

***The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, edited by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff. Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. xx + 297. ISBN 0-7546-0577-9. \$109.95 (hardcover).**

With the publication in 2000 of Phyllis Weliver's *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900*, Ashgate's "Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain" series became indispensable reading for scholars of Victorian literature and culture as well as for musicologists. The current volume, *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, is one of two new essay collections from Ashgate in this series (the other is *The Idea of Music in Victorian Poetry*, ed. Phyllis Weliver) that promise to be essential reading for anyone whose work touches on musical culture and Victorian literature.

As Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff point out in their introduction to this collection, interdisciplinary work on nineteenth-century music and literature is a growth industry, with significant additions from musicologists and literary critics alike appearing almost yearly. Indeed, so frequently have recent contributions to this field emerged that few scholars have yet had the opportunity to synthesise, much less apply and extend, the insights of Weliver, Paula Gillett, Ruth Solie, Alisa Clapp-Itnyre, Delia da Sousa Correa and others. Readers of this new collection may regret that, while it certainly advances our understanding of music's cultural importance and literary manifestations, the essays do not – either individually or collectively – offer a comprehensive critical perspective on the state of recent scholarship in this area. Fuller and Losseff's introduction, while providing a useful list of key works, offers only a cursory assessment of their various modes and merits; greater attention to situating this collection in its evolving field would have been most valuable. Weliver's *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction* is really the only recent publication to receive extended attention and use from the essayists in this volume; Clapp-Itnyre's *Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs* (2002), which receives a few citations, is itself excerpted (puzzlingly) in this collection, while the editors frequently disclaim that da Sousa Correa's *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture* (2002), appeared too late to be substantially included in the volume.

The great strength of this collection, then, is not its broad claim to advance its field, although the essays taken together certainly do just that. Nor is it the principle by which the editors have organised the book's eleven essays under the headings of "Musical Identities," "Genre and Musicalities," and "Construction of Musical Meaning." Most essays from a given section read as if they could fit equally well in either of the others, and obvious connections among essays within a given section are few. Rather than explaining in the introduction their rationale for this distribution, Fuller and Losseff call attention, effectively, to common themes and aims among the essays that transcend these categories. Like any essay collection, furthermore, this one suffers from some lack of consistency among its contributions: while all of the pieces are impressively researched and have substantial arguments to make, not all do so with an equal degree of clarity and organisation.

These criticisms, however, are of distinctly secondary importance next to the groundbreaking scholarship offered by many of the volume's contributors and the illuminating readings of comparatively familiar texts put forth by others. Exceptional essays on hitherto neglected topics include those of Sophie Fuller, who investigates representations of women composers in both canonical and noncanonical novels; Irene Morra, who stakes a claim for the literary legitimacy of Sherlock Holmes through a wide-ranging, contextual analysis of that character's relationship to music and music-making; Joe Law, who uncovers music's significance to the code of representation through which *fin-de-siècle* writers of every literary level approached the forbidden topic of homosexual desire; and Charlotte Purkis, whose extended treatment of Gertrude Hudson's writings sheds light on the author's distinctive approach to melding fiction with music criticism. Each of these essays not only provides a thorough, accessible account of its subject but also clearly establishes directions for future research.

Equally strong are those essays that approach from new perspectives works that have already received a substantial amount of attention from scholars working on the intersections of music, literature and culture. Phyllis Weliver scrutinises George du Maurier's much-studied *Trilby* through the lens of nineteenth-century crowd theory, particularly the writings of the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon; she also offers an illuminating analysis of the significance of a musical audience's orientation towards the performer or the work performed. Placing Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* in the context of music's use in melodrama, Laura Vorachek argues convincingly that sensation fiction not only appropriated but extended and deepened the musical conventions of this related genre. As she does in the book from which this excerpt is drawn, Alisa Clapp-Itnyre attends in detail to the significance of the musical texts performed by George Eliot's characters in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Perhaps most appealing to specialists in individual texts or particular theoretical approaches are those essays that either pursue a topic through a large number of otherwise unconnected works or that extend rather experimentally the notion of "the idea of music in fiction." Such is the case with Nicky Losseff's meditation on the concepts of voice, breath and soul as manifested in four novels that span the Victorian period; most well developed are Losseff's points about the complex relationship between song and spirituality, and the potential for "authentic" song to render social class irrelevant. Some of Jodi Lustig's most compelling readings concern not the "the piano plot" upon which she focuses, but rather scenes of musical appreciation (e.g. in *Sense and Sensibility*) and attitudes towards music that function as shorthand for femininity (especially in *David Copperfield*). Jonathan Taylor ambitiously reads the writings of novelists (Eliot, du Maurier) against those of a critic and a composer (Thomas Carlyle, Richard Wagner), in an effort to reach conclusions about the broader significance of their ideas regarding musical mastery and Jewish identity. Finally, Karen Tongson, deploying Roland Barthes' notion of

“the grain of the voice,” explores the often-overlooked importance of music to Carlyle and particularly to his theory of the creative critic.

As is appropriate to a book published in this series and one edited by musicologists, Fuller and Losseff emphasise that the aim of their collection is to shed light on musical culture through the study of literature. Literary scholars, and students of Victorian culture in general, should not be deceived, however. The varied approaches to “the idea of music in fiction” collected in this volume will be of great interest to anyone who researches or teaches literature or music of this period.

**Juliette Wells**