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A Revolutionary Image of
Black Womanhood”
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“Female Agency in the
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The Electric Lady: A Revolutionary Image of Black Womanhood

Charley Hausknost

Racism and misogyny have not vanished since the abolition of slavery—they have simply evolved. The dehumanization and “primitive” sexuality that has historically been accorded to the Black female body, as seen in the commonly cited example of Sara Bartmann, is present today in the Black culture industry.¹ Patricia Hill Collins claims the new racism is justified by oppressive “controlling images” of Black women that are created and propagated by popular culture and mass media. These images refer to a number of archetypes that tend to demonize Black women across a variety of social classes and lifestyles. Most of them portray Black women as working-class single mothers (e.g. the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, or the welfare queen). Yet the image Collins claims has “permeated Black culture in entirely new ways” is the contemporary “hoochie.”² The “hoochie” symbolizes sexual deviance and her main purpose is to be a sex object for men. This image is frequently depicted in hip hop videos and often remains unchallenged within Black popular culture by African American men and women alike.³ The display of nameless, naked Black female bodies in hip hop music videos echoes those presented at slave auctions.⁴ Furthermore, the lyrical content of songs like “Baby Got Back” and “Pop That Coochie” perpetuate this fascination with Black women’s “booties” that can be traced back to the Bartmann example.⁵

At the same time, Collins situates the Black culture industry as an available and important site for resisting and challenging racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism.⁶ Hip hop feminism arose as a way to counteract these images, or at least reclaim them as a means of positive empowerment. Women in hip hop have often done this by taking

1. Sara Bartmann was a Black servant who was nakedly displayed in 1810 to show off her genitalia—which was later dissected and preserved in the Musée de l’Homme of Paris until 1976. No such experiments were conducted on male African genitals. This historical example asserts that Black sexual “deviance” has always been accorded to the female body in particular. Noel Siqi Duan, “Policing Beyoncé’s Body: ‘Whose Body Is This Anyway?’” in *The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race and Feminism*, ed. Adrienne M. Trier-Bieniek (New York: Routledge, 2016), 56.

2. Patricia Hill Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 82.

3. Ibid.

4. Patricia Hill Collins, “Get Your Freak On: Sex, Babies, and Images of Black Femininity,” in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128.

5. Ibid., 129.

6. Ibid., 122.

control of their own sexuality, thereby exerting freedom and independence over their own bodies.⁷ Still, whether this serves as an empowering act of resistance or continues to uphold oppressive structures is frequently contested. An example of this debate is found in Noel Siqi Duan’s chapter “Policing Beyoncé’s Body: Whose Body Is This Anyway,” which argues against bell hooks’ accusations that Beyoncé is anti-feminist and colludes with white, capitalist patriarchy. While both scholars make compelling arguments, Robin James identifies that there is, in fact, a paradox embedded in such forms of resistance, which explains the reason for these debates. Using Beyoncé’s “Video Phone” as an example, James states that, unlike the hip hop songs mentioned above, Beyoncé consciously performs the stereotypical “hoochie” controlling image and uses her scantily-clad, dancing body to *invite* the male gaze.⁸ James describes this as an act that transforms “damage” into empowered female agency.⁹ She identifies that this resilience narrative is dependent on publicly *overcoming* damage caused by white patriarchal systems of oppression, but in reality, does nothing to change said systems.

In this essay, I propose there is an alternative method of resistance that is capable of confronting the controlling images produced by the Black culture industry without simultaneously reinforcing them. Janelle Monáe is a leading figure in this rebellion. She challenges controlling images by celebrating collectivity and imagining new spaces for female bodies that defy gendered expectations. This paper, divided in two parts, begins by explaining what makes collective identity politics important and how they are inextricably linked to movement and embodied musical practices. The second part presents an analysis of Monáe’s emotion picture (music video) “Electric Lady” and describes how these politics and practices manifest themselves through her use of lyric, large- and small-scale narratives, and, most of all, dance.

Part I: Why Collectivism is Important

In her book, *Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism and Feminism*, Patricia Hill Collins characterizes nationalism and feminism as “two powerful ideologies that have catalyzed major social movements” and identifies them as the most effective ideologies in engaging politically active Black youth.¹⁰ Interestingly, she notes that these ideologies are at odds when it comes to the social relations they inspire. Black Nationalism is group-based and rooted in collective identity, where Western feminism draws on individual rights and freedoms and is linked to personal identity politics. The contradictory nature of these ideologies makes it difficult to align with both at the same time. This tension may also explain why Black women (and other racial minorities) have

7. Ibid., 127.

8. Robin James, “Chapter Three: Look I Overcame!” in *Resilience & Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), 109.

9. Ibid., 110.

10. Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 13.

not felt included by white feminism, since individual identity politics do little to help the larger Black community to which they also belong. Collins points out that while individual Black women such as Condoleezza Rice, Oprah Winfrey, and Winnie Mandela have earned accolades through their incredible accomplishments, “Black women as a collectivity remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy.”¹¹ The intersectional experience of Black womanhood justifies the need for a focus on community and collectivity in Black women’s activism.

Monáe’s activism works similarly; she draws on collective identity politics and Black joy by depicting one important product of African American shared cultural experience: social dance. In her book, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double Dutch to Hip Hop*, Kyra Gaunt explores how young Black girls are taught to perform gender and ethnicity through the games they play in the schoolyard, such as hand games, chants, stepping, or double-dutch. From a young age, these games lay the foundation for embodying a musical Blackness. Gaunt claims that “musical Blackness is a culturally transmitted set of practices, communications, and traditions, where embodied language and orality (kinetic orality) play a significant role in the social construction and knowledge of being African American in a sphere of culture and identifications that is dominated by music.”¹² In other words, “Black rhythm,” so to speak, is not biologically inherited but rather a learned social paradigm that constitutes an important part of African American identity. In the book’s second chapter, Gaunt shares a personal anecdote featuring an informal conversation she had in graduate school that contextualizes the significance of this research. A Black colleague voiced an observation that rhythm must not be genetic, because his youngest daughter, apparently, had none—to which the professor replied, “yes, but the exception *proves* the rule.”¹³ Gaunt attests to this being an empowering conversation because it marked the first time she heard an academic argue in support of a cultural rule that determines an “ethnic behavior of rhythm and dancing” does, in fact, exist.¹⁴ Typically, such a statement was undermined in the “anti-essentialist climate of U.S. academic discourse [during] the early 1990s,” but the reality is, these rhythmic sensibilities, while learned, are an important part of being able to self-identify with a unifying trans-diasporic Black culture.¹⁵ Gaunt quotes Cornel West who—in addition to coining the term “kinetic orality”—describes how these subliminal forms of communication are what allow a person to “assert [their] somebodiness in a society in which [their] body has no [perceptible] public worth, only economic value as a labouring mechanism.”¹⁶ The focus on dance in Monáe’s video is thus a joyful celebration of cultural belonging as well as a way to combat the “controlling images”

11. Hill Collins, 23.

12. Kyra Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 38.

13. *Ibid.*, 44.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 45.

16. *Ibid.*, 5.

that commodify Black women’s bodies in the media or view them solely as working-class laborers.

Part II: Empowered Racial and Gendered Identities in Monáe’s Electric Lady

Singing Her Praises

The lyrics of Janelle Monáe’s “Electric Lady” challenge the one-dimensional nature of individual controlling images by celebrating women. The way this is done is relatively straightforward.¹⁷ The first verse defines women—“*electric ladies*,” so to speak—as beautiful, self-assured forces of nature, ready to shake up the world. The bridge references the idiom of the “glass ceiling,” recognizing the inequality that keeps women (and especially women of colour) from the success they deserve, and then continues with a celebration of the “illuminating,” “magnetic,” “sophisti[cated],” “funky” and captivating qualities of a truly *electric* lady. The lyric “she can fly you straight to the moon or to the ghettos / wearing tennis shoes or in flats or in stilettos” emphasizes that there is not one given way to *be* a woman, as all are equally deserving of love and respect.

Large- and Small-scale narratives: Cindi Mayweather the Archandroid

Monáe’s “Electric Lady” emotion picture operates on two narrative levels simultaneously. On a small-scale it is a stand-alone music video, but on a large-scale it presents just one narrative moment within Monáe’s concept-oeuvres. The local narrative in the “Electric Lady” emotion picture depicts an all-Black sorority having a party, making Black joy and sisterhood the central themes of the video. The “Electro-Phi-Beta” logo is worn with pride as a symbol of group belonging and reinforces the importance of collective identity. Secondly, Monáe challenges the controlling images that claim African American women are “bad” mothers. At the beginning of the emotion picture, before the music begins, Monáe is shown at home ironing her shirt for the party. During this time, she has a brief but endearing interaction with her mother, who is making cookies in the kitchen. Wearing what appears to be a work uniform—a black vest with a nametag, paired with a white blouse—one could assume she is a single, working-class mother. In their short conversation, Monáe teases her mother, tells her she loves her and then rushes off to her party. This paints a more complete picture of Black motherhood and does not comply with the controlling images (such as the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare

17. Full lyrics listed at the end of this essay: “Electric Lady: Janelle Monáe,” *Genius*, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://genius.com/Janelle-Monae-electric-lady-lyrics>.

mother, or the welfare queen) that claim Black mothers ultimately fail their children or leech off of society.¹⁸

While the “Electric Lady” emotion picture presents its own self-contained narrative, it is better understood as a part of Monáe’s larger Afrofuturist universe. “Electric Lady” is the title track of Monáe’s second full length studio album, which contains suites IV and V of the Metropolis Saga. This large-scale narrative begins with Monáe’s debut EP, *Metropolis: The Chase Suite*, released in 2008. It introduces the story of Monáe’s alter ego, Cindi Mayweather, an android who has fallen in love with a human and is now on the run from Droid Control as she tries to escape the orders for her disassembly. Throughout suites II-V—spanning studio albums *The ArchAndroid* (2010) and *The Electric Lady* (2013)—Cindi becomes a messianic figure who has come to liberate the androids of Metropolis.

Many scholars have theorized the revolutionary possibilities that this Afrofuturist narrative offers its viewers and listeners. Carrie Walker writes that “through her cyborg persona, Monáe disrupts the stereotypes imposed upon Black female performers.”¹⁹ In the emotion picture “Many Moons,” Monáe depicts an android auction by presenting it as a twenty-first-century fashion show.²⁰ This auctioning of Black female bodies directly references slave history; yet, using the image of a fashion show, the show holds the culture industry accountable for the present-day commodification of women’s bodies. In this sense, Monáe actively resists the “hoochie” image of Black women without simultaneously maintaining it, as seen in the discussion of Beyoncé above. Monáe uses this narrative to challenge the social structures that allow such commodification to be profitable in the first place. By representing our first encounter with Cindi as an auction, Monáe makes clear what the android body is meant to symbolize across the rest of the saga—a reflection of present-day dominance over Black bodies, be it racial, economic, or political. Additionally, the android body represents liminality.²¹ Somewhere between human and machine, it represents intersecting identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Cindi Mayweather wears a black and white tuxedo, rendering her more androgynous than explicitly feminine. What is more, this black and white costuming is repeated across her entire video output for the Metropolis Saga and is frequently referred to as her “uniform.” This allusion to a uniform has specific class associations. Considering the narrative context and choice of costuming, it is clear Monáe uses her android persona to challenge white-capitalist patriarchy, and to create liminal spaces for various identities to converge, allowing for a more multi-dimensional representation of Black womanhood.

Cindi Mayweather’s saga persists throughout Monáe’s individual emotion

18. Patricia Hill Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” 69-96.

19. Carrie Walker, “Disassembling the ‘Matrix of Domination’: Janelle Monáe’s Transformative Vision,” in *In Media Res: Race, Identity, and Pop Culture in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. James Braxton Peterson (Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 221-222.

20. This emotion picture is the first in Monáe’s Metropolis Saga and serves as an introduction to the character Cindi Mayweather and her universe.

21. Walker, “Disassembling the ‘Matrix of Domination,” 215.

pictures. It is understood that the Electro-Phi-Beta sorority party takes place in the city of Metropolis through the presence of futuristic technologies, with androids being the most important among them. The first example of futuristic technology occurs approximately thirty seconds into the video. Cindi takes a photo of her friends using her watch, which immediately communicates with her cell phone. This technology would have been foreign to viewers of Monáe’s video (keeping in mind that smartwatches today are still not made with built in cameras, and the first Apple Watch came out a year after this video’s release). A second example is the large floppy-disc-esque or video-game-chip-like album that Monáe connects to her car to play music. We are to assume this disc is technology of the future, yet it is oddly reminiscent of our technology from the past. This is another example of how Monáe’s universe represents liminality, situated between our past and future.

Monáe makes distinct costuming choices in the “Electric Lady” emotion picture to remind us that this party is specifically for androids. At 4:03, a group of Black women run in to perform a choreographed dance. They are identified as androids through their appearance. They enter with lightsaber-esque glowing swords which immediately associates them with popular science fiction, allowing the viewer to understand their presence as somehow futuristic. Secondly, their costumes allude to the android’s “othered” position in society. The dancers wear black leggings, black tank tops with white varsity numbers, and large visors that hide their faces. Their appearance renders them virtually indistinguishable from one another save for the white numbers on their chests. Cleverly, this varsity-athletic style does not look out of place in a sorority party setting, but given their nameless, faceless bodies, the numbers can be likened to serial numbers assigned to androids. I suggest Monáe’s inclusion of these references in her large-scale narrative within “Electric Lady” is more than a mere effort at aesthetic coherence. Rather, I argue that Monáe uses this overarching narrative to remind us that the resistance movement is ever-present, even in moments of celebration. This party represents just one of many instances of Black joy contained within an ongoing struggle for social justice, equality, and liberation.

Embodying a Musical Blackness

Takiyah Nur Amin writes that “dances are sites for bodily enactments of pleasure, agency, and resistance, and consider[s] that moving one’s body in the manner of one’s choosing is perhaps as revolutionary an act as many others.”²² This quote aptly summarizes the use of dance in Monáe’s “Electric Lady.” As mentioned above, the video depicts Mayweather and her friends having fun at a sorority party. This setting is an interesting choice considering Olly Wilson’s observation that *musical movement* is used

22. Takiyah Nur Amin, “The Booty Don’t Lie: Pleasure, Agency and Resistance in Black Popular Dance,” in *Are You Entertained?: Black Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. S.C. Drake and D.K. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 240.

to mark “distinct social occasions” including “protests or parties.”²³ I suggest that this party is also a protest, as Monáe uses dance to embody a collective Black identity that challenges objectifying controlling images of Black women.

The central role dance plays in the video is immediately apparent when fraternity boys are pictured carrying the coffee table away to free up a dance floor (1:51-1:54). This action alone reflects the importance of embodied musical movement within African American social settings, which lead to constructions of collective identity. Monáe exemplifies this collectivity through moments of synchronized dance featured in the video. On a symbolic level, synchronicity can be understood as a visual representation of unity; but more importantly, I argue that it directly relates to Gaunt’s theory that Black rhythm is a learned social paradigm. I specifically label these moments as “synchronized” rather than “choreographed” dance because Monáe presents them as unrehearsed. Evidence of spontaneity is shown through the fact that the group dance begins with two people and continues to grow in numbers as the video progresses (beginning at 1:54).²⁴ This is significant because it implies that anyone who can easily pick up the dance is welcome as part of the collective, thereby actively demonstrating the processes that Gaunt observed in schoolyard games. Monáe even goes as far as to depict this process from start to finish. At 2:00, Cindi is shown observing the dance; by 2:09, she is pictured timidly participating from the sidelines; and at 2:14, a male friend extends his hand and *invites her* to participate in the center of this community of dancers. This invitation represents the importance that “instruction” plays in learning how to perform musical Blackness—whether it is learned in the schoolyard or other social settings. It also reinforces the idea that musical embodiment (or kinetic orality) *is* a language with the ability to transmit meaning between bodies who are fluent in it.

Embodying Gendered Identities

As well as promoting collectivity, these synchronized dances are equally a site for resisting objectification by eluding the male gaze. Any kind of “gazing” necessarily requires that someone is actively or intensely looking at something else; there is a clear relationship between the observer and the observed. In Monáe’s “Electric Lady,” the distinction between observer and observed is blurred. Most notably, the dancers do not perform for anyone in particular, but rather just for the enjoyment of the dance. Meanwhile, those watching the group dances at the party are still *active participants*, as they groove along to the music and cheer on their peers. The act of participating (even from the sidelines) uplifts rather than objectifies the dancers, and eludes the concept of “gazing” entirely. Similarly, “gazing” is avoided by the way the video’s viewers are made to feel like party attendees through the way Monáe addresses the camera. When I

watch this video, I can’t help but feel like there are moments where Monáe is inviting *me* to dance.²⁵ There is an ease and comfort in her eye-contact that is friendly, inviting, and even a little flirtatious—making me feel like part of her inner circle! Not only does this encourage a sense of community and belonging between Monáe and her viewers, but it removes the idea of a non-participatory audience entirely.

The group dances also resist objectification by placing Black men and women on an equal playing field. Both men and women participate in the synchronized dances—together *and* in separate groups—which places them as equals rather than allowing one gender to dominate the other. In addition, the relationship between dancing male and female bodies is never possessive. In fact, Black female bodies are never sexualized or objectified in Monáe’s works as is typical of hip hop music videos; any hip gyrating or booty poppin’ is purely done for the pleasure derived from the dance.

Monáe liberates the female body from expected gendered performances by participating in dances that are coded as masculine. Groups of men are shown, from 2:26-2:50, performing stereotypically masculine (aggressive, strong, and athletic) dance moves. Unlike the group dancing mentioned above, which included men and women, this choreography features only male bodies. However, Monáe aligns herself with this style of dancing from 3:00-3:12. Here, she is located in the center of a circle of these men and joins in their dance. Her central position (as well as still being the only female to perform this dance) marks her individual agency in challenging gendered performance within African American musical culture. This is not new for Monáe, as she often performs dances that are coded as Black *and* male. For example, she borrows the footwork of James Brown and the Michael Jackson ‘moonwalk’ in “Many Moons.”²⁶

There is one instance during this party where dancing is explicitly choreographed. Here, I refer to the dance performed by the group of Black women with visors and lightsabers who represent an android presence. Their movements borrow from typical girls’ step dance routines, which, as Gaunt argues, are often learned growing up. More significantly, these routines have a long tradition of being staged by African American sororities—such as Delta Sigma Theta at Howard University.²⁷ The Electro-Phi-Beta party is, thus, an obvious location for such a performance. By including this moment, Monáe pays homage to this highly celebrated cultural event that necessarily involves embodying a “kinetic orality” that is both Black and explicitly feminine. It is also important to note that rather than conforming with the tradition that uses dance to

23. Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play*, 8.

24. It is worth noting that this begins *immediately* after the table is removed (1:51-1:54). Janelle Monáe, “Janelle Monáe: Electric Lady [Official Video],” YouTube, July 20, 2014, Video, 6:12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPFgBCUBMYk>.

25. This type of direct eye-contact begins at 1:00 and is interspersed with Monáe’s other interactions with people at the party. Janelle Monáe, “Janelle Monáe: Electric Lady [Official Video],” YouTube, July 20, 2014, Video, 6:12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPFgBCUBMYk>.

26. This example is not an isolated incident. Monáe can be found borrowing dance moves from Black male pop icons throughout her works—from *Metropolis* to *Dirty Computer*.

27. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Alpha Nu Chapter, “Alpha Nu – BGC Yard Show Fall 2018,” YouTube, September 20, 2018, Video, 12:04. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4jL2mW5jUECaP3s2SGVxWw/videos>.

sexualize Black women in music videos, Monáe displays women who are fully clothed and dance to express their own joy and celebrate their identities.

Conclusion

At its core, Monáe’s music explores themes of freedom, love, and inclusion. It follows, then, that dance is an obvious tool for spreading her message, as the act of “moving one’s body in the manner of one’s choosing” is a literal definition of bodily freedom.²⁸ We live in a society where Black and female bodies are constantly policed, commodified, and controlled through media and legislation alike. That said, simply “moving one’s body” for personal pleasure and enjoyment is a powerful and liberating act. Additionally, in making dance her main mode of resistance, Monáe uses a language that is immediately recognizable by the community she aims to empower. It reinforces a sense of collective identity through kinetic orality and provides an opportunity for individual and gendered expression. Though depicting a sorority party may appear frivolous in nature, Monáe’s “Electric Lady” presents an important site for celebrating Black joy and sisterhood. In a culture industry full of “mammies,” “matriarchs,” and “hoochies,” Monáe’s works create spaces in which African American women can see themselves represented with agency, integrity, and grace as well as sexuality, and not *only* the latter. Through artistry and imagination, Monáe built a futuristic universe where just one rebellious android—whose capital crime was loving with no bounds—started a revolution, and, in telling her story, created a new image for Black women: The Electric Lady.

28. Amin, “The Booty Don’t Lie,” 240.

Lyrics to “Electric Lady”

[Verse 1]

Ooh, you shock it, shake it, baby
Electric lady, you’re a star
You got a classic kind of crazy
But you know just who you are
You got the look the Gods agree they wanna see
All the birds and the bees
Dancing with the freaks in the trees
And watch the water turn to wine
Out in space and out your mind
Ooh, shock me one good time

[Hook]

Electric Lady, get way down
Cause tonight we gon’ do what we want to
Electric Lady, get way down
Cause tonight we gon’ do what we want to
Lady (baby)
Electric Lady

[Verse 2]

Yeah, I’ll reprogram your mind, come on, get in
My spaceship leaves at 10
I’m where I wanna be, just you and me
Baby, talking on the side, as the world spins around
Can you feel your spine unwind?
And watch the water turn to wine
Ooh, shock it one good time

[Hook]

Electric Lady, get way down
Cause tonight we gon’ do what we want to
Electric Lady, get way down
Cause tonight we gon’ do what we want to

[Bridge]

Gloss on her lips
Glass on the ceiling
All the girls showing love
While the boys be catching feelings

Once you see her face, her eyes, you'll remember
 And she'll have you falling harder than a Sunday in September
 Whether in Savannah, K-Kansas or in Atlanta
 She'll walk in any room, have you raising up your antennas
 She can fly you straight to the moon or to the ghettos
 Wearing tennis shoes or in flats or in stilettos
 Illuminating all that she touches, eye on the sparrow
 A modern day Joan of her Arc or Mia Farrow
 Classy, sassy, put you in a razzle-dazzly
 Her magnetic energy will have you coming home like Lassie
 Singing, "Ooh, shock it, break it, baby"
 Electro-, sophisti-, funky, lady
 We the kind of girls who ain't afraid to get down
 Electric ladies go on and scream out loud

[Hook]

Electric Lady, get way down
 Cause tonight we gon' do what we want to
 Electric Lady, get way down
 Cause tonight we gon' do what we want to

[Outro]

Ooh, shock it, break it, baby
 Electric Lady, Electric Lady

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Female Agency in the *Chanson de Mal Mariée* Genre

Mary Shannon

Despite the large quantity of scholarship on the musical developments of medieval Paris, such accounts rarely privilege questions of gender in their approaches. Often, these accounts treat the masculine as the normal, unmarked form, whether in the case of authorship, subject, or speaker in a text or piece of music. This markedness principle seems to insinuate a lack of in-depth representation of women in medieval music history. The achievements of women and minorities during this time are often difficult to determine due to the pervasiveness of male composers and exclusionary practices within musical institutions. Women were not as accepted in the public sphere of music, which now manifests itself in the high concentration of anonymous and male-attributed works from the time. Descriptions of "women's contributions to the past" tend to gravitate their focus toward Hildegard of Bingen as the sole representative of women in music during the Middle Ages.¹ However, her presence in this realm of study serves more to show diversity in the genre than to provide an all-encompassing representation. How, then, do we study the representation of female musicians in medieval Paris, and why do we seek to do so? Feminist scholarship attempts to answer these questions in the context of the growing knowledge of medieval history, considering the roles and agency of women, shaped simultaneously within and apart from the underlying patriarchal mindset. In this paper, I will examine the case of female representation in the *chanson de mal mariée* genre of the *chanson de femme*. Through analyzing these various theories and musical works in the genre, I hope to demonstrate that although the representation of women in the *mal mariée* genre can give a sense of sexual agency and independence to the female speaker, this representation often varies in its application and effectiveness.

Female Representation and Authorship

Some existing studies of female representation within medieval Paris and its musical works look at the case of authorship. Multiple studies from the late twentieth century debate the topic of female authorship, questioning whether or not female poets and composers existed during this time. These musicologists and critics often had differing, and frequently conflicting, opinions and views on the attributions of medieval lyric

1. Cynthia J. Cyrus and Olivia Carter Mather, "Rereading Absence: Women in Medieval and Renaissance Music," *College Music Symposium* 38 (1998): 102.

poetry and songs. This debate came to the forefront largely as a reaction to a 1979 article by Pierre Bec, in which he discusses his claim that women trouvères did not compose *any* of the songs from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Northern France. Bec goes on to distinguish between female authorship and female subject, claiming that although the latter exists, the former does not.² This is a very bold claim; in fact, many new findings since 1979 disprove Bec's theory. Although Bec's work became a foundation for many pieces of medieval scholarship, some musicologists began to question the validity of his claims. In a review of Bec's article, Joan Tasker Grimbert posits that Bec's arguments "conceal a bias that has unfairly oriented how scholars assess the contribution of women to medieval poetry."³ Grimbert's analysis subsequently sparked a discussion and search into female musical and literary authorship in medieval Paris.

One such rebuttal to Bec's claim comes from Madeleine Tyssens, who studied the case of the female trouvère. Tyssens discussed the lack of recognition of the female author in Bec's study. She cites multiple instances of manuscripts that point to female authors, rather than limiting the representation of women to only female speakers within the texts.⁴ This directly contradicts Bec's study and demonstrates a broader view of the pervasiveness of female representation in medieval Paris, despite the previous debates. In fact, now, "most critics, even those who believe that the *chansons de femme* were all composed by men, concede that these songs were originally inspired by more archaic forms composed by women."⁵ Thus, the ongoing debate sparked discourse in the discipline that furthered the study of female representation in the case of authorship. This paper agrees with the argument of Tyssens and subsequent musicologists that supports the existence of female composers and poets during this time period.

However, the inclusion of this debate here mainly serves to further highlight the distinction between female authorship and purely female representation within medieval works. Many works that have a female speaker are anonymously written, so either female or male poets and composers could have written them. We cannot exclude the possibility of those of any gender writing in this genre, or even a combination of people, in some cases. Although there is debate on this topic, and the case of the gender of the authorship is important, this project makes the distinction between "female authors" and "female representation through taking on the female voice." Rather than making a claim on the authorship of the works, my project views the female perspective in the works as examples of the representation of women at the time. Even so, the discussion of authorship versus speaker is nuanced and often interconnected. The gender of the author

is always a factor in the creation of the female representation, so although the two concepts differ, they continue to build on one another.

Chanson de femme and the *Mal Mariée* Genre

One such type of lyric poetry and song that makes use of the female subject as the speaker is the *chanson de femme* (woman's song). This term, originally coined by nineteenth-century male scholars, does not designate a genre in the poetic or musical sense; rather, it labels songs from a number of genres that all deal with similar narrative topics. In the various genres of the *chanson de femme*, the songs all present the same basic format and plot: "that of a loving woman separated from the man she loves."⁶ The theme of love permeates throughout this lyric type and manifests itself in the unique "woman's song" practice and feminine perspective. Although these songs do not necessarily have female authorship, there is still reason to suspect that women listened and contributed to this lyric type.⁷ The existence of the *chanson de femme* provides an interesting representation of love and the female voice through either a female or a male authorial perspective. These representations are further complicated by an ongoing debate on the implications of the coinage of *chanson de femme* by nineteenth-century male scholars. This lyric type further serves to present the female figure in an elevated status in the narrative context.

Works from multiple formal genres have been categorized as *chansons de femme*. Doss-Quinby et al. grouped songs from different genres under the label *chanson de femme*, which include:

- grans chans* (courtly love song)
- jeu-parti* or *tenson* (debate poem)
- plainte* (death-lament)
- aube* (dawn song)
- chanson de croisade* (crusade lyric)
- chanson de mal mariée* (unhappy wife's lament)
- chanson de nonne* (nun's lament)
- chanson pieuse* (devotional song)⁸

Many of these genres present themselves in both the *chanson de femme* lyric type and in other lyric types with male speakers. The most common themes of these genres are those of love and lament, which relate back to the trend of *chanson de femme* in relation to a woman separated from the man she loves. For the purposes of this paper, I am focusing on the *chanson de mal mariée* (unhappy wife's lament) genre. However, the additional

2. Pierre Bec, "'Trobairitz' et chansons de femme: Contribution à la connaissance du lyrisme féminin au moyen âge," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 22 (1979): 235-236.

3. Joan Tasker Grimbert, "Diminishing the *Trobairitz*, Excluding the Women Trouvères," *Tenso* 14, no. 1 (1999): 23.

4. Madeleine Tyssens, "Voix de femmes dans la lyrique d'oïl," in *Femmes, mariages-lignages, XII^e-XIV^e siècles: Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1992), 377.

5. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Wendy Pfeffer, and Elizabeth Aubrey, *Songs of the Women Trouvères* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 5.

6. Doss-Quinby, 6-7.

7. *Ibid.*, 11.

8. *Ibid.*, 34.

aforementioned genres are noteworthy in order to provide context for the lyric type as a whole.

The common theme of “laments” throughout the genres of *chanson de femme* provides a more active role for the female speaker expressing her discontent. The *chanson de femme* is additionally defined as a “large body of lyrics that give voice to women and explore the whole spectrum of feelings and behavior said to be characteristic of them.”⁹ By depicting this discontent and unhappiness in the genres of *plainte*, *chanson de mal mariée*, and *chanson de nonne*, the author, regardless of gender, grants the female speaker control over the expression of her own emotions. In this regard, the *femme*, in discussing love and lament, “must be active to leave that valorized space of passivity open for [the man].”¹⁰ The very nature of the female speaker grounds itself in the inherent power of the woman to control the conversation, rather than giving the conversational floor to the male love interest. This dichotomy between active and passive representations of women seems to directly contrast the stereotypical *pastourelle*, which usually presents the female as the object of admiration by a male speaker.

However, this representation of activity presents a contradiction in the overall female representation of the *chanson de femme* lyric type. While these songs can depict a woman with agency, in the case of her speaking, this also opens her up to the criticisms and words of others, including introducing the possibility of a male author. Thus, in the *chanson de femme*, “her entry into [the] narrative is ambiguous because, while it embodies her, making her available to the gaze and accessible to sexual and other attentions, it also makes her active.”¹¹ The nature of activity in the narrative creates a contradiction that serves as a double standard: either to build up the conversational agency of the female speaker or to tear her down for acting against societal conventions. The reader or listener is then left to distinguish the balance between positive and negative representations of women in this lyric type, on the basis of this fundamental contradiction. This representation also varies between the genres of the *chanson de femme*, which present vastly different narrative structures, plots, and ideas for the female speaker and perspective.

Returning now to the *chanson de mal mariée*, I proceed to examine the agency of the female speaker in this “unhappy wife’s lament.” Although there are multiple variations of this genre, its most basic form features a woman who “complains that her father married her to a hateful husband against her will.”¹² The woman frequently discusses her desire to leave the marriage on account of being unhappy with its conditions. *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* describes this genre as one where “a young, occasionally coquettish wife complains that against her will she has married an

old, impotent, yet cruel and jealous boor but desires a real or imaginary young lover.”¹³ In the translations and texts of many of these *chanson de mal mariée*, the word “vilain,” here translated as “boor,” is extremely prevalent. This purposeful slandering of the husband typifies the genre, focusing on the woman’s own desire for happiness outside the confines of the marriage. The typical socioeconomic reasoning for many of these forced marriages reflects concerns for property and inheritance, in addition to “the social reality of customary male dominance.”¹⁴ Thus, the contradiction between activity and passivity presents itself in this genre through the juxtaposition of the female speaker actively complaining about the realities of her life and society, while still having to remain passive to these realities at the same time.

The *chanson de mal mariée* provides a unique outlook into the views and representations of women at the time in terms of agency and the duality of active versus passive movements. As mentioned, the same contradiction exists in this genre that permeates through the *chanson de femme* as a whole. However, the agency in this genre seems to be more of a sexual agency than just an agency of speech. The texts of these songs portray a confident woman, strong in her convictions and opinions against her husband and towards her lover.¹⁵ While this depicts the conversation of love for the female speaker, the undertones highlight her sexuality in combination with her femininity to portray a sort of “new age woman” who is capable of expressing her own discontent. Even the structure of the narrative reflects this increase in agency. The texts are in monologue form, which “gives the *femme* room to move because there is no one to cut her off.”¹⁶ The conversational independence mirrors the increase in the independence of the speaker. However, this newfound agency must be considered in conjunction with the underlying contradiction of the genre and lyric type. Does the musical genre of the *mal mariée* serve to give the female figure sexual agency and independence, or does this representation present the female figure as passive and in a negative light? Multiple theories and musical works in the *mal mariée* genre can be examined in order to explore this query. Through this analysis, I hope to show that the *mal mariée* genre provides the female voice with a sense of sexual agency and independence, though the application and effectiveness of this representation is often varied.

The question of agency and representation in the *mal mariée* genre lends itself to multiple interpretations, on the basis of both historical and sociocultural ideas. Within this genre, we see that the female speaker is presented simultaneously as both a positive and negative subject.¹⁷ In this sense, a positive subject refers to one who possesses self-prescribed agency, while a negative subject possesses significantly less or none of this agency. One such theory for the origin of the *mal mariée*, which presents a more nega-

9. Doss-Quinby, 6.

10. Helen Dell, “Chronotopes of Desire I: Case-Study of a Mal mariée: feminine Space-Times,” in *Desire by Gender and Genre in Trouvère Song* (Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 119.

11. Ibid.

12. “Mal Mariée,” *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 842.

13. Peter France, *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 150.

14. France, 150.

15. Dell, 116.

16. Dell, 120.

17. Sylvia Huot, “The Amorous Maiden,” in *Allegorical Play in the Old French Motet: The Sacred and the Profane in Thirteenth-Century Polyphony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 106.

tive interpretation, outlines the idea that the *chanson de femme* was a genre comprised of songs created by men to portray a different persona of women in music focused around sexual desire.¹⁸ In this theory, the male gaze exploits the sexuality and the sexual desire of the female subject, thus taking agency away from the female speaker. This theory depicts the negative end of the contradiction, showing how the male author uses the sexual agency of the female subject for purposes other than empowerment and direct activity. In this case, the gender of the author provides important context for the interpretation of the text and the music, due to the direct exploitation and lack of feminist ideals.

Another theory for the origin of the *chanson de mal mariée* is that they were originally songs that women wrote before music and texts were written down. Theories from scholars like Alfred Jeanroy suggest that the *mal mariée*, and some other genres within the *chanson de femme*, may be “pseudo-popular adaptations of lost, orally transmitted folk-songs originating in May festivals.”¹⁹ This theory can partly explain the large gap in the research and information concerning the authorship of these poems and works. These preliterate folk-songs, composed by women, discuss a pagan celebration centered around the goddess Venus, in which the May Queen leads the other women in a dance and the women in the festival participate in a traditional role reversal, giving them initiative to love.²⁰ This depiction of the May festivals and *carole* dances appears in multiple lyric types and genres throughout medieval Paris. However, the combination of the theory of female authorship of these folk-songs and the female voice in the *chanson de femme* and *chanson de mal mariée* presents this genre as representative of an increased activity for the female subject. This theory grants the woman in the songs more sexual agency due to her direct choice, initiative, and inherent role reversal in the festival.

A third theory offers a contrasting idea that considers a differing motive for the activity of the female representation in the *chanson de mal mariée*. Sylvia Huot outlines the idea that “the love that motivates a resistance to marriage may be either adulterous or virginal, and certain antimarital motets exploit this dichotomy.”²¹ So far, I have discussed the agency granted to women in the *mal mariée* genre on the basis of sexual freedom in their language, which relates to the “adulterous” resistance to marriage. However, Huot and other scholars also theorize that the *mal mariée* may be an allegory for women wanting the love of Christ.²² This interpretation seemingly takes sexuality out of the analysis of the works, instead focusing on the pious, virtuosic undertones of the words in relation to becoming closer to Christian salvation. While this claim is noteworthy, especially in its connection to the religious Latin tenor lines in many motets, its removal of sexuality presents a contrastive passive agency, the implications of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

18. Doss-Quinby, 12.

19. Alfred Jeanroy, *Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, 4th ed. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1965), 150.

20. Doss-Quinby, 12-13.

21. Huot, 107.

22. Judith A. Peraino, *Giving Voice to Love: Song and Self-Expression from the Troubadours to Guillaume de Machaut* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 258.

While it is helpful to consider the theories for the representation of female sexual agency in the music of medieval Paris, it is also critical to examine the application of these ideas to the *chanson de mal mariée* works. Below, I outline the female representation presented in two *mal mariée* pieces: one rondeau and one motet. Through these analyses, I hope to gain and present a more thorough perspective on the topic of female agency in the *chanson de mal mariée* genre of the *chanson de femme*.

Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous anuit

*Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous anuit,
Demain m'arés et mes amis anuit.
Je vous deffenc k'un seul mot n'en parlés.
— Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous mouvés. —
La nuis est courte, aparmains me rarés,
Quant mes amis ara fait sen deduit.
Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous anuit,
Demain m'arés et mes amis anuit.*

*Be patient, husband, and may it not irk you,
Tomorrow you will have me and my lover will tonight.
I forbid you to speak one word of it.
— Be patient, husband, and do not move. —
The night is short, soon you will have me again,
When my lover has had his pleasure.
Be patient, husband, and may it not irk you,
Tomorrow you will have me and my lover will tonight.*²³

The piece *Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous anuit* is a rondeau given the typical structure of ABaAabAB, where the uppercase letters signify repeated text and music together while the lowercase letters signify only repeated music with new words.²⁴ I show the rondeau structure by the use of italics for the repeated refrain lines. Generally in the text, and in text across the *mal mariée* genre, there is a theme of adultery that persists. This theme can depict either female sexual agency or the erotic desire from the perspective of a male lover, deriving from the first two theories of female agency representations. However, in this rondeau text, Huot remarks that the female speaker also objectifies herself, which “seems to be for her a measure of her importance, rather than her ultimate unimportance.”²⁵ Indeed, the speaker seems to objectify herself notably in the repeated ‘AB’ lines of the text (lines 1-2, 7-8). In these lines, she makes use of stereotypical hedging in the use of the phrase *et si ne vous anuit*, which here translates to “and may it not

23. Doss-Quinby, 184-186.

24. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Regina 1490, fol. 108v.

25. Huot, 132-133.

irk you.” This hedging is a marker of politeness, here used to quell any anger or disparities that result from the woman’s absence from her husband. The ‘B’ line also serves as a form of passivity for the female speaker. The phrase “you will have me” indicates a possession of the woman to the husband, in addition to a possession to the lover. The female speaker places herself in the position of an object for male pleasure in these lines, rather than taking control of her own sexual choices. However, this rondeau exhibits the rarer quality of addressing the husband directly, which may indicate a reason as to why the speaker is using more stereotypical feminine language practices, due to the societal expectations of the time.

As a rondeau, the text and music have three iterations of the same ‘A’ line. However, with this repetition, the second iteration of the ‘A’ line has a different last word. In line 4, instead of containing the phrase *et si ne vous anuit*, as in lines 1 and 7, the ‘A’ line ends with the phrase *et si ne vous mouvés*, which translates to “and do not move.” This line, even with only one word difference, contains a vastly different meaning than the other two. In this, the phrasing is such that the female speaker is telling, or ordering, the husband to do something, rather than using politeness markers and hedging. Upon further inspection of this, the inner lines of the rondeau (lines 3-6) seem to more directly order the husband, while the outer lines (lines 1-2, 7-8) make more use of politeness markers and hedging in their word choice. The translation of line 3 as “I forbid you to speak one word of it” emphasizes this point further. The female speaker takes control of her own situation and her own happiness in these inner lines. By “forbidding” her husband to do anything about her adultery, she practices her heightened sense of sexual agency and freedom.

In this way, the inner lines of the text depict the activity and sexual agency of the female subject, while the outer lines depict a more passive representation, reflective of the patriarchal societal expectations of the time period. This structure of the rondeau, therefore, seems to mask an underlying sense of agency underneath the outer facade of passivity and complacency. This is perhaps due to the fact that the female speaker is addressing her husband during this poem. While societal expectations mask her speech under the guise of traditional feminine values, her independence presents itself in the inner lines, perhaps reflecting her inner psyche, if not her reality.

Within the musical notation of the work, the structure of the musical repetition may also hint at the hidden agency of the female speaker. The ‘a’ sections (lines 3, 5) are supposed to repeat the same musical phrasing as the ‘A’ sections. However, in this piece, the ‘a’ sections present slightly different phrasings, with different notes corresponding to syllables in the phrase structures. In this way, the music itself hides the activity and “breaks from the norm” by showing these different phrases within the inner lines. Additionally, the form of the rondeau itself reflects the form of the *carole* dance, which references the female authorship theory in the preliterate folk-songs, further emphasizing the idea of sexual agency in the representation of the female subject in this piece.

Je me doi bien doloseir / Por coi m’aveis vos doneit / Docebit

The piece *Je me doi bien doloseir / Por coi m’aveis vos doneit / Docebit* is a motet for three voices: triplum, motetus, and tenor.²⁶ While this piece falls under the genre distinction of *chanson de mal mariée*, the two upper lines of text are from two contrasting perspectives and voices, not only the female perspective. The triplum sings the perspective of the male lover and the motetus sings the female “protagonist” perspective. With this, we can expect the two voices to complement each other well in terms of their texts and music, due to the metaphorical connection between the two speakers in the poem. In fact, the voices both contrast each other and work together in order to further the narrative. The male vocal line (triplum) speaks largely about the female narrative and his place within it. Conversely, the female vocal line (motetus) speaks about her love for the man and her anger regarding her marriage to another. With these ideas, we can see that even though the female speaker is not the only one in the text, her perspective is the driving force behind each vocal line, placing her in control of the narrative. Additionally, the connection between these parts is juxtaposed with the lack of connection between the woman and her husband.

Throughout the entirety of the text, the female perspective language is more possessive than that of the male perspective. The motetus line begins with the phrase *Por coi m’aveis vos doneit, / Mere, mari?*, which translates to “Why have you given me, / A husband, mother?”²⁷ These lines seem to present a vastly different initial representation than that of the beginning of the rondeau. With the passive voice in “given me,” the female speaker marks the male subject as the one undergoing objectification. With this, the female subject places herself in the stereotypical “male role” of receiving a spouse, alluding to the reversal of gender roles common in the May Festival. This contrasts with the more passive role of the male speaker, notably in the last two lines. The triplum, male perspective, text ends with the phrase *Tant k’ameit bien se porat / Li siens clamier*, which translates to “That the one who belongs to her / Can claim to be loved passionately.”²⁸ In these lines, the male speaker speaks of himself in the third person and even uses the passive voice in the last line. Similar to the gender role reversal of the female speaker, the male speaker in this line places himself in the stereotypical “female role” and objectifies himself for the sake of the woman. This contrast gives the female perspective more control and sexual agency, even in the midst of her forced marriage.

In the sonic characteristics of the music, the connection between the two parts is evident, as is their simultaneous physical separation. When the parts line up with one another, they move in sync both rhythmically and harmonically, following similar triplet rhythms and motion. However, the rests within both parts never line up with one another, creating a seamless sound throughout the motet. This designation of rests symbolically shows the physical separation between the female and male speakers. Additionally, the melody of the motetus, which takes the female perspective in this motet, takes an equal

26. Turin, Biblioteca Reale, vari 42, fol. 27r-28r.

27. Doss-Quinby, 216-217.

28. Ibid.

role in the back and forth movement of the two upper lines and against the melody of the tenor. In terms of register, the triplum line is written above the motetus line, depicting a higher vocal range for the male speaker than for the female speaker in the text. This register difference may be representative of emasculating the male speaker, thus placing the two perspectives on a more equal footing. Equality in this sense shows more of an active role for the female speaker line, symbolically representing more sexual agency and independence in the female perspective.

Conclusion

Through these discussions and analyses, I have demonstrated that although the representation of women in the *chanson de mal mariée* genre can give sexual agency and independence to the female speaker, this representation often varies according to the other perspectives and the sociocultural context of the genre and works. In the rondeau *Soufrés, maris, et si ne vous anuit*, the back and forth dichotomy between activity and passivity presents a conflicting view of agency on the surface. However, this representation becomes clearer in considering the masking of sexual agency under a guise of passivity in order to maintain social norms. In the motet *Je me doi bien doloseir / Por coi m'aveis vos doneit / Docebit*, this agency was more apparent through the juxtaposition of the male and female perspectives. The reversal of stereotypical gender roles allows the female speaker to possess more independence and agency in both the text and musical lines. This analysis allows for a nuanced interpretation of the *chanson de femme*, beyond the confines of nineteenth-century male scholarship. By reading a more modern ideal of femininity into narratives situated within this historical time and place, we can bury notions of contemporary feminist "exceptionalism."

Musicologists can further study this topic by looking at more examples in the genre with varying speakers and perspectives, including all-female voiced motets. An analysis of agency in all-female voiced motets would suggest information on interactions between women and provide an avenue to study possible homoerotic subtexts. Such an analysis could allow for a more in-depth representation of the genre, outside the scope of the present paper. Additionally, a further analysis of this nature could compare representations of female agency across different genres of *chanson de femme*, rather than strictly examining the *chanson de mal mariée*, in order to present productive perspectives on the female subject representation as a whole in the music of medieval Paris.

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The Lavender Effect: Lavender Country and Queer Acceptance in Country Music

Spencer Slayton

Country music is a longstanding American genre of popular music that has become associated with displays of white, working-class masculinity and nationalistic ideals. While the genre has had its fair share of flamboyant players throughout its storied history in the popular music sphere, it has largely remained a heterocentric genre often linked with the politics of conservatism in the American South and Southwest. Country music has consistently been a genre that has seemingly rare interactions with overt queerness. However, in 1973, Patrick Haggerty and his band Lavender Country released their self-titled debut album and displayed their queerness as a badge of honor, forging an uncertain path right through the heart of country music. Unabashedly queer while remaining true to the sincere roots of the genre, Lavender Country provided a vital voice to the underrepresented queer fans and participants of country and Western music. Many out-and-proud queer artists today can now brandish their love of country music and their LGBTQ+ pride in ways that once seemed impossible. Artists like Lil Nas X, Orville Peck, and Trixie Mattel have continued to challenge the norms of country music to provide a voice for people who straddle the lines of these cultural and musical barriers. Lavender Country's trailblazing displays of overt queerness presaged an abundance of contemporary representation, leading to adjustments in our views of social and genre boundaries and the limitations that have been put on queerness and country music.

Lavender Country was formed in Seattle in 1972 by the self-proclaimed "rabid gay liberationist," Patrick Haggerty, along with Michael Carr, Eve Morris, and the sole heterosexual member of the group, Bob Hammerstromm.¹ Founding member, lead vocalist, and guitarist Haggerty was deeply involved in the post-Stonewall gay liberation movements which informed much of the politics of Lavender Country's music. With frank depictions of existing as a queer person in the 1970s, their self-titled debut and only official album offers a heartfelt snapshot into this critical time for LGBTQ+ folks, similar to the modernistic and transgressive displays of autonomy and politicized sexuality displayed by women in blues in the 1920s.² By directly addressing topics such as gay love and sex, as well as conversion therapy, systemic homophobia, and concealing

your true identity, Lavender Country mirrored how these women used music with frank discussions of their sexuality, both queer and otherwise, as a means of developing agency and empowering themselves in a world that sought to silence them. To deliver their empowering message of queer love and life, Lavender Country employed the traditional instrumentation of a four-piece country band of the era with a scrappy, low-fidelity style; their album pivots from jaunty piano-led tunes espousing the pleasures of being gay, to protest songs of antiwar and antifascism, to sparse ballads of lesbian love. Lavender Country presents these themes with equal parts sincerity and tongue-in-cheek references to queer life. With song titles like "Cryin' These Cocksucking Tears," "Come Out Singin'," and "Back in the Closet," Lavender Country were making country music for and about queer people in a direct way unlike any artist before them. This is a testament to the true bravery of existing as a forward-facing queer person whose mere existence is a political act to some, especially in an era in which homosexuality was still illegal in most states and outright homophobia was not uncommon.³

The world in which Lavender Country released their groundbreaking album was a politically charged environment for queer people. Years of activism and protest were finally culminating in substantial social change for queer communities. In the wake of the Stonewall riots and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the 1970s saw these minority groups continuing to fight "to recover histories previously overlooked or excluded."⁴ Despite the revolutionary nature of Patrick Haggerty's work with Lavender Country, he was by no means the first queer person in twentieth-century popular music. Composers like the foundational architect of the "American sound" Aaron Copland and artists like beloved "queen" of rock 'n' roll Little Richard had previously left bold impressions on American music and queer visibility.⁵ However, Haggerty is considered the first within the world of country music to not only exist as a homosexual, but boast it proudly within his music. Having only been released on a limited initial run of 1000 records, Lavender Country's pivotal 1973 album may not have been as contemporaneously significant as the previously mentioned artists; however, this limited run did not detract from the album's potency or longevity.⁶ Haggerty admitted "we knew it was completely outrageous, and that it had no chance at any kind of success, but, in truth, that turned out to be the backbone blessing of (the band), because we weren't catering to the industry. We weren't catering to anyone but the Stonewall revolution folk."⁷ Despite this initial

1. JD Doyle, "The First Openly Gay Country Singer...Was Patrick Haggerty, in 1973," *Queer Music Heritage*, July 10, 2013, <http://queermusicheritage-theblog.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-first-openly-gay-country-singerwas.html>.

2. Hazel V. Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. by Robert G. O'Mneally, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 482.

3. Gregory Herek, "The Father of 'Homophobia': George Weinberg (1929-2017)," *Beyond Homophobia*, March 24, 2017, <https://herek.net/blog/the-father-of-homophobia-george-weinberg-1929-2017/>.

4. Thomas Piontek, "Forget Stonewall: Making Gay History Perfectly Queer," in *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 7.

5. Nadine Hubbs, "Homophobia in Twentieth-Century Music: The Crucible of America's Sound," *Daedalus* 142, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 46, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00237; Tyina Steptoe, "Big Mama Thornton, Little Richard, and the Queer Roots of Rock 'n' Roll," *American Quarterly* 70, no. 1, (March 2018): 64, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0003>.

6. JD Doyle, "The First Openly Gay Country Singer...Was Patrick Haggerty, in 1973."

7. Patrick Haggerty and Orville Peck, "Orville Peck Meets Queer Country Pioneer Lavender Country," interview by Selim Bulut, *Dazed*, August 23, 2019, www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/45637/1/lavender-pioneer-patrick-haggerty-queer-country-orville-peck-interview.

modest release, Lavender Country would eventually inspire and shape much of the queer visibility within country music we see today.

Before Lavender Country, country music had minimal associations with homosexuality, gender nonconformity, or queerness in general. However, historically, there have been instances of flamboyance and effeminacy within the genre. A prime example of this can be seen with the honky-tonk crooner Webb Pierce. Much like Patrick Haggerty, Pierce's contributions to the genre helped sustain country music's appeal through the 1950s. In an effort to conform to the desired narrative of country music authenticity, and due to his effeminate character and his flamboyant appearance, "country music trade presses continually attempted to mute his gaudiness."⁸ With a flashy camp sense of style and a subversive display of country musicality, Pierce complicates our picture of what a Southern male country music star should look and sound like in 1950s America. Despite these roadblocks, he was able to maintain his prominence. Although Pierce was not confirmed to be gay, these attempts to sterilize atypical gender expression within working-class genres are further complicated when we consider the acceptance of gay pop artists like Liberace.⁹ This provides an interesting glimpse into our historically muddled views of class, queerness, and acceptance and how an artist like Liberace, in all of his glitz and glamor, is seemingly afforded more leeway in his expression than an artist like Pierce who inhabited working-class genres of music.

Compared to the era of Lavender Country, the 1950s gave rise to more complicated interactions of homosexuality, gender identity, and class; here, the associations between the working class and homosexuality were more interrelated than in the post-Stonewall world. Musicologist and cultural historian Nadine Hubbs explores the developments of queerness and class in her book *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, in which she illuminates that "from the late nineteenth century through most of the twentieth, sexologists and other experts viewed the working class as the natural home of homosexuality."¹⁰ The disparities between class and gender expression and desire between the 1950s and 1970s make Pierce an interesting figure in the development of gender roles and queerness within country music. This may explain why, despite his showy camp sensibilities, he maintained popularity within the genre while Lavender Country was obscured to the margins. The complicated dynamics of class and queerness are further explained by Hubbs, who posits that:

Since the 1970s, America has seen a shifting of ideological poles in the realm of sexuality and class. Homosexual acceptance has gone from being working class and bad to middle class and good, while homosexual aversion—what we now call

homophobia—has gone from being middle class and good to working class and bad.¹¹

This cultural transference of moral objection to homosexuality alters our perceptions of working- and middle-class social acceptance of queer people historically. Contemporarily, we tend to hold to the erroneous belief that queer people are highfalutin, metropolitan, and highbrow while country fans or musicians must be hillbilly, rural, and lowbrow. These ideas are deceptive in that they limit the reality that queer people exist in all forms and all walks of life, which minimizes the prominence of queer acceptance in historically working-class environments. These arbitrary distinctions were developed out of the gay liberation movement that sought to heteronormalize homosexuality into the status quo. This resulted in an even more steadfast binary between heterosexual and homosexual as well as shifts in class distinctions between the acceptance of one or the other.¹² Despite the limited interactions of queerness and country music, our contemporary view of an inherently homophobic or bigoted working-class country music world is a dangerous misconception and not historically sound. While queer representation is crucial for advances in acceptance, so too is realizing that representations of the working class have been historically unjustly skewed. Artists like Pierce and Lavender Country challenged this view by incorporating their flamboyance or explicit queerness and injecting it straight into the country music lexicon, expanding our ideas of the intersections of the working class, music, and queerness.

Beyond the class distinctions of homosexual acceptance and the working-class identity of country musicians and fans throughout twentieth-century America, the socio-politically charged era in which Lavender Country released their album witnessed other adjustments to gender roles within country music. The genre has evolved tremendously over its hundred-year history, and by the 1970s was no longer associated with rednecks, hillbillies, and hoedowns.¹³ In this period of country crossover with pop and rock 'n' roll, we witness the inspection of masculinity and adjustments to the production of country music within the subgenre outlaw country, with artists like Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson pioneering this new sound and principles.¹⁴ Simultaneously, we see a rise in the powerful female perspectives of artists like Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton, subverting the previous tropes of the naive cowgirl sweetheart. These disparate sectors of the genre act in response to one another to further complicate the gender dynamics of country music. Outlaw country was a result of what sociologist Michael Messner has described as two adopted personas of masculinity that emerged in response to the Women's Liberation Movement: "the emergent, emotionally-expressive New Man [...] and the inexpressive,

8. Stephanie Vander Wel, "Weeping and Flamboyant Men: Webb Pierce and the Campy Theatrics of Country Music," in *The Honky Tonk on the Left*, ed. Mark Allan Jackson, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 75.

9. *Ibid.*, 94.

10. Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 147.

11. *Ibid.*, 150.

12. *Ibid.*, 155.

13. William M. Reynolds, "Redneck Piece of White Trash: Southern Rebels and Music: Epistemologies Of Class, Masculinity, and Race Identity," *Counterpoints: Critical Studies of Southern Place* 434, (2014): 68.

14. Waylon Jennings, "Popular Music" 32, no. 3, (2013): 343.

hypermasculine Traditional Man.”¹⁵ While trying to subvert previous categorizations of country music, these outlaw acts appeared rough and dangerous and performed working-class masculinity and a “traditional man” persona that reflects the anxiety of navigating a changing world around them.¹⁶ Acting as the antithesis of the ideals of Lavender Country, outlaw country was a gritty masculine evolution of country music and rock ‘n’ roll. The heteronormative standards of country music are maintained in outlaw country and its reactive positioning against feminist movements makes its distance from queerness even more pronounced, creating an even more challenging ecosystem for artists like Lavender Country to deliver their message of queer acceptance.

In the decades following the release of *Lavender Country*, the 1980s and 1990s saw additional advancements in the development of gender dynamics and more queer representation. During this period, K.D. Lang established a successful career as a crossover country musician even though, as Gill Valentine notes, “country and western appears on the surface an unlikely musical genre to spawn a lesbian icon, given that the discourse of country is most definitely heterosexual.”¹⁷ While she did not officially come out until the 1990s, she had cultivated an identity during the previous decade as a strong, masculine woman because her musical style and physical appearance could be read as clearly suggesting a lesbian identity.¹⁸ Like Lavender Country before her, K.D. Lang’s coming out portended an abundance of representation and a vocal queer presence within country and popular music, with artists like Melissa Etheridge following suit.¹⁹ While the 1990s were still fraught with homophobia, the developing attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people allowed for more representation and visibility of queer identities in popular culture that would continue to develop over the next thirty years.

As we have witnessed throughout the history of this genre, the trademark authenticity of country music and its roots in conservative Southern traditionalism create a challenging environment for queer artists to navigate, as “authenticity is the painstakingly cultivated attribute key to the construction of country music artist identity.”²⁰ Homosexuality, specifically, is viewed as incompatible with the authenticity of a country musician. While displays of vulnerability and emotional musings have traditionally been a trademark of the genre, even in the early twenty-first-century, coming out as gay still had the potential to damage your reputation and ruin your country music career. This is not to say that out queer individuals did not inhabit the country music industry. Journalist Chris Willman suggests, it is “chock-full of gay people and one of the most accepting

businesses [...] unless, of course, said gay person wants to be a country music artist—in which case that rhinestone ceiling is as hard as diamonds.”²¹ While the industry may have developed a queer backbone behind the scenes, to be an out homosexual performer is another story. Despite this stigma, K.D. Lang saw one of her most beloved albums released the year she came out; however, other artists have not been so lucky. One of the most notable queer figures in the world of country music during the 2000s is the artist Chely Wright, who is often erroneously recognized as the first mainstream country artist to come out.²² Having developed a career that played into the growing nationalistic tones of contemporary country music, the ability to pass as straight allowed her career to flourish.²³ However, once she came out in 2010, she saw a steep decline in sales and an intense adverse reaction from her conservative fans.²⁴ It is interesting to consider the difference in response between Lang and Wright, which may be a result of divergent personas and differing degrees of conservatism within their respective fanbases in the same way that Liberace and Webb Pierce had differing responses to their displays of queerness due to their respective genre categorizations and class representations. The difference in reception between these two artists seem to complicate Hubbs’ claims concerning the dynamics of homophobia within country music that defy our stereotypes, even as it at times aligns with them, as seen with the homophobic backlash Wright experienced.

In our current music landscape, where queerness is decidedly less damaging to an artist’s career, representation and visibility have become commonplace and queerness has permeated all genres of music. An example of the intersectionality of queerness, race, and genre is Lil Nas X and his boundary-defying song “Old Town Road.” This song skyrocketed into the zeitgeist of 2019 and was immediately embroiled in near-mythologized controversy. *Billboard*, which is historically notorious for racist practices that allow white artists free reign on all charting categories, but relegates Black artists to specific charts, disallowed it from performing on the country charts by refusing to categorize it as such.²⁵ Due to the song’s intersections of country, a largely white genre, and hip-hop, a largely Black genre, this move by *Billboard* was seen as indefensible racism. These actions reinforce the historically racist practices of establishing genre boundaries of race within the industry. The positioning of this song as authentically country was only secured once a remix featuring the white country musician Billy Ray

15. Michael Messner quoted in “Narrative, Vocal Staging and Masculinity in the ‘Outlaw’ Country Music of Waylon Jennings,” *Popular Music* 32, no. 3, (2013): 345.

16. *Ibid.*, 348.

17. Gill Valentine, “Creating Transgressive Space: The Music of Kd Lang,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 4, (1995): 475.

18. *Ibid.*, 476.

19. “A Married Life From K.d. Lang to Chely Wright,” *Advocate*, May 17, 2012, www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/advocate-45/2012/05/17/married-life-kd-lang-chely-wright.

20. Tara M. Tuttle, “Queering Country Music Autobiography: Chely Wright’s Like Me and the Performance of Authentic,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 37, no. 2, (2015): 67.

21. *Ibid.*, 68.

22. Chris M. Walsh, “Chely Wright Comes Out As Country Music’s First Openly Gay Singer,” *Billboard*, May 4, 2010, www.billboard.com/articles/news/958369/chely-wright-comes-out-as-country-musics-first-openly-gay-singer.

23. Tuttle, “Queering Country Music Autobiography,” 69.

24. JD, “Chely Wright Now Faces Death Threats + 50% Drop In Sales. Was Coming Out Worth It?” *Queerty*, January 10, 2011, www.queerty.com/chely-wright-now-faces-death-threats-50-drop-in-sales-was-coming-out-worth-it-20110110.

25. Lisa Respers France, “Lil Nas X is kicked off country chart, leading some to blame racism,” *CNN*, March 29, 2019, www.cnn.com/2019/03/29/entertainment/lil-nas-x-country/index.html; Elias Leight, “The Music Industry Was Built on Racism. Changing It Will Take More Than Donations,” *Rolling Stone*, June 5, 2020, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/music-industry-racism-1010001/.

Cyrus was released. In contrast to Chely Wright's experience almost a decade prior, Lil Nas X's success was not damaged by coming out as gay. It seems most of the controversy was around the artist's race. This speaks to the deep-rooted racism within the industry, which is a result of the longstanding racial divisions within American society represented in the racial genre divisions established at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The formation of "hillbilly records" and "race records" fractured the race lines of these genres and allowed white artists more freedom than their Black counterparts.²⁶ The fact that we are still navigating hundred-year-old racist structures within the industry highlights the potency of Lil Nas X's success. Despite these roadblocks of genre, race, and orientation, Lil Nas X has become a household name—"Old Town Road" went on to win two Grammys.²⁷

Orville Peck is another example of country music's embrace of queerness in the contemporary music landscape. Subverting the traditional masculinity of outlaw country, Peck's glistening take on this subgenre incorporates elements of classic country western and rockabilly, all while remaining brazenly queer. On his debut album, *Pony* (2019), Peck's deep voice and mysterious persona (his true identity is still unconfirmed) complicate the tropes of outlaw country by incorporating the perspective of a homosexual male. Orville Peck's existence within the pop music landscape is another testament to Lavender Country's truly trailblazing nature. In an interview with *Billboard*, Peck shared that after discovering Haggerty's band when he was nineteen, he "thought it was so fascinating because it was such a classic country sound, but the subject matter was so subversive for what country music was."²⁸ In further melding the past and the present, Lavender Country performed a surprise opening set for Orville Peck's concert in Seattle, Patrick Haggerty's hometown.²⁹ Peck's queering of outlaw country, which was gaining popularity during the formation of Lavender Country and originally distanced itself from displays of effeminacy or queerness, speaks to the growth country music has experienced over the last fifty years and the impact that Haggerty's music has had on the queer acceptance within.

Another instance of an artist incorporating themes introduced by Lavender Country, but further catapulting the camp of country in ways that would make Dolly Parton proud, can be found in drag queen Trixie Mattel (real name Brian Firkus). Mattel has made a name for herself in both the country music and drag world. Riding on the success of her appearance as a contestant on the seventh season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*

and the third season of *RuPaul's Drag Race All-Stars* (during which she was crowned the winner), Mattel has developed a successful career as a musician. Mattel further complicates the interactions between queer life and country music by performing a sincere blend of country, folk, and pop music, all while in full drag that she likens to "Barbie after a drug-fueled shopping spree at Sephora."³⁰ While other contestants from the series have also pursued careers in music, mainly the traditional pop route, Mattel embraced her Wisconsin folk roots and her skills on the guitar and autoharp to take a different approach to combine her drag queen persona with her talents as a musician. Her success as a country music performer is evidence of the substantial progress made over the last 50 years. Mattel subverts the gender norms of country music in the same transgressive ways that Dolly Parton refined them in the 1970s but in an even more dramatized and direct way. Instead of simply "being like a drag queen" like Parton, Mattel actually *is* a drag queen.³¹ As a way to honor the roots of queer country music, Mattel's most recent album *Barbara* (2020) contains a cover of Lavender Country's song "I Can't Shake the Stranger Out of You." On June 12, 2020, she released an updated version of this song featuring Patrick Haggerty with all proceeds from the single going to the Marsha P. Johnson Institute.³² Haggerty's collaboration with a drag queen during Pride Month 2020 in support of Black trans lives emphasizes his status as an ardent activist and reinforces the continuous influence of his progressive take on country music to this very moment.

It is a true testament to Lavender Country's contributions that they were not relegated to footnotes in the annals of queer music, but rather propelled queer acceptance in country music for almost fifty years. Their album was officially honored and archived in the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999.³³ In 2014, *Lavender Country* was lovingly reissued by the label Paradise of Bachelors to immense praise, with *Pitchfork* writer Jayson Greene giving it a rare "Best New Reissue" qualification and stating, "it's a tremendous feat, a remarkable act of bravery and honesty as well as a statement on the universality of love and lust and belonging."³⁴ Participating in performances with other queer artists like Orville Peck and Trixie Mattel and releasing a compilation of unreleased recordings in 2019 entitled *Blackberry Rose and Other Songs and Sorrows from Lavender Country*, Haggerty's resonating influence on queer culture has yet to be completed; he has been fully reactivated into the contemporary queer country music scene he helped create.³⁵ While it may have been perpetuated that country music is "trapped in

26. Karl Hagstrom Miller, "Black Folk and Hillbilly Pop: Industry Enforcement of the Musical Color Line," *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 216.

27. Monica Mercuri, "Lil Nas X's Viral-Fueled Hit 'Old Town Road' Wins Two Grammys," *Forbes Magazine*, January 28, 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/monicamercuri/2020/01/27/lil-nas-xs-viral-fueled-hit-old-town-road-wins-two-grammys/.

28. Stephen Daw, "Meet Orville Peck, the Masked Gay Crooner Revitalizing Classic Country's Spirit," *Billboard*, April 23, 2019, www.billboard.com/articles/news/pride/8508400/orville-peck-interview-queer-country.

29. Patrick Haggerty and Orville Peck, "Orville Peck Meets Queer Country Pioneer Lavender Country."

30. Jonathan Parks-Ramage, "Manic Trixie Dream Girl: How Trixie Mattel Dragged Herself to Stardom," *Vice*, November 15, 2017, www.vice.com/en_us/article/3kvxy3/manic-trixie-dream-girl-how-trixie-mattel-dragged-herself-to-stardom.

31. Leigh H. Edwards, "'Backwoods Barbie': Dolly Parton's Gender Performance," in *Dolly Parton, Gender, and Country Music*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 31.

32. Christopher Rudolph, "Trixie Mattel Teams Up With Lavender Country in New 'Stranger' Video," *LOGO News*, June 12, 2020, www.newnownext.com/trixie-mattel-lavender-country-stranger-video/06/2020/.

33. Rachel Cholst, "A Brief History of Queer Country Music, From Lavender Country to Orville Peck," *The Boot*, September 6, 2019, <https://theboot.com/queer-country-music-history/>.

34. Jayson Greene, "Lavender Country: Lavender Country," *Pitchfork*, March 25, 2014, www.pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/19088-lavender-country-lavender-country/.

35. Selim Bulut, "Orville Peck Meets Queer Country Pioneer Lavender Country."

straight white patterns,” as Haggerty sings in the penultimate song on their debut album, Lavender Country’s trailblazing take on the genre has proven there is plenty of room at the hoedown for queer folks.

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“The Detail of The Pattern is Movement”: Technology, Embodiment, and Ensemble Singing

Eva Stone-Barney

Ensemble singing is a practice understood as being almost entirely *of* the physical body. From the conducting gesture, to pedagogical approaches to singing such as Dalcroze Eurythmics, to phonation itself, the body is—or has the potential to be—involved in nearly every step of the choral process. *Grove Music Online* describes dance as having the potential to “satisfy the simplest inner needs for emotional release through motor activity.”¹ The same can be said of the impulses we have when creating music; although performance contexts might dictate a music-making body refrain from externalizing them, the rhythms and melodic lines felt and understood by a body engaging in a musical practice are themselves a type of dance. Contemporary Western choral music practices make deliberate use of movement and the body in the rehearsal room while learning music, yet often advocate for a “blended” sound that falls short of allowing the singer’s body to be involved as a musical instrument when it comes to the finished product. Technologies such as microphones and speakers have become increasingly popular in ensemble singing contexts, both of which offer potential to change our relationship to sound as producers. This is also true of digital media and its technologies, which converge with ensemble singing in the instance of the “virtual choir.” Introducing microphones, speakers, and audiovisual editing into the process of ensemble singing necessarily changes the ways that both singers and audience members participate in embodied sounding and listening by altering the ways they hear, sound, and engage with their own instruments and other music-making bodies.

Movement in the Choral Rehearsal

In her work on the body’s role in the performance of the Boccherini Cello Sonata in E-flat, Elisabeth Le Guin suggests that the movements necessary to execute this piece represent a pattern of movement similar to choreography.² A similar claim can be made

1. Julia Sutton et al., “Dance,” *Grove Music Online*, 20 January 2001, accessed 1 May 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045795>.

2. Elisabeth Le Guin, “‘Cello and Bow Thinking’: The First Movement of Boccherini’s Cello Sonata in E-flat Major, Fuori Catalogo,” in *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (University of California Press, 2006).

about singing in an ensemble—as Liz Garnett puts it, “singing in the choir [represents] a regime of the body.”³ Scholars, musicians, and pedagogues have advocated and studied the use of movement and the body in singing for decades. The idea that movement and an awareness of the body can enhance the ability to learn and perform music in an ensemble setting is not new; teaching philosophies such as the Orff Schulwerk method, Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and Laban Movement Analysis have long advocated for an integration of bodily awareness and movement into music learning and ensemble singing contexts. A study done by Katheryn E. Briggs in 2011 suggests that integrating movement into choral rehearsals reminds singers to use their whole bodies when producing sound.⁴ Her findings—as collected through journals kept by singers throughout the rehearsal process, as well as surveys completed by participants as movement and gesture were integrated into their warm-ups and rehearsals—argued that use of physical activity in rehearsal improved tone, posture, and technical awareness for the singers. Integrating movement into rehearsal also increased the participants’ ability to visualize both the musical phrase and the anatomical processes involved in phonation of which they were previously unaware.⁵

Movement and bodily awareness are also crucial on the other side of the podium. Conducting represents an act of translation and communication, as it presents musical information in an alternative form to communicate as efficiently as possible to a large group of people.⁶ In order for a conducting gesture to be successful, it must be fully embodied by the conductor. It is difficult to follow someone who doesn’t seem sure of what they are doing; more often than not, an uncertain gesture is one that is not fully embodied. Conducting shares many of its qualities with dance. As is the case in many traditional Western dance types (such as ballet and ballroom dance) and in many modern American dance styles (such as hip hop and contemporary dance), the “dance” of the conducting gesture depends on an awareness of the body in relation to space and gravity. A great deal of the information communicated through conducting is found in a conductor’s ictus and rebound, which reflect the degree to which a conductor engages with their own bodyweight, and their weight in relation to a sense of gravity.⁷ Conducting situates itself as a point of convergence between improvised and choreographed dance. As Gail Poch writes, “conducting is an imitative form of communication dictated by conventional patterns of movement which have evolved into a series of universally understandable gestures.”⁸ Conductors use a vocabulary of prepared gestures and patterns which in re-

3. Liz Garnett, “Choral Singing as Bodily Regime / Zborsko Pjevanje Kao Tjelesni Režim,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 36, no. 2 (2005): 249

4. Katheryn E. Briggs, “Movement in the Choral Rehearsal: The Singers’ Perspective,” *The Choral Journal* 52, no. 5 (2011): 28-36.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Carroll L. Gonzo, “Metaphoric Behavior In Choral Conducting,” *The Choral Journal* 17, no. 7 (1977): 8-12.

7. Jeffery Wall, “Intentional and Expressive Conducting: It’s All in the Rebound,” *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 8 (2015): 41-44.

hearsal and performance are paired with improvised gestures based on both the musical and verbal feedback a conductor receives and seeks out from a given ensemble. While prepared gestures, such as beat patterns, and navigation of tempo changes, are devised during score study and preparation, improvised gestures are the result of navigating the musical product a conductor receives in the room during rehearsals, and the ways it correlates or diverges from their musical goals and ideas.

These rehearsal practices and conducting philosophies are quite commonplace in contemporary Western choral contexts, both professional and amateur, in which singers aspire to technical precision and embodied singing while aiming to maintain a choral blend. In adhering to traditional choral performance aesthetics both visually and aurally, however, they run the risk of constraining the choreography of the singing body—limiting the degree to which the body is involved in the production of the sound.

Embodiment in Ensemble Performance Practice

There are several ways in which ensemble singing has historically been understood as less connected to the body than solo singing. This is often blamed on the coveted choral “blend.” In professional ensembles, singers are expected to modulate their voices to blend their sound with the voices of their colleagues. Western classical solo singing is widely understood to be a deeply physical experience; however, ensemble singing often gets criticized as encouraging poorer, more disembodied technical approaches that disconnect the voice from the body—a sacrifice made in the hopes of achieving a better blend. In a study done by Elisabeth Ekholm on singing mode, acoustic seating, and choral blend, it was found that there are in fact physiological differences in how singers produce sound when singing alone as opposed to in choral contexts. Ekholm notes that when trying to blend with others, singers produce “less energy in the ‘singer’s formant’ region and a narrower vibrato than in solo singing.” These slight vocal adjustments “[obscure] differences in vocal timbre among singers,” which is ideal in Western choral contexts as conductors tend to look for a more homogenized sound.⁹

While movement and embodiment are crucial to every aspect of ensemble singing—from rehearsal approaches to conducting techniques—achieving the ideal ensemble tone quality involves sacrificing some of this embodiment and taking the focus away from our individual bodies as instruments. This raises several questions: can choral singing be as embodied in performance as the movements used in both conducting and rehearsals? Can performance be aligned with pedagogy? Conversely, can a choral “blended” sound operate as more than a desired musical effect, and extend to a deliberate process that creates collective musical intention, blurring the performer’s sense of individual artistry? Can blended choral vocal techniques enhance a sense of collective

embodiment, and might the value of this collective embodiment subjugate the risk of sacrificing individual embodied technique?

In recent years, various technologies have come to be involved in Western classical ensemble singing and have resulted in differing performance practices across groups. In many cases, I believe that these changes have the potential to alter the degree to which music, as it is performed and heard, can be embodied by both singers and listeners.

When technologies—specifically digital technologies—are introduced into existing classical music contexts, traditionalists (or those who adhere to strict ideas about classical music performance practice) might assume that the musical product is diminished in some way: that by introducing technology, the music somehow loses some of its integrity. Ideas about artistic integrity and performance quality often find themselves threatened by amplification. For example, in the case of opera and musical theatre, microphones are elaborately hidden by hair and makeup teams so as to maintain the illusion of a “purer” presentation of the craft. A number of recent artistic projects suggest that technology changes the relationship singers, conductors, and listeners have with singing and the body in positive ways, increasing the potential for an embodied experience of sound. These developments can be seen in technologies such as the microphone and the speaker, as well as the introduction of digital media in the work of artists such as Roomful of Teeth, Eric Whitacre, and Janet Cardiff.

The Radical Potential of Amplification

The approach to vocal production taken by many Western classical choirs can be described as a modified *bel canto* technique. This technical approach has been used widely and is established as the ideal approach to vocal production for a number of subjective reasons pertaining to taste and style. However, its normalization is also on account of its functionality. *Bel canto* singing is loud, it carries. Roomful of Teeth challenges this technical model. An eight-voice ensemble founded in 2009 by Brad Wells, comprised of four classically trained singers and four musicians trained on other instruments such as trombone, violin, and piano, they are actively changing the way Western audiences experience ensemble singing by bringing in experts in Tuvan throat singing, yodeling, Broadway belting, Inuit throat singing, Korean *p’ansori*, Georgian singing, Sardinian *cantu a tenore*, Hindustani music, Persian classical singing, and Death Metal to work with and teach them these styles of singing.¹⁰

Roomful of Teeth is able to experiment with “extended” vocal techniques (techniques not in line with the Western classical tradition) that carry less than *bel canto* singing on account of a particular technology: the microphone. By integrating this technology into their work, they are able to explore new and alternative forms of phonation. As a result, they make use of “different parts of the vocal anatomy,” thus

8. Gail Poch, “Conducting: Movement Analogues Through Effort Shape,” *The Choral Journal* 23, no. 3 (1982): 21-22.

9. Elisabeth Ekholm, “The Effect of Singing Mode and Seating Arrangement on Choral Blend and Overall Choral Sound,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 48, no. 2 (2000): 124.

10. Burkhard Bilger, “Roomful of Teeth is Revolutionizing Choral Music,” *The New Yorker*, February 11, 2019.

opening the door to a new set of embodied music-making experiences.¹¹ Roomful of Teeth combines and layers traditional ensemble singing with these non-Western vocal styles, using them both concurrently and in quick succession. Their choice not to prioritize the production of a conventionally blended sound, coupled with their use of microphones and other amplification technologies, provides them with the opportunity to use their voices and the rest of their bodies to produce a wide range of sounds, and thus to engage in different music-making choreographies altogether. This would suggest that they also have new experiences of physical embodiment in singing, and of their bodies in relation to the sounds they produce. In their music-making practices, as the first line of Caroline Shaw’s *Partita for 8 voices* duly points out, “the detail of the pattern is movement.”

Audiovisual Editing: Singing Alone, Together

Digital media has also influenced ensemble singing and the singer’s relationship to the body, a phenomenon made audible in Eric Whitacre’s Virtual Choir. Eric Whitacre is an American composer and conductor who, in 2009, started what has now become a worldwide phenomenon. In 2009, Whitacre posted a video of himself conducting his piece “Lux Aurumque” and put a call out on the internet asking individuals to record themselves singing along with his gesture. The project has since gained popularity, now with 8000 participants ages 4-87 in a total of 120 countries.¹² That said, the curiosity of this project extends past its success as a digital participatory phenomenon. It goes without saying that the fact of this being a “virtual” choir changes the experience of those singing in it.

First and foremost, ensemble singing is a social act, something done in public that involves engaging with others. The way we hold ourselves and behave physically is naturally quite different depending on the environment in which we find ourselves. It follows that the same might be said of how we sing differently based on where we are situated, that the way we sing and the ways in which we embody sound and the practice of singing changes in private versus in public. I know from my own experience of preparing and recording virtual choir pieces through the Covid-19 pandemic that the relationship to our bodies in the act of singing changes when we move from a rehearsal hall to our bedroom. Pre-recording your voice singing alone also removes the burden of restraining one’s voice in service of blend and displaces it elsewhere. To a certain degree, pre-recording blurs the line between solo and ensemble singing; although the intended goal is a musical work performed by a group of voices, at the moment the sound is created, those voices are singing alone. Because they are alone, and blend is not a concern, singers can thus have the fully embodied “bel canto” vocal experience they would have were they singing as soloists, should they choose to have it. In this way, the presence of technology has the potential to enhance the level of embodiment on the part

of the singer, as there is nothing (no other bodies or voices, that is to say) preventing the individual from singing with their full body and voice.

Sound Systems and Performance Geography: Modifying the Audience Experience

Technology also enhances the opportunity for embodiment on the part of the listener, as is captured by Janet Cardiff’s piece *The Forty Part Motet*. As a sound artist, Cardiff found herself fascinated by the fact that this work was written in forty parts, and took it upon herself to explore the ways in which it could be consumed by listeners. Her installation, which has toured around the world, consists of forty speakers, arranged in eight groups of five (as the piece is written for eight choirs of five). These speakers are set up in a large oval, each one playing a single voice part. By requiring the listener to move to experience the multiple parts of the piece, she presents the listener with the opportunity to experience this music in a far more personal, actively embodied way. The technology used here is an enabling factor. As the piece plays through the speakers, those experiencing it are free to circulate and position themselves however they choose, and are exposed to an aural experience that is not perfectly blended. This, in turn, highlights the perspectival character of embodied, positioned listening.

There are two interesting elements of the relationship created between the music and the listener’s body as a result of the introduction of technology. First, as Cardiff says in an interview with Tate Modern, “technology is invisible to the audience.”¹³ As the singing is not visually connected to a body in her piece, it enables listeners to more quickly and more easily connect it to their own bodies, thus enhancing their own embodied experiences of the sound. By hearing these voices through speakers rather than people, the audience feels comfortable establishing an intimate relationship with the sounds they are hearing. They get very close to the speakers (it is hard to imagine an audience member ever standing so close to a performing singer), which allows for an uncharted relationship between the listener and the individual voices that make up the choral sound.

The introduction of this technology also influences the way the listening bodies move in space. The way the audience takes in the work becomes a sort of improvised dance: sitting down, walking in a circle, standing beside one speaker the entire time, staying inside and outside of the circle. These movements represent unanticipated physical reactions to the sound, similar to improvised dance. These responses would be impossible were the audience taking in the piece in a traditional context. The speakers are thus an essential component to the embodiment of this piece on the part of the mobile listener, themselves acting as anthropomorphized bodies.

11. Ibid.

12. Eric Whitacre, “About the Virtual Choir,” ericwhitacre.com, accessed March 28, 2019.

13. TateShots, “Janet Cardiff and the Forty Part Motet,” YouTube, July 7, 2017, Video, 2:55, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38ORiaia9r8&ab_channel=Tate.

In his article in the *New York Times* on Roomful of Teeth, Berkard Bilger writes that “the human voice can assume almost any shape if we want it badly enough.”¹⁴ Whether or not this is true, ensemble singing serves as a compelling tool with which to push these boundaries, as well as a site of investigation into the shapes the human voice and body can take. As a process that has historically been so centered around the human body and the practice of physical embodiment of sound, choral activity provides a medium through which to ask questions about how introducing new technologies into these practices changes our relationship to ourselves, and allows us to explore the ways technology is allowing ensembles, bodies, and voices to think, act, sing, and be in new and innovative ways.

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Pastoralism, Loss, and Nostalgia: Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* as an Elegy for Environmental Disruption

Kirsten Barker

On an episode of the BBC's *In Tune Highlights* podcast in 2015, British violinist Nicola Benedetti stated that Ralph Vaughan Williams's violin romance *The Lark Ascending* "is perhaps considered so particularly emotive because it depicts a vision of England that was on the brink of destruction."¹ Benedetti was referring specifically to the piece's relationship to the First World War and the idea that *The Lark* is evocative of pre-war England. This is just one interpretation that suggests the intersection between the pastoralism, loss, and nostalgia that has characterized much of *The Lark*'s reception over time. The connections between these three components create opportunities for varied interpretations of the piece beyond the one to which Benedetti refers. As I will show, *The Lark*'s pastoral and nostalgic attributes can be recontextualized, opening up possibilities for the music to represent and react against environmental loss in the present moment, perhaps creating a new understanding of pastoral England and the rest of the planet, both of which are already experiencing the effects of anthropogenic climate change to varying degrees. In order to construct this new topical interpretation, this paper will first explore how *The Lark* and its eponymous poem exemplify the attributes of pastoralism. This will lay the groundwork for a consideration of how performance reception and analysis interpret both these traits and the piece's background. Building on the relationship between pastoralism and loss, I will explore *The Lark* through a nostalgic framework, providing a bridge to a new interpretation of the work that relates to contemporary reactions to environmental loss and ecological disruption. Just as the piece can be understood as an exemplar of the pastoral and a nostalgic reaction to the aftermath of the First World War, *The Lark Ascending* can also serve as an elegy for everything already in the process of destruction and a reaction against the loss of possible futures due to climate change.

1. Nicola Benedetti, "Ten Facts Ten Pieces: Vaughan Williams – The Lark Ascending," *In Tune Highlights*, podcast, October 14, 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p034sjh2>.

The Lark Ascending

Vaughan Williams began composing *The Lark Ascending* in 1914, but his enlistment in the Royal Army Medical Corps at the outbreak of the First World War interrupted his work. He returned to *The Lark* in 1920 and revised the piece with the help of Marie Hall, the work's dedicatee.² She performed the piece accompanied by piano at an Avonmouth and Shirehampton Choral Society concert in mid-December of that year, with the orchestral premiere as part of a British Music Society concert in June of 1921. A review of the latter notes the piece's relationship to George Meredith's eponymous 1881 poem, and the program of the former includes the fragments from each of the poem's three stanzas that preface the score:

"He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
* * *
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes;
* * *
Till, lost on his aerial rings
In light ... and then the fancy sings."³

2. Hall (1884–1956) studied with the likes of Edward Elgar and Otakar Ševčík before touring internationally beginning at age 19, which made her the foremost British violinist in the world at the time. She continued performing until the year before her death and made several recordings, including an abridged version of Elgar's violin concerto under the composer's own baton. See W. W. Cobbett and Noël Goodwin, "Hall, Marie," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, ed. Deane Root, <https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.12232>; Jean M. Haig-Whiteley, "Hall, Marie Pauline (1884–1956), violinist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept. 2004, <https://doi.org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/38575>; Simon McVeigh, "'As the sand on the sea shore': Women Violinists in London's Concert Life around 1900," in *Essays on the History of English Music in Honour of John Caldwell: Sources, Style, Performance, Historiography*, ed. Emma Hornby and David Maw (Woolbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer: 2010), 232–258; Hugh Thomas, "To Marie Hall," *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal* 54 (June 2012): 14–15.

3. Anon., "British Music Society – An 'Unknown' Programme," *The Times*, June 15, 1921, <https://link-gale-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/apps/doc/CS134942927/TTDA?u=utahstate&sid=TTDA&xid=f466a861>; Anon., "The Lark Ascending Premiere," Bristol Ensemble, <https://www.bristolensemble.com/the-lark-ascending-premiere>; George Meredith, "The Lark Ascending," *The Fortnightly Review* 35 (1881): 588–591, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924077571200>; Ralph Vaughan Williams, *The Lark Ascending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), www.bl.uk/collection-items/vaughan-williams-the-lark-ascending.

Though the poem has a bipartite structure, the overall form of the violin piece is a ternary ABA', which allows the thematic material to return in an arch-like structure. The piece opens with a cadenza followed by Theme 1, another cadenza, Theme 2, and Theme 3, at which point the thematic occurrences reverse—Theme 2 returns followed by Theme 1 and the closing cadenza. The opening cadenza and initial occurrences of each of the themes are included below in order to provide a baseline reference for discussing how pastoral and nostalgic components relate to each other and fit within *The Lark's* larger structure, which can be seen below in Figure 1. Figure 1 also provides a visualization of how the themes and cadenzas reoccur within the form. Because thematic returns are a component of nostalgic interpretations of the piece, understanding the overall structure of the relationships between the presence and absence of thematic components is useful.

Opening Cadenza

senza misura
Cadenza
pp sur la touche

2 3

8 — slow. — poco accel.

4 nat.

loco

senza misura

3 3

Theme 1

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

p

Theme 2

Allegretto tranquillo
(quasi Andante)

68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75

Fl.

A Cl.

p

76 77 78 79

pp

Theme 3

119 120 121 122 123 124

Ob.

A Cl.

p scherzando

2 2

4

125 126 127

Ob.

A Cl.

4

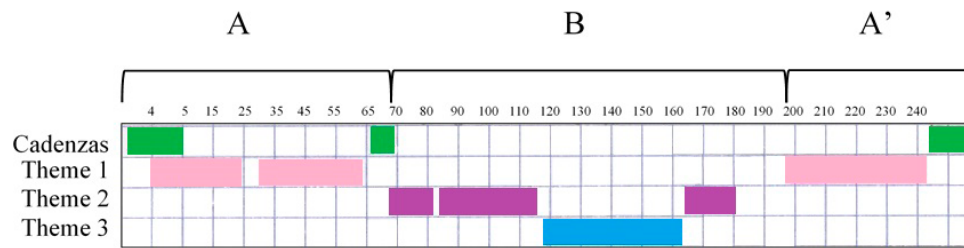


Figure 1

Pastoralism as it Relates to Vaughan Williams and Meredith

According to literary scholar Paul Alpers, pastoralism, which is a thematic element of both Vaughan Williams's piece and Meredith's poem, is often equated with idyllic portrayals of rural environments.⁴ Vaughan Williams's *Lark* demonstrates pastoral characteristics through melodic content, harmonic structure, and performance reception. In *English Pastoral Music: From Arcadia to Utopia, 1900–1955*, Eric Saylor defines musical pastoralism as typically including many of the following attributes:

- Prolonged passages of harmonic stasis, often achieved by the use of pedal points, drone fifths, sustained chords, or gently oscillating accompanimental patterns.
- Generally triadic harmonies that retain pitch centrality without necessarily adhering to conventional means of securing or reinforcing tonality. For example, chordal parallelism, parallel fifths, and unusual dissonance resolutions are frequently present.
- The use of modal scales, pentatonicism, and/or pandiatonicism, sometimes in ways that obscure the identity of the scale (e.g., employing a pitch collection of G–A–B–flat–C–D–F to imply either G minor or G Dorian).
- Extended passages of parallel thirds, particularly in the upper voices.
- Cross relations are common, though extended passages of chromaticism are usually avoided. Diatonic and consonant harmonies prevail.
- Avoidance of systematic motivic development in favor of motivic or thematic fragmentation, repetition, and recombination.
- Rhapsodic melodies, often featuring irregular, unpredictable, and/or rhythmically free phrase structures, frequently starting low in the range and gradually rising. These are often accompanied by sustained harmonic sonorities.

4. Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16–22.

- Use of compound meters and/or gently flowing rhythms, usually at slow to moderate tempos. More active passages either evoking the qualities of English folk dance or employing elaborate, cadenza-like solo embellishments or rhapsodic flourishes may occur.
- Predominantly quiet dynamic levels and light, transparent textures.
- A proclivity for string-dominated timbres, with secondary emphasis on the upper woodwinds. Double reeds, violins, violas, and clarinets are often favored as soloists within an orchestral context.
- Texts, titles, or programs that evoke natural landscapes (particularly specific sites within England), classical imagery, elegiac sentiments, and/or introspective (possibly religious) contemplation.⁵

Understanding how these traits relate to *The Lark's* thematic material is necessary for demonstrating how the piece exemplifies and embodies musical pastoralism and supports related interpretations. Passages of harmonic stasis occur throughout the piece and are most evident in the cadenzas, where the orchestra holds one of its opening chords while the violin plays a series of trills and arpeggios (mm. 3–4, 66–67, 246–247). Triadic harmonies occur in passages of octaves leading into alternating fifths, thirds, and sixths at the end of each section (mm. 40–49, 181–196, 219–223). Modal scales and pentatonicism are present throughout the piece—for example, measures 1–3 and their subsequent repetitions demonstrate E Dorian.⁶ Parallel thirds are also present throughout, but are mostly confined to the passages of tremolo-trills and Theme 1's final return (mm. 234–240), and diatonicism and consonance are also prominent throughout the piece. Thematic fragmentation is prevalent at the ends of sections, where the small segments of melody pass between overlapping voices. Measures 50–64 clearly demonstrate this fragmentation through the overlap of several melodic ideas with fragments derived from mm. 20–23, the second *senza misura* of the cadenza, and Theme 1. *The Lark* has several rhapsodic melodies that all contain some level of rhythmic freedom with sustained accompaniment throughout. The piece's prevailing meter is compound, and the rhythms in the slow A and A' sections could be considered “flowing,” which is something that Theme 1 clearly demonstrates. The B section is reminiscent of folk song or dance due to the lively squareness and triplets of Themes 2 and 3. With a few notable exceptions such as Theme 1's return in A', the dynamics of the piece are within the piano range, the overall musical textures are light and transparent, and the piece's timbre is string- and wind-dominated. *The Lark Ascending's* title is evocative of all the ideas in the final bullet point of Saylor's list, which contributes to the piece's embodiment of the pastoral style.

5. Eric Saylor, *English Pastoral Music: From Arcadia to Utopia, 1900–1955* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 24, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=4866466>.

6. Further occurrences of modality are discussed in detail by scholars such as Christopher Mark and David Manning. See Christopher Mark, “Chamber music and works for soloist with orchestra,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aiden J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 185–187; David Manning, “Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music,” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2003), 57–71.

As Meredith's "Lark" clearly inspired Vaughan Williams's, the former's pastoralism can be understood to contribute to that of the latter. In Romantic poetry such as that of Meredith, idyllic depictions of nature and landscapes are prevalent, and the writing is characterized by simplicity, sentimentality, nostalgia, and/or elegiac qualities.⁷ Meredith's poetry is said to "call up all the delicate country sensations," and to convey "the spirit lurking beneath and expressed in [nature's] outward appearance," which correlates with the qualities that Alpers ascribes to pastoralism.⁸ In "The Lark," the pastoral is present through imagery and metaphors. Meredith's descriptive writing evokes the essence of a bucolic nature and its relationship to the lark in a way that goes beyond the title; and the bird's song, flight, and connection to natural landscapes are clear for the reader, as is the unity of the people and earth. According to John Holmes, the poem "... urges us to accept Nature on its own terms and to realize that we ourselves are part of the natural world," though this seems to refer to an idealized version of nature that is constructed and unrealistic.⁹ These pastoral depictions contribute to an idyllicism within "The Lark" by emphasizing rural beauty and simplicity, which is seen in *The Lark* through its inclusion of poem fragments.

The relationship between the music and the poem increases *The Lark's* ability to support multiple interpretations by emphasizing the ambiguity of pastoralism and its ability to evoke the nostalgic or elegiac through the use of and connection to text. These symbolic intersections between the piece and the poem demonstrate a plausible relationship the two might have beyond the fragments with which Vaughan Williams chose to preface the score, and specific examples of this connection are present in each of *The Lark's* sections. For example, the first stanza of "The Lark" describes the beauty of the bird's song and flight with the line "a press of hurried notes that run." This imagery might be likened to the opening cadenza's fluttering trills and arpeggios (hereafter referred to as bird-music, an example of which appears in an excerpt of m. 3 below that lead into the soaring Theme 1, where these trill figures are present in at least one of the voices throughout the A section (mm. 1–68).



The poem's second stanza blends the imagery of the bird with that of dance and unity, which is heard in the alternating, near-constant presence of the bird-music and one of

the folk-like themes of the B section (mm. 69–196). The poem's third stanza focuses on the people who "sing not, sweet" and are unified with the rest of the world despite not hearing the bird's song "Because their love of Earth is deep." The poem implies that though the bird remains unheard, he continues to sing as "he to silence nearer soars," expanding the unification of the poem's pastoral people and earth before becoming "lost on his aerial rings." In *The Lark*, the absence of the bird-music and the focus on a fully orchestrated return to Theme 1 in section A' (mm. 197–247) reflects the idea that the bird is unheard by the people. As in the poem, the trills and arpeggios of the bird-music return as the main focus in the closing cadenza before ascending to the violin's upper register and dissipating into silence. Each of these connections emphasizes the relationship between the piece and poem.

The Lark Ascending, Pastoralism, Loss, and Nostalgia

Throughout the century since *The Lark's* composition, its performance reception demonstrates many of the ways in which audiences understand the music's pastoral elements, particularly in relation to stereotypical idyllicism. At the piece's premiere, reviewers described music that "dreams its way along," "is that of the clean countryside," and has a "serene and remote sense of contemplation."¹⁰ This pastoral atmosphere was also heard in later performances, where reviewers describe the piece as "rapturous and unearthly" and emphasize the "meditative introspection" of the sound.¹¹ These descriptions relate to the idea that pastoral settings can provide transcendent connection to the natural world, an example of which appears in Holmes' reaction to Meredith's poem. *The Lark's* evocations of pastoral imagery, specifically the rural and rustic connotations, can be seen in reviews that note that the music is like "the shimmer of spring sunlight," and performances "[conjure] up visions of open fields and sky and the heavenly songster soaring into the blue," "capture the true spirit of that small bird, pouring its heart out above the open countryside," and "always makes one think of a Westcountry landscape."¹² These examples clearly demonstrate some of the ways in which listeners

10. Anon., "British Music Society – An 'Unknown' Programme," *The Times*, June 15, 1921, <https://link-gale-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/apps/doc/CS134942927/TTDA?u=utahstate&sid=TTDA&xid=f466a861>; Edward J. Dent, "The World of Music," *Illustrated London News*, June 25, 1921, <https://link-gale.com/apps/doc/HN3100245614/ILN?u=utahstate&sid=ILN&xid=702e72c4>.

11. Anon., "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* 68, no. 1010 (April 1, 1927): 355, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/912810>; Alfred Kalisch, "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* 62, no. 941 (July 1, 1921): 490, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/908238>. See also Anon., "B.B.C. Orchestra's Visit," *Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald*, Jan. 27, 1940, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000515/19400127/064/0008>; Anon., "Music in the city," *Runcorn Weekly News*, June 12, 1969, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003296/19690612/182/0011>.

12. Anon., "Leith Hill Festival," *The Times*, April 14, 1926, <https://link-gale.com/apps/doc/CS235608718/TTDA?u=utahstate&sid=TTDA&xid=55403936>; Anon., "One Hour of Music," *Bucks Herald*, July 26, 1940, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000270/19400726/123/0006>; Norah Lewis, "Guests are right on song," *Sandwell Evening Mail*, July 10, 1986, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002487/19860710/243/0029>; Anon., "Our London Letter," *Western Morning News*,

7. Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?*, 27–37.

8. George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 44; Martin Armstrong, "The Poetry of George Meredith," *The North American Review* 213, no. 748 (March 1921): 358, www.jstor.com/stable/25120703.

9. John Holmes, "Darwinism, Feminism, and the Sonnet Sequence: Meredith's 'Modern Love,'" *Victorian Poetry* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 530.

consistently hear *The Lark's* pastoralism as evoking both introspective experiences and rural imagery.

However, as the quote that opens this paper suggests, *The Lark Ascending* and its pastoral qualities are not always heard as symbolic or as evocative of reassuring, bucolic landscapes. Though the idyllic evocations presented in the previous paragraph are prevalent across time, other reviewers describe the music as “cast over with a certain melancholy” and as having “a sweet sadness.”¹³ These interpretations underline the idea that in addition to representing landscape and/or nature, pastoralism can evoke the elegiac. Saylor demonstrates this aspect of pastoralism in Vaughan Williams’s *Pastoral Symphony*, where musical elements can “evoke the unsettling stillness war leaves in its wake.”¹⁴ In *The Lark*, this same biographical context supports similar elegiac interpretations. Though the composer served as a heavy artillery officer and music director, his wartime experience also directly exposed him to the horrific consequences of trench warfare as a stretcher-bearer, ambulance driver, and hospital orderly. The deaths of several of his younger friends in the first two years of the war, including the composer George Butterworth, also greatly affected Vaughan Williams—in a letter to Gustav Holst, Vaughan Williams expresses “dread” at the prospect of returning to England and facing the “gaps” left by those who died.¹⁵ As Saylor demonstrates with the *Pastoral Symphony*, where he suggests that “Vaughan Williams must have hoped that, for certain listeners, it would evoke the unsettling stillness war leaves in its wake—the barren fields, the silent dead, and the emotional gaps in the lives of survivors,” these losses and experiences arguably had an impact on Vaughan Williams’s post-war music, including *The Lark Ascending*.¹⁶ This is also noted by Michael Kennedy, who states that Vaughan Williams’s post-war compositions, specifically *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, the *Pastoral Symphony*, and *The Lark*, were “some of his quietest, most meditative music.” Kennedy suggests that Vaughan Williams used these pieces to respond to the war by “look[ing] into the recesses of the human spirit,” a reaction that is more melancholy and

contemplative than distressed or angry.¹⁷ Similarly, Christopher Mark argues that the manner of thematic return within *The Lark* contributes to “a powerful sense of loss.”¹⁸ The pastoral sound of *The Lark* can be interpreted as an evocation of mourning and longing for a past that has been destroyed and a future that is no longer possible. This kind of longing enables the piece to exemplify nostalgia, which is broadly characterized by a yearning for a moment that is not available in the present.¹⁹

Musical pastoralism can imply loss and in turn create a nostalgic response in the listener. In *The Lark Ascending*, this is connected to the utilization of thematic returns in a way that intensifies feelings of loss and nostalgia through the awareness of differences.

The image contains two musical staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.) and is labeled 'Theme 2 initial occurrence'. It shows measures 69 through 74. The tempo is 'Allegretto tranquillo (quasi Andante)' and the dynamic is 'p'. The bottom staff is for Violin (Vln.) solo and is labeled 'Theme 2 return'. It shows measures 169 through 174. The tempo is 'Allegretto molto tranquillo' and the dynamic is 'pp'. Both staves are in G major and 2/4 time.

This is particularly noticeable in mm. 169–248 due to the way in which the returns of the bird-music and Theme 2 subvert listener expectations through the end of the piece. In his analysis of the piece, Mark demonstrates how the preparation for the return of Theme 2 at m. 169 is recontextualized by the disruption of melody and pulse from mm. 163–168. There, the solo violin repeats its lowest five notes in a slowing pulse that turns

Dec. 16, 1936, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000329/19361216/072/0008>. See also Anon., “Brilliant Concert in the Shire Hall,” *Gloucester Journal*, Sept. 8, 1928, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000532/19280908/111/0015>; M. M. E., “A Wealth of Music,” *Western Mail & South Wales News*, September 11, 1931, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19310911/236/0010>; Anon., “A piano concerto lacking greatness,” *Belfast Telegraph*, Oct. 12, 1963, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002318/19631012/028/0002>; David Ross, “English flavor in Halle’ treat,” *Cheshire Observer*, August 8, 1975, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000157/19750808/541/0034>.

13. Anon., “Mr. Guy Warrack’s Concert,” *The Times*, December 9, 1926, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS236657545/TTDA?u=utahstate&sid=TTDA&xid=a65821dc>; K. W. Dommett, “Orchestra da Camera concert,” *Birmingham Post*, March 8, 1965, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002135/19650308/176/0005>.

14. Saylor, *English Pastoral Music*, 87.

15. Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 115–132; Ralph Vaughan Williams to Gustav Holst, October 21, 1916, “VWL426,” *The Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, <http://vaughanwilliams.uk/letter/vwl426>.

16. Saylor, *English Pastoral Music*, 87.

17. Michael Kennedy, *Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 150–155.

18. Mark, “Chamber music,” 185–187.

19. Within nostalgia studies, there is a consensus that nostalgia is paradoxical and unfixed, containing many variations and categorizations that overlap and blend together and can be classified based on source or application. These variations relate to how one approaches the nostalgic experience and includes descriptions such as individual and collective; simple, reflexive, and interpretive; endo- and exo-; and reflective and restorative. Because of its unfixedness and ability to “increase empathy, charitable intentions, and charitable behavior,” nostalgia is utilized by various disciplines and industries in ways that serve personal, commercial, and political interests, including connection to the identity of self and community, commodification of aspects of an idealized past, and social initiatives and public policy. See Michael Hviid Jacobsen ed., “Introduction,” in *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2020), 10–13, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=6121570>; Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979); David Berliner, *Losing Culture: Nostalgia, Heritage, and Our Accelerated Times*, trans. Dominic Horsfall (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 62; Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 107–108, doi: 10.2307/2928525; Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 63–65, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=4014625>; Janelle L. Wilson, “Future imaginings: Nostalgia for unrealized possible selves,” in *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (London: Routledge, 2020), 75–76, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=6121570>.

into a *senza misura*, which creates a feeling of suspended time.²⁰ The peculiarity of this passage in relation to the rest of the piece draws attention to the return of Theme 2, which was initially introduced in m. 69 as a folkish flute solo. At m. 169, this theme is slightly slower and re-orchestrated for violin, and the last beat of each measure includes tenuto markings that emphasize a more contemplative character. The differences between these two versions of the theme can be seen below. The rhetorical effect of this return is nostalgia for the lively version from m. 69.

Theme 2 initial bird-music

Theme 2 final bird-music

20. Mark, "Chamber music," 185–187.

At the same time, the listener is reminded that because the past cannot be had again, all that remains in the present moment are memories of what is now absent. Matthew Riley argues that these kinds of returns evoke nostalgia by creating a reminiscent atmosphere and reminding the listener of what the theme was and how perception of the theme has changed due to the nature of its return.²¹

Just as the recontextualization of Theme 2 at m. 169 adds to the nostalgic atmosphere that surrounds it, so too does the return and alteration of the bird-music beginning at m. 181. In mm. 181–196, it subverts the listener's expectations for what should follow Theme 2. After Theme 2's initial occurrence in mm. 69–79, the solo violin enters with a sixteenth-note passage that circles around E and G and serves as ornamentation for the theme. Something similar happens following Theme 2's return at m. 169. However, though the harmonies here are similar to what they were at m. 79 in regard to tonality and the musical line, the atmosphere and character are more subdued due to the decreased tempo, the orchestra's held E minor chords, and the use of *allargando* and breath marks. As can be seen below, the contour of the solo violin line both descends and ascends at m. 79, while at m. 181 it only ever leads downward. Though the orchestra part (seen above as a piano reduction for visual clarity) leads back up to the violin's fifths, this instills a sense of weight and inertia in the listener, particularly as the pulse has a suspended quality. This passage leads into the A' section at m. 197, where the complete absence of the bird-music is noticeable. Because the trills and arpeggios are a near-constant presence in *The Lark* in earlier sections, this sets up the expectation that they will continue to ornament Theme 1 throughout A'. Hearing this gap where the bird-music should be can generate intense nostalgia because just as with Theme 2, the listener realizes that something is missing or changed, and the way they experienced that something in the past is cut off in the present. When the bird-music finally does arrive in the final three bars of the piece, it defies expectation, and rather than simply reprising the previous versions of the cadenza, the closing cadenza is more nostalgic because, like the return of Theme 2 and the altered bird-music in mm. 181–196, the music is a memory or ghost that reminds the listener of the past versions. By becoming simultaneously more elaborate and more directionless (see first and final cadenzas below), the return of the trills and arpeggios and their subsequent disappearance into silence can remind the listener of the past that is inaccessible in the present.

These thematic alterations demonstrate how the form and pastoral elements of the piece can be read in terms of loss and nostalgia. Additionally, because a nostalgic interpretation of the piece is an enduring element of *The Lark's* reception history and is clearly supported by the music, this introduces the possibility of a reinterpretation of the nostalgia towards concerns of the present.

21. Riley discusses this in relation to Edward Elgar's *Concerto in B minor for Violin and Orchestra*, op. 61, where he demonstrates how thematic reiteration evokes nostalgia in the concerto's third movement. In the Elgar concerto, Riley suggests that this nostalgia is possible due to the preceding material and new orchestration. See Matthew Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–19.

Opening Cadenza

senza misura
Cadenza

pp sur la touche

2 3

8 *slow* *poco accel.*

loco 4 *nat.* senza misura

3 3

Closing Cadenza

senza misura
Cadenza

246 *ppp* sur la touche

8 *lunga lunga*

247

The Lark Ascending as an Environmentally Nostalgic Work

The Lark Ascending's pastoral and nostalgic traits can be reframed in relation to modern experiences of environmental loss through the climate change that threatens the present and future—though the extent of this experience is and will in no way be universal due to inequality, injustice, and geographic differences, climate change will still affect everyone across the globe.²² Andrew Mark suggests that the arts can create a space that allows people to process these “otherwise unspeakable, un-identifiable, un-acknowledgeable, and un-grievable loss[es].”²³ This space is particularly relevant to environmental nostalgia because the potential losses are vast, spanning across ecosystems and encompassing entire geographic regions. Within this space, one can follow the ideas of Ashlee Cunsolo Willox, Alastair Bonnett, and others to experience environmental mourning, which can lead to action motivated by greater willingness to act on behalf of the environment.²⁴ Because environmental losses create gaps in the future and lead to a disruption of pastoral landscapes that listeners might regard as idyllic, environmental approaches to nostalgia are relevant to *The Lark Ascending*.²⁵ Just as

22. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), *Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, Germany: IPBES, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579>.

23. Andrew Mark, “Don’t Organize, Mourn: Environmental Loss and Musicking,” *Ethics and the Environment* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 53, doi:10.2979/ethicsenviro.21.2.03.

24. Cunsolo Willox argues that by mourning losses across time, we can use shared grief to create communities and expand climate-related discourse and action. Ashlee Cunsolo Willox, “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning,” *Ethics & the Environment* 17, no. 2, Special Issue on Climate Change (Fall 2012): 137–164. Similarly, Joanna Macy suggests that acknowledging environmental mourning and its cause is essential for moving from despair to action and change. Joanna Macy, “Working Through Environmental Despair,” in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 240–252. Bonnett contends that nostalgic responses to environmental crises “[seek] to take us back in order to take us forward” by challenging societal structures and anthropocentrism, and he suggests that this approach is “a process of rediscovery and, inevitably, romanticization, of nature-human relationships from other times and places,” (Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2010), 172–173, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=592427>), which allows us to acknowledge hope and create what Sarah Jaquette Ray calls “optimistic caring.” Sarah Jaquette Ray, “Coming of Age at the End of the World,” in *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, ed. Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 299–313, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=5520528>. Studies analyzed by Clay Routledge support each of these ideas and suggest that “nostalgia increases empathy, charitable intentions, and charitable behavior.” Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 63–65 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=6121570>.

25. Though the problematic aspects of nostalgia’s romanticization of the past are not considered in the present study, they are discussed in detail by numerous scholars. In addition to the sources referenced in this paper, see also: David Berry, *On Nostalgia* (Toronto: Couch House Books, 2020); Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, eds, *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Tammy Clewell, ed., *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Christopher Lasch, “The Politics of Nostalgia: Losing history in the mists of ideology,” *Harper’s* 269 (1984): 65–70; David Lowenthal, “Nostalgia Tells it Like it Wasn’t,” in

many people hear *The Lark* through pastoral nostalgia, the piece can also function as a vehicle for an ecologically-oriented nostalgia as a response to a disrupted environment. Three nostalgic approaches that are useful for understanding how *The Lark*’s traits can relate to ecological disruption are reflective, solastalgic, and imperialist, each of which offers a different perspective of longing for an unchanged environment.

Using the concept of reflective nostalgia developed by Svetlana Boym, one can hear in *The Lark* a longing for the lost landscapes and nature that listeners might understand as idyllic and that have been and will be permanently altered. The English countryside associated with the piece is already undergoing significant change through increased temperatures, flooding, drought, and loss of native species, each of which is projected to worsen.²⁶ The compositional elements of the work, particularly the nostalgic atmosphere surrounding the thematic returns in the latter half of the piece, further emphasize remembrance and mourning rather than reconstructing or restoring the object of longing. This relates to environmental loss, where even if all degradation stops, it will be impossible to return to what once was (particularly before industrialized societies) or to bridge the ecological gaps exacerbated by the feedback loops of climate change. Even if a habitat could be completely restored, it will never be whole or untouched by the effects of humanity and industrialization again because of the extent of the ongoing disruption. In relation to *The Lark*, once we hear the music and themes, it is impossible to return to the time before we knew the piece.

This reflective approach to loss relates to the components of solastalgia, an offshoot of nostalgia that focuses on mourning as a reaction to environmental disruption and is specifically defined as a longing for a continuance of the solace once provided by home. Unlike reflective nostalgia, solastalgia focuses solely on the loss of the present and not the past or future.²⁷ Through the desire to retain the idyllic, this longing for the continued existence of the landscape and nature of “home” directly relates to the

The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia, edited by Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 18–32; Michael Hviid Jacobsen, ed., *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2020); Stuart Tannock, “Nostalgia Critique,” *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): 153–164.

26. Committee on Climate Change, *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017* (London: 2017), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017>; Adaptation Sub-Committee of the Committee on Climate Change (ASC), *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 Evidence Report – Summary for England* (London: 2016), <https://www.theccc.org.uk/what-is-climate-change/preparing-for-climate-change/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017/national-summaries/england/>.

27. Glenn Albrecht, who coined the term, argues that though solastalgia is specifically felt due to “the ongoing impact of the changed environment on those who remained in the area affected,” solastalgia extends to those not directly experiencing that impact because “direct experience” and “home” are blurred due to the increasingly global nature of our media consumption. See Glenn Albrecht, “‘Solastalgia’: A New Concept in Health and Identity,” *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* no. 3 (2005): 41–55. See also: Glenn Albrecht, *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 29–61, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/lib/usu/detail.action?docID=5742760>; Glenn Albrecht, “Solastalgia and the New Mourning,” in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, ed. Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 292–315, doi:10.2307/j.ctt1w6t9hg.17.

pastoral's representation of stability, even though listeners likely have not experienced a bucolic pastoral themselves.²⁸ The listener might then consider the loss of their own environments and others by relating these losses back to their actual home and extending the solastalgia and concept of home outward to other places and ecosystems. Within *The Lark*, the recontextualization of thematic material leads the listener to desire the continuance of trills and arpeggios, and for the thematic returns to be what they once were. But this is impossible; when the themes return, their alterations only remind us that what we knew will only exist as a memory.

Because these reflective and solastalgic approaches to environmental loss are connected to what we ourselves have disrupted, they also relate to an imperialist nostalgia, which is derived from colonialism and is oriented toward objects that have been altered or destroyed by those experiencing nostalgic longing. Longing for pastoralism's lost idyllicism becomes focused on the nature and landscape that the listeners and performers helped destroy, whether purposely or not, simply by virtue of being part of a society that is rooted in the consumption of fossil fuels. The interpretation of the piece as "a vision of an England [...] on the brink of destruction" can also be seen through this lens because this evocation is an interpretation of a response to the aftermath of the First World War, an anthropogenic event that (like our current climate crisis) caused and contributed to ecological disruption. This kind of nostalgia is particularly relevant because the people, groups, and systems whose actions are primarily driving climate change are not those who currently (and will continue to) bear the brunt of its effects; this disparity intensifies the imperialist nature of the nostalgia that *The Lark* evokes for listeners.

As applied to the musical rhetoric of *The Lark Ascending*, these nostalgias can be interpreted in a way that invites listeners to contemplate and mourn past, present, and future environmental losses through the piece's nostalgic attributes as they relate to the pastoral. Highlighting certain aspects of the piece, specifically the absence and altered return of the bird-music, might heighten this feeling for audiences. In the closing cadenza (mm. 246–248), emphasis of the ethereal qualities of the *sul tasto* sound of the violin imparts a more haunting timbre to the return and nostalgic expansion of the trills and arpeggios, particularly when they dissipate into silence at the close of the piece. Beyond the final cadenza, the melancholy nature of the piece's nostalgic traits and of nostalgia itself allows *The Lark* to serve as an elegy for possible futures that have been and will be lost due to climate change and for the people, places, and creatures that have been and will be irreversibly altered because of those losses.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this paper, *The Lark Ascending* is an archetype of pastoralism, though the meaning of that pastoralism is ambivalent. One interpretation that is supported by historical context is that of nostalgia in relation to loss, where the elegiac qualities of both pastoralism and nostalgia can be understood as mourning the impossibility of return. The piece's "vision of England [...] on the brink of destruction" can apply to a more modern interpretation of the piece; just as Vaughan Williams's England was on the precipice of the First World War when he began *The Lark*, England and the planet currently stand at a more daunting precipice. Without significant action, both will be largely unrecognizable by the end of the century due to anthropogenic climate change that is already disrupting ecosystems.²⁹ In the same "Ten Facts Ten Pieces" program from which the paper's opening quote is drawn, Benedetti suggests that "[Vaughan Williams's] visions of nature are often shot through with a bittersweet element suggestive of humankind's separation from it," which is particularly relevant in a world that is losing more and more of its biodiversity and biomass. An environmental nostalgia allows us to engage with these losses by reflecting on what has been and will be disrupted, what is presently affected, and how even with the best intentions, we ourselves contribute to all levels of environmental degradation and disruption. While *The Lark's* elegiac qualities and capacity for ecologically-oriented nostalgia and mourning can simply focus on longing for the absent and soon-to-be absent, the piece's nostalgia can also contribute to environmental action by encouraging listeners to acknowledge the cause of mourning. This approach allows the nostalgia of *The Lark Ascending* to serve as a springboard for addressing ecological disruption and for potentially reimagining and challenging current systems through the pastoral's romanticization of nature and the past, in a way that Bonnett argues leads us to "turn [...] back to things that remain worth fighting for and which sustain."³⁰ By doing so, our actions will enable more of the planet to step back from the processes that are driving toward ecological tipping points that place us on the brink of destruction.

28. Brian S. Turner, "A Note on Nostalgia," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 4, no. 1 (1987): 147–156.

29. For specific sources and projections regarding best- and worst-case scenarios for how ecosystems and societies globally have been and will be affected by various aspects and externalities of climate change, see David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019).

30. Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 172–173.

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Contributors to this Issue

CHARLEY HAUSKNOST is an interdisciplinary artist and scholar with a background in both classical voice and theatre. Her research interests are in popular music as it relates to gender studies, intersectionality, queer theory, and decolonization. Recently, she is particularly curious about how embodied musical practices contribute to forming individual and group identities. In February 2020, she had the opportunity to study abroad at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands as part of the McCall MacBain International Fellowship Program. She recently completed her bachelor's degree in music history with a minor in music theory at McGill University's Schulich School of Music and will be obtaining an MA in musicology from the University of Toronto starting in Fall 2021.

MARY SHANNON recently graduated from the College of William & Mary with a bachelor's degree in music and linguistics. Fascinated by the interdisciplinary nature of both fields, much of Mary's current academic interests lie in the intersections between language, gender, and sexuality in the music of the twentieth century. She will pursue a PhD in musicology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill starting in Fall 2021.

SPENCER SLAYTON is an avid record collector, horror film fanatic, and film music enthusiast. A recent graduate of the Music History and Industry program at UCLA's Herb Alpert School of Music, he hopes to employ his love and passion for music and film to pursue a career in music supervision. When he's not collecting and listening to film scores or watching horror films, he's on the quest to find the perfect breakfast burrito.

EVA STONE-BARNEY is a mezzo-soprano, student, researcher, journalist, and community facilitator from Montreal, QC. Having just completed her bachelor's degree in vocal performance at the Schulich School of Music (McGill University), she will begin a master's degree in musicology at the University of Toronto in Fall 2021. In recent years, Eva has worked with La Scena Musicale, Planet in Focus: International Environmental Film Festival, and The Yellow Door. Eva was awarded an honourable mention in the Outstanding Student Essay category at the 2020 Canadian National Choral Awards and is a 2020-2021 Emerging Artist Fellow with the Association for Opera in Canada.

KIRSTEN BARKER graduated from Utah State University with a bachelor's degree in music performance and an environmental studies minor in May of 2021. During her time at USU, Kirsten has been a member of the Caine Undergraduate Research Quartet, performed and co-wrote the libretto for a co-commissioned opera titled *A Storm We Call Progress*, and presented at undergraduate research events such as UCUR, NCUR, ROCH, and POH. Kirsten will begin pursuing graduate studies in musicology at UIUC in Fall 2021, where she hopes to combine her interests in music and science communication.

Closing Notes

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