

Sylvia Townsend Warner's Modernist *Ekphrasis* and Synesthesia

by

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The presence of music and sound is crucially important in the writing of Sylvia Townsend Warner (1873-1978). A noticeably acoustic writer, music, and noise in general, are major tools Warner employed to convey the vacillation of the Modernist perspective. Examining the deployment of these tools reveals a type of musical rhetoric which is built around aural *ekphrasis* and literary synesthesia, and this study concentrates on this feature of three of Warner's novels and one short story: *Lolly Willowes* (1926), *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927), *The Corner That Held Them* (1948), and "Emil" (1956). While the exact patterns of Warner's use of music and sound throughout her fiction ultimately remain ambiguous, probing them in these four works does cast light upon Warner's private and public concerns.



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by

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I dedicate this thesis to Jim Batchelor in acknowledgement of his stalwart support. He deserves a Nobel Prize.

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## Chapter 1

The fundamental importance of music in the literary output of Sylvia Townsend Warner (1873–1978) has been acknowledged in Dame Gillian Beer’s and Lynn Mutti’s Warner studies. This importance is based on recognizing Warner’s personal musicianship and work as a musicologist. As Beer states, Warner was “alert to the music—and the cacophony—of human voices, and [she listened] intently to human silences . . . Music is in the grain of her prose, her plotting, her life” (“Music” 52). She is a particularly auditory writer as, when reading Warner, it is striking how often she appeals to the reader’s internal ear by evoking not only music, through imagery, portrayal, and allusion, but by including the sounds that accompany the scene in her description and narrative, and emphasizes the human voices involved. This orchestration of sound is a part of her noted musicological skill in counterpart and polyphony that enriched “her writing throughout her career, with its intertwined narratives where inner darker voices sometimes emerge, or are sometimes secreted” (“Music” 55). These developing and concealed voices are evident in her novels and short stories and examining them reveals the complexity of Warner’s personal and political agendas. Their sounds frequently allude to unconscious, stifled needs not yet expressible in actual language. This study proposes to investigate the intersections between Warner’s love for, and expertise in, music and words, and music’s manifestation in her literary work through her use of imagery to explore and illuminate some of her various themes, such as alienation, individualism and community. Sound is as central to Warner’s writing as vision. Warner acknowledged her debt as a writer to her musical activities right from the beginning of her authorial career, stating in 1931, “I used to compose music, and I believe I write like a composer still. I must get the shape first, before the actions or words” (*With the Hunted* 395). This was an effective practice for her, as she reiterated in 1975: “I keep to a formal mode. I

am extremely fidgety about form, but that was because of music. I really learned all my ideas of form from studying music” (*With the Hunted* 404-05). With music and sound so integral to Warner’s approach to writing, placing her writing within an *audio narratological* context seems particularly apropos, examining her written presentation of sounds, voices, music and silence as she creates a sound experience for her readers, and subliminal motivations for her characters.

Warner’s father was Harrow School housemaster George Townsend Warner (remembered as an excellent teacher) and his wife, Nora. Following an unsuccessful term at kindergarten she was home-schooled by her father. She was a gifted musician, so much so that it is said that she planned to study composition in Austria with Arnold Schoenberg, but her plan was thwarted by the outbreak of the First World War. Three years later, she was recruited to the Editorial Committee preparing the ten volumes of *Tudor Church Music*, and published by Oxford University Press 1922-1929, by her married lover of many years, the eminent musicologist Percy Buck, who was twenty-two years her senior. Warner’s role in the endeavor was traveling throughout the United Kingdom to study fifteenth- and sixteenth-century musical manuscript material and transcribing the music into modern musical notation, making it accessible to contemporary musicians for the first time. This facilitated the rediscovery of a large tranche of English music that had lain dormant over the intervening centuries, solidifying Warner’s contribution to this aspect of British national culture. She also published on the subject of musical notation and contributed to the introductory volume of *The Oxford History of Music* (1929). Encouraged to write professionally by David Garnett, Warner became a prolific author of poetry and prose and remained closely associated with music through her literary work, as it was

to be entwined with all aspects of her life: her writing, her friendships, and her professional partnerships.<sup>1</sup>

Through her friendship with Theodore Powys she met the poet Valentine Ackland in 1930, and the two women's shared devotion to the opposition of European fascism forms an significant milieu for Warner's writing. Despite some unhappy times, Warner and Ackland remained lovers until Ackland's death in 1969. Warner published her first collection of poetry *The Espalier* in 1925, later followed by the narrative poem *Opus 7* (1931). Although she continued to write poetry, Warner is better known for her prose writings, with numerous short stories appearing in *The New Yorker* over several decades.

Her first major success came with the novel *Lolly Willowes* (1926), a supernatural tale that uses the setting of a pastoral romance to create a feminist probe of gendered standards. The character Laura's (Lolly's) insistence on pursuing a rustic "feminine" life is a politicized premise equivalent to Warner's own chosen way of life. Biographers have remarked on the contradictory nature of Warner's combining rural life with social nonconformity. *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927) contrasts the evangelizing fervor of the Christian proselytizer plot with an alternative of cross-cultural acceptance. A comparable motif of emancipation from ideological constraints and awareness of alternative realities is central to *Summer Will Show* (1936) and *After Don Juan* (1938). The possibility of unconventional and marginal lives is a theme that unites much of Warner's writing, and also helps position her work centrally within the women's movement and the expansion of feminist literary innovation.

*Audio narratology* is an over-arching term for a methodology that considers forms and roles of sound in its relation to narrative structure. Sound contributes to the construction of

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information is taken from Claire Harman's *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*.

tangible and fictional spaces and worlds both in audio genres and everyday storytelling, to create a soundscape with music or spoken language. Sound can express the emotional state of the speaker, indicate irony or sarcasm, illustrate contrasts, or engage the listener's, or the reader of literature's, focus. It is an inter medial method, defined as "the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact" (Werner 1), that is a logical extension of intertextuality making a broader cultural context possible, widening interpretive possibilities (Wolf 1-2). It is a mingling of different media, with one mingled medium illuminating another within the blend, relating to the classical rhetorical device, *Ekphrasis*,<sup>2</sup> a device that usually applies to a visual work of art within the literary. I am suggesting that Warner substitutes musical works of art in the place of the visual in her version of *ekphrasis*.

Emilie Crapoulet's argues that musicality in literature is, by definition a "travelling concept," changeable in the sense that the idea of music and musicality has altered throughout history, and that what was thought of as musical at the time of composing a particular music, or a particular piece of literature, is not necessarily the same for readers at a particular point of history, creating an interesting bibliographic line of enquiry:

It is important to be fully aware of the fact that our understanding of music today is quite different from that of Modernists, and again different from that of the Romantics. The meaning of music is fluid and the concept of 'musicality' ... is undoubtedly different from that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century critic or of the composers in question. Therefore, we must be aware of the very fact that this concept travels, not only on the lateral plane, from discipline to discipline, art form to art form and even culture to culture, but also, and most importantly, on the vertical axis, in time within disciplines and art forms. (82)

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<sup>2</sup> The *OED* defines *ekphrasis*: "Originally: an explanation or description of something, esp. as a rhetorical device. Now: *spec.* a literary device in which a painting, sculpture, or other work of visual art is described in detail" ("Ekphrasis").

Something to be mindful of when approaching Warner's work is the liminality of this interpretive tool, with its potential for expression. A writer's presentation of music/musicality/sound will shift just as a reader's response to any interpretation of music/musicality/sound will be personal to that reader and will be influenced by that reader's culture.

In the context of Modernism, Crapoulet contends that Warner's contemporary:

Virginia Woolf was one of the Modernist authors most interested in the potential musicality had for literature and her intermedial understanding of this concept is particularly revealing. More than any other author of the period she developed an aesthetics of literature in which musicality played a leading role. Virginia Woolf's lifelong interest in music and the possible relations between music and literature is well documented and many of her novels underwent a process of musicalization. (83)

While Warner did not, perhaps, develop a formal system of aesthetics centered on music, she connects to her contemporary of musical references and evocation of music rooted in her work. In this respect, Warner was on a Modernist trend, and music is one of the ways in which she meets Modernism. Crapoulet links Woolf's musicality to "pattern and thus of order and meaningfulness" (88), Warner's is more closely associated with personal revelation, disharmony between people rather than harmony, and possibilities that may or may not be explored, creating a more complex realism.

Warner's writing encompasses the move away from the nineteenth century idea of music's superiority to other art forms and the way composers, and other writers, were stressing the need to think about music in relation to the new sounds of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century music was esteemed for an ability to reach beyond representative language and arrive at a purer form of communication, as language, in its ordering and organization, can impede access to the essence of expression. In 1873, Walter Pater wrote that "all art constantly

aspires towards the condition of music” (Albright 2). Baudelaire and Mallarmé in France demonstrated a flow towards breaking down the lines dividing literature and music to show that literature was becoming a more nebulous and ethereal response to the world, a course that also characterized British Modernist literature.

These concepts of transcendence and their suggestion of entirety and unison came under new challenges from numerous contemporary developments at the beginning of the twentieth century: industrialization, the division of labor, increased mechanization of the work force, disorientation from the scale of the British Empire, the new Freudian ideas about consciousness supplanting the notion of an identity that was understandable, and the First World War which demolished the myth of an inevitably smoothly evolving and progressing society, by literally and physically taking matter, bodies, psyches, traditions, and nations, apart. The old philosophies of transcendence and accord in art began to be unfitting for an early twentieth century experience. This was a new, disjointed era.

According to Josh Epstein “noise and music” are fundamental features of Modernism:

[N]oise and music—as mutually informing sonic presences and as aesthetic and cultural categories . . . shape the writing of the early twentieth century. Modernists imagined music as mediation of noise: an effort to interpret, orchestrate, sublimate, amplify, or critique the sounds and the affective shocks of industrialization, urbanization, warfare, publicity, and mechanical reproducibility. (xv)

Noise inspires the modernist text. Referencing musical artefacts and other works of literature, within the literary, refines and extends the strategy’s rhetorical scope, and Warner’s work abounds with examples in the fluctuating voices she evokes. If music and the voice are used to suggest emotions and atmosphere in Warner, it is possible to think of their representation as a

kind of aural *ekphrasis*<sup>3</sup> expressing the various ambiguities and nuances of her words. In his book on *Ekphrasis*, Murray Krieger discusses the sound of a literary work's ability to bring receptivity to its ambiguity:

If words in poems can use their aural dimension to give shape to the sequence they form, then through the mutual influence of their sounds they can deepen or even transform the meanings they bring to the text. Through such manipulation in the poem, the sensible – because it is aural rather than visual and thus leaves the mind free to range—is able to serve and enrich the intelligible instead of displacing it. (26)

If we can look at, and listen to, an aural *ekphrasis*, it can become a means to “look into the illusionary representation of the unrepresentable” (Krieger xv), and of expressing unrecognized and suppressed desires, and in Warner's work this is also represented through her connection to her characters by her employing the *mise en abyme*<sup>4</sup> device, reflecting her personal status as an outsider to her own society as a woman who transgressed its norms as she never married, bore children, and had lovers of both sexes. From Krieger's discussion, *ekphrasis* was an early manifestation for multiple senses working together to perceive meaning in art:

The early meaning given “ekphrasis” in Hellenistic rhetoric ... was totally unrestricted: it referred, most broadly, to a verbal description of something, almost anything, in life or art. . . it consistently carried with it the sense of a set verbal device that encouraged an extravagance in detail and vividness in representation, so that ... our ears could serve as our eyes since “[ekphrasis] must through hearing operate to bring about seeing.” (7)

I believe that aural *ekphrasis* can be analyzed in the following ways: the effect the combination has on an audience; the effect of the discernibly obvious, such as rhythm and melody; the

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<sup>3</sup> The only other instance of the term “aural *ekphrasis*” I have found is in a (2006) M.A. thesis by Valerie Ann Leitner, submitted to the University of Florida. See Works Cited section.

<sup>4</sup> In the *OED*, *Mise en abyme* is part of literary theory: A term denoting “self-reflection within the structure of a literary work; a work employing self-reflection” (“*Mise en abyme*”).

elements of the structure, e.g. rhyming couplets; the inherent temporal nature of music; the context of the interaction; and the content of a novel's plot.

Certain phenomena regarded as musical are not exclusive to music, such as rhythm, tone, stress, and intonation, and if included in literary analysis they can enhance the readers' insight into the relation between music and narrative. Warner makes use of all of these phenomena, but this is not the extent of her use of music. In addition she transposes musical works into her narratives, adapting narratives originating in musical forms, quotes explicit musical references (therefore planting them in the reader's interior ear for music), and evokes musical effects in order to construct analogies through a specific piece of music in the form of a musical title for a text, or in a musical discussion between characters.

In the same way that musical notes on paper are not the actual music, merely symbols of the musical sounds they represent, the words on printed paper are also representative of sound, and thus literature is accessible to the ear (Brown 8-9). The applicable distinction that Brown makes is: "music is an art of sound in and for itself . . . Its tones have intricate relationships among themselves, but no relationship to anything outside the musical composition . . . Literature . . . is an art employing sounds to which external significance has been arbitrarily attached" (11). Warner's use of language shows an appreciation of its sounds and meanings as they work together to create her literary soundscapes, drawing on the inescapable values and connotations of words Brown remarks upon as unique to literature (Brown 14).

## Chapter 2

Emily Petermann argues that “literary techniques may be employed in imitating music, regardless of its musical genre” (6); that literature can emulate music in many ways; and that this is key in defining the “musical novel.” The musical novel is: a genre based fundamentally on the integration of strategies borrowed from another medium ... such novels are not merely about music – though this is often the case – but crucially, attempt to translate selected musical forms or techniques into text (7). As music and sound are, by definition, perceived as audible and disembodied, received through hearing and feeling vibration, this makes them a suitable mode of expression for the liminal quality of Warner’s characters, plots, and fictional landscapes. Another aspect of this perception is that music and sound (sound is vibration, which incorporates the sense of touch) serve as a literary synesthesia,<sup>5</sup> uniting senses so that their interaction enables understanding for us and Warner’s characters, an effective device for comprehensively presenting an entire experience. Richard E. Cytowic discusses this inter-relatedness in the context of Japanese literature, where there is a cultural inclination of accepting the integral connections between all things, making the concept of synesthesia a natural vehicle for merging and articulating the variety of sensual qualities (320).

In the European context, literary synesthesia was a model taken up by the French symbolists, notably Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), as a means of unifying senses to define different levels of reality and experience (Meadows 118).

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<sup>5</sup> The *OED* offers these pertinent definitions of the term:

1c. Production, from a sense-impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense-impression of another kind.

2. *Literature*. The use of metaphors in which terms relating to one kind of sense-impression are used to describe sense-impressions of other kinds; the production of synaesthetic effect in writing or an instance of this. (“Synesthesia”)

Mallarmé spoke of this fusion thus: “For what is the charm of literature if it is not [ . . . ] to open the book, and the text itself, to the volatile scattering of the spirit, whose sole purpose for existence lies within the realm of universal musicality?” (Kolocotroni 341; ellipsis in the original).

Baudelaire’s most celebrated use of a sensorial synesthesia appears in “Correspondances” from *Les Fleurs du mal*:

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.  
Odours there are, fresh as a baby’s skin,  
Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass,  
— Others corrupted, rich, triumphant, full,

Having dimensions infinitely vast,  
Frankincense, musk, ambergris, Benjamin,  
Singing the senses’ rapture, and the soul’s. (McGowan 18)

Baudelaire synthesizes three senses: hearing, sight, and smell, to express spiritual and sensual ecstasy (“les transports”) (Meadows 123). The experience is intimately connected to all three physical sensations equally. The Symbolists wanted to use language to harness speech, song, and silence to poetry’s rhythm and create a new aesthetic that challenged the boundary between nature and artifice in pursuit of alternative co-existing realities. This challenge was taken up as the goal for many Modernists, such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce through their exploration of fractured selves and portrayal of coexisting subjectivities, and it is to this Modernist challenge

to which Warner responds time and again in her writing.<sup>6</sup> For Peter Dayan, Baudelaire and Mallarmé epitomize “a style of writing that refused to recognize clear boundaries between the literary, the critical, and the musical” (ix) that still shapes twentieth-century writing.

*Lolly Willowes* opens in 1902 when twenty-eight year old Laura’s father dies, and traces its heroine’s life over just short of two decades. One of the ways Warner connects with Modernist trends is her concern with the preoccupation with the self and its fulfilment, the central concern of this novel. Laura’s life, her desires and selfhood, are seen as secondary and peripheral to her family’s, so that her potential teems with liminality and her self-suppression: “Her father being dead, they took it for granted that she should be absorbed into the household of one brother or the other, and Laura, feeling rather as if she were a piece of property forgotten in the will, was ready to be disposed of as they should think best” (10). Her relatives regard her as a presence living an arm’s length existence. She has remained outside the usual social norms for women of marriage and motherhood through her childless, spinster status. This is symbolized by the way her brother’s children, not even the adults, change her name from Laura to the diminutive Lolly, to define her identity within the household. As the act of naming is accepted from a child barely out of infancy, this emphasizes the infantilization:<sup>7</sup> “The name hit upon by Fancy was accepted by Marion and Titus; before long their parents made use of it also ... when Laura went to London she left Laura behind, and entered into a state of Aunt Lolly. She had quitted so much of herself in quitting Somerset that it seemed natural to relinquish her name also” (56).

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<sup>6</sup> The latest edition of *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* (2016) contains nine translations by Warner of poems from Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*, appearing in print for the first time, making it certain that she was exposed to his literary synesthesia.

<sup>7</sup> Noreen O’Connor also notes this infantilization process.

It is a status she eventually tires of and spectacularly (in her family's minds) rejects. Negation of the single woman's life is regarded as the norm, as it is only through association with these conventional social constructs, that a woman can achieve (limited) validation.

Laura's life has a meandering, unfocused, quality as she tacitly accepts her negation. Sound is used to communicate dormant, inhibited longings not yet voiced: "Her mind was groping after something that eluded her experience, a something that was shadowy and menacing, and yet in some way congenial; a something that lurked in waste places, that was hinted at by the sound of water gurgling through deep channels and by the voices of birds of ill omen" (73-4). This is until the Proustian (or perhaps Baudelarian) moment of epiphany that spurs her into self-determination that involves the vision-inspired smells and sounds of nature manifested in the woods of her imagination: "The great fans of orange tracery seemed to her even more beautiful than the chrysanthemums . . . She sniffed. They smelt of woods, of dark rustling woods like the wood to whose edge she came so often in the country of her autumn imagination" (81). Her senses are stimulated, and the resultant moment of clarity speaks to her subconscious. As a result, for once her outlook becomes undeviating, "Laura knew all that she wanted to know. Her course lay clear before her" (82) as she accepts and pursues her life-changing decision. The ephemeral quality of sound prompts, and helps us understand, the ephemeral moment of her resolve.

In contrast to the nebulous sense of the passage of time for Laura, the cataclysmic First World War is dealt with in a few pages (62-66) as is fitting for its devastating effect on Warner's generation, both men and women, and on European history. The theme of female noncombatants is explored through the disparity of the wartime experiences of Laura's niece, the "widowed amazon . . . who drew on a pair of heavy gauntlet gloves and went to France to drive motor

lorries,” Laura’s sister-in-law, “The married nun . . . [who] refused battle” (63); and Laura, for whom: “The war had no such excitements . . . Four times a week she went to a depot and did up parcels. She did them up so well that no one thought of offering her a change of work” (63). Her humdrum duties are curtailed with a cacophonous, dissonant soundscape, the antithesis of music, to define the precision of the timing of the Armistice to the very moment of 11 a.m. on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918:

Then, when she heard the noise of the cheering and sounding of hooters, she left her work and went home. The house was empty. Every one had gone out to rejoice . . . All the hooters were sounding, they seemed to domineer over the noises of rejoicing with sarcastic emphasis . . . On the mantelpiece was a photograph of Titus. “Well,” she said to it, “you’ve escaped killing anyhow.” Her voice sounded harsh and unreal, she thought the walls of her room were shaking at the concussion, like stage walls. (64)

In the moment of its termination, the dissonance and alienation of the twentieth-century war is expressed through the dominance of the mechanical over the human (a defining feature of twentieth-century warfare), and through Laura’s perception of the walls shaking, because sound has physical effects and can vibrate matter, Warner is expressing the legacy of instability the war has created for its survivors. There is a terrible irony that although the human voices are raised in delight and celebration as concord is restored, it is the mechanically-sourced sound of the dissonant hooters that dominates in its mockery of the futile human jubilation.

Here, Warner is in modernist mode in accordance with Epstein’s examination of modernist writers reacting to the “new rhythms, dissonances and noises” (xiii) produced by technology, mechanization and war. He states: “Modernists imagined music as mediation of noise; an effort to interpret, orchestrate, sublimate, amplify, or critique the sounds and the affective shocks of industrialization, urbanization, warfare, publicity, and mechanical reproducibility” (xv). To have an awareness of what music is entails an understanding of its

antithesis: resonances, uproars, noises, are all means to describe what is separate from music. She is exploring noise's impact on the outbreak of harmony after conflict, and its essential destruction of that harmony. There is a newly strident and harrowing antagonism for music to be delineated against, and which is aligned to rudimentary factors of modern life.

The echoing sound of the First World War is still evident within the peace, and remains influential on the decades and events leading to the Second World War. In the interwar community there was a utopian feeling that remaking the self should not be an independent endeavor, and Laura begins to move towards the realization that individual action cannot defeat cultural forces, with Warner offering an ultimately positive resolution (O'Connor 130).

By the end of the war, Laura's sense of alienation and isolation has increased. Warner is acknowledging that women need useful outlets to mitigate the private and public effects of war. Failure to alleviate these effects, such as loss, destructions and disruption of selfhood might be attributable to exclusion or detachment from the community at large. Laura's war work has required her to be within, yet without, the national macro community, just as her family has placed her in relation to their micro community. Part of her gaining agency is to position herself within her chosen community of the Great Mop coven, as it is a community that values her individuality within its commonality. Thus we can see Warner critiquing the patriarchy of the time operating at various social levels. Laura's liberation is plotted in the move from the novel's initial realism to its utopian fantasy, with music and sound connecting and unifying the narrative movement.

Once ensconced in Great Mop, Laura is struck by how untypical the life of the village is, expressed by its noise, or rather, its silence:

Nor was Great Mop a sociable village, at any rate compared with the villages which Laura had known as a girl. Never had she seen so little dropping in, leaning

over fences, dawdling at the shop or in the churchyard. Little laughter came from the taproom of the Lamb and Flag. Once or twice she glanced in at the window as she passed by and saw the men within sitting silent and abstracted with their mugs before them. Even the bell-ringers when they had finished their practice broke up with scant adieus, and went silently on their way. She had never met country people like this before. (115)

There is a marked lack of the usual hustle and bustle audible in human activity. Audibility is key to the unusual community, with human voices perceptible just before cock-crow as the participants in witchcraft wend their way home. The audible clues are developed when:

Another night, some time after this, she heard someone playing a mouth organ. The music came from far off, it sounded almost as if it were being played out of doors ... it was half-past three ... The noise of the mouth-organ came wavering and veering on the wind ... She lay awake for an hour or more, half-puzzled, half-lulled by the strange music, that never stopped, that never varied, that seemed to become part of the air. (116)

The description is of an enchanted music which carries within it the magic the coven is producing, part of the very air she breathes, to exert the power to intrigue and calm Laura, who at this point is still not privy to the villagers' secret.

Laura takes a step closer to her vocation as a witch in a scene full of sounds from a personified natural and manufactured world that nudges her towards her ultimate epiphany:

She went to the top of Cubbey Ridge, past the ruined windmill that clattered with its torn sails ... The wind routed through the woods. Laura from the hill-top heard the different voices. The spent gusts left the beech-hangers throbbing like sea caverns through which the wave had passed; the fir plantation seemed to chant some never-ending rune.

Listening to these voices, another voice came to her ear – the far-off pulsation of a goods train lumbering up a steep cutting. It was scarcely audible, more perceptible as feeling than sound, but by its regularity it dominated all the other voices ... She began to feel defenseless, exposed to the possibility of an overwhelming terror. (122-3)

The sounds are a combination of the countryside and Laura's London life, drawn from Warner's awareness of bi-location, that it is possible to inhabit two realities simultaneously:

It is well known that a woman can be in two places at once; at her desk and at her washing machine. She can practice a mental bi-location also, pinning down some slippery adverb while saying aloud, 'No, not Hobbs, Nokes. And the address is 17 Dalmaney Crescent.' Her mind is so extensive that it can simultaneously follow a train of thought, remember what it was she had to tell the electrician, answer the telephone, keep an eye on time, and not forget the potatoes. (Warner, *With the Hunted* 234)

The train's journey and eventual Paddington destination provides a geographical link between the two locales, and Laura's terror is rooted in a fear of her old life overwhelming the new, with the realization that she is benefiting from what is conventionally considered a dark power:

She must yield, yield up all her attention, if she would escape. It was a wicked sound. It expressed something eternally outcast and reprobated by man, stealthily trafficking by night, unseen in the dark clefts of the hills ... The wind and the moon and the ranging cloud pack were not the only hunters abroad that night: something else was hunting among the hills, hunting slowly, deliberately, sure of its quarry.

Suddenly she remembered the goods yard at Paddington, and all her thoughts slid together again like a pack of hounds that have picked up the scent. (123)

At this point her new-found independence and autonomy is still fragile, and Laura is subliminally aware of the need for a final consolidation of her personal agenda:

In the goods yard at Paddington she had almost pounced on the clue, the clue to the secret country of her mind ... For a moment it had seemed as though the clue were found, but it had slid through her hands again ... She knew that this time she had come nearer to catching it than ever before. If it were attainable she would run it to earth here, sooner or later. Great Mop was the likeliest place to find it. (123-4)

She is impelled to create a connection to the dark side, the pact with Satan that Laura must accept if she is to secure her get away from her previous life.

Attending her first Witches' Sabbath, Laura encounters the unearthly music she heard that spoke to her unconscious calling, but now in the midst of it, it adds to her sense of discomfort that seems to be rooted in her realization that it is generated by the gathering of the Great Mop witches:

She wondered where the music came from. She had heard it quite clearly as she came over the hill, but upon entering the field she had lost it. Now as she watched the others she heard it once more. When they neared it grew louder, when they retreated into the darkness it faded with them, as though the sound issued from the dancers themselves, and hung, a droning exhalation, above their heads. It was an odd kind of music, a continuous high shapeless blur of sound. It was something like mosquitoes in a hot bedroom, and something like a distant threshing machine. But besides this, it had a faintly human quality, a metallic breathing as of trombones marking the measure; and when the dancers took hands and revolved in a leaping circle the music leaped and pounded with them, so much like the steam-organ music of a merry-go-round that for a moment Laura thought that they were riding on horses and dragons, bobbing up and down on crested dragons with heads like cocks, and horses with blood-red nostrils. (176-77)

Once again, we see and hear the dissonance of modern life making inroads into the natural world in the "high shapeless blur of sound" through the mechanization within the music through the image/symbol of the threshing machine, the steam-organ of the merry-go-round, and the trombone's metallic breathing, just as the steam train's placement within the landscape has the power to evoke the urban London existence she wants to leave behind.

If this liminal moment of rite of passage is intended to confirm Laura as part of the community of the coven, it only serves to unnerve her, as she fears becoming subsumed within it as she was within her family's life in London: "[T]he dancers veered away to the further side of the field, their music retreating with them. She hoped they would stay away, for their proximity was disturbing" (179). As a result, she experiences: "the unreasoning anger of a woman who has allowed herself to be put in a false position. This was what came of attending Sabbaths, or rather, this was what came of submitting her good sense to politeness" (182).

We see her become more determined to embrace a solitary independence, one that is free of the trappings of a social system, no matter how unconventional. Her instinct is for escape into isolation from the community, a move that is paralleled in *The Corner That Held Them* by Dame Lilius's desire to live as an anchoress, attached to, and yet separated from, the convent's community.

This separate but attached life is the utopia Laura finally defines through her pact with Satan as she returns full circle to the kind of benevolent patriarchy she experienced in her youth, when her father lived and she was mistress of Lady Place. Satan allows her to find her own voice in a monologue defining the main difference, and dominant relationship, between the sexes. This is the essence of this epiphany, as Laura sums up the ways women are expected to spend their lives "... listening to men talking together in the way men talk and women listen. Quite different to the way women talk, and men listen, if they listen at all" (212). This monologue is, literally, the longest and most passionate "speech in the whole of her life" (213), facilitated by Satan who is almost cast as a therapist: "I encourage you to talk, not that I may know all your thoughts, but that you may" (216). Laura pragmatically accepts that Satan is her new master under that same model of benevolent patriarchy, one where she can make her own decisions whilst living as an individual within a community of like-minded souls, in contrast to the degrading version of living with her brother's family and his (incompetently) controlling her finances. The novel closes with peaceful sounds conveying the soothing security that characterizes her personal Shangri-La: "A closer darkness upon her slumber, a deeper voice in the murmuring leaves overhead – that would be all she would know of his undesiring and unjudging gaze, his satisfied but profoundly indifferent ownership" (222). The dissonance that has featured in the

soundscapes accompanying her quest has been quietened, and harmony established. She has found a community that helps her escape this individualized alienation through her self-reinvention.

In Warner's second novel, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927) which examines colonialism, music is used throughout to explore aspects of the heterotopia of Mr. Fortune's Fanuan experience:

Fanua was a small remote island which could only be seen in imagination from that beach edged with tin huts where Mr. Fortune walked slowly up and down on evenings when he had time to ...

"I must warn you, Fortune, you are not likely to make many converts in Fanua."

"What, are they cannibals?"

"No, no! But they are like children, always singing and dancing, and of course immoral ... I believe I told you that the Raratongan language has no words for chastity or for gratitude?" (12)

He is entering a prelapsarian world, and carries with him the prejudices of the colonizing Christian outlook of the British Empire. Singing and dancing are regarded puritanically as signs of an inherent moral decay in the absence of the Protestant work ethic.

In the disparate collection of worldly goods Mr. Fortune selects to accompany him on his "pious escapade" (13), he includes a musical instrument: "tinned meat, soup-squares, a chest of tea, soap, a tool-box, a medicine chest, a gentleman's housewife, a second-hand harmonium (rather cumbrous and wheezy but certainly a bargain), and an oil-lamp" (13-14). The harmonium is used throughout the novel to establish his otherness from the Fanuans: "Except for the lamp, the sewing-machine, and the harmonium, Mr. Fortune's house had not an European appearance, for while on the island he wished to love as its natives did" (18). It is at once a symbol of his social respectability and the Christian religion he hopes to impart:

He was anxious to do things befittingly, for the Archdeacon's admonition on the need for being solemn still hung about in the back of his mind. This occasion, it seemed to him, was something between a ceremony and a social function. It was a gathering, and as such it had its proper routine: first there comes an address, after the address a hymn is sung, then comes a collect and sometimes a collection, and after that the congregation disperses.

Mr. Fortune sat down to his harmonium and sang and played through a hymn. (18-19)

For Mr. Fortune, music is a matter of religious gravitas. The childlike nature of the island's way of life is characterized even in the soundscape provided by its natural fauna. We are told the birds "did not sing anywhere near so sweetly as English blackbirds and thrushes, but Mr. Fortune was pleased with their notes, a music which seemed proper to this gay landscape which might have been coloured out of a child's paint-box" (19). In spite of these apparently alienating contrasts, music becomes fundamental to the bond between Mr. Fortune and Lueli.

There is an extended passage dealing with Mr. Fortune's and Lueli's musical dissimilarities as expressions of their dissimilar spiritualities where Warner explicitly inserts herself into the narrative, casting off her otherwise detached authorial voice, an act of *mise en abyme*, perhaps inspired by Baudelaire's theories of synesthesia, of placing the self at the center of the text (Meadows 117):

Like the harpsichord, the harmonium has a repertory of its own, pieces that can only be properly rendered on this instrument. Naturally I do not speak of the harmonium compositions of such recent composers as Schoenberg or Max Reger: these would have been too difficult for Mr. Fortune ... But without being in any way a virtuoso – and some think that the harmonium, being essentially a domesticated instrument, sober and of a religious cast, is inherently unsuited for displays of skill – Mr. Fortune played quite nicely and had a repertory of many classical larghetts and loud marches ... the usual hymns and chants. Haydn was his favourite composer; and arrangements from the string quartets go rather well on the harmonium. (48)

If Mr. Fortune is a formal, classical type of musician, reflecting his spiritual life, the untrained Lueli is instinctive in his music-making, which puts him closer to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field:

Lueli too was a musician after a simpler fashion. He had a wooden pipe, rather like a flageolet ...

Lueli's tunes were very long tunes, though the phrases composing them were short; the music seemed to waver to and fro, alighting unexpectedly and then taking a small flight, and listening to it was like watching a bird flitting about in a bush; the music ends, the bird flies away; and one is equally at a loss to explain why the bird stayed so long and seemed so busy or why it suddenly made up its mind that the time had come for a longer flight, for a flight that dismisses it from our vision. (48-49)

Mr. Fortune, the European, and Lueli, the islander, are linked by a love of music, but rather than uniting them, music defines their spiritual differences and separation. When their disparate musical styles are combined by Mr. Fortune arranging some of Lueli's melodies on his mechanical harmonium, the result is that

Mr. Fortune's European harmonies queered the pitch, perhaps he had misunderstood the time-values; in any case Lueli showed no signs of recognizing the tunes, and even when their identity was pointed out to him he seemed doubtful. As for the duet plan it was not feasible, for the harmonium was tuned to the mean tone temperament and Lueli's pipe obeyed some unscientific native scale; either alone sounded all right, but to a conjunction they were painfully discordant. (50)

This lengthy description of the conflicts and problems of moving in harmony together goes to the crux of the failure of Timothy Fortune's missionary work. Although Lueli is (ostensibly) the only other Christian on Fanua, Fortune "[finds] it impossible to convert Lueli's pipe" (50) into a compatible musical style, just as he finds it impossible to convert the pagan indigenous population in the Christian context.

### Chapter 3

Similarly, in *The Corner That Held Them* (1948), Warner creates the everyday life of the inhabitants of a medieval convent over a period of thirty-three years (1349-1353) with a comparable sense of the meandering of time and events within the liminal, transitory landscape of its Fenland setting. The creation is enhanced by the soundscape described, comprising music, the human voice, the bells that mark time and events, and the sounds of the natural world.

Warner began the book “on the purest Marxian principles ... if you were going to give an accurate picture of the monastic life, you’d have to put in all their finances” (Warner, *With the Hunted* 404). Rather than focusing on an individual, as in *Lolly Willowes*, *The Corner That Held Them* concentrates on the social relations within the convent community, and its political, with a small ‘p’, factions. As it was written over the period 1942-1947, drawing conclusions about Warner making implicit comparisons between the women of the convent and the women on the Second World War home front are inevitable, as are comparisons with the Black Death and Fascism, and impression supported by Warner’s diary: “Actually, I think people here would be much more frightened if the Germans were the Black Death. Then the news – the Black Death is in Rouen, in the Channel Ports, has appeared on Paris, would set people to thinking: soon I may catch it and die” (Warner, *Diaries* 104). Unlike the intangible nature of the passage of time in the novel’s narrative, Warner chose the time period it encapsulates purposefully as: “between the birth of Chaucer (Well, his first or second birthday’, she said: I want him on his feet’) and the dispersal of the Peasant’s revolt of 1381 (‘it’s no use leading to an event if it fails. Go for the failure’)” (Rattenbury 231).

Here her bi-location straddles two historic periods. Peterman observes that: “[r]ather than conceiving of time—or the plot of the novel—as something linear and progressive, novels based on a theme and variations are inclined to present it as cyclical” (10). The meandering quality of *The Corner That Held Them* also reflects the loose structure of the convent’s contemporary musical form of Gregorian chant and also the uncertainties and insecurities the non-combatants of the Second World War’s home front faced. Warner was conscious of wartime’s effects on her creative process, writing in 1946:

I thought my novel was almost finished; then I went back to the beginning, and now I find I want to rewrite a great deal of it, perhaps the whole of it. Because having spent so long on it and written it at such divers times and under such distracting circumstances, though all the characters in it are solid and consistent, the lighting, so to speak, has an inconsistency, the shadows are sometimes to the east sometimes to the west of an incident, and it needs a long study as a whole, to put these discrepancies right. One might almost think that the material of a work of art has the awkward individual vitality of timber; and warps and changes its contours after it has been sawn and fitted and put together. (*Letters* 93)

The image of the novel’s overall setting as an organic material that responds to fluctuations in environmental conditions brings Warner into contact with the Modernists’ explorations of subjectivity, and how perception is perpetually in motion and, therefore, inherently unreliable. Her characters may be fixed points, but their responses to events are fluid, in a state of flux, so the suggestion here is that her work may be constantly reinvented and developed.

Linked to this consciousness of living in the extraordinarily destabilizing time of war is an abiding image of the convent as a prison – the patron is St. Leonard. The novel is a covert allusion to the United Kingdom’s Second World War society, with impaired relationships, and its people divided against one another. The convent is a disharmonious and unsympathetic society within a larger society subject to rapid, unsettling, change, at odds with versions of the past that stress national neighborliness and unity in time of warfare and national emergency, just

as it was for the nations in the Second World War which were defining themselves in the post-war period. Warner recognized the effect her wartime experience had upon her writing, and that her aesthetic, like war time and post-war societies, was essentially liminal and modulating in response to change—emotional social, historical—and that transition for her characters comes from the arts, several of which are depicted in the novel as they touch this microcosm of the medieval world. She is suggesting a link between the fourteenth-century developments in English artistic identity and Modernism's contribution to English artistic identity.

The fourteenth century was a time of progress for an English artistic tradition, a tradition that had been dominated by France's position as the seat of European culture. The new polyphonic music of *Ars Nova*, the establishment of the Perpendicular style in architecture displacing the old-style Decorated Gothic, and a new articulacy in literature with Langland's *Piers Plowman* represent this evolution. In the novel, Henry Yellowlees encounters the new music, prioress Dame Alicia's hubris is embodied in the new spire project she initiates, Sir Ralph encounters the English language epic he comes to identify as a work of genius, "The Lay of Mamilion,"; and the nuns evoke the textile skill of the esteemed *Opus Anglicanum* style of needlework in creating their embroidered altar-hanging. All of these elements symbolize various strands in a particular culture (Mulford 197-98), and similar strides were taken in Warner's contemporary culture.

A key feature of the exterior physical landscape, which influences the interior human emotional landscape, is its infirm, watery nature:

The Waxle Stream flowed north-east through a poor country of marsh and moorland: a muddy reluctant stream, full of loops and turning, and constantly revising its course, for the general lie of the land imposed no restraint on its vagaries . . . Every second year or so it spread itself into a flood. When the flood-water went down, the Waxle Stream had changed some part of its course . . .

Such a stream makes a very contentious boundary . . . (5)

This precariousness is reflected in the narrative as the novel proceeds, through the constant emphasis on the economic and emotional instability of the characters' lives. Music and sound are intertwined within the written word to express the fleeting moments that become the years of a lifetime.

Infirmity and vagueness were built into Warner's concept of the novel. Writing to the composer Paul Nordoff in April 1942 she says, "It is not in any way a historical novel, it hasn't any thesis, and so far I am contentedly vague about the plot" (*Letters* 79). The description still applied in January 1946, when she wrote in another letter to Nordoff: "It has no conversations and no pictures, it has no plot, and the characters are innumerable and insignificant" (*Letters* 91). Ironically, once a member of the community becomes the Prioress, the position of power in the convent, her personality becomes eroded and merged with all of the prioresses before and after her. She loses her name and is referred to as "the Prioress," making the individuals holding the office difficult to distinguish and differentiate as the novel progresses. Authority confers anonymity.

One of the ways Warner expresses the passage of time and the disposition of the community is through the convent's music and the use of the bells that mark the daily canonical hours. Here is a key passage that opens with onomatopoeia, "Swish-swish, shuffle-shuffle, yap-yap-yap from Dame Adela's little dog" (147), which goes to the importance of the audible. It is a very specific sound that defines the importance of listening to the convent's soundscape, and how it relates to inward emotional landscapes: "The bell ceased and the chanting began. It was loud and hearty, dominated by Dame Alice's oversweet soprano. Hearing it, Sir Ralph reflected that one could distinguish the changing moods of a convent by the way its nuns performed the

unchanging chant of the office” (147) and the nun’s priest contemplates how, in turn, the leadership of the prioresses he has known over the years also set the convent’s mood:

In the days of the old prioress the singing had been elegant, reedy, almost insubstantial like the notes of water-birds secluded in some distant mere. In the time of Prioress Johanna it had grown ragged and strident. Now the tone was full and saccharine, the cadences were reposed on as though they were cushions ... He had looked forward to the reign of Dame Matilda. It had come; and he was satisfied, and yet he was not satisfied. (147)

The ephemeral, changing temperaments of the prioresses and their individual regimes are expressed audibly and perceptibly in the music of their regimes, making the indiscernible discernable through the voices of the order at Oby’s members and the voice of its bell. The music gives the enclosed society its vibrancy and continuity. In keeping with these nebulous characters, the loose rhythm of the Gregorian chant influenced music of the medieval period expresses this ill-defined sense of time passing.

Emphasis is given to each detail, event and character so that individual characters occupy the limelight for transitory periods before returning to the background. Part of augmenting their temporary importance is the stress on their voices, which shifts from being part of the background, the general milieu, to the foreground, in turn dominant and submissive. Calvin S. Brown says, in the context of his discussion of fugue, “In this sense of the word, a ‘voice’ may be human or instrumental. Thus a string quartet consists of four ‘voices,’ one for each instrument” (150). The voices in *The Corner That Held Them* swell and diminish in volume and significance, as melodic motifs in a symphony.

A recurring plot in the novel that advances and recedes from focus is Dame Liliás’s vocation to become an anchoress. Her life is an illustration of the book’s meandering quality. We are told she, “had never tried to escape her destiny, and no gale had thrust such an idea on her. She had been a novice, and now she was a nun . . .” (152). Dame Liliás’s meandering continues

until voices are instrumental in her acquiring a new sense of purpose. Unfortunately, this resolve is thwarted by the petty, mean-spirited "... malice and the routine amusement of the other nuns . . ." (154). When in her initial interest in the post of infirmaress is thwarted, she finds herself appointed as cellaress, "and from the hour that snapped off her rather indefinite intention she was overcome by a sense of coldness and stagnation" (153), leading to a "languor ... diagnosed as pride" (153). Her condition is attributed, in the thirteenth century, to one of the seven deadly sins, but would now be recognized as depression. This depression is expressed in her personal submission to God's will and recognition of a conflict between a spiritual state and sensuality (in her case articulated through her pleasure in the scents of the herbs and spices of medicine and cookery), "and the sins of the flesh which nourish the life of the spirit" (154). These are her circumstances prior to her epiphany.

Within the ritual of the sacrament of Confession, the bogus, unordained priest, Father Ralph, diagnoses Dame Lilius's plight as "accidie, . . . a malady of the soul that in its final intensification of wanhope<sup>8</sup> is one of the seven deadly sins" (154). Accidie is another word for Sloth, and was a manifestation of the sin as a spiritual disorder afflicting religious persons causing them to be uninterested in their duties and commitments to God, making it a kind of spiritual form of the mortal sin of suicide. It was associated with an indifference to the self, or others, that caused ennui, resentment, and lethargy. Physically, it was connected with immobility and lack of interest in work. Dame Lilius's initial relief at his recognition of her plight is

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<sup>8</sup> The *OED* defines *accidie* as: "Physical or mental slothfulness, esp. as a condition leading to listlessness and lack of interest in life; apathy, lethargy, torpor; (also) †an instance of this (*obs.*). Regarded esp. in early use as characteristic of or equivalent to the 'deadly sin' of Sloth, and in Christian asceticism as a condition to which monks and hermits were particularly liable." ("Accidie")

The *OED* defines *wanhope* as: "Hopelessness, despair. In early use chiefly, despair of salvation. Hence often in amatory compositions which imitate religious language." ("Wanhope")

immediately undermined as her depression speaks to her as: “the laconic voice of her intelligence ... assuring her that since the majority of mankind will be found among the damned the addition of herself to that number could not be remarkable, and that if Sir Ralph were interested it could only be because wanhope was rather more of a rarity than sloth or anger” (154). This is a classic example of the way a depressive thinks and of the thought processes controlling their internal and external voices, serving to keep them isolated, a mental dissonance that emphasizes Dame Liliass’s status as an outsider.

Sir Ralph’s response, in contrast, is to experience, if not an epiphany, a renewal of a sense of purpose, expressed through a musical simile: “She had touched his heart. The words so inadequate and true, in which she had described her wasting misery were like a descant on his own revival. Her dreariness was the antipodes of his delight. Everything he had, she lacked; and the antithesis drew him to her because it completed his self-realisation” (154-55). As a descant is a separate melody in the upper vocal register, sung or played above a basic tune where the female voice is usually pitched, it carries the idea of complementing that basic tune. The descant was a feature of medieval church music and its polyphony. The image of a duet is fitting for Sir Ralph’s and Dame Liliass’s mutual revival.

Dame Liliass is a target for the hostility that has grown out of the cliques within the convent, the trivial fault-finding that has embittered and sullied the small, isolated community. She is the outsider within this sorority of outsiders, and indeed the convent itself is an outsider within the environs of the Church. Oby’s isolation and its regime makes it a prison for its community, emphasized by the convent’s patron saint being Saint Leonard, the benefactor of prisoners, including prisoners of war, political prisoners, criminals, captives, or slaves. Dame Liliass is doubly a prisoner of the institution and its dysfunctional culture. Sir Ralph’s appeal to

the prioress for Dame Liliás's protection from the nuns who, "would murder Dame Liliás among them . . ." (155) is ignored, so he suggests to the beleaguered nun, "Why do you not pray to Saint Leonard? He releases prisoners." The results are spectacular.

Dame Liliás experiences a vocally conveyed epiphany regarding her vocation, an epiphany she believes inspired by the saint who will deliver her from her tormentors:

She had done as he had bid, escaping from the afternoon recreation to go and pray before the statue of the saint . . . She had felt, she said, all of a sudden such a force of loathing that it was as though a headsman's axe had fallen on the nape of her neck, and she had tumbled face forward. Then she was aware of Dame Dorothy standing behind her saying: "What a pity to disturb such devotion! But the rest of us are such dull groveling creatures that we have to live by the Rule . . ."

"And while she was still speaking," she concluded, I heard another voice. And it said: 'Now see the reason of all this hating. Go, and become an anchoress.'

"An anchoress!" she repeated. Saint Leonard bade me become an anchoress." (156)

Not surprisingly the voice speaking to her within articulates her instinct for escape into isolation from the community in a way she has been unable to verbalize for herself. We are told several times that she lacks eloquence and that she has lapsed into silence.

As before, Sir Ralph feels that his spiritual state is bound up with Dame Liliás's. If she was a "descant" before, now she has heard: "a voice from heaven, and the voice she had heard was now reverberating in him, and assuring him with the greatest distinctness that it takes a sacrament to make a priest . . . Dame Liliás had heard a voice from heaven, and so little a priest was he that he thought none the worse of her and even took her at her word." (157) This is an example of a flexible, multi-layered voice at work in the novel as it touches and affects Sir Ralph's and Dame Liliás's relationship with the Church. Dame Liliás's access to the voice of

God via a saint's voice puts their roles in this church community into perspective as Sir Ralph contemplates the presence of divine intelligence, as manifested in this voice.

With the appointment of a new Bishop, the convent is thrown into a state of uncertainty as to its present and future. Bishop Walter Dunford is defined by his "murmuring" (180) voice of "persistent sweetness" (178). Whilst making his minute inspection his demeanor is at direct odds with his harsh judgments in the critical letter he sends detailing his views on the convent's management:

His questions went into the minutest detail and covered everything ... Coming to the subject of revenues and expenditure the questions ramified and became more searching ... Such an interrogation was impressive but not intimidating. He was so lucid, so methodical, that each obedientiary came out of her examination with the sense that she had given a good account of her ministry, while the listeners felt that they were assisting in a very fine sort of performance. Only when the sitting was broken off did the nuns realise how exceedingly tired they were and how their limbs ached, as though they had been taking some violent and unaccustomed exercise. (178-79)

In presenting this mild persona, he is able to mask the full extent of his forensic investigation, and his disapproval of what he finds, as it enables him to probe the nuns he interviews by having lulled them into a false sense of security:

Greeting his dear sisters, Bishop Walter informed them that he had earnestly considered the plight of their house, which was like a house builded on sand . . . Oby was full of pride, sloth, greed, falsehoods, worldliness, pet animals and private property. His grieving eyes had beheld spiced meats, soft cushions, perfumed and flowing mantles, better befitting harlots than brides of Christ, whose joy it should be to feed on roots and wear narrow garments. Instead of the silence of the tomb, which to the ear of religion is music, his hearing had been tormented by the yelping of little dogs and the clattering of egg-whisks. (183)

He equates the religious life with silence and death; ideally it is a total removal of the human voice, its sound and its music, or at least an injunction that the voice should be *sotto voce*, as one of his criticisms is couched thus: “The office was performed with wordly glibness, the song too loud, the words were not fully pronounced” (184).

The bishop’s auditor, Henry Yellowlees experiences an epiphany through music in the chapter “Triste Loysir” (the action takes place October 1374-May 1377) that uses this musical focus to ponder the politics, micro and macro, of the Church, and its position in society at large. As Warner states, “In music the *Ars nova* discarded a good deal of clutter and long-windedness in favour of ease of movement and euphony” (“*The Corner That Held Them: ‘A Note on the Historical Background’*” 12). The music is a framework for examining the prelude to the Peasant’s Revolt. The influence of “Triste Loysir,” a fictional example of the *Ars nova* musical genre, stems from a lively discussion about the new style and the subsequent changes to one man, and manifests aural ekphrasis. Warner uses Yellowlees’ story to illustrate the gathering resentment against the Church that culminates in the Peasant’s Revolt (1381) and the need for change.

Warner’s use of *mise en abyme* is noted earlier in the discussion of *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot*. In making the *Ars nova* development in English church music central to the chapter and Yellowlees’ story, when English church music was a particular expertise of Warner’s, it is possible to argue that she is consciously inserting herself into her text through this evocation, while maintaining the impersonality of authorship. This presence through allusion strikes a connection to the thirteenth century and adds a further dissonant note to the narrative, with an added layer of complication. The past is connected to the present, and influences the future through progressive artistic effort which thrives by drawing on what has gone before. By placing

herself in the middle of this interaction, Warner becomes our mediator to these connections yet provides a sense of continuity within the nebulous plotting. It is a case of bringing knowledge of the outside, contemporary world to the text, and how fictional worlds can interact and reveal the real world. The music is a symbol of a particular culture, and through its polyphony and harmony we can envision alternative social possibilities. In an extension of the use of synesthesia, our attention is drawn to the primary color of her character Henry's name, so he personifies a fusion of sight, sound and touch.

Warner's linking of artistic practice in the fourteenth and twentieth centuries raises a question around Modernism's definition that it was a pivotal discontinuity or rift with nineteenth-century artistic forms. However, this demarcation depends on homogenous or loosely defined concepts of "tradition." Looking at specific aesthetic traditions within these monolithic definitions shows that Modernism's meeting with these is often troubled and multifaceted rather than a straightforward abrupt break. Warner had a wide-ranging familiarity with the arts and was extremely musically informed which makes her writing fertile ground for analyzing how it references and engages with other artworks, and how they do or do not engage with Modernism.

The chapter opens with the first of several allusions to the Psalms, a quotation from the Second Psalm, "*Quare fremuerent gentes*" ("Why do the heathen so furiously rage together"), marking the beginning of Dame Lovisa's "distaste for David" (186), which serves to illustrate the petty personal irritations that mar the community: "The man talked like Dame Helen: he said what he had to say, often silly enough, and then immediately said it all over again in rather different words. As something to sing about it might be well enough, but as a statement from one rational being to another – and God is the sum of rational being – it was poor" (186). Warner then moves to link the psalteress with Bishop Walter as he prepares to aggravate irritation by

appointing his auditor to look into the convent's financial affairs, in a highly ironic passage on the theme of unity:

Thus Dame Lovisa, unwittingly, was a confirmation of what Bishop Walter was writing on that same morning in the peroration which closed the first book of his treatise *De Cantu*.

The song of David tempers the clarion of the victor; accords the inharmonious cries of the oppressed; awakens the slothful ... And as the psaltery is made of reeds of differing lengths, varying from the most treble to the most grave and yet all by the lips of the player breathe forth a melody, even doth the Psalter conform itself to every mood of man and melodiously control and express them. (186)

The Bishop's musings also contain another allusion to Dame Liliás's spiritual malaise, "awakens the slothful", reinforcing the idea that sound has been the catalyst that has helped her towards a spiritual cure.

Here again, the voice is the key to Yellowlees' character: "He had a soft diffident voice – a voice that the bishop, if he had been more attentive to humankind, would have recognised as the kind of voice that goes with an obstinate character" (187). The description is very similar to the Bishop's voice, but this is deceptive as the obstinate Yellowlees is to demonstrate. In this chapter, the stress on the voice prepares us for the singing epiphany that occurs towards its end. Mutti writes of the transformational influence of music as an agent of epiphany and personal change:

This is the beginning of new thinking for the steward; an intellectual journey into the unknown brought about by the transformational experience of the music he shares in such extraordinary circumstances; and importantly it is the power of music, not of religion, that Warner is highlighting here. An example of Yellowlees' revelatory new thinking is his dawning acceptance of the leper, the most reviled of social outcasts ... This explicit combination of socially disparate voices shows the political implications of polyphony; none of the voices are dominant; they are independent yet harmonizing and each has its equally important melody ... despite being from different walks of life and differing

circumstances, the perspectives of the three men merge in the narrative as do their voices in the polyphony they sing. (11-12).

In this part of the episode, Warner uses this new music to underline her political conviction in social equality and inclusion through the harmony and polyphony of the musical episode.

However, although the social harmonization of music may be found within the Church, ultimately, there is no true inclusion, and the Church is an institution of the *status quo*. The chaplain's passion for the new musical form leads to his death as he has neglected his Christian duty of care for his charges in order to indulge himself: "What did the other lepers think of it, those who could not sing, sitting in their straw, mumbling their sour bread ... and hearing the music go on and on?" (204). This thought about simmering resentment against the chaplain is confirmed when Yellowlees returns to the leper house to find it raided, destroyed, and the chaplain murdered by an itinerant, vigilante group known as the Twelve Apostles. Ultimately, the chaplain's obsession with the new music has led to his death:

They called themselves the Twelve Apostles, they said they were going about to right the poor. One had been here before, and had heard the lepers complain, I suppose. They were always complaining and saying that he spent all on music-books that should have been spent on them. And it is true, there was often nothing to eat. It was the lepers who killed him, they had hated him for a long time. The others only shouted and destroyed. (212)

The music is a key component to this overture to the larger rebellion to come in 1381. Warner puts a sophisticated analysis of the resentment driving the rebels that strikes at the heart of the Church's false, smug piety into the Killdew librarian's mouth:

[T]he most damaging rumours about Bishop Walter were those telling of his poverty and abstinence. Such talk suggested to the poor and ignorant that the majority of churchmen lived inordinately richly. Personal austerities were all very well no doubt, but to obtrude them was disloyal to the tonsure. He added that if Bishop Walter ate two dishes at dinner instead of one, in all likelihood the

unfortunate chaplain at Saint Sepulchre would not have been clubbed to death.  
(215)

To the starving and desperate, for a person of wealth and status to affect poverty is unbearably insulting.

Reunited with the leper whom he sang with on his previous visit, Yellowlees shares another musical experience with him, but this time it begins with the Church's established tradition, of the hymn associated with compline, the clerical hour of the day as they approach the Killdew religious house: "The leper hawked, and crossed himself, and began to sing *Te lucis ante terminum* ["To Thee Before the Close of Day"] and as Henry took it up he deserted the plain-chant and sang a descant." The singing then morphs into the *Triste Loysir* of their previous encounter, reestablishing the mood of fraternity:

[T]he leper [was] sitting a dozen paces away, but near enough to prompt Henry in the bass part of *Triste loysir* until he could sing it steadily enough for the tenor to be added. He sang it three times through, and if in the beginning, Henry remembered the chaplain from whose stinking body the chill of evening had now swept off the flies, by the third repetition nothing remained but the two voices answering and according and a regret that they could not sit singing all night through. (213)

The final two sentences of the chapter suggest that although this is a feudal society, the Church is explicitly Capitalist in nature, rather than spiritual:

Tell the bishop that money is the root of all evil, he replied. Some new element, perhaps, *Ars nova*, perhaps the conversation of the sophisticated Lombard, had made a new man of Henry Yellowlees, and the secretary reported to the bishop that Master Yellowlees had been away for so long he had been consorting with the Lollards." (215)

In invoking the Lollards, a dissident religious group within the Church, Warner also reminds us that the Church's move away from spirituality to the business of making money out of Christian

belief encouraged dissension and eventually would culminate in the Reformation and the challenge of Protestantism to the Catholic Church. In her note on the novel's historical background she quotes John Ball, the revolt's Lollard leader, in his articulation of the grievances:

For what reason have they, whom we call lords, got the better of us? If we are all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can they assert or prove they are more masters than ourselves – except perhaps that they make us work and produce for their spending. They are clothed in velvet, ermine, and furs, while we wear coarse linen. They have wines, spices, and good bread, while we get rye bread, offal, straw, and water. They have mansions and fine manors, and we bear the toil and the trouble, and must endure the wind and rain out of doors. And it is from us and our labour that they get the wherewithal to keep up their pomp. (*The Corner That Held Them: 'A Note on the Historical Background'* 11)

It is a litany echoed in the description of the unjust treatment of St. Sepulchre's lepers.

The frequent appearance of the words *voice* and *voices*, acts as a kind of chorus and is one of the ways Warner directs us to take notice of the aural aspect of her writing, where the sound, and the absence of sound, are vital to weaving her stories. The interpretation of what is said, and what is not said, is a large part of the action. An example of this is the way Dame Alice becomes convinced, through convincing herself, that Prioress Matilda wants her to murder Magdalene Figg before the new bishop's visitation, to spare the embarrassment of the discovery of Sir Ralph's and Magdalene's amorous liaison. Bishop Walter Dunford is "... a man of low birth: his father had been a candle-maker, his mother a midwife, and between them with great piety they had reared up a long family" (160), and "Dame Alice was ... a woman of low breeding (164), enabling Dame Alice to claim class solidarity, with the bishop, and therefore insight into his mind:

"Speak of it? Not I! But do you suppose, dear Mother, that we your poor loyal nuns, are the only people who can talk of it? If Bishop Walter has not heard of it already, he soon will. The nearer you are to earth, the quicker you hear these stories. And the bishop is only a candle-maker's son, you know. He is quite a low-

bred gossiping sort of person—like me, dear Mother. . . We are simple people, the bishop and I. We think like the common folk we are.” (165)

The passage contains four words concerned with the voice, words, and hearing— *speaking, talking, heard,* and *hear* — and this is a common occurrence in the novel.

Warner’s attention to the soundscape of the scenes she describes provides commentary on her characters’ internal emotional landscapes and their society’s political landscape. Musical metaphors and symbols augment the effects of these soundscapes. Beer states:

Her training as a transcriber of music and her gifts as a musician move into the pacing and timbre of her writing: she has a particularly acute ear for the nuanced hesitations of dialogue: the narrative presence of her work relies often on the unvoiced rests between sentences for its effect, and she also draws freely on musical experience in describing emotional states.” (“The Centrifugal Kick” 24)

Moving to Warner’s contemporary setting, the salient point about music’s role in her short story “Emil” (1956) is that instead of expressing harmony and accord, it expresses the disharmony between the individual characters stemming from the political upheaval that marks the inexorable progress towards the Second World War. Musical dissonance expresses social dissonance. The story is set in the aftermath of Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria, the *Anschluss*, of 1938. Mr. and Mrs. Hathaway embody the profound niceness of Middle England. They have resolved to help Emil, an Austrian refugee, and bring him to the profoundly nice Middle English village of France Green through the auspices of the Friends of Democracy.

Emil’s connection with music is established at a point during their first evening together, when, “. . . the conversation flagged, and it was a relief when he said, ‘You have a piano. I, too, am fond of music.’” However, the respite to the social awkwardness with this apparent point of mutuality is momentary, as instantly Mrs. Hathaway is seized with the fear of exposing an inferior ability: “Now I shall be caught out . . . They are so intensely musical, and suppose he

asks me to play duets with him? If it were only the slow movements—but when everything gets black with semiquavers I always lose my head” (185). The musical connection is used, ironically, to stress the differences between the characters. Music divides rather than unites them.

Distance and differences between the characters is confirmed by Emil’s playing as a solo activity, rather than the partnership of a duet, as “Emil showed no inclination for duets” (185) and his hosts not recognizing his repertoire. His music expresses his emotional solitude, and is an emotional outlet, as, “The piano was clearly a great solace to Emil, even more so after it had been tuned. He played it by the hour: sad melodies and dance tunes with a sorrowful hop in them” (185).

Part of the distance between Emil and the Hathaways is that as a refugee, his status is different from their usual expectations of foreign citizens within England. They are uncomfortable as: “[I]t is difficult for people living in their busy untroubled homes to understand the position of a refugee, unless, of course, that refugee is of a class which cooks or sews or looks after children” (185), and they are of the social class used to employing servants, or else dispensing charity in exchange for services in kind. Refugee and hosts do not even bond over the political act that brought them together as it was anticipated that “a common disapproval is common ground enough” (185).

Emil’s piano playing provides the bathetic sound track to a comic scene where humor is derived from misunderstanding and confusion about the political situation that has brought him to France Green as Warner satirizes the everyday person’s disengagement with politics. While Miss Forrester gives “an eloquent speech about the sufferings of the Jews,” and reveals another inhabitant’s misperception of Emil being a Communist, Mrs. Hathaway tries to disabuse her of these false impressions. Miss Forrester remains oblivious to the corrections, and “the music

continued ... But still the music continued” in the background. Emil is a disembodied presence, represented by his music, part, and yet not part, of the conversation.

Emil remains in isolation until the threat of a war begins to increase. It seems that he becomes more animated and involved with his new community as the 1938 home front preparations intensify around installing an air raid warning siren and, “Emil dug too. He dug extremely well. After a little wary observation by the other diggers, he became very popular among them. When it was too dark to dig any longer, he produced a mouth organ and the gang marched home with a swagger” (189-190). His music has changed from a melancholic solo performance on the piano, to an entirely more sociable, rousing version on the humble mouth organ, which helps to raise the spirits of his companions.

In the foreground, Emil becomes more and more active with the civilian war defenses, while in the background, the political scene continues to shift: “On Wednesday the news came that the Prime Minister was going to Munich . . . The morning papers carried the headlines: ‘Agreement Reached, Occupation to Begin Tomorrow. Mr. Chamberlain Flying Back,’ and in smaller type, ‘Prague Agrees to Further Concessions’ (190-92). The deepening crisis in the Sudetenland, dramatized in the press and in radio broadcasts, is another step in Europe’s journey towards war, “a war which would make him [Emil] an enemy alien . . .” (191). Emil has tacitly accepted the inevitability of war (even if Chamberlain had not at this point) during his period of self-imposed musical isolation, and is ready to commit to the Allies’ cause against Nazi Germany. Acceptance is implicit in the last lines of the story: “Emil limped across to the piano. For a moment he stared at the keyboard. Then he turned and looked at Mrs Hathaway — a look of mournful, scornful, listless understanding. ‘Couldn’t we play a duet?’ he said” (192). He has undergone an internal change from soloist playing in isolation, to a person who will work

resignedly in collaboration and coordination with others towards the common goal of defeating Nazism through a world war, the ultimate disharmony.

By evoking sounds and music, Warner provides multi-layered points of access to her aesthetic and narrative through internal and external soundscapes within the text. In the examples above the aural descriptions are a relief from thought, a disruption of ordinary life, and the articulation of otherworldly, bodily, and political longings, and detachment, and dissonance. In literature's search to find new ways to tell stories, using music and noise offers one conceivable standard of how material can be ordered and offered. These unforeseen arrangements frequently unsettle the reader's anticipations of a narrative text, thus calling for extra participation in the analysis of the text. Music may pose an unaccustomed challenge, drawing on alluded associations with music and sound that cannot be enclosed inside the fictional work itself, just as any reading involvement entails the reader's own participation in order to build a combined meaning. For some readers, the use of any actual music could involve them as part of a coterie conversant with the systems, performances, and terminology of that style. For others, it might make the full reading experience inaccessible, since the forms in the text cannot be easily explicated without recourse to musical awareness. If Warner is writing musical fiction, that is fiction that is structured around essential allusions to music, it is conceivable that her prospective audience is limited, but that rewards await those who accept the challenge, solve the puzzle, and recognize the musical analogies.

Up to the nineteenth century, music's ability for interaction and emotional inspiration was connected to perceptions of it as above material affairs. In the twentieth century, Eric Prieto writes, "For those modernists more interested in the exploration of mental reality than in the representation of the physical and social realities of the outside world . . . , music offers a set of

formal, expressive, and referential principles that can be used in the attempt to better represent the inner space of consciousness” (x). Prieto’s approach is confirmed by Brad Bucknell, who maintains that when confronted with a crisis of language over absolute meaning, modernists drew on music as a paradigm “to represent conscious and unconscious levels of emotion” of “deeper significance” (2, 1). It is possible to see Warner as using music and sound to “go beyond the mere rationality of language” (Bucknell 3) and influenced by the change in musical culture in the early twentieth century. Epstein cites composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, as well as the “noise” of Dadaist sound poetry, as exemplifying this turn, and comments: “For these composers, and for the writers listening to them, it became a principal project of modern art to figure out what would “count” as music or noise, and what was aesthetically or culturally at stake in pressing that question” (xv). What was understood to be music was in flux, forcing a reconsideration of the distinction between noise and music as definitions blurred.

The reader who recognizes a connection between the text and the sounds, musical and otherwise, which Warner evokes can better understand how the text works. The unexpected and complex forms make more sense and yield an epiphanic satisfaction when the pattern has been found, and we can consider what the addition of music and soundscapes add to Warner’s meanings and messages. A useful way to think of this interaction is to visualize a Venn diagram where the separate elements of the synesthesia can be represented, along with their overlap and various combinations and how they can work together to create meaning through an assortment intermingling. The optimum sensual experience originates in a blend of sensualities, which will allow readers to arrive at an optimum epiphany at the overlapping point of the diagram’s circles.

One approach to this question is to recognize the recurring theme of dissonance in the texts above. Music is usually a means to giving order to chaos, and the musician’s struggle is to

find balance between freedom and constraint. Too little structure results in chaos, and too much inhibits the musician's freedom. In this aural *ekphrasis* the production of a piece of music is cast as a parallel to the writing process and the figure of the musician as an alter ego of the author figure in the text.

What can we conclude from Warner's depiction of music, the human voice, and noise? That they are all central to her writing as her narrative is frequently mediated through sound, but the occurrences are too diverse to make for a single supposition. Assessing a narrative text on the degree to which it manages to be like music is dependent on the pertinence of discussions of wholeness and unity. In Warner the demarcation between music and noise is blurred. The literature does not only try to convey music, but numerous experiences of sound. Yoking different aesthetic forms together provides a sensually and cerebrally comprehensive experience that may, or may not, unify incongruent aspects of life, and may, or may not, confer ambiguity. While the nineteenth-century aesthetic convention came under pressure and inspection, as no longer applicable to the early twentieth-century experience, it had still not quite relinquished its hold. If music was to carry on expressing and critiquing the human condition in modernity, it had to find a way to admit and suggest the aural and psychological effect of modernity. Hearing with our internal ear as we read is essential to appreciating Warner's writing, leading to an appreciation of the relationship between music and literature through sound. More work remains to be done on musical and aural elements, such as timbre and rhythm, in Warner's prose and poetical works that may uncover a grand scheme that, for the moment, remains hidden.

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