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'The Wreckers and *The Boatswain's Mate* by Ethel Smyth: Gender, Nationalism, and Politics.'

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Table of Figures

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Ethel Mary Smyth was a composer of operas, orchestral works, a mass, chamber, and instrumental works.[1] She was one of the most successful English opera composers of her generation as all her six operas were produced with international recognition with some of them later being revived.[2] During Smyth's lifetime, female composers were expected to be teachers or maybe parlour musicians at most. Despite this, Smyth's full-scale works were performed across Europe. Apart from her career as a successful composer, Smyth is also known for her literary successes and her political activism.[3] Her tireless hard work and constant struggle in the male-dominated world of composition led Smyth to feminism and eventually to her involvement in the Suffragette Movement.[4] There are many aspects of Smyth's life to be focused on such as Smyth as a composer, a woman (who loved women), an English woman (in Germany), and a Suffragette.[5] These aspects of Smyth's life meant that she constantly had to struggle for success. In Elisabeth Kertesz's article *Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle,* she points out that if we are to fully understand Smyth, we need to understand her external struggles.[6] With this in mind, I would like to reflect on the aspects gender, nationalism, and politics in Smyth's life in relation to two of her operas, *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswains Mate.* It is also interesting to note that within these two operas Smyth attempted to create a medium of English expression by introducing local themes at a time when opera in England was not supported by English opera companies or public subsidy.[7] Both of these operas were composed in a way that made them viable in theatres across Europe while clearly employing English themes in the hope that they would pave the way for successful English operas to come.[8]

As mentioned above, the focus of this thesis lies on *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* in relation to the societal topics gender, nationalism, and politics. The research is focused mainly on two countries: England and Germany. The reason for this is that Smyth was born and

[1] Kathleen A. Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", in *The Musical Quarterly,* 73/2 (1989), p. 196.
[2] Elizabeth Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers': a Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera" in: *Studia Musicologica,* 52/1 (2011), p. 485.
[3] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 196.
[4] Ibid., p. 204.
[5] Cornelia Bartsch / Rebecca Grotjahn / Melanie Unseld: "Introduction", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 15.
[6] Elisabeth Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", in Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 98.
[7] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 487.
[8] Ibid., p. 491.

raised in England and then moved to Germany at the age of nineteen to follow her dreams of becoming a composer. This means that Smyth's career was split between these two counties which resulted in some advantages and disadvantages which will be discussed later. The timeframe which the research covers goes mainly from 1877 when Smyth left for Leipzig to 1916 when *The Boatswain's Mate* was premiered with some mentions of performances after the premiere. Although Ethel Smyth stands in the spotlight of this thesis there are many other people mentioned as they were important figures in Smyth's life who also influenced her operas.

The topic of this thesis is important because, after Smyth's death in 1944, she disappeared from the limelight until recent years. Although there has been a lot of work done by the likes of musicologists, campaigners, and musicians, there is still a lot of work to be done on ensuring that composers such as Ethel Smyth have a rightful place in the musical canon. The history of classical music is much more diverse than what the canon as we know it represents. By reentering composers such as Ethel Smyth into our musical canon and concert programs, it gives us a larger and broader understanding of what classical music entails while also changing how we think about classical music and composers that we know now. For example, the British composer Benjamin Britten would have known Smyth's works as she was known as a pioneer of modern English opera. Smyth's overture to *The Wreckers* was played at the Proms most years between 1913 and 1947, while *The Boatswain's Mate* was played at the Proms throughout the interwar years. Britten's success stemmed from a long debate about what English opera should be defined as and Smyth was central to this debate. Another reason in favour of expanding the canon is that it simply gives us more great music to listen to and more interesting histories to learn about. During the 2019-2020 season, 8.2% of orchestral concerts worldwide contained music by women. Researching music by female composers such as Ethel Smyth ensures that statistics like the one mentioned above are pushed in the right direction and female composers and musicians alike receive the recognition that they deserve.[9]

Although there has already been research done on *The Wreckers,* particularly on the feminist and societal topics within the opera by scholars such as Kathleen A. Abromeit, Elizabeth Kertesz, and Suzanne Robinson, there has been less done on *The Boatswain's Mate* as it is not as

[9] Leah Broad: "Without Ethel Smyth and classical music's forgotten women, we only tell half the story", in: *The Guardian* (02 October 2020), online: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/02/ethel-smyth-classical-music-forgotten-women-canon-composition#comments>.

well-known. The reason why I have chosen these two operas is that *The Wreckers* was the last opera that Smyth composed before she dedicated two years of her life to the suffragette movement and *The Boatswain's Mate* was the next opera that she composed after this political juncture. It is interesting to see how Smyth's involvement in the suffragette movement influenced her compositional style, the plots of her operas, and their reception. When comparing *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* it can be seen how Smyth's own feminist ideologies and the way in which she criticised society changed. For us to truly have an in-depth understanding of Smyth's operas it is essential that we have access to information regarding the circumstances of her life including her struggles and interests. Without knowing about the difficulties that Smyth faced because she was a woman and her fight for women's right to vote during the suffragette movement, we cannot truly understand the heroes Thirza and Mrs Waters. Without knowing about Smyth's struggle to be taken seriously as an English opera composer we cannot fully understand the reasons behind the English elements of *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate.*

1.1. The Relevance of Gender, Nationalism, and Politics in Smyth's Life

Smyth's nationality had a significant impact on the way that she composed and the way in which her works were received by the public and by music critics. The fact that Smyth spent so much time in Germany meant that wherever she was she felt like and was seen as a foreigner. Because her career was split between Germany and England, it meant that she also had critics from both countries. English critics knew that Smyth had studied and lived in Germany which resulted in them often mentioning that they heard this German influence in her operas. German critics on the other hand tended to comment that various styles were present in Smyth's operas. Even though Smyth spent much time abroad, she made sure to include English settings and melodies in her operas. Smyth also tried her best to have both operas performed in England even though English operas were generally poorly supported by opera companies and state funds.

In Germany, where Smyth's career began, she was very well respected by some of the most famous composers of the time such as Hermann Levi, George Henschel and Bruno Walter. Brahms on the other hand presumed that her works were composed by Henschel as he did not believe that a woman could compose such works. In England, Smyth had more difficulties in becoming recognized even though she was English. For example, her Mass in D which Levi described as 'the strongest and most original work that had come out of England since Purcell's

time,'[10] was only performed once in England in 1893 and again thirty-one years later. The only logical reason for this is that at the time, the people in power in the music industry did not know how to deal with a female composer who didn't compose in a typically 'female way,' but in a way that matched the 'strength' of any male composer. Whether their sexism was conscious or not, there is little doubt that if her Mass in D had been composed by a man, its performance history would be very different.[11]

Another reason as to why Smyth had difficulties reaching success in England was because England simply didn't have as many opera houses as Germany. The main one was Covent Garden which was run by the Syndicate who had a limited budget and therefore only produced operas which had already proved to be successful so that there was low financial risk involved.[12] It often happened that when an English work was performed it was severely under-rehearsed as it wasn't worth it for the singers to put a lot of time into something that was likely to only be performed once.[13] Many early 20th-century music critics were aware that there was a lack of grand opera in the English music tradition and of course the lack of suitable opera houses and production companies contributed to this.[14] Because of this, there was no real sense of what English opera even was.[15] When Smyth talked about how difficult it was for her to be successful in England, she knew that male composers also had these difficulties, but she also had to face up to another element of difficulty that no man had to battle with; the fact that she was a woman:

> Now it may be said that hundreds of artists are called on to endure the like, but in my case was a disheartening element no man had to cope with – that only men of great imaginative power and intellectual integrity can picture to themselves – an instinct borne out later by our struggles for the Suffrage (with J. S. Mill believed to be won in in 1860), that given my sex, my foreign musical education, and the conditions of English music life as I was coming to know them, if I were ever to win through at all it would not be till I had one leg in the grave. And there was I, crotchets and quavers racing round and round in my head like mice in a barn, seething with musical desire, and knowing that unless a composer tried out his work in public he is like a painter who should paint in the cellar. I believed I had something to say, but as far as my countrymen went was seemingly alone in that opinion.[16]

[10] Ernest Newman: "Introduction", in: Smyth Ethel, *Impressions that Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1946, p. xii.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Aidan J. Thomson, "Decadence in the Forest: Smyth's *Der Wald* in its Critical Context", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 229.
[14] Ibid., p. 226.
[15] Ibid., p. 246.
[16] Ethel Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* (abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton), London: Faber & Faber 2011, p. 356.

While Smyth was in Germany, she wrote a letter to her mother saying, 'in this musical country, strange to say, my music goes farther than in unmusical England, and my accompanying and singing at sight are made much use of.'[17] In *Female Pipings in Eden,* Smyth also wrote in reference to England, 'as things are to-day it is absolutely impossible in this country for a woman composer to get and to keep her head above water; to go on from strength to strength, and develop such powers as she may possess.'[18] Smyth was seen as a *Grenzgängerin* as she regularly crossed the border between Britain and Germany in more ways than one. Due to her education and training in Leipzig, she was very well connected with German musical culture while also keeping in touch with the British elements that she grew up with. A mixture of both elements can be heard throughout her compositions which sometimes resulted in negative reviews from the press in both countries.[19]

Smyth's 'great desire' was that she would have one of her own operas performed in Germany by the time she reached the age of forty which she succeeded in doing.[20] Another one of Smyth's 'great desires' was to 'be made a Peeress in [her] own Right because of Music!'[21] Smyth felt as though she had achieved this when she was offered the degree of *Mus. Doc. Dunelm* at Durham University.[22] Smyth also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1926. The fact that this was even possible for Smyth shows how the rights of women at university level had changed since 1900.[23] The *Oxford Times* published the speech which the public orator gave on the day of Smyth's award:

> A leader of the militant suffragettes, who wrote their song, comes to receive our welcome today, draped as a very different 'leader'. We all admire her grand and impressive Mass, the power and variety of her musical works and 'operas' – the 'Wreckers' and the 'Boatswain's Mate'. In her music and librettos there is humour. Her force of character has advanced her to a prominent place among musicians. She has given us a vivid record of her life in 'Impressions that Remain' and 'Streaks of Life'. I leave it to you to honour our Pallas.[24]

There are many different factors that contributed to Smyth's image other than her music such as her political engagement as a Suffragette, the lengths to which she went to promote her

[17] Ethel Smyth: *Impressions that Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* New York: 1946, p. 188.
[18] Ethel Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden,* London: P. Davies 1933, p. 4.
[19] Bartsch / Grotjahn / Unseld: "Introduction", p.14.
[20] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 51.
[21] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 97.
[22] Ibid, p. 463.
[23] Bartsch / Grotjahn / Unseld: "Introduction", p. 16.
[24] *Oxford Times,* 25 June 1926, p. 11. (cited in Susan Wollenberg: "Ethel Smyth as Honorary Doctor of the University of Oxford", in Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 86).

music, and the various forms of discrimination that she faced as a composer. Smyth struggled incessantly with getting her works to be performed. Even during her most successful years between 1890 and 1920, Smyth spent more time trying to promote her music than she did composing it. This constant struggle contributed to her self-identifying as a fighter for English music abroad.[25] Because Smyth was seen as a 'fighter' it caused her reception between 1920 and her death in 1944 to be focused on national elements such as the 'Britishness' of her music rather than her gender which previously dominated the critics' writings. Smyth also contributed to her own public image as an English female composer with a fighting spirit through her autobiographies.[26]

As mentioned above, this thesis is a study of two of Smyth's operas *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* in relation to gender, nationalism, and politics. The central aim of my research is to gather information and gain a greater understanding of these two operas and how they came about by asking the question; how did important aspects of Smyth's life such as gender, nationalism, and politics influence the composition and the success of *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate*? To carry out this research, Smyth's set of memoirs is very useful as they show her own reactions to the public, her difficulties in getting her operas performed, and the struggles she faced because of her nationality and gender. Studying the scores and librettos is also crucial when analysing the operas and there is also much secondary literature available which helps gather an overview of the political and societal situations during Smyth's life. These main three types of sources will be used and cross-referenced to successfully research this topic.

This thesis begins by describing Smyth's early life and her introduction to the musical world. It then goes on to tell of her life and education in Leipzig from the age of nineteen and the influential people whom she met there such as Lisl von Herzogenberg, George Henschel, Johannes Brahms, Henry Brewster, and the Empress Eugénie. It then describes the political events that took place during Smyth's career and how they impacted her life such as the Suffragette Movement and the First World War. Subsequently, it analyses *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* with focus on topics such as how the operas came about, the performance history and critical reception, the plots, Englishness, critique of society, heroism, and feminism.

[25] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth", p. 102.
[26] Bartsch / Grotjahn / Unseld: "Introduction", pp. 16-17.

1.2. Literature Review

In recent decades Smyth has returned to the public eye for her contribution to women's politics as a suffragette. Despite the six operas Smyth composed and the ten books she wrote, the research done on Smyth mostly focuses on her brief political contribution. The 2018 centenary of many women receiving the right to vote in the United Kingdom sparked a renewed interest in Smyth's life and music. This rise in interest caused Smyth's musical works to be performed around the world.[27] More interest in Smyth has also been shown in recent years due to the growing interest in feminist and queer musicology. While recent publications have often focused on Smyth's gender and the struggles in her life because of it, few researchers have taken the intersectionality of Smyth's gender, nationalism and politics into account while researching her operas.

1.2.1. Gender

During the 19th century, concepts were drawn up on gender roles with focus on the rightful place of women in society. Gunilla Budde compares the educations and experiences of German and English middle-class women before the Suffragette movement. Budde's article shows that Ethel Smyth grew up in a sexist society where men were given many more opportunities in relation to freedom and independence than women.[28] Around 1900 it was believed that female composers lacked success because their mental potential differed to that of men. However, when female composers were successful, they were seen to be lacking femaleness as they deviated from societal norms. Rebecca Grotjahn highlights that as a woman Smyth had to fight to be a respected and successful composer in her own right.[29] Elisabeth Kertesz focuses on many of the struggles that Smyth faced throughout her life because of her gender. Although Smyth's works were all performed, she was often left frustrated as her efforts in getting her works more performances were often unsuccessful. Even when Smyth succeeded in getting her works to be performed, the press was often particularly harsh towards her as well as other female composers. Through Smyth's memoirs, we can see the constant gender discrimination that she faced.[30]

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[27] Christopher Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 169.
[28] Gunilla Budde: "'In pre-Suffragette days'. Mädchenerziehung und Frauenleben im 19. Jahrhundert im deutsch-englischen Vergleich", in Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth* Munich: Buch&media 2010, pp. 21-38.
[29] Rebecca Grotjahn: "Das Komponistinnenparadox. Ethel Smyth und der musikalische Geschlechterdiskurs um 1900", in Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth* Munich: Buch&media 2010, pp. 39-53.
[30] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 98-107.

In fact Melanie Unseld analyses the gender aspects of Smyth's autobiographical writings.[31] Throughout the literature, there is evidence that Smyth grew up in a sexist society where her gender was a constant disadvantage to her.

1.2.2. Nationalism

Smyth had the privilege of an upper-class upbringing because of her father's success in the British army. Pavel B. Jiracek writes of how the Smyth family profited from the existence of the British Empire and how the growing interest in orientalism influenced Smyth's life and resulted in her spending months in Egypt.[32] While Jiracek writes of the advantages of Smyth's nationality, Aidan J. Thomson explains that Smyth's Britishness also became a disadvantage for her in Berlin during the Boer war as it caused a rise anti-British sentiment in Germany. Meanwhile in England, Smyth's music was often described by the press as too German or Wagnerian because of the years she spent in Germany.[33] Elizabeth Kertesz explains, that because of this Smyth focused the style of *The Wreckers* in a way that it would appeal to both British audiences and audiences on the continent. Although it was considered the most English opera of its time by Smyth's contemporaries, Smyth had difficulties in getting it to be performed in England due to the general lack of support for English operas there.[34]

1.2.3. Politics.

Amanda Harris explains Smyth's motivations for joining Suffragette Movement as the inequalities that she experienced as a woman drew her towards feminism and eventually the Suffragette Movement. According to Harris feminist politics and music were equally important for Smyth and even when she left the Suffragette Movement to return to composing, she maintained her feminist values and stayed in contact with other Suffragettes.[35] Even though music and politics were equally important for Smyth, she believed that these two subjects were completely incompatible with one another which is why she claimed to have taken a break from composing during

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[31] Melanie Unseld: "Identität durch Schreiben. Ethel Smyth und ihre autobiographischen Texte", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, pp. 108-120.
[32] Pavel B Jiracek: "Empire zwischen den Zeilen. Eine postkoloniale Perspektive", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, pp. 153-160.
[33] Thomson: "Decadence in the Forest: Smyth's *Der Wald* in its Critical Context", pp. 218-249.
[34] Kertesz, Elizabeth: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers': a Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera" in: *Studia Musicologica,* 52/1 (2011), p. 485.
[35] Amanda Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women': An English Musical Feminism", in Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, pp. 70-84.

her two-year involvement in the Suffragette movement. However, Marleen Hoffmann argues that music and politics were much more interlinked in Smyth's life than she perhaps realised or admitted.[36] In relation to Smyth's operas Suzanne Robinson writes that Smyth's political opinions can be seen in *The Wreckers* as she highlights topics such as religion, morality, radicalism, and sexism.[37] While Robinson writes of political aspects in *The Wreckers,* Christopher Wiley highlights the feminist aspects of *The Boatswain's Mate* and the influence that the Suffragette movement had on Smyth's composition.

As we can see, there has already been a variety of research done on Ethel Smyth, much of which focuses on the gender aspects of her life. In this thesis, I would like to specifically focus the topics of gender, nationalism and politics on *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswains Mate.* The reason for this is that these three factors influenced Smyth's life in many ways and surely also her compositions. It is especially interesting to compare the last opera she composed before she became involved in the Suffragette movement with the first opera she composed after her time in the movement. It is also hugely important to research female composers as they often didn't and still don't receive the recognition that they deserve even though many have accomplished great things under difficult circumstances. By reflecting on female composers and their struggles it encourages us to reflect on our own society.

1.3. Smyth's Upper-Class Upbringing and Introduction to Music

Smyth's upper-class upbringing led her to have a very large network of connections to aristocracy and royalty in England and her time in Leipzig introduced her to another circle of aristocrats and royals in Germany. These connections benefited her in many ways throughout her musical career as they gave her opportunities and helped her gain popularity.

Smyth was born in Marylebone, England on the 22nd of April 1858, and died in Woking, England, on the 9th of May 1944. She grew up in a large family with seven siblings and her father had a high position in the military. Smyth's upbringing was typically upper-class Victorian as she had private tuition and attended a boarding school in Putney.[38] Smyth describes her father

[36] Marleen Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", in Rose, Lucy Ella / Wiley, Christopher (ed.), *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen: The Making of a Movement,* London / New York: Routledge 2021, pp. 186-204.
[37] Suzanne Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20/2 (2008), p. 149-179.
[38] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 196.

as a keen conservative politician, while also being advanced in his ideas. Smyth claimed that he supported women's suffrage before it was even a current topic in English society. He pointed out that it was ridiculous that almost three-quarters of the land in their area was owned by women, yet they still did not have the right to vote. Smyth and her father had a difficult relationship as he was against 'artistic temperaments'[39] and saw artists as 'loose fish.'[40] He also had very specific plans for his children. He wished for each of his daughters to marry, and his only son, Bob to be sent off to India. His plans for all his children fell into place, except of course for Ethel Smyth.[41]

It is interesting to think about how much the British empire impacted Smyth's life. Because of her father's well-paying job as a general major in the British army and the time he spent stationed in India serving the British empire, he was able to provide for his family and ensure that they enjoyed an upper-class lifestyle. This financial privilege that Smyth grew up with certainly benefited her and made it possible for her to have a governess and travel to Germany which in turn enabled her to become a composer.[42]

Smyth's governess that she had at the age of twelve had studied music at the Leipzig Conservatorium, and she opened Smyth's world up to classical music. Without knowing it, this governess impacted the course of Smyth's life.[43] The next music tutor that Smyth had was a Mr Ewing whom she was very fond of:

> My chief gain in this companionship was of course the immense quickening of my musical life generally, and the comfort of at last feeling 'the breath of kindred plumes about my feet.' I always think of my first musician friend with amusement, tenderness, and also great sadness, for if ever nature fashioned an artist it was this man, condemned by fate to live and die a drudge in the Army Service Corps.[44]

Smyth had quite a happy childhood overall. However, the one thing which caused her to react angrily when she reflected on her youth was the fact that her father did not allow her to go to Leipzig to study music.[45] Smyth tried multiple times to convince her father to allow her to go to Leipzig, but those conversations were so heated that they got to the point where it was no longer possible to broach the topic. In retaliation, Smyth refused many things such as going to

[39] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, pp. 31-32.
[40] Ibid., p. 100.
[41] Ibid., p. 36.
[42] Jiracek: "Empire zwischen den Zeilen. Eine postkoloniale Perspektive", pp. 154-155.
[43] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 74.
[44] Ibid., p. 100.
[45] Ibid., p. 10.

church, singing at dinner parties, horse-riding, and even speaking. She aimed to make life at home so insufferable for her parents that they would eventually let her go.[46] At last, on the 26th of July 1877, at the age of nineteen, she headed to Leipzig under the supervision of Harry Davidson and with a monthly allowance from her father. Despite being disgraced by her parents Smyth was not all that much bothered as she was fulfilling the dream that she had had for the past seven years.[47] It is important to note the pressure from society that women like Smyth were under at this time. It was not just that Smyth's father had very specific plans for her and feared that she would be 'knocking too late at doors in the marriage market'[48] if her music plans didn't work out. As Gunilla Budde points out, society, in general, had very little tolerance towards women who wandered outside the role of wife and mother. In the second half of the 19th century, academics were discussing the topic of how much education women could handle. Before the First World War, there were few women with a full second level education and those who did were rarely given credit or recognition for their work. This meant that there were few female role models for the likes of Smyth in her youth. With this at the backdrop of Smyth's life, it is remarkable that she even managed to find the inspiration and courage to travel to Leipzig at the age of nineteen.[49]

1.4. Ethel Smyth in Leipzig: Relationships and Education

Smyth was not impressed by the conservatory in Leipzig and claimed that the university was 'merely trading on its Mendelssohnian reputation.'[50] She noticed quite early on that many of the students were simply there to receive their certificates from their professors, and they did not have the same burning passion for music that she did.[51] There were however some exceptions like Grieg, Dvořák, and Tchaikovsky whom she met as fellow students. At the conservatory, Smyth was taught composition by Carl Reinecke, counterpoint and harmony by Salomon Jadassohn, and piano by Joseph Maas. As well as being disappointed in the students at the conservatory, Smyth was also disappointed in her tutors. She described Reinecke and Jadassohn as 'rather a farce'[52] as Jadassohn would often show up fifteen minutes late to their forty-minute lesson and spend the next ten minutes with his back to the stove telling funny stories. He did however compliment her by saying that she was 'the only really talented composeress he had

[46] Ibid., pp. 57-59.
[47] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 112.
[48] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 49-50.
[49] Budde: 'In pre-Suffragette days', pp. 30-31.
[50] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 145.
[51] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 72.
[52] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 145.

met in his whole life.'[53] She also wasn't very impressed with Maas as she described him as conscientious and dull.[54] Smyth became good friends with the Griegs in the winter of 1887-8 and she also got along very well with and admired Tchaikovsky and claimed that they would have become close friends had their circumstances been different. One of the things that Smyth admired about him was that he was so open about hating Brahms' music. The two of them would discuss his music for hours as Tchaikovsky played passages on the piano explaining how terrible they were. He also pointed out to Smyth that her education at the conservatory was lacking instrumentation and encouraged her to turn her attention to orchestras. Smyth then took up his advice and went to see numerous concerts taking notes on orchestral effects.[55] As well as improving her compositional skills by getting to know these composers, Smyth also became aware of what kind of composer she wanted to be and learned that she would have to fight a lot harder than her male counterparts to become that composer.

After one year, Smyth dropped out of the conservatory in disappointment and began to study privately with the Austrian composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg,[56] who was seen as 'the most fully equipped German contrapuntist of his day.'[57] When Herzogenberg suggested to Smyth that he be her tutor he said 'it will be great fun for I have never given a lesson in my life.'[58] Smyth gladly accepted his offer, officially deregistered from the conservatory and joined the Bach-Verein.[59] However, there were also some gaps in her education under Herzogenberg as he didn't like opera and discouraged her from composing for the stage.[60]

Apart from the conservatory, Smyth was very much impressed by the music scene in Leipzig. The array of live concerts and operas that she had the honour of attending shaped her composition career in ways that her time at the university could not.[61] She attended many concerts in the Gewandhaus where Reinecke was the conductor. As well as not being impressed with his teaching skills she also wasn't impressed with his conducting skills. Smyth found it difficult to get tickets to these concerts, but she often attended the dress rehearsals which took place the

[53] Ibid., p. 203.
[54] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 197.
[55] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, pp. 401-403.
[56] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 197.
[57] Ernest: "Introduction", p. xiii.
[58] Ethel: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 177.
[59] Ibid, pp. 177-178.
[60] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 197.
[61] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 72.

day before and were free to students of the conservatory.[62] During this time, Smyth discovered her love for Bach which she describes as a musical education in itself.[63]

1.4.1. Lisl von Herzogenberg

One of the most important people that Smyth met in Leipzig was Elisabeth von Herzogenberg (Heinrich von Herzogenberg's wife). In Smyth's first memoir, *Impressions That Remained,* she describes their relationship together in detail.[64] In one of the passages she describes how they initially got close when Smyth suddenly fell ill, and Lisl nursed her back to health:

> Then suddenly Fate did me a good turn. Immoderate work, combined with too much excitement generally, was telling on me. I had among other things become subject to violent fits of palpitation, and there were yet more drastic warnings, such as the romantic fainting on the ice, that health was giving way under the strain. At last one day, at a birthday party at the Klengels', I collapsed altogether. Lisl, who was present, and who, though I was unaware of the fact, had gradually become attached to me in spite of herself, insisted on taking me back to my attic, and during the rather severe illness that followed, really a nervous breakdown, nursed me as I had never been nursed before, putting off her departure from Leipzig for a fortnight in order to see me through the worst.[65]

Smyth was so ill during this time that she could barely write a letter to her mother:

> At last I am up and able to write to you with my own hand, but just fancy, with pauses about every three minutes, as writing brings on the attacks more than anything almost… I have at last seen the absolute necessity of acquiescing in the matter of my *modus vivendi* during the holidays and have signed a paper of rules the doctor prescribes for me. Imagine – no lawn tennis, no riding, no dancing, nothing!![66]

Although Smyth had a good relationship with her mother, she also had a very maternal relationship with Herzogenberg as they often referred to each other as mother and daughter. We can see this in a letter that Herzogenberg wrote to Smyth while she was in England in June 1878:

> In a way I myself feel as if we were 'drifting further and further from each other,' but that cannot change the fact that we love each other, that I 'had you' when I was eleven, and shall have you till I'm eighty – and that's such a good feeling! … My child, I wonder sometimes at the different ways Fate spins the thread which binds people together – how it often takes years to enter into possession, and how in our case something has grown between us that tells me we belong together, inseparably![67]

One of the possible reasons as to why they had this kind of mother-daughter relationship was because Herzogenberg had no children and as she looked after Smyth who was eleven years

[62] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 147.
[63] Ibid., p. 244.
[64] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 196.
[65] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 179.
[66] Ibid., p. 217.
[67] Ibid., pp. 222-223.

younger, she had the opportunity to care for Smyth as if she were her daughter.[68] Cornelia Bartsch says that when reading Smyth's memoirs it is made clear that they in fact had an erotic mother-daughter relationship which shifts the idea of heterosexual desire in Smyth's life.[69] If this is true, Heinrich von Herzogenberg seemed to have had very few concerns over the matter as Smyth described herself as being like a member of the Herzogenberg family for seven years eating meals with them daily.[70] This supports Margaret R. Hunt's theory that:

> The notion that passionate female friendship between women could be fully consistent with, and indeed enhance heterosexuality, sheds considerable light on the apparently approving view Heinrich von Herzogenberg took toward the intense relationship between his wife, Lisl, and the young Ethel Smyth, as well as the openly supportive attitude of Ethel Smyth's friend and lover, Henry Brewster toward her passionate affairs with women.[71]

Hunt also describes Smyth as a typical upper-class queer woman of her time:

> This is the world that Ethel Smyth was born into and that she made her own. In her case it translated into some very familiar patterns: boarding school loves; a passion for at least one opera star; endless letter-writing; a long-time love alliance with a man who seems to have been little threatened by her intense connections to women; numerous passionate female friendships some of which were clearly physical in the lesbian sense, and some of which, almost certainly, were not; mannish clothes; and a life-long attraction to noblewomen, women who themselves patronized, 'protected', and formed passionate bonds with artists, writers, actresses and musicians, including Ethel herself.[72]

Through Lisl von Herzogenberg, Smyth began to be involved in musical circles with the likes of Clara Schumann and Brahms.[73]

1.4.2. George Henschel and Johannes Brahms

Some of the composers whom Smyth met were very supportive of her music while others were doubtful of her skills as a female composer. For example, George Henschel was very supportive of Smyth's work and in a letter to her mother, Smyth wrote, 'he said such things of my talent! Things I never ever dreamed of. He said it was simply wonderful, and could not believe I had no tuition.'[74] Henschel also reassured Smyth that her music was of high standard despite being a woman:

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[68] Ibid., p. 275.
[69] Cornelia Bartsch: "Schön Rohtraut und das Sattelpferd. Lyrisches und biographisches Ich in Ethel Smyths Liedkompositionen der 1870er Jahre", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 148.
[70] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 231.
[71] Margaret R. Hunt: "Same-sex Love before *Psychopathia Sexualis:* Or, What Young Ethel Knew", in: Bartsch, Cornelia / Grotjahn, Rebecca / Unseld, Melanie (ed.), *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* Munich: Buch&media 2010, p. 171.
[72] Ibid., p. 173.
[73] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 197.
[74] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 188.

> I felt it myself, I sometimes doubted whether it was only for a woman, and an Englishwoman living in a not musical circle, that I was anything particular in music – whether such talent as I have deserved to have everything else put aside for it. And now I know it does deserve it! The greatest musical genius I know has seen my work and so to speak has given it his blessing, and it is well with me…! […] It is just this: men who have lived among musicians all their lives, who have been hand in glove with Schumann and Mendelssohn, and are so with Brahms and Rubenstein, say that they seldom saw such talent, in a woman *never,* and I can but tell you all this.[75]

Brahms on the other hand reacted very differently to Smyth's music. When Smyth first met him, Henschel had already told him about some of her works, while mentioning that she hadn't studied he said that he should look at them. When Brahms then met Smyth, he said, 'so this is the young lady who writes sonatas and doesn't know how to counterpoint!'[76] Afterwards, Henschel gave him two of her songs and Brahms couldn't believe that Smyth had written them herself and insisted that Henschel must have composed them.[77] Smyth had a complicated relationship with Brahms as she was angered by his sexist views and his jokes. Smyth recalls that he called women 'Weibsbilder' and if he was in the company of a woman that he did not find attractive, he would behave awkwardly and ungraciously. However, if he was in the company of a woman that he found to be attractive 'he had an unpleasant way of leaning back in his chair, pouting out his lips, stroking his moustache, and staring at them as a greedy boy stares at jam tartlets.'[78] Smyth also didn't like his patronizing tone which she believed he had because at that time women composers were not to be taken seriously.[79] She also believed that Brahms saw women as playthings and associated them only with three things: 'Kinder, Kirche, Küche.'[80] On top of this she also claimed that he strongly disliked England.[81] Considering his negative backward views of women and his prejudice towards England it is clear why Smyth would have had her difficulties with him. Smyth recalled that her music education may have been limited because she was spending a considerable amount of time with what she refered to as the 'Brahms group.'[82] Brahms avoided opera as he believed he would not have shone in that field, and anyway, Wagner had already taken over that area. According to Smyth, the musicians and concertgoers of Leipzig were sceptical of music-drama as their focus lay on orchestral or oratorial music.[83]

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[75] Ibid., p. 189.
[76] Ibid., p. 158.
[77] Ibid., p. 158-159.
[78] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 102-103.
[79] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 198.
[80] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 235.
[81] Ibid., p. 237.
[82] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 103.
[83] Ibid., p. 106.

1.4.3. Henry Brewster

Out of all of Smyth's social circles and the people around her who contributed greatly to her success as a composer, one of the most important people in her life was Henry Brewster, who she also referred to as 'Harry' or 'H.B.'.[84] According to Smyth, his personality was delightful. She describes him as being shy like a well-reared child. She also found him to be witty, amusing, and generally quite impressive.[85] Smyth wrote:

> He seemed to have read all books, to have thought all thoughts; and last but not least was extremely good looking, clean shaven but for a moustache, a perfect nose and brow, brown eyes set curiously far apart, and fair fluffy hair. It was the face of a dreamer and yet of an acute observer, and his manner was the gentlest, kindest, most courteous manner imaginable.[86]

He was an American-English writer and philosopher who loved Germany and had a special connection to France as he was born there in 1850.[87] Brewster was a descendant of Puritans and claimed that he could trace his roots back to two Yankee clergymen and a Minuteman in the American Revolution. His father who was American emigrated to Russia and then to Paris, where he worked as a dentist for members of the French court. Although Brewster was educated through French, he could speak many European languages with most of his poetry and prose being published in either French or English.[88]

Smyth also made friends with his wife Julia von Stockhausen who was eleven years older than Brewster and the sister of Lisl von Herzogenberg.[89] With their wealth they lived relatively isolated in Florence where Brewster self-trained to be a philosopher.[90] Smyth recalls that the Brewsters 'held unusual views concerning the bond between man and wife.'[91] It is rumoured that in 1882 when Smyth went to visit Brewster in Florence, he fell in love with her. This resulted in some difficulties and things became even more complicated when Smyth fell in love with his wife. Brewster then suggested the possibility that they get involved in a romantic trio attempting to convince his wife that Smyth would belong to them both. This attempt was unsuccessful, and their marriage was put to the test in 1884 when Brewster and Smyth had a short affair. Brewster and Smyth reacted very differently after the affair: Brewster negotiated a treaty with his wife

[84] Ibid., p. 9.
[85] Ibid., p. 120.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[88] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 162.
[89] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 9-10.
[90] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 162.
[91] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 366.

stating that in a nutshell, they would have an open relationship, and Smyth was left feeling guilty refusing to see Brewster for the next five years.[92] For this affair Smyth received a lot of critique from her friends and family. Lisl von Herzogenberg for example was so hurt and confused that she decided to break off her relationship with Smyth which resulted in Smyth's connection with the whole Herzogenberg family being cut off. [93] In her memoirs, Smyth refers to this time as 'The Desert.' Her being cut off from Lisl von Herzogenberg was traumatic for Smyth, and she never fully recovered from it. Von Stockhausen, however, did not break off her marriage with Brewster and after her death, he persistently asked Smyth to marry him, but she never gave in claiming that married life would not be compatible with her career.[94]

Smyth and Brewster discussed many intellectual topics, the most challenging one for them being religion. In the 1890s Smyth was going through quite a religious phase and she was often left frustrated with Brewster's opinions. Smyth saw Brewster as being a deeply religious spirit on the one hand and an enemy of creeds on the other. When they discussed the existence of God, he claimed that he didn't know or care about a God. Smyth tried to change his opinion but, she was unsuccessful. Brewster was heavily involved with the artistic and philosophic circles in London during the 1880s and 1890s which opened him up to a range of ideas about society and religion. This later influenced his libretto to *The Wreckers* as he effectively criticized the use of violence and power in the opera. Brewster also used irony as everyone in *The Wreckers* is Christian but most of them are willing to kill. The wreckers that Brewster created represent a government which is only sustainable by use of force which goes so far as to use capital punishment. The heroes of the opera Thirza and Mark on the other hand rebel against this unethical majority through non-violent protest which ultimately results in them portraying a more accurate form of Christianity in comparison to the wreckers' fundamentalist form of it. The idea of two individuals who are in conflict with those who represent the state may also have been used as a symbol for the controversy surrounding the morality of war at the time. During the Boer War, pacifists questioned the British empire and its maintenance through force. In *The Wreckers,* Mark and Thirza are used as role models for an ethical and non-violent form of protest. Here Brewster and Smyth used a more literal form of Christianity than a fundamentalist one.[95] It can be said that Brewster contributed more to the unconventionality of *The*

[92] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 162-163.
[93] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 365.
[94] Newman: "Introduction", p. xiv.
[95] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 163-166.

Wreckers than Smyth. In the libretto we can see the influence of his anarchism and sexual libertarianism. Freedom of speech, the right to protest, the right of one to leave their spouse and the right to a fair trial are all rights which Brewster advocated for through his libretto.[96]

The 13th of June 1908 marks another traumatic loss for Smyth as this is the day that Brewster died of liver cancer. As he passed away, Smyth sat at his bedside and held his hand.[97] After his death Smyth grieved like a widow which can be read about in her book *What Happened Next* which she wrote thirty years later. She dedicates approximately half of the book to their relationship which she describes as a true marriage though it was not sanctioned by the church.[98]

1.4.4. Empress Eugénie

Because of Ethel Smyth's intelligence, drive, and resourcefulness, she would most likely have coped just fine by herself in Leipzig, but because she got to know her neighbour Empress Eugénie it meant that Smyth was quick to land on her feet.[99] Empress Eugénie quickly became Smyth's patron, friend, and a very important asset to her. For example, in 1891 when Mr Barnby who was the director of the Royal Choral Society provisionally accepted Smyth's Mass in D at the Albert Hall for the following season, he wouldn't give Smyth a fixed date as to when the performance would be. That's when Empress Eugénie stepped in and told Mr Barnby that she may be present on the night of the performance. This was a big deal for Empress Eugénie as she hadn't officially appeared at a public event since 1870. This was no doubt a great sign of loyalty and friendship.[100]

Although this performance was very successful, Smyth describes in her book *Female Pipings in Eden,* that she experienced many difficulties in getting this performance to even take place:[101]

> I found myself up against a brick wall. Chief among the denizens of the Groove at that time were Parry, Stanford, and Sullivan. These men I knew personally; also Sir George Grove; Parry and Sullivan I should have ventured to call my friends… not one of them extended a friendly finger to the new-comer.[102]

Smyth's Mass in D was not performed again for another thirty-one years for which Smyth blamed the men in the music world.[103]

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[96] Ibid., p. 179.
[97] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*., p. 279.
[98] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 167.
[99] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 11.
[100] Ibid., p. 184.
[101] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", pp. 198-199.
[102] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden*, pp. 38-39.
[103] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", in: pp. 199.

> Year in year out, composers of the Inner Circle, generally University men attached to our musical institutions, produced one choral work after another – not infrequently deadly dull affairs – which … automatically went the round of our Festivals and Choral Societies… Was it likely, then, that the Faculty would see any merit in a work written on such different lines – written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?[104]

The Empress also introduced Smyth to many royalties such as Queen Victoria which opened up a whole new social circle that brought her many opportunities throughout her musical career.[105] In October 1891, Smyth was invited to stay with Empress Eugénie at Birkhall. The day after Smyth's arrival, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Prince Henry of Battenberg came to visit and Smyth was asked to sing. Queen Victoria also sent a letter stating that the next time she would be there to visit, Smyth was also to perform. When the Queen arrived at Birkhall, she informed Smyth that her dear friend and advisor the Bishop of Rochester who was also the former Dean of Windsor and the Queen's private chaplain had told her a great deal about Smyth. However, Smyth had already some connections with the Bishop of Rochester as his brother was married to her eldest sister. Smyth then sang some German songs. The audience was impressed, and she also sang the choral and solo parts of the Benedictus and the Sanctus of her Mass in D. The Queen was so pleased with Smyth's performance and composition that she asked Empress Eugénie if she would one day take Smyth to Balmoral. When she then performed at Balmoral, she embarrassed herself by speaking to the Queen before the Queen addressed her. Luckily, she redeemed herself by performing another spectacular concert. The Queen was again so impressed with the Mass in D that upon leaving she told Smyth that she hoped to see her in Windsor someday.[106]

We can see that Smyth had a large network of connections to aristocracy and royalty throughout Europe. Smyth's upper-class upbringing led her to these connections in England and her time in Leipzig introduced her to another circle of aristocrats and royals in Germany. These connections benefited her in many ways throughout her musical career as they gave her opportunities and helped her gain popularity while others provided her with education and emotional support.

2. Smyth's Involvement in the Suffragette Movement and the First World War

Smyth's memoirs are useful resources when looking at the sexism that she experienced throughout her life and the events which led her to becoming a feminist and eventually joining the

[104] Ethel Smyth: *As Time Went On,* Milton Keynes: Lightning Source 2007*,* p. 172.
[105] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 11.
[106] Ibid., p. 185-192.

WSPU. However, they do not provide much information on her two-year stint as an active WSPU member as she stopped both writing and composing during this time. There are however many other reliable sources which highlight Smyth's life as a suffragette such as essays by the likes of Amanda Harris, Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld. When we look at the events leading to Smyth joining the Suffragette movement, we gain a greater understanding of the sexism that she experienced throughout her life. It is also important to acknowledge the two-year gap that Smyth took in her music career to fight for her right to vote and the impact that this had on her future career and compositions such as *The Boatswain's Mate.*

2.1. Smyth's Sexist Experiences Which Led Her to Feminism

By the last decades of the 19th century, discussions on gender roles and gender identity had become quite polarised. In England, the discussions were politically charged, while in Germany the *Frauenfrage* was intensely trying to be answered. These discussions along with the rising of the suffragette movement were responded to with misogynistic writings attempting to prove women's inferiority to men.[107] For example, Otto Weininger wrote that 'Women have no existence and no essence, they *are* not, they are *nothing.*'[108] Smyth was often the target of these writings as a composer, writer, and suffragette. These writings and discussions at the backdrop of Smyth's life may have contributed to her eventually resorting to militant feminism.

Smyth was not always a feminist, in fact, there was a time when she was completely opposed to the suffragette movement. When Smyth was in her twenties, she stayed with some friends of hers, the Garretts, in a thatched cottage in Rustington. Smyth wrote that their cousins and friends were all ardent Suffragettes. When Smyth looked back on that time, it surprised her that they received her opinions with such patience although hers were so different from theirs. However, she very much made up for it over thirty years later.[109] Even though Smyth was not always a feminist, she was annoyed when women let themselves be dominated by their husbands and describes how German women were particularly guilty of this. For example, this situation where she was at a ball in Bavaria:

> Needless to say, there were remarkable men among them, people of European reputation whom it was interesting to watch, but not one single remarkable woman. There is a phrase for ever on German female lips that used to irritate me: 'Mein Mann sagt

[107] Bartsch / Grotjahn, / Unseld: "Introduction", p. 15-16.
[108] Otto Weininger: *Geschlecht und Character. Eine prinzipiele Untersuchung,* Vienna: 1903 (Reprint Munich: 1997), p. 383.
[109] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 116.

> …' ('My husband says…'), but as uttered by the ignorant, arrogant wives of these infallible ones it is the least attractive side of German life in a nutshell.[110]

Although Smyth wasn't always political throughout her life, she was very aware of sexism and the importance of the women in her life. The people who helped Smyth the most throughout her life were women, the first being her sister, Mary. Smyth describes her relations with certain women as 'shining threads in [her] life.'[111] She realised early on that she was living in a world that was ruled by men which benefited men and disadvantaged women. Women who didn't conform to norms and went their own way to compete and earn a salary had an even larger drawback.[112]

Smyth experienced sexism from very early in her life. In *Impressions that Remained* she recalls the sexual assault she experienced as a child by a neighbour*:*

> The subsequent happenings were standardized, he would invite you into the library to look at the bindings of some new books; and then an arm would steal round your waist, and various pinchings and squeezings, graduated according to the receptivity of his companion, had to be endured. Even the most recalcitrant, such as I, were begged to 'give an old man a kiss,' and it is strange he did not guess with what repulsion one met those old, cold lips. What could we do? He had tried his best to give us a good time, and we felt this was the only return we could make; but it was extremely horrible, and I often wonder how far he went with more facile subjects than myself. Once he gave me a sovereign – not, be it remarked, for favours received – and when I hesitated to accept it he said: 'My dear, take an old man's advice, never refuse a good offer.'[113]

Smyth wrote that her parents knew about these incidents but did not do anything about them as they believed that their 'children should learn their own way about.'[114] Smyth was also aware of other instances of sexual assault such as the story of Conor McIvor who had proposed to both of her sisters Mary and Alice and 'had made improper advances to the children's governess.'[115]

When Smyth moved to Munich the sexist experiences continued as she faced difficulties regarding accommodation. In one instance, the landlady informed Smyth that the house owner would hand her her notice unless she moved out immediately as he allowed no female lodgers there. However, when he learned that she had paid her rent in advance he tolerated her presence

[110] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 164.
[111] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 114.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 92.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., p. 94.

until the date to which she had paid. Smyth wrote, 'I wondered if the *Hausherr* was a woman hater, a lunatic, or what.'[116] When she searched for accommodation afterwards she learned that the opinion of the last *Hausherr* was quite normal as 'furnished rooms for lady students of [her] type do not exist in Munich.'[117] Respectable female students lived in a *Pension* and if a female student was to live in a fully furnished room by herself (like a man would have) she would not have been seen as respectable.[118]

Another example is how it was so often presumed that Smyth was not the composer of her own works. Before Levi had gotten to know her, he presumed that Smyth had gotten somebody else to write the score for her Mass in D. Brahms also presumed that Henschel had written her songs. Smyth also feared that Schuch thought that she wasn't the original composer of *Fantasio.* 'Such are the delights of being a woman!'[119]

These experiences and more no doubt added up to drive Smyth towards the Suffragette Movement and make her an ardent feminist. Perhaps another thing that made Smyth such an active feminist was the fact that she didn't care much about what other people thought of her. She didn't fit the gender norms of society and she didn't try to. An example of this is her view on marriage and her decision to put her career first instead of fulfilling the expectations that were put on her to marry and have children. In a letter to her mother, she wrote:

> Every day I become more and more convinced of the truth of my old axiom, that why no women have become composers is because they have married, and then, very properly, made their husbands and children the first consideration. So even if I were to fall desperately in love with BRAHMS and he were to propose to me, I should say no![120]

In *Impressions That Remained*, she reemphasised one of her reasons for not marrying namely that she didn't want marriage to get in the way of her career: 'Where should be found the man whose existence could blend with mine without loss of quality on either side? My work must, and would always be in first consideration.'[121]

Another example of Smyth not conforming to the societal gender norms of the time is when the lady's bicycle was first invented. The newspaper, *The Illustrated London News* showed pictures

[116] Ibid., p. 439.
[117] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* p. 155.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., p. 233.
[120] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, pp. 190-191.
[121] Ibid., p. 256.

of women cycling around Epping Forest. When Smyth saw this, she straight away went to get her own bicycle as she saw it as a chance to show her superiority over senseless prejudice. Her friends and relatives were shocked and horrified at the sight of Smyth on her lady's bicycle, but she cycled it nonetheless.[122] Smyth explained that no 'nice' women rode bicycles, but she did it anyway as it was a convenient way for her to get from A to B while also doing a sporting activity.[123]

2.2. Smyth's Two-Year Dedication to the WSPU

In 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was set up by Emmeline Pankhurst and when Smyth first met her in 1910, she described her as:

> A graceful woman rather under middle hight; [sic] one would have said a delicate-looking woman, but the well-knit figure, the quick deft movements, the clear complexion, the soft bright eyes that on occasion could emit lambent flame, betokened excellent health.[124]

After Smyth had been awarded the degree of honorary Doctor of Music from the University of Durham, she received a letter from her old acquaintance, Lady Constance Lytton who was a member of the WSPU. In this letter, Lytton asked what Smyth's views on women's suffrage and militancy were. At this time, Smyth was in fact quite indifferent towards the efforts of the Suffragettes, and it was the Austrian novelist Hermann Bahr who explained to her the importance of the movement and the inspiring character of Emmeline Pankhurst. Smyth was convinced by Bahr and a fortnight later she attended a meeting to hear Pankhurst speak and be introduced to her.[125] Pankhurst knew that Smyth was an artist who didn't have any connections to suffragist groups which made her sceptical at first, but they quickly got to know each other, and it wasn't long before they formed a deep and lasting friendship. Smyth was at first very reluctant to join the WSPU as she felt that there was no way that she could balance her life in both the arts and politics.[126] However, she did support their growing militancy as she wrote in *Votes for Women:*[127]

> Where such things are done, deep, fierce fires are burning somewhere – fires such as prevent this globe from becoming a dead thing turning in space like the moon. And when such actions of heroic self-sacrificing violence show up against a background of years and years of quiet constitutional effort … then, indeed, one marvels at those who dare, in the name of dignity or fastidiousness, criticise the militant's methods.[128]

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[122] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 163.
[123] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 459.
[124] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 294.
[125] Ibid., pp. 293-294.
[126] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 76.
[127] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 179.
[128] Ethel Smyth: "Better Late Than Never", in: *Votes for Women,* (18 November 1910), p. 99.

When Smyth's musical career did not go according to plan, she decided to dedicate two years of her life to the fight for women's suffrage. During this time Smyth wrote no diaries and kept no records which was very unusual for her as she was an avid writer throughout most of her life. Smyth's plan was that after these two years she would go back to her life as a composer.[129] In *A Final Burning of Boats,* Smyth wrote:

> In the Autumn of 1911 I realised for the first time what 'Votes for Women' meant, and it seemed to me that all self-respecting women, especially such as occupied any place, be it ever so humble, in the public eye, were called upon to take action. Nothing is less compatible with musical creation than politics of any kind, and the peculiarly devastating effect of a struggle such as the militants were engaged in – and this was the party, of course, to which I allied myself – needs no stressing. There was only one thing to be done; it would spell ruin to the painfully sown little musical crop, but other women were giving life itself…. I determined to devote two years of my life to the Cause, and afterwards return to my own job; which programme was carried out to the letter.[130]

According to Ernest Newman who wrote the introduction to Smyth's Autobiography *Impressions That Remained – Memoirs of Ethel Smyth:*

> They were two years of torment and anger and suffering such as she had never known before and was never to know again. Upon the ghastly record of that struggle none of us who witnessed it and took part in it can ever look back without horror and disgust. There were faults, of course, on both sides. Some of the violences of the women could not escape condemnation at the bar of reason; but their argument – and it was unanswerable – was that the appeal to justice having failed, only unscrupulous and unrelenting violence would avail against the stupidity, the duplicity and the cowardice of the politicians of the time.[131]

There is some ambiguity surrounding when exactly Smyth joined the WSPU. Some sources state 1910 while Smyth often states 1911. The reason for this is that in Spring 1910, Lady Constance Lytton who was a leading suffragette asked Smyth to take up a position regarding votes for women. On the 10th of November 1910, Smyth announced in an article in *Votes for Women* that she had officially joined the WSPU. However, Smyth attended her first demonstrations in 1911 which is why Smyth may refer to 1911 more so than 1910. From 1910 to 1912 Smyth accompanied Pankhurst to her WSPU speeches, helped her hide from the police in her house, and helped her escape to France. Smyth also wrote feminist articles and gave interviews

[129] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 76.
[130] Smyth, Ethel: *A Final Burning of Boats,* London, New York: Longmans, Green and Company Limited 1928, p. 31.
[131] Newman: "Introduction", pp. ix-x.

for *Votes for Women, The Suffragette,* the *Manchester Guardian,* the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times,* and was also involved in organising WSPU meetings and took part in demonstrations.[132]

In 1911 the Second Conciliation Bill was supported by all the suffrage societies and was expected to come into law in 1912. The bill 'proposed votes for women householders and occupiers of business premises over a certain relatable value. Though not excluding married women as such, it did not allow husband and wife to vote for the same property.'[133] Although this bill was incredibly classist, it would have been a step in the right direction for women's suffrage as it would have given approximately 1,000,000 women the right to vote. Unfortunately, this bill was not passed as Mr Asquith announced a 'manhood suffrage bill' instead. This caused outrage amongst the women of the WSPU and as a result, they organised a great window-smashing raid throughout London. This was the start of many violent acts (including arson attacks) that continued into 1912.[134] Smyth wanted to go a step further than the average suffragette, so when Pankhurst called on volunteers to smash the windows of any politician who was against votes for women, Smyth was one of the 109 W.S.P.U. members to sign up. On the 4th of March 1912, Smyth targeted one of the windows of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Harcourt with a stone. He had irritated her as he told her that he would support votes for women if they were all intelligent and well-behaved like his wife. She aimed successfully, smashing the window, resulting in her arrest and a two-month prison sentence of which she only served three weeks due to health reasons.[135] While Smyth was in Holloway prison, she witnessed what was called the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. This was a practice where women who were on hunger strike and weak almost to the point of death were released from prison only to be arrested again after about a week when they had regained their strength and the cycle would continue. This was done as the authorities didn't want to have any women's deaths on their hands or a martyr of the movement. Another reason was that it was a way of attempting to exhaust the prisoners emotionally and physically.[136]

[132] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", pp. 189-190.
[133] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* p. 298.
[134] Edward Raymond Turner: "The Women's Suffrage Movement in England", in *The American Political Science Review* 7/4 (1913), p. 605.
[135] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 206.
[136] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 301.

Thomas Beecham didn't support Smyth's involvement in the suffragette movement as he felt it took her attention away from composing. In an article to commemorate the centenary of Smyth's birth he wrote:

> But unfortunately she was diverted from the broad course of composition into politics and revolutionary activity. This activity took the form of becoming a leader of the Suffragette movement and into this she threw herself with the same excitement, vigour and industry as she did into all things of artistic nature. She led processions, she made speeches, she thumped many tubs here and there, and finally distinguished herself by throwing bricks through the dining-room and drawing-room windows of Cabinet Ministers. After a while it became too much of a habit to be encouraged, and so Ethel, was, as they would say today, 'pinched', or, in more classic English, arrested, tried, convicted and sent to Holloway prison to reflect and, if possible, repent. She pursued a joyously rowdy line of activity. Accompanying her were about a dozen other Suffragettes, for whom Ethel wrote a stirring march, 'Song of Freedom', and on one occasion I went to see her. Well, as a matter of fact I went to see her several times. But on this particular occasion when I arrived, the warden of the prison, who was a very amiable fellow, was bubbling with laughter. He said, 'Come into the quadrangle'. There were the ladies, a dozen ladies, marching up and down, singing hard. He pointed up to a window when Ethel appeared; she was leaning out, conducting with a toothbrush, also but with immense vigour, and joining on the chorus of her own song.
> Well, this was an unfortunate diversion really, because Ethel was a composer, in a certain way, of originality; not only of originality. She was a composer of spirit, vigour, with a talent for emphasis, accent on what you might vulgarly call 'guts': qualities or merits that were not shared by many composers at the time in England.[137]

Smyth saw the time that she spent in Holloway prison as a badge of honour as she had achieved her goal of personal militancy.[138] There is no doubt that Smyth's two-year political period took up a lot of time and energy which she could have used for her compositions. But the time that she invested into the Suffragette Movement like so many other women did, paved the way for women to come and gave them opportunities to vote, but also to 'pursue activities that would enrich their lives and artistic freedom.'[139]

2.2.1. 'March of the Women'

It is interesting to note that although Smyth often claimed that she took a complete break from composing during her involvement in the Suffragette Movement, she composed what would become the anthem of the Suffragette Movement 'March of the Women' during the winter of 1910/11. The song was composed as part of her three *Songs of Sunrise.* The two other songs are 'Laggard Dawn' which is for unaccompanied women's chorus and describes women's hope for better times and '1910' which is for mixed choir and orchestra. '1910' is based on the events of Black Friday on the 18th of November 1910 when 300 suffragettes demonstrated against the

[137] Thomas Beecham: "Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944)", in: *The Musical Times* 99/1385 (1958), pp. 364.
[138] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 76.
[139] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 205.

then prime minister H.H. Asquith and were brutally attacked by the police. In the chorus, there is a dialogue between the suffragettes (sopranos and altos) and policemen and anti-suffragist (tenors and bases).[140] Smyth composed the music to 'March of the Women' and Cicely Hamilton wrote the lyrics to the melody.[141] The structure of the march is clear, and the melody is relatively simple with harmonies in thirds which makes it easy to be sung by the masses. With its fighting spirit, it could be seen as a propaganda song as it expresses the solidarity of the suffragettes and calls on them to fight for their rights. The main theme of 'March of the Women' was influenced by an old tune which Smyth had been familiar with. The march was first performed on the 21st of January 1911 at a welcome ceremony for released WSPU prisoners. The song then gained recognition as it was often sung at WSPU meetings and protests. At the Royal Albert Hall on the 23rd of March 1911, it was performed by the suffragette choir as part of a mass rally. At this performance, Smyth was given an honorary baton for her composition. It is interesting to note that Smyth did not compose this work to boost her career as a composer, but rather in support of the Suffragette movement.[142]

In late 1910 and early 1911, Smyth was busy organising a performance of some of her works including her *Songs of Sunrise.* This performance then took place on the 1st of April 1911 with another performance following on the 29th of June 1911. Smyth conducted the whole performance by herself which was a first for her. The performance on the 1st of April was of great significance for the suffragettes as it was part of the Suffrage Census Programme which was where the suffragettes boycotted the census by not being home. As a result of this many suffragettes were at this concert meaning that Smyth had a large audience. Even women who would have usually never gone to a classical concert attended the event. We can see here that Smyth didn't entirely separate her music and political affiliations. There were also some other music-related events that Smyth took part in, for example, she conducted *The Wreckers'* Overture on the 1st of June 1911 at the International Musical Congress at Queen's Hall in London and on the 8th of November 1911 in Bournemouth. Smyth also gave a speech before the Society of Women Musicians in January 1912.[143]

[140] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", pp. 193-197.
[141] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 298.
[142] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", pp. 193-196.
[143] Ibid., p. 194.

2.2.2. Smyth's Return to Composing

In the summer of 1912, Smyth was falsely arrested and kept in custody for one day before being released.[144] This marked the end of Smyth's two-year political dedication to the WSPU, before travelling to various places such as Paris, Stuttgart, and Vienna. In Vienna, she even got to hear Bruno Walter conduct some of her works. She was no longer politically active, but she stayed in close contact with Pankhurst.[145] It is interesting to note that although Smyth spent two of her eighty-six years involved in the Suffragette Movement, she was associated with it long after her death. There can be some correlations made between the persistence that she showed during her fight for women's suffrage and the persistence that she showed while promoting her music. Even though Smyth left the movement after two years, she remained militant in her pursuit of gender equality in the music business particularly regarding female composers. In doing this she maintained respect from her fellow suffragettes throughout her life.[146]

When Smyth returned to her music career, she found that everything had changed. Her two-year engagement in the suffragette movement caused her to lose her place in the German music scene and she never quite managed to regain it.[147] Despite this, Smyth had no regrets and would have done it all over again had it been necessary.[148] Although Smyth blames her two-year involvement with the WSPU for her lack of popularity in the music world, Marleen Hoffmann expresses a different opinion in her article 'Ethel Smyth: suffrage activities and music'. Here Hoffmann explains that Smyth's popularity grew during these two years as her name often appeared in newspapers through her activism and imprisonment. Also, Smyth's *Songs of Sunrise* reached a new audience including women who would previously not have been inclined to listen to classical music.[149]

Smyth moved temporarily to Cairo in 1913 where she composed her next opera *The Boatswain's Mate.*[150] The reasons as to why she moved to Cairo was to look after herself and take time to improve her poor health.[151] Egypt was a place that generated much popularity for the upper classes due to the recent archeological findings at that time. These archaeological findings

[144] Ibid., p. 190.
[145] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* p. 301.
[146] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 70.
[147] Newman: "Introduction", p. xiii.
[148] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 360.
[149] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", p. 199.
[150] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 301.
[151] Newman: "Introduction", p. x.

were catalysts for the ever-growing popularity surrounding exoticism and orientalism.[152] In *Female Pipings in Eden,* Smyth recalls that she originally intended on spending Christmas in Vienna that year as it was Europe's most musical city. However, Smyth then decided that Vienna was too near to England, and she headed further afield.[153] While Smyth was in Cairo, she remained in contact with Pankhurst which shows that she hadn't completely left the movement behind while working on her next opera. Smyth's keeping in touch with Pankhurst may also have been the reason why she was not heavily criticised by other suffragettes for leaving the movement.[154]

After finishing *The Boatswain's Mate*, Smyth headed to Vienna to meet with Bruno Walter who intended on producing the opera in Munich during the next season (1914-1915). Smyth's next steps were to promote *The Boatswain's Mate* to as many opera houses as possible. In mid-June, Smyth was told that Bruno Walter was willing to produce *The Wreckers* in Munich after Christmas and without any problems the director in Frankfurt am Main agreed to host the premiere of *The Boatswain's Mate* (scheduled just fourteen days after the performance of *The Wreckers* in Munich). This was fantastic news for Smyth as it meant that two of her operas would be performed in two of the best opera houses in Europe within two weeks of each other. Smyth then headed to Paris to meet with Pankhurst where she found out that the British government was taking strong action towards anyone who was involved with or showed their support for the Suffragettes. However, Smyth had already written an article in *The Suffragette!* where she expressed her support for the Suffragette's destruction of property. After writing this article she was advised not to return to England any time soon and Smyth obeyed as she did not want to risk going to prison during this critical time in her career.[155]

2.2.3. The Great War

On the 28th of June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were shot dead in Sarajevo marking the beginning of the First World War. Smyth eventually decided to go back to England with Pankhurst to find that the entire Suffragette movement was being put on hold as the militant members focused on contributing to the war effort.[156] In 1915 Smyth joined her sister Nina on the Italian front, where they worked with the ambulance service for which they were

[152] Jiracek: "Empire zwischen den Zeilen. Eine postkoloniale Perspektive", pp. 155.
[153] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden.,* p. 215.
[154] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 77.
[155] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 311-312.
[156] Ibid., pp. 313-314.

decorated in valour.[157] Smyth then returned to Paris where she completed her examinations as a radiographer and worked for the thirteenth Division of the French Army as a volunteer in a Hospital at Vichy.[158] In addition to Smyth taking a two-year break from her musical career, her connections to Germany were also ruined due to the Great War.[159]

In January 1918, women finally got the right to vote in Britain. Unfortunately, there were no large celebrations as Britain was still under the impact of the Great War.[160] Some argued that women would have gotten the vote in Britain for their services during the war and that there was no need for their violent militant methods. Smyth's response to these statements was that there was no way that anyone could have known that a world war was about to start![161]

2.3. Women and the Orchestra

Smyth strongly believed in the talents and strengths of women which became evident in their work and importance during the Great War:

> Generally speaking, I find women more capable of enthusiasm and devotion, readier to spend and be spent emotionally than men – as I noticed in my dealings with stage choruses long before the war. Their nerves, too, seem nearer the surface, more responsive to appeal, less deeply buried under that habitual resistance to the emotional appeal which is surely a post-Elizabethan trait. I cannot conceive of music being an Englishman's religion – that is, a thing pure of financial taint – but in the case of an Englishwoman I can conceive it. At this moment, too, women are the harder-working sex. All the world over, men seem disinclined to put their backs into the job – war-weariness, it is called – and the responsible statesmen of Europe are unanimous in ascribing the slackness of trade in large measure to the slackness of the workers. But during the war woman *found her powers,* glories in them now, and only asks to go on using them.[162]

In 1911, Smyth had an interview with *The Vote* which was a non-militant suffragist paper. Here she told the interviewer that she had introduced a female flautist to the orchestra and explained that people should lose their prejudice against female musicians playing in orchestras.[163] The Great War actually gave women a chance to advance in the world of music. Because so many young men had died or were at war, it was necessary for some orchestras to let women play to keep up the number of members. Smyth describes how this had a positive impact on the orchestras themselves as fresh new energy and talent were brought in. An exception to this however

[157] Phil Cooper: "Dame Ethel Smyth, Woking's Composer and the Great War", in: *Surry in the Great War: A Country Remembers,* <https://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/ethel-smyth/>.
[158] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 314.
[159] Ibid., p. 360.
[160] Ibid., p. 314.
[161] Ibid., p. 333.
[162] Ibid., p. 340.
[163] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women', p. 78.

was the London Symphony Orchestra who refused to let any women take part aside from harpists. After this, the Hallé Orchestra regressed a step as they dismissed all their female members not long after. The committee gave two reasons for this; one was that when they went on tour it was difficult to find Hotels that were suitable for women, and the other was that the orchestra did not have the same unity of style since there were female members. Smyth was very disappointed in both statements, but particularly in the second one. She pointed out that playing in an orchestra was the best and cheapest training for a composer. By playing in an orchestra, one automatically learns about form and instrumentation and is constantly being introduced to an array of musical works. If women don't have access to any of this, they do not have the same opportunities of becoming successful composers as men do. Smyth added: 'Theoretically we are inferiors, practically we are, one would imagine, superiors, or at least formidable competitors, judging by the lengths men go to keep us out of the arena.'[164]

It is clear that women were greatly needed during the First World War, and Smyth makes the point that women are greatly needed everywhere in every aspect of life for the good of everyone:

> Men are not only slacking themselves but are combining to prevent women from earning their livelihood in this and that sphere, notwithstanding the fact that if prosperity is to be restored to this country, every ounce of its working power must be utilized.[165]

In 1913, the conductor of the Queen's Hall Orchestra Henry Wood was one of the first to allow female musicians to play in an orchestra.[166] He said:

> I will never conduct an orchestra without women in the future, they do their work so well. They have great talent for the violin and wonderful delicacy of touch. They are sincere; they do not drink, and they smoke less than men. In the Queen's Hall *they have given a certain tone to our rehearsals and a different spirit to our performances*.[167]

Although this statement would be considered sexist and problematic today, at the time it was a very bold and liberal statement. It was a big step from such a prolific and well-respected conductor to state that he would only conduct mixed orchestras. In 1913, Smyth wrote an article in *The Vote* called *Musical Feminism* where she praised Henry Wood on his initiative on this matter.[168] Despite this, Smyth stated in *Female Pipings in Eden,* that although there were now

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[164] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 340-343.
[165] Ibid., p. 344.
[166] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", p. 198.
[167] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* p. 344.
[168] Harris: "'Comrade' Ethel Smyth in the 'great liberative war of women'", p. 78.

some new possibilities for professional female orchestral musicians, they continued to be ghettoized and belittled. She also mentioned that gender alone influenced which instrument a musician played. For example, women were not allowed to play the cello, but an instrument as large and cumbersome as a harp being played by a woman was accepted. It was much easier for women to join choirs than orchestras and it is important to note the financial aspect of this. Choirs were generally voluntary, while orchestras were generally paid.[169]

Although Smyth saw music and politics to be two separate things, she was very involved in musical politics. For example, she was a patron of the Manchester Women's Orchestra. From 1911 to 1914 Smyth was also a member of the Society of Women Musicians and in 1922 she became honorary vice-president of the society. She also fought for the British Women's Symphony Orchestra to get Henry Wood to be their conductor and to raise money for them to work professionally. Through Smyth's experience as a member of the WSPU, she learned to express her feminist views through music, support women and fight for their rights in the world of music.[170]

3. Ethel Smyth and Opera

Smyth worked as a composer for over forty years however, she never quite managed to make a name for herself in what she called the 'English music machine.' Constant Lambert claimed that this was because Smyth put all her focus on opera and concentrated it on Germany. Smyth on the other hand replied:

> But not till I had knocked my knuckles raw on the closed doors of England's concert halls did my eyes swerve back again across the Channel. For I had always loved England as passionately as I do today when patriotism is at a discount. (And well it may be, seeing what is being done in its name!)[171]

Smyth considered the 'Machine' to be everyone and everything that was against her throughout her career. It was a complex construction of everybody who was involved in the music industry. This included directors, conductors, producers, the press, heads of conservatories, publishers, members of music committees etc. The 'Machine' was of course run by men. It might not have been visible as an entity, but Smyth was up against it and therefore very certain of its existence and intentions of limiting women's opportunities:[172]

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[169] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden*, pp. 9-12.
[170] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", p. 199.
[171] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth,* p. 356.
[172] Ibid., p. 357.

> In order to master music as a *trade*... you have to be right down in the rough and tumble of music life, and no sooner did a woman leave college that she became aware of men's firm intention to keep her out of the arena.[173]

She also sometimes referred to the 'Machine' as the 'Group.' In *Female Pipings in Eden,* she describes how the 'Group' held great power over composers and their works:

> I always visualize the Group as a sort of reservoir in which swim about potentates of various kinds: University men, rich music patrons, Heads of Colleges, of publishing houses; representative men in big provincial Festival Committees, perhaps a pressman or two; who can say who they are? And connected with the reservoir is a slantitudinal groove, a thing like a rain-gutter with very sharp edges; and unless you are lifted over those edges by the Group and sent racing down with the running water you won't get far.[174]

> If you are going *with* the stream, as men do, and barge up against an obstacle, very often the impact will shoot you right out into the current and actually help you on your way. But if you are swimming *against* the stream, which is the privilege of the female, such an impact can but send you spinning back… back… yards and yards in the wrong direction.[175]

3.1. Fantasio

Altogether Smyth composed six operas between 1892 and 1925, all of which were professionally produced on stage. This was a truly impressive achievement for a female composer at that time.[176] From 1894 to 1898, Smyth's sole focus was to have an opera of hers performed in Germany as it would have been much more difficult to do so in England.[177] One of the main reasons as to why Smyth turned to opera was because of the Wagner conductor Hermann Levi who was based in Munich. When he heard her Mass in D, he said, 'You must at once sit down and write an opera.'[178] While saying this he was also well aware of the fact that a woman who was also a foreigner would have hardly any chance of success with a German Kapellmeister. For this reason, Levi advised Smyth to enter her first opera *Fantasio* into a competition where he was one of the judges. He reassured Smyth by saying, 'I know all that is doing in this line in Europe and there is not a soul you need to be afraid of.'[179] In late September 1896 Levi informed Smyth that he had read fifty of the hundred and ten operas that were handed to him so far and none of them compared to Smyth's first opera *Fantasio.* After he had read all one hundred and ten of them, he was sure that *Fantasio* would win. Eventually, Smyth received a telegram from Munich which stated, 'No opera has received the first prize. *Fantasio* highly recommended.

[173] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden*, p. 8.
[174] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[175] Ibid., p. 28.
[176] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 200.
[177] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 213.
[178] Ibid., p. 12.
[179] Ibid., p. 213.

Letter follows. Levi.'[180] Smyth never found out who the judges were or how many there were but had gathered her own opinion of what had happened in the competition:

> Of the hundred and ten works, ten had been selected as 'in the running', one of which was *Fantasio.* From these three were chosen between which the prize was divided; *Fantasio* was *not* one of these three but was among the seven 'highly recommended' ones! Of the original ten set aside, one, *Fantasio,* had been deemed worthy of the Crown and received *one* vote to that effect! But one vote was not considered enough, and when Levi announced in secret session that he was that solitary voter, the others were surprised, and two of them – Schuch of Dresden (one of the most brilliant opera conductors in Germany) and Hofmann of Cologne (a deeply musical man who greatly admired Levi) promised to examine *Fantasio* once again (and evidently did so, as subsequent events proved).
> Some thought that what Henschel and others feared might happen in a case of such a very 'open secret had happened – that the identity of the composer had leaked out. Another thing; I wrote in German as well, perhaps, as is possible for a foreigner, but I dare say a turn or two of phrase may have suggested a foreign librettist. And the jurors would certainly have hated the idea of a foreigner carrying off the prize.[181]

3.2. Der Wald

Der Wald is an opera in one act with many elements of German symbolist art.[182] Smyth labelled *Der Wald* a 'Music-Drama' as many early-twentieth century through-composed operas were considered Wagnerian. However, Aidan J. Thompson describes it as 'a hybrid of music drama and German Romantic opera.'[183] The idea behind *Der Wald* is that the peaceful Spirits of the Forest are interrupted by tragedy. The story includes themes such as the eternal march of nature and human destiny.[184]

When Smyth finished composing her opera *Der Wald,* she felt that there was still no opportunity for her to have it performed in England, so she set her focus on Berlin. Her next step was to find out whom she needed to contact there. She then contacted Richard Strauss who was the director of the Staatsoper Berlin and performed *Der Wald* on the piano for him, including the choral, orchestral, and solo parts. He straight away agreed to produce the opera after Christmas however, he did add that there would surely be some difficulties due to the Boer War and of course 'the Press would be merciless to an English opera written by a woman.'[185]

[180] Ibid., p. 217-218.
[181] Ibid., p. 218.
[182] Ibid., p. 200.
[183] Thomson: "Decadence in the Forest: Smyth's *Der Wald* in its Critical Context", p. 233.
[184] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 237.
[185] Ibid., pp. 236-237.

In Autumn 1899 the Boer war began.[186] Every day the German newspapers reported on the terrible atrocities that the British troops in South Africa were committing.[187] This contributed considerably to the anti-English sentiment that was increasingly spreading across Europe at the time. In fact, Smyth had the feeling that it was increasing hourly[188] and she very much felt how it influenced the way people thought of her. For example, this is what Smyth wrote about her interview with Karl Muck about conducting *Der Wald*:

> 'Your work is good,' he said. 'I liked it in England in the rough; I like it now, and am willing to conduct it… But there can be no friendly personal relations between us, for when I hear the word "England" I see red.' His hands clenched convulsively, and the veins stood out on his forehead… here was the fire, unmistakably ablaze! I knew that his wife adored England, but as if he guessed my thought, he went on, 'My wife snatches the newspapers away from me… for reading about this horrible war of yours deprives me of appetite and sleep…' I then asked whether his views would prevent his doing his best for me? He calmed down a little and said certainly not, that art is art, etc.[189]

As time went on tensions between Germany and Britain rose as the German chancellor gave an offensive and threatening speech saying that if 'England tried to bully Germany, she would find herself biting an iron!'[190] Anti-English demonstrations were a daily occurrence which sometimes resulted in violent actions such as the windows of the British Embassy being smashed. Smyth recalls that she no longer dwelled at shop windows as she was afraid that her back would be spat on when turned.[191] Smyth's negative experiences in Germany due to the Boer War also made her have negative opinions of Germany and describe it as 'a huge cistern full to the brim of hatred – military hatred anyhow – and that [she] was sitting under the escape pipe.'[192]

Smyth felt quite stuck as she knew from her experiences with *Fantasio* how hard it was to have an opera produced as a woman and a foreigner and at the same time she had to deal with extra anti-British sentiment due to the Boer War. Getting *Der Wald* to be performed in England also wasn't an option for Smyth as she explained: 'without the leverage of an ice-breaking foreign performance I knew I might knock on the doors of Covent Garden till my knuckles were raw. For there is no money in a new English work produced in England.'[193]

[186] Ibid., p. 230.
[187] Ibid., p. 239.
[188] Ibid., p. 235.
[189] Ibid., p. 237-238.
[190] Ibid., p. 240.
[191] Ibid., p. 244.
[192] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 350.
[193] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 247.

When *Der Wald* did eventually premiere in Berlin on the 9th of April 1902, the performance went well. In Smyth's opinion, however, the political situation at the time caused it to end with hissing and booing from the audience. Smyth did not step onto the stage afterwards as she was afraid that rotten eggs would be thrown at her.[194] The next day the conductor Much could not attend the cut rehearsal, so Smyth had to take over even though she had never conducted an orchestra before. When she walked into the room she was greeted with an applause from the orchestra. 'Well, gentlemen, I don't believe you think my opera is as bad as all that, in spite of the Press,' Smyth replied. 'Ach die Presse,' replied the leader of the second violins. 'Your opera is simply splendid as people will gradually find out, in spite of the Press!' added one of the tuba players.[195] Despite the political difficulties which Smyth encountered in relation to this opera, there were a couple more successful productions of it. It was also performed in Covent Garden in 1902 which was then followed by a performance in New York in 1903.[196]

3.3. The Wreckers

3.3.1. How *The Wreckers* Came About

The plot of *The Wreckers* came about in 1886, eighteen years before Smyth and Brewster started writing the libretto. At the age of twenty-eight Smyth was walking along the Cornish coast and came across some smugglers' caves. The cave that captivated her most was Piper's Hole on Tresco in the Scilly Isles. This cave which was near the sea had a fresh-water lake with blind fish and became the setting of the Third Act of *The Wreckers.*[197] In *What Happened Next,* Smyth describes entering the cave through its secret passage:

> On entering it, just above high-water mark, you go downwards rapidly and alarmingly by an ever-narrowing passage illuminated by torches which are stuck at intervals in rings in the wall; the passage suddenly bends sharp to the left and you become aware, by the growling of boulders apparently only a few inches above your head, that you are under the sea; … presently, to your great relief, the passage takes another turn, the rumbling ceases, and squeezing between two rocks at what seems to be the end of the cave, you behold an unearthly-looking freshwater lake, on which floats Charon's boat, while the waving torch of the guide reveals to you that the lake is full of goldfish (put there by the owner of that island, Mr Smyth-Dorrien) and that the goldfish are blind.[198]

Smyth was mesmerised by the stories that she had heard of ships being lured onto the coastline as they were tricked by misleading coast lights. Smyth visited sights where ships had been

[194] Ibid., p. 250.
[195] Ibid., p. 251.
[196] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 200.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Smyth, Ethel: *What Happened Next,* London / New York: Longmans, Green and Company Limited 1940, p. 233.

plundered and their crews murdered.[199] There were also stories and tales of men who entered the caves never to be seen again, and of dogs exiting the caves having lost their fur. Smyth also heard that these were places where lovers met linking these caves to the one of Dido and Aeneas. With these stories in mind, it was Piper's Hole where Smyth imagined *The Wrecker's* tragic ending taking place.[200]

The villagers whom Smyth had heard so much about believed that they had been chosen by God and that they had a right to these ships. Smyth then added the story of two lovers who went against these villagers and lit fires in secret to warn oncoming ships. The heroine, Thirza, hopes that these good deeds would justify her unfaithfulness to her husband, and her lover, Mark, is willing to take any risk for her. In the end, they get caught by the villagers and are sentenced to death in one of the caves by the Wreckers' committee. Smyth was unsure of whether she created this story in her sleep or if it was a legend that was told to her while in Cornwall.[201] However, the way in which Thirza and Mark die was probably Smyth's own creation as there are no records of death by drowning in these caves.[202] Smyth gave this story to Brewster and asked if he could make a libretto out of it. He was fascinated by the story and said that he would try his best. Brewster asked Smyth if he could write the libretto as *Les Naufrageurs* in French as this was the language that he was more comfortable working with. Smyth agreed as André Messager who was head of the Opéra-Comique in Paris would be the next artistic director of Covent Garden and this would increase the chances of her opera being performed in England.[203] Ironically, *The Wreckers* was never actually performed in French even though it was originally written as *Les Naufrageurs.*[204]

In the Autumn of 1902, Smyth visited Cornwall a couple more times to speak to the older inhabitants of the area and gather more information to solidify the story's plot. Some of the stories that she was told appeared directly in the opera for example the comic chorus after Chapel in Act I. Smyth also spent time lying on the cliffs taking in the sounds of the wild Atlantic sea bashing against the ragged rocks, the cold and unrelenting wind, and the wild seagulls. These sounds were summarised in the prelude to Act II, 'On the Cliffs of Cornwall', but

[199] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 260.
[200] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 151-152.
[201] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 260.
[202] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 152.
[203] Ibid., p. 12.
[204] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 200.

can also be heard throughout the opera. Smyth then finished her research in London and handed any extra information that she found in books from the National Museum to Brewster and waited for his final Libretto.[205] During this period of research Smyth was haunted by:

> that strange world of more than a hundred years ago; the plundering of ships lured on to the rocks by the falsification or extinction of the coast lights; the relentless murder of their crews; and with it all, the ingrained religiosity of the Celtic population of that barren promontory, which, at the end of the eighteenth century, became the scene of Wesley's great religious revival![206]

In November 1902, Brewster's synopsis was complete. At first, Smyth felt that the plot was perhaps too distant from what was considered conventional morality and wanted him to partially reduce the level of drama. Smyth wanted Thirza (the heroine) to show some remorse for being unfaithful to her husband Pascoe. However, Brewster refused and explained that Thirza was simply young and madly in love with Mark while Pascoe was old and amorous. What did appeal to Smyth was that every character was doing what in their opinion was the morally right thing to do; the wreckers believed that they had been chosen by God and were entitled to wreck and plunder those ships for their own wellbeing, Thirza and Mark were doing what they believed to be right by saving the victims, and Avis ruined her reputation and risked her own life in an attempt to save Mark's which resulted in her father casting her out in shame. Perhaps the array of personalities and opinions within the opera helps the listener to reflect on their own sense of morality.[207] In 1903, Smyth and Brewster focused their lives on composing *The Wreckers*. Smyth recalled that whenever she would send Brewster the summary of a scene in English, he would send her back:

> a beautiful version in French verse; - every motion of the soul-wave of the speaker so wonderfully rendered, that when I began to compose it, the music was seemingly already there.[208]

3.3.2. Performance History and Critical Reception

The entire score of *The Wreckers* was completed in the spring of 1905. Smyth then had to find a cast and a theatre in which it could be performed.[209] Smyth had huge difficulties in getting this opera to be performed as it was rejected in Covent Garden, Monte Carlo, Leipzig, Frankfurt, Brussels, Vienna, and Munich.[210] According to Thomas Beecham:

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[205] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 260.
[206] Smyth: *What Happened Next*, p. 233.
[207] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 261.
[208] Smyth: *What Happened Next*, p. 237.
[209] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 266.
[210] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 174.

> For five years Ethel Smyth, wearing mannish tweeds and an assertive cocked felt hat, had been striding Europe, cigar in mouth, trying to sell her opera *The Wreckers* to timorous or stubborn impresarios.[211]

It often happened that when Smyth showed a director or conductor the opera, it was received enthusiastically, and she got her hopes up. Unfortunately, she usually ended up disappointed as the score was sent back to her with a letter of the reasons why it would not be possible to perform it.[212]

At this time the anti-English sentiment caused by the Boer War was calming down and Smyth had heard that the conductor Arthur Nikisch was very successful as the director of the theatre in Leipzig. Smyth was also sure that he would not refuse her opera based on her gender.[213] Smyth sent him the libretto and Nikisch replied that 'it was magnificent, and if the music is good, I congratulate you'[214] and they agreed to meet. Smyth then played each one of the acts through and they straight away signed a contract and arranged for the opera to be performed towards the end of the next (1906-7) season. This put Smyth under a lot of pressure to get the opera translated from French to German by then and get it translated well. A Herr B. was recommended to Smyth to help with the translations. He had a deep knowledge of the French language and was also a poet and musician. Unfortunately, Herr B. turned out to be extremely unreliable and the whole process was delayed.

> He would send ten really exquisite lines followed by half a dozen of such absolute balderdash that I imagined he must be a drug-addict. And some of his actions, such as threatening to burn all the rest of his work unless I instantly sent him three pounds (evidently a classical copyist move) were bordering on criminal.[215]

After this ordeal with Herr B. Smyth found out that Nikisch had overspent the funding from the Town Council resulting in his post ending in June 1906. Smyth was sceptical of his successor Hagel performing *Strandrecht* (the German title of *The Wreckers* which was suggested by a lawyer friend of Smyth), so she brought her score to three other theatres, but with no success. Smyth thought that she might have been in with a good chance of having *Strandrecht* performed in Prague because the impresario there Angelo Neumann had been the director in Leipzig twenty years before and was a good friend of Nikisch. Nikisch had informed Neumann of *Strandrecht,* but Neumann feared that it wouldn't be financially successful and turned it down.[216]

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[211] Charles Reid: *Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography,* London: Readers Union 1962, p. 82.
[212] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 201.
[213] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 266.
[214] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 201.
[215] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 266.
[216] Ibid.

In a change of events, Brewster invited Smyth to Rome where they would discuss the next steps for the opera. Brewster informed Smyth that he seriously intended on sending Neumann £1,000 as a bribe. Brewster's bribe worked and Smyth travelled to Prague where she met with Neumann and some of the singers who were suggested for the cast. Shortly afterwards Smyth discovered that the opera had also been booked in Leipzig for the 15th of November with Hagel using the cast suggested to him by Nikisch. Smyth decided not to intervene in the rehearsals in Leipzig and informed Hagel that she would not show up until the dress rehearsal unless she was needed. Her one condition was that there be no cuts to the score. When Smyth arrived as planned on the day of the dress rehearsal, she was horrified to discover that Hagel had made so many cuts in Act III that it hardly made sense. Smyth was so furious that she said that she would not attend the performance. However, she did attend the performance the next day while hiding in the crowd so as not to be seen. To Smyth's surprise, the performance was a great success. During the applause when the performance was over, she made her way onto the stage and bowed hand in hand with the director on one side and Hagel on the other. The opera was so well received that there were thirteen curtains in total.[217]

However, some German music critics were not impressed with this English opera by an English women composer. For example, Alfred Heuß from the *Leipziger Kalender* found the plot to be distasteful with its combination of history and myth as he commented:

> Des Textes wegen ist es einigermaßen zu bedauern, daß nicht mehr Leute mit dem Werk bekannt geworden sind, da dieses zeigt, welchen Rückfallen das Musikdrama auch heute ausgesetzt ist. Es handelt sich um eine Räuberoper von ausgesucht widerlicher Gestalt, sofern die Strandräuber ihre Arbeit unter Gebeten und Kirchengesängen verrichten. Gottesfurcht, Mord, Brutalität, Beten und Fluchen haben in diesem Stück einen so engen Bund geschlossen, daß man dem sonderbarsten Gemisch religiöser Heuchelei gegenübersteht. Dies alles soll entschultigt werden in Rücksicht darauf, daß solche Verhältnisse bis in das letzte Jahrhundert an gewissen Künsten Englands vorhanden gewesen sein. Daß mit dem gleichen Recht auch Menschenfresser auf die Bühne gebracht werden können, daran scheint man nicht zu denken.[218]

Later that night Smyth and the director arranged to meet the next morning to discuss the possibility of performing the entire third Act at the next performance. However, early the next morning, Smyth received two notes; one from Hagel stating that the opera was to be performed exactly the same way or not at all, and one from the director stating that Hagel would not allow

[217] Ibid., p. 267-269.
[218] Heuß, Alfred: "Zur Opernsaison 1906/1907", in: *Leipziger Kalender* (1908), pp. 238.

the opera to be changed. Smyth responded by sending a note to each of them threatening to withdraw her opera if they did not reconsider. She received no response and wrote a letter to the *Leipziger Tageblatt* explaining her reasons and intentions.[219] The newspaper then published this letter while remaining neutral:

> Zur Premiere von "Strandrecht". Fräulein E. M. Smyth schickt uns die folgende Mitteilung, die wir abdrucken, ohne hierdurch mit der Komponistin uns zu identifizieren: "In dem Glauben, zum Erfolg des Werkes beizutragen, sind ohne mein Wissen im zweiten und namentlich im dritten Akt Striche gemacht worden, die ich vom dramatischen, sowie vom musikalischen Standpunkt aus absolut mißbillige. Ich bin als Ausländerin zu glücklich, an einer so berühmten Bühne und unter solch glänzenden Verhältnisse aufgeführt zu werden, als daß ich deswegen das Werk, welches mit so viel Mühe und Hingebung einstudiert worden ist, zurückstehen [*sic*] will; ich möchte auch vor allem mit keinem Wort die tief empfundene Dankbarkeit auch nur scheinbar beeinträchtigen, die ich allen an meinem Werk Beteiligten entgegenbringe, doch kann ich mich unmöglich in diese Lage stillschweigend fügen. Ich bin in keiner Probe gewesen; es ist möglich, daß die Bearbeitung des Herrn Kapellmeister Hagel manchem Geschmack besser entspricht als das Original, welches nächstens in Prag zur Aufführung kommt; nur ist es mein Werk nicht."[220]

Three days after the successful premiere, she headed to the theatre in Leipzig where the scores of *Strandrecht* were left. She gathered every single scrap of manuscript that she could find including the full score and made her way to Prague. This was a very risky thing for Smyth to do as it may have been possible that her actions would have turned every theatre in Germany against her and generated more negativity and scepticism surrounding her in the press. Although this was brave of Smyth, it may also be seen as inconsiderate towards the performers who worked on that opera for weeks who then suddenly discovered that there would be no next time.[221] We can see that the critics were on the performers' side in this short article in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik:*

> Die englische Komponistin E.M. Smyth hat ihre kürzlich im Leipzig Stadttheater zur Uraufführung gebrachte Oper „Strandrecht" nach der ersten Aufführung wieder von dieser Bühne zurückgezogen, weil die Direktion die von Fr. Smyth gewünschten Änderungen (NB. es handelt sich dabei wohl lediglich um Wiederaufmachung der verständiger Weise angebrachten Striche) ablehnte. Zu bedauern sind dabei nur die ausführenden Künstler, die wochenlang mühsame Vorarbeiten um einer einzigen Aufführung willen auf sich genommen hatten.[222]

When Smyth arrived in Prague, she was informed that Neumann had had a stroke and was bedridden. She then tried to get in touch with the Kapellmeister there only to find out that he had left Prague. Amongst the confusion, the performance did take place, but it was rather poor.

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[219] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 269-271.
[220] Ethel Smyth: "Zur Première von 'Strandrecht'", in: *Leipziger Tageblatt* (12 November 1906), Abend-Ausgabe p. 2.
[221] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 269-270.
[222] Carl Kipke: "Vom Theater", in: *Musikalisches Wochenblatt/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 48 (22 November 1906), p. 863/925.

Even the English press which had been very generous regarding the Leipzig performance questioned how such poor orchestral playing could be heard in a city like Prague. Smyth however was not surprised as she knew that the musicians were under-rehearsed and were practically sightreading on the night of the performance. While the English press wrote of bad playing, the German press wrote of bad scoring. Nonetheless, the consensus of the press was it was a terrible performance of an English woman's opera. This was all very unfortunate since if Neumann hadn't had a stroke, there surely would have been a very different result.[223]

After this ordeal, Smyth now had to think outside the box. She refused to have her opera performed in Leipzig, it was likely that many other opera houses in Germany had turned against her because of this, and there was quite a slim chance of *The Wreckers* ever being performed again in Prague after that performance. That's when she thought of Gustav Mahler. At the time, he was in charge of the Vienna State Opera. Smyth and Mahler had met many years ago and she believed that he thought of her as the young English anti-Wagner woman of the Herzogenberg group in Leipzig. Smyth wrote to Mahler, and she travelled with Brewster to Vienna where they had an appointment to meet with him.[224] Smyth was quite excited about this appointment as she considered Mahler 'far and away the finest conductor [she] ever knew, with the most all-embracing musical instinct.'[225] Mahler, however, was sceptical of an English woman's composition and asked his second-in-command to meet with them and report back to him. This is when Smyth first met Bruno Walter and the two of them developed a deep friendship over time that lasted for years.[226] Soon after, Mahler was driven from his position at the Vienna State Opera and was left to focus wholly on composing. This was a pity for many reasons and Smyth describes this as one of the small tragedies of her life that he didn't have the opportunity to produce *The Wreckers* in Vienna.[227] Smyth later went to Vienna to meet with Mahler again and apparently, he was delighted to see her and promised to tell his successor, Felix Weingartner, that if he was still there, he would surely arrange for *Strandrecht* to be performed. However, when Smyth met with Weingartner in London he said that Mahler never told him such thing![228] Smyth's only hope now was to wait for Walter to open his own theatre where he would surely perform *Standrecht.* They then had a date arranged for the 15th of February 1915, but by then

[223] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 270-271.
[224] Ibid., p. 271.
[225] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 400.
[226] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 271.
[227] Ibid., p. 141.
[228] Ibid., p. 272.

the First World War had begun. Unfortunately, Smyth didn't have much luck with this opera and its performances so, for the next while, she decided to lay low and see what would happen. She hoped that it might again gather some traction in Germany, but she also pondered on the possibility of it taking off in England.[229]

However, one of the many difficulties that she faced in England was the fact that any form of adultery shown on stage was highly frowned upon. For example, even *Tristan and Isolde's* first performance in England in 1882 was seen as immoral as theatrical representations of women who left their husbands along with prostitutes and mistresses were seen as offensive towards women in the audience. During this time there was a heated public debate surrounding on-stage censorship. Many playwriters and authors called for the abolition of censorship but there were still some artists such as the librettist William Schwenck Gilbert who supported it:[230]

> The stage is not a proper pulpit from which to disseminate doctrines possibly of Anarchism, Socialism and Agnosticism. It is not the proper platform upon which to discuss questions of adultery and free love before a mixed audience composed of persons of all ages, of both sexes.[231]

Despite this, Thomas Beecham still managed to receive a license allowing him to produce *The Wreckers* in His Majesty's Theatre in 1909. This was due to Smyth's important friends and connections in the industry such as the successful keyboard player Violet Gordon-Woodhouse.[232]

By 1908 Smyth was making a name for herself in England and throughout that year there were three performances of excerpts from *The Wreckers* in London. These performances were arranged by Gordon-Woodhouse and funded by Brewster until his death on the 13th of June 1908. On the 2nd of May, Nikisch conducted the Prelude to the Second Act of *The Wreckers.* This was the first time that an orchestral piece by Smyth was performed in England. Following this, Smyth requested for the First and Second Acts to be performed in Queen's Hall by the London Symphony Orchestra with Nikisch as the conductor. Smyth's wish was granted with a performance booked for the 28th of May. During this performance, 'The Cliffs of Cornwall' was very successful and according to Smyth, Nikisch conducted it fantastically. This made Smyth optimistic about the prospect of her finely getting a toe in the door of the English world of

[229] Ibid., p. 273-275.
[230] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 175-176.
[231] Nicholas De Jongh: *Politics, Prudery and Perversion: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901-1968,* London: Methuen Publishing 2000, p. 44.
[232] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 176.

performance[233] and on the 28th of November there was a further performance of the prelude to Act II at Queens Hall.[234]

After the successful concert performance of the first two acts of *The Wreckers* and hoping to reach more success in England, Smyth submitted the score to the Covent Garden Syndicate and the response she received stated:

> Frankly there is no chance of our being able to produce it. To announce a new work by a new composer is to ensure an absolutely empty house, and in future no opera will be produced here that has not established success abroad. I feel sure you will understand that we are not justified in embarking on expeditions into a *terra incognita* at the expense of our shareholders.[235]

This shows just how difficult it was for opera composers to get their operas performed in England and what the mindset of those in charge of the theatres was like. From Smyth's point of view, England seemed to be more interested in money than art. As Landon Ronald said: 'I feel that in this country nothing succeeds like financial success, and that artistic ideals and aims count for little unless they happen to pay.'[236] Nevertheless, Smyth's friend Mary Dodge, an American millionaire who lived in England, was there to help her. Dodge asked Smyth if it would be possible for *The Wreckers* to be performed at the West End Theatre. She said to Smyth:

> You are always telling me, what a wonderful conductor Thomas Beecham is. Couldn't your wonderful Mr. Beecham be roped into the scheme? And do you think £1,000 would cover the production?[237]

Smyth then contacted Beecham in 1909 and this is his recollection of the occasion from his article in *The Musical Times*:

> She said, 'You have to conduct my opera *The Wreckers.*' I said, 'Why?' She said, 'Well do you know anything about my opera?' I said, 'Oh, yes, I know a great deal about it.' 'Don't you like it?' I said, 'Well, I might like it if I knew it a little better than I do at the moment.' She said, 'You shall know it better. Will you come and see me, and I'll go through it with you?' She did. She played the whole piece through, mostly wrong notes, but still with a vigour and élan that was really very inspiring. And I couldn't help saying at the end: 'Well yes, I really like it, you know. Are you sure you want me to conduct it?' 'I do.' I said, 'Right, I will.'[238]

Smyth was able to rent His Majesty's Theatre for six performances of *The Wreckers* and Beecham was very excited about conducting these performances as it was his chance to introduce himself to London as an opera conductor. For these performances, the set was quite sparse, but

[233] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 273-275.
[234] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 175.
[235] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 284.
[236] Ibid., p. 357.
[237] Christopher St. John: *Ethel Smyth,* London: Longmans, Green and Company 1959, p. 109.
[238] Thomas Beecham: "Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944)", p. 363.

the cast and chorus were top class. While Smyth picked out the cast, Thomas Beecham picked out the orchestra and he was also so generous as to conduct the performances free of charge.[239]

Although Smyth was delighted that she now had this opportunity of having *The Wreckers* performed in England, the run-up to the live performances was quite stressful as they were under-rehearsed. Smyth knew what this meant from her experience in Prague. For example, the long passionate duet between Thirza and Mark in the second act had only one orchestral rehearsal before the first performance. Luckily the first night ran quite smoothly and as the nights went on the performances improved.[240] Although *The Wreckers* had these problems in the run-up to its productions, it was a success for both Smyth and Beecham as it was well-received by the public.[241] Many of the critics focused on Smyth purely as a composer, the standard of the singers and the quality of the production as others showed pride in the fact that *The Wreckers* had been composed by a British composer. It is interesting to note that in comparison to the German critics, the English critics didn't seem to be concerned by the plot of the drama.[242] There was however some mention of the misrepresentation of Cornish people by the likes of the music critic Filson Young in the *Saturday Review*.[243] Smyth also received some sexist reviews such as the one by Alfred Kalisch where he writes that the opera 'fails just in those qualities which one might expect to find in the work of a woman – restraint, subtlety, and charm'.[244] Kalish was also concerned that the combination of the wreckers and Christian tradition portrayed the wreckers as innocent particularly because of the wreckers' choruses as they sing what is according to Robinson the most enjoyable music of the opera. This may be the result of Kalisch failing to see the irony within Smyth's music. Kalisch was also left unsettled by the idea that Thirza had committed adultery and was also the hero of the opera as she effectively saved lives by hindering the wreckers in their quests to cause shipwrecks. Perhaps Kalisch failed to see how unhappily married Thirza was. In general, the opera was seen by many music critics as a tragedy because of its many moral failures; the wreckers are betrayed, Avis is disowned for lying, Thirza leaves Pascoe, and Mark and Thirza are sentenced to death.[245]

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[239] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 286.
[240] Ibid., p. 288.
[241] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 204.
[242] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 177.
[243] Filson Young: "The Wreckers", in: *Saturday Review* (26 June 1909), p. 811.
[244] Alfred Kalisch: "A Woman's Opera. 'The Wreckers' in London", in: *Manchester Guardian* (23rd June 1909), p. 7. (cited in Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 177).
[245] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 177-178.

The following year, it was also performed at Covent Garden[246] and on the 20th of February 1915, *The Wreckers* was to be performed in Munich and Smyth was very impressed with the stage design as the mechanist there invented a device which created the illusion of the sea being brought right up onto the stage. Smyth described this possible production as something that could have been the ideal performance for which she had to wait ten years.[247] However, this plan never came to life due to the Great War. Smyth describes this as the bitterest disappointment of her life.[248]

In 2006 *The Wreckers* was produced in Truro by a Cornish company. This performance started a debate about wrecking and if the Cornish had really taken part in wrecking in the way that Smyth portrays them. The public debate got so heated that the mezzo who played the role of Thirza had to reassure journalists that in the opera they are not saying that that is exactly what the Cornish were like or did. It is interesting to note that even with this performance of the opera one hundred years after it was composed, the moral message seemed to get lost as the music critics and audience focused so much on the wrecking that they missed the opera's moral message.[249]

The Wreckers is the only full-length opera, that Smyth composed, and it is seen as being her greatest achievement.[250] According to Kathleen Abromeit, *The Wreckers* is considered by many to be 'the most powerful English opera of its period'.[251] Despite this, it is only occasionally performed by student and semi-professional opera companies since its Sadler's Well production in 1939.[252] By the time this production had taken place, Smyth had already given up on the prospect of her opera being given a 'real performance' in her lifetime. But there it was, and unfortunately, Smyth's hearing had deteriorated so much that she was too deaf to hear it.[253]
In his autobiography, Thomas Beecham wrote:

> This fine piece has never had a convincing representation owing to the apparent impossibility of finding an Anglo-Saxon soprano who can interpret revealingly that splendid and original figure, the tragic heroine Thirza. Neither in this part nor that of Mark, the tenor, have I heard or seen more than a tithe of the intensity and spiritual exaltation without which these two characters must fail to make their mark.[254]

[246] Newman: "Introduction", p. xii.
[247] Smyth: *Impressions that Remained*, p. 383.
[248] Ibid., p. 436.
[249] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 178.
[250] Abromeit: "Ethel Smyth, 'The Wreckers,' and Sir Thomas Beecham", p. 200.
[251] Ibid., p. 204.
[252] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, p. 12.
[253] Ibid., p. 289.
[254] Ibid., p. 12.

In general, British music critics focused almost solely on the German aspects of *The Wreckers.* They were aware that most of Smyth's music education had taken place in Germany, and this shaped the critics' opinions. Also, the main thing that they knew about Smyth was her previous opera, *Der Wald.* This resulted in her music often being referred to as too Germanic. On the other hand, Smyth was complimented on her orchestral and choral writing due to her having learned these skills in Germany. Her expansive use of representative themes meant she was described as Wagnerian, but at this time it was common for English music critics to call anything associated with Germany Wagnerian.[255]

3.3.3. Plot

On the third page of the English libretto of *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs,* there is a note on the opera which explains that the libretto is a partly factual Cornish story set in the mid-eighteenth century in a village isolated from civilisation. In this community shipwrecking was believed to be a morally sound practice and the ships which crashed onto the shores were sent from God. In this edition of the libretto, there is also a short musical analysis which describes the musical themes. The music of the opera is largely based on seven or eight themes, some of which portray the moods and characteristics of these Celtic people such as romance, religiosity, and cruelty. Other themes depict nature, with some representing individual characters.[256]

The three main characters are Pascoe who is headman of the village and the local preacher, his wife Thirza, and Mark a young fisherman. Other important characters include the lighthouse keeper Lawrence, his brother-in-law Harvey and daughter Avis, the keeper of the tavern Tallan and his son Jack. There are also Fishermen, miners, shepherds, and their womenfolk, all of whom are Wreckers.[257]

The plot is built around an impoverished coastal community with two of its members (Mark and Thirza) trying to escape the village and its morally questionable values. The young fisherman, Mark is in love with Thirza who has lost interest in her older husband, Pascoe. Pascoe, the local preacher supports the idea of turning off the lighthouses during stormy weather to ensure that ships will crash into the rocks along the coast, providing the villagers with ships to

[255] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 494.
[256] Henry Bennet Brewster / Alma Strettell / Ethel Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs,* London: 1909, pp. 2-3.
[257] Ibid., p. 8.

plunder and secure their livelihood.[258] Pascoe justifies this behaviour as he says that these ships are gifts for them from God.[259]

In Act I, there is a lack of ships to be plundered by the wreckers and Pascoe blames this on the sinful behaviour of the villagers. Pascoe is the spiritual leader of the village which makes him the authoritarian and paternal figure. It is under Pascoe's command that the villagers quench or fail to light the lighthouse's flame in the hope that God will supply them with an oncoming ship for them to plunder. This horrifies Thirza which results in her refusing to take part in their prayers. This causes problems in her marriage with Pascoe which was already under strain due to the large age difference of thirty-three years. Avis on the other hand becomes aware of the fact that someone is lighting fires on the cliffs to warn the incoming ships of the dangerous rocks below. Avis is in love with Mark and when she becomes aware of his involvement with Thirza she informs Pascoe. Lawrence, the lighthouse keeper also notices the lit-up lighthouse which results in the wreckers setting out to find the traitor.

Act II is set on the cliffs. Here we learn that it was Mark and Thirza who were setting the warning beacons alight. Mark is about to light a warning beacon when Thirza urges him not to as the cliffs are being watched. Mark realises that it is not safe for him to stay in the village any longer and Thirza agrees to leave her marriage and home to run away with him. Thirza then lights the beacon herself, they sing an emotional love duet and run away together when they hear the wrecker's horns. This crime which Mark and Thirza have committed is considered worse than adultery as they are betraying their fellow villagers by sabotaging their livelihood. At this moment, Pascoe appears on the cliff and sees that it is Thirza who has committed this crime as her face is lit up by the moon. Pascoe then faints in shock beside the fire. When the villagers find him, they presume that he is the one who has been lighting the warning beacons. They then carry him away to be put on trial.

In Act III, Pascoe is unwilling to betray his wife. This results in Avis trying to convince the villagers that Thirza bewitched her husband. Mark and Thirza confess their crimes knowing that they will receive the death sentence. Pascoe tries to save Thirza by offering her redemption if she repents and Avis tries to save Mark by giving him the alibi that he spent the night with

[258] Stephen Banfield: "The Wreckers [Les naufrageurs; Strandrecht]" in: *Grove Music Online* (2002), <https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O002276>.
[259] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 492.

her. Both attempts were unsuccessful, and Mark and Thirza are sentenced to death as they are left to drown in the cave as the tide rises. They die branded as traitors with Thirza also being an adulterer. At this moment they profess their love for each other, and they are united in death.

3.3.4. Analysis

For much of this analysis, the English libretto is used which was published in 1909. For this publication, Smyth asked the poet and experienced translator Alma Strettell to translate twelve passages from the original French libretto. These consist of Act I, scenes 5, 6, 7, and 11, Act II, scenes 2 and 3 including the song 'Blaze, fire of love', and in Act III there are five sections including songs by Avis, Mark, and Thirza, and the last twenty-six lines. Strettell's translations remain mostly true to Brewster's original libretto. Smyth also made her own changes as she added and deleted some stage directions, made some minor cuts and added titles to some songs. Even though the topic of censorship was very present at the time, there is little to suggest that Smyth censored any part of the libretto or plot in this publication. However, there is one thing that suggests that Smyth may have actually taken the censorship into consideration and that is the fact that she excluded a passage in the final act which was written by Brewster where Lawrence accuses Avis of behaving like a prostitute. Despite this, Smyth did not reduce the radicalism of *The Wreckers* even though she had the opportunity to do so. Smyth could have used this opportunity to soften the language or make it less obvious with whom her sympathies lay through her music.[260]

3.3.4.1. Pascoe and Religious Symbolism

Pascoe seems to play the role of Moses as he berates the men for consuming alcohol on a Sunday and Avis for wearing jewellery. The most severe instance of Pascoe implementing religious law is when he sentences Thirza and Mark to death which aligns with the Old Testament's stance on adultery which states that 'if a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die … so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.'[261] This would imply that Thirza and Mark were executed as adulterers more so than traitors.[262]

As well as portraying Pascoe as a highly religious character, Smyth also portrays him as being stubborn and almost blinded by his own beliefs and legalistic theology. Neither Thirza's

[260] Ibid., pp. 176- 179.
[261] Deuteronomy 22:22, King James Version
[262] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 157.

arguments nor the fact that the wrecking is contributing to his failing marriage can convince him to change his opinions. An example of this can be seen in the four-bar ostinato with a prolonged pedal on F which Smyth assigns Pascoe as he preaches to Thirza about the benefits of wrecking.[263]

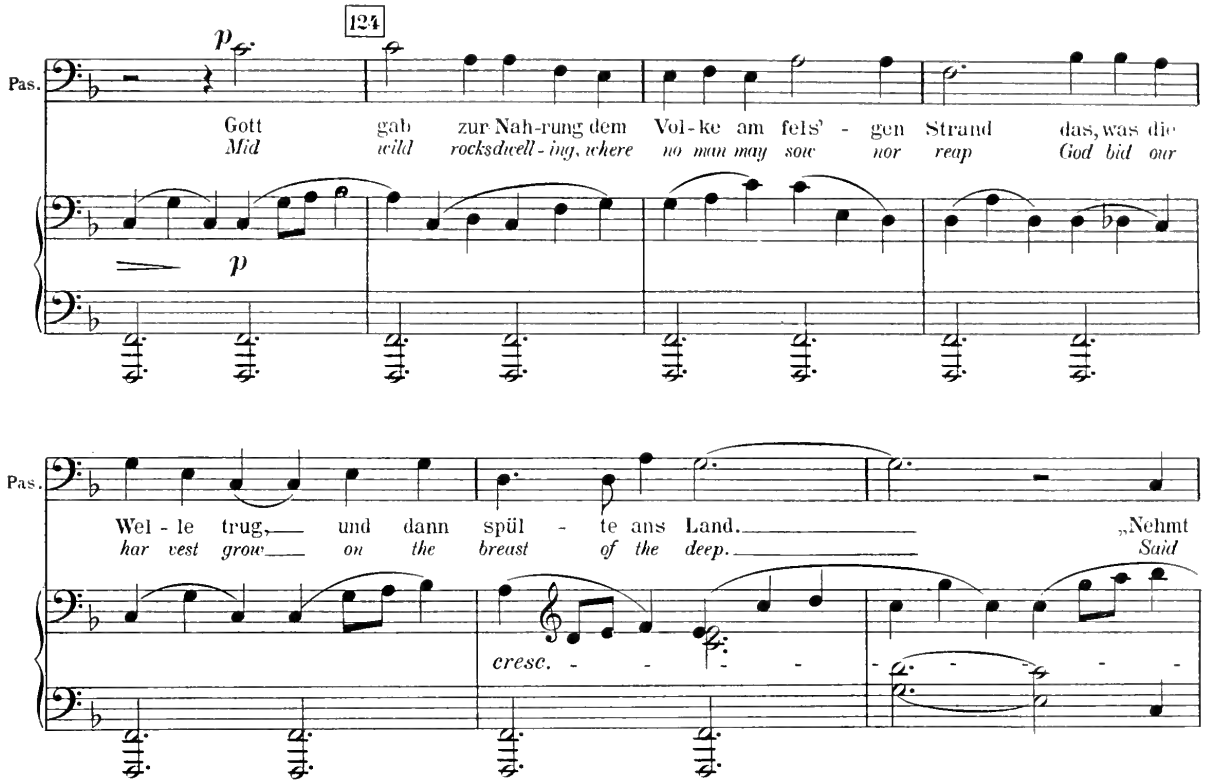

Figure 1: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 9 - Pascoe's Theme.[264]

In Smyth's 'Musical Analysis' to the English libretto she writes that this theme is 'a theme indicative of iron tenacity of purpose.'[265] Through Pascoe's irrational and severe behaviour Smyth criticises the hypocrisy of staunch Christianity.

3.3.4.2. British Imperialism

In *The Wreckers,* Smyth touches on the topic of British imperialism which is interesting as the Smyth family profited greatly from British imperialism as mentioned in more detail above. In 1707, the United Kingdom of Great Britain was founded upon a shared Protestantism with a doctrine consisting of missionary impulse and the sanctity of hard work. This led to imperialism thriving on Christian missions in the nineteenth century with racial elitism having been given a

[263] Ibid., p. 170.
[264] Ethel Smyth: *The Wreckers,* Piano-vocal score, Vienna / Leipzig: Universal-Edition 1916, Plate U.E. 5516, p. 85.
[265] Brewster / Strettell / Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs*, p. 5.

theoretical bases by Social Darwinism and the theory of the survival of the fittest. This would explain why in Act I, scene 9 Pascoe sings[266] 'well way our Cornish land breed a hard race and brave! / Strong in the spotless fame of the women that bore us, / As were of old our sires before us.'[267] It is also interesting to note that Lawrence says in reference to the ships which the villagers would like to wreck: 'the foreign ships homeward bound are passing.'[268] Both of these examples suggest that the villagers believed that they as Britons were superiors and rulers of the sea.[269]

At the time when this opera was composed, British imperialism was at its peak as there were many important events surrounding the royal family such as Queen Victoria's funeral and Edward VII's coronation. During this time Britons were also famous for being rulers of the seas. It is interesting to note that in Act I, scene 1 Smyth parodied coronation hymns[270] to the words 'God's Chosen People shall not pay the price of sin!'[271] Smyth called this the 'Revival Theme' and in her notes to the English libretto, she described the theme as:

> A broad, exultant tune, such as might conceivably spring into life at a period of extreme religious fervour, and in which the composer has used intervals similar to all who know our folk-music.[272]

[266] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 157.
[267] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, pp. 86-87.
[268] Ibid., p. 98.
[269] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 158.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 11.
[272] Brewster / Strettell / Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs*, p. 4.

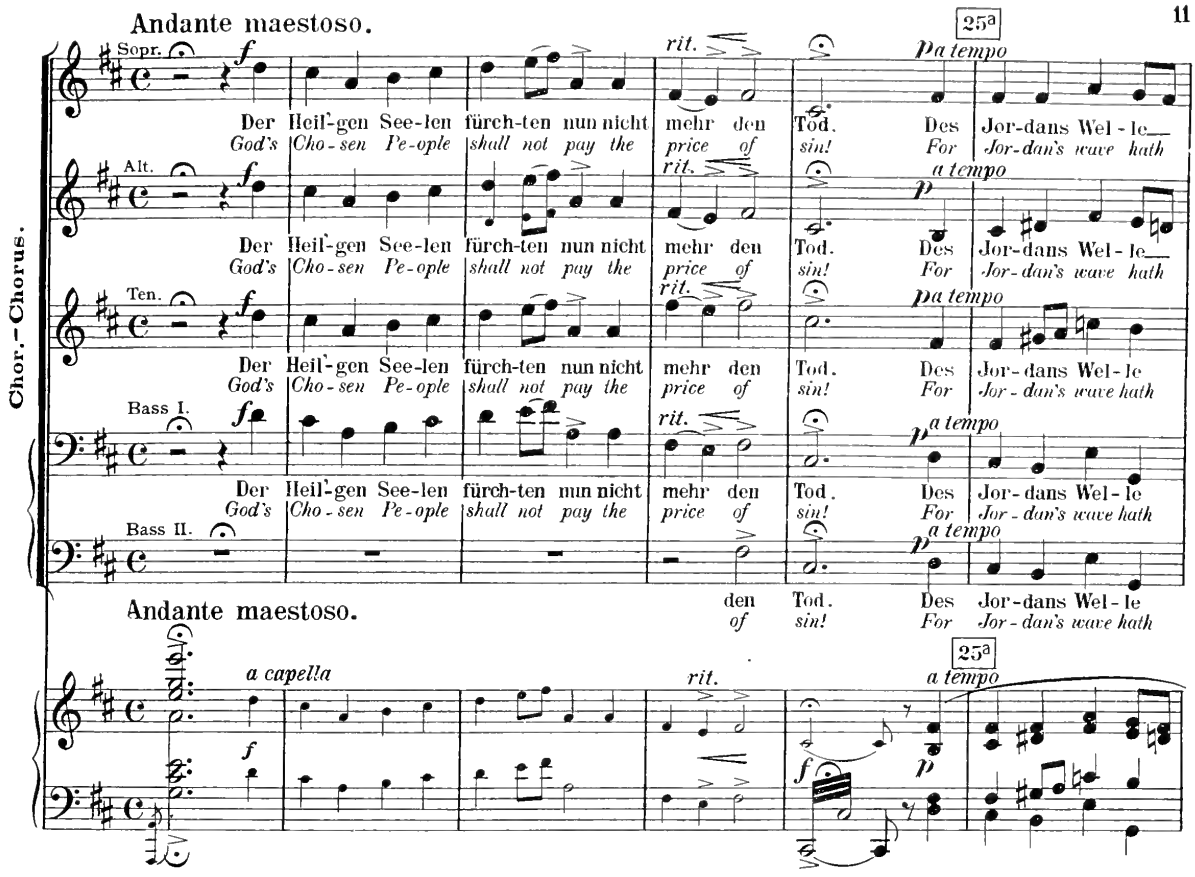

Figure 2: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 1 - 'Revival Theme'[273]

This hymn in D major gives a jubilant feeling with its trumpet and drum accompaniment leading to a hallelujah chorus with all voices singing in unison. This is the first moment where the wreckers appear, and the audience gets the feeling from this theme that the wreckers uphold justice and moral virtue and that they are the earthly representatives of 'the King of might.'[274]

3.3.4.3. 'The Wreckers' Theme' and the 'Horn Signal'

Smyth listed fifteen themes in the 'musical analysis' section of the English libretto of *The Wreckers.* Her use of these themes shows us the irony of her music as she manipulates motifs associated with the wreckers. Particularly the way she uses 'The Wreckers' Theme' which is heard at the beginning of the overture. A lively festive mood is created by the first four notes which are based on a D minor triad and followed by a dotted rhythm sequence. This theme is then used to provide the melody in 'Haste to the shore', where the chorus celebrates the wreck-ages.[275]

[273] Smyth: *The Wreckers,* p. 11.
[274] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 158.
[275] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

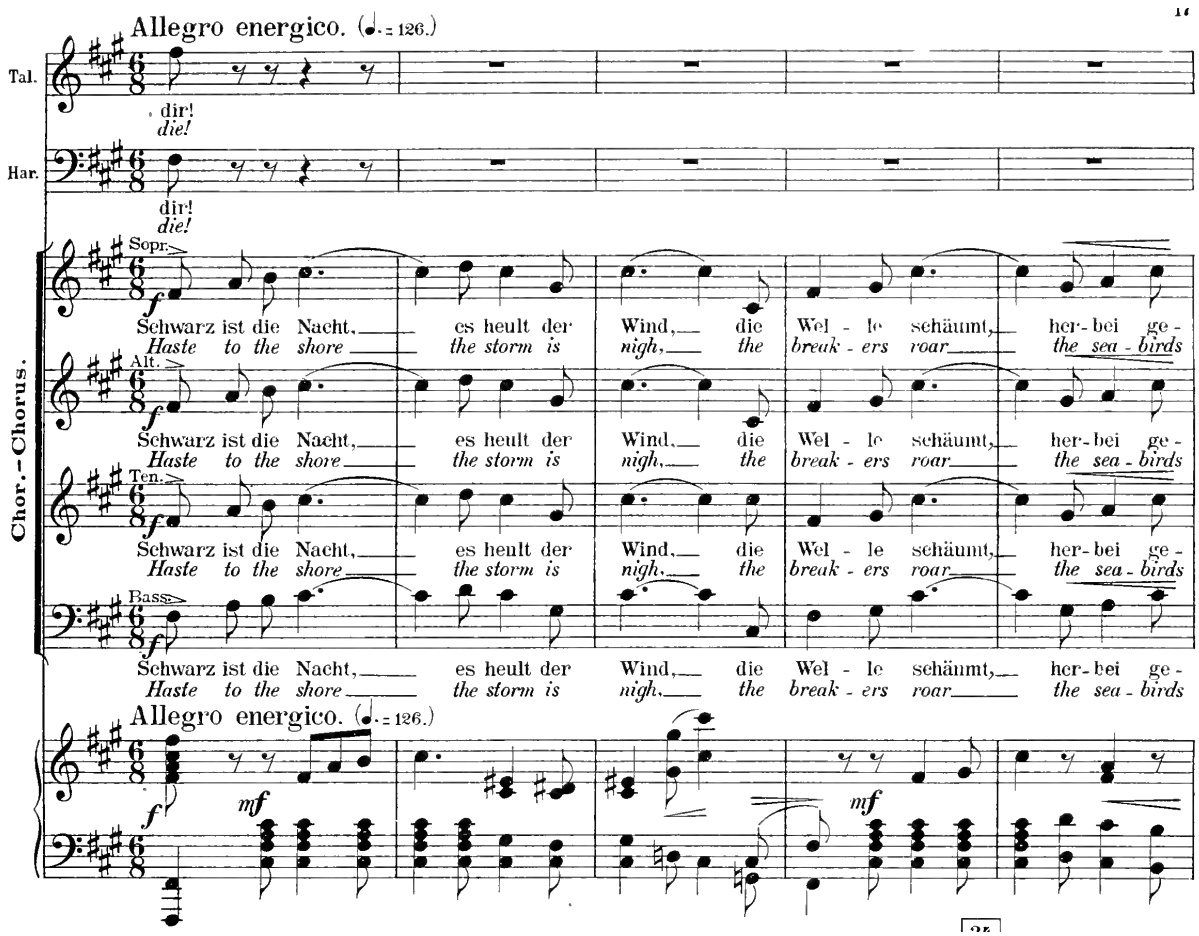

Figure 3: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 1 - 'The Wreckers' Theme'.[276]

Smyth uses this motif again when the wreckers leave the chapel in Act I, scene 10. Here the motif is in major, and the wreckers sing in canon at the fifth. This could be interpreted as Smyth giving the wreckers momentary grace in comparison to what the theme represents in Act I, scene 1.[277]

[276] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 17.
[277] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 159.

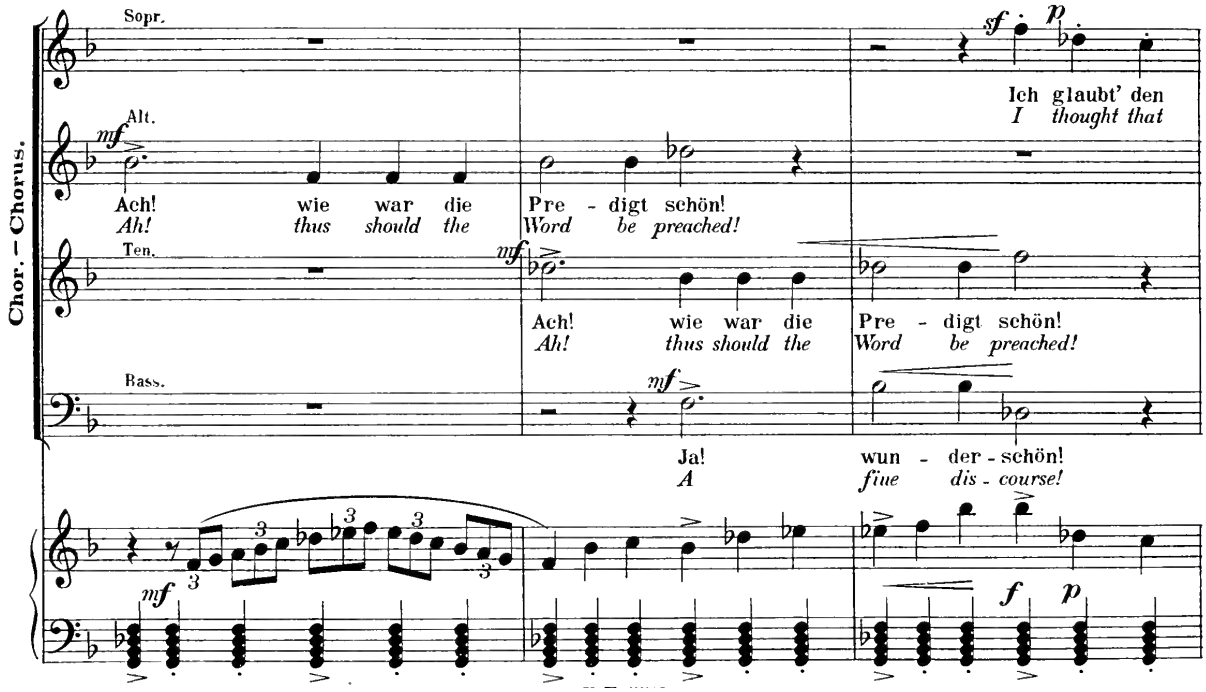

Figure 4: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 10 - A variation of 'The Wreckers' Theme' in canon.[278]

There are many variations of the Wrecker's Theme in Act II, scene 3. For example, when Thirza tells Mark not to light the fire tonight. Here the contrast in dynamics adds another layer of drama to the theme.[279]

[278] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 89.
[279] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 160.

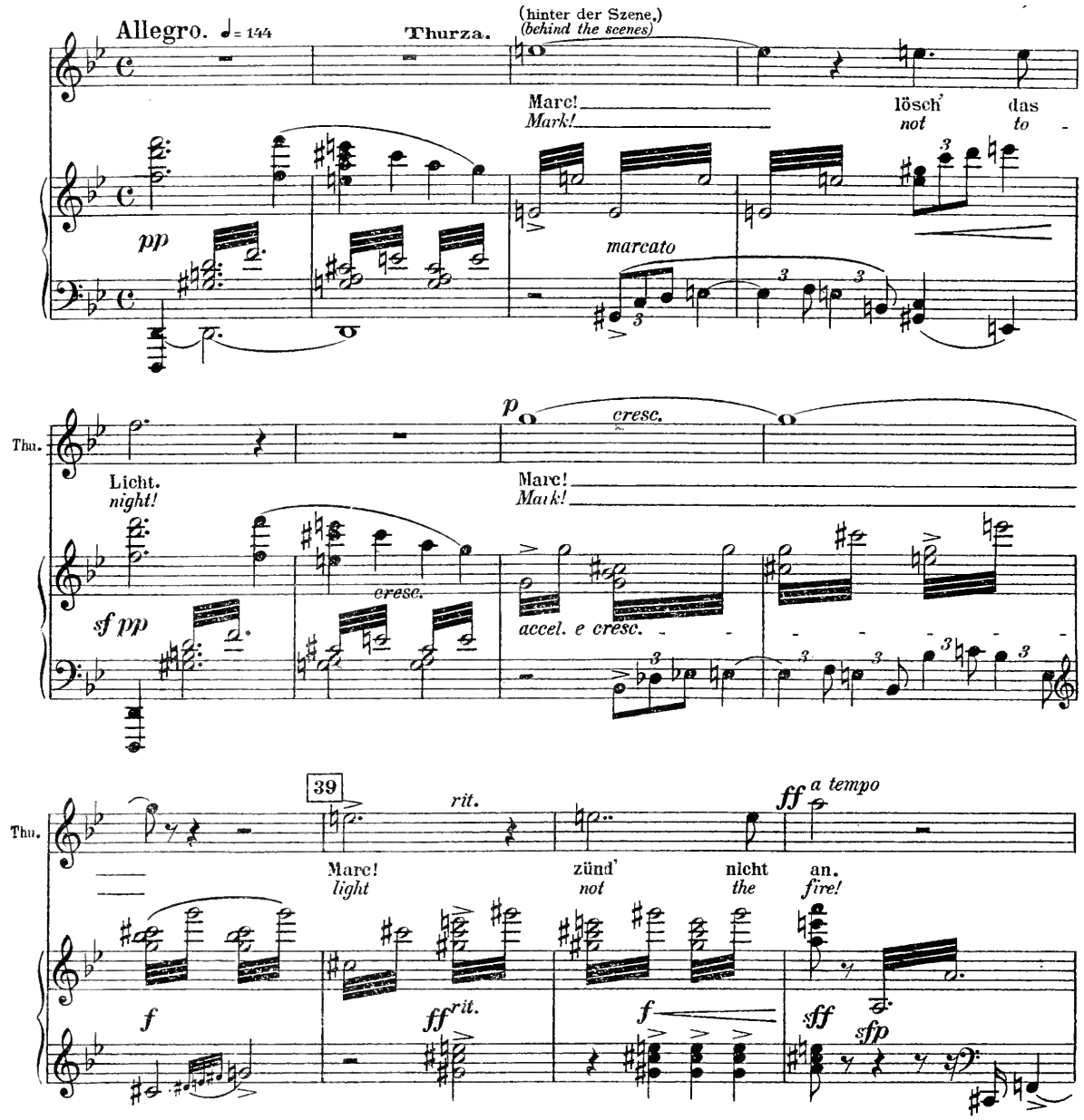

Figure 4: *The Wreckers:* Act II, scene 3 - Thirza sings a variation of the 'Wreckers' Theme'.[280]

Another alteration of the 'Wreckers' Theme' in the same act is heard when Mark brands the wreckers as 'Hounds of hell'.[281]

[280] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 158.
[281] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 160.

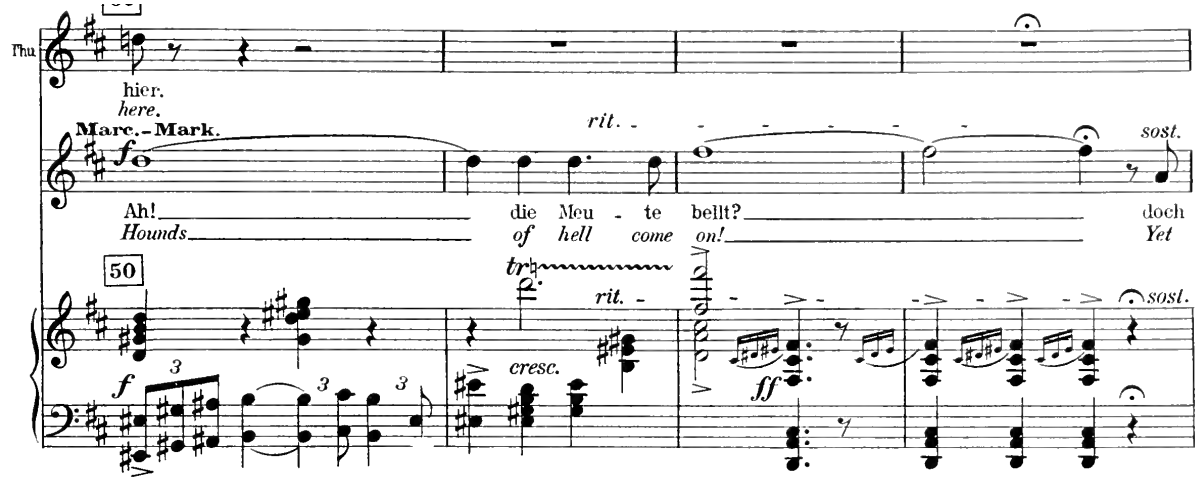

Figure 5: *The Wreckers:* Act II, scene 3 - Another variation of the 'Wreckers' Theme' sung by Mark.[282]

Soon after when Thirza lights the torch herself, there is yet another variation of the theme:[283]

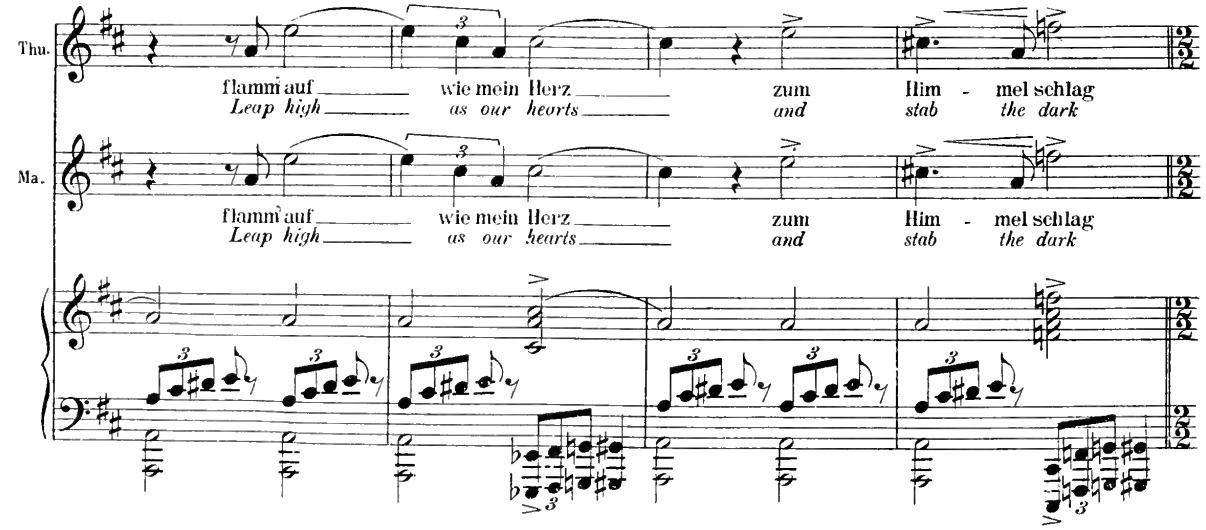

Figure 6: *The Wreckers:* Act II, scene 3 - 'The Wreckers' Theme' as Thirza lights the beacon.[284]

When Pascoe condemns Thirza to death 'The Wrecker' Theme' is also used giving it significant meaning:[285]

[282] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 167.
[283] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 160.
[284] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 186.
[285] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 160.

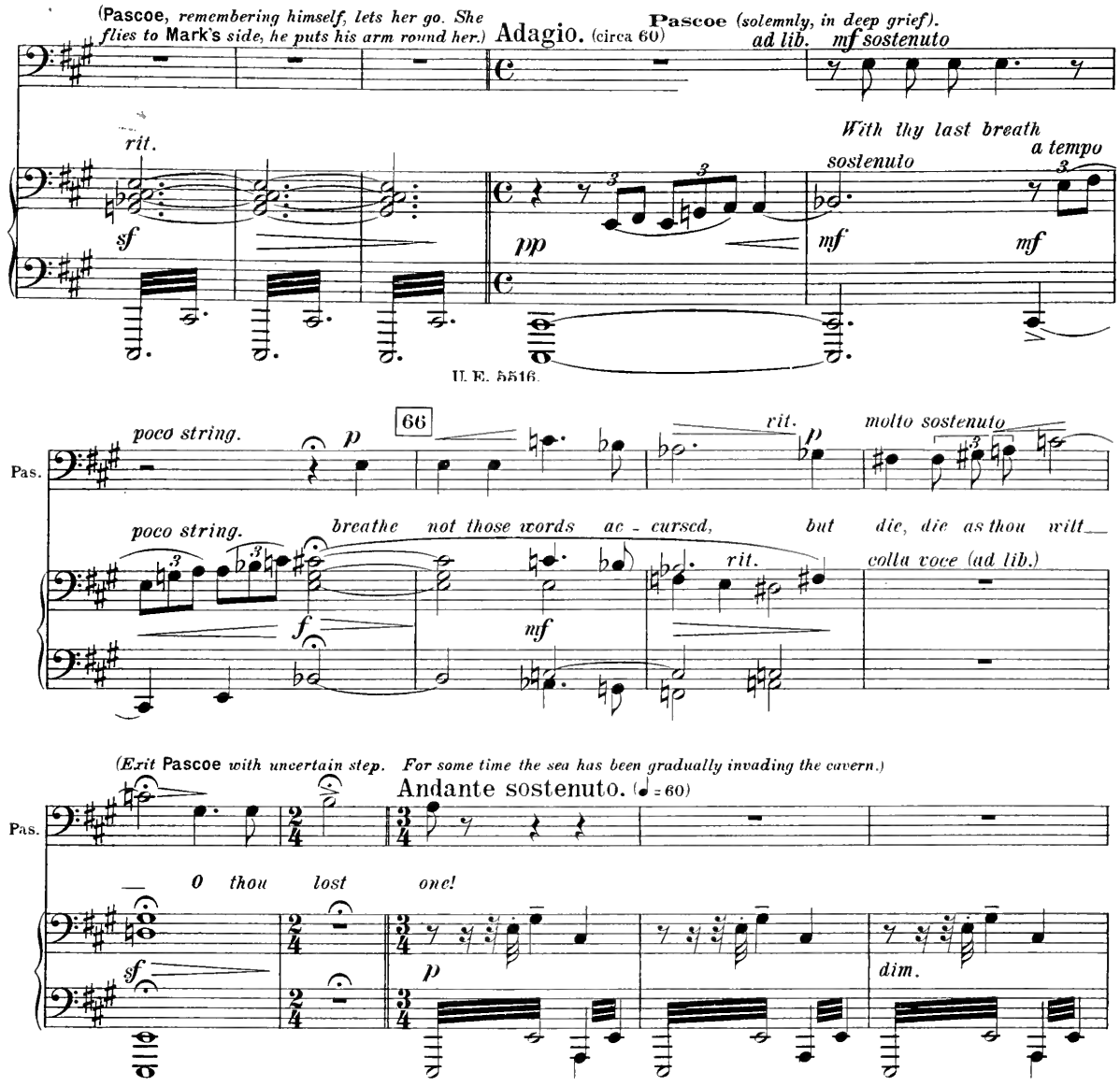

Figure 7: *The Wreckers:* Act III, Scene 2 - 'The Wreckers' Theme' as Pascoe condemns Thirza to death.[286]

All in all, 'The Wreckers' Theme' is used in a way that shows that Pascoe's self-centred interpretation of biblical scriptures was the cause of everything from the wreckings to Thirza and Mark being sentenced to death.[287]

Another motif which is associated with the wreckers is the 'Horn Signal.' In Smyth's notes to the English libretto, she describes the theme as:

> a weird call in use among the Wreckers (see 2nd Section of the Overture where it is flowed by a scream of wood-wind and harps suggestive of the whistling of wind and frightened sea-birds).[288]

[286] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, pp. 266-267.
[287] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 160.
[288] Brewster / Strettell / Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs*, p. 3.

The first time that this theme is heard is in the overture. The theme builds momentum with its drawn-out *fortissimo* and rising augmented fourth suddenly halting to draw attention. This interval hints at chaos and malice and is used to symbolize the Wreckers' determination to find who lit the warning fires on the shore.[289]

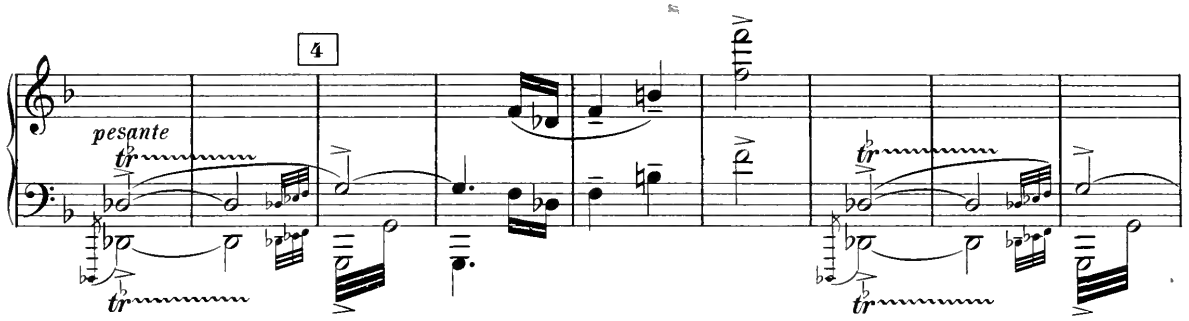

Figure 9: *The Wreckers:* Act I, Overture - 'Horn Signal.'[290]

3.3.4.4. Bach Chorale

Another way in which Smyth manages to criticize the religiousness of the wreckers is when she uses a sixteenth-century German chorale for the hymn that the wreckers sing in the church. The melody is taken from the song 'Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag' composed in 1560 by the composer Nikolaus Herman. This hymn was originally intended to be sung on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The English translation of the original text is:[291]

> The day hath downed – the day of days
> Transcending all our joy and praise:
> This day our Lord triumphant rose;
> This day He captive led our foes.[292]

When the wreckers sing their version of the hymn, they keep the theme of God's triumph but leave out the theme of Christ's death and resurrection. This gives their hymn an Old Testament-like feeling as it focuses on beating enemies:[293]

> Up Lord our God! Avenge thy name
> And whet thy sword our foes to smite!
> Their hosts o'erwhelm, their bones consume!
> Let all the earth proclaim thy might![294]

In the 'Musical Analysis' section of the English libretto, Smyth describes the Bach Chorale as:

[289] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 159-160.
[290] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 4.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, pp. 82-83.

An old Church melody that occurs only in this Act as accompaniment to Thirza's frenzied vision of the scenes on the beach, and as a *'basso ostinato'* sung by the old man to the wild Death Dance with which Act I ends.[295]

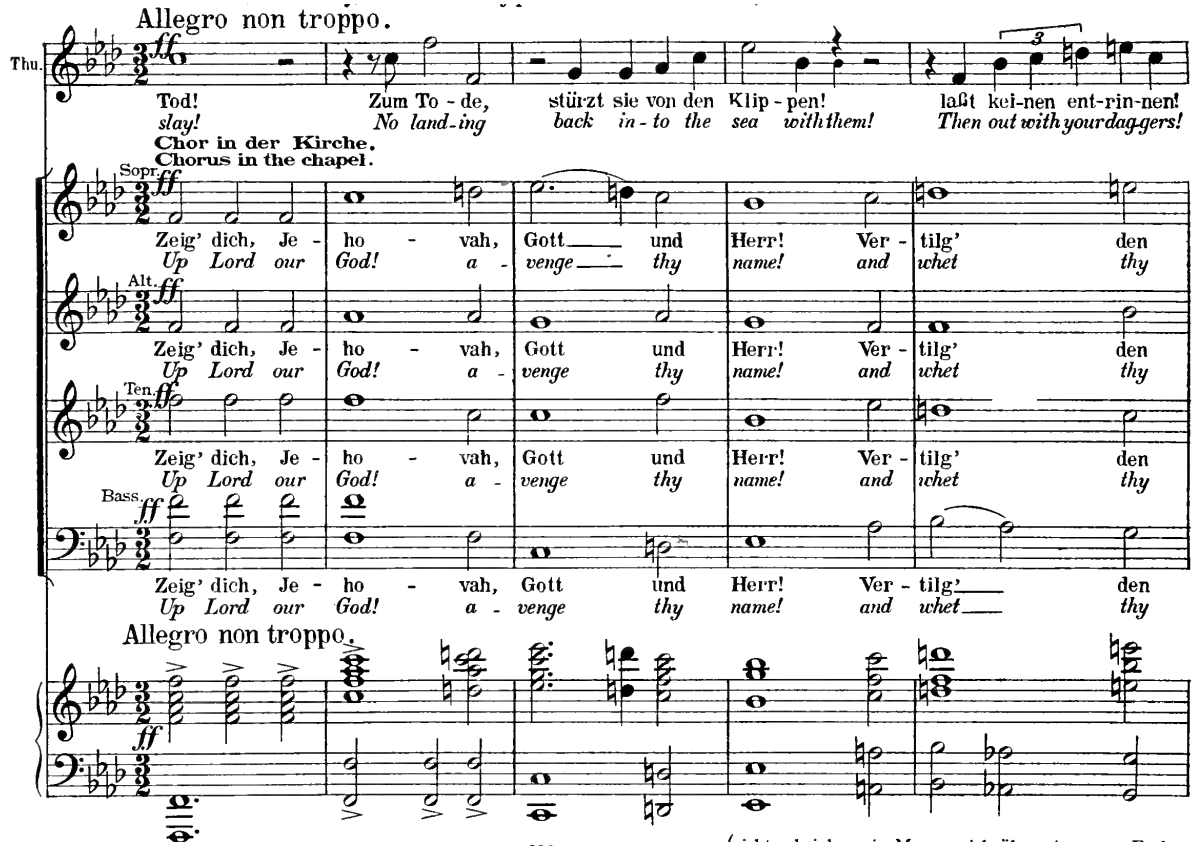

Figure 10: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 9 - Bach Chorale.[296]

3.3.4.5. Wild Death Dance

Another time when Smyth makes the contradictory religiousness of the wreckers clear is during the 'Wild Death Dance' during Act I, scene 11 as the wreckers sing 'Blood and sea water mingle gladly / snow white and red the foam will glance.'[297] Here they gather wrecking equipment such as ropes, hooks, and axes. During this section, Smyth very cleverly uses Herman's choral melody for the cantus firmus which gives the feeling that there are religious motives behind their actions.[298]

[295] Brewster / Strettell / Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs*, p. 4.
[296] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, pp. 82.
[297] Ibid., pp. 117-118.
[298] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 160-161.

3.3.4.6. Englishness in *The Wreckers*

Stephen Banfield stated that the music of this opera is virile with many aspects of German Romanticism from operas such as *Der fliegende Holländer* and composers like Wolf and Mahler. There are also some unpredictable whole-tone French elements from the likes of Bizet.[299] According to Elizabeth Kertesz, there are also some Italian elements that can be seen in its detailed depiction of a village community.[300] This makes the exact style of the opera difficult to categorise.

Despite this, there are many English elements which outweigh these multinational elements. For example, to add to the Englishness of this opera, Smyth borrowed some Cornish material. We can see this in Mark's theme as he sings a lilting Cornish melody.[301] Smyth herself calls this a Cornish melody however, there is no reference to where exactly it comes from.

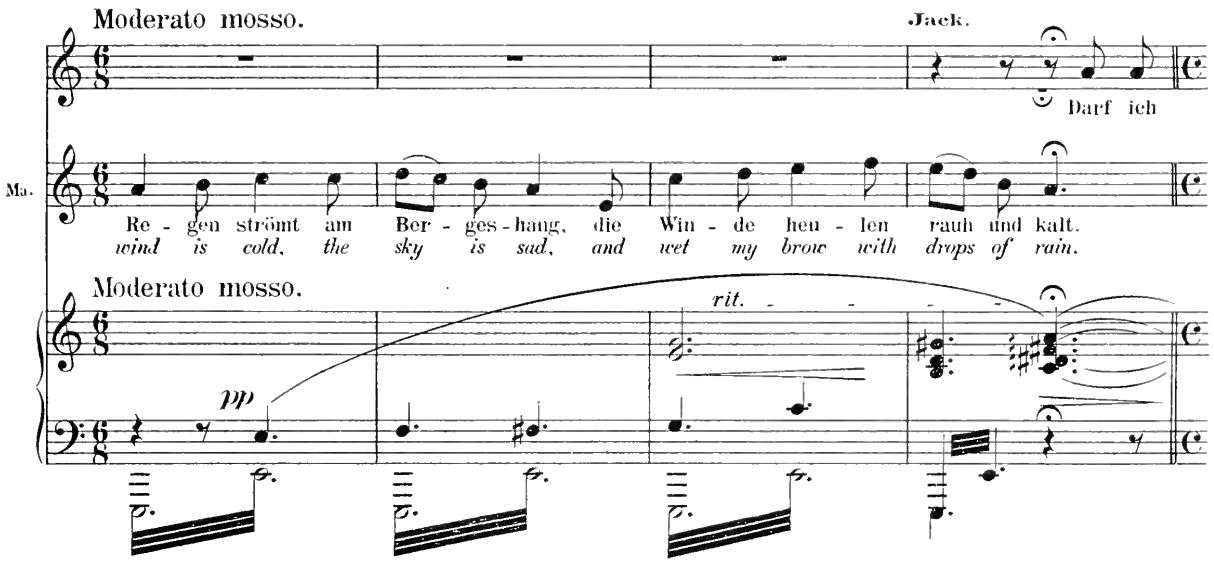

Figure 11: *The Wreckers:* Act I, scene 5 - Lilting Cornish Melody sung by Mark.[302]

Smyth's portrayal of the sea is another example of Englishness in *The Wreckers.* The sea is in the background of every scene, and it plays a particularly large role at the end of the opera as it is the sea which eventually kills Mark and Thirza. The English have traditionally a great love of the sea and Smyth herself had a fascination with it. Also the overture to the second Act, *On*

[299] Banfield: "The Wreckers [Les naufrageurs; Strandrecht]".
[300] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 494.
[301] Ibid., p. 492.
[302] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 51.

the Cliffs of Cornwall, has had much success as an independent orchestral work while almost painting an impressionist sea picture.[303]

Smyth had many French influences in her life such as her French-educated mother, Empress Eugénie, and Harry Brewster. Contemporary critics associated *The Wreckers* with Bizet which is interesting as Smyth's favourite opera was *Carmen.* Kertesz explains that there are also some similarities between Thirza, Avis and Carmen. For example, Thirza dies because of her self-determination, her refusal to remain silent, and her love for Mark while Avis and Carmen both show disrespect towards authority. Many critics saw these similarities and questioned Smyth's creativity and originality as opposed to being concerned by women resisting authority. Heinrich Zöllner, a German music critic and composer described Avis as a 'close relative of Carmen:'[304]

> Überhaupt hat die Partie der Avis […], eine nähere Verwandte der 'Carmen,' vielleicht die glücklichsten Momente; so ist ihre Verzweiflung in der Ariette 'Ha, ha! Die Ratt' ist da' mit wenigen Strichen, mit knapper Orchesterbegleitung wirkungsvoll gemalt.[305]

Smyth also used techniques from French opera and melodrama in *The Wreckers* such as passages with intoned dialogue and recitative on one tone. We can see an example of recitative on one tone in Act I, scene 9. Passages like these were used to heighten the tension:[306]

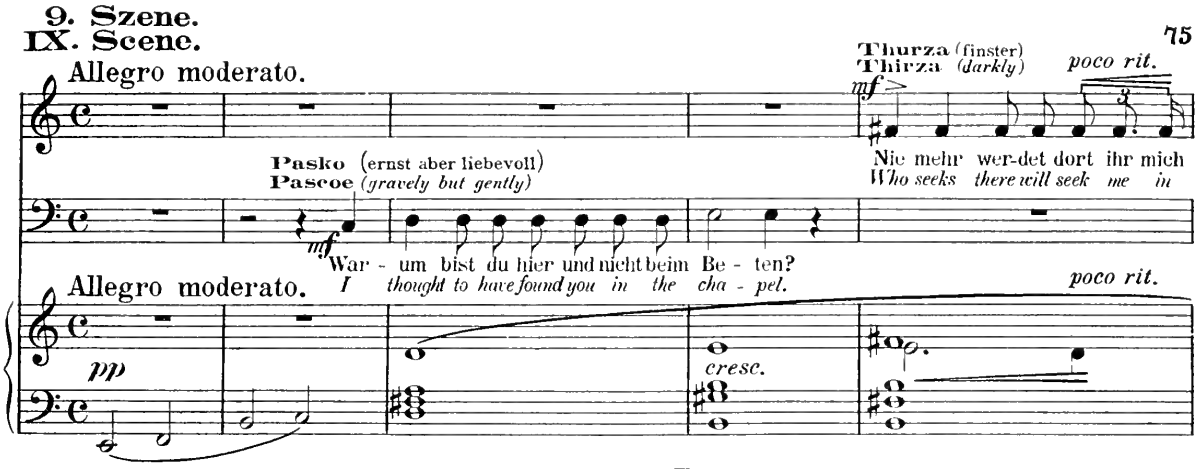

Figure 12: *The Wreckers:* Act I, Scene 9 - recitative on one tone.[307]

German music critics found Smyth's use of colouristic and evocative writing for her portrayal of the sea and storm to be linked to French orchestral styles. She also used French harmonic

[303] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 493.
[304] Ibid., pp. 494-495.
[305] Heinrich Zöllner: "Theater und Musik", in *Leipziger Tageblatt,* 12 November 1906, p. 3.
[306] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 495.
[307] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 75.

devices which led Walter Nieman to go so far as to call the opera impressionist. It is interesting to note that German critics mentioned the French and Italian aspects of the opera more so than English critics who focused on the German aspects.[308]

3.3.4.7. Critique on Society

As well as featuring Cornish history, *The Wreckers* also brings many societal topics to the forefront such as morality, religion, women's social status, and sexual double standards.[309] As Suzanne Robinson sums up in her article *Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' radicalism in 'The Wreckers'*:

> Taking into account Smyth's jaundiced use of Cornish history, the contribution of Brewster's professed individual anarchism and sexual libertarianism, and Smyth's willingness to parody and manipulate musical conventions in order to reinforce radical ideals, it views the work both as a reflection of its authors' engagement with modernism and as a herald of Smyth's subsequent contribution to militant feminism.[310]

In this way, *The Wreckers* could be seen as a parable of modern society where social norms and Smyth and Brewster's radical ideas are pitted against one another. *The Wreckers* being so unconventional may reflect the unconventionality of Smyth and Brewster's relationship as well as reflecting their characters as they both lived at the margins of society's norms. Smyth used her belief in artistic freedom of expression to criticise society's moral and Christian values. However, her efforts in presenting it to that very society may have been partly responsible for the negative reception of the opera and the difficulties that Smyth faced in securing productions.[311] The moral aspects of this opera question the legality of wrecking and what is justifiable on the grounds of the greater good. There are also some moral questions surrounding the resistance of immorality and what it is worth losing to fight it such as order, romantic relationships, or even life itself.[312]

3.3.4.8. Thirza as Hero

Thirza's determination to die with Mark even though she could have remained silent and saved herself says a lot about her strength and her deep love for him.[313] Also the fact that Thirza abandoned a loveless marriage for a relationship based on compassionate love and sexual

[308] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 495.
[309] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 150.
[310] Ibid., p. 149.
[311] Ibid., p. 150.
[312] Ibid., p. 149.
[313] Kertesz: "Ethel Smyth's 'The Wreckers'", p. 494.

attraction is extremely radical for this time. Around the turn of the twentieth century, marriage was often considered a means of financial dependency for women even though there were feminists such as Olive Schreiner who avoided and questioned the shackles of marriage around this time.[314] Although there was some mention of female adultery in German novels such as *Effi Briest* (1895), such plots were unheard of in English literature, yet Smyth introduced it into English opera. Thirza and Mark are seen as traitors as well as adulterers which implies that they have not just betrayed their village, but also the 'moral' foundation on which their community is built. Thirza is described as the 'shameless one false and faithless!'[315] It is interesting that Brewster wrote such a libretto since he, himself was also an adulterer. [316]

In comparison to Pascoe's relatively plain theme, Smyth gives Thirza a more lyrical melody in her duet with Mark, 'Blaze, fire of love.' We can see that it represents passion and fire with its rhythmical freedom, metrical irregularity, flexible tempo, and chromaticism. It is also interesting to note that musically this is the most modern section of the opera.[317]

[314] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 167-168.
[315] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 246.
[316] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 167-170.
[317] Ibid., p. 170.

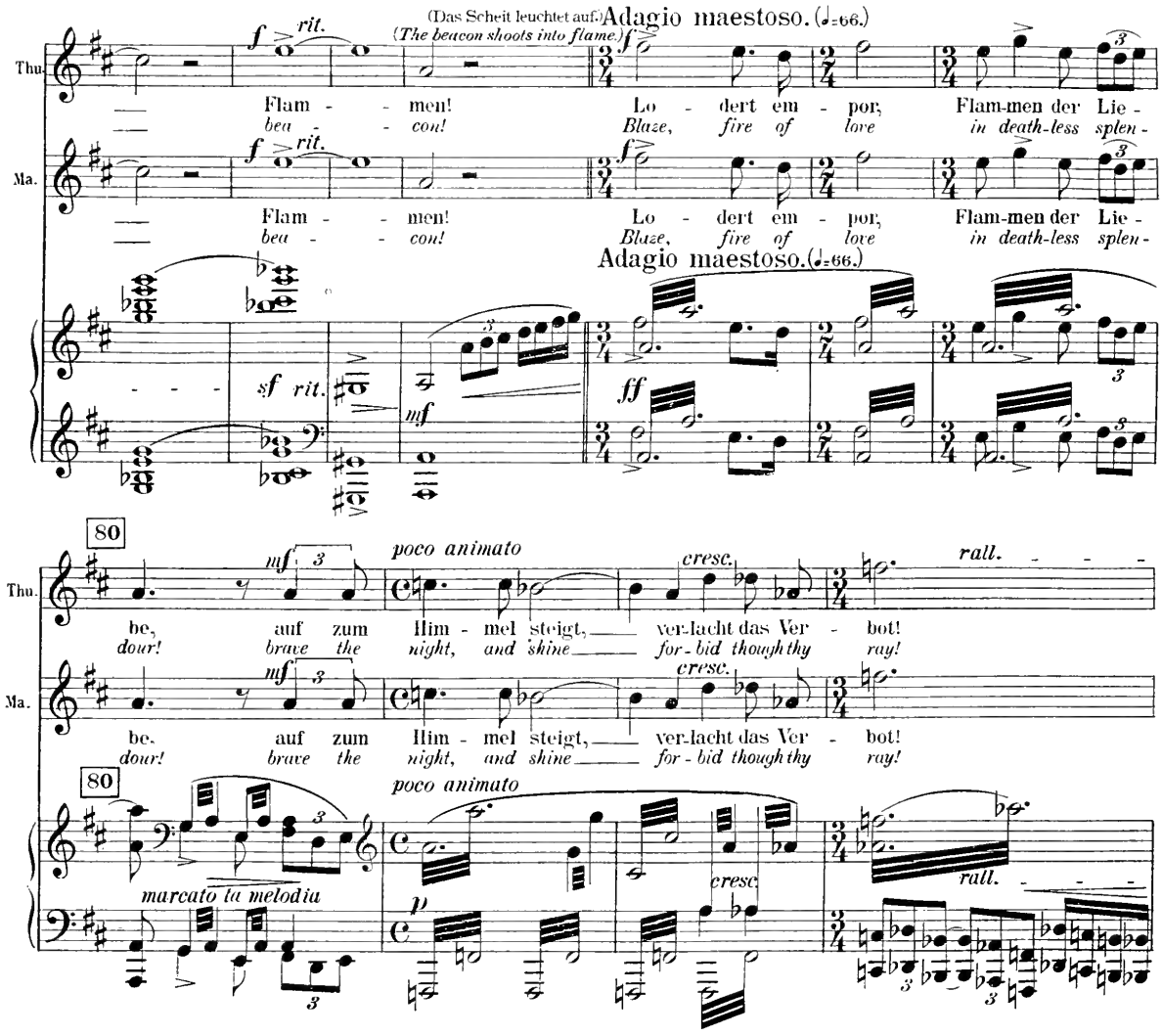

Figure 13: *The Wreckers:* Act II, scene 9 - Thirza and Mark's duet.[318]

Throughout Thirza's trial, she is wilful and shows no signs of regret which means that she is not portrayed as being typically feminine. Thirza admits to being complicit in lighting the beacon and says that she will only repent when the stream starts flowing uphill.[319] It is interesting to note that Smyth also showed no signs of regret when she was arrested for her militant activity in the suffragette movement.

During this time, women who were convicted of adultery often had their sanity questioned as it was assumed that only women with a mental imbalance could be capable of such a crime, however, Thirza's sanity was never in question. It is in fact, Avis's sanity which is questionable

[318] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 187.
[319] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 171-173.

as she imagines that Thirza is a rat and wishes for her to be killed. Avis is also portrayed as hysterical and emotional when she suffers heart palpitations which are reflected in the music:[320]

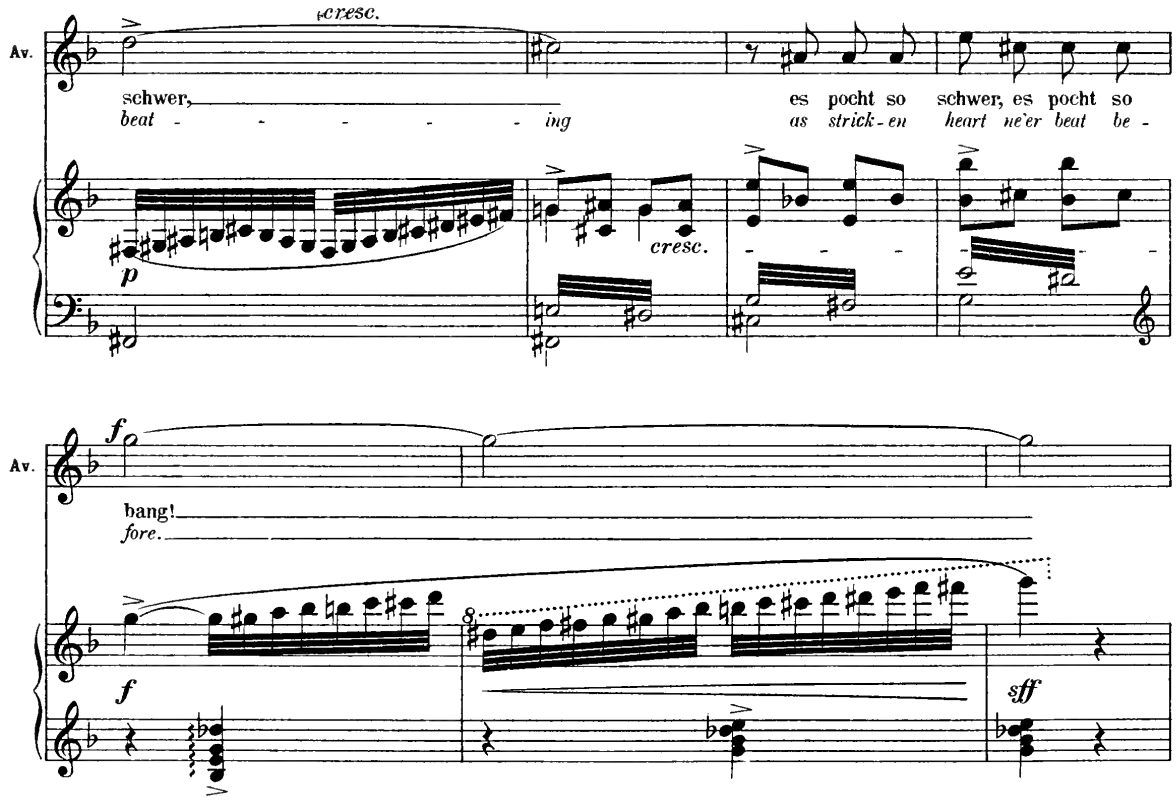

Figure 14: The Wreckers: Act I, scene 6 - Avis suffers palpitations echoed in the music's accents.[321]

All things considered; the end of the opera is not actually as dark and sad as one might expect. As Mark sings his last song, he accepts his fate as he sings 'But the cup must be drained, be it better or sweet.'[322] The cup is another reference to the Bible as the book of Matthew states: 'He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done'.[323] The book of Mathew also states: 'They give him vinegar to drink, mixed with gall'.[324] This is why Mark calls it the 'bitter cup'.[325]

With this religious symbolism, their death can be seen as a sacrifice to a greater cause and not just as a punishment. Through Smyth's music, the audience experiences a feeling of triumph as 'the iron gate clangs to'[326] Thirza sings 'Victory!'

[320] Ibid., pp. 172-173.
[321] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 63.
[322] Brewster / Strettell / Smyth: *The Wreckers = Les Naufrageurs*, p. 37.
[323] Matthew 26:42.
[324] Matthew 27:34.
[325] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 173.
[326] Ibid.

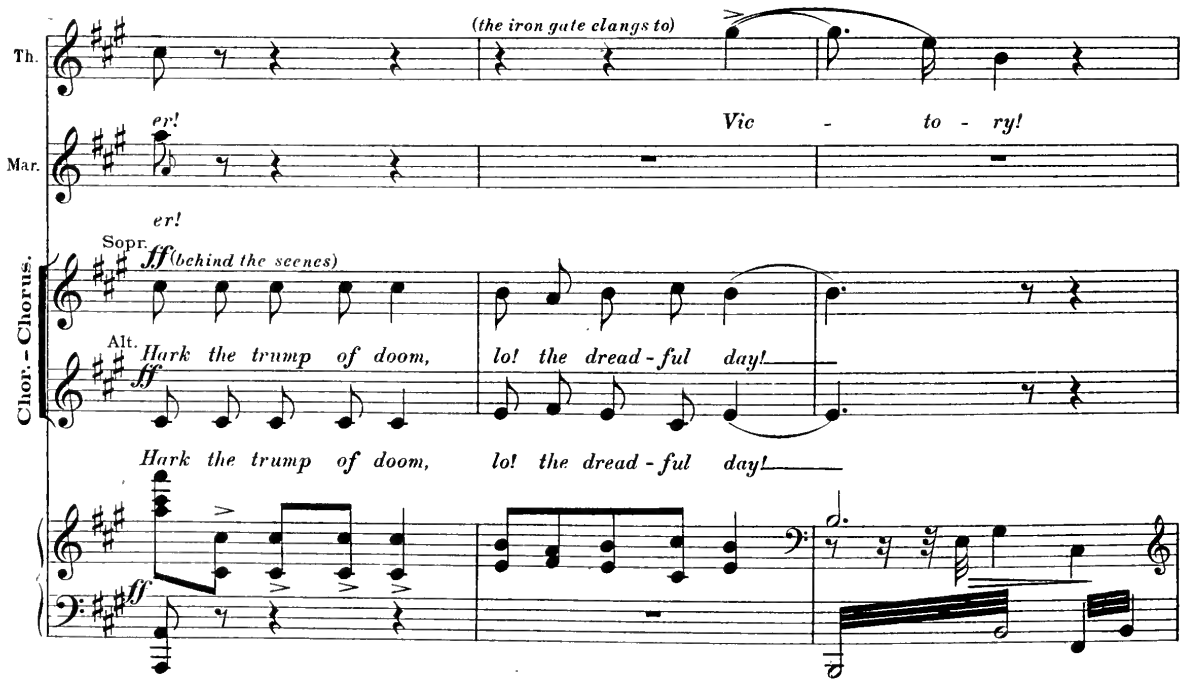

Figure 15: *The Wreckers:* Act III, scene 2 - Thirza sings 'victory' as she is about to die.[327]

As Thirza and Mark sing their final love duet 'the sun streams through a fissure in the rocky roof'[328] and multiple crescendos add up to the Love Theme being played *fortissimo* as they come to the end of their song. The plagal cadence we hear here is quite interesting as the sub-dominant minor (D minor) moves to the transcendent tonic (A major). The D minor is taken from the Wreckers' Theme at the start of the opera and the cadence is similar to the cadence at the end of *Tristan and Isolde.*[329]

[327] Ibid., p. 272.
[328] Ibid., p. 275.
[329] Ibid., p. 173.

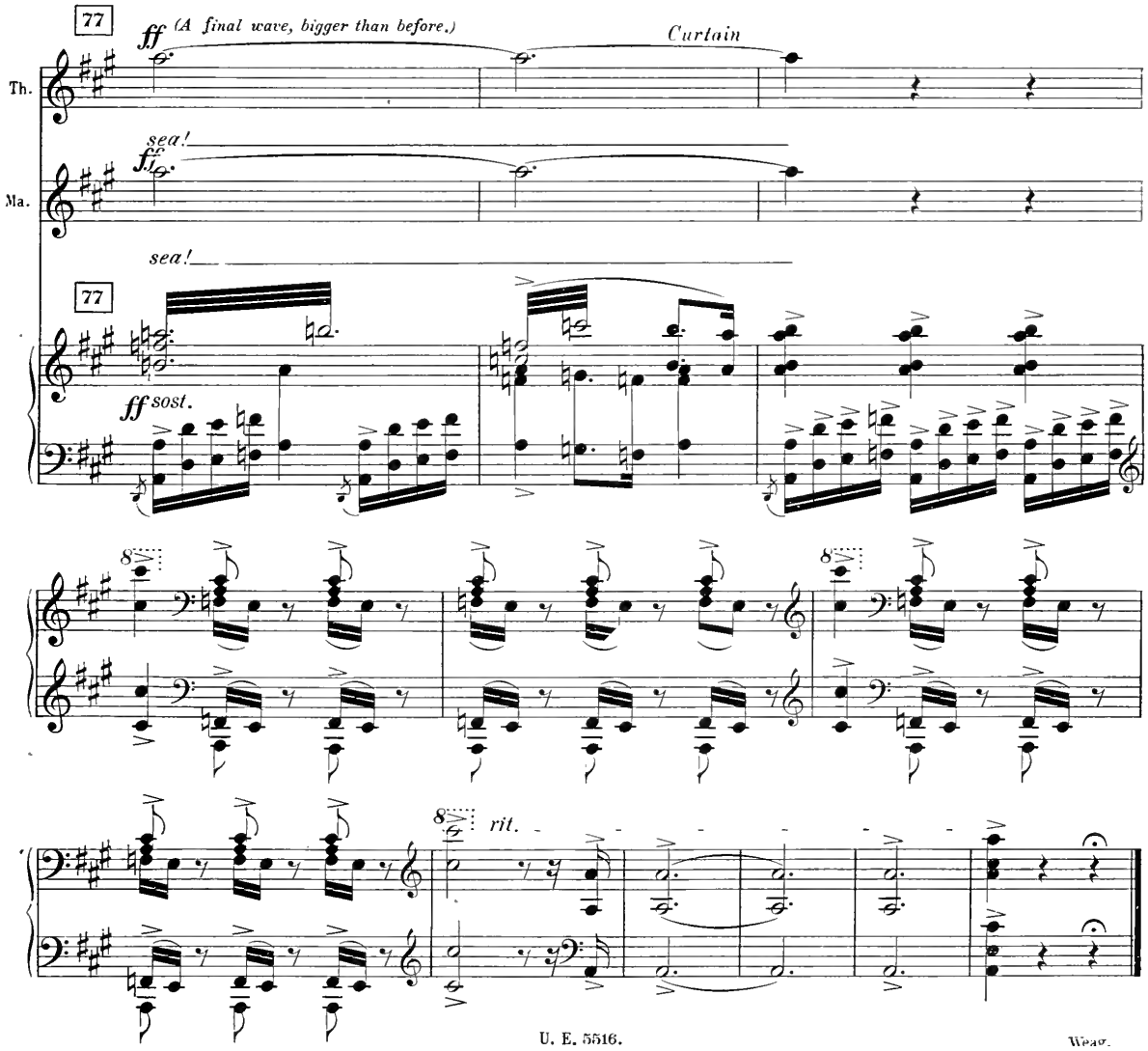

Figure 16: *The Wreckers:* Act III, scene 2 - The closing cadence of *The Wreckers*.[330]

As the final wave washes over Mark and Thirza it is as though their sins are being washed away like during a baptism. The light which shines on them is also taken from at least two sections of the Bible:[331] In Psalm 67:1, when God is asked to shine his face on a psalmist as a sign of blessing and also in the book of Matthew 17:3 and 17:5, where Jesus is 'transfigured… and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light' to which God said, 'This is my beloved Son, in which I am well pleased.'[332]

Smyth created two modern heroes in *The Wreckers.* Both Thirza and Mark show through their attitude towards the church and marriage that the wreckers are part of an old-fashioned era

[330] Smyth: *The Wreckers*, p. 277.
[331] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", pp. 173-174.
[332] Psalm 67:1, Matthew 17:3 & 17:5.

where conservatism and prudery prevail. Even though *The Wreckers* could be seen as an unsuccessful form of moral propaganda, the violent act which Smyth was later to commit during her involvement in the suffragette movement contributed to achieving the rights which were envisioned in *The Wreckers.*[333]

The amount of effort that Smyth put into creating the plot of *The Wreckers* is remarkable. We can see Smyth's eye for detail as she integrates her critique of society into the plot in such a way that it makes the audience reflect on their own sense of morality. Despite her efforts, Smyth had huge difficulties in getting *The Wreckers* to be performed. Although the anti-British sentiment in Germany surrounding the Boer War was subsiding, Smyth still faced sexism and the reluctance of English theatres to produce new English operas added an additional obstacle. However, Smyth's rich friends helped her to secure some performances in Leipzig, Prague, and eventually London before the outbreak of the Great War. After these performances, many British critics focused on the German aspects of *The Wreckers* often referring to it as Wagnerian.

Even though Smyth had the opportunity to do so, she did not reduce the radicalism of *The Wreckers* by softening the language or making it less obvious with whom her sympathies lay. Through this opera, Smyth criticises Christianity, the patriarchy, and questions aspects of morality. Through the character of Pascoe, Smyth criticises religion as she shows the hypocrisy of Pascoe being blinded by his own beliefs and no longer able to make morally sound decisions. Smyth also criticises the religiousness of the wreckers by using Herman's hymn 'Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag' which was originally intended to be sung on Easter Sunday by giving the Wreckers their own lyrics to the song to be about slaying their enemies. Also, during the 'Wild Death Dance' Herman's melody is ironically used for the cantus firmus as the wreckers are collecting wrecking equipment.

Although *The Wreckers* has many German, French, and Italian elements, they are outweighed by the number of English elements such as Cornish melodies and depictions of the sea. There are also aspects which refer to British imperialism as the wreckers believed that they were superior to those from other lands and considered themselves to be God's chosen people. This is supported by the 'Revival Theme' with its jubilant melody.

[333] Robinson: "Smyth the Anarchist: 'fin-de-sciècle' Radicalism in 'The Wreckers'", p. 179.

In *The Wreckers,* we can see many political elements which are also relevant in Smyth's future involvement in the Suffragette movement. The unconventionality of this opera may reflect Smyth and Brewster generally going against the grain in relation to societal norms in their lives. Smyth used her artistic freedom to address issues that were important to her. This was quite brave of her as audiences were forced to self-reflect and ask themselves questions about what is worth losing in the fight for morality. Smyth created a female hero who shows great strength and bravery as she is willing to die with Mark. Thirza is radical for leaving her loveless marriage and standing up for her beliefs, contrary to what her husband and the rest of the villagers believe. Throughout Thirza's trial, she shows no sign of regret which means that she is not portrayed as being typically feminine. This is similar to when Smyth showed no regret for her militant involvement in the Suffragette Movement just a few years later.

3.4. The Boatswain's Mate

3.4.1. How *The Boatswain's Mate* Came About

After Smyth's two-year political juncture, she was free to return to her normal life. However, she was not quite sure what her next steps would be. One of the things she considered was turning the W.W. Jacobs play *The Boatswain's Mate* into an opera if he would give her permission to do so. After all, she had already prepared a rough libretto. However, she then had her doubts as she became aware of the play *Riders to the Sea* by John Millington Synge. This play inspired Smyth to travel to the west of Ireland where the play was set. Her travels included the Connemara coast and the Aran Islands. Smyth fell in love with the area, and the play also became a possibility for another opera. Smyth travelled around Ireland and tried to find out who owned the rights to *Riders to the Sea.* However, this proved to be a difficult feat. Smyth contacted Synge's family and although they liked the idea of the play being turned into an opera, they didn't seem to know who owned the rights to it. This situation was too complicated for Smyth, and she eventually began to lose interest. After receiving the rights to *The Boatswain's Mate,* Smyth decided to go with her first instinct and compose it as her next opera.[334]

While composing *The Boatswain's Mate*, Smyth struggled to fit her own compositional style into what opera had developed into while she was involved in the Suffragette Movement. Since Smyth began studying music, her compositional style in terms of form, genre and structure evolved steadily as she slowly ebbed away from the German academic style that she was first

[334] Smyth, Ethel: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* London: Chapman & Hall 1935, pp. 82-95.

taught and found her own unique composer. Up until this point, Smyth's music had a range of international influences. *Der Wald* had traditional Romantic and German fairy-tail-like aspects, while *The Wreckers* had French and Italian as well as German elements. Now Smyth wished to direct her next opera back home with a range of English folk song influences, themes, and humour resulting in her being drawn back to the English market.[335]

The style of this opera is quite split which represents Smyth's own struggle with finding the balance between English and German operatic styles. It was also the first opera which she composed after *The Wreckers* and the death of Henry Brewster. As Smyth was composing this opera in the winter of 1913-14 on a working holiday in Egypt, she struggled with writing her own libretto while also composing music to be right for the text. Although she complained about this difficult task, Smyth also enjoyed making progress. Although Smyth had these difficulties, she had reached a new audience through her involvement in the Suffragette Movement which would be to her advantage. Smyth had already had the reputation of being an outspoken female composer who appealed to audiences of aristocracy and high society but while involved in the Suffragette Movement, Smyth got to know women from different classes and educational backgrounds which made her aware that she could reach an even broader albeit British audience. This realisation meant that Smyth was given the drive to break free from the elitism of her earlier career.[336]

Smyth focused her attention on British audiences meaning that she needed to know what they would be interested in. Smyth stated that the British are 'brimming with talent for another form of art rather than "grand" opera, namely, light, or *non*-grand opera, to cultivate which would be a manageable proposition both financially and otherwise.'[337] Smyth explains why grand opera is not suited to the British 'race':

> How, pray, should it be otherwise? Does not our whole culture discourage loud voices, extravagant gestures, and violent demonstrations of all kinds? Now the repose that stamps the class of Vere de Vere is a fine ideal in its way, and fashions a magnificent breed of self-controlled, self-contained citizens; people who when fires break out at bazaars will not trample women and children to death, nor, when afflicted with 'catarrh,' advertise the fact in the manner of less highly disciplined races. But, unfortunately, a habit of reserve militates against the free expression of the passions in public – on the stage for instance – and is generally unfavourable to the supping up and training of great dramatic actor-singers. Our operatic renderings always seem to be more like what is called 'markieren' in Germany; that is, the mere *indication* of the

[335] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 102.
[336] Ibid., p. 104.
[337] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats*, p. 181.

> musical and dramatic like which is all that singers who have delicate vocal chords give at rehearsal.[338]

It is interesting to read Smyth's statement with *The Boatswain's Mate* in mind as it is a light opera, and we know that she was eager to reach a broader British audience.

Smyth expressed her disappointment in comic opera in Britain being perceived as a lower form of opera than tragic opera. For example, after *The Boatswain's Mate's* performance in Manchester, the Business Director of the British National Opera Company told Smyth that the evening had been financially unsatisfactory. Smyth responded with 'well, anyhow they liked the thing, for they never stopped laughing from start to finish.' To which the Director replied 'ah, but suppose they don't want to laugh?'[339] Smyth explained why the public may have felt as though they were not getting their money's worth:

> I fancy my excusably petulant comment at the time was that of course if people confound opera with divine service there is nothing more to be said. But on reflection it occurred to me that if a public had been taught to believe that 'Grand' opera is the only thing that counts, it will not consider it is getting its money's worth unless wallowing in tragic, *i.e.* 'grand' emotions. Abroad the same Opera House had 'Tristan' one day and 'Fledermaus' the next. Here a sandwiched-in light opera – and mind, it has to be a classic – is only put up with as an exception; an experiment in questionable taste that must not be often repeated.[340]

Smyth believed that Britain's only contribution to the musical world since Purcell was light opera. Despite this, there were still no proper facilities to host or support British light operas. Other areas such as the likes of grand operas or symphonies had already been dominated by other countries. Smyth explains in hindsight that *The Bosun* as she called it was done well in the Old Vic 'but since those days our star had declined rapidly. Perhaps it never was a star at all; only a firework, doomed in the natural course of things to declension and extinction.'[341]

Kertesz writes that Smyth wanted to make *The Boatswain's Mate* more convenient for travelling orchestras.[342] As previously mentioned, Smyth wanted to appeal to British audiences and in *A Burning of Boats,* Smyth mentions the British 'obstinate clinging to the hideous fetish of touring.'[343] However, there is also some information contradicting this as Smyth also wrote that

[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid., pp. 195-197.
[340] Ibid., p. 197.
[341] Ibid., p. 188.
[342] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 104.
[343] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 181.

she found touring a massive waste of energy for the orchestra and stated that 'touring is death to art.'[344] She went on to say:

> Even if, like a snail, an opera troupe could carry its house about with it, the dispersing, devastating effect of being always on the move would remain. Who that has ever had a glimpse of the life led by a company on tour can forget the horrors witnessed – horrors the infatuated victims take as a matter of course! The train journeys; the hotel life; the hasty adapting of scenery to stages too large or too small for it; the truck-load of 'props' that had been sent off to Glasgow by mistake instead of remaining in Leeds; the 'Siegmund' tree that ought to be sheltering the lovers in Manchester but us now reposing in a siding at Birmingham! And the inevitable scamping of rehearsals; and the tenor one hopes will be back from his concert engagement by the time the curtain goes up. Not to speak of the young conductor who boasts, as one did rashly to me, that last week he conducted 'the Meistersinger' for the first time in his life, and that without a rehearsal! And of course the usual old gentleman had come up afterwards and declared that nothing finer could be heard at Bayreuth. Notwithstanding which I rather surprised the young conductor by remarking that, properly speaking, a bolt from heaven ought to have consumed him and his baton then and there. If the absurd and sorry spectacle of Mr. Vincent Crummles still on tour in the proud glare of the twentieth century leaves your complacency undisturbed, think, think of the appalling waste of precious energy, every ounce of which should be devoted to the art itself![345]

Although there is discrepancy as to whether Smyth scored *The Boatswain's Mate* for touring companies or not it seems even more unlikely that the former is true as she also wrote:

> I have the greatest admiration for the pluck and resourcefulness of touring companies: I marvel that they achieve as much as they do, and am aware that they give many people a lot of pleasure. But this does not alter the fact that, culturally speaking, they are not only useless but *worse* than useless, inasmuch as they stand between purblind eyes and the only vision that has redemption in it – the vision of an Opera House founded on a rock.[346]

Nevertheless, *The Boatswain's Mate* was conveniently composed for piano as well as a small orchestra. In *A Final Burning of Boats,* Smyth describes that:

> If ever the moment comes for reviving the sleepers I would suggest that they wake to the sound of a piano. Why break the back of your enterprise financially by having an orchestra at all? Why waste hours over orchestral rehearsals – and what rehearsals! – when every second of your time is needed for getting the action and the fun across? – more especially as the diction of our singers is so very inadequate, 'voice production' having apparently destroyed even the *idea* of articulation. Yet comic opera depends above all else on diction and acting! So, again I say it, scrap the orchestra. It is amateurish to be more ambitious than practical.[347]

3.4.2. Performance History and Critical Reception

As Smyth was on her way home from Egypt in 1914, she stopped in Vienna to get *The Boatswain's Mate* published. The publisher, whom Smyth admired was happy with the opera and Dr Rud. Steph. Hoffman who had typed the German translation of the opera was also satisfied

[344] Ibid., p. 183.
[345] Ibid., pp. 183-184.
[346] Ibid., p. 185.
[347] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats.,* p. 201.

with it.[348] Smyth believed that it would not have been possible for her to have it published in England as there was little interest shown there towards new works which had not been performed yet.[349] When Smyth got home there were two performances that were set to take place in February 1915 that she was looking forward to. One was the premiere of *The Boatswain's Mate* in Frankfurt and the other was a performance of *The Wreckers* under Bruno Walter in Munich. Unfortunately, neither of these performances could take place due to the outbreak of the First World War:[350]

> Optimism is an incurable disease, and as I landed in England, once more I said to myself: 'Operas at two leading Continental Opera Houses! … now they *can't* very well go on keeping me out of Concert Rooms and Festivals.' But fate spared my countrymen of the conductors' desk and committee-rooms a painful dilemma. Both performances were to take place in February 1915, and hardly was the ink on the contracts dry that war broke out.[351]

One of the results of the First World War for Smyth was that the connections which she had carefully built up with Germany over the previous years had then been ruined. These connections would surely have been strengthened had the two planned performances in Frankfurt and Munich taken place.[352]

However, *The Boatswain's Mate* premiered just under a year later in the Shaftsbury Theatre under Beecham's newly formed Beecham Opera Company in wartime London on the 28th of January 1916. [353] At the last minute Smyth decided to conduct it herself and recalls that for this performance she had a great cast consisting of Rosina Buckman, Courtice Pounds and Frederick Ranalow.[354] However, Smyth was not content with the style of the production 'thanks to the amateurish ineptitudes of his scenic constructor.'[355]

> You cannot pull off what Germans call a 'Conversazions-Oper' when the 'conversation,' in other words the laying-out of the plot, takes place on a tea-tray in the sky at the extreme back of the stage. Very picturesque and stylish, no doubt, but not practical; for in works of this kind not a word of the dialogue, not a shade of facial expression should be missed.[356]

[348] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharoah,* p. 177.
[349] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden.,* p. 43.
[350] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats.,* pp. 31-32.
[351] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden.,* p. 43.
[352] Smyth: *As Time Went On.,* p. 298.
[353] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*., p. 289.
[354] Smyth, Ethel: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* London: 1935, p. 53.
[355] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats.,* p. 32.
[356] Ibid., p. 33.

In 1922 it was staged again in the Old Vic [357] and this time Smyth recalled that the style of the production was 'mounted in an appropriately simple Jacobs style.'[358] At this time Lilian Baylis assisted in running the Old Vic where three operas a week were being held. Smyth described how the audience reacted to this performance in the way that she expected:[359]

> Her music-lord hates new music, and though her audience were delighted to flirt with something very English and unhighbrow like 'The Bosun's Mate' (and O how well it was done there too!) the box-office returns proved that they did not love their Bosun quite connubially, so to speak; not in the 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow' style reserved for 'Cav' and 'Pag' and 'The Bo Girl.' Given what we know of our conservative audiences it would be unreasonable to expect anything else.[360]

Smyth was glad that *The Boatswain's Mate* was performed in the Old Vic as the audiences there were 'from passion, not from fashion. These people show the qualities that, as I said above, belong to trained audiences only; they are at once "expert, critical, and enthusiastic."'[361]

Smyth was surely glad to have *The Boatswain's Mate* performed in the Old Vic as she truly admired Lilian Baylis for her success and the success of the Old Vic. In *Female Pipings in Eden,* Smyth described the growth of the Old Vic under Lilian Baylis as 'as miraculous as anything in the Bible or fairy tales.'[362] She also went on to write:

> Her *flair* in matters which are her province is so unerring, that is one's views did not tally with hers, I, for one, should feel extremely uncomfortable and begin to question my own judgement. Can one pay a theatre manager a greater compliment?[363]

In 1923 there was another production of *The Boatswains Mate,* this time in the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden conducted by Eugene Goossens.[364] Smyth describes this performance as 'scandalously under-rehearsed.' In *A Burning of Boats,* Smyth also mentions an excellent performance of *The Boatswain's Mate* in Manchester.[365] Even though Smyth focused on this opera reaching a broader audience, in *A Final Burning of Boats,* Smyth wrote that *The Boatswain's Mate* was unlikely to ever be performed again because of the lack of support for opera in Britain. For this reason, Smyth published the libretto of *The Boatswain's Mate* in *A Final Burning of Boats.*[366] Smyth wrote:

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[357] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*., p. 289.
[358] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats.,* p. 33.
[359] Ibid., p. 198.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid., 199.
[362] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden,* p. 176.
[363] Ibid., p. 179.
[364] Smyth: *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, pp. 289-290.
[365] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 196.
[366] Ibid., p. 189.

> Anyone who has the knowledge of stagecraft will easily see that given music appropriate to the text they are bound to come off *if adequately rehearsed;* (I am aware of the irony of this proviso) and, as regards 'The Bosun,' many have been in a position, thanks chiefly to Miss Baylis, to judge for themselves.[367]

On the 15th of December 1954, *The Boatswain's Mate* was performed at the Rudolf Steiner Hall by the local opera school. Donald Mitchell of *The Musical Times* obtained such a positive picture from the production by Joan Cross along with the singing and acting of the students that he wrote:

> There seems no reason now why *The Boatswain's Mate* should not be successfully restored to the repertory of one of our opera houses. Stage-worthy works by native composers are not so many that we can afford to neglect one so competent, mature and, in its modest fashion inspired.[368]

The next London performance of *The Boatswain's Mate* was presented by Primavera in association with Neil McPherson more than fifty years later in June 2007 in Finborough Theatre. While rehearsing for one of the earlier productions of the opera, Smyth is known to have told the BBC Symphony Orchestra: 'I want a great rollicking sound.' However, *The Times* reported on the 25th of June 2007 that 'no rollicking orchestra is possible with the handkerchief stage and budget available for Primavera's production.'[369] While referring to *The Boatswain's Mate,* Donald Mitchell stated that 'when the history of English opera comes to be written, Dame Ethel will rightly be placed as one of the most important founders of opera in this country.'[370]

There has been a renewed interest in *The Boatswain's Mate* in recent years due to Smyth's contribution to women's politics and the growing interest in gender studies. In 2014 there was a German performance of *The Boatswain's Mate* in Luzerne Theatre in Switzerland. 2018 marked the centenary of many women receiving the right to vote in the UK and in anticipation of this, the Toronto-based company Opera 5 produced *The Boatswain's Mate* in a 1970s British punk-era setting. At the Arcola Theatre in London as part of the Grimeborn Festival during the Summer of 2018 there was also a production of *The Boatswain's Mate.* In October 2019 there it was also performed by St Albans Chamber Opera at the Abbey Theatre. The first professional recording of *The Boatswain's Mate* was released in 2016 by Retrospect Opera marking the 100-year anniversary of its premiere.[371]

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[367] Ibid.
[368] Mitchell: "London Music", p. 91.
[369] Geoff Brown: "The Boatswain's Mate", in: *The Times,* (2007), < https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-boatswains-mate-xglqk6hgvs6>.
[370] Donald Mitchell: "London Music", in: *The Musical Times* 96/1344 (1955), p. 91.
[371] Christopher Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", in: Rose, Lucy Ella / Wiley, Christopher (ed.), *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Stage and Screen; The Making of a Movement,* London / New York: Routledge 2021, p. 169.

In *Female Pipings in Eden,* Smyth explains why comic operas such as *The Boatswain's Mate* were often prevented from being performed in non-English-speaking countries:

> In Grand Opera the exact words are relatively unimportant: (I say 'relatively' and mean relatively); the line of song, the musical gesture, the broad orchestration, the scenic effects, get the main points across somehow. But in delicate lace-work like comic opera the word is at least as important as the music. And this fact – not the fact of the insularity of the subject matter – is what I fear will always prevent most of these operas we are talking about from getting on to foreign stages in those blessed countries where opera plays the part that golf, football, and other games do in England; that is to say is part of the necessities of life.[372]

3.4.3. Plot

Unlike the libretto of *The Wreckers* there is no 'note' at the start of the libretto of *The Boatswain's Mate.* There is just the description 'Comedy in One Act and Two Parts after W.W. Jacobs' Story of that Name.'[373] The plot consists of three main characters: Harry Benn who is an ex-boatswain, Ned Travers who is an ex-soldier, and Mrs. Waters who is the landlady of 'The Beehive.'[374] The plot is based on the comedy by W.W. Jacobs, which was written in 1905.[375] It is interesting to note that W.W. Jacobs was married to a suffragette.[376] In addition to the short story, Jacobs also wrote the story in the form of a play with the help of Herbert C. Sargent in 1907.[377] Because the story and the play are so similar, it is difficult to tell which one Smyth referred to when writing the libretto for her opera.

Harry Benn, who is an ex-boatswain persistently proposes to the widowed landlady of 'The Beehive', Mrs Waters. One evening while Harry Benn is in 'The Beehive', he starts talking to the young ex-soldier Ned Travers and the two of them plan how Mr Benn can get Mrs Waters to accept his hand in marriage. Their plan is that Travers would pretend to burgle Mrs Waters' house during the night and Benn would come and tackle him, saving Mrs Waters and earning her hand by impressing her. However, their plan falls apart when Mrs Waters locks Travers in a wardrobe and uncovers their plan. Mrs Waters then comes up with a counterplan and pretends to shoot Travers in revenge. Benn is then left terrified as he believes that Mrs Waters has murdered Travers all because of his plan which results in Benn telling the whole story to a nearby

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[372] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden*, pp. 148-149.
[373] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 203.
[374] Ibid.
[375] William Wymark Jacobs: "The Boatswain's Mate", in: *The Literature Network,* < http://www.online-literature.com/ww-jacobs/captains-all/2/>.
[376] Hoffmann: "'It seemed to me my first duty to signify I was one of the fighters': Ethel Smyth's two years of suffrage activities and her suffrage music", p. 197.
[377] William Wymark Jacobs / Herbert C. Sargent: *The Boatswain's Mate: A Play in One Act,* New York, London: Samuel French 1907.

policeman. Once the situation has been clarified, Mrs Waters' attraction toward Travers is made clear.

3.4.4. Analysis

In Smyth's book *Beecham and Pharaoh,* she reserved one section for her letters to Emmeline Pankhurst from the 16th of December 1913 to the 9th of May 1914.[378] In these letters Smyth wrote about her process of writing and composing *The Boatswain's Mate.* From these letters, we can see that Smyth thoroughly enjoyed the compositional process. On the 22nd of December 1913, Smyth wrote:

> I'm working away at my comic opera *The Boatswain's Mate* and enjoying it hugely, specially writing the lyrics, mostly comic verses a very long way after W.S. Gilbert, but not bad, I think. And as they and their music are thought out by the same brain it's really fun pulling it off. I looked at the books of words of some of our Musical Comedy writers, but it's all stark convention. Quite funny sometimes, but all to pattern as to psychology, versification, and form. So I just had to do my own … no help for it.[379]

On the 31st of December 1913, Smyth wrote again to Pankhurst about how much she loved working on *The Boatswain's Mate:*

> I love working on this comic opera, as I have to manipulate the story into musical blocks and spoken blocks, and this requires strategy of the highest order! Whether I possess it or not remains to be seen, but it is fun beyond words inventing new talents in oneself … such as playing golf in spite of what I fear is a chronically stiff lumbar region! It *can* be done, but takes thinking out …[380]

This opera is structured as a one-act opera in two parts with an optional intermezzo which Smyth labelled as a comic opera. The score is symphonically constructed around folksongs and 'March of the Women' with the pacing and orchestration of the opera cleverly managed.[381] It is also interesting to note that due to Smyth's engagement with so many feminists, it gave her the confidence and freedom to play with the traditional sense of opera while also engaging with it seriously.[382]

On the first page of the libretto, Smyth wrote that 'the Opera may be played either with a pause between Parts I and II, or straight through. Part I consists of dialogue and music; Part II is wholly music.'[383] Smyth also added that 'when the Opera is played without a break between

[378] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* p. 115-149.
[379] Ibid., p. 116.
[380] Ibid., p. 117.
[381] Banfield: "The Boatswain's Mate".
[382] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 103.
[383] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 203.

the Parts, the Music of the Intermezzo may serve as Prelude to Part II.[384] According to Robin Hull, the first part 'is incomparably better than the second.'[385] Smyth wrote:

> In the spoken part of *The Boatswain's Mate* I of course embodied as much as I could of Mr. Jacobs' inimitable dialogue, ekeing out his gems with pebbles picked up on the shores of the Nile at the Helouan where I was staying at the time; as it might be a jeweller trying to match priceless pearls. But certain constructive features, such as the policeman episode, the tipsy agriculturists, the figure of Mary Ann, the Finale, and of course all the lyrics, are my own.[386]

As Smyth was about to finish composing the first part, she wrote a letter to Pankhurst on the 9th of January 1914:

> Fancy, I shall actually finish Act I before we start on our trip! Of course the second Act will be far harder and go more slowly, for everything is predestined by then – shape, colour, length, everything. But it will be awfully interesting, for as you travel through a first Act the perspective of Act II slightly changes…[387]

In Smyth's letters to Pankhurst, we can see that she was very happy with the first part of *The Boatswain's Mate.* For example, on the 19th of April 1914, Smyth wrote:

> Pulling this opera together is huge fun. I find Act I (which is being operated on now) really very good; and as I know Act II, when its turn comes, is better, all is well.[388]

There are many comical elements along with sentimental moments which critics have had different opinions on. Some have found this combination to be seamless while others have found it to be arbitrary. The style of the first part can be related to many things such as both burlesque and ballad opera. Smyth was also quite experimental with its post-Romantic popular forms and modern settings while keeping it typically English in its style. The second part differs from the first part in the way that it is through-composed and sung throughout. It contains large orchestral textures and angular vocals which according to Elizabeth Kertesz can be connected to other contemporary composers such as Richard Strauss.[389]

3.4.4.1. Humour

Humour is a very important factor in *The Boatswain's Mate* as it was targeted toward a British audience. Robin Hull states that:

> Ethel Smyth was sometimes unreliable in her judgement about stage humour. […] but in *The Boatswain's Mate,* guided by the capital yarn of W.W. Jacobs, she made a valuable and engaging addition to the repertoire.[390]

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[384] Ibid., p. 219.
[385] Robin Hull: "Dame Ethel Smyth", in: *Tempo* 1944/7 (1944), p. 12.
[386] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 200.
[387] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharoah,* p. 118.
[388] Ibid., p. 173.
[389] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 103.
[390] Hull: "Dame Ethel Smyth", p. 12.

Although Hull believed that Smyth was unreliable in her judgment, Smyth seemed to be confident in her judgement as she believed that the British are 'probably the most humorous race in the world.'[391] Through the use of humour, Smyth tried to bring out more human and realistic aspects of love. The love that is portrayed in *The Boatswain's Mate* is both funny and pathetic which in a way was well suited to the twentieth century in comparison to the very different picturesque portrayal of love in the eighteenth century.[392] One example of a scene which Smyth believed to be humorous is in Part I, scene 6, when the policeman recalls Harry Benn confessing to the murder of Ned Travers. On the 21st of March 1914, Smyth wrote a letter to Pankhurst stating, 'I'm brilliantly finished with the policeman scene and I think it really will be funny.'[393]

3.4.4.2. Sentimentality and Nature

Although humour is a vital part of comic opera, it was also important for Smyth to have some moments of sentimentality. In a letter she wrote to Pankhurst on the 4th of January 1914, Smyth mentioned her wanting to add a scene with sentimentality:

> I have got through quite half of my first Act. Now comes the very difficult job of writing the little half-sentimental scene for 'Mrs. Waters.' I want a touch of something like beauty and languor, not all snap and fun from start to finish, and this is the only possible spot for that touch.
> She is shutting up her house, having sent Mr. Benn packing, and I want a momentary harking back to the 'what might have been' mood. This nowadays decided, business-like widow has let out with her remark, 'once bitten, twice shy,' that her marriage had not been a success; still she remembers that when she was young there *had* been a time … Well! you can imagine! It wants frightful delicate handling and I know just what it ought to be, but oh! to find the right words when you are not a poet … only a person who knows poetry when she sees it! …[394]

In this letter, Smyth refers to Mrs Waters' solo song in Part I, scene 6. In this song we can see that Mrs Waters makes a connection between nature and sentimentality. Mrs Waters dreams of spring with 'a day like this, the air so soft and kindly and a little wind blowing, and everywhere the scent of new mown hay and flowers.'[395] She also reminisces about her youth as she sings of 'memories long ago.'[396] She then confirms the romance associated with spring as she sings, 'Springtime! The only pretty ring time!'[397] She then returns to her memories of her youth as

[391] Smyth: *A Final Burning of Boats,* p. 186.
[392] Ibid., p. 202.
[393] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* p. 153.
[394] Ibid., p. 117.
[395] Ethel Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* Vocal Score, Vienna / New York: Universal-Edition 1915, Plate U.E. 5537, p. 55.
[396] Ibid., 56.
[397] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

she sings 'What if I were young again, careless and gay, what if I were young again just for today.'[398] Despite Mrs Waters' love of spring and nature in general, she remains very strong and sensible as she tells Mr Travers that she will think about his proposal after he has left.[399]

3.4.4.3. Romance

Even though Mrs Waters is portrayed as being strong and independent, she would be interested in love if she were to meet the right man. She turns down Mr Benn as she is not attracted to him, but when she meets Travers for the first time in Part II, scene 3, she is worried about her appearance and would like to impress him. In a letter to Pankhurst on the 28th of February 1914, Smyth wrote about this scene:

> I'm working splendidly, pulled off a little duet yesterday with which, for one, I am satisfied. It's where Mrs. Waters lets Travers out of the cupboard, and finding he's quite a young and good-looking man, is upset at having put on so few clothes for this burglar hunt of hers; also, she says 'time was short, but it wouldn't have taken a moment to do up my hair'… a touch I know you will sympathise with! It only takes two minutes, but I aimed at making a little gem of it; delicate, tuneful, suggestive, in order to get the balance right of what comes after. *I think I've done it!*
> You see my widow had made a bad shot with her No. I (her husband) but is quite conscious of other possibilities – a *nuance* of which I have no experience! But that's where the artist comes in – revelling in moods you have never known yourself, catching hold of them by guess-work and imagination. Writing that little duet I might be that person, and I have loved doing that mood … *in music!* (there's conceit for you!) …[400]

3.4.4.4. The Overture and 'The March of the Women'

Smyth had some difficulties when composing the overture to *the Boatswain's Mate* as she struggled to reuse the themes from the opera. Smyth told this to Pankhurst in a letter written to her on the 6th of May 1914:

> I am working badly now, and my Overture won't come nicely so far; perhaps because I'm tired of the themes (taken of course from the Opera). But how *you* recook old, old themes! Ever a new turn, a fresh inspiration, and that's the artist in you coming out. Well, it may come right yet. I've made good things – one of my best, for instance, the last movement of my string quartet – in far worse despair….[401]

In another letter which Smyth wrote to Pankhurst three days later, she told her of her ideas regarding the overture:

> Did I tell you that I've had a grand idea about the Overture? I've scrapped all I had written and am writing a quite short very cheerful piece with never a theme from the opera in it, but, as a chief tune… *The March of the Women!* Mrs. Waters gave those two men 'what for' in such a splendid style, that I think the opera deserves that touch

[398] Ibid., 57.
[399] Ibid., p. 140.
[400] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* p. 150.
[401] Ibid., p. 175.

> – don't you? Not that such was my idea; I simply stuck in the March because, as you know, I like the tune![402]

Christopher Whiley explains that the Overture to *The Boatswain's Mate* is in sonata form. This typically means that there are two contrasting themes in different keys and towards the end of the movement the two themes appear in the same key which resolves the tension. The first theme is taken from Smyth's song '1910' which appears in bar one in D major:[403]

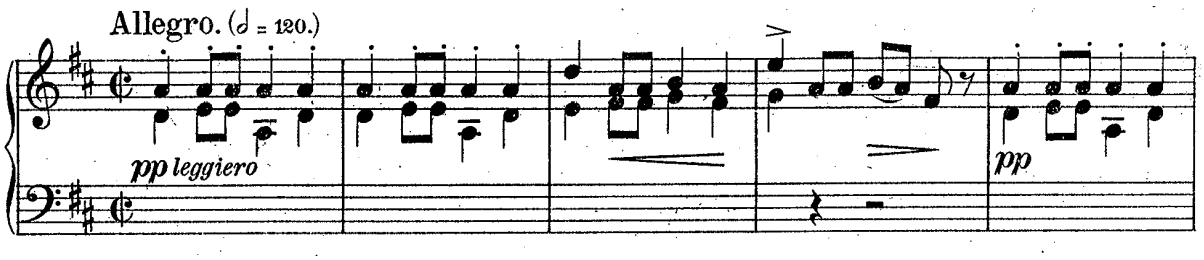

Figure 17: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Overture - '1910' theme in D major.[404]

The second theme is of course 'The March of the Women' which is in A major:[405]

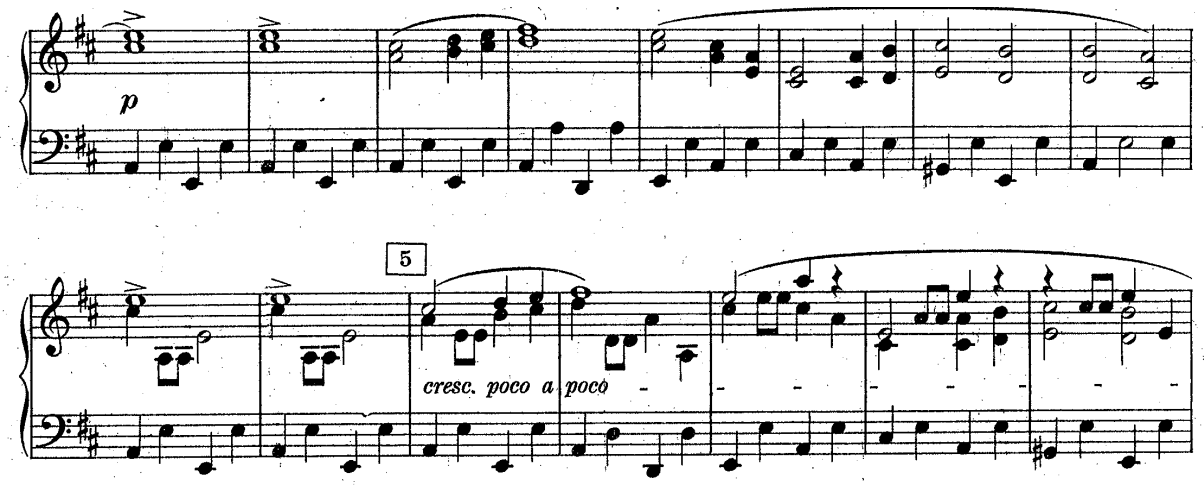

Figure 18: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Overture - 'March of the Women' theme in A major.[406]

In bar 198 the '1910' theme is repeated in D major and in bar 259 'The March of the Women' theme is recapitulated in D major:[407]

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[402] Ibid.
[403] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 175.
[404] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 3.
[405] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 175.
[406] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 5.
[407] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 175.

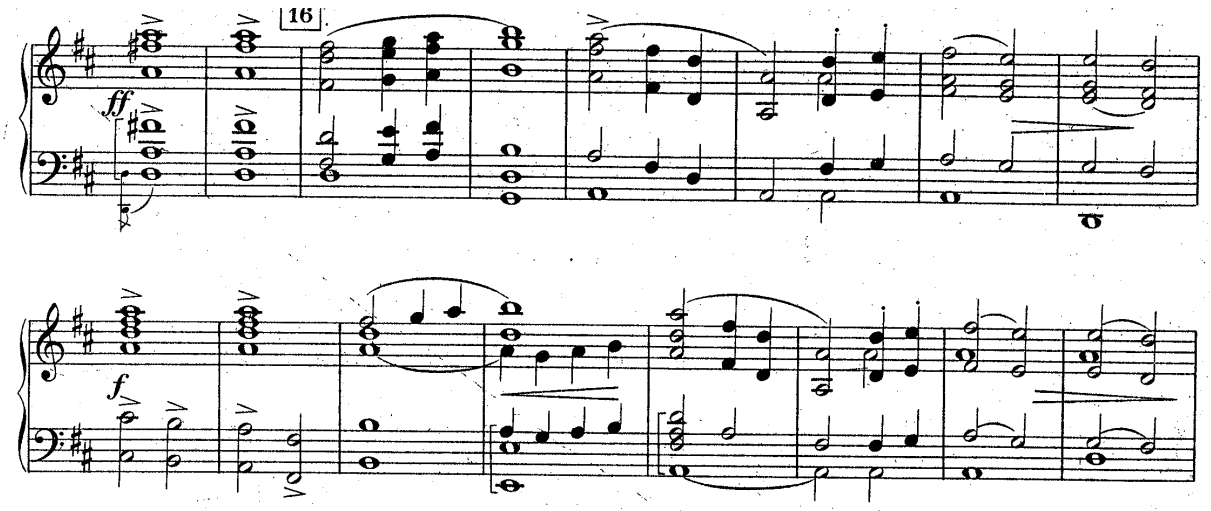

Figure 19: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Overture - Recapitulation of 'The March of the Women' theme in D major.[408]

During the time Smyth composed *The Boatswain's Mate* there was some specific gendered rhetoric surrounding sonata form. There were often 'masculine' characteristics associated with the first theme and 'feminine' characteristics associated with the second. Wiley states that Smyth would likely have been familiar with such gendered rhetoric. In response to this discourse, Smyth made the secondary theme (the 'feminine' 'March of the Women') the more important one even though it is in a way brought under the control of the primary 'masculine' theme by recapitulating it in the home key. 'The March of the Women' theme is made the more important theme by its triumphant recapitulation but also by its variation in bar 167:[409]

[408] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 10.
[409] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 175.

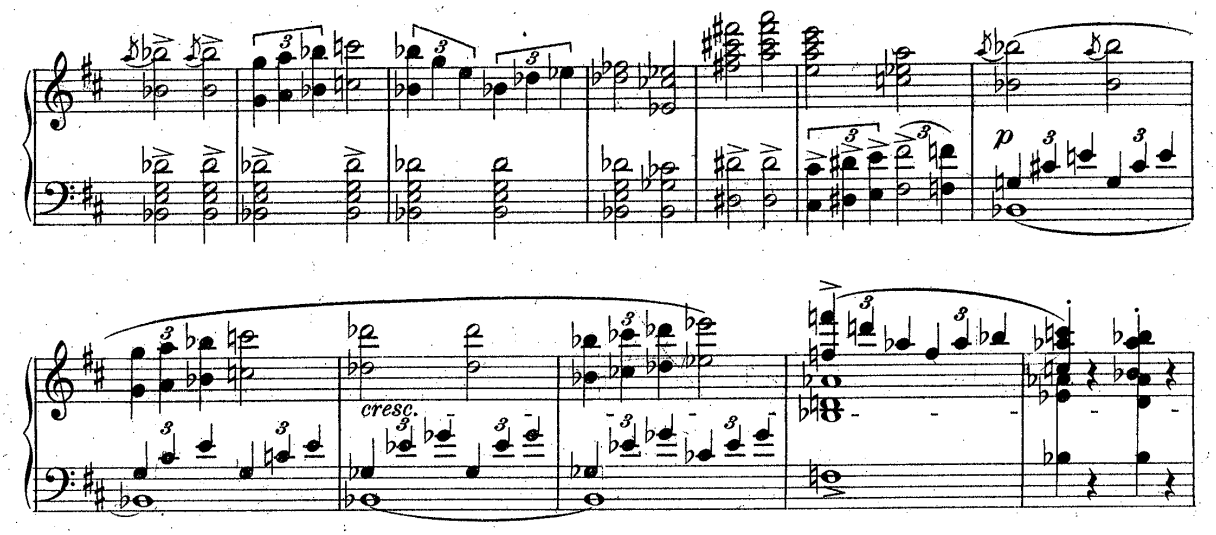

Figure 20: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Overture - Distorted 'March of the Women.'[410]

Through this strategy Smyth manipulated this standard patriarchal musical convention. By pairing her two most feminist melodies in this Overture and appropriating and subverting sonata form Smyth made an obvious feminist statement while undermining the gender narrative of sonata form.[411]

3.4.4.5. The Finale and Henry Brewster's Influence

Smyth had more difficulties composing the second part of *The Boatswain's Mate* than the first, particularly with the closing scenes as she had a new idea for the finale as to avoid the typical stereotype of an opera ending with a love duet. Smyth was aware of the risk that she was taking as she knew that many audiences would be expecting a romantic finale, but that is simply not what Smyth longed for in this opera. Smyth went against the grain by not dedicating the last moments of the opera to the potential couple but to Mrs Waters alone who is given the moment to herself to bring the opera to a close.[412] On the 18th of March 1914, Smyth wrote to Pankhurst about this very scene:

> I'm now in the last scene before the final one, which will be the most difficult as she does it all alone; quite a new idea for a finale. At the end of Act I she'd been a little bit sentimental on the theme of 'Spring Time' being 'the only pretty Ring Time,' having no wish to make a fool of herself. But at the end of the Act – the last, you know – I'm going to make her blaze up at the discovery that that's all nonsense. Spring had a bright face to promise, and a cold heart to deceive …! No! *Summer's the time for*

[410] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 7.
[411] Christopher Wiley: "'When a Woman Speaks the Truth About Her Body'": Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/biography", in: *Music & Letters* 85, no. 3 (2004), pp. 410-411.
[412] Kertesz: "Creating Ethel Smyth: Three Variations on the Theme of Struggle", p. 104.

> *love!* As you can imagine, one might strike a big warm vein there. I want to, anyway. But like you say 'one step enough for me,' and just now I'm all policeman …[413]

On the 1st of April 1914, Smyth wrote another letter to Pankhurst regarding the finale:

> I've determined not to embark on the Finale (Mrs. Waters' solo) till after the big mail is in to-night and I have news for you. So I'm just tidying up other bits … Of course the public would like a *great final duet* 'Love the Conqueror': but that doesn't happen to be what I want. How subtle are one's art desires! I couldn't put my feeling about it into words – at least not till the stage of 'explaining what you have done afterwards,' as you call it, has come – but it is as stiff a necessity for me as a strait-waistcoat might be.[414]

We can see that Smyth made a clear connection between Mrs Waters' solo song in Part I, scene 6, and the finale. In another letter to Pankhurst on the 25th of March 1914, Smyth wrote about her difficulty in writing this final text and how she missed her deceased friend Harry Brewster who had written the librettos to her previous operas:

> I wish for the hundredth time I were a poet and could write what Harry would have written for me, were he alive, for that last outburst Summer *v.* Spring! True, it would have been in French, but I could have translated it all right. As it is, I may fiddle away at those few words for days – and the word inspires me so immensely! As I think I told you I hit on two or three lines I really liked in her other solo (Act 1) where she speaks of what she would have been feeling when a young girl 'on a day like this – the air so soft and kindly … and a little wind blowing … and ev'rywhere the scent of new mown hay and flowers…!' And oh, Em, I did write such a nice bit of music to that! Well, you must do for oneself what no one else can do for you. And seeing that I know to a hair's breadth what I want – a thing no one else can possibly know – perhaps after all I can get a better result than if someone else wrote these things for me.[415]

In another letter to Pankhurst on the 9th of April 1914, Smyth wrote again about Brewster's talents and her difficulties in writing a libretto to *The Boatswain's Mate:*

> To explain what I meant about the libretto; for this particular job my powers, I think, suffice. But I couldn't clothe a tragic theme in adequate words. For that more is needed than having a poet's heart – far more. I can write for 'Mrs. Waters' a few tender or imaginative lines that are not so bad, but I can't pull off more than that. […] Now that H.B. is dead it is unlikely that I shall ever find anyone to write for me; and even though H.B. suited me in French he couldn't have written English *verse* that would have tempted me.[416]

Smyth truly missed Brewster and she often thought of him while composing and writing the libretto for *The Boatswain's Mate.* Smyth surely learned a lot from him and knew what parts of the opera he would have been fond of. In a letter to Pankhurst on the 9th of May 1914, Smyth wrote:

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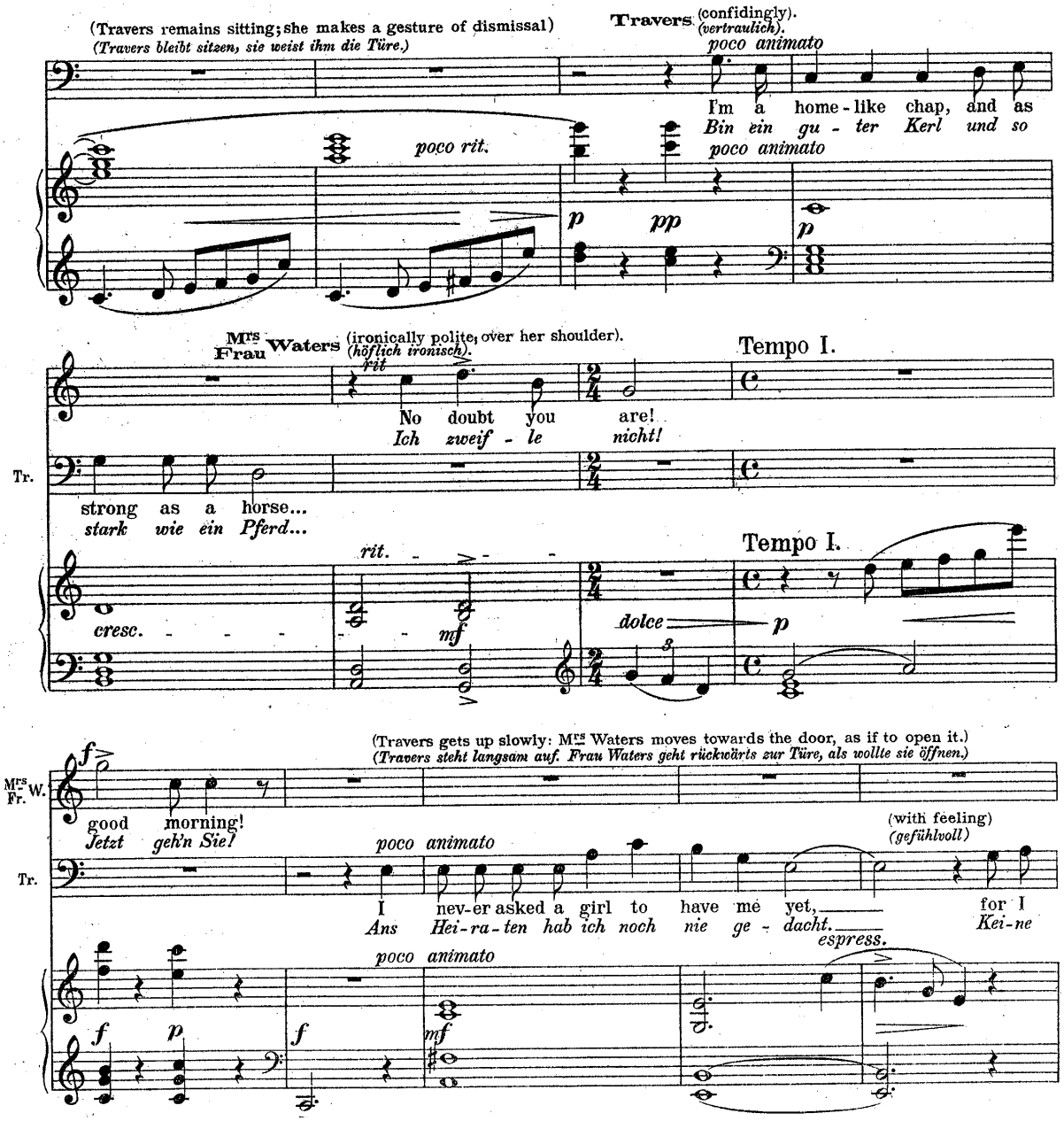
[413] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* p. 153.
[414] Ibid., p. 171.
[415] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharoah,* pp. 153-154.
[416] Ibid., 173.

Well, it is wonderful to have had that love, and when I write a particular sort of phrase in music to know he would have liked it! (did I ever tell you he was immensely musical?). He liked simple, melodious, almost *talking* phrases, such as where Travers says he's a 'homelike chap and as strong as a horse.' Or again where he says 'I never asked a girl to have me yet' … (ah! There's a nice little bit of music there!) '*for I never met one I wanted before*' … That's another bit he would have liked, but I wonder, don't you, whether Travers was speaking the strict truth? Harry said it was foolish to 'wonder' anything of the sort – that men fall in and out of love as often and as naturally as the sun comes blazing out of one cloud, and slips behind another on a bright windy day … but I won't pursue that theme for it will make you too angry![417]



[417] Ibid., 176.

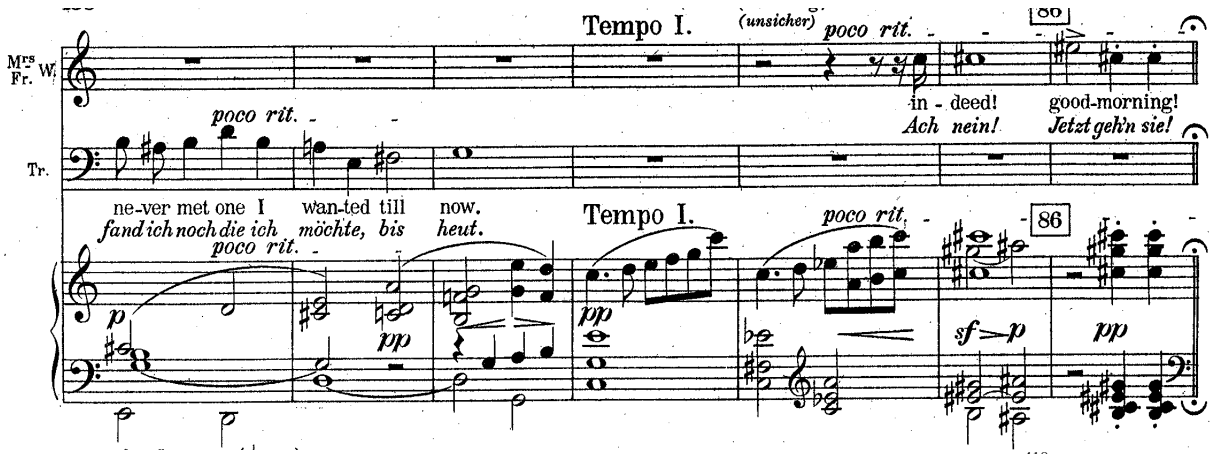


Figure 21: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Part II, scene 7 - Phrases which Smyth says Brewster would have liked.[418]

It is interesting to note that in the original story by W.W. Jacobs, Mr Benn's first name is George. Smyth may have changed his name to Harry for her opera in memory of Brewster.[419] This may have been a humorous jibe at her friend as he had proposed to her many times, and she always turned him down.

3.4.4.6. Mrs Waters as Hero

At the start of the letter section of *Beecham and Pharaoh,* Smyth wrote:

> The following extracts deal with two subjects only, the writing and composing of my comic opera, *The Boatswain's Mate*, and my estimate, here revealed to a certain extent, of the most remarkable woman I have known. All the other matters dealt with in this correspondence have been, and will further be, embodied in the main text.[420]

This shows that in a way Smyth didn't separate Pankhurst from *The Boatswain's Mate.* And her consistent letter writing to Pankhurst may have helped in keeping her personality in mind while creating Mrs Waters' personality. Through these letters we can see that Smyth gave Mrs Waters many of Pankhurst's qualities. Mrs Waters isn't just an independent businesswoman. She has a range of feelings and emotions and many great qualities such as humour and bravery as she outsmarted the two main male characters in the opera. Bravery is certainly a quality that Smyth associated with Pankhurst as she was admired for her perseverance throughout her hunger and thirst strikes.[421]

Another similarity between Pankhurst and Mrs Waters is that they were both widowed and continued to use their married titles. They did however differ in age as Mrs Waters is between

[418] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* pp. 137-138.
[419] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 173.
[420] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh,* p.115.
[421] Ibid., p. 154.

28 and thirty years old while Pankhurst would have been in her mid-fifties around the time that Smyth was composing *The Boatswain's Mate.*[422] Smyth also made Pankhurst aware of her similarities with Mrs Waters. For example, in her letter written on the 28th of February 1914. Here Smyth tells Pankhurst about Mrs Waters worrying about her appearance when she first meets Mr Travers. She writes 'a touch I know you will sympathise with.'[423]

Also, the fact that Smyth used 'The March of the Women' in the overture is of huge significance. By using 'The March of the Women' in the overture, Smyth linked the Suffragette Movement to *The Boatswain's Mate.* This could also be seen as a way of linking Pankhurst to Mrs Waters. After all, it was Pankhurst who inspired Smyth to join the fight for votes for women.[424] It is also relevant that Mrs Waters owns a pub by herself which is typically a male domain. Ironically the pub is called 'The Beehive' and beehives are ruled by a matriarch.[425]

3.4.4.7. The Representation of the Policeman

Apart from the Overture and the character of Mrs Waters, there are other feminist characteristics of this opera. For example, in Part II when the Policeman knocks on Mrs Waters' door:

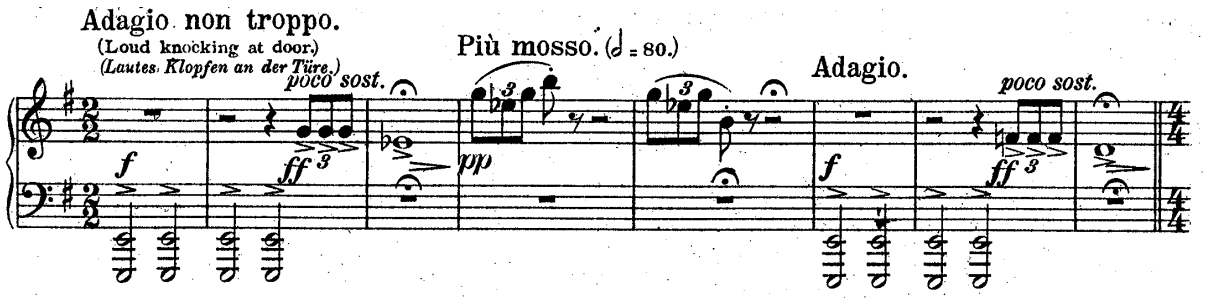


Figure 22: *The Boatswain's Mate:* Part II, scene 6 - Policeman knocks on the door.[426]

Here we can see that this section is very similar to the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony which ironically symbolises 'fate knocking at the door'. Wiley suggests that Smyth did this in reference to the patriarchal musical canon in which Beethoven was a figure of authority. Beethoven was hugely important for Smyth's musical career as it was his sonatas which Smyth discovered as a child that inspired her to study in Germany and pursue a career as a composer.

[422] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 174.
[423] Smyth: *Beecham and Pharaoh.,* p. 150.
[424] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", p. 170.
[425] Ibid., p. 177.
[426] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 114.

In this context, it is interesting that Smyth would use Beethoven's music in connection with a policeman which represents Smyth's attitude towards authority and policemen in general following her recent activity in the suffragette movement.[427]

It is likely that when Smyth was creating the character of the policeman, she had the policemen who arrested her and her comrades during the Suffragette Movement in mind. Smyth satirised male authority by portraying the policeman as incompetent and inexperienced.[428] For this reason Smyth describes him in the characterisation as 'a country constable; blend of extreme density and self-importance, any age.'[429] Later in the score there is also the description 'Policeman produces a note book: wavers between attempts at the official manner and extreme confusion of mind: evidently new to his job.'[430]

After Smyth's involvement in the Suffragette Movement, she moved to Egypt to get away from England and it was during this time of great change in her life that she composed *The Boatswain's Mate.* It is also interesting to note that this is the first opera that Smyth composed after Brewster's death which meant that she was writing a libretto alone for the first time. Smyth wanted to create an English opera that could be successful in England. For this reason, she composed a comic opera because she was familiar with British humour and knew what British audiences would like and find funny. This, however, also caused problems in securing productions as comic opera was seen as a lower form of opera in comparison to grand opera in England. As well as humorous aspects there are also moments of sentimentality which bring some serious elements.

The Boatswain's Mate is also an opera that can be performed by low-budget and amateur opera companies as well as travelling orchestras. This shows that Smyth was breaking away from the purely elitist audiences of the past and after her involvement in the Suffragette movement where she was in contact with working-class women was now attempting to reach a more mixed audience. We can see the influence that the Suffragette Movement had on *The Boatswain's Mate,* especially when we look at the Overture. Here Smyth used melodies from 'The March of the Women' and '1910' while also manipulating the gendered rhetoric of sonata form. The way in

[427] Wiley: "Ethel Smyth, music and the suffragette movement: Reconsidering *The Boatswain's Mate* as feminist opera", pp. 175-176.
[428] Ibid., pp. 179-180.
[429] Smyth: *The Boatswain's Mate,* p. 2.
[430] Ibid., p. 115.

which the policeman is portrayed also references Smyth's encounters with the police during her involvement in the Suffragette Movement. It is also important to note that Smyth stayed in contact with Pankhurst through letters while she was composing *The Boatswain's Mate* and we can see many similarities between the character of Mrs Waters and Pankhurst, particularly in their independence and bravery. Another characteristic that makes them similar is that they both used their married titles even though they were both widowed. Mrs Waters is independent in the way that she runs her own pub which is typically a male-dominated environment. It is interesting to note that the pub is called 'The Beehive' and beehives are run by matriarchs.
The ending of *The Boatswain's Mate* is quite untypical in that instead of the very last song being a romantic duet, it is given to Mrs Waters to sing alone. Perhaps Smyth took this risk due to the confidence that she had gained through her involvement in the Suffragette Movement.

4. Conclusion

The three main points of focus throughout this thesis are gender, nationalism, and politics. The focus lay on these themes as they were all present in *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* to some degree. They were also huge factors in Smyth's life as they shaped her career – both positively and negatively.

Smyth's upper-class Victorian upbringing benefited her career in many ways. Because of her family's wealth, Smyth had a German governess who taught her music. She introduced Smyth to Beethoven's works and inspired her to study in Leipzig and pursue a career in composing. Because of Smyth's social status, it meant that she had connections to a large social circle of aristocrats which gave Smyth many opportunities.
Smyth had quite a happy childhood, but she recalls having some disputes with her father. Her father was a conservative military man who had specific expectations for his children. He wanted all his daughters to get married and have children while his only son was to join the military in India. All his children filled these expectations except Ethel. According to Smyth, he did not like artistic temperaments, and he forbid Smyth from going to Leipzig to study. Smyth retaliated and made her parents' lives so unbearable that they eventually let her go. At the age of nineteen Smyth fulfilled her dream and moved to Leipzig to study composition. It is quite remarkable that Smyth had the inspiration and courage to make this move as it was unusual for a young unmarried woman to move abroad to study. It is also important to note that Smyth wouldn't have had many female role models to look up to in this field, so she basically found her way alone.

When Smyth started studying in Leipzig, she was unimpressed by the standard of teaching at the conservatory. Her education there lacked orchestration and to make up for this she went to see many concerts to learn about it herself. Through the conservatory, she got to know some famous composers such as Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and Brahms. After one year, Smyth dropped out and began taking lessons privately under Heinrich von Herzogenberg. However, under Herzogenberg there was another gap in Smyth's education, opera. As a result of this, Smyth went to see many live operas which contributed greatly to her music education. It wouldn't have been possible for Smyth to have had this kind of education in England due to the lack of opera houses and the range of operas performed.

Smyth also got to know Heinrich von Herzogenberg's wife, Lisl von Herzogenberg. They had an intimate relationship while also having a kind of mother-daughter relationship which can be read about in their letters to each other. Smyth wrote very fondly of Lisl von Herzogenberg as she describes that their relationship started when she nursed Smyth back to health during an illness.

Some of the composers that Smyth met in Leipzig were supportive of her music career such as George Henschel while others were not. Brahms for example didn't even believe that Smyth composed her own works. Smyth and Brahms had a complicated relationship as he made many sexist remarks, had many sexist opinions, and held a strong dislike for England.

Smyth first met Henry Brewster through Lisl von Herzogenberg as he was married to her sister. Brewster was hugely important for Smyth's career as he wrote the librettos for her first three operas. He was a philosopher and Smyth admired him and was impressed by how knowledgeable he was. Smyth had a short affair with Brewster which ended her relationship with Lisl von Herzogenberg and the whole Herzogenberg family. Brewster on the other hand stayed married to his wife. Smyth and Brewster had many intellectual conversations about topics such as religion and Brewster's opinions can be seen in the libretto of *The Wreckers.* His death was very difficult for Smyth as it meant that she had lost a very close friend and she had to write the libretto of *The Boatswain's Mate* herself.

Another very important friend for Smyth was Empress Eugénie. She was Smyth's patron and a very important asset to her as she introduced Smyth to many important royals such as Queen Victoria which opened another important social circle for Smyth. She also helped Smyth secure a date for the performance of her Mass in D in the Albert Hall.

Even though Smyth wasn't always politically active, she was very aware of sexism, the importance of women in her life and the fact that she lived in a world ruled by men. Smyth experienced sexism throughout her life. From the sexual assault she survived as a child, to her difficulties finding accommodation in Munich, to the likes of Brahms not believing that she was the composer of her own works, to her difficulties in getting her operas published and performed. Throughout her life, Smyth also stood out as she didn't conform to the gender norms of her time. Smyth's bravery and willingness to go against the grain and not conform to society's gender norms meant that she created a deserving space for herself in the world of politics, literature, and music while paving the way for many more women to come:

> Because I have conducted my own operas and love sheepdogs; because I generally dress in tweeds, and sometimes, at winter afternoon concerts, have even conducted in them; because I was a militant Suffragette and seized a chance of beating time to *The March of the Women* from the window of my cell in Holloway Prison with my toothbrush; because I have written books, spoken speeches, broadcast, and don't always make sure that my hat is on straight; for these and other equally pertinent reasons, in a certain sense I am well known.[431]

Smyth also refused to get married or have children as it would have gotten in the way of her career. Smyth met Emmeline Pankhurst for the first time in 1910 and was at first reluctant to join the WSPU as she didn't want to mix music and politics. Over time Smyth changed her mind and decided to dedicate two years of her life to the Suffragette Movement. Smyth's plan was that after these two years she would return to composing. These two years were a time of anger, torment, and suffering. Despite this she didn't regret it and would have done it again if she had to. On the 4th of March 1912 Smyth was involved in a protest where she smashed the Colonel Secretary Lord Harcourt's window. For this Smyth was arrested, charged, and sentenced to two months in Holloway Prison of which she served three weeks due to health issues. Smyth was proud that she had this experience and saw it as a badge of honour. These two years took a lot of time and energy away from Smyth's music, but it helped change the lives of millions of women. Although Smyth's involvement in the Suffragette Movement was just two of her eighty-six years, it shaped her identity. Smyth's persistence during her fight for the vote could be compared with her persistence in getting her operas performed.

During this time, Smyth didn't completely remove herself from composing. An exception was her 'Three Songs of Sunrise.' One of these three songs was 'The March of the Women which became the song of the Suffragette Movement. With its fighting spirit and easy melody, it was the perfect propaganda song that could be sung by the masses. It is also interesting to note that Smyth didn't compose this song to benefit her career but as a way of contributing to the

[431] Smyth: *As Time Went On.,* p. 288-289.

Suffragette Movement. Even though it wasn't her intention Smyth gained a broader audience and fanbase through 'The March of the Women.'
1914 marked the outbreak of the Great War which put the Suffragette Movement on hold. After the war, Smyth found that the important connections that she had built up in Germany had been ruined and she never could quite regain her position in the German music scene. In 1918 women were finally granted the right to vote in Britain but there were no celebrations due to the war. After the struggle for the vote was over, Smyth was involved in another struggle; the fight for women to be allowed to play in orchestras. Smyth explained that it was so important for women to be allowed to play in orchestras as it was the best and cheapest form of education for composers. According to Smyth, this was one of the reasons why there were so few women composers.
Smyth was also involved in musical politics as she was a patron of the Manchester Women's Orchestra and a member of the Society of Women Musicians from 1911 to 1914 becoming the honorary vice-president of the society in 1922. Smyth also fought for the British Women's Symphony Orchestra to get Henry Wood to be their conductor and she raised money for them to work professionally. Through Smyth's involvement in the Suffragette Movement, she learned to express her feminist views through her music while also fighting for and supporting other women.

Smyth pushed the boundaries of society with *The Wreckers.* Thirza who is an adulterer and leaves her husband is the hero of the opera as she is brave in so many ways. We see her bravery from the beginning of the opera as she refuses to take part in the villagers' prayers, she doesn't accept the wrecking, and she stands her ground as Pascoe preaches his immoral opinions. She is also brave as she chooses to die with Mark even though she could have saved herself.
Through *The Wreckers* Smyth criticises many aspects of society. She criticises British imperialism, sexual double standards, the patriarchy, and the church. In doing this she also highlights topics such as morality and the status of women. Smyth could have reduced the radicalism of *The Wreckers,* but she chose not to even though her use of artistic freedom contributed to much of the negative criticism that the opera received and made it more difficult for her to secure productions. This opera can be seen as a form of moral propaganda as it forced the members of the audience to question what is justifiable on the grounds of the greater good and what is worth losing in the fight against immorality. One could say that Smyth gave up her freedom in Holloway prison for the greater good.

We can see that Smyth was also brave like Thirza when she withdrew *The Wreckers* from Leipzig even though it had already been rejected by many other opera houses. Thirza has strong moral values against the patriarchy, the church, and the general society in which *The Wreckers* is set for which she shows no regret. Thirza's attitude could be compared to Smyth's while she took part in the Suffragette Movement as she also showed no regret for her militant actions. Perhaps Smyth and Brewster created such an unconventional opera because their own relationships were unconventional.

Smyth's connections due to her social status helped her secure some of the few performances that *The Wreckers* had. For example, when her good friend Brewster bribed Neumann with £1,000 or when Mary Dodge covered the production costs of *The Wreckers* in the West End Theatre for £1,000.

For *The Wreckers*, Smyth used many English melodies with German, French and Italian elements. These multinational aspects of the opera show that Smyth had a broad musical education spanning numerous countries. The English elements come from her English upbringing, the German ones from her musical education in Germany, the French elements were inspired by her mother's French education, the empress Eugénie, and Henry Brewster, and the Italian elements came from Smyth's many holidays in Italy. Despite these many cultural influences, Englishness was very important to Smyth as the English elements out-way the others.

Smyth composed *The Boatswain's Mate* at a time of great change in her life. It is of huge importance that it was the first opera that Smyth composed after her two-year involvement in the Suffragette Movement and the death of her good friend Henry Brewster. Through Smyth's involvement in the Suffragette Movement, she reached a new audience. Before that, she was already well known by members of the aristocracy and now Smyth could break free from elitism and reach a broader and more working-class audience. It was also much more convenient for travelling orchestras and productions with a lower budget to perform this opera. This opera was focused on British audiences as Smyth's reputation which she had built up in Germany was ruined by the Great War and it was generally difficult for comic operas to be performed abroad because it is so important that the libretto is understood.

Humour is a very important factor in this opera which suited British audiences as Smyth believed that the British were the most humorous people in the world. As well as humour there are other elements such as sentimentality which at times gives the opera a more serious and reflective mood.

Smyth clearly had a very close relationship with Pankhurst after their involvement in the Suffragette Movement together. We can see this through the letters that Smyth wrote to her while she was busy composing *The Boatswain's Mate.* In fact, the character of Mrs Waters in *The Boatswain's Mate* was based on Pankhurst. Mrs Waters is a strong independent businesswoman who also has admirable qualities such as humour and bravery. There are also times when we see her sentimental and romantic sides like when she reflects on her youth. It is interesting that Pankhurst and Mrs Waters are both widowed but continued to use their married titles. It is also interesting to note that the pub that Mrs Waters owns is called 'The Beehive' which is a male-dominated environment and a beehive is run by a matriarchy. Smyth saved the very last song for Mrs Waters alone even though it would have been more typical to have a romantic duet. Smyth knew that this was a risk, but she was willing to play with the traditional sense of opera as she had gained confidence from the experiences she made as a member of the WSPU.
There are many feminist aspects in *The Boatswain's Mate.* For example, the use of '1910' and 'March of the Women' in the Overture which give a direct link to the Suffragette Movement. Smyth's clever use of sonata form also has feminist characteristics in the way that she implements and uses the 'feminine' and 'masculine' themes. There is also the scene where the policeman knocks on the door, and we hear a short reference to Beethoven's 5th Symphony. This is ironic as it refers to 'fate knocking at the door.' Smyth may also have intended on drawing attention to and making fun of the musical canon of which Beethoven is head.
During Smyth's involvement in the Suffragette Movement, she had some unpleasant experiences with policemen which may be why the policeman in *The Boatswain's Mate* is portrayed as being incompetent and inexperienced.

Smyth's writings were of great use for this thesis. To read of her struggles and triumphs through her eyes meant that information was provided from another perspective. The letters provided in both volumes of *Impressions that Remained* show that Smyth had a deep connection with so many people and had many close friends. She tells of her love interests, passionate affairs, struggles, successes, frustrations, joys, hobbies and so on. Through the feminist aspects of *Female Pipings in Eden,* Smyth shows her admiration towards the many prominent women in her life such as Emmeline Pankhurst. Through the letters Smyth wrote to Pankhurst which are printed in *Beecham and Pharaoh* we can follow Smyth through her process of composing and writing the libretto for *The Boatswain's Mate.* We can also see how close Smyth and Pankhurst were and how much Smyth adored her. Smyth's other books equally provide an insight into her private life and thoughts. In general, these books provide a great base for anyone who wishes

to do more research on the life of Ethel Smyth. It is important to know that Smyth's books may at times have a one-sided or biased view of certain occasions. For that reason, it is also important to look at reviews and other reports.

There are also many secondary sources which were very helpful in gaining a greater understanding of Smyth as a composer, writer, and activist such as the articles found in the book *Rock Blaster, Bridge Builder, Road Paver: The Composer Ethel Smyth,* edited by Cornelia Bartsch, Rebecca Grotjahn and Melanie Unseld. Also, Suzanne Robinson's article on *'fin-de-siècle' Radicalism in The Wreckers,* was hugely helpful for my own analysis of the opera. The various articles in *Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen: The Making of a Movement* edited by Christopher Whiley and Lucy Ella Rose were also hugely helpful towards gaining a greater insight into the Suffragette Movement in general and how intertwined music and politics were for Smyth and the Suffragette Movement.

Smyth's life experiences are what made both *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate* the operas that they are. Both lead characters of these operas are strong women. Although Thirza and Mrs Waters are very different, they both show bravery. Like Smyth, they don't conform to society's norms, they are independent and make their own decisions.
Even though Smyth lived abroad for so long and had most of her music education in Germany, she still did not forget her roots and made sure that her operas contained many English elements. Both are set in England, have English librettos, English melodies and are composed for English audiences.

There was much political turbulence throughout Smyth's lifetime. She recalls experiencing discrimination as an English woman in Germany because of the Boer War, she took a two-year break from her music career to fight for the right to vote, she was stationed in France during the First World War, and she even lived to see the Second World War. Smyth was aware that her music could not be completely separated from the society and politics of her time. When Emmeline Pankhurst asked Smyth in relation to her involvement in the suffragette movement, 'O how can you, with your gift, touch a thing like politics with a pair of thongs! I can't bear to think of it!' 'But I told you,' Smyth replied, 'that I do it just *because* of my music!'[432]

[432] Smyth: *Female Pipings in Eden.,* p. 205.

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6. Abstract

Ethel Smyth's life and work as a composer, writer, and suffragette were shaped by the factors gender, nationalism, and politics. This thesis investigates how these factors influenced Smyth's upbringing, relationships, career, critical reception, literature, and compositional style but most of all how gender, nationalism, and politics influenced two of Smyth's operas: *The Wreckers* and *The Boatswain's Mate.* It also investigates Smyth's two-year involvement in the Suffragette Movement, and in what way this is relevant to these operas.

Smyth's own writings create a basis for understanding while also containing some biases as they give an insight from her perspective. The scores and librettos of both operas were critical for the analytical aspects while secondary literature on Smyth and the Suffragette Movement was very helpful towards the general research of the thesis.

This thesis shows that because of Smyth's gender, she had to fight during her career to reach success and pave the way for women to come. Because of Smyth's nationality as an English woman having lived many years in Germany, it meant that she was seen as a foreigner wherever she went which influenced her critical reception. And of course, Smyth's politics was intertwined with her nationality, gender, and perhaps most of all, her music.

Ethel Smyths Leben und Schaffen als Komponistin, Autorin und Suffragette waren geprägt von den Faktoren Gender, Nationalismus und Politik. Diese Arbeit untersucht, inwiefern diese Faktoren maßgeblich waren in Bezug auf Smyths Erziehung, Beziehungen, Karriere, ihre kritische Rezeption, ihre Schriften und ihren Kompositionsstil – vor allem wird jedoch der Frage nachgegangen, welchen Einfluss Gender, Nationalismus und Politik auf Smyths Opern *The Wreckers* und *The Boatswain's Mate* hatten. Zu diesem Zweck setzt sich die Arbeit unter anderem mit Smyths zweijähriger Mitgliedschaft in der Suffragetten-Bewegung auseinander, und untersucht, inwiefern diese relevant ist in Bezug auf die genannten Opern.

Smyths eigene Schriften generieren ein Grundverständnis für die genannten Themen, während sie gleichzeitig eine gewisse Voreingenommenheit der Autorin zeigen und Einblicke aus ihrer Perspektive erlauben. Die Partituren und Libretti beider Opern waren entscheidend für die analytischen Aspekte der vorliegenden Arbeit, Sekundärliteratur über Smyth und die Suffragetten-Bewegung waren zugleich sehr hilfreich bei der allgemeinen Erforschung des Themas.

Diese Masterarbeit zeigt, dass Ethel Smyth aufgrund ihres Geschlechts kämpfen musste, um zu einer erfolgreichen Karriere zu erreichen und um weiteren Frauen den Weg zu bahnen, dasselbe zu tun. Als Engländerin, die viele Jahre in Deutschland gelebt hatte, wurde Ethel Smyth als Fremde angesehen, wohin sie auch ging, was wiederum ihre kritische Rezeption beeinflusste.

Zudem war Smyths Politik selbstverständlich verflochten mit ihrer Nationalität, ihrem Geschlecht, und vielleicht am allermeisten mit ihrer Musik.