

BEYOND MODERNISM'S EDGE:
JOHANNA BEYER'S STRING QUARTET NO. 2 (1936)
AND VIVIAN FINE'S *THE RACE OF LIFE* (1937)

by

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ABSTRACT

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Advisor: Joseph N. Straus

Although a number of women were active as composers in New York during the Great Depression, their efforts have typically been neglected in favor of those of their male colleagues. Over the last two decades, scholars have begun to examine the small oeuvre of Ruth Crawford Seeger in greater depth, but aside from a few well-known publications much of this work has not been analytically oriented; in addition, scholarship on Crawford has tended to overshadow studies of the great variety of music by other modernist women composers. This dissertation addresses these lacunae in several different ways. First, I provide in-depth discussions of compositions by Johanna Magdalena Beyer (1888–1944) and Vivian Fine (1913–2000), whose music from this era has not previously received extensive analytic attention. These close readings are strongly informed by feminist theory, as I explore how contextual issues (such as biography, contemporaneous attitudes towards women, and the “problem” of being a woman composer in the 1930s) might enliven and enrich our understanding of these women’s works.

After the introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 contains a biographical sketch of Johanna Beyer. Chapter 3 discusses the complicated ways that borrowing and gender

intersect in Beyer's String Quartet No. 2 (1936), a work in which Beyer's dissonant setting of a Mozart aria about marriage provides an opportunity to both emulate—and subvert—“ultramodern” and common-practice stylistic principles and traditional conceptions of womanhood. Chapters 4 and 5 examine a collaborative work by Doris Humphrey and Vivian Fine, entitled *The Race of Life*. Loosely based on a series of drawings by James Thurber, this piece is significant not only because it was Fine's first major composition for modern dance (a genre for which she composed extensively in the late 1930s), but also because it provides a glimpse into some of the strategic ways that women used humor in the performing arts during this era, a topic that has received minimal scholarly attention. Chapter 6 offers final thoughts and outlines several different directions for future research.

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There are many reasons that George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is one of my favorite novels, but one of the things I treasure most about this book is Eliot's brilliant depiction of the pedantic scholar Edward Casaubon. The curmudgeonly Casaubon is described as a "dried bookworm," a "mummy" who is "buried in books"; in one of his first passages of spoken dialogue, Casaubon himself openly acknowledges his ascetic solitude, when he notes with a hint of pride, "I feed too much on the inward sources; I live too much with the dead."

For most people outside academia, Casaubon likely exemplifies the stereotypical image of an academic: an aloof, fastidious man, whose heart is just as withered as the pages of the hallowed tomes he hoards. But as we all know, academia is actually chock-full of brilliant, warmhearted, and hilarious people who are dramatically different from Eliot's forlorn character, and the process of writing this dissertation has repeatedly shown me, in countless and unimagined ways, the profound abundance of kindness, support, and generosity that exists among academics. I hope to be able to pass on this spirit of compassion to my own students.

First and foremost, thanks to Joe Straus, who has mentored me in all aspects of my academic career. Like most gifted pedagogues, Joe continually teaches both inside and outside the classroom, and I am forever grateful to him for all the advice he has given me about research, teaching, and professional development. Although he wasn't directly involved with this particular research, Bill Rothstein has influenced me in innumerable ways over the years, and his MA seminar at Queens College first ignited my interest in music theory. Allan Atlas also offered me guidance and advice on other projects, and I

will always remember with fondness his witty conversations and fabulous concertina playing.

I also owe huge debts (both personal and intellectual) to the Women's Studies program at the Graduate Center. My professors—Cheryl Fish, Rupal Oza, Talia Schaffer, and Michele Wallace—have utterly transformed my thinking. Nancy K. Miller, who generously agreed to serve as a reader for this project, inspired me through her brilliant scholarship and pedagogy. I was fortunate to be a part of her Feminist Theory and Autobiography seminar, and her courses reveal the extraordinary things that can happen in an environment that is truly interdisciplinary.

I would also like to thank Stephanie Jensen-Moulton and Ellie Hisama for their willingness to be involved with this dissertation. Their scholarship directly demonstrates the rich and exciting ways in which feminist theory can inform music (and vice versa), and I feel profoundly grateful to have their comments and suggestions about my own research.

Since much musical work by women from this era remains unpublished, a number of librarians and archivists have been extremely helpful throughout my research process. In particular, I would like to thank the staff of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, especially Jonathan Hiam; the staff of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, especially Thomas Barrick; and Jeni Dahmus, archivist at The Juilliard School. Finally, my deepest thanks to Peggy Karp, Vivian Fine's daughter, who provided me with a number of different materials that have been extremely helpful for Chapters 4 and 5.

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* * *

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When graduate students meet other academics in their field for the first time, the conversation inevitably takes a predictable turn, and at some point they are usually asked about their dissertation. While working on my own dissertation research, I would answer polite and seemingly innocuous queries about my topic by saying that my dissertation project was about women composers in the 1930s. And in response, every single person I met replied by stating in a matter-of-fact tone, “Oh, so you must be working on Ruth Crawford Seeger.” When I would say no, my conversation partners would almost always counter, usually with astonished surprise (or sometimes even with a marked degree of condescension), “Well, who else is there?”

This conversational exchange kept happening. At first, I didn’t think too much about it—frankly, I was just pleased that my colleagues had such high regard for Ruth Crawford Seeger, clearly one of the preeminent composers of the twentieth century. Yet again and again, this same conversation occurred: at conferences, in seminars, and even in more informal settings, like those wonderful sessions of friendly small talk we all share as we greet one another in libraries, hallways, and at departmental photocopy machines. But just as I, like most other New York City residents, have come to loathe the cutesy, repetitive tune of the Mister Softee ice cream truck that circles my Brooklyn neighborhood every afternoon (which visitors and those freshly transplanted to New York often hear as unique and charming, rather than annoying), so too did I come to

dread these inevitable exchanges, which reflect some of the deeper turbulences within the academic disciplines of music theory and musicology—particularly regarding the persistent lack of women composers in accounts of music (especially before the mid-twentieth century) and the scarcity of analytical work on female composers. Further, these conversations also raise broader issues of tokenism and inclusion for women composers and composers of color, still recurring problems that we continue to grapple with in the musical canons we discuss in our teaching and research.¹ In the twenty-first century, is it really sufficient to have *one* female composer (whose small oeuvre of ultramodern works was largely completed during a brief, three-year span²) to represent and stand for the efforts of all women during an entire era? Eventually I began to realize that this seemingly benign conversation, while exasperating, is actually profoundly interesting because it reveals many of the lingering assumptions that, at its core, this project seeks to dismantle: in all, my research aims to show that there are, indeed, “other” female composers—even female modernist composers—who wrote extensively during the 1930s, and that their works are worth studying not only because they are musically interesting, but also because they contain rich, fascinating representations of gender and womanhood.

Describing the composers and works discussed in this dissertation in terms of an “edge” is an attempt to reflect some of these philosophical tensions. Simplistically

¹ Panels on this issue were recently presented at both the 2011 Society for Music Theory conference and the 2012 Society for American Music conference.

² Crawford’s “ultramodern” works include *Four Diaphonic Suites* (1930), *Piano Study in Mixed Accents* (1930), *Three Songs to poems by Carl Sandburg* (1930–32), *String Quartet 1931*, and *Two Ricercare to poems by H.T. Tsiang* (1932). Crawford completed only two compositions after 1932: *Rissolty, Rossolty* (1939) and *Suite for Wind Quintet* (1952).

speaking, edges have a demarcative function, serving as borders, boundaries, limits: edges delineate an “inside” and “outside.” To varying degrees, Beyer and Fine, as women, were “on the edge” of a decidedly male-dominated field, since both women struggled to build musical careers during an era in which men dramatically outnumbered women as composers, particularly in the realm of dissonant, atonal music. Scholars continue to grapple with the “problem” of the female modernist composer, and the traditionally thorny relationship among women, gender, and modernism has been a subject of marked debate: for example, although some scholars assert that the staunch misogyny of modernism had particularly pernicious—even debilitating—consequences for female composers, others argue that the individuality and piece-specific contextualism inherent in modernist compositional style actually serves as an ideal platform for women to create musical works that reflect their own unique subjectivities and perspectives.³ These complex issues deserve to receive more scholarly attention, especially because the experiences of individual female composers were far from uniform, and attitudes towards women modernist composers were often inconsistent and contradictory. For example, Henry Cowell, who at times used blatantly gendered discourse to harshly disparage composers who did not meet up to his modernist standards, also served as an important mentor for a number of female composers in this era, arranging patronage, publication, and performances not only for Ruth Crawford, but

³ For example, see the contrasting opinions on this issue in Catherine Parsons Smith, “A Distinguishing Virility’: On Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender*, Susan C. Cook and Judy Tsou, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) and Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

also for Vivian Fine and Johanna Beyer.⁴

In addition, the works discussed in this dissertation—Beyer’s String Quartet No. 2 (1936) and Fine’s *The Race of Life* (1937)—were both completed “on the edge” of a particularly interesting stylistic moment in American music, composed during a confusing time in which social and economic concerns associated with the difficulties and uncertainties of the Great Depression resulted in many “ultramodern” composers abandoning their previous commitment to dissonance in favor of writing more accessible, tonal music. In this sense, these pieces are especially fascinating for the ways in which they navigate these stylistic issues, particularly since both women not only studied with leading ultramodern composers (including Ruth Crawford and Henry Cowell), but also had close personal associations with these influential mentors. However, these particular compositions (of course, in very different ways) both differ from earlier works Beyer and Fine completed: in many ways, these works are also stylistically “on the edge,” straddling a historical and stylistic shift between tonal and atonal, experimentalism and convention.⁵

⁴ In 1933, Cowell famously noted that “American composition up to now has been tied to the apron-strings of European tradition.” See Henry Cowell, “Trends in American Music” in his *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1933). Straus also discusses this quote in *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 215–16.

Tick has also described Charles Ives’s strident use of gendered discourse in detail. See Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 80–106.

⁵ Ultramodernism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Briefly, ultramodernism was a movement within modernism that centered around a small group of American composers (such as Henry Cowell, Dane Rudhyar, Carl Ruggles, and Ruth Crawford Seeger) during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ultramodern composers highly valued dissonance and experimentation, and strove to distance themselves from Europe and European composers. Oja (2000) notes that ultramodern composers “seized experimentation as their rallying cry and dissonance as their ideal” (97). For more background information on ultramodernism, see David Nicholls, *American Experimental*

But edges can be more than just superficial lines or categorical boundaries—edges can also be places of power. One who is “on the edge” navigates multiple fields, multiple areas—and is able to see both inside and outside, within and between their respective positions. Edges can serve as spaces of privileged insight, with the potential for fostering unique and powerful politics of location. A broad wealth of feminist scholarship, including work by Code (1987/1991/1995), Haraway (1988), Harding (1986/1991/1998), Hartsock (1998), hooks (1981/1984/2000), and others, has examined the potentially transgressive perspectives of oppressed groups and outsiders, reevaluating the epistemologies of those who are “on the margins” as revelatory, subversive, and even revolutionary. To cite just one example, Anzaldúa (1987) draws on the experiences and perspectives of Chicanas from the U.S./Mexico border region to develop what Anzaldúa calls the “new *mestiza* consciousness.” For Anzaldúa, the conflicts between multiple cultures that those on the borderlands experience, although a source of “intense pain,” also serve as a place of unique agency—and transformation. Because *la mestiza* “can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” she has “a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity”; furthermore, “not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. . . . to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how

Music, 1890–1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially pp. 213–19; and Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97–152.

In the past, the term “ultra-modern” has appeared with a hyphen in some scholarship (for example, Straus 1995 and Oja 2000), but in this dissertation I will follow more recent usage (such as Straus 2011) and present the terms “ultramodern” and “ultramodernism” without hyphens.

duality is transcended.”⁶ Ultimately, an “edge” can actually reflect a capacity for great insight, as an individual’s experiences as an outsider can potentially confer an epistemological advantage.⁷

Finally, “edge” also denotes something keen, acute...or even severe. Knives, swords, and other weapons have edges—sharp ones. Edges can be dangerous: when honed and whetted, they have the power to sever, tear, and wound. Both of the pieces discussed in this dissertation contain fascinating representations of gender and womanhood, yet these works do not serve just as simplistic, passive reflections of contemporaneous gender ideologies: instead, both have an additional layer of meaning that goes against—and even “cuts through”—traditional gender roles and typical representations of womanhood. In this sense, “edge” refers to the satirical and cynical “bite” found within both of these works, which do not just slavishly adhere to

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007 [first published, 1987]), 101–102.

⁷ Obviously, the perspectives of different “outsiders” or oppressed groups are not uniform: the experiences of Chicanas in the Mexico/U.S. border region in our era differ from the experiences of white women modernist composers in the 1930s. I include Anzaldúa here not in order to conflate these differences, but to show the wide range of feminist scholarship on this issue.

In addition, it is very important to note that not all feminists agree that the supposed epistemic advantage of oppressed groups is inherently positive, and some scholars have described the dangers of reifying this “double vision,” particularly for non-western individuals. For example, Uma Narayan has discussed in detail the “dark side of ‘double vision,’” cautioning that “Feminist theory must be temperate in the use it makes of this doctrine of ‘double vision’—the claim that oppressed groups have an epistemic advantage and access to greater critical conceptual space. . . mere access to two different and incompatible contexts is not a guarantee that a critical stance on the part of an individual will result.” Narayan also notes that those in nonwestern countries are particularly susceptible to the inimical effects of “double vision,” which include living with a sense of profound alienation. See Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives From a Nonwestern Feminist,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 308–317 [essay first published, 1989].

conventional depictions of middle-class womanhood and domesticity, but instead draw on strategies of sarcasm, parody, and humor in order to puncture and undermine such stereotypes.

In all, the aim of this dissertation is not only to draw attention to these two composers and to deepen our knowledge of their musical works, but also to problematize such simplistic, binary constructions as “edge” and “center” in the hopes of moving beyond them. For those who are seemingly on the edge often have much to tell us about what is happening at the center, and the unique contributions and perspectives of these women can enhance our understanding of the music in this era as a whole. Examining works by these two women provides an opportunity to progress beyond facile notions of their musical contributions as just the dusty, archival periphery of modernism’s edge: instead, these works are vitally important not only because they expand our awareness of women’s musical achievements in the 1930s, but also because they foster a richer, more nuanced understanding of modernism itself.

State of Research

Until recently, the 1930s has often been passed over (or ignored entirely) as an important historical era for American women, characterized as a kind of “dry spell” in between the first and second waves of feminism. Bolstered by the gains of the second-wave feminist movement, during the last few decades a number of scholars in other (non-musical) fields began to seriously challenge their respective canons and historical narratives by recovering and examining artistic works by women from the Great Depression. In particular, scholarship on radical and experimental works by women has directly flouted the notion that women’s creative activities in the 1930s were conservative

in nature (or even non-existent). For example, in the 1980s *The Feminist Press* began reprinting a number of feminist and left-wing literary works from the 1930s by American women that had been forgotten or ignored by scholars, such as Tess Slesinger's novel *The Unpossessed*, as well as an anthology of radical women's literature (*Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930–1940*), which includes poems, nonfiction articles, and short stories.

Scholarship on women, gender, and music has notably increased since the 1970s, including both “recovery”-based studies of composers, performers, teachers, or patrons (such as Block/Neuls-Bates 1979 and Pendle 1991/2001), as well as work that examines music and musicians from a feminist perspective (such as McClary 1991/2002, Solie 1993, and Citron 1993). However, musical scholarship on women experimental composers in America during the 1930s has largely concentrated on a small number of compositions of one female composer—Ruth Crawford (Seeger), whose *String Quartet 1931* has been discussed with such frequency that Crawford has now come to stand in some writings as *the* token female atonal composer of the first half of the twentieth century. (For example, in David Nicholls's *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940*, Crawford is the only woman composer mentioned.)

Another troubling pattern in scholarship on Crawford—a pattern that may also be found in work on other women composers (whether “tonal” or “atonal,” “modern” or otherwise)—is the lack of analyses of her actual music. Of course, there are a few well-known exceptions (such as Straus 1995 and Hisama 2001), but generally speaking, work on Crawford has tended to focus on biographical or sociocultural issues (see, for example, Gaume 1986, Tick 1997, and Oja 2000), rather than offer rigorous theoretical

discussions of her compositions. A wonderful recent collection on Crawford (*Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds: Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century American Music*, 2007), while fascinating and rich, also follows this trend: of the twelve essays in the volume, only three contain analyses of her compositions (and some of this material has been previously published elsewhere in slightly different form). It is my hope that this dissertation will bridge some of these gaps not only by expanding the existing “canon” of analyses of modernist music by women composers, but also by highlighting two composers—Johanna Magdalena Beyer and Vivian Fine—whose works from this era have been almost entirely overlooked by scholars.

State of research: Beyer and Fine

Although Johanna Magdalena Beyer (1888–1944) has been virtually forgotten today, her life and musical career are complex and fascinating subjects that deserve serious scholarly attention. Beyer is interesting not only because of her commitment to composing ultramodernist works, but also because of her unusual status as an unmarried female composer, who emigrated from Germany to the United States and spent the last years of her life attempting to support herself after being diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis). Beyer’s compositions—numbering more than fifty, and covering a wide range of instrumental combinations, from solo and chamber pieces to works for full orchestra—represent a substantial contribution to the modernist canon, as Beyer was closely associated with a number of important “ultramoderns,” studying with Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Henry Cowell, and briefly with Dane Rudhyar. Beyer is also noteworthy because of the difficulties she faced, working in an era in which female composers—particularly those who wrote dissonant, atonal music—were often

treated with hostility and derision. As de Graaf (2006 and 2008) has shown, Beyer endured harsh, explicitly gendered criticisms of her music following performances of her works in 1936 and 1937. Although Beyer is clearly a remarkable figure, she has received minimal scholarly attention; most existing work on Beyer (such as Kennedy/Polansky 1996, de Graaf 2004/2006/2008, and Beal 2008/2011) has concentrated almost exclusively on biographical or sociocultural issues, providing only brief descriptions of her works. In similar fashion, a recent M.A. thesis (Hiser 2009) largely recapitulates existing biographical work on Beyer; a D.M.A. dissertation (Nevill 2005, published by Lambert Press in 2010) features discussions of Beyer's life and focuses on her works for percussion ensemble from a performance-oriented perspective. Boland (2007) includes a few general observations about Beyer's music (such as her occasional use of cluster chords), but this article is quite brief (less than eight pages) and lacks rigorous analytical discussion. There are good reasons for the attention paid to Beyer's biography, as she remains a shadowy figure at best, and many details about her biography have yet to be uncovered: most information about her life may only be found in archival sources (in particular, letters in the Henry Cowell Papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and letters and other documents in the Percy Grainger Collection, Fabien Sevitzy Papers, and Serge Koussevitzky Archive, Library of Congress—Music Division). An additional challenge to Beyer research is that only *one* of her works was published during her lifetime (*IV*, for percussion nonet); the great majority of her music remains in manuscript at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In recent years, Frog Peak Music has begun to publish some of Beyer's chamber music (twenty of

her compositions to date). But unfortunately, Beyer's fascinating music has received no in-depth analytic attention from scholars.

Surprisingly, the music of Vivian Fine (1913–2000)—whose compositional career spanned more than six decades, and includes more than one hundred completed works—has also been significantly overlooked by scholars. Von Gunden wrote the first full-length biography of Fine (Von Gunden 1999), but this work contains only brief descriptions of her actual music. Cody completed a bio-bibliography of Fine (Cody 2002), but this reference volume also does not feature detailed examination of her compositions. Although she studied extensively with Ruth Crawford Seeger (whom she considered to be one of her foremost musical mentors, as well as a close personal friend), Fine and her music have received scant attention in more general studies of ultramodernism (she does not appear in Nicholls 1990, for example). One of the only published analytical discussions of her music from this era is a more general article about ultramodernism by Gilbert in *Perspectives of New Music* (1973–74), which contains a four-paragraph discussion of one of Fine's *Four Songs* for soprano and string quartet. A few D.M.A. dissertations have focused on Fine: Kim (2010), on Fine's music for cello and piano; López (2004), on two of Fine's works for flute; and Jones (1994), on Fine's compositions for solo piano. However, these dissertations use a performance-oriented approach, and lack rigorous theoretical discussions of Fine's music; in addition, almost all of this work centers on Fine's later works, not her compositions from the 1930s.

A particularly surprising void in Fine scholarship is the utter lack of writing on Fine's music for dance, which constitutes a substantial part of Fine's compositional output during the 1930s. As a young composer in Depression-era New York, Fine used

her formidable skills as a pianist in order to support herself financially, working as an accompanist for eminent dancers such as Doris Humphrey. Fine also wrote a number of important dance scores in the 1930s for some of the pioneers of modern dance in the United States (including Humphrey, Hanya Holm, and Charles Weidman), such as *The Race of Life* (1937), *Opus 51* (1938), and *Tragic Exodus* (1939). However, existing scholarly work on Fine (such as Von Gunden 1999) skims over Fine's compositions for dance, which deserve serious scholarly consideration.

Approach and Chapter Overview

The dissertation is divided into two large parts and features analyses of works written by female composers living in New York during the 1930s that are informed by contextual issues (in particular, gender and biography); these analyses also draw extensively on feminist theory, which is used not as a means of making facile, categorical generalizations about “women’s music” or “women composers,” but as a tool for cultivating a more enriched, nuanced understanding of the various intersections between music and gender in these women’s compositions. Focusing on two musical works written during the Great Depression provides an opportunity to explore how these women may have subverted and composed against traditional depictions of womanhood during a particularly rich era of American history, one in which conventional, old-fashioned ideals of domesticity and womanhood were often valorized as a means of coping with the instability and precarious economic conditions of the Great Depression.

My choice to use feminist theory as a means of exploring these particular compositions certainly does not intend to “prove” that Beyer and Fine were themselves feminists, that all of Beyer’s and Fine’s music is about women, that all women composers

are feminists, that all women composers write music in a certain way, or any other such generalization. The wealth of fascinating works by women composers that has been (and continues to be) recovered, discovered, performed, discussed, published, and recorded spans a dizzying variety of historical epochs, geographical locations, and musical styles, and this diverse range of works immediately disproves any kind of blanket, superficial oversimplifications about “women’s music” or what music written by women composers sounds like.⁸ It is also important to emphasize that “feminist theory” itself is far from uniform, and encompasses a huge—and often conflicting—array of opinions, perspectives, and approaches. Furthermore, there is obviously no mandate that feminist theory should only be used to examine compositions by women: the wealth of insights that feminist theories offer can and should be applied to works by both men and women. In addition, I have no intention of trying to claim that Beyer and Fine composed these kinds of works simply because they are women, that they wrote music in a particular way because they happened to have two X chromosomes. Like most feminists, I view gender as something that is culturally constructed—and ever subject to change. The perspective I am interested in pursuing here is not that “Beyer and Fine composed this way because they were born biologically female,” but rather, how their experiences as women in a particular sociocultural moment help to shape the artistic works they created.

⁸ Published collections demonstrate the rich heterogeneity of works by women composers, including Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer, eds., *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages*, vol. 1–8 (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996–), James R. Briscoe, ed., *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), as well as publications by Furore Verlag and Hildegard, such as Helen Walker-Hill, ed., *Black Women Composers: A Century of Piano Music* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing Co., 1992).

Chapter overview

Following this introductory chapter, the first part of the dissertation focuses on Johanna Magdalena Beyer and her String Quartet No. 2 (1936). Since Beyer's life is not well documented in music scholarship, Chapter 2 is a biographical chapter on Beyer that provides a summary of her life, drawing on existing work by Polansky, Beal, and de Graaf, and archival resources from the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Chapter 3 examines musical borrowing, gender, and Johanna Beyer's String Quartet No. 2, a work in which Beyer appropriates a melody from a well-known aria about women and marriage (Mozart's "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen"), re-setting the tune in a strikingly dissonant context. Exploring the connections between borrowing and gender in this piece (and drawing on Beyer's letters, which reveal a decidedly unorthodox view of marriage) unearths a rich array of analytical possibilities, as Beyer's use of borrowing provides an opportunity to subvert and challenge conventional conceptions of marriage and womanhood. A particularly important aspect of both of these chapters is the emphasis on archival research, as Beyer's original manuscripts and personal letters are examined in addition to her actual music.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on Vivian Fine's first full-length composition for dance, *The Race of Life*, which she composed for Doris Humphrey. Part II discusses both the dance and the music, and in order to highlight the complicated ways in which the two intersect with one another the structure of this part of the dissertation follows that of a *pas de deux*, the traditional dance duet in five parts: *entrée*, *adagio/adage*, variation I (Chapter 4), variation II (Chapter 5), and coda. Like Part I, this

portion of the dissertation also draws heavily on archival documents, including manuscripts, photographs, programs, and interviews from the Juilliard Archives, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and Music Division of the Library of Congress, as well as various primary-source materials generously provided to me by Fine's estate. *The Race of Life* (1937) is particularly interesting not only because it was written for Doris Humphrey, one of the pioneers of modern dance in America, but also because it was one of the first pieces Fine completed after she had begun to turn away from ultramodernism. The work is also fascinating for the ways in which it constructs (and deconstructs) relationships between men and women. Loosely based on a series of cartoons by James Thurber from the early 1930s, *The Race of Life* satirizes the experiences of a married couple and their child as they "race" towards a life of material success and security. Using Butler's work on gender, performance, and parody, as well as recent scholarship on women, feminism, and humor, I argue that this work creates a space in which Fine and Humphrey use humor as a means of destabilizing—and subverting—traditional gender roles. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation and delineates a number of possibilities for future projects that extend beyond the research presented in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 2

Biographical Sketch of Johanna Beyer

In April 1938 the American Composers Alliance (ACA) published its first bulletin, which optimistically outlined the organization's core objectives.¹ Many of the stated aims of the ACA centered around issues that composers have grappled with in many different eras, such as financial compensation and dissemination of their music. But what is especially interesting about the content in this *Bulletin* is the gendered language used to describe the organization's primary goals:

[The ACA aims] To further the general interest, and to protect the economic rights of the composer of serious music in America, and to ensure him a just compensation for his work. (. . .)

a group of forty-eight American composers met...to discuss means for obtaining for the writer of serious music just remuneration for his labor and wider recognition for his work. (. . .)

We feel convinced, that the creative men in music, once they are properly organized in one all-inclusive body, will be able to exert an influence in musical affairs such as they are far from having at the present.²

¹ I would like to thank Gina Genova, executive director of the ACA, for providing me with copies of early *Bulletins* from 1938. See American Composers Alliance, *ACA Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 1 (April 1938) and vol. 1, no. 2 (December 1938). The ACA was officially founded on December 19, 1937; this New York City-based organization is still in existence today.

² *Ibid.*, 1–2. For a fascinating discussion of gendered discourse among male composers in this era, see Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 83–106.

Of course, at this time masculine pronouns were often used collectively to refer to both men and women. However, in this case the repeated use of masculine pronouns (especially in phrases like “his work,” “his labor,” and the brawny exertions of “creative men in music”) is particularly fascinating since a number of women were closely involved with the ACA in these formative years, both as charter members and members of the organization’s Executive Committee.³ This seemingly insignificant detail—a trivial choice of a pronoun—actually exemplifies many of the larger issues involving inclusion that women composers faced in this era: even if they did actively participate in organizations, concerts, and other activities that were important for “serious” modernist composers, their efforts were often obscured behind those of their male colleagues.

The very first *ACA Bulletin* included a list of current members, and hidden amongst a column laden with familiar composers (such as George Antheil, Marc Blitzstein, and Elliott Carter) lies a name completely unknown to most scholars—“Johanna M. Beyer.”⁴ Yet tucked away in three unassuming boxes in the archives of the New York Public Library are more than fifty manuscripts by Johanna Magdalena Beyer (1888–1944), including a pedagogical treatise, solo and chamber works, music for percussion ensemble, and large works for orchestra and band.⁵ Although only one of

³ The ACA had many more men who were members than women, but a number of important women composers were members from the very beginning of the organization, including Marion Bauer, Margaret Bonds, Ulric Cole, Ruth Crawford, Vivian Fine, and Miriam Gideon. Marion Bauer and Evelyn Berckman served on early committees of the ACA.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Johanna Magdalena Beyer scores, JPB 82-77, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. According to the NYPL, when Beyer passed away in 1944 her manuscripts were sent to the archives of the American Music Center, and later transferred to the NYPL. A few scores are also held in the Fleisher Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia. For an overview of Beyer’s oeuvre, see John Kennedy and Larry

these works was published during Beyer's lifetime (*IV*, for percussion nonet), Beyer's manuscripts are particularly important because they represent an unusually large group of compositions written by a woman who was closely associated with a number of prominent "ultramoderns," as Beyer studied composition with Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford, Henry Cowell, and very briefly with Dane Rudhyar.⁶

However, Beyer is also fascinating for several other reasons: in particular, because she was not a native-born American. Beyer emigrated permanently to the United States from Germany in 1923, and attempted to forge a career in an era in which Germans were often treated with hostility and derision; the potential difficulties Beyer faced not only as a woman composer, but a *German* woman composer are difficult to imagine. Although Beyer was fluent in English, and no explicit evidence exists of her enduring any overt discrimination or suffering because of her German heritage, her letters

Polansky, "'Total Eclipse': The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer: An Introduction and Preliminary Checklist," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 719–778. Kennedy/Polansky (1996) was the first in-depth study of Beyer to appear in print.

⁶ See Beyer's CV in Serge Koussevitzky archive, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [hereafter, Koussevitzky-LOC], Box 6, Folder 15. An identical photocopy of this CV is also in the Nicolas Slonimsky collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [hereafter, Slonimsky-LOC], Box 131, Folder 16. Beyer's relationship with Cowell will be discussed below and in Chapter 3.

Beyer claimed to know the Seegers well in a letter from Beyer to Mrs. [Olive] Cowell, September 19, 1936, Henry Cowell Papers, JPB 00-03, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts [hereafter, Cowell papers-NYPL], Box 124, Folder 2. Beyer also wrote to the Seegers during Henry Cowell's incarceration in San Quentin, asking them to write letters of support for Cowell. Furthermore, an interesting letter from Charles Seeger to John Douglas Short (Henry Cowell's appeals attorney), dated March 29, 1937, may possibly refer to Beyer. Seeger describes an "offer of marriage" to Cowell from "one of our mutual friends, a woman of fine character, about 45 years of age, a citizen of the United States, unmarried..." (see letter from Seeger to Short, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 127, Folder 15). Beyer was 48 in March 1937. Beyer also mentions writing the Seegers in March 1937 in two letters to Olive Cowell written just prior to Seeger's letter (March 8 and March 19, 1937); see Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 3.

do occasionally reveal a degree of caution regarding her background. For example, in an August 31, 1936 letter Beyer notes her emotional turmoil about Cowell's imprisonment, and tells Olive Cowell that "Germans are frightful [sic] sentimental, you know, and it still remains with me" but is careful to qualify her statement by concluding with an emphatic disclaimer "although I am very much of an American by now."⁷ In one of her last surviving letters to Cowell (dated June 4, 1941), Beyer describes her deep discontentment and frustration about the lack of performances of her compositions, and after lamenting that she has had "no chance to hear one of them," Beyer asserts that her ancestry is not exclusively German:

Tell them that some of my forefathers fought in the Civil War of America, some are English and that I have alive [relative?] close [?] Irish-English. Some relatives walking around in Washington to-day. My own father lived for a number of years in France and England, his coming back to Germany was merely accidental! Why do I mention this now? Perhaps because you brought out the 100% American once too often. All those percentages make me laugh!"⁸

In another undated letter to Cowell, Beyer worries about a competition in Boston that she is considering entering: "I have not heard back from Boston about the contest, perhaps I made a mistake by asking whether it was only open to natives. I shall write again from New York and simply ignore my being born in Germany."⁹ Although she lived in the United States for more than twenty years and eventually became a US citizen, Beyer seemed to have some lingering ambivalences about her German nationality, which indicate that the contemporaneous sociopolitical climate (in which many Americans harbored anti-German sentiments) may have affected her personally.

⁷ Letter from Beyer to Olive Cowell, August 31, 1936, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

⁸ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, June 4, 1941, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 4.

⁹ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, "Wednesday," Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 5.

In addition, unlike other women ultramoderns (such as Jessie Baetz, Vivian Fine, and Ruth Crawford Seeger), Beyer never married. As a single woman Beyer also faced a number of further difficulties, as she had to earn a living and support herself during one of the starkest economic decades in American history. Carolyn Heilbrun has brilliantly discussed the unusual—sometimes even “outrageous”—choices made by accomplished women who consciously avoid the potential restrictions of the “conventional marriage plot” (which, as Heilbrun notes, has traditionally benefitted men more than women) in order to have the opportunity to fully pursue their creative and intellectual work.¹⁰ Some of Beyer’s complicated ideas about marriage will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but ultimately Beyer’s experience as a single woman serves as a rich example of some of the freedoms—and challenges—unmarried women encountered in this era.

Because Beyer died in poverty and without an immediate family, little biographical information on her has survived.¹¹ Although she had at least two relatives in New York City, most of her family remained in Germany.¹² She was born in Leipzig,

¹⁰ See Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), especially Chapter 2, in which Heilbrun discusses the lives of Dorothy L. Sayers and George Eliot.

¹¹ Scholarship on Beyer’s biography remains minimal. Aside from Kennedy and Polansky (1996), see Melissa de Graaf, “‘Never Call Us Lady Composers’: Gendered Reception in the New York Composers’ Forum, 1935–1940,” *American Music* (Fall 2008), esp. pp. 290–301, and two brief articles from *ISAM Newsletter/American Music Review*: Melissa de Graaf, “Intersection of Gender and Modernism in the Music of Johanna Beyer” (Spring 2004); and Amy Beal, “‘Her Whimsy and Originality Really Amount to Genius’: New Biographical Research on Johanna Beyer,” (Fall 2008). In addition, Amy Beal has recently self-published an extended biographical essay on Beyer. Unfortunately, Beal’s essay only became available after this chapter had been completed. See Amy C. Beal, “How Johanna Beyer Spent Her Days,” web-published essay draft (2007; rev. 2011): 1–46; <http://music.ucsc.edu/faculty/amy-beal>. Material from Beal’s recent essay also appears in Beal 2008.

¹² Beyer’s census records and immigration documents list two relatives in New York City: a niece, Frieda Kastner (with whom she lived in Long Island City in the 1930s), and

Germany on July 11, 1888, and claimed to have “graduated at the ‘Verband der Direktoren Deutscher Konservatorien und Musik Seminare E.V.’” in September 1923.¹³ Before she immigrated to the United States, Beyer apparently had a thriving career as a music teacher. In a June 1936 interview, Beyer remarked, “I was teaching in Germany during the revolution, and no matter how shabby the people they would not give up their lessons. I was frightfully busy—so busy that sometimes I wouldn’t have time to change my marks until I found they had become worth almost nothing.”¹⁴ Beyer entered the United States at least once (in 1911) before she moved permanently to New York in 1923, and seems to have become a naturalized citizen by 1930.¹⁵ In the late 1920s, she studied at the Mannes School, earning a diploma in Solfege (May 1927) and a Teacher’s Certificate (May 1928). She also studied composition with Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Henry Cowell, and very briefly with Dane Rudhyar; Beyer even mentions her work with these composers in an undated letter to Cowell, in which she

an uncle, who lived at 661 Columbus Avenue. See 1930 census records and Beal (2008), 4.

Beyer’s letters rarely discuss her family, but a letter to Cowell (postmarked August 24, 1940) mentions her mother and sisters abroad, and that she may help her nieces come to the United States. (Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1). A letter from Beyer to Mrs. Cowell (September 22, 1936) mentions her 86-year-old mother had a stroke and will likely die soon; see Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

¹³ See Beyer’s CV, cited above. Beyer’s biographical records in the Federal Music Project Collection state that she studied “piano, harmony, theory, counterpoint, singing, dancing, and improvisation” privately in Germany, and “graduated under the organization E.V. Verband der Direktoren Deutscher Konservatorien and [sic] Musikseminare.” See Federal Music Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [hereafter, FMP Collection-LOC], Box 203.

¹⁴ “All Composers Aren’t Dead,” *New York World Telegram*, June 25, 1936.

¹⁵ A passenger manifest from September 7, 1930 lists Beyer as a United States Citizen, with “naturalization papers” (Passport 195564 is listed) issued in Washington, D.C. on April 10, 1930.

asked for advice on how much detail to include about her studies as she was compiling her biographical information in hopes of securing a performance of her music.

Perhaps I should simply state my studies in Europe, then here at the Mannes School and the New School and the studies with the Seegers. Have I studied with you, or have I not. In a way I have not, yet again, I have. And the little bit with Rudhyar should perhaps not be mentioned at all.¹⁶

Beyer supported herself by teaching music, both privately and in schools in the New York area. Both her death certificate and census records list her occupation as “music teacher,” and in letters Beyer chronicles her teaching across the New York area, in a dizzying array of different places including Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Harrington Park (New Jersey).¹⁷ Beyer even completed a pedagogical work, entitled *Piano Book—Classic-Romantic-Modern*, which contains piano exercises (most with texts) as well as charming illustrations and watercolors that would be appealing to young students.

¹⁶ Beyer’s connections with ultramodernism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In the letter cited above, Beyer asks Cowell for advice regarding which biographical information she should send to “Kindler’s secretary” for their records. The “Kindler” in question is likely Hans Kindler (1892–1949), conductor of National Symphony Orchestra from 1931 to 1949. During his tenure with the NSO, Kindler performed many new works by living composers. See undated letter from Beyer to Cowell, “Wednesday,” Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 5.

¹⁷ See especially the following letters from Beyer to Cowell in Cowell papers-NYPL: April 3, 1941 (Box 2, Folder 4), June 24, 1936 (Box 124, Folder 2), and September 28, 1940 (Box 2, Folder 1).

Figure 2.1

Excerpt from Johanna Beyer, *Piano Book—Classic-Romantic-Modern* (ca. 1935)¹⁸

The image shows a handwritten musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of music and a scale exercise. The first system has two staves (treble and bass clef) with lyrics: "Tiny little shoots are peeping through, longing for the sunshine, rain and dew." The second system also has two staves with lyrics: "Tiny little shoots are growing tall, soon there will be flowers, bees and all!". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *mf*, and *f*. Below the second system is a C major scale exercise with fingerings and the instruction: "C major Scale to be practised: separate, together, contrary motion. Thumb - exercises".

Figure 2.2

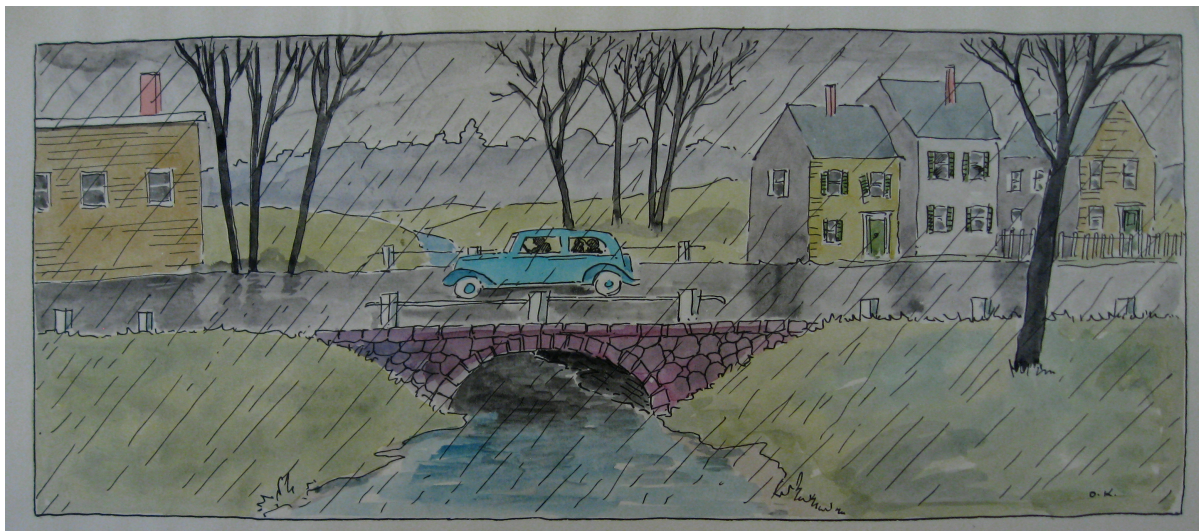
Illustration from Johanna Beyer, *Piano Book—Classic-Romantic-Modern* (ca. 1935)



¹⁸ A copy of the entire (unpublished) manuscript of Beyer's *Piano Book* may be found in Johanna Magdalena Beyer scores, JPB 82-77, Music Division, NYPL.

Figure 2.3

Watercolor (by “O.K.”) from Johanna Beyer’s *Piano Book—Classic-Romantic-Modern* (ca. 1935)



It is difficult to imagine the burdens of commuting around the metropolitan New York area and trying to earn a living during the 1930s—an era in which women were often seen as threatening to male workers, who were typically thought to have priority over women for jobs because they needed to support a family.¹⁹

Beyer also seems to have had impressive skills as a pianist. Many of her piano works, such as *Dissonant Counterpoint* (n.d.), *Gebrauchs-Musik* (1934), *Clusters* (1936), and *Movement for Two Pianos* (1936, dedicated to Henry Cowell) are quite challenging, and Beyer performed the piano parts to *Movement for Two Pianos*, *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, *Excerpts from Piano Suites 1930–35*, and *Suite for Violin and Piano* at her

¹⁹ See Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982). This topic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Composers' Forum Concerts in 1936 and 1937. She also performed works by other composers, including Henry Cowell's *Rhythmicana* (dedicated to Beyer and performed by her on a Composers Forum concert on February 11, 1940). Beyer also appears to have been well-versed in extended techniques: in a letter to Koussevitzky, she notes, "I am working now on his [Cowell's] *Piano Concerto*, I have the clustertechnic. I like to be ready if it ever should be played by an orchestra while he is not able to take his own part."²⁰ Others also took note of her skills as a pianist: in a 1938 letter, Cowell wrote, "I remember Beyer's playing as having the composer's intelligence behind it."²¹ Beyer also seems to have had some proficiency as a singer and violinist. According to her biographical records in the Federal Music Project Collection, she sang for several years in a church choir and at the Leipziger Singakademie.²² While Beyer was briefly staying in West Belmar, New Jersey in August 1940 because of her illness, she asked Cowell to bring her violin so that she could play it, writing, "I wish I had my violin here. If you come, you must bring it along; it is underneath the piano leaning against the tall bookshelf in the corner."²³

Most importantly to this study, Beyer was a prolific, creative, and highly individual composer. Her works range from solo and small chamber compositions to pieces for full orchestra. She also completed at least two portions of a four-act opera, entitled *Status Quo*, about which she claimed, "I am adopting a musical form, quite new, and which, in combination with various forms of pantomimes [sic], dances, as well as

²⁰ Letter from Beyer to Serge Koussevitzky, October 11, 1937, Koussevitzky-LOC, Box 6, Folder 15.

²¹ Letter from Henry Cowell to Olive and Harry Cowell, March 9, 1938, quoted in Beal (2008), 13.

²² Federal Music Project Collection, Library of Congress, Box 203.

²³ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, August 1, 1940, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1.

speech, exclamations, songs, would seem to express our modern life.”²⁴ She had written a “work plan” for the opera by 1937 as part of her Guggenheim Fellowship application, but only two pieces from the opera survive: “Dance for Full Orchestra” (1938) and “Music of the Spheres” (1938). Although at one time she claimed to have composed more than one hundred works,²⁵ only approximately fifty compositions have been found.²⁶

Sadly, Beyer’s compositions do not seem to have been published, performed, or recorded during her lifetime with any regularity. Only one work—her percussion nonet, *IV*—was published while she was living, in the *New Music Orchestra Series* 18 (1936). Prior to 1976, the only recording of her music was *New Music Quarterly Recordings* #1413A-B (1938), which contains two movements from Beyer’s *Suite for Clarinet and Bassoon* (the other side of the record has Cowell’s *Two Chorales and Ostinato*). Beyer’s music was performed in several major concerts, including a Society of Women Musicians performance in London on July 13, 1935, which featured movements from Beyer’s “Suite for Piano”; a *Musical Times* review of the concert noted that “these fragmentary little movements, so neat on paper and so puzzling to the ear, proved a stimulating addition to the afternoon.”²⁷ One important venue for her music was the Federal Music Project’s

²⁴ “Work plan,” in letter to Koussevitzky, October 11, 1937. Koussevitzky-LOC, Box 6, Folder 15. Also quoted in Kennedy and Polansky (1996), 750.

²⁵ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, June 4, 1941, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 4.

²⁶ A clue that Beyer may have composed more works than those in the NYPL and Philadelphia Free Library may be found in the Federal Music Project Collection, which lists several works—in particular, “Op. 28, no. 1, 2, and 4”—that have not been located. See FMP Collection-LOC, Box 145.

²⁷ “London Concerts,” *Musical Times*, August 1935, vol. 76, no. 1110, 741–742. “Some numbers from a Suite for Piano by J.M. Beyer, an American guest, proved to be very up to date indeed. Modeled on the apocalyptic manifestations of Schönberg and Webern

Composers' Forum-Laboratory concert series; Beyer was featured on two Composers' Forum concerts (in May 1936 and May 1937).²⁸ She also had a chance to hear at least one of her large-scale works (probably *Reverence* and/or *Elation*, for wind ensemble) when Percy Grainger arranged to play her music at one of his wind ensemble rehearsals in 1939.²⁹ Beyer also was featured as "guest artist" in Henry Cowell's course "Creative Music in America" at the New School for Social Research in 1941.³⁰

Most surviving information on Beyer has been gleaned from her letters. An avid correspondent, Beyer also had a large network of professional contacts, acquaintances, and friends, including Henry Cowell, Percy Grainger, Serge Koussevitzky, Otto Luening, Harry Allen and Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet, Bertha Reynolds, Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Fabien Sevitzyk. Her letters reveal a creative, driven, and witty personality: some contain original poems, quotes from Goethe, or even charming hand-drawn illustrations for the Christmas holiday. At times, these letters also lend insight into the stress, anxiety, and aggravation Beyer felt as she tried to support herself and forge a

[?!], these fragmentary little movements, so neat on paper and so puzzling to the ear, proved a stimulating addition to the afternoon." (742)

This *Suite for Piano* is not the 1939 work of the same title, but probably excerpts from the work later entitled *Dissonant Counterpoint*. See Kennedy and Polansky (1996), 740.

²⁸ I would like to thank Melissa de Graaf for generously providing me with copies of the programs and question-and-answer sessions from Beyer's 1936 and 1937 Composers' Forum concerts. See de Graaf (2008) for a fascinating discussion of the reception of Beyer's works at these concerts.

²⁹ See Kennedy and Polansky (1996), 746–48. See also the Percy Grainger Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., microfilms 300 and 3189, which contain letters by Grainger, Cowell, and Beyer that discuss the rehearsal. Beyer's letters to Grainger discuss both *Elation* and *Reverence* (dedicated to Grainger).

³⁰ Printed announcement from unidentified source, dated March 10, 1941: "J. M. Beyer, pianist-composer, will be the guest artist tonight in Henry Cowell's course, 'Creative Music in America,' at the New School for Social Research, at 8:20 P.M." Clipping in The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, M-Clippings File, Johanna Beyer.

career as a composer, expressing both feelings of hopeful excitement (“There is a concert on, a chance for the woman composer! You perhaps saw it in the *Times*, I wrote for detailed information...”³¹) and utter frustration (“With all these festivals and goings on and I belonging to two composers organizations since years, etc. etc. and having written over 100 works, anyway, 6 symphonic works and no chance to hear one of them!”³²).

At present, Beyer is perhaps best known for her relationship with Henry Cowell, and an important source of information on Beyer is the more than one hundred surviving letters from Beyer to Cowell, written between 1935 and 1941. Their relationship seems to have been close (perhaps even intimate), but ultimately remains frustratingly ambiguous, especially since most of the surviving letters are from Beyer to Cowell (and not Cowell to Beyer).³³ While Cowell was incarcerated, Beyer acted as what both Beyer and Cowell described as his “agent,” writing letters on his behalf, receiving and mailing out scores, trying to obtain performances of his works, negotiating performances and fees, organizing letter-writing campaigns for his defense, and even trying to secure a publisher for his book manuscript, *The Nature of Melody*.³⁴ Beyer seems to have been a

³¹ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, August 7, 1940, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1.

³² Letter from Beyer to Cowell, June 4, 1940. For another letter expressing Beyer’s frustrations, see letter from Beyer to Cowell, “Monday” (n.d.), Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 5.

³³ Although during his imprisonment Cowell was restricted to writing only one letter per day, a startling number of Beyer’s letters (both to Cowell and others) mention letters that she received from him during his incarceration. Unfortunately, most of these letters have not survived.

Beal (2008) speculates that their relationship may have become intimate in late 1935, before Cowell’s trip to California (and subsequent imprisonment). The relationship between Beyer and Cowell has been discussed by Beal (2008 and 2011), and will also be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

³⁴ Letters that refer to Beyer as “agent” include: Cowell to Grainger, January 2, 1937, June 14, 1938, Library of Congress-Percy Grainger Collection, microfilm 300; Beyer to Olga Naoumoff (secretary to Serge Koussevitzky), May 16, 1938, Beyer to

formidable negotiator for Cowell: a letter from Cowell to Grainger (1939) describes how Beyer managed to convince a potential publisher to keep certain portions of Cowell's book manuscript:

I am very hopeful that the book [*The Nature of Melody*] may at last find publication. Lamb went thru the usual process of demanding that the more acute statements in the book be softened, but Miss Beyer went up and jollied him along a bit, and succeeded in having retained everything of import!³⁵

In the last few years of her life, Beyer was afflicted with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the disease that eventually took her life. In a letter from July 1940, Beyer mentions that “things have been difficult” and describes the challenge of composing because she is “physically hindered”; one month later (after temporarily relocating to West Belmar, NJ), Beyer writes, “I have begun to walk normally again, but need to stay on for endurance” and poignantly wonders, “Who wants to marry an old sick woman?”³⁶ In an undated letter to Cowell, she bleakly describes her illness specifically in terms of their relationship:

My leg has become thinner and shorter steadily, something radical has to be done—But what worries me more is the piercing pains through my heart (caused by our friendship) these pains seem to pierce right through to the spine and cause paralyzing of both legs at times.³⁷

Until her death in January 1944, Beyer struggled to support herself as her symptoms worsened. Her letters to Cowell from 1940–41 chronicle her financial

Koussevitzky, March 10, 1940 (form letter for letter-writing campaign), Koussevitzky-LOC, Box 6, Folder 15.

³⁵ Letter from Cowell to Grainger, February 25, 1939, Percy Grainger Collection, Library of Congress, microfilm 300.

³⁶ Letters from Beyer to Cowell, July 20, 1940; August 7, 1940; and August 24, 1940, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1. Interestingly, Beyer's death certificate lists the date of onset of ALS as 1938—six years before her death.

³⁷ Letter from Beyer to Cowell, “Tuesday” (n.d.), Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 5.

troubles, sometimes mentioning bills that Cowell paid, or bills that needed to be paid.³⁸

In 1941, their relationship began to officially disintegrate: Cowell agreed to pay Beyer for the copying and promotional work she had done for him, and sent two checks—totaling less than \$100—in January and February 1941; no correspondence between Beyer and Cowell after June 8, 1941 has been found. In one of the few surviving letters from Cowell to Beyer (from June 1941), Cowell severs the last threads of their relationship:

I believe that it is best for us to discontinue contact altogether. This does not mean I feel unfriendly—quite the reverse; I shall always be your friend; but I am sure that the real way for you to gain new strength, and help with your health, is not to continue a contact that cannot lead anywhere eventually, but to establish new friendships and contacts. I am sure that this will be easier if contacts with me do not drag on. . . . I hope very heartily for your best health, and believe that a fresh start in a new life will be the best aid in your health's improvement.³⁹

On September 27, 1941—just three months after writing this letter—Cowell married Sidney Robertson in Thurmont, Maryland.

Very little information has been located regarding Beyer's activities after 1941. Her last dated work was completed in June 1943, around the time that Beyer entered a charitable hospital in the Bronx, the Home of the Holy Comforter, where she remained until her death on January 9, 1944.⁴⁰ She was interred in Kensico Cemetery on January

³⁸ See especially letters from Beyer to Cowell, August 7, 8, and 24, 1940 (Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1); undated letter “Friday” from Beyer to Cowell (Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 5).

³⁹ Letter from Cowell to Beyer, June 3, 1941, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 20, Folder 14.

⁴⁰ This piece, *Sonatina in C*, was dedicated to Beyer's student Roland Leitner, and is briefly discussed in Kennedy/Polansky (1996) and in Larry Polansky's liner notes to Johanna Beyer, *Sticky Melodies*, New World Records 80678-2, 2008.

12, 1944, her remains buried in a portion of the cemetery purchased by the Home of the Holy Comforter for their deceased patients.⁴¹

⁴¹ Email correspondence with Judy Mitchell, public relations consultant, Kensico Cemetery (June 2011).

CHAPTER 3

Borrowing, Gender, and Johanna Beyer's String Quartet No. 2 (1936)

Musical borrowing has a long and varied compositional history, appearing in countless works by a diverse group of composers, ranging from Renaissance recompositions and parody masses to John Zorn's explorations of quotation and collage. Scholarship on musical borrowing has been similarly broad, including studies of particular composers (such as Burkholder's work on Charles Ives) as well as larger genres or stylistic eras (such as Lockwood's work on parody in the sixteenth century). Yet all of these works have one thing in common—they focus entirely on music by male composers. Studies of borrowing in music by women have been notably neglected in music scholarship.¹

¹ The only substantive work I have been able to find on borrowing in music by women is a single chapter—on the performance of cover songs by the comedienne Sandra Bernhard (in her film *Without You I'm Nothing*)—in David Metzger's *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), but the chapter focuses more on race and the performance of “camp,” not gender. A brief (two-paragraph) discussion of Janet Jackson's “Someone To Call My Lover” also appears in Mark Spicer, “Strategic Intertextuality in Three of John Lennon's Late Beatles Songs,” *Gamut*, vol. 2, issue 1 (2009): 348–350, but this passing discussion does not mention gender.

In other respects, scholarly work on musical borrowing is vast, including works such as Robert Hatten, “The Place of Intertextuality in Music Studies,” *American Journal of Semiotics* 3/4 (1985): 69–82; Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990); Kevin Korsyn, “Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence,” *Music Analysis*, vol. 10, no. 1/2 (Mar.–Jul., 1991): 3–72; J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Ellie M. Hisama, “John Zorn and the Postmodern Condition” in *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, Yayoi Uno

This chapter examines borrowing in Johanna Beyer's String Quartet No. 2 (1936), which features numerous, prominent statements of the opening phrase of Papageno's aria "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen," from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.² Beyer's use of borrowing is interesting for a number of different reasons. First, Beyer was closely associated with leading ultramodern composers such as Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford, and Henry Cowell, who did not typically feature quotations or borrowing in their ultramodern works.³ Although a large number of Beyer's works may be strongly aligned with these ultramodern composers, this quartet departs from her other ultramodern works (and ultramodernism) by fusing a markedly tonal, common-practice tune with the principles and ideas of dissonant counterpoint.

But Beyer's quartet is also distinctive because of the ways in which it intersects with borrowing more generally, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Drawing on Bloom's work on the "anxiety of influence," Straus (1990) has shown how the first half of the twentieth century was an era in which (male) composers such as Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, and Stravinsky explored the music of their compositional

Everett and Frederick Lau, eds. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 72–84; Catherine Losada, "A Theoretical Model for the Analysis of Collage in Music Derived From Selected Works by Berio, Zimmerman, and Rochberg," (Ph.D. diss, City University of New York, 2004); Kevin Korsyn, "The Death of Musical Analysis? The Concept of Unity Revisited," *Music Analysis* 23/ii–iii (2004): 337–351; Michael Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

² For biographical information on Johanna Magdalena Beyer (1888–1944), see Chapter 2.

³ Obviously, Ives is well known for his use of quotation, but it is unlikely that Beyer knew Ives' music well, especially since his scores were not widely available. Beyer's letters describe her feelings about music by Schoenberg, Bach, and Cowell, but do not mention Ives' music. Ives' music was apparently not well known by Ruth Crawford, either: Charles Seeger noted that Ruth Crawford "knew next to nothing of Ives" in the early 1930s. See Ray Wilding-White, "Remembering Ruth Crawford Seeger: An Interview with Charles and Peggy Seeger," *American Music*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 445.

“forefathers” in their own works as a means of grappling with their own angst and anxieties about the music of the past. Feminist scholars have long noted the gendered implications of Bloom’s “anxiety of influence,” as Bloom’s work focuses on the heroic, manly strivings of white male European poets, who are said to “conquer” and “overcome” their literary patrimony.⁴ Some scholars have offered a different take on the experiences of women authors: for example, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) have argued that women creators experience an “anxiety of authorship” because of the cultural limitations associated with their gender, as well as their lack of (female) literary role models.⁵ How does Beyer’s borrowing relate to these various “anxieties”?

Finally, Beyer’s specific choice of borrowed tune—an aria, sung by the lusty Papageno, that focuses entirely on his desire for “a maiden or little wife”—suggests a number of extramusical connections, particularly given Beyer’s own experiences as an unmarried woman during the Great Depression, an era in which ideals of marriage and domesticity were often touted as central to a woman’s existence.

Beyer’s quartet thus provides an opportunity not only to discuss borrowing in a work by a female composer, but also to engage with these larger questions of style, influence, and meaning. This chapter is divided into three large sections. The first section provides a brief summary of the movement, and then examines how Beyer’s use of borrowing is informed by existing analytical work on borrowing in the first half of the

⁴ Straus (1990) clearly acknowledges Bloom’s narrow focus (e.g., 15), yet tends to replicate Bloom’s language; for example, describing “strong” composers (64), who experience a “vigorous and self-aggrandizing struggle” to “neutralize” and “undermine” the music of their compositional forefathers (72–73).

⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000 [first published, 1979]), 45–92. The “anxieties” described by Bloom and Gilbert/Gubar will be discussed in more detail below.

twentieth century (in particular, Straus 1990). Does Beyer “remake” Mozart, vigorously striving to prove her compositional “strength” by appropriating his tune and setting it in a new (atonal) context? The second section of the chapter discusses how Beyer’s setting both follows *and* departs from ultramodernism more generally, with a special emphasis on dissonant counterpoint. Finally, the third section of this chapter explores how Beyer’s subversive setting of this borrowed tune might be understood through the lens of gender, by examining a number of different issues, including: prevailing ideologies of women, marriage, and female modernist composers during the Great Depression; Beyer’s experiences as an unmarried “lady” modernist composer and her remarkably unconventional views on marriage; and specific strategies of musical subversion (including concealment, parody, and textual association) in the quartet itself. This section of the chapter builds on the previous discussions of musical borrowing (section 1) and ultramodernism (section 2) in order to show the ways in which gender might also be used to develop a rich array of analytic insights, particularly (although certainly not exclusively) with regard to borrowing in music by female composers.

I. “Remaking” Mozart?

From its opening measures, Beyer’s String Quartet No. 2 features an element that is extremely unusual in her oeuvre—a borrowed melody; to my knowledge, this is the only one of Beyer’s works—which number more than fifty—to feature an explicit musical borrowing. Surprisingly, the tune is taken from a common-practice-era opera, Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*: more specifically, the Act II aria “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen,” in which the earthy birdcatcher Papageno yearns for a “little wife,” whom he likens to “a soft little dove.” Figure 3.1 shows the text of the entire aria.

Figure 3.1Text and translation of “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen”⁶

Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich. O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich! Dann schmeckte mir Trinken und Essen, Dann könnt ich mit Fürsten mich messen, Des Lebens als Weiser mich freun, Und wie im Elysium sein.	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! Then I should drink and eat with relish, Then I could hold my own with princes, Enjoy life in my wisdom, And be as if I'm in Elysium.
Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich. O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich. Ach, kann ich denn keener von allen Den reizenden Mädchen gefallen? Helf eine mir nur aus der Not. Sonst gräm ich mich wahrlich zu Tod.	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! Ah, can't I find one, then, amongst all The lovely girls, who would like me? Let just one help me out of my misery, Or I shall truly die of grief.
Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich. O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich! Wird keine mir Liebe gewähren, So muss mich die Flamme verzehren! Doch küsst mich ein weiblicher Mund, So bin ich schon wieder gesund!	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! If no one will offer me love, Then the fire must consume me, But if a woman's lips kiss me, I shall be well again straightaway!

The borrowed tune in Beyer's quartet is taken from the melody featured in the first twenty measures of the aria, which corresponds to the first four lines of text. Example 3.1 shows a score of the passage.

⁶ Translation by Robert A. Jordan, Karl Böhm/Berlin Philharmonic, Deutsche Grammophon recording, 1997 [first released, 1964], 449749-2.

Example 3.1

“Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen,” mm. 9–20 (Papageno’s entrance)

9

Ein Mäd - chen o - der Weib - chen wunscht Pa - pa - ge - no sich! O,

13

so ein sanf - tes Täub - chen wär_ Se - lig - keit für mich, wär

17

Se - lig - keit für mich, wär Se - lig - keit für mich!

In Beyer’s quartet, the Mozart quotation is prominently featured in both the first and fourth movements, where it appears in the cello part. Interestingly, in both movements the pitch content of the quotation is virtually identical to the aria, and is even presented in the same key, F major. When the quotation is first heard (in the opening measures of the first movement), it contains only a few slight changes from the aria: the time signature in the quartet is 4/4, not 2/4 (but the rhythms are altered proportionally so

that the tune sounds the same); the neighbor tones in the second, sixth, and seventh measure of the phrase are not included; the rhythm is slightly different in the third measure; and the pitches C2 (m. 2) and E2 (m. 7) do not appear in the original. Example 3.2 shows the first statement of the quotation, from the opening measures of Beyer's quartet.

Example 3.2

Beyer, String Quartet No. 2, first movement, mm. 1–10

The musical score for Example 3.2 consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The Cello part is marked *f marcato*. The Violin I part has a *mf* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 3. The Violin II part has a *mp* dynamic. The Viola part has a *mp* dynamic. The second system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The Violin I part has a *mf* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 3. The Violin II part has a *mf* dynamic. The Viola part has a *mp* dynamic. The Cello part has a *f marcato* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Beyer's choice to borrow this tune is certainly intriguing, but one of the most distinctive aspects of this movement is the way in which Beyer sets the source melody: although the tune sounds virtually identical to the original, Beyer re-sets the melody in a strikingly dissonant context, drawing on ideas of "dissonant counterpoint" associated with Beyer's teachers Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford. (The intersections between

this movement and dissonant counterpoint will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.⁷)

Because each of the individual melodic lines of the quartet exhibits a strong degree of autonomy, determining a clear phrase structure for the movement is somewhat difficult, due to the degree to which each of the phrases played by the separate instruments overlap and intersect with one another. At first hearing—one driven by focusing on the borrowed melody—the first movement might be divided into four statements of the borrowed melody: mm. 1–10, mm. 11–22, mm. 23–41 (in which the borrowed tune is at first transferred to the first violin, and subsequently fractured, appearing in brief glimpses between all four instruments), and mm. 42–49 (in which the borrowed melody returns to its original cello register). The first phrase seems to showcase the Mozart melody, which is prominently featured in the cello part; the upper three string parts accompany the tune, each with their own dissonant melodic line. In mm. 11–22, the quotation again appears in the cello, but Beyer begins to enliven and slightly alter the tune, largely by using chromatic substitutions a semitone away from notes in the original quotation (for example, the G#2 in m. 11 and the A \flat in m. 14), as well as shifts of register (in m. 15–18). In these measures, Beyer playfully subverts the borrowed melody by adding dissonant, chromatic embellishments to the tune.

⁷ For more information about Beyer's relationship with the Seegers, see Chapter 2. A number of Beyer's works, particularly from the early 1930s, seem to have been influenced by Ruth Crawford's compositional style: Beyer's *Clarinet Suites* bear a strong formal resemblance to Ruth Crawford's *Diaphonic Suite no. 1*, and Beyer even wrote a piece for solo piano called *Dissonant Counterpoint*. On the program notes to her May 1936 Composers' Forum Concert, Beyer dedicated a movement from "Excerpts from the *Piano Suites*" to Ruth Crawford.

Example 3.3

Cello, mm. 11–15 (embellishment of borrowed melody)



This second iteration of the borrowed tune is also interesting because of the way that the upper three parts unfold: because of the flexibility with which the violin and viola lines are expanded and contracted rhythmically, when the quotation is heard the second time the upper three parts have each shifted, so that different moments of the dissonant lines are heard against the borrowed tune. Things begin to noticeably unravel in m. 19, where statements based on m. 1 and mm. 7–8 of the cello melody are bounced back and forth between the cello, viola, and first violin, ultimately leading to the third phrase of the movement (mm. 23–41), during which the first violin takes over the melody from the cello, and pieces of the Mozart melody are fragmented, interrupted, and fused together into a complex web of phrases, culminating in a pixilated fabric where snatches of the quotation are juxtaposed against one another in all four instruments. Within this boisterous passage, the first violin does have a complete statement of the borrowed tune (the only note missing is the G first heard in m. 4 of the cello quotation), but bobs and weaves between fragments of the quotation and a repetition of its own dissonant line (heard in mm. 13–20), sputtering and interrupting itself as it alternates between the two. This section ends when the first violin performs an ascending chromatic gesture based on a passage first heard in the cello in mm. 19–23, but takes the line one pitch further, culminating and crescendoing up to a sustained C#6 in m. 41.

Example 3.4

Beyer, String Quartet No. 2, first movement, mm. 23–41

23

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello

sfz

sfz

This system contains measures 23 through 26. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 23 shows a melodic line in Violin I with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 24 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in Violin II. Measure 25 continues the melodic development. Measure 26 features a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part.

27

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

sfz

sfz

sfz

trmm

trmm

This system contains measures 27 through 31. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Measure 27 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part. Measure 28 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part and a tremolo marking (*trmm*) in the Viola part. Measure 29 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part and a tremolo marking (*trmm*) in the Cello part. Measure 30 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part. Measure 31 has a forte dynamic marking (*sfz*) in the Cello part.

32

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

This system contains measures 32 through 36. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The music continues with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines across all instruments.

37

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

This system contains measures 37 through 41. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The music concludes with sustained notes and complex rhythmic patterns.

The final phrase of the movement (mm. 42–49) again features the borrowed tune, returned to the cello part (an exact repetition of what the cello plays in mm. 1–8), but with a very different accompaniment—here, prickly pizzicato quarter notes—resulting in the most vertically aligned moment of the upper three parts in the entire movement (these passages will be discussed in more detail below).

Example 3.5

Measures 42 and ff.

The musical score for measures 42 and ff is presented in a four-staff format. The top staff is Violin I, the second is Violin II, the third is Viola, and the bottom is Cello. All parts are in 4/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is marked with *pizzicato* and *ppp* for the upper three parts, and *marcato* and *f* for the Cello. The music shows a high degree of vertical alignment, with many notes occurring simultaneously across the staves.

“Remaking”—or “misreading”—Mozart?

Straus (1990) has discussed the ways in which canonic composers of the first half of the twentieth century both connected with and subverted the music of the past, borrowing from their predecessors while also rewriting them, ultimately creating new contexts and ways of hearing the great “masters” (and masterworks) of the past. Composers such as Schoenberg, Webern, and Stravinsky are said to willfully “misread” the music of the past as a means of asserting their own compositional identity; Straus notes that “by misreading their predecessors in this way, twentieth-century composers

simultaneously assert their links to the tradition and clear creative space for themselves.”⁸ Yet Beyer’s “remaking” of Mozart is somewhat different than many examples of borrowing in works by other composers, first because initially her use of the Mozart quotation seems so explicit, and much of the dramatic action of the movement centers around the gradual subversion of the (initially blatant) tune. Unlike, for example, many of Ives’s works, which use a form Burkholder has termed “cumulative setting” (in which at first only fragments of borrowed music appear, which gradually culminate in an entire statement of a borrowed melody near the end of the work), Beyer’s movement begins with a seemingly unequivocal statement of the borrowed Mozart tune.⁹ The opening statement of Papageno’s melody in Beyer’s quartet is emphasized by dynamic (the cello is the only instrument to play *forte* in the opening measures), tenuto markings, and even a “marcato” indication. The borrowed melody is further highlighted by the marked contrast between the indomitable tonality of the cello quotation and the striking dissonance of the violin and viola lines, creating a dramatic (and seemingly disparate) texture in which “tonal” and “atonal” are pitted against one another.

However, closer examination reveals that Beyer actually makes incremental changes to the Mozart tune even in its first appearance in mm. 1–10, and some of these almost indiscernible “revisions” not only highlight interesting aspects of the Mozart melody, but also have larger, deeper resonances that extend into the seemingly unrelated (and dissonant) melodic strands of the other instruments.¹⁰

⁸ Straus (1990), 168.

⁹ Burkholder (1995) eloquently notes that “for Ives, simplicity is a place one gets to, not where one starts” (159).

¹⁰ The following discussion is indebted to Straus (1990), particularly chapters 3 and 6.

Beyer's modifications are shown in the example below; the first is the C2 on the last beat of measure 2. Because the corresponding moment of the Mozart aria contains two Fs at this moment, Beyer's substitution of C for F adds a degree of tension to the largely consonant source melody, not only by weaving an extra dissonant (minor seventh) interval into the line, but also by anticipating (and, through repetition, further emphasizing) the striking C-B \flat leap that begins the second half of the phrase in the original melody.¹¹ Another almost indiscernible change occurs in the penultimate measure of the phrase, in which the turn figure around G (G-F-G-A) in the original vocal melody is eliminated, and simple quarter notes G3-E3-F3 are used instead.¹² Clearly, both of these moments maintain the tonality, line, and character of the borrowed tune. Yet surprisingly, both of these subtle alterations result in instantiations of the same set class (sc), (013).¹³ The C in m. 2 creates two interlocking (013)s, connected by RICH: {0, T, 9} and {T, 9, 7}.¹⁴ The conclusion of the cello phrase contains the understated

¹¹ Interestingly, Beethoven's *Zwölf Variationen über das Thema "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen"* (op. 66) also contains a C instead of an F in m. 2 of the first statement of the melody. Could Beyer be "borrowing" from both Mozart and Beethoven?

¹² When Papageno sings this portion of the tune, it is slightly different than the orchestral introduction that precedes his entrance. The second beat of measure 7 (the penultimate measure of the orchestral introduction), uses the notes C-D-E-C, which sounds more similar to Beyer's seventh measure than what Papageno sings in m. 15.

¹³ For those readers unfamiliar with the term, "set class" (typically abbreviated as "sc") is a designation used by theorists to describe and categorize collections of pitches based on their underlying intervallic content. There are twelve trichordal (three-note) set classes. For more information, see Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005), 52–60.

¹⁴ One could also hear an additional statement of [9, T, 0] in m. 6 of the cello part (ignoring the upper-neighbor D).

For those readers unfamiliar with the term, "RICH" (retrograde-inversion chain) refers to a contextual transformation in which the last two notes of a set are used as an inversive axis around which the earlier notes of a set invert. For example, {0, T, 9} and {T, 9, 7} are related by RICH, using the axis of inversion in which the last two notes of the trichord (T and 9) invert into one another (T \rightarrow 9, 9 \rightarrow T, 0 \rightarrow 7). For more information

quarter-note ending, heard twice (in mm. 7–8 and repeated in mm. 9–10).¹⁵ Beyer’s “revised” ending relates to the (013)s in m. 3 (and m. 6), a transposition of these motives upwards by a markedly tonal level of transposition, a perfect fifth. All of these “(013) moments” are particularly interesting for the way in which they are woven into the borrowed melody—while they slightly alter Papageno’s tune, the changes are so small that they are almost unnoticeable. Like individual brushstrokes within a painting, these moments do not disrupt the overall smoothness and coherence of the cello’s decidedly tonal line, but serve as intriguing points of reflection when examined more closely.

Example 3.6

(013) relationships in Beyer’s cello line (mm. 1–10)

The image shows two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. The top staff contains a melodic line with a boxed section of notes. The bottom staff contains a different melodic line, also with a boxed section. An arrow labeled "RICH" points from the top staff to the bottom staff, with the transformation $\{0, T, 9\} \rightarrow \{T, 9, 7\}$ above it. Other annotations include T_7 and I_6 with arrows pointing to specific notes, and $[4, 5, 7]$ below the bottom staff.

These moments are particularly noteworthy when considered against the fabric of the source tune. The charming (and catchy) quality of Mozart’s melody lies in its use of a large number of nonchord tones (many of which are neighbor groups), which lend an upbeat, almost effervescent quality to the tune. Figures involving neighbor tones occur

on RICH, see David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 [first published by Yale University Press in 1987], especially 180–88, 221–24, and 226–27. Lewin defines RICH as “that retrograde-inverted form of (s) whose first two elements are s_{N-1} and s_N , in that order” (180).

¹⁵ In the aria, Papageno’s phrase has a four-measure (2+2) extension (mm. 17–20). The orchestral introduction (mm. 1–8) does not contain these repetitions at the end of the phrase.

throughout Papageno's opening phrase, featured prominently in m. 10 (A-B \flat -A-G), m. 11 (A-G-A-B \flat), m. 15 (G-F-G-A), and even in the most chromatic moment of the phrase (m. 14, where the B natural occurs). An especially interesting moment occurs during the opening measures of the tune, during which two embellishing figures—involving statements of the same pitches, A, B \flat , and G—are contained within a large-scale statement of the upper neighbor/passing tone group (A-B \flat -A-G) heard on the first beat of the second measure of the tune. Another interesting moment occurs towards the end of the phrase, where three interlocking statements of (013): [E, 0, 2], [9, T, 0], and [7, 9, T] occur.

Example 3.7

Papageno's entrance (mm. 9–20); some (013)s

Ein Mäd-chen o - der Weib - chen wunscht Pa - pa - ge - no sich! O, so ein sanf - tes

Täub - chen wär' Se - lig keit für mich, wär' Se - lig keit für mich, wär' Se - lig - keit für mich!

Of course, these moments become doubly significant when one realizes that these tonal fragments, when abstracted from their tonal context, are actually statements of the same (013) sc featured in Beyer's altered cello line. In addition, by revising the tune to have a C in m. 2 instead of an F, Beyer creates an additional statement of the RICH-related {0, 9, T} and {9, T, 7} that anticipates this moment found in m. 14 of the source tune and in m. 6 of Beyer's setting of the borrowed melody, creating further emphasis on

the (013)-ness within the (tonal) borrowed melody. Furthermore, Beyer places additional emphasis on the {B \flat , A, G}/“(013)” motive in the third phrase of the movement, during which the cello gets “stuck” on this motive, performing an astonishing number of repetitions of these notes (no fewer than seven), varied by rhythm and the use of trills. This is the *only* moment from the borrowed melody that is repeated and lingered on this extensively. The dissonant second violin and viola lines (interestingly, the “inner” voices of the quartet texture) contain a number of connections with these moments in the cello line. The second violin melody begins with two overlapping (013)s, [E, 0, 2] and [T, E, 1], related by T₋₁, perhaps a large-scale realization of the semitone contained within sc (013).¹⁶

Example 3.8

Violin II and viola lines

Violin II

(013) $\xrightarrow{T_{-1}}$ (013)

(con'd)

¹⁶ One might also hear a connection between the prominent notes in the upper register of the second violin in mm. 5–6 (F, F \sharp , G \sharp). These three notes are the only second-violin notes on the entire first page of the score to have tenuto markings, and also serve as one of the few moments in the movement where the second violin ascends over the register of the first violin. Remarkably, the (013)s in mm. 2–3 and mm. 5–6 of the second violin are related by T₇—the same level of transposition that connects the (013) statements in m. 3/6 and mm. 7–8 of the cello part.

(Example 3.8, con'd)

Viola

[4, 5, 7] $\xrightarrow{\text{RICH}}$ [5, 7, 8]

The viola phrase also begins with the same sc (013)—here, [4, 5, 7]—and the first three measures of the viola line could also be heard as two overlapping (013)s: [4, 5, 7] and [5, 7, 8], which (similarly to the two RICH-related motives in the cello part) invert into one another around their shared dyad (here, [5, 7]). Of course, the opening pitches of the viola line [4, 5, 7] also anticipate the last three notes of the cello line, discussed above.

These observations—particularly when considered with the general fabric of the piece, which pits a decidedly tonal borrowed melody against three distinctly dissonant upper parts—call to mind some of the ideas about “misreading” in Straus (1990), in which composers such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky are said to recompose the music of the past in order to engage with the musical tradition that preceded them (and that they feel themselves to be the current culmination of) while also calling the creative work of their musical “forefathers” into question. Composers’ anxieties about the lingering influence of their predecessors are explored in the music itself, as (originally diatonic) elements from source pieces are recast in a new way, “superimposing a new [atonal] dimension upon the old one.”¹⁷ One important way that these “misreadings” occur is through the use of motives and pc sets, which can be used to subvert and challenge the source pieces, by isolating fragments and motives and exploiting them in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, ultimately resulting in being able to hear the source works

¹⁷ Straus (1990), 61.

differently (in an atonal context). For Straus, this process is “driven by tension,” an active “struggle for priority between post-tonal and tonal, and between twentieth-century composers and their eighteenth-century models.”¹⁸

Yet something seems unsatisfactory, even forced, about the preceding hearing and analysis, which doesn’t seem to provide a full picture of the music itself. Although connections might be drawn between the tonal and atonal dimensions of the piece through Beyer’s emphasis on the “(013)-ness” of the tonal melody, both the dissonant and tonal lines also feature a number of other set classes. Furthermore, unlike many of the examples Straus discusses, which contain statements of motivic set classes in both vertical and horizontal dimensions, Beyer’s work does not contain vertical statements of (013) that are particularly significant. The individual melodic lines seem more concerned with exploring the horizontal dimension, and intersect to create a number of different sonorities; when vertical (013)s do occur (such as the sonority heard in the last half of m. 38), they appear more as fallout from the different interactions between the different melodic strands, rather than as significant structural or analytical events. Finally, (013) is obviously a sc that is extremely common within the diatonic collection, and ultimately focusing entirely on this particular sc obscures many of the other structural relationships found in the violin and viola lines, as well as their connections to (and departures from) ultramodernism and dissonant counterpoint. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore some of these relationships more fully, by examining some of the ways in which this movement both conforms to—and pushes against—the ultramodern style more generally.

¹⁸ Straus (1990), 64.

II. Emulating—and “misreading”—ultramodernism

As we have discovered, this movement not only provides the opportunity to examine tensions between Beyer and her (tonal, common practice) musical past, but also to explore some of the tensions between Beyer and her own contemporaneous contexts, both musical and sociocultural. In this section, I will explore some of ways that this movement both relates to and departs from more generalized stylistic traits of ultramodernism. Over the past twenty-five years, music scholars have drawn a distinction between what Hatten (1985) has termed “strategic” and “stylistic” intertextuality. *Strategic* intertextuality involves a composer’s reference to a specific musical work (such as Beyer’s use of the borrowed melody). *Stylistic* intertextuality involves a composer’s use of a particular musical style or shared musical element, without reference to a particular musical work (such as Stravinsky’s exploration of sonata form in the opening movement of his Symphony in C).¹⁹ Beyer’s use of ultramodern stylistic elements is obviously not a “perfect” example of stylistic intertextuality—first, because most of her works from the early- and mid-1930s are clear examples of the ultramodern style, so her use of ultramodernist elements in this movement is not particularly unusual; and second, because stylistic intertextuality often involves works that draw on a musical style from a more distant past.²⁰ However, it is still fascinating

¹⁹ See Hatten (1985), 69–82. Straus (1990) adopts Bloom’s terms “anxiety of influence” and “anxiety of style,” which make a similar distinction between reference to a specific musical work, versus reference to a more general musical style or element; see Straus (1990), 18–19. For a discussion of Stravinsky’s use of sonata form (in Symphony in C and Octet), see Straus (1990), ch. 5. Hatten’s terminology is also cogently discussed in Spicer (2009), especially 353–54.

²⁰ For example, Hatten describes Beethoven’s invocation of a “stylized Baroque dance” in the third movement of his String Quartet in A minor, op. 132. See Hatten (1985), 71–72.

(and important) to consider the ways in which this movement both conforms to and departs from ultramodernism, particularly since ultramodernism itself was facing a kind of crisis at the time this work was completed, as many ultramodern composers had already turned away from the style, deliberately choosing to write music that was more populist and accessible.²¹

Throughout the 1930s, Beyer was closely associated with a number of ultramodern composers, including Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Henry Cowell; Beyer valued her connections with these leading figures of ultramodernism, and her relationships with the Seegers and Cowell were complex and multifaceted, containing both professional and personal dimensions.²² Beyer described her relationship with the Seegers in a 1936 letter to Olive Cowell, noting that “the Seegers and I have spent a lot of time together and we know each other quite intimately.”²³ Beyer also translated at least one movement of Ruth Crawford’s *Three Songs* into German, and corresponded with the Seegers on Cowell’s behalf during his incarceration.²⁴

²¹ This issue will be discussed in more detail at the conclusion of this section.

²² Beyer’s relationship with Cowell (particularly during his imprisonment, which occurred while she was completing this quartet) will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

²³ Letter from Beyer to Mrs. [Olive] Cowell, September 19, 1936, Henry Cowell Papers, JPB 00-03, Music Division, The New York Library for the Performing Arts [hereafter, Cowell papers-NYPL], Box 124, Folder 2. For more information about these relationships, see Chapter 2.

²⁴ Crawford’s *Three Songs* contains translations of Sandburg’s “Rat Riddles,” “Prayers of Steel,” and “In Tall Grass” into both German and French. In the score, Jeanne de Mare is credited with all three of the French translations. However, it is unclear if Beyer was responsible for translating all three movements into German. In the score, she is only credited for translating “Prayers of Steel”; however, no other translator is listed for the German translations of “Rat Riddles” and “In Tall Grass,” so it seems probable that Beyer could have completed all three German translations.

In letters to Olive Cowell, Beyer also mentions corresponding with the Seegers in March 1937. For more detail about these letters, see Chapter 2, footnote 6.

In many ways, Beyer's works from the early 1930s seem strongly influenced by ultramodernist principles, particularly the Seegers' ideas about dissonant counterpoint.²⁵ Briefly, dissonant counterpoint cultivates a texture that has dissonance, not consonance, as its basis, and strives to maintain independence both between and within musical parts (what Charles Seeger termed "heterophony" or "diaphony"). In his theoretical work on dissonant counterpoint, Seeger emphasized the importance for modern works "to cultivate 'sounding apart' rather than 'sounding together'—diaphony rather than symphony."²⁶ Seeger also emphasized the importance of composing short works for single instruments (especially woodwinds) as a way for composers to develop their understanding of dissonant counterpoint.²⁷ Beyer composed several solo instrumental works in the early 1930s (such as *Suite for Clarinet I* and *Suite for Clarinet Ib*) that follow the principles Seeger outlines, and these works also strongly resemble Ruth Crawford's *Diaphonic Suite no. 1*, incorporating musical elements such as angular,

²⁵ See Charles Seeger, "Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music [hereafter, *TENM*]," in *Studies in Musicology II 1929–1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–267; and Charles Seeger, "On Dissonant Counterpoint," *Modern Music* vii/4 (1930): 25–31. For information about the intellectual connections and exchanges between Ruth Crawford and Charles Seeger, see especially Nancy Rao, "Partnership in Modern Music, Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929–31," *American Music* 15/3 (Autumn 1997): 352–380; Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

A recent article by John D. Spilker argues that Cowell—not just the Seegers—may have been more involved in the development of dissonant counterpoint than previously thought. See Spilker's "The Origins of 'Dissonant Counterpoint': Henry Cowell's Unpublished Notebook," *Journal of the Society for American Music*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2011): 481–533.

²⁶ Seeger (1930), 28.

²⁷ Seeger writes, "Composition for a single melodic line need not at first presume to any great length. . . Small suites for the single woodwind instruments make a nice vehicle for early efforts in dissonant writing." See Seeger, *TENM*, 195–198.

dissonant lines, and verse/sectional form; these pieces also draw on the palindromic structures sometimes used by Crawford in other works, and discussed by Seeger in his treatise.²⁸ Beyer also seems to have been quite familiar with (and strongly influenced by) Seeger's ultramodern theoretical terminology: she composed a solo piano work entitled *Dissonant Counterpoint*, and the phrase "dissonant counterpoint" also appears numerous times in her program notes for her May 1936 Composers' Forum Concert.²⁹ In addition, Beyer honored her relationships with her ultramodernist composer colleagues by dedicating works to both Ruth Crawford and Henry Cowell.³⁰

Many musical features associated with dissonant counterpoint may also be found in the violin and viola lines in this movement, including avoidance of repetition of pitches, emphasis on dissonant intervals, and filling in chromatic gaps, yet each melodic strand represents a somewhat independent horizontal melodic statement, with unique and individual features. As with many of Ruth Crawford's works, the three dissonant

²⁸ Seeger notes, "The more rigorously the dissonant fabric is sustained, the better it will be in retrograde motion. Whole sections and whole compositions can be performed backward with either exact or modified relation. This is a form of 'repeat.'" See Seeger, *TENM*, 196. For discussions of palindromes in Ruth Crawford's works, see Straus (1995), 71 and Mark D. Nelson, "In Pursuit of Charles Seeger's Heterophonic Ideal: Three Palindromic Works by Ruth Crawford," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 4 (1986): 458–75.

²⁹ The second movement of *Dissonant Counterpoint* also uses Seeger's "verse form." The works by Beyer performed at this concert were: *Movement for Two Pianos, Excerpts from the Piano Suites 1930–35*, *String Quartet* [no. 1] 1933–34, and *Suite for Soprano and Clarinet* (1934) [later titled, *Three Songs for Clarinet and Soprano*]. For the program notes to Beyer's May 1936 Composers' Forum Concert, see Federal Music Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [hereafter, FMP—LOC], Box 203. Beyer dedicated *Movement for Two Pianos* (1936) and *Suite for Piano* (1939) to Henry Cowell. Thanks also to Melissa de Graaf for providing me with copies of both the programs and question-and-answer sessions to Beyer's 1936 and 1937 Composers' Forum Concerts.

³⁰ On the program for her May 1936 Composers' Forum Concert, Beyer dedicated the first movement of "Excerpts from the Piano Suites" to Ruth Crawford. Beyer dedicated *Movement for Two Pianos* (1936) and *Suite for Piano* (1939) to Henry Cowell.

melodic lines seem to work as autonomous melodic entities, each more concerned with their own dissonant contrapuntal horizontal construction than the harmonies they create when fused together. Although the three upper parts of the first movement do coincide and intersect to create a variety of (largely dissonant) sonorities, Beyer's focus seems to be on the linear aspect of the upper three melodic lines, which each have their own uniquely dissonant melodic motives and features. When combined together, the three dissonant melodic lines weave a highly dissonant contrapuntal fabric, which dramatically contrasts—and even subverts—the markedly tonal borrowed tune by appropriating it and re-setting it in a staunchly dissonant context. From the opening measures of the quartet (previously shown in Example 3.2), the first violin, second violin, and viola each perform their own melodic line; these contrapuntal phrases recur numerous times throughout the movement, although Beyer slightly varies them by using different rhythms, or shifting them into different octaves. Before I explore the more general relationship between this movement and ultramodernism, I will begin by examining some of the structural aspects of the violin and viola lines in more detail.

First violin line

This line is based on a ten-note series (75120E9T46); Table 3.1 charts the appearances of the series throughout the movement.

Table 3.1
Violin I series

Measures	Series	Notes
mm. 1–3	75120E9T46	
mm. 4–7	75120E9T4	• Missing F#
mm. 8–12	75120E9T46(7251)(46)	• add (7251) • (46) repeated
mm. 13–22	75120E9T46(7251)(46) (46) {745}	• Shifts of register • (46) repeated twice • mm. 21–22 = last two measures of cello tune {745}
mm. 23–36	{057} 75120E9T46(72) {9750} (51) {T97} (46) {0T729} (46) {745}	• Series alternates with segments of borrowed tune

N.B. In the table above, repetitions of series segments are shown with (). Melodic segments taken from the cello tune are shown with {}; repetitions of pitches within each segment based on the cello tune are not shown.

Example 3.9 shows a reduction of the opening phrase in the first violin. The line contains ten pitches; no notes are repeated. This ten-note phrase recurs throughout the movement, although subsequent statements are altered with different rhythms, shifts of register, or minimal expansions or contractions (in mm. 4–7, for example, the last F# is omitted). As with many of Crawford’s melodic lines, even consonant references are avoided, and even when they are obliquely referred to (such as the descending major-third-sounding F5 to C#5 in m. 1) they are “dissonated”: the F-C# is notated as a diminished fourth, and is immediately followed by dissonant interval (a semitone C#5 to D5).

The first violin line also reveals Beyer’s concern with inversive symmetry. Many of Beyer’s melodies are noticeably balanced, unfolding as linear manifestations—often in pitch, not pitch-class space—of a markedly symmetrical structure. For example, the first violin melody may be divided into two pentachords (01257) that invert into one

another at I_{11} . Interestingly, the exact midpoint of the violin phrase contains the dyad (C5/B4, m. 2) that serves as the inversional fulcrum for the entire phrase.

Example 3.9
Violin I line

The four pitches that flank this dyad balance around it with their inversional partners in pitch space (C#5/A#4, D5/A4). The remaining pitches (G5, F5; E5, F#5) also pair off into inversionally related dyads, but in pitch-class space, not pitch space (these pairs are shown with brackets in the example). The entire phrase balances around the C/B dyad, inversionally related dyads organized almost completely in (reverse) order and pitch space. Beyer sometimes momentarily addresses the G5, F5/E5, F#5 pitch-space “discrepancy” in subsequent phrases of the movement, such as when she interrupts the violin phrase in m. 9. Here, the phrase sweeps down into the four-octave for a brief parenthetical embellishment, which begins with the “missing” pitch-space inversional partners of G5 and F5 (E4 and F#4) (however, in mm. 10–11 the phrase ends by returning to the original E5 and F#5, first heard in mm. 2–3). The beginning of the phrase repetition in mm. 13–14, which contains a number of register shifts, is also almost entirely symmetric in pitch space, this time around the C6/B5 dyad (the only exception

being the inversive pair F/F# and the repetition of the pitch G, which are all heard in the six-octave).

Example 3.10

Violin I, mm. 8–14

The first violin line also can be parsed into two all-interval tetrachords (AITs) that do not have any notes in common; these two (0146) tetrachords balance around the mid-phrase dyad (C5, B4) by which they invert into one another (see Ex. 3.11 below).³¹ The first of these AITs [1257] is also emphasized in later occurrences of the series, as Beyer expands the series by adding a parenthetical repetition of {7,2,5,1}, in between two statements of the final dyad of the series [46] (see mm. 9–10, mm. 14–15, m. 25 and m. 27).

The first violin line also reflects Beyer's preoccupation with intervallic symmetry; many of Beyer's dissonant lines seem to be based on an orderly, systematically unfolding intervallic structure. Here, the intervallic structure of the series is an almost perfect mirror image, with notes that wedge out from the central C/B dyad. The only exception to the pattern is the tritone A#-E, which is +6, not +4. However, there are good reasons for departing from the pattern here: first, the addition of the tritone A#-E lends a more

³¹ For those readers unfamiliar with the term, an all-interval tetrachord (AIT) is a collection of four pitch classes whose underlying structure contains all six interval classes. There are only two AITs: sc (0137) and sc (0146). The AIT described above, [1257], is a member of the sc (0146).

dissonant quality to the line, which would not sound nearly as “crunchy” if Beyer had maintained the pattern and added another major third. More importantly, if the intervallic pattern were exact, the melody would go from A# to D, which would result not only in a repeated note (D) within the series, but a repeated note that would be heard after only four pitches, resulting in a monotonous, repetitive line—something ultramodern composers actively avoided.

Example 3.11
Violin I series

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. The notes are: A4, B4, C#5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C#6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C#7. Intervallic relationships are indicated by arrows and numbers: +2 (A-B), +4 (B-C#), -1 (C#-D), +2 (D-E), I_C^B (E-F#), -2 (F#-G), +1 (G-A), +6! (A-B), +2 (B-C#). Below the staff, two brackets are shown: [1257] under the first five notes and [469T] under the last five notes. A large arc underneath these brackets is labeled I_C^B.

Second violin line

The second violin line is based on a twenty-note series. Like the first violin line, the series recurs throughout the movement; subsequent statements are slightly altered by shifts of register, and rhythmic expansions or contractions. Table 3.2 (below) charts the appearances of the series throughout the movement.

The melodic line of the second violin (shown in Ex. 3.12, below) shares a number of features with the first violin line, including avoidance of repetition of pitches and avoidance of consonant intervals. Strikingly consonant intervals, such as the ascending perfect fifth A-E, are surrounded by dissonances (here, the perfect fifth is preceded by a tritone, and followed by a semitone).

Table 3.2
Violin II series

Measures	Series	Notes
mm. 1–9	02ET13945867; 854E1567	
mm. 10–17	02ET13945867; 854E1(9)5(4)67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts of register • Added 9 and 4, m. 15
mm. 18–31	0{57}2ET13945867; 854E1(9) {02T9} 67 {02T9} (6)9 {02T974}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts of register • Added 5 and 7, m. 18 • Series alternates with segments of borrowed tune, beginning in m. 25 • Missing 5 in second part of series • Added 9, m. 28
mm. 32–41	45867 854E1(9) {02T974} 02ET139	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Series in different order, begins with 45867 • Missing final three notes of entire series [567] • Series alternates with segments of borrowed tune, beginning in m. 34 • mm. 32–34 = mm. 23–25 • mm. 38–41 = mm. 1–4

N.B. In this table, repetitions of series segments are shown with (). ; indicates completion of an aggregate. Melodic statements taken from the cello tune are shown with {}; repetitions of pitches within each statement taken from the cello tune are not shown.

However, the second violin line expands upon the features of the first violin line in two important ways: first, it contains all twelve chromatic pitches, and second, the entire opening of the melody (mm. 1–5, which contains all twelve chromatic pitches and no repeated notes) is balanced—in pitch space—around the C5/C#5 dyad. As these measures unfold, this symmetry becomes increasingly apparent: the last three pairs of dyads (A4/E5, F5/G#4, and F#5/G4) are successive statements of inversionally-related pairs in pitch space. This twelve-note phrase may be divided into two (012345) hexachords, a tritone apart.

Example 3.12
Violin II line (first twelve pitches)

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. The first six notes are grouped by a bracket and labeled [TE0123]. The next six notes are grouped by another bracket and labeled [456789]. A curved arrow labeled T_6 points from the first group to the second, indicating a transposition by six semitones.

Like the first violin phrase, this phrase is also designed with an underlying symmetric intervallic construction, although this phrase uses a different pattern, as notes incrementally expand outward from the first pitch in the series as the phrase progresses.

Example 3.13
Violin II line, intervallic relationships

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. The first six notes are grouped by a bracket and labeled (013). The next six notes are grouped by another bracket and labeled [9T13]. The next six notes are grouped by a third bracket and labeled [5,8]. The next six notes are grouped by a fourth bracket and labeled [6,7]. The next six notes are grouped by a fifth bracket and labeled (Agg.). The next six notes are grouped by a sixth bracket and labeled [E145]. The final six notes are grouped by a seventh bracket and labeled <6,7>. Curved lines connect the first note to various other notes, labeled with intervals: +2, +1, +3, +4, +5, +6, -1, -2, -3, -4, -5.

It is worth noting that this incrementally unfolding intervallic structure is similar to that of an untitled work in Beyer's pedagogical treatise, *Piano Book—Classical, Romantic*,

Modern.³² (There is some uncertainty as to the exact title of this particular work, as an identical version of this brief piece also appears in the manuscript of *Dissonant Counterpoint*, as “IV.”) Example 3.14 shows the opening phrase of this work; both melodic lines contain phrases based on this kind of slowly unfurling (and largely chromatic) motion, built on a wedge-like structure that unfolds both within and between the parts.

Example 3.14

Excerpt from Beyer’s *Piano Book—Classical, Romantic, Modern* (ca. 1935), mm. 1–9

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a 3/4 time signature. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a *una corda* instruction. The second staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *tre corda* instruction. The score shows a series of chords and melodic lines that unfold over nine measures.

The two violin lines also share a number of subsets with one another, particularly subsets that have deeper analytic significance. The opening trichord of the second violin phrase [EO2] also occurs in the first violin line <2,0,E>; as discussed in the first section of the paper, (013) is prominently featured in the cello phrase, and statements of (013) in the upper string parts serve as a means of creating a structural connection between the (tonal) cello line and the (atonal) violin and viola parts. In addition, the second violin line also contains the AIT [9T13]. While this tetrachord contains different pitches than the two AITs in the first violin line, the AIT in the second violin line does connect with the AIT [469T] that concludes the first violin phrase, as the second violin’s AIT results

³² The manuscript of this treatise (which was never published) is found in Johanna Magdalena Beyer scores, JPB 82-77, Music Division, The New York Library for the Performing Arts, Folder 20.

from the inversion which preserves their shared dyad [9T].³³ This [9T13] tetrachord is further emphasized since it contains the only pitch class (3) that is missing from both the first violin and viola lines—this “missing” pitch completes the aggregate when all three lines are combined together.³⁴

Viola line

Like the violin lines, the viola line also illustrates principles central to dissonant counterpoint: avoidance of repetition and avoidance of consonant intervals. The phrase contains nine pitches; no notes are repeated. When consonant intervals do occur (such as the descending fourth A to D) they are bound by dissonant intervals (here, semitones).

Table 3.3 (below) charts the viola series as it appears throughout the movement. A prominent feature of this line is its recurring chromatic dyads [45], [78], [01], [12], [9T]. Beyer emphasizes these chromatic dyads in mm. 20–33, when the viola begins to appropriate segments of the borrowed tune in alteration with its own. The different segments are arranged to highlight to chromatic flavor of the viola line, which is arranged so that [45], [78], [012], and [9T] subsets sound alongside the borrowed tune.

³³ One might also hear another AIT in the final eight notes of the violin II series. In a similar fashion to the violin AITs just discussed, this AIT [E145] relates to other AIT played in the second violin line [9T13] by the inversion which preserves their shared note [1]. However, this [E145] sonority is more difficult to hear, as it occurs very much in mid-phrase.

³⁴ Completion of the chromatic aggregate will be discussed below.

Table 3.3
Viola series

Measures	Series	Notes
mm. 1–8	45780129T	
mm. 9–19	45780129T (9T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts of register • Repetition of (9T)
mm. 20–33	{057} 45 {975} 78 {0T97} 012 {70T} 9T (9T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Series in same register as mm. 1–8 (rhythms virtually identical) • Series alternates with segments of borrowed tune, beginning in m. 20
mm. 34–41	{057} {02T9} {745} (454)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material based on cello melody, but ends with alternating statements of (45) that recall opening of viola line, in mm. 39–41

N.B. In this table, repetitions of series segments are shown with (). Melodic segments taken from the cello tune are shown with {}; repetitions of pitches within each segment based on the cello tune are not shown.

The viola line also contains a number of connections with the other string parts. First, the viola line is sc 9-11 (01235679T), the complement of the sc of the triad (037) suggested by the staunchly diatonic cello line. The viola line also has a more overt connection with the cello line, as two of the dyads within the viola series [57] and [9T] are also featured in the cello tune (in mm. 1–2, m. 3, and m. 6). The prominent [57] dyad that begins the cello tune also has some intersections with the other string parts, as it not only appears at the beginning of the viola line, but also serves as the opening dyad of the first violin series.

Although superficially the viola line may seem to be the least remarkable of the string parts, it may be parsed in several different ways that yield interesting results. First, if the underlying chronology of the series is maintained, it may be arranged into two

inversionally symmetric tetrachords—[4578], sc (0134) and [9T12], sc (0145)—separated by C4.³⁵

Example 3.15
Viola line

The diagram shows a musical staff with two tetrachords. The first tetrachord is labeled (0134) and the second is labeled (0145). Below the staff, two transformations are shown: [4,5,7] RICH [5,7,8] and [1,2,9] RICH [2,9,T].

On the surface, the viola line does not seem to possess the same degree of intervallic organization in its structure as the violin lines. However, a deeper structural pattern—one that connects the viola line to the violin melodies—emerges if the pitches of the viola line are slightly rearranged to reflect their orientation in pitch space (shown in Ex. 13 below). Here, a clear intervallic symmetry emerges, as in pitch space the line can be neatly organized into two (0134) tetrachords, the first of which [4578] is the tetrachord that begins the viola line in the actual music.³⁶ In this arrangement, each pitch is neatly paired with its inversional partner in pitch space, except for D4, which lacks its inversional partner (Eb4). Interestingly, this “missing” pitch class (3) may also have a deeper connection with Beyer’s mischievous explorations of chromatic completion in this movement.

³⁵ Of course, both of these tetrachords might be further parsed into two trichords [457] and [578], <1,2,9> and <2,9,T>; in both sets of trichords, RICH transforms the first trichord into the second.

³⁶ These (0134) tetrachords are also connected by T₅; perhaps this creates another (tonal) association between the viola and cello lines.

Example 3.16
Viola line, in pitch space

The diagram shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Above the staff, arrows indicate intervals: -1 between F#4 and G4, -2 between G4 and A4, -1 between A4 and B4, a bracketed interval labeled 'missing Eb?' between B4 and C5, -1 between C5 and B4, -2 between B4 and A4, and -1 between A4 and G4. Below the staff, two set classes are identified: [4,5,7,8] under the first four notes (F#4, G4, A4, B4) and [9,T,0,1] under the last four notes (B4, A4, G4, F#4). A large arc labeled T_5 spans from the first set class to the second.

Aggregate completion

Boland (2007) has briefly commented on several instances of the chromatic pitch-class aggregate in some of Beyer's works.³⁷ While it would be markedly incorrect to claim the twelve-note aggregate as a defining feature of Beyer's music, Beyer does seem to cultivate a playful relationship with the chromatic aggregate in this particular movement, as instantiations of all twelve chromatic pitches are relatively rare, and tend to occur at moments that relate to the larger formal structure of the work.³⁸ These

³⁷ See Marguerite Boland, "Experimentation and Process in the Music of Johanna Beyer," published in German translation in *VivaVoce*, no. 76 (2007). This brief article describes only a few very basic features of Beyer's music (such as instrumentation and the use of tone clusters). Unfortunately, this article also (incorrectly) claims that aside from Beyer, Ruth Crawford was "as far as we know, the only other woman actively composing in the New York experimental scene at that time."

³⁸ Ruth Crawford also explored aggregate completion in several different works, but (like Beyer) it was not a defining feature of her compositional style. Straus (1995) notes that the aggregate of all twelve pitch classes "is best understood as a special case of a more general preference for saturating the available chromatic space" (see Straus 1995, 8–16). Burkett (2007) discusses both the avoidance and completion of twelve-tone aggregates in

aggregates also seem to serve as a means of unifying the violin and viola parts, and creating an additional contrast between the dissonant violin/viola lines and the tonal cello tune.

Because of the structure of the violin and viola parts—only the second violin line contains all twelve chromatic pitches—complete statements of the aggregate are relatively uncommon in this movement. In addition, Beyer creates an expansive (twenty-note) series for the second violin line, which also precludes numerous statements of the complete pitch (or pitch-class) aggregate, because of the slow, gradually unfolding structure of the second violin series (for example, in mm. 1–7, two statements of the first violin series occur within a single statement of the second violin series).

Although the rhythms of the violin and viola parts are altered throughout the movement (so that they continually unfold and intersect with one another in different ways), Beyer does seem to structure the lines so that completion of the pitch-class aggregate serves as a subtle signal of—and means of support for—the first violin series. Ultimately, this serves as a clever way of creating a sense of tension (or separation) between the (tonal) borrowed tune and the (atonal) upper string parts.

Measures 1–3, the first statement of the first violin series, also contain the first statement of the complete pitch-class aggregate.³⁹ But what is particularly interesting about these measures is not just that a pitch-class aggregate is completed, but that the

Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, and how these processes relate to the work's formal structure. See Lyn Ellen Burkett, "Ruth Crawford's *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*," in *Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds: Innovation and Tradition in Twentieth-Century American Music*, Ray Allen and Ellie M. Hisama, eds. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 57–72.

³⁹ Boland (2007) has also noticed the aggregate in these measures, which she mentions on p. 6.

“missing” pitches from the first violin series (D# and G#) sound in the second violin and viola at the end of the first violin phrase (shown in Example 3.17). More importantly, the D#5 and G#4 balance—in pitch space, not pitch class space—around the C5/B4 inversional dyad that serves as the referential axis of inversion for the first violin line, serving as a means of unifying the violin and viola lines, and reinforcing the autonomy of the first violin phrase.⁴⁰

Example 3.17
Aggregate in mm. 1–3

Violin I (7 5 1 2 0 E 9 T 4) Missing 3, 8... (6)

Violin II (3!)

Viola (8!)

Cello (*f* *marcato*)

⁴⁰ Note also that m. 3 is very much in the middle of the cello phrase, which also helps to create a sense of disconnect between the borrowed tune and the upper string parts.

Other moments of aggregate completion in the movement also occur at the conclusion of the first violin series—and when the cello is in mid-phrase—but these other aggregates are pitch-class, not pitch-space, aggregates. These pitch-class aggregate completions occur in m. 12 (end of the third violin 1 phrase), m. 21 (end of the fourth violin 1 phrase), m. 36 (brief eighth note in cello, end of fifth violin 1 phrase, before brief “codetta” in mm. 37–41), m. 40 (final measures of chromatic “codetta” that ends the fifth violin 1 phrase).

Example 3.18

Aggregate completion in mm. 1–3 and its relation to Violin I line

"Missing" inversional dyad:
aggregate completed by Violin II
and Viola at end of first Violin I series

I_{C5}^{B4} (except for dyads marked *,
which invert into one another in pc-space)

Another example of how aggregate completion helps to create a sense of unity between the violin and viola lines—ultimately furthering the feeling of separation between the cello line and upper string parts—occurs in mm. 42–48. Here, the upper string parts have a radically different texture from what they play during the rest of the movement, as they slowly slide towards one another in a kind of chromatic wedge. In these measures, the upper string parts are unified by their rhythm, shared *pizzicato*, and *ppp* dynamic, and the violin lines wedge towards one another in contrary motion, forming a chromatic wedge that begins and ends on G and C#/D♭. The viola line deviates from the pure chromatic pattern slightly, as its first two notes are the whole step F-G, but the rest of the viola line spans the pitches “missing” from the violin parts, driving up chromatically from G to C. By the end of this upper string phrase (m. 48)—which concludes well before the borrowed tune—the complete pitch-class aggregate has unfolded in the upper string parts.⁴¹

⁴¹ One could try to argue that the pitch-class C, which concludes the viola line (and completes the aggregate) in m. 48, is also heard throughout the cello line in these measures (in m. 41, m. 43, m. 45, and m. 47). However, these notes—like the other pitches in the cello line throughout the movement, which duplicate pitch classes heard in the upper string parts—seem to sound apart from the chromatic space of the upper string parts. In addition, even if we “count” the cello Cs towards the pitch-class aggregate, it

Example 3.19
Aggregate, mm. 42–49

42

Violin I
pizzicato
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
ppp

Violin II
pizzicato
7 6 5 4 3 2 1
ppp

Viola
pizzicato
5 7 8 9 T E 0
ppp

Cello
f marcato

Tensions with ultramodernism

However well these dissonant contrapuntal lines might seem to embody the spirit of ultramodernism, overt tensions remain between this movement and ultramodernism more generally. Beyer's idiosyncratic choice to use a borrowed tune represents a clear departure from the ultramodernist style, which reifies compositional innovation and originality. Although ultramodern composers are a highly diverse group with a broad range of contrasting and individualistic styles, a characteristic feature they held in common was a veneration of distinctly independent musical style—one that relinquished the established forms and sonorities of the European classical tradition, and one that also turned away from the rekindling of these traditions in modern neoclassicism.⁴² Beyer's choice to use a borrowed tune that is not only unabashedly tonal, but one that has clear

still would not be completed until the viola's B3 in m. 47, which is still in mid-phrase of the cello line.

⁴² As Straus cogently puts it, "The ultramoderns because the first group to turn away from Europe, both physically and mentally. . . the ultramoderns tried in various ways to create an authentically American mode of musical expression." See Straus (1995), 215.

associations with one of the “masterworks” of the European canon, represents a marked divergence from these ideas. Furthermore, not only does Beyer use numerous statements of a borrowed (European) tune in her work, but a borrowed tune that is staunchly, unequivocally tonal—ultimately weaving a contrapuntal fabric in which one of the melodic strands expressly violates one of the fundamental principles of dissonant counterpoint, Seeger’s insistence upon “the establishment of dissonance, rather than consonance, as the rule.”⁴³ Beyer’s choice to incorporate this tune into the movement thus creates tension from two different angles: not only is the stability of the tonal borrowed tune actively undermined by the dissonant violin and viola lines, but the “authenticity” of the “dissonated,” ultramodern texture is also compromised, since one of the melodic strands (the tonal cello line) does not “fit” neatly into Beyer’s ultramodernist realm; in some sense, both tonality *and* ultramodernism are called into question.

An additional layer of understanding might be added to the “battle” between tonal and atonal in Beyer’s quartet when one considers the historical moment during which the work was completed. Because of the bleak economic conditions and widespread suffering caused by the Great Depression, by 1936 most of Beyer’s ultramodern colleagues had moved away from the stylistic traits they had previously embraced, turning towards a more accessible, less esoteric compositional style.⁴⁴ Some even abandoned dissonant counterpoint altogether, such as the Seegers, who began working extensively with American folk music. As Charles Seeger noted,

⁴³ Seeger (1930), 26.

⁴⁴ The move to tonality by another composer in the ultramodern circle, Vivian Fine, will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

We discovered the Anglo-American folk music at the same time in the early thirties and were both carried away with it. It was partly the reaction to the depression in which we were very much embroiled, and it might be partly a sense of the increasing pointlessness of the composition of those days. . . . Ruth and I were completely flabbergasted by the situation—that here we were—people who called ourselves American composers and we didn't know anything about America or American music, so we simply decided that we would lay aside for a while our interest in dissonant counterpoint and try to find out something about America.⁴⁵

Perhaps a connection might be drawn between Beyer's choice to set this well-known, markedly tonal tune against a dramatically dissonant texture and the larger trend by modernist composers to move towards music that was more readily intelligible, and geared towards a wider audience. And perhaps this conflict—between tonal and atonal, accessible and elite—is directly written into the musical fabric of Beyer's quartet.

Yet problems remain with both of the discussions of borrowing in this work presented thus far, whether it is Beyer's "misreading" of a particular common-practice work, or her defense of (and departure from) the ultramodern style. The issue involves the uncritical application of ideas of "anxiety" and "misreading" to this particular work by this particular composer. As a poverty-stricken immigrant—and a woman—Beyer (unlike the canonic twentieth-century composers Straus discusses) clearly composed on the edges of musical society (and even on the fringes of ultramodernism). Although she was an avid correspondent, penning letters and sending scores to major conductors (such as Sevitzy and Koussevitzky), most of her compositions remained unperformed and unpublished during her lifetime. Furthermore, a number of scholars (such as Gilbert and Gubar) have noted that Bloom's manly discourse about "annihilating forefathers" and "neutralizing and destroying patrimony" seems inappropriate for describing the unique

⁴⁵ Comments by Charles Seeger, quoted in Straus (1995), 212.

situation of female authors, who often worked in relative isolation, and without knowledge of a female creative lineage that preceded them. For Gilbert and Gubar, a female author experiences an “anxiety of authorship,” a “radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her.”⁴⁶ As an “outsider” (and female) composer, Beyer seems to both reflect and go against these ideas. Unlike Ruth Crawford, who turned away from composing art music for almost two decades, Beyer never retreated from her compositional work, composing more than fifty pieces (a number of them large-scale works for orchestra or band) during a decade in which she struggled with poverty and illness. Yet as a female composer, Beyer also clearly experienced the hostility and opposition often faced by women who attempted to enter the elite realm of misogyny-ridden modernism, and was greatly pained that she never received sufficient attention for her compositions.⁴⁷ Clearly, some further context is needed here, in order to examine these complex issues more fully. In the following section, I would like to explore some of the ways in which Beyer’s choice to use this borrowed melody might intersect with issues of gender and Beyer’s experiences as an unmarried woman ultramodernist composer.

⁴⁶ Gilbert and Gubar (2000 [1979]), 48–9.

⁴⁷ Although Beyer completed a number of large-scale works for orchestra and wind ensemble, they were never published or performed, which pained her deeply; this issue was previously discussed in Chapter 2.

III. “Re-visioning” Mozart, marriage, womanhood

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.⁴⁸

—Adrienne Rich

As is well known, women and modernism have shared a turbulent and conflicting relationship, and women composers—particularly those who wrote modernist music—faced a number of difficulties during this era.⁴⁹ Catherine Parsons Smith has given a detailed account of the inimical effects modernism had on female composers, claiming that many (including Ruth Crawford) were rendered helpless against these assaults, ultimately abandoning composition altogether rather than confront a modernist aesthetic riddled with misogyny.⁵⁰ More recently, Ellie Hisama has argued that Ruth Crawford and Marion Bauer, rather than being incapacitated by these issues, actually managed to

⁴⁸ Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979–1985* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 35.

⁴⁹ Scholars in a variety of disciplines continue to argue about the relationship between women and modernism. For just a few examples, see Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson, eds., *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-Readings* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997); Janet Lyon, “Gender and Sexuality” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, Walter Kalaidjian, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston, eds., *Modernism, Inc.: Body, Memory, Capital* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *The Gender in Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Catherine Parsons Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility’: On Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender*, Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 90–106.

create against them, composing works in the 1930s that intersected with their own personal experiences and political ideas.⁵¹

Yet it is important to acknowledge that “anti-woman attitudes” in the 1930s were not only a kind of “backlash” against feminist gains in prior decades (such as the Nineteenth Amendment), but also a result of the bleak economic conditions of the Great Depression—an era in which overwhelming unemployment and financial difficulties fostered a return to late-nineteenth century ideologies of domestic womanhood, and a proliferation of idealized conceptions of marriage and domesticity. For example, a lengthy article in *New York Times* entitled “The College Girl Puts Marriage First” noted that for a college-educated woman, “her career now ranks second, although she hopes to fit it into her plans”; the article also claimed that 83% of Bryn Mawr students preferred marriage to a career, and 94% would abandon their career if it caused conflicts in their marriage.⁵² Even prominent, “strong-minded” women such as Eleanor Roosevelt sometimes replicated these views: for example, her 1933 book (entitled, *It’s Up to the Women*) contains lengthy chapters on domestic issues—including “Budgets,” “Family Health,” “When Your Children Marry,” as well as more than fifteen pages of menus and recipes for “the mother of a family”—*before* her discussion of working women.⁵³ During

⁵¹ Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This work also includes chapters on works by Miriam Gideon, which were composed well after the 1930s.

⁵² Eunice Fuller Barnard, “The College Girl Puts Marriage First,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1933. For another fascinating discussion of the career/marriage “problem” from this era, see Jane Allen, “You May Have My Job: A Feminist Discovers Her Home,” *Forum and Century*, vol. 87 (April 1932): 228–231.

⁵³ Roosevelt notes that “women, the wives and mothers, are the inspiration of the homes” (20) and that “it is up to the women to organize their households and themselves, to see

these lean years, working women were often considered problematic, as “stealing” jobs from men, who were viewed as more “deserving” of both jobs and relief aid, because of their traditional role as household breadwinners.⁵⁴ In both contemporaneous culture and public policy, the Depression was typically construed as a male problem, a gendered realm in which the experience of the female poor—particularly, the single and unmarried female poor—was overlooked, rendered invisible. Until recent years, accounts of the 1930s often followed the discourse of the era, marginalizing women in the historical narrative (or even omitting them from it entirely), but scholars have now begun to explore the various ways that women worked, lived, and created during these stark and often desperate times.

Single women (sometimes termed “extra women” or “lone women” in this era) often faced exclusion and ostracizing during these difficult years, even in large cities with organized social-service networks. In New York City, the Emergency Employment Committee (founded in 1930) gave priority for work-relief funds to married men with families; although the Emergency Work Bureau (the administrative agency of the EEC) received numerous applications from women, single women without dependents were not considered eligible.⁵⁵ “Unattached” women in New York City were also not eligible for

that they live within their incomes...” (248). See Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *It's Up to the Women* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1933).

⁵⁴ For more information on women, work, and the Great Depression, see Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that no women served on either the administrative or executive levels of the Emergency Employment Committee. See Elaine S. Abelson, “The Times That Tried Only Men’s Souls: Women, Work, and Public Policy in the Great Depression,” in

Home Relief aid until the winter of 1933–34—four years after the Depression began; when finally granted, Home Relief aid was thought to provide “a sort of husband substitute and that so-needed sense of security” for single women.⁵⁶ But single women were also considered a kind of cultural problem. Numerous articles in major publications view unmarried women negatively, sometimes even offering medical or scientific evidence of the superiority of marriage, such as a 1936 *New York Times* article, entitled “Marriage Held Aid to Mental Health,” which noted that successful marriages are “a sign of good mental health” and “serve as an indicator against the probability of latently developing mental disorders.”⁵⁷ Some writings offer more concrete solutions for the “problem” of the single woman, such as surgery on the female adrenal gland (said to correct “principal personality changes” and “abnormalities” in women, including “aversion to marital relationship” and “a general drift away from feminine toward decidedly masculine traits”).⁵⁸ Even the best-selling *Live Alone and Like It: A Guide for the Extra Woman*, a flippant, upbeat self-help book penned by *Vogue* editor Marjorie Hillis, noted that “an extra woman is a problem,” musing further that:

Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single, Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 219–238.

⁵⁶ Quote taken from Gertrude Steel-Brooke’s 1936 social-work thesis (quoted in Abelson, p. 230). The Home Relief Bureau officially denied aid to unattached women beginning in 1932. See Abelson (2008), 219–238. “The Times That Tried Only Men’s Souls: Women, Work, and Public Policy in the Great Depression,” In *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 219–238. For a fascinating study of gender and homelessness during this era, see Elaine S. Abelson, “‘Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them’: Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression, 1930–34,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 104–127.

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 12 April 1936. The article also notes that “men, more than women, are the special beneficiaries” of matrimony’s mental-health benefits.

⁵⁸ William L. Laurence, “Women’s Personalities Changed By New Adrenal Gland Operation,” *New York Times*, 28 October 1935.

...the problem of the solitary woman is, of course, infinitely more intricate than that of the solitary male. The lonely male, however unprepossessing, really has no problem. He just looks for an unattached female—usually equally unprepossessing—and goes on looking until he finds one.⁵⁹

“Anti-woman” attitudes also seemed to infiltrate music, particularly in regards to women atonal composers. As Judith Tick has shown, many of Charles Ives’s fiery, polemical writings rant about the “effeminacy” or “emasculatation” he perceived in music and performances, particularly those that did not conform to his modernist ideals.⁶⁰ Even the future husband of Ruth Crawford subscribed to “anti-woman” sentiments, initially refusing to teach her composition because he thought her works were “just improvisation on paper.”⁶¹ Charles Seeger later reflected on his opinions during this time, noting:

I was very snooty in those days about women composers and had come more or less to the conclusion that the great tradition of European music, say from 1200 to about 1930, had been created mostly by men and it was a bit absurd to expect women to fit themselves into a groove that was so definitely flavored with machismo (and of course, the early music of the twentieth century... was machismo with a capital M).⁶²

Yet however harsh these kinds of sentiments were, their existence does not mean that women could not—or did not—continue to write atonal music, or try to fight against these misogynistic ideas.⁶³ One important opportunity for women composers in the

⁵⁹ Marjorie Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It: A Guide for the Extra Woman* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1936). This book lingered on the best-seller list for months. Interestingly, it was reprinted—with the new subtitle “The Classic Guide for the Single Woman,” and a cheerful pink cover—in 2008.

⁶⁰ Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 80–106.

⁶¹ Tick (1997), 116.

⁶² Wilding-White (1988), 445 [this passage is also quoted in Hisama (2001), 34].

⁶³ For example, since the mid-1980s, literary scholars have recovered and analyzed radical writing by women in the 1930s, most of which had been previously ignored (or

1930s—particularly women composers of atonal and ultramodern works—was the Composers’ Forum, a concert series (featuring both men and women composers) run by the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Music Project. In New York City, Composers’ Forum concerts between 1935 and 1940 featured works by more than fifty different women composers.⁶⁴ An important feature of these concerts was the question-and-answer sessions that followed each musical performance, during which audience members submitted written questions for the composers. As Melissa de Graaf has shown, many women ultramodern composers had profoundly negative experiences in these post-concert discussion sessions, as they were subjected to criticisms, taunts, and degrading comments, such as “Have you read *Live Alone and Like It* [discussed above]?” “Did you try hard to be original?” or “[your] variations on ‘doom-de-doom’ are really not sufficiently infantile.”⁶⁵ Beyer also faced similar attitudes of hostility and derision in

even forgotten entirely) by scholars. See Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz, eds., *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930–1940* (New York: Feminist Press, 1987); Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire: Women’s Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and several reprints by Feminist Press, including Tess Slesinger, *The Unpossessed* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1984 [first published, 1934]), and Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987 [first published, 1929]).

⁶⁴ This figure includes both student and professional composers; fifteen different “professional” composers appeared in the Forum concerts during these five years. For more information on women in the New York Composers’ Forum Concerts, see Melissa de Graaf, “Documenting Music in the New Deal: The New York Composers’ Forum Concerts, 1935–1940” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2006), particularly ch. 4 and Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix D; and Melissa de Graaf, “‘Never Call Us Lady Composers’: Gendered Reception in the New York Composers’ Forum, 1935–1940,” *American Music* (Fall 2008): 277–308. The following material about women in the Composers’ Forum concerts is based on work by Melissa de Graaf. I would also like to thank Melissa de Graaf for generously sharing copies of transcripts from Beyer’s Composers’ Forum concerts with me.

⁶⁵ de Graaf (2006), fn. 83, 152 and de Graaf (2008), 296. In addition, Ruth Crawford’s question-and-answer session also included the comment, “Do you really believe that your

her two Composers' Forum concerts (in 1936 and 1937), during which Beyer's ultramodern works were described as containing "pathological sounds and noises"; audience members asked if her works were "mere brain children" or if they "emanate[d] from the heart."⁶⁶ Beyer's gender was even directly connected with her compositions after her 1936 concert, when an audience member remarked:

Miss Beyer, you seem to have gone your male preceptors one better in search for strange and ineffective tonal combinations. Have you consciously adopted Rudyard Kipling's statement, "The female of the species is deadlier than the male" as a guiding principle in your composition?⁶⁷

Beyer's difficulties were perhaps compounded by the fact that she was not only a woman, but a "foreigner" (even though she had become a naturalized US citizen)—and of German heritage, no less. Even worse, Beyer was unmarried, a dangerous "extra woman" who could not attempt to soften or mitigate her ultramodern works by drawing on a more acceptably "feminine" identity, such as wife or mother. (For example, Ruth Crawford remarked that she had been "composing babies" for several years, during her Composers' Forum concert question-and-answer session.⁶⁸)

But however traumatic these post-concert discussions may have been, the Composers' Forum remains an important example of the ways in which women

music is the future music of America? If so, I pray for its deliverance." (de Graaf 2008, 296). de Graaf also describes how some women received "positive" feedback that directly related to their physical appearance, such as remarks made after Alda Astori's concert, where an audience member noted that "Your music is indeed reflective of your beautiful self. Charming and delightful." Quoted in de Graaf (2008), 286.

⁶⁶ Composers' Forum Transcripts, May 1936 and May 1937, quoted in de Graaf (2008), 294–95.

⁶⁷ Excerpt taken from Melissa J. de Graaf, "The Records of the New York Composers' Forum: The Documentary Motive and Music in the 1930s," *Notes* (June 2008): 697, Figure 2. In response to this question, the transcript notes that "Miss Beyer bowed graciously and the audience laughed."

⁶⁸ Quoted in Tick (1997), 223.

composers fought to preserve their work, and even while being subjected to animosity and derision, battling against these criticisms and ideas to have their voices heard (both musically and literally). Beyer's two Composers' Forum concerts featured performances of approximately ten of her works, and remain one of the most—if not the most—important venues to feature her music.⁶⁹ In addition, Beyer's experience with the Composers' Forum served as the basis for two of her choral compositions (*Federal Music Project* and *Composers' Forum-Laboratory*), which parody both the Composers' Forum and the Federal Music Project as a silly, overly intellectual enterprise. These works serve as a clear example of how a woman composer might be subjected to derision, sarcasm, and scorn, but also (quite literally) have the power to “write against” these experiences, ultimately subverting and resisting “anti-woman” attitudes, rather than being incapacitated by them.

Beyer and marriage

Although she never married, Beyer's rather unconventional views on marriage may be gleaned from her letters, which serve as an important window into an “extra” woman's feelings and ideas about marriage during an era in which both marriage and domesticity were so highly valued. More than one hundred letters from Beyer to Henry Cowell have survived, and these letters chronicle the depth and range of their

⁶⁹ The works featured on Beyer's 1936 and 1937 concerts were *Movement for Two Pianos*, *Suite for Soprano and Clarinet* (three movements), *String Quartet no. 1* (four movements), *Excerpts from the Piano Suites*, *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, *Suite for Clarinet and Bassoon*, *Suite for Violin and Piano*, and *Quintet for Woodwinds*. With the exception of *Movement for Two Pianos*, all of these are lengthy, multi-movement works. (It is unclear whether or not the *Quintet for Woodwinds* was actually performed at the concert; a hand-written note in the FMP archive in the LOC listed it as “not performed.”)

relationship, which had both musical and personal components.⁷⁰ Beyer was an invaluable resource for Cowell during his incarceration in San Quentin, working tirelessly on his behalf in a variety of different capacities.⁷¹ As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the two also shared a close musical relationship: Cowell dedicated his *Rhythmicana* to Beyer, who also performed the work, and Beyer dedicated several works to Cowell, including *Movement for Two Pianos* (1936) and *Suite for Piano* (1939). Beyer also appeared as a “guest lecturer” in Cowell’s course at the New School in 1941.⁷²

Although it is currently impossible to definitively state whether or not Beyer and Cowell ever had a romantic relationship (particularly because the overwhelming majority of surviving letters are the ones Cowell received from Beyer, not vice versa), the two did share a significant personal connection, particularly given Beyer’s devotion to Cowell

⁷⁰ Cowell papers-NYPL, especially Box 2, Folders 1–5 and Box 124, Folders 2 and 3. Published sources for biographical information on Beyer (previously cited in Chapter 2), include Kennedy and Polansky (1996) and Beal (2008).

⁷¹ For more information, see Chapter 2. As is well known, Cowell was arrested in California on the evening of May 21, 1936, on “morals charges.” For more information on Cowell’s imprisonment, see Michael Hicks, “The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 44, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 92–119; Michael Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), especially 134–49, and Leta E. Miller and Rob Collins, “The Cowell-Ives Relationship: A New Look at Cowell’s Prison Years,” *American Music*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 473–92.

Beyer was an avid correspondent, writing letters not only to Cowell, but to Olive Cowell, Henrietta Cowell, as well as contacting Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, Charles Ives, and many others. A list that Olive Cowell created of people to help with Cowell’s defense (entitled “Important Persons Who Will Write Letters”) lists “Miss J.M. Beyer...a composer friend who will get statements from others.” Beyer, the thirty-fourth entry on the list, is clearly in good company—Martha Graham is the thirty-second name on the list, and Edgard Varese is the thirty-seventh name on the list. See Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 127, Folder 15.

⁷² Polansky and Kennedy (1996) have also speculated that Beyer’s *Crynab* (for orchestra) is an anagram of their two names (see p. 739 of their article).

during his imprisonment and after his release.⁷³ Cowell was arrested on “morals charges” for his sexual encounters with teenage boys, and had relationships with men throughout his life. Cowell also had relationships with women: he was married to Sidney Roberston from 1941 until his death, and also had a number of relationships with other women, including Else Schmolke. Like Beyer, Schmolke was German (and older than Cowell); Cowell and Schmolke had an affair in Germany (they also lived together there), and Cowell subsequently attempted (unsuccessfully) to arrange for her immigration to the United States so that they could marry.⁷⁴ However, the most fascinating aspect of the

⁷³ Beyer’s letters to Cowell are highly conflicting and inconsistent, ranging from passionate, almost cliché expressions of devotion (such as a letter of 29 October 1935, which contains a lengthy love poem by T.O. Robinson, and is signed “Persephone,” which will be discussed in more detail below) to insistently platonic admiration. For example, see Beyer’s letter of 7 August 1940: “When you misunderstood again my letter and came and said; ‘I do not want a love-affair.’ *I spoke of closeness and companionship, but that means to me not sex* [my emphasis],” Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1. In an earlier letter of 24 June 1936, Beyer writes: “I do not love your body, that is secondary to me, I love you, it is a very fine thing and I am happy in it. Remember what I wrote you once in the very beginning? Well, that still holds and always shall. You shall always find a true friend in me, no matter how your outcome [Cowell had just been arrested in California]; loving you, means to serve the idea. But at the same time I am a temperamental fullblooded type, perfectly normal, yet I live chaste, despite all the chances of the world. Fortunately, I find an outlet in my work and once in a while I make a slip, by writing a love letter to you. A great crime in your eyes, not in mine...” Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

However, in a 1937 letter Beyer dismissed the occasional passionate letters she had sent to Cowell in 1936 and 1937, claiming that “some sort of love-letters” were an integral part of her “plan” to arrange a marriage with Cowell. See letter from Beyer to Olive Cowell (30 August 1937), Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 3 [a fuller excerpt from this letter is discussed in more detail below].

⁷⁴ Cowell seems to have had sexual relationships with both men and women. He planned to marry Edna Smith in 1922 (Smith was tragically killed in a train accident in April 1922), see Hicks (2002), 108–109. Cowell met Schmolke in Germany in 1925 (they lived together while he was in Germany) and claimed that she “was the first woman with whom he had intimate relations.” Cowell tried to bring Schmolke to the United States in 1932, but the Nazi government would not let Schmolke immigrate. See Hicks (2002), 127–28, and 135. Cowell also discussed his relationship with Schmolke in his July 6, 1936 Defense Statement (reprinted in Hicks 2002, 162–63). As part of his defense,

Beyer/Cowell correspondence is not the salacious question of a possible sexual relationship between them; but rather, what these letters reveal about Beyer's remarkably untraditional views of marriage, which are especially noteworthy given Beyer's position as a single woman in an era in which "home" and "domesticity" were often lauded as central to a woman's existence.

Rather than parroting conventional ideas of marriage, Beyer's letters reveal a different view, one that seems remarkably practical, frank, and forward-looking. Interestingly, many of these letters were written during the summer of 1936, while Beyer was completing her String Quartet No. 2, and shortly after Cowell's arrest. Beyer's letters showcase her witty, sensitive, and forthright spirit—a woman who courageously asserted "...I detested wanting, groping females. . . I am not a set piece of so many molecule's [sic] I am an ever changing something; hope to stay so."⁷⁵ In a June 1936 letter—in which Beyer proclaims "I personally believe that freedom in marriage is the only tie"—she not only describes in detail her willingness to have an open, arranged marriage with Cowell, but even how she could financially support both of them:

In case of need, I would stand up for you, marry you, if you are willing, but with this understanding that you should be always as free as before, for I am a couple of years older and have no right to spoil your life. If you fall in love with somebody you are free to go and leave entirely. I personally believe freedom in marriage is the only tie. If you should not have work just for a temporary time, I am able to pull you through. I know what I am talking about and I am strong enough to do it. I hope you don't mind my frankness.⁷⁶

Cowell also composed a document entitled "Synopsis of My Sex Life," in which he described his relationship with Schmolke and others. This document is in Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 127, Folder 7.

⁷⁵ Ironically, Beyer wrote these statements in a letter to Cowell dated 7 August 1940, after their relationship began to disintegrate following Cowell's release from prison (and before Cowell's 1941 marriage to Sidney Robertson). See Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1. For more on Beyer's relationship with Cowell, see Amy Beal (2004).

⁷⁶ Beyer to Cowell, 24 June 1936, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

Three months later, in a letter to Mrs. Olive Cowell about her son, Beyer echoes some of the similar sentiments:

I wish you to tell Henry for me that I shall always love him deeply, but he must not get disturbed over it and think I am trying to tie him down, on the contrary. I should be very happy if he should find a younger woman and the right one, my love is not of a possessive type, I would never accept anything which would not be given spontaneously. To be allowed to be his friend is a great privilege to me and makes me very happy. I shall be there if he needs me, if he does not need me, I shall stay away. Don't think this attitude comes from an old heart, no, it is only too very very young. But I have trained myself all my life, for I have seen life in all it's phases, I have seen life as it is.⁷⁷

The next year, in another letter from Beyer to Mrs. Olive Cowell, Beyer describes in detail her offer to marry Henry as an attempt to help his case:

I have been wanting to write you of the following: I might be wrong, but I still feel, that, if the authorities are informed of the engagement to marry between Henry and myself, which was prior to this confinement at S.Quentin, the case might be looked upon from a different angle. I hope I don't shock you with these statements. They are true, they are not true, just the way you look upon it. There has been some sort of a tie between Henry and myself since years. Either consciously or unconsciously, Henry has wanted to know me closer, I have definite proof, that he is not a confirmed homo-sexual, if one at all. But, because I am a very proud girl, and a few years older than he, I have not responded to his shy, yet insistent pleas. Had I known, what the future was to bring, I would have encouraged him. That is, where I feel guilty! At times it is bearing down on me.

The first fact [? test?] of reaction to Henry's case from "civilized society" resulted in the offer to stand up for Henry, marry him, if he is willing, but with the understanding, that he was to be free as before. And if, in the case of time, he should fall in love with a younger woman, he should be entirely free. I entrusted a friend [Bertha Reynolds?] with all this, it was not meant to get direct to Henry. But I started to write some sort of love-letters to Henry (this was necessary in the plan) and Henry began to worry. This resulted again in my frank letter to Henry about my offer. I never even expected a letter from him, despite that, he was deeply aroused and we were to discuss matters—marriage, at a possible meeting. How much Henry has told you of this, I do not know. Of course, after his confinement to S. Qu. he asked me not to count on him in the future, as we could not make plans for so many years ahead.

⁷⁷ Beyer to Mrs. Cowell, 22 September 1936, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

Now, please, don't think for a moment, that I want to tie Henry. It is my most sincere wish now as always: to be of help. If there should be a possibility of saying: Henry is engaged (one does not need to give the exact time of engagement) marriage has been detained only by prison walls—if therein should lie a chance to get him free, why, please, do steps towards it.⁷⁸

These complicated and conflicting letters reveal the profound complexity of Beyer and Cowell's relationship, the exact nature of which may never be fully known. Beyer's motivations for outlining this arrangement—whether a result of her deep respect for Cowell as a musician, because she loved him, had actually been engaged to him at some point, had been romantically involved with him, or some combination of these—will probably never be fully understood. Yet what is particularly fascinating about these letters is how they directly “write against” dominant ideologies of domesticity that were so lauded in this era, describing instead a practical, unconventional marriage that is something altogether different. In these letters, Beyer not only explicitly envisions a marriage in which “freedom” for both parties prevails, but actively exploits the much-lauded domestic institution, as a means of attempting to “prove” Cowell's “respectability” (heterosexuality). Ultimately, these complex and heartfelt letters first serve as an example of just how powerful and widespread these domestic ideologies were in this era, but also how they might be simultaneously engaged with—and, more importantly, actively subverted and exploited by women. Moreover, these letters also lend insight into some of the circumstances Beyer herself was facing, as she was completing her String Quartet No. 2.

⁷⁸ Beyer to Olive Cowell, 30 August 1937, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 3.

Marriage, gender, and String Quartet No. 2

Although music and (auto)biography do not always intersect with one another, many of these contextual issues seem to have deep resonances with Beyer's quartet. Before I return to the music, I'd like to take a moment to clarify my intellectual position. First, following Joan Scott, I make a distinction between *sex* (a biological designation) and *gender* (the sociocultural organization of perceived differences between the sexes, used to create and sustain power relationships between and among certain kinds of bodies).⁷⁹ Therefore, I am not interested in making essentialist arguments: there is a vast difference between the shallow claim "women, because of their biological sex, compose this way" and the more contextually based argument, "a work may be influenced by a woman's experiences of gender and womanhood in a particular era and cultural setting." In addition, I am not trying to argue about Beyer's intentionality—there is obviously no way to unequivocally determine whether she purposefully intended to encode these exact meanings into this particular musical work—but rather, that one way of interpreting this quartet might be to explore some of the intersections between the music and ideologies

⁷⁹ Judith Butler defines gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* [her emphasis]" in her classic work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

Scott, like most feminists, sees gender as a fluid category—something that can change according to one's sociocultural setting, and is influenced by other factors (race, class, sexuality—to name just a few). For her lucid discussions of sex and gender (from which the definitions above are taken), see Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–1075; and Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), especially 1–11. Feminists continue to debate these terms: see also Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Wendy Cealey Harrison, "The Shadow and the Substance: The Sex/Gender Debate" in Kathy Davis, Mary Evans, and Judith Lorber, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008 [first published, 2006]), 35–52.

about marriage and womanhood that were circulating (in both Beyer's personal life and her larger cultural milieu) while this piece was composed. These contextual issues are particularly salient given the timing of the writing of this quartet, since Beyer completed the final manuscript of this work during the first month of Cowell's imprisonment.⁸⁰ The different readings offered throughout this chapter are not exclusive; rather, a listener might engage with this piece in any number of ways. But since this piece remains something of an anachronism in Beyer's oeuvre because of its use of quotation, and because the one borrowed melody used centers around marriage, these aspects of the work seem to invite an additional level of interpretation—one that also engages issues of gender—and one that explores the various ways in which Beyer seems to surreptitiously subvert the agency of the borrowed melody, perhaps as a means of undermining Mozart—or even marriage itself.

Concealment

A number of feminist theorists have discussed the ways in which women authors “write against” narratives and situations, their own characters or plots drawing on various strategies of concealment, in which hidden details are obscured within more overt

⁸⁰ It is not clear exactly how much of the final version of the quartet was completed when Cowell was incarcerated. In any case, the two had been separated for months, since Cowell had been in California since December 1935 (see Hicks 1991, 95). The final manuscript has (in Beyer's hand) a date of July 1936. In a June 1936 letter to Cowell, Beyer mentions that she had finished the quartet, but later in this letter she also asks Cowell a number of questions about notating the viola part and mentions that she is having difficulties working because of her feelings about his arrest. Beyer writes, “Henry, dear...There is no getting around it, my mind is constantly with you, no possibility of concentration for work. A good thing I had finished my new String-Quartet, but I have not started copying it and there is not the least sign of ambition. I had planned to start an orchestral work but all hope is gone, at least that is the state of mind I am in now. How long I can bear this, I do not know, it seems unbearable now and I feel sure I will burst up one way or another, let it burst—” See letter from Beyer to Cowell, June 9, 1936, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2.

elements. For example, Showalter has described women's writing as rife with concealment, noting the potential for women's works to use "a double-voiced discourse, containing a 'dominant' and a 'muted' story."⁸¹ Gilbert and Gubar have explored hiddenness as a form of duplicity, used by women in their creative works "both to express and to camouflage."⁸² Gilbert and Gubar discuss Anne Brontë's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which centers on a female protagonist (Helen Graham) who longs to become an artist, but conceals both her identity and her desires in her works. As a girl, Helen sketches the face of the man she loves on the *back* of her paintings. Helen's anxiety about her creative works continues throughout the novel: even when she becomes a professional artist, Helen signs her landscape paintings with false initials.⁸³

One particularly fascinating connection with concealment in this quartet involves a small yet significant detail found on the manuscript.⁸⁴ Beyer almost always signed her works "J.M. Beyer," presumably using initials for her first and middle name as a means of disguising her gender when submitting her works for contests or when being considered for performances; this practice was far from uncommon for women composers, even during this era.⁸⁵ At first glance, both the score and parts (clearly in

⁸¹ See Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8/2 (Winter 1981): 179–205. Hisama (2001) applies Showalter's ideas to the third movement of Ruth Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*.

⁸² Gilbert and Gubar (2000 [1979]), 81.

⁸³ This novel is discussed in Gilbert and Gubar (2000 [1979]), 80–83.

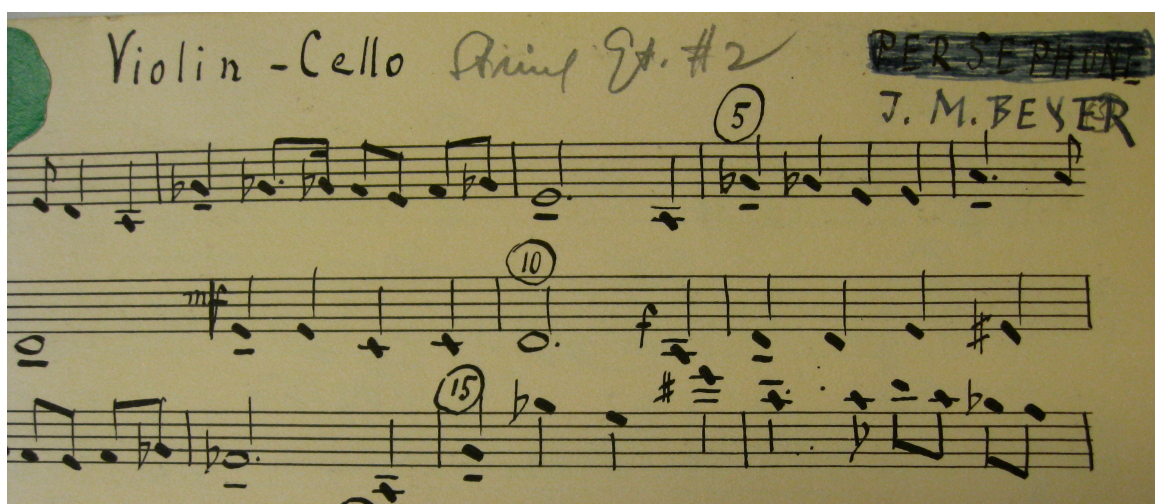
⁸⁴ Manuscript copy of the score and four manuscript parts to the quartet are found in the Johanna Magdalena Beyer scores, JPB 82-77, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (hereafter, Beyer-NYPL), Box 2, Folder 33.

⁸⁵ Beyer's choice to use initials sometimes yielded interesting results: several of the early letters written to Beyer from Fabien Sevitzy are addressed, "Dear Mr. Beyer." See letter from Sevitzy to Beyer (4 November 1939), Fabien Sevitzy Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Beyer's hand) seem to bear her characteristic "J.M. Beyer" signature. However, closer examination reveals a small, inked-over rectangle on the upper-right-hand corner of the manuscripts of *both* the score and parts; barely legible underneath the crossed-out rectangle is a single name—"Persephone."

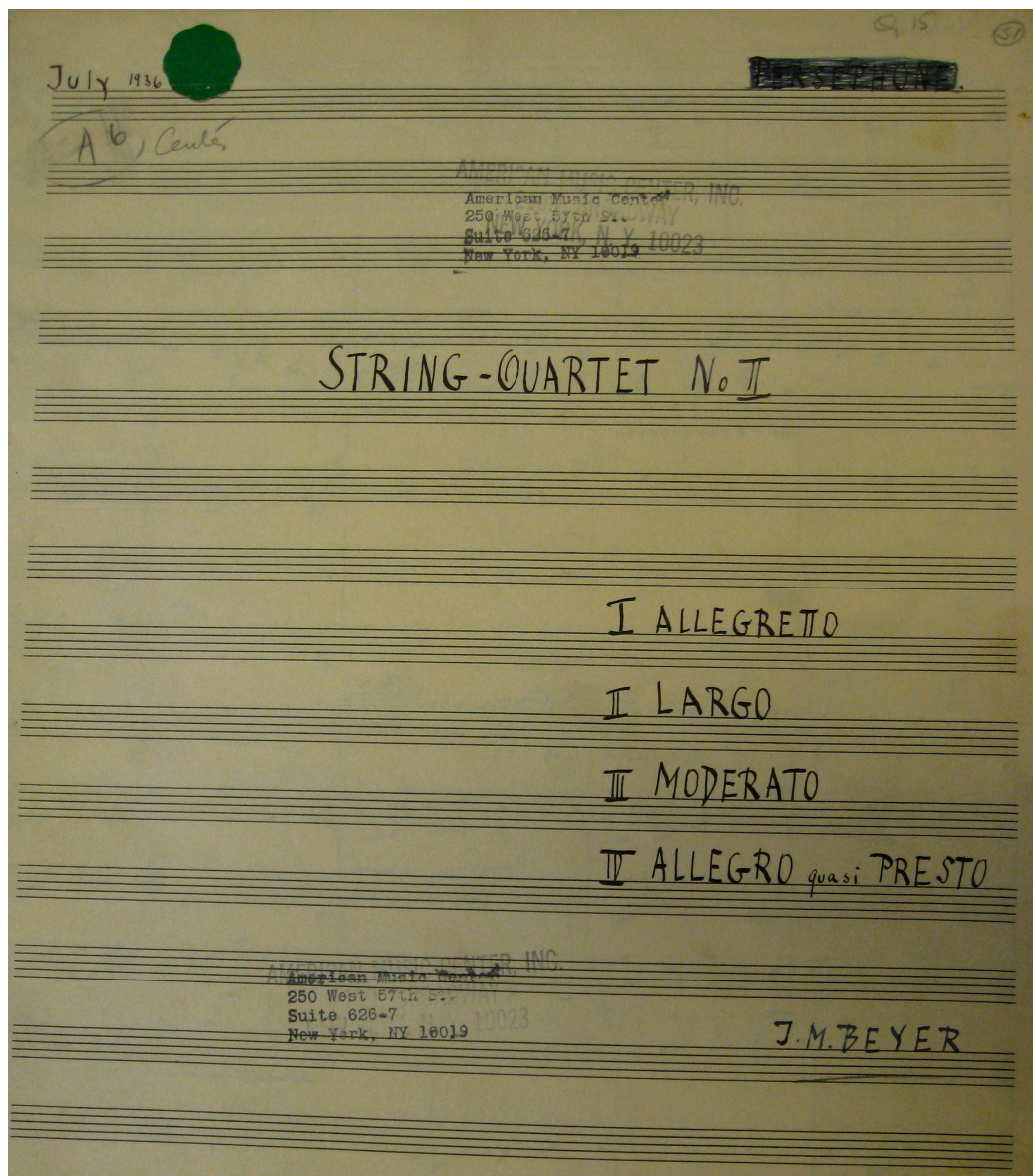
Figure 3.2

Beyer, String Quartet No. 2, close-up of "Persephone" on cello part



Other women composers also concealed their gender during this era. For example, the composer Ulric Cole (1905–1992) changed her first name from “Frances” to “Ulric” at the suggestion of her father, who thought that changing her name to something more masculine would help her career, since he believed that women composers were not taken seriously. See Paula M. Neihouse, “Piano-String Trios by Selected American Women Composers, 1923–1945: A Study and Performance Guide,” (DMA Thesis, University of Miami, 2001), 44. Even Vivian Fine occasionally disguised her gender: one of the manuscripts of *Piece for Flute and Muted Strings* (1937), which Fine submitted for a contest in the 1930s, has the pseudonym “R. Winfield” on the cover page. (Fine won the contest, and received a prize of \$33.33.) After the contest, Fine crossed out the gender-neutral pseudonym and wrote her own name on the cover page. This manuscript is in the Vivian Fine Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Figure 3.3
Manuscript title page (“Persephone” on upper-right-hand corner)



To my knowledge, this is the *only* work by Beyer to bear this pseudonym. In mythology, Persephone is a well-known figure (the wife of Hades and Queen of the Underworld). Persephone was abducted by Hades, who kidnapped her and brought her to the Underworld: in many versions of the myth, Hades also rapes Persephone. Hades also

tricked her into eating pomegranate seeds, which resulted in their unconventional marriage arrangement in which Persephone spent several months of the year in the Underworld (one month for each pomegranate seed she consumed), and the other months of the year on Earth with her mother, Demeter.⁸⁶ One can only speculate as to why Beyer originally used “Persephone” as a pen name for this piece: perhaps she felt some kind of pang of separation from Cowell because of his trip to California and subsequent incarceration, which, in her mind, may have paralleled the separation of Persephone and her husband, Hades. Interestingly, the only other instance I have found of Beyer’s use of this pseudonym is an October 1935 letter from Beyer to Cowell—which contains a lengthy excerpt from a romantic poem by T.O. Robinson—and which Beyer signs, “Persephone.”⁸⁷

Whatever reasons Beyer may have had for using this pseudonym, its inclusion remains fascinating not only for its extramusical associations (particularly in terms of marriage), but even more for the *way* in which the pseudonym appears on the score:

⁸⁶ Numerous women have written about sexual initiation using the Persephone myth, including Mary Shelley, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison; some women writers (such as H.D.) have even appropriated the Persephone myth, re-writing it in a new way. See Gilbert and Gubar (2000 [1979]), 80, 504, and 660 (n. 61).

⁸⁷ Among other sentimental verses, the poem contains the lines, “Love, let me take our days into my arms, and keep them close, to fend them from all harms.” See letter from Beyer to Cowell, 29 October 1935, Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 2, Folder 1. One could speculate about a number of other connections involving the pseudonym “Persephone,” based on her status as Queen of the Underworld. Many letters from Beyer written during this period (ca. 1936) use the phrase “Sunny Hades” as a kind of address before Beyer writes the date. Another fascinating connection (albeit, an oblique one) also exists between the pseudonym and the text of Papageno’s aria, the middle portion of which contains a direct reference to the underworld, when Papageno sings “und wie im Elysium sein” (“and I feel like I’m in Elysium”). (Elysium, of course, is the part of the underworld in which good people frolic about, a sort of paradise of the underworld.) However, it is important to note that Beyer does not use the music from this portion of the aria.

hidden, crossed out, and obscured by the clearly written, gender-neutral signature “J.M. Beyer.” The manner in which “Persephone” is concealed on Beyer’s manuscript calls to mind Gilbert and Gubar’s ideas about women’s creative works often containing “hidden” elements, which often serve as a reflection of women creators’ anxieties of authorship. What’s particularly fascinating about Beyer’s signatures on this manuscript is the way that her (female) identity is not just concealed, but rendered an enigma, a question: in this lone work, Beyer obliquely refers to her gender only with a pseudonym, which is ultimately crossed out and “written over” by a gender-neutral signature, “J.M. Beyer” (an ambiguous, gender-neutral signature that, ironically, is based on her real name).

But concealment also seems to have other resonances in this quartet, particularly in the closing measures of the first movement. Although these final measures may appear to be inconsequential, they actually have profound meaning when examined more closely, particularly in terms of the second movement of the piece. While the cello plods through yet another familiar statement of the borrowed tune, the upper parts are organized around chromatic motion: the violin parts wedge out from one another from a G5/C#6 tritone, eventually creating a voice exchange between the two instruments that spans mm. 42–48 (ending on D \flat 5/G6); the viola part ascends from F3 to C4, beginning with a whole step (F3 to G3), and then moving chromatically from G3 to C4.⁸⁸ Surprisingly, the upper three parts begin on the pitches C#, G, F (m. 42), a vertical statement of the first three pcs of the first violin line (first heard in m. 1). Although the final note of the piece is the humorous solo F in the cello, an interesting moment occurs on the downbeat of the penultimate measure, at the conclusion of the chromatic motion of

⁸⁸ The viola’s chromatic line spans the same (012345) hexachord played by the cello in mm. 19–23, and in the same register.

the upper string parts, which come to rest on a striking (016) sonority. The (016) is almost imperceptible, buried in the texture, as the first violin doubles the cello's pc G; in addition, the violin and viola parts are not only marked *ppp*, but also use *pizzicato* during this passage, so the final sonority of the upper string parts is a fleeting moment, eclipsed by yet another emphatic statement of the borrowed tune by the cello.⁸⁹ Yet this subtle sonority has lasting ramifications in the second movement of the piece.

Example 3.20

Measures 42–49 and concluding (016)

The musical score shows four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measures 42-49 are marked with 'pizzicato' and 'ppp'. The Cello part is marked with 'f' and 'marcato'. Measure 49 is marked with '(016)' and shows a sonority with a circled G in the first violin part.

In contrast to the active, cacophonous first movement of the quartet—with its rapidly-changing textures, hodgepodge of quotation (and fragments of quotation), and juxtaposition of varied dissonant melodic lines—the second movement reveals a dramatically different sound world, one marked by solemnity, sustained tones, stillness, and incrementally unfolding textures. Surprisingly, the borrowed tune is abandoned in this movement, as the cello is now subsumed into a rather different and highly dissonant context, one suggested by the violin and viola parts in the first movement. However, this

⁸⁹ In the penultimate measure of the first movement, the cello plays G2 and E2, but because the violins and viola play this passage *pizzicato*, the sound of the upper strings has already dissipated well before the cello plays E2.

seemingly static, placid surface actually conceals a complex and highly organized musical fabric that holds a number of interesting musical connections not only within the opening of this movement itself, but also with the first movement.

The opening measures of the movement are a virtual essay in transformational design, constructed around the chord heard in the first measure of the second movement. The movement begins with an (016) [G, C, C#] chord that is identical—in pitch space!—to the sonority heard in the penultimate measure of the first movement, at the conclusion of the upper-string line. All of the sonorities in mm. 1–7 may be understood as some kind of transformation of the opening chord. Taken together, the notes of the first violin line {G, C#, G \flat } arise from a tritone transposition of the opening chord. The phrase played by the second violin {C#, G, A \flat } results from the inversion of the opening chord that preserves its tritone. The second violin line could also be thought of as an inversion of the first violin line in which G inverts into itself (pc G is not only doubled in the opening chord, but serves as a kind of outer-voice boundary for the sonority, since it is played by first violin and cello). The chord that concludes the opening of the movement (C, G \flat , G, m. 7) is T $_{-1}$ of the second violin melody, or the inversion of the opening chord that preserves its pitches G and C. All of the melodic material in the opening measures of the movement is thus based on a transformation that relates to the structure of the opening chord.

Example 3.21

Beyer, String Quartet No. 2, mvt. 2 (opening)

pp sempre con sordino

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

[1, 6, 7]

[7, 8, 1]

[7, 0, 1]

[6, 7, 0]

These events are interesting enough on their own, but what makes them even more profound is the way that the generating (016) structure for this stark, dissonant opening is concealed within the humorous conclusion of the first movement. Beyer uses a seemingly fleeting and insignificant moment—buried within a texture that, on the surface, is dominated by another plodding, silly statement of the borrowed tune—to generate the entire opening of a tremendously rich (and markedly different) inner movement; and its ascetic, lugubrious texture serves as a dramatic foil to the boisterous, comical first movement.

Parody

A number of scholars have explored the potentially subversive implications of parody from a feminist perspective, discussing the use of parody in creative works by women, or the potential challenges parody and parodic acts offer to the construction of gender itself. For example, Gilbert and Gubar have chronicled the ways in which women

writers both “use and misuse” common literary traditions, characters, or genres, whether in Jane Austen’s wry novels of sense and sensibility, or the appropriation and re-telling of traditional stories of patriarchal mythology by modern women poets.⁹⁰ Gilbert and Gubar describe parody as “one of the key strategies through which this female duplicity reveals itself,” as women’s subversive deviations from their inherited literary traditions constitute “a vibration that undercuts and ridicules the genre being employed.”⁹¹

Hutcheon has also written extensively on parody, which she defines as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity”; parody is also characterized by ironic “play” and “reversal,” and encompasses a wide range of creative forms and interpretative possibilities.⁹² Hutcheon (1989) examines the connections between parody and politics, noting that parody “works to foreground the *politics* [her emphasis] of representation.”⁹³ This work explores how parody serves as a primary strategy of subversion for female and feminist artists and theorists; Hutcheon claims that

⁹⁰ Some of the characters and heroines of traditional patriarchal mythology whose stories have been reinvented include Circe, Cassandra, Medusa—and Persephone, by authors such as Mona Van Duyn, Margaret Atwood, and H.D. See Gilbert and Gubar (2000 [1979]), 80 and 660, n. 61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹² Parody will also be discussed in Chapter 4. See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), particularly 6–7, and 101. Hutcheon (1985) discusses parody in a number of different artistic forms, including literature, art, film, and music, and emphasizes parody’s inherent diversity: “...parody can obviously be a whole range of things. It can be a serious criticism, not necessarily of the parodied text; it can be a playful, genial mockery of codifiable forms. Its range of intent is from respectful admiration to biting ridicule” (15–16).

⁹³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 94. Hutcheon (1989) upholds her broad definition of parody, noting parody’s “wide range of intents—from that witty ridicule to the playfully ludic to the seriously respectful” (94). The sixth chapter of this book also examines in detail how parody is used by postmodern feminist artists (including Kolbowski, Kruger, and Hunter) to subvert cultural representations of women and to challenge the “masculine gaze” (151–160).

“in feminist hands, parody becomes one of the ways of ‘rereading against the grain of the ‘master works’ of Western culture.’”⁹⁴

Butler (1990) also emphasizes the potential power of parody, particularly in terms of its capacity for calling into question the fixedness and uniformity of gender itself. For Butler, parodic repetition directly challenges the very notion of “the original,” and ultimately “reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* [Butler’s emphasis] of the natural and original.”⁹⁵ Interestingly, Butler highlights that the “subversive laughter” of parodic acts that call the authenticity of “the original” into question are not inherent, but contextual, noting that “parody by itself is not subversive... [it] depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered.”⁹⁶

Beyer draws on strategies of parody throughout this movement as a means of subverting the borrowed tune and its associations. As previously discussed, although the borrowed tune is painstakingly obvious from the moment it first appears, Beyer makes a number of small, almost indiscernible revisions to the melody, and these incremental changes seem to have deeper significance, not only with regards to some of the structural aspects of the tune (as outlined in the first section of this chapter), but also in terms of its

⁹⁴ Ibid., 154. As Hutcheon notes, the quote “rereading against the grain of the ‘masterworks’ of Western culture” is taken from Teresa de Lauretis, “Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts” in Teresa de Lauretis, ed. *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 10.

⁹⁵ Butler (1990), especially 31 and 137–41. Butler is particularly interested how practices grounded in gender parody—such as drag and cross-dressing—actively subvert the idea of gender identity as something that is static, unchanging, or homogenous; for example, she writes, “gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is *an imitation without an original* [my emphasis]” (Butler 1990, 138).

⁹⁶ Butler (1990), 139. Butler’s work on parody will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

overall impression and effect as a borrowed melody. In the opening measures of the movement, the tune sounds almost comical, as it is simplified and stripped of the fluid, effervescent embellishments that appear in the original Mozart melody. A number of nonchord tones are removed, and the rhythm of the borrowed melody is markedly simplified, rendered almost naive, as it largely consists of straight, almost rigid-sounding quarter notes and eighth notes. Differences in articulation between the cello and other string parts (which, in contrast, have lyrical, legato melodic lines) also create a sense of contrast between the two textures. In all, the straightforward, guileless presentation of the borrowed tune has a distinctly humorous effect, particularly when heard against the fluid agility and rhythmic variety of the other (dissonant) parts.

The cello part is also parodied through its unsophisticated content, as it doggedly blunders through repetitions of the borrowed tune (or slight variations of it) throughout the movement. The cello's insistent, earnest repetitions of the borrowed tune stand in marked distinction to the upper string parts. The freedom and flexibility of the violin and viola parts is evinced not only by the numerous ways that their dissonant lines are varied (particularly rhythmically), but also by their ability to state *both* the borrowed tune *and* their own dissonant lines, a liberty not granted to the cello part, which is constrained by only stating the Mozart tune (or slight variations of it).⁹⁷ The independence of the upper string parts dramatically culminates in the third section of the movement (mm. 23–41), where the violin and viola lines commandeer the borrowed tune, each simultaneously stating brief slivers of the cello's melody, which are fragmented and interrupted with

⁹⁷ Aside from fleeting chromatic variation to the tune, the cello's only departure from the content of the borrowed tune occurs in mm. 20–23, a three-measure passage based on an ascending chromatic elaboration of the concluding (G-E-F) figure of the tune.

portions of their own dissonant lines, ultimately weaving an astonishing sonic fabric in which the borrowed tune is not only appropriated and overtaken by the upper parts, but shattered, splintered, and ruptured by them.

The satirical setting of the borrowed tune continues even in the conclusion of the movement, a moment that juxtaposes an exact repetition of the first eight measures of opening statement of the borrowed melody (of course, in the cello) against pizzicato quarter notes in the violin and viola parts. These final measures are the only moment in the movement where the violin and viola parts linger on identical rhythms for a substantial amount of time (the quarter-note passage continues for six measures). When paired with the plodding simplicity of the cello quotation, the upper-string parts help create a tongue-in-cheek, almost comical setting, as if a student or amateur cellist is diligently practicing the borrowed tune against the unrelenting clicking of a (dissonant) metronome. The feeling of parody is heightened by the way in which the movement concludes, as the quarter-note upper-string accompaniment suddenly grinds to a halt one measure before the end of the borrowed tune, leaving the lonely cello to sustain the end of its phrase all alone, as if a conductor has cut off the ensemble (or the other members decided to drop out early), but the bumbling cellist somehow missed the cue, sustaining its note just a few moments too long, the sound of its final note infringing, all alone, into the end of the movement, cluelessly out-of-sync with the other parts.

The phrase structure of the movement challenges the autonomy of the borrowed melody. As previously discussed, discerning a definitive phrase structure for the movement is difficult because of the ways in which the parts entwine and overlap with one another (see Examples 3.2 and 3.4, shown at the beginning of this chapter). At first

hearing, the phrase structure of the cello stands out, as it is simpler, more predictable, and almost cliché: with the exception of mm. 23–41, where outbursts of different melodic fragments occur in all four instruments, each of the cello's phrases contains a simple, almost droll eight-measure statement of the tune (heard in mm. 1–8, mm. 11–18, and mm. 42–49).⁹⁸ When heard against the dynamic and varied upper string parts, the even phrase structure of the cello sounds humorously unsophisticated, even banal.

In contrast to the predictability of the cello part, which lends a lumbering, comical quality to the borrowed tune, the three other parts exhibit a great deal of flexibility and contrast in their rhythm and phrase structure. Although their respective melodic lines each consist of phrases based upon repetitions of virtually identical pitch-class content, the violin and viola parts each display a great deal of independence in the rhythmic realm, proceeding in a starkly unexpected fashion as their melodic lines expand and contract (see Table 3.4 below). The unpredictability of the violin and viola parts actively subverts the borrowed tune, as the upper strings refuse to be constrained by the rhythm, phrase structure, or cadential points of the borrowed melody. The violin and viola parts each exhibit a strong degree of agency and autonomy; these are clearly *not* passive accompaniments, but individual melodic lines, each with their own character and verve.

⁹⁸ Each of these phrases ends slightly differently, yet each has the same phrase structure—and, no less, the exact same rhythms—in its first eight measures (as previously discussed, the tune in mm. 11–18 contains slight chromatic alteration, but is still clearly recognizable).

Table 3.4
Phrase structure, first mvt.

Instrument	Measure	Phrase Length
Violin I	1–3	(3)
	4–7	(4)
	8–12	(5)
	13–22	(10)
	23–36	(14)
	37–41	(5)
	42–48	(7)
Violin II	1–9	(9)
	10–17	(8)
	18–37	(20) [very fragmented passage]
	38–41	(4)
	42–48	(7)
Viola	1–8	(8)
	9–19	(11)
	20–33	(14)
	34–41	(8)
	42–48	(7)
Cello	1–10	[8 (4+4) +2]
	11–23	[8 (4+4) +5]
	24–41	[16 +2]
	42–49	(8) (4+4)

One of the most interesting fallouts of this varied and overlapping phrase structure is that cadence points of the borrowed melody are consistently undermined. Even the conclusion of the piece demonstrates the rift between the parts, as the cello humorously

continues its phrase one measure after the other instruments have ceased playing. Because of the way in which the independent melodic lines are woven together, the possibility exists for a number of different hearings of the piece, which organically unfold as the piece progresses, and in subsequent hearings of the work. At first hearing, one might focus entirely on the familiar borrowed tune, observing phrase endings in m. 10, m. 23, m. 41, and m. 49, but with the upper three parts serving as an out-of-joint accompaniment, which rarely coincides with the cello line. But if one focuses instead on the first violin part, a completely different experience emerges, one with phrase endings in m. 3, m. 7, m. 12, m. 22, m. 34, m. 41, and m. 48. Subsequent hearings of the work give a listener a chance to explore each of the melodic strands as independent entities, and this plurality of possible hearings (as well as the overall effect of hearing them simultaneously) adds to the magic and complexity of the piece; moreover, these varied lines also serve as a means of challenging—and even subverting—the primacy and dominance of the borrowed tune.

But the phrase endings of the borrowed tune are also actively undermined in terms of their actual pitch content, as Beyer parodies the borrowed tune through her use of “improper” part-writing (in particular, overt parallel octaves) at the conclusion of the borrowed melodic line. Beyer is not the only female composer to purposefully violate the “rules” of tonal syntax as a means of subversion. For example, Chicago composer Irene Britton Smith (1907–1999) described her feelings about using parallel fifths in her compositions as a means of resistance to her inherited (tonal) tradition:

You noticed I'm writing a lot of stuff with fifths and fourths, and so forth. Yes, that's to get even with them for telling me I couldn't use it [laughs]! Yes, parallel fifths [laughs]...how *dare* I do that. So I write and I use my fifths.⁹⁹

Parallel octaves are not common in this movement, but they appear at every phrase ending of the borrowed melody in the first half of the piece. Parallel octaves are first heard between the viola and cello in mm. 9–10 (in the last measures of the first statement of the borrowed tune); Beyer staggers the viola line so that parallel octaves result during the cello's final "cadential" gesture. Parallel octaves also occur at the conclusion of the second statement of the borrowed tune (mm. 18–19), this time between the cello and second violin (F-G). This moment is particularly interesting, because mm. 18–19 are the *only* time that Beyer adds new pitches to the opening of the second violin series (here, F and G); the addition of these notes results in transparent parallel octaves at the conclusion of the cello phrase. Parallel octaves also occur in mm. 21–22, at the close

⁹⁹ Irene Britton Smith, taped interview with Helen Walker-Hill (July 7, 1989). See Irene Britton Smith Papers, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Box 12. Irene Britton Smith studied at the American Conservatory in Chicago, and in France with Nadia Boulanger, but most of her works remain unpublished. For more information about Smith, see Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 189–215.

Another twentieth-century female composer to appropriate parallel fifths is Elizabeth Vercoe (b. 1941). The concluding movement of Vercoe's *Herstory III* (a monodrama about Joan of Arc, written for mezzo soprano and piano) consists *entirely* of slowly moving parallel fifths, juxtaposed in both the right and left hands of the piano. Of course, by citing these (female) composers, I am *not* trying to assert any kind of essentialist argument that this compositional strategy is unique to women composers. Obviously, both male and female composers may choose to violate the "rules" of tonal syntax, suggesting a variety of analytical readings that are dependent on a particular context. As Ellie Hisama lucidly explains, "There is, obviously, no biological imperative for women to compose one way and men another...If one indeed discovered similar strategies in compositions by men, their existence would not alter my argument about the relationship between gender and structure in these pieces...I would not identify their presence as being related to gender and female identity in the ways that I claim here." See Hisama (2001), 9–10.

of the first violin's phrase (mm. 13–22). Here, the first violin ends its phrase with a statement of the final gesture of the borrowed melody (the turn figure G-G-E-E-F), and as with the phrase ending in mm. 9–10, the closing gesture of the borrowed tune is accompanied by parallel octaves between the viola (E-F) and the borrowed tune.¹⁰⁰

Parallel octaves are not prominently featured in other moments of the movement, and since they are highlighted in such a transparent fashion in these phrase endings, these “improper” gestures seem to serve as an additional means of willfully subverting—and parodying—both the borrowed tune and the “rules” of traditional tonal syntax.

Example 3.22

Parallel octaves and phrase endings in borrowed tune

mm. 9–10 (end of first cello phrase)

The musical score for measures 9 and 10 features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Measure 9 begins with a measure rest for all instruments. In measure 10, the Cello plays a descending eighth-note line (G4, F4, E4, D4) marked *mf*. The Viola plays a descending eighth-note line (E4, D4, C4, B3) marked *mp*. The Violin I part has a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) followed by a quarter note (C5), marked *p*. The Violin II part has a half note (E4) followed by a quarter note (D4), marked *p*. Both the Viola and Cello staves have a fermata over the final note (B3 and D4 respectively) with an 8-measure repeat sign (8!).

(con'd)

¹⁰⁰ Parallel octaves may also be found in m. 11 between the cello and viola (G-G#), but this moment is more fleeting than the other parallel octaves described above, as it occurs in mid-phrase, not at the conclusion of the borrowed tune. Perhaps these octaves are used as a means of drawing attention to the first chromatic pitch (G#) added to the borrowed tune, as something “incorrect” or “transgressive” in the (tonal) context of the borrowed tune.

(Example 3.22, con'd)

mm. 17–19 (end of second cello phrase)

17

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

* F and G added to Violin II series!

8!

8!

Pronouns and subversion of the borrowed melody

In much of Lewin's work on atonal music (1982–83, 1987, 1993, 1997), there is an emphasis on balance and symmetry as a kind of goal, as notes actively strive, seek, (or even desire) their inversions partners over the course of a piece. In other work on more triadic music (1992), Lewin has discussed the “transcendent female voice,” explicitly challenging the notion that upper-register events should be considered subordinate to (or engendered by) the lower register by default.¹⁰¹ In this essay, Lewin draws a connection between the subordination of upper voices to lower ones and gender, noting that the fundamental-bass tradition centers on imagining a “root representative” that lies in the low register, paralleling the typical register or range of the male voice. For Lewin, “the man *could* [his emphasis] sing such a ‘root itself,’ even if he is not at present doing so; the woman *could not*” (276). In contrast, Lewin imagines a rich array of analytical possibilities that might arise from taking a different view, one in which the (upper-

¹⁰¹ David Lewin, “Women's Voices and the Fundamental Bass,” reprinted in *Studies in Music with Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 267–281 [first published in *Journal of Musicology*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1992)].

register) “transcendent female voice,” not the bass, drives—or even controls—the texture.

Lewin discusses the “transcendent female voice” with regards to the actual sung vocal line in Schoenberg’s String Quartet No. 2, op. 10, but some of his ideas might also be applied to the agency of the soprano register more generally, and its dependence on—or subversion of—the bass in Beyer’s quartet. As we have seen, in Beyer’s tonal/atonal sound-world, the bass clearly does not determine the structure, as the violin and viola parts function as independent dissonant melodic lines, which seem to question and subvert the predictability (and tonality) of the cello’s borrowed tune. Although initially they may seem to function merely as juxtaposed dissonant lines, which serve as a means of contrasting the cello part, we eventually come to realize that the violin and viola parts have actually been exerting a great deal of power all along, continually subverting the autonomy of the cello part.

Although there is no explicit “voice” (male or female) in Beyer’s quartet, clear connections might easily be drawn between the cello part and a male voice. A particularly interesting aspect of the quartet is that the quotation appears almost entirely in the cello part, rather than a more traditional setting, in which the melody is set in the upper register, with accompaniment underneath. Interestingly, another work based on this borrowed melody, Beethoven’s *Zwölf Variationen über das Thema ‘Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen’*—written for cello and piano—follows this more conventional orchestration, with the theme heard first in the upper register of the piano part, not the cello. In contrast, Beyer seems to draw an explicit connection between the low register of the cello part and the low register of Papageno’s (male, baritone) voice, even

exaggerating the low register further by setting the borrowed tune one octave lower than Papageno sings it.

The text of the aria associated with this borrowed melody obviously could not be explicitly stated within the instrumental texture of Beyer's quartet; however, it seems reasonable to imagine that some connections might be drawn between the subject matter of the aria and Beyer's quartet, particularly since Beyer was a native German speaker, and even more so because the borrowed tune is associated with one of Mozart's most well-known arias from one of his most famous operas. In addition, Beyer's choice to set the borrowed melody largely in the low register of the cello part also invites us to associate the borrowed melody with Papageno's (male, baritone) voice. Interestingly, Beyer's quartet is not the first work to make explicit connections between an instrumental version of this tune and marriage. The blockbuster 1930 German film *Der blaue Engel*—one of the first German sound films, which featured the seductive Marlene Dietrich—chronicles the exploits of a professor as he falls from an academic career at the local (all-male) *Gymnasium* into the decrepitude of a life working as a cabaret clown performer. The professor's descent into depravity (and eventual death) is a direct result of his relationship with the vixen performer Lola Lola (Dietrich), a sultry cabaret headliner whom he lusts after (and eventually marries). Interestingly, the opening bars of Papageno's aria feature prominently in the film, as the borrowed tune serves as the basis for the orchestral music for the opening credits, as well as the final scene (in which the professor dies). The tune also recurs throughout the film, as its opening measures are also heard as the chimes of the local bell-tower, which tolls at three different points

throughout the film, as if to chart the professor's fall from grace.¹⁰² Although this blockbuster film was released only a few years before Beyer completed this quartet, there is no explicit evidence that Beyer saw *Der blaue Engel*; however, it was discussed frequently in the *New York Times* (a newspaper that Beyer read), and it seems possible that Beyer (particularly because she was a German immigrant) would have had some passing interest in the film. Both German and English versions of the film were made concurrently, and the *New York Times* featured articles about both versions (which ran throughout metro New York in 1930 and 1931).¹⁰³

Returning to Beyer's quartet, interesting connections may be drawn between certain points in Mozart's text and their appearance in Beyer's quartet. Papageno's aria chronicles his own craving for a female partner, and remains entrenched within his own (selfish) perspective. Papageno does not long for any particular woman, but simply *ein* (my emphasis) "maiden or little wife," whom he likens to "a soft little dove."

Throughout the aria, the text continues to objectify women, as Papageno refers

¹⁰² Birds also feature prominently in the film, perhaps serving as another reference to Papageno. In the opening scene of the film, the professor whistles to his pet bird (held in a birdcage), only to find that the bird is dead. Lola Lola also has a (live) pet bird in her room, which chirps throughout the scene the morning after she and the professor sleep together. When the Professor and Lola Lola marry, they both act like birds at their wedding dinner, cooing and chirping at one another.

¹⁰³ The English version of the film premiered in New York City at the Rialto (a theater in midtown Manhattan) in December 1930. The film was also shown in other theaters in the New York area: notices in the *New York Times* advertize showings of the English version at three theaters in Brooklyn in February 1931, and the German version of the film was shown at the 5th Avenue Playhouse in May 1931. See *New York Times*, 2 April 1930, 30 November 1930, 6 December 1930, 14 December 1930, 4 January 1931, 1 February 1931, 4 May 1931, and passim. For a fascinating study of the film, see Barbara Kosta, *Willing Seduction: The Blue Angel, Marlene Dietrich, and Mass Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009). A recent article by Simon Richter draws numerous connections between the film and Mozart's *Magic Flute*; see Simon Richter, "The Return of the Queen of the Night: Joseph von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* and *Die Zauberflöte*," *German Life and Letters* 61:1 (January 2008): 171–185.

generically to “those charming girls” (den reizenden Mädchen) and “a womanly mouth” (ein weiblicher Mund), and remains focused on his own bawdy desires, noting that “a girl or little wife” will help him feel bliss, health, alleviate his worry, and even improve his appetite for food and drink.

Figure 3.4

Text and translation of “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen” (with references to Papageno highlighted)¹⁰⁴

Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich . O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich! Dann schmeckte mir Trinken und Essen, Dann könnt ich mit Fürsten mich messen, Des Lebens als Weiser mich freun, Und wie im Elysium sein.	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! Then I should drink and eat with relish, Then I could hold my own with princes, Enjoy life in my wisdom, And be as if I’m in Elysium.
Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich . O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich . Ach, kann ich denn keener von allen Den reizenden Mädchen gefallen? Helf eine mir nur aus der Not. Sonst gräm ich mich wahrlich zu Tod.	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! Ah, can’t I find one, then, amongst all The lovely girls, who would like me? Let just one help me out of my misery, Or I shall truly die of grief.
Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen Wünscht Papageno sich . O, so ein sanftes Täubchen Wär Seligkeit für mich! Wird keine mir Liebe gewähren, So muss mich die Flamme verzehren! Doch küsst mich ein weiblicher Mund, So bin ich schon wieder gesund!	A girl or a little wife, Is what Papageno desires. Oh, a sweet little dove like that Would be bliss for me! If no one will offer me love, Then the fire must consume me, But if a woman’s lips kiss me, I shall be well again straightaway!

¹⁰⁴ Translation by Robert A. Jordan, Karl Böhm/Berlin Philharmonic, Deutsche Grammophon recording, 1997 [first released, 1964], 449749-2.

Although Beyer simplifies the rhythm of the borrowed tune, the text to the aria may still easily be heard during the borrowed melody:

Example 3.23

Cello melody, with text added

Ein Mäd - chen o - der Weib - chen wünscht Pa - pa - ge - no sich! O

5 so ein sanf - tes Täub - chen wär' Se - lig - keit für mich! Se - lig - keit für mich! 10

Imagining the text of the aria with the cello part provides an opportunity to explore the remarkable ways that certain moments of the text are treated—specifically, those exact moments that involve direct references to Papageno (“Papageno sich” and “Seligkeit für mich”). Many feminists have discussed the various ways in which pronouns and textual points-of-view can have profound significance in creative works. Perhaps most famously, Virginia Woolf described the unsettling effect of the “I” in works by men, in this wonderful passage from *A Room of One’s Own*:

Indeed, it was delightful to read a man’s writing again. . . . But after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter “I.” One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. Back one always hailed to the letter “I.” One began to be tired of “I.” Not but what this “I” was a most respectable “I”; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. . . . “But—I am bored!” But why was I bored? Partly because of the dominance of the letter “I” and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007 reprint [first published, 1929]), 109–110.

As discussed above, a particularly interesting aspect of this aria's text is the vague way Papageno refers to women, who do not have concrete, specific identities, but are seen as an all-embracing, generic category ("*ein Mädchen*," "*ein sanftes Taübchen*"); clearly, Papageno doesn't care which particular woman he manages to obtain, as long as he gets one. (Of course, Papageno's bawdy desperation for a partner even culminates in his "settling" for an ugly old hag, who is conveniently transformed back into the youthful, coquettish Papagena upon receiving Papageno's kiss.¹⁰⁶) In contrast, Papageno identifies his own agency and individuality through his repeated use of pronouns. During this brief aria, Papageno refers to himself (either by using "I," "me," "myself," or "Papageno") sixteen times; direct references to himself occur in virtually every line of text (these are highlighted in Figure 3.4). In the four lines of text associated with the borrowed melody, the exact moments when references to Papageno appear ("*wünscht Papageno sich*" and *Seligkeit für mich*") are the two musical moments during which Beyer slightly alters the melody, creating the statements of (013) previously discussed (in the first section of this chapter). Beyer even emphasizes the music associated with "*Seligkeit für mich*" by adding an additional repetition of the (G,G, E,E,F) phrase ending in mm. 9–10, a phrase extension that also differs from the original aria. Furthermore, as the aria progresses, these moments become repeated and varied even more, and are increasingly drawn out of their tonal context into the dissonant sound-world of the violin and viola parts. By appropriating these moments—which originally centered on

¹⁰⁶ Papageno's decision to kiss the aged, witchy woman has interesting parallels with Beyer's situation at the time: perhaps Beyer—who was 48 years old when this quartet was completed—felt an additional connection to this aspect of the plot because of her age. (Beyer was also nine years older than Cowell.)

Papageno’s thoughts, perspective, and desires—Beyer recasts them, distancing them from their original context and associations.

Example 3.24

Cello, mm. 19–23, tinges of chromaticism added to “bliss for me” motive



The first change (corresponding to the phrase “Seligkeit für mich”) occurs in the cello in mm. 19–23, where what sounds like the beginning of the phrase extension first heard in mm. 9–10 is altered with the ascending chromatic line G-G#-A-A#-B, a move first suggested by the chromaticism of the repeated viola line (G-G#, m. 3; A-A#, mm. 6–8), or even the chromatic hexachord (012345) that begins the second violin line (first heard in mm. 1–3). The original “bliss for me” also serves as a point of imitation in mm. 35–41, where staggered two-measure statements of the original (G-E-F) figure in the first violin, second violin, viola, and cello occur simultaneously with the chromaticized riff based on the motive, but now heard in the higher register of the first violin, which overtakes the cello’s statement, extending it further upwards to C#6, the climax of the piece. Papageno’s (tonal) bliss and agency seems to have been recast, appropriated, and reset in a decidedly dissonant context.

Example 3.25

Measures 35–41, fragmentation of “bliss for me” motive

The musical score for measures 35–41 is presented in a four-staff format. The top staff is Violin I, the second is Violin II, the third is Viola, and the bottom is Cello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. Measure 35 begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Violin I part features a melodic line with a crescendo leading to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in measure 36, followed by a further crescendo to forte (*f*) in measure 41. The Violin II part provides harmonic support with sustained notes and some movement. The Viola and Cello parts play a rhythmic, eighth-note pattern that fragments the 'bliss for me' motive. The Cello part concludes with a long, sustained note in measure 41, representing the 'mich' fragment mentioned in the text.

One could reflect on these moments in a number of different ways: has Papageno’s bliss been subverted? Is the “mich” under discussion, fragmented and set in a dissonant context, no longer Papageno’s, but rather, Beyer’s? And what should one make of the very conclusion of the movement, where a single, silly-sounding statement of the original “bliss for me” (G-E-F) motive ends the piece, the cello performing the “mich” alone, by itself, without the violin or viola parts?

The other interesting textual intersection in the quartet occurs in mm. 25–34 (shown in Example 3.26, below), a thrilling moment in which the independence of the upper string parts dramatically culminates, as the violin and viola parts commandeer the borrowed tune, each simultaneously stating brief slivers of the cello’s melody, which are fragmented and interrupted with portions of their own dissonant lines. During this fascinating passage, the cello has relatively little musical material, as it gets “stuck” on various rhythmic riffs, which are all based on variations of mm. 3–4, the other textual moment of the borrowed tune in which Papageno refers directly to himself (“wünscht Papageno sich”). The repetitiveness and stodginess of the cello part in these measures markedly contrasts with the buoyancy, flexibility, and unpredictability of the violins and

viola, which merge simultaneous statements of their own dissonant melodies, mixed with assertive fragments of the original borrowed tune. Just as Papageno remains staunchly entrenched in his own selfish perspective and desires in this aria, the cello remains tied to its own (tonal) material, bound and confined to statements or variations of the borrowed melody, unable to experience the freedom, flexibility, and agency of the violin and viola parts.

Example 3.26

First movement, mm. 25–34, cello “stuck” on “Papageno sich”

Musical score for measures 25–28. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 25 begins with a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. Violin I plays a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) followed by another triplet (C5, B4, A4). Violin II plays a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola plays a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello plays a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 26 shows Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 27 features Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 28 shows Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). A trill is indicated in the Cello part in measure 28.

Musical score for measures 29–32. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 29 begins with a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. Violin I plays a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II plays a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola plays a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello plays a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 30 shows Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 31 features Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). Measure 32 shows Violin I with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Violin II has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Viola has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (B4). Cello has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (A2), and a quarter note (B2). A trill is indicated in the Cello part in measure 32.

(con'd)

(Example 3.26, con'd)

32

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Conclusion

Much of the existing scholarship on borrowing emphasizes its profoundly rich analytic potential, not only for multiple (and even divergent) interpretations and analyses, but also for fostering analyses that draw on extramusical associations and sociocultural contexts—analyses that are infused with “thick description” (to borrow a term from Clifford Geertz). Korsyn (1991) illuminates the potential for such analyses to “clear imaginative space...allowing music analysis to recover the element of fantasy that is as necessary to theorizing about art as it is to artistic creation.”¹⁰⁷

However, previous work on borrowing (in particular, borrowing in Western “art” music) has not only focused exclusively on male composers, but also has avoided examining the ways that borrowing might be exploited as a means of exploring (or encoding) ideas about gender in musical works. This chapter argues that women’s “revisions” of past texts can be fraught with deep meaning, and to ignore contextual issues such as gender risks not engaging a wealth of potential analytic insights. To quote Elaine

¹⁰⁷ Korsyn (1991), 61.

Showalter, “We must first go beyond the assumption that women writers either imitate their male predecessors or revise them and that this simple dualism is adequate to describe the influences on the woman’s text.”¹⁰⁸ In Beyer’s case, examining some of the connections between borrowing and gender allows us to unearth a rich array of analytical possibilities, as borrowing seems to provide an opportunity for Beyer (and her listeners) to think subversively about marriage and traditional gender roles.

Unfortunately, the 1930s has often been mischaracterized as a dormant era in between the first and second “waves” of feminism, a time in which feminism and “women’s issues” were not only in decline, but also considered peripheral to the widespread economic difficulties of the Great Depression. In many ways, the Great Depression did foster domestic values of the past, but that does not mean that women could not (or did not) continue to struggle against—or actively challenge—these ideas. As scholars, it is imperative that we listen very carefully to these overlooked, yet profoundly important voices, who serve as powerful examples of subversion—and resistance.

¹⁰⁸ Showalter (1981), 204.

PART II

Blowzy Women and Spineless Men? Doris Humphrey and Vivian Fine's *The Race of Life*

Entrée

Women and humor have traditionally had a rather rocky relationship. Although there is a long tradition of women using humor in a variety of different artistic genres, their work was usually not included in mainstream anthologies or humor scholarship until “recovery” efforts inspired by the second-wave feminist movement began to recognize the long tradition of women’s humor, and a number of prominent anthologies slowly began to appear, including Kaufman and Blakely (1980), Walker and Dresner (1988), and Barreca (1996).¹ Humor scholars generally attribute the dearth of attention given to

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Peggy Karp, Vivian Fine’s daughter, for her willingness to provide me with a number of primary-source materials, including manuscripts. Many thanks to Ms. Karp for also granting me permission to use musical examples from *The Race of Life* and quotes from interviews with Vivian Fine. I would also like to thank Jeni Dahmus (archivist at The Juilliard School) for locating a number of documents and photographs in the Juilliard Archives that have been extremely helpful for this project.

¹ See Gloria Kaufman and Mary Kay Blakely, eds., *Pulling Our Own Strings: Feminist Humor and Satire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner, eds., *Redressing the Balance: American Women’s Literary Humor from Colonial Times to the 1980s* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), and Regina Barreca, ed., *The Penguin Book of Women’s Humor* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996). Two anthologies of American women’s humor were actually published long before the second-wave feminist movement: Kate Sanborn, *The Wit of Women* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886) and Martha B. Bruère and Mary R. Beard, *Laughing Their Way: Women’s Humor in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1934) were the first two attempts to document the long tradition of women’s humor in America. However, these efforts had little affect on most writing on American humor, which tended to marginalize women’s contributions—or ignore them entirely. For example, in her classic 1931 work (*American*

women's humor to the enduring cultural stereotype that women lacked a sense of humor, which has a long historical tradition in America: even Kate Sanborn, who published the very first collection of American women's humor, noted that "I have wasted quite a portion of my life answering and contradicting men who have stubbornly insisted that women had no sense of humor."² In addition, feminism itself has long been broadly mischaracterized by its opponents and the media as an angry, confrontational realm that is totally devoid of humor, even though humor has always been a vital part of feminist movements, used even by notoriously "humorless" second-wave feminists and publications, such as Gloria Steinem, Naomi Weisstein, Rita Mae Brown, and *Ms.* magazine (to name just a few).³

Humor: A Study of the National Character) Constance Rourke claimed that even by the mid-nineteenth century "women had played no essential part in the long sequence of the comic spirit in America" (118).

² See the introduction to Sanborn (1886), reprinted in Linda A. Morris, *American Women Humorists: Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1994), 9. The long-held stereotype that women lacked a sense of humor has been discussed by a number of scholars: for example, see Joseph Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter: People's Humor in American Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 45–48 and 164–65, and the introduction to Walker and Dresner (1988).

³ See, for example, the comments of a *New York Times* reporter: "I am always distressed whenever she [Gloria Steinem], and so many other feminist leaders, display such a total lack of humor." Judy Klemesrud, "Ms. Understanding," *New York Times*, 8 April 1973. Joseph Boskin also describes several classic "light bulb" jokes based on the idea that feminists have no sense of humor, such as Q: "How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb?" A: "That's not funny" (or "This is no laughing matter."). See Boskin (1997), 116.

Of course, humor has always been an important part of all kinds of feminist movements. Bruère and Beard (1934) contains an entire section of humor by "first-wave" feminists, as well as a number of political cartoons and drawings by women that focus on feminist issues (such as suffrage and birth control). For examples of humor by second-wave feminists, see Steinem's brilliantly funny "If Men Could Menstruate," (*Ms.* Magazine, October 1978), as well as Kaufman and Blakely (1980): most of the humor in this anthology is by second-wave feminists.

Figure II.1
Ms. Magazine (November 1973)



Even in the twenty-first century, women (whether they explicitly identify as feminist or not) are consistently accused of not being as funny as men. Professional hilarious women (such as Tina Fey, Sarah Silverman, and Amy Poehler) are everywhere, yet major publications still question whether women are “really” funny or not. In 2007, *Vanity Fair* published a lengthy article by Christopher Hitchens, which used a pseudo-scientific argument to claim that women aren’t as funny as men because biologically, women don’t need to be funny to try to attract a male sexual partner.⁴ And in 2011, an article in the *New York Times*, entitled “The Comedy Gatekeeper Who Makes Letterman Laugh,” discussed Eddie Brill’s prestigious position as booking agent for the stand-up

⁴ Christopher Hitchens, “Why Women Aren’t Funny,” *Vanity Fair*, January 2007. This article prompted a scathing response from Alessandra Stanley, entitled “Who Says Women Aren’t Funny?,” which appeared in the April 2008 issue of *Vanity Fair*.

comics on the David Letterman Show. When asked why he had only selected only *one* female comic to appear on Letterman during 2011, Brill replied, “There are a lot less female comics who are authentic. I see a lot of female comics who to please an audience will act like men.”⁵

In the past few decades humor studies has certainly gone a long way towards recovering women’s use of humor in certain genres (in particular, literature and film).⁶ However, the use of humor in art music by American women remains a significantly overlooked area of scholarship, one that has the potential not only to expand our knowledge of the various (and often strategic) ways that women in the performing arts have used humor in their works, but also to enhance our understanding of the wealth and diversity of women’s contributions to the rich terrain of American music as a whole.⁷ This portion of the dissertation discusses a collaborative work by Doris Humphrey and Vivian Fine, entitled *The Race of Life*. This dance is particularly interesting not only

⁵ See Jason Zinoman, “The Comedy Gatekeeper Who Makes Letterman Laugh,” *New York Times*, 11 January 2011. Brill was subsequently fired from his position shortly after this article appeared, in part because Brill’s words spawned a huge internet backlash against him. The only woman comic who was booked on Letterman during 2011 was Karen Rontowski.

⁶ See Nancy A. Walker, *A Very Serious Thing: Women’s Humor and American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), Regina Barreca, ed., *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), Regina Barreca, ed., *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), and Gail Finney, ed., *Look Who’s Laughing: Gender and Comedy* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

⁷ A number of different compositions by women written during the 1930s contain humorous content. These include works by Johanna Beyer, such as String Quartet No. 2 (discussed in Chapter 3), as well as two comical choral pieces written as satirical responses to Beyer’s experiences in the Composers Forum-Laboratory concerts: *The Composers Forum-Laboratory* (1937) and *The Federal Music Project* (1936) (see de Graaf 2008 for a brief description of these two pieces). Ruth Crawford’s short orchestral work *Rissolty, Rossolty* (1939) uses two folk songs, each of which contains humorous depictions of marriage (“Rissolty, Rossolty” and “Phoebe”). For a description of this work, see Tick (1997), 259–64.

because it is an example of a humorous work—created by women—that is seventy-five years old, but also because of its content, which focuses on a series of adventures (and misadventures) experienced by a middle-class family (Woman, Man, and Child) as they “race” towards a life of material success. This piece provides an opportunity to reveal how Humphrey and Fine use humor to explore—and even subvert—traditional gender roles. Although dance scholars and music scholars often discuss their respective fields independently from one another, in my view the complicated relationship between music and dance requires in-depth consideration of both areas in order to present a more nuanced reading of an artistic work. Therefore, this part of the dissertation presents detailed discussions of both Humphrey *and* Fine’s contributions to this collaboration. Just as the dramatic tension in dance often relies heavily on the mercurial relationship between two principal dancers, each of whom retain a degree of autonomy as they sometimes dance apart, and sometimes dance together, so too do music and dance share a fluid relationship, a relationship of possibility, in which each aspect of the work has the potential to follow or even undercut the other.

In order to showcase the complex—and sometimes conflicting—ways in which Humphrey and Fine’s individual contributions come together to create *The Race of Life*, the organizational structure of Part II is inspired by dance’s traditional *pas de deux*, a duet in five parts: *entrée*, *adagio* (or *adage*), variation I (featuring one lead), variation II (featuring the other lead), and coda. Since no substantive scholarship on *The Race of Life* exists, following this *entrée* the discussion begins with an *adagio* that presents background information on Fine, Humphrey, and the work itself. After this introductory material, Humphrey and Fine are each the focus of their own chapter; both of these

chapters discuss the various strategic ways that humor is used in this collaboration.

Chapter 4 (Variation I, which concentrates on Humphrey), examines the connections between humor and agency and the use of excess, exaggeration, and parody; Chapter 5 (Variation II, which concentrates on Fine) explores how humor and double text coalesce and entwine with Fine's music. In all, these different artistic strategies both destabilize and dismantle rigid categorizations of gender and womanhood, and this collaboration ultimately serves as a powerful example of how women's work in the performing arts should also be recognized as a vital, vibrant addition to our existing canon of American women's humor.

Adagio: Fine, Humphrey, and The Race of Life

Vivian Fine’s extraordinarily prolific compositional career not only extended over six decades, but also includes more than one hundred works written in a wide variety of genres, ranging from chamber music to opera. Yet Fine’s music has received minimal scholarly attention, and one significant aspect of her career that has received absolutely no in-depth study is her music for dance, most of which was composed in the 1930s.¹ When Fine arrived in New York City in the fall of 1931, she was eighteen years old,

¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, Fine (1913–2000) has received scant scholarly attention, and her music has received virtually no in-depth analytic treatment. For general information on Fine and her music, see Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Vivian Fine* (Lanham, MD and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999), and Judith Cody, *Vivian Fine: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2002). A few DMA dissertations have focused on Fine’s music from a performance-oriented perspective, including Leslie Jones, *The Solo Piano Music of Vivian Fine*, DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1994, Christine Kim, “Vivian Fine’s Works for Violoncello and Piano,” DMA Diss., Rice University, 2010, and Berlinda López, “The Solo Flute Works of Vivian Fine: ‘The Flicker’ for Solo Flute and ‘Emily’s Images’ for Flute and Piano,” DMA diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004.

Many of Fine’s compositions for dance are listed in Cody (2002), including: *Affirmations* (for Charles Weidman, 1934), *This Believing World* (for Elizabeth Waters, 1934), *Quest (Convergence and Affirmations)* (for Charles Weidman, 1934), *Conviction* (for Rose Crystal, 1935), *Invictus* (for Rose Crystal, 1935), *The Race of Life* (for Doris Humphrey, 1937), *Opus 51* (for Charles Weidman, 1938), *Tragic Exodus* (for Hanya Holm, 1939), *They Too Are Exiles* (for Hanya Holm, 1939), *Like a Driven Leaf* (for Corinne Chochem, 1939), *Tin-Horn Rebellion* (for George Bockman and the Adelphi Dance Theater, 1941). Decades later, Fine also composed *Alcestis* (for Martha Graham, 1960) and *My Son, My Enemy* (for José Limón, 1965).

I have also discovered manuscripts to two short pieces for dance by Fine that do not appear in Cody (2002): “Repetitious Form” and “Cumulative Form.” These manuscripts are held in the José Limón collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, JPB 95-20, Folder 12. Fine briefly mentions some manuscripts in the Limón collection that she did not have personal copies of in a 1978 interview (transcript, pp. 8–9). See Vivian Fine, interview by Theresa Bowers, 10 December 1978, transcript, Martha Hill Papers, Bennington Summer School of the Dance—Oral History Project, Juilliard Archives. Many thanks to Peggy Karp for granting permission to access and quote from this interview.

alone, and had only fifty dollars to her name.² Fine came to New York on the encouragement of two leading “ultramodern” composers: Henry Cowell, and Ruth Crawford (with whom she had studied composition and piano back in Chicago during the mid-1920s, beginning when Fine was eleven years old).³ In New York City, the teenage Fine began to establish herself as a composer, and throughout the 1930s she drew on her tremendous skills as a pianist to earn a living as a dance accompanist: Fine’s virtuosic piano playing helped her to become one of the most sought-after dance accompanists in New York, and she worked with many top-tier modern dancers and dance companies.⁴ Fine’s work as a dance accompanist and composer became so acclaimed that she even managed to support her family on her income when her parents moved to New York from Chicago in 1932 after her father lost his job, a particularly remarkable feat given Fine was just a teenager—and, no less, a woman—surrounded by the profoundly difficult economic conditions of the Depression.⁵ Yet Fine recognized she was at the epicenter of

² Fine frequently described her humble beginnings in New York in interviews; see also Von Gunden (1999) and Cody (2002).

³ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59–60.

⁴ In numerous interviews, Fine humorously recounted how she convinced Gluck-Sandor to hire her for her first official dance accompanist job, even though she had played for only *one* dance class in Chicago before she moved to New York. Fine soon began to earn the top-level salary of \$1.50 an hour as a dance accompanist. For more information about her work with dance, see Fine (1978) and Vivian Fine, comments during “Music and Dance Symposium,” Bennington College (June 1987), video recording [generously provided to me by Fine’s estate].

Among the dancers Fine worked with and composed for were: Gluck-Sandor, Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, Eve Gentry, Elizabeth Waters, Rose Crystal, Nini Theilade, and Martha Graham. Fine’s work with dance has never been examined in detail: it is glossed over in Von Gunden (1999), discussed only on pp. 16–17 and pp. 29–31. A brief summary also appears in Cody (2002), 11–15.

⁵ Von Gunden (1999), 17; Cody (2002), 11.

an astounding era of American dance, and she remembered her work with dance with fondness some fifty years later:

I had this all the time I worked for modern dance...The sense of frontier was there and that's what I liked. This I knew. I knew I was with great artists, and I loved that, and that they were innovative artists. That was very important to me.⁶

During this decade, Fine collaborated with many of the pioneering figures of modern dance in the United States, including Hanya Holm, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey (for whom she wrote *The Race of Life*).

Doris Humphrey, along with Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm, and Martha Graham, is considered one of the leading figures of her generation of modern dancers, known for her “fall and recovery” technique as well as her wide-ranging and deeply philosophical outlook on choreography and dance: as dance historian Sally Banes notes, “Humphrey’s social vision permeated her entire oeuvre.”⁷ Works like Humphrey’s *New*

⁶ Fine interview (1978), Juilliard Archives, 21. Interestingly, Fine gives a slightly different account of this era in an interview from the 1980s, when she noted that “It was a *wonderful* experience, and I had no idea at the time that I was working with the immortal pioneers of modern dance. We were just working together. And it was later on that I realized what an extraordinary position I’d been in, to work with these great dancers, and some other lesser dancers.” See Vivian Fine, comments during “Music and Dance Symposium,” Bennington College (June 1987), video recording, 16:21.

⁷ Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 136. For more information on Humphrey (1895–1958), see Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), Selma Jeanne Cohen, ed., *Doris Humphrey: An Artist First* (Pennington, NJ: Dance Horizons-Princeton Book Company, 1995 [first published, 1972]), Sali Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America: The Bennington Years* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1981), and *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Autumn 1996), which featured a series of articles on Humphrey and her works.

Like Fine, Humphrey grew up in the Chicago area (in Oak Park, a suburb). Humphrey studied with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn in the Denishawn Company, but eventually left Denishawn in 1928 and moved to New York City, where she and fellow Denishawn colleague Charles Weidman formed the Humphrey-Weidman company.

Dance trilogy condemned the triviality and competitiveness of modern life, offering an alternative vision of community based on equality, cooperation, and benevolence.⁸ A prolific writer, Humphrey also penned a number of books, articles, and speeches on dance, and Humphrey's *The Art of Making Dances* is still considered a foundational text for aspiring choreographers.⁹ Humphrey was also active in bringing modern dance "to the people" through her national tours (which often featured substantial educational components, such as lectures or instructional sessions in addition to the formal programs) and was also a leading figure in modern dance education, as she was a founding faculty member in the dance department at The Juilliard School. Humphrey was also known for her musicality and rich understanding of musical phrasing: as former Humphrey-Weidman company member Nona Schurman remembered, "Doris *knew* music, Doris was really a musician, that's the whole thing. ...understanding of musical phrasing was part of the whole thought."¹⁰ Humphrey even composed a short percussion work, entitled *Dance*

Humphrey's "fall and recovery" technique is based on how the body responds to gravity, but it also has larger philosophical connotations. Humphrey described the most interesting part of human movement as "the arc between two deaths": the process of a fall between the body standing erect and the body lying prone. Nona Schurman described "fall and recovery" as: "Doris Humphrey's message, her theme. Most people emphasize the 'fall' but choreographically and philosophically Doris emphasized the 'recovery,' and that emphasis (in her dances) speaks about the affirmation of the life force, which was her great message. . . . Fall and recovery *is* the message and *form* is its statement." See Schurman's discussion in Barbara Hausler, "Packaging Doris Humphrey or A Question of Form: Nona Schurman Shares Her Thoughts on Doris Humphrey's Choreography," *Dance Research Journal* vol. 28, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 42.

⁸ *New Dance Trilogy* is discussed in Banes (1998), 136 and ff. This work featured music by Wallingford Riegger.

⁹ Many of Doris Humphrey's writings have been published, including *The Art of Making Dances*, ed. Barbara Pollack (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), and *New Dance: Writings on Modern Dance*, ed. Charles Humphrey Woodford (Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 2008).

¹⁰ Nona Schurman, interview with Ann Vachon (unedited), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, VHS cassette, n.d., ca. 12:52. In this interview, Schurman also

Rhythms (1935), which was published in Henry Cowell's *New Music Quarterly* in 1936.¹¹

She also used music for her dances by a host of well-known contemporary composers, including Roy Harris, Aaron Copland, Paul Hindemith, Henry Cowell, Dane Rudhyar, and Wallingford Riegger.¹²

The Race of Life represented something of a departure for Humphrey, whose works were usually serious and dramatic. In contrast, *The Race of Life* is a wildly humorous piece, which features the madcap, exaggerated adventures of a Woman, Man, and Child. Humphrey is still renowned for creating dances that addressed weighty and serious social and philosophical issues, but Nona Schurman recalled *The Race of Life* as an important example of Humphrey's often unacknowledged comedic talents.

Humor is a funny thing. Now Doris could compose funny things simply beautifully. When she did—what was the name of the thing...*The Race of Life*—it was *hilarious* [laughs]. . . . It was absolutely hilarious. Bea [Beatrice Seckler] was in that I guess, and Katie Litz; Katie Litz could do comedy very well. Charles [Weidman] could do comedy. But Doris could do comedy *very* well, you see.¹³

notes that Humphrey came from a musical family, and claims that Humphrey's mother was her accompanist when she first toured the country.

¹¹ *New Music Quarterly*, vol. 18 (1936). This issue contained works for percussion by Johanna Beyer, Harold Davidson, Ray Green, Doris Humphrey, William Russell, and Gerald Strang. Humphrey's *Dance Rhythms* was notated by Wallingford Riegger. Many of these works appear on the recent recording *Restless, Endless, Tactless: Johanna Beyer and the Birth of American Percussion Music*, New World Records 80711-2 (2011).

¹² For example, Humphrey included an entire chapter on music in *The Art of Making Dances*, and it is one of the longest chapters in this work. Some of Humphrey's dances with music by these composers include: *Duo-Drama* (1935, Roy Harris), *The Banshee* (1928, Henry Cowell), *New Dance* (1935–36, Wallingford Riegger), *The Call/Breath of Fire* (1929–30, Dane Rudhyar), *Day on Earth* (1947, Aaron Copland), *Life of the Bee* (1929, originally accompanied only with humming on a haircomb, later with music by Paul Hindemith).

¹³ Schurman, NYPL interview, 46:21–47:41.

that was described by the *New York Times* as “the most extensive tour yet made by an American modern dance ensemble.”¹⁴

Table II.1

List of known performances of *The Race of Life*¹⁵

Date	Location and Venue	Notes
1938 23 January 1938	New York, NY: Guild Theatre	Premiere performance
Early Feb. 1938*	Washington, D.C.: ?	1938 tour (Feb.–May 1938) (1938 tour, con’d)
Early Feb. 1938*	Cleveland and Toledo, OH: ?	
Early Feb. 1938*	Michigan: ?	
Early Feb. 1938*	Milwaukee, WI: ?	
11 Feb. 1938*	Chicago, IL: Auditorium Theater	
8 March 1938*	Berkeley, CA: ? [UC Berkeley?]	
13 March 1938*	San Francisco, CA: Curran Theatre	
March–May? 1938*	Houston, TX: ?	
March–May? 1938*	Salt Lake City, UT: ?	
1939 29 Jan. 1939*	New York, NY: YMHA	
Week of Jan. 30 1939*	New York, NY: Bayes Theatre	Part of WPA—Federal Theatre dance project

¹⁴ See John Martin, “The Dance: On The Road—Modern Artists on Tour Report Healthy Increase of Interest—News Notes,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1938.

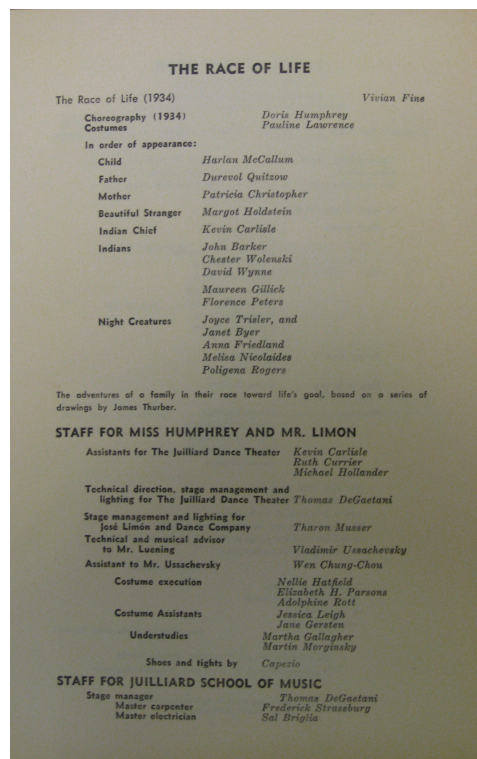
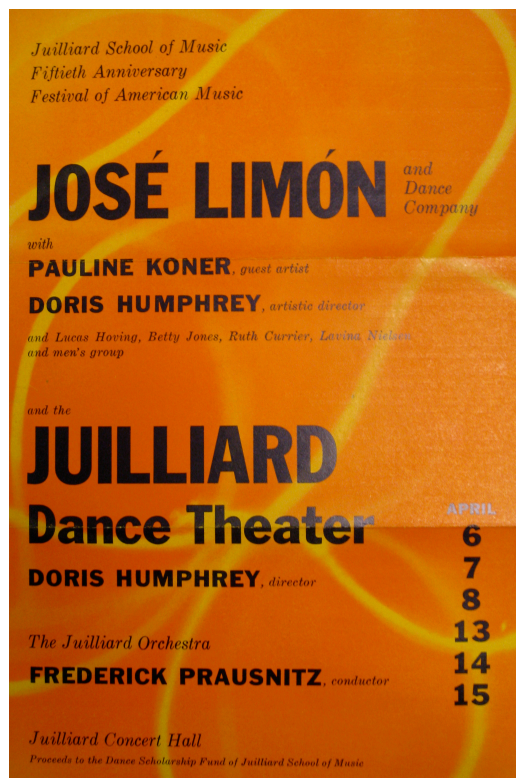
¹⁵ Only four of the performances in this table appear in Cody (2002). I would like to thank Jeni Dahmus (Juilliard Archives) and Tara Olivero, librarian in charge of the Doris Humphrey Collection, Julia Rogers Library, Goucher College, for providing me with clippings and programs from several of the performances in this table. In addition to these archival sources, information on these known performances has been taken from the following sources: Gervaise Butler, “Choreographics,” *Dance Observer*, vol. V, no. 1 (January 1938): 13; Edward Barry, “‘Race of Life’ Tests Dance as Senseless Art,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 February 1938; John Martin, “The Dance: On The Road—Modern Artists on Tour Report Healthy Increase of Interest—News Notes,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1938; “Interview with Doris Humphrey,” *Dance Observer*, vol. V, no. 5 (May 1938): 69; K.B., “The Dance: Jordan Hall—Humphrey and Weidman Dance Group,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 11 February 1939; and Dance Division Scrapbooks, Microfilm Reel #1 (vols. 1–4, 1951–1960), Juilliard Archives. See also Siegel (1987), which notes that the ten-week tour had *forty* performances, with stops in Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Chicago, and colleges in Ohio, Michigan, and Milwaukee. Siegel (1987) describes the Humphrey-Weidman tours in the late 1930s on pp. 166–84.

10 Feb. 1939* 25 March 1939	Boston, MA: Jordan Hall Des Moines, IA: Roosevelt High School	
21 April 1939*	Los Angeles, CA: Philharmonic Auditorium	
1940 1940 (?)*	Boston, MA: Tufts College	(date taken from handwritten note on program in Goucher College Archives)
6 Jan. 1940*	New York, NY: Washington Irving High School	
31 March 1940*	New York, NY: YMHA	
1956–1961 27–29 April 1956	New York, NY: Juilliard Concert Hall	Juilliard Dance Theater First performance, orchestral version
17 Jan. 1957*	Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art	Juilliard Dance Theater tour
19 Jan. 1957*	Augusta, GA: Medical College of Georgia	Juilliard Dance Theater tour
16 April 1961	Poughkeepsie, NY: ?	Orchestral version only (no dance), Hudson Valley Philharmonic. Performance used slides from Thurber drawings.

* None of these performances are listed in Cody (2002).

Figure II.3

Program excerpt and flyer for April 1956 performances of *The Race of Life*, Juilliard Dance Theater¹⁶



Although *The Race of Life* has been virtually forgotten today in favor of Humphrey's more well-known (and generally solemn) works, Humphrey also regarded the piece highly enough to include it as part of the Juilliard Dance Theater's repertoire in the mid-1950s, and it was performed with full orchestra at Juilliard in April 1956. For these performances, Fine made an orchestral version of the work from the original piano score, and the orchestral version was also performed as a freestanding concert work by

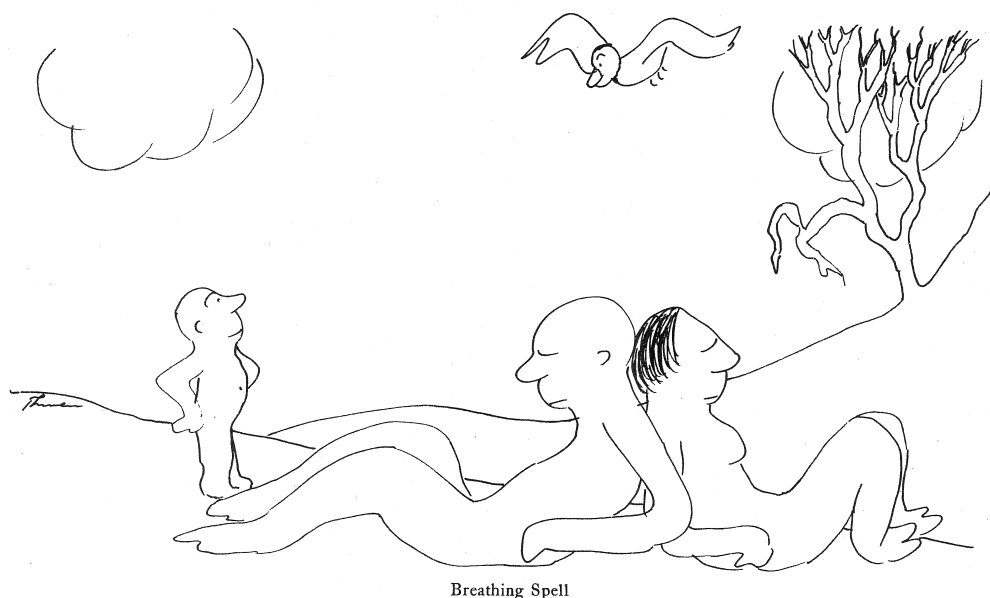
¹⁶ Dance Division Programs, 1956 season, Juilliard Archives. The April 1956 performance of *The Race of Life* was originally scheduled for April 13–15, but had to be postponed until April 27–29 due to a fire at Juilliard. The composition date for *The Race of Life* is incorrectly listed on the program as 1934.

the Hudson Valley Philharmonic in 1961. The Juilliard Dance Theater also performed the work as part of its east coast tour in January 1957.¹⁷

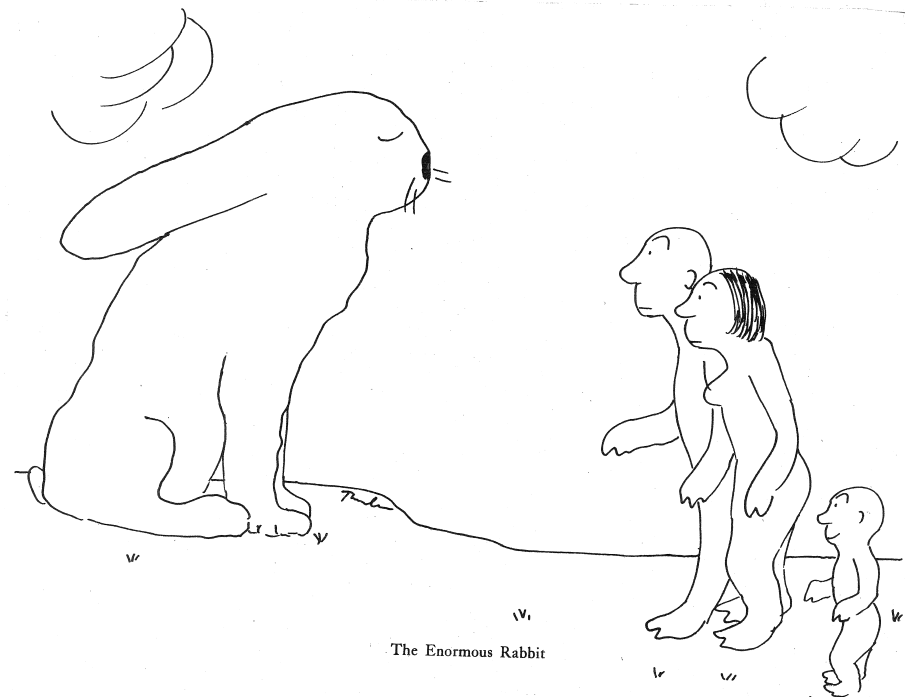
The Race of Life is loosely based on a series of drawings by James Thurber of the same title, which first appeared in Thurber's *The Seal in the Bedroom* (1932). Thurber's *The Race of Life* satirizes the foibles of a married couple and their child as they "race" towards a life of material success and security. In contrast to Humphrey's six-movement structure, Thurber's *The Race of Life* consists of a sequence of thirty-five drawings that depict the family in a large variety of different situations, including their travels, or even encounters with bizarre and unexpected animals. (The differences between the Humphrey and Thurber versions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.)

Figure II.4

James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, "Breathing Spell"



¹⁷ Dance Division Scrapbooks, Microfilm Reel #1 (vols. 1–4, 1951–1960), Juilliard Archives. The tour took place on January 15–21, 1957, and included performances in Baltimore, Maryland and Augusta, Georgia. These performances are not listed in Cody (2002).

Figure II.5James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, “The Enormous Rabbit”*Research and methodology*

In her pioneering work on women, feminism, and dance, Sally Banes describes the inherent difficulties in analyzing dance due to its intrinsically elusive nature, as a “live” performing art that resists documentation. Particularly with older dances (especially those performed before the widespread use of film and video recordings), little concrete evidence often survives, and so scholars must “piece together” their readings of older dances, based on what Banes describes as “shards, traces, memories, context, written descriptions, revivals, reconstructions, and speculation, as well as with film and video recordings of individual performances.”¹⁸ Banes also emphasizes that

¹⁸ Banes (1998), 7-8.

even if a dance has been recorded on film, this seemingly definitive record is actually quite fragmentary, since the position of the camera and editing of the film still present only a partial record of the dance. To this I would also add another problem with early dance recordings: as silent films, most of these sources contain no clear record of how the music and dance relate to one another.

My research on *The Race of Life*, then, draws on a large number of disparate resources to reconstruct the dance. The only surviving film of the dance that I have been able to locate is a brief portion of a silent film in the NYPL, which contains excerpts from Humphrey-Weidman Group's 1938 tour.¹⁹ In addition to this film, I have consulted photographs of both the 1938 and 1956 performances and rehearsals, held in the NYPL and Juilliard Archives. I have also used descriptions (both written and in interviews) of the dance from many different dancers involved with these productions, including Doris Humphrey, José Limón, and Nona Schurman. Luckily, a large number of different reviews of the work appear in a variety of newspapers and periodicals, and I have also drawn heavily on these descriptions. Finally, surviving manuscripts of Fine's score have been an invaluable resource, and her notes and marginalia have been particularly important for determining how the music and dance connect with one another. While certainly not an "exact" record (if such a thing even exists), when combined together this heterogeneous assemblage of sources provides a wealth of information on *The Race of Life*, and this rich collection of materials has been instrumental in illuminating key aspects of this fascinating, yet largely forgotten, artistic work.

¹⁹ Humphrey-Weidman company, film from 1938 tour. 16mm, 6½ minutes, 1938, filmed by Ann Barzel, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. This silent, black-and-white film contains excerpts from a performance at the Auditorium Theater, Chicago.

CHAPTER 4

Variation I (Humphrey): Performing Woman, Performing Thurber

If you're going to be made ridiculous and there's no way out of it, you may as well pretend you meant to.

—Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle*

Connections between humor and power have been explored by scholars in a host of different disciplines, particularly the ways in which humor can be used by dominant groups as a form of social control. Work in the social sciences has examined the way that humor is often used by authority figures or individuals in positions of power as a way of maintaining and bolstering existing hierarchical networks, such as those found in the workplace. For example, Pizzani (1991) and Coser (1960) studied joke-telling in medical institutions, noting that physicians often joked about their subordinates directly in front of them, but this relationship was not a reciprocal one, since subordinates did not typically make jokes about physicians in their presence.¹ Humor can also establish and intensify differential social boundaries between an “in group” and an “out group” (what has been described by Barreca as “us vs. them humor”), used as a way for social groups to strengthen their sense of community and camaraderie by joking about Others who are not

¹ A number of different studies exploring the relationship between joke-telling and social hierarchy are discussed in Janet Bing, “Is Feminist Humor an Oxymoron?” *Women and Language*, vol. 27, no. 1: 22–33. Coser’s study, “Laughter Among Colleagues” is also discussed in Lisa Merrill, “Feminist Humor: Rebellious and Self-Affirming” in *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina Barreca (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), 271–80.

part of their clique. As Lorenz (1963) has noted, “laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line.”²

In recent decades, feminist scholars have examined the ways that humor can be allied with agency. Although some kinds of humor maintain existing social hierarchies, humor can also be used as a subversive force, one that can disrupt or call into question existing structures of power. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, Nancy A. Walker describes how humorists cultivate a position of superiority from which their comedic observations emanate, even if this stance does not reflect their actual status within society. As Walker notes, “Because the humorist adopts at least the *stance* of superiority, claiming the freedom to point out incongruity or absurdity in a world that others are accustomed to accepting on its own terms, he or she works from a position of privileged insight.”³ Humor, then, can be closely entwined with agency, and the act of telling a joke—particularly if the person telling the joke does not hold a dominant position within their social structure—has the potential to disrupt and even transform existing matrices of power. As Regina Barreca has so eloquently put it, “every time a woman laughs, she’s breaking through a barrier.”⁴

The following chapter discusses the various ways that Humphrey uses humor—in both her composition of *The Race of Life* and her own performance of *Woman*—in order to complicate and even problematize the depictions of gender in Thurber’s original series, as well as gender roles more generally. The first section of the chapter explores how

² See Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002 [first published 1963]), 284. This famous phrase also appears in Barreca (1991), 136 and Boskin (1997), 18.

³ Walker (1988), 25.

⁴ Barreca (1991), 182.

Humphrey's artistic choices, like those of other women humorists, demonstrate how humor may be used as an important means of cultivating agency. The second part of the chapter examines how Humphrey's performance of *Woman* draws on various strategies of excess and parody in order to ultimately undermine the flat, one-dimensional trope of "Thurber woman."

In some sense, one could read an inherent sense of agency just in Humphrey's decision to bring Thurber's drawings into the modern dance realm. Performing Thurber as a modern dance work is a particularly remarkable choice because at this time modern dance in the United States was an overwhelmingly female domain, in which the majority of leading choreographers (such as Humphrey, Holm, and Graham) were women; most modern dance companies were also overwhelmingly female, although Humphrey's group was somewhat unique because it included both men and women.⁵ Humphrey's ideas about gender equality and women's agency permeated her oeuvre, as Nona Schurman remembered:

You've got to realize...Doris's great message, all the way through, choreographically, is the equality of the men and women. There's none of this dominance any place. . . . It's this completely democratic point of view, personally, socially, philosophically and choreographically.⁶

The dominance of women in modern dance provides an interesting contrast to many of the prevailing cultural sentiments of the 1930s, an era in which the bleak economic uncertainties of the Depression fostered a return to domestic ideologies of the

⁵ For example, the Bennington School of Modern Dance had an average male population of less than 5% between 1934 and 1939. Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, and Hanya Holm each had all-female dance groups. See Banes (1998), 136 and 145–46. The small percentage of male dancers at Bennington is also discussed in Salli Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America: The Bennington Years* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 22-23.

⁶ Nona Schurman, quoted in Hausler (1996): 45.

past, since professional women (particularly if they were married and/or middle class) were often perceived as “stealing” jobs from men.⁷ In contrast, modern dance served as a fascinating realm in which women were clearly at the forefront, performing as dancers, working as choreographers, organizing performances, and serving in leadership roles as administrators of dance programs (such as the Bennington School of Modern Dance) or their own dance companies.⁸ In his memoirs, José Limón cited the preeminence of women in modern dance as a direct counterexample to the long-held notion that powerful, creative women were successful because they possessed “masculine” intellectual characteristics:

In the dance of our day there is no question as to the preponderant genius of women. Men are hard put to match the historic genius of Anna Pavlova, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, and Doris Humphrey. . . . The American dance, as we know it, in the second half of the twentieth century is largely the product of two titanic artists [Humphrey and Graham], both women and both completely feminine women. There is no justification whatever for the old bromide of a masculine mentality in the body of a female.⁹

Banes (1998) examines the large number of strong female roles in modern dance at this time and describes these commanding roles as a natural outgrowth of the

⁷ For information about women, work, and the Great Depression, see Elaine S. Abelson, “The Times That Tried Only Men’s Souls: Women, Work, and Public Policy in the Great Depression,” in *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 219-238; Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); and Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

⁸ Martha Hill (1900–1995) was the first chairman of the Dance Department at Bennington College from 1932–1951 (she was also director of the Bennington Summer School of the Dance). Hill was also the first director of the Dance Division at Juilliard, a position she held from 1951 to 1985.

⁹ José Limón, *José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir*, ed. Lynn Garafola (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 53.

dominance of women in the field. Leading choreographers like Humphrey, Holm, and Graham often composed works based on historical or political themes that used all-female casts, or featured women in principal roles.¹⁰ While these choreographers might not have realized the potentially subversive implications of their artistic choices, Banes notes that works composed in this era serve as vitally important examples of the power of artistic creations to cultivate a sense of agency for women, and to expand the possibilities of what “woman” and “feminine” could mean:

Living in a modern dance world dominated by women, these choreographers did not seem to think that in making political statements about war and nationality one had to represent gender literally by casting “gender-true.” And yet, perhaps for this very reason, they often seemed unaware that gender itself could be a political issue. While they did not usually choreograph dances specifically about women’s political or cultural status, their very assumption that the world of the intellect and of artmaking was as available to them as to men was an important contribution to female emancipation. That is, they assumed agency, and they endowed their female characters with agency as a matter of course.¹¹

Humphrey’s choice to bring Thurber into the predominantly female world of modern dance remains a particularly surprising—even bold—decision, especially given Thurber’s preoccupation with masculinity and the ill effects of external forces (such as technology, finances, weather, the workplace, or women) on the emasculated “little men” he often featured at the center of his works.¹² However, while a certain agency may be found just in Humphrey’s decision to perform Thurber in her own voice, and on her own (largely female) modern dance “turf,” what’s especially striking about Humphrey’s

¹⁰ The works Banes specifically mentions are Hanya Holm’s *Trend* (1937), Anna Sokolow’s *façade-Esposizione Italiana* (1937), and Martha Graham’s *American Document* (1938). See Banes (1998), 145.

¹¹ Banes (1998), 145.

¹² Thurber’s explorations of masculinity and his “little man” figure will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

version is the ways that she alters, revises, and changes Thurber, ultimately revealing an interpretation that focuses on women characters and the female perspective decidedly more than Thurber's original sequence.

For example, in Thurber's version of *The Race of Life*, "The Beautiful Stranger" is just a single cartoon, just one event among many of the thirty-five different scenes of the family's unusual experiences. However, Humphrey chose to significantly expand this single scene, using the conflict between Man, Woman, and Stranger as the basis for an entire movement, and one that provided much of the dramatic action for the entire dance. Although Thurber's series focuses more upon the different encounters between the nuclear family (man, woman, and child) and their external environment, Humphrey's version concentrates more heavily on the drama of the marital relationship.

Table 4.1Comparison of Thurber and Humphrey/Fine, *The Race of Life*

HUMPHREY/FINE	THURBER
I. Introduction and Start of the Race	The Start Swinging Along Neck and Neck Accident Water Jump
II. The Beautiful Stranger The Quarrel (written within mvt. II in all versions of the score)	The Beautiful Stranger The Quarrel The Pacemaker Spring Dance* (see mvt. IV, Humphrey) Faster The Enormous Rabbit Escape Top Speed Winded Quand Même Breathing Spell The Dive Dog Trot Down Hill Menace Up Hill Dogs in the Blizzard Out of the Storm The Skull The Water Hole The Laggard
III. Indians!	Indians! War Dance Gone!
IV. Spring Dance* (See Thurber sequence above)	The Bear Sunset
V. Night-Time	On Guard (only cartoon that is at night) Dawn: Off Again
VI. Finale	Final Sprint The Goal

Bold indicates similarities between the two versions. * indicates a change in order from Thurber's original sequence.

More importantly, the female characters in Humphrey's version play a decidedly more prominent role in the drama in the staged work than in the cartoons. In Thurber's sequence, women—if they appear at all—are just one small part of the wide range of scenes and encounters he depicts, some of which even feature fantastical animals, such as the “Enormous Rabbit” or “Dogs in the Blizzard.” Thurber's version has only two female characters, the Woman and the Beautiful Stranger—and the Stranger only appears once, in a single drawing. In addition to expanding the Stranger role, Humphrey also chose to add a number of female characters to her version that do not appear in Thurber's drawings, including several female “Indians” and entire group of Night Creatures, led by a queen.

Humphrey also changed details within Thurber's drawings to give the female characters more power and agency. For example, in Thurber's cartoon “The Quarrel” (which immediately follows “The Beautiful Stranger”), the son hits the father on the head with a rock. However, in Humphrey's version, the Woman hits the Man on the head with the rock.¹³ The Thurber sequence also begins with the child clutching a pennant with the word “Excelsior” written on it. In Thurber's sequence, the woman never holds the flag, but during Humphrey's version the woman dances furiously in center stage, wildly waving the “Excelsior” flag and taunting the Man and Child.¹⁴ Humphrey also significantly alters Thurber by casting the Woman as the main character. A review of the 1938 premiere of the work also described the importance of the Woman, noting that

¹³ Limón (2001), 72–73. Limón remembers, “The Beautiful Stranger appeared. Papa was enticed and enmeshed. Momma, who had seen all, knocked her errant husband cold with a rock conveniently provided by the boy.”

¹⁴ Humphrey-Weidman company, 1938 film, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

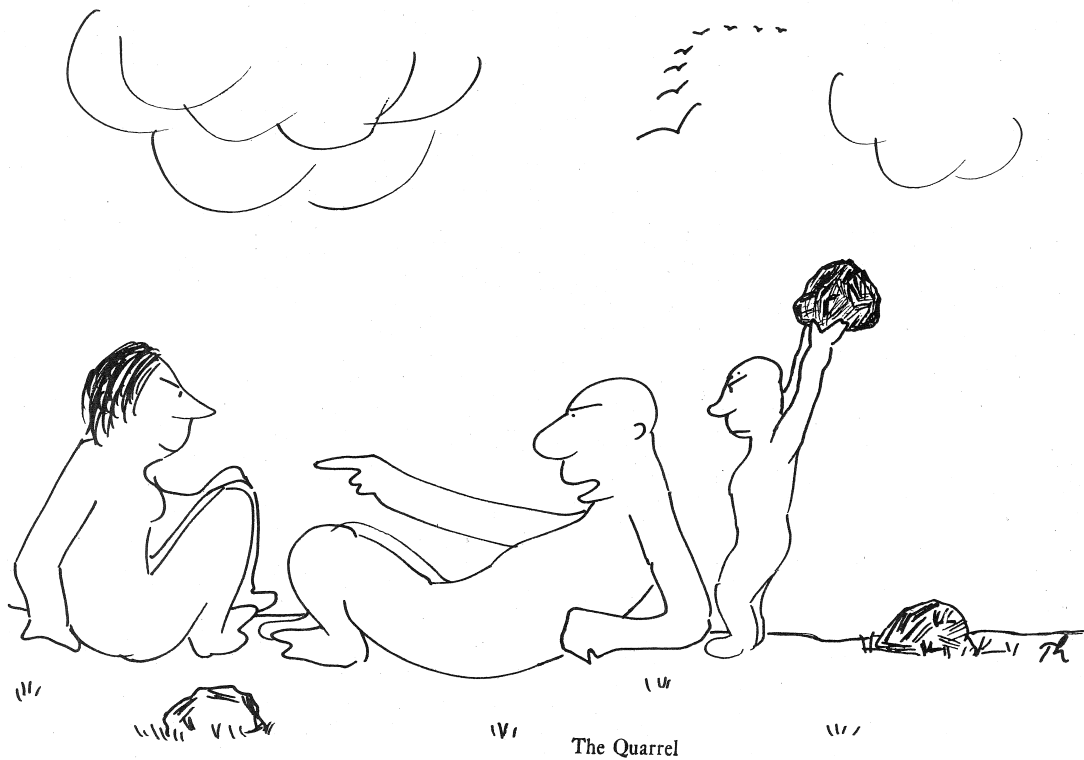
“José Limón is her husband and Charles Weidman their little boy, who accompany her on the campaign for success, but it is obviously she who rules the expedition.”¹⁵ One year later, a review of the Humphrey-Weidman group’s weeklong engagement at the Bayes Theatre (performing a program that included *The Race of Life*), noted that all three works showcased Humphrey “in the central role, admirably assisted by Mr. Weidman, José Limon [sic, Limón] and the regular members of the project.”¹⁶

Humphrey also undercuts the general perspective of Thurber’s drawings. Thurber’s series most often features the Man as the focal point of the drawing, prominently positioned in the center of the frame with the other characters and contents of the drawing directed inward, towards him. The drawing below showcases the man at the center of the frame: other aspects of the drawing (such as the son holding the rock, or even the birds above the family) all point towards the Man, who is clearly the focal point of the scene.

¹⁵ John Martin, “Hilarity Feature at Dance Recital,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1938.

¹⁶ This series of performances was organized under the auspices of the WPA Federal Theatre’s dance project. The program for the week consisted of three works: *The Race of Life*, *With My Red Fires*, and *To the Dance*. See John Martin, “WPA Group Opens Dance Production: Three Works by Miss Doris Humphrey Featured—She Has Central Role in Each,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1939.

Figure 4.1
James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, “The Quarrel”



In contrast, Humphrey’s version showcases female characters who often take a more central role onstage, and photographs of the dance reveal many scenes in which a female character, not a male character, is at the center of the action onstage. Humphrey herself even described her intention for her own character to be a focal point in a passage from her text *The Art of Making Dances*, in which she discusses how choreographers should strive to maintain a clear focus in the onstage action of their works:

One must be careful to watch the focus, as the eye of the viewer should be led to the important statement. Interference with the main theme is so well known in the theater that it has a name, “catching flies,” so that the actress who maliciously wishes to destroy her rival’s important speech has only to flick a handkerchief now and then to catch every eye and melt the concentration. This can very well happen in dancing, too. If the group, which has been reduced to almost nothing during a solo passage, makes just a few sharp hand movements, it can successfully nullify the main statement. . . .

In the department of catching flies, I once had to restrain Charles Weidman in one scene. He had just made an entrance as a small boy, and when I came in as his mother, he was down on his knees in a corner, catching a bug. This seemed like minor business, except that every eye was on him and not one on me!¹⁷

Film footage of the dance also features a number of moments in which the woman was clearly the center of the choreography: for example, when the Woman is wildly waving a flag, directing the Man and Child upstage, or when the Woman frantically dances alone, the Man and Child watching her, frozen, at the side of the stage. Clearly, Humphrey had no qualms about revising Thurber’s version to create more prominent female roles, and Humphrey’s artistic decisions in *The Race of Life* reinforce Banes’s observations about the creative freedom of female choreographers in this era, who “assumed agency” and “endowed their female characters with agency as a matter of course.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Humphrey does not specifically give the title of the dance she discusses in the passage, but to my knowledge, *The Race of Life* is the only work in which Weidman performed the role of Humphrey’s son. The quote is taken from Humphrey (1959), 156.

¹⁸ Banes (1998), 145.

Figure 4.2

The Race of Life, dress rehearsal for Juilliard performance (April 1956)
Juilliard Archives



But *The Race of Life* was not the only time that Humphrey considered using Thurber's work as the basis for a dance and invested the female characters with more agency. After she completed *The Race of Life*, Humphrey worked on a different libretto for a dance based on James Thurber and E. B. White's *Is Sex Necessary* (1929). This volume depicts sexual and romantic relationships between men and women, featuring humorous case studies that are based on popular contemporaneous psychoanalytic

discourse.¹⁹ Humphrey's detailed plans for the dance survive in her own annotated copy of the Thurber and White text, which is held by the New York Public Library. This fascinating book reveals the extent to which Humphrey felt comfortable revising and even re-writing Thurber's narrative, as the book is laden with Humphrey's own marginalia, as well as numerous instances where Humphrey crossed out or changed the text. Like Humphrey's version of *The Race of Life*, a number of these revisions alter the text to focus more upon women, or involve issues related to representations of women. The example below shows a particularly interesting series of revisions, in which Humphrey crosses out the most condescending descriptions of the "biologico-cultural type" (such as "she was growing older" and "had developed an ambition to write") and even changes the actions of the woman—from "going quietly home to bed" to "going out."²⁰

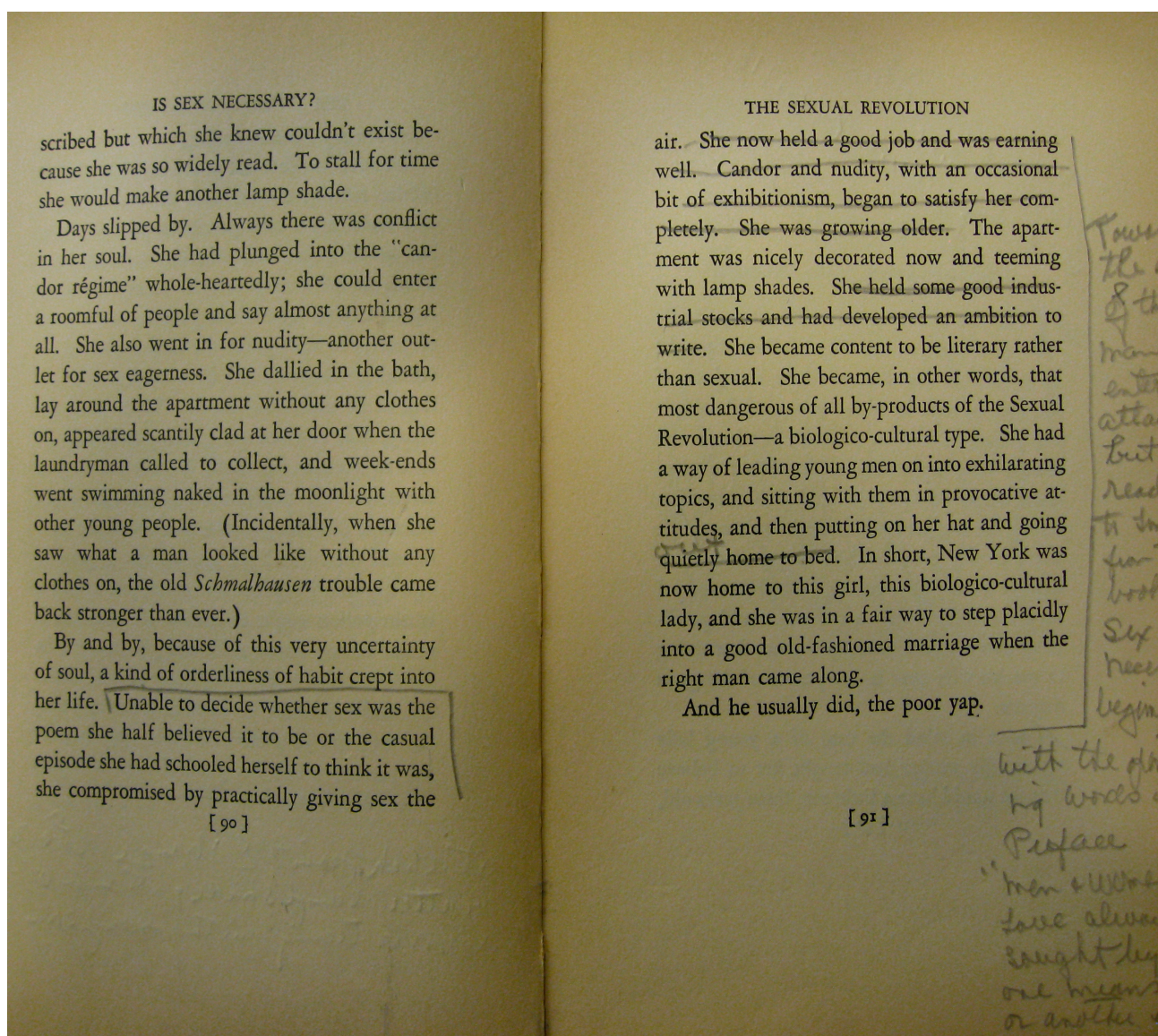
¹⁹ See James Thurber and E.B. White, *Is Sex Necessary? Or Why You Feel the Way You Do* (New York: Perennial/HarperCollins, 2004 [first published by Harper & Bros., 1929]). Thurber made the drawings for the book, and Thurber and White both wrote the text: Thurber wrote the odd-numbered chapters, the glossary, and the preface, and White wrote the even-numbered chapters, the forward, and two brief concluding items ("Answers to Hard Questions" and "A Note on the Drawings in this Book").

²⁰ Interestingly, on this page Humphrey also crosses out the sentence "She now held a good job and was earning well." Humphrey never staged *Is Sex Necessary?*. Siegel notes that Humphrey completed a detailed script for the dance in the mid-1940s for the Theatre Guild in New York City, but it was never performed (the Theatre Guild eventually gave Humphrey an award of \$500 in December 1947 for *Is Sex Necessary?*). Weidman organized a performance of *Is Sex Necessary?* two years after Humphrey's death. See Siegel (1987), 225.

A letter from Martha Hill to William Schuman (then President of Juilliard) reveals that Humphrey originally proposed *The Race of Life* or *Is Sex Necessary?* for the 1956 season at Juilliard, but decided that *Is Sex Necessary?* would be "too difficult" to prepare in only a few months time (since it had never been performed). See letter from Hill to Schuman, 19 October 1955, Dance Division Production Records, 1951–71, Box 1, Folder 9 (Juilliard Dance Theater, 1955/56: planning, budget), Juilliard Archives.

Figure 4.3

Doris Humphrey's personal copy of Thurber and White, *Is Sex Necessary?*
 Performing Arts Research Collections-Dance, NYPL



Scholars of gender and humor often discuss the ways that humor is allied with agency and power—and how *who's* telling the joke matters.²¹ Barreca (1991) describes

²¹ Certainly, essentialist narratives of humor and joke-telling are something to be avoided: clearly, an argument such as “women tell certain kinds of jokes because they were biologically born women” is obviously problematic. Yet some humor does depend

the differences between the “voice of authority” and the “subversive voice,” noting that groups (such as women) who have not traditionally been in dominant positions within our social hierarchy can use humor as a means of destabilizing existing matrices of power:

The dynamic of the powerful authority versus the subversive voice is an important one to keep in mind here. The voice of authority, challenged by one joke maker, is different from the authority’s own use of the joke against a powerless victim. . . . The voice of authority assumes control and offers definition; the voice of the minority suggests subversion and redefinition. Joking is a reaction that allows the joker to feel in control, however briefly.²²

Weisstein (1973) also draws connections between humor, control, and subversion, noting that “...people *do* laugh at their own pain. The important difference is that if they are really to find it funny, *they* have to make the joke. Humor here, too, has a political use, but its function is reversed: it is a weapon or a technique of survival used by the oppressed. It is the powerless fighting back.”²³

Humphrey’s changes to Thurber, then, may be allied with this sense of agency and power. Although obviously Humphrey is using Thurber’s joke, *she*’s the one who’s telling Thurber’s joke, and her choice to recast Thurber’s version in favor of a more female-centered perspective reveals a remarkable degree of artistic agency. Perhaps the

on the gender of the subject or the gender of the joke-teller. For example, a number of scholars have noted that while American humor is replete with mother-in-law jokes, it has a noticeable lack of father-in-law jokes (see Barreca 1991, pp. 35–36). Boskin (1997) also notes the lack of father-in-law jokes in our culture, and describes sociologist George P. Murdock’s observation that mother-in-law jokes are unique to American humor (see Boskin 1992, p. 121).

²² Barreca (1991), 58. Walker (1988) also describes the power humorists wield, noting that “the humorist places himself or herself—however momentarily—in the superior position of truth-teller, upsetting conventional assumptions of reality.” See Walker (1988), 25.

²³ Naomi Weisstein, “Why We Aren’t Laughing . . . Any More,” in Linda A. Morris, ed., *American Women Humorists: Critical Essays* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 134. Emphasis in this quote is Weisstein’s. This essay first appeared in *Ms. Magazine* (November 1973).

dominance of women in modern dance helped to give Humphrey a sense of freedom to explore—and even revise—Thurber’s work on her own terms. However, it is also extremely important to remember that because Humphrey’s work was in dance, a genre that relies heavily on live performance for its dissemination (especially in this era), Humphrey’s version of *The Race of Life* was not just a zany creation that happened within the largely female “cloister” of modern dance, but something that was presented out in “the real world,” before audiences and critics, both women *and* men.²⁴

Humphrey’s choice to perform her adaptation throughout the United States and bring it before a concert-going public that was *not* overwhelmingly female also requires an additional degree of agency, since she was flaunting her exaggerated characterization of Woman directly in front of a social group who has traditionally held a position of dominance in society—men.

The connection between humor and agency has been a recurring theme for women, even in our era: in interviews, Nora Ephron has often described the potentially empowering aspects of humor, noting that “My mother taught me a very fundamental lesson of humor, which is that if you slip on a banana peel, people laugh at you, but if you tell people you slipped on a banana peel, it’s your joke. *And you’re the hero of the joke because you’re telling the story.*”²⁵ Almost thirty years earlier, Ephron also expressed similar sentiments in her novel *Heartburn* (1983). The conclusion of this novel features the protagonist’s lengthy explanation of why she wants to be the one to tell

²⁴ As previously discussed, *The Race of Life* was performed in a wide range of venues throughout the United States, and was an important part of the Humphrey-Weidman Group’s 1938 tour. See Table II.1 for a list of known performances and venues.

²⁵ Nora Ephron, “I Remember Nothing: Nora Ephron, Aging Gratefully,” NPR interview, 9 November, 2010, available online at www.npr.org [emphasis in quote is mine].

the story, and remains a poignant example of the potential power of humor to serve as a means of agency, particularly for women:

Because if I tell the story, I control the version. Because if I tell the story, I can make you laugh, and I would rather have you laugh than feel sorry for me. Because if I tell the story, it doesn't hurt as much. Because if I tell the story, I can get on with it.²⁶

Exaggeration and Parody

Marriage is an institution, but I'm not ready for an institution.

—Mae West

Exaggeration is one of the fundamental elements of comedy, and this section of the chapter examines some of the complex ways that exaggeration is used in *The Race of Life* by focusing on several different issues surrounding Humphrey's depiction of Woman, including: 1) intersections between exaggeration and the grotesque; 2) differences between Humphrey's and Thurber's characterizations of Woman; and 3) connections between exaggeration and parody. Using various strategies of exaggeration and excess, Humphrey ultimately creates a representation of Woman that complicates—and even deconstructs—the “Thurber woman” stereotype.

A number of scholars have described exaggeration as one of the most distinctive features of American humor, tracing a historical legacy of hyperbole and overstatement that has its origins in the “tall tales” of the American frontier.²⁷ Exaggeration in

²⁶ This quote from Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983) also appears in Barreca (1991), 153.

²⁷ See Nancy A. Walker, *What's So Funny?: Humor in American Culture* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1998). Walker's introduction describes how exaggeration was even noted as a distinct aspect of American humor in the nineteenth century, as British writer H. R. Haweis named exaggeration as one of the three key aspects of American humor (see Walker's introduction and ch. 1 in Walker 1998). See also Sculley

American humor also has a long tradition of being used to subversively comment on imbalances in power among different social groups, as amplifying and overstating enduring stereotypes directly brings lingering sociocultural discontinuities into sharp relief. Walker (1988) discusses the ways that women have traditionally used humor to “work through” the various female stereotypes presented by the dominant (male) culture, such as the “nagging wife” or “dumb blonde.” As Walker notes:

The “presiding masculine genius” placed woman in comedy in a way as to codify her allowable roles and influences: she is the silly status-seeking matron in Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast*; she is Rip Van Winkle’s nagging wife; she is the morbidly sentimental Emmeline Grangerford in *Huck Finn*.

For women to use humor as a means of defining self in relation to culture, therefore, they had first to do battle with these images, to work from within a thicket of established stereotypes that denigrated their intellectual capacities and denied their autonomy.²⁸

Numerous accounts of *The Race of Life* recall exaggeration as being a key element of the comedy in the work, and its overstated qualities are repeatedly mentioned in both contemporaneous reviews of the work as well as published firsthand accounts of the work by other dancers. Humphrey’s depiction of the Woman seems to have been the most exaggerated of all, and most descriptions of *The Race of Life* focus on her performance of the Woman, such as a review in *American Dancer*, which described how “Miss Humphrey has genuinely succeeded in projecting the nonsensical Thurber mood, particularly in her own characterization of Woman.”²⁹ Humphrey’s character is clearly intended to be humorous, but a decidedly interesting trend within much of the surviving

Bradley, “Our Native Humor,” in Joseph Boskin, ed., *The Humor Prism in 20th Century America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), especially pp. 51–53.

²⁸ Walker (1988), 181.

²⁹ Albertina Vitak, “Dance Events Reviewed—Humphrey-Weidman, January 23,” *The American Dancer*, vol. 11, no. 5 (March 1938): 19.

commentary on *The Race of Life* is the tendency of many writers to emphasize the grotesque aspects of Humphrey's comic role. José Limón, who performed the role of the Man in the 1938 production, remembered, "An entirely new manner and style of movement had to be invented. . . . And more than anyone else, Doris completely made herself over. She became a gross, strident, harassed female, a woman no longer young or attractive."³⁰

A number of feminist scholars have drawn connections between exaggeration and the monstrous, exploring the various ways that excessive and grotesque depictions of women can function, particularly in terms of their potential to threaten—and even transform—existing structures of power. Transgressive women have often been viewed negatively or admonished for their actions: a woman who breaches the boundaries of the status quo is often criticized for "making a spectacle of herself."³¹ Expanding on work by Bakhtin, which describes the underlying social functions of the overindulgent grotesquerie of carnival, scholars such as Little (1991) and Russo (1995) have examined the potential that grotesque representations of women have for subversion and social transformation.³² Russo (1995) describes an astonishing array of grotesque female performances (including stunt pilots, trapeze artists, and cinematic depictions of "freaks" and "mutant women") in order to problematize the long-standing characterization of the female grotesque as something automatically base or low; instead, Russo examines the

³⁰ Limón (2001), 72.

³¹ For a discussion of this issue, see Barreca (1991), 60–61.

³² See Judy Little, "Humoring the Sentence: Women's Dialogic Comedy," in *American Women Humorists: Critical Essays*, ed. Linda A. Morris (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994 [Little essay first published, 1991]), 155–70 and Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

various ways that grotesques can open up a space of risk and ambivalence, a place of possibility that also “leaves from for chance.”³³ Hélène Cixous’s famous essay “Laugh of the Medusa” reappropriates the image of this mythological monster as a call to action for women to write about their distinctly female experiences. For Cixous, grotesque (female) monsters like Medusa can be transgressive, yet transformative figures.

Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a...divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster?

[. . .]

They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. . . . You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.³⁴

³³ Russo (1995), 11. A central theme of Russo 1995 is to examine just how wide-ranging the category “grotesque” can be. For example, Russo describes “grotesque” categorizations of women ranging from stunt pilots (including Amelia Earhart), “freaks” (such as Siamese twins and circus performers) in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* and Ulrike Ottinger’s *Freak Orlando*, and “mutant women” such as the leading female character, Claire, in David Cronenberg’s *Dead Ringers*.

Jensen-Moulton (2008) has drawn on Stephen Lyng’s concept of “edgework” and its connection with risky, thrill-seeking behaviors to analyze the intersections between Miriam Gideon’s biography and her 1958 opera, *Fortunato*. See Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, “‘Sparring With Fate’: Miriam Gideon’s 1958 Opera *Fortunato*,” PhD diss., City University of New York (2008), 138–51.

³⁴ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” [“Le Rire de la Méduse”], trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1976): 885. This essay is considered one of the founding texts of *l’écriture féminine*: elsewhere in this essay, Cixous compels women to “write her self” and “put herself into the text” (875), to move beyond fear and apprehension and simply “Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it” (876).

Julia Kristeva has also written extensively about abjection, horror, and women. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). See also Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), especially chs. 4 and 6.

Obviously, not all grotesque representations of women are positive, and monstrous depictions of women can also have a decidedly negative function, reflecting anxieties about women or their position in society. Of course, a long history of disgusting and vicious gendered representation exists: for example, repulsive images of Medusa have been present in visual art for thousands of years.³⁵ Russo (1995) discusses an enduring tradition of how the grotesque has been used to establish and maintain a binary opposition between “low” and “high” culture: writings ranging from Vitruvius’ *De Architectura* (ca. 27 BCE) to Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais outline an aesthetic stratum in which the excessive, vile, and “unnatural” grotesque is used to contrast the rational, official, and monumental sleekness of canonical classical aesthetics and “high” culture.³⁶ While Bakhtin describes at length the potential that carnivalesque and grotesque bodies offer for destabilizing high culture, his work also contains some striking associations between the grotesque and (abject) feminine, and he specifically chooses to use his (now-famous) description of the “senile, decaying, and deformed flesh” of the laughing pregnant hag figurines in the Kerch terracotta collection as exemplifying the grotesque, explicitly noting that these abhorrent hags are “a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque.”³⁷ Although humorous, James Thurber’s strident, overblown, and sometimes frightening depictions of what came to be called the “Thurber woman” or “Thurber female” often teeter on this fragile border between comedy and monstrosity, between laughter and horror, and thus also may be included within this longstanding legacy of

³⁵ For example, Russo (1995) includes a photo of Medusa on a temple in Corfu, dating from ca. 600–580 BCE. See Russo (1995), 2.

³⁶ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³⁷ See Bakhtin (1984), 25–26. Russo (1995) discusses this passage in detail on pp. 62–64.

association between grotesque and female. Thurber's "House and Woman" (1935), shown below, serves as one of his most overstated examples, as a monstrously blended mass of woman and house threatens to engulf the tiny man returning home in the foreground of the drawing.

Figure 4.4

James Thurber, "House and Woman" (*New Yorker*, March 23, 1935) [reprinted in *Men, Women, and Dogs* (1943)]



Thurber is often remembered today for these vivid depictions of overbearing women, which played into Depression-era anxieties about traditional gender roles.³⁸ Part

³⁸ Scholarship on Thurber is vast. A range of Thurber's work is featured in Garrison Keillor, ed., *James Thurber: Writings and Drawings* (New York: The Library of America, 1996). See also Thomas Fensch, ed., *Conversations with James Thurber*

of the salience of Thurber's humor was its ability to reflect the precarious position of masculinity during this era, as Thurber's works drew on widespread contemporaneous concerns not only about working middle-class women, but also about male unemployment and the difficulties many men faced in fulfilling their "manly" duties as breadwinners and heads-of-household.³⁹ A number of Thurber's short stories and cartoons center around his depictions of what is generally known as the "little man," an emasculated figure who is constantly engaged in various "battles" with outspoken and domineering women.

However, it is important to note that Thurber's female characters, while often overbearing, actually demonstrated a wide range of characteristics and behaviors, and although Thurber is remembered best today for the strident women featured in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" and "The Catbird Seat," many of his other female characters did not strictly conform to this overblown stereotype. In his chapter on "feminine types" in *Is Sex Necessary?*, Thurber notes that "the varieties of the female of the species are as manifold as the varieties of the flower called the cineraria," and hilariously delineates a number of different "female types," including lengthy descriptions of the Quiet Type (or, Q.T.), the Buttonhole-twister Type, and the "Don't, dear" Type, and brief mentions of the Outdoors Type, the Clinging Vine Type, and the "I-can't-go-through-with-it" Type.⁴⁰ Thurber even wrote a short story featuring a "little woman" character, a skittish, middle-

(Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), Charles S. Holmes, *Thurber: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), and Harrison Kinney, *James Thurber: His Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995).

³⁹ For more information on the status of women during the Depression, see Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ See Thurber, "A Discussion of Feminine Types" in Thurber/White's *Is Sex Necessary?* (1929).

aged spinster with an inexplicable fear of automobiles and an overwhelmingly unhealthy attachment to her mangy dog, Feely.⁴¹

In addition, the “little men” in Thurber’s stories usually have anxieties about a number of different aspects of their environment (such as jobs, finances, technology, etc.), and their relationships with women (even overbearing women) typically represent only a small portion of these larger, more generalized fears about the world at large.⁴² Further, many of Thurber’s works culminate with an ending in which his tyrannical female characters are eventually punished—often quite drastically—by the supposedly “little men” in the story, who ultimately enact their revenge upon their female tormenters. Several of Thurber’s most domineering women—such as Ulgine Barrows (“The Catbird Seat”) or the wife in “The Unicorn in the Garden”—are taken away to mental institutions at the conclusion of the story, cleverly outwitted by the male protagonists they initially bully. Although Thurber certainly featured overbearing women in his works throughout his career, many of the most famous and outlandish depictions of oppressive “Thurber

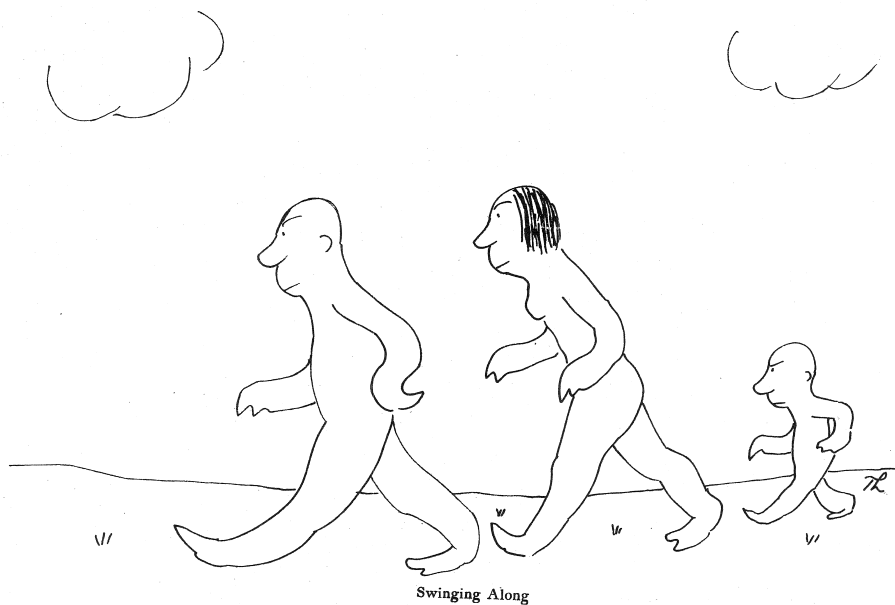
⁴¹ James Thurber, “The Departure of Emma Itch” (1935). This story first appeared in the *New Yorker* (10 August 1935), and was also published in Thurber’s *The Middle-Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1935).

⁴² For a fascinating discussion of the differences between Thurber’s “little men” and representations of “little women” by female authors, see Nancy A. Walker, “Fragile and Dumb: The ‘Little Woman’ in Women’s Humor, 1900–1940,” *Thalia*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1983): 24–29. Walker emphasizes that Thurber’s “little man” figure tends to be at the mercy of large, indefinite forces” (24) that he usually attempts to directly combat in some way. In contrast, the “little woman” is “the victim of specific social expectations” (24) and often “at the mercy of husband and household” (28); the “little woman” also tends to internalize her experience and often “assumes the blame for her predicament” (27) rather than attempting to directly confront or change her situation or circumstance. For Walker, “The ‘little man’ is bewildered because there seem to be no rules, what bothers the ‘little woman’ is that there are too many rules, and she does not seem capable of following them. The ‘little man’ finds the world absurd, but the ‘little woman’ finds *herself* [Walker’s emphasis] absurd in a world which presumably makes sense to someone” (24).

women” did not appear until the late-1930s and early 1940s, *after* Humphrey completed *The Race of Life*.⁴³

Interestingly, Thurber’s drawings for *The Race of Life* contain a more moderate depiction of Woman, one that is not nearly as hyperbolic as his other despotic female characters. In *The Race of Life* the family unit is always featured together, and although in several cartoons the Woman leads the family, she is far from being an authoritarian figure. The family is often pictured running together in profile or with the Child leading the way; in a few cartoons, the Man is actually shown leading the family.

Figure 4.5
James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, “Swinging Along”

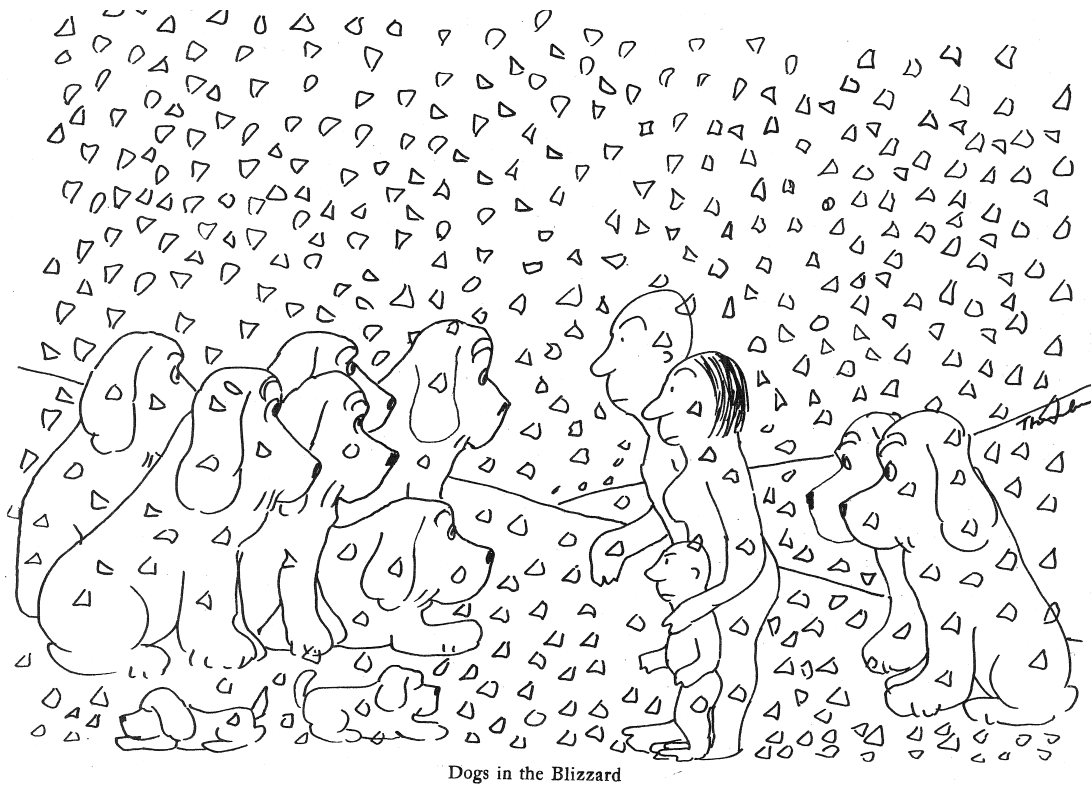


⁴³ These well-known Thurber works that appeared after Humphrey completed *The Race of Life* include: “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” (1939), “The Catbird Seat” (1942), and “The Unicorn in the Garden” (1939).

Many Thurber works emphasize the difference between a controlling “Thurber woman” and an emasculated “little man” by also exaggerating their respective physical attributes, creating a female character that dominates the male through both her large physical presence and psychological intimidation. However, *The Race of Life* presents the Man and Woman as roughly equal in size—and in most drawings, the Man is slightly larger than the Woman.

Figure 4.6

James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, “Dogs in the Blizzard”



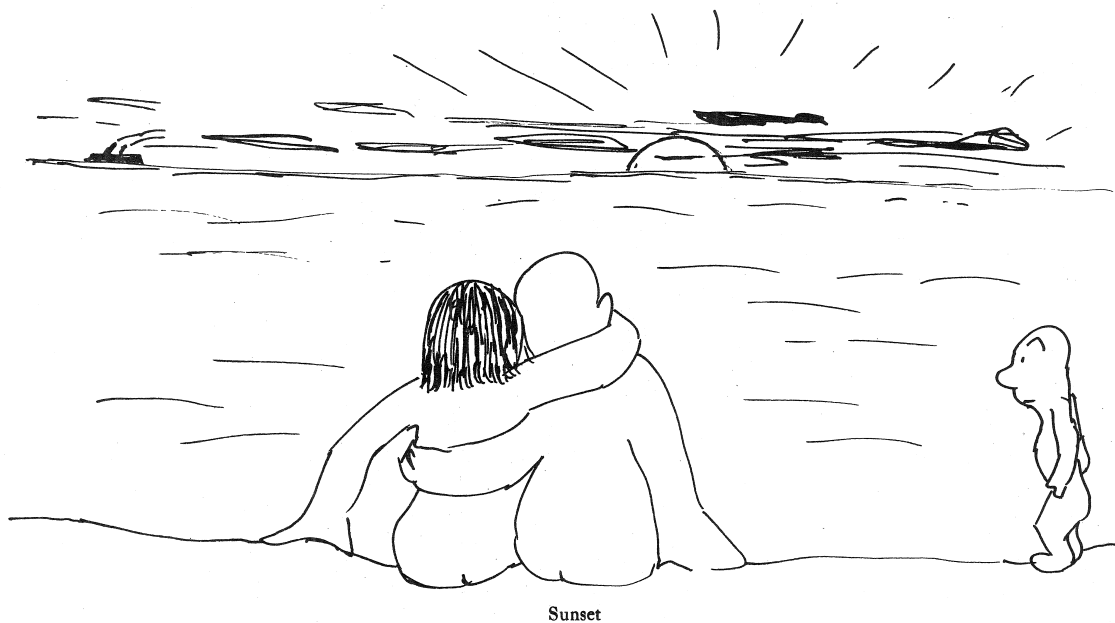
Dogs in the Blizzard

While glimpses of the Woman’s strength and assertiveness do occasionally appear (such as “Menace” or “The Bear,” drawings in which the Woman attempts to defend her family from a would-be attacker) these brief moments are not as exaggerated as

Thurber's other unflattering portraits of aggressive women. Ultimately, in *The Race of Life* the Woman seems to try to help the Man, not attack or dominate him. Grauer (1994) discusses Thurber's various depictions of women, and notes how the female characters in Thurber's *The Race of Life* and *The Last Flower* depart from the domineering "Thurber woman" stereotype: Grauer observes that in these two works, "it is the women who nurture regeneration and support the faltering men."⁴⁴

Figure 4.7

James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, "Sunset"



In contrast, Humphrey draws on the general idea of an overbearing "Thurber woman," but amplifies the stereotype, overperforming and exaggerating it to its utmost.

A review in the *Dance Observer* singled out Humphrey's performance as "unsurpassed as

⁴⁴ Neil A. Grauer, *Remember Laughter: A Life of James Thurber* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 156.

dramatic characterization.”⁴⁵ In Humphrey’s hands, “Woman” is caricatured in excess, so overly determined that she borders on the monstrous, and many accounts of Humphrey’s performance emphasize the “grotesque” aspects of Humphrey’s creation of Woman. Many commentaries also seem to fixate specifically on the ugly or repulsive aspects of Humphrey’s performance, such as Limón’s description (quoted above) of Humphrey’s transformation into a disgusting, hag-like matron.⁴⁶ Nona Schurman remembered Humphrey’s performance in *The Race of Life*:

And with Doris, with this red hair hanging down around her face, and gosh, you know, the worst possible—boy, she didn’t look like a slut, but she really looked like an urchin.⁴⁷

A brief newspaper review of the 1938 Chicago performance spent an entire paragraph focusing on the repellent physical aspects of Humphrey’s character, noting that the work “exploits for comic effect the lamentable tendency of the uncorseted human body to droop into a thousand unlovely shapes and to ferry itself from place to place by means of the most awkward motions on which the sun has ever looked.”⁴⁸

Aside from exploiting these “unsightly” physical details to exaggerate the grotesque aspects of her representation of Woman, photographs and film excerpts of the dance also reveal the extent to which Humphrey’s choreography often features the Woman dancing in a gawky, angular way, her feet and arms rigid and sharp.

⁴⁵ Mary P. O’Donnell, “Doris Humphrey—Charles Weidman,” *Dance Observer*, vol. V, no. 3 (March 1938): 38.

⁴⁶ Limón (2001), 72. Limón’s exact words were, “a gross, strident, harassed female, a woman no longer young or attractive.” This quote was previously given on p. 153.

⁴⁷ Interview with Nona Schurman, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 46:21–47:41.

⁴⁸ Edward Barry, “‘Race of Life’ Tests Dance as Senseless Art,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Saturday, 12 February 1938.

Figure 4.8

Doris Humphrey (Woman), José Limón (Man), and Charles Weidman (child),
The Race of Life, 1938⁴⁹



A number of surviving photographs also show the Woman lunging awkwardly and ungracefully towards the Man, her body outstretched to its fullest and fast approaching the Man, whose back is often turned. In one photo, the Woman even seems

⁴⁹ Performing Arts Research Collections, Humphrey-Weidman Collection, NYPL.

to attack the bewildered Man, who recoils with clenched fists as she pounces directly into his torso.

Figure 4.9

Doris Humphrey (Woman), José Limón (Man), and Charles Weidman (Child)
The Race of Life, 1938⁵⁰



⁵⁰ Humphrey and Weidman Choreography: Photographs, vol. 5, NYPL.

Figure 4.10

Charles Weidman (Child), José Limón (Man), and Doris Humphrey (Woman)
The Race of Life, 1938⁵¹



In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous and Clément discuss the tenuous border between laughter and the grotesque in more detail, explaining that in some sense, for women “all laughter is allied with the monstrous.”⁵² Drawing another comparison between the image of the laughing woman and Medusa, they describe the easy slippage between women’s laughter and the horrific: “She laughs, and it’s frightening—like

⁵¹ Humphrey and Weidman Choreography: Photographs, vol. 5, NYPL.

⁵² Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 33.

Medusa's laugh—petrifying and shattering constraint. There she is, facing us.”⁵³ Yet Cixous and Clément also emphasize just how easily the overstated grotesquerie of humor can also be used as a transgressive force, noting that “laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over...”⁵⁴

Humphrey exploits the fragile boundary between humor and the monstrous, and draws on the inherent ambiguity Cixous and Clément describe in her own characterization of Woman. Humphrey's Woman ultimately questions the flat, static, two-dimensional “Thurber woman”—Humphrey's Woman is both horrific and transformative: she Runs! Leaps! Soars! directly before our eyes. Humphrey's Woman may also be aligned with Russo's examination of the female grotesque and what she calls the “aerial sublime.” Part of the aim of Russo (1995) is to deconstruct the long-held notions of the female grotesque as something automatically disgusting, horrible, base; instead, Russo argues that some kinds of spectacle associated with female grotesques are actually “up there,” not “low,” and uses examples of different kinds of female aerialists (such circus performers and stunt pilots) to reimagine “the technologies of spectacle as multi-vectored, in contrast to an earlier identification of the grotesque with the symbolically ‘low’” and “to introduce a principle of turbulence into the configuration female/grotesque.”⁵⁵

But Humphrey's representation of Woman is not simply grotesque, it is also side-splittingly funny. One of the things that makes Humphrey's performance so funny is the many different ways that she uses excess, exaggeration, and parody—all strategies that

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁵ Russo (1995), 29.

are often aligned with defiance and subversion of existing stereotypes or social norms, which can be particularly effective and transformative when also tied with humor. I will now examine some of these important intersections in more detail.

Intersections Between Exaggeration and Parody

An inherently subversive aspect of comic exaggeration is its potential to ultimately undermine the very structures it seems to be replicating, and thus exaggeration also may be closely tied to parody, which has been recognized by a number of feminist theorists for the ways that it can disrupt existing structures of power. Work by Butler, Walker, and Hutcheon helps to illuminate the intersections between humor, exaggeration, and parody, and this work also explores how all of these may be used as strategies for destabilizing rigid categorizations of gender and womanhood.

In a broad sense, Humphrey's depiction of Woman could be connected with some of Butler's work on compliance and gender parody, as Humphrey's hyperbolic portrayal of Woman uses exaggeration (and humor) to present an overblown representation of Woman that ultimately undermines the overbearing "Thurber woman" stereotype. For Butler, exaggerated overcompliance can be a subversive force that has the potential to undercut an existing law⁵⁶ or power structure. Individual subjects can unsettle or disrupt the law by overcomplying with prevailing norms, rules, or requirements: Butler notes that "the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity...subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command" and that "repetition of the law into hyperbole" can serve as "a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who

⁵⁶ Here, of course, Butler (drawing on Foucault and Althusser) is referring to "laws" in a broad philosophical sense, as cultural norms and "regulatory practices"—not just judicial and/or criminal legislation.

delivers it.”⁵⁷ Butler discusses parody as one of the significant ways of destabilizing the “regulatory ideals” or “regulatory fictions” of gender:

...practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy, as it were. . . Hence, there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects. . . The parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance.”⁵⁸

More specifically, Butler (1990 and 1993) has used drag as an example of how exaggeration and overcompliance to regulatory gender norms enacted by what she calls the “heterosexual matrix of desire” (later, “heterosexual hegemony”) can ultimately reveal “the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals.”⁵⁹ Butler also describes how practices of gender parody, while subversive, also have the potential to become vibrant “occasions for laughter” when one realizes that gender norms themselves are merely constructions or fabrications:

⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 122. Butler also describes how exaggerated compliance can potentially dismantle regulatory practices, when “...the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law” (122). For Butler, “the hyperbolic conformity to the command can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself, indeed, can become the cultural sign by which that cultural imperative might become legible. Insofar as heterosexual gender norms produce inapproximable ideals, heterosexuality can be said to operate through the regulated production of hyperbolic versions of ‘man’ and ‘woman.’” See *Bodies That Matter*, 237.

⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge Classics, 2006 [first published, 1990]), 200. All page numbers for *Gender Trouble* are taken from the 2006 edition.

⁵⁹ Butler (1993), 237. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler abandons the term “heterosexual matrix” (used in *Gender Trouble*) in favor of “heterosexual hegemony” as an attempt to reflect the potential for its malleability. She discusses her change in terminology in an interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, “Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler,” published in *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994).

...gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. [...]

The loss of the sense of “the normal,” however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when “the normal,” “the original” is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived.⁶⁰

Although Butler’s insights about parody and performativity continue to foster rich, new ways of examining gender in a host of different disciplines, including music, it is important to recognize some of the differences between Butler’s discussions of gender parody and the parody in Humphrey’s *The Race of Life*. First of these involves the *kind* of parody involved. Butler’s discussions of gender parody involve imitations based on gender norms or “regulatory ideals,” but Humphrey’s work involves a somewhat different strategy. Humphrey uses exaggeration to create a hyperbolic representation of an excessively domineering woman, a gendered stereotype already rooted in caricature and excess. In a sense, then, Humphrey’s exaggerated performance of the “Thurber woman” stereotype creates not merely a parody, but a parody of a parody, as Humphrey’s performance uses overcompliance to subvert the stereotype of “overbearing woman” itself. Of course, one way that stereotypes can be called into question is through parody, particularly when parody is paired with humor. Although he uses a very different theoretical framework than Butler, Boskin (1987 and 1989) examines how humor and exaggeration can be strategically used by minority social groups to dismantle the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 188–89.

hyperbolic stereotypes that dominant social groups often perpetuate about them. In a broad sense, Boskin's ideas relate to Butler's discussion of exaggerated compliance, since Boskin notes that "overperforming" or parodying an (already exaggerated) stereotype can ultimately reveal just how ridiculous the original stereotype is, just as Butler notes that "laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived."

The difference between Humphrey's gendered "performance" of Woman and Butler's ideas about gender *performativity* also needs to be clarified. Since *Gender Trouble* was published, scholars have (quite understandably) latched onto Butler's profoundly influential concepts of gender and performativity. Perhaps in part because of the notoriously opaque prose found in many of Butler's works from the 1990s, scholars (particularly those in the performing arts) have tended to conflate Butler's use of the terms "performance" and "performativity." Critics of Butler's work have noted that Butler herself sometimes does not make this distinction particularly clear, but in later writings Butler does refine her use of these terms. For example, Butler (1993) bluntly asserts that "the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake," and focuses at length on this issue in her essay "Critically Queer" in the same volume.⁶¹ She also discusses the differences between "performance" and "performativity" in a 1993 interview, noting repeatedly that "it is important to distinguish performance from

⁶¹ Butler (1993), 234. The chapter "Critically Queer" is in Butler (1993), 223–242. For more on Butler and performativity, see Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31 and Sara Salih, "On Judith Butler and Performativity" in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*, Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 55–67.

performativity.”⁶² For Butler, the distinction between the two concepts rests in the subject, the “doer”: while *performance* involves a preexisting subject, *performativity* “contests the very notion of a subject,” and Butler describes how gendered identities, as performatives, are constituted by and within an underlying framework of “regulatory norms” and forces.⁶³ Drawing on work by Foucault, Derrida, and Austin, Butler develops a conception of gender based in linguistic theories of performativity, which posit that subjects and identities do not exist outside of discourse, but are produced and brought into being by and through language and discourse itself. In her work on Butler, Salih offers a “wardrobe analogy” as a way of succinctly explaining performativity: an individual may choose to “put on” different outfits, but the seeming freedom of an individual’s clothing choice is still restricted, influenced, or even regulated by underlying forces, such as culture, society, economy, etc. In all, “culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings. It is in this sense that gender is performative.”⁶⁴

Humphrey’s characterization of Woman serves as a good illustration of some of these differences, as her artistic work is both performance *and* performative. As a modern dancer, Humphrey is obviously “performing” a particular role of “Woman” that she developed and created for the stage. Yet the character of “overbearing Woman” Humphrey presents is also performative in the sense that it draws on and reenacts an existing trope of gender and womanhood that is already firmly rooted in heterosexual hegemony—middle-class nagging wife. This raises some of the key issues in the closing

⁶² See Peter Osborne, Lynne Segal, and Judith Butler, “Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler,” *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994): 33.

⁶³ Butler (1994): 33.

⁶⁴ Salih (2007), 56–57.

chapters of Butler (1990), where she examines how existing regulatory norms can be potentially undermined through parody and subversive repetition. As Butler notes:

The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an “I,” rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*. . . . signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat, “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition...it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible [all emphasis Butler’s].⁶⁵

Or to state it a little more concisely, “the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat,” and subversive repetitions, such as parody, serve as an important way to destabilize existing norms and stereotypes.⁶⁶

Humphrey uses exaggeration and parody to expose the silliness and superficiality of the “overbearing Woman” stereotype, but she also uses humor, and so it is also important to note how humor scholars have examined these relationships (this topic will also be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Women’s humor, like that of other social groups who have not typically been in dominant positions of power within society, often works from within an existing stereotype as a means of undermining it. More than two decades ago, Walker described a trend in American women’s humor to rearticulate clichéd characterizations of women (such as the “dumb blonde” or “nagging wife”), but to use this rearticulation as a means of revealing the inherent flaws of the stereotype itself, as well as the flaws in the larger sociocultural forces that create and sustain these tropes. For example, the “dumb blonde” characters in works by Anita Loos and Dorothy

⁶⁵ Butler (1990), 198–99.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 202–203.

Parker are more than simplistic, trivial presentations of ditzy women: both work from within the stereotype, using exaggeration and hyperbole to call into question larger cultural problems, not only by revealing “the dichotomy between woman as sex object and woman as intellectual,” but also the ways in which women can be negatively affected or exploited by a culture that emphasizes women’s physical appearance instead of their intelligence.⁶⁷ Through comic exaggeration of a stereotype, both authors ultimately use parody as a means for satirizing larger cultural forces and relationships.

While not exclusively feminist, Hutcheon’s extensive work on parody also provides interesting ways to consider the various ways that exaggeration, humor, and parody intersect in *The Race of Life*. Hutcheon develops a particularly broad definition for parody, which she defines as “repetition with difference” and “repetition with critical distance”; parody may be found in a wide array of artistic genres and styles, and can range in tone from “respectful admiration to biting ridicule.”⁶⁸ Hutcheon also makes a useful distinction between parody and satire: while parody involves the more broad practice of “repetition with difference” and “imitation with critical ironic distance,” satire is distinctly “extramural” because of its “moralizing ethos” and focus on larger social issues. For Hutcheon, satire has an “ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and

⁶⁷ For example, Walker discusses the female protagonists in Anita Loos’s novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Dorothy Parker’s “Big Blonde,” describing how their comic misadventures (such as Lorelei’s economic dependence on her male suitors) ultimately serve to satirize prevailing cultural forces that create and sustain these inimical exchanges. Walker notes, “Instead of being educated for independence, both women are rigorously schooled in the notion that woman’s function is to please man; and beneath the surface of Lorelei’s comic misspellings and Hazel’s ironic bewilderment is the same message: the denial of women’s intellect leads directly to their exploitation” (95). For more information about these literary characters, see Walker (1988), 91–95.

⁶⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, Inc., 1985), especially pp. 6–16 and 30–49. Quotes are taken from pp. 6–7, 15–16, and p. 101.

follies of mankind, with an eye to their correction.”⁶⁹ Yet Hutcheon also acknowledges the difficulties in delineating clean boundaries between parody and satire, especially since satire frequently draws on parody. Hutcheon coins the term “parodic satire” to describe works that use parody as a means of executing their extramural goal of bringing attention to discontinuities and problems in larger society.⁷⁰ *The Race of Life* functions as a form of “parodic satire” since a parody of a middle-class family is used in order to satirize the shallow materialism of the “average” middle-class family, as well as gender roles. Many women and feminists have used parody to explore representations of gender and womanhood: for example, later work by Hutcheon describes in detail the various ways that parody has been used by postmodern feminist artists as a strategic way to deconstruct depictions of women and the female body.⁷¹

Hutcheon also emphasizes the way that parody is inherently “two-voiced.” Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, which discusses parody as a double-directed discourse that is transgressive but ultimately “consecrated by tradition,” Hutcheon examines this ultimate “paradox of parody”: because parody is imitative (based on a pre-existing text or practice), it has both conservative and revolutionary impulses—parody “presupposes both authority and its transgression.”⁷² To put it more succinctly, parody works through norms, rules, or texts that it dismantles, yet in some sense parody remains contradictory: as Hutcheon notes, “even in mocking, parody reinforces.”⁷³ Because of this inherent

⁶⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 62–64.

⁷¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1989), 100–102 and 151–60.

⁷² Hutcheon (1985), 74 and 106–107. Hutcheon (1985) includes an entire chapter on this issue, entitled “The Paradox of Parody” (pp. 69–83).

⁷³ Hutcheon (1985), 75.

ambiguity, discerning and identifying parody is not always a clear-cut process, since “getting the joke” of parody (particularly parodic satire) rests precisely on the capacity for understanding this difference or “critical distance,” and having knowledge of (and familiarity with) the hegemonic cultural codes that parody cuts against.

Addressing this issue from a slightly different angle, Butler has discussed the difficulties in determining whether or not particular kinds of parody are subversive. Some parodic acts are more imitative in nature, and do not attempt to undermine or satirize; scholars often cite the examples of Dustin Hoffman’s drag performance in *Tootsie* or Robin Williams’s drag performance in *Mrs. Doubtfire* as examples of parody that are ultimately not transgressive or subversive, since they do not attempt to make a profound, transformative commentary on larger social issues or gender roles.⁷⁴ As Butler cautions:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. ...parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered.⁷⁵

A certain degree of the “critical distance” parody requires might be read just in Humphrey’s decision to bring Thurber’s two-dimensional drawings into a live, performed, three-dimensional space, by her choice to translate Thurber’s frozen,

⁷⁴ See Butler (1993), 125–26 and Salih (2007), 66. Exploring a slightly different aspect of this dilemma, Hutcheon (1989) describes the problem of seemingly feminist art that parodies “sexploitational” representations of women: are these parodied images of the naked female body truly subversive, since they still exploit the female body? Marguerite Walker has hilariously coined the term “Tootsie trope” to describe “a work’s failure to allow its feminist intentions to alter its male-centered mode of signification.” This quote appears in Hutcheon (1989), 159.

⁷⁵ Butler (1990), 189.

fragmentary images into the living, temporal (and largely female) realm of modern dance. However, in order to explore whether *The Race of Life* is truly subversive, truly a form of parodic satire, deeper examination is needed of the “critical distances” in this work, in its “differences.” One way these “critical distances” are manifested is through the various incongruities found within *The Race of Life*: much of the humor in *The Race of Life* clearly rested on Humphrey’s own uncharacteristic, incongruous performance of Woman. Humphrey was renowned for her solemn and lyrical choreography and performances, and *The Race of Life* directly challenged this image of Humphrey. Reviews of the premiere performance noted how *The Race of Life* represented something of an anachronistic turn away from Humphrey’s typically sober, philosophical creations.

The second performance, vastly superior in every way, offered two new works—*This Passion*, by Charles Weidman, and *Race of Life*, by Doris Humphrey. Both compositions are departures from the artists’ usual style, especially Miss Humphrey who is usually lyrical.⁷⁶

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To make the paradox complete, it was Mr. Weidman, usually the comedian of the team, who introduced the nearest thing to a serious theme in his new work, “This Passion,” while Miss Humphrey turned wholeheartedly to Thurber and farce in her new work, “Race of Life.” . . . Certainly Miss Humphrey as a character actress and farceuse has been keeping something from us all these years.⁷⁷

Some critics commented on Humphrey’s incongruous performance in especially surprising ways. An article in the *New York Times* discussing the “rich and undervalued vein” of comedy within modern dance cited Humphrey’s performance as particularly funny, affirming that *The Race of Life* “showed that she had a great deal in the back of

⁷⁶ Albertina Vitak, “Dance Events Reviewed: Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman and Dance Group,” *The American Dancer*, vol. 11, no. 5 (March 1938): 19.

⁷⁷ John Martin, “Hilarity Feature of Dance Recital,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1938.

her mind besides epic trilogies.”⁷⁸ A review in the *Dance Observer* observed that in Humphrey’s performance, “All evidence of the lyricism, the fragility of Doris Humphrey is lost in a lump of female.”⁷⁹ In the 1950s, a feature on Humphrey that appeared in *Dance* magazine cited *The Race of Life* as an important example of Humphrey’s dramatic range, as her ability to depict ugliness provided a sharp contrast to her naturally graceful and beguiling femininity:

What grand characterizations they were! For them she was willing to discard beauty or hide it in disguise, as she did for the unlovely Thurber woman in her acid comedy, *Race of Life* (1939) [sic]. In herself she was lovely. She had the spring and lilt of the born dancer, the radiance of the true artist.⁸⁰

In a sense, Humphrey’s overblown characterization of Woman is a parody that functions on several different levels, as Humphrey uses exaggeration not only as a means of parodying more general stereotypes of Overbearing Woman, but also as a way of deconstructing the image of “Doris Humphrey,” lithe and lyrical modern dancer, itself.

Interestingly, Humphrey herself seems to have played up the incongruity between her typically “serious” roles and the comedy of the Woman role in her programming of *The Race of Life*. Although the work was initially premiered alongside Weidman’s *This Passion*, later performances of the work often featured *The Race of Life* juxtaposed against different dances, and many of these programs included some of Humphrey’s most philosophical dances as well as her richest female roles. For example, the Humphrey-Weidman group’s weeklong engagement at the Bayes Theatre in 1939 presented a

⁷⁸ John Martin, “The Dance: Comedians—A Glance at a Rich and Undervalued Vein in the Choreographic Field,” *New York Times*, 4 September 1938.

⁷⁹ Mary P. O’Donnell, “Doris Humphrey—Charles Weidman,” *Dance Observer*, vol. V, no. 7 (March 1938): 38.

⁸⁰ Margaret Lloyd, “Doris Humphrey: Yesterday and Today,” *Dance Magazine* (November 1954): 39.

program consisting of *The Race of Life*, along with Humphrey's *To the Dance* and *With My Red Fires*, a work that showcased Humphrey in the lead role of the Matriarch, one of Humphrey's most profoundly malevolent roles. Banes (1998) describes the Matriarch as "above all a devastating portrait of a standard cultural stereotype: the domineering woman whose native strength is twisted into manipulation."⁸¹ An undated program in the Goucher College Archives reveals a different performance of *The Race of Life*, this one featuring two dances from Humphrey's *New Dance* trilogy: *New Dance* and *With My Red Fires*.⁸² It is fascinating to consider how these programs not only featured Humphrey performing some of her strongest female roles, but how Humphrey's varied representations of "Woman" might be read against one another: in these programs, rigid and superficial categorizations of womanhood are ultimately deconstructed both within and between the different works Humphrey performs.

Part of the humor of Humphrey's role in *The Race of Life* also rested on specific physical incongruities, in particular, the difference in stature between Humphrey (who was notably petite) and Limón and Weidman, who were both very large men, especially for this generation of modern dancers. Humphrey played up these physical differences to great advantage, exploiting the obvious humor of a conspicuously petite woman bossing around two men, both of whom had imposing, physically domineering presences on

⁸¹ Banes (1998), 142. Banes also notes how the Matriarch, while evil and manipulative, actually expanded "the possibilities for female representations" because the Matriarch was also a political character, exercising her tyranny not only over her immediate family, but also in the larger society over which she ruled. See Banes (1998), 144. John Martin described the Matriarch as "a colossal symbol of vengeful and self-destroying tyranny."

⁸² Undated program (late 1930s or early 1940s) provided to me by Tara Olivero, librarian in charge of the Doris Humphrey Collection, Julia Rogers Library, Goucher College.

stage. Years later, Nona Schurman remembered this unique aspect of the principal dancers:

Huge man of course [José Limón], enormous, but then you see he matched Charles [Weidman], Charles was tall too, we keep forgetting. Most male dancers are smallish men, I mean, 5'8, 5'6, 5'7' or something, but both those guys [Limón and Weidman] were over six feet. And I think they were a great match on stage because little Doris was the foil for them [laughter].”⁸³

While obviously there is no reason to assume that Humphrey’s audiences may have had any knowledge of her personal life—and one must be cautious about drawing connections between an artist’s work and biography—it is also quite fascinating to consider some of the many incongruities between Humphrey’s depiction of Woman and her own family life. Just like the Woman in *The Race of Life*, Humphrey also was part of a small family with three members: herself, her husband Charles Francis (“Leo”) Woodford, and one young son (who at the time was about the same age as the boy in *The Race of Life*). Yet Humphrey’s approach to navigating family and womanhood sharply contrasted with the nagging, matronly Woman in *The Race of Life*, as Humphrey’s virtually nonexistent domestic inclinations were far from traditional, perhaps even *laissez-faire*: as Siegel notes, “one can scarcely imagine Doris fitting into a middle-class marriage.”⁸⁴ Humphrey did not marry (or even have serious, long-term relationships with men) until she was 36 years old, and the husband she eventually chose was a sailor—eight years her junior—who was rarely in town; Humphrey also had her first and only child later in life, particularly for this era (she was 38). Humphrey clearly prioritized her career over her domestic life; Banes note that Humphrey’s husband “sometimes

⁸³ Nona Schurman, NYPL documentary.

⁸⁴ Siegel (1987), 102.

complained—in a tone traditionally used by women to criticize their workaholic husbands—that he seemed to value their marriage more than she did.”⁸⁵ Those who may have had some familiarity with these aspects of Humphrey’s life may have gotten an additional chuckle from the personal incongruities in this performance, with Humphrey playing a henpecking Woman, firmly entrenched in a middle-class existence, ensconced within the “conventional marriage plot” Humphrey herself avoided.⁸⁶

In all, Humphrey’s exploitation of these various incongruities does help to “create a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered.” While on the surface Humphrey may seem to simply be re-enacting a typical stereotype of overbearing, domineering, “Thurber woman,” other layers of meaning may be found underneath her hilarious performance that not only parody this stereotype, but also help to problematize such facile representations of womanhood. These multiple levels of meaning are not mutually exclusive: certainly, one can simply enjoy the boisterous comedy of Humphrey’s hilarious performance of Woman, and leave it at that. However, the changes Humphrey makes to Thurber’s version, as well as the numerous incongruities found both between the performers and creators of this work and within the work itself, combine to create a kind of fracture or rift that allows for other, more complicated readings of this work. One level presents the madcap, comical adventures of a man, woman, and child, but a deeper level of meaning also exists in this performance, one that calls these empty pursuits into question, and ultimately works through parody to satirize

⁸⁵ In other ways, Humphrey also seemed to value her career over motherhood and domestic life: scholars have noted how Humphrey had at least one abortion, and also asked friends and colleagues to care for her son for long periods of time when she was performing or on tour. See Siegel (1987), 101–105 and 129–31 and Baner (1998), 145.

⁸⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2, the term “conventional marriage plot” is taken from Heilbrun (1988).

the larger society in which these stereotypes—both of women and domesticity—exist and flourish.

But other artistic elements also give rise to these “critical distances” as well—in particular, Fine’s musical score, and how Fine’s music both bolsters *and* undercuts Humphrey’s choreography and onstage performances. The next chapter (“Variation II”) discusses how incongruity and double text fuse with humor and music to deconstruct and destabilize gender relations in *The Race of Life*.

CHAPTER 5

Variation II (Fine): Music and Double Text

In her classic work on American women's humor, Nancy A. Walker (1988) has identified several different strands within women's humor: some is "overt" and directly challenges existing social problems, but often women's humor is more subtle and relies heavily on the use of subtext. While on the surface this type of humor seems to merely replicate (or even endorse) an existing stereotype, artists actually use the stereotype as a way to "work through" larger social issues, ultimately satirizing and calling into question the forces in society that create and sustain such stereotypes. Walker notes that this kind of humor often "makes use of a double text to pose a subtle challenge to the stereotype or the circumstance that the writer appears superficially merely to describe."¹ Walker identifies a long tradition of the humorous double text in works by American women, ranging from nineteenth-century work by Frances Whitcher and Marietta Holley to modern-day satire by Erma Bombeck and Marge Piercy. A classic example of humorous double text is actually found in a short story published just one year after the premiere of *The Race of Life*—Dorothy Parker's "The Waltz" (1939), in which the female narrator waltzes with a man who is a positively wretched dancer. Here, a double text is quite literally written into the story, which contains two separate narrative strands: one that is spoken aloud (the conversation between narrator and her dance partner, in which she demurely maintains a polite, coquettish, and appropriately feminine demeanor), and

¹ Walker (1988), 13; see also pp. 3–37 and 139–68.

another revealing her inner dialogue, in which she bitterly rants against her terrible dance partner and the societal expectations that ask her to blithely conform to such social conventions. Parker's story begins with the narrator agreeing to dance by saying, "Why, thank you so much. I'd adore to..." while her inner dialogue reveals an altogether different perspective that satirically undermines her seemingly acquiescent, flighty exterior:

I don't want to dance with him. I don't want to dance with anybody. And even if I did, it wouldn't be him. . . . What can you say, when a man asks you to dance with him? I most certainly will *not* dance with you, I'll see you in hell first. Why, thank you, I'd like to awfully, but I'm having labor pains. . . . No. There was nothing for me to do, but say I'd adore to.²

One way in which a humorous double text can be fostered is through the use of incongruity, which can help to create a kind of rift, or difference, between different "levels" of an artistic work. Incongruity was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to parody, but incongruity is certainly an important aspect of all kinds of humor; even early twentieth-century writings on humor by Bergson and Freud recognized incongruity as one of the things that makes humor "work." In particular, scholars have long noted the rich connection between incongruity and women's humor, especially since using and recognizing incongruity in humor obviously depends on an individual's background, culture, and personal life experience. In the introduction to their 1934 anthology, Bruère and Beard described the important relationship between incongruity and women's humor, emphasizing that "The angle of vision from which women see a lack of balance, wrong

² This story has been discussed by a number of scholars of gender and humor, including Walker (1988), 32–33, and Suzanne L. Bunkers, "‘I Am Outraged Womanhood’: Dorothy Parker as Feminist and Social Critic," in *American Women Humorists: Critical Essays*, ed. Linda A. Morris (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 327–330.

proportions, disharmonies, and incongruities in life is a thing of their world as it must be—a world always a little apart.”³

Similarly to many of the examples Walker (1988) describes, *The Race of Life*, while a “performed” text, is also a work with humor that functions on several different levels. In all, the double texts in *The Race of Life* may be found both within *and* between the individual components (dance and music) of the work. Chapter 5 (Variation II) explores how Fine’s score to *The Race of Life* serves as a complex counterpoint to the action onstage, a double text that both corroborates and complicates Humphrey’s vision. The precise relationship between music and dance was a subject of some debate in this era, as modern dance was striving to establish itself as a serious artistic genre. In order to provide a proper context for Fine’s dance score, the chapter begins by examining the relationship between music and dance in the 1930s, as well as the place of *The Race of Life* in Fine’s larger compositional oeuvre. Then, the discussion turns specifically to the music, and shows how aspects of Fine’s score work as a sonic double text that both bolsters and deconstructs the gendered choreographic depictions presented onstage.

Before these discussions begin in earnest, it is important to acknowledge that neither Humphrey nor Fine ever claimed that this work had any kind of explicit message about gender or feminism. This is perhaps not surprising, especially since *The Race of Life* is not only almost seventy-five years old, but also was completed during a “post (first-wave)-feminist” era in which “women’s issues” were often sidelined in mainstream public discourse in favor of discussions of the precarious economic conditions of the Depression. In addition, Walker (1988) notes that most early examples of women’s

³ Bruère and Beard (1934), vi.

humor—particularly those from before the mid-twentieth century—contain satiric statements about gender and womanhood that were never openly acknowledged by their authors.⁴ In a brief letter to Frederick Prausnitz (then Dean of Juilliard), which contains some of the only surviving commentary on the work by Humphrey, she claimed that her work “closely follows Thurber in mood and appearance,” perhaps because the work was being considered for inclusion during the 1955–56 season at Juilliard.⁵ Yet as we have seen, while Humphrey’s work certainly captured the ebullient, side-splitting farce of Thurber’s cartoons, the actual *content* of her production actually deviates quite substantially from Thurber, and it contains numerous changes and revisions that clearly depart from Thurber’s original sequence, most of which relate to the ways that masculinity and femininity are depicted in the work. Yet as Banes notes, in dance it is relatively common for the descriptions of a work given by its choreographer in the libretto or program to differ quite substantially from the work’s actual performance, since characters and dramatic action are both invested with a marked degree of agency onstage that is not usually reflected in a written libretto.⁶

But Humphrey was not the only one who emphasized gender relationships in her interpretation of Thurber—so did her collaborator. Fine’s comments about *The Race of*

⁴ See Walker (1988), especially chs. 1 and 2.

⁵ Letter from Doris Humphrey to Dean Prausnitz, 2 November 1955, Juilliard Archives, Dance Division Production Records 1951–71, Box 1, Folder 10, Juilliard Dance Theater, 1955/56: program. A portion of this letter is also quoted in Doris Humphrey, *New Dance: Writings on Modern Dance* (Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 2008), 97.

⁶ Banes also cautions that scholars should be cautious about how much “weight” they place on a dance libretto text for this very reason, and instead draw on a variety of different sources to try to capture a more well-rounded idea of what a dance was like. See Banes (1998), Introduction.

Life, which appear in an article she wrote for *Dance Perspectives*, also stress the centrality of the “war between men and women” to the work.

In comedy one has an especial sense of being both doer and observer. In Thurber’s world, marvelously made to live in the theatre by Miss Humphrey, our fears and foibles are plain—we are able to laugh because Thurber himself is so very human and intelligent. He shows us the war between men and women, their competitiveness and triangular jealousies. The actions of his people are never threatening, nor do they come close to real anger or hate. While we know these jealous quarrels are no laughing matter in life, for the moment we see them without fear of consequences. Perhaps it is this dual state of being both actor and spectator that gives an air of elegance to good comedy. All good comedians have a certain meticulousness about them.⁷

Interestingly, in these comments Fine seems to credit Thurber—not Humphrey—for showcasing these marital conflicts. However, as discussed at length in the previous chapter, although marital discord was certainly a recurring theme in Thurber’s oeuvre, *The Race of Life* does not highlight the “war between men and women” as heavily as many of his other works. Further, the close connection Fine made between *The Race of Life* and “the battle of the sexes” is not just found in her recollections of the work, but is also literally written into a few surviving copies of the score. A manuscript held in the NYPL and a copy provided to me by Fine’s estate both contain a series of titles, written in Fine’s hand, throughout the entire score of *The Race of Life*. All of these additions are preceded by a small boxed number, and appear either directly above or within the staves: most of the added text matches the titles of individual drawings from Thurber’s *The Race of Life*. The orchestral version of *The Race of Life* was performed as a freestanding concert work in 1961, and for this performance slides of various Thurber cartoons were shown along with the music. These added titles, which do not appear in any of the

⁷ Vivian Fine, “Composer/Choreographer,” *Dance Perspectives*, vol. 16 (1963): 8–11.

original manuscripts or orchestral parts, are instructions for the projection of the drawings that were shown at this particular concert, and the annotated piano score was probably used to help the slide projectionist follow the orchestral performance more efficiently.⁸

But the most interesting aspect of these text additions is the decided emphasis they place on male/female relationships. During the third movement (“Indians!”) a long series of titles appears in the score that are not part of the original sequence for *The Race of Life*. Instead, these additions are actually the titles of drawings from Thurber’s famous series *The War Between Men and Women*, and Fine uses the titles of ten of the fifteen drawings from this work: “Women’s G.H.Q.,” “Men’s G.H.Q.,” “Capture of Three Physics Professors,” “The Spy,” “Surrender of Three Blondes,” “Battle on the Stairs,” “Parley,” “Gettysburg,” “Zero Hour,” and “The Fight in the Grocery.”⁹ Obviously, the subject matter associated with many of these added titles differs substantially from the choreographic content of Humphrey’s dance (which did not contain any of the characters in *The War Between Men and Women*, such as the “three physics professors”), so the added titles in Fine’s score are her own personal addition, and are not taken from

⁸ A note, written in Fine’s hand, on the bottom of the introductory page of *The Race of Life* manuscript held by the NYPL states that “Numbers in red refer to slides and their titles.”

⁹ Interestingly, Fine omits some of the final cartoons of Thurber’s series, in which the men conquer the women (“Retreat,” “Rout,” and “Surrender”), and she also slightly alters the order of the drawings. For readers unfamiliar with this Thurber series, “G.H.Q.” = “General Headquarters” (the respective “war rooms” for the men and women during the war between the sexes depicted in the sequence). Thurber’s original series includes the following drawings: “The Overt Act,” “The Battle on the Stairs,” “The Fight in the Grocery,” “Men’s G.H.Q.,” “Women’s G.H.Q.,” “Capture of Three Physics Professors,” “Surrender of Three Blondes,” “The Battle of Labrador,” “The Spy,” “Mrs. Pritchard’s Leap,” “Zero Hour—Connecticut,” “The Sniper,” “Parley,” “Gettysburg,” “Retreat,” “Rout,” and “Surrender.” These drawings originally appeared as a weekly series in *The New Yorker* that ran from 20 January 1934 until 28 April 1934. The drawings were also published in James Thurber, *Men, Women and Dogs: A Book of Drawings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943).

Humphrey's choreography. Yet Fine's choice to feature ten drawings from this particular series, rather than any of the hundreds of other Thurber drawings she might have selected, reveals how Fine, like Humphrey, focused more extensively on the relationships between men and women in her conception and interpretation of the work than Thurber did in the original version of *The Race of Life*.

Example 5.1

Example of one of Fine's additions, "Capture of three physics professors," also the name of a drawing from Thurber's *The War Between Men and Women*¹⁰

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a single page. At the top left, the number '24' is written in a red box. To its right, the title 'Capture of three physics professors' is written in cursive. Further right, the number '100' is enclosed in a black rectangular box. The score itself consists of several staves of music, including a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, and several single staves. The notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as '>' and 'f'. The handwriting is in black ink on aged paper.

¹⁰ Vivian Fine, *The Race of Life*, mvt. III, ("Indians!"), m. 99. Manuscript held by the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and Vivian Fine estate.

Music and Dance in the 1930s

Before turning to a more specific exploration of the music for *The Race of Life*, it is important to consider the somewhat ambiguous relationship between music and modern dance in this period. The 1930s was a particularly fascinating era because at that time modern dance was vigorously attempting to assert itself as a serious genre, one that could “stand on its own,” an artistic realm that was decidedly independent from—*not* subordinate to—music. Therefore, many modern dance choreographers would first create the dance, and then ask composers to write music that followed their choreographic counts. This trend flouted the traditional practice of creating choreography to pre-existing music, and caused some intense discussion among composers about the relationship between music and dance; in particular, whether or not composers who wrote music for already-completed choreography were “really” creative, or if their music was just a shallow accompaniment to the dance. Wallingford Riegger, a composer who also worked extensively with Humphrey, described his experience creating music for choreography that had already been developed, and how pieces written in this way could still be rich musical works, not just a superficial backdrop for the dance:

I have discovered that it is possible to create music conforming to the preconceived dance patterns, and yet, as it seems to me, complete in itself as music. I admit there was some resistance to be overcome before I could bring myself to writing music to fit into some such design as this...The problem was intriguing, however, and a challenge to one’s inventiveness. The more I became involved in it, the more strongly I was convinced that the correct solution lay in regarding both the music and dance as being of equal importance...a fusion into something else for which we have no name.¹¹

¹¹ Wallingford Riegger, “Synthesizing Music and the Dance,” in *Making Music for Modern Dance: Collaboration in the Formative Years of a New American Art*, ed. Katherine Teck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 60–61. This article was first

Dane Rudhyar, another composer who worked with dancers (although not extensively with Humphrey), also wrote about these complicated issues. In a 1938 essay, Rudhyar described the relationship between music and dance as “essentially a psychological one,” dependent upon the individual needs of the artists involved; Rudhyar also compared the relationship of music and dance to a “companionate marriage,” in which “cooperation and creative understanding” should flourish.¹²

Like many other composers who worked with dancers in this era, Fine composed the music for *The Race of Life* to Humphrey’s already-completed choreographic counts. Fine explained this creative process in some detail during a 1987 panel discussion, where she also described Humphrey’s sensitive and musical sense of phrasing:

In those days, there was a very strong feeling that dance should have nothing to do with music interpretation, it should create its own forms, its own structures, its own movement, that wasn’t dependent on music in any way. It was a kind of almost religious belief. How one moved and what one moved was of paramount importance. And so Doris composed the ballet—she’d compose a section. This was based on a wonderful series of drawings by James Thurber called *The Race of Life*. So she composed the movement, and I would come and look at it. And her count structure, that is, how she counted the music and her phrasing, it was very musical. She knew a lot about music, and she was very sensitive to music. And so I’d get a structure for four phrases of sixteen bars, two phrases of eight bars, and so forth, and I’d watch the movement, and then go back and compose the music. I don’t know that I could do that today, because it’s really very

published in the *Dance Observer* (Dec. 1934): 84–85. Louis Horst, who worked extensively with Martha Graham, noted that “If the dancer then elects to have a tonal frame written *to* the dance, much as a painter has a frame made for his painting, it in no way compromises the dancer’s achieved freedom, and as demand creates supply, our leading American dancers have found our leading American composers not only willing, but desirous of writing musical scores upon the forms supplied by the choreographers.” Louis Horst, “Music and Dance: The New Generation’s Change in Methods,” in Teck (2011), 46.

¹² Dane Rudhyar, “The Companionate Marriage of Music and Dancing,” *Dance Observer*, vol. V, no. 3 (March 1938): 37.

challenging, to look at the movement, and then compose the music. But that worked out very well, too.¹³

Opus 51 (1938), which Fine wrote for Humphrey's dance partner Charles Weidman, was also based on choreographic counts, yet Fine emphasized how the music for both of these works did not just superficially imitate the choreography. Like Riegger, Fine noted how music and dance "create patterns of inter-relatedness that enhance the total work,"¹⁴ and described how writing music for dance, even if the choreography has already been composed, can still be a challenging experience that requires a particular set of skills in order for the work to be successful.

I had a knack for this, too, early on. That is, you just can't write any kind of music. You have to know what the counts are, but you also have to remember the quality of the movement and write a complement to it. So early on I found out that I could do this also. That's the way *The Race of Life* was composed also.¹⁵

Decades after their collaboration, both Humphrey and Fine recalled how Fine's score was more than just a background or accompaniment to Humphrey's dance. Twenty years after the premiere of *The Race of Life*, Humphrey fondly remembered their work together:

It was quite a score and quite an experience. She [Fine] was a true collaborator in a field, that of composing for dance, which is so different from other kinds of program music that it calls for unique qualifications. The dance is an art which, though a part of the theater, has its roots in physical and psychological sources which differ from those of the opera, film, or the musical to a marked degree. All these forms, except programmatic concert music, depend on the word for explicit meaning; consequently music does not bear the full burden of the dramatic idea. Not so in dance, where words are rarely used and movements and music carry all

¹³ Fine (1987), "Music and Dance Symposium," Bennington College, videorecording, 9:35–11:12.

¹⁴ Vivian Fine, "My Scores for Modern Dance: Tragedy and Comedy" in Teck (2011), 66.

¹⁵ Fine (1978), 11.

the responsibility of communication. . . . In its entirety it was a notable score—bright, humorous, expert.¹⁶

On several occasions, Fine recalled her dance compositions with great fondness, noting that: “Music and dance are two languages with a common source. . . . Music speaks through symbols we hear; dance speaks to the eye. So the two sisters—one having no voice—can both speak at once, each telling us of their mysterious mother.”¹⁷

When asked about the differences between composing “absolute” music and composing for dance, Fine remarked:

There’s another element, you have to say there’s another element, but it’s not different, I would say. Many dance pieces will stand on their own afterwards. So the same kind of musical thinking goes into the work, it’s just—it adds that element of working on top of the music.

It’s the same thing, to try to achieve coherence. It’s like—well, you might say it’s different when you’re using a text for a vocal work, some people would say. Well, yes it’s different, because I’m using a text, it’s not just music. But it’s about that degree of difference. *I don’t put my dance music in one place and my music in another place.*¹⁸

Although Fine composed *The Race of Life* to Humphrey’s choreographic counts, many critics commented favorably on Fine’s score, including Wallingford Riegger. In an article about Fine’s music written during the 1950s, Riegger singled out *The Race of Life* as *the* outstanding example of what he called Fine’s “second period” (1937–44):

The Race of Life, brilliantly scored for small orchestra, was written for Doris Humphrey and reveals an astonishing versatility. Its weakness is the weakness of all music written for a dance already composed choreographically, that of episodic treatment. It is to be hoped that the composer will do some surgical

¹⁶ Doris Humphrey, “Music for an American Dance,” *ACA Bulletin*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1958): 4. This article also appears in Teck (2011), 70–71.

¹⁷ Vivian Fine, “My Scores for Modern Dance: Tragedy and Comedy,” in Teck (2011), 65–66.

¹⁸ Fine (1987), Bennington panel comments, ca. 1:25:14.

operations on the work (as I have had to do with the *New Dance*) to make it satisfactory as a concert number: the material is far too good to let fall by the wayside.¹⁹

A number of reviews of the dance also admired Fine's music for *The Race of Life*, a particularly remarkable occurrence given that dance was fighting so hard to establish itself as an autonomous genre during this era (and so modern dance reviews tended to avoid focusing on the musical aspects of the work). For example, a review of the 1938 premiere in the *Dance Observer* noted that "Vivian Fine's music is miraculously right for the romping nonsense it accompanies."²⁰ Fine's score was even praised in newspapers; a review of a 1939 performance in Los Angeles also called attention to Fine's vibrant score: "The music by Vivian Fine was exceptional and would hold attention by itself."²¹ Fine reworked her score to *The Race of Life* on several different occasions over the course of her career—not only was the orchestral version performed as a freestanding concert work in 1961, but Fine also used substantial portions of music from *The Race of Life* in some of her other compositions, including *Dance Suite* (1938; for orchestra), *Ma's in Orbit* (1987; violin, bass, percussion, piano), and even in her last major work, *Memoirs of Uliana Rooney* (1994), a semi-autobiographical chamber opera that chronicles the experiences of a female composer as she struggles to forge a career.²² (This opera actually begins with music from *The Race of Life*, which also recurs throughout the

¹⁹ Wallingford Riegger, "The Music of Vivian Fine," *ACA Bulletin*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1958): 2. Riegger also worked extensively with Humphrey: as noted earlier in this chapter, he composed the music for Humphrey's *New Dance* trilogy in the mid-1930s.

²⁰ O'Donnell (1938): 38.

²¹ Isabel Morse Jones, "Dances by Noted Pair Win Praise," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1939.

²² See also Cody (2002), 187 and 250; and Von Gunden (1999), 130 and 144.

work.) Clearly, Fine felt a special connection with the music in her first ballet score, completed when she was only twenty-four years old.

Example 5.2

The Race of Life (1937), piano score, mvt. I, mm. 39–47

39

The musical score for Example 5.2 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 39-43) is in 2/4 time, featuring a melodic line in the right hand with eighth-note patterns and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand. The second system (measures 44-47) includes a key signature change to three flats (B-flat major) and a time signature change to 3/4. The melodic line continues with eighth-note patterns, while the left hand provides a consistent accompaniment.

Example 5.3

Memoirs of Uliana Rooney (1994), piano/vocal score, opening, mm. 1–9

1. Uliana, Narrator, Combo, Film

Allegro moderato ♩ = 72

The musical score for Example 5.3 is for the opening of 'Memoirs of Uliana Rooney'. It is marked 'Allegro moderato' with a tempo of ♩ = 72. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex piano accompaniment with many beamed eighth notes. The right hand includes dynamic markings such as *pno.*, *p*, *mf*, and *f*. The left hand includes markings for *pizz.* and *cl. vin.*. A circled number '5' is placed at the beginning of the first system. The score concludes with a *pno.* marking.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of incongruities may be found in the choreographic aspects of this work, but incongruities may also be found in its musical aspects as well. First is the position of *The Race of Life* within Fine's larger compositional oeuvre. Just as *The Race of Life* represented a kind of departure for Humphrey, who usually choreographed serious, weighty works, so too was *The Race of Life* a departure for Fine, whose works up until *The Race of Life* had been firmly dissonant and strongly rooted in the "ultramodern" style of her mentors Ruth Crawford and Henry Cowell. Cowell once wrote of Fine's early compositions:

When I first met Vivian Fine she was a Chicago girl of seventeen, writing in the grimmest of dissonant styles. She had developed a technique for elimination of concord that gave her work an angular, unladylike manner, which, however, was quite consistent. She had an extraordinary native gift, good conventional training and the ability to apply known principles of writing to new media, which she handled logically and uncompromisingly.²³

Obviously Cowell is praising Fine here, but the tone of his approval and his choice of words reflect contemporaneous preoccupations with disassociating modernism from tonal music by emphasizing long-exalted virtues of "logic" and "intellect" as a way of reifying the supposed "manliness" of experimental music. Referring to Fine's music as "unladylike," while here clearly intended as a kind of compliment, also reflects the kinds of discourse that de Graaf has discussed in her work on women modernist composers in the New York Composers' Forum, whose dissonant, atonal music was often described quite negatively—and in sharply gendered terms—during post-concert discussion forums.²⁴ Because of the overwhelming dominance of women in modern

²³ Henry Cowell, quoted in Wallingford Riegger, "The Music of Vivian Fine," *ACA Bulletin*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1958): 4.

²⁴ For more information on these post-concert discussions, see Chapter 3.

dance, that particular genre served as a kind of artistic haven for women interested in embracing the experimentalism of ever-evolving modernist aesthetics. However, American experimental music at this time was something altogether different: a realm that was not only almost entirely comprised of men, but one in which dissonant, atonal music was typically prized as a ruggedly intellectual, “masculine” accomplishment.²⁵ Clearly, although women composers like Ruth Crawford, Vivian Fine, Johanna Beyer, and others did manage to find some degree of success as ultramodern composers, many of their works remain unknown, even today. The large percentage of male composers during this era is also reflected in Humphrey’s own choreographic catalogue: to my knowledge, Vivian Fine was the only female composer to write a major work for Doris Humphrey.

A striking example of the gender imbalance in composition at this time may be found in a photo of the participants of the first Yaddo Festival of American Music, held in 1932.²⁶ In a sense, the photo serves as a visual representation of the issues of “edge”

²⁵ See Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 80–106, Catherine Parsons Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility’: On Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music,” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender*, Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 90–106, Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁶ Aaron Copland directed the first two Yaddo Festivals, held in Saratoga Springs, New York in 1932 and 1933. Composers whose works were performed in the first Yaddo festival (1932) included: Robert Russell Bennett, Nicolai Berezowsky, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Henry Brant, Carlos Chávez, Israel Citkowitz, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Louis Gruenberg, Roy Harris, Oscar Levant, Walter Piston, Silvestre Revueltas, Wallingford Riegger, Roger Sessions, Virgil Thomson—and Vivian Fine. For more information about Yaddo, see Rudy Shackelford, “The Yaddo Festivals of American Music, 1932–1952,” *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1978):

and “center” that have been explored throughout this dissertation, as the image shows a dapper group of eager-looking—and overwhelmingly male—composers and performers. Vivian Fine (in black, center front) was the only female composer whose works were performed at the festival; remarkably, Fine was still a teenager when she attended Yaddo.

Figure 5.1

Photo, first Yaddo festival (1932)²⁷



Returning to the music, *The Race of Life* is particularly interesting because it is one of the earliest works in what has been termed Fine’s “second period,” a time in which Fine (like Ruth Crawford and many other dissonant composers) turned away from

92–125. The list of composers who had works performed at the 1932 Yaddo Festival appears on p. 96 of this article.

²⁷ Vivian Fine Collection, Library of Congress.

ultramodernism, instead embracing a more accessible, tonal style.²⁸ *The Race of Life* was also the first major piece Fine wrote after taking a several-year hiatus from composition during the mid-1930s; as Fine's largest completed work from 1937, *The Race of Life* itself was completed "on the edge" of a major change in Fine's compositional style.²⁹ Although *The Race of Life* has generally been characterized as entirely representative of Fine's second, tonal period, traces of her earlier ultramodern music may also be found in *The Race of Life*, such as some of the fragments of dissonant melodic figuration during the second movement (discussed below), or the movement entitled "Night-Time," featuring an (all-female) group of Night Creatures who dance to a slowly unfolding chromatic texture, the strangeness of the movement heightened by the addition of a flexatone to the score.³⁰ Perhaps these lingering glimpses of Fine's earlier style are not surprising, especially given the strong associations with ultramodernism found in so many of her works from the early 1930s. But ultimately, *The Race of Life* does represent a significant stylistic turn for Fine: just as Humphrey's choice to choreograph a wildly humorous work marks a clear departure from her typically serious, weighty works, so too does Fine's score for *The Race of Life* stand in contrast to her earlier music. In all, it is important to recognize the degree to which *The Race of Life* served as an incongruous

²⁸ Fine studied extensively with Roger Sessions at this time (beginning in 1934); Fine credited Sessions as one of her main compositional influences after Ruth Crawford.

²⁹ Fine completed no major works from 1934 to 1937. During these years, she did write five short pieces for dance. See Cody (2002), 178–179. Fine began composing extensively again in 1937. Aside from *The Race of Life* (her major work from that year) she also completed three short chamber works: *Prelude for String Quartet*, *Piece for Muted Strings*, and *Lyric Piece for Cello and Piano*.

³⁰ The flexatone was used in the "Night Creatures" movement even in the 1930s production. Humphrey (1958) described this movement as "handled with grotesquerie, but still with a dreamlike delicacy," and noted that for this movement Fine "added to the score a Flexatone whose sliding eeriness exactly met the requirements of the weird scene." See Humphrey (1958), 5.

stylistic shift not only for Humphrey, but also for Fine, as both women's contributions to the collaboration expanded and even challenged the boundaries and expectations of their respective compositional styles in the mid-1930s.

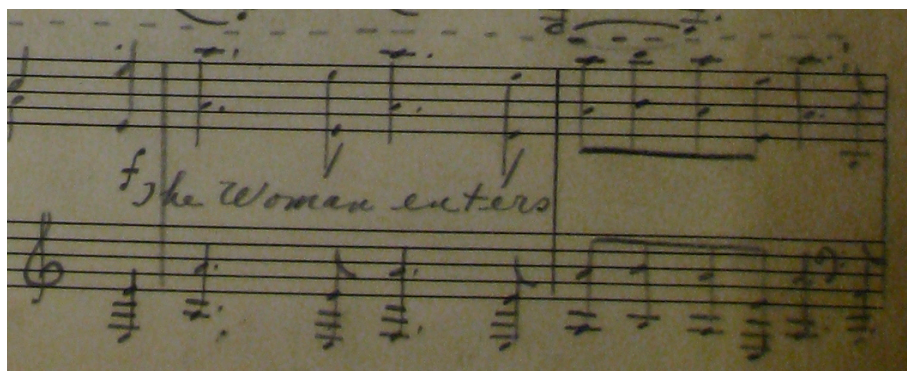
Music as caricature; music as double text

At first glance, Fine's score to *The Race of Life* seems to simply reflect the exaggerated qualities of Humphrey's choreography, as the musical surface contains a number of specific musical details to delineate the overdrawn, comic proportions of the characters. Forty years after her work with Humphrey and Weidman, Fine poetically referred to the art of creating music for dance (both in accompanying and composition) as "learning to dance with them, but without doing any physical movements...you feel movements."³¹ Luckily, Fine performed her own score in the original production of *The Race of Life*, and many of her notes about the onstage action survive in archival manuscripts of the score, several of which contain specific indications about the choreography and events onstage. Fine's notes about the performance are particularly significant because of the era in which *The Race of Life* was created: at that time, film and video resources were scarce (or even completely non-existent); therefore, Fine's notes serve as a vital link between the onstage action and the musical score.

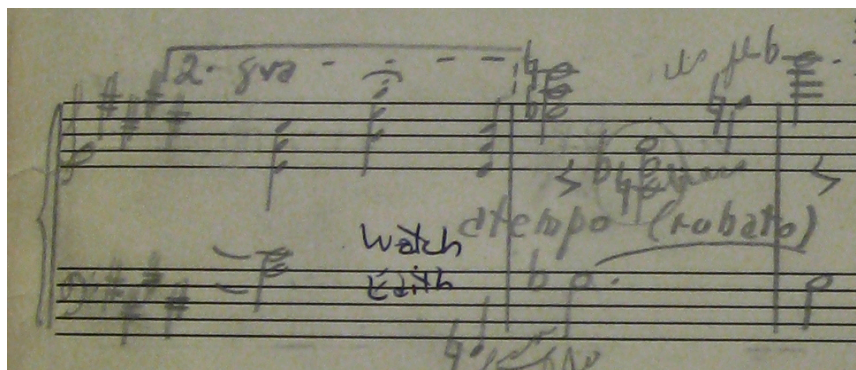
³¹ Vivian Fine, interview with Theresa Bowers, December 10, 1978, Hoosick Falls, NY. Interview transcript held in Juilliard Archives, Martha Hill Papers, p. 43.

Example 5.4

Fine's notes on manuscript for *The Race of Life*, "The Woman Enters"³²

**Example 5.5**

Fine's notes on manuscript for *The Race of Life*, "Watch Edith"³³



Fine herself even mentioned the marginalia in her dance scores as an important aspect of working successfully with dancers.

It involved an immense amount of memorizing of cues. I usually wrote the cues down on the music—watch for this and watch for that—because there were too

³² Vivian Fine manuscript, held in José Limón Collection of Manuscript Music Scores, NYPL.

³³ Vivian Fine manuscript, held in José Limón Collection of Manuscript Music Scores, NYPL.

many to remember. . . . Often I would say, “Watch. Watch Charles [Weidman],” or, “Watch left arm,” and so forth. Things like that.³⁴

On the surface of the music, Fine’s score helps to further exaggerate the characters, and the intersections between the music and dance were even recognized by the *New York Times*, which described how Fine’s score “attempted to convey the ‘musical psychology’ of the characters.”³⁵ Superficial aspects of the music clearly add to the overblown, clichéd feeling of the characters and heighten the hilarious characterizations of overbearing Woman, seductive Stranger, and emasculated Man; Fine also uses the tritone in stereotypical ways, such as to express anger.

For example, the strong and strident theme associated with the Woman lends an additional sense of swagger to her character. Although it is in A \flat major, the first movement of *The Race of Life* does not open with tonic harmonies, but with an extended series of phrases almost entirely accompanied by 6/5 chords on E \flat , marked *piano* and *mezzo piano*, during which the Man and Child enter. A \flat major is not strongly confirmed until the Woman’s entrance in m. 31, when A \flat major is stridently pronounced with the brazen “Woman” motive, doubled in octaves in both hands, and marked *forte*. The affected, pompous theme sharply diverges from the preceding music; its commanding insistence—and constant repetition of fourths—brings to mind a sense of the postured machismo typically associated with the heroic style. At the same time, the theme also has a degree of emptiness, its melodic circularity further emphasized by its accompaniment (octave doubling rather than a full harmonic texture). Just as Humphrey deconstructs and parodies the stereotype of “nagging wife” in her performance of

³⁴ Ibid., 43–44.

³⁵ John Martin, “The Dance: Events Ahead,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1938.

Woman, so too does Fine undermine the stereotype of “overbearing Woman” musically, by presenting a self-important theme that on the surface is authoritative but at the same time has a sense of hollowness, its lack of rich harmonic support lending a contrived, artificial feeling to the tune. Interestingly, even Fine’s orchestral version of the work further emphasizes the forthrightness of the “Woman” theme, as the opening phrases (during which the Man and Child enter) are marked *pianissimo* and played by the strings. In contrast, the “Woman’s theme” appears in m. 31 as a blatant kind of fanfare, heavily accented and marked *fortissimo*, in which the winds and brass dramatically appear for the first time in the piece.

Example 5.6

“Woman’s theme,” mm. 31–36, mvt. I

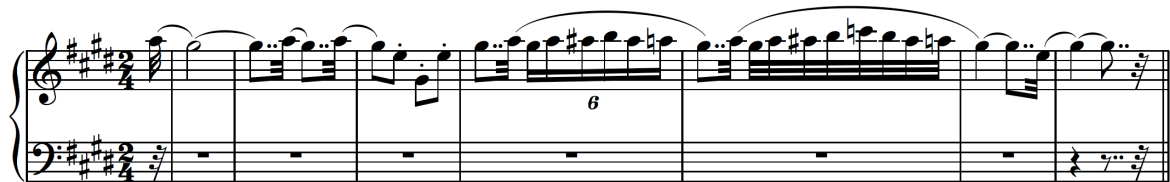
The musical score for Example 5.6, "Woman's theme," mm. 31–36, mvt. I, is presented in two systems. The key signature is one flat (F major), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is marked *f* (fortissimo) and *8va* (octave up). The melody is characterized by a strong, fanfare-like quality with heavy accents and a clear, rhythmic pattern. The first system covers measures 31–34, and the second system covers measures 35–36. The music is written for piano, with the right hand playing the melody and the left hand providing harmonic support.

Superficially, the Beautiful Stranger’s theme also draws on clichéd musical gestures to help depict the character. The Stranger’s theme recurs throughout the second movement (mm. 1–7, mm. 21–26, mm. 37–40, mm. 83–5, mm. 90–95), and uses a

number of slinky, chromatic motives to depict her flirtatious character.³⁶ As with the Woman’s theme, Fine also uses instrumental colors to reflect the Stranger’s character: in the orchestral version, a solo flute languidly plays the Stranger’s theme, slipping through seductive gestures that include undulating rhythmic patterns and chromaticism that sharply contrast with the dogged evenness of the Woman’s theme. The conclusion of the “Beautiful Stranger” movement is also interesting because it features a final statement of the “Stranger theme,” this time, with a contrapuntal accompaniment that proceeds entirely in parallel fifths, lending a markedly empty quality to the theme, perhaps in an attempt to convey the Stranger’s seemingly vacuous character.

Example 5.7

“Stranger theme,” mvt. II (“The Beautiful Stranger”), mm. 1–7



(con’d)

³⁶ The associations between chromaticism and female characters is a well-worn topic that has been discussed at length by a number of different scholars. For example, see Catherine Clément’s discussion of *Tristan und Isolde* (in Clément 1988), or Susan McClary’s discussion of *Carmen* (McClary 1991). Renée Cox Lorraine also discusses this topic in “Recovering Jouissance: Feminist Aesthetics and Music,” in Pendle (2001), especially pp. 4–6. This essay also describes chromaticism and female characters in film, citing *Body Heat* and *Basic Instinct* as examples.

(Example 5.7, con'd)
 “Stranger theme,” conclusion of mvt. II

In addition to its inability to confirm the tonic from the very beginning of the work, the Man’s theme is also stereotypically “weak” in other ways, bolstering the Man’s choreographic persona, which was remembered as both “a fat fool of a husband, stupid and dull” and “a pompous Wall Street stockbroker.”³⁷ Although when the Man enters in m. 21 his phrase begins in $A\flat$, it does not strongly confirm the key, but immediately flits away from $A\flat$ even in his second measure, which flirts towards the whole-tone 1 (WT 1) collection.

Example 5.8
 “Man’s theme,” mvt. I, mm. 21–25

³⁷ Limón (2001), 72 and Schurman documentary, (46:21–47:41).

When this theme reappears in the first and second movements, it not only continues to repeat the whole-tone content in the second measure, but is also typically paired with a harmonic accompaniment that lacks harmonic “strength.” For example, when the “Man’s theme” returns in the second movement, it is accompanied by parallel sixths, lending an empty, circular feeling to the texture.

Example 5.9

“Man’s theme,” mvt. II, mm. 30–35



Although her music up to this point had largely been characterized by a richly dissonant melodic and harmonic palette, in this piece Fine incorporates dissonance in a strikingly different way, often as a means of humorously evoking stereotypical, clichéd textures. For example, towards the end of “The Beautiful Stranger” movement—in a passage marked “The Quarrel” (beginning in m. 75)—Fine juxtaposes two simultaneous versions of the Woman’s theme (one in $A\flat$ major, and a varied tritone version of the motive), creating a kind of “battle” between tonal and atonal themes that expresses the Woman’s displeasure at her husband’s philandering. Perhaps not surprisingly, “The Quarrel” begins with a hilariously trite series of tritones, but the tritone “Quarrel” motive actually first appears six measures before “The Quarrel” section begins, as it is first heard one octave lower in mm. 69–71. Written above these measures on the score, in Fine’s hand, is the phrase “closeup of the wife scowling.” The phrase “wife scowling” is found

(Example 5.11, con'd)
Orchestral score, with Fine's additions³⁹

Music as double text

The previous section discussed how Fine's musical themes help to exaggerate and delineate certain attributes of the characters in *The Race of Life* through excess and caricature. Although superficially the music seems to merely help represent the exaggerated proportions of the characters, a number of deeper structural relationships in the music actually create a kind of subtext to the work, providing a commentary that undercuts these superficial categorizations and portraits of the characters, one that emphasizes the connections between them and ultimately blurs the boundaries between them. In this section, I explore how intersections between the "Man" and "Woman" themes undercut the rigid, binary categorizations of gender on the surface of the music,

³⁹ Orchestral score, *The Race of Life*, NYPL.

and then examine how musical connections between two seemingly disparate depictions of womanhood—matron and mistress—ultimately call these stereotypes into question.

Remarkably, the idea of using music as a dramatic counterpoint to the onstage action—as a kind of “double text” that could both support *or* go against the dance—was discussed at length by Fine in a 1978 interview. Here, Fine describes how the most effective music for dance does not merely replicate or conform to the choreography, but rather, creates a sense of tension against the dramatic action onstage.

Also, the good dancers like counterpoint against the movement—oh very much so, very much so. Having something against the movement made it stronger, and you had to develop a sense of writing against the movement. Charles and Doris were very strong about that. . . . You see if you have the music going along with the movement all the time, it weakens the movement. If you have that, and then you have something else, it strengthens the movement; it actually physically gives you a feeling of strength, being stronger, than if you have something going with you all the time. So all these things I had to learn. That I was told. Probably Doris told me that: that I shouldn't write with the movement all the time; it has to be against it, at least part of the time.⁴⁰

Superficially, the Man theme and the Woman theme seem strikingly different from one another. Although both are tonally oriented, the Woman's theme remains staunchly within its A \flat major realm, while the Man's theme contains chromatic deviations. Yet both themes have interesting underlying structural patterns. The Man's theme, with its chromatic alterations, is sc 7-24 (0123579), and is tightly organized around an intervallic series based on ic2 and ic1, a combination of whole-tone and chromatic subsets.

⁴⁰ Fine (1978), 49.

Example 5.12

Reduction of “Man’s theme”

Fully grounded in A^b major, the Woman’s theme is also highly organized and its pitches create a diatonic hexachord, sc (024579). Like the Man’s theme, the Woman’s theme is also structured around a progression of ic1s and ic2s. Interestingly, while the brazenness of the Women’s theme helps to depict her domineering, frenetic, and overzealous character, the structure of the Woman’s theme is actually more “balanced” than the Man’s theme, and is inversionally symmetric around its two middle tones, G and A^b (I_3).

Example 5.13

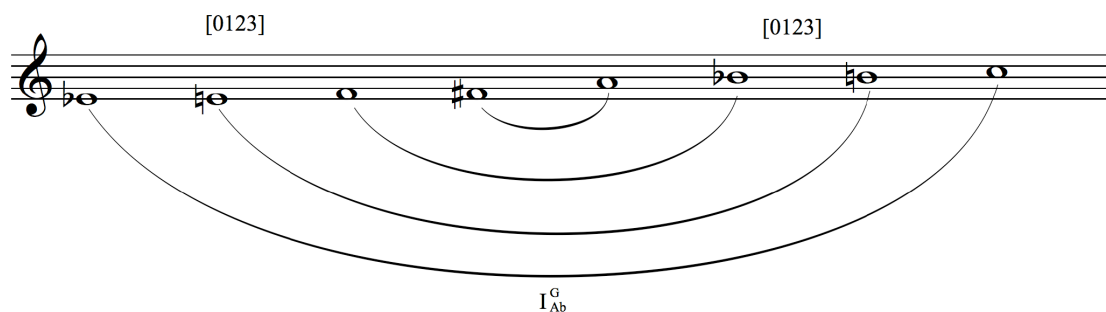
Reduction of “Woman’s theme”

The particular level of inversional symmetry found in the Woman’s theme also comes into play in other moments in the work. A connection may be drawn between the level of inversion of the Woman’s theme and the opening of the Man’s theme: before his theme begins its chromatic deviation, the first four pitches of the Man’s theme (F_3 , E^b_3 ,

B \flat 2, C3, mm. 20–21, mvt. I) are inversionally symmetric—in pitch space, not pitch-class space—at the same level (I_3) as the Woman’s theme. Interestingly, I_3 also returns at the end of the “Beautiful Stranger” movement, as the tritone-ridden accompaniment to “The Quarrel” between the Man and the Woman, sc 8-9 (01236789) can be divided into two (1234) tetrachords, with invert into themselves around their “missing” axial notes G and A \flat .

Example 5.14

Reduction of “The Quarrel,” accompaniment (mvt. II, mm. 80–92)



When compared, the Man’s theme and Woman’s theme also share five common tones [357T0], and these common tones form the pentatonic collection. This is noteworthy not only because the pentatonic collection sc (02479) is the complement of the diatonic collection, but also because the pentatonic collection is one of the most aurally ambiguous, since its potentially diatonic character is obscured by the collection’s lack of semitones.

In all, what’s interesting about Fine’s themes for the Man and Woman is how they depart from stereotypically gendered musical characteristics in order to depict the characters: although both themes are obviously diatonic, the Man’s theme contains

chromatic slippages traditionally used to depict exotic, seductive female characters, while the Woman's theme maintains the ruggedly grounded tonality often associated with (male) heroic figures. At the same time, both themes also have deeper structural elements that depart from their exaggerated, caricatured surface (such as how the frenetic-sounding Woman's theme is actually structurally more "balanced" than the Man's theme). And although the musical themes used to depict the Man and Woman are superficially quite different from one another, they actually contain deeper structural relationships that undercut their seeming binary opposition and reveal a certain degree of connection between them (such as the use of I_3 to draw a subtle connection between the Woman's theme, the opening gesture of the Man's theme, and the accompanimental material that appears during their quarrel).

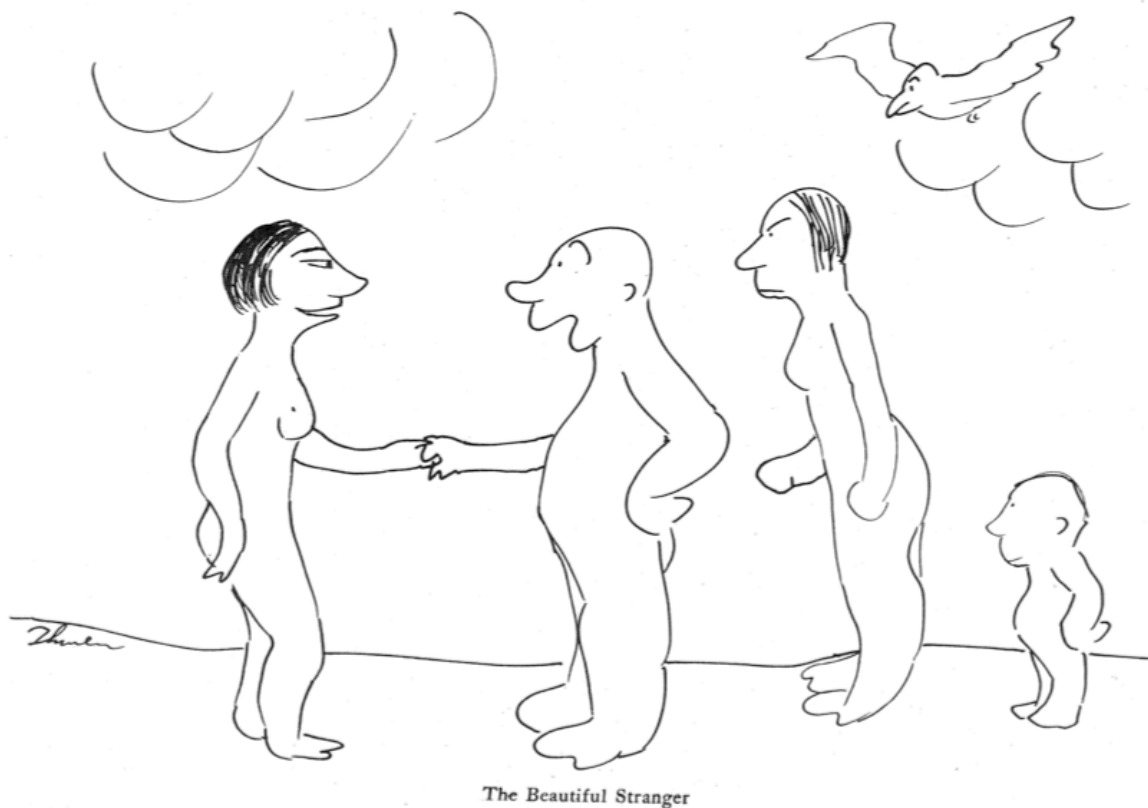
"Matron" and "mistress"

Humphrey's alterations to Thurber's version of *The Race of Life* have been discussed in some detail, but one of her most interesting artistic choices is the way that the Beautiful Stranger was characterized: instead of a stereotypically alluring, desirable mistress figure, Humphrey added a degree of comedy and strength to the character that is not found in Thurber's original drawing. In Thurber's sequence, the Stranger appears only once, in a single drawing, which features the svelte, comely Stranger with large, almond-shaped eyes and an alluring figure: in Thurber's version, the Stranger is also a tangential presence, who represents just one among many obstacles (including strange animals and situations) the family encounters along their journey. But in Humphrey's version, this single fleeting scene is expanded into an entire movement, and the Stranger character is invested with an emphasis not found in Thurber's drawings. On the surface,

the musical themes for the characters seem to simply recreate the distinctions drawn between the characters in Thurber's "Beautiful Stranger" drawing, a scene in which Woman, Man, and Beautiful Stranger are shown in opposition to one another, the Man stuck directly in the middle of two stereotypical representations of womanhood, matron and mistress. As with many of the other drawings, here the Man also clearly remains the focal point of the scene.

Figure 5.2

James Thurber, *The Race of Life*, "The Beautiful Stranger"



Interestingly, Humphrey's Beautiful Stranger character was more complex than Thurber's: instead of a stereotypically alluring, desirable mistress figure, Humphrey created a character with more depth and dimension, adding a degree of humor and

strength to the character that is not found in Thurber's original drawing. Humphrey noted that the Beautiful Stranger, "is no chic adolescent, but is rather hard, aggressive, and blowzy. To catch such a conception in music was a difficult feat."⁴¹

Figure 5.3

The Race of Life, Stranger and Man, Juilliard Archives (1956 performance)



⁴¹ Doris Humphrey, "Music for an American Dance," *ACA Bulletin*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1958): 5. A 1939 review of *The Race of Life* also focused on the aggressive aspects of the Stranger character, praising Katherine Litz for "her performance of a horrendous Thurber vamp." See John Martin, "WPA Group Opens Dance Production," *New York Times*, 31 January 1939.

Dissolving and dismantling shallow, patriarchal categorizations of women such as “matron” and “mistress” has obviously been a major project for women and feminists, and has been examined in all sorts of different ways. For example, Kaufman (1980) describes a scene from Zetterling’s 1968 comic film “The Girls,” which involves a woman and her husband hilariously fighting over his “mistress” (a mannequin he has brought with them on tour, and that he is trying to stuff into a suitcase while insisting there’s no other woman). Kaufman notes that Zetterling’s satiric scene functions as slapstick, but also subtly addresses a much deeper issue, of how “wife and mistress share similar problems (men) and a common humanity. There is a magical sympathy between them.”⁴²

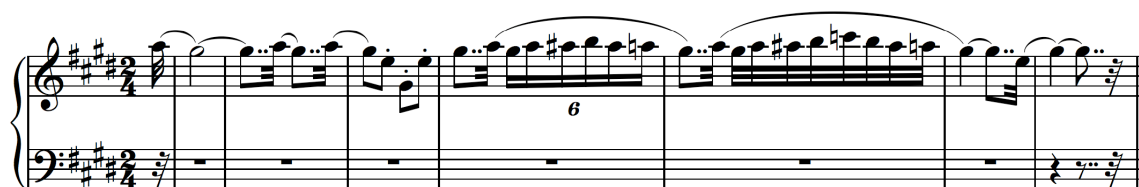
On the surface, the musical themes for the Woman and the Stranger seem to reflect stereotypical notions of “matron” and “mistress,” with the strident, unabashedly tonal character of the Woman’s theme providing a sharp contrast to the slinky, flirtatious chromaticism of the Stranger’s theme. However, closer examination reveals structural relationships that seem to undercut these rigid, superficial categorizations.

One of the defining features of the Stranger’s theme is the undulating alternation between G# and A natural, which is heard repeatedly during each of the four statements of the Stranger theme that occur throughout the movement.⁴³

⁴² Kaufman 1980, 16.

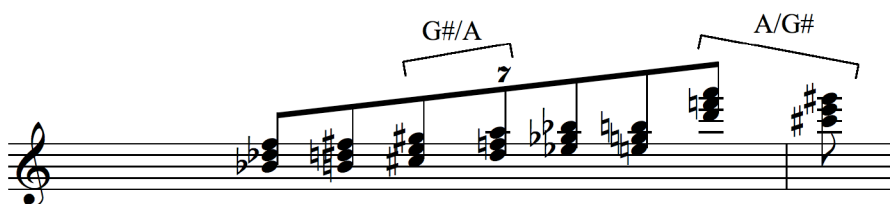
⁴³ These four statements of the Stranger motive appear in mm. 1–7, mm. 21–26, mm. 37–40, and mm. 98–103).

Example 5.15
 “The Beautiful Stranger,” G#/A



The G#/A motive is not the sole domain of the Beautiful Stranger, but actually may be found in a number of other important moments in the piece, such as the upper pitches of the striking, gestural series of minor triads towards the end of the movement, before the final statement of the Stranger theme.

Example 5.16
 G#/As in concluding gesture, before final statement of “Stranger” theme



In the first movement, the motive also is featured (as A^b/A natural) in the outer voices during an octatonic-ish transitional passage that follows the Woman’s entrance in m. 31. Some of the most prominent harmonies in this passage, ones that occur not only in strong metric positions but are further stressed with accents, also invert into themselves around the inversional level under which A^b and A invert into one another.

Example 5.17A \flat /A, mvt. I, mm. 44–47

While these small-scale moments are certainly important, what’s more fascinating is how connections might be drawn between this G \sharp /A motive and deeper structural aspects of the themes used to depict the two main female characters. Perhaps the most striking instance of our G \sharp and A natural “conflict” occurs during the “Quarrel” section of the second movement, where the wife confronts her husband about his philandering, and the original Woman theme—in A \flat major—is pitted against a tritone variation of the Woman theme, creating a crunchy, dissonant texture that contains a striking juxtaposition of the G \sharp /A natural conflict, as well as a fleeting statement of the Stranger theme.

Example 5.18
 “The Quarrel,” mvt. II, mm. 75–85

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 75-78) shows the "ANGRY WOMAN THEME" in the right hand and the "WOMAN THEME" in the left hand. The second system (measures 79-81) continues the "WOMAN THEME" in the left hand. The third system (measures 82-85) features the "STRANGER THEME" in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings like accents and "8va".

Because these three different themes: “Woman,” “Angry Woman,” and “Stranger” are all different set classes, they obviously cannot be related to one another using an exact level of transposition or inversion. However, on closer examination these

three themes do relate to one another at the “fuzzy” level of inversion based on our G#/A motive.⁴⁴

Example 5.19

Relationships between three themes

The diagram shows three musical themes on a staff. The "Woman theme" consists of notes 3, 8, and T. The "Angry woman theme" consists of notes 7 and 9. The "Stranger theme" consists of notes 1, 4, 8, and 9. Solid lines connect 3 to 7, 8 to 9, and T to 1. Dashed lines connect 3 to 1 and 8 to 9. Below the staff are two instances of the G#/A motive: $*I_A^{G\#}$ (1).

In each case, these themes differ by the same amount—only a single semitone. But there are obviously good musical reasons that these three themes have these differences: if all were members of the same sc, we would not hear the striking contrast between the staunch tonality of the Woman’s original theme and the other themes. In addition, if the themes related to one another exactly, the two Woman’s themes would be [38T] and [279]—and the “Angry Woman” theme would lack the crunchy tritone that makes it so distinctive. The “Stranger” theme would also not have its wonderful semitonal G#/A motion, the very dissonance that makes the phrase sound so slinky and flirtatious. The inversive relationships between these three themes present important questions about the analytical weight that is often given to musical entities that conform

⁴⁴ Interestingly, a passing variation on the “Stranger” theme, which occurs at the beginning of the second movement and not during this “Quarrel” passage, does relate to the “Angry” woman theme at an exact level of inversion—more precisely, I_5 , the inversion that preserves our G#/A motive (see E, G#, A#, mm. 7–9, mm. 10–11, mm. 14–15, mm. 18–19).

to neat, exact relationships: in this case, these particular themes are musically interesting precisely because of their differences, and while they do have some underlying structural relationship, it is a “norm” that is askew, imbalanced, imperfect—and decidedly richer for it.⁴⁵ In all, Fine’s music serves as a kind of “double text” to the choreographic action, as it not only helps to bolster the parodic performance, but also adds another, deeper dimension to the categorizations of gender being performed onstage. While on the surface these themes appear to be merely disparate melodic fragments used to musically depict the familiar “matron” and “mistress” binary opposition, deeper examination reveals that “matron” and “mistress” actually share (as Kaufman has put it) a “magical sympathy between them,” structural connections that help to dissolve such rigid, shallow, binary categorizations. As Naomi Weisstein has so eloquently stated:

How can you trust humor when it’s a weapon used against you? It is quite a feat to turn what is defined as a ridiculous state of being into your own definition of the ridiculous, to take control of the *quality* of the absurdity, to turn it away from yourself. We must at the same time show that our existence has social meaning...that nobody is either WOMAN or “lady,” and that all this is very funny indeed.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For more on inversional balance and normativity, see Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a discussion of inversional symmetry and gender, see Martin Scherzinger, “Anton Webern and the Concept of Symmetrical Inversion: A Reconsideration on the Terrain of Gender,” *repercussions*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 63–147.

⁴⁶ Weisstein (1973), in Morris (1994), 138. All emphasis in this quote is Weisstein’s.

Coda

In the past few decades, scholars have begun to examine the rich tradition of women's humor in America in greater depth, and *The Race of Life* provides an opportunity to add to this legacy by exploring the ways in which humor was also used by women in the performing arts in the first half of the twentieth century. Humphrey and Fine's version of *The Race of Life* harnesses humor to unravel simplistic characterizations of women and the "war between the sexes," and uses Thurber's drawings as a point of departure for complicating, parodying, and ultimately deconstructing superficial representations of womanhood itself. Perhaps Thurber himself would have even been proud. In an interview, Thurber once said, "Almost any century now Woman may lose her patience...and let fly. I wish I could be there to witness the saving of our self-destructive species by its greatest force. If I have sometimes seemed to make fun of Woman, it has only been for the purpose of egging her on."¹

The final moments of *The Race of Life* contain an exhilarating, fast-paced codetta that features numerous repetitions of the "Woman" theme, and thus I would like to conclude my own discussion in a similar fashion by letting Fine speak for herself. In a number of different interviews, Fine poetically described an incident that was my original inspiration for working on *The Race of Life*, an encounter that succinctly reveals just how easily women can use humor in what Barreca calls "strategic" ways, as a means of cultivating agency—or even defiance. Since composition is a field in which men have traditionally outnumbered women, female composers are frequently asked to discuss their experiences as a "woman composer." On several occasions when she was asked about

¹ Quoted in Grauner (1995), 156.

the difficulties and discrimination she faced in her career, Fine specifically recalled the Juilliard performance of *The Race of Life*, which featured her new orchestration of her original piano score. After the concert, an esteemed male composer approached Fine and loudly proclaimed, “I liked your orchestration very much, very much. Did you do it yourself?” Without hesitation, Fine wittily retorted: “Well...don’t you do yours?”²

² See Vivian Fine, interview with Frances Harmeyer, *American Music Series Interview Number 50*, North Bennington, Vt., June 28, 1975; Vivian Fine, interview with Elizabeth Vercoe, *International League of Women Composers Journal* (June 1992): 18–23. Fine does not reveal the identity of the famous male composer who asked this.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Future Projects

The final chapter of the first book to focus extensively on American experimental music in the first half of the twentieth century (*American Experimental Music, 1890–1940*) ends with a rousing tribute, in which the efforts of the composers featured in the volume are reverentially lauded for the ways that their creative works demonstrate a rich pluralism that reveals a ruggedly American trait, that of “unity being created through diversity.”¹

Thus the American experimental tradition is rooted not just in a desire to explore new compositional horizons, but also in a (conscious or subconscious) realisation that musical unity can—and should—be created through stylistic diversity, both individually and collectively, within a work or between works. Experimentalism can therefore take many different forms, and be presented in many different ways....²

Further, this pluralism is not merely a stylistic characteristic of the music of this particular era, but reflects a distinctly American culture: because the United States is said to be “a nation unintentionally based upon the tensions of pluralism,” heterogeneity itself represents “a fundamental characteristic of American society.”³

Yet more than twenty years after the publication of this volume, our accounts of modernist music still fail to fully reflect the bountiful diversity Nicholls envisions.

¹ David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 221.

² *Ibid.*, 220.

³ *Ibid.*, 221. Nicholls notes that the phrase “a nation unintentionally based upon the tensions of pluralism” is taken from Brook Hindle.

Ultimately our canon of experimental and modernist compositions remains limited, especially with regard to the contributions of women composers during the 1930s. This dissertation has been an effort to confront the widespread assumption that only one or two “exceptional” women (namely, Ruth Crawford Seeger) were active as modernist composers during this decade. If ultramodernism and modernism are said to be distinguished by a profusely rich tapestry of heterogeneity and pluralism, then studying works by other women composers who also made important musical contributions in this era goes a long way towards enriching our knowledge of exactly how vast and wide-ranging this vibrant musical diversity actually is.

The first part of this dissertation focused on Johanna Beyer. Since Beyer is unfamiliar to most scholars and many details of her biography remain hazy at best, Chapter 2 contained a biographical sketch of Beyer, informed by archival resources from the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Chapter 3 discussed Beyer’s String Quartet No. 2, a fascinating work in which Beyer sardonically juxtaposed a common-practice tune from a Mozart aria about marriage against a strikingly dissonant accompaniment that has a number of stylistic features in common with ultramodernism (particularly principles of dissonant counterpoint). Like Chapter 2, this chapter also relies heavily on information obtained through extensive archival research, as Beyer’s original manuscripts and her personal letters provide insight into her rather idiosyncratic views about marriage and gender roles that enlivens our understanding of this fascinating quartet.

The second part of the dissertation discussed Vivian Fine’s first major work for dance, which she composed for Doris Humphrey, one of the pioneers of modern dance in

America. Since scholars have never examined this dance or music in any substantive detail, this portion of the dissertation analyzes both the musical and choreographic aspects of this piece. The obscurity of *The Race of Life* required a substantial amount of archival research in order to uncover more information about this fascinating work, and so these chapters also feature a wide range of materials—including photographs, interviews, manuscripts, films, and concert programs—gathered from a number of different archival collections, including the Juilliard Archives, Goucher College Special Collections, Library of Congress, and New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, as well as many materials (such as manuscripts and interviews) generously provided to me by Fine’s family. As a dance piece, this work is particularly interesting because it provides an opportunity to consider performances of “Woman” from several different angles, examining both the unusual characters that Humphrey created and performed as well as the intersections (and divergences) between the ways that gender was physically enacted onstage and how Fine’s music both supports *and* undercuts these physical representations. In addition, Part II serves as an example of women’s use of humor in the performing arts in the first half of the twentieth century, a topic that rarely appears in humor studies scholarship. These chapters not only contain the first in-depth discussion of *The Race of Life* (as a dance or musical work), but also are the first study of Fine’s Depression-era work with modern dance, a genre that constituted a significant amount of her compositional output during the 1930s.

However, this dissertation has also raised a number of different issues that I hope to pursue in more depth in my future research. First and foremost, the dizzying array of works that Beyer and Fine composed clearly warrants further study. Scholarly editions of

their compositions would help bring more attention to their music, as well as ease the current difficulties of access for scholars and performers. Although some of Beyer's chamber and percussion pieces have begun to be published by Frog Peak Music, these editions are geared towards performers, and lack in-depth scholarly discussion of the music. In addition, none of Beyer's large-scale works for orchestra and band have ever been published or studied in detail; these ensemble pieces are especially interesting since women composers often avoided writing larger compositions due to difficulties in securing performances and publication. Beyer's biography deserves further scrutiny as well, particularly because of the difficulties she endured as an older, unmarried woman during the economic austerity of the Great Depression. In contrast with the marked scarcity of existing research on Beyer, Fine's biography and music have received slightly more scholarly attention, in part because of the longevity of her professional career, which spanned more than six decades. However, scholarship on Fine is by no means complete, and many gaps remain (particularly regarding her oeuvre): for example, the majority of Fine's compositions from this era are still only available in manuscript. A scholarly edition of Fine's dance music from the 1930s—including the ballet score to *The Race of Life* as well as her other major dance pieces—could help bring much-needed attention to this fascinating music, as well as make it easier for these pieces to be performed (either as independent musical works or even with the original choreography).⁴

⁴ Some of the dance works for which Fine composed the music have recently begun to interest dance scholars. This past year, Margaret O'Sullivan and Elizabeth McPherson staged a reconstruction of Charles Weidman's *Opus 51* (1938), which was performed at Montclair State University and the 92nd Street Y by dancers from Montclair State University. See also Elizabeth McPherson, "Diary of a Dance: Charles Weidman's *Opus*

Although the compositions featured in this dissertation were both written as Beyer and Fine began to turn away from their ultramodern “roots,” both composers also completed a significant number of compositions during the early 1930s that are staunchly grounded in the ultramodern style. Many of Fine’s earliest works contain strikingly dissonant, heterophonic lines that seem strongly influenced by principles of dissonant counterpoint; even Wallingford Riegger effusively described how “at the age of seventeen,” Fine “already showed her mastery of dissonant counterpoint in her charming *Four Pieces for Two Flutes*.”⁵ As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, many of Beyer’s compositions from the early 1930s are also strongly influenced by ultramodernism, and she even composed a solo piano piece entitled *Dissonant Counterpoint*. These compelling works should also be examined in detail, particularly in order to unravel the various ways in which they conform to (or even go against) the contributions of other ultramoderns, such as Ruth Crawford or Henry Cowell. Exploring the ultramodern works these two composers wrote during the early 1930s directly challenges the long-held notion that only men—and, of course, Ruth Crawford Seeger—were writing music in the ultramodern style during these years, and further research about these works will greatly enrich our current understanding of ultramodern music in this era, which at present only includes a select group of composers that is almost entirely male.

51,” *Library News: From the Dance Notation Bureau*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (February 2012): 3–4.

⁵ Wallingford Riegger, “The Music of Vivian Fine,” *ACA Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (1958): 2.

Example 6.1

Vivian Fine, *Four Pieces for Two Flutes* (1930), mvt. I, opening

FOUR PIECES for TWO FLUTES

accidentals affect only those notes
before which they occur

VIVIAN FINE

Grazioso, un poco giocoso [♩: 152] I 1930

The musical score is written for two flutes. It begins with a tempo marking of 'Grazioso, un poco giocoso' and a metronome marking of 152. The first system shows the initial melodic lines with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The second system includes a first ending bracket and a piano (p) dynamic. The third system features a piano (p) dynamic with a subito (sub.) marking and a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The fourth system starts with a boxed measure number 10, followed by a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a decrescendo (dim.) marking. The score concludes with a forte (f) dynamic and a decrescendo (dim.) marking.

Example 6.2

Johanna Beyer, *Dissonant Counterpoint* (n.d.), mvt. I

Reilly 2 (P = 102) 120 - 132 I

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Example 6.2, consisting of six systems of staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings. The score is written in a style that suggests it is a working draft or a composer's sketch.

Key features of the score include:

- System 1:** Starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It features a melody with a *mf* dynamic and a bass line with a *f* dynamic. There are triplets and a *rit.* marking.
- System 2:** Features a *pp* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking. It includes a *stringendo* instruction.
- System 3:** Shows a *pp* dynamic and a *sfz* marking. It includes a *f* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking.
- System 4:** Features a *pp* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking. It includes a *f* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking.
- System 5:** Shows a *mf* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking. It includes a *f* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking.
- System 6:** Features a *mf* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking. It includes a *f* dynamic and a *ritenuto* marking.

At the bottom of the page, there is a handwritten note: "Accidentals affect only those individual notes before which they stand."

Yet Beyer, Crawford, and Fine are not the only women who had close ties to experimental music in this era, and through my research I have encountered a number of other forgotten figures who also composed experimental music during this time. For example, Jessie Drummer Baetz (1895–1980), a native of Toronto, Canada, immigrated to the US in the 1930s and was a composer, teacher, and housemate of Johanna Beyer (Baetz also studied composition with Beyer). Also a performer of some skill, Baetz played piano in the premiere of Beyer’s *Movement for Two Pianos* (1936), and percussion on a *New Music Quarterly* recording of William Russell’s *Three Dance Movements*.⁶ Baetz also studied with Henry Cowell, both in his New School classes in the mid-1930s as well as privately.⁷ Only three letters from Baetz to Cowell survive in the Henry Cowell papers at the New York Public Library, but the third letter in the collection contains an extraordinary passage, in which Baetz painfully describes some of the convergences between her experiences as a woman and her compositions. (Interestingly, this letter also seems to hint that Baetz and Cowell’s relationship might have been more than just that of a teacher and student.)

The significance of the leading tone to be resolved in the 4th measure has just crept into my brain, so I must tell you some things. My years—now several more than yours—in a woman this is different than for a man. Twice I have gone through the ordeal of having a child—with no result except long illnesses—and a

⁶ This work was performed on Beyer’s May 20, 1936 Composers’ Forum concert. The recording on which Baetz performed was *New Music Quarterly*, vol. III, nos. 7–8. The other percussionists who performed alongside Baetz in Russell’s piece were William Russell, Miles Dresskell, and Henry Cowell.

⁷ Baetz’s name appears on the registration lists for a number of Cowell’s “Work Courses in Music” at the New School for Social Research, including “The Theory and Practice of Combining Rhythms” (session beginning January 1933), “New Possibilities in Piano Playing” (session beginning October 1933), and “Modern Harmony” (session beginning October 1934). See Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 163, Folder 11.

On these forms, Baetz’s occupation is listed as “piano teacher,” “music teacher,” and “student,” respectively.

question about repeating it. Hence the necessity for the creative music. I feel the child is very important to you—so ponder this well, before you see me. You should have some one younger—I was so swept away, that all things were confused. You will see this clarity of vision in the next music I bring you—which is very much controlled. I ~~felt~~ feel you must know the truth in all things—don't answer this.⁸

Although at present their musical works have been largely forgotten, a number of women were actively involved in the experimental music scene, and the creative activities of women like Beyer, Baetz, and Fine would obviously benefit from further scholarly attention. The distinctive contributions women made to ultramodernism deserve to be considered with sensitivity and in great detail, and examining these important works could ultimately provide new ways of thinking about this fascinating genre of American music—and the complicated ways in which gender intersects with it. Several possibilities for further research in this area are described below.

Mentorship among women composers

Networking and mentorship among women composers is another area of research that desperately needs further study, in order to unravel exactly how these particular professional relationships influenced and affected women working within the male-dominated realm of ultramodernism in the 1930s. Although Ruth Crawford Seeger has received more attention than most other female composers in this era, many aspects of

⁸ Letter from Jessie Baetz to Henry Cowell, “Thursday,” Cowell papers-NYPL, Box 1, Folder 16. This letter is undated, but has “1941” written in pencil on top. The other letters from Baetz to Cowell in this collection are from March 1941 and April 1941.

Jessie Baetz was married to Walter Baetz from December 1926 until his death in 1978. The couple had no children. Baetz's music was featured on a Composers' Forum concert on December 15, 1937; three of her works were performed: *Two Compositions for Violin and Piano*, *Three Vocalizes for Soprano*, and *Six Dances for Percussion* (see de Graaf 2006, 251). At present, I have not been able to locate any of Baetz's compositions or manuscripts.

her career have still not been examined in depth: Crawford's contributions as a music educator have been discussed by a number of scholars (such as Tick 1997, Lamb 2007, and Watts 2008) but her impact as a composition teacher has not been studied in any substantive detail. Crawford maintained a grueling teaching schedule in Chicago (in the 1920s) and later in Washington, DC, and her private piano students often remembered her with great fondness. Sylvia Parmelee, a piano student, noted that "Ruth was such a gifted teacher, who knew how to encourage even the least talented and to bring out the music latent in them."⁹

Yet Crawford's pedagogical gifts seem to have also extended into her work as a composition teacher. Crawford taught composition to both Beyer and Fine, and her influence on their development as composers seems to have been profound. Vivian Fine regarded Crawford as one of her primary musical mentors, and she began studying with Crawford when she was only eleven years old. In numerous interviews, Fine recalled her first efforts at writing a piece of music, and noted the formative importance of Crawford's sensitive response:

When I had studied for about six months, she asked me to write a [piano] piece, and it wasn't a bad little piece. It had something individual about it. I remember Ruth standing in the back of the room, and when I turned around after I played it, there was a very intent look on her face. She had really listened. And I think the only thing she said was, "Write another one." And that was the beginning of my

⁹ Letter, Sylvia Parmelee to Charles Seeger, May 4, 1978, Charles Seeger Materials, Box 23, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Sylvia Parmelee and her two daughters studied piano with Ruth Crawford Seeger in Washington, D.C., beginning in the early 1940s, and the two eventually became friends. For more on Parmelee, see Tick (1997), 294, 329, 339–40.

Crawford's Chicago diaries contain descriptions of days in which she taught for twelve hours at a time. For example, Saturday, November 11, 1927: "Today tho [sic] my hardest teaching day, since I teach from 8:15 till eight, has been very enjoyable." See also Friday, November 26, 1927, "...tomorrow an alarm at 6:45, and twelve straight hours of teaching."

being a composer. Then I began to write, and Ruth became very interested in what I was doing.¹⁰

Fine also described how having a female composition teacher made it seem “perfectly natural” for a woman to write music:

She [Crawford] influenced me in a very fundamental way. I always thought it was perfectly natural to write music. I never thought of myself as a woman composer, and of course, Ruth was a woman composer, so that was something very fundamental that I got from her. Also, she took a very deep interest in my compositions and my development — in a very feeling way. She wasn’t didactic and she didn’t think of me as just “some young thing.” We had a real friendship.¹¹

Johanna Beyer also studied with Ruth Crawford, who she claimed to know “quite intimately.”¹² Beyer also dedicated one of the movements she performed on her 1936 Composers’ Forum concert to Crawford (one of the “excerpts from the Piano Suites”).¹³ Beyer’s studies with Crawford took place in the early 1930s, before the Seeger family left New York City at the end of 1935.¹⁴ Some of Beyer’s works from these years seem to have been strongly influenced by Crawford: for example, Beyer’s *Suite for Clarinet I* (1932) and *Suite for Clarinet IB* (1932) both bear striking similarities with Ruth

¹⁰ Vivian Fine, interview with Elizabeth Vercoe, *International League of Women Composers Journal* (June 1992): 18–23. A transcript of this interview is also available at www.vivianfine.org.

¹¹ Vivian Fine, interview with Leslie Jones, *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 16 (1997): 21–26.

¹² Letter from Beyer to Mrs. [Olive] Cowell, September 19, 1936, Cowell papers—NYPL, Box 124, Folder 2. Beyer mentions both of the Seegers in this letter, noting, “You see, the Seegers and I have spent a lot of time together and we know each other quite intimately.” This letter was previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, which also briefly discussed Beyer’s studies with Crawford.

¹³ Kennedy and Polansky speculate that the “excerpts from the Piano Suites” contained music from *Clusters*, *Dissonant Counterpoint*, and/or *Gebrauchs-Musik*. See Kennedy and Polansky (1996), 723.

¹⁴ Tick (1997) briefly mentions Beyer’s studies with Crawford on p. 227, and also believes that this took place in the early 1930s.

Crawford's *Diaphonic Suites*, particularly in their use of agile, dissonant lines and "verse form."

Example 6.3

Johanna Beyer, *Suite for Clarinet IB* (1932), mvt. I, "Giacoso"

Giacoso CLARINET-SUITE: B I B *Gradual growth of bird tones*

(P. 72)

un poco crescendo

crescendo più

un poco decrescendo

decrescendo più

crescendo più

decrescendo

crescendo più

crescendo molto

ritardato

sfz

Carl Fischer, Inc. New York.
No. 5-14 lines.

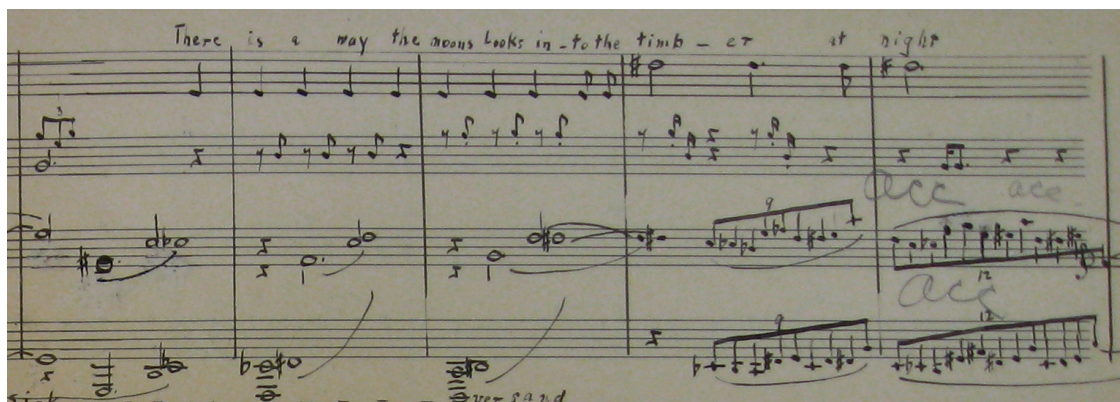
Accidentals affect only those individual notes before which they stand

Beyer also composed a set of three songs in 1933 based on texts by Carl Sandburg (“Stars, Songs, Faces,” “Timber Moon,” and “Summergrass”) that has much in common with Ruth Crawford’s *Three Songs* (1930–32), which are also settings of three Sandburg poems (“Rat Riddles,” “Prayers of Steel,” “In Tall Grass”). Beyer knew Crawford’s *Three Songs* not just because she was probably studying with Crawford during the years she composed these works, but also because Beyer translated at least one of the movements (“Prayers of Steel”) into German for Crawford. Like Crawford’s set, Beyer’s songs use a dramatic texture that features a richly angular piano part with large dissonant leaps (often of sevenths), which is punctuated by interjections from a small group of percussion instruments. Similarly to Crawford’s “Prayers of Steel,” Beyer’s “Timber Moon” also contains a vocal line with a large number of repetitions of the same pitch, in which the vocal line seems to get “stuck” on certain notes. Beyer also uses percussion instruments that are almost identical to Crawford (including Chinese blocks, triangle, cymbal, bass drum), and the two pieces are notated in strikingly similar ways. Clearly, the complicated stylistic relationship between these works deserves further scrutiny,

Example 6.4

Johanna Beyer, *Three Songs for soprano, percussion, and piano* (1933),
 “Timber Moon,” mm. 1–10

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the first ten measures of "Timber Moon" from Johanna Beyer's *Three Songs for soprano, percussion, and piano*. The score is written on three systems of staves. The top staff is for the Soprano voice, the middle staff is for Percussion, and the bottom staff is for the Piano. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 60$. The time signature is 4/4. The percussion part includes instructions for Chinese blocks, triangle, cymbal, and bass drum. The piano part features large dissonant leaps and is marked *pp sempre*. The vocal line has several notes that are repeated, creating a "stuck" effect.



In all, Crawford's work as composition teacher definitely deserves in-depth scholarly study, not only to examine the fascinating connections between her mentorship and the works of these two other "ultramodern" women composers, but also to explore the ways in which these female relationships may have affected the experiences of these women as they navigated a compositional terrain overwhelmingly dominated by men.

* * *

Another area that would benefit from further research is the complicated ways in which "the body" both affected and was represented in these women's music and careers. This is obviously a broad topic that offers a huge range of possibilities for future projects, but here I will outline two different ways in which this relationship might be explored in more detail, with regard to music by modernist women composers in the 1930s.

Beyer's "late style" and ALS

In the last six years of her life, Beyer completed an explosion of new compositions, many of which were large-scale orchestral works that have never been performed or published. At the same time, Beyer was supporting herself through a hectic

schedule of private teaching, as well as also working tirelessly on Cowell's behalf during his imprisonment in the late-1930s—writing letters, copying and sending out scores and manuscripts, and trying to secure performances of his music. Yet underneath this astonishing flurry of creative and professional activity, Beyer was also dealing with another issue—as early as 1938, she had been diagnosed with ALS.¹⁵ Beyer continued to compose until she was confined to a hospice six months before her death (although her compositional output waned as her disease worsened), and exploring the connections between her works and her illness is profoundly important for cultivating a more nuanced understanding of her compositional style during these years. Straus (2008/2011) has discussed at length how “late style” might be more accurately understood as “disability style,” and the wealth of compositions Beyer completed during these years—as well as her personal letters, which often contain heartbreaking descriptions of her illness—could foster new insights about how composers might “write the disabled body musically.”¹⁶ In addition, Beyer is of particular interest because of the unique set of circumstances she endured, not only as she dealt with a disease that medical professionals had just begun to diagnose, but also the difficulties she faced as an unmarried, impoverished woman attempting to navigate the limited health-care options available to her.

Bodies—[Music]—Cities

In a 1995 essay, feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz explores the connections between bodies and cities in an attempt to problematize the ways in which they are often

¹⁵ Lou Gehrig died of ALS in 1941—just three years before Beyer—and the disease became popularly known as “Lou Gehrig’s disease” during these years.

¹⁶ See Joseph N. Straus, “Musical Narratives of the Fractured Body: Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartók, and Copland” in *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82–102 [first published, 2008].

characterized—as dualistic, binary categories, in which “human” and “city” are constructed in opposition to one another.¹⁷ Typically, the relationship between “body” and “city” is described in one of two ways: either as “causal” (a humanistic perspective, in which cities are products of “human endeavor” and “the conceptual and reflective possibilities of consciousness itself”) or “representational” (in which the city or nation state—the “body politic”—is conceptualized as a kind of “parallel” to the body). Instead, Grosz argues that bodies and cities should be viewed from a new perspective that considers the ways in which the two are not just dualistic categories or a simplistic binary opposition, but always already imbedded in one another—a relationship that Grosz terms “interface.” This mutual relationship is a “two-way linkage” in which bodies and cities are “mutually defining”: bodies are obviously a necessary part of the production of cities, but at the same time a city also remains “an active force in constituting bodies, and always leaves its traces on the subject’s corporeality.”¹⁸

Grosz’s essay opens up a new way of thinking about how bodies and cities are represented in the music of this era, particularly in Ruth Crawford’s “Prayers of Steel,” a fascinating work that could arguably be viewed as the epitome of Crawford’s highly structured ultramodern style. Much has been written about the stylistic contrast between Crawford’s “spiritual” or “naturalistic” music (largely composed before 1930) and her dissonant, tightly-structured ultramodern works (written between 1930 and 1933). There is no question that Crawford’s compositional style changed after she moved to New York (and began studying with Charles Seeger), but viewing her oeuvre in these dualistic terms

¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Grosz, “Bodies—Cities,” first published in Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 103–110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108 and 110.

(between Chicago/New York, or “spiritual”/“ultramodern”) seems problematic, particularly since a number of works composed during her “ultramodern” period seem to contain stylistic traits from her earlier, “spiritual” works. Oja (2000) and Tick (1991) have described how some of Crawford’s music from the early 1930s (*Three Chants* and *String Quartet 1931*) may be aligned with her earlier music, and perhaps even some of Crawford’s most austere ultramodern works—such as “Prayers of Steel”—might also contain “human” and “spiritual” elements.¹⁹

Crawford’s sensitive writings about nature and spirituality have been discussed at length by scholars, but her Chicago diaries also contain intensely emotive reflections about the beauty and personal attachment she felt with Chicago’s urban landscape. Like her friend Carl Sandburg, Crawford seems to have felt a kind of spiritual bond in all kinds of different aspects of everyday life, and her sensitivity to her surroundings extended beyond just the rugged beauty of the natural world: Crawford also seems to have felt a strong connection with the concrete, cement, and skyscrapers of Chicago.

On the streetcar: this one tiny section of iron grating on the car window, how many pictures I can sight. They are tearing down blocks of houses—old ramshackle derelicts—along Indiana Avenue from 22nd to [illegible]. It always seems like tearing a living thing limb from limb to tear down a place where men have lived. I feel the bricks, plaster, beams, ceilings, ribs, and bones of the house must vibrate with the pulsing consciousness of those who breathe among them; and to tear them apart is like vivisectioning a soul...²⁰

¹⁹ See Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept’: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924–1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 221–61, and Carol J. Oja, “Ruth Crawford and the Apotheosis of Spiritual Dissonance” in *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144–52.

²⁰ Ruth Crawford, Saturday, October 29, 1927, Chicago diary. I would like to thank Ellie Hisama for generously allowing me to have access to a copy of Crawford’s Chicago diaries.

In her 1927 diary, Crawford even described a plan to express in music the affection she felt for the urban landscape, noting “I want sometime to write a big song of the city, a series of smaller ‘poems’ on the voices of the city, lights, various aspects.”²¹ Five years later, Crawford finally wrote her “song of the city”—the second movement of her *Three Songs* (1930–32), “Prayers of Steel.” What’s most fascinating about this work is the way that Crawford breaks down—even deconstructs—the seeming opposition between “body” and “city,” instead relishing their “two-way linkage” as a kind of spiritual experience. Thus a movement from a set of dissonant, mechanistic pieces written during the height of Crawford’s “ultramodern” period actually contains a number of “spiritual” and “natural” elements usually associated with her other, non-ultramodern works.

For example, the vocal line is characterized by its constant, chant-like intonation of the pitch G#, which is repeated sixteen times in the first two measures alone (the vocal line also continues to return to G# throughout the piece). Tick (1991) describes in detail how Crawford used repetition of individual pitches as a means of portraying her “spiritual concept” in her music before 1930, and draws a connection between Crawford’s use of repeated individual notes and Dane Rudhyar’s ideas about the “symbolic content of the single tone.”²² Rudhyar claimed that “A tone is a living cell. . . . Concentrate on a cell, and the mysteries of the universe may be revealed to you therein. Concentrate on a tone and in it, you may discover the secret of being and find Ishwara,

²¹ Ruth Crawford, Thursday, September 8, 1927, Chicago diary.

²² Tick (1991): 237.

the Christ within.”²³ As Tick notes, the words “mystic” or “mistico” appear only four times in Crawford’s works (in the *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, 1926; and the sixth piano prelude, 1927), and are typically used either in passages that contain Scriabin-esque harmonic content, or as a descriptive performance indication for an entire movement.²⁴ However, on one occasion the word “mistico” appears over a single, repeated note: in mm. 7–8 of the first movement of Crawford’s *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. Interestingly, the repeated note over which “mistico” appears in the sonata happens to be the same pitch—G#—that the voice part constantly intones in “Prayers of Steel.” In some sense, “Prayers of Steel” seems to suggest that even in the height of her ultramodern compositional style, and in one of her most tightly structured, dissonant works, Crawford continued to problematize dualistic categorizations such as “nature” and “reason,” “body” and “city,” and “spiritual” and “intellectual.” Clearly, works such as “Prayers of Steel” should be examined in more detail in order to unravel the fascinating ways that they explore—and even deconstruct—these binary oppositions.

Concluding Thoughts

In all, women’s contributions to modernist music in the 1930s are compelling and distinctive, and deserve to receive more in-depth scholarly attention. Although many of their efforts remain forgotten today, scholars should begin to move beyond simplistic categorizations of these women as “exceptional” or “obscure” figures who exist only on the shadowy edges of modernism, and instead begin to ask the more difficult—but

²³ This passage is from Rudhyar’s *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, quoted in Tick (1991): 238.

²⁴ The two works in which “mystic” or “mistico” appears are the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1926) and the sixth piano prelude (1927).

decidedly more interesting—questions about how their various contributions might expand and enliven our understanding of modernism as a whole.

In her landmark volume *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks begins with a moving discussion of her childhood experience growing up “on the edge” of her rural Kentucky town. Like the feminist scholars discussed in the opening chapter of this dissertation, hooks views the experience of being an “outsider” as one that has the potential to confer great insight.

Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center.²⁵

hooks’s work remains profoundly inspiring, not only for her desire to enrich feminism by including the voices of those who have often been marginalized within it, such as people of color, but also her intense commitment to renewing feminist theory itself by moving it from broadly mischaracterized (and largely academic) obscurity into a “mass-based” movement that “will always challenge, shake us up, provoke, shift our paradigms, change the way we think, turn us around.”²⁶ hooks’s writings remind us of how much is lost

²⁵ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000 [first published, 1984]), xvi. hooks also emphasizes that the perspectives of “other” feminists (such as people of color or working-class individuals)—whose voices have not typically been considered with equal weight by the white, economically privileged women who have traditionally dominated feminist theory—are vitally important for enriching feminism as a whole. Obviously, hooks’s experiences as an African American woman in the rural South in the mid-twentieth century are very different from the experiences of the women composers who are discussed in this dissertation. I include hooks here not in order to conflate these experiences, but because her ideas provide great insight into the issues at hand.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv–xv.

when we continually focus on the same insular center—and how quickly one’s perspective can be utterly transformed just by considering what might lie beyond it.

I began this dissertation with the simple goal of exploring some little-known works by two female composers who have quite undeservedly been relegated to the dusty margins of modernist music. Yet throughout my work on this project, I have become convinced that the astonishing artistic accomplishments of women like Beyer and Fine have much to tell us about music from this period as a whole. In our existing narratives of modernist music in the 1930s, women composers are usually considered either as a few “token” exceptions—or ignored entirely. But their fascinating compositions ought to be uprooted from their current position on the forgotten edges of modernism. Instead, this vibrant wealth of creative work deserves to be at the very center of our accounts of music in this era.

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