

# TRANSNATIONAL SMYTH: SUFFRAGE, COSMOPOLITANISM, NETWORKS

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## ABSTRACT

Erica Fedor: Transnational Smyth: Suffrage, Cosmopolitanism, Networks  
(Under the direction of Annegret Fauser)

This thesis examines the transnational entanglements of Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944), which are exemplified through her travel and movement, her transnational networks, and her music’s global circulation. Smyth studied music in Leipzig, Germany, as a young woman; composed an opera (*The Boatswain’s Mate*) while living in Egypt; and even worked as a radiologist in France during the First World War. In order to achieve performances of her work, she drew upon a carefully-cultivated transnational network of influential women—her powerful “matrons.” While I acknowledge the sexism and misogyny Smyth encountered and battled throughout her life, I also wish to broaden the scholarly conversation surrounding Smyth to touch on the ways nationalism, mobility, and cosmopolitanism contribute to, and impact, a composer’s reputations and reception. Smyth herself acknowledges the particular double-bind she faced—that of being a woman and a composer with German musical training trying to break into the English music scene. Using Ethel Smyth as a case study, this thesis draws upon the composer’s writings, reviews of Smyth’s musical works, popular-press articles, and academic sources to examine broader themes regarding the ways nationality, transnationality, and locality intersect with issues of gender and institutionalized sexism. Such intersections have the power to shape labels of insider/outsider and influence whose music gets performed, studied, and remembered.

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## INTRODUCTION

The echoes from the one-year anniversary of the Women’s March on Washington ring in my ears. I have saved my sign from my own participation in the 2017 march here in Raleigh, NC (hot pink with “Rise Up”—a nod to a recurring theme throughout *Hamilton: The Musical*—written in large block letters.) The #metoo and #TimesUp movements are spreading rapidly across social media platforms and U.S. awards-show stages, connecting, highlighting, and amplifying marginalized voices. Now is a critical time for us to turn to discussions of women who are regarded as groundbreaking figures, including Dame Ethel Mary Smyth (1858–1944). That Ethel Smyth has been described as a *Grenzgängerin*, a crosser of borders, is fitting.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, Smyth’s legacy of border-crossing is exemplified by her own global movement and mobility. She studied music in Leipzig, Germany, as a young woman; composed an opera (*The Boatswain’s Mate*) while living in Egypt; and even worked as a radiologist in France during the First World War.

Additionally, Smyth as border-crosser refers to the way she traversed and even obliterated once impenetrable borders for female, British composers. White, educated, and born into an upper-class military family, Smyth certainly benefitted from a number of privileges, particularly in terms of race, class, and education. However, her positionality as a female, queer, British composer marked her as an outsider in the Western art-music world, and attempts were

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn, and Melanie Unseld (eds.) *Felsensprengerin. Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin. Die Komponistin Ethel Smyth* (München: Allitera Verlag, 2010), 14.

made throughout Smyth's career to silence her and to relegate her music to the margins. Eugene Gates also describes the stifling "double standard" that plagued Smyth and her music's reception during her life: "On the one hand, when she composed powerful, rhythmically vital music, it was said that her work lacked feminine charm; on the other, when she produced delicate, melodious compositions, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Smyth was forced to compose in a variety of styles—not simply as matter of interest or inspiration but frequently as a strategy for survival—as the following testimony from her memoir reveals: "in the intervals of operatic adventures abroad every sort of ammunition was turned out wherewith to attack our own strongholds . . . short choral works, orchestral and chamber works, songs; everything, I think, except a Reverie for Pianoforte and Comb—a regrettable omission, for that might have done the trick."<sup>3</sup>

The description of Smyth as *Grenzgängerin* extends beyond the realm of biography to encompass the ways in which her music broke boundaries of its own. As musicologist Elizabeth Wood notes:

Smyth's acts and statements similarly manipulate traditional *musical* materials. They invade and disrupt music's institutional structures, public sites, and performance conventions. They break boundaries, among opera's gendered roles and musical genres. They invent parodic, subversive counternarratives to musical models. Her music

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene Gates, "Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't: Sexual Aesthetics in the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 31 no. 1 (Spring 1997): 68. Smyth was not the only composer either in the later nineteenth or throughout the twentieth centuries who faced this issue. Her slightly older French contemporary, Augusta Holmès (1847–1903), encountered similar issues. See, for example, Jann Pasler, "The Ironies of Gender, or Virility and Politics in the Music of Augusta Holmès," *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* vol. 2 (1998): 1–25.

<sup>3</sup> Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1936), 291–92.

articulates and performs the female voice and visionary compulsion of a rebellious feminist activism.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, although dictionaries and other paratexts tend to label Smyth as a “British” composer and describe her as a prominent figure in the English “musical renaissance” of the early twentieth century, it is clear that her life and career had complex relationships with the concepts of “Britishness” and “Englishness.” While Smyth was eventually named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1922, the label of “English,” of hailing from the so-called *Land ohne Musik*, continually damaged Smyth’s reputation as a composer throughout her life. As Michael Oliver writes in a *Gramophone* review: “I wonder whether Smyth’s difficulties in getting her music accepted didn’t stem as much from her distinctly un-English boldness as from prejudice against women composers, stronger though that undoubtedly was.”<sup>5</sup>

Ethel Mary Smyth was born on April 22, 1858, in London, England. She wrote six operas as well as orchestra, chamber, and vocal works. Smyth was also a prolific writer, and published ten autobiographical books and polemical writings between 1919 and 1940. In 1877, Smyth moved to Germany to attend the prestigious Leipzig Conservatory. Although she left the conservatory after only one year of study, she stayed in Leipzig, where she studied with Heinrich von Herzogenberg. According to musicologist Sophie Fuller, “Smyth made no secret of her attraction to women, and her many passionate relationships influenced and affected her music in

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Wood, “Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women’s Suffrage,” *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 79, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 615.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Oliver, “Ethel Smyth Chamber Works & Songs, Vol. 3,” *Gramophone*, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/ethel-smyth-chamber-works-songs-vol3>.

a variety of ways.”<sup>6</sup> Smyth alludes to these so-called “passions” throughout her writings. Notable love interests of Smyth’s include the writers Virginia Woolf and Edith Somerville as well as British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. Smyth also developed a romantic relationship with at least one man during her life, her longtime collaborator and librettist Henry B. “Harry” Brewster.

Smyth devoted much of her time and energy to securing performances of her operas in various opera houses throughout Europe. Getting her works performed in English opera houses was a particularly difficult task. Her first opera, *Fantasio* (1892) premiered in Weimar, Germany, in 1898. Smyth’s second opera, *Der Wald* (1899–1901), premiered in Berlin in 1902 and was performed again in London later that year. By 1910, all of Smyth’s major works had been performed. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Durham University that same year. Smyth also met Emmeline Pankhurst in 1910, and she decided to dedicate two years to the women’s suffrage cause following her meeting with the influential militant suffragette. Smyth’s suffrage song “The March of the Women” became a powerful women’s suffrage anthem, and notable performances of the work occurred throughout Europe as well as the United States. In 1912, she was arrested for her involvement in a suffragette window-smashing campaign, and was sentenced to two months in the notorious Holloway Prison.

After World War I broke out, the professional relationships Smyth worked hard to cultivate and build in Germany were destroyed. While she worked as a radiologist in France, she soon realized that she was losing her hearing, which left her utterly devastated. Though Smyth continued composing music, she also began writing memoirs, starting with *Impressions That Remained* (1919). In 1922, Smyth was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British

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<sup>6</sup> Sophie Fuller, “Smyth, Dame Ethel,” *Grove Music Online*, December 10, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/0-mo-9781561592630-e-0000026038>.



Empire. A special celebratory concert featuring Smyth's music was held in her honor in 1934. The Queen herself attended the concert and reportedly led the vigorous applause at the show's conclusion. Smyth, however, was totally deaf at this point and could hear neither her music nor the applause. She died in 1944 at the age of 86. An avid sportswoman and golfer throughout her life, Smyth requested that her ashes be scattered near the golf course she frequented in Hook Heath, Surrey.

Marked by international travel, embedded in feminist networks that extended across Europe and the United States, shaped by transnational activism and advocacy through her involvement in the women's suffrage movement, and fostered by music that circulated across Europe and the United States, Smyth's life is a notably transnational one. To capture this border-crossing enmeshment of Smyth's life, I turn away from the usual focus on her nationality in biographical and musical studies about the composer and instead apply the concept of transnational biography to her life. In the introduction to the edited collection, *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity*, volume editors Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott acknowledge that "Transnational history focuses not so much on international connections between states as on the connections and movements that have preceded, transcended or exceeded national boundaries."<sup>7</sup> Deacon, Russel, and Woollacott also acknowledge the staggering diversity regarding the definition of what defines a life as being *transnational*. They note:

there is a large variety of 'transnational lives.' Some spent years and decades in various countries, never settling down in one place, while others retained a strong sense of attachment to their homeland even as they lived and worked abroad. Some moved

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<sup>7</sup> Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott, "Introduction," in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700–Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

essentially within imperial territories, others were born and raised within an empire as dependent people but sought to achieve freedom by appealing to a world community, while still others sought to transcend national distinctions in pursuit of careers in music, fine arts, dancing, or acting.<sup>8</sup>

In this thesis, I locate the transnational in several critical dimensions of Smyth's life: her global movement, which took her from England to Germany, as well as Austria, France, Italy, and Egypt, among other diverse locales; her female relationships and connections; her sense of belonging and complex national loyalties; and her music's global circulation and use.

But first—what is transnationalism and what does it mean to think about Ethel Smyth's biography in an explicitly transnational way? According to Axel Körner, "Thinking transnationally means to trace people, ideas and goods across national boundaries, and to rethink established spatial categories of historical analysis in order to engage with hitherto neglected transnational entities."<sup>9</sup> Smyth's life, which was marked not only by global movement, but also competing, often conflicting loyalties to Germany and England and a network of powerful women from all over Europe, challenges narratives of the nation, as well as established frameworks of national history. As Patricia Clavin argues, "Transnationalism, despite its early identification with the transfer or movement of money and goods, is first and foremost about people: the social space that they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange." She continues, "The influence and character of these networks defy easy categorization."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott, eds. *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700–Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xi.

<sup>9</sup> Axel Körner, "Transnational History: Identities, Structures, States," in *Internationale Geschichte in Theorie und Praxis/International History in Theory and Practice*, ed. William D. Godsey, Barbara Haider-Wilson, and Wolfgang Mueller (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 265.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* vol. 14 no. 4 (2005): 422.

I am interested in the concept of transnationalism not only as a key critical lens but also as a vital corrective to the prevalence nationhood assumes in traditional biographical investigations. I follow here the three editors of *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity*, who posit:

Historically, the nationality of individuals has been determined by complex combinations of birthplace, language, residence, citizenship, ethnic identity, racial classification and allegiance. But human lives elude official classification. The transnationalism—the mobility, confusion and sheer messiness—of ordinary lives threatens the stability of national identity and unsettles the framework of national histories.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, though human lives evade, cross, push against, and defy national boundaries, biography and biographical works often become powerful tools for nation-building. According to Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott,

Lives elude national boundaries; yet biography, the telling of life stories, has often been pressed into the service of the nation, downplaying its fleeting acknowledgements of lives lived in motion. Dictionaries of national biography, in particular, reify and defend national boundaries by constructing individual significance and achievement within them.<sup>12</sup>

Such biographical works frequently downplay the necessary movement and networks that typify lived experiences in order to prop up the status of nation. As mentioned above, Smyth journeyed all over the world, from attending a premiere of one of her operas in Monte Carlo to seeking inspiration in Egypt as she composed *The Boatswain's Mate*. She spoke excellent German as well as French. To refer to her merely as a “British” or “English” composer erases these rich

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<sup>11</sup> Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott, “Introduction,” 1-2. In his study of Arsenio Rodriguez, David Garcia similarly emphasized the importance of transnational circulation in order to understand “the role that race, identity, and politics had in shaping his music and the trajectory of his musical career both locally and within the transnational realm of Cuban and Latin popular music.” See David F. Garcia, *Arsenio Rodriguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott, “Introduction,” 2.

details of her life, which informed and shaped both her writing, particularly her music and her ten autobiographical tomes, as well as her activist sensibilities.

Focusing on Ethel Smyth and transnational biography—with particular attention to her feminist networks, her music’s global circulation, and her ties to both Germany and England (which directly challenged nationalist sentiment both prior and during World War I)—also allows for the opportunity to dismantle the male-centeredness of a great deal of biographical investigations, even those that purportedly focus on female composers. That Smyth knew Johannes Brahms, Edvard Grieg, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Bruno Walter, among other prominent male musical figures, is well documented. It is because of the primacy these networks and relationships assume in previous texts that I deliberately choose throughout my thesis *not* to emphasize Smyth’s connections with male composers and their legacies. In order to decenter the prevalence maleness assumes, I continue to return to the edited volume *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity*, which brings together the stories of “extraordinary, fluid, disruptive, and yet ordinary lives,” with a focus on various dimensions of the personal, often using feminist, fine-grained analyses of networks. As Deacon, Russel, and Woollacott argue, capturing the lived experiences and realities of transnational lives “demands a central focus on private life, a recognition of the ways that transnational movement and connections have been driven by and reflected in personal experience.”<sup>13</sup> This thesis thus considers Smyth’s autobiographies and memoirs as well as personal correspondence as critical sources through which to problematize Smyth’s relationship to and with Britain, which remains unproblematized in both popular and scholarly texts.

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<sup>13</sup> Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott, “Introduction,” 6.

Chapter 1 focuses on Smyth as cosmopolitan, celebrity, and character, and argues that her cosmopolitan life has been downplayed in the historical record. Yet without considering the ways in which nationalism and patriotism influenced critics' reception of Smyth's ambiguous nationalist aesthetics, we are left with an incomplete picture as to why Smyth's music was marginalized during her lifetime. In Chapter 2, I examine Smyth's European and U.S. feminist networks. Throughout her writings and letters, Smyth refers to the group that excluded her by a number of different names, including the Machine, the Male Machine, the Inner Circle, the Group, and the Faculty. This group, Smyth contends, was made up of powerful men across nationalities who acted as gatekeepers to every aspect of musical life, from music-education opportunities to reviews and music criticism in the popular press. In order to best the "Machine," Smyth drew upon a carefully-cultivated, powerful network of women who hailed from all over Europe and across the Atlantic. In other words, she "deployed her own networks of female sociability when faced with difficulties she could not overcome with her own charm and persistence, calling on royal and aristocratic friends or congenial members of the musical elite."<sup>14</sup> Who made up these "networks of female sociability," or, as I shall refer to them, Smyth's transnational feminist networks? When the Machine blocked Smyth at every turn, upon whom did she call for assistance? Who were these women and why are they so frequently glossed over in descriptions of Smyth's life and career, such as her entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*? The importance of these networks cannot be overlooked nor overstated when we examine Smyth's life or her success as a composer. In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Kertesz, "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle," in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin: die Komponistin Ethel Smyth*, eds. Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn, and Melanie Unseld (München: Allitera Verlag, 2012), 99.

Smyth's composition "March of the Women" (1910). Rather than exploring this song as a hallmark of the British women's suffrage movement, I aim to place it instead in a network of global flows and circulation that came about as part of an unprecedented international turn in the movement's history.

By examining Smyth's biography and writings, as well as her transnational feminist networks and her music's global circulation, I aim to highlight Smyth's highly transnational life and work. While I acknowledge and hold space for the sexism and misogyny Smyth encountered and battled throughout her life, I also wish to broaden the scholarly conversation surrounding Smyth to touch on the ways nationalism, mobility, and cosmopolitanism contribute to, and impact, a composer's reputations and reception. Smyth herself acknowledges this particular double-bind—that of being a woman and a composer with German musical training trying to break into the English music scene. She knew she would have to fight continually “against the stealthy, consistent, inflexible opposition to women's advancement: what with my sex and my foreign musical education, I do think the odds against winning through were overwhelming.”<sup>15</sup> Using Ethel Smyth as a case study, this thesis draws upon Smyth's writings, reviews of Smyth's musical works, popular-press articles, and academic sources to examine broader themes regarding the ways nationality, transnationality, and locality intersect with issues of gender and institutionalized sexism. Such intersections have the power to shape labels of insider/outsider and influence whose music gets performed, studied, and remembered.

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<sup>15</sup> Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 295.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Ethel Smyth: Cosmopolitan, Celebrity, Character

During Ethel Smyth's youth, English composers would not be taken seriously without German training or support of a German musical institution. As Smyth's biographer Christopher St. John (born Christabel Marshall) writes, "in Ethel's youth the 'music life' of London, and indeed of all English cities, was not propitious to native musicians, whether composers, conductors, instrumentalists, or singers." In order to boost her credibility, Smyth thus set off to study at the Leipzig Conservatory at age nineteen in 1877. Smyth wistfully recalls her early days in Germany in *Impressions That Remained* (1919): "I was lost in a dream of delight during my first season in Leipzig."<sup>16</sup> While she soon found herself disappointed in the overall caliber of her conservatory peers, she found tremendous joy in Germany's musical culture and institutions, and frequently attended concerts at the Gewandhaus and the Opera. Her friend and love interest, Lisl von Herzogenberg (to whom I will return to in Chapter 2 as part of a more detailed investigation of Smyth's transnational feminist networks) introduced her to a number of famous composers and patrons dominating the Leipzig scene. After she and Lisl had a disastrous falling-out in 1884–85, Smyth lost her connection to this elite musical community and returned to England. She felt like an outsider in London's art music scene, however, and lamented: "I felt a stranger in the music life of London, I, who even as a half-baked neophyte had associated with people to whom music

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<sup>16</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Impressions That Remained* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946), 175.

was a sacred thing, people like Clara Schumann, Levi, Nikisch, Brahms, the Herzogenbergs, the Röntgens, the Griegs, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, and the rest.”

Unfortunately for Smyth, the fact that she was not well known in London also negatively impacted her potential success in Germany:

I revisited haunts in Germany where years ago I had been considered a promising neophyte, bringing with me two ripe works—the Mass and the pianoforte score of a three-act opera. I will not elaborate the effect produced, beyond saying that if I had ever lacked self-confidence that little composers’ tour would have made good the deficiency. None the less, of those foreign performances of the Mass, believed by me to be as certain as the arrival of Christmas, *not one materialized*; and in each case the reasons, as reported by faithful friends on the spot, were the same: (1) my sex; (2) the fact that apparently I was quite unknown in England. CHECKMATE!”<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Smyth’s German training coupled with her identity as an English composer made it challenging for musical institutions in either country to categorize and promote her. William McNaught writes of the dual focus of Smyth’s career in his 1937 *Modern Music and Musicians*:

This composer’s remarkable career had been divided between Germany, where she received her musical education, and England. Her music itself displays a parallel duality. The German idiom assimilated during her formative period has been subjected to, and has to some extent resisted, modification by the English bearing of her operatic and other texts and by an artistic course set towards the English marked; and the survival of this German influence tends to separate her music from the prevalent English school of later birth and more unblended character.<sup>18</sup>

A 1902 review of Smyth’s opera *Der Wald* explicitly addresses the problematic nature of Smyth’s identity as a composer who maintained musical and cultural ties to both Englishness and Germanness:

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<sup>17</sup> Ethel Smyth, “A Life Summed Up,” in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking, 1987): 356–57.

<sup>18</sup> McNaught quoted in Elizabeth Jane Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception of Ethel Smyth’s Mass and First Four operas in England and Germany” (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2001), 248.



That the Berlin Opera House should open its doors to Miss Ethel Smyth, for the performance of her opera, “Der Wald,” is no doubt a great compliment to an English musician; but the fact that an English composer, with a sufficient talent in operatic composition to obtain a hearing at Berlin, should seek the bubble of reputation in a foreign land, is not without its unpleasant significance; “Der Wald” is the second opera which the composer has written for performance in Berlin, and the question naturally arises,— why does not Miss Smyth write an English opera for performance in England. Her education at the Leipsic Conservatoire and a probable preference for the German language for the purposes of opera must of course be taken into account. But no doubt Smyth has been chiefly influenced by the immense difficulties which face all British aspirants in the operatic field.<sup>19</sup>

Just as Smyth’s music was often attacked in the press for sounding too masculine or too feminine, here the piece’s national identity is critiqued and questioned. Some reviews go so far as to link Smyth’s masculinity and her affiliations with Germany, as in English critic Neville Cardus’ “Seventieth Birthday Greeting” to Smyth. He writes the following:

Dame Ethel would prefer the valuation of her genius that ignored her sex, but that is not easy, because she has put as much of her genius into her life as into her art. No doubt it must be taken as a sign of an essentially unmusical land that as a whole this country did not really wake up to Dame Ethel’s existence until she was observed to be fighting manfully in the cause of women’s suffrage . . . Not until she published her “Impressions that Remained” could we in this land thoroughly realise the strength, the individuality; the richness of mind which make up Dame Ethel’s personal magnetism. This as much as her music, possibly, achieved her conquests in Germany.<sup>20</sup>

Drawing on Cardus and numerous other sources, Elizabeth Kertesz summed up the ways Smyth’s “dual focus” on England and Germany negatively impacted critical response to the composer’s musical aesthetics:

This . . . affected critical assessment of her music, for her national and artistic allegiances were confused by critics with their assessments of the ‘accent’ of the music itself. Smyth herself contributed to critical debate by making public statements reflecting on the relative merits of the two countries in providing opportunities for her music. Aesthetic prejudice and political tension affected whether Smyth’s musical style was dubbed German, English or neither. Her German training, cosmopolitan existence and difficulty

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<sup>19</sup> *The Musical Times*, “Comments on Events,” *Musical News* 22 (12 April 1902), 351.

<sup>20</sup> Cardus quoted in Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 195.

breaking into English musical life rendered her slightly ‘foreign’ even at home and the staging of her operas provoked debates about choice of repertory on both sides of the Channel.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to issues of musical and compositional style, Smyth also found English musical culture lacking in comparison to what she experienced in Germany. She shunned London’s musical life in particular, as she could not find the “religious” devotion to music that she felt pervaded all of German culture.<sup>22</sup> Although she preferred life in the English countryside to life in London, this also negatively impacted her music’s reception and her reputation as a composer.

As Smyth’s biographer Christopher St. John notes, “A list of her comings and goings in the late nineties, and in the first years of the Edwardian epoch would read like the itinerary of a leisured *flâneuse*, whose main interest in life was to go about visiting people and places. To be fair, it should be added that a great deal of her gadding abroad was a necessary part of her fight to get her music performed in foreign capitals.”<sup>23</sup> However, Smyth’s border-crossing need not be so readily dismissed as “gadding around.” Rather, it can be readily theorized in terms of cosmopolitanism. Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz describes cosmopolitanism as a particular type of “orientation,”

a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural contrasts rather than uniformity . . . At the same time, however, cosmopolitanism can be a matter of competence, and competence of both a generalized and a more specialized kind. There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>22</sup> Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 296–297.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 89.

<sup>24</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996), 103.

As philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, the term cosmopolitanism dates back to Greek Stoics who “reject[ed] the call to local loyalties.” The type of cosmopolitanism that Smyth embodies depends on mobility enabled by privilege. According to literary scholar Amanda Anderson, “Cosmopolitanism also typically manifests a complex tension between elitism and egalitarianism. It frequently advances itself as a specifically intellectual ideal or depends on a mobility that is the luxury of social, economic, or cultural privilege.”<sup>25</sup> As Smyth affiliated herself with, and immersed herself in, various transnational social and musical circles, she demonstrates what Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta describe as “overlapping loyalties.”<sup>26</sup> They write, “According to the new understanding, cosmopolitanism can be defined as any one of many possible modes of life, thought, and sensibility that are produced when commitments are multiple and overlapping, no one of them necessarily trumping the others.”

Smyth’s overlapping loyalties to England and Germany are prevalent in both her music and her writings. She continually found English musical culture lacking compared to that which she had experienced in Germany. The following passage—a letter from Smyth to Edward J. Dent discussing Bruno Walter’s departure from England—is only one example: “I hope Walter will never settle in England. It destroys the soul of musicians who have to deal with our belief in compromise . . . When Youth is past your own country is the place for you. I think of beloved Henry Wood & feel ungrateful. But the atmosphere, the level, the putting up with mediocrity in

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<sup>25</sup> Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 73.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, “Introduction,” in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins, Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 3.

your aims, is the killing thing.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as Kertesz writes, “Smyth’s uncompromising attitude cannot have endeared her to her compatriots.”<sup>28</sup> Additionally, while German musical influences pervade her early musical style, Smyth acknowledges the break with the German musical tradition that marks her “later manner.” She considered *The Wreckers* and her songs as works “in my ‘later manner’ (!! ) i.e. absolutely out of the German wood.”<sup>29</sup> As Smyth endeavored to achieve performances of her works, however, having once had multiple, overlapping loyalties and commitments in both Germany and England negatively impacted her music’s reception and her reputation as a composer, as later sections of this chapter demonstrate. Even though she thought of her style gradually becoming less influenced by Germany and German composers, she felt the English music scene continued to snub and shun her.

The first decade of the twentieth century found opera in a time of crisis, both in Germany and in England. Germany had to contend with the long shadow of Wagner, as well as a mounting number of non-German operas taking over its stages. Music critics such as Detlev Schultz worried about the pervasiveness of foreign works when he commented in 1907: “The yield of novelties from German opera theatres in 1906 comes to: 12 ... German and 16 foreign works—not a normal proportion! The Italians are at the top of the foreigners, in quality as well . . . Remarkably, England was also represented with new works.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smyth quoted in Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 247.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Schultz quoted in Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 61.

Opera as a genre was also in crisis among English opera companies, and many English composers had a difficult time getting their works printed or even just distributed as loan materials. In many cases, the only option was to publish abroad. Kertesz describes the vicious cycle of publication and performance that English opera composers faced during this time:

A guaranteed performance was a good inducement for publishers, but while choral festivals provided this for many English composers, it was a much more difficult proposition to secure performance for an English opera. The untried composer faced a vicious circle: performance was impossible without a published score, and no publisher would take on a work without the prospect of a successful performance.<sup>31</sup>

Further, at the turn of the twentieth century, English choral-music composers concentrated predominantly on oratorios and non-sacred choral works.<sup>32</sup> By focusing on opera, Smyth advocated for a genre of music that was—paradoxically—both at the apex of musical life in London where Italian, French, and German operas dominated the repertoire of the Royal Opera House and very much at the margins, given the scarcity of performance opportunities for British works.

Between 1894 and 1898, Smyth struggled to see her first opera, *Fantasio*—setting a German-language libretto that she co-wrote with Harry Brewster—produced at a German opera house. At the time, Germany had fourteen opera houses, a far richer landscape than the limited opportunity offered by the singular Royal Opera House at Covent Garden. On May 24, 1898, after four years of unremitting effort, *Fantasio* premiered at the Hoftheater in Weimar to decidedly mixed reviews. While there was more interest in both England and Germany regarding Smyth's second opera, *Der Wald*, securing German performances remained challenging,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 63.

Christopher St. John attributes a great deal of this to the anti-English sentiment that pervaded Germany during the Boer War, which lasted from October 1899 to May 1902.<sup>33</sup> Though Smyth knew a production of *Der Wald* at Covent Garden was being discussed, she nevertheless began campaigning for a production in Berlin. In *Streaks of Life*, she attributes the need to return to Germany to the lack of interest in opera in England: “As there was no outlet for English opera in England I turned my thoughts again to Germany.”<sup>34</sup> Yet St. John does not find this claim convincing. In any case, Smyth persevered, and *Der Wald* premiered in Berlin in 1902, and St. John (writing long after the end of World War II) observes admiringly that Smyth “won the Battles of Weimar and Berlin.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the successful premiere in Berlin led to one of Smyth’s biggest triumphs when Covent Garden produced the work in English. It was, Smyth recalled, one of her “few almost wholly delightful operatic experiences.”<sup>36</sup> The Metropolitan Opera in New York followed suit and staged the work in 1903 to great acclaim. On opening night, Smyth herself received a ten-minute standing ovation. This was the first opera composed by a woman to be performed at the Met; the second, Kajia Saariaho’s *L’Amour de Loin*, would not appear on its stage until its 2016 season, over 100 years later.

Such battles persisted throughout Smyth’s career—but not all ended in victory. Needless to say, the relationship between Germany and England, in both political and musical realms, changed dramatically throughout Smyth’s lifetime. Smyth was understandably devastated when

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography*, 96.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 204, cited in Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 103.

all performances of her music in Germany came to a complete halt following the outbreak of World War I. She laments:

no sooner was I back from Egypt, whither I had fled in the winter of 1913 in order to write *The Boatswain's Mate*, than war broke out ... and therewith my carefully built up connection with Germany (which was to have culminated in February 1915 with *The Wreckers* at Munich and the premiere of the *Bo'sun* at Frankfurt) collapsed forever and ever.<sup>37</sup>

Following World War I, Smyth would “re-orient” her career to focus on England.<sup>38</sup> Based on later remarks from Cardus and McNaught, however, one wonders to what degree she truly succeeded in rebranding herself and her music. Donald Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams describe Smyth as a “continentally minded composer” whose very presence in the opera scene was in direct opposition to composers seeking to “create a viable opera of distinctly English character.”<sup>39</sup> In 1924, for instance, Smyth supported the Covent Garden Syndicate’s highly controversial invitation to the Vienna State Opera as an important symbol of international exchange and understanding between the two nations. Smyth’s divisive stance privileged a cosmopolitan vision over nationalist politics. Due to the unrest that Covent Garden’s invitation provoked, the Viennese State Opera eventually cancelled their trip to London. Though it was intended for a German premiere, Smyth’s opera *The Boatswain's Mate* was, as Elizabeth Wood argues, Smyth’s “first truly British, contemporary, vernacular theatre work.” In this work, she claims, Smyth “sheds German romanticism for British folk and traditional airs.”<sup>40</sup> While Smyth’s

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<sup>37</sup> Smyth, “A Life Summed Up,” 360–61.

<sup>38</sup> Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 248.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams, *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 708.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Wood, “Women, Music and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music,” *The Massachusetts Review* vol. 24, no. 1 (1983): 130.

*The Wreckers* was performed in English in London in 1909, the work originally had a French libretto and was performed in German (with the title *Strandrecht*) in Leipzig in 1906.

But turning her focus to England was not Smyth's only notable "reorientation." As a way of coping with her worsening deafness, as well as the horrors she witnessed while working as a radiologist in France during World War I, Smyth turned to writing memoirs. As she grew older, she worried constantly about her legacy. She feared that she had become better known in England as a writer of memoirs than a composer:

Yes, reader ... even now, at an hour when perhaps all passion should be spent, it sometimes saddens me to think that during my lifetime I have had no chance of making myself musically known to my countrymen and women as I have done in books—more or less. Yet rather less than more.<sup>41</sup>

The issues of celebrity and notoriety feature prominently throughout Smyth's writings. Though they became close friends late in life, Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf's views on publicity and public notoriety could not have been more distinct. Woolf protested that "my publicity is already too much... Limelight is bad for me: the light in which I work best is twilight."<sup>42</sup> Smyth, however, was never one to shy away from attention. Indeed, according to literature scholar Suzanne Raitt, her "life was conducted in a blaze of publicity, and of narrative."<sup>43</sup> Smyth's larger-than-life personality and numerous writings, particularly her ten books, were often the

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<sup>41</sup> Smyth, "A Life Summed Up," 361.

<sup>42</sup> Woolf quoted in Wiley, "'When a woman speaks the truth about her body': Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/biography." *Music and Letters* vol. 85 no. 1 (August 2004): 393.

<sup>43</sup> Raitt quoted in Elizabeth Wood, "Gender and Genre in Ethel Smyth's Operas," in Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Ottlieb, eds., *The Musical Woman: An international Perspective*, Vol. 2 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 493.



subject of public discourse. But while Smyth was considered a celebrity in many ways, the label of “celebrity” is not without its serious complications and complexities. Smyth confronts the issue of her celebrity in her 1933 essay, “A Life Summed Up.” She writes:

‘But *aren’t* you in the mainstream now?’ such a one might ask.

Ah! it’s a queer business! Because I have conducted my own operas and love sheepdogs; because I generally dress in tweeds, and sometimes, at winter afternoon concerts, have even conducted in them; because I was a militant Suffragette and seized a chance of beating time to the *March of the Women* from the window of my cell in Holloway prison with a toothbrush; because I have written books, spoken speeches, broadcast, and don’t always make sure that my hat is on straight; for these and other equally pertinent reasons, in a certain sense I am well known. If I buy a pair of boots in London, and not having money enough produce an envelope with my name, the parcel is pressed into my hand: ‘We want no reference in *your* case, madam!’

This is celebrity indeed! – or shall we say notoriety?— but it does not alter the fact that after having been on the job, so to speak, for over forty years, I have never yet succeed in becoming even a tiny wheel in the English music machine; nor did this fantastic latter-day notoriety even pave the way—that much it really might have done—to inclusion in programme schemes!”

Throughout this passage, Smyth attributes her celebrity status to her eccentricities rather than her talent and skill as a composer. This sentiment is echoed by music scholar Elizabeth Kertesz:

“The absence of substantial scholarly work on Smyth’s life and music from St. John’s biography until the renewed interest in the 1980s can perhaps be explained by the fact that Smyth survived in English public memory as a *character*, rather than a composer.”<sup>44</sup> Smyth published her first memoir, *Impressions That Remained*, in 1919 and became a Dame of the British Empire in 1922, when she was 63 years old. These first years after the end of World War I was the period when “she began to be accorded the status of a national treasure but was no longer seen as relevant to current musical developments.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kertesz, “Issues in the Critical Reception,” 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Smyth's status as a "character" persists to this day. For instance, a 1993 article in the *Independent* reads: "Give our obsession with anniversaries, 1994 will no doubt see a small flood of Smyth performances—a small flood only, for she is still regarded as an engaging oddity, an archetypal English eccentric, rather than a serious composer. It is certainly true that she was a character."<sup>46</sup> The 2016 *Mental Floss* article, "The Story of Ethel Smyth, Breaker of Operatic Glass Ceilings," begins with the following: "Last night, New York City's Metropolitan Opera premiered an opera composed by a woman. The last time that happened, it was 1903. Here's the story of the feisty (and eccentric) composer-turned-suffragist who broke that musical glass ceiling 113 years ago."<sup>47</sup> And a 2015 National Public Radio piece about a restaging of Smyth's opera *The Wreckers* is titled "One Feisty Victorian Woman's Opera Revived."<sup>48</sup>

In popular press articles and music-history textbooks, many scholars and authors are quick to label sexism as the root cause of Smyth's marginalization. Yet in addition to issues regarding gender, issues of repertory related to nationalism powerfully influenced the reception and even performances of Smyth's work. Smyth herself writes, "All my life, as regards the worth

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<sup>46</sup> Nick Kimberley, "Classical Music: It's Still an Unsuitable Job for a Woman," *The Independent*, April 10, 1993. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical-music-its-still-an-unsuitable-job-for-a-woman-ethel-smyth-was-once-a-victorian-oddity-nick-1454548.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Lucas Reilly, "The Story of Ethel Smyth, Breaker of Operatic Glass Ceilings," *Mental Floss*, December 2, 2016, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/89480/story-ethel-smyth-composer-suffragette-and-breaker-operatic-glass-ceilings>.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Huizenga, "One Feisty Victorian Woman's Opera Revived, NPR, July 23, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2015/07/23/410033088/one-feisty-victorian-womans-opera-revived>.

of my contribution to music such as it is, I have been confronted by two opposing estimates — one made in Germany, the other in England.”<sup>49</sup> Smyth considered England her country and Germany her adopted home. Neither truly accepted her during her lifetime, however. Consistently regarded as a “foreigner,” Smyth remained a composer without a musical home. According to Smyth, when she became a Dame of the British Empire in 1921, she was still perceived as a national “character” rather than a national composer. Given all of these odds working against her, how was Smyth able to secure performances and productions of her music? Much of the answer lies with the women who made up Smyth’s powerful network of female benefactors, to whom I will turn in the following chapter.

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<sup>49</sup> Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 301–2.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ethel Smyth's Transnational Feminist Networks

According to her friend and love interest, famed author Virginia Woolf, Smyth “is of the race of pioneers, of path-makers. She has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who come after her. Thus we honour her not only as a musician and as a writer . . . but also as a blaster of rocks and the maker of bridges.”<sup>50</sup> Yet Smyth did not cross borders, fell trees, blast rocks, build bridges, and make a way for those to come all by herself. Rather, these processes involved a vital community of women, Smyth's transnational network, with whom Smyth worked hard to develop and maintain relationships. Elizabeth Wood describes Smyth as “the Admiral who leads an attack not merely to destroy but to rally the Fleet and rebuild.”<sup>51</sup> Smyth learned early on that as an outsider on multiple levels—including her gender but also her positionality as a German-trained composer in England and an Englishwoman in Germany—she found herself actively excluded by those in power.

Throughout her writings and letters, Smyth refers to the group that excluded her by a number of different names, including the Machine, the Male Machine, the Inner Circle, the Group, and the Faculty. This group, Smyth contends, was made up of powerful men who acted as gatekeepers to every aspect of musical life, from music-education opportunities to critical

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<sup>50</sup> Bartsch, Grotjahn, and Unseld, eds., “Introduction,” in *Felsensprengerin, Brückenbauerin, Wegbereiterin*, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Wood, “Women, Music, and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music,” *The Massachusetts Review* vol. 24, no. 1 (1983): 126.

reviews in the press. In order to best the “Machine,” Smyth drew upon a carefully-cultivated, powerful network of women who hailed from all over Europe as well as the United States. In other words, she “deployed her own networks of female sociability when faced with difficulties she could not overcome with her own charm and persistence, calling on royal and aristocratic friends or congenial members of the musical elite.”<sup>52</sup> This network of women has attracted some recent research. Martha Vicinus has written about Ethel Smyth and her same-sex relationships in her work on the complex “erotic and emotional relations” between women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>53</sup> Rachel Lumsden also discusses Smyth’s relationships with women, although she focuses predominantly on the friendship between the composer and prominent women’s suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst.<sup>54</sup> Conceptualizing networks of women artists and their benefactors requires a theoretical stance that takes into account unappreciated and unrecognized forms of labor, particularly women’s emotional labor. When writing about twentieth-century female modernist authors, Susan McCabe encourages us to expand our understanding of patronage to include “affectional patronage.” According to McCabe, patronage in all-female networks expands beyond monetary support to include “gifts like friendship, emotional support, childcare, and even housekeeping.”

Throughout this chapter, I investigate Ethel Smyth’s legacy of bridge-building and border-crossing by focusing on her transnational “networks of female sociability,” which I will

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<sup>52</sup> Kertesz, “Creating Ethel Smyth,” 99.

<sup>53</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Rachel Lumsden, “‘The Music Between Us’: Ethel Smyth, Emmeline Pankhurst, and ‘Possession,’” *Feminist Studies* vol. 41 no. 2 (2015): 335–370.

also refer to not as Smyth's patrons or patronage but, rather, her "matrons" and "matronage." As art historian Melia Belli Bose suggests, "In the past few decades several feminist art historians have adopted the term 'matronage' in an effort both to restore agency to women who were a vital force in historical artistic commissioning, as well as to distinguish women's practices of commissioning from examples of normative masculine artistic patronage."<sup>55</sup> Art historian Leslie Brubaker used the term "matronage" in the very title of her influential 1997 article "Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries." A number of conferences about art and matronage have been held in the United States and the United Kingdom, including Temple University's "Matronage: Women as Patrons and Collectors of Art, 1300–1800" in 1990. Referring to these powerful women as matrons instead of patrons is also a way to acknowledge that these benefactors, while certainly powerful and privileged in many ways, existed within a patriarchal society that focused on and prioritized patrilineal relationships and male dominance.

Ethel Smyth grew up during a time of tumultuous changes regarding gender and sexuality in Britain. In one of the Victorian era's most important conduct books for women, *The Daughters of England* (1842), women's private circles of friends are described as vital to the concept of middle-class femininity, as well as middle-classness itself.<sup>56</sup> Having close female friendships reportedly helped to foster desirable attributes in women, attributes that would make them into good wives and partners. But what does it mean to be a "friend?" Literature scholar

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<sup>55</sup> Meli Belli Bose, "Royal Matronage and a Visual Vocabulary of Indian Queenship: Ahilyabai Holkar's Memorial Commissions," in *Women, Gender, and the Arts in Asia, c. 1500–1900*, ed. ead. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 41.

<sup>56</sup> Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 25.

Sharon Marcus writes: “for Victorians, a friend was first and foremost an emotional intimate who was not a relative or a sexual partner, but the term could also be a euphemism for a lover. Only through a discreet but marked rhetoric did Victorians qualify that some ‘friends’ were not friends, but special friends.”<sup>57</sup> Beginning in the 1880s, New Woman narratives altered public perceptions of women and sexuality. Additionally, as Marcus notes, “Eugenics shifted the meaning of marriage from a spiritual union to a reproductive one that depended on heterosexual fertility and promoted racial purity.”<sup>58</sup> Heterosexuality began to be viewed as diametrically opposed to homosexuality. Although in Great Britain the death penalty for sodomy was abolished in 1861, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, also known as the Labouchère Amendment, made “gross indecency” an offense worthy of lifetime imprisonment. Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing were both tried and punished under the Labouchère Amendment, which targeted gay men. While lesbianism was considered a pathological sexual condition, it was not criminalized during this time. In 1921, Members of Parliament attempted to add lesbianism to the criminal offenses outlined in the 1885 law, but when other Members of Parliament worried that this legislative initiative might encourage women to “discover” same-sex eroticism, the amendment was soon dropped. In the public sphere of Victorian England, women’s friendships, however close they might be, maintained the polite veneer of platonic companionship and matronage.

In Smyth’s transnational feminist network, each woman held a unique role—they were her friends, her lovers, her colleagues. Throughout her life, they acted as her support system, her matrons, and, frequently, her powerful helpers who made it possible for her to achieve

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 6.

performances of her works that she simply could not have attained on her own. In other words, they were key characters without whom Smyth's status as a composer and public figure would undoubtedly have been compromised. In this chapter, I hope to illuminate the legacies of a few of these women in order to demonstrate the multifaceted roles of Smyth's transnational feminist networks. It is my belief that the importance of these networks cannot be overlooked nor overstated when we examine Smyth's life or her success as a composer. That being said, Smyth's networks' most influential and powerful members were white women from elite social classes. Though Smyth writes about the poor and lower-class women she met and befriended while serving a sentence in Holloway Prison, it is difficult to know about her attitudes toward and perceptions of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Such feelings are notably absent from Smyth's copious writings—a statement in and of itself. That being said, in United Kingdom, the women's suffrage movement in the United Kingdom cut across lines of social class. According to historian R. S. Neale, it was working-class women who instilled the women's suffrage movement with “a new vitality, leadership, and militancy to draw attention to the plight and position of women generally.”<sup>59</sup> However, while working-class women's activism was critical to the women's suffrage movement's very foundation, “class inequality troubled the movement from the inside out.”<sup>60</sup>

Whereas transnational biography is still only beginning to be established as a field of research, the study of composer's networks has become more widespread in a number of

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<sup>59</sup> R. S. Neale, “Working-Class Women and Women's Suffrage,” *Labour History* no. 12 (May 1967): 16.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Jackson, “Women Quite Unknown: Working-Class Women in the Suffrage Movement,” *Votes for Women*, British Library, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/women-quite-unknown-working-class-women-in-the-suffrage-movement>.



academic disciplines across the arts and humanities disciplines. Sociologists Siobhan McAndrew and Martin Everett problematize the popularly-held conception of the composer as a singular, solitary figure, focusing their investigation instead on composers' networks. Furthermore, they explore the ways in which networks of composers inspire these artists' creativity, specifically composers involved in the English Music Renaissance.<sup>61</sup> In *Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries*, scholars from a number of disciplines seek to contextualize Woolf's writings through examinations of her networks of women writers. The collected volume "explores how burgeoning communities and enclaves of women writers intersected with and coexisted alongside Virginia Woolf and emphasizes both the development of enclaves and specific female subcultures or individual writers who were contemporaneous with Virginia Woolf."<sup>62</sup>

By focusing on Smyth's network of female transnational actors, I push against the male-centeredness of a great deal of biographical investigations, even those that purportedly focus on female composers. As volume editors Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott argue in *Transnational Lives*, capturing the lived experiences and realities of transnational lives "demands a central focus on private life, a recognition of the ways that transnational movement and connections have been driven by and reflected in personal experience."<sup>63</sup> These networks might include "patterns of careers, networks, enterprises, relationships, families, and households that constitute

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<sup>61</sup> Siobhan McAndrew and Martin Everett, "Music as Collective Invention: A Social Network Analysis of Composers," *Cultural Sociology* vol. 9 no. 1 (2015): 56–80.  
<http://journals.sagepub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1749975514542486>.

<sup>62</sup> Julie Vandivere and Megan Hicks, "Introduction," in *Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries*, ed. id. (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2016).

<sup>63</sup> Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott, "Introduction," 6.

a life.”<sup>64</sup> My investigation of Smyth’s female friends, patrons, and colleagues thus fits in with these scholars’ calls to investigate various dimensions of private life.

I begin in my investigation in the domestic sphere. Smyth’s childhood plays particular importance in *Impressions That Remained* (1919), the first of Smyth’s ten autobiographical works and memoirs. The early sections of *Impressions* are categorized according to which governess the Smyth family had employed at their home at the time. The use and prominence of governesses as a device by which to mark the passing of time reveals the importance of governesses to Smyth not only while she was growing up, but also when she reflected upon her youth later in life. One particular governess—who goes unnamed though she is notably described as German—reportedly played a particularly important role in Smyth’s childhood. Smyth notes: “I have said that the whole course of my life was determined, little as she realized it, by one of our governesses. When I was twelve a new victim arrived who had studied music at the Leipzig Conservatorium, then in the hey-day of its reputation in England; for the first time I heard classical music and a new world opened up before me.” Smyth continues:

Shortly after, a friend having given me Beethoven’s Sonatas, I began studying the easier of these and walked into the new world on my own feet. This was my true bent suddenly revealed to me, and I then and there conceived the plan, carried out seven years later, of study at Leipzig and giving up my life to music. The intention was announced to everyone and of course no one took it seriously, but that troubled me not at all. It seemed to me a dream that I knew would come true in the fullness of time, but I was in no hurry as to the when.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>65</sup> Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 74.

In a later section of *Impressions That Remained*, Smyth again emphasizes, “I always count the arrival of that governess who played classical music to me when I was twelve as the first milestone on my road.”<sup>66</sup> In her biography of Ethel Smyth, *Impetuous Heart*, Louise Collis notes:

The incumbent [governess] in 1870 when Ethel was twelve happened to be an ex-student of the Leipzig conservatorium. Instead of the usual drawing-room tinklings, she played Beethoven sonatas. It was the first time Ethel had heard classical music. She was overwhelmed. Suddenly, as in a conversion, she became aware that she was an artist and that music was her sphere. Her life was transformed. She determined to go to Leipzig and attend this conservatorium of which the Fraulein spoke, as soon as she was old enough.<sup>67</sup>

Admittedly, there is some conflation between the two stories. Smyth notes that she received Beethoven’s sonatas from a friend after her experience with the Leipzig-educated governess. According to Collis, however, it is the governess who plays Beethoven. Yet it is interesting to note that this governess is left out of the account written by Smyth’s first biographer, Christopher St. John. Indeed, St. John does not mention any governesses at all throughout her biography of Smyth.

Sophie Fuller’s *New Grove* entry on Smyth also fails to mention this governess. Rather, Fuller writes, “Smyth was educated at home and at a London boarding school. Her early musical education included lessons in harmony from Alexander Ewing.”<sup>68</sup> Fuller thus places Ewing at the center of Smyth’s early music-training rather than the governess prominently discussed in Smyth’s *Impressions* as well as Collis’ biography. Fuller, too, excludes mention of governesses

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>67</sup> Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber and Co. Limited, 1984), 14.

<sup>68</sup> Sophie Fuller, “Smyth, Dame Ethel,” *Grove Music Online*, December 10, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/0-mo-9781561592630-e-0000026038>.

altogether. However, according to Collis and Smyth herself, young Ethel set her heart on Leipzig because of this governess, even though her father remained adamantly opposed to the idea. Indeed, according to Smyth, her father defined artists as “people who are out to break the Ten Commandments.”<sup>69</sup> Many sources describing Smyth’s early life, including her own autobiographical works, detail the escalation of the conflict that raged between father and daughter. At one point, Ethel refused to attend church or speak to guests when they came to the house. She often locked herself in her room, and her father reportedly nearly kicked down her bedroom door on one occasion. Finally, for whatever reason, he relented, and in 1877, Ethel set off for Leipzig.

After a year of attending the Leipzig Conservatory, Smyth reportedly became disillusioned with the program, and decided to pursue private composition lessons with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, a key figure in the J. S. Bach revival. While taking composition lessons from him, Smyth became romantically involved with his wife, Elisabeth, more commonly known as Lisl. Regarding the first time she met Lisl, Smyth writes:

If ever I worshipped a being on earth it was Lisl... At the time I first met her she was twenty-nine, not really beautiful but better than beautiful, at once dazzling and bewitching; the fairest of skins, fine-spun, wavy golden hair, curious arresting greenish-brown eyes, and a very noble, rather low forehead behind which you knew there must be an exceptional brain. I never saw a more beautiful neck and shoulders . . . It really was true that with her sunshine came in at the door, and both sexes succumbed easily to her charm.<sup>70</sup>

This description of Lisl’s beauty, particularly the passage that focuses on her skin tone, hair, and the shape of her head, is in line with turn-of-the-century scientific racist ideology, wherein

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<sup>69</sup> Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 109.

<sup>70</sup> Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 192–93.

specific cranial measurements and skull shapes were used to justify white European racial superiority. While imperialism and colonialism are often conceptualized as movements typified by the imposition of violent, masculine force, this quotation reveals the ways in which the discourses of racism and racial superiority, critical in arguments justifying the need for colonialist “intervention,” permeated and shaped the domestic sphere. Thus, empire found itself at home also in the domain of women.

Lisl became one of Smyth’s “passions,” and came to fill a complex, multi-faceted role in Smyth’s life as both a love interest as well as a nurturing maternal figure, and the two regarded Smyth as a kind of adopted daughter. Though Lisl had a tremendous impact on Smyth’s personal life, this influence is often understated in comparison to her husband’s impact on Smyth’s musical education and compositional development. Both Lisl and Heinrich were key members of the Leipzig musical establishment, and through Smyth’s connections with the couple, she was able to gain access to an elite musical circle that included Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. As Martha Vicinus notes, Lisl “had performed an essential role, encouraging both Smyth’s creative life and her emotional independence.”<sup>71</sup> Things started to change, however, when Smyth began an affair with French-American philosopher Harry Brewster, who was then married to Lisl’s sister, Julia. Feeling betrayed by Smyth’s lack of loyalty, Lisl suddenly broke off all contact with her former protégée. This left Smyth utterly devastated, as she was shunned by possibly the most important person in her life. Notably, Fuller’s *New Grove* article does not

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<sup>71</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 130.

mention Lisl von Herzogenberg in the “Life” section, though Fuller describes her as a powerful love interest of Smyth’s.<sup>72</sup>

The story of the Empress Eugénie’s arrival in England is one worthy of a whole separate study regarding transnationalism and transnational actors. After her husband, Napoleon III, was defeated by the Prussians in 1870, Empress Eugénie was forced to flee France. She and her lady-in-waiting were smuggled away in a cab during a revolt, and an American dentist helped them both gain passage to England. The Empress lived just a few miles from the Smyth’s family home, and she was frequently invited to Smyth’s soirees. She maintained a keen interest in supporting women in a variety of professional fields, particularly the arts, throughout her life, and took a special interest in Smyth and her music.<sup>73</sup> In *Impressions That Remained*, Smyth notes: “In the years immediately following the date at which these memoirs close I was to owe to the Empress, one way and another, the demolition of some of the barriers that block an unknown artist’s road into the open, not to speak of the blessed certainty of contact, almost at my own doors, with an original and remarkable mind. I still enjoy that privilege . . .”<sup>74</sup>

One of the first things the Empress did to help Smyth was to cover the cost of printing her earliest compositions. In 1891, the Empress presented Smyth to Queen Victoria at the Empress’ home. During this particular musical occasion, Smyth is reported to have sang a number of

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<sup>72</sup> Fuller, “Smyth, Dame Ethel.”

<sup>73</sup> For more information regarding Empress Eugénie as a groundbreaking, prominent arts patron, see Alison McQueen, *Empress Eugénie and the Arts: Politics and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 468.

German songs so well that the Empress told the Queen about Smyth's *Mass*. Queen Victoria then requested to hear the *Mass*. Smyth describes this performance:

Presently I was asked to sing, and sang several German songs which seemed to please my audience so highly that the Empress was emboldened to say: 'You ought to hear her sing her *Mass*.' Whereupon I performed the *Benedictus* and the *Sanctus* after the manner of composers, which means singing the chorus as well as the solo parts, and trumpeting forth orchestral effects as best you can—a noisy proceeding in a small room.<sup>75</sup>

Queen Victoria so enjoyed this impromptu performance that she requested a repeat performance at Balmoral Castle. Smyth's *Streaks of Life* describes this performance, in which she sat at the piano with the Empress Eugénie to her left and Queen Victoria to her right, in great detail. It was this command performance at Balmoral Castle that encouraged the Empress and the Queen (at Smyth's request) to support a performance of the *Mass* in London. Once again, the Empress not only helped Smyth by using her prominent status to assist her with promoting her music, but later paid for the costs of printing the parts and score for the *Mass*'s London performance. Eventually, in March 1893, almost two years after her rather spontaneous performance for Queen Victoria, Smyth's *Mass in D* was placed on a program alongside Joseph Haydn's *Creation*. Leading up to the premiere, Queen Victoria allowed her name to be used in advertisements. The Empress even broke one of her most stringent rules—never to appear in public—in order to attend the London premiere. Because of these powerful endorsements, many of England's most fashionable citizens decided to attend—not to see Haydn's *Creation* but, rather, Smyth's *Mass in D*. The Empress continued to support Smyth's career in London, for instance by footing the bill for printing the piano-vocal scores of *Fantasio* in a private print run as well as *Der Wald*, in 1902, and *The Wreckers* in 1904.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1922), 117.

<sup>76</sup> Kertesz, "Issues in the Critical Reception," 103.

Winnaretta Singer (Princesse de Polignac), the American-born daughter of American sewing machine millionaire Isaac Singer, was another key figure in Smyth's transnational network—and one of her “passions” as well. While Singer was born in New York, she traveled to Paris, London, and Devon. Singer's lesbian identity was well-known in private circles, and she entered into a platonic marriage to amateur composer Prince Edmond de Polignac, who was aware of her extramarital affairs with women. Together, the Princesse and Prince de Polignac founded a musical salon in Paris, and Singer supported contemporary composers including Ethel Smyth and Adela Maddison, as well as Maurice Ravel, Gabriel Fauré, and Claude Debussy. For a brief time, Smyth was also a part of the Princesse's most intimate circle of queer women, which consisted of Anna de Noailles, Hèlène Caraman-Chimay, and Augustine Bulteau. According to musicologist Sylvia Kahan, with the addition of Ethel Smyth, the tight-knit foursome “became a ‘fivesome,’ sharing a love of literature, music and lively conversation, crossing the Continent and the Channel to visit one another's city and country homes.”<sup>77</sup> After Smyth tried to pursue a romantic relationship with the Princesse, she was no longer welcome in this particular circle, although the Princesse continued to support Smyth's work from a distance.

In her autobiography, *Impressions That Remained*, Ethel Smyth writes the following moving passage about the role of women in her life:

Let me say here, that all my life, even when after years had brought me the seemingly unattainable, I have found in women's affection a peculiar understanding, mothering quality that is a thing apart . . . And further it is a fact as H.B. [Harry Brewster] once remarked, that the people who have helped me most at difficult moments of my musical career, beginning with my own sister Mary, have been members of my own sex. Thus it

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<sup>77</sup> Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 134.



comes to pass that my relations with certain women, all exceptional personalities I think, are shining threads in my life.”<sup>78</sup>

In this description, which focuses on the importance of women’s affection, Smyth highlights the importance of women’s emotional labor and its critical role in women’s networks. Indeed, conceptualizing networks of women patrons and their benefactors requires a theoretical stance that takes into account unappreciated and unrecognized forms of labor, particularly women’s emotional labor. Smyth’s, her career would have been compromised without her transnational feminist network. While the monetary support from her wealthy female benefactors remains remarkable, there must also be a place to acknowledge the importance of emotional and affective labor involved in supporting Smyth. From the governess who inspired Smyth in her early years, to Lisl von Herzogenberg, the Empress Eugénie, the Princesse de Polignac and undoubtedly more—these women deserve a place in the conversation.

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<sup>78</sup> Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, 6.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “The March of the Women” and the International Turn

At the time of its composition and extending to today, Ethel Smyth’s “March of the Women” has been considered a landmark work. Dedicated to Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), the song includes lyrics by suffragist Cicely Hamilton, who wrote the text after Smyth composed the music. Smyth was first introduced to Pankhurst in 1910. After Smyth received an Honorary Doctor of Music degree from the University of Durham, she felt increasing pressure to respond to the “women’s suffrage question” and considered joining the fight for women’s suffrage. After all, Smyth now had a newly-minted status as a “woman of distinction.”<sup>79</sup> Within two weeks of meeting Emmeline Pankhurst for the first time, Smyth decided to dedicate two years of her life to women’s suffrage. Following her two years of service, she would return to her composing career. Smyth then began to devote herself wholeheartedly to Pankhurst’s WSPU, the militant wing of the suffrage movement, founded in 1903. The WSPU was considered a radical women’s suffrage organization known for its members’ sensational acts of protest, which included organizing large-scale demonstrations, vandalizing property, fighting police, undergoing hunger strikes, facing prison sentences, and even the planting of homemade bombs. After deciding to commit herself to the WSPU, Smyth wrote to Pankhurst, noting:

Owing to a very busy and very fighting sort of life, I have never paid much attention to the suffrage question. Lately I have read and thought much about it and want to tell you that no one can be a more profoundly convinced suffragist than I . . . If at any time I could help, other things being equal, I want you to know that no one would be more glad than Yours very truly, Ethel Smyth.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lumsden, “The Music Between Us,” 338.

<sup>80</sup> Ethel Smyth, letter to Emily Pankhurst, September 15, 1910, Ethel Mary Smyth Letters, 1894–1937, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University Libraries.

Throughout her writings, particularly in *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934), Smyth continually draws comparisons between Pankhurst and Joan of Arc. For instance, she writes:

Thus since many women still let men set the key for them in the judging of public matters, decades may elapse before Mrs. Pankhurst is seen for what she really was—an even more astounding figure than Joan of Arc, in that instead of performing her miracles in an age of romance, religious faith, and mystic exaltation, round about her blared the hard, skeptical light of the twentieth century.<sup>81</sup>

However, such high opinions of Pankhurst were not shared by all women. She was a divisive figure even among fellow suffragettes. Frustrated by the consolidation of power by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, as well as the WSPU's overall lack of democratic processes, seventy-seven dissenting members of the WSPU left the organization in 1907 to create the Women's Freedom League.

Others disagreed with Pankhurst's social conservatism and imperialist views. Pankhurst praised the British Empire throughout her life, and felt that the British Empire had a moral duty to govern the rest of the world, as the following 1925 quotation illustrates: "Some talk about the Empire and Imperialism as if it were something to decry and something to be ashamed of. [I]t is a great thing to be the inheritors of an empire like ours . . . great in territory, great in potential wealth . . . If we can only realise and use that potential wealth we can destroy thereby poverty, we can remove and destroy ignorance."<sup>82</sup> Emmeline's own daughter, Sylvia, portrays her mother throughout her writings as "a leader who deliberately encouraged wealthy Conservative women

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<sup>81</sup> Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* (Edinburgh: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933), 188–89.

<sup>82</sup> Emmeline Pankhurst quoted in Anita Anand, *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 356.

to join the WSPU and who failed to mobilise the working classes and address their economic, social and political needs.”<sup>83</sup>

Even women in Smyth’s own transnational feminist network found themselves at odds with Pankhurst, her views, and her various agendas. According to Louise Collis, both Lady Mary Ponsonby (a British aristocrat and one of Smyth’s patrons) and the Empress Eugenie

were of the opinion that a woman in [Smyth’s] position, recently honoured with a doctorate, should know better than to follow a crowd of publicity-seeking hysterics; for who could suppose Emmeline Pankurst’s critics, whatever the heroism of individual members on occasion, improved the image of a woman as a responsible person, deserving an adult position in society? She should have chosen the non-militants, whom every rational person could support.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, as Collis continues, “Ethel took no notice of these sage counsels.” While Smyth originally imagined that she would have to give up composing in order best to serve the WSPU, she soon realized that the most excellent way to serve was, in fact, to use her talents as a composer. She notes, “I was devoting myself henceforth entirely to my own job—that being the way, moreover, in which I personally, can best serve the women’s cause.”<sup>85</sup> Smyth set to work at once to compose “The March of the Women,” which replaced the “Women’s Marseillaise” as the official song of the women’s suffrage movement in England.

A 1944 *New York Times* article announcing Smyth’s death notes, “During the agitation for women’s suffrage in the years preceding the first World War Dame Ethel Smyth was a leading figure, the ‘cause’ inspiring some of her best music. Her most famous piece, ‘March of

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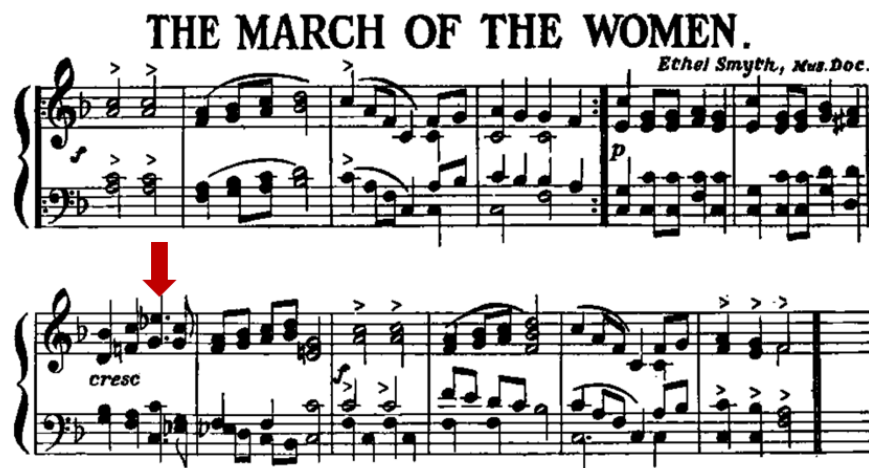
<sup>83</sup> June Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biographical Interpretation,” *Women’s History Review* no. 12 (2003): 74.

<sup>84</sup> Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 103.

<sup>85</sup> Smyth quoted in Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 122.

the Women,’ was the ‘Marseillaise’ of the suffragist movement.”<sup>86</sup> By linking Smyth’s “March” to the French national anthem, the “Marseillaise,” this reporter heightens associations with, and connections to, nationalist sentiments and politics. This article is not alone in linking Smyth’s suffrage anthem with nationalism.

Over the course of the twentieth century, “The March of the Women” has often been associated with Britishness on a number of levels, particularly its composition and connections with the British women’s suffrage movement. Even strictly musical elements have been described and mythologized as part of a nationalist agenda. Smyth herself identified one difficult musical passage—an Eb that theatre director and fellow WSPU member Edith Craig complained was too challenging to sing—as containing “a peculiarly English” interval (Example 3.1).



Example 3.1: Ethel Smyth, “The March of the Women” (mes. 1-12)

<sup>86</sup> Wireless to the New York Times, “Dame Ethel Smyth British Composer,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1944, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/106860760?pq-origsite=summon>

In this chapter, I problematize associations between Smyth's "March of the Women" and unilateral associations with Britishness by locating it in a historical moment and cultural context marked by an unprecedented international turn.

Despite prominent performances of "The March of the Women" in the United States and the United Kingdom I will describe in this chapter, Smyth's suffrage anthem was far from universally acclaimed. Indeed, Smyth's feminist march, and, more broadly, her two-year involvement in the WSPU were not appreciated by all women or by all women's societies. Moreover, music was largely thought of as secondary to the women's suffrage movement, particularly in England. On the one hand, many moderate suffragists were worried that Smyth's involvement in their cause would inherently radicalize it, suspicious of her two-year service to the WSPU, Britain's most radical women's suffrage organization. Additionally, music was generally not considered a critical component of the movement. Indeed, "Music—for many educated middle-class women in Victorian and Edwardian times an amateur and domestic accessory or adornment, something borrowed, rarely new—meant little more to suffrage organizers than the flowers arranged on a speaker's platform or the feathers on her hat."<sup>87</sup> Vera Brittain, a well-known British suffragette, nurse, and pacifist argued explicitly that there was no place in the women's suffrage social movement for any kind of art: "Neither music nor painting seems to be an appropriate medium for conveying the essence of a democratic revolution."<sup>88</sup>

"The March of the Women" was originally composed as a unison song with five verses and optional piano accompaniment. Smyth reportedly based the melody on a traditional song she

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<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 79, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 612.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 612.

heard while traveling in Abruzzo, Italy. She arranged the song for various ensembles, including choir and orchestra, solo piano, and even a military band. A version of the song also appears in Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate*, which she composed between 1913 and 1914. On January 20, 1911, *Votes for Women*, at that time the official newspaper of the WSPU, described Smyth's song with the following comment: "The fiery spirit of revolution united with religious solemnity, the all-conquering union of faith and rebellion which makes the strength of the militant movement, is expressed in Smyth's Marching Song. It is at once a hymn and a call to battle."<sup>89</sup> "The March of the Women" was officially premiered on January 21, 1911, by the Suffrage Choir during a celebration on Pall Mall, London, to celebrate the release of suffragist activists from prison. Emmeline Pankhurst introduced the song as the WSPU's official song, replacing "The Women's Marseillaise." When Sir Thomas Beecham, the appointed conductor for the evening, failed to show up for the premiere, Smyth filled in as the conductor. In her writings, Smyth herself has repeatedly recalled notable performances of her March. This passage draws attention to a performance on March 23, 1911:

In those early days of my association with the W.S.P.U. occurred an event which, in her pride, the writer must recount ere the pace becomes such that a personal reference would be unthinkable, namely the formal introduction to the Suffragettes of 'The March of the Women', to which Cicely Hamilton fitted the words after the tune had been written – not an easy undertaking. A suffragette choir had been sternly drilled, and I remember Edith Craig plaintively commenting on the difficulty of hitting a certain E flat. But it was maintained that the interval is a peculiarly English one (which is true) and must be coped with. We had the organ, and I think a cornet to blast forth the tune (a system much to be recommended on such occasions), and it was wonderful processing up the centre aisle of the Albert Hall in Mus. Doc. robes at Mrs. Pankhurst's side, and being presented with a beautiful baton, encircled by a golden collar with the date, 23rd March 1911.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 641.

<sup>90</sup> Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden*, 201.

Another particularly famous performance took place in London's notorious Holloway Prison in 1912. This performance demonstrated powerful ways of not only showcasing solidarity but literally sustained a number of detained women, especially those enduring brutal hunger strikes. Smyth herself was arrested and sentenced to two months in Holloway Prison for smashing the window of an important cabinet minister: Lewis Harcourt, the Secretary of the State for the Colonies. Beecham who considered Smyth a "tremendous ally,"<sup>91</sup> visited her in Holloway Prison. He describes the evocative, impromptu performance of "March of the Women" he witnessed:

I arrived in the main courtyard of the prison to find the noble company of martyrs marching round it and lustily singing their war-chant while the composer, beaming approbation from an overlooking upper window, beat time in almost Bacchic frenzy with a toothbrush.<sup>92</sup>

In terms of a more recent view on Smyth's "March," musicologist Elizabeth Wood describes the song as a powerful piece of propaganda. She writes,

The March is a propaganda song, no less: cheap, portable, and pocketable, a multipurpose commodity for the mass market. Smyth prepared multiple editions and arrangements for any and every performance opportunity, site, and vocal resource to hand: whether indoors and out, for solo voice, choir, wind band or brass, a cappella or accompanied by orchestra, piano, percussion, or chamber ensemble, with even a sol-fa guide for the musically illiterate.

She continues:

In Holloway prison, both inside and outside its formidable gates, the March cheered and exercised inmates and greeted their release. At WSPU feasts it replenished hunger strikers. At meetings it helped raise the Union fund. In city and countryside, as sung and heard in Union safehouses and nursing homes, the March restored the health and spirits of militants awaiting certain rearrest. In the composer's Woking cottage, Coign (which

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<sup>91</sup> John Lucas, *Thomas Beecham: An Obsession With Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>92</sup> Beecham quoted in Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 155.



means “a forward looking-post”), where she hid and nursed Mrs. Pankhurst, Smyth herself trained the bodyguard choristers in the March and other new choruses she composed for women’s voices.<sup>93</sup>

While the performances of “March of the Women” I described previously took place exclusively within the United Kingdom, the piece was performed in several countries throughout the world. A particularly famous performance occurred in 1914 on the Capitol Building steps in Washington, DC during a prominent women’s suffrage pageant.

It was not uncommon for a material object—in this case, a song composed in Britain—to travel far from home in order to be used to promote and benefit the women’s suffrage cause in another country. Art and music related to women’s suffrage traveled around the world via dynamic global flows, and much of this travel was related to the emergence of a number of international women’s organizations. As I argued in my introduction, in order to understand the establishment of women’s organizations operating at this time, we must first consider the early twentieth century’s unprecedented “international turn.” As Glenda Sluga notes:

As contemporaries understood it, the mechanisms of that turn were the new “objective facts” of steam, electricity, and trade. Roads and railways, canals and ocean carriers, and telephone, telegraph, cable, wireless, news, and mail services had all transformed economies and provided the opportunities for cooperation and sociability across the political borders of empires and nations. Even more importantly, they provided the infrastructure and motivation for the international institutions and associations devoted to all manner of internationalized political, economic, religious, and humanitarian issues proliferating across the world.

She continues, “these organizations were construed as evidence of the difference between twentieth-century internationalism and previous nineteenth-century versions. From a historical

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<sup>93</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst quoted in Elizabeth Wood, “Performing Rights,” 618.

perspective, the articulation of this difference is less evidence of a really-existing internationalism, than of a new self-consciousness of the internationality of everyday life.”<sup>94</sup>

Historian Bonnie Anderson locates the first international women’s movement in a border-crossing assemblage of letters, newspaper publications, and international visits between women from the US, the UK, Germany, France, and Sweden during the mid-nineteenth century. In her introduction to *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830–1860*, she describes letters sent from two jailed Frenchwomen in a Parisian prison to American and English sympathizers. These letters defied Anderson’s previously-held concepts of both internationalism and feminism. “This astonished me,” Anderson writes, “because I assumed internationalism to be a twentieth-century development, facilitated by phones and faxes, e-mail and air travel. Yet these women not only exchanged letters, they also visited each other, read a common body of published writings, and shared and transmitted tactics and ideas.”<sup>95</sup> Along with Anderson, Leila J. Rupp also locates the establishment of international women’s organizations in the late nineteenth century. She contends,

The first wave of a transnational women’s movement emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century out of a variety of connections forged across national borders . . . A variety of movements, including abolitionism, socialism, peace, temperance, and moral reform, called women’s attention to the cross-national character of their causes and brought together women from different nations in mixed-gender meetings.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>95</sup> Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Leila J. Rupp, “Transnational Women’s Movements,” European History Online, last modified June 16, 2011, <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/international-social-movements/leila-j-rupp-transnational-womens-movements>.

When the International Congress of the Rights of Women (*Congrès international du droit des femmes*) met for the first time in Paris in 1878, they regarded themselves as the “first” international women’s rights congress. From July 25 to August 9, 1878, an “international group of nearly two hundred writers, intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and activists” met at 16 rue Cadet, Paris.<sup>97</sup> These meetings took place during the Exposition Universelle in Paris. During this meeting, a number of critical issues were addressed and discussed, women’s roles throughout history, women’s rights and equality, equal pay, and even morality and prostitution. The final day of the congress featured a large-scale celebration due to the event’s overall success, as well as the promise that this international group would continue to organize meetings.

The International Congress of Women met for a second time in June 1889 at the *Salle de Géographie* in Paris. Once again, another Parisian World’s Fair—this time focused on celebrating the centenary of the French Revolution—formed the social and political background against which this organization reconvened. In September 1900, the International Congress on the Rights and Condition of Women met again during the Paris Exposition Universelle, although this time the event was an official part of the Fair. Though the International Congress sought to combine issues facing French women as well as women as a global community, certain members began to feel as though the organization tended to prioritize French nationalist interests. Other international women’s organizations founded and based in France, including the *Congrès Général des Sociétés Feministes* (General Congress of Feminist Societies) which formed in 1892, and the International Feminist Congress, established in 1896, were also active during this time. Little information is known about their discussions and activities, however. Unlike the

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<sup>97</sup> Lauren Stephens, “‘International’ Feminism? International Women’s Rights Congresses at the Paris World Exhibitions, 1878–1900” (Master’s thesis, Central European University, 2014), 1.

International Congress of Women, their proceedings were never published officially. Notably, the *Congrès Général des Sociétés Feministes* was the first congress to label themselves explicitly as *feminist*.

Following the example of the International Congress of Women, the first International Council of Women congress took place in Washington, DC, in 1888. Prior to this organization's formation, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony traveled to England and France in 1882 and 1883, where they met with women and worked to form an international suffrage association. The invitation to join the International Council of Women went out to a broad swath of women and women's groups, including "women's literary clubs, temperance societies, labor groups, moral purity societies, peace organizations, and professional groups"<sup>98</sup> The first National Council of the International Council of Women was formed in the United States, and councils in Canada, Germany, Sweden, Australia, Great Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands soon followed. By 1914, there were 23 National Councils around the world. This number grew to 36 by 1939.

France and the United States were not the only countries forming international congresses related to women's rights, however. In 1896, the International Congress of Women's Work and Ambitions convened in Berlin, and an International Feminist Congress met in Brussels. Two German suffragists, Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg, advocated for the creation of an international organization explicitly focused on women's suffrage rather than women's rights more broadly. Unlike many of the previously mentioned international women's organizations, the Alliance vowed to meet every two years in a different country. Several members of the

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<sup>98</sup> Leila J. Rupp, "Transnational Women's Movements," European History Online, last modified June 16, 2011, <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/international-social-movements/leila-j-rupp-transnational-womens-movements>.

Alliance split off to create a new organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), in response to increasing international tensions leading up to the First World War. During the 1915 WILPF meeting at The Hague, women from both neutral and warring countries came together and discussed women's enfranchisement as well as peace initiatives, such as the establishment of an international society of nations.

Each of these organizations had its own newspapers, newsletters, journals, and pamphlets, and the international presence of women's societies led to an international circulation of material culture. The earliest suffragist newspaper, *The Women's Journal*, an American periodical, ran from 1870 to 1931. *The Suffragist*, another successful U.S. suffragette journal, this one founded by Alice Paul, ran from 1913 to 1920. During the suffrage pageant in Washington, D.C., Smyth's "March of the Women" was printed in this journal and circulated widely among demonstrators.

In addition to impactful material objects and products, performance and performativity were a crucial aspect of suffragist activist practice. Beginning in 1910, suffrage organizations began sponsoring, planning, and executing large-scale pageants.<sup>99</sup> The first suffrage parade, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch took place in New York City in 1910. On March 3, 1913, the National American Woman Suffrage Association sponsored the first national woman's suffrage pageant. This pageant was unprecedented in terms of scope. According to Sarah J. Moore, "Thousands of women from across the United States and of all ages and social classes marched through the capitol city demanding the vote." Moore continues, "Daring to make a spectacle of themselves, the organizers of and participants in the National

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<sup>99</sup> Sarah J. Moore, "Making a Spectacle of Suffrage: The National Suffrage Pageant, 1913," *Journal of American Culture* vol. 20 no. 1 (Spring 1997): 89.

Woman Suffrage Pageant stood completely outside of conventional standards of feminine behavior and property while negotiating new definitions and boundaries of women's roles in society."<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, these parades proved to be their own form of theater. Their performativity made them powerful. They were "carefully choreographed and directed, and in order to understand more fully the pedagogy of the plays and pageants, it is therefore useful to consider the suffragists' harnessing of spectacle in these mass performances—and their understanding of the concept itself."<sup>101</sup> As Hazel MacKaye, a noted suffrage pageant director, once argued: "A pageant has more power to convince people of the truth of our cause than any other means. A pageant is a forceful and vivid force of drama. It combines the medium of the spoken word, the dance, pantomime, stirring music, masses of people in striking costumes, strong contrasts in situation, in its appeal. It is an intensely moving thing to witness."<sup>102</sup>

Regarding Smyth's "March," the Women's Suffrage Memorabilia project notes, "Smyth's song, originally published by the Women's Social and Political Union, was imported to the United States where it was featured in a major demonstration by Alice Paul's Congressional Union in Washington, D.C. on May 9, 1914"<sup>103</sup> The Congressional Union published "The March of the Women" in their official newspaper, *The Suffragist*, in order to

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>101</sup> Maggie Amelia Rehm, "Art of Citizenship: Suffrage Literature as Social Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2011), 43.

<sup>102</sup> MacKaye quoted in Kertesz, "Issues in the Critical Reception," 1.

<sup>103</sup> "Sheet Music," Woman Suffrage Memorabilia, accessed February 1, 2018, <http://womansuffragememorabilia.com/woman-suffrage-memorabilia/sheet-music>.

assure parade attendees' familiarity with the song and encourage as many demonstrators as possible to sing.

More than 5,000 suffragists and women's suffrage supporters marched on May 9, 1914 from the White House to the Capitol building. When they arrived, they gathered on the building's east steps and sang Smyth's "March" together. The Library of Congress' caption for this photograph reads:

Photograph of large crowd of suffragists who took part in Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage procession of May 9, 1914, gathered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol (those in front line, white dresses with sashes, singing "The Woman's March"), advocating a federal amendment securing women's right to vote.

While this same photo can also be accessed on the U.S. Capitol's Visitor Center webpage, their caption does not reference Smyth's "March of the Women." It does not even mention the fact that the demonstrators were singing at all. Rather, the caption reads:

In May 1914 the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, headed by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, organized a demonstration in the nation's capital for women's voting rights. Five thousand suffrage supporters marched from Lafayette Square down Pennsylvania Avenue to the U.S. Capitol and delivered stacks of petitions from around the nation to Congress.<sup>104</sup>

As this chapter demonstrates, Smyth's "March of the Women" is about more than British women's suffrage. Rather, it deserves a place in our popular and scholarly imaginary as a global work of art related to women's suffrage that benefitted from a newfound turn to internationalism. The tensions between Britishness and internationalism surrounding this piece did not stop at the turn of the twentieth century, however. Indeed, the 1964 Disney film *Mary Poppins* likely drew upon Smyth's "March" for the movie's newly-composed "Sister Suffragette," sung by Mrs.

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<sup>104</sup> U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/artifact/photograph-delegations-women-support-woman-suffrage-east-capitol-steps-may-9>.

Banks.<sup>105</sup> Yet in “Sister Suffragette,” we find Hamilton’s language transformed—“Shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend” becomes “Shoulder to shoulder into the fray!” “Sister Suffragette” also name drops Emmeline Pankhurst, as Mrs. Banks sings: “Take heart! For Missus Pankhurst has been clapped in irons again!” As Trevor Nelson argues, this song powerfully shaped popular conceptions of British suffragettes, perhaps its presence can also be used to challenge nationalist narratives, and allowing us to acknowledge the local as well as the global.

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<sup>105</sup> Trevor Rand Nelson, “The Dissident Dame: Alternative Feminist Methodologies and the Music of Ethel Smyth” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2016), 67.



## CONCLUSION

On May 11, 2018, the Cecilia Chorus of New York gave a performance of Ethel Smyth's *The Prison*, her final musical work, at New York City's Carnegie Hall. In order to publicize the landmark event, the group filmed a YouTube "mini-documentary" about Smyth's life, with particular focus on *The Prison*, a work for soprano, chorus, and orchestra. In the April 2018 mini-documentary, the ensemble's soprano soloist, Chelsea Shepard, passionately connects the struggles Smyth experienced as a female composer to contemporary issues facing women today, particularly women pursuing careers in the arts.

At one point during her interview, Shepard looks off camera and unexpectedly smiles, experiencing an epiphany: "I mean, she is the perfect example of the 'nevertheless, she persisted,' because she had a lot working against her, and yet she created all this beautiful music, and had a career as a woman in the arts, which is still difficult today... So she's kind of a hero." Indeed, the U.S. feminist rallying cry, "Nevertheless, she persisted," first popularized in 2017 by supporters of Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, is an apt description for Smyth's life and career. Smyth herself, I think, would agree with the sentiment, as she often recounted themes of struggle and perseverance in her own writings and reflections. For instance, Smyth's *A Final Burning of Boats* features the following passage, which illustrates just a few of the difficulties she faced as a so-called "lady composer:"

I found myself be-hung with a label—that innocent-looking label that has been the bane of my life, from which I have not yet shaken myself free! I was not a composer amongst composers, but a *lady* composer. And as, of course, no woman could possibly write music of her own, it became a habit never to mention mine without reference to some plagiarized victim—Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, or Wagner, according to the

writer's fancy . . . No doubt other English composers have had their difficulties, but once a man gets his head above water he can turn on his back and float. I have struggled to the surface half a dozen times, only to be dragged under again by the dead weight of all the label stands for.<sup>106</sup>

However, while Smyth undoubtedly faced sexism and gender bias from the Male Machine, we must widen the scope when considering Smyth's marginalized status to include issues of nationalism in music, which Smyth's dual loyalties to England and Germany certainly challenged. Considering issues of genre, particularly the challenges of producing operas at the turn of the twentieth century, also remain at play.

Further, by focusing solely on Smyth's marginal status as a female composer, we fail to acknowledge her successes, particularly the victories she was able to attain and witness during her life. By virtue of her gender, Smyth was allowed access to influential, wealthy arts matrons. These intimate same-sex friendships and relationships allowed Smyth to promote her music in ways that her male contemporaries simply could not. These relationships also ensured Smyth had access to powerful musical circles and spaces where Smyth and her music commanded influence. In addition to the performance opportunities such relationships promised, Smyth also benefitted from her matrons' "affectional patronage," particularly in the forms of friendship and emotional support, both of which sustained Smyth as she fought for performances of her works across Europe and the United States. Smyth's song "The March of the Women" is more than a British suffrage song. It is an anthem of the women's suffrage movement whose resonances echoed powerfully across the Atlantic, as demonstrated by its critical place in the 1914 suffrage pageant in Washington, D.C.

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<sup>106</sup> Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats* (London: Longmans, 1928), 84–85.

In 1902, Smyth wrote to Harry Brewster explaining the struggle to achieve productions of her second opera: “I feel I must fight for *Der Wald* . . . because I want women to turn their minds to big and difficult jobs; not just go on hugging the shore, afraid to put out to sea . . . In my way I am an explorer who believes supremely in the advantages of this bit of pioneering.”<sup>107</sup> This quotation resonates with me because it emphasizes that Smyth lived a life in motion. That Smyth was a pioneer as a female composer and activist, is well-documented and frequently taught in music-history classes. While this undoubtedly important, it only emphasizes part of what makes Smyth a pioneer, ignoring her legacy as a border-crosser whose life must be considered with the world as its backdrop.

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<sup>107</sup> Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1940), 210.

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