious device that intervenes between doctor and patient, and operates in a manner separate from, or 'besides the medicine' which the physician has brought. Within the context of the novel, Hester's reaction is evidence of her lack of education as well as her lack of access to modern medical care. However, her description of the stethoscope as a form of musical rather than medical instrument helps establish for readers a means of understanding what has taken place during the medical consultation. When Mr Goodricke declares to Hester's mistress that this is a serious case of heart disease, and 'told her exactly what he thought was the matter, which I was not clever enough to understand', it becomes clear that, in Hester's world of semi-literacy and partial understanding, it is the physical object and not the medical rationale that has captured her attention.<sup>2</sup> The object becomes representative of the doctor's practice and those medical realms of information that Hester can neither access nor understand. In so doing, it draws attention to the



Figure 10.1 Laennec-type monaural stethoscope, 1851–1900. Science Museum, London.

potential interplay between those pulses and vibrations that lie beyond the thresholds of human hearing, and the new ways of knowing, understanding, and making sense of, the human body through the medium of sound that were emerging in nineteenth-century British medicine.

Hester's analogy is, in fact, a sound one, as in many ways the stethoscope was a logical extension of the ear trumpet, which had been in use for centuries. Like the ear trumpet, it was originally designed to be applied to only a single ear (see [Figure 10.1](#)). It was also, like the musical trumpet, an instrument of communication through the transmission of sound which conveyed an internal state (albeit a material and pathological rather than an emotional one) to an external auditor. It was perhaps for this reason that in 1824, the London *Times* introduced the stethoscope to its non-medical British readers as a 'wonderful instrument' in 'complete vogue at Paris', which was 'merely a hollow wooden tube, about a foot in length (a common flute, with the holes stopped and the top open, would do, perhaps, just as well)'.<sup>3</sup> Later, in 1841, the editors of *Punch* similarly referred to the stethoscope as 'a curious instrument, something like a sixpenny toy trumpet with its top knocked off'.<sup>4</sup> The musical instrument was an easily recognized stand-in for the physical appearance and the mystifying operations of the stethoscope from the perspective of the medically untrained. In this framework, the medical consultation becomes a kind of performance and the physician himself a kind of musician, capable of drawing sounds from the human body and from the instrument at hand in a strangely medicalized production, whose tones remained inaudible to the patient's ear.



The advent of the stethoscope was an integral component of the burgeoning field of modern clinical diagnosis in the early nineteenth century, which, as Foucault has claimed in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), saw the ‘opening up of the concrete individual, for the first time in Western history, to the language of rationality’.<sup>5</sup> Mediate auscultation – literally, listening with the aid of a mediating instrument – facilitated a new mode of medical investigation oriented towards the body, which might exist independently of the patient’s own narrative or free will. It marked, as both Stanley Joel Reiser and Jonathan Sterne have observed, an important shift in the Western history of listening, whereby the voice of and the subjective account given by the patient were no longer the primary basis of diagnosis, but now existed in relation to an array of other scientifically meaningful sounds, made by and within an increasingly objectified body.<sup>6</sup> In Sterne’s words, ‘speaking patients with mute bodies gave way to speaking patients with sounding bodies’.<sup>7</sup> While Sterne and Reiser offer detailed accounts of the significance and use of the stethoscope as a particular mode of listening in everyday medicine, one that transformed methods of diagnosis and led to ‘the expansion of audile techniques’ in media contexts such as sound reproduction technologies, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the social, cultural, and psychological ramifications of this shift in listening for the newly objectified patient, now acutely aware of and yet unable to hear or to interpret the sounds of their own body.<sup>8</sup> Not only did the stethoscope mark a new way of listening in medical diagnosis, but, as a visible, material conduit between doctor and patient, it was understood to give the doctor access to potentially frightening sounds and intimate knowledge beyond the limits of average sensory perception.

This chapter addresses the medical developments of the stethoscopic age in the context not of the trained physician, but of the untrained patient, or, to adapt Jonathan Sterne’s useful phrase, those non-‘virtuoso listeners’ who were denied the privileged access of the physician to the soundings of the body.<sup>9</sup> My primary sources are, for most part, literary, as fictional interactions with stethoscopes provide the most detailed evidence of its effects in the broader cultural imagination in the decades after its introduction. As medical institutions accepted new technologies and became increasingly professionalized and specialized throughout the century, the stethoscope became for many patients an object of anxious contemplation, serving as a palpable interface between doctor and patient, between hope and fear, and between the visible and invisible. Many fictions of the period speculated upon the nature of that interface. While early, Realist modes of

exploration tended to focus on the practicalities and potential social embarrassments of stethoscopic diagnosis, later, gothic works seized upon the new powers and the restrictions of both medical science and the human sensorium in positing human experiences that were attuned to realms beyond normal consciousness and corporeality. Throughout the period, the stethoscope's presence in consultations remained a stimulus to the imagination and to fantasies of super-sensory and extra-sensory hearing, as it emphasized to the general public the limitations of the undiscerning, unassisted human ear, as well as the penetrability and vulnerability of the human body, whose inner motions and secrets might now be unwittingly exposed.

### **Questions of Decency and Privacy**

The stethoscope emerged as a tool of the medical consultation, and it was a response to a specific set of social and technical challenges facing physicians performing a diagnosis. From the perspective of the physician, those eight inches of distance between doctor and patient marked out by the stethoscope were frequently celebrated in no small part for reasons of hygiene. To use the London-based doctor Henry Hyde Salter's words, 'the foul and sordid condition in which the sick members of "the great unwashed" present themselves to us' in hospitals not only rendered them 'intolerable', but it was 'often really almost impossible, to touch them'.<sup>10</sup> It was for this reason that Dr William Lennard designed an unusually long monaural stethoscope in the 1850s, intended not for any acoustical purpose but rather to keep the physician at a safe distance from any particularly filthy or flea-ridden patients.

Not only was the stethoscope a tool for the physical distancing of a doctor from his lower-class patients, but it also served in the maintenance of gendered expectations. The benefit of using a stethoscope to distance oneself from a female patient and to preclude any necessity for exposure of the chest for the application of the naked ear was frequently lauded in medical journals. From the perspective of the patient, this physical distancing potentially lessened any embarrassment or sense of indecency derived from the examination. As Hyde Salter noted, while 'a physician in search of a diagnosis is a being of no sex' and a 'mere machine' to whom 'a woman's bare breast is . . . only so much integument intervening between him and the object of his interest', it is not so with his patient. There is 'the feeling that has to be overcome', for 'a woman in undergoing a thorough and free auscultation does so at the sacrifice of a certain amount

of instinctive sensitiveness and modesty'.<sup>11</sup> The stethoscope, then, protected those sentiments which Salter insisted are 'a most important element in our constitution' and 'a most important part in the social and moral system of our race'.<sup>12</sup> The medical instrument thus became a mediating object between doctor and patient which enforced both the social and physical distance between the two.

Questions of female dignity and the potentially improper nature of the cardiovascular medical examination were explicitly addressed by Elizabeth Gaskell in her 1851 story 'Mr Harrison's Confessions'. This tale, often understood as a prequel to Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851–53), is set in a small country town called Duncombe, where the young Will Harrison, having recently finished his medical training and qualified as a surgeon at Guy's Hospital in London, joins the medical practice of the elderly Mr Morgan. Gaskell herself was well acquainted with the medical apprentices of her maternal uncle Peter Holland (1766–1855), a surgeon in Knutsford, and she devotes much of her tale to Harrison's struggles in navigating social and professional boundaries as a young surgeon.<sup>13</sup> Gaskell exploits the intimate and potentially embarrassing nature of the doctor–patient relationship to great comic effect. Although attracted to the vicar's beautiful young daughter Sophy, Harrison nonetheless finds himself embroiled in a series of romantic misunderstandings involving three young women in the town, as rumours spread about his engagement to each of them. These misunderstandings are largely derived from his behaviour as an aspiring young doctor, instructed by Morgan to study the 'slight, delicate attentions' of the medical profession in both manner and facial expression in order to identify with his patients and to 'really feel pain when listening to their account of their sufferings'.<sup>14</sup> Ambiguities surrounding the limits of the doctor's professional role and the extent of his duties as a sympathetic listener mean that Harrison extends this behaviour from the confines of the medical consultation to his social life in Duncombe more generally. Thereafter, the obliging but naïve Harrison lends his arm to fatigued young ladies on walks, accompanies one woman on a boating party because her overbearing mother insists that she be paired with a strong swimmer, and remains in attendance on another young woman who claims to be feeling faint lest she have a nervous attack.

In the case of Miss Caroline Tomkinson, rumours about Mr Harrison are explicitly exacerbated by his use of a stethoscope. Although operating, at least in part, as a tool for the maintenance of gendered and social boundaries, this instrument ironically places Harrison in a

situation that makes possible new violations of those boundaries. Harrison reports:

One day [Caroline] told me she thought she had a weakness about the heart, and would be glad if I did bring my stethoscope the next time, which I accordingly did. And, while I was on my knees listening to the pulsations, one of the young ladies came in. She said, 'Oh dear! I never! I beg your pardon, ma'am' and scuttled out. There was not much the matter with Miss Caroline's heart: a little feeble in action or so, a mere matter of weakness and general languor. When I went down I saw two or three girls peeping out of the half-closed schoolroom door, but they shut it immediately, and I heard them laughing.<sup>15</sup>

Harrison's behaviour in this scene is entirely professional, although it is misunderstood by witnesses as a romantic proposal. Stethoscope designs of the time were not at all flexible, and care had to be taken to position the end of the instrument flat against the body, which often required kneeling on the part of the physician. It is clear, however, that Caroline intends to create a private moment of intimacy with Harrison by requesting such an examination, and her insistence that she is experiencing heart palpitations can be read as an expression of her own emotional, metaphorical heartache for him.

Although she does not discuss 'Mr Harrison's Confessions' in her study, this, I would suggest, is an instance of what Kirstie Blair has identified in *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (2006) as the uneasy oscillation in both nineteenth-century literary and medical texts between 'the primary physical sense of the organ within the breast and traditional associations of the heart with romantic love, spirituality, and the play of the emotions and passions'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Caroline's elder sister later melodramatically warns Harrison that if he rejects Caroline after encouraging her attentions, 'this disappointment will kill her', Caroline's heartache taking on the material qualities of a medical condition.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, Harrison's medical assessment of Caroline's heart has both romantic and social implications, as others in Duncombe conflate the medical with the metaphorical, and interpret Harrison's examination of Caroline as a profession of his love for her. Even Mr Morgan, himself a medical man, rebukes Harrison when he hears the gossip in town: 'You were discovered on your knees to her – a positive injury to the establishment.'<sup>18</sup>

Although in the course of Gaskell's narrative all the romantic misunderstandings inspired by Mr Harrison's medical practice are satisfactorily resolved, it is important to note the challenge to the balance of social

hierarchies that occurs in the stethoscopic examination. As Lilian Furst has observed, the priority of physical diagnosis provoked new forms of negotiation between doctor and patient and fundamentally altered the balance of power between the two. With the increasing identification of disease by means of probing medical instruments and a cumulative scientific understanding of disease, the social power of doctors 'swelled, whereas that of patients was inevitably diminished when their word came to have lesser significance'.<sup>19</sup> Mr Harrison's examination of Miss Caroline, however, indicates that despite the doctor's supremacy in treating the medical matters of the heart, the social aspects of the medical examination were inescapable and might well be manipulated by a shrewd or lovesick patient.

The editors of *Punch* had already recognized this intrusion of the stethoscope into the medical and social operations of the doctor by way of a brief sketch in 1842 entitled 'Reminiscences of a Stethoscope'. In keeping with the genre of the it-narrative, or novel of circulation, this tale follows the changing fortunes of a material object in Britain, in this case a 'well-shaped, good-looking, and portable' stethoscope, narrated from the point of view of the instrument itself.<sup>20</sup> Early in life, the stethoscope tells us, it attracted the notice of one Dr Hammer Roses at a shop on the Strand. Roses then introduced it into society, where it gained the confidences of hundreds of men and women. In another slippage between the metaphorical and the literal in questions of the heart, these confidences, it transpires, are not of disease or pain. In one instance, the stethoscope is applied to the side of an 'old miserly stock-jobber', where it detects a strange metallic tinkling, taken as evidence of an 'incurable case' of penny pinching. In the case of a sweet and delicate young girl, the stethoscope reports:

I discovered a peculiar murmur not mentioned either by Laennec or the lamented Dr Hope . . . when her bosom heaved a sigh, I distinctly heard 'Henry Corbelle', *vale*-ing from one air passage to another. Upon this hint Dr Hammer Roses spoke – the parents adopted his prescription, and I soon afterwards noticed in the doctor's library, cards bearing the names, 'Mr Henry Corbelle' – 'Mrs Henry Corbelle'.<sup>21</sup>

This light-hearted piece is testament to the wonder and novelty of this medical technology as it increasingly comes into contact with, and intervenes in, the personal affairs of Victorian society at large. In this way, *Punch* demonstrates the ways in which social relationships were being renegotiated around the physical presence of the stethoscope and the secrets it exposed.

*Punch* had fantasied about the stethoscope's life and its heightened, extra-sensory experiences a year earlier, in its piece titled 'The Physiology of the London Medical Student'. Here, it advised its readers that 'to keep up his character, a new man ought perpetually to carry a stethoscope', which, it noted somewhat contemptuously, was a 'curious instrument' that was used 'for the purpose of hearing what people are thinking about, or something of the kind'.<sup>22</sup> Again hinting at fears that the stethoscope could reveal not only the inner sounds but also the private thoughts of a patient within the mechanical/scientific process of stethoscopic diagnosis, it went on to observe that 'when medicine arrives at such a pitch that the secret of the human heart can be probed, it need not go any further, and will have the power of doing mischief enough'.<sup>23</sup> The notion that a stethoscope, and by extension a physician, might hear one's thoughts or access the secrets contained in one's heart moves once again between the metaphoric and material operations of the heart. There is a curious sense of invasion incited by the stethoscope as the human body becomes vulnerable to the scientific instrument transmitting its innermost sounds – sounds that the patient themselves can neither access nor control. The use of the stethoscope is identified here as a method of revealing intimate secrets and unspoken, indeed unacknowledged, passions.

It was in such a vein that William Makepeace Thackeray employed the stethoscope as a metaphor in his historical novel *The Virginians* (1859), in his observation that 'tis cruel to babble the secrets of a young man's love: to overhear his incoherent vows and wild raptures, and to note, in cold blood, the secrets – it may be, the follies – of his passion'.<sup>24</sup> Drawing on an image of intimate listening from contemporary medicine, the narrator goes on to ask, 'Shall we play eaves-dropper at twilight embrasures, count sighs and hand-shakes, bottle hot tears: lay our stethoscope upon delicate young breasts and hear their heart throbs?'<sup>25</sup> In this aside, he aligns the medical practice of listening to the motions of the heart with the rather more ignoble practice of eavesdropping. As an anonymous poem published in the *Lancet* in 1829 made clear, there are no dark, enclosed chambers within the human body or society in general into which the stethoscope might not intrude:

Quoth Rod'rick, 'I'll a place contrive  
So dark and safe, no man alive  
Shall to our private meetings grope:  
'Egad,' cries Johnny, 'that won't do,  
If there's no crack to listen through,  
They'll take "reports" by Stethoscope!'<sup>26</sup>

Whatever its flaws and limitations in medical practice, the stethoscope was frequently bestowed with extraordinary powers of penetration in the popular imagination. Its receptive capacities both promised and threatened to surpass the usual limits and boundaries of the senses, the self, and society.

In most cases, this sense of invasion into the patient's domestic and social life, as well as into their body, was not romantically thrilling but unsettling and physically exhausting. Such exhaustion was frequently the result of the rigidity and awkwardness of the instrument to hand, which generally required the unsettling and rearrangement of the physical positions of both the physician and the patient in order to facilitate diagnosis. It was absolutely 'fatal to auscultation', Hyde Salter insisted, that there should be any chink between the stethoscope and the chest-wall, which would effectively bring the column of air within the stethoscope into communication with the external air and thereby produce an incessant humming akin to the sounds one hears on applying the ear to a shell.<sup>27</sup> Pressing the instrument firmly against the patient to avoid such reverberation also produced complaints regarding the coldness of certain metals, the weight of them pressed against ailing bodies, and the physical pain of examination.<sup>28</sup> In his chapters on practical directions in *The Physical Examination of the Chest* (1861), Somerville Scott Alison not only emphasized the importance of the material conditions of the examination, but reflected that 'I have seen patients not greatly wasted, faint under the fatigue and excitement of the erect examination'. Furthermore, 'the stethoscope sometimes causes so much pain that the patient winces much, and thus interferes with auscultation'.<sup>29</sup> Fictional patients also testify to the sheer exhaustion induced by a stethoscopic examination. Thus the narrator elicits sympathy for sixteen-year-old Katie Woodward in Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1857) by observing that 'the poor girl lived beneath a stethoscope, and bore all their pokings and tappings with exquisite patience'.<sup>30</sup> Homer Sivewright in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lucius Davoren* (1873) invites his physician to visit him often in the role of friend, but adds that 'I suppose there will be no necessity for any more serious examinations like this morning's, with a faint smile, and a disagreeable recollection of the stethoscope'.<sup>31</sup> Later, in *Vixen* (1879), Braddon's nervous Mrs Winstanley also complains that the London doctor who was called to examine her 'tired me dreadfully with his stethoscope'.<sup>32</sup>

So widespread were such complaints of the exhaustion induced by stethoscopic examination in already weakened patients that some attributed the increase in mesmeric practice in the mid-nineteenth century to a



determination on the part of the patient to avoid granting a physician what was still quite experimental access to the invisible parts and sounds of the body. Mesmerism, with its emphasis upon the powers of one individual to influence or control the mind and body of another, was, as Alison Winter has demonstrated, not a 'fringe' activity or a pseudo-science that operated at the margins of Victorian society. Rather, it held a 'central place among the preoccupations of Victorian culture' and it was practised and debated 'widely and continuously from the 1830s through the 1860s and beyond'.<sup>33</sup> In undergoing mesmeric treatment, the *Athenaeum* noted in 1846:

No doctor intrudes with his troublesome and disagreeable questions; no pulse need be felt, no tongue need be shown; no horrid *percussor* or more horrid *stethoscope* need frighten the gentle breast from its propriety. . . . The dropped *Morning Post* is picked up, the new novel is resumed; the ripple of a moment vanishes, and the surface of life is as tranquil as before.<sup>34</sup>

Cast here as a respectable family practitioner akin to the medical professional, the mesmerist is clearly preferred because his treatments do not trouble or interfere with the body. Mesmerism stands in stark contrast to the physicality, intrusion, and disruption represented by the stethoscope and the physical examination. In this context, it represents detachment, decency, and a mere 'ripple of a moment' in the patient's consciousness, while those treated mesmerically clearly regard it as a valuable form of therapy for potentially serious physical ailments.

The itinerant lecturer and mesmerist William Davey sought to make the therapeutic value of mesmerism clear in the illustrations accompanying his 1854 manual *The Illustrated Practical Mesmerist, Curative and Scientific*.<sup>35</sup> In this work, Davey had sections dedicated to the use of mesmerism in treating consumption and tuberculosis, two diseases which were frequently diagnosed in earlier stages thanks to the advent of the stethoscope. In the accompanying illustrations, the patient is recumbent and calm while the physical distance between doctor and patient (with no medical instrument intervening between the two) is clear (see [Figure 10.2](#)). A clairvoyant diagnosis of internal complaints seemingly negotiated the threshold between the heard and unheard sounds of the body in far more abstract and subtle ways than any crude instrument. Unlike the stethoscope, it not only penetrated the threshold between the individual body and its surrounding environment, but it supposedly had access to, and could incite responses from within, the different layers of the human mind. Significantly, this reinforced the importance of the (inner) voice and

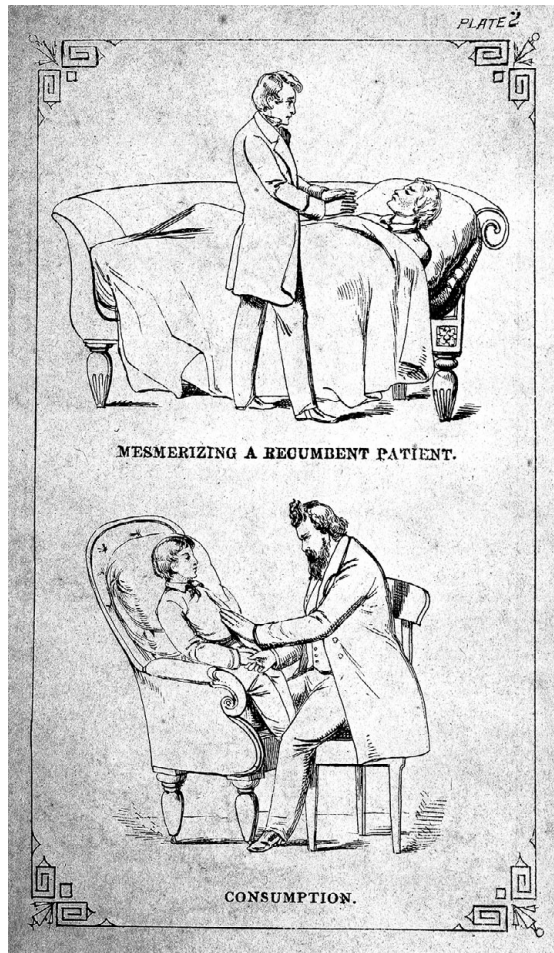


Figure 10.2 William Davey, *The Illustrated Practical Mesmerist, Curative and Scientific* (Edinburgh: William Davey, 1854), plate 2. Science Museum, London.

subjective experiences of the patient, which were declining in importance when it came to more clinical methods of diagnosis.

Although the stethoscope provided a new clarity of medical insight, it was nonetheless a source of deep confusion and anxiety for many early patients. Stanley Joel Reiser has attributed much of this anxiety to the fact that in the early decades of the century, medical instruments were almost exclusively associated with surgery and the possibility of being cut open.

He observes that some physicians were themselves hesitant to use the stethoscope for fear that such an instrument might class them with surgeons, lesser medical types who were seen to work with their hands as mere craftsmen.<sup>36</sup> Certainly, the use of an instrument was new and potentially unsettling in its physical interference with the body and its treatment of the human subject as an object of examination. It is perhaps little wonder that, as Scott Alison noted, in some cases 'the sight of the stethoscope, the idea that an examination is about to be made, causes so much distress and agitation to some patients, that it is prudent and justifiable to postpone the inquiry'.<sup>37</sup> More than this, however, there are numerous accounts, both historical and fictional, of patients being left utterly exhausted and unable to speak after their physician has conducted what was often seen as a thoroughly draining, intrusive examination. It is clear that the application of the stethoscope in physical examinations was something of a shock to many nineteenth-century patients, who were made painfully aware of new efforts to access and to interpret the sonic realm within their own bodies, despite the fact that they themselves were deaf to its sounds. It is this concept of sounds that were only accessible to and able to be interpreted by highly trained physicians that gave rise to what, I want now to suggest, was the primary cause of patients' fear and distress relating to the new stethoscopic practice: fear of the unknown becoming real.

### A Very Trump of Doom

Although John Forbes registered his anxiety that the very presence of a stethoscope in consultations made 'a sort of bold claim and a pretension to certainty and precision of diagnosis' that he did not believe was warranted, Hyde Salter insisted that 'anything that increases our patient's confidence is of value; the strict adoption of the advice given often depends upon it'.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, patients seemed more willing to accept a diagnosis made with a stethoscope than one made by immediate auscultation, believing, in one case, that 'auscultation without the use of that mysterious instrument was ... a thing of nought'.<sup>39</sup> As early as 1828, Dr J. P. Kay of Manchester, who advocated the use of the stethoscope as a means of avoiding simple but potentially fatal errors in clinical examination, declared that despite the resistance that the stethoscope was meeting among the British medical profession, it would soon be 'dangerous, positively *suicidal* to the professional reputation, to object to the use of the stethoscope'.<sup>40</sup> In an interesting rhetorical shift in focus from the

internal sounds of the human body to the external babble of human voices, Kay announced that 'the public ear is awake, rumour speaks with a loud voice and a hundred tongues', and 'the public is acutely sensible of impressions'.<sup>41</sup> The stethoscope not only allowed for greater precision, it lent an impression of authority to the examination as visible proof to the patient that analysis and diagnosis were taking place by way of the physician's ear.

As the years passed, the materiality of the stethoscope also lent the figure of the physician himself a greater degree of credibility, giving greater weight to his words and the impressions of his ear. It is for this reason that in the opening pages of Wilkie Collins's novel *A Rogue's Life* (1879), we read of the narrator's hatred not only of what he considers to be the abstruse studies of the medical profession, but also of the 'diurnal slavery of qualifying myself, in a social point of view, for future success in it'. Seeking social acceptance requires presenting himself in the guise of a doctor, making visits in the brougham 'with a stethoscope and medical review in the front pocket, with Doctor Softly by my side' in order to canvass for patients.<sup>42</sup> A similar tactic is employed by the young doctor in Arthur Conan Doyle's 1894 story 'A False Start', in which he seeks to impress and recruit new patients by leaving a copy of Sir Richard Quain's *Dictionary of Medicine* out on the table in his consulting room alongside his stethoscope and other instruments. He believes that his abstract medical knowledge and highly trained ear are physically realized in these objects.<sup>43</sup> In Doyle's story 'A Question of Diplomacy', which appeared in the same collection, the physician is referred to by one resistant patient as a 'medical autocrat' who 'with his stethoscope and thermometer is a thing apart' and strangely 'beyond the reach of an argument'.<sup>44</sup> By the later decades of the nineteenth century then, such instruments had become material signs, tangible objects that helped to create a 'profession' of medical practice in the broader social and cultural consciousness.

As an embodiment of the medical profession, the stethoscope became for many patients a focal object in consultations and in later memories of those consultations. As *Blackwood's* observed in 1847, this was an object that 'had long ceased to excite merely professional interest', for 'there are few families to whom it has not proved an object of horror and the saddest remembrance'.<sup>45</sup> Reflecting upon its status as an instrument 'on which the hopes and fears, and one may also say the destinies of mankind, so largely hang', the writer noted that 'it appears to present a fit subject for poetic treatment'.<sup>46</sup> And it was indeed the subject of poetic treatment. *Blackwood's* followed this rumination with a rather lengthy and extravagant

poem by an anonymous poet. Throughout, the stethoscope is referred to by a range of metaphors, including a musician's trumpet (which has heraldic overtones to it while aligning the physician with a musical performer), a king's sceptre, a prophet's source of vision, and a priest's sacrificial altar. It is all-powerful, all-knowing, and entirely indifferent to human desire. From the perspective of the unhearing and unknowing patient, it is the stethoscope, not the doctor, that makes a declaration of health or disease as it whispers its secrets into the ear of the physician:

Stethoscope! Thou simple tube,  
Clarion of the yawning tomb,  
Unto me thou seem'st to be  
A very trump of doom.

Wielding thee, the grave physician,  
By the trembling patient stands,  
Like some deftly skilled musician;  
Strange! The trumpet in his hands,  
Whilst the sufferer's eyeball glistens  
Full of hope and full of fear,  
Quietly he bends and listens  
With his quick, accustomed ear –  
Waiteth until thou shalt tell  
Tidings of the war within:  
In the battle and the strife,  
Is it death, or is it life,  
That the fought-for prize shall win?<sup>47</sup>

There is, the poem makes clear, a battle being waged inside the human body that the individual sufferer is not and cannot be privy to, and the stethoscope therefore comes to operate as a kind of interface on the threshold between life and death. While many doctors were eager to establish their authority by employing the stethoscope as an instrument of science and an objective measurer of human health, those subjected to stethoscopic examinations, it seems, rather more anxiously imbued this process with wonder and magic. The instrument became a symbol of hope, anxiety, dread, and horror that would ultimately augur life or death, providing significant scope, I would suggest, for individual fears and fantasies of the occult and the quasi-magical.

It is far from unusual for new technologies to be described as magical, wonderful, or frightful by their first users. However, the association of the stethoscope with magic and strange, supernatural happenings by those on whom it was first used marks a deep cultural fascination with that

potentially distressing and intimate knowledge of one's own body and future health or pathology which lay beyond the limits of normal auditory perception. While an anonymous doctor writing to the editor of the *London Medical Gazette* in 1828 might draw upon a popular framework of technological magic to insist that the authority conveyed by the stethoscope had a remarkable ability to soothe and calm a patient if the physician 'let him but once feel its soft and gentle touch, stealing over the seat of decay, and by a sort of magic influence drawing to itself the venom that lurks within', his extraordinary image of the stethoscope as an enchanted and beneficent healer was certainly not shared by all.<sup>48</sup> More often, it provoked distress and a sense of the possible futures and temporalities of one individual life contained within the stethoscope, when, as in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Willing to Die* (1873), 'there were the hushed, dreadful moments, while [the physician] listened, thoughtfully, through his stethoscope, to the "still, small voice" of fate, to us inaudible, pronouncing on the dread issues of life or death'.<sup>49</sup> It was an instrument of ordeal that, as the narrator of Braddon's *All Along the River* (1894) observes, 'thrills us all with the aching pain of fear when we see it in the doctor's hand'.<sup>50</sup>

Given that such sensations as horror, dread, and insight into the unknown or the supernatural are staples of Victorian sensation and gothic literature, it is not surprising that medical facts and cultural anxieties surrounding the use of the stethoscope provided an anxious site for the medical and the imaginative to disrupt and inform one another in fictional explorations of the powers of the stethoscope. In the opening scenes of Sheridan Le Fanu's gothic novel *Uncle Silas* (1864), the young heroine Maud Ruthyn is informed by the housekeeper that a 'Doctor Bryerly, a great conjurer among the Swedenborg sect' is coming to visit her father, Austin. Maud's imagination runs wild with suspicions of 'necromancy, and a weird freemasonry, that inspired something of awe and sympathy'.<sup>51</sup> The day after this mysterious guest's arrival, Maud interrupts her father and Bryerly in the study, where they are surrounded by strange instruments, and 'too intent on other matters to hear her'. Maud recalls:

My father was sitting in his chair, with his coat and waistcoat off, Mr Bryerly kneeling on a stool beside him, rather facing him, his black scratch wig leaning close to my father's grizzled hair. There was a large tome of their divinity lore, I suppose, open on the table close by. The lank black figure of Mr Bryerly stood up, and he concealed something quickly in the breast of his coat.<sup>52</sup>

As her father stands up, looking very pale, and brusquely orders Maud from the room, it is clear to the reader that Austin is anxious that his

daughter has interrupted his medical examination and discovered the truth regarding his declining health. Mr Bryerly has been leaning forward, listening to Austin's exposed chest, and we presume that he conceals a stethoscope from view as Maud enters. Maud, however, is frightened and confused by what she has seen, and mistakenly believes these figures to be engaged in some kind of occult worship:

I remember so well the kind of shock and disgust I felt in the certainty that I had surprised them at some, perhaps, debasing incantation – a suspicion of this Mr Bryerly, of the ill-fitting black coat, and white choker – and a sort of fear came upon me, and I fancied he was asserting some kind of mastery over my father, which very much alarmed me.<sup>53</sup>

Maud's conflation of the figure of the physician with an enigmatical, 'lank high-priest' (as in the *Blackwood's* poem above) and of her father with a penitent sinner 'confessing to this man in black' is, of course, erroneous. It nonetheless replicates the inescapable hierarchy of the doctor–patient relationship as well as the cultural and social power bestowed upon the physician because of his medical knowledge and application of scientific instruments.<sup>54</sup> Austin Ruthyn is not confessing his sins to a priest; rather, his body is revealing the truth of its physical condition and future deterioration to a skilled auscultator. An intimate exchange of information largely inaudible to the naked ear is taking place as Austin looks to his physician for guidance and insight into his future. Here, the medical professional exerts a new form of power over matters of life and death, and one which is as awe-inspiring and potentially 'haunting' as that inspired by religious institutions or the occult.

Such responses to the stethoscope interweave traditions of magic, science, religion, and the occult in order to inculcate a popular sense of mystery and power in this object, which blurs the boundaries between magical phenomena and scientific possibilities. The stethoscope offers a kind of mystical communication between doctor and patient. It presents a delicate balance between science and mystery in its apparent ability to foretell the future and the hitherto unknown. It was doubtless this tradition that, as late as 1910, prompted Rudyard Kipling's short story 'Marklake Witches' featuring a young man called René Laennec, who is a French prisoner on parole and in the process of inventing the stethoscope (though it is never named as such). While the local village physician is suspicious of Laennec and his collection of 'toy trumpets', old Jerry Gamm, known locally as the 'Witchmaster on the Green' because he cures people 'by herbs and charms', is far more open-minded, and uses



Laennec's trumpets on some of his patients.<sup>55</sup> However, as René and Jerry debate the best materials for their trumpets and discuss the sounds made within the chests of various sick people in the village (including the buzzing 'like breakers on a reef' emanating from the consumptive Laennec himself), they are interrupted by a group of angry villagers who insist that they are practising devilry and 'prying into God's secrets by means of some papistical contrivance'.<sup>56</sup> With no understanding of the acoustical properties of the trumpet, or indeed of its medical purpose, they fear the stethoscope as a cause of pain and suffering rather than a mere means of listening to suffering bodies:

They said Old Gaffer Macklin was dying from stitches in his side where Jerry had put the trumpet – they called it the devil's ear-piece; and they said it left round red witch-marks on people's skins, and dried up their lights, and made 'em spit blood, and threw 'em into sweats. Terrible things they said. You never heard such a noise.<sup>57</sup>

Each of these complaints is in fact a symptom of consumption, which manifests itself on the body's surface much later than the sounds emanating from Old Gaffer's chest might reveal the disease to the attentive ears of René and Jerry. That this earlier knowledge is perceived as some kind of satanic foresight is not only testament to the villagers' paranoia, but, beyond Kipling's story, points to the ways in which, from the perspective of 1910, by which time the stethoscope had emerged as the iconic image of modern medical practice, fear of such an instrument had been rendered absurd.

Cultural fears and fantasies that the stethoscope would reveal both the medical and metaphorical secrets of the body, particularly the human heart, were, in some ways, rather prescient. Alongside explorations of the body's sonic soundscape, over the course of the century, techniques for rendering visible and capturing a more permanent record of the heartbeat, blood pressure, and circulation were also being developed. In 1831, the Frenchman Jules Hérisson developed the sphygmometer, which was designed to display the pulse visually, and like the stethoscope his instrument underwent numerous modifications throughout the nineteenth century. In 1854, the German physiologist Karl von Vierordt combined Hérisson's instrument with a device that would record the movement of the pulse on paper to create a sphygmograph, and could be used to record a human pulse over a longer period of time. In 1863, the French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey improved the device by making it portable. After the invention of the telephone, a later method of recording rendered the pulse wave audible by means of an electromagnetic induction coil and was essentially a stethoscope fitted with an electric microphone.

In the 1890s, these same techniques were put to use by the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso in what is now recognized as the first lie detector, which similarly measured the changes in a subject's blood pressure and pulse over the course of a criminal interrogation. Lombroso's device required the subject to wear a glove attached to a rubber membrane, which was in turn connected to a stylus that rolled across the surface of a kind of drum in response to variations in the subject's blood flow. The basic principle of this was that no matter what the subject's words might tell the listener, their pulse would reveal the 'true' story. In his study *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (1999), Ronald R. Thomas presents Lombroso's lie detector as 'the fulfillment of a dream' inspired by nineteenth-century detective fiction.<sup>58</sup> In fiction such as Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart', Thomas notes, 'what the culprit imagines to be the still-beating heart of his victim', announcing its hiding place beneath the floor-boards, is in fact his own physiological reaction to his body's suppression of the ugly truth, 'a truth his pulse spells out as if it were directing the automatic writing of the gloved hand of Lombroso's lie detector'.<sup>59</sup> Thomas's argument that Poe's literary transformation of the body 'into a text that seems to speak the truth for itself' emerges 'from the same configuration of cultural needs and anxieties' which gave rise to the lie detector as a machine of law enforcement, can be read here as part of the longer history of the social and cultural reception of the stethoscope and of the new body of medical knowledge acquired, represented, and constructed through sound that this inspired.<sup>60</sup> That knowledge demanded a cultivated and highly trained medical ear to distinguish different internal body sounds, as well as the ability to 'read sounds' as physical signs and interpret their significance. However, a wider reading of cultural materials tells us that this new way of listening in medical diagnosis also emphasized more broadly the limitations of the unassisted human ear, unable to hear the wars being waged within, as well as the penetrability and vulnerability of the human body, whose inner motions and secrets might now be exposed to a third party in the figure of the physician. A challenge to the subjective experience of pain and illness, and an object of fear, hope, and cultural fantasy, the stethoscope became a material testimony to human frailty and the limits of human auditory perception.

### Notes

- 1 Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 400.
- 2 *Ibid.*

- 3 Cited in George Rosen, 'A Note on the Reception of the Stethoscope in England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 7.1 (January 1939), pp. 93–94.
- 4 'The Physiology of the London Medical Student. III – Of His Gradual Development', *Punch, or the London Charvari*, 1 (1841), p. 165.
- 5 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), p. xvi. For a detailed analysis of Foucault's approach to the role of auditory perception in the development of clinical medicine, see Lauri Siisiäinen, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 10–54.
- 6 Stanley Joel Reiser, *Medicine and the Reign of Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 23–33; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, pp. 87–136.
- 7 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 117.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 10 Henry Hyde Salter, 'Lecture v. – On the Stethoscope', *British Medical Journal*, (7 February 1863), pp. 105–8, 133–35, at p. 105.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Gaskell's connection to Holland's apprentices is noted in George Payne, *Mrs Gaskell and Knutsford*, 2nd ed. (Manchester and London: Clarkson and Griffiths, 1905), pp. 36–37.
- 14 Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Mr Harrison's Confessions', in *Cousin Phillis and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), pp. 109–95, at p. 122.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 16 Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 2.
- 17 Gaskell, 'Mr Harrison's Confessions', p. 174.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 19 Lilian R. Furst, *Between Doctors and Patients: The Changing Balance of Power* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 62.
- 20 For a study of the British it-narrative from a range of theoretical and historical vantage points, see Mark Blackwell, ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007).
- 21 'Reminiscences of a Stethoscope', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 2 (1842), p. 76.
- 22 'The Physiology of the London Medical Student', p. 165.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1859), vol. 2, p. 144.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- 26 'Auscultation Extraordinary', *Lancet*, (10 October 1829), p. 96.
- 27 Salter, 'Lecture v. – On the Stethoscope', p. 134.

- 28 The material instability of the stethoscope throughout the nineteenth century reflects the ongoing attempt within the medical profession to obviate the sounds of echoes, roars, and reverberations emanating from within the instrument itself, while listening to the sounds of the body more effectively and reducing the degree of pain and discomfort caused to the patient at hand. Laennec himself experimented with a range of materials for his stethoscope, including lead, leather, cedar, ivory, and horn.
- 29 Somerville Scott Alison, *The Physical Examination of the Chest in Pulmonary Consumption and Its Intercurrent Diseases* (London: John Churchill, 1861), pp. 303–4.
- 30 Anthony Trollope, *The Three Clerks* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1860), p. 443.
- 31 Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lucius Davoren; or, Publicans and Sinners* (London: John Maxwell, 1873), pp. 177, 181.
- 32 Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Vixen*, 3 vols. (London: John and Robert Maxwell, 1879), vol. 3, p. 286.
- 33 Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 4–5. For a detailed account of the arrival and reception of mesmeric practice in Victorian London, see *ibid.*, pp. 32–59.
- 34 ‘Mademoiselle Julie: Or, Witchcraft for the Aristocracy’, *Athenaeum*, 957 (28 February 1846), pp. 221–23, at p. 222.
- 35 William Davey, *The Illustrated Practical Mesmerist* (Edinburgh: William Davey, 1854).
- 36 Reiser, *Medicine and the Reign of Technology*, p. 36.
- 37 Alison, *The Physical Examination of the Chest*, p. 299.
- 38 John Forbes, ‘Translator’s Preface’, in R. T. H. Laennec, *A Treatise on the Diseases of the Chest and on Mediate Auscultation*, trans. John Forbes, 2nd ed. (London: G. and T. Underwood, 1827), p. xix; Salter, ‘Lecture v. – On the Stethoscope’, p. 106.
- 39 Salter, ‘Lecture v. – On the Stethoscope’, p. 106.
- 40 J. P. Kay, ‘Use of the Stethoscope’, *Lancet*, (23 February 1828), pp. 754–57, at p. 757.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 Wilkie Collins, *A Rogue’s Life* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), p. 7.
- 43 Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘A False Start’, in *Round the Red Lamp*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1894), pp. 65–88.
- 44 Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘A Question of Diplomacy’, in *Round the Red Lamp*, pp. 174–99, at p. 182.
- 45 ‘To the Stethoscope’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 61 (March 1847), pp. 361–67, at p. 361.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 ‘Stethoscope’, *London Medical Gazette*, (8 March 1828), pp. 408–9.

- 49 Sheridan Le Fanu, *Willing to Die* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), p. 22.
- 50 Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *All Along the River* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1894), p. 200.
- 51 Sheridan Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*, ed. W. J. McCormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 4.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Rudyard Kipling, 'Marklake Witches', *Rewards and Fairies* (New York: Doubleday, 1910), pp. 91–116, at p. 98.
- 56 *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 58 Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 22.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 60 *Ibid.*

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# Index

- Abrams, M. H., 146, 164  
Academy of Ancient Music, 85  
accentual-syllabic metre, 167–68  
*Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in Commemoration of Handel* (Burney), 4  
Addison, Joseph, 4, 35, 68, 120  
affective rhythm, 116, 120, 123, 129  
*Africans, The* (Colman), 101–2  
Alexander's Feast, 24  
*Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music* (Dryden), 23–25  
Alison, Somerville Scott, 232  
*All Along the River* (Braddon), 238  
Amigoni, Jacopo, 19  
*Analysis of Beauty Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste, The* (Hogarth), 25  
Anderson, Benedict, 210  
*Ansichten der Natur (Views of Nature)* (Humboldt), 187–88  
Armstrong, Isobel, 11  
Arnold, Samuel, 6, 64, 85  
arrhythmia in London soundscape, 123–24, 128  
*Art of Poetry* (Bysshe), 169  
*Asiatic Mirror* (Calcutta), 208  
associationism, 1  
*Athenaeum*, 190, 233–34  
attention, 5  
Attridge, Derek, 163  
attunement metaphors, 2  
audiovisual aesthetics, 5  
aural culture, 192  
aural recognition scenes  
  in *Guy Mannering*, 90–103  
  Hindustani language and, 102–6  
  introduction to, 90–94  
  musical recognition, 103–6  
  staging of, 94–99  
  in *The Steam-Boat* (Galt), 100–1  
  unintelligible sounds, 99–103  
Austen, Jane, 3  
Babbage, Charles, 116  
ballads and ballad-singers, 48–49  
Banks, Joseph, 137–43  
Bannister, Elizabeth, 65  
Barker, Samuel, 165  
Barlow, Jeremy, 21  
Bate, Henry, 120–21  
Beattie, James, 7  
Beaumont, Francis, 86  
'Beautiful Maid, The' (Liston), 62  
*Beggar's Opera, The* (Gay), 19, 30–31, 68, 70  
Bell, Alexander Graham, 195  
Bell, John, 120–21  
Belsham, William, 174–75  
Benjamin, Walter, 210  
Biot, Jean-Baptiste, 188  
bird sounds in poetry, 178  
*Birth of the Clinic, The* (Foucault), 226  
Bishop, Henry, 6  
*Blackwood's*, 236  
Blair, Kirstie, 229  
Blancanus, Josephus, 157–58  
Blaszkievicz, Jacek, 11–12  
Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, 232, 238  
Braham, John, 98  
Brewster, David, 186  
British Association for the Advancement of Science, 190  
British soundscape, 46  
Brougham, Henry, 185  
Bryce, James, 204–14  
Buckley, Arabella, 195, 196  
Burney, Charles, 4, 6, 21, 43, 47  
Burns, Robert, 6  
Butler, Samuel, 27  
Byron, George Gordon (Lord Byron), 6  
Bysshe, Edward, 169

- Castrucci, Pietro, 20–21  
*Chart of the Coast of Scotland* (Stevenson), 141  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 168–69  
 Chladni, Ernst, 188  
*Choleric Man The* (Cumberland), 122  
 Christianity, 34, 191, 209  
 Clare, John, 176  
 Cobbold, William, 67  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 5, 11  
 Collins, Wilkie, 224–25, 236  
 Colman, George, the Elder, 6  
 Colman, George, the Younger, 101–2  
*coup de théâtre*, 75  
 Crabbe, George, 123  
*Cranford* (Gaskell), 228–30  
 Cruikshank, George, 62  
 Cruikshank, Isaac, 126
- Davey, William, 233–34  
 Davies, James Q., 184–85, 210–11  
 Davis, Leith, 50, 52  
 Davy, Humphry, 1–2  
 De Quincey, Thomas, 10–11  
 Derham, William, 158, 161  
 Dering, Richard, 67  
*Der Vampyr* (Marschner), 144  
*Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*  
 (Thomas), 241  
 Deval, Krishnaji Ballal, 216  
*Dictionnaire de musique* (Rousseau), 39–40, 52  
*Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen*  
 (Helmholtz), 186  
 digital humanities, 11–12  
 Dilke, Charles, 108  
*Distress Poet, The* (Hogarth), 5–6, 17–18, 36, 37  
 doctrine of vibrations, 2  
 Douglas, Mary, 11  
 Doyle, Arthur Conan, 236  
 Dryden, John, 23–25, 165–75  
 dustman's bell, 115–16
- Ear Phonautograph (Bell), 195  
 East, Michael, 67  
 echoes and echoing sounds  
 experience of sound in poetry, 176–78  
 Gilbert White and, 155, 156–63  
 historical acoustemology of, 155  
 introduction to, 154–56  
 John Dryden and, 165–75  
 measurement of, 156–63  
 poetics of, 155, 163–76  
 prosody in, 160–62  
 Edgeworth, Maria, 183, 194  
*Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, 211  
*Edinburgh Review*, 190
- Edwin, John, 65  
 electromagnetism, 192  
 Enlightenment era, 2, 4, 177  
*Enraged Musician, The* (Hogarth)  
 amplified noise in, 23  
 cultural identity of sound in, 48–49  
 deafening silence of, 28  
 distressed poet in, 28–31  
 Fielding on, 28, 31–35  
 introduction to, 5–6, 17–18  
 John Dryden and, 23–25  
 Lamb on, 17, 32–35  
 location of, 21–23  
 May Day milkmaid in, 25–26  
 Michael Angelo Rooker and,  
 60–62, 67  
 mood and mind in, 31–35  
 as musician provoked, 18–20  
 poverty in, 35–36  
 as read by, 20–21  
 'Eolian Harp, The' (Coleridge), 11  
*Epicæne* (Jonson), 65, 86  
 Erlmann, Veit, 146  
 Erwin, Timothy, 65  
*Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*  
 (Laborde), 39–40  
*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*  
 (Locke), 3–4, 41  
*Essay on Criticism* (Pope), 7, 154–55  
*Essay towards a Rational System of Music*  
 (Holden), 202–3  
 euharmonic organ (Henry Liston)  
 introduction to, 9, 201–5  
 James Bryce and, 204–14  
 missionary education and, 209–14  
 nature versus culture, 201–5  
 reactions to, 205–8  
 shift and displacement of, 214–18  
 space and time modernity, 210  
*śrutis* scale and, 215–16  
 Timothy Mitchell and, 210, 212–14, 215  
 Euler, Leonhard, 211  
*European Magazine*, 65, 67  
 eurythmic soundscape, 123
- Fairy-Land of Science, The* (Buckley), 196  
 'False Start, A' (Doyle), 236  
 Farey, John, Senior, 8–9, 201, 211–12  
 Festin, John, 20–21, 22  
 Fielding, Henry, 28, 31–35, 48, 64–65  
 Fingal's Cave  
 Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond and, 139–41  
 Felix Mendelssohn and, 136, 144–46  
 introduction to, 7, 136–37  
 John MacCulloch and, 148–49

- Fingal's Cave (cont.)  
 Louis-Albert Necker and, 142  
 romantic resonance, 136, 144–49  
 search for, 137–43  
 Walter Scott and, 142–43, 144, 146–47
- Forbes, John, 235
- Franco of Cologne, 212
- Furst, Lilian, 230
- Fussell, Paul, 168–69, 170, 171–72
- Galt, John, 7, 100–1
- Gaskell, Elizabeth, 228–30
- Gay, John, 19, 68
- Gelbart, Matthew, 44–45, 49–50
- generational rhythms, 128–30
- Genesis, book of, 24
- Gentleman's Magazine*, 36
- George, Georgina, 65
- Gibbons, Orlando, 67
- Gilchrist's Guide*, 103–6
- Gilpin, William, 74
- globalization, 106
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 77–80
- Grassini, Josephina, 10–11
- Guy Mannering* (Scott), 90–103
- habit of mind, 33
- Hammond, Paul, 170
- Handel, George Frideric, 21
- Hardy, Robert, 157
- harmonic improvement, 201
- harmony and the euharmonian organ, 211
- Hartley, David, 1–2
- Hebrides, The, or Fingal's Cave* (Mendelssohn), 7
- Helmholtz, Hermann von, 186, 195
- Hemans, Felicia, 6
- Herber, Reginald, 7, 103–6
- Herder, Johann Gottfried, 129
- Hérisson, Julius, 240
- heroic verse, 169
- Herschel, John, 186, 189–90
- Hindustani language, 102–6
- historical acoustemology, 155
- Historical Magazine*, 65, 75–77
- Hogarth, William, 5, 17–38, 48, 60–89, 126
- Holden, John, 202–3
- Holland, Peter, 228
- Hollander, John, 154
- Hudibras* (Butler), 27
- Humboldt, Alexander von, 187–88
- Hume, David, 41–43
- Illif, Maria, 65
- Illustrated Practical Mesmerist, Curative and Scientific, The* (Davey), 233–34
- Imitations of Horace* (Pope), 27, 28–29
- 'Imperfect Sympathies' (Lamb), 34
- Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (Reid), 4
- involuntary actions, 1
- Jackson, Virginia, 164
- Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali, 218
- Johnson, James, 6
- Johnson, Samuel, 7, 49, 162, 165
- Jonson, Ben, 65, 86, 122–23, 138
- Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, The* (Boswell), 49
- Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, A* (Johnson), 49
- Kay, J. P., 235
- Keats, John, 11
- Kempelen, Wolfgang von, 189
- Khare, Ganesh Sakharam, 216
- Kipling, Rudyard, 239–40
- Kirnberger, Johann Philipp, 211
- Kiston, Henry, 208
- Knight, Charles, 128
- Knight of the Burning Pestle, The* (Beaumont), 86
- Knox, Vicesimus, 40
- Kollmann, A. F. C., 203, 204, 212–14
- Laborde, Jean-Benjamin de, 39–40
- Ladies Monthly Museum, The*, 98
- Laennec, René, 9, 224
- Lamb, Charles, 17, 32–35
- Lancet*, 231
- Langan, Celeste, 6
- Laplace, Pierre-Simon, 185
- Laroon, Marcellus, 19
- Leapor, Mary, 120
- Leask, Nigel, 138–39
- Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Smith), 43
- Le Fanu, Sheridan, 238–39
- Lefebvre, Henri, 116
- Lennard, William, 227
- Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (Brewster), 186
- Letters on a Tour through Various Parts of Scotland* (Lettice), 48
- Lettice, John, 48
- Le vampire* (Nodier), 144
- Lichtenberg, Georg Christoph, 17, 32, 48
- listening,  
 decline of, 3–4
- Liston, Henry. *See also* euharmonian organ (Henry Liston)
- Liston, John, 62, 101–2
- Locke, John, 3–4, 41



- Lockhart, Ellen, 184–85, 204  
 Lockwood, Tom, 65  
 Lombroso, Cesare, 241  
*London Evening Post*, 120  
*London Medical Gazette*, 238  
*Lord of the Isles, The* (Scott), 147  
 Louthembourg, Philip James de, 64  
*Lucius Davoren* (Braddon), 232
- Mabey, Richard, 164–65  
 Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 209  
 MacCulloch, John, 148–49  
 Mackay, Charles, 69  
 Marey, Étienne-Jules, 240  
 ‘Marklake Witches’ (Kipling), 239–40  
 Marschner, Heinrich, 144  
 Martin, Meredith, 155  
 Marxism, 3  
 Mayes, Catherine, 40  
 Mayhew, Henry, 128  
 McDowell, Paula, 48  
 McIlvenna, Una, 50–51  
*Mécanique celeste* (Laplace), 185  
*Mechanism of the Heavens* (Somerville), 185  
 mediate auscultation, 226  
 medicine, 41, 224, 225, 226, 231, 236  
 Meisel, Martin, 65, 66  
 Mendelssohn, Felix, 7, 136, 144–46  
 mesmerism, 233–34  
*Metamorphoses* (Ovid), 154  
*Metropolitan Magazine*, 73–74  
 Metropolitan Police Act, 115  
 Miles, Robert, 2–3  
 mind-altering substances, 1  
*Mirror and the Lamp, The* (Abrams), 164  
*Mirror of Literature*, 123  
 Mitchell, Timothy, 205, 210, 212–14, 215  
 mixed automatic actions, 1  
 Moore, Thomas, 6  
*Morning Post*, 121  
 moving and sounds, 106–8  
 muffin-boy’s bell, 115  
 musical exoticism, 39  
 musical instruments. *See also* euharmonic organ (Henry Liston)  
   learning to play, 1  
   Romantic philosophy of nature, 8–9  
   sound from, 9, 186, 188, 193  
 musical recognition, 103–6  
 musical universalism, 44–45  
*musica mensurata*, 212  
 music and noise distinction, 71–74  
 music theory, 8, 216, 218  
 Mylius, Christlob, 32
- Napoleonic Wars, 106, 117  
 Nathan, Isaac, 6  
 national characters, 40, 43  
 national identity, 5  
 national songs, 39–40, 47, 53  
*Natural History of Oxford-Shire* (Plot), 157–58  
*Natural History of Selborne, The* (White), 155, 156–57  
 nature versus art debate, 68–71  
 Necker, Louis-Albert, 142  
 Newman, Steve, 49  
*New Morning Post*, 121  
 news-horn sound  
   affective rhythm of, 120, 123–27  
   complaints against, 123–27  
   as generational rhythm, 128–30  
   introduction to, 115–17  
   loss of, 127–28  
   in metropolis, 120–23  
   pastness of present, 117–20  
 ‘Newspaper, The’ (Crabbe), 123  
 Newtonian theory of gravity, 192–93  
 Nichols, John, 17, 36  
 nitrous oxide (laughing gas), 1, 2  
 Nodier, Charles, 144  
 Nora, Pierre, 6
- Observations on Man* (Hartley), 1  
 ocularcentrism, 2, 4  
*Of National Characters* (Hume), 43  
*Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing* (Hume), 45  
*Of the Standard of Taste* (Hume), 41–42  
*On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* (Somerville), 184, 190–91, 195–96  
*On the Sensation of Tone* (Helmholtz), 195  
 opera, 10, 47, 48, 70, 86, 142, 144, 184  
 opium, 10–11  
*Original Anecdotes of Hogarth and Illustrations of His Plates* (Nichols), 36  
 Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), 34–35, 154, 159
- Paradise Lost* (Milton), 26  
 Parry, John, 6  
*Pastorals* (Virgil), 157, 159  
 Pater, Walter, 5  
 Pennant, Thomas, 137, 156  
*Penny Magazine*, 147–48, 191  
 Pepusch, Johann Christoph, 21  
 Peterfreund, Stuart, 164  
*Philosophical Magazine*, 211–12, 214  
*Philosophical Transactions*, 158  
*Philosophy of Music, The* (Pole), 196  
*Physical Examination of the Chest, The* (Alison), 232  
 Picker, John, 5, 192  
 Plot, Robert, 157–58, 160–61

- Poe, Edgar Allen, 241  
 poetry and poetics  
   accentual syllabic metre, 167–68  
   bird sounds in, 178  
   experience of sound in, 176–78  
   heroic verse, 169  
   lyric expressions of, 163–76  
   in measuring echoes, 156–63  
   of Romanticism, 155  
   ten-syllable line in, 172, 174  
   trissyllabic substitutions, 168–69  
 Pole, William, 196  
 Pope, Alexander, 7, 27, 28–29, 69, 154–55  
 postal networks. *See* news-horn sound  
 post-boys. *See* news-horn sound  
*Practical Education* (Edgeworth), 183  
*Present State of Music in Germany*,  
   *The* (Burney), 47  
 Prince, Mary, 107  
 prosody,  
   in echoes, 160–62  
 Proverbs, book of, 23  
*Punch*, 230–31
- Ramsay, Allan, 49–50  
*Rape of Lucrece* (Shakespeare), 32  
 Ravenscroft, Thomas, 67  
 Reid, Thomas, 4  
 Reiser, Stanley Joel, 226, 234–35  
 representation in images, 210  
 resonance metaphors, 2  
 Ritson, Joseph, 52  
 Robison, John, 8–9  
*Rogue's Life, A* (Collins), 236  
 Romanticism, 155, 191–95  
 Romantic resonance, 136, 144–49  
 Rooker, Edward, 60  
 Rooker, Michael Angelo, 60–62, 67,  
   74–77  
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 39–40, 44–45, 52  
 Roy, Rammohan, 209  
 Royal Philharmonic Society, 204  
 Royal Society of Musicians, 85
- Saint-Fond, Barthélemy Faujas de, 139–41  
 Sala, George Augustus, 21  
 Salter, Henry Hyde, 227–28  
 Sandbury, Paul, 60  
 satire in *The Enraged Musician*, 35  
*Saturday Magazine The*, 191  
 Savart, Félix, 188  
 Say, Samuel, 170  
*Sceptic The* (Hume), 42  
 Schmidt, Leigh Eric, 3–4  
 science of sound, 184–90
- Scotland, 39–59, 100, 139, 144, 145, 207  
   Church of, 201, 205, 209  
 Scott, Walter, 7, 46, 90–103, 142–43, 144, 146–47  
 Scottish Enlightenment, 204  
 Scottish national music  
   history, judgement, and taste, 41–46  
   performance, collection, and history, 46–53  
   sound and, 39–41  
 Sebastiani, Silvia, 43  
 secondarily automatic movements, 1  
*Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the*  
   *Voice, A* (Thomson), 52  
 self-portrait by Hogarth, 36–37  
*Sense and Sensibility* (Austen), 3  
 Shakespeare, William, 25, 32  
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 125–26  
 Sheridan, Thomas, 45, 171  
 Shield, William, 52–53  
 sight, 4  
 S-line in *The Enraged Musician*, 25–26, 30  
 Smith, Adam, 5, 43  
 Smith, Mark M., 154  
 Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 191  
 Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,  
   185  
 Somerville, Mary (née Fairfax)  
   introduction to, 8, 183–84  
   Maria Edgeworth and, 183, 194  
   Newtonian theory of gravity, 192–93  
   popularity of work, 190–91  
   science of sound, 184–90  
   sonorous Romanticism, 191–95  
*Something Concerning Nobody* (1814), 122  
*Song for St Cecilia's Day, A* (Dryden), 24  
 sonic experience of place, 6–7  
 sonic modernity, 191–95  
 sonorous Romanticism, 191–95  
*Sorcerer's Apprentice, The* (Goethe), 77–80  
*Sound and Music* (Taylor), 196  
 sounding shields, 142  
 sounds and soundscapes. *See also* echoes and  
   echoing sounds; news-horn sound;  
   stethoscope  
   arrhythmia in London soundscape, 123–24, 128  
   aural recognition scenes, 99–103, 106–8  
   bird sounds in poetry, 178  
   conveying violence through, 108  
   cultural identity of, 48–49  
   dustman's bell, 115–16  
   eurythmic soundscape, 123  
   experience of sound in poetry, 176–78  
   moving, 106–8  
   muffin-boy's bell, 115  
   from musical instruments, 9, 186, 188, 193  
   of Napoleonic Wars, 106, 117

- science of, 184–90  
 in Scottish national music, 39–41  
 sonic experience of place, 6–7  
 sonic modernity, 191–95  
 unintelligible sounds, 99–103  
 urban soundscape, 7  
 violence through, 108  
 sound studies, 11–12, 64, 136, 155, 177  
*Spectator, The* (Addison), 4  
*śruti* scale, 215–16  
 St Andrew's Presbyterian Church of Calcutta, 9  
 St John's Gospel, 103  
*Steam-Boat, The* (Galt), 100–1  
 Steege, Benjamin, 186  
 Steevens, George, 17, 30, 36  
 Steinberg, Michael P., 146  
 Sterne, Jonathan, 4, 226  
 stethoscope  
   decency and privacy concerns, 227–35  
   Elizabeth Gaskell and, 228–30  
   human frailty and, 235–41  
   introduction to, 9, 224–27  
   mediate auscultation, 226  
   mesmerism and, 233–34  
   Wilkie Collins and, 224–25  
 Stevenson, John Andrew, 6  
 Stewart, Dugald, 43, 50  
 street musicians, 115  
 Swidzinski, Joshua, 159  
  
 Tagore, Sourindro Mohun, 216  
 Taylor, Sedley, 196  
 'Tell-Tale Heart, The' (Poe), 241  
 ten-syllable line in poetry, 172, 174  
 Thackeray, William Makepeace, 231–32  
 Theobald, Lewis, 30  
*Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England*  
   (Fussell), 168–69  
 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' (Coleridge), 11  
 Thomas, Ronald R., 241  
 Thomson, George, 6, 52  
*Three Clerks, The* (Trollope), 232  
 timbre, 6, 9, 12  
 Tour, Charles de la, 188  
 'Treatise on Sound' (Herschel), 186, 189–90  
 Tresch, John, 8  
 trisyllabic substitutions, 168–69  
 Trollope, Anthony, 232  
 Trusler, John, 17, 120–21  
 Tyndell, John, 196  
  
*Uncle Silas* (Le Fanu), 238–39  
 unintelligible sounds, 99–103  
 Unitarian science, 11  
  
 universalism, 39, 45  
*Universal Magazine*, 65  
*Universal Songsters; or Museum  
 of Mirth, The*, 98  
 urban soundscape, 7. *See also* news-horn sound  
 useful knowledge, 192  
*Ut Pictura Poesis, or, The Enraged Musician*  
   (Colman)  
   distinction between music and noise,  
     71–74  
   evocation of Hogarth's image,  
     74–77  
   interpretations, 85–86  
   introduction to, 60–65  
   nature versus art debate, 68–71  
   noises of the street, 77–85  
   overview of, 65–68  
  
 Vanderbank, Moses, 37  
*Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*  
   (Blair), 229  
 Vierordt, Karl, 240  
 violence through sound, 108  
 Virgil, 157, 159  
*Virginians, The* (Thackeray), 231–32  
 visual tropes, 4  
*Vixen* (Braddon), 232  
 voice, cultural origins expressed in, 107  
*Voyage en Angleterre, en Écosse et aux Îles Hébrides*  
   (Saint-Fond), 139–41  
*Voyage en Écosse et aux Îles Hébrides*  
   (Necker), 142  
*Voyage to the Hebrides* (Pennant), 137  
  
 Walpole, Horace, 121  
 wardmotes, 124, 125  
 Watt, James, 8–9  
 Weelkes, Thomas, 67  
 Weiskott, Eric, 168  
 Wheatstone, Charles, 8–9, 188–89  
 Whewell, William, 190  
 White, Gilbert, 7–8, 155, 156–78  
 Whittaker, John, 98  
*Willing to Die* (Le Fanu), 238  
 Willis, Robert, 189  
*Winter's Tale, The* (Shakespeare), 25  
*Woman in White, The* (Collins), 224–25  
 Woodfield, Ian, 47–48  
 Woolf, Virginia, 157  
 Wordsworth, William, 128  
  
 Young, Thomas, 8–9, 188  
  
 Zitin, Abigail, 26

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