Voices from the Killing Jar

Kate Soper

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2011
ABSTRACT

Voices from the Killing Jar

Kate Soper

This dissertation presents an analysis of my work for voice and ensemble, Voices from the Killing Jar, which was written for the Wet Ink Ensemble in 2010-2011, and which takes as its subject seven female characters from literature, history, and myth. A musical analysis of each of the work's seven movements is accompanied by brief literary analyses of the characters and their sources. This is followed by relevant details of my history as a performer, composer, and Wet Ink Ensemble co-director, and a discussion of the unique instrumentation and performance practice encapsulated in this piece as a result of my close work with Wet Ink over the last several years. I conclude with an examination of my dual role as a composer and performer in this piece and in my work in general, and with a brief discussion of social and gender-theoretical issues that inform my work as a female composer.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments iii

Section 1. Introduction 1

Section 2. Music Analysis 2

  Movement I: Prelude: May Kasahara 5
  Movement II: Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess 14
  Movement III: Palilalia: Iphigenia 22
  Movement IV: Voilà Minuit: Lucile Duplessis 32
  Movement V: Mad Scene: Emma Bovary 38
  Movement VI: The Owl and the Wren: Lady Macduff 51
  Movement VII: Her Voice is Full of Money (A Deathless Song): Daisy Buchanan 60

Section 3. Summary 74

Section 4. Performance Issues 76

Section 5. The Wet Ink Ensemble and Band 78

Section 6. Conclusion: On Being a Female Composer 84

Bibliography 92
LIST OF EXAMPLES

Figure 1. *Voices from the Killing Jar* At a glance 4

Example 1.1. *Prelude: May Kasahara* - Vocal Phrases 7

Example 2.1. *Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess* - Clarinet figures 17

Example 2.2.1. *Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess* - Instrumental textures 19

Example 2.2.2. *Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess* - Instrumental textures, beginning/end. 19

Example 3.1. *Palilalia: Iphigenia* - Vowel overtones in SPEAR and in music notation 24

Example 3.2. *Palilalia: Iphigenia* - Refrains in three orchestrations 24-5

Example 3.3. *Palilalia: Iphigenia* - Final verse 31

Example 4.1. *Voilà Minuit: Lucile Duplessis* - Opening “machines,” gestures/rhythms 34

Example 4.2. *Voilà Minuit: Lucile Duplessis* - Ending “machines,” gestures/rhythms 39

Example 5.1. *Mad Scene: Emma Bovary* - Vocal lines, part I 41

Example 5.2. *Mad Scene: Emma Bovary* - Mm.61-77 46-7

Example 5.3. *Mad Scene: Emma Bovary* - Soprano/mozart harmonies 48

Example 6.1. *The Owl and the Wren: Lady Macduff* - Polymeters 58-9

Example 7.1. *Her Voice is Full of Money: Daisy Buchanan* - The “Deathless Song” 62

Example 7.2. *Her Voice is Full of Money* - Vocalist-activated “deathless song” 65-6

Example 7.3.1. *Her Voice is Full of Money* - Vocal part, part II 68

Example 7.3.2. *Her Voice is Full of Money* - Vocal part, part II (piano reduction) 68

Example 7.4. *Her Voice is Full of Money* - Part III reduction 71-2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Camargo Foundation for a fruitful residency in Cassis, France in fall 2009, during which the seeds of *Voices from the Killing Jar* were planted.

My deepest gratitude goes to the members of the Wet Ink Core Ensemble, including: Ian Antonio, percussion; Erin Lesser, flute; Alex Mincek, saxophone; Joshua Modney, violin; Sam Pluta, electronics; and Eric Wubbels, piano. The creation and performance of this work would not have been possible without their commitment, creativity, and incredible talent.
VOICES FROM THE KILLING JAR

Introduction

A killing jar is a tool used by entomologists to kill butterflies and other insects without damaging their bodies: a hermitically sealable glass container, lined with poison, in which the specimen will quickly suffocate. *Voices from the Killing Jar* is a seven-movement work for vocalist and ensemble which depicts a series of female protagonists who are caught in their own kinds of killing jars: hopeless situations, inescapable fates, impossible fantasies, and other unlucky circumstances. Their jailers, the ones screwing the lid on tight, are sometimes friends or lovers, sometimes strangers, and sometimes themselves, their longings and ambitions and delusions. Among these women are housewives and teenagers and mothers and daughters, innocents and tragic heroines and *femmes fatales*.

We don't know how all their stories end. Four will eventually die violently, while the rest may be young enough to change course. *Voices from the Killing Jar* visits these women only for a diary entry or a scene or a chapter in their lives, lets them speak for a moment, and then returns them to history and myth.

The world in which these characters live for the span of this piece is constructed from among the countless possible sonic environments of the seven-member Wet Ink Band. This is a piece written not for instruments, but for individual players with individual skill sets, from the typical (the saxophonist plays the clarinet) to the more peculiar (the
soprano also plays the clarinet). The transformation of the musicians, as they take up or trade instruments and occasionally move around the stage, is part of the mercurial landscape of the piece. Shape-shifting, the ensemble forms and reforms between and within each movement, moving through myriad textures, styles, and moods, following the path traced by the seven characters from 20th century Japan to ancient Greece to the French Revolution.

This paper begins with a musical analysis of each of the seven movements, including relevant textual and plot elements. Afterwards, issues of performance, including composer background and a brief history of the ensemble, will be explored. The paper concludes with a discussion of potentially enlightening gender theoretical issues relevant to the context and performance of the piece.

**Voices from the Killing Jar**

**Music Analysis**

The seven movements of *Voices from the Killing Jar* are distinct from one another in structure, character, compositional style, and instrumentation, although some are more closely linked than others in these regards. Figure 1 is a table displaying the basic features of each movement, including: their source texts/characters; the instrument(s)
played by each of the seven performers; their basic formal structural; their treatment of
the text; and their approximate length.¹

The movements form various constellations depending on criteria. Formally, movements
I and III are broadly ABA; movements IV, V and VII consist of two or more contrasting
sections; and the symmetrically situated movements II and VI, the shortest movements,
present one single idea. The outer movements share a preoccupation with vocal range
expansion – in the first movement, outwards from the center, and in the last, upwards
from the bottom – while in movements VI and most of movement III the soprano remains
more circumscribed in tone and/or range. Movements II and IV contain no singing but
only speech, and spoken voice is also prominent, either in the electronics or within the
ensemble, in movements VI and VII. Harmonically, movements III and VI are most
prominently diatonic, although neither is tonal, and between them movement V
incorporates both original tonal fragments and wholesale D Major in an extended Mozart
quote. The harmonic material for the outer and center movements, I, IV and VII, is
unsystematic, richly chromatic, and interval-dense. Repeated instrumental gestures,
loops, and refrains are a prominent thread, appearing in very different contexts in
movements III, IV, V and VI.

The movements are performed one after the other with no pause. Transitional music or
vamping is necessitated by stage changes between the first four movements, while the
last three follow attacca on the heels of their predecessors. More often than not, with

¹ Timings for movements I-III are based on recent performances; the remaining four
movements have yet to be premiered, and their timings are estimates.
**Figure I: Voices from the *Killing Jar* at a Glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mvt</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
<th>Players</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II. Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess</td>
<td>Henry James, <em>The Portrait of a Lady</em> (novel); Richard Browning, <em>My Last Duchess</em> (poem)</td>
<td>Cl/speaker Bb flt Sax Vn/speaker Pno Pc</td>
<td>Process form: one continuously developing texture plus intro/coda.</td>
<td>Adapted from sources; spoken; in tape part as prelude and inter-movement cues, briefly spoken live.</td>
<td>~4.5&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Palilalia: <em>Iphigenia</em></td>
<td>Aeschylus, <em>Agamemnon</em> (play)</td>
<td>Sop/pc Flt Cl/sax Vn</td>
<td>Broadly ABA: 'A' sections strophic with regular pulse, based on F Major triad/harmonic series; 'B' unmetered, static.</td>
<td>By the composer; strophic, metric, unrhymed; sung.</td>
<td>~7.5&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. <em>Voilà Minuit</em>: Lucile Duplessis</td>
<td>Diaries of Lucile Duplessis</td>
<td>Sop/po Piec/flt/bs flt Cl/sax Vn/tpt Pno Pc [Tacit]</td>
<td>Four contrasting sections based on systematically repeating gestures.</td>
<td>Adapted from source material; prose; spoken (in French).</td>
<td>~7&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. The Owl and the Wren: Lady Macduff</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>Macbeth</em> (play)</td>
<td>Sop Piec/bs flt. Cl/sax Vn Recorder Pc</td>
<td>Strophic, harmonically modal with some deviation, regular pulse; microtonally-distorted vocoder.</td>
<td>By the composer; strophic, metered, rhyming; sung. Spoken text by Shakespeare in tape part (largely unintelligible).</td>
<td>~3&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Her Voice is Full of Money (A Deathless Song): Daisy Buchanan</td>
<td>F. Scott Fitzgerald, <em>The Great Gatsby</em> (novel)</td>
<td>Sop Flt/bs flt Cl/sax Vn/tpt Pno Pc/speaker</td>
<td>Through-composed, based on quasi-tonal melodic structure with heavily chromatic harmony.</td>
<td>Adapted from source material; prose; spoken and sung by soprano, spoken by percussionist.</td>
<td>~7&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each new movement a completely new affect and sound world surges onto the stage. What ties these disparate worlds together? The musicians must maintain the sense of continuity themselves, by their attitudes and bearing. While each member of the ensemble plays a role, freezing between movements and carefully changing instruments and seating positions without disrupting the tableau, it is the vocalist who is primarily responsible for tending the dramatic arc and who must stay intensely in character, and, during transitions, in-between character, for the duration of the piece. She occupies the most physical space, moving from the piano bench to a downstage chair to the upstage percussion setup and back, and takes on the most musical roles: she accompanies herself on the piano, takes up a clarinet, dons metal-tipped gloves to scrape at a cymbal, beats a drum, sings to herself or to the ensemble or to the audience, speaks, hums, shrieks. She is present at times as a silent body and at times as a disembodied voice, emerging from the speakers in the tape parts. Bit by bit, she spools out the narrative thread, an Ariadne-like Mistress of Ceremonies.

The piece begins with an announcement, an invitation—a quiet, ten second triangle roll—and then bursts into hushed, twittering life with the first movement.

I. Prelude: May Kasahara

In Prelude: May Kasahara, the titular sixteen year-old of Haruki Murakami's novel The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle speculates on the true nature of the force underlying human
existence. In increasingly agitated fragments, she describes the essential malevolence of this force and admits its influence on her to commit acts of violence and cruelty.

Musically, the main preoccupation of *Prelude: May Kasahara* is a string of interrupted vocal phrases which stretch and contract over the course of the movement. In terms of pitch content, these phrases are unrelated to each other in any systematic way: their contour evolution is effected via a freely composed intervallic and range expansion.

These phrases are organized into four sections, labeled A1, A2, A3 and A4, each containing four phrases. There is a break in the texture between each section, with the break between A2 and A3 constituting a slow and tranquil B section, as May ruminates on the unstable nature of time.

Example 1.1 shows the first two phrases of each of the four phrase groups, with the interval size between each note, counted in half-steps, shown as a circled number above the staff. Below this is a chart tracing the intervallic content and total range of every A section phrase. In the final column, the average melodic interval size and the mode, or most frequently occurring interval, are listed for each section.

In the A1 and A2, the teenage May struggles, mostly unsuccessfully, to articulate a terrifying sense of impersonal otherness she feels is somehow cohabitating with her developing sense of self. Her unrhymed phrases are vague fragments:
way down inside there's a—

tiny and hard as—

inside of each living—

all the way down into—

Size of Melodic Intervals in Each Phrase/Mean and Mode of Each Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Phrase 1 [ints.], range</th>
<th>Phrase 2 [ints.], range</th>
<th>Phrase 3 [ints.], range</th>
<th>Phrase 4 [ints.], range</th>
<th>Mean/mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A¹ m.2-28</td>
<td>[4-3-2-3-2] range = 7</td>
<td>[2-4-3-6] range = 9</td>
<td>[4-3-2-4-2] range = 7</td>
<td>[2-7-3-4-11] range = 11</td>
<td>3.7 / 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A² mm.29-49</td>
<td>[4-3-2-9-23] range = 23</td>
<td>[4-3-2-7-20] range = 20</td>
<td>[2-7-2-2-4] range = 13</td>
<td>[2-6-3-2-3-26] range = 26</td>
<td>6.5 / 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A⁴ m.89-103</td>
<td>[2-8-3-2-4-11] range = 11</td>
<td>[4-3-2-6-14] range = 14</td>
<td>[2-7-3-2-4-14] range = 14</td>
<td>[4-2-3-2-6-17] range = 17</td>
<td>5.4 / 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The difference between A1 and A2 is noticeable but not extreme: the average interval size jumps from 3.7 to 6.5, but the mode remains constant, at 2. The phrases of both sections are largely based on intervals of major seconds and minor and major thirds. In A2, the largest intervals usually occur at the end of the phrases, as the soprano leaps away from the snaking chain of seconds and thirds established as the basic phrase contour in A1. The overall texture in both sections is skittering and jumpy, with rapid tossed-off fragments and trills from the instruments.

A1 and A2 are separated by a long sustained chord in mm.18 – 24 (re-attacked in m.23). After an ensuing seven beats of silence, May, having reconsidered her strategy, resumes her broken sentences with a somewhat more sinister edge:

*deep down and biding its—*

*waiting for the chance to—*

*in darkness, feeding on—*

*clawing its way out from the—*

The orchestration changes accordingly, darkening the texture and lowering the ensemble tessitura: the flute switches from C flute, played mostly with an airy technique, to bass flute, played with fluttetongue and tongue rams; the previously trilling and ricocheting violin begins to play glissandi over a measure or longer, thickening the overall texture;
the clarinet range is subtly yet noticeably lowered; the piano (played by the soprano) moves from prepared harmonics and woodblock-like accents to plucked mid-range strings doubling the vocal line; and the percussionist switches from triangle (played in erratic bursts and rolls) to low tom.

The B section, which separates A2 and A3 and lasts from mm.50-68, has an entirely new affect and texture: where the A sections are restless and full of activity, B is static and calm. Here May reassures herself with an observation on the behavior of time. For her, time "doesn't flow in order, does it – A-B-C-D? It just sort of goes where it feels like going."\(^2\) She accepts this fact calmly, however, finding it easy to reconcile with a traumatic adolescence in which events seem to follow with no reason or consistency. This section is heralded in the music by the first appearance of electronics in the movement (and thus in the piece): at the end of the last phrase of A2, in m. 47, the soprano's last note (G5) is filtered through a max patch which separates its overtones, assigning each overtone an adjustable amplitude and a delay line\(^3\). The effect is of one sound breaking off into many high, thin threads, which unfold and die out unpredictably over a few suspended seconds.

The B section proper begins at m.55. The percussionist introduces the new atmosphere by beginning to "play" a tuned wine glass by rubbing the outer rim, sustaining the pitch

\[^3\] jg.spectdelay~, by John Gibson.
the entire ensemble, including the soprano, abandons their previously disparate wanderings and meets on this pitch. As the music moves slowly through the section, the single-note texture regularly expands into multiphonics from the bass flute and tenor saxophone and double-stops from the violin, as the vocal technique swells from a breathy, non-vibrato sound to a more penetrating vibrato style, and shrinks back again to unison. The notes of the chord produced by the multiphonics/double stop are hidden in the piano's sostenuto: when this chord sounds in the ensemble, the strings are struck, activating its echo in the piano. This is accompanied by a rising overtone arpeggio produced by running a finger up a low, repeatedly struck piano string. The percussionist sustains the C5 pitch on a wine glass throughout this section. A second max patch adds a delay to the soprano line which decrescendos to nothing as it repeats: as the soprano is usually singing the same pitch, this effect is very subtle, as though the soprano's voice were retreating down some long corridor. May steps away from herself, considers her situation and looks for peace rather than logic.

A-section material resumes in m.69, but in a newly aggressive and brutal guise. As can be seen in Example 1.1, the predominance of seconds and thirds in the vocal textures is gone in A3: the soprano leaps from intervals as wide as 26 half-steps, or two octaves and a major second, resulting in a wildly careening, unstable melodic line. The ensemble's "real" pianist, who heretofore had been playing only inside the piano, joins the soprano on the keyboard in this section, and thick four-handed piano chords add to a violent and dense texture as the other instruments play with new extremes of dynamics and with

\[ \text{Middle C} = \text{C4} \]
noisier and more aggressive techniques. The imagery in the text is violent, and the indescribable object that May describes has revealed its savage nature:

* growing faster than—
* tearing the life from—
* devouring from in—
* breaks your body into—

As mentioned above, the phrases of every A section have an interrupted feel: this has to do not only with the broken text, but with a cessation in activity: a little pool of static sound between each phrase. In the pauses between phrases in both A1 and A2 the static sound is a tremolo, drum roll or trill: a motionless yet alive, expectant sound (the ten-second triangle roll of the opening is the first taste of this constant sense of anticipation). In each case, if the sound is pitched, it is the last pitch of the soprano's phrase, extending her broken thought into the realm of sound. In A3, a variation on this idea emerges: in the pauses between phrases, a pitch in the electronics part, made from a pre-recorded rubbed wine glass, dovetails with the soprano's last note, continuing to sustain as the music resumes. These pitches accumulate over the course of her phrases, until by the end of A3 a four-note chord rings through the speakers: D5-G5-A5-C6. Although this set is taken from the soprano's pitches at the ends of each phrase, its extreme diatonicism stands in contrast to the dissonant melodic and harmonic content of those phrases and of

---

5 These gaps in the activity were originally written as fermatas, but due to the difficulty of navigating a fermata-strewn piece with a conductor-less ensemble, have been replaced by rests. The intended feeling remains one of stopped time.
the ensemble. This chord serves as an abstracted reminder of the impassive calm of the B section, in which a live wine-glass served as the pitch and timbral center around which the ensemble waxed and waned.

The chord continues to ring as the final A section begins in m.89: it will ring until the end of the movement. As shown in example 1.1, the melodic intervals and ranges in A4 are somewhere between the extreme oscillations of A3 and the relatively curtailed movement of A1. What is new here is the treatment of the voice within the ensemble. In the previous A sections, the soprano has always been doubled by the piano, which she plays herself: in A1, she shades her voice with bell-like, out of tune piano harmonics; in A2, the second pianist plucks the string of each note as she sings/plays it, resulting in a trailing echo of her vocal line; in A4, her sung pitches are buried within the four-hand chords, which follow her contour. Additionally, the ensemble's elusive mutterings and weavings are roused and silenced by her voice: when she breaks off, so do they, and they resume with her. In section A4, for the first time, the soprano line is neither doubled nor accompanied. Instrumental activity has largely ceased: the flutist plays a multiphonic trill on the bass flute, which, while fairly unstable and changeable, is an essentially static sound; the percussionist rolls on a triangle; and the singer, at the piano bench, drums thimble-tipped gloves against the bolts of the high-register piano strings. The overall effect is of a shimmering rattle underneath the cool sustain of the wine-glass chord.

Over this texture, the soprano sings her final group of phrases. The text has undergone a switch in emphasis, from the impersonal, descriptive and enigmatic lines of the first
sections to a first-person voice that beseeches, threatens, and warns the listener. This time, the broken-off ends of May's phrases are more suggestive, their implications hanging ominously in the air:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\textit{believe me capable of} - \\
&\textit{push you all the way down} - \\
&\textit{if just to show a living} - \\
&\textit{your life in the palm of my} - \\
\end{align*}
\]

In the novel, May's desperation to communicate the volatility of her inner life and to show to another person the menacing internal presence which she considers to be "the only thing that isn't fake" incites her to risky acts, such as one that imperils the life of the main character. The result of these acts, however, is to leave her feeling even more alone. In the movement, the vocalist's change in point-of-view from third-person narrator to first person supplicant, coupled with her alienation from the ensemble, emphasizes the poignancy of this isolation. The violin and saxophone accent the ends of her phrase, but their slight gestures serve more to interrupt than to encourage, and there is no response to her phrases from either the impassive electronics chord, against which her phrases clash dissonantly, or the rattling flute/percussion/piano texture. Defeated and alone, in her final phrase the vocalist leaps up to finally connect with a prominent, though unsteady, pitch in the flute trill, B-flat 5: at this moment, however, the rattling cuts off abruptly, and the wine-glass chord fades away as the prelude to the second movement begins.
II. My Last Duchess: Isabel Archer

*Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess* portrays the heroine of Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, whose disastrous marriage to a soulless Machiavellian ends all hope for what should have been a bright future for a uniquely thoughtful, ambitious, and intelligent young woman.

The transition from movement I to movement II involves the most complicated set of adjustments for the soprano: after removing her gloves at the piano bench, she must move to a downstage chair, taking her vocal mic with her; she then either takes the clarinet from the saxophone player, switching out the mouthpiece, or takes her own clarinet, adjusting the microphone height and angle to amplify the clarinet. Accomplishing this as quickly as possible leaves little room for steady actorly presence: dramatic interest is therefore maintained with a short prologue, a prelude of manipulated spoken text, pre-recorded by the composer, of about one minute in length.

The text of the prelude (printed on the first page of the score for that movement) consists of three overlapping speeches culled from *Portrait*, each performed with a different affect and manipulated with a different distortion effect. With the entrance of each successive section of text, the prelude moves from bright to dark and high to low, in terms of both mood and of timbre and vocal range. The first, describing Isabel's earnest, if naïve, attitude towards the responsibilities attending her position of relative privilege, is spoken in a high voice and altered electronically with a patch used in the previous movement.
which isolates and delays overtones, giving it a bubbling, trailing, high accompaniment.\textsuperscript{6} It lasts from the start of the prelude until 0:45. The second section sews together phrases which reveal Isabel's dawning understanding of her reality and her growing dismay at finding herself married to a cruelly unimaginative emotional tyrant. Lasting from 0:06-0:50, this section is spoken in a mid-range voice (close to the composer's normal speaking range) and is distorted with filters, muffling the vocal timbre, and delays.\textsuperscript{7} The electronic effects on these first two voices become more extreme over time. In the third section of text Isabel is ensconced in her self-made prison, and contemplates with "incredulous terror" the prospect of an entire life lived without freedom and built on principles she despises. The voice here is spoken in a low range and is warped almost beyond intelligibility with rumbling feedback and heavy distortion.\textsuperscript{8}

Movement II proper begins immediately after the last line of the tape, with a series of chords in the piano shrinking from a three and a half octave range (the approximate physical limit for a two-handed piano chord both wide in range and densely packed) to one octave: as each successively smaller chord is played, their attacks are covered completely by rimshots from the percussionist. This scenario is a microcosm of what will unfold in the piece: a chord will collapse in on itself towards the middle, punctuated by attacks.

\textsuperscript{6} Max object used: jgspectdelay~ (see note 3).
\textsuperscript{7} Max objects used: pong~ (foldover distortion) and tapin~/tapout~.
\textsuperscript{8} Max object used: pong~ (wraparound distortion)
All the text in this movement, except for a very brief coda, comes from the electronics: the vocalist does not use her voice at all, but plays the clarinet. However, she is to be identified with the protagonist here—with Isabel—as directly and literally as she is with any of the other movements in which she sings or speaks the protagonist's words. This must begin, after the microphone and clarinet setup has been prepared, with physical stage presence, as she waits for the cue to begin playing. Once she does, what she plays will be a gross musical translation of Isabel's entrapment.

Isabel's tragedy is that she orchestrates her own undoing. She is misled by the deliberate calculations of those who stand to benefit from her marriage, including her husband and his former mistress, but also by her blind faith in her own judgment and her naïve desire to distinguish herself as noble and principled by marrying a penniless man, Gilbert Osmond, whom she believes to be totally unique. The following passage is an observation from her cousin and only real friend, Ralph Touchett, who, in trying to warn the soon-to-be-married Isabel of grave danger, finds his objections have perversely strengthened her resolve:

Ralph had listened with great attention….accommodating himself to the weight of his total impression--the impression of her ardent good faith. She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was dismally consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a
fine theory, about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours.⁹

Thus Isabel walks freely into the worst mistake of her life.

In the piece, the vocalist/clarinetist plays a series of multi-note *bisbigliando* figures on the clarinet, produced by rapidly playing the right-hand trill keys while holding a particular fingering. Example 2.1 shows the approximate pitch content of these figures.¹⁰

With each new fingering, the pitch range produced by the trill-key motion shrinks slightly. The clarinetist plays as continuously as possible, pausing only for (gasping) breaths. Around her, the bass flute, saxophone, and violin play various figures, trills, and fast melodies made up of the pitches (including the microtones) present in the clarinet trill, and only of those pitches: their material is generated from hers, and consequently each time the clarinet fingering changes the prevailing harmony of the ensemble changes as well. The pianist and percussionist make these changes with percussive attacks: the pianist always plays the closest equal-tempered approximation of the current pitch collection.

---

⁹ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (p.235)

¹⁰ The technique of producing these trills results in many microtones: the written pitches in the score and example are the nearest equal-tempered approximations.
Two types of textures compete in the flute/sax/violin writing. As described above, the constant clarinet bisbigliando is matched in character by the rapid, detached or fluttering melodic fragments, trills, or staccato sounds. In contrast to this are sustained pitches, distorted during their duration by singing while playing, for the winds, or by adding a unison double stop that slides out of tune, for the violin. As the piece progresses and the pitch range closes in tighter and tighter, these static notes become longer, louder, and more distorted. By m.42, they have taken over the texture completely, choking out all other activity except for the final and narrowest clarinet trill, which at this point is all but buried in overlapping waves of sound. Enterprising Isabel (i.e., the clarinet) struggles valiantly to resist her growing suspicion that the world she has created is an awful one, but her fears gradually become more solid with the intrusion of undeniably malevolent behavior from her husband.

Example 2.2.1 demonstrates this gradual inundation of the initially turbulent material with static lines from mm.8-42. The sustained notes are represented on one staff, with all other activity replaced by rests. Double bars indicate a move to the next clarinet figure, and thus a tightening of the overall range. With each new pitch set, the sustained lines become longer and their dynamic envelopes more intense, moving from quiet swells to linear crescendi. The example ends at m.42, at which point the sustained lines become continuous, as described above. Below this, example 2.2.2 presents two excerpts of the flute, saxophone, and violin material, one from the beginning of the piece, with the sustained lines as brief resting points within a highly active texture, and one from the end, where they have become much more prominent.
Example 2.2.1
Isabel Archer: My Last Duchess - instrumental texture
Double bar indicates new clarinet figure

Example 2.2.2
Instrumental texture at beginning and end of movement
The text for this movement is from Richard Browning's 1842 poem *My Last Duchess*. Excerpted phrases of the monologue were recorded by the composer and treated with various distortion effects produced with Max/MSP, and are deployed by the electronics performer as a series of sound files. *My Last Duchess* is a dramatic monologue written from the point-of-view of an unnamed Duke, who discusses with a member of his bride-to-be's entourage his conjugal expectations of complete and exclusive obedience and allegiance. Eventually he seems to imply that he has had his most recent wife executed for a perceived slight to his authority over her. The tone, subject, and personality of the speaker are an uncanny match for the aristocratic, morally corrupt, Osmond.

The abridged poem's final lines, near the conclusion of the piece, contain the Duke's veiled reference to the fate of his former wife. At this point, the sustained pitches in the flute, sax, and violin have taken over the texture completely, and are swelling and receding towards an overall dynamic increase to **fff**. The clarinet continues to move rapidly, bleating out its detuned *bisbigliando*, which with the final fingering has dwindled to three notes spanning a major second, as shown in example 2.1. In the electronics, the Duke speaks of his last Duchess' detestable habit of smiling at men other than her husband and drops the hint about her fate:

*This grew; I gave commands*

*Then all smiles stopped.*
At the word "stopped," in m.50, the sustained lines break off along with the clarinet trill.
The piano and percussion now come to the fore for the first time since the opening of the piece. As before, the pianist plays chords, this time at a low dynamic, with loud rimshots masking the attacks. The right hand plays pitches and chords in the mid-register, where the ensemble broke off in m.50, while the left hand plays clusters in the extreme low register, providing a quietly sinister low resonance, and the flute and saxophone extend the percussion attacks with unpitched air and slap sounds. The clarinetist puts down the instrument and, motionless, looks into the audience. She will be visibly out of breath from the strenuousness of continuous playing, providing an affecting visual for the final words of the tape, which will be thrown into the foreground with the cessation of instrumental activity:

*There she stands, as if*  
*Alive. Will it please you rise?*

As the clarinetist looks beseechingly into the audience, she must be assumed to be the "she" in question. It is the responsibility of the vocalist/clarinetist to make this connection as plausible as she can. As the saxophone and flute play a final rising trill to end the piece, the vocalist and the violinist momentarily enact an exchange from the previously described scene in the novel between Ralph and Isabel, speaking two lines of dialogue:

Violinist/Ralph: "You're going to be put in a cage."
Vocalist/Isabel: "If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you."

The vocalist's line is accompanied by the scraping of a coin along a low piano string, noisily intruding upon her fateful words as she prepares to take the piece into darker and more violent territory in movement III.

III. Palilalia: Iphigenia

*Palilalia* is the pathological repetition of a word or phrase. *Palilalia: Iphigenia* is set sometime before the events of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. In the midst of the Trojan War, Clytemnestra waits for her husband Agamemnon to be returned to her so that she may enact a plot of vengeance against him for his sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. The text consists of three metered, unrhymed verses, separated by a chorus that is a crying of Iphigenia's name. In the first verse, Clytemnestra sends a prayer for bloodshed to Artemis; in the second, she speaks to her murdered daughter, instructing her on how to receive her soon-to-be-dispatched father in the underworld; in the third, she issues a grim warning to Agamemnon *in absentia*, vowing that he will be held accountable for his actions.

The pitch structure for this piece is based entirely on the formant and overtone structures of the name "Iphigenia,"\(^{11}\) especially of the vowels, and on the resonant frequencies of the particular china cymbal used to create the tape part and used in every live performance to

\(^{11}\) The name "Iphigenia" has myriad acceptable pronunciations and is here pronounced "ɪfɪdʒɪnæə."
An analysis of the sounds produced by striking this cymbal using various methods was made using the audio analysis software SPEAR. Several strong resonant frequencies emerged: in particular, the pitch F#4 was almost always present regardless of the playing technique. F#4 was then chosen as the fundamental on which to base the spectra of the vowel analyses (other prominent notes from the cymbal analysis make an appearance in the middle section of the movement, discussed below, and in the soprano part). Each of the five syllables of Iphigenia were analyzed with regards to overtone strength and quantized into a series of five chords: these chords are the constant refrain of the movement, as the name and memory of Iphigenia herself are a constant presence in the obsessively calculating mind of Clytemnestra, waiting out twenty years of war.

Only the first six partials of each syllable, including the fundamental, were used to create this refrain: approximated to equal temperament, these comprise the pitches F#4, F#5, C#6, F#6, A#6, and C#7. Example 3.1 shows a SPEAR graph of the relative strengths of these six frequencies in the five vowels of the name Iphigenia, sung on the pitch F#4, and a translation of this information into music notation. The numbers next to each note indicate the strength of the pitch relative to the other pitches, on a scale of 1-5. (Note that the fourth vowel, a diphthong, undergoes a change in relative frequency amplitude, which is taken into account in the orchestration of these chords.)

---

12 The piece has been performed three times by the full ensemble, twice in an original trio version for soprano, tenor saxophone, violin, and tape and (upcoming) in a version for soprano, flute, cello and tape.
Example 3.1

*Palilalia: Iphigenia* – vowel overtones in SPEAR and music notation

Top figure is spectogram of first six partials of *Iphigenia* vowels: amplitude indicated by shading. Staff below is notated reproduction: numbers indicate relative strength/dynamic of partial.

Example 3.2 presents three different orchestrations of this refrain, all within the first verse. Version 1, for solo violin, opens the piece and vamps until all are performers are in place. Version 2 at m.4 is a relatively restrained orchestration for the full ensemble, while version 3 at m.13 is more vigorous. The relative strengths of the partials in each syllable are orchestrated through dynamics and instrumentation. Consonants are
Example 3.2

Patilalia: Iphigenia - refrain in three orchestrations

Version 1: solo violin (m.1)

Version 2: ensemble (m.4)
represented by the use of air and noise sounds. This gives the music a hitched, slightly stuttering quality that contrasts with the slow, ritualistic regularity of the chords, which are played in constant slow quarter notes.
Many factors complicate the translation of this series of partials into the five instruments: they each have their own rich timbre, for one, and the performance of the precise amplitude relationship between the pitches is unpredictable and contingent on performance factors. Pitch-wise, the exact tuning of the instruments will never precisely match: in particular, the equal-tempered piano alongside violin natural harmonics adds a tiny but sharp grain of discord. This uneasy timbral dissonance within a squarely triadic realm is part of the psychology of the piece: Iphigenia is constantly present, but as an idea, something abstracted from the reality of the girl herself that serves only to continually stoke Clytemnestra's rage and anguish. Perhaps over the long years of waiting Clytemnestra's hunger for retaliation has overshadowed the memories of her real daughter, as she immerses herself in fantasies of revenge.

In this movement, the soprano accompanies herself on a cymbal – the same exact cymbal from which the original pitches were drawn – which she plays with thimble-tipped gloves, put on during the solo violin loop at the start of the piece. In between her utterances, she keeps time with the refrain, at first by drumming the thimbles together into the microphone in an attitude of anticipation, and later by scraping the thimbles on the surface of the cymbal, striking the cymbal with open palms, spinning the cymbal with one hand while holding thimbles against it, and other techniques, adding both a wash of indefinite sound to the ensemble and a visual pantomime of conjuring. She does not participate in the refrain at first, but incants the text in a microtonally-inflected monotone between refrain iterations, using pitches selected from the cymbal analysis. In the first
verse, amidst an instrumental texture building itself up little by little, she weaves her initial spell, steeling herself for the signal that the men have returned from Troy. As small disturbances such as air sounds, trills, or glissandi begin to infiltrate the refrain on the second half of each beat, the soprano joins in with noise and breath sounds. (This can be seen in 3.2, last refrain.) At m.18, she adds her voice to the refrain for the first time, singing each syllable simultaneously with its orchestrated equivalent and thereby fusing herself with the ensemble.

The chorus between verses 1 and 2, mm.9-27, is a wailing incantation of "Iphigenia," with the soprano accompanied by violin glissandi and piano accents. At the last syllable of the final iteration, the first track of the tape part begins. The five tracks for Palilalia consist entirely of manipulated (but with no processing) recordings of the china cymbal. The first track plays through the entirety of verse 2, in which Clytemnestra remembers and mourns her daughter, and contains a wraithlike reflection of Iphigenia's name. Using pitches selected from the initial analysis of the cymbal's resonant frequencies, the composer recorded herself singing the five Iphigenia vowels in extreme proximity to the cymbal. The sound of the voice was then deleted from the recording, leaving only the cymbal's resonance: an echo with no source. The different vowel sounds are audible, although indistinct, and the metallic timbre of the cymbal gives them a tolling quality. In verse 2, (mm.28-45), the refrain is absent except for its ghostly presence in the tape, and the strong sense of pulse established from the beginning of the movement on is knocked off kilter with an alternation between measures of 1/4 and 3/8. At m.36, halfway through this verse, Clytemnestra addresses Iphigenia directly, alerting her that she will be meeting
her father again soon in Hades. At this point, the refrain is re-initiated, building up from one chord, in m.37 to the full five, in m.43.

It is here, at m.45, that the underlying pulse loses its grip, as a swelling gong-like sound from the second tape track, produced from a cymbal hit with extremely close miccing, sweeps the ensemble into an uneasy trance. This section, lasting from mm.45-49 consists of five microtonal chords built up of pitches from the cymbal analysis and presented "out of time:" the soprano cues each new chord by spinning and striking the cymbal, and each measure lasts for several seconds. For the duration of each chord, all but one of the four melodic instruments – voice, flute, tenor saxophone, and violin – swell in and out of audibility on one pitch, while the fourth repeats a microtonally inflected five-note pattern, mimicking the repetition of Iphigenia (when the soprano takes the five-note pattern, she sings on the vowels of the name). The pianist plays each new chord's closest equal-temperament equivalent, while the percussionist plays a scattering of crotale notes. In m.49, tempo is re-established by the percussionist, the instrumental swells are aligned, and the ensemble crescendos into the third and final verse at m.50.

The third verse (mm.50-70) is the emotional peak of the movement, as Clytemnestra swears vengeance on Agamemnon's entire lineage:

*House of Atreus!*

*I wait for ruin*

*Plotting the trial*
Rigging my nets

The third tape part, made from spun and struck cymbal noises, coincides with the start of this verse, and the refrain re-emerges intact in its most ferocious orchestration yet. The soprano's incantations are lengthened by half from verses 1-2, allowing her to draw out the phrases, and she sings howlingly along with the first refrain on C#6. The movement cannot, however, end in a burst of furious triumph, as it is situated chronologically before Clytemnestra's notorious victory over her husband, and thus she and her music must wind back down into the quiet, deadly patience of the opening. With each subsequent refrain, the soprano steps her pitch down the ladder of partials, moving from C#6 at m.51 down to the original F#4 at m.57, as the ensemble gradually calms down to something resembling the opening level of intensity. Example 3.3 shows this diminishment in the soprano, flute, and saxophone parts for this transition, m.50-57.

Reduced to her opening state of tense inactivity, drumming her thimbled fingers together, Clytemnestra addresses Agamemnon in the second half of her last verse from mm.58-66, assuring him that she will carry out her plan, as the ensemble again regenerates the refrain from one chord to the full five, as in m.37-43. While the instruments build up to play the final refrain with an intensity similar to the beginning of the last verse, the soprano is here silent: she has had her moment of cathartic rage, and has wound up the charm. The final chord of the refrain cuts off into the atmospheric quiet of the final tape track, again made from voice-activated cymbal recordings. In a trailing-off coda, the soprano cues five sighing tutti invocations of "Iphigenia." As the last tape track fades
Example 3.3

Platea: Iphigenia - final verse (sop/fl/sax only)

Sop.
House of Aetress 1 (ph)e (g)e (n)i a I wait for men

Fl.

Cl.

Sop.
I (ph)e (g)e (n)i a plotting the trial

Fl.

Cl.

Sop.
I (ph)e (g)e (n)i a rigging my nets I (ph)e (g)e (n)i a

Fl.

Cl.
away, the percussionist plays a pianissimo roll on a low drum, and the soprano makes her way to the back of the stage with her microphone for the fourth movement.

**IV. Voilà Minuit: Lucile Duplessis**

Lucile Duplessis (1771-1794) is the only woman among the *Voices* who actually lived – not a literary/fictional character, but a historical one. Lucile was a fairly sheltered middle-class Parisian girl who became a figure in, and eventual victim of, the French Revolution after marrying her former tutor Camille Desmoulins, a journalist and politician influential in shaping the course of the Revolution and its aftermath. After running afoul of the Revolutionary Tribunal, Camille was guillotined in 1794, and his wife was arrested and executed a few weeks later, at age twenty-three, on false charges of plotting his escape.

*Voilà Minuit* takes place before the events of the Revolution – before, in fact, the marriage that gave Lucile a place in history. Her personality and character are forcefully evident in her surviving journals and letters,13 which reveal her to be a passionate, dreamy, morbid, charming, and fiery young woman, prone to extravagant fits of both ecstasy and despair. As the tape track from *Palilalia: Iphigenia* fades away, the soprano, still singing the last of its final repeated phrases, wanders upstage to the percussion setup. In *Voilà Minuit*, she will speak the text from Lucile's diary (in the original French) and accompany herself with percussion. The percussionist's drum roll at the very end of

---

*Palilalia*, having faded almost to inaudibility, starts to *crescendo* after the last notes from the ensemble have faded. The roll abruptly stops at its peak, and the soprano announces with impersonal authority: "Des journals de Lucile Duplessis, 1788.\textsuperscript{14}

This movement is in four short sections, each of which is based around a diary entry or fragment from Lucile's personal writings. The soprano performs this movement, which consists entirely of spoken text, from the back of the stage, near the percussion setup, removing her physical presence to emphasize the disembodied remnants of Lucile's character as they exist in her words alone. In Section 1 (mm.1-36), she complains of a feeling of persistent *ennui*. She feels estranged from herself, depersonalized, "like a machine." As she speaks the text, the vocalist rubs sandpaper blocks into the microphone in time with her speech, like the sound of a pen scratching on paper, or the static that separates us from an 18\textsuperscript{th} century life. The ensemble in this section takes its cue from Lucile's metaphor by constructing a series of what I will refer to as "machines": each instrument repeats short gestures at regular intervals and unaligned with each other, creating an impression of mechanically moving yet unconnected parts. Throughout, the percussionist plays a constant fast pulse, a racing heartbeat, providing the basic rate for the gestures of the instruments, and calibrating its speed according to Lucile's words.

Example 4.1 shows the construction of the first three "machines" in Section 1, which are labeled as A1, A2, and A3. The top staff system presents the repeating gestures of each

\textsuperscript{14} "From the journals of Lucile Duplessis, 1788."
Example 4.1

Voïd Minuit Lucile Duplessis opening "machines": gestures

A1 (mm.3-10)  
"I am utterly without spirit."

A2 (mm.11-18)  
"I don’t understand myself..."

A3 (mm.19-23)  
"What agitates me so?"

opening "machines": rhythmic structures
instrument and a portion of the translated text for each,\textsuperscript{15} while the staff systems below show the rate of repetition for each element/instrument, and the overall pulse rate played by the percussionist. The gestures use a limited vocabulary of robotic-sounding fragments: repeated notes in quick bursts and/or deliberate groups, percussive sounds, and/or short melodic fragments. The harmonic material of this section is derived from the pitch cluster A\#-B-C-C\#-D. The registral spread of this cluster across the ensemble draws in as the section goes on, and the repetitions of each instrument's gestures draw closer together in time. As a result, the music tightens around the speaker gradually over Section 1 as she reaches the conclusion "Je suis comme une machine." At the end of this section, Lucile concludes that "la mort est préférable à cette espèce d'anéantissemens."\textsuperscript{16}

It is here, at m.32, that the machine breaks apart into sparse fragments. After four nearly empty measures, the percussionist returns to a \textit{ppp} drum roll, and again starts a long crescendo, buoying Lucile into a new section where her listlessness will be replaced by a dream of demented triumph.

In Section 2, mm.37-60, Lucile addresses herself to the deposed French Queen Marie Antoinette. Asking herself what she would do in Antoinette's place, she constructs a vivid and violent fantasy of self-sacrifice, declaring that she would construct her own funeral pyre and die a martyr's death at an hour of her choosing rather than let herself be dragged ignominiously from her palace. She describes a ritualistic execution to take

\textsuperscript{15} In performance, the text is spoken in French.
\textsuperscript{16} "Ah, death would be better than this kind of annihilation." \textit{Lucile Desmoulins: Journal 1788-1793}, p.47
place "à la lueur des flambeaux...à minuit," and imagines her own death as an event of cosmic significance: "[je] voudrais en mourant en imposer à l'univers entier!" The music here is virtuosic and unhinged, with relentlessly driving motivic texture of the piccolo, saxophone and piano punctuated at key moments in the text by long sustained trumpet lines. The chaos is reigned in by a drum beat, played by the vocalist. The rhythm of the drum, always simple and steady, changes with the text: plodding along at every beat as Lucile describes the three days leading up to her death, slowing to every third beat as she invokes the "grand maître de l'Univers." As she completes her depiction, the ensemble rallies together in chords alternating with bursts of sextuplets. These bursts draw closer together until the percussionist strikes midnight with a series of twelve deafening snare drum rolls.

The final snare roll dovetails with the start of Section 3, mm.64-87. In total contrast to the preceding material, this section is placid, hushed, almost immobile. Lucile is writing in her diary on a still, moonlit night. She wonders what is happening on the earth (is anyone thinking of her?), wishing the oppressive silence could be broken by a clap of thunder. Her first words in Section 3, "Voilà minuit qui sonne," retroactively identify the twelve snare drum rolls as striking chimes coming from a nearby Parisian clock tower, or perhaps from inside her well appointed apartment.

A few elements in this section recall the material in Section 1. First, the voice of the

---

17 "By torchlight, at midnight." IBID, p.64
18 "I want, in dying, to impose upon the entire universe!" IBID, p.63
19 "Midnight is tolling." IBID, p.53.
speaker again plays a percussion instrument in rhythm with her speech: here small
triangle adds an indistinct shimmer to her words. Secondly, a short saxophone
multiphonic gesture from A2 of section 1 is woven into a rocking piano motive in section
3. Thirdly, and more generally, there is a vague reminiscence of the "machines" of the
opening: as in Section 1, the same gestures are repeated over and over by the instruments,
including a languid, pedaled piano phrase; a low note in the bass flute reaching up to an
octave harmonic; an ethereal subtone clarinet sustain; and a ppp rolled crotale. However,
the gestures are now not only unaligned between the instruments, but themselves repeat
irregularly: they drift, unattached to a grid. In the stratosphere, the violin plays a high
harmonic tremolo which breaks into brief cascading harmonic arpeggios each time the
vocalist speaks, forging a connection between her vaguely restless words and the overall
tranquil texture.

Disturbances to the texture creep in as Lucile expresses her longing for thunder at m.81,
in the form of bass flute multiphonics and low drum rolls. The piano, while retaining the
same phrase contour, has moved to a new set of pitches/chords which use both extremes
of register, and begins to toll relentlessly on its lowest note. Coupled with a violin
crescendo which becomes gradually distorted with bow pressure in m.85-87, this toll
accomplishes a transition out of this section into the fourth and final section at m.88.

Section 4, mm.88-106, couples the frenzy of Section 2 with the repetitive patterning of
Section 1, as Lucile bewails her undirected angst ("J'ai la rage dans le coeur!20"). The

20 "My heart is full of rage!" IBID, p.53-54.
three "machines" in this section last only a few measures each. Example 4.2 shows the gestures of these "machines" and, below the staff, their rate of occurrence, as in example 4.1. Note that there is no regulating percussion pulse here: the percussionist participates in the overall pattern, and the sense of ticking regularity is absent. As in the opening section, the instruments are linked through motivic consistency, although their lexicon has erupted into dissonant multiphonics, loud noise sounds, and brash fanfare-like gestures. Towards the end of each brief pattern, the regularity within each instrument breaks and each gesture comes more quickly on the heels of the last, giving a sense of relentless propulsion as Lucile melodramatically begs her tears to consume her and reduce her to ash. These instances of irregularity are indicated in example 4.2 with asterisks. By the end of the third machine (mm.95-102), there are no breaks at all, resulting in a cacophonous pile-up.

Movement IV with Lucile's threefold cry of "Périsse ma mémoire!"²¹, accompanied by a tutti chord and followed by a hard, glittering handful of ff notes from the piano and crotales: this last gesture rings in the air as movement V begins attacca.

**V. Mad Scene: Emma Bovary**

Musically as well as psychologically, the end of movement IV hinges easily to the start of movement V, and for the first time there is no intra-movement transition. The chaotic intensity of the Lucile's final dovetails into Madame Bovary's violent entrance. The

---

²¹ "Perish, memory!" IBID, p.54
Example 4.2

Voilà Minuit: Lucile Duplantier - ending "machines" gestures

ending "machines" rhythmic structure
- indicates shortening length between repetitions
soprano takes as her starting point in V the same fervor with which she ended the last
movement, but takes this fervor immediately into the realm of total melodrama – in fact,
of caricature – with four measures of growling "vocal fry." Following this, and after an
entire movement of speaking only, she begins to sing without words.

_Mad Scene: Emma Bovary_ presents the eponymous heroine/anti-heroine of Gustave
Flaubert's novel at her most gloriously, megalomaniacally unhinged. This is not Emma
Bovary the bored, listless housewife or even the fretful, ecstatic lover, but something
closer to the desperate creature shoving handfuls of arsenic down her throat at the novel's
end. In all her incarnations, however, she remains in full possession of her considerable
charms. The particular inspiration for this movement comes from a scene in the second
half of the novel in which Emma attends a performance of _Lucia di Lammermore_ and is
electrified into a swoon-like state of blissful mental anguish by the performance of the
lead tenor. Movement V is split into two sections. Part one (mm.1-54) is a series of
short loops of varying emotional character and constant high-pitched theatricality. Part
two (mm.55-142) is a grafting of this material onto an aria from Mozart's _Le Nozze di
Figaro_, presented as a diegetic intrusion into the Emma's inner world.

Example 5.1 gives the vocal part only for all twelve of the loops in part one, and, beneath
this, a chart indicating the order of their presentation (not entirely sequential: several
loops make further appearances after their introduction) and the number of repetitions of
### Example 5.1

**Mad Scene: Emma Bovary - Vocal lines, part I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of repts.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of repts.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of repts.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The instruments, not shown in the example, are always in cahoots with the singer and share her general sound world and mood. Each loop has a specific affective instruction – "graceful," "dignified," "deer in headlights," etc. – and the vocalist must incorporate these as much as possible into her performance. In many of the loops, #2, #8, and #11 in particular, she performs a kind of demented coloratura, with Major-key scales and arpeggios running amuck or falling apart. Some, such as #3, #5, #6, and #10, incorporate non-sung vocal sounds such as growling, gasping, panting, and laughing and crying. All twelve are fairly over-the-top and ludicrous. The repetition serves to emphasize the artificiality of the emotions being enacted, and in so doing stays true to the character: in the novel, many of Emma's extremes of emotion are pretensions based on what she thinks she ought to be feeling or experiencing, and the face she shows to others, even to her lovers, is very often a self-conscious construction. Similarly, the seeming randomness of the number of repetitions and the occasional reprises of certain loops speak to Emma's instability and the lurid volatility of her emotions. Only one phrase, #12, marked "tender and sincere" and at a sudden slow tempo, is not looped. This is Emma's single moment of real feeling, and a chance for the vocalist to drop the mask of hysteria. Emma is not a monster, after all, and she does experience real heartbreak despite her lack of empathy.

Part one ends with loop #6, with the soprano spewing furious gibberish, and runs headlong into the opening chords of *Ha Gia Vinta La Causa*, the recitative that precedes

---

22 Loops #6 and #8 have a normal version and a slightly longer version with a brief tail, which is usually performed as the last repetition: the longer versions are shown in ex 5.1.
the Count's aria *Vedrò mentr'io sospiro* from the third act of *Le Nozze di Figaro*.\(^{23}\)

Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte's Count Almaviva is a suitable counterpart to Madame Bovary: he is arrogant yet resentful, privileged yet entitled, and suffers from persecution fantasies and an insatiable desire for new romantic adventures despite a devoted spouse.\(^{24}\) He does not, however, participate in the proceedings of this movement, but represents an entirely different world from the soprano, the world outside her turbulent mind: she is watching the baritone perform the Count's aria just as Madame Bovary watched the tenor perform the role of Edgardo in *Lucia*.

This section is made possible by the fact of Wet Ink's electronics player's background in vocal performance, and it is he who sings the aria. A moment of extreme disorientation occurs as he rises abruptly from his anonymous position behind a mixing board and bursts unexpectedly into song. As he will most likely be seated somewhere in the audience, or in a control booth behind the audience, the disorientation will include a sudden shift in focus as the location of the stage is recalibrated: the audience itself is now "onstage" with the baritone, and the soprano is the spectator.\(^{25}\) For the remainder of the movement, two entirely different musical worlds co-exist, peopled by different members of the ensemble. The baritone, who sings only Mozart, is joined by the pianist, whose

---


\(^{24}\) While these explanations for the inclusion of this particular aria are perfectly true, the most crucially important aspect and the main reason why it was chosen over many other possibilities is the fact that the laptop/electronics performer for whom it was written, Sam Pluta, has studied and performed it and sings it very well. The implications of writing for an ensemble with such peculiar skills will be explored in a later section of this paper.

\(^{25}\) It is possible that the laptop player will be onstage, off to one side of the ensemble: in this case, he may sing from the stage, although with an affect of no awareness of anyone aside from the pianist. The soprano will focus away from the audience and onto him.
music is mostly a transcription of the orchestra accompaniment, with occasional atonal
defections to the soprano's side. The flutist, saxophonist, violinist and percussionist stay
mostly with the soprano, intermittently weaving into the Mozart.

Four the first four measures of this section (m.55-60), the baritone/piano play the Mozart
recitative alone, with occasional exclamations from the ensemble, while the soprano,
struck dumb, looks wildly around in utter bafflement before locating and fixing her awed
attention on the baritone. These measures present the most unencumbered Mozart in the
movement, giving the audience time to adjust to an entirely new musical language: while
the frequent tonal elements and operatic vocal conventions of the previous section will
partially mitigate the shock of the sudden appearance of 18th century opera buffa, it will
still be (as is intended) bewildering enough to confound the whole operation for several
moments.

In m.61, the soprano begins to sing: all her text in this section is taken from Madame
Bovary's inner monologue during the opera scene in the novel. Over the continued
recitative of the baritone, she remarks to herself: "Il devait avoir un intarrissable
amour!" in a slowly moving line accompanied by trilling multiphonics in the
woodwinds and a long, high violin glissando. She and the flute, saxophone, and violin
(hence referred to as "the ensemble") are entirely unconnected with the Mozart, and

"His love must be inexhaustible!"
linger on for a measure after the baritone and piano have finished.\textsuperscript{27}

The Mozart is spliced in several places to fit the proportions of the movement.\textsuperscript{28} At m.14, the baritone jumps to the start of the aria proper,\textsuperscript{29} the delightfully pompous Allegro maestoso. Mozart's D-Major chord and descending scale motive is followed by the baritone's answer on the dominant, and this is repeated twice. The ensemble joins the Mozart at the beginning of the phrase and then is seduced to the soprano's side, with indistinct flutterings and tremolos, as she begins to sing at a slow, dreamy tempo. Example 5.2 shows mm.61-77 of the score, including the transition out of the baritone's recitative and the first phrase of the aria.

The soprano/ensemble and the baritone/piano in this section must be harmonically and metrically remote enough to keep their two worlds separate and intact, and yet not so completely unconnected as to lose the plausibility of the soprano "hearing" what is going on in the Mozart. Example 5.3 shows the vocal parts from mm.70-95 and a reduction to a close-spaced chord progression of the harmony accompanying each. For the soprano's harmony, a pitch set, in square brackets, and an interval vector, in arrow brackets, are given. The nine interval vectors in particular demonstrate the richness and heavy chromaticism of the ensemble harmony: all but two have at least one instance of every interval class, and all contain at least one minor second. For each chord, however, there

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{27} The percussionist in the second half of this movement is something of a free agent, but plays with the ensemble more often than with the Mozart.
\textsuperscript{28} Cut measures: 14-40, 54-77, 106-132. Measure numbers are not in the Mozart score, and are counted from the beginning of the recitative to the end of the aria.
\textsuperscript{29} The pitches of the piano reduction are changed in m.14 to accomplish this transition.
\end{flushleft}
is at least one common tone between the Mozart and the ensemble: these are drawn in black diamond noteheads.

The vocal lines of the soprano and baritone are mostly at odds, although certain pitches are heard simultaneously or in close proximity: these pitches are marked with arrow lines between the vocal parts in Example 5.3. At m.88, these common tones between the voices cease, to highlight their arrival on the same pitch-class in mm.93-94. In addition to their different pitch areas, the singers sing at different rates: for mm. 70-94, the average number of new notes/attacks is 1.35 for the soprano and 3 for the baritone.\textsuperscript{30} The peaks of their phrases, however, as shown in Example 5.3, become less skewed as they move towards the end of the \textit{Allegro maestoso} section, and, in addition to arriving on the same pitch-class, they share their first simultaneous attack/cut-off in m.95. In addition to this moment of coincidence between the vocalists, a correspondence between the ensemble and the piano precipitates this moment: at m.89, the flute and saxophone prophetically begin a series of four- and three- note runs, which motive is immediately thereafter "taken up" by the piano, forging a new thematic connection between the two instrumental groups.

This sudden collision of worlds forces a complete break in the texture at m.95, giving the soprano a moment alone as she absorbs its implications. \textit{"Folie – il me regarde!}\textsuperscript{31} she exclaims at m.96 in a quasi recitative, as the Mozart falls silent for the first time since its appearance. This moment corresponds directly to the scene in the novel, as Emma's

\textsuperscript{30} Whole-measure rests and pick-up notes in the baritone part are excluded.
\textsuperscript{31} IBID, p.271. "Madness – he's looking at me!"
fantasy of whirlwind romance with the tenor onstage suddenly pierces through to her perception of reality: she becomes convinced that he is actually singing to her, that he is receiving her frantic telepathic declarations of love.

From here to the end of the movement, the two worlds waver between similar harmonic and rhythmic remove and instances of closer connection, with distorted motives from the Mozart reverberating in the ensemble and harmonic digressions towards the ensemble's side derailing the Mozart. Even as the pianist moves increasingly towards an agitated sound world and non-tonal pitch material, however, the baritone never wavers from the Mozart score, and the pitch and tempo relationship described in the preceding paragraphs, with the soprano moving in slow chromatic lines against the baritone's sprightly, triadic phrases, continues to characterize their musical relationship – indicating, perhaps, that the baritone's interaction with the soprano exists only in her mind. She is forced to come to him instead, sharing one moment of total union in m.131-132, as she leaves her languidly weaving chromatic line to snap into his tempo and tonality, harmonizing in thirds with a brief cadenza-like passage.

For the final nine measures of the movement (m.134-143), the two groups rush towards collision, the ensemble taking up the rapid eighth-note pulse of the Mozart just as the piano devolves completely into dissonant harmony, while both vocal lines end in a two-measure-long held note. They cut off together, along with the instruments, as the
proverbial curtain falls, and the music crashes headlong into the next movement, dovetailing with its downbeat, as a hand drum begins a mellow dotted rhythm.

VI. **The Owl and the Wren: Lady Macduff**

The penultimate movement, *The Owl and the Wren*, is in the voice of Lady Macduff, who is murdered along with her children in what might be the most chilling scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In this scene (IV.ii), she seeks help and information from two decidedly unhelpful men. The first reassures her that her husband must have had sound reasons for inexplicably leaving her unprotected in a treacherous time; the second informs her that men are on the way to the Macduff castle to kill everyone inside, and advises her to flee. Both take their leave abruptly, and in between her conversation with these adults Lady Macduff shares some morbid but gentle banter with one of her children. She cannot flee, as she has nowhere to go, and immediately after the second man exits the murderers arrive and she is chased offstage to her death. *The Owl and the Wren* inserts a scene between Lady Macduff's knowledge of her inescapable fate and its arrival. It is a nursery-rhyme/lullaby, which she sings to her children in a state of barely concealed dread in an attempt both to soothe them and to quell her own panic.

The title and the text of this short song derive from her dialogue. Shocked and disgusted at the sudden departure of her husband, and ascribing fear as the motivation behind his desertion, Lady Macduff compares his conduct with correct, "natural" behavior:
…the poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in the nest, against the owl. (IV.ii.9-11.)

The owl and the wren, predator and prey, become characters in the fable she spins in her song, with the wren using Lady Macduff's own futile arguments against violence:

"Sir owl," she cries, "you'll be despised
For I have done no wrong!"
But he knows all the blameless fall
While murderers live on.

She switches to human characters in her second of two verses, naming "the Dane of Fife," who "had a wife" (herself), and his "many pretty babes," and detailing their fate:

Their eyes are shut, their throats are cut
You'll hear them sing no more.

By the last few lines, the text has little to do with lullabies or nursery rhymes and merely describes her situation, as if the ruse of storytelling is no longer tolerable:

Oh God, say why He fled my side
And left me to this fate?
They come anon with daggers drawn,
They come and we await.

Throughout this movement, the tape part is a sinister intrusion on Lady Macduff's song. It presents, albeit in indistinct and distorted versions, the other women who populate the play, mocking and threatening Lady Macduff as her fragile courage fails.

Lady Macduff is traditionally presented as a foil to her show-stealing counterpart, Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth famously takes a different view of familial duty, and when she speaks of children, it is to make the point to Macbeth that honoring one's ambition requires brutal subservience of all other human impulses:

… I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (I.vii. 54-59)

This and other passages of Lady Macbeth's make up the main material of the first two tape tracks, spoken, hissed, and whispered in overlapping textures and distorted with digital effects.
As the piece moves on and Lady Macduff’s world quickly crumbles, another and even more menacing female presence arises: that of the three witches. Much as has been made of Lady Macbeth’s “unladylike” ruthlessness, the witches are far more ambiguously gendered: their grotesque androgyny is immediately remarked upon by the first character to lay eyes on them. In fact, despite their appellation as "weird sisters," the witches are non-human, and it is ultimately they who instigate and perhaps even control all the events in the play, including Lady Macduff’s murder. Their strange speeches rise up in cackles and gurgles in the last two tape parts, fragmented enough to disguise phrases that have become clichés ("bubble, bubble, toil and trouble"), but recognizable as chanting, intoning voices. All four tape tracks rise up at first only when Lady Macduff falls silent, as if by singing she keeps the demons at bay. By the end of the piece, however, the voices are ineradicable, and they accompany Lady Macduff in her last refrain, continuing through to the end of the piece.

Lady Macduff’s lullaby is a simple strophic tune in mixolydian mode, with a refrain on the word "lullaby." During the second part of the previous movement (V), the soprano wanders in a Mozart-induced daze from the percussion stand near the back of the stage to the downstage chair she occupied for movements II and III. She is seated for movement VI, and sings while beating out the measures on a tambourine. Immediately following the last measures of movement V, the percussionist starts a dotted rhythm on a hand drum, which he vamps until all musicians are in place. The accompaniment for most of this movement consists of piccolo, used mostly in its lowest octave for its hollow, recorder-like timbre; clarinet; recorder (played by the pianist); and violin, held "guitar
style" and strummed with a pic.

The tune, while original, is a Renaissance folk-song parody, and does not deviate from the modal harmony until the second half of the piece, when dissonance creeps into the accompaniment. Earlier disturbances (aside from the tape part, as described above) are found in the rhythmic structure. While the same steady pulse holds for all the musicians, the metrical stress of the ensemble begins to deviate from the steady 4/4 pattern of the tune fairly early on. For the first few measures of the piece, the music is squarely in 4/4: the recorder, violin, and percussion outline this with a rhythmic pattern emphasizing the downbeats, while the piccolo and clarinet repeat 4-bar phrases. At m.11, however, the patterns for the instruments, though not the vocalist, change: the piccolo and clarinet phrases are shortened by one beat, and the "rhythm section" of recorder and percussion switch to a 3/4 pattern. Above this, the soprano continues her song in 4/4. Given the unchanging pulse rate and the simplicity of the harmonic and rhythmic structure, the new, shortened phrases and skewed beat pattern still "work," moment to moment, with the soprano. Something is off, nevertheless: the intended effect is one of elusive aural confusion, of disturbances difficult to put a finger on.

Shortly after the onset of this polymetricism, the instrumental motives begin to splinter, and by the end of the phrase in m.80 have morphed from clear phrase lengths to unfinished-sounding fragments. Lady Macduff, tacit in mm.15-16 when the first tape track suddenly looms, is loosing the thread of her charade of normalcy. When she resumes her lullaby in m.17, the tape stops. The 4/4 meter is briefly regenerated, only to
be pulled apart beginning in m.20 with the recalibration of the instruments to a 5/4 pattern. At the end of her first verse in m.21, Lady Macduff falls silent for five bars as her nemesis, Lady Macbeth, emerges for five measures from the tape part. Example 6.1 shows mm.7-22: the polymeters of the ensemble are indicated with brackets.

The lullaby refrain duly restores normalcy at m.27, silencing Lady Macbeth and reinstating the 4/4 meter. But as soon as it ends in m.32, the witches make their first unsettling appearance in the tape, breaking off at the start of verse two. This second half of the piece, which begins at m.36, contains more blatant disruptions to the modal regularity of the song. The first four-bar phrase is rounded off with an airy piccolo tremolo and a cadence in f#-minor, and the start of the next phrase – "the owl is fed, his claws are red" – introduces pulsing multiphonics in both piccolo and clarinet and dissonant chords in the violin. At the phrase with the most violent imagery – "their eyes are shut, their throats are cut" – there is an abrupt increase in both pitch dissonance and timbral dissonance, as the piccolo adds a distorting sung note to her playing. Throughout these pitch disturbances, the soprano does not waver but clings to her tune as her intimations of catastrophe become more and more intrusive.

She pauses mid-phrase in m.47 — "they come anon with daggers drawn" — as the comforts of her domestic lullaby world transform completely. Having switched from piccolo and clarinet to the anachronistic bass flute and tenor sax, the wind instruments begin to play pulsing multiphonics; the violin in mm.45-47 moves from a modal chord to an extreme dissonance to a pitchless percussive sound; and the recorder repeatedly bleats a pathetic
fragment of the tune. The witches reenter on cue at Lady Macduff's hesitation in m.47 and this time are not silenced when Lady Macduff picks up where she left off in m.52. Her lullaby is no longer able to credibly restore order, signified by the continuous presence of the witches as well as by the behavior of the instruments, who occasionally take up melodic patterns, but only in broken fragments.

Helplessly sensing defeat, the soprano's sing-song pattern is broken for the first as she lingers for seven beats on "they come and we await." Simultaneously, from mm.52-60 another metrical shift takes place, this time as a process: the perceived meter shortens from 5/4 to 4/4 to 3/4 before snapping back to the 4/4 grid at m.60. In m.60 it briefly seems that the flute and saxophone will accompany the soprano as she sings her second lullaby refrain: however, they both slide back into multiphonics by m.62, which they sustain, with undulating dynamic pulses, until the end of the piece movement at m.68. The soprano is now completely alienated from the ensemble, and finishes her song in m.65. The regular pulses from the violin become further and further spaced, accompanied by increasingly erratic interjections from the recorder and cymbal and a crescendo in the tape part. As the witches' mutterings and the multiphonic swells overtake all other elements in the texture, the winds crescendo to the end of movement VI, cutting off on the downbeat of the seventh and final movement.
Example 6.1
The Owl and the Wren: Lady Macduff - polymeters

at day-light's end a moth-er wren in times corrupt and sowl with chicks a-hole in her poor home is

spotted by an owl. "Good owl" says she, "do pi-ty me, and spare this lit-tle nest." He bends her nest, he has no thought for

* disintegration of motives
Example 6.1, con't.

her dis-times-lessons.

"Sir owls," she cries, "you'll be disappointed, for

* disintegration of motives

I have done no wrong," but he knows all the blame- less fall, while mur- der-ers live on.
VII. Her Voice is Full of Money (A Deathless Song): Daisy Buchanan

The voice in the final movement is that of Daisy Buchanan, a voice that is endlessly waxed upon in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Daisy's traps are her passivity and myopia, which are at odds with her susceptibility to romantic delusions, a susceptibility shared by most of the main characters. Ultimately, she lacks the moral courage to take responsibility for her actions and to make choices incompatible with her sheltered, though passionless, world. In one aspect, however, she stands outside this world, wholly unconventional. Her uniqueness, and thus her power over men impressed by rarity, lies in the unusual qualities of her voice.

This movement takes Daisy's voice, rather than her character, as its primary subject, guided by the rhapsodic descriptions of it in Fitzgerald's text. Her speaking voice is variously described by *Gatsby*'s narrator Nick Carraway as "low and thrilling," a "singing compulsion," an "exhilarating ripple," "full of aching, grieving beauty:" when she talks, "a stirring warmth flow[s] from her as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words." The sound of her voice communicates emotion and personality entirely separate from the content of her chatty and often trite remarks. Indeed, it is unclear which is to be trusted, which is the "real" Daisy: her voice or herself. This conundrum is made clear during an early conversation she has with Nick in which she hints at a profound unhappiness:

The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I
felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick….sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face….

Daisy's voice is sincere in spite of herself, and it is this voice most of all that is loved by Gatsby, the penniless young suitor and first love of her girlhood who has made it his life's goal to win her back, acquiring to this end a fortune and a new name. When Gatsby reunites with the now-married Daisy, Nick observes the inevitable flickers of uncertainty as Gatsby is confronted with the human reality of his long-cherished, sacrosanct fantasy. This uncertainty can only be vanquished by Daisy's secret weapon:

There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything….as she said something low in his ear he turned toward her with a rush of emotion. I think that voice held him most with its fluctuating, feverish warmth because it couldn't be over-dreamed – that voice was a deathless song.

Taking this description as a starting point, movement VII is constructed around a literal instantiation of just such a "deathless song." This (short) song, shown in example 7.1, is a generally tonal melody with an emphasis on modal mixture and on "melodic sighs" of

33 IBID, 101. Italics mine.
small descending intervals. It can be split into four phrase groups that themselves fall into two larger periods. The first phrase group, mm.1-4, begins in g minor with a descending half-step, B-flat to A, and ends by outlining a C Major triad. The second phrase group, mm.5-10, begins with the same B-flat to A head motive and ends with a rising broken scale indicating F Major, on the pitch C5. The first phrase group of period 2, mm.11-14, takes C5 as the starting point for a transposition up a Major ninth of the first phrase of period 1, beginning in a minor with a descending half-step head motive C to B, and outlining a D Major triad in m.14. Deviation from the straight transposition occurs in the last measure of the song (m.15), when the melody, instead of reaching down for the F-sharp that would point it towards D major, continues its ascent up to C6, shortening this last phrase by one bar from its predecessor and producing the last diatonic tetrachord of C Major (G5-A5-B5-C6). This rising motive, when it occurs in the score, is repeated three times.

![Example 7.1](image)

---

34 The precise rhythm of the song is not fixed, as the song occurs both in fragments, separating its phrases and notes by many beats, and in the midst of a full ensemble texture that disrupts its structure. Example 7.1 shows the basic proportions and the rhythms of the motives, which remain fairly constant in every iteration.
Why this tune, and why the tonal emphasis? Attempting a literalization of Fitzgerald's metaphor is a preposterous task, for what music could live up to it? The tune, then, itself functions as a kind of metaphor, a stand-in for whatever it is about Daisy's voice that carries such an overwhelming burden of significance. Its tonal underpinnings in the context of the movement are compromised by timbrally unstable playing techniques and heavy chromaticism in the other parts, but are present enough to achieve two things: the maintenance of melodic coherence over time, even when the phrases are broken up and separated, and a solid, if conventional, sense of direction, resolution, and affect, via the use of Major/minor key areas and formulaic cadential patterns. Finally, the song is constructed in a way to emphasize particular ranges of the female voice. The first half of the song stays within the lowest octave of the generic female vocal range, from G3-G4, a typically weak (for sopranos) yet sweet and plush timbre, and ends with a move up to a cleaner and more penetrating register with m.15's C5, the first note of real soprano power in the range of many sopranos (including the composer's, for whom it was written). The second half stays comfortably within this clear, expressive mid-high range of C5-G5, and then breaks away in the final measure to the highest part of the tessitura and the bright but not-yet-extreme intensity of the high C. The tune, when sung, is a sinuous yet harmonically logical climb across the entire range.

The movement is split into three sections, of which the "deathless song" appears in the first and last. In the first section (mm.1-35), the vocalist speaks in fits and starts: whenever she speaks, the violinist, playing sul ponticello with a metal mute, plays as long a fragment of the song as he can fit within her words. The sound of her voice is
shadowed by the flutist, who speaks the text in unison with her into the bass flute, and by a max/MSP patch that triggers a sound file at every word. The sound files in the patch are short (1-4 second) samples of metallic, unpitched percussion: the aural result is of a glittering trail of noise following the rhythmic pattern of the vocalist's speech. Various hushed, shivery textures fill the gaps between bursts of speech, made up of air sounds, fluttertongues, trills and tremolos from the winds and violin and clattering, tinkling gestures from the piano and percussion. The text itself is all dialogue lifted verbatim from *Gatsby*, and is all triviality: as in the novel, what will be grasped is not the semantic meaning of Daisy's remarks but the song which plays beneath them, triggered by her every careless word, and the atmosphere produced by and surrounding them.

Partway through this first section, at m.26, the texture turns darker as the mercurial Daisy switches from cheerfully inane social niceties to bitter exclamations of gloom, and the whole ensemble switches to a harsher and drier array of sounds, from plucked low piano strings and drum rolls to saxophone slap tongues and distortingly heavy violin bow pressure. The flutist begins to rattle keys as she speaks along with the soprano, and the sound samples in the voice-following patch become slightly harder and louder.

Example 7.2 shows the vocalist and violin parts for this section, with the notes of the "deathless song," played by the violin, doubled on a third staff and numbered according to their order in example 7.1. The song will only reach its midpoint in this section: in mm.33-34, all the instruments break off their activities to join the violin in the rising broken F-Major scale that ends the first half of the song, and after one more flurry of
Example 7.2
*Her Voice is Full of Money (A Deathless Song): Daisy Buchanan* - Part I: vocalist-activated 'deathless song'
circled numbers on third staff indicate notes of 'deathless song' melody

Voice doubled by f l u t e s p e a k i n g i n t o b a s s f l u t e

[Vocal notation and musical staff

Notes of "Deathless Song"]

1. (repeated) 2. (repeated)

you re-mind me of an abs-olute rose. I looked out doors

it's very roman-tic out-doors. There's a bird on the lawn a night-ex-pèrè

it's no man-tic isn't it, Tom? Yousee
indistinct instrumental mutterings in m.35, the soprano comes in alone on this pitch, switching from speech to song and precipitating the second section of the movement.

Section two (mm.35-57) takes for inspiration the following similarly-themed descriptions in *Gatsby*:

"It was the kind of voice the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again." (p.13)

And:
"The exhilarating ripple of her voice was a wild tonic in the rain. I had to follow the sound of it for a moment, up and down, with my ear alone before any words came through." (p.90)

This section consists of seven pieces of dialogue from Daisy, all fairly run-of-the-mill coquetry, sung in winding, chromatic phrases. The vocal melodies are doubled by pedaled piano and interwoven with similarly undulating lines from the flute, clarinet, and violin. This section is presented in two parts in example 7.3. Example 7.3.1 replicates the first two phrases as they appear in the score, mm.35-41, and example 7.3.2 presents just the vocal line for the remaining phrases in mm.42-54, with a reduction of the harmony underneath. (The movement and shape of the instrumental lines in example 7.3.1 characterizes their behavior for the rest of this section.) The soprano is camouflaged by the instruments here, which occasionally double, leap over, or duck underneath her line: the ear may be distracted in trying to follow the voice among the constantly weaving lines, sharing Nick's pleasurable befuddlement. In mm.55-57, the soprano sings a final phrase alone with the piano, leading into the third and final section of the movement, mm.58-94.

This final section marks the triumphant return of the "deathless song" from section 1. As in the first section, it is paralleled by text from the novel, which unspools word by word along with it. Whereas in the opening section the song was splintered by frequent gaps in the text, played in timbrally muffled, muted excerpts by the violin, and curtailed before the dramatic registral shift of its second half, in this section it appears in
its entirety, sung by the soprano in a continuously unfolding, wordless "Ah." The spoken text is supplied by the percussionist, whose voice is run through the same sample-triggering patch as was the soprano's in section 1, with additional distortion.

The text here is adapted from one of the most beautiful passages in Fitzgerald's novel: the description of the moment when Gatsby, with all the solemn gravity of the last days of invincible youth, glimpses for the first time the profound sacrifice of self that real love demands. In turning to Daisy and kissing her, he confronts and accepts this sacrifice, attaching himself to her forever. This moment as reflected in the piece is Daisy's true siren song, a demand for capitulation against which masculine ambivalence is powerless. As the soprano's voice rises in register, it increases naturally in intensity: the percussionist's voice, in the literal background at the back of the stage, melts into this sound, and after the third iteration of the last phrase of the melody, the rise to high C, he falls silent.

The soprano is accompanied in her gradual climb by the trumpet, which ascends step-by-step alongside her from G3 to G5, covering a similar (to the soprano) timbral ground of unfocused, rich low notes to brilliant, piercing highs. The woodwinds (flute and clarinet until m.68, then flute and tenor sax) begin by playing sustained timbral trills with undulating hairpin crescendi, moving to rapid tonguing and a one-directional crescendoing envelope at m.67, and finally erupting into swooping, ornamented lines at m.75 at the soprano's rise to the high C. Example 7.4 shows the soprano, trumpet, and
percussion parts from mm.58-83, with the overall harmonic progression reduced to block chords across four staves: changes in woodwind texture are indicated in boxes. The harmony, outlined in rhythmically free, gradually unfolding chords in the piano, is densely, intensely chromatic, contradicting and perhaps imperiling the soprano's diatonicism. Her voice beats through the bars of the cage of dissonance being woven around her, and eventually, as she reaches the peak of her ascent in m.75, the trumpet sounding a perfect fourth below her, the prevailing harmony capitulates somewhat, settling into a basically c-minor/A-flat Major collection.

After this moment of triumph, the texture thins out and moves towards stasis from m.84 to the end in m.94. The denouement of this movement, and thus of the entire piece, is instigated by a shocking revelation in the novel. As has been shown, the centrality of Daisy's voice to her charm and mystery is emphasized to an almost gratuitous degree, and as the novel draws towards its climactic scene, Gatsby himself speaks on the subject for the first time with an incredible observation. Nick, the narrator, talking to Gatsby, is struggling to pinpoint in words the arresting nature of Daisy's voice:

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—"

I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood it before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it…. (p.127)
Example 7.4

*Her Voice is Full of Money (A Deathless Song): Daisy Buchanan - part III reduction*

Flt/Cl: long notes, timbral trills

Sop.  
Tpt.  
Pc.  

Sop.  
Tpt.  
Pc.  

Flt/Sax: long notes, fast as poss. tonguing

Sop.  
Tpt.  
Pc.  

He knew that when he kissed this girl his mind never a-gain would be the mind of God. His heart beat fast-er fast-er he
Example 7.4 con’t.

Sop.
Tpt.
Pc.

Fl/Sax:
ornamented melodic lines w/ held notes

wait-ed so he wait-ed list-ened a moment longer he wait-ed

then he kissed her. Then he kissed her. Then he kissed her.

Sop.
Tpt.

(As cymbal/mark tree)
The contrast between the grossness of Gatsby's comment and the florid descriptions laced through the rest of the novel is intensely jarring. Daisy's voice, after having been raised to an almost supernatural level of otherworldliness, is revealed to hold a precise commercial value: Gatsby hears it as a signal of the privilege and status that he craves and that Daisy possesses, and it is for this—for her elite socio-economic position—that he loves her. She represents not unique eccentricity, but generic luxury: she is valued for what is least individual about her, the wealth into which she was born. The impact of this confirms what we have begun to suspect, that Gatsby doesn't love a person but an idea, and, unsurprisingly, the end of the affair follows shortly, amidst betrayal and violence. Gatsby's dreams will be revealed to be based on his own fabricated myth, he will die in heartbreaking confusion, and Daisy will retreat into her world of affluence and forget him.

The intrusion of this discovery on the piece is utterly literal: a pre-recorded voice (the composer's), cued by the laptop player, enters at the pick-up to m.90 with the phrase "Her voice is full of money." The soprano and trumpet repeat their climactic C6/G5 sonority and cut off for the last time at the entrance of this recorded voice. At this moment, the winds and piano drastically circumscribe their freewheeling phrases: the piano begins to play an echo of the soprano and trumpet's last dyad and to pick occasional pitches out of the final harmony, still based around c minor/A-flat major, while the saxophone and flute play increasingly quiet sustained notes, bowed crotale adding a glint high above. The recorded voice, meanwhile, repeats its phrase two more times. In the final two measures, the piano plays one more dyad, expanding from G5/C6 to a relatively more expectant/less
final G5/D6, and the flute, violin, and saxophone hold an airy tremolo. The recorded
voice, now in the foreground as the instrumental textures have faded back, makes its
announcement once more, this time ending abruptly in mid sentence:

"Her voice—"

The instruments cut off with these last words. Four beats later the piano and percussion
dampen any remaining resonance, and the piece is over.

**VOICES FROM THE KILLING JAR**

**Summary**

*Voices from the Killing Jar* is an idiosyncratic work, whose overall aesthetic character is
difficult to pin down. The pitch choices range from completely triadic, to non-tonal but
harmonically suggestive, to deliberately dissonant, while its rhythmic organization varies
from metered and pulsed, to patterned but unpredictable, to erratic and free. While the
electronics in *Voices* stand mostly outside of discussions of pitch and rhythm, they too
run the gamut, from timbral and affectual reinforcement of the current sound world, as in
movements III, VII, and parts of movement I, to extreme dialectic contrast, as in
movement VI and the final section of movement I.

Most of the musical "types" in *Voices* reflect a concurrent musical interest and can be
identified in other works of mine, both vocal and instrumental, written over the last seven
years. The frenetic, aggressively dissonant and virtuosic material at the end of movement I and the second and last sections of movement IV stem from a fascination with complex and unpredictable instrumental textures that took root with a piece for large chamber ensemble, Crosshatch, in 2005. The looped, mechanical nature of the first sections of movement IV and movement V reflect a more recent interest in the idea of musical material as automaton, which is an overriding structural feature of Nine Rakes for wind ensemble (2007) and What Makes it Go, which exists in versions for string ensemble (2008) and large chamber ensemble (2010). My increasing preoccupation with seeking out new sounds from familiar instruments accounts for the predominance of "non-standard" instrumental techniques. As for the electronics, while Voices from the Killing Jar is the first work of mine to include live processing, earlier electronic and electro-acoustic works of mine have used similar recorded spoken text collages, including Five One Liners (2003) for tape and Morning Branch (2008) for ensemble and electronics (2008). The musical style most longstanding in my compositional language is probably the particular harmonic flavor used in movement I, the slow section of IV, the second half of V (soprano part), and movement VII. These harmonies, with their emphasis on rich interval content, fleeting impressions of major and minor triads, and unpredictable but pitch-center-oriented melodic lines, are part of a musical language that has been endemic to my work for years and can be found in many pieces from 2000 on.

This stylistic inconsistency of Voices is itself another common feature of much of my recent work, such as As the Crow Flies (2007) for large chamber ensemble and, especially, Helen Enfettered (2009), an oratorio for two voices and ensemble that also
covers a range of vocal and musical styles, though to a less extreme degree than in *Voices*. The choice to depict seven distinct women's voices, stories, and characters was of course an invitation for me to explore stylistic inconsistency in an inclusive form.

What is totally new in my compositional is the pastiche-like inclusion of the modal movement VI and, especially, the Mozart material in movement V. To account for these moments of explicit external reference, I can point to experience with other, more tonal styles of music in my background (which will be discussed further below), or to a directorial desire to situate my characters in their original environments. It may be more accurate, however, to simply say that in writing *Voices from the Killing Jar*, it seemed necessary for me to follow every artistic impulse to its logical, if bizarre, end, in order to create the kind of world in which these women could come to life.

**Voices from the Killing Jar**

**Performance Issues**

The circumstances of the creation of *Voices from the Killing Jar* and the backgrounds of those involved have resulted in a work that presents some unusual logistical and programmatic concerns. For one, it is difficult to classify: it is not a song-cycle, opera, or melodrama, though it shares characteristics with all of these. The score lacks the kind of involved staging and multi-media presentation that would mark it as music theatre, but the literary/theatrical concept and the drama inherent in the music set it apart from more traditional concert works. It has affinities with other dramatic pieces for solo voice and instruments, such as Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* or Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs*
for a Mad King, but its musical and textual style is much more divergent from movement to movement than in these classic works.

The difficulty of finding performance opportunities for a forty-five minute, quasi-theatrical yet non-staged work is mitigated by Voices' modularity: movements may be excerpted from the full work and presented in groups of two or more, and each may be performed as a stand-alone piece (with the possible exception of VI). This fluid structure is an essential part of the work's performance practice, allowing for both a multiplicity of musical narratives, brought to life through particular groupings and juxtapositions, and for possible inclusion of the work on programs of contemporary chamber music. The most authentic experience of the work, however, will be the premiere of the full seven-movement piece.

The biggest performance challenge of this work in general is the issue of the extremely unorthodox doubling. As stated in the introduction to this paper, this piece was written for the members of the Wet Ink Band, and takes full advantage of the unique talents and strengths of these players. This is both in order to enrich and expand the sound world of the piece and to define it as dedicated to these individuals. While additional players may certainly be used to accommodate the doubling in the case of performances by other ensembles, the most basic element of the work's construction, its instrumentation, will always be connected to the players for whom it was written.

This is not to say, however, that any of the instrumental choices were arbitrary. The
trumpet would not have been used if the violinist did not happen to play the trumpet, but this fact makes this instrument no less essential to the noisy, declamatory moments in movement IV or to the heroic registral expansion in the second half of VII. The particular Mozart aria *Vedrò mentr'io sospiro* would not have been included had it not been in the repertoire of the electronics performer, but this does not complicate its status as uniquely qualified to stand up to Madame Bovary. The soprano's multitasking has its origins in my own background as a piano-based singer-songwriter and my love of accompanying myself while singing, as well as in a brief clarinet stint in grade school, but the dramatic impact of this key player's caprice is an equally valid explanation for her multiple instrumental roles. These aspects of *Voices* are simply extreme examples of the myriad ways in which writing for musicians whom one knows very well affects the work being written: the individual techniques and idiosyncrasies of each player make their way into the music itself, stamping it forever with personal meaning.

**VOICES FROM THE KILLING JAR**

**The Wet Ink Ensemble and Band**

The Wet Ink Ensemble was formed in 1998. Its mission is to present programs of exceptional new music, with a focus on underrepresented composers, new American music, and the European avant-garde. I joined the group as a composing member and co-director in 2006 and am currently Managing Director and vocalist. Wet Ink is distinguished from other new music ensembles in New York city by its uncompromising commitment to seeking out and performing music rarely heard elsewhere, by its
juxtapositions of very different kinds of music over a season or even within a single event, and by the status of its four co-directors as composer/performers. Its ability to move fluidly among various contemporary trends stems in part from the diversity of the directors, who have extensive backgrounds in such disparate fields as jazz, electronics, pop/folk music, theatre music, sound design, and many forms of improvised music, as well as cultivated interests and experience in the worlds of visual art, creative writing and literature, video art, and linguistics.

In 2010, during our most recently completed season, Wet Ink introduced a new seven-member group as an independent auxiliary to the full ensemble, which is of various instrumentation and which contracts and expands (up to about twenty musicians) according to programming. This smaller group was created in response to a need for a subset of reduced size and fixed instrumentation to facilitate performance and travel logistics for tours and residencies. The group members include the four composer member co-directors alongside three Wet Ink players who additionally participate in programming decisions, season planning, and administration. Its semi-official title is the "Wet Ink Band," a moniker that alludes to its collaborative nature, in which all of its members share creative control in rehearsals and performances and have influence over commissioning and engagement decisions. The Wet Ink Band performs most often without a conductor, fostering a sense of intense concentration and communication among the members during music-making.

Personnel choices for this group were made based on dedication to and history with Wet
Ink, rather than on practical ensemble concerns, which resulted in the unconventional instrumental combination of soprano, flute, saxophone, violin, piano, percussion, and electronics. As there existed no repertoire for this group other than pieces for smaller combinations of its members, Wet Ink has been active in commissioning and composing new works for this combination. By the end of our twelfth season we will have presented works for the group by Rick Burkhardt, George Lewis, Alex Mincek, Sam Pluta, Ian Power, Kate Soper, Katharina Rosenberger, Lew Spratlan, and Eric Wubbels, and commissions continue to be offered regularly. In order to allow for some composer preference, Band commissions obligate the composer to use every member, but in any capacity, not necessarily on his or her regular instrument: we have performed pieces in which the soprano played harmonica and guiro rather than singing and in which the pianist played accordion. This collective attitude of flexibility was an inspiration in the writing of *Voices from the Killing Jar*. The experience of performing a concert of all Band works, much like performing a concert with a rock band, has a special exhilaration that sets it apart from other types of events: the ritual of waiting in the green room while your colleagues perform is eliminated, and equal investment in the entire evening creates a unique mood of solidarity.

My own participation in Wet Ink, both in the Band and the regular ensemble, has had an enormous influence on my work in the last several years. Although I have been a performer of my own music in private since I began composing at an early age, I owe my current activities as a new music soprano largely to my involvement in the group.
My background and training as a singer is mixed, including many years of participation in choirs, including Columbia's collegium, and a few years of private vocal study. Until joining Wet Ink, my main performance experience was as a singer-songwriter, and from 1999 to about 2002 this was my main compositional outlet as well, resulting in four full length albums of original songs self-produced from 1999-2004. Writing songs came extremely easily and naturally to me, in direct contrast with a frustrating and occasionally agonizing struggle throughout college and early graduate school to find the technique and style to create the kind of concert music I wanted to write.\(^{35}\) In addition to personal expression, songwriting offered an opportunity for innovative musical and lyric-writing technique, albeit within a fairly conventional, tonally-oriented genre. Equally importantly, it allowed me to perform as a pianist and singer, activities which, again in contrast with the perhaps more ultimately satisfying but unquestionably more demanding rewards of composing, has always been an uncomplicated source of profound pleasure.

It was my belief on graduating from college that I would have to give up this pleasure in order to become a "real" composer, and that, while I planned to continue writing vocal music as I was naturally inclined to do, I was unqualified for participation as a singer in my concert works due to my lack of operatic training and unconventional voice. Joining Wet Ink as a performer led to two realizations. One, that I could perform in a concert setting despite this non-standard vocal background, and that in fact there were composers besides myself writing music for which my voice was more appropriate than that of a trained singer. Two, that I could retain some of the performance and musical elements I wrote several songs that alluded to or directly addressed this struggle—evidently missing the irony of writing music about not being able to write music.
most loved and missed from songwriting, such as lyric and text creation, singing from the piano, and communicating directly and expressively as a performer and composer, even as I lost interest in the genre. These have been the most significant personal artistic discoveries of my graduate school career.

Having embarked on a performance side career and joined with a group of outrageously talented colleagues, one of my goals as a novitiate composer/performer was to explore my limits as a singer and performer by acquiring as much technique and range as I could. *Voices from the Killing Jar*, the second work I have written for myself as vocalist, is thus partially a challenge to myself, which fact partially accounts for its extremes of register, wildly different singing styles, extended techniques, and considerable acting demands.

A non-musical part of my creative background that factored heavily into the writing of *Voices from the Killing Jar* is my involvement in writing, theatre, and literature. I began writing at least as early as I began making music, that is, earlier than I can remember, and for a long time felt it was equally plausible that I would go to school for and try to become a writer as a musician. As with performing, I was under the impression that my creative writing skills were not adequate for serious concert music. Thus, while I developed lyric control via my "non serious" pop songs, I maintained a constant investigation into the 20th century and contemporary writing scene, working with texts by poets and writers such as Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Frost, Charles Simic, Frank O'Hara, Thomas Merton, Sylvia Plath, Martha Collins, Christian Bök, Karen Volkmann, and Lydia Davis, and finding additional inspiration from contemporary poets and writers.
such as Anne Carson, Jorie Graham, Lauren Mullen, Jen Hofer, Steven Millhauser, David Markson, and David Foster Wallace, as well as non-contemporary writers. While I retain a passionate interest in these explorations, I have recently begun to reconsider my own writing as an appropriate basis for musical settings, and *Voices* is the first concert work of mine to include original texts.36 *Voices* provided me with the opportunity both to rediscover my writing skills and to pay tribute to a few deeply loved works of literature, as well as allowing me to indulge in the kind of literary analysis that might have been my lot had I pursued a different line of study.

Finally, my background in the theatre has reemerged as a significant force in my recent music, including *Voices*. The theatre has always been a presence in my work: my first paying job as a composer was writing incidental music for a local production in my hometown in 1995, and in addition to composing incidental music for other productions, I have had experience as a sound designer and as an actor in both plays and musicals. The incredible intimacy of live theatre at its best comes in part from a hyper-awareness of performing human bodies sharing space and air with the audience, forcing an empathetic connection with the actions and words that holds both performers and spectators in a kind of symbiosis that exists in no other art form. This physicality and direct performer/audience connection certainly informed the conception of *Voices*, and I expect a theatrical element to gain more prominence in my future projects.37

36 I do not consider my lyrics to be stand-alone poetry, either for my earlier pop songs or for the movements of *Voices from the Killing Jar* with original text (I, III, and VI).
37 These projects include a half-program length staged work for three voices and piano, *SIREN*, for which I am writing/compiling the libretto, and a work for solo voice and electronics based on the *Roman de la Rose*. 
"Finding one's voice" is one of music compositions most eye-rolling clichés, but it is also often a real event. For me, this search included years of compositional writers block stemming from an intense dissatisfaction with the limited tonal language I developed in high school, followed by years of writing a kind of intensely difficult, complicated music that was somewhat self-consciously antithetical to those early impulses. This has given way in recent years to an acceptance both of my interest in complex and unpredictable textures, new techniques, and conceptual innovation, and of my need to feel moved and to move, my love of storytelling, and my natural inclination towards melody and a pitch-centered, if not tonal, harmonic language. Circumstantially, conceptually, and musically, Voices from the Killing Jar represents both a culmination of what I now consider to be the first stage of my compositional career and a new artistic path, which has opened new realms for me as both a composer and a performer, a path that I hope to continue along fruitfully during the next stage.

**Voices from the Killing Jar**

**Conclusion: On Being a Female Composer**

"I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one."

- Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (p.233)
"Where's the woman in all this lust for glory?"

- Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (line 935)

There is one final issue I would like to address in this paper: the issue of gender, as it relates to both the subject matter of the piece and to my experiences as a female composer and soprano. While *Voices from the Killing Jar* may certainly be understood and appreciated without particular attention to either its possible relevance to feminist theory or to the gender of its composer, the conception and realization of this piece have more to do with issues of gender identity than any previous work of mine, and these issues must be explored for a complete understanding of the work.

The women featured in *Voices from the Killing Jar* are in various situations of mortal, psychological, or spiritual danger that make a kind of Venn diagram of female entrapment: enduring marriage to an unworthy (or worse) husband, as are Clytemnestra, Isabel, Madame Bovary, and Daisy; suffocating from the infuriating uselessness of being an adolescent girl, as do May Kasahara, Lucile, and Isabel; or immobilized in a powerless position that prevents them from acting in self-defense, as are Isabel, Lucile, and Lady Macduff. The seven protagonists do not all inspire admiration. May Kasahara, Clytemnestra, and Daisy are guilty of the murder of an innocent person, and Madame Bovary is infamous for her crooked morals. In the sources and stories in which they are found, however, they do inspire our sympathy and the sympathy of those with whom they
interact—because they are innocent, or because they have been wronged, or simply because, like a butterfly in a killing jar, their beauty and charm is undiminished by their predicament.

These characters were selected for inclusion in *Voices* not out of sympathy but empathy, out of a feeling of recognition upon my first encounter with them and an accompanying desire to tell their stories, as a composer, and to speak in their voices, as a performer. Clearly, the lives of these women are in most ways unimaginably different from mine—and yet, there are aspects of their circumstances, personalities, actions or behavior with which I strongly identify, and which seem to me to speak to a specifically female experience. The influential critical theorist Judith Butler describes this sense of affinity despite vastly different life situations in her groundbreaking article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*:

…..the feminist impulse, and I am sure there is more than one, has often emerged in the recognition that my pain or my silence or my anger or my perception is finally not mine alone, and that it delimits me in a shared cultural situation which in turn enables and empowers me in certain unanticipated ways.

The women in *Voices* are bound together by their pain, their silence, their anger, their perception, connected not just via juxtaposition, but through their communal duress. As

---

the narrator of their stories, I empower them by resurrecting their voices, which echo and forge connections across the movements, and by bringing them to life before an audience. I inhabit these voices in part by recalling the emotions and mental states which are the catalysts for their speech and song. This is not to say that I draw on personal experiences in order to portray the characters, but rather that my sense of at least partially shared consciousness with each of these seven women gives me unique access to them as both a composer and a performer. In playing their roles, I interact with them in a deeper and more meaningful way than in reading their stories.  

So much for the role of the performer/composer. What, if anything, does this piece have to do more generally with being a female composer?

Judith Butler, in the essay quoted above, unveils what was to become an enormously influential theory of gender as a socially-constructed performance. Rather than being an essential, congenital part of self-identity, she claims that gender has always been instead a socio-political tool, a set of learned behaviors that add up to a "right" or "wrong" way to

39 Two interesting complications to this view of my role as performer in this piece exist: firstly, the fact that the authors of the source material, with the exception of Lucile Duplessis, are men; and secondly, the masculine point of view of the tape part in movement II. In the first case, I would venture that (in keeping with Butler's article) the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" and more generally that of gender may have little to do with biological assigned sex, and that the ability of, say, Henry James to create on paper a twenty-two year old woman who is fully recognizable by me, a former twenty-two year old woman, therefore does no damage to the authenticity of either his creation or my reaction. Similarly, my ability to perform, in movement II's tape part, the role of Isabel's male oppressor speaks to my ability and indeed obligation to portray and inhabit a wide variety of gender roles, an issue whose relevance to my experience as a female composer will be discussed below.
behave according to a binary system of man/woman. How well one fits into this system is a matter for serious concern:

…..as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished. 40

The example Butler offers in her essay of someone "failing to do their gender right" is that of a transvestite, whose punishment is the rage and disgust of those who embody a discrete, acceptable gender. Reading this passage, however, brought me immediately to mind of a situation in which "incorrect" gender performance is required for inclusion and peer acceptance, while "correct" performance is grounds for mistrust or ostracization: that of being a female composer.

Music composition is a male-dominated field, and my experience of this fact, while perhaps on the extreme side, is by no means exceptional: at two universities and eight music festivals, I have had two female composition professors, and as a student I have most often been one of one or two women. The reasons for this lopsidedness are doubtless numerous and complicated, and it is not my intention in this paper to speculate on them or to offer solutions. Rather, I wish to illuminate the ways in which embarking on the composition and performance of *Voices from the Killing Jar* was motivated in part

40 IBID, p.522
by my desire to reclaim certain aspects of myself which, as a female composer, are normally off-limits to me at risk of alienation or prejudice.

Butler outlines, in her article, the possibilities offered by the theatre to challenge proscribed notions of gender performance. Unlike in other contexts, gender performances that deviate from the norm are acceptable when on stage because there they are designated as "not real," and thus whatever social dissonance they create may be ignored:

…it seems clear that, although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions….In the theatre, one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real.41

To be a female composer, in my experience, is to be constantly putting on an act. In order to win confidences and friendships, and to avoid sexist rumors, one must occupy the non-threatening, non-suggestive position of "one of the guys." This is not to say that I am not myself when interacting with my overwhelmingly male colleagues and friends, but just that I am aware that only certain parts of myself are appropriate for these interactions. This mitigation of different selves is, of course, part of daily social life: there are ways in which we behave with our friends or families that are different from

41 IBID, p.525
how we behave with coworkers, or with students, or with strangers on the subway. The distinction I am making is that in this particular case, the lines between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable are largely based on gender, and are not drawn by me. In order to be treated the same way as my male counterparts, I must work to make sure they "forget" about my femaleness. I am therefore regularly classified as "not like other women," "basically a man," "accidentally female." This last, said not to provoke but in an (I believe) genuine attempt to sympathize, gives particular insight into the situation. That sentiment offers me a way out of my position: I am granted that, being "accidentally" female, my gender is "not my fault," "can't be helped," and has nothing, in fact, to do with who I am, and certainly not with what kind of music I write. Although I might have accepted this idea with gratitude at an earlier point in my career, I am no longer willing to do so.

While it is impossible to measure the impact that being a woman has had on my music, it would be equally impossible and indeed ridiculous to deny that being a woman has had much to do with my life experience. By virtue of that fact, it is useless to wonder whether my music would be the same if I were not accidentally female but rather (deliberately?) male: it would not be, as I would not be the same person. I am not generally interested in finding ways in which a composer's maleness or femaleness is manifested in his or her work: if anything, I suspect that the terms "masculine" and "feminine" might be usefully applied to music notwithstanding the gender of its creator if one considers those two categories, as Butler proposes, to evoke a set of characteristics which are divorced from biological sex. *Voices from the Killing Jar* is an exception in
that I acknowledge a gender-related impulse, not behind the details of the music exactly, but behind the original concept.

In writing *Voices from the Killing Jar*, with myself as title character, I have created a personal space for otherwise verboten types of expression. In "performing" May Kasahara, Isabel Archer, Clytemnestra, Lucile Duplesis, Emma Bovay, Lady Macduff, and Daisy Buchanan, I am not merely singing and speaking with their voices, but am giving myself free reign to perform the brazenness, girlishness, vindictiveness, sentimentality, sensuality, vulnerability, and coquettishness that are incompatible with my persona as a composer and are thus unavailable to me in most aspects of my daily life. Unlike these women, I am neither brutally oppressed nor under threat of danger. I enjoy the respect of, and respect in turn, my fellow composers. Nonetheless, the peculiar position of being forced to siphon off large parts of my personality in all aspects of my field except the solitary, creative one, has finally begun to chafe. Performing in *Voices* is a liberating antidote to this tedious compartmentalization, and taking the risk of presenting myself as a "real woman," even through the artificial reality of a work of art, feels refreshingly dangerous and subversive. It is as yet unclear to me how this new discovery of personal relevance in my work as a performer/composer will unfold in future projects in that area. Whatever developments lie ahead, *Voices from the Killing Jar* represents a synthesis of artistic, performative, and personal concerns I had not previously thought possible, and that fact alone is enough to mark it for myself as my most successful work to date.
Bibliography


