

Stanley Makower's Contribution to the "Woman Composer Question": A Reading of *The Mirror of Music* (1895)*

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The Mirror of Music (1895), a novel by Stanley V. Makower, is a unique document in which a contemporary male music critic attempted to approach the conflicts experienced by a young female composer, using first-person monologue in the form of a diary. A contemporary reviewer defined the novel as follows: "This is the interrupted diary of an insane girl who goes mad over music" (*The New York Times*, September 15, 1895). Indeed, on the surface level, the novel can be read as such. The female protagonist pursues her ambition to become a composer against her family's opposition, but on achieving the desired success, she undergoes a serious nervous breakdown, starts having hallucinatory visions, and dies young. Thus the novel seems to tell a typical antifeminist tale of the consequences of a woman's deviation from her proper "sphere." While that may be the ostensible plot presented to the conventional readership, it actually camouflages the radically controversial pro-feminist ideology of the work. The "madness" of the heroine is presented not merely as a typical Victorian female malady, but as that kind of madness which, according to Schopenhauer, is an aspect of genius. According to Schopenhauer, musical genius is privileged to have access to the deep reality of the world, to "things-in-themselves." Though Schopenhauer did not admit the presence of genius among women, Makower has characterized his heroine as such, by creating the phantasmic images viewed by the heroine according to Schopenhauer's theory of musical revelation.

A look at the formal and stylistic aspects of *The Mirror of Music*, especially its pastiche method, would strengthen the argument that Makower positively supported the presence of female artistic genius.

1. Introduction

The Mirror of Music (1895), a novel by Stanley V. Makower, dedicated to Yvette Guilbert, is a unique document in which a contemporary male music critic attempted to approach the conflicts experienced by a young female composer, using first-person monologue in the form of a diary. Oscar Wilde, in his letter to Makower on 22 September 1897, much praised this work:

My dear Stanley, I think your book intensely interesting: a most subtle analysis of the relations between music and a soul: I know nothing else in literature where this motif is treated with anything like your skill of analysis and power of presentation.¹

Curiously, however, there has been very little secondary work on this unusual novel. And even in these few articles which refer to *The Mirror of Music* (hereafter *MM*), it is rather hard to find favourable comments on it. William F. Blissett calls this work “rather slight” in his essay on George Moore.² What, then, in this novel that fascinated and incited Wilde to give such unconditional approval as we have seen? I would suspect that the ambiguity and ambivalence the interpretation of this novel encompasses have hitherto hindered the work from being properly evaluated.

This essay, therefore, is an attempt to revalue and hopefully, revive this much under-read and under-estimated novelistic work, by disentangling its complicated narrative devices and thus disclosing and approaching the authorial intention which lies hidden deep below the surface level of the text. The story might appear “slight” and trivial at a glance, to a casual reader, but the author is trying surreptitiously to send

out a secret message to select few readers who share with him a common cause, a common feminist ideology—but since that ideology was still too controversial to be openly declared at the time, he might have been compelled to convey it in an encrypted form to his fellow conspirators.

A contemporary review published in *The New York Times* defines this novel as "the interrupted diary of an insane girl":

This is the interrupted diary of an insane girl who goes mad over music, and music is very good in its way, but really not worth your losing your brains about. You might say that Stanley V. Makower was trying to intensify the unfortunate traits of a Marie Bashkirtseff, only Sarah Kraftal [sic], the suppositious composer of a choral symphony, had a much wilder bee buzzing in her bonnet than the unfortunate Russian girl. Nordau did he ever read "The Mirror of Music" would hold it up as an example of decadent taste.³

Critics seem to tend simply to regard, and describe, the phantasmic vision experienced by the heroine as a sign of "madness." Benjamin F. Fisher, in his article on Stephen Crane, also refers to *MM* as an "experimental novel," in which Makower "in places substituted musical scores for words to express the heroine's emotional vicissitudes which eventually ran to madness."⁴

As we have seen, both Fisher and the reviewer for the *New York Times* describe the chief characteristics of the heroine as "madness." And indeed, the author seems to have intentionally characterized his heroine with some overtly typical attributes of madness. Can it not, however, be possible to suggest that Makower presented this "madness" of the heroine not as a typical Victorian female malady, but as that kind of madness which, according to Schopenhauer, is an aspect of genius? In Schopenhauer's philosophy, musical genius is privileged to have access to the deep reality of the world, to "things-in-themselves." Though Schopenhauer did not admit the presence of genius among women, Makower has characterized Sarah,

his heroine, as such. However, to those who do not share this Schopenhauerian concept of genius, or cannot conceive of any genius in women, the revelation of the mystery of the world to which the heroine is exposed at the end of the novel may be viewed just as a phantasmic illusion experienced in madness, madness as punishment for her deviation from her prescribed role in society.

When at Cambridge, Makower co-edited with the young philosopher Bertrand Russell a student newspaper called *Cambridge Observer*, and contributed several articles on Ibsen's plays.⁵ After *MM*, he would publish *Cecilia* (1897), another novel featuring a "New Woman" type heroine who also is musically talented like Sarah in *MM*. And in 1908, *Perdita: A Romance in Biography* comes out, in which Makower attempts to respond to the "steady appeal for comprehension" (3) shown in the eyes of Mary Robinson in her portrait by Thomas Gainsborough. These works would make one conclude that throughout his writing career, Makower remained a serious advocate of women's social and spiritual emancipation and also of their artistic and creative efforts.

This article will first have a look at what is called the "Woman Composer Question"⁶ around the turn of the last century to grasp the historical and cultural background against which Makower's novel was created. Then it will focus on how Makower manages to prove the theoretical possibility of female musical genius, using the very discourses which attempt to deny such possibility. I would like to pay attention also to the way Makower undertakes literary conversations with his contemporary women writers through his pastiche method.

2. The "Woman Composer Question"

MM consists of three sections: an introductory frame narrative; which introduces the diary of Sarah, which is the central and the main part; and the epilogue. In the opening scene of this novel, club-men are arguing about their ideal type of woman. When Severine Maidanoff, a music critic, a brilliant violinist, and the only appreciator of the genius of Sarah Kaftal,

the heroine – by giving him the same initials as his own, Makower seems to have created this character as his other self – is asked if he has “ever really [been] in love,” he replies with another question, “Have you ever heard of a musical composer called Kaftal? (10)⁷” Severine/Makower intentionally introduces the heroine only by her surname, inviting the following response from the interlocutor/reader by obscuring the composer’s sex: “Did he write a very modern kind of choral symphony? (8)” The careless use of the pronoun “he” reveals the unconscious presupposition that a “modern” innovative composer should be a male. Having once responded: “Exactly,” only to approve the association of that name and the sort of work done by the composer, Severine adds, “The composer was a woman (9)” “quietly,” as if to mitigate the shock this surprising information might give to a conventional mind.

Music composition has traditionally been viewed as an activity belonging exclusively to the male domain. Even today, the stereotype remains persistent. In the special issue of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* entitled “1960-2000: Aesthetics in Britain,” there appeared an article on the issue of the apparent absence of female composers from the history of Western music: “Women in Music” by Gordon Graham. Graham first raises a question about St. Cecilia’s being a musical saint, while also being female: “it is a striking fact that the patron saint of music should be female, because if in the history of any art women have been specially conspicuous by their absence, it is music.”⁸ He then seeks for an explanation for the “fact” that “most people cannot name a woman composer” and even if “the better informed” are able to “supply *some* names,” “none of these has anything of the currency of Mozart and Beethoven.”⁹ He opposes the claim made by Marcia Citron that there might have been many women composers who have been ignored by “the male-influenced selectivity of historical enquiry,” and also rejects Citron’s hypothesis that “if women are generally taught not to aspire to certain goals, they will lack the confidence actually to aspire to them.”¹⁰ He even denies the need to assume “that the absence of women composers is *abnormal* and therefore something for which there

must be a special explanation.”¹¹ Though ostensibly admitting that “we do not possess” “. . . a biological explanation,” Graham finally seems to explain the scarcity of female composers by biological determinism, comparing the ability to “compose significant music” to the ability to “bear children”:

That there are important differences between men and women is an incontestable fact. Despite the imaginings of some fantasists, it is, remains, and will remain the case that only women can bear children. This is something that some men might conceivably envy, but their envy does not alter the fact. Suppose it should turn out only men can compose significant music. Should this depress women who are concerned for their own respect and standing?¹²

However, might it not be that this line of Graham’s argument happens to be the very same one as has hitherto deprived women of the opportunity of exploring their potential in composition?

In nineteenth century Europe, music was conceived of as a necessary part of cultural education for women of middle-class and aristocratic families. Unmarried girls were encouraged to cultivate music, “primarily voice and piano,” to “improve their marriage possibilities.”¹³ In an era when women had only limited access to education, music was an exceptional field where women could excel, even over men. However, one ultimate female ideal commonly held in the middle-class family was the “angel of the house.” Such an angel would be a chaste housewife satisfied with her role within the household as the supporter of her husband. If women attempted to commit themselves to musical activity beyond the household, it was regarded as undesirable excess. Nancy B. Reich states:

Although this situation [increased opportunity of access to musical education] yielded a large group of amateurs out of which some real talents emerged, upper- and middle-class women were discouraged from taking music too seriously. Even the most competent were

forbidden by husbands or fathers to appear in public, to publish music under their own names. . . ¹⁴

Although the presence of female performers, such as singers and pianists, was becoming socially accepted (piano was considered “a particularly appropriate instrument for women to play because of its association with domestic music making,”¹⁵ and opera singers were “the great stars of the period”¹⁶), composition was regarded as a more serious deviation from the desirable female role; while performance could be the realization of a musical idea conceived of by composers, who are mainly male, and thus could allow for a limited degree of autonomy to female performers, composition is undeniably a creative activity which requires originality and mastery of logical structure of music. Creativity was a quality attributed to the male: “The Romantic ethos idolized the artist-genius—always male—who was seeking self-expression. Woman was idealized; her function was to serve as a Muse for the creator, to inspire and nurture the man.”¹⁷ Therefore,

Women who attempted creative work suffered societal displeasure; consequently, even among professional musicians who were supported and encouraged by family and friends, there were internal and external conflicts about composing. This may explain why such a gifted composer as Clara Schumann was ambivalent about her creative work and could declare that women should not compose.¹⁸

Carol Neuls-Bates devotes a whole section to this “Woman Composer Question” in her anthology, *Women in Music*. According to Neuls-Bates, there were “a large number of women composers in the realm of popular music” throughout the nineteenth century, whose activity was “seemingly deemed acceptable.”¹⁹ However, “the influx of women into the loftier realm of art music—Le Beau and Smyth were part of this generation and at its forefront—occasioned a strong opposition that raged for more than thirty

years.”²⁰ Neuls-Bates argues that, to cope with this phenomenon of the emergence of women composers who would threaten the well-established consensus around male supremacy in their intelligence and creativity, “theories that maintained the innate inferiority of women as composers” were created. These theories, then, were constructed from the attempt to suppress female creativity, not from the actual observation of the reality – but rather against it.

George Upton, a Chicago music critic, was one of the formulators of such theories. Though admitting on the one hand that “music is the highest expression of the emotions”²¹ and also that women live “in emotions,”²² Upton denies, on the other hand, the potential aptitude of women for composition: “She will always be the recipient and interpreter, but there is little hope she will be the creator.”²³

Though Graham uses the presence of eminent women performers as evidence for the equal opportunity women have had in music at education,²⁴ it seems obvious that they have suffered unequal treatment even when they desired to develop their creative talent in the field of music composition. Helen J. Clarke cites the example of “German teachers who absolutely refused to teach women the science of harmony, because, as they declared, no woman could understand it.”²⁵ She argues that it is not appropriate to attribute the “causes” of the apparent absence of women composers to “any innate inferiority of mind or heart” without taking into consideration that woman “has until comparatively recently been taught to execute but not to create.”²⁶

In her essay “Women and Music” (1900), Amy Fay says “women have been too much taken up with helping and encouraging men to place a proper value on their own talent.”²⁷ She lays the blame on such ideas as are represented in John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, in which Ruskin emphasizes the dichotomy of male and female intellects, which fixes women in the role of supporters of their male partners, and which never justifies the room for the development of their own creativity:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention. . . . But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.²⁸

These ideas, however, have started being questioned, says Fay:

Women are beginning to realize that they too, have brains, and even musical ones. They are, at last, studying composition seriously, and will, ere long, feel out a path for themselves, instead of being "mere imitators of men."²⁹

Even though women began to realize their own talents, there were many more difficulties to overcome before actually being able to fulfil their creative potentials—those who experienced this awakening were still a minority and had to struggle against the unsympathetic opposition of the majority.

In her essay *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934), Ethel Smyth explored the difficulties of women becoming composers, pointing out the problems residing in society. Men's refusal to admit creativity in women, or their desire to monopolize the creative domain, was allegorized in the following "legend":

The legend relates that one afternoon while Adam was asleep, Eve, anticipating the Great God Pan, bored some holes in a hollow reed and began to do what is called 'picked out a tune.' Thereupon Adam awoke; 'Stop that horrible noise,' he roared, adding, after a pause, 'besides which, if *any one's going to make it, it's not you but me.*'³⁰

Smyth's main argument is that "as things are to-day it is absolutely impossible for a woman composer to get and keep her head above water." As "an ardent but good-natured fighter in the cause of women," she points out

that “few men realise how differently from themselves women are placed in the musical world,” “which,” according to her, “is not surprising”: “How many of us are capable of profound X-ray insight on any question whatsoever, let alone on one that doesn’t interest us?”³¹ Smyth conceives the suppression of female creativity as evidently present, but at the same time as unseen and unrecognised by those who do not directly suffer from it. She assumes the role of a seer who projects “profound X-ray” into problems of women hitherto ignored, and presents them to the public in a recognizable form.

In writing *MM*, Makower also must have been keenly aware of the serious invisibility of the problem of the suppression of female creative genius. *MM*, however, might be designed to work as a prism—the instrument which analyzes and dissects the seemingly neutral white light into hidden components—rather than as an “X-ray insight,” as termed by Smyth. In the discussion of the female ideal mentioned above, to the clubmen who become interested in the female figure, whom Severine has referred to as “a great musician (9),” he offers Sarah’s diary to be read, with the following words: “Anybody who cares to fetch it may read it, but he won’t understand much about it; it is full of music (10).” This is a challenge to readers (in the story and in reality), an expression of doubt as to their capacity to appreciate properly the unconventional heroine and the ideas around music expressed in the novel. Being not understood was a serious problem faced by many new women like Sarah, and here, the problem of understanding the woman overlaps with the problems of the understanding of music. Music is conceived of as a representational medium, which conveys some profound meaning to be deciphered.

According to Carl Dahlhaus, “[t]he thought music can be destined to be ‘understood’”³² arose around 1800 and was put to practice by Ludwig van Beethoven:

The new insight that Beethoven thrust upon the aesthetic consciousness of his age was that a musical text, like a literary or a

philosophical text, harbors a meaning which is made manifest but not entirely subsumed in its acoustic presentation—that a musical creation can exist as an “art work of ideas” transcending its various interpretations.³³

Dahlhaus describes the reaction of contemporary audiences to Beethoven: “Audiences were astonished . . . and at all events feeling that they understood little or nothing of what happened in Beethoven’s work, even though they were supposed to understand it all.”³⁴ Thus, an “esoteric”³⁵ piece of music can function as a prism to separate listeners into two categories—those who understand, and those who do not.

Considering this contribution of Beethoven to the formation of modern musical aesthetics, it is no wonder that his piano sonata, *Appassionata*, is employed as a key motif throughout the novel, leading to the final revelation of the universe to the heroine. The next section looks at how Makower constructs and presents the theoretical possibility of the presence of a woman composer of genius, subversively using a patchwork of contemporary ideas which deny any presence of such, Schopenhauerian philosophy in particular. Makower bases the characterization of Sarah, the heroine of *MM*, on the description of genius presented by Schopenhauer. Sarah is shown to be an “innovative” genius who adds to the lineage of great composers such as Beethoven, Schumann, and Wagner.

3. Intellectual Construction of Female Musical Genius

On the starting day of her diary, dated “London, 27th October 1879,” Sarah is tiring herself by playing this sonata *Appassionata*. She feels that there is “something very mysterious about that melody (12)”:



and cannot feel relieved until she discovers what is in it:

It is a perpetual worry to me not to know why I am so fond of music and what it is that fascinates me. For instance, what is there in that melody that is so great? (12)

It is this obsession to know better, and reach the deep structure of music, that distinguishes Sarah from the ordinary people around her, who are satisfied with the surface level of music as the mere enjoyment of sound. While playing the piano is an exhausting activity for Sarah, which demands the whole commitment of her body and soul, her mother's friends, for example, regard it as a form of distraction, commenting: "it must be so pleasant to be able to play when one was tired and wanted relaxation" (18). Not being able to understand such comments nor being understood, Sarah feels a huge communication gap between herself and other people, with the single exception of Severine, who seems to be the fictional double of Makower, the author, and whom she has once met: "Of the people I have met there is only one who does not talk of music in a way that is absolutely incomprehensible to me" (18).

In Schopenhauer's philosophy, to which *The Mirror* admittedly owes much, "[e]very genuine and successful work of art" answers the question, "What is life?"³⁶ : and the questioning of "How is it really constituted?" makes "the artist or the poet."³⁷ Moreover, Schopenhauer places music as the highest among the arts:

Music also answers it, more profoundly indeed than do all the others, since in a language intelligible with absolute directness, yet not capable of translation of our faculty of reason, it expresses the innermost nature of all life and existence.³⁸

For the creation of such a work of art, Schopenhauer says, a "*perceptive apprehension of things*"³⁹ is required [Original italics]. For Schopenhauer,

the reason, or the "abstract," is only a secondary means of knowledge, motivated by the subjective "will" to live and therefore leading only to the understanding of the "world as will." The "normal" person relies mostly on this "will," whereas "the genius, on the contrary, has two-thirds intellect and one-third will" ⁴⁰: "The frequently observed kinship on genius with madness rests chiefly on that very separation of the intellect from the will," ⁴¹ says Schopenhauer. The "awakening of genius, the hour of inspiration" is the time of "the intellect's becoming free," ⁴² and: "The intellect is then of the greatest purity, and becomes the clear mirror of the world." ⁴³ The "mirror of music" in the title of the novel, therefore, can be interpreted as music as a pure medium, which conveys a clear understanding of the world, "the innermost nature of all life and existence" in a language different from our analytical system of words.

According to Schopenhauer, genius is characterised by "an abnormal excess of intellect that can find its use only by being employed on the universal of existence" ⁴⁴ and "the high value of imagination." ⁴⁵ However, as people of genius exert their energy chiefly on the pursuit of "universal" truths, they tend to sacrifice their "personal welfare," ⁴⁶ or the fulfilment of the task inflicted by "the intention of the will" to survive, to such a degree that it can "even become injurious to them." ⁴⁷ Moreover, their "brighter" intellect enables them to perceive "more distinctly" "the wretchedness" of the condition of "the will-to-live," leading to "the melancholy accompanying genius." ⁴⁸ Accordingly, Sarah is depicted as more sensitive to the misery of life than ordinary people, and as suffering from maladjustment to the circumstances she is put in. At the age of eight, she declares to her governess "firmly, and with some conviction in [her] voice, that [she] was unhappy and no amount of luxury and education could make up for that" (38).

Schopenhauer says, "the genius perceives a world different from them [the rest] all." ⁴⁹ Since childhood, Sarah has been made to know her difference from others at a cost. Being an inquisitive girl who cannot be satisfied with a superficial understanding of phenomena around her, she

would put “I don’t understand,” “for which [she] never failed to be called either ‘excessively stupid’; or ‘excessively obstinate’” (37-8). It leads to her sense of unhappiness: “It was so hard not to be able to understand things, and then to be laughed at or punished as well; yes, over and over again, I would be punished for what I could not possibly help” (38). For Schopenhauer’s genius, “the whole concerns him [the genius], and he tries to grasp it, in order to present it, or explain it, or act it in practice.” And “he simply cannot do otherwise.”⁵⁰ It is impossible for Sarah to reconcile herself to the world like others, but it is not permitted to keep on questioning: Sarah is not allowed to be herself.

Sarah starts to “understand the Pathetic,” Beethoven’s piano sonata: “I had never understood until now the meaning of this—but it overwhelmed me this time as I played it. It is like the world forming itself out of chaos. Certainly there is more than this one planet in it.” (53-54) This intuitive statement that “the world” forms itself “out of chaos” by the help of this sonata, and “there is more than this one planet” in this artistic piece of work of genius, is similar to Schopenhauer’s view of art as the revealer of “the Idea of the world.” It will be justified and much more developed at the later part of the novel, where Sarah experiences the revelation of the whole universe through the notes of *Appassionata*, another piano sonata¹ by Beethoven.

After the performance of her own symphony, which has been a great success, she falls ill, and finds herself shut up all alone in a room of bare walls (152). Through the window, she sees a “figure in white” and hears a woman’s voice (156):

‘Sit at your window and watch till the pictures of life rise before you. To each picture there shall be music and the world shall be unfolded to you.’ (156)

Just like Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, Sarah sails to “the island of music,” guided by this white figure. In the process, “[t]he history of life” is unfolded

to her “from the supremacy of man back to the dawn of life in plants” (176). Firstly she sees a “Tower” with an accompanying melody singing “high and clear” (158):



Next she sees a world of monkeys with this constant sound: (164)



The “sound of a deep note”(170) resonates through the world of reptiles :



Then she hears the “crash of planets, millions of ages ago when the world is formed” and “the age of granite,” which is accompanied by “a heavy bass sound far deeper and more difficult to move than any of the sounds [she has] heard before.” (176)

At the “island of music” she finally reaches through this history of the universe in the reversed order, she hears “a wild beautiful song” (176) which might remind the reader of the music Dante hears in Paradise.⁵¹ The words go like this:

‘You have heard the melody of the music from the Tower.

‘It came from that part of the mirror wherein was reflected the highest form of life.

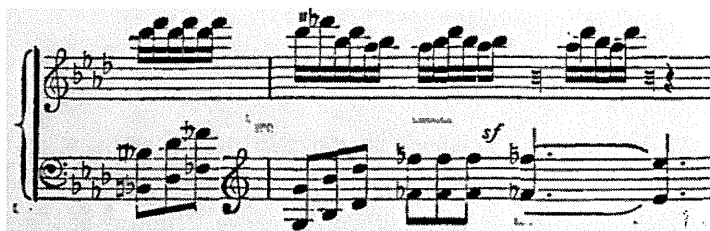
‘For to the builder the essence of the power was revealed, as now it is revealed to you.

‘The world is made up of many things.

‘There are sun and moon and stars.

‘There are land and water and living creatures, and countless other things. And they are to one another as the notes in a great piece of music. (177)

The sounds Sarah has heard with each stage of life come from Beethoven’s *Appassionata* Sonata, whose meaning she has been seeking since the early days in her diary. At the very end of the novel, it is intimated that Severine, in whose possession Sarah’s diary has come into after her death, has detected the source of the sounds she has heard in delirium. On the last page of the diary, Severine has left “a few pencil notes” including “a phrase quoted from Beethoven, op.57”:



By the side of it was written this note in French, signed with the initials ‘S. M.’

Here is the passage that came into Sarah Kaftal’s head, note by note when she saw the pictures from her window; but the notes occurred to her in the inverse order, so that she did not recognize their source. (179)

Are all these visions just a mad illusion created in her deluded sensibility? Or are these the ultimate revelation of the world, given to Sarah as a privileged genius, through the medium of Beethoven’s music? The latter interpretation sounds convincing to me, for the idea of the

correspondence of the things in the world and musical notes fits in Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music:

The four voices or parts of all harmony, that is, bass, tenor, alto, and soprano, or fundamental note, third, fifth, and octave, correspond to the four grades in the series of existences, hence to the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, and to man.⁵²

It could be said that Makower is presenting *Appassionata* by Beethoven, a quintessential composer of genius, as a revealer of the ultimate reality of the world, and also characterizing his heroine equally as a musician of genius who can rightly understand and decipher the musical piece and have access to its esoteric meaning. He does these things by faithfully basing his story on the theory of music and genius formulated by Schopenhauer, whose well-known misogyny is encapsulated in such passages as I quote below:

One needs only to see the way she is built to realize that woman is not intended for great mental or for great physical labour.⁵³

Women are suited to being the nurse and teachers of our earliest childhood precisely because they themselves are childish, silly and short-sighted, in a word big children, their whole lives long: a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, 'man.'⁵⁴

And also:

[It] lies in the nature of women to regard everything simply as a means of capturing a man, and their interest in anything else is only simulated, is no more than a detour, i. e. amounts to coquetry and mimicry.⁵⁵

The last passage I have just quoted bears a certain similarity to the derogatory view on women presented by the male protagonist of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*, who, driven by his jealousy, has murdered his wife:

‘The fact that this one [=woman] is rather good at mathematics, and that one can play the harp – that alters nothing. A woman’s happy and gets everything she wants when she succeeds in bewitching a man. That’s her main task in life. That’s the way it’s always been, and that’s the way it’ll go on being.’⁵⁶

The Kreutzer Sonata is a novel which Makower must have perused and alluded to in his *MM*. In *MM*, the musical piece by which Sarah and Severine feel ascertained of their mutual understanding and perfect comradeship is Beethoven’s “The Kreutzer Sonata,” the very same piece that is featured in Tolstoy’s novel as an epitome of the demonic power of music that could ignite an illicit passion in the heart of man and woman:

‘Ah! It’s a fearful thing, that sonata. Especially that movement. And music in general’s a fearful thing. What is it? I don’t know. What is music? What does it do to us? And why does it do to us what it does? People say that music has an uplifting effect on the soul: what rot! It isn’t true. It’s true that it has an effect, it has a terrible effect on me, at any rate, but it has nothing to do with any uplifting of the soul.’⁵⁷

In *MM*, Makower also reproduces the image of that demonic kind of music, but it seems to me that he does so in order to deviate from the stereotypical description and rewrite the myth of the fatal music. On Sarah’s first encounter with Severine in Russia, when she was fourteen years old, she hears him playing the “Kreutzer” sonata and “When he came to this”:



I felt as if I had entered another world. . . The magnificence of the music grew upon me. I was bewildered, and, when Severine came to the passage I have quoted, the head and shoulders seemed to rise, and their outline to become intenser. The colours of his face grew stronger, the blackness of his hair and the whiteness of his skin terrified me, and the eyes were thrown up, following the bow with a strange inhuman light in them. (19-21)

We can see that the character Severine, with his exotic foreignness (“there was an even rhythm in the pronunciation of the sentence that is not English” [6]), is modelled on the image of Svengali, a mystic musician presented in George du Maurier’s *Trilby*, a novel that appeared in the year before the publication of *MM*. Svengali hypnotizes the eponymous heroine and manipulates her in an unconscious state. The “strange inhuman light” in his eyes appears to denote the presence of that hypnotic, manipulative power in Severine. Moreover, after a ten year interval, when Sarah visits Severine secretly, against her parents’ will, to consult him about the possibility of her composition getting performed, he has a look at her manuscript, judges its value, saying, “As far as I have read, it is extraordinary” (125), and then suggests to her their playing the “Kreutzer”

sonata together, a suggestion that makes her “shudder” (126). The following passage would give the reader the impression as if the “terrible effect” described by the wife-killer in Tolstoy’s novel were being exerted to the full:

Oh, how mad I felt as we played! During the first movement I quite forgot where we were. It was as if I were one of two great forces working in absolute sympathy, but working all the time, each straining every nerve to complete the other’s part, till the result was a perfect unity in which all individuality was merged. (126)

However, the narrative mocks and betrays any expectation on the part of the reader that their perfect musical affinity would lead to their sexual intimacy between each other or exploitation of one by the other. Instead, Severine, now “Director of some Russian theatres” (119), promises her to produce her work at his theatre in Moscow (129).

Despite her previous worries about whether her “innovative” work would be accepted by the public (“Will not everybody either laugh at me for being mad, or shake their fists at me for being unconventional?” [107]), Sarah’s music overwhelms the performers with its divine power: “All the performers look on me as a deified genius. There is a regular worship at the altar of my work” (136). The performance proves to be a great success. “Crowds of distinguished musicians had come on to the stage for an introduction,” “[t]here was a chorus of congratulations in the air mingled with the clatter of horses’ hoofs on the paved street outside,” and:

Then Severine came to me and whispered that some one wanted an introduction—a great man. I just caught the name of Tolstoi, and I dimly remember a massive figure with a broad forehead, from which the iron grey hair was brushed back over the temples. There was a look of generous enthusiasm in the deepset brilliant grey eyes which flashed from under shaggy brows. (149)

Thus, Makower makes his heroine successfully convince with her power of genius even Tolstoy, in whose work belittling remarks on women appear, and gain his approval. Whereas the wife-killing husband in Tolstoy generalized the life's aim of women solely as "bewitching a man,"⁵⁸ Sarah gets bored by her "pretty, innocent" cousin, who is getting married and goes on "babbl[ing] about the husband she [i]s going to have" (66). Sarah wonders "why I too could not laugh and be happy like this" (67) and finally, "felt angry and irritated by the sight of her" (67). For Sarah, this cousin, who unquestioningly accepts her allotted role as a devoted wife who has little interest outside the household, represents the norm of submissive femininity which is demanded by society, and which Sarah herself cannot satisfy. Sarah becomes filled with self-disgust when she forces herself to flirt with a man, stifling her "real self" (77), to meet the expectation of her parents by playing out her socially imposed role.

As we have seen so far, Makower has constructed the unconventional figure of a female musician of genius from the patchwork of contemporary ideas and discourses negating such potential in women. Sarah's innovation in the world of music could be compared to that of Beethoven. When her surname "Kaftal" is first mentioned at the beginning of the novel, her work is referred to as "a very modern kind of choral symphony" (8). Before starting to write the music, Sarah has determined that "it should have a deep meaning like the C minor symphony" (18) and it seems she means to contest with her own work the musicological theories of Wagner, then much in vogue. And Sarah herself deems her work "shall be called an operatic symphony: for, though it is a protest against opera, it will contain operatic feeling, while the form will, with modifications, be that of a symphony" (40).

I think it quite probable that Makower had read *The Daughters of Danaus*, a novel by Mona Caird that came out in 1894, the year before the publication of *MM*, and affirmatively responded to it in a roundabout way. *The Daughters of Danaus* narrates how the exceptional talent for music composition and creative urge of Hadria, a "New Woman" type of heroine, are abraded away through her fights and struggles against the social and

domestic conditions which are antagonistic to women's pursuit of an untraditional career. After having been forced by her family situations to abandon her musical training in Paris and to return to England, Hadria is mocked by a "callow youth" who says "women [are], by nature, passive and reflective, not original"⁵⁹: "It was no use to try to fight against Nature. . . If there was so much buried talent among women, why didn't they arise and bring out operas and oratorios?"⁶⁰

Makower's novel could be read as a response to that challenging question, presenting a heroine who does "arise and bring out" an operatic symphony, while also depicting the cost she has to pay for such acts of transgression. The female protagonist pursues her ambition to become a composer against her family's opposition, but on achieving the desired success, she undergoes a serious nervous breakdown, starts having hallucinatory visions, and dies young. Thus the novel seemingly traces a typical plot told by antifeminists about the consequence of a woman's deviation from her proper "sphere." It was believed by many that women were not made for mental or physical exertions but should save up all their energy for child-bearing. The sudden shrinking of Sarah's once beautiful head just after the first performance of her work reminds the reader of the shocking transformation of Dorian Gray at the time of his death,⁶¹ and might give the impression that the author is punishing the heroine for the impropriety of her behaviour, or for her disobedience to the existing social (and supposedly natural) order. That, however, is the ostensible plot presented to the conventional readership, possibly to camouflage the radically controversial pro-feminist ideology of the work. The initials 'S. M.' inscribed on the last page of Sarah's diary seem to be given as a clue to the characterization of Severine, a music critic, a brilliant violinist, and the only appreciator of the genius of Sarah Kaftal, the heroine: Stanley Makower might have created Severine Maidanoff as his other self. Countersigning thus the diary of Sarah Kaftal, the heroine, Makower is showing his approval of the way of life of this unconventional, artistic heroine of his creation. Moreover, one could hear the echo of the name of the

protagonist of *Venus in Furs* by Sacher-Masoch, another renowned writer having the same initials, “S. M.” At the very ending of *Venus in Furs*, Severin, its male protagonist, presents the view that “woman, as Nature has created her and as she is currently reared by man, is his enemy and can be only his slave or his despot, *but never his companion*. She will be able to become his companion only when she has the same rights as he, when she is his equal in education and work.”⁶² The whole structure of the novel *MM* is actually modelled on that of *Venus in Furs*, possibly indicating Makower’s sharing the same idea as Severin’s shown here, the same anticipation of a period when woman “has the same rights” as man and when “she is his equal in education and work.”

4. Conclusion

A look at the formal and stylistic aspects of *The Mirror of Music*, especially its pastiche method, would strengthen the argument that Makower positively supported the presence of female artistic genius. In writing the diary of Sarah, which is the central and the main part of the novel, Makower employs the technique of stylistic assimilation and emulates the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-1884), a Ukrainian female painter who died of tuberculosis at the young age of twenty-seven, leaving a famous diary, and who later became an object of worship among the aesthetes.⁶³ The description of the phantasmic vision also seems to have been inspired by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” published in 1892. By renouncing originality and thus resigning himself to becoming an orchestrator who cleverly arranges into variations the themes and motifs originally created by women artists, Makower subverts the prevalent discourse that creativity exclusively belongs to the male sex and in the artistic field, women can at best be men’s imitators.

However, has this work all been written for the vindication of revolutionary women? It must also be noted that the double-standard which prescribed the “proper” sphere for each sex not only limited the scope of women’s activities, but also denounced male aesthetes as degenerate.⁶⁴ The

portrait of Sarah, a “New Woman,” might be a mirrored image of Makower, the author, who often contributed to *The Yellow Book*, a journal representing the Decadent Movement at the fin-de-siècle period. The duality of interpretation residing in this text is generated through such double-standards and conflicting ideologies within the society, which the text fully “mirrors” in the form of pastiches that are enabled to flow freely in the first-person monologue of a diary.

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¹ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, Eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 946.

² William F. Blissett, “George Moore and Literary Wagnerism,” *Comparative Literature* Vol. 13, No. 1 (1961): 53.

³ “Mad over Music: THE MIRROR OF MUSIC. By Stanley V. Makower.” *The New York Times*, 15 September, 1895, p.27.

⁴ Benjamin F. Fisher, “*The Red Badge of Courage* under British Spotlights Again.” *WLA* Fall/Winter 2000. p.206.

⁵ Carl Spadoni, “The Curious Case of The Cambridge Observer.” *Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1 (1982), Article 12. Web. <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/russelljournal/vol2/iss1/12> Seen 17 Feb 2015.

⁶ See, for example, Eugene Gates, “The Woman Composer Question: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives.” *The Kapralova Society Journal*, Vol.4, Issue 2 (2006):1-5. Web. www.kapralova.org/journal7.pdf. Seen 17 Feb 2015.

⁷ Stanley V. Makower, *The Mirror of Music*. 1895. Web.

<https://archive.org/details/mirrorofmusic00makoiala>. Seen 29 Jan 2015. Hereafter, all the page references in parenthesis are to this edition.

⁸ *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 40 (January 2000). 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, 112.

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- ¹³ Nancy B. Reich, "European Composers and Musicians, ca. 1800-1890" in Karin Penale ed. *Women & Music: A History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). p.98.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p.98.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p.109.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p.114.
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- ¹⁸ Ibid., p.99.
- ¹⁹ Carol Neuls-Bates ed. *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). 206.
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- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., 207.
- ²³ Ibid., 210.
- ²⁴ *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 40 (January 2000). 104.
- ²⁵ Carol Neuls-Bates ed. *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). 211.
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- ²⁷ Ibid., 217.
- ²⁸ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies, The Ethics of the Dust, The Crown of Wild Olive: with Letters on Public Affairs 1859-1866* (London: Longmans, 1905). 121-122.
- ²⁹ Carol Neuls-Bates ed. *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). 217.
- ³⁰ Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* (Edinburgh: Peter Davies, 1934). 3.
- ³¹ Ibid., 5.
- ³² Carl Dahlhaus, translated by J. Bradford Robinson, *Nineteenth-Century Music*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). p.10.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p.11.
- ³⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, translated by E. F. J. Payne, "On the Inner Nature of Art," from Wolfgang Schirmacher ed. *Philosophical Writings*. (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.98.
- ³⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, translated by E. F. J. Payne, "On Genius," from Wolfgang Schirmacher ed. *Philosophical Writings*. (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.90.
- ³⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Inner Nature of Art," p.98.

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- ³⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.88.
- ⁴⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.84.
- ⁴¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.96.
- ⁴² Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.87.
- ⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.88.
- ⁴⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.84.
- ⁴⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.86.
- ⁴⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.93.
- ⁴⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.84.
- ⁴⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.91.
- ⁴⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.83.
- ⁵⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Genius," p.93.
- ⁵¹ Dante Alighieri, translated by David Widger, *Dante's Paradise*. Web. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8799/8799-h/8799-h.htm>. Seen 17 Feb 2015.
- ⁵² Arthur Schopenhauer, translated by E. F. J. Payne, "On the Metaphysics of Music," from Wolfgang Schirmacher ed. *Philosophical Writings*. (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.113.
- ⁵³ Arthur Schopenhauer, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, "On Women." in *Essays and Aphorisms* (London: Penguin), 80.
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- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 86.
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- ⁵⁷ Ibid. 96.
- ⁵⁸ Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 65.
- ⁵⁹ Mona Caird, *The Daughters of Danaus*, 1894. (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989): 371.
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- ⁶¹ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994). 159.
- ⁶² Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, translated by Joachim Neugroschel, *Venus in Furs* (New York: Penguin, 2000). 119. Italics original.
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