"Oh What a World":
Queer Masculinities, the Musical Construction of a Reparative Cultural Historiography,
and the Music of Rufus Wainwright

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all LGBT people and allies—those I love, those who have inspired me, those with whom I argue, those I don't know, and those who have not yet entered the community. We have no choice but to continuously and forcefully push toward social justice. This necessitates consciously taking time for joy, celebrating our beautiful histories, loving our dynamic and diverse community, and periodically repairing our often-battered selves and psyches.

Abstract

Throughout his ascendancy in fame and cultural visibility, singer/songwriter and gay pop icon Rufus Wainwright's output has been consistently related, by scholars and critics alike, to camp aesthetics, modes of artistic expression typically understood as emerging from queer communities, particularly certain gay male populations, but ones whose political potential is highly contested. Traditional conceptions of camp, as most famously articulated by Susan Sontag in the 1960s, emphasize style over content, necessarily rendering it politically-disengaged. However, scholars have vehemently challenged conceptions like Sontag's, in order to reclaim camp as a potent means to facilitate queer world-making and a powerful resistance to heteronormativity. I examine Wainwright's image and music in order to theorize a new queer interpretive listening position. Specifically, I draw upon the literary perspective of "reparative reading," articulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in opposition to what she describes as "paranoid reading," to propose a uniquely queer approach to musical and cultural historiography, exemplified by Wainwright's music. Much of the current queer musicology focuses on lost histories, systematic marginalization, and the commoditization of queer identities. While such approaches have produced important insights, thorough examination of the relationships between queer cultural products and their queer reception has proven elusive. This project suggests a unique approach to understanding the musical construction of a specific kind of queer masculinity, one which combines authorial creation with reparative conceptions of reception, in order to theorize a uniquely gay male interpretive position. When viewed through a theoretical lens combining politically-

potent conceptions of camp performativity with a reparative reading position,

Wainwright's music strikingly enacts Philip Brett's call to claim, not historical evidence,

but the right of interpretation, emerging as an act of resistance via the reclamation and

consolidation of a queer interpretive authority. In this way, Wainwright articulates both a

rupture in the history of queer masculinity and a powerful means of resistance to the

often-exclusionary relationships between literary, musical, and artistic objects and the

heteronormative cultural systems in which they are created.

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In a 2005 interview for *The Advocate*, openly gay singer-songwriter Rufus

Wainwright claimed to find himself alienated from mainstream images of gay men,

finding a source of identification in an idealized figure from the past:

> I think that the majority of the gay press is quite bad and misleading to the
> intellectual and physical health of homosexuals. It betrays the historical legacy of
> brilliance that once existed in the gay world, of being the true guardians and
> keepers of intellectual and artistic brilliance. Gay people have upheld high art for
> years. Now, in the gay male press, there's nowhere for the opera queens, there's
> nowhere for the faggy snobs. It's all about youth and body image. It's very light
> reading, you know?[1]

He positions himself as outside the mainstream of gay male society, while simultaneously

claiming for a nebulous and undefined homosexual community an exalted function as

protectors of high culture. On the one hand, his complaint should serve as a warning to

scholars concerned with issues of sexual identity, demonstrating the need to avoid

anachronistic analyses of a unified, homogenous "gay culture." On the other, he does

cast his sense of difference in terms of prominent historical tropes surrounding male

homosexuality. His description of an idealized, aristocratic, and "cultured" gay

sensibility resonates strongly with Susan Sontag's influential work of the 1960s. In

"Notes on Camp," Sontag famously claimed that "Jews and homosexuals are the

outstanding creative minorities in contemporary urban culture [. . .] Homosexuals have

pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent

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[1] Rufus Wainwright in an interview with Sara Marcus, "Rufus Redux: Queer Troubadour
Rufus Wainwright Sounds Off on Rehab, the Media, and the Death of Gay Diversity,"
The Advocate, 26 April 2005.

of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness."[2] Sontag, writing

before the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion and the consequent emergence of gay liberation

movements, suggests in this passage that camp functions as a haven for homosexuals, but

since "it goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at

least apolitical," she portrays its role as entirely passive, precluding the potential for

queer agency through camp.[3] Sontag's discussion of camp is undoubtedly questionable

in its implicit endorsement of gay stereotypes and its rejection of queer agency via the

generally passive notion of camp-as-"haven," yet the kind of camp sensibility she

describes, especially in its celebration of a supposedly "gay" gift for high art, is critical to

Wainwright's persona and music. Indeed, few current popular musicians so fully

encompass traditional notions of camp aesthetics as Wainwright.

Sontag's assessments of camp have been revised and critiqued by many queer

theorists and scholars in the decades following its initial publication.[4] Her notion of

camp as a sensibility which, through its celebration and aestheticization of objects, is

inherently apolitical, strikes some readers as an ominously familiar appropriation of queer

cultural production through the explicit rejection of the queer subject's own identity

priorities. Perhaps the most notorious, relatively recent example of such appropriation in

music occurs in the cultural history of disco. Like camp, disco provided an extremely

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[2] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 290.

[3] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 277.

[4] Two anthologies largely encompass the major debates surrounding camp aesthetics and politics: Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), and the more wide-reaching survey, Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

important framework for gay community building, as well as for community building among racial and ethnic minorities in the 1970s, before its mainstreaming made it fodder for ridicule. To make disco palatable—and thus marketable—to a large audience, it had to be detached from its cultural roots and transformed into the white heterosexual fantasy of *Saturday Night Fever*.[5] But the roots still managed to hold on and it wasn't long before one of the most massive musical backlashes in American history—"Disco Sucks"— almost perfectly solidified a cultural "truism" that became virtually irrefutable (though some, notably Richard Dyer, have done an admirable job of attempting a refutation).[6]

Disco's legacy also provides a useful counterpoint to conceptions of gay culture that universally attribute to it a campy, snobbish, artsy, or flamboyant sensibility. The contemporary club music that emerged in the 1980s, after its progenitor had been co-opted and denigrated by popular culture, fosters imagery dramatically different from the erudite aesthete of Sontag's description. Walter Hughes, Fiona Buckland, and Stephen Amico have examined the culture of the queer dance floor in relation to concepts of bodily discipline. While the three offer varying analyses of how one might understand dance music as affirming and liberating, each connects the preeminence of the "beat" in such environments to a response to music that focuses on physicality, rather than aesthetic aural reception. For Amico, in particular, the notion of the repetitive "beat"

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[5] See Kai Fikentscher, *"You Better Work!" Underground Dance Music in New York City (*Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000); and Walter Hughes, "In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, ed. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 147-157.

[6] Richard Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Corey K Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 407-415.

translates into the physical imagery that typically accompanies the gay male dance floor:

pumped-up, minimally clothed gym bodies of the kind familiar to much of the American

public via the opening sequence of *Showtime*'s popular television series *Queer as Folk*

and specifically referenced in Wainwright's complaint. This replacement of the image of

the "artistic homosexual" by the overly sexualized "gym bunny," for many in the gay

community, coincides with an increasing commoditization of gay identity. Commenting

on a tragic scene from Alan Gurganus's novel *Plays Well With Others*, in which a

character notes the decline in civic cultural philanthropy in New York, John M. Clum

notes that:

> For many affluent folks, gay and straight, aestheticism was replaced by hedonism.
> The creation of culture and taste was replaced by consumption. Porter and Hart
> were replaced by jet-setting superstar Elton John sitting with the late Princess
> Diana at Versace's funeral. The most displayed gay cultural product is not a play,
> musical, painting, ballet, or symphony, but underwear.[7]

Further, the dramatic changes in gay culture—an increasing celebration of sex and

commercialization over artistic and cultural achievement—during the past few decades

appears to occur along with an equally dramatic change in the conceptualization of gay

identity among young people. Psychologist Ritch C. Savin-Williams argues that the

increased visibility of homosexuality in popular culture has led to a sharp decline in

adolescents' associations with homosexuality as a framework of identity at all.[8] His

research appears to suggest that, as younger generations of people with same-sex desire

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[7] John M. Clum, *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 25.

[8] Ritch C. Savin-Williams, *The New Gay Teenager* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press), 2005.

continue to divorce themselves from a group identity, associations of gayness with aestheticism and camp sensibilities may diminish in potency in future decades.

For Wainwright, these cultural trends are not entirely desirable. In a recent interview, the *New York Press* asked him for a comment on the passage of California's Proposition Eight—a ballot measure that prohibits same-sex marriages. His response of "oddly enough, I'm actually not a huge gay marriage supporter" sent waves of indignation throughout the gay blogosphere.[9] Wainwright went on to describe his position as "libertarian" and to assert his opposition to constitutional bans relating to love and marriage. Still, his initial statement riled a community still recovering from the California initiative, which, in effect, gave a preexisting civil rights ruling by the state's Supreme Court over to a popular vote. In response, Wainwright posted a message on his official website, in which he stated:

> Recently, a quote from an interview was taken out of context and as these things go, it has appeared on many internet sites. So, to set the record straight (or shall we say gay?), I am not nor have I ever been opposed to anyone's right to marry - straight or gay. I myself just don't want to at the moment and feel a strong tie to the traditional bohemian concept of being a homosexual, ie: the last thing we want is to be like everybody else.[10]

Here, again, Wainwright references and celebrates a notion of "gayness" that is rooted in historical tropes and cultural images of homosexuality. The misunderstanding that surrounded Wainwright's comments result from a collision of current mainstream ideas

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[9] Interview with Andrew Seccombe, New York Press (8 December 2008), website: http://www.nypress.com/blog-3026-messiahs-gay-and-otherwise-a-very-rufus-wainwright-christmas.html, accessed 2 January 2009.

[10] "Note from Rufus: Setting the Record Straight . . . or Gay" Rufus Wainwright official website (16 December 2008), website: http://www.rufuswainwright.com/news/default.aspx?nid=19788, accessed 2 January 2009.

of homosexuality and a more dated "traditional bohemian concept." The desire to be different, Wainwright's explanation for his ambivalent statements regarding gay marriage, distinguishes his traditional form of self-identification from what he perceives as a more common form that seeks assimilation into the broader culture.[11]

This "cultural" model, the perception of a fundamental difference from other social groups, constitutes the most significant generative idea for discussions of camp aesthetics. For many queer theorists, camp serves as a specifically queer mode of artistic production. For Moe Meyer, while Sontag's writing acknowledged homosexual connections to camp, its concern with objectification concurrently sanitized those connections and denied queer agency:

> Though the erasure of homosexuality from the subject of Camp encouraged the public's embrace, it also had a mutational consequence. Earlier versions of Camp were part of an unmistakable homosexual discourse bound together by a shared referent (the "Homosexual"-as-Type). By removing, or at least minimizing, the connotations of homosexuality, Sontag killed off the binding referent of Camp— the Homosexual—and the discourse began to unravel . . .[12]

While Sontag's theorization remained relatively unquestioned for years, scholars like Meyer have increasingly concerned themselves with recovering the "queerness" of camp and, consequently, re-politicizing it. For Meyer, Camp is necessarily a homosexual mode of culture ("real" Camp denoted by its capitalization in his essay collection), straight camp amounting to an act of cultural appropriation. Fabio Cleto criticizes the specificity of Meyer's politicization of camp, suggesting that his attempt to claim a "queer" essence

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[11] Since the passage of California's Proposition 8, Wainwright has altered his position in the media, asserting that he would like to marry his partner Jorn Weisbrodt.

[12] Moe Meyer, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

for camp plays into the cultural framework of domination that he rejects in Sontag's writing: "In reclaiming camp through the recovery of its erased agent, the queer subjectivity, Meyer's will to ascertain a unified definitional ground would thus devoid that very subjectivity of a specific positioning within culture."[13] For Cleto, Meyer's attempts at delineating pure (queer) "Camp" from its derivations (pop camp and kitsch), reinforce the very high/low, legitimate/illegitimate, authentic/inauthentic dichotomies that have historically served to render queerness a devalued cultural marker in the first place:

> If we postulate, in a fundamental(ist) key, a queer (that is to say, here, gay) signified and a homosexual referent as only rightful (correct, straight) semiotic counterparts of the signifier Camp, we are doing nothing else than stabilizing in universally consensual (and "natural") code a sign that works on the crisis of codes and signs, and through these, of the cultural hierarchies that are inscribed in all "naturality of signs."[14]

Meyer's perspective seems to deny that the political efficacy of camp, as well as that of its related term "queer," depends upon its resistance to clear, succinct definition. Indeed, as Cynthia Morrill observes, Sontag's attempt to categorize and define camp illuminates the contradictions inherent in the term itself.[15] For Morrill, compulsory reproductive heterosexuality renders queerness unintelligible in the structures of dominant cultural discourse. Conceptions of camp as irony or masquerade are lacking due to their dependence on a language—the language of compulsory heterosexuality— that is antithetical to expressions of the very subject they seek to understand: queer

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[13] Cleto, 18.

[14] Ibid., 19.

[15] Cynthia Morrill, "Revamping the Gay Sensibility: Queer Camp and *dyke noir*," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 110-129, esp. 115-117.

subjects that are discursively unrepresentable in the limited framework of dominant

culture. Instead:

> Camp results from the uncanny experience of looking into a nonreflective mirror
> and falling outside of the essentialized ontology of heterosexuality, a queer
> experience indeed. By this logic, Camp can be seen to be the aftermath of a
> shattering of representation, a queer discourse that results from un-queer
> proscriptions of same-sex desire.[16]

The resultant reconstitution of queer identity provides the potential for critique, but it

continues to depend upon heteronormative language. In his linguistic study, Keith

Harvey suggests that verbal camp disrupts the distinction between "authentic" truth and

fiction in language, thereby subverting dominant structures by undercutting their

authority.[17] The decontextualized use of existing terms and artifacts maintains an

especially powerful political impulse. Rather than constructing an alternate language,

which could then be appropriated or disciplined, it disrupts notions of authority in an

existing language—that of assumed or compulsory heterosexuality—through which queer

subjects are rendered unintelligible. For Jonathan Dollimore, camp "negotiates some the

lived contradictions of subordination, simultaneously refashioning as a weapon of attack

an oppressive identity inherited as subordination, and hollowing out dominant formations

responsible for that identity in the first instance."[18] The cultural products of

heteronormative dominance, the force that constructs the queer minority, become tools

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[16] Ibid., 119.

[17] Keith Harvey, "Camp Talk and Citationality: A Queer Take on 'Authentic' and 'Represented' Utterance," *Journal of Pragmatics* 34 (2002): 1145-1165.

[18] Jonathan Dollimore, "Post/modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert's Revenge on Authenticity," *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 221-236, 224.

for queer agency when they are de- or re-contextualized, but only when the contradictions involved in such revisions of context are embraced, rather than explained away.

Regarding Wainwright, the most compelling effect of this kind of subversive cultural production is an assertion of a new type of authority through the denial of the monolith of heteronormativity. Such an act requires both the recognition of difference and the choice to resist accepted forms of knowledge. More importantly, it reflects an understanding of queerness that moves beyond the notion of subjective interiority and essentialized definitions of sexual identity to a conception of identity formation constituted by a performative act. As Meyer observes, queer identity depends on the reality that "at some time, the actor must *do* something in order to produce the social visibility by which the identity is manifested."[19] Compulsory heterosexuality means that the "closet" is continuously in place; no one is compelled to "come out" as heterosexual and, as Sedgwick observes, "there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them . . . there can be few gay people . . . in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence."[20] The revelation of an identity at odds with the enforced expectations of a culture requires a conscious, continuously repeated assertion of self-definition, which involves claiming the authority to describe oneself and one's position in society. But since the act of coming out, as Meyer observes, "is constituted by an institutionalized speech act," it still occurs within the framework of Merrill's

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[19] Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 4.
[20] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 68-69.

"unreflective mirror."[21] In other words, expressions of queerness, even the highly

political act of coming out, necessarily take place within the discursive and cultural

boundaries of dominant society. If the social articulation of sexual identity is dependent

upon the language of heteronormativity, the manipulation of that language through camp

becomes a crucial means of asserting queer resistance.

　　Moreover, while the slipperiness of definitions of camp provides for its political

potential, the term's complexity also positions it as a linguistic and cultural parallel to the

term "queer." This may, in part, help to justify Meyer's claims of camp as exclusively

"queer parody," though the fluidity of the term renders his argument more inclusive than

his striking rhetoric may indicate. For David Halperin:

> Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the
> dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an
> identity without an essence. "Queer," then, demarcates not a positivity but a
> positionality vis-à-vis the normative—a positionality that is not restricted to
> lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels
> marginalized because of her or his sexual practices.[22]

While such a formulation runs the risk of washing over differences among individuals

identifying as queer and wrongly suggesting a cohesive, fully-inclusive community, it

also refuses to close the door on multiple conceptions of identity or multiple tactics of

resistance. Queer as "position" requires the recognition of one's deviation from

culturally-sanctioned sexual norms as well as the conscious and continual choice to resist

homogenization. By extension, and more significantly, queerness requires the adamant

assertion of the legitimacy of multiple modes of knowledge, the declaration of the

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[21] Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 4.

[22] David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 63.

authority to understand the world and its history in the most self-affirming way possible, despite ridicule or rejection from disciplinary institutions or traditions. In the words of Philip Brett, "it is not the evidence, but the right to interpret it, to which we have to lay claim."[23] A politically-engaged, while concurrently queer camp, therefore, constitutes asserting the authority to access products, ideas, or styles which have been defined exclusively through privileged heteronormative structures and either reinterpreting or reclaiming them as queer.

While the various debates about the definitions and political efficacy of "camp" and "queer" may seem to be mere academic squabbling, they entail weighty cultural implications. Playing with pre-existing cultural products and contexts involves, necessarily, appropriation and claims of authority. As Pamela Robertson has discussed, many quintessential "high" camp masterpieces have gained their cultural power through the manipulation of frameworks of race and class.[24] Camp is a crucial concept in queer culture, and its relevance to Wainwright's output is undeniable, yet as a mode of representation, often described as "sensibility," the concept runs into the cyclical logic that is so often a trap of queer theory. If, as Meyer asserts, camp (or "Camp") production constitutes a purely queer cultural tradition, "queer" may lose its radical potential to critique frameworks of value and identity. "Queer" becomes a site of cultural privilege that, as in the development and marketing of disco, can either reinforce dominant logics

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[23] Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed., ed., Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 9-26, 22.

[24] Pamela Robertson, "Mae West's Maids: Race, 'Authenticity," and the Discourse of Camp," *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 393-408.

or become appropriated by them. If, as in Cleto's critique of Meyer, camp exists in an interstitial cultural space, defying dominant frameworks, it may lose its capacity to serve as a rallying-point or historical tradition for particular identity-communities.

In large part, these issues and contradictions emerge from a desire among these theorists to construct what, in Silvan Tomkins's terminology, might be understood as a "strong affect theory." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick combines Tomkins's work with that of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein to describe alternative interpretive positions for marginalized populations reading dominant culture texts.[25] In this case, the qualifier "strong" does not connote positive value, but rather refers to the scope of the theory, the size and amount of phenomena it seeks to explain within its framework. In contrast, "weak theory" takes as its subject more localized phenomena. Thus, it lacks the wide-ranging scope of "strong theory," but maintains the potential for more nuanced formulations. For Sedgwick, Klein's description of "paranoid" reading positions constitutes "strong theory," in opposition to the "depressive" position that might be described as "weak theory." From this second position, the "weak theory," Sedgwick locates reparative potential:

> This is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or "repair" the murderous part-objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, not necessarily like any preexisting whole. Once assembled to one's own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.[26]

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[25] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-152.
[26] Ibid., 128.

Camp debates, I suspect, become so fraught with competing definitions and large-scale

theories because they seek to quantify unquantifiable concepts of reception—particularly

the means by which the marginalized find personal and communal value in products and

artifacts emerging from the center—the culture of dominance. For "invisible" minorities,

this relationship to the dominant culture is crucial. The desire to construct "strong

theories" to account for such a complex reception position is understandable, as academia

tends to far more greatly value "strong" over "weak" theories. Nevertheless, the weak

position, the reparative one, may well provide more compelling accounts. Sedgwick

suggests that criticism in the humanities after the establishment of New Historicism

privileges "paranoid" positions—ones insisting upon the exposure of hidden (or not-so-

hidden) histories of oppression through large-scale frameworks of dominance. While

such practices are crucial, Sedgwick suggests that their centrality to the academy tends to

push aside other methodologies that may be more adaptable and may have more

"reparative" value for oppressed populations, such as imaginative close reading:

> The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a
> culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or
> reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are willing to describe their
> acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, has been in
> the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative
> motive itself. [. . .] What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the
> many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the
> objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to
> sustain them.[27]

By "communities," Sedgwick clearly refers to large-scale, marginalized demographic

groupings, but her observations certainly pertain to all of the varied and diverse so-called

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[27] Ibid., 150, 151.

"subcultures" and individuals that, in fact, constitute such blanket categories. Her

critique of terminology that isolates "reparative" readings as "aestheticizing" and "anti-

intellectual" strikes close to the debates surrounding camp. The "reparative" position

serves, in my opinion, as a useful alternative descriptive framework.

Sedgwick's "weak" theory of reparative reading seeks to understand the ways that

devalued individuals might engage on a personal level with products of the very culture

that has devalued them. Marginalized populations do this already, of course, but critical

methodologies tend to have an easier time exposing a society's abuses than they do

describing how those that are harmed manage to function culturally within that society.

This might help to explain how, in his Marxist critique of late capitalism, Fredric

Jameson can pejoratively refer to postmodernism as "camp or 'hysterical' sublime,"

apparently missing (or not caring about) the level to which gays and women, straight or

otherwise, might justifiably take offense.[28] Among Jameson's concerns is the seeming

abolishment of historical and material specificity in the "pastiche" of postmodernism.

Yet for many people, the mass-marketing of de-historicized styles and objects can,

indeed, provide substantial points of identification. This is especially true of queers, for

whom cultural and historical identification has largely been denied until the last few

decades, due to an invisibility forced upon sexual difference through cultural and legal

proscriptions (more on the implications of fragmented queer history in chapter three).

This dissertation seeks to apply Sedgwick's notion of reparative reading to

Wainwright's music and image. Particularly, I suggest that Wainwright engages in a

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[28] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984), 76, 77.

"reparative cultural historiography," in which objects, images, and figures of the past combine in ways that affirm queerness, provide it with a level of authority, and construct historical revisions. Further, I suggest that Wainwright's reparative perspective invites his listeners to adopt reparative motives of their own. Thus, I hope to describe ways in which reparative compositional processes are inextricably linked to reparative listening practices. Musicology as a discipline is still struggling to come to grips with notions of criticism and ahistorical interpretation, but Michael L. Klein's *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* provides me with a certain level of reassurance. [29] Klein's work suggests the immense value of expanding our analytical/historical perspectives beyond the notion of musical "influence" to a broader concept of intertextuality, one that doesn't confine itself to musical master narratives, but rather takes into account connections among historically diverse works:

> Rather than view texts as links in a chain of influence, we can use the metaphor of a web to show that texts are interlinked in multiple directions. [. . .] a distinction needs to be made between influence and intertextuality, where the former implies intent or a historical placement of the work in its time or origin, and the latter implies a more general notion of crossing texts that may involve historical reversal."[30]

By recognizing that music is not experienced in a historically linear fashion, he acknowledges that the listener, even a scholarly one, brings his/her individual experiences to the interpretation of any performance, recording, or score. Further, Klein's conception of intertextuality opens the door to a massive range of readings of individual works, informed by a seemingly endless collection of textual and contextual

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[29] Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[30] Ibid., 4.

angles, and divorced from obligations to factual relations; rather, Klein's notion embraces the multiplicity of listener reactions that, in fact, describe the reception of music far better than any systematized music theory can hope to do.

Michael Long's recent work engages in a kind of intertextuality that is consistent with Klein's, but is specifically concerned with locating the means by which contemporary popular music engages with the "classical" tradition. Long draws upon the literary-theoretical concept of expressive register, which he identifies as "a region *within* normative cultural discourse."[31] For Long, the activation of the "classical" register in a popular musical context, "will trigger a recognition response that tends to proceed from the listener's experience (memory) on one hand, or from an intuition that beyond what has been heard, its phenomenal portion, lies a greater whole, with 'greater' intended in the dimensional rather than the evaluative sense."[32] In this context, the evocation of the "classic" elicits listener responses that, while difficult to define, are nonetheless quite familiar to most fans of popular music. Throughout the following pages, I will argue that the intermingling of "pop" and "classic" maintains a particular potency for members of many queer populations, for whom access to sites of "classic" privilege has, until recently, been denied or permitted only through the double-bind of the closet. However, such relationships have broader significance, as well. For most popular music fans, the presentation of "classical" music within a pop culture context carries with it clear affective responses, ranging from confusion to comfort. The interaction of "high" and

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[31] Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters: Imagining the Classic in Musical Media* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 26.
[32] Ibid.

"low" has informed a variety of musicological analyses, such as Robert Walser's

compelling juxtaposition of Eddie Van Halen and Antonio Vivaldi.[33] Nevertheless, this

type of musical intertextuality can be quite challenging to scholars concerned with

constructing "strong" theories, quantifiable knowledge, or objective means to understand

art.

My approach to Wainwright's music and image might best be understood as a

conflation of Klein's intertextuality and Long's expressive registers with Sedgwick's

reparative reading. Each chapter emerges from a particular intertext, drawing out

connections with Wainwright's music in order to explore how different interpretive paths

lead to reparative perspectives on pre-existing cultural products. These readings are

unashamedly driven by a particular motivation: specifically, the uncovering of queer-

affirming potentialities of cultural artifacts. Underlining the subjective nature of any act

of humanistic scholarship, I believe, helps avoid the positivistic, pseudo-scientific

impulse that has traditionally dominated music scholarship, and that Klein's ideas

explicitly reject. This is not to say that my readings are arbitrary. Far from it: the

intertexts and interpretive moves I make are designed to highlight particular approaches

to understanding, in Sedgwick's terminology, ways that gay men like Wainwright might

"extract sustenance" from cultural products created by a social framework "whose

avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."

Each chapter constitutes a case study in reparative reading, using Wainwright's

music as a lens through which to read culture. My approach assumes that value can be

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[33] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. (Middletown, CT: Middletown Press, 1993), 67-78.

found in privileging fantasy over verifiable reality. Thus, Chapter One uses perhaps the

ultimate classic "camp" text, *The Wizard of Oz*, to explore ways that Wainwright plays

with ideas of the fantastic to negotiate concepts of authority, morality, and value.

Chapter Two extends Chapter One's discussion of authority to encompass, specifically,

the cultural image of the opera queen, a social category with which Wainwright strongly

identifies. This chapter re-examines the cultural life of the ancient Greek mythological

hero Orpheus, whose divine musical prowess inspired the birth of opera, but whose

operatic representations have traditionally hidden his queerness. Wainwright's activation

of the Orpheus myth suggests new perspectives on the tragic image of the opera queen.

Opera queens, as they have prominently been represented, constitute part of a collection

of gay male images originating during the decades before the gay liberation of the 1970s,

a collection of images that portray homosexual identity as profoundly melancholy and

self-defeating. Chapter Three turns to this collection of images by examining

Wainwright's use of the classic *cinema vérité Grey Gardens* and Thomas Mann's novel

of disastrous pederastic longing, *Death in Venice*. The juxtaposition of these two works

invites new perspectives on the pre-liberation image of homosexuality while concurrently

disrupting the standard linear history of gay life, punching interpretive holes through the

traditional boundary that divides pre-liberation and post-liberation queerness. Chapter

Four considers Wainwright's music in relation to one of his most prominent artistic

progenitors, Franz Schubert. Schubert, like the fictional Orpheus, serves as an iconic

generative figure in Western music, in his case, in relation to art song. But also, like

Orpheus, his biography has become convoluted through history: Schubert's sexuality has

been the source of extreme anxiety and speculation in the academic community. In

claiming an artistic heritage that links his music with that of Schubert, Wainwright

insinuates his own queerness into the musical life of the great Lied composer, in effect,

claiming his queerness as, not a subject for debate, but as a site of power and creative

authority.

Wainwright's production has begun to provide fodder for a few musicologists

intrigued by the cultural implications of Wainwright's explicitly gay persona and musical

production. For example, Kate Galloway's presentation at the 2006 annual meeting of

the Society for Ethnomusicology examined, through readings of concert footage, how

Wainwright's live performances combine multiple genres in a camp aesthetic. An early

version of Chapter Two of this dissertation, "(Re)Queering Orpheus in the Music of

Rufus Wainwright," was presented at Feminist Theory and Music 9 in Montreal (2007).

Paula Higgins discussed implications of Wainwright's production framed by his song

"The Maker Makes," commissioned for Ang Lee's film adaptation of Annie Proulx's

Brokeback Mountain, at the 2008 meeting of the American Musicological Society in

Quebec City. Matthew Jones presented a portion of his master's thesis, in which he uses

camp aesthetics and stock gay male images to frame his reading of Wainwright's 2002

album *Poses*, at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music—U.S.

Chapter's 2008 meeting in Iowa City.[34]

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[34] Kate Galloway, "Witches and Divas and Rufus, Oh My!: Camping High Art in the
Music of Rufus Wainwright," paper presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology
(2006), Honolulu, HI; "(Re)Queering Orpheus in the music of Rufus Wainwright,"
presented at Feminist Theory and Music 9 (2007), Montreal, QC; Paula Higgins,
"Stemming the Rose, Queering the Song: Brokeback Mountain, Old Hollywood, and the

In large part, each of these projects takes Wainwright's music and image as its subject of inquiry, endeavoring to explain specific aspects of his musical persona. My project differs, in that Wainwright serves as a lens through which I examine alternative views of cultural history. I present particular aspects of his music and image in tandem with readings of specific intertexts, attempting to allow the texts to inform one another. In addition to distinct works of art, the texts I pull into this process include contexts themselves, and I hope to suggest how the examination of particular works can revise perceptions of the historical, political, and cultural environments in which they are created. It is crucial, then, to articulate specifically what this project *is not*. It is not an exhaustive discussion of Wainwright's output; it is not a biographical or musico-biographical portrait of Wainwright; it is not a structural analysis of his music. Rather, it is an exploration of ways cultural histories might be reparatively revised, albeit metaphorically, using Wainwright as locus of intertextual relationships. Wainwright's music serves as a kind of interpretive guide, but the interpretations are mine, and they are motivated by a revisionist impulse to reclaim or re-envision cultural history. I don't seek to deny historical fact, but propose that in the fanciful world of music reception, there is value in reimagining painful histories. In the face of cultural revulsion, without recourse to a coherent and objectively legitimized history, imaginative relationships to historical ideas, tropes, and cultural products can serve powerful healing functions for queer

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Radical Politics of Rufus Wainwright," presented at the American Musicological Society (2008), Quebec City, QC; Matthew Jones, "All These Poses, Such Beautiful *Poses*: Articulations of Queer Masculinity in the Music of Rufus Wainwright," presented at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music-U. S. Chapter (2008), Iowa City, IA.

individuals. These functions depend on reexamining the relationships between reality

and fantasy, authority and subservience, and I now turn to these ideas in Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONE:
"Oh What A World!" *The Wizard of Oz*, **Queer Authority, and the Negotiation of Fantasy**

"Elphaba, where I come from, people believe all sorts of things that aren't true. We call it 'history'"

—The Wizard, from *Wicked: The Musical*[35]

On the Grammy-nominated recording of his recreation of Judy Garland's much-celebrated 1961 Carnegie Hall concert, Wainwright pauses after a medley of "Almost Like Being in Love" and "This Can't Be Love" to speak to the audience "because on the album, Judy talks here." He relates what he calls his "big Judy Garland story," in which, as a child, he dressed up like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* "on good days" and the Wicked Witch of the West "on bad days." This dual drag childhood performance has resonance and familiarity for many gay men, particularly white, middle class gay men. To a large extent, *The Wizard of Oz*, especially as told through Victor Fleming's classic film of 1939, is understood as a gay legend simply through tradition and the flamboyancy of its elaborate set, costumes, and the eccentricities of its actors' performances. Still, the film's content includes plenty of images and themes that clearly justify its inclusion—indeed, supremacy—in a gay cultural canon. Wainwright revels in fantasy, and Oz looms large among the most prominent fantasylands floating about in his music and image. This chapter examines Wainwright's negotiation of notions of authority within the context of cultural images of Oz. Specifically, it considers some aspects of Wainwright's music and image within a reparative reading of the tale, focusing on notions of voice,

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[35] Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman, *Wicked: Original Broadway Cast Recording,* CD (Decca, 2003).

location, and power. Oz is a potent source of queer reparative motivations, and

Wainwright's musical production makes effective use of it.

Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty describe Fleming's film's queer appeal

as rooted in "camp functions":

> *The Wizard of Oz* is a story in which everyone lives in two very different worlds,
> and in which most of its characters live two very different lives, while its
> emotionally confused and oppressed teenage heroine longs for a world in which
> her inner desires can be expressed freely and fully. Dorothy finds this world in a
> Technicolor land 'over the rainbow' inhabited by a sissy lion, an artificial man
> who cannot stop crying, and a butch-femme couple of witches. This is a reading
> of the film that sees the film's fantastic excesses (color, costume, song,
> performance, etc.) as expressing the hidden lives of many of its most devoted
> viewers, who identified themselves as "friends of Dorothy."[36]

In their reading, it is crucial to note, the "campy" elements of the film's stylization all

relate directly to its content. "Fantastic excesses" serve as a bridge between the real-life

"friends of Dorothy"—a mid twentieth-century code phrase for gay men—and the

fictional lives of the film's characters. Meaning, in other words, is generated not simply

through excessive style, but through the activation of style and aesthetics in the

negotiation of narrative and characterization—double lives, sissy lions, and butch-femme

witches. Indeed, the content of the film invites a wide range of queer readings.

Elsewhere, Doty examines the film as a tale of lesbian longing and sexual growth, rather

than the gay male fantasy it is commonly thought to be. He strikes a political tone similar

to Meyer's, going so far as to assert that "straight" readings of Dorothy or her friends and

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[36] Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, Introduction to *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 1-12, 3.

enemies are acts of appropriation.[37] For performance scholar Reid Davis, the incredible

discomfort he felt upon watching the "sissiness" of the Cowardly Lion as a young gay

child, transforms into a sense of pride when re-viewing the film at the Castro Theater

among a community of gay men.[38] Judith Peraino articulates *The Wizard of Oz*'s queer

appeal by describing Dorothy as a conflicted character who, "is caught in her struggle

against banality and her own desire for it. She articulates an ambivalent relationship to

'ordinariness' and normalcy that resonates with many gay, lesbian, and transgendered

populations."[39]

Most commonly, though, the gay resonance of the film is understood as emerging

from the supposedly all-encompassing queer worship for its star. It is crucial to

remember that, while cultural perceptions of the gay male/Judy Garland connection are

prevalent, Garland worship is far from universal and is strongly influenced by a diversity

of identity elements, particularly race, social class, and age. Nevertheless, among

middle-class white men, especially those who are old enough either to remember her

television appearances or live performances or to recall the queer potency of the

coincidence of her death during the period between the Stonewall Rebellion and the

AIDS crisis, she retains an intense cultural relevance. Jack Babuscio describes the

relationship between gay men and diva worship as located in an awareness of the

performative aspects of identity. Gays and lesbians live portions of their lives in

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[37] Alexander Doty, "'My Beautiful Wickedness': *The Wizard of Oz* as Lesbian Fantasy,"
in *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 49-78.
[38] Reid Davis, "What WOZ: Lost Objects, Repeat Viewings, and the Sissy Warrior,"
Film Quarterly 55/2 (2001-2002): 2-13.
[39] Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from
Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 122.

conscious or unconscious states of "straight" performance in circumstances where the

revelation of homosexuality might put them in danger. For Babuscio:

> It is this awareness of the double aspect of performance that goes a long way to explain why gays form a disproportionately large and enthusiastic part of the audience of such stars as Judy Garland. In part, at least, Garland's popularity owes much to the fact that she is always, and most intensely, herself. Allied to this is the fact that many of us seem able to equate our own strongly felt sense of oppression, past or present, with the suffering/loneliness/misfortunes of the star both on and off the screen.[40]

Babuscio articulates a commonly held view of this unique relationship. The striking

ways in which Garland consistently seemed to blur the line between her performance

persona and real-life experiences held resonance for populations who, due to the cultural

imperatives of the closet, felt a constant need to evaluate circumstances and balance self-

revelation with careful performance. Garland's tendency to take film roles that reflected

her own life (*A Star is Born*, for example), as well as her unique capacity to transform

vulnerability into power onstage, rendered her a truly transformative site of identification

for gay men. Peraino relates a moment during Garland's 16 November 1964 London

concert in which the crowd demanded that the diva sing "Over the Rainbow":

> At the end of the concert, she finally began the much-awaited number, and, knowing that her voice was giving out, she made the crowd sing it, as if to say, "I'm tired of being 'Judy Garland'! You sing the song; you be 'Judy Garland.'" She then turned the song into a comedy, badgering the audience as they had badgered her: "Oh, I've sung this song for so many years. Sing it with me. You can sing it better than I can."[41]

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[40] Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility), in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 117-135, 125-126.

[41] Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 129-130.

For Peraino, Garland's actions in this performance, resulting from her fatigue, transform

a song that typically would create a sense of sentimentality and catharsis in her audience

into a moment of self-deprecating camp. Garland, in this example, transforms

inadequacy into simply a different performance tactic through a maneuver that would be

familiar to populations who are used to the spontaneous adaptation required by the

framework of the closet. In large part, Garland's appeal derives from her persona near

the end of her life, after her shocking personal tragedies were known and she was able to

capitalize on them with continual public "comebacks." But images of the older Garland

only render the teenaged Dorothy more campy and powerful in gay imaginations.

Dorothy's naïve innocence seems all the more absurd and amusing with knowledge of the

real-life nightmares of Garland's life.

Wainwright's "big Judy Garland story" contains several important tropes that

shed light on how Garland and Oz have affected his personal life and, more significantly

to my project, how they influence his musical usage of Dorothy's tale:

> When I was a kid I wanted to be Dorothy—on good days; on bad days I wanted to
> be the Wicked Witch. And what I would do is, when I was feeling swell and my
> mom was, you know, tolerable [. . .] and Canada wasn't too cold, I would sort of
> prance around with this apron called my "put-it-on," and dance around—of
> which there are many videos of me in with my dad in the background with a
> scotch going "oh my god." [. . .] I would run around in that and have a great time
> with my little dog Toto, which was really a little lamb, but we won't get into that.
> [. . .] But on really bad days when it was freezing and I was depressed and, I don't
> know, just the usual, I would be the Wicked Witch. And what I would do is, I
> would take my mother's shoes, high-heeled shoes, and I would place them in this
> diabolical circle. And I would take one of her finest gowns [. . .] And I would get
> into the gown and I would get into the shoes and I would melt. Then I would get

into the next pair of shoes and I'd melt. Melt, melt for hours and hours in that circle. Then I passed out and I've just woken up right now.[42]

Wainwright reinforces the dualistic morality that is made explicit in Oz: he channels the "good" Dorothy when he is happy, the Wicked Witch when he is unhappy. In doing so, he acknowledges the centrality of a given good/evil ethical framework to the roleplaying of his youth. Second, while the Witch constitutes half of his dual identification, he places Garland at the center of the story: it is not his *Wizard of Oz* story, but his "big Judy Garland Story." This clarification, within the context of his own public Garland homage, immediately places his recollection in a familiar gay context, at least a context familiar to generations of gay men older than Wainwright (as Davis asserts, "I'm guessing that every white middle-class gay man has his own Judy Garland story").[43] The reference, therefore, illustrates Wainwright's desire to access a historical trope of gayness that predates his own coming of age. Third, he describes an impotent disciplinary figure: his father disapproves of his behavior, but does not (cannot?) put a stop to it. His child drag performances occur under the watchful eye of an authority that is perplexed by a spectacle that it views as shameful and humiliating, confused to the point of being ineffective.

The open adoration of Garland, the negotiation of established ethical codes, and the embrace of acts that are reviled by authority figures all relate to commonly held ideas about gay identity formation. Yet Wainwright's closing statement—"then I passed out and I've just woken up right now"—lends itself to further examination. In the 1939 film

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[42] Rufus Wainwright, commentary on *Rufus Does Judy at Carnegie Hall*, CD (Geffen, 2007).
[43] Reid Davis, "What WOZ," 3.

version of *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is knocked over the head during the tornado, but

wakes up twice, once en route to Oz and again in Kansas. At the film's end, Dorothy

declares that Oz actually exists, despite Auntie Em's insistence that the girl was

dreaming: "No, Aunt Em. This was a real, truly live place!" Despite the seemingly neat

narrative closure—"there's no place like home"—and its concurrent cyclical return to

sepia tones after the garish color of Dorothy's supposed "dream world," the line between

reality and fantasy remains somewhat fuzzy. The film's dream structure is, in fact, an

addition by the filmmakers. In L. Frank Baum's original novel *The Wonderful Wizard of

Oz*, the tornado carries Dorothy over a vast desert to the mysterious Oz, which is not

simply a figment of her sleeping imagination, but a world with its own history and future,

explored in Baum's numerous sequels. Indeed, *Wicked: The Life and Times of The

Wicked Witch of the West*, Gregory Maguire's bestselling revisionist novel of Oz,

suggests that Dorothy's return to Kansas is, in fact, the fantasy: "A lot of nonsense has

been circulated about how Dorothy left Oz. There are some who say that she never

did."[44] Judy Garland's film version of Dorothy experiences two awakenings in two

different places with radically different social and political realities. Where is it, then,

that Wainwright has "woken up?" Does his Judy Garland recreation take place in the

symmetrically organized, yet fantastically colored, social world of Oz, or does it take

place in the socially unstable and drably brown Depression-era Kansas? Or, rather than

channeling his young "put-it-on" persona, is he dressed up in his mother's gown,

portraying the Wicked Witch, who, in Stephen Schwartz's musical version of *Wicked*,

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[44] Gregory Maguire, *Wicked: The Life and Times of The Wicked Witch of the West*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, [1995] 2004), 406.

only pretends to melt, enacting a ruse in order to rise again to be reunited with her lover, the Scarecrow?[45]

These questions suggest that the simple children's tale, with its seemingly clear-cut moral framework, may hold more complex reparative implications when activated in Wainwright's music and persona. Much of Dorothy's conflict in both Baum's novel and the classic film can be understood as resulting from her desire to comprehend, choose, and articulate her place in the world, a desire emerging from her ambivalent relationship with home and the parental, adult authority figures contained within it. Maguire's retelling, as well as Schwartz's stage adaptation of it, portrays Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, as in a continual quest to reconcile her personal ethics and sense of difference with the religious dogmatism of her family and the political authoritarianism of the Wizard. Similarly, a great deal of Wainwright's music, often brash and unapologetically personal, presents conflicted images of home, family, and authority. Oz functions as a world in which individuals marked by strangeness and difference negotiate their perceptions of their own identities in order to discover that they already possess what they think they lack, their "heart's desire," framed by a concept of home that is presented as stable but revealed to be fluidly and troublingly conceived. Likewise,

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[45] Schwartz's stage musical dramatically rewrites Maguire's complex narrative. While Maguire's tale features a love triangle between Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West), Glinda the Good, and the Winkie Fiyero, Schwartz constructs a plot device through which Elphaba transforms Fiyero into the Scarecrow and fakes her own death. In many ways, Schwartz's stage adaptation rewrites Maguire's story in a manner similar to early opera composers' revisions of the ancient Greek tale of Orpheus, which I explore in Chapter Two. In both cases, tragic endings are subverted by last minute plot devices: Maguire's Elphaba does, indeed, die; early operatic versions of the Orpheus tale revise the ancient story by rescuing the hero just before his brutal murder.

reparative listening positions enable fictions and histories to coexist, unlikely connections to be drawn, and isolated moments of insight to be magnified in ways that pull out self-reflective and self-productive potentialities. By taking Wainwright's "big Judy Garland story" seriously and letting it direct us in one possible interpretive direction regarding his music, we can find other such stories and interpretive angles. Subsequently, these stories and interpretations enable new understandings of other contexts and "intertexts" that can be reapplied to our experience of his music. Such begins a constant interpretive movement between a body of music and the enormous and ever-expanding collection of available cultural ideas and products.

By definition, then, my conception of reparative listening is never-ending, a daunting reality that is, in fact, empowering, in that it necessitates self-determined stopping points, moments in which the interpretive process reveals the most affirming and productive ideas for the subject engaged in the interpretation. Dorothy has the option simply to believe what is placed before her eyes. It is only when she allows herself to both listen and speak, as well as see, that she begins to recognize that she can choose her reality—Oz or Kansas. This choice does not entail a denial of either reality, but affirms her right to understand the world and her position within it as filled with alternatives and choose the ones that serve her needs. Fantasy is more than the delusional binary opposite of reality, but a space in which to discover one's power.

For members of LGBT communities, individuals whose identities remain largely "unintelligible" within dominant perspectives of sex, gender, and sexuality, and whose self-perceptions tend to defy the limited, simplistic, and largely visual frameworks that

bolster such categories, one of the most crucial aspects of establishing power is self-articulation. No examination of Wainwright's music and image can truly begin without attempting the daunting task of explaining the strikingly unusual singing voice through which he carries out his musical discourse of self-articulation. His voice perplexes many fans, even while it serves as a powerful source of catharsis and emotional healing. Consideration of Dorothy's complex discursive choices can help to frame the implications of self-revelation, and I contemplate those implications in relation to Wainwright's unique vocal production in the next section.

"You Psycho Glitter Bitch!": Voice

> "I am Oz, the Great and Terrible. Who are you, and why do you seek me?"
> It was not such an awful voice as she had expected to come from the big Head; so she took courage and answered,
> "I am Dorothy, the Small and Meek. I have come to you for help."[46]
> —L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)

Dorothy knows the difference between sight and sound, the visual and the verbal. Her initial confrontation with the Wizard in Baum's original novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* reveals a great deal about their subsequent interactions and the dynamics of power and authority at work in the girl's exploration of the strange land. Dorothy's presence in Oz throws its entire power structure into confusion. The strange Ozians exist in a world centered—literally, as the Emerald City stands (roughly) at the intersection of Oz's North/South and East/West axes—on the charisma of a false authority whose grandeur relies entirely upon deception. The inhabitants of Oz acquiesce to the Wizard's power

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[46] L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York: Signet Classics, 2006), 101.

through his use of a kind of coerced volunteerism manifested in a superficial manipulation of their optical senses: in Baum's novel, the splendor of the Emerald City is constructed only through the Wizard's decree that anyone entering the city must wear glasses with green lenses. The removal of the glasses would instantly reveal the falsity of the Wizard's magnificence. His authoritarianism functions through the unwillingness of his subjects to exercise the slightest level of free will—to take even a tentative peek around the glass in front of their eyes. Yet even on this first meeting with the Wizard, Dorothy recognizes that his intimidating visual spectacle promises much more than it delivers. His voice is less frightening than his image, a dissonance empowering her to counter his spoken "Great and Terrible" with her parallel "Small and Meek." While Dorothy believes she needs his assistance, she already detects a hint of his deception, revealed through the asymmetry of his overblown visual presence and his less convincing vocal presence. While her self-description, in sharp contrast to his, uses terms connoting weakness, it nevertheless emerges from an honest assessment of her position within what she perceives to be the power structure of her environment. In this initial assessment, of course, she has underestimated her own power and, as a result, the two characters' self-descriptions reveal themselves as having no demonstrable bearing on reality, as readers learn when the "Great and Terrible" Oz is exposed as a pathetic charlatan and the "Small and Meek" Dorothy discovers her own power to travel across worlds.

The Wizard's image doesn't seem to jibe with the vocal sounds he creates; the aural presence of his speech undercuts the authority and power he seeks to display visually. We might do well, then, to consider the power structure of Oz as hinging upon

questions of constructed versus real legitimacy, framed by the relationship between visual

and aural discursive tactics. This framework can be extended to include geography in the

realm of the visual, as beyond the immediate environment of the Wizard's city—a center

of unsubstantiated though all-encompassing authority—Oz's society is held in a more

substantive, but extremely delicate balance emanating from the four primary compass

points and manifested through the benevolence of two anti-interventionist "good" women

and the tyranny and terrorism of two "wicked" women. Dorothy's house squishes one of

the evil witches, upsetting the balance of power. Yet she has no knowledge of her own

capacity for world-changing actions; she is deeply apologetic for killing the wicked

witches even though, in both cases, she has liberated entire races of people: the

Munchkins in the East and the Winkies in the West. As Regina Barreca describes,

"Dorothy is an innocent, and because—not in spite—of her innocence, she is powerful.

She doesn't know that there are any choices, so she doesn't make any bad ones. She does

not whine; she does not whimper."[47] Rather, despite her constant apologizing and

frequent equivocations, her speech-acts ultimately demonstrate both an innocent

confidence and an ethical simplicity that rejects arbitrary expressions of authority: when

the Wizard tries to delay granting the companions' wishes, the Tin Woodman and the

Scarecrow express impatience ("You've had plenty of time already," and "We shan't

wait a day longer"), while Dorothy forcefully asserts a moral imperative: "You must keep

your promises to us!"[48] In the film, of course, Garland's Dorothy notoriously often

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[47] Regina Barreca, Introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum (New York: Signet Classics, 2006), i-xviii, viii.
[48] Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 153.

presents a vocal "whininess" and immaturity, but it ultimately reveals itself to be a campy affectation, as she maintains the timbre even when she is absurdly cheery. Most importantly, through her naïve innocence, in both the novel and film, she demonstrates an aptitude that is lacking among all of the native inhabitants of Oz: the ability to detect the artificiality of authority and, therefore, to destroy it, albeit, in her case, inadvertently.

There is something especially powerful and intriguing in the juxtaposition of Dorothy's sweet, quiet Kansas farm girl image with the poise and power she demonstrates through her verbal assertiveness. Yet for some, as an example of female power, she manages to disappoint. Indeed, Pam R. Sailors disagrees with my reading of Dorothy, insisting that, in the novel, she is a "perfect example of the stereotypical female: let the men to the work, coyly accept their compliments, base your own happiness on the happiness of others, and then return to the domestic front where you can, once again, be invisible;" in the film, for Sailors, "if you squint your eyes just right, you can almost see Dorothy's backbone."[49] In 2004, Fox Television's *MadTV* aired a sketch that cleverly played upon the confusing contradictions inherent to Dorothy's image, concurrently highlighting the legendary gay male obsession with Judy Garland. Nicole Parker brilliantly imitates Garland's vocal delivery. The parody rewrites the ending of Fleming's film to allow Dorothy to say what, deep down, we might really want her to say, and in a manner that would likely please Sailors. As the Wizard is carried away by his balloon—his final act of incompetence ("I can't come back. I don't know how it

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[49] Pam R. Sailors, "*Wicked* Feminism," in *The Wizard of Oz and Philosophy: Wicked Wisdom of the West*, ed. Randall E. Auxier and Phillip S. Seng (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court, 2008), 289-303, 289.

works!")—Glinda, that nauseatingly saccharine *deus ex machina*, floats down in her pink bubble. In the film, she arrives to help Dorothy learn the infuriatingly domestic moral of the tale: "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard." *MadTV*'s parody duplicates Glinda's arrival through Dorothy's desperate plea of "Oh, can you help me? Will you help me?" but the moment that Glinda reveals that the girl has "always had the power to go back to Kansas," Dorothy flies into a rage. Glinda asserts that she didn't tell her before because she "wouldn't have believed me," to which Dorothy shouts, "are you out of your fucking mind?" As Glinda describes the absurdly simple mechanism by which Dorothy can return home—clicking her heels and saying "there's no place like home"—she swats the magic wand from the Good Witch's hand, calls her "two-faced," accuses her of taking a sadistic joy in Dorothy's suffering, and screams "you psycho glitter bitch!"

This parodic revision of the film's conclusion hilariously endows Dorothy with the "backbone" that Sailors longs for, but can only barely make out in the canonical versions of the story. At the same time, it piles another layer of campiness onto what might well be the Bible of queer camp, rendering the film's "fantastic excess" even more excessive though a diva tantrum that includes an explosion of homophobic epithets. When the Lion says that, if Dorothy had returned to Kansas immediately, she never would have met her companions, she replies, "I could have done without the three of you! A teenaged girl skipping down the road with three dudes? I had to sleep with my hands between my legs. Thank god I had the dog!" The Tin Woodman tells her that she didn't have to fear him, to which she retorts, "Believe me, I picked up on that right away,

tinsel toes." As he tries to calm her down, she snaps, "Zip it, homo." The context of these seemingly vicious verbal attacks is crucial. Many gay men refer to each other using slurs like "faggot," "homo," and "pansy," not as insults, but as terms of endearment, an everyday parallel to the political and academic reclamation of the term "queer." I have, in fact, had many students who are so used to hearing the word "queer" that they have been unaware that its history is one of extreme disrespect and hate, or that, like its corollary racial slurs, it has often served as the verbal preamble to physical violence and murder. While some gays undeniably hear any such speech as hateful, for many, in safe contexts, it constitutes a campy, funny, and in fact deeply respectful, admission into a loving community. For them, to hear such assaults coming from Dorothy, even when spoken angrily, is both jarring and fitting. As a potent icon of gay male community, the unifying figure for "friends of Dorothy," she serves as a kind of overarching cultural "fag hag," a term describing a straight woman who is a close friend and confidant of a gay man; the phrase's excessively pejorative overtones reveal the same paradoxically loving connotations of "faggot" within a safe community. Indeed, the sketch is often played on the monitors of an upscale gay bar that I frequent (aptly named Camp and displaying an enormous painting of the Madonna and Child that substitutes Judy Garland for Mary and Liza Minnelli for the baby Jesus), where it consistently receives an enthusiastic response.

Dorothy's rant pulls homosexuality into focus during the sketch's narrative and serves to foreshadow the conclusion, which explicitly reworks the sepia Kansas boundaries of the film to place *The Wizard of Oz* within a gay framework. Rather than Dorothy, it is the Tin Woodman who, panicked at the girl's attempts to strangle Glinda,

clicks his heels and repeats, "there's no place like home." The scene fades and changes to show the Woodman tossing and turning in bed. A male voice says, "Joel, wake up! Wake up!" as the frame expands to show another Tin Woodman lying in bed next to him. The Woodman, now identified as "Joel," turns to his companion to say, "Oh Eric, I just had the most insane Judy Garland dream." "Eric" comforts him with "a little TLC," sexually pleasuring him with an oilcan. Home has been transformed from the Kansas house where Dorothy wakes surrounded by her loving aunt and uncle and the three farmhands into the bed of a same-sex male couple, the comforting words of parental figures translated into the physical affection of a gay partner. Bitchy Dorothy, Parker's reworking of Garland's youthful innocence into a tantrum legitimized by its dependency on exposing the absurdities of the tale, derails the fantasy of the film's narrative, allowing the fantasy of its queer reception to emerge in its place. Dorothy's voice, finally speaking truth to power by putting Glinda in her place, breaks through the artifice to reveal explicit gayness, even while reveling in the artifice of a mechanical man.

The distinctiveness of Dorothy's voice and verbal content can serve as interpretive doorways to the vexingly unusual sound produced when Wainwright sings. Discussions of Wainwright's music frequently begin with considerations of his unique voice. The overwhelming majority of times I have initiated such conversations, my companions' immediate responses have been some variation on "I really like his music, but that voice drives me nuts," or, "he has the most beautiful voice." On his Wainwright-dedicated blog, UCLA music scholar and composer Roger Bourland confirms my experience:

> The timbre, or tonal quality of his singing voice is the most problematic selling point for Rufus enthusiasts. "I can't stand his voice" is a phrase we've all heard after confessing our Beatles-like infatuation for Rufus. "Yeah, I understand, but his songs are amazing." "Sorry, I can't get past his voice." We're not talking Flora Foster Jennings, or Tiny Tim, or Mrs. Miller here. For that matter, I was always baffled how in the early 70s, the Bee Gees made millions (and they were not gay) with those silly high falsetto voices.[50]

Bourland admits to struggling to describe Wainwright's voice, continually returning to terms like "nasally," "whiny," and "howl," but expressing dissatisfaction with them. I, too, struggle to describe Wainwright's singing; in addition to Bourland's terms, I experience it as piercing, straining, while equally soothing. Suzanne Cusick's reading of the vocal production of Eddie Vedder, lead singer of the "grunge" rock band Pearl Jam, has a surprising reverberation with how I perceive Wainwright's sound:

> Vedder's voice is produced, in a literal sense, by constricting the muscles of his neck and throat and by avoiding the resonant spaces of his face and head. I think the constriction is a way of performing his body as male without engaging the traditional trope of sex as register. He performs his masculinity instead as a near closing of the body's border. His nearly closed throat give voice to his resolve to police that border, exercising strict control over what gets in and what gets out.[51]

The fact that Cusick's reading of Vedder's gendered voice reminds me of my understanding of Wainwright's gendered voice, despite the blatant differences between the two singers' gender performances, leads me to doubt the specificity of her assessment. Still, her notions of vocal constriction as a means for the post-puberty male

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[50] Roger Bourland, "Rufus Wainwright's Voice," posting of 8 March 2006, www.rogerbourland.com, website: http://rogerbourland.com/blog/2006/03/08/rufus-wainwrights-voice/. Last accessed 2 March 2009. A portion of Bourland's blog constitutes a public working-out of ideas for a book on Wainwright's compositional techniques. The book project appears to have been abandoned, though Bourland still posts to the blog on occasion.

[51] Suzanne Cusick, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex," in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich and Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 25-48, 35.

voice to regulate bodily borders while pushing against gendered ideas of vocal register,

seem appropriate. Wainwright achieves more resonance than Vedder, but in his case, this

physical "policing" often results in a kind of "warble," emerging as much from his often

flat intonation and vocal strain as from his fast vibrato. It is jarring, grating, compelling,

and comforting all at the same time. Bourland suspects, despite his struggle for

description, that audiences hear something "gay" in Wainwright's unique singing. My

response is less generalized, but related; even in soft ballads, Wainwright's voice seems

to almost violently massage me, relieving tension by exerting a painful pressure. I desire

its sound, even as it grates at me. Is there something "gay" about that experience? I tend

to think that such a claim constitutes too essentialist of an interpretive leap, but I do find

his voice reparative and healing. So, for gay men experiencing the voice of an openly

gay singer, perhaps there's something to it, particularly when considering it alongside the

image of "a single skin lin[ing] the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings,"

which partly constitutes Roland Barthes's famous "grain of the voice."[52] To conceive of

song as an extension of the internal body is to enable a liberating potential for vocal

production among populations who daily confront the dominance of identity definitions

based on simplistic and underdeveloped external, visually-marked categories; it equally

enables a powerful reparative potential for listeners whose own identities and desires are

encumbered by precisely the same dominance of false visual markers.

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[52] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 181, 182. Here, Barthes is describing the voice of a Russian church singer, drawing upon some essentialist assumptions in his creation of a general image. Nevertheless, I find his imagery compelling in its portrayal of an embodied vocality.

Still, I cannot quite take Bourland's attempted step toward describing a "gay"

voice. Nevertheless, the implications of his attempt still warrant consideration. Shana

Goldin-Perschbacher's recent examinations of differently-gendered vocalities in popular

music point strongly to the central role the reception of specific voices plays in the

reception of particular songs more generally. I find it fitting that she begins her

discussion of audience reactions to the late Jeff Buckley's vocal acrobatics with a

typically flippant comment made by Wainwright in a 2005 concert: "I wish I had gotten

the chance to sing with Jeff Buckley. The combination of our voices would have turned

any straight boy gay."[53] I will turn more substantively to the unique musical relationship

between these two singers in the following chapter, but for now, it is striking to notice

that, even in his standard, self-aggrandizing, joking fashion, Wainwright claims that his

voice *itself* has power, a claim substantiated in a variety of ways by his fans. On the

official Rufus Wainwright message board, on 11 October 2008, "kathquadmum" started a

discussion strand called "Because of Rufus . . ." in which she asked the board community

to finish her sentence. Within hours, "blackoutsabbath" responded, "So many things, but

the most important thing is because of Rufus I had the confidence to come out as a gay

man, after far too many years in the closet, and for that I shall always be in his debt.

Thank you, Rufus, for giving me the most precious gift in the world: the freedom to be

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[53] Rufus Wainwright, Comments from his performance at Wolf Trap Center for the
Performing Arts, Vienna, VA, 3 August 2005, quoted in Shana Goldin-Perschbacher,
"'Not with You But of You': 'Unbearable Intimacy' and Jeff Buckley's Transgendered
Vocality, in *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (New
York and London: Routledge, 2007), 213-234, 213. See also, Shana Goldin-Pershbacher,
"Sexuality, Listening, and Intimacy: Gender Transgression in Popular Music, 1993-2008,
Ph.D. dissertation (Univeristy of Virginia, 2008).

myself." A flurry of postings followed, in which "blackoutsabbath" was praised for

sharing such a moving story, including this, from "crazystairs":

> wow that's awesome blackoutsabbath
> now I don't feel so trite saying this... but yea I really believe Rufus saved me.
> when I was 14 I was pretty majorly depressed, I thought I would never snap out of it and just wanted to shut myself up forever. I never sought therapy or anything since I felt foolish and my parents thought it was a phase, though I know it wasn't...
> but then one day I randomly heard Rufus sing and *his voice* just sort of *beat its way through everything around me* and reached me in a way nobody else had been able to. so because of Rufus or really thanks to Rufus, I felt like living for real again, I was changed. for the better I hope[54]

"Crazystairs" frames his/her story in notions of vocality. The depressed desire for silence

and isolation, "to shut myself up forever," is removed when Wainwright's voice manages

to break apart the bleakness and penetrate the writer's dulled senses.

The image of Wainwright's voice "beat[ing] its way through everything around

me" resonates with my own experience of first truly taking notice of his music. While I

had heard his famous cover version of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" (from the

soundtrack of the film *Shrek*), I was unfamiliar with any of his original songs. Late on

the night of 22 August 2005, I had left the television running in my living room, as I

wandered about my apartment, doing dishes and cleaning up. That night, Wainwright

appeared as the musical guest on CBS's "The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson."

Distracted by the chores I frantically sought to finish so I could get to sleep, I barely

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[54] "Because of Rufus," message strand on Rufus Wainwright Message Board, website: http://boards.rufuswainwright.com/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=UBB1&Number=622163&Forum=UBB1&Words=voice&Match=Entire%20Phrase&Searchpage=1&Limit=25&Old=allposts&Main=622078&Search=true#Post62216, Last accessed 2 March 2009. Emphasis mine. I have maintained the grammar, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation of the original posts.

registered the sounds emanating from the television, even the simple, but melancholy

piano opening—a somber quadruple meter adaptation of a simple waltz

accompaniment—of Wainwright's tragic ballad, "This Love Affair" (from *Want Two*).

But the moment Wainwright began singing the sad, long-held pitches of the melody, his

rough, but gentle voice seemed forcibly to compel me to cease my mundane activity and

pay attention. I recognized his utterly distinctive voice from the Cohen cover, but

hearing it in a new context completely dislodged my focus from its utilitarian goal. I

went to the living room to see Wainwright, gaudily dressed in clashing plaid and polka

dots, sitting at the piano with his neck and head positioned at an awkward angle, which I

would later come to know as his trademark contorted singing posture. His voice had

demanded that I pay attention to the artifice of his visual presentation. In turn, his

flamboyant appearance (fan message board responses to the performance consistently

repeat assessments along the lines of "no one but our boy could have pulled off that

outfit") helped me immediately recognize the subtext of his words. As he sings the

second verse, his voice divorces itself from the previous melodic structure, half-soaring,

half-struggling, upward, singing what, with knowledge of his sexual identity (a

knowledge that, until that moment, as I recognized the visual cues of his clothing choices,

I did not possess), references an utterly common trope among gay men: "I can't say that

I'm cruising/ not that I don't like cruising/ It's just that I'm bruising/ from you." I knew

at that moment, only half-way through the song, that this man would somehow become

important to my musical and academic life. Despite my overwhelming desire to get to

bed only moments before Wainwright began singing on "The Late Late Show," I never

went to sleep that night. Rather, I stayed up until morning researching this (for me) newly-discovered singer/songwriter, downloading any of his music that I could locate, and obsessively listening to his voice and his strange compositional pastiche. My experience was less emotionally or personally transformative than those of "blackoutsabbath" and "crazystairs," as my exposure occurred during a time when I didn't feel particularly depressed or self-denying, but it did mark a significant turning point in my life. Wainwright's voice had demanded that I turn from the mundane— scrubbing dishes—to the pleasurable, which as a result, enabled me to find identification with, and healing from, that voice.

I'm not certain these experiences can lead to any concrete conclusions regarding the cultural or personal impact of Wainwright's vocal timbre. Indeed, I strongly believe that any such attempt misses the point. The inherently subjective reception of individual vocal qualities necessarily involves indefinable preferences and coincidences. Nevertheless, these indefinable aspects of reception can be central to moments of reparative listening. Despite these complications, though, the consideration of these individually-valued experiences help illustrate that, like the distinctive voice of Dorothy—expressed by her innocent verbal truth-telling in the novel and her paradoxically "whiny," while confident voice in Garland's film portrayal, or even the absolutely justified mega-bitch camp of the *MadTV* parody—the contradictorily grating and soothing voice of Wainwright contains a unique and dynamic potential for multiple productive audience receptions.

Consideration of one of the many duets Wainwright has performed with other

singers can help further elucidate such a potential. In 2005, Wainwright toured with

singer/songwriter Ben Folds. One highlight of the tour was their dual performance of

George Michael's classic 1980s pop ballad "Careless Whisper," a solo song released

during his time with Wham! Jaap Kooijman describes "Careless Whisper" as part of

Michael's attempt to position himself as a solo singer by releasing more serious, soul-

influenced singles: "the transformation from boyish fun to explicitly heterosexual

seriousness was not a coincidence, as Michael's newly acquired star image was used to

broaden his commercial success to an international level and (perhaps most importantly)

to conquer the American pop market."[55] Kooijman is correct in asserting that Michael

only became an explicit gay megastar with the release of the video for the track

"Outside" following his arrest for public indecency and subsequent outing as gay.[56] Yet,

as Kooijman acknowledges, the homoerotic and flamboyant appeal of the Wham! duo

demonstrated a powerful implicit queerness that was hardly lost on fans. The original

recording of "Careless Whisper" exemplifies what, in the context of Michael and

Wham!'s contemporary Neil Tennant's Pet Shop Boys, Fred Maus refers to as "double-

voicedness." Maus observes that:

> Until very recently, indirect communication about 'the love that dares not speak
> its name' has been normative in most settings. Connotation and double-entendre
> have perpetuated an atmosphere of secrecy, shame and social control around

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[55] Jaap Kooijman, "Outside in America: George Michael's Music Video, Public Sex and Global Pop Culture," *European Journal of Cultural Studie*s 7 (2004): 27-41, 29.
[56] The video for "Outside" constituted an explicit commentary on Michael's arrest, transforming a public restroom into a disco, thereby conflating the site of his humiliation into a site of gay community and erotic celebration.

homosexuality, even while they also provide a style of public communication for gay men themselves.[57]

For Maus, Pet Shop Boys's lyrics frequently duplicated this process: "Tennant's lyrics are often double-voiced, carrying special meanings for insiders while remaining differently meaningful for others as well."[58] While "Careless Whisper" can easily be read as a heterosexual tale of lost love, a reading bolstered by the narrative of the song's video, from a queer perspective, it can be just as easily understood as the tragic rejection and uncomfortable misunderstanding that many gays and lesbians recognize as the frequent result of coming out to a straight friend to whom one is attracted. For many, such experiences are part of a tumultuous period of self-revelation during adolescence and early adulthood, so it is entirely reasonable to suggest that these ideas may have influenced the writing of the song, which occurred when Michael was only seventeen years old. Lyrics like "time can never heal the careless whispers of a good friend," and "there's no comfort in the truth, pain is all you will find," resonate with queer audiences, even while allowing dominant readings. Such reparative readings became more explicitly understood after Michael came out of the closet, but they certainly existed while his public persona seemed self-consciously constructed as heterosexual.

When Folds and Wainwright cover the song, then, it carries with it a great deal of public knowledge of its originator's sexuality and tumultuous relationship with the closet. The song's famous introductory saxophone line and soaring, descending, scalar refrain of "I'm never gonna dance again," are ubiquitous in popular culture and, therefore, instantly

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[57] Fred E. Maus, "Glamour and Evasion: the Fabulous Ambivalence of the Pet Shop Boys," *Popular Music* 20/3, (2001): 379-393, 383.
[58] Ibid.

recognizable by the majority of the audience. While the saxophone riff of the original song conveys a jazzy brashness—a dated sound easily located in 1980s pop—its transference to Folds's piano renders the melody far more introspective and melancholy—the more "timeless" sound of a piano ballad. Folds initiates the vocal line, his voice as distinctive as Wainwright's, but far smoother, gentler, indeed far closer in timbre to the voice of Michael. Wainwright enters with the chorus, his piercing voice highlighted by its juxtaposition with that of Folds, as well as the melody's dramatic change of register. The combination of these contrasting voices lends the song a compellingly unsettled sensibility when the two sing together, but at no point does the contrast become distracting or unpleasant. Rather, placed within Folds's set during the tour, the performance seemed to privilege Wainwright by highlighting his vocal timbre. At their performance during Central Park Summerstage on 14 July 2004, Wainwright began the song by saying to Folds, "you're a much better piano player than I am, for the record" to which Folds responded, "and you're prettier than I am." The local television rebroadcast of the performance incorporated interviews with the performers, including one with Ben Folds in which he said of Wainwright, " . . . he owns it. He's the real deal singing that song." The camaraderie between the singers serves to underline the different ways the straight Folds and the famously gay Wainwright relate to the song. Wainwright's powerful, gritty voice overpowers Folds's softer timbre, seeming to epitomize a claim of authenticity that Folds confirms in the interview. The two male voices revise Michael's solo song, drawing attention to homosociality in a pianistic musical context provided by Folds that both lends a cultural gravitas to the performance

and highlights the performative queerness of Wainwright. Wainwright defers to Folds's technical musical prowess while Folds defers to Wainwright's surface-level "fabulousness" as legitimizing his queer claim on the song. The crooning Wainwright, upon his first entrance at the song's chorus, reclaims "Careless Whisper" from the discourse of "double-voicedness," vocally asserting his right to this closeted piece of the gay popular music canon.

This is but one of the many places in Wainwright's oeuvre in which his unique voice seems to command attention by both defying expectations—his voice is, for many, an acquired taste—and, at the same time, soothing the listener. These subjective assessments of his vocal timbre admittedly constitute personal responses, but I believe they can help shed light on the compelling reactions listeners like "blackoutsabbath" and "crazystairs" have expressed. When Garland's Dorothy first bursts into song in *The Wizard of Oz*, the juxtaposition of her sweet speaking voice and her deep and mature singing voice is striking. Indeed, the power of her singing highlights the level of affect and camp contained in her spoken timbre. But what she sings in this initial musical number is, perhaps, the most deeply cherished and communally powerful song in the enormous and growing canon of gay anthems: "Over the Rainbow." These two musical moments—Garland dropping her little-girl voice to belt what would become the "gay national anthem" and Wainwright assertively intruding on a piano version of a classic song written from the closet—are inextricably linked in my mind, due to their disruption of expectations. This reparative juxtaposition is, I believe, the answer to Bourland's quest to characterize the "gayness" of Wainwright's voice. It is not a matter of locating

an intrinsic "gay" vocality, but rather, the acknowledgement of the power of uniqueness

to be both jarring and comforting.

"There's No Place Like Home": Geography, Movement, and Ethical Inversion

> "Am I really wonderful?" asked the Scarecrow.
> "You are unusual," replied Glinda.
> —L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*[59]

Like much of Wainwright's output, "California," from his 2002 album *Poses*,

juxtaposes a range of cultural images to create a commentary on notions of location,

fantasy, and reality. The idyllic, fantastic imagery begins with the song's musical

texture, powerfully evocative of 1960s beach films: a rhythmic guitar riff accompanied

by snare drum, woodblock, and tambourine. A backup chorus that sings exuberant

"oohs" in swirling melodic lines, while occasionally providing descant harmonies to

Wainwright's text, reinforces the *Beach Blanket Bingo* quality of the song. The fantasy

escapism alluded to by the song's timbre and texture finds new contexts in the song's

video. The video presents Wainwright as a patron of a karaoke bar, hobbling up to the

stage with the aid of a cane. The karaoke screen provides an additional level of fantasy,

however, showing a black-and-white scene in which Wainwright, dressed in a tuxedo and

sporting a moustache and heavily-pomaded hair, sits in a 1940s bar, looking bored while

his sister Martha drinks heavily and dances around Rufus shaking maracas. The contrast

between these two images of Wainwright—the shaggy, insecure, and enfeebled karaoke

singer and the heavily-groomed, aloof, and vaguely irritated bar patron—highlights the

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[59] Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 214.

song's juxtapositions of reality and fantasy. Karaoke-Rufus struggles to keep up with the

bouncing ball on the screen, showing overt perplexity at some of the song's campier

phrases ("big nights back East with Rhoda," and "my new grandma Bea Arthur)."

Quaffed-Rufus, on the other hand, delivers the text in an utterly deadpan, disinterested

way.

In direct contrast to Joni Mitchell's famous song of the same name, which uses

similar "beach-tropes" to construct California as a longed-for home during times of travel

and exile, Wainwright's "California" uses the cheerful, idyllic sound sarcastically to

construct a location filled with false potential and artifice: "California, California, you're

such a wonder that I think I'll stay in bed." He perceives California as a land that is

entirely foreign. In the pre-chorus, he sings "I don't know this sea of neon," followed by

a phrase that is altered in subsequent iterations from "thousands suffer whiffs of Freon,"

to "thousand surfers, whiffs of Freon." This paralleling of "suffer" and "surfers"

explicitly critiques the joyous, even hedonistic, surf-music of the song, exposing what the

song presents as the vapidity and ultimate tragedy of beach culture. In the second verse,

Wainwright turns to Oz imagery in order clarify his home: "There's a moment I've been

saving. A kind of Crucifix around this Munchkinland. Up North freezing, little me

drooling. *That's Entertainment*'s on at eight. Come on Ginger, slam." This image-

soaked passage poetically dramatizes Wainwright's youthful dream of stardom. The

conflation of California with Munchkinland, the first place Dorothy visits during her

fantastic trip, equally draws in imagery of sacrifice and pain. The young Wainwright—

"little me drooling"—longs for a glittery Hollywood world that he experiences only

through television, in this case a broadcast of MGM's 1974 self-celebratory film *That's Entertainment*. Within the context of Ozian imagery, Wainwright connects his hometown of Montreal with the North, the home of Glinda the Good in Fleming's film (though in Baum's novel, Glinda is actually from the South). Retroactively, we hear the connection between Munchinland, with its Lollipop Guild and Lullaby League and Wainwright's lament over California's "big-time rollers, part-time models." In "California," the Oz fantasy fails to deliver on the promise offered by its façade and excess. Yet, the journey from reality to fantasy is not always disappointing in Wainwright's music. The journey itself, just as in the Oz tale, contains dynamic potential that can be accessed for reparative perspectives.

Baum clarified the motivation behind his fanciful creation in an introduction to the first edition of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). His conception of a new, quintessentially American fairy tale necessitated a revision of the genre, a revision primarily concerned with eliminating the convention of presenting moral lessons for children. This impulse powerfully aligns his writing with reparative motives toward cultural history in that, on the one hand, he does not seek to create an entirely original style or genre, but rather seeks to approach a cherished literary form from a new socially and historically specific vantage point and, on the other, he explicitly disrupts the form's traditional ethical framework, in which frightening narrative characteristics serve to educate children and reinforce particular behaviors and attitudes:

> Yet the old-time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated,

together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale.[60]

Baum's stated desire, of course, betrays an idealism that was not only doomed by the incredible range of ways the tale has been retold and valued by different populations at different times, but by his own original tale. While in the novel, the Winged Monkeys turn out to be benevolent figures forced to do the bidding of whomever possesses the Golden Cap, their coerced actions are nevertheless often disturbing: they viciously throw the Tin Woodman against sharp rocks, leaving him "so battered and dented that he could neither move nor groan," effectively dismember the Scarecrow by pulling "all of the straw out of his clothes and head," and tie up the Lion so tightly that he cannot move.[61] Fleming's film portrayal of the Winged Monkeys is known for its capacity to inspire nightmares in young children. Further, Baum's descriptions of conflict often become fairly graphic for an author who specifically derides fairy tale violence. The Kalidahs, vicious creatures with the heads of tigers and the bodies of bears, are defeated when they plummet into a chasm, "dashed to pieces on the sharp rocks at the bottom."[62] When the Wicked Witch sends forty wolves to attack the companions, the Tin Woodman hacks each of them to pieces with his axe. In addition, while he explicitly eschews moral lessons, Baum makes explicit at the end of the book that Dorothy's self-sacrifice in the service of others provides her with the reward of returning home. Each of the companions thanks her for helping them find the personal attributes they had previously believed they lacked and Dorothy responds, ". . . I am glad I was of use to these good

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[60] Ibid., *xix*.
[61] Ibid., 122.
[62] Ibid., 63.

friends. But now that each of them has had what he most desired, and each is happy in having a kingdom to rule beside, I think I should like to go back to Kansas."[63] Baum, despite his stated intentions, adopts many of the very conventions of the form he seeks to revise.

Rather, what ultimately distinguishes the tale from its European precursors and renders it so resonant with American readers and viewers is its usage of images of place and home within a specifically American context. Kansas, as the geographical center of the contiguous United States, becomes a real-world parallel to the fantastic Emerald City. This analogy implicitly troubles notions of beauty and artifice. Even as the Emerald City loses its luster with the elimination of the green glasses, the blandness of Kansas becomes a longed-for beauty in the eyes of Dorothy. This problematized aesthetic duality underpins what is perhaps a far more potent aspect of the story. Dorothy's travel over immeasurable distances speaks to an immigrant nation defined, in part, by its expanse and a concurrent regionalism. Location and geography are powerful ideas in American culture, and many of the most cherished cultural products of the nation hinge on notions of place and movement. Works like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* tell epic tales of travel driven by need, desire, or most commonly, both. The musical New England fetishism of Charles Ives gives way to the exoticization of the American West in the most famous works of Aaron Copland; John Adams's famous memorial to the victims

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[63] Ibid., 216.

of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, *On the Transmigration of Souls*, relies upon allegorical meanings of movement and travel.

Wainwright's most explicit musical usage of *The Wizard of Oz* dramatizes ideas of movement, while concurrently highlighting notions of musical artifice and beauty. "Oh What a World," the opening track of *Want One*, demonstrates one of the ways Wainwright negotiates the distinction between "normal" and "different" in order to construct a uniquely queer authority (example 1). Wainwright says of the song, "It's about looking at the world and seeing what's actually there, not feeling either good or bad about it, just feeling apart . . . even though the world is a strange place, you're still on the train, you paid for your ticket, and it's going to arrive at some point."[64] The notion of journey through a strange land finds an oddly campy logic in the song's construction of binary spaces and its lyrical inversion of binary gendered value structures. A prerecorded, multi-tracked chorus of Wainwright's voice, seeming to originate from some distant location, begins the song, presenting a sophisticated contrapuntal harmonization of the primary melodic ideas. These heavily manipulated vocal clones—disembodied, artificially duplicated, and acting in perfect imitative collaboration—immediately give the track an aura of fantasy and mystery. A tuba enters, laying down a one-five-one bass line which initiates the song's obsessive repetition of short phrases in which Wainwright laments: "Men reading fashion magazines/ Oh what a world it seems we live in/ Straight men/ Oh what a world we live in."

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[64] *Want One* press kit, DreamWorks Records (Aug., 2003).

Even this short description of musical elements illustrates the kind of reparative perspective Wainwright can formulate through the playful revision and juxtaposition of existing, easily identifiable and understandable elements. The opening hummed chorus evokes a common musical trope of ethereal, insubstantial dreaminess, the weaving contrapuntal lines compelling a sense of movement while the lack of text seems to deny more explicit semantic meaning. The simple, even clichéd, tuba line, on the one hand, grounds the music, making it more physically present and embodied, while on the other, it conveys a sense of playfulness and unpretentious, undemanding joy. By using part of the Wicked Witch's dying speech ("Oh what a world!") as a repeated structuring element, the song invites readings that place Oz in a symbolic parallel relationship to the world denoted in the song's more literal lyrics—"fashion magazines" read by "straight men."

Example 1: Rufus Wainwright, outline of the opening of "Oh What a World" (author's transcription).

Oz is a fantasy world filled with individuals marked by their strangeness, initially providing an escape from the normalizing and authoritarian reality of Kansas. Dorothy's desire to return home does not amount to acquiescence to its power structures, however, but demonstrates the double-bind of desiring escape from the dominant culture even while struggling to exist within it—a striking example of what Sedgwick describes as "minoritizing" and "universalizing" homosexual impulses.[65] Sedgwick offers her binary as an alternative to the essentialist/constructivist debate that, before her influential work,

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[65] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, esp., 82-86. See also Ross Chambers, "Strategic Constructivism? Sedgwick's Ethics of Inversion," in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed., Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, 2002), 165-180.

served as the primary analytical node of theorizations of homosexuality. The "minoritizing" impulse encompasses ideas of internal identity and discursive tactics that delineate an identifiable homosexual community. The "universalizing" impulse encompasses continuum models of sexuality and models that favor shifting conceptions of desire over fixed identity. For Sedgwick, this alternative is crucial as it mitigates the politically hazardous consequences of a nature/nurture structure, including most prominently, the ever-present notion that, if homosexuality is a choice, it can be reviled and eliminated. The "closet," within this framework, serves as a cultural device that washes away the inherent conflict between these two perspectives by forcing sexual difference out of the public sphere into "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century."[66] As Peraino suggests, Dorothy's conflict between desiring to be apart from her home culture (minoritizing) and desiring to be a part of it (universalizing), reflects the unending psychological struggle faced by many individuals whose sexual or gender self-knowledge places them in a similar quandary. Yet, in "Oh What a World," the structuring principle of the closet becomes reversed: the "straight men" appear strange and it is their behavior that becomes incomprehensible. Their external identification as "straight" is portrayed as incompatible with the behavior of reading fashion magazines.

The simple tuba line drives the song's musical development, a one-five-one pattern that moves predictably from the tonic to the supertonic, then to the dominant, then to a scalar motion back to tonic, whereupon it simply continues its relentless repetition. The backup chorus continues to provide contrapuntal interest, now using text that echoes

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[66] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 71.

Wainwright's words, but, like the continuo of a Baroque trio-sonata texture, the tuba

provides the structural weight, enabling the voices to move about freely within the

containment of a strict harmonic framework. The incredible harmonic simplicity of the

song, iterated by the incessant plodding of the tuba, musically manifests Wainwright's

description of the song as being "on a train," waiting for it "to arrive at some point."

The surface-level vocal-harmonic alterations to the endlessly repeating phrases

may begin to suggest to the listener a sense of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*, until, sure

enough, *Bolero* itself begins to sneak in, providing counterpoint to Wainwright's singing.

Bolero slowly overtakes "Oh What a World," until there seems to be more Ravel than

Wainwright in the composition. The unproblematic continuation of the original tuba line,

however, demonstrates that the two works exist concurrently; *Bolero* simply emerges

from the musical structures already present. Ravel has been there all along, but allowed

to assert himself only through Wainwright's musical framework. The ubiquitous harp

arpeggios telling us that it is all just a dream and Dorothy is still in Kansas, disrupt the

increasing intensity of *Bolero*, which in Ravel leads to an apocalyptic, dissonant

cacophony, replacing it with an orchestral chromatic descent during which Wainwright

and his band "melt" like the Wicked Witch. Yet Wainwright rejects both Ravel's tragic

ending, and the Witch's demise; the chorus of his own voice, which had initiated the

entire spectacle, remains after the orchestral music ends. Wainwright, manifested in the

pre-recorded multiplication of his voice, survives the intrusion of Ravel. The insertion of

Bolero offers a number of interpretive off-ramps. *Bolero* is undoubtedly one of the most

instantly recognized orchestral works of the Western musical canon, appearing in

contexts from feature films to television commercials. Its continual building-up of

musical sounds over a repeated harmonic framework, along with its initial privileging of

woodwind timbres juxtaposed with an incessant percussive rhythmic pattern, constructs

cultural images of urbanity and suppressed excitement, emerging from a surface-level

exoticism. To the extent that exotic and "superficial" musical characteristics relate to

cultural images of hedonism and sexual difference, as much of Brett's work on Benjamin

Britten's music demonstrates, Wainwright's musical and structural command of the piece

exerts an authority over the representation of such concepts.[67]

But more significantly, Wainwright's usage of Ravel's most well-known work,

like his usage of one of George Michael's most famous songs, may constitute an explicit

musical "outing." As Lloyd Whitesell explains, speculation regarding Ravel's sexuality

has proliferated since his earliest emergence into public awareness.[68] He was:

> fiercely protective of his privacy. In personal recollections the composer's friends
> attest repeatedly to his aloofness, modesty, or reserve. He never married or, as far
> as we know, engaged in any long-term sexual relationship. For much of his adult
> life he lived with his beloved mother, staying with her until her death in 1916.
> After World War I he moved outside Paris to 'Le Belvedere,' a house in
> Montfort-l'Amaury, where he lived alone to the end of his life.[69]

Whitesell's account asserts that Ravel's public persona was commonly that of a "dandy,"

a nineteenth-century trope that often served as an external expression of an internal

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[67] See Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," and ibid., "Eros and
Orientalism in Britten's Operas," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian
Musicology*, 2nd ed., ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York
and London: Routledge, 2006), 235-256.
[68] Lloyd Whitesell, "Ravel's Way," in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed.
Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press,
2002), 49-78.
[69] Ibid., 49.

homosexuality, and an image that is central to Matthew Jones's queer reading of

Wainwright's album *Poses*.[70] While clear documentary evidence of Ravel's sexual

orientation is elusive, his image relates with queer conceptions of self-presentation during

his time. A reparative perspective does not, however, depend upon concrete evidence of

Ravel's personal life. Whitesell's research invites considerations of Ravel's work from

interpretive frames informed by LGBT concerns and relationships to cultural histories.

In queering the possibly already queer and undeniably "dandy" Ravel, Wainwright claims

Bolero as his own and demands the right to revise it according to his own fantasy, cast

within the context of that quintessential masterwork of gay camp, *The Wizard of Oz*. In

Wainwright's re-appropriation, *Bolero* constitutes a world of strangeness which can be

accessed as fantasy, but must ultimately be revealed as a dream. He inverts notions of

normalcy, reclaiming a well-known work by a possibly gay composer and placing it at

the "center" around which his marginalization is defined.

Yet Wainwright neither wears a wig of long curly locks for "Oh What a World,"

nor does he sing "there's no place like home." Instead, in certain live performances of

"Oh What a World," Wainwright and his band visually channel the Wicked Witch of the

West by donning witch's hats and capes.[71] Rather than casting himself as Dorothy, he

identifies with the Wicked Witch, a figure who is both contained within the fantasy land

and represents an authority which, in its original context, must be subverted. Wainwright

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[70] Matthew Jones, "All These Poses, Such Beautiful *Poses*: Articulations of Queer Masculinity in the Music of Rufus Wainwright," presented at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music-U. S. Chapter (2008), Iowa City, IA; See also, ibid., "All These Poses, Such Beautiful *Poses*: Articulations of Queer Masculinity in the Music of Rufus Wainwright, M.A. Thesis (University of Georgia, 2008).
[71] Such a performance is available on the bonus DVD packaged with *Want Two*.

inverts the narrative's binary construction of "straight" (or "correct" and real) Kansas and "queer" (or "wrong" and imaginary) Oz, just as the song's lyrics—implicating straight men's reading of fashion magazines as out of the ordinary and lamentable—invert notions of authority in contemporary culture. Straight men are interlopers in a preexisting gay culture—they are the ones who are "queer," in that they deviate from their prescribed behavior. Rufus-as-Witch re-centers Oz as the privileged reality and source of authority. But it also redefines the parameters through which authority and power are valued.

In his commentary on *The Wizard of Oz*, Salman Rushdie explores the film's portrayal of images of travel and exile. He refers to "Over the Rainbow" as "a grand paean to the Uprooted Self, a hymn—*the* hymn—to Elsewhere":

> What [Dorothy] expresses here, what she embodies with the purity of an archetype, is the human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots. At the heart of *The Wizard of Oz* is a great tension between these two dreams, but as the music swells and that big, clean voice flies into the anguished longings of the song, can anyone doubt which message is the stronger? In its most potent emotional moment, this is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in the "place where there isn't any trouble."[72]

Queer Dorothy returns to Kansas, but Queer Rufus returns to Oz. *The Wizard of Oz* as an object of queer camp may seem obvious, but it is only by digging below the surface that we remember the gay code-phrase is "friend of Dorothy," not "friend of the Wicked Witch." If camp is purely aesthetic, we can simply laugh at Wainwright's joke, missing the song's inversion of queer and straight spaces and its resultant critique of concepts of normalcy. Wainwright's journey is not as passive as his description might suggest: his

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[72] Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: The British Film Institute, 1993), 23.

train is traveling through the "strange place" of the real world with its heteronormative

cultural structures, but he has a ticket to Oz, where his pseudo-drag persona serves as an

authority figure.

Gregory Maguire's *Wicked* portrays Dorothy's perspective on the Oz tale as

deluded or disingenuous:

> It became a celebrated event, the death of the Wicked Witch of the West. It was
> hailed as a political assassination or a juicy murder. Dorothy's description of
> what had happened was deemed self-delusion, at best, or a bald-faced lie. Murder
> or mercy killing or accident, in an indirect way it helped rid the country of its
> dictator.[73]

Openly gay Maguire constructs a complex back-story for the Wicked Witch of the West,

in which her profound sense of difference, resulting primarily from her green skin,

provides her with a deep compassion for the disenfranchised and abused populations of

Oz. *Wicked* provides readers with an alternate view of the Witch, one that utterly revises

her portrayal in Baum's novel and Fleming's film. Dorothy's entrance into Oz

constitutes an extremely minor moment in Maguire's narrative, demonstrating the

importance of competing perspectives when considering notions of "good and evil."

Elphaba, the Witch, knows that the shoes—the only material remnants of her tragically

killed sister, the Witch of the East—will provide the dictatorial Wizard with the power to

forever manipulate the Munchkins: "Maybe, if she tried, she could shrug her shoulders

and leave Munchkinland to its own fate—but damn it, the shoes were *hers*."[74] She

orchestrates her own death—the famous scene in the film in which Dorothy splashes a

bucket of water on the Witch—in order to provide Oz with a narrative that sacrifices her

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[73] Maguire, *Wicked*, 405.
[74] Ibid., 377.

own reputation, making her notoriously "wicked" in the view of Oz's population, in order

to prevent the destruction of the liberty of the land's people. Elphaba chooses historical

debasement and death in order to save the citizens of her world. Her self-sacrifice

originates in the difficulties of her own life as a reviled outsider, an individual who is

marginalized because of cultural distrust of difference.

Maguire and Wainwright both revise the ethical framework of Oz, suggesting that

"evil" rests in the eye of the beholder. In Stephen Schwartz's stage musical adaptation of

Maguire's novel, which premiered the same year as *Want One*'s release, Elphaba's

choice to divorce herself from the inequities of her society is expressed in the show-

stopping final number of Act I, "Defying Gravity." In this song, Elphaba and Glinda part

company, choosing their roles in Ozian culture. Elphaba is incapable of acquiescing to

the unjust power of the Wizard, whereas Glinda is incapable of defying the social order

into which she has been born. The musical climax bursts forth as the Wizard's guards

catch up with the now rebellious Elphaba, just as Glinda makes it clear that she will not

join her friend. Elphaba sings, triumphantly, "So if you care to find me, look to the

Western sky." She expresses a sense of agency through alienation, singing, "and if I'm

flying solo, at least I'm flying free." The allegorical implications of Elphaba's tale in

relation to many coming-out stories is palpable in this dramatic musical moment,

conveying an empowerment that depends upon separating oneself from the expectations

of one's culture and accepting social isolation. The dangerous implications of such a

choice are dramatized as "Defying Gravity" concludes, Elphaba's "and nobody in all of

Oz, no wizard that there is or was, is ever gonna bring me down" juxtaposed with the

chorus's foreboding "so we've got to bring her down." As Schwartz's musical Elphaba

takes to the sky, her transparent metaphor contains immense rhetorical and cultural

power: while defying gravity may provide a pretty nice spectacle, the Witch's truly

meaningful defiance is against an unjust social system that, rejecting her difference. will

do everything in its power to "bring her down."

Like Dorothy, Elphaba's complex relationship to her given culture is strongly

influenced by her perspectives on authority. Dorothy seeks to escape a home life that

feels stifling. Elphaba spends her story in a continual struggle to release herself from

parental authority. Her religious and ethical struggles with her (unknowingly) adoptive

father conflate with the political and social war she wages against the Wizard,

particularly after he is revealed as her birth father. As Randall E. Auxier observes, in the

novel, Elphaba's parentage is crucial to notions of home, geography, and belonging:

> It's easy to notice that people *do* travel from our actual world to Oz—in balloons,
> in cyclones, magically by way of certain shoes, or even by the pure power of
> belief. The story really depends on it. In *Wicked*, Elphaba, our WWW [Wicked
> Witch of the West], is the offspring of the Wizard from Omaha, and a Munchkin
> from Oz named Melena. Elphie is, without knowing it, a half-breed, half of our
> world and half of Oz. This is a difficult mode of being, with one foot in either
> world. Indeed it may be *im*possible, in the sense of contradictory. She lives
> nearly her whole life not knowing why she is so misplaced and miserable, and she
> is not quite able to believe the truth about herself when she finally learns it.[75]

Maguire carefully constructs Elphaba as Dorothy's parallel. In *Wicked*, she dreams of the

"real world" as if she *is* Dorothy and upon confronting the girl, cries, "You're my soul

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[75] Randall E. Auxier, "The Possible World of Oz, *The Wizard of Oz and Philosophy:
Wicked Wisdom of the West*, ed., Randall E. Auxier and Phillip S. Seng (Chicago and
LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2008), 167-186, 182.

come scavenging for me."[76] The idea of a spiritual relationship between the Witch and Dorothy has powerful cultural relevance. Indeed, a similar dramatic device is used in the Sci Fi Channel's 2008 miniseries *Tinman*, a reworking/sequel to the Oz story, in which D.G., a descendant of Dorothy, travels from Kansas to Oz in order to confront a despot who is possessed by the Witch and who turns out to be D.G.'s sister. Such cultural constructions not only invite more sympathetic readings of the Wicked Witch of the West, but they suggest that ethics can be contingent, that "wickedness" may not be universal.

The metaphorical implications of these ideas for LGBT populations can hardly be understated. Auxier's description of the difficulty of living "in-between" resonates with many people whose lives necessarily involve levels of secrecy in various circumstances and who may, in the course of revealing hidden aspects of their lives, feel ostracized from loved ones and family. As Sedgwick argues, even the most expressly "out" individual confronts the closet daily.[77] Further, Wainwright and Maguire rescue one of the most clearly hated characters in American popular culture (her very name tells us what to think of her, after all). Maguire gives her a story. Wainwright flips the ethical world of identity politics, the closet, and cultural stereotypes. Rufus-as-Witch transforms the cry, "Oh What a World!" from a lament over the capacity of a child to "destroy my beautiful wickedness" to a campy incredulity over the "queerness" of straight men.

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[76] Maguire, *Wicked*, 183.
[77] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 67-69.

" . . . Why, Then Oh Why Can't I": Home, Family, and Being Judy

[. . .]

perhaps we have lost her
perhaps home is no longer comfort
or comfort no longer home

evenings we sit awake in
our disenchanted kitchen
listening to the dog whine
to Dorothy clicking her heels

--Lucille Clifton, "after oz"[78]

If the "surf-music" of "California" presents fantasy without substance, while the

heavily produced, "classic"-stealing "Oh What a World" serves as fantasy with

transformative potential, "Hometown Waltz," from *Want Two*, offers conflicted images

of home and the desire for escape. The song begins its waltz meter with a sustained

melody on accordion accompanied by a rhythmic banjo. The orchestration of the song,

emphasizing sounds that are frequently culturally understood as "folk" timbres, strongly

evokes a sense of the "real," the geographically situated, the authentically "true." More

specifically, theses sounds evoke the folk-revival music associated with Wainwright's

famous family, especially his father Loudon Wainwright III and his late mother and aunt,

the McGarrigle Sisters (Kate and Anna).

Home and family are substantive issues in Wainwright's music. Music is the

family business, and the Wainwrights and McGarrigles pull their interpersonal

relationships into their art in truly striking ways. Until Kate's death in 2010, the annual

"McGarrigle Family Christmas Hour," brought the family, including Kate, Rufus, and

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[78] Lucille Clifton, "after oz," *Callaloo* 27/3 (2004): 649.

Martha, as well as Anna and her children, together with various other performers (guests

have included Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson) for a concert that was almost absurdly

"homey"—several family members appeared on the Martha Stewart Show in December

2008, sporting sweaters knitted by Kate; Kate and Rufus baked Kate's ski-shaped

Christmas cookies, and the family serenaded Martha Stewart and audience with a carol.

Beneath this idyllic, domestic image, however, rests a level of instability and animosity

that is barely masked. The family has produced a number of songs referencing each other

that is so large I cannot fully catalogue them in this context, but a selection of the better-

known examples serves to illustrate the complexities of this musical family's artistic

relationships. Loudon and Kate's divorce when Rufus and Martha were young children

provides a particularly ripe source of inspiration. Loudon's "Rufus is a Tit Man,"

released in 1975, eroticizes Kate's breastfeeding of Rufus, a heteronormative and

masculinist perspective now made dramatically ironic by Rufus's flamboyant

homosexuality (Rufus is quite clearly *not* a tit man). Wainwright covers Loudon's "One

Man Guy" on *Poses*. Loudon's original song articulates his independence from

attachments—"the one man is me"—but Rufus alters the text, gently merging the word

"man" with "guy," producing the lyric, "the one man guy is me." Rufus's version shifts

Loudon's emphasis on self-attention to an explicitly homosexual conception of romantic

attachment. The haunting piano ballad "Dinner at Eight," from Rufus's *Want One*,

conflates a moment of media competition with his father with the divorce: "why is it so

that I've always been the one who must go, that I've always been the one told to flee,

when in fact you were the one, actually, in the drifting white snow, who left me." Martha

Wainwright's eponymous debut album contains a much angrier portrait of Loudon,

entitled "Bloody Mother Fucking Asshole" (abbreviated as "B.M.F.A."): "I will not

pretend, I will not put on a smile, I will not say I'm alright for you, when all I wanted was

to be good, to do everything in truth." In sharp contrast to their referencing of their

father, the musical relationship between Rufus and Martha is striking in its affection.

Before she initiated her own solo career, Martha consistently sang backup for Rufus. In a

documentary, she comments that Rufus always writes music that makes her "sound

good."[79] Rufus's "Little Sister" evokes a mid-eighteenth century Viennese style, simple,

parallel melodic structures and harmonic sequences, to comment on the privilege of his

upbringing in relation to that of Martha's, in a reference clearly intended to call to mind

the educations and careers of Wolfgang Amadeus and Maria Anna ("Nannerl") Mozart.

The "folk" musical associations of the opening of "Hometown Waltz," then,

clearly carry an extreme amount of biographical weight. Yet at the initiation of the vocal

text, the song swiftly presents the ambivalent relationship between reality and fantasy

that is so central to Wainwright's musical oeuvre. Wainwright's piano, the primary

instrument of his creative process, enters the musical texture, as he sings, "The drummers

and jugglers of Montreal don't even exist at all." The piano, here, cooperates with the

banjo and accordion, his instrumental production working in tandem with the "folk"

sounds that initiate his "Hometown Waltz." He continues: "and so I'm tearing up these

tarot cards and Venetian clowns, antique shops and alcoholic homosexuals." Images of

"tarot cards," "Venetian clowns," and "antique shops" all suggest aspects of material and

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[79] *Rufus Wainwright: All I Want*, dir., George Scott, DVD Universal (2005).

social culture that can function as "camp" objects. The final image, "alcoholic homosexuals," evokes a tragic sense of homosexuality that appears to be related to the previous camp images.[80] Yet, as the song progresses, a new musical idea emerges. While the waltz texture continues, the vocal line rises to a two-note oscillation with the words, "will you ever ever ever go, ever ever fly away," the melody transforming from "folk-song" to a diminution of the fanciful, longing melody of "Over the Rainbow": "if happy little bluebirds fly beyond the rainbow, why, oh why, can't I?"

"Hometown Waltz" contains an homage to Rushdie's "hymn to elsewhere," the "gay national anthem," but through Wainwright's recreation of Judy Garland's famous Carnegie Hall concert, he also has an opportunity to claim the song itself. By nearly any standard, the act of duplicating such a legendary concert is an expression of extreme arrogance. Yet, in light of Wainwright's unique approach to history, it might be understood as a potentially transformative moment. In the concert's official marketing, Wainwright was not presented as an impersonator, or even as an admirer paying homage; rather, he was portrayed *as* Judy. The concert poster duplicated Garland's poster, substituting "Rufus" for "Judy" and Wainwright's visage for Garland's. The posters' proclamations of "World's Greatest Entertainer" are, of course, contradictory—after all, only one of them can be the greatest. On the one hand, its use in Wainwright's marketing demonstrates a straight-faced and serious engagement with the absurd that marks it as an exceptional instance of camp, while lending a certain goofy legitimacy to Wainwright's apparent self-fashioning as Garland's second coming. The cover for the DVD release of

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[80] I pursue "tragic" images of homosexuality in Chapter Three.

the concert is titled "Rufus! Rufus! Rufus! Does Judy! Judy! Judy!" and features mirror images of Wainwright's face, as if reflected in a pool. The image draws attention to the duality implicit in Wainwright's concert, while equally highlighting a Narcissus imagery that is certainly appropriate for such a self-aggrandizing project.

In concert, Wainwright's costuming at times closely reflected iconic costumes of Garland. In some performances, he duplicates the famous mini-skirt suit, pumps, and fedora she wore for "Get Happy" in the film *Summer Stock*, a costume that Peraino observes served to provide Garland with an androgynous look for a number that, through her choreographed domination of a chorus of flamboyant men, barely masked its male homoerotic appeal.[81] In certain contexts, Wainwright presents this song in a visual spectacle reminiscent of some of his performances of "Oh What a World," dressed in Garland drag, lip-syncing to a backing track, while his band duplicates the choreography of the film's number.

Creating such a direct parallel between himself and Garland is both absurd and self-congratulatory. But its significance is larger than a general campiness or overblown arrogance. Garland's 1961 concert was meant to serve as one of her many comebacks during a life filled with tragedy. Popular lore attributes the close relationship between Garland and her gay male fans in large part to her capacity to face adversity publicly and constantly emerge from it. Gay men, so the story goes, relished watching Judy's seemingly endless failed relationships, often, as could almost be predicted, with gay men, and her truly horrific substance abuse (tales of the drugs virtually forced upon a young

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[81] Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 123-124.

Garland by her MGM handlers are the primary basis for the rhetoric used by some gay

clubbers in reference to using drugs to maintain an active party schedule: "uppers to get

her going, downers to put her to sleep"). For John M. Clum:

> It wasn't totally sadism to adore Garland for her weakness. To some extent it was identification for gay men at a time when they had nothing but silence or negative comments from any corner of the culture and often had internalized their society's hatred. Garland was the Wreck Who Went On—brilliantly."[82]

Wainwright's life, too, has been marked by tribulation. The period during which he was

recording *Poses* marks the low point for his crystal methamphetamine addiction—a drug

increasingly common among gay men—as well as the period during which he began to

be dissatisfied with his notorious promiscuity (having spent several years moving in gay

circles while identifying myself as a researcher of Wainwright's music, I can attest that

one can barely throw a stone among gay men in many cities without finding someone

with a juicy story about Rufus Wainwright). His Garland recreation came after rehab for

his drug abuse and the beginning of a long-term relationship with Jörn Weisbrodt, then an

artistic assistant at the Berlin Opera. The concert, then, resonates with the parallels

between the tumultuous lives of Garland and Wainwright, offering the possibility that,

rather than "the Wreck Who Went On," Rufus might succeed at a true sobriety and

improvement in his personal life that, ultimately, never truly manifested for Judy. The

tragedy that entranced a pre-Stonewall generation might be revised into a redemption for

a post-Stonewall generation.

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[82] John M. Clum, *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 151.

I want to close this chapter, then, with a brief consideration of the two singers' renditions of "the gay national anthem," "Over the Rainbow." Throughout her concert, Garland's voice frequently faltered. She struggles throughout "Over the Rainbow," the song that launched her fame as Dorothy, her difficulties culminating in missing her entrance at the coda. During the phrase, "somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly," Garland's voice simply disappears on the word "fly," becoming little more than an audible expulsion of air. True to her legend, these moments of "failure" only drive her to reassert her power, as she crescendos to the point of almost overpowering her microphone on the words that, perhaps, most powerfully speak to gay audiences: "If happy little bluebirds fly beyond the rainbow, why, oh why, can't I?" Wainwright delays his entrance at the coda, though in this case it is clearly an intentional duplication, rather than the exhausted error of Garland. Like his predecessor, Wainwright's voice fails (again, quite possibly intentionally) during the coda, the word "happy" becoming an unvoiced hiss. While unable to quite match a belting Garland, even a tired Garland, he nevertheless duplicates her massive crescendo, his piercing voice turning to a virtual shout.

If many aspects of his marketing and performance seem to be an attempt to cast Rufus as Judy, however, he makes important and personal alterations, as well. His version of "Over the Rainbow" begins with his mother, who plays a simple piano accompaniment before the orchestral arrangement emerges in the second verse. The orchestra accompanies Garland throughout her performance. At the end of the recorded version of his performance, Wainwright can clearly be heard saying, "take a bow, ma."

This moment of a mother performing "the gay national anthem" with her gay son would have been unthinkable to the gay men at Garland's concert in 1961, a time in which homosexuality largely remained hidden, masked in camp and self-denial. In Chapter Three, I pursue a different way that Wainwright's production can be understood as a revitalization, even rescue, of the self-denying image of "pre-Stonewall" homosexuality. But in these live performances of "Over the Rainbow," the complex musical family drama takes on a remarkable queer flavor. Kate's musical production is part of Wainwright's queer voice, as well as its concurrent invitation to his fans to hear it reparatively. Just as other aspects of the family's interpersonal relationships get played out in much of its music, Kate's musical presence in Rufus's Garland performance asserts a unique mother-son moment of love that is not simply "tolerant" of the son's gayness, but indeed productive of it. Kate's illness and death in 2010 contributed to the dark and spare sound of Wainwright's 2010 album *All Days are Nights: Songs for Lulu*, a collection of Schubertian Lieder that complicates the relationship between piano and voice in songs of the Western tradition (see chapter 4).

CHAPTER TWO
"For My Harp I Have Strung:" Orpheus and Queer Authority

The video for Wainwright's "April Fools" opens with the singer waking up in bed with five easily-recognizable nineteenth-century opera heroines (Tosca, *Madame Butterfly*'s Cio-Cio, Carmen, *Rigoletto*'s Gilda, and *La Boheme*'s Mimi).[83] Wainwright moves his left hand to reveal what appears to be a wedding band, its significance clarified both by its prominence in the frame and by the lack of additional jewelry on the notoriously gaudily adorned singer. Yet the relationships are portrayed as platonic and playful; Gilda and Wainwright act like siblings, Rigoletto's daughter pestering Rufus by jumping on the bed. Rufus's sister Martha Wainwright plays Cio-Cio, only reinforcing the sense of camaraderie among the group. Like any good nineteenth-century family, even this abstinent—yet decidedly "queer" one—they gather around the parlor piano for some music-making, the women encircling Wainwright as he leads them in song from the keyboard. The distinctiveness of their costumes—highlighted through juxtaposition with Wainwright's own entirely black and non-descript clothing—becomes even more strikingly incongruous with the video's aesthetic as the sextet leaves their polygamous home and enters the gritty reality of the modern world. The flamboyant diva entourage engages with the veracious daily grind effortlessly; there is no collision between fantasy and reality. Rather, the ease of the encounter seems to demonstrate its ubiquity, even naturalness, in the life of Wainwright's video persona, while concurrently and paradoxically illuminating the difference between the two worlds. The women inevitably

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[83] Sophie Muller, dir., "April Fools," music video, available as a special feature on *Rufus Wainwright: All I Want*, dir., George Scott, DVD Universal 0602498807729 (2005).

die their operatic deaths, but in ways that are comically adapted to their surroundings—

Tosca throws herself from an overpass, for example, while Cio-Cio ritualistically stabs

herself with a butter knife in a diner.   Wainwright's melodramatic reactions to the deaths

clarify—excessively and redundantly—the already obvious "campy" irony of the video's

style. The video destabilizes the standard narrative of heterosexual marriage—

desexualizing the matrimonial bed, removing monogamy from its foundational role,

recasting the nature of commitment signified by wedding bands—creating, instead, a

pseudo-matrimonial structure focused on an apparently patriarchal, though clearly non-

heterosexual Wainwright.

For Wainwright's fans, this April Fool's joke—the unexpected wedding ring and

"wives"—lacks the punch-line, the revelation of a truth that provides the relieved laugh at

the end of a prank. The truth is known beforehand because Wainwright has always worn

his homosexuality on his sleeve. Indeed, in many ways, he has built his career on making

it explicit. The presence of operatic characters in the contemporary setting of a video for

a song with no explicit operatic reference is, therefore, no surprise at all, as Wainwright is

a self-identified opera queen—possibly the most publicly recognizable opera queen in

contemporary culture and certainly the most prominent in the world of popular music.

While the categorization is notoriously slippery and loaded, opera queens are frequently

characterized as obsessive gay male opera fans whose interests in the genre center on

diva-worship—the identification with operatic heroines and the sopranos who play them.

The extremity of opera queens' commitment to the genre undeniably varies, but for

Wainwright, opera's psychological significance is explicit and serious: in an interview for

the *New York Times*, he declares in a characteristically dramatic fashion, "Opera saved my life twice."[84] He refers, here, to two moments of crisis—his rape at age fourteen and the period surrounding his entrance into drug rehab—during which he says he found solace in opera. His deeply personal connection to opera provides one particularly prevalent source of inspiration and material, which he incorporates into the diverse patchwork of cultural and musical allusions that make up his own musical language.

This chapter seeks to examine one of the ways Wainwright musically accesses opera history, in order to suggest a conceptualization of the opera queen that differs from many traditional portrayals. Specifically, I will argue that Wainwright uses opera as a means to access an otherwise denied queer cultural authority. By claiming, identifying with, and ultimately revamping the figure of Orpheus in the songs "Memphis Skyline" and "Waiting for a Dream," from *Want Two*, Wainwright takes for himself the right to conceptualize cultural products queerly, in opposition to the strictures of compulsory heterosexuality. Opera Queendom becomes detached from aesthetic and largely passive notions of identification with divas or the attempt to uncover homoerotic subtexts. Rather, through Orpheus, it enables an authority from which Wainwright asserts his queer agency both to rewrite and reinterpret opera and to voice a productive, anti-tragic, and reparative queer conception of identity.

The story of Orpheus is not a likely candidate for an opera queen's affections. The myth virtually disappears as a source for opera plots in the nineteenth-century repertoire that constitutes the core of most opera queens' interests. The plot also offers

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[84] Rufus Wainwright, quoted in Anthony Tommasini, "Born into Popular Music, Weaned on Opera," *New York Times*, 7 September 2005.

little by way of the standard characteristics that appeal to most opera queens. Orpheus's

bride Eurydice, the most likely nominee for a diva role, has few opportunities for

overblown musical catharses; she does little besides passively die—twice (though, in

Virgil's rendition, she has a dramatic opportunity to rage against Orpheus in the moments

before her second death and, in fact murders Orpheus in Ernst Krenek's *Orpheus und

Eurydike* [1926]).[85] In most renditions, all the dramatic tension falls to Orpheus and,

while the original castrato role in the Italian version of Gluck's *Orpheo ed Eurydice*

(1762) offers modern casting options that place a soprano in the lead, indeed enabling

potent lesbian readings such as that of Wendy Bashant, his female love object hinders

diva-identification for gay men.[86]

What Orpheus has going for him, however, is a privileged role in narratives of

opera history. A poet whose singing voice carried a rhetorical impact powerful enough to

soothe the dead and influence the gods, Orpheus served as an ideal subject for early opera

librettists and composers looking to recapture Greek drama. For Joseph Kerman:

> Initially, Orpheus is the supreme lyric artist. [. . .] But for Orpheus the lyric
> singer, the crisis of life becomes the crisis of his lyric art: art must now move into
> action, on to the tragic stage of life. It is a sublime attempt. Can its symbolic
> boldness have escaped the musicians of 1600, seeking new power in the stronger
> forms of drama?[87]

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[85] See Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. Peter Fallon (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 92.

[86] Wendy Bashant, "Singing in Greek Drag: Gluck, Berlioz, George Eliot," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender, Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 216-241.

[87] Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, new and revised version (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 20.

Peter Conrad goes so far as to claim that "Orpheus is opera's *founder*, and he presides

over it throughout its subsequent history."[88] But this operatic authority comes at a cost.

Orpheus has a queer cultural history which, while explicit in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—the

principal source for librettists at the turn of the seventeenth century—is excised from all

canonic operatic versions of the story. He is the ultimate musician, organizing sound into

a force so potent that it alters the very fabric of the natural and spiritual worlds; he is also,

in the contemporary jargon of sexuality, "polyamorous," certainly bisexual, and, after

Eurydice's death, apparently homosexual. The first of these characteristics, his

supernatural musicianship, enables Orpheus to serve as a dominating figure in the world

of classical music; the second, his sexual difference, constitutes a perceived threat to that

dominance. To a large degree, the symbolic Western musical life of Orpheus reflects

Philip Brett's influential queer formulation and critique of music institutions. For Brett,

musical training permits emotional expression, but does so by requiring adherence to

strict principles of "musicality" and prescribed performative ideals. Thus:

> For the musician in general, and particularly for the gay or lesbian musician, there
> is an involvement in a social contract that allows comforting deviance only at the
> sometimes bitter price of sacrificing self-determination. [. . .] the musician is
> fully caught in the erotic double-binding effect of the closet.[89]

Centuries of opera composers and librettists have forcibly closeted Orpheus, the glory of

his tale of musicality obscuring from view the nitty-gritty details of his sex life—the

details that enable him to serve as not simply an operatic symbol, but as a symbol of

queer power. Wainwright challenges such notions at their foundations through his use of

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[88] Peter Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera* (New York:
Poseidon, 1987), 19. Emphasis mine.
[89] Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," 17.

the Orphic story's claims to authority. Wainwright's explicit usage of the Orpheus myth

in *Want Two* suggests a powerful reparative impulse in his musical referencing of opera

history. Ultimately I hope to suggest how his revamping of Orpheus not only suggests an

otherwise culturally-denied queer subjective authority, but may be seen as a symbolic

liberation both for the tragic heroines of opera and for the opera queens who identify with

them.

"I Always Believe You:" Opera Queens and Queer Identity

In his first album, Wainwright himself acknowledges the centrality of Orpheus to

opera history. In the song "Damned Ladies"—an opera queen's anthem if ever there was

one—he pleads with a variety of opera heroines, trying to intervene in the tragic plots

before the fictional women meet their inevitable demises. The song's foreboding

introduction consists of an oscillating pattern of a minor ninth, between C and D-flat, in

the piano's low register. Without context, this interval suggests no tonal center, rather

evoking an unspecified dis-ease. Upon the entrance of Wainwright's voice, however, the

D-flat reveals itself as the dominant of the G-flat tonality that dominates the remainder of

the song. The lower pitch, continuing its alternation with the D-flat, changes to G-flat

and D-flat, replacing the disturbingly unsettled dissonance of the dark C, a tritone away

from the revealed tonality. Wainwright delivers his omniscient advice, for example,

calling to Verdi's Violetta (*La Traviata*), "keep your man locked up, or like Cio-Cio, you

will end up burned by love or sickness" (Cio-Cio commits ritual suicide when she learns

that the father of her child has another wife; Violetta dies of consumption after her lover

Alfredo abandons her). He speaks to each of his opera divas in first person until reaching

Pamina (of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*) at the bridge: after demanding of Leoš Janáček's

Káťa Kabanová, "why did you marry him [Tichon]? You knew his mother was a bitch

and would keep hold of him," he refers to Pamina in third person, observing that she " . . .

got away from mama/ Before the age of Rambo opera." In other words, tucked away in

eighteenth-century Singspiel, Pamina is saved from the violent insanity of nineteenth-

and early twentieth-century opera, in which, almost without exception, women die

because of the manipulative and callous men in their lives. The impossible virtuosity of

Pamina's mother, The Queen of the Night, becomes conflated with the extravagances of

nineteenth-century opera, the cooler, more languid Pamina escaping the excessive female

tragedy that accompanies the growth of Bel Canto. In the song's chorus, Wainwright

issues the great opera queen's lament: "why don't you ladies believe me when I'm

screaming? I always believe you." As the song ends, he refers his divas as the "Damned

ladies of Orpheus," at once calling attention to a figure strongly associated with the birth

of the art form in which their tragedies are enacted, and perhaps suggesting an

overarching patriarchal frame represented by Orpheus.

To a large extent, "Damned Ladies," with its emphasis on female characters who

emerge from the Bel Canto tradition, as well the song's text's desperate interaction with

their tragedies, dramatizes a standard image of the opera queen. The opera queen

functions culturally and symbolically as a particular "type" of gay man, one who, in the

words of Mitchell Morris, "defines [him]self by the extremity and particularity of [his]

obsession with opera."[90] Morris continues by trying to distinguish the semantic weight of

the term, while demonstrating caution in the creation of such categories:

> I am not merely describing a gay man who is interested in opera, however, nor
> even a gay man who has an all-consuming passion for it. In the gay community, a
> whole battery of specific tastes and attitudes are attributed to the stereotypical
> opera queen. Although we ought to recognize this as an in-house simplification
> and, like all such 'ideal types,' only partly corresponding to reality, still the truth
> contained in the stereotype tends to suggest a coherent aesthetic stance which is at
> least partially opposed to that of the majority of the audience (especially those
> who are musicologists or critics), gay or straight.[91]

While descriptions of opera's significance to opera queens vary, they generally involve

the vicarious identification with opera's overblown, excessively tragic female

protagonists. For Morris (as well as for the majority of commentators), the most crucial

aspect of opera queen culture is the "cult of the diva"—the excessive celebration of

particular sopranos, specifically the valorization of the sounds of individual voices. For

Paul Robinson:

> Above all, opera queens are voice fetishists, preoccupied almost exclusively with
> operatic singing, as opposed to such other aspect [sic] of opera as its musical
> organization, its dramatic logic, even its stagecraft or scenery. In their response to
> opera, they home in on particular vocal movements—a single aria or even a single
> phrase—which are abstracted from the larger musical and dramatic fabric and
> listened to over and over.[92]

Robinson's description—aptly condensed in the word "fetish"—points to the

aestheticization of isolated sound commonly associated with opera queens' relationships

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[90] Mitchell Morris, "Reading as an Opera Queen," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender
and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles:
University of California Press, 1993), 184-200, 194.

[91] Ibid., 185.

[92] Paul Robinson, "The Opera Queen: A Voice from the Closet," in *Opera, Sex, and
Other Vital Matters* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 157-169,
161.

to music. Reveling in moments of sonic beauty, according to most accounts of the opera

queen, enables powerful connections between subjective responses to the female singing

voice and the experience of a socially-marginalized sexual identity.

This image carries with it a daunting amount of historical weight, particularly in

its evocation of a pre-liberation conception of the closet and gay male socialization.

Wayne Koestenbaum's well-known confessional *The Queen's Throat* casts this type of

identification in profoundly tragic terms: "The opera queen is lonely *because* he listens to

opera: opera isolates him from the sexual marketplace."[93] For Koestenbaum, opera

substitutes for relationships which are doomed to failure. *The Queen's Throat* is

permeated by a sense of misery brought on by social ostracization:

> . . . I as a gay person do not feel "gay"; I distrust the word and dislike its everyday
> straight signification as "cheerful." I am not a cheerful person. I am not gay.
> When I say the word "gay" the vowel "A" sticks in my throat. . . . For divas and
> gays, cheerfulness or gaiety is part of the profession. But during my entire career
> . . . I never knew a day without pain.[94]

Sam Abel offers a vicious critique of this depiction: "For Koestenbaum, the great era of

opera is dead, its heroines die on stage for us, and gay men flock to opera in a cult of

death, a glorious but ultimately futile gesture of symbolic self-immolation in the face of a

hostile society and impossible love."[95] He equates Koestenbaum's gloomy appraisal of

his life as an opera queen with a troubling strain of gay self-hatred. Abel's alternatives to

Koestenbaum's tragic readings emerge from his assertion that "opera is queer: not gay

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[93] Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon, 1993), 31.

[94] Ibid., 97-98.

[95] Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 59.

per se, but standing in opposition to mainstream, normalized constructions of desire."[96]

He engages in operatic readings that provide far more explicitly affirming celebrations of

his sexuality, even while frequently depending upon creative re-imaginings of same-sex

duets and dramatic devices.[97]

Upon my first encounter with *The Queen's Throat*, a leisurely reading of the

book's first edition, I was filled with a sense of revulsion that is familiar to many gay

men: I read in it an utterly tragic and self-hating image of gay superficiality,

powerlessness, and apolitical apathy. I distrust expressions of sexual difference that seem

to perform and embrace the assumptions of heterosexist dominance. Yet, as I continued

to ponder Koestenbaum's figure of the opera queen in relation to my personal and

scholarly goals, I began to understand his project not as an act of scholarly exegesis, but

as a far more powerful mixture of scholarship and art. The revised version of *The*

Queen's Throat features an introduction by Tony Kushner, the Pulitzer Prize and Tony

Award-winning playwright and, undeniably, one of the most significant artistic

commentators on contemporary queerness. Kushner's introduction helps clarify my

ambivalent reaction to Koestenbaum. Indeed, he describes Koestenbaum's work in terms

closely reflecting my attempt at reparative relationships to culture, claiming it to be, "the

recovery, the rescue of meaning."[98] Like Reid Davis's rediscovery of the Cowardly Lion

as a source of pride, in contrast to his youthful perception of the flaming feline as a

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[96] Ibid., 65.

[97] Abel also draws attention to Koestenbaum's neglect of the operas of Benjamin Britten
or Alban Berg's *Lulu*.

[98] Tony Kushner, Introduction to *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the*
Mystery of Desire, by Wayne Koestenbaum (New York: Da Capo Press), 1-8, 2.

source of shame, the revitalization and celebration of melancholy figures, icons, and images of the past, even if that celebration necessitates a reliving of oppressive tropes, begins a reparative process. For Kushner, "it's always a mistake to suppose that earlier forms and styles of representation seemed 'real' to the people who created and appreciated them. We are in the habit of condescending to the past, incorrectly and arrogantly interpreting a now-familiar sophistication as forlorn, unadorned naivete."[99] He understands *The Queen's Throat* as:

> a book about generational transformations. It's about using the past to understand and, presumably, change the future, it's about comprehending and apprehending the past rather than despising it. The balancing of theory and practice, contemplation and transformational activity is a delicate task. Too much delving into depth can produce depression, too much mourning can produce melancholia, one of the sandtraps the mind prepares for the body.[100]

Striking a tone similar to Kushner's, Kevin Kopelson's eloquent and convincing defense of Koestenbaum highlights the value of subjective experience, particularly in its ability to valorize the notion of "failure" and, thus, "to deconstruct the notion of sexual 'failure' altogether."[101]

What these wide-ranging discussions have in common is a self-conscious motivation to uncover the value to homosexual male audiences of a form of cultural production whose content offers little or no explicitly gay-affirming imagery. Writings on opera queens often take on an ambivalent tone, alternating between confidence and pride in opera fans' obsessions and a defensive position seeking to justify the fetishism

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[99] Ibid., 4.

[100] Ibid., 6.

[101] Kevin Kopelson, "Metropolitan Opera/Suburban Identity," in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and David Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 297-314, 302.

involved in this particular self-identification. The desperate need to explain the

relationship between gay men and opera often becomes less a scholarly exercise than a

deeply personal quest. These writings often seem highly self-conscious and underlined

by a sense of shame.

Shame, however, need not be understood in a negative psychoanalytic sense.

Sedgwick argues convincingly for the centrality of shame to the creation of queer

identities:

> It has been all too easy for the psychologists and the few psychoanalysts working
> on shame to write it back into the moralisms of the repressive hypothesis:
> "healthy" or "unhealthy," shame can be seen as good because it preserves privacy
> and decency, bad because it colludes with self-repression or social repression.
> Clearly, neither of these valuations is what I'm getting at. I want to say that at
> least for certain ("queer") people, shame is simply the first, and remains a
> permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that . . . has its own, powerfully
> productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities.[102]

Sedgwick's attempt to distinguish between the various roles and valuations attributed to

the concept of shame helps to reveal a potentially affirmative and reparative conception

of historical tropes of opera queenery. Because the most immediate and prominent social

reaction to gender or sexual difference has long been revulsion, and because this reaction

continues to influence public policy, many—perhaps all—queers are acculturated into

self-hate. The struggle to reconcile personal identity with social rejection is often the

primary psychological process confronting queer people's self-acceptance, and it is a

process that can continue long after a formal coming-out or the establishment of a family

and social circle. The negotiation of shame is central to queer identity-formation.

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[102] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry
James' *The Art of the Novel*," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*
(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 35-65, 64-65.

Cultural production and practices channeling shame, therefore, can be understood as vessels for identity formation, particularly for people whose sexual identity has been culturally defined as repugnant and morally reprehensible. What is left, however, is to determine ways to conceptualize such practices as productive uses of shame rather than self-loathing or pitiful.

Wainwright's usage of operatic imagery, therefore, can be seen as a negotiation of the "shame" framework that is so prominent in Koestenbaum's account of the opera queen. Through the reclamation of a queer Orpheus in *Want Two*, he combines the kind of opera queen "fetishization" described by Robinson with a reparative reading position, ultimately providing for an artistic subjectivity that derives immense potency from its cultivation of a unique interpretive authority. Wainwright publicly exhibits many of the characteristics of an opera queen, but presents them in a distinctively positive light. In his first album's "Beauty Mark," a love song to his mother, folk-singer Kate McGarrigle, he implies his own membership in a "diva cult," connecting it to his sexuality: "I think Callas sang a lovely Norma/ You prefer Robeson on "Deep River"/ I may not be so manly/ but still I know you love me." A far cry from Koestenbaum's melancholy assertion that, "the gay man has left his mother behind," this passage both emphasizes Wainwright's sexual difference and explicitly draws attention to his loving relationship with his mother.[103] While his "unmanliness" is something he almost apologizes for, it constitutes a critical aspect of his mother/son artistic perspectives and ultimately provides love rather than alienation. While this charming but simple passage provides a positive

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[103] Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 97.

representation of Wainwright's operatic proclivities, its full reparative potential emerges when he activates Orpheus as not only a master symbol of opera, but as a symbol of queer musical power.

Queer Orpheus

Just as his channeling of the Wicked Witch of the West saves her from annihilation, Wainwright's casting of himself as Orpheus recovers an aspect of the mythological hero's ancient narrative: accounts of his rejection of heterosexual love and his introduction to Thrace of homosexuality.[104] A broad summary of the story in Greco-Roman sources begins with the tragic fate of the newly married couple Eurydice and Orpheus. Eurydice dies of a snake bite, plunging Orpheus into despair. His grief is so immense that he descends into Hades to plead for her return. As the son of Apollo, Orpheus commands great musical power through both his singing and lyre playing. His song to the underworld is so moving that Eurydice is allowed to return to the land of the living on one condition: Orpheus must not look upon her until they return to the mortal realm. Overwhelmed with joy at regaining his lover, Orpheus cannot live up to the bargain and turns back to see Eurydice, dooming her to a second death. Grieving for a second time, Orpheus declares never to love another woman. He sings a lament so moving that it commands the natural world. It also attracts the Thracian women, often described as baccantes or maenads—followers of Dionysus—who, enraged at his

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[104] See Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 24-26; and Ellen Harris, *Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge and New York: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. 1-48.

rejection, brutally kill him, dismember him, and throw his decapitated head and lyre into

the Hebrus River. Head and lyre float down the river, bizarrely continuing to make

music. Washing up on the shores of Lesbos, the head is attacked by a snake but is saved

through the intervention of Apollo.

In Plato's *Symposium*, Orpheus is portrayed as a failed lover, directly contrasted

to Alcestis, who was willing to die to save her husband Admetus. Phaedrus, one of the

Symposium's participants, rewrites the traditional story, declaring that Orpheus's

attempt to save Eurydice is inadequate, his music-making a sign of his weakness and lack

of true commitment to his lover and, therefore, worthy of brutal death:

> Orpheus, however, they sent unsatisfied from Hades, after showing him only an
> image of the woman he came for. They did not give him the woman herself,
> because they thought he was *soft* (he was, after all, a *cithara-player*) and did not
> dare to die like Alcestis for Love's sake, but contrived to enter living into Hades.
> So they punished him for that, and made him die at the hands of women.[105]

The major Roman sources abandon Plato's sense of divine retribution, as well as his

apparent distain for Orpheus. The impulse for the women's attack is explicitly cast as

rage against his abandonment of heterosexual love after Eurydice's second death. For

Virgil (*Georgics*, Book 4, lines 520-522), Orpheus's lament implies rejection of the

Thracian women: "But the baccantes thought themselves scorned by such devotion/ and,

one night of rites and reveling,/ tore him apart, this youth, and broadcast the pieces

through the land."[106] Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book X, lines 111-122), the primary

source of the story for early modern librettists, raises the possibility that Orpheus either

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[105] Plato, *Symposium*, trans., with introduction and notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul
Woodruff (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1989), 11. Emphasis mine.
[106] Virgil, *Georgics*, 93.

loses sexual interest in women, or that his rejection of heterosexual relationships is driven by continuing devotion to Eurydice. In either case, Orpheus does not become celibate, but turns his sexual interest to young men:

> Three times the Sun had finished out the year
> in Pisces of the waters. Orpheus
> had fled completely from the love of women,
> either because it hadn't worked for him
> or else because the pledge that he had given
> to his Eurydice was permanent;
> no matter: women burned to have the bard,
> and many suffered greatly from rejection.
> Among the Thracians, he originated
> the practice of transferring the affections
> to youthful males, plucking the first flower
> in the brief springtime of their early manhood.[107]

This passage suggests that the Thracian women's discontent originates not simply in personal rejection, but also in the education of Thracian men in the practice of homosexuality. Orpheus has not only scorned the women, but has disrupted the sexual status quo. Further, holding the *natural* world in thrall by his music, he sings a series of stories, including those of Ganymede, Hyacinthus, Pygmalion, and Venus and Adonis, all of which deal with *culturally*-unsanctioned love. When, in the following book (Book XI, lines 1-94), the Thracian women kill Orpheus in a Bacchic frenzy, they mete out punishment for his personal rejection of them as well as for the dissolution of a preexisting heteronormative cultural framework and, perhaps, for the enormously transgressive act of asserting authority over nature through songs of illicit love.

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[107] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 344.

As Carolyn Abbate suggests, this story offers opera composers three ideal opportunities to invoke Orpheus's miraculous musical abilities: his plea to the powers of the underworld, his lament, and the magical song of his disembodied head.[108] The first two musical moments, in some form, appear consistently in operatic versions of the myth. The last is eliminated, either through the creation of a happy ending in which divine intervention reunites the two lovers—consequently eliminating the need for Orpheus's death—or, as in Haydn's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, rewriting Orpheus's death scene.[109] In translating the myth to musical drama, librettists and composers followed a tradition of subverting the narrative in various ways. Most crucially, while the drama of Eurydice's death and Orpheus's descent into the underworld remains central, its tragic ending is studiously avoided or altered, some *deus ex machina* or other ensuring some form of redemption.

The difficulties of representing the dismembered body part singing on stage, as well as a wide variety of performance-specific motives for avoiding the gruesome scene, undoubtedly provide compelling reasons for these operatic rewritings.[110] Still, for Abbate:

> The singing head represents the uncanny aspects of musical performance, operatic performance in particular, precisely because one cannot say how it sings, who is

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[108] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. Chapter 1, "Orpheus. One Last Performance," 1-54.

[109] Striggio's libretto for Monteverdi's 1607 version contains the scene with the bacchantes, but Orpheus's death is merely suggested. The final musical realization of the opera eliminates the scene entirely. See Ibid., 4.

[110] For a more detailed look at ways in which the Orpheus myth appears in early opera, see Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 1-54; and F. W. Sternfeld, *The Birth of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1-30.

in charge, who is the source of the utterance, and what is the nature of the medium
through which musical ideas become physically present as sound.[111]

The head becomes a "master symbol" for Abbate's intricate and excellent discussion of

the relationships between composition, performance, and aural experience in opera.

These questions center on the concept of musical authority: where is the origin point, and

who is the originator of musical sound and meaning? While Abbate's analysis is not

directly concerned with the particular cultural issues I am addressing, her discussion is

complementary and extremely useful; when conceptualized in this way, I would argue,

the head of Orpheus is a profoundly queer symbol. The miraculous singer is allowed his

position of authority, his *foundational* role, in opera, only through the excision of his

most incomprehensible and culturally unintelligible musical act—an act precipitated by

his defiance of sexual norms and, even more significantly, his *naturalization* of

sexualities which are culturally-construed as *unnatural*. This is Orpheus's "queer" song,

a song defying the "natural" requirements of vocal production, a song occurring after

death and—either fittingly or ironically (depending on how you look at it)—en route to

the future home of the great poet Sappho. The last song of Orpheus must be eliminated

because of its challenge to the performance network and compositional authority, but also

because it stands in opposition to normalcy and the ostensibly natural order of things.

Further, while in Virgil—a source which might suggest Orpheus's queerness, but only

obliquely—the head cries out for Eurydice, in Ovid—where queerness is explicit—the

song is described as indecipherable moaning which is echoed by the riverbanks. Orpheus

can no longer speak a language comprehensible to existing reality, a culturally-

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[111] Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 5.

threatening prospect because he seems to be drawing the natural world, over which he has already demonstrated his command through lament and songs of queerness, into his oppositional state.

". . . I've come for to sing for him:" Rufus-as-Orpheus

Like the operatic versions, Wainwright presents his Orpheus story with two songs intact, but unlike his predecessors, he allows the disembodied head to sing; the lament and Orpheus's last song are musically combined. Wainwright's first "Orphic" song, "Memphis Skyline," in which he explicitly casts himself as Orpheus, does not follow a conventional pop song framework. While sectional, even alternating between two distinct musical ideas, it only vaguely constitutes a verse/chorus form. Rather, the musical motives interact in a way closely to reflect a narrative rewriting the myth from Orpheus's journey to the underworld to Eurydice's second death. Yet Wainwright superimposes upon the story a mythology central to his own career. Wainwright's Eurydice is the singer/songwriter Jeff Buckley, who tragically drowned in Memphis in 1997. Early in Wainwright's career, he tried unsuccessfully to play New York's Sin-é, where Buckley was singing. His rejection by the club translated into a deep bitterness of the then more commercially successful musician:

> I hated him . . . Years later, after my first album came out I met him. I was struck by both his darkness and frailty. When I covered Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' (for the Shrek soundtrack) I hadn't heard his version of it. I finally did hear it after he had died, and I had this out of body experience. I felt the loss of his voice and there's still a tremendous sadness that we'll never be able to sing together.[112]

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[112] *Want Two*, press materials, Geffen Records (Nov. 2004).

The Cohen song is a huge presence in the outputs of both singers; it is one of Buckley's most popular songs and played a major role in Wainwright's career, arguably remaining his best-known work. The song is, therefore, both deeply personal and filled with a distinct Wainwright lore that is easily recognized by his fans.

The mythological and operatic reference in "Memphis Skyline" is made explicit from the start: "Never thought of Hades under the Memphis Skyline, but still I've come for to sing for him." Wainwright's piano-playing provides a simple accompaniment to the initial sung phrases, tracing his voice in parallel thirds with subtle, unobtrusive elaborations. The music is declamatory, the close relationship between the voice and piano providing the means for a close emphasis of the words through a free rubato. The repeat of the opening material presents Wainwright's confrontation with the underworld and his plea—more a demand in this case—for Buckley's return: "So Southern furies prepare to walk, for my harp I have strung and I will leave with him." The piano then presents a new texture, breaking from the vocal line into a pattern of oscillating chord inversions as Wainwright sings more lyrically: "Relax the cogs of rhyme over the Memphis skyline, turn back the wheels of time." Strings enter in this section, predicting the larger orchestral sound which will later both highlight this song's moment of greatest tension and provide the musical connection to the second song. The opening material returns for a retrospective passage more directly referencing Buckley. Wainwright sings of his initial resentment toward the other singer and describes his reaction toward Buckley's cover of "Hallelujah," referencing another cultural icon whose death in a river

is eerily familiar to that of Buckley: ". . . sounding like mad Ophelia for me in my room living."

The reference to "Hallelujah" in conjunction with Hamlet's tragic and psychologically-unhinged lover enables additional levels of interpretation. The tale of Orpheus is, in part, a tale of dualistic ancient Greek value systems and aesthetics. The music of antiquity is often understood as structured around a binary framework in which the art and rituals associated with Apollo represent rational control and illumination while the art and rituals associated with Dionysus represent orgiastic abandon and physical and sensual extremes.[113] As the son of Apollo, it is not coincidental that Orpheus is killed by women who are typically portrayed as baccantes or maenads, Dionysian followers whose brutal assault on Orpheus demonstrates precisely the extremity of their frenzied rituals. The cults of Apollo and Dionysus both involved sexuality, but they provided conflicting gendered perceptions of male socialization. Apollonian rituals celebrated the pederastic ideal of Orpheus, in which an older man's active sexual role served as a pedagogical tool for his youthful, passive partner. In Dionysian rituals, adult men cross-dressed and took on passive sexual roles, which, in contrast to the Apollonian conception of masculinity, were understood as feminizing.[114] Goldin-Perschbacher's examination of Buckley's voice and performance style points to fans' and critics' perceptions of the singer as transgressively-gendered and out of control. Discussing one critic's usage of the term "masturbatory" to describe Buckley's music, she notes that "pleasuring oneself seems narcissistic, and as in Ovid's myth of Narcissus, liking oneself is too close to liking one

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[113] See Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 19-22.
[114] Ibid.

who looks like you. In other words, masturbation may be too close for comfort to being gay."[115] Her invocation of ancient Greek ethics points to the continued currency they have in contemporary Western societies. Indeed, if Buckley's performance style can be understood as narcissistic in the Greek sense, his cover of Cohen's song can be equally understood as Dionysian when directly compared to that of Wainwright. Cohen's original maintains a simple, repetitive and consistent accompanimental pattern, as his notoriously languid, even lethargic, voice is augmented only by a gospel chorus's harmonic support. Wainwright's version is even more basic, simple piano arpeggios almost slavishly adhering to meter and tempo. Buckley's version, with its elaborate guitar passages, instrumental interludes, and vocal extremeties constitutes the Dionysus to Wainwright's Orphic homage to the song's father, the Apollonian Cohen. While Cohen and Wainwright perform the song in four and a half and four minutes, respectively, Buckley's elaborations extend the song to over six minutes in the studio track on *Grace* and over nine minutes on his live recording from Sin-é. His musical ornamentation of the simple song does, indeed, sound "mad" when considered in juxtaposition with the other two versions.

But if the contrasts between these three versions of "Hallelujah" can suggest an interpretive framework that places Wainwright in the role of Orpheus, "Memphis Skyline" gives that framework more symbolic and narrative weight. After the song's referencing of Buckley's "mad" "Hallelujah," the accompanimental material of the lyrical section returns, this time without Wainwright's voice. Instead, the piano,

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[115] Goldin-Perschbacher, "'Not with You But of You,'" 223.

substituting for Orpheus's lyre, sings by itself. It ultimately returns to the declamatory music, but continues without the voice. When Wainwright sings again, his voice is set against a dramatic, quasi-Romantic accompaniment in which the piano is explicitly multi-tracked, simultaneously playing tremolos and arpeggios in the same register, as the orchestral sounds grow in intensity. This is the tragic moment in which Orpheus and Eurydice, Wainwright and Buckley, are both reunited and simultaneously separated forever: "So kiss me, my darling stay with me 'till morning." In kissing, of course, they have violated the cruel requirement of the underworld and Buckley is again lost to Wainwright: "Turn back, and you will stay under the Memphis skyline." Wainwright has claimed the role of Orpheus in relation to Buckley's Eurydice, a role Wainwright constructs through his referencing of "Hallelujah," and he must live with the consequences—at least until the following track.

In the studio version of this song, the orchestral arrangement continues, merging with the next track, "Waiting for a Dream." The second song does not explicitly reference the Orpheus myth; indeed the two songs are independently cohesive and not necessarily linked in live performance. Yet the musical connective tissue on the album—the high strings of "Memphis Skyline" continuing into the opening moments of "Waiting for a Dream"—suggests the possibility of reading the songs together, a possibility made more plausible and even explicit when keeping the Orphic imagery in mind. The first song, despite its heavy production—multi-tracked piano, lush orchestration—uses little manipulation of Wainwright's voice; he continuously sounds present, intact. In the second song, his voice is electronically "disembodied" through a variety of production

techniques. He seems distant one moment, present the next. Extensive echoes, carefully placed, emphasize this de-centered sense of the voice, strongly evocative of Abbate's description of cultural associations of disembodied voices as "originating from an unseen locus of energy and thought . . . with no visible point of origin . . . divine, or at least supernatural, free of ordinary encumbrances."[116] While the relationship between voice and piano in "Memphis Skyline" emphasized cooperative declamation, here the piano is entirely independent, merely playing measured chord inversions on the beat. Whereas in the first song, Wainwright maintained close control over the piano, in "Waiting for a Dream," its sounds seem to be created by an outside force, the consistent current of a river. The musical texture strongly evokes a sense of floating. My use of this imagery is not accidental or arbitrary: in the second verse, low timpani rolls create the clear aural sensation of waves, as the text explicitly references both water and a death that, in the context of "Memphis Skyline" can hardly be read as that of any other but Eurydice (or Ophelia): "But in turning back the brackish waters will not reflect you/ After you have turned the color black of death or something like that." With knowledge of the Orpheus myth, this passage evokes the aurally-disembodied voice, set against the flowing accompaniment complete with rolling waves, as Orpheus's head floats down the river, singing as his lyre accompanies him, played by the even current of the Hebrus. The first verse's declaration that "You are not my lover, and you never will be/ 'Cause you've never done anything to hurt me," then suggests not only the Orphic lament for Buckley, but an admission that, not only were the two not lovers in reality, but that Wainwright's

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[116] Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 6.

bitterness toward Buckley was undeserved. Orpheus's lament and final, post-death song are re-imagined as one and the same in Wainwright's queer retelling of the story. Lament for the lost lover becomes inextricably connected to the ethereal song of the disembodied head, Buckley's death serving as the real-world tragedy that enables mythic cohesion in Wainwright's musical landscape.

In not only reclaiming the queer song of the decapitated head, but eliminating the narrative space between it and the lament, Wainwright has excised Orpheus's brutal death. Eurydice is male, Orpheus is queer from the start, and, as no heteronormative cultural framework is present, he has not disrupted any preexisting, naturalized sexual prescription. But, while the head has been queerly empowered, all is not idyllic. The chorus of "Waiting for a Dream" suggests a disruption: "There's a fire in the priory/ And it's ruining this cocktail party." The full meaning of this line is revealed through a change in its last repetition: "There's a fire in the priory/ And an ogre in the oval office." Wainwright's queer, Orphic "dream" is interrupted by a political and cultural reality—a governmental authority (quite clearly referring to the George W. Bush administration) supported by anti-gay religious fundamentalism (famously activated by Karl Rovian political mechanisms in the 2004 presidential campaign), which is threatening to his sexual identity. This threatening religiosity is explicitly and very campily addressed in "Gay Messiah," the song immediately preceding "Memphis Skyline." The "dream" for which Wainwright is waiting is a "reality" in which Orpheus need not be reclaimed, in which queerness need not result in destruction, in which the articulation of his identity need not result from a confrontation with Morrill's "unreflective mirror" or repressive

notions of shame. But until then, he still has the Hebrus, from where, as in Oz, he has the authority to reinterpret and reclaim cultural products by manipulating the structures that both describe them and, if allowed to function only through the interpretive framework of the dominant culture, render his own identity-formation secretive, hidden, and repulsive.

Rufus-as-Orpheus enables a powerfully reparative perspective on the invocation of opera divas in Wainwright's first album. In the video for "April Fools," he tries to save the opera heroines; failing, he grieves for only a moment, as he is immediately drawn to the next woman's tragic demise. These women bring with them the weight of their stories, in which love not only fails, but ends in death. Yet in direct defiance of the scripted operatic tragedies, Wainwright sings his opera queen's demand: "You will believe in love." As queer Orpheus, he claims the authority to subvert the narratives through the simplest of means: he nonchalantly resurrects the women, revealing the fiction in the most explicit way possible. Unlike the cases of the real Buckley and the fictional Eurydice, this resuscitation sticks. They return home, jovially chat over a glass of wine, and go to bed, happily ready to reconstruct the entire façade tomorrow. Wainwright's authoritative Orphic role enables him to revive the "Damned Ladies." As in the various operatic versions of the Orpheus story, "April Fools" rewrites the narrative by revising their tragic deaths. While the operatic omissions of Orpheus's grisly end also eliminate his queerness, Wainwright's revision celebrates queerness as a locus of authority.

If Koestenbaum is held captive by his divas and dies along with his beloved opera divas, Wainwright has an answer for him: Orpheus is queer, and that gives you the

authority to be "gay" about being gay in the opera house; Tosca is your confidant, rather than your tormentor and your Orphic authority means you can interpretively undo the damage wrought on both of you by the patriarch Scarpia. A queer Orpheus may, in fact, enable a uniquely gay connection to opera, but it is one which empowers and authorizes reparative interpretation and an affirming, rather than tragic, listening position. In this way, Wainwright revises the melancholic imagery that dominates literature and cultural portrayals of opera queens, embracing opera queenery and transforming it into a productive, rather than socially shameful, force for identity-formation.

Wainwright has taken his opera queenery to new levels recently. In July 2009, he experienced every opera queen's ultimate dream: his opera *Prima Donna* premiered at the Manchester International Festival. The opera, fittingly, tells the story of an aging soprano diva's return to the stage. Originally commissioned for the Metropolitan Opera, *Prima Donna*'s first performances have moved to England due to its composer's demand, in true opera queen style, that it be performed in French, rather than in English. While the Met sought a new American opera in its attempt to revitalize the genre for a younger audience, Wainwright stubbornly refused to change his opera's language, refusing to relinquish authority in his new venture into a truly Orphic act of operatic creation.

CHAPTER THREE
"Get Me Through *Grey Gardens* Tonight":
The Politics of Queer Cultural Histories and the Revision of Cultural Memory

> History without myth is surely a wasteland; but myths are compelling only when
> they are at odds with history. When they replace the need to make history, they
> too are a dead end, and merely smug.
> —Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train*[117]

The studio recording of Wainwright's "Grey Gardens," from his 2002 album

Poses, begins with a sound clip from the 1976 documentary of the same name. "Little

Edie" Bouvier Beale, cousin to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, says to the filmmakers, "It's

very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present, you know what I mean?"

David and Albert Maysles's *Grey Gardens* gently portrays the lives of Little Edie and her

mother "Big Edie," who cohabitate in a dilapidated East Hampton, New York mansion

overrun with cats and raccoons, with poor plumbing and crumbling walls. The two

former socialites and prominent members of the Eastern aristocracy, now rejected by the

social circle in which they once thrived, live like squatters in the ruins of their own home.

The film powerfully dramatizes Little Edie's remark, playing upon tropes of time and

memory, while remaining strikingly dispassionate. The women's lives themselves seem

to embody the fluidity of history, the disconnect between objective reality—their

impoverished living conditions—and subjective understandings of individual identity—

they suggest nothing bizarre or wrong in their lifestyle. Little Edie views herself as

"revolutionary," standing against the oppressive "mean, ugly, Republican town" of East

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[117] Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock'n'Roll Music*, 5th Edition
(New York: Plume, 2008), 123.

Hampton. To the viewer, she appears utterly deluded, yet entirely sympathetic. Little

Edie feeds the raccoons in the attic and Big Edie cheerfully allows cats to defecate on the

floor behind her portrait in her bedroom. Their lives seem to bear no resemblance to their

glory days when Grey Gardens hosted Kennedys, Rockefellers, and Gettys. It seems that,

for Little Edie, "the line between the past and the present" should be crystal clear.

In an October 2008 concert in Minneapolis, MN, Wainwright dedicated his "Grey

Gardens" to a mother and daughter in the audience, paused, commented that the

dedication of this particular song might seem a little strange, paused again, and said, "I

love that movie." The audience erupted in cheers.[118] There aren't many contexts in

which referencing the film without specifically commenting on its content would

resonate with a group of strangers, but a Rufus Wainwright concert is certainly one of

them. A gay bar might be another. Since its release, *Grey Gardens* has become a cult

classic, particularly among certain gay men who derive immense joy from its excessive

and eccentric heroines. A musical stage adaptation of the film won three Tony awards in

2007, bringing more public exposure to the film, and a recent HBO film starring Drew

Barrymore as Little Edie and Jessica Lange as Big Edie generated more interest in the

women, but since the seventies, the film has maintained a certain underground queer

cultural currency. *Grey Gardens* functions in many ways as an artistic touchstone for

certain populations of gay men and, as such, serves as a vehicle for community

identification while remaining under constant reinterpretation in shifting contexts. The

film's resonance with some gay men can easily be viewed through the lens of camp

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[118] Throughout, quotation marks demarcate Wainwright's song, while italics indicate the
Maysles's film or the Broadway musical adaptation.

aesthetics—the Edies are over-the-top in their mannerisms, they seem utterly divorced

from reality, and their behavior is bizarrely "diva-esque" in contrast to the utter filth

surrounding them. The documentary, a clear example of *cinéma vérité*, provides a

narrative that is non-linear, constituted by a series of seemingly random vignettes,

inviting readings of its celebration of the surface over substance. As Kenneth J. Robson

observes, "the Maysles ask us to forego the pleasures of the conventional narrative in

order to experience the satisfaction of perceiving the embedded stories, often linked more

through atmosphere or attitude than through causality."[119] Style and surface, rather than

teleology, do indeed seem to be the driving forces behind its dramatic logic. Yet, as I

have suggested, limiting the power of queer interpretations to the realm of campy,

superficial absurdity—even though the absurd itself maintains a potency of its own—runs

the risk of missing the truly reparative potential of re-interpretive strategies. Robson's

assessment is entirely accurate, but for the purpose of exploring queer reparative cultural

historiography, it is inadequate.

While *Grey Gardens* derives much of its power from the apparent unreality of its

subject, the Edies were real people living real lives. In large part, the filmmakers attempt

to present the women passively, without excessive artistic intervention. The

unencumbered depiction of reality is the objective of all of the Maysles' films and, at the

time of his writing, Robson considered *Grey Gardens* to be their most successful in this

regard: " . . . nowhere have [the Maysles] achieved this aim more completely than in

Grey Gardens. By comparison with the earlier films, *Grey Gardens* is quite

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[119] Kenneth J. Robson, "The Crystal Formation: Narrative Structure in 'Grey Gardens,'"
Cinema Journal 22/2 (1983): 43.

unpredictable in its development; it is far closer to being an uncontrolled film in the process of making itself up as it goes along."[120] While occasional shots of the road outside the mansion, separated from the house by the massively overgrown and unkempt grounds, or close-ups of portraits of the women in their youths dramatize their isolation, both physical and temporal, for the most part, the documentary allows casual conversation to drive its depiction. In effect, it is a Realist film whose subjects' own, individually performed, eccentricities render it strange and campy. It stands at the cusp of camp aesthetics and self-aware realism.

This chapter builds upon the kinds of artistic and cultural juxtapositions explored in the previous chapters in order to conceptualize further a modular framework for queer readings of cultural history. In particular, it takes as its subject cultural narratives of queer liberation, often bifurcated into "pre"- and "post"-Stonewall Rebellion, the 1969 uprising in New York often deemed to be the "breakthrough" of gay liberation. *Grey Gardens* serves as a uniquely suitable cultural nexus point. Released during the initial post-Stonewall surge of gay liberation in the 1970s, it can also be seen as an alteration of the campy "gay sensibility" often deemed as prevalent before Stonewall. The veracity of the documentary form, in some senses, renders it antithetical to camp. Yet the Edies might be seen as revised, ultimately more potent camp figures, their "objective" depiction in the documentary placing excess and absurdity in the realm of "truth," rather than the realm of the externally and superficially stylized. Among the changes in queer culture that emerged in the 1970s were reformulations of queer identities that, reflecting the

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[120] Ibid., 43.

increased visibility enabled by the liberation movement, began to value the "real" and "authentic" forms of self-representation over fanciful means of demarcating queer culture that are often viewed as characteristic of the pre-Stonewall era. As is typical of his output, Wainwright juxtaposes multiple cultural images through his referencing of the Edies. By inscribing additional cultural products, in this case, specifically Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, onto *Grey Gardens*, Wainwright both reaffirms the Edies' significance to gay male cultures and confronts pre-Stonewall images of the tragic, melancholic, self-hating homosexual. Along the way, his music illustrates a means of interpreting cultural history that might demonstrate why, to queer populations, there is great value in blurring "the line between the past and the present."

"We Leave the Showtunes to Rufus": The Politics of Queer Cultural Histories

In the summer of 2006, during the Twin Cities Gay Pride Festival, I attended a concert of the legendary "queercore" band Pansy Division at the Minneapolis Eagle, the Twin Cities' primary gay leather bar. Having begun preliminary research for a study of queercore music, I had a sense of the kinds of self-presentations and cultural ethics that underpin much of queercore culture; I certainly knew that the man arriving at the venue some time after me, wearing a concert t-shirt promoting Rufus Wainwright's heavily advertised recreation of Judy Garland's famous 1961 Carnegie Hall concert, had not planned his attire well. Queercore, in general, channels punk ethics of anti-commercialism and self-sufficiency into a rhetoric that rejects both heteronormativity and

conventional displays of homosexuality.[121] As I suspected, the band, whose own

"Anthem" declares "We can't relate to Judy Garland/ It's a new generation of music

calling," playfully jeered at the man's t-shirt. After a fairly lengthy discussion of the

"mainstream gay" music they like to parody, the band's bassist pointed at the man,

sneering "we leave the showtunes to Rufus." The implication was clear: while Pansy

Division will do send-ups of disco and singer/songwriter ballads, the ubiquitous

Broadway/gay male connection deserves only explicit ridicule; it is not even worthy of

parody. I saw in this moment the encapsulation of the cultural forces and conflicts that

have absorbed my energy for some time. For Pansy Division, the man's shirt illustrated a

regression to a kind of counterproductive gay past that could never be more clearly

demonstrated by anyone but the two musicians it referenced—Judy Garland and Rufus

Wainwright. Garland and Wainwright, in this context, seemed to epitomize a version of

gay male culture that Pansy Division rejects outright. The man had mistakenly believed

that wearing a "gay" shirt—any "gay" shirt—would be appropriate for attending a "gay"

event. I recall thinking that his grey hair might help to explain the dissonance between

his self-fashioning and the environment in which he chose to display it: older than the

majority of the audience, his perception of gay cultural history was potentially quite

different from that of the crowd surrounding him, as well as that of the band he had come

[121] See Ashley Dawson, "'Do Doc Martens Have a Special Smell?' Homocore, Skinhead Eroticism, and Queer Agency." in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics,* ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar and William Richey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 125-144; D. Robert DeChaine, "Mapping Subversion: Queercore Music's Playful Discourse of Resistance," *Popular Music and Society* 21/4 (1997): 7-57; and Kathleen Chapman and Michael du Plessis, "Queercore: The Distinct Identities of Subculture*," College Literature* 24/1 (1997): 45-58.

to hear. This conflict in cultural perception is understandable, as queer cultural histories

are extremely fluid and slippery, resisting totalizing narratives and clear, unifying images.

Nevertheless, attempts to construct cohesive theories of queer cultural production and

reception abound. This section examines some of the implications of such endeavors to

trans-generational communities and perceptions of culture.

Numerous attempts to reclaim queer histories have appeared over the past several

decades. One of my personal favorites is Cathy Crimmins's *How the Homosexuals Saved*

Civilization.[122] I enjoy this book because it is funny, flippant . . . and so utterly simplistic

and uncritical of its subject that it offends me to my very core. In its use of generalities

and stereotypes, it is the 2004 successor to Sontag's "Notes on Camp." In a passage

lambasting Massachusetts Congressperson Barney Frank for his criticisms of the popular

television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Crimmins writes, "Lighten up Barney.

Of course not every gay man has great style. You don't, Barney . . . But shouldn't we be

grateful for the growing public perception of queers as style mavens? Is it so bad to deal

with a positive stereotype?"[123] The distance by which she misses the point is startling:

Queer Eye doesn't reveal the supposed fashion sense of gay men; it harnesses a pre-

existing public perception of it and explicitly markets it, placing gay men in the service of

commodity culture and of straight men's self-fashioning—hardly a new or revolutionary

development. Further, how can we unproblematically assume the fashion sense of the

Fab Five to be a "positive" stereotype? There are plenty of gay men who resent the

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[122] Cathy Crimmins, *How the Homosexuals Saved Civilization: The True and Heroic
Story of How Gay Men Shaped the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
[123] Ibid, 81.

implicit requirement to adhere to the aesthetic assumptions at work in such portrayals. In

her choices of case studies, Crimmins is the queen of the obvious: Abercrombie & Fitch's

marketing tactics rely upon homoeroticism? David Bowie's early successes hinged, in

large part, on his self-presentation as queer? These examples of queer culture are utterly

self-evident to most people who are conscious of such things.

But ultimately, such responses are fundamentally unfair. Crimmins's purpose is

not to dig deeply into history and uncover hidden heritages. It is to restate the obvious,

and it emerges from an admirable and necessary motive directed toward celebrating the

queer roots of certain cultural practices and legacies, roots typically reviled by much of

the broader public; Crimmins humorously seeks to give gays their due in the

development of human culture. She rightly leaves both positivistic and critical

scholarship to others. If, for example, one wishes to delve more deeply into the

contradictory marketing practices of A & F, there is Dwight A. McBride's excellent

essay "Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch" in his collection of the same name, in which he

provides a detailed examination of the company's history juxtaposed with a critical look

at its official marketing policies in order to demonstrate its disturbingly paradoxical

channeling of homoeroticism for a targeted advertising campaign that is explicitly

exclusionary and often racist.[124] If one seeks a more thoughtful discussion of David

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[124] Dwight A. McBride, "Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch," in *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 59-87.

Bowie's public persona, there is Philip Auslander's historically situated and theoretically

rigorous examination of the gender and sexual politics of glam rock.[125]

Rather, the lack of depth in Crimmins's book, intended for mass audiences, points

to a central issue in queer cultural historiography. The reclamation of devalued cultural

histories is and always has been a critical endeavor for identity politics and civil rights

movements. Yet such reclamations are inevitably different for *visible* minorities than

they are for largely *invisible* ones such as LGBT individuals. While all identity

categories can be—and have been—argued to be social constructs, the weight of identity-

definition is quite different for those whose defining minority attributes are generally

understood as behavioral than for those whose defining minority attributes are generally

understood as physical. Locating sources created by members of disenfranchised groups

can frequently be difficult, but in most cases, once found, they can be attributed to such

groups. For the most part, for instance, a female author or African American artist can be

identified as such. This process is often more complex when dealing with queer histories,

as the category itself is exceptionally nebulous. The queerness of much mainstream

culture is, indeed, blatantly obvious. Both popular and "high" cultures have long

subsumed queer culture. But the implicit question at the foundation of Crimmins's book

is "when does gay culture get to be *gay*?" The follow-up question necessarily must be

"what on earth is gay culture, anyway?"

These are undeniably tricky questions, as gay culture is among the most

undefined and indefinable cultures in history. While we can look to Plato and Ovid and

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[125] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

numerous other ancient writers and recognize homosexual practices in antiquity, for

example, the notion of homosexual identity and culture are far more complex. In the

realm of homosexuality, the categorical distinctions between identity and behavior can

lead to daunting epistemological confusion. John Boswell eloquently describes this

quandary in his lengthy attempt to situate categorical terminology historically:

> Few classicists have doubted that homosexuality occupied a prominent and
> respected position in most Greek and Roman cities at all levels of society and
> among a substantial portion of the population. Indeed familiarity with the
> literature of antiquity raises one very perplexing problem for the scholar which
> will not have occurred to most persons unacquainted with the classics: whether
> the dichotomy suggested by the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual"
> corresponds to any reality at all. Terms for these categories appear extremely
> rarely in ancient literature, which nonetheless contains abundant descriptions and
> accounts of homosexual and heterosexual activity. It is apparent that the majority
> of residents of the ancient world were unconscious of any such categories.[126]

Boswell rightly observes that the creation of minority categories occurs only in times and

places in which supposedly representative characteristics of such categories are perceived

by the larger population as aberrant, wrong, or unnatural. Identification with minority

groups, therefore, also largely depends upon historically and geographically situated

social forces.

In the contemporary American context, a minority or disenfranchised status

typically defined by behavior requires a conscious act of self-definition. While women

and racial minorities are—with some important exceptions—immediately recognizable,

unless they choose to make themselves visible performatively, queers are not. Despite

the reality that social perceptions of sexual and gender difference have consistently

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[126] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in
Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*
(Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 58.

moved toward understandings of them as innate and unchangeable, as I discussed in

Chapter One, queer identity necessitates a continual articulation, either to others or to

oneself, of that identity. An individual may experience same-sex desire, but inclusion in

a queer community depends entirely upon that individual's decision to be part of that

community. A powerful example of this in a contemporary American context is the

cultural concept of the "Down Low," an identification that thrives among some black and

Latino men who engage in same-sex activity while vehemently maintaining their

heterosexuality and disavowing any relationship to gay culture.[127] In many cases, these

men foster relationships with women, often marriage, while secretly pursuing activities

that would be considered homosexual by anyone but themselves. Is the "Down Low" a

component of queer culture? Men on the "DL" would viciously refute any such

assertion, rendering any cultural claim made by self-identified gay men to it, or any

cultural products emerging from it, exceptionally problematic.

This illustrates precisely the issue confronting the creation of queer cultural

histories. Because understandings of LGBT identities are in continual flux, queer cultural

histories cannot take their subjects for granted. The term "homosexual" itself did not

appear until the late nineteenth century and was not in common usage until the mid-

twentieth. Does homosexuality begin with the birth of the term? Clearly not, as Boswell

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[127] See Keith Boykin, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America* (New York: Avalon, 2005); also, J. L. King, with Karen Hunter, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Black Men Who Sleep with Men* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2004).

and others have traced identifiable gayness across geographies and histories.[128] Michel

Foucault's famous, though frequently misunderstood assertion that, in the nineteenth

century, "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a

species," has often led to confusion in this regard, so it may be useful to consider it in its

fuller context:

> [The late nineteenth century's] new persecution of the peripheral sexualities
> entailed *an incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals*.
> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of
> forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of
> them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case
> history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a
> morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.
> Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It
> was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their
> insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and
> body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial
> with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that
> the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted
> from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on
> "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of
> sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of
> inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as
> one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy
> onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite
> had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[129]

Foucault's assertion here is that, in the late nineteenth century, "homosexual" became a

category of identity, the terminology consolidating a set of behaviors into an internal

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[128] Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penquin, 1989) is an excellent collection of historical essays that spans histories and locations, as is Robert Aldrich, ed., *Gay Life and Culture: A World History* (New York: Universe, 2006); Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003) is another useful historical survey.
[129] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 42-43.

sense of self, defined by external social and scientific discourses. The point is not that homosexuality became an *option* in the nineteenth century, but that it was conceptualized as a describable identity and given a *name* and, therefore served as a category usable by individuals and cultures. The coinage of the term does not indicate the initiation of the behavior, but the creation of a category of identity and socially unified community emerging from the behavior.

The trouble, then, becomes how one might conceptualize a cultural legacy that emerges from a social group that existed throughout the ages, but whose constituents, for the most part, had little or no opportunity to *understand* themselves as a group. For this reason, queer culture has generally been much more clearly defined through reception than through production. Debates about camp aesthetics clearly demonstrate this in their focus on "sensibilities" and aesthetics rather than on examination of works by explicitly gay authors and artists. Diva worship demonstrates a similar impulse. While certain gay authors from the past can clearly be identified (Whitman, Wilde, Britten, etc.), attempting to uncover gay authorship tends to lead to a distasteful and often futile process of post-mortem "outing." Hence, gay culture has traditionally trended toward certain tactics of reception of products and historical events, rather than the celebration of products produced by gays themselves. Another, more theoretically rigorous and, indeed, more influential study attempts to place gay authorship at the center of gay culture. Michael Bronski's *Culture Clash* begins with examinations of works by writers who have more or less been established as central to the gay literary canon—Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde, most significantly—and how these works might be seen as illustrating certain

trends in nineteenth-century gay society that constitute a five-part framework of a "gay sensibility."[130] But, in reading Bronski's engaging work, it quickly becomes apparent that holding up certain individual authors as representative of a gay "sensibility" is utterly insufficient, as Part II suddenly turns to reception of film, theater, and opera before exploring the still largely underground gay publishing industry. Examining Bronski's book, now over two decades old, even now demonstrates the incredible difficulty of constructing a cultural history based on authorship, particularly for a culture that must continually fight to claim authors as its own. That his discussion of authorship begins in the late nineteenth century vividly illustrates the artificial historical starting point for such projects, a boundary erected because of the difficulty in establishing queer bona fides prior to it. Thus, it demonstrates the limitations of author-based constructions of queer cultural histories. Richard Dyer's much more recent essay collection *The Culture of Queers* essentially abandons any such quest, drawing upon gay authorship when appropriate, but by no means demonstrating any obligation to make it central to his ideas.[131] Rather, his collection casts an enormously wide net, drawing out queer resonances from all manner of cultural products and practices, thereby allowing for a far less restrictive conception of queer culture. All of this is not to suggest that gay authorship is unimportant, but rather, that gay culture has long, out of necessity, involved a dicey process of appropriation, locating cultural unity through products and practices

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[130] Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
[131] Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

emerging from more specifically defined cultural configurations, which largely have excluded LGBT populations, or included them only grudgingly or secretly.

The corollary to this is that events and products which are *assumed* to be *explicitly about* gayness become disproportionately celebrated. Few moments in history can be read as queer-positive. Undoubtedly there are some, but their significance frequently becomes confused by the ever-shifting nature of queer representation, social perceptions, and ideas about just what constitutes a laudable queer historical moment. The 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde, for example, are often heralded as a critical public emergence of homosexuality. Yet any affirmative political potential of the events of 1895, a nightmarish scene that has become the stuff of legend for many LGBT people, is far from unambiguous. Wilde's failed libel suit against the Marquis of Queensberry, the father of Wilde's lover Lord Alfred Douglas, was a brave, if amazingly foolish, act. Opening his personal life to public examination left Wilde enormously vulnerable to the personal and political rage of the marquis and supplied the evidence needed for an indecency prosecution against the writer. After two trials, Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor, during which he composed *De Profundis*, his anguished letter to Douglas that has become a central part of the gay literary canon. As Graham Robb explains:

> This sad and avoidable sequence of events is still the biggest single influence on the perceptions of Victorian homosexuality. [. . .] [The trials] not only helped to impose a music-hall view of homosexuality as the preserve of camping aesthetes and seedy sex-workers, they also provide modern homosexuality with a date of birth, a charismatic martyr and some memorable legends.[132]

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[132] Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York and London: Norton, 2003), 36.

The "martyrdom" of Wilde carries with it contradictory and troubling implications, not just because of its tragedy, but because it promotes an inaccurate and, in some cases, damaging view of homosexual history. Wilde's conviction was for "indecency," not the far more drastically punishable offense of "sodomy" (in Wilde's time, sodomy carried a sentence of life in prison; prior to 1861, the crime was punishable by death, without the standard exception for clergy). This legal distinction demonstrates the rhetorical impact of sexual "deviancy" in English society. The anti-sodomy statute was first established in 1533, during the reign of Henry VIII, as part of a series of legal changes designed to establish the supremacy of secular law over Ecclesiastical law and, thus, to distance Henry from the Catholic Church in Rome, while legitimizing his authority. Henry's reign set a precedent in which sodomy was largely dealt with as a "supporting" crime, evidence of criminality that bolstered prosecutions for violent or political crimes, useful for suppressing dissidents or political enemies during an excessively tumultuous period.[133] The Catholic clergy, in particular, were major targets and popular Protestant perceptions of links between sodomy and celibacy (as sexually "unnatural") proved convenient during Henry's vicious raids of English monasteries, raids carried out both to strengthen the royal treasury and to demonstrate the English monarchy's supremacy over the Church.[134] As a potent piece of legal rhetoric, sexual criminality served, and continues to serve, as a symbolic trope to further other kinds of charges, a remarkably potent discursive tactic furthering political or personal aims.

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[133] See Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
[134] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 362-366.

It is striking, then, that Wilde's prosecution is generally remembered as a moment of homophobic legal tragedy, despite the fact that his conviction was for a more broadly defined and less serious offense. Robb continues:

> To reduce this complex muddle to a simple tale of "martyrdom" (as both Wilde and Douglas later saw it) is to amplify the effects of anti-sodomy legislation. The melodramatic approach fashions a weapon of sexual oppression out of a jumble of laws that were often casually enacted, sporadically applied and aimed primarily at acts of violence. It promotes a highly localized and pejorative view of homosexuality. It suggests that gay people were defined entirely by their sexuality and that they participated in "normal" society only as imposters. It creates a largely invented oppressor and the possibility of a correspondingly fictitious "liberation."[135]

The creation of an idealized view of Wilde's tragedy demonstrates what, in Sedgwick's framework, might be seen as a "paranoid" reading of history, even as it constructs a symbolic figure around which to foster a sense of communal heritage. The facts of the case become unimportant, paradoxically both positively establishing a crucial historical touchstone and regressively re-inscribing a homophobic historical narrative. My own project seeks to suggest ways of reading cultural histories that privilege perception and interpretation over historical master narratives, but the case of Wilde powerfully demonstrates that such readings must not rely upon established frameworks that may reinforce cultural logics that render such histories subservient, ancillary, or deviant.

The celebration of Wilde as a gay hero is understandable given the dearth of clear and widely recognized moments of queer visibility or victory in standard histories. Therefore, moments in history that can be clearly understood as being about *productive* queer *assertion* become inflated in the queer imagination. Returning to Crimmins, we

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[135] Robb, *Strangers*, 38.

can see the centrality to her project of perhaps the most mythologized event in American

gay history:

> When one is alienated from the mainstream life and must create a protective
> niche and a common means of recognizing those who are similarly alienated, a
> full other set of customs, language, and art can arise. The culture of closeted gay
> men before the 1970s was underground but thriving; once the events of the
> Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village in 1969 forced Americans to an awareness
> of homosexuality itself, it also made us more aware of the gay sensibility, the gay
> sense of humor, and the gay insistence on camp and irony. Of course, as
> everyone eventually discovers about the best things in life, the gay sensibility had
> been there all along.[136]

Crimmins portrays "the gay sensibility" as a transhistorical, singular, and unavoidable

force, its power unleashed only through visibility. This points to the central structuring

principle of virtually all historical narratives of queer life and identity: the imperative of

the destruction of the "closet."[137] The political strain of this line of thinking maintains

that making oneself visible enables personal liberation and, therefore, through analogy,

large-scale visibility of queers enables structural social change. Recently, the centrality

of the closet has been challenged by theorists seeking to account for the diverse ways it is

experienced by individuals from varying cultural backgrounds.[138] Visibility is

undoubtedly crucial, but narratives focusing on the destruction of the closet at Stonewall

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[136] Crimmins, *How the Homosexuals Saved Civilization*, 9.

[137] Sedgwick famously describes the closet as the fundamental structuring binary of
culture in general in *The Epistemology of the Closet*.

[138] This movement is perhaps most prevalent in recent developments in African American
queer studies, particularly in "quare" theory. Scholars in this area, in part, seek to de-
center the closet, recognizing that its power is experienced differently among many black
and Latino populations than it is in many white populations. This dissonance vividly
illustrates the enormous dangers of constructing unified, homogenous queer histories.
See, for example, E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies:
A Critical Anthology* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), especially
Johnson's "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I
Learned from My Grandmother," 106-124.

construct in its place an inaccurate concept of a unitary community simply emerging

from the shadows. Crimmins seems to suggest that Stonewall allowed a preexisting

queer culture to assert itself, without recognizing the distinct changes to that culture that

accompanied the riots. Rather, Stonewall's true cultural impact was a massive alteration

to an already nebulous community, a moment of stress that profoundly divided that

emerging community along generational lines, a division that has great importance for

the reception of cultural products.

I by no means seek to diminish the significance of the Stonewall Rebellion; it is

an extremely potent moment that should be celebrated and chronicled. The decades

following the six days of rioting in Greenwich Village saw significant legal

improvements for LGBT communities, not the least of which was the repeal of state

sodomy laws, which had been in place in forty-nine states before the rebellion.

Subsequent to the riots, grassroots political organizing led to the formation of the Gay

Liberation Front, an effective, if frequently militant, advocacy organization whose

infrastructure later contributed to the creation of the anti-AIDS organization ACT-UP.[139]

The impact of Stonewall's political legacy is incontrovertible.

Rather, I wish to suggest that, in the words of Little Edie, the central trope of

cultural visibility—as distinct from political action—emerging from Stonewall

constitutes a cultural "line between the past and the present" that has been erected as a

productive historical touchstone, celebrating while bifurcating queer cultural ethics. The

ambivalent reaction to the riots demonstrated by the Mattachine Society of New York—

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[139] See David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 210-232.

an offshoot of the Los Angeles-based "homophile" Mattachine Society formed in the

1950s—vividly illustrates what I mean. Prior to Stonewall, Mattachine-New York had

been one of the most active gay-rights organizations in the country. During the first few

days of the Rebellion, the Society sided with police, publicly calling for an end to the

violent protests, protests conventionally understood as enabling the visibility of precisely

the concerns for which the Society had been formed.[140] During the subsequent

mobilization of gay rights advocates, organizational meetings were marked by a high

degree of tension as some of the "old guard," largely drawn from Mattachine ranks,

argued for passivity, while many in the "new guard," who would form the Gay Liberation

Front, argued for militancy.[141] Mattachine influence on the gay rights movement quickly

diminished after Stonewall, replaced by a more aggressive, younger movement that

advocated radical political action. Stonewall served, at least politically, as a moment of

massive change in gay identity and community. The "sensibility" that asserted itself was,

therefore, not precisely the same "sensibility" of a "pre-Stonewall" gay community. In

establishing a cohesive political movement, the participants in the emerging gay rights

movement profoundly changed the cultural dynamics of gay identity.

Richard Dyer and Derek Cohen's "The Politics of Gay Culture" delineates two

strains of gay male culture—the "traditional" and the "radical"—as well as the emerging

"mainstream" which, to a great degree, results from the interactions between the two.[142]

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[140] Ibid., 195-197.
[141] Ibid., 209-221.
[142] Richard Dyer, with Derek Cohen, "The Politics of Gay Culture," in Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 15-30.

They set up their essay in a manner that clearly articulates the importance of the

liberation movement evolving after Stonewall in the generation of the two strains:

> The distinction between "traditional" and "radical" gay cultural modes, though
> conceptually and historically valid, also springs from our two different
> experiences. This difference can best be indicated by the contrast in how we
> came out as gay—one of us by learning and adopting camp behavior and taste
> before the advent of the gay liberation movement, the other coming out straight
> into the gay movement and the already altered gay world.[143]

Dyer—the representative of the "traditional"—describes the pre-liberation embrace of

art, theater, "high" culture, etc., as the creation of a refuge from a hostile society.

Embracing and fostering notions of gay men's artistic proclivities, intellectualism, and

eye for beauty served, contradictorily, to provide a positive characteristic countering the

perceived negativity of same-sex desire, while enforcing a kind of self-oppression due to

social perceptions of artistic pursuits as "feminine" and unproductive:

> It is clear that, as I experienced it then, the equation of artistic queerness with
> femininity downgraded both femininity and me. I negate myself by identifying
> with women (hence refusing my biological sex), and then put myself down by
> internalizing the definition of female qualities as inferior—for the values I was
> brought up with were those of work, instrumentality and seriousness, values I still
> feel the pull of.[144]

The celebration of queer artistic proclivities, then, involves the self-oppressive process of

reinforcing established frameworks of social and personal identity-formation—

frameworks which explicitly devalue queer identities and knowledge—even while

providing a cultural rallying point for queer identities. Cohen describes the "radical"

strain of gay culture as "self-conscious." His examination of "radical" queerness makes a

crucial point about the nature of authorship:

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[143] Ibid., 16.
[144] Ibid., 22.

> The self-conscious culture differs from the traditional one, even when this is on rare occasions affirming of homosexuality, in its ability to look critically at our experiences without being condemning, to be self-aware rather than descriptive from the outside. The reason for this lies, most obviously, in the fact that the (homo)sexuality of the artists is an integral, rather than incidental or hidden aspect of the work.[145]

With the liberation movement comes the capacity to establish queer authorship as central to culture. The fundamental issue I have described as confronting queer cultural histories, in other words, becomes revised in the 1970s and subsequent decades, as queer production is able to play a far greater role in queer culture. The visibility enabled by Stonewall fundamentally altered the ways in which queer culture could be conceptualized. Rufus Wainwright is a prominent example of this, in his explicit openness about his sexuality, indeed, in the centrality of his sexuality to his work.

The funeral of Judy Garland, perhaps the most powerful public symbol of "pre-Stonewall" gay culture, was held the day of the first of the Stonewall riots. Popular legend cites the gay community's anguish over the loss of its favorite icon as an initiating force for the uprising, despite a complete lack of empirical evidence for the claim—none of the contemporary accounts makes such an assertion.[146] The prevalence of this myth, however, demonstrates how the generational rift apparent in the political organizing following the Rebellion translates into generational cultural distinctions that can be washed over in many popular perceptions of the event. The assumption that Garland's death would be so devastating to the gay community as to spark violent revolt points to the universalizing impulses of popular perceptions of gay culture. David Carter

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[145] Ibid., 22-23.
[146] Carter, *Stonewall*, 260-261.

accurately debunks this conception, noting that "the main fighters in the riots were street youths. These young men were not of the generation that listened to Garland, their music being rock, soul, or both."[147] The particular queers engaged in the Rebellion were, in large part, simply not those who idolized Garland. Yet the prevalence of the Garland/Stonewall legend demonstrates the failure of notions of a unified "gay sensibility" to account for changes in aesthetic and ethical predilections among gay populations. Stonewall, when conceptualized as a simple "emergence" into visibility of a pre-existing cultural formulation, both falsely renders a dynamic queer culture static and divides that culture by means of an artificial historical boundary.

The man in the Rufus/Judy shirt at the 2006 Pansy Division concert— undoubtedly without any conscious motivation to do so—inserted a "pre-Stonewall" cultural icon into an environment dramatically removed from such a cultural association. To a great extent, the queercore ideal at the social foundation of a Pansy Division concert translates a 1970s punk ethos into a post-1990 queer formulation of identity that rejects the basic tenets of "gay sensibilities" fostered by universalizing conceptions of queer cultural history that would cast Stonewall—or any other moment of gay liberation, for that matter—as an "emergence" of a consistent and unified queer culture. The man's attire could only have been further from the mark if he had worn a "God Hates Fags" shirt, or perhaps a three-piece suit—though even these two options would likely have been read as humorously ironic. The violation of the generational divide between "pre-" and "post-Stonewall" ethics demonstrated by the connection between Wainwright and

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[147] Ibid., 261.

Garland has a visceral impact on some members of queer communities, an impact which illustrates the politically complex implications inherent in the construction of queer cultural histories. The mythic historical construction of Stonewall creates a cultural "line between the past and the present" that Wainwright—born well after Garland's death and the New York riots of 1969—playfully prances along, freely and (sometimes) thoughtfully disturbing it.

Revisiting Grey Gardens

Wainwright's "Grey Gardens" foregrounds the dynamic interplay between past and present suggested by Little Edie's "line between" them, both in its referencing of a film in which temporal dissonance plays such a pivotal role and in the musical structures that underpin it. As Little Edie's opening statement turns into a question—"you know what I mean?"—her voice is overtaken by a guitar anacrusis, almost rudely interrupting her with the lead-in to an extended diatribe that answers her question before she is able to articulate it. The entrance of the primary musical material is marked by the addition of a piano, Wainwright's primary instrument, to the timbre. While Wainwright plays both the guitar and piano, the latter instrument is the one with which he identifies most closely. Indeed, after releasing a series of albums marked by ever-increasing density and orchestral lushness, his sixth studio album, *All Days are Nights: Songs for Lulu*, consists of nothing more than piano and vocals.[148] In "Grey Gardens," Wainwright's instrumental

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[148] This claim is commonplace in the numerous interviews he has done in the latter part of 2008. Just one of the countless sources in which he asserts his plans for the sixth album can be found in Matthew Richardson, "Rufus Wainwright says New Album will

proxy initiates a parallel period, whose symmetrical antecedent and consequent phrases

constitute the driving musical structure of the song's verses (example 2). The music here

can be characterized as a calculated and extended creation of suspension. The melodic

material is lyrical and lengthy and moves in a registrally confined cyclical pattern,

pausing on scale degree two at the end of the antecedent phrase, fostering a sense of aural

deferment—a floating sensation which will find solid ground only at the resolution of the

consequent phrase. The bassline moves downward in measured steps, further subverting

any sense of tonal momentum by bypassing diatonic pitches, substituting the flat 6 and

flat 7 scale degrees for their more tonally "motivated" counterparts. Even within the

texture, the leading tone is downplayed, even as the bass rests on scale degree five,

suggesting a closure that only arrives meekly and unconvincingly with the initiation of

the consequent phrase. The music seems content to sit, unresolved, resting on the fifth

scale degree, with little desire to move onward. When a stronger cadence is experienced

at the conclusion of the consequent phrase, it is anticlimactic after the extended

meanderings of the previous material. In effect, while tonally logical, the musical

material displays little clear momentum toward tonic, rather floating about in a moving

but relatively static sonic world. The melodic anticipation of the tonic pitch expresses a

motivation toward the cadential resolution that is stronger than the motivation of the

harmonic framework. While such processes are not particularly unconventional in much

popular music, the lyrical content and film reference emphasize temporal entrapment, a

vague desire for movement but a lack of forward progress. Wainwright seeks someone to

be Just Piano and Vocals," Prefix, website, 22 October 2008: http://www.prefixmag.com
/news/rufus-wainwright-says-new-album-will-be-just-piano/22512/.

"get me through *Grey Gardens* tonight," suggesting that he is unconfident in his own capacity to get through it on his own. Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that his seeming inability or unwillingness to move, in fact, reveals the very capacity for momentum that seems to be absent from the song.

Example 2: Rufus Wainwright, "Grey Gardens,"
Structural outline of opening period (author's transcription).

Music, of course, is one of the most perfect media for the negotiation of time. Its most basic structuring principles depend upon temporal progression. This is obviously the case for such characteristics as tempo, rhythm, and meter, but time is equally critical in the supposedly "vertical" principles of harmony, the collection of pitches at a single moment, for tonal music ultimately derives its logic from the desire for resolution, and much of its interest lies in how that resolution is delayed, predicted, or subverted in time. In a remarkable essay, Paul Attinello explores how some of these principles are negotiated in songs about AIDS.[149] For individuals confronted with terminal illness, teleology—the motivated desire to move toward an endpoint—takes on a dramatically more complex meaning:

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[149] Paul Attinello, "Fever/Fragile/Fatigue: Music, AIDS, Present and . . ." in *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*, ed. Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13-22.

> Though it may be unsurprising, it is also exasperating that so much music about AIDS, even when it foregrounds a variety of experiences or emotions, allows its temporal universe to collapse into a foreshortened waiting for death. This is, of course, a particular problem for music, as music is so often concerned with temporal metaphors, with constructing models for different ways of experiencing time. Too many of these songs dissolve the past and present into a future that has not yet arrived, thus causing time itself—our time, the time in and through which we live—to vanish. The frequency of tropes of mourning and fear, even in songs directed at or modeled on the relatively healthy, and the temporal opposition of the teleological and a visionary eternity are, in this context, simply opposing but mirrored schemes in the dangerous redefinition of the PWA [person with AIDS] as a death just waiting to happen.[150]

If music often serves as an expression of emotional states at particular moments, lives in which death—at least in cultural imagery, if not medical reality—is an immanent, rather than distant, conclusion might be better served by musical representations focusing on the present. Those basic musical imperatives of resolution have major implications for different life narratives, and Attinello goes so far as to suggest that the popularity of minimalist musical techniques, ones in which musical devices often serve to focus attention on the present rather than on harmonic progressions pointing toward the future, may be attributable to new ways of viewing life and death during the height of the AIDS crisis.

Attinello is concerned specifically with musical representations involving terminal illness, but his ideas resonate strongly with Judith Halberstam's work on queer temporalities as well. Halberstam draws attention to differing ways of viewing life narratives among populations that exist outside of standard social frameworks of

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[150] Ibid., 21.

living.[151] Standard conceptions of the life cycle involve ideas such as the emergence

from adolescence into adulthood, marriage and the raising of children, inheritance of

parents' prosperity, retirement, and reliance on the next generation. Such ideas are

fundamentally tied to heteronormative conceptions of living, the cultural elevation of

notions of stability, and the celebration of traditional family structures. Indeed, queers

are often prohibited legally, through bans on same-sex marriage and adoption, as well as

socially, through alienation from family and discriminatory practices still evident in many

professions, from participating in these narratives. This, of course, further depends upon

whether or not queers desire to participate in such narratives in the first place.

Halberstam conceptualizes "queer time," as "those specific models of temporality that

emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois

reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance."[152] Here, as in

Attinello's work, progressive time must be denaturalized in order to account for different

ways of living, different motivations, and different perceptions of identity. The

embodied experience of the present, therefore, becomes a critical space imbued with

possibility for alternate life trajectories.

    The strange suspension of time apparent in *Grey Gardens*, then, might be seen as

having more substantive queer resonance than simply the surface appeal of the "campy"

Edies. The mansion is a temporal island, trapping its occupants' memories by rejecting

the "progress" of its East Hampton community. The impetus for the film is the somewhat

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[151] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
[152] Ibid., 6.

shocking series of events surrounding East Hampton's attempt to evict the Edies. After

complaints from their neighbors regarding the dilapidated state of the house began

pouring in, the Department of Health "raided" the home and declared it unfit for human

habitation. Jackie Kennedy, undoubtedly fearing further scandal regarding her aunt and

cousin, brought the mansion up to code, though the film clearly shows that it remained

extremely dirty, unsanitary, and most likely structurally unsound. The queen of

"Camelot" herself is reduced to scrubbing floors in an effort to save her socially outcast

family members. In 2006, the Maysles revisited footage excluded from the original film

and created *The Beales of Grey Gardens*. This "sequel," chronologically concurrent with

the original, includes a striking scene in which Little Edie tells the filmmakers that she no

longer goes onto the front porch—the front porch of her own mother's house—because

the neighbors had complained about her appearance. The "normal" world has exerted

such an influence over Grey Gardens that its primary portal to the outside has been

regulated. Yet within that regulated space, trapped in time, the Edies formulate an

alternative reality that is foreign and frightening to most observers, but charming in its

absolute conviction of its own legitimacy.

Wainwright's downplaying of tonal, temporal imperatives in "Grey Gardens" also

maintains a unique, undefined and therefore infinitely adaptable potential for

unconventional narrative alterations. The rambling, circuitous, noncommittal musical

opening contrasts directly with the preceding song "Tower of Learning" and the

following song "Rebel Prince," both of which use short, simple melodies that resolve

quickly, comfortably, and unproblematically. It therefore constitutes, within the context

of the album, a musical island of subverted, mysterious time that can be seen as analogous to the mansion for which it is named. Yet Wainwright does not leave the queer enclosure of anomalous time unchanged. His song seeks to alter it in productive ways, to "get my mansions green after I've *Grey Gardens* seen." If, as I've suggested, *Grey Gardens* stands at the crossroads of "pre-" and "post-"Stonewall cultural formulations, if it conflates campiness with realism, the film itself can be seen as existing within a space of temporal ambiguity, a space between hidden and visible histories. After all, if "queer time" resonates in positive ways with queer populations, we might do well to reconsider linear narratives of history as larger cultural reflections of individual personal life narratives. Listening to "Grey Gardens" from a reparative perspective, I believe, enables one to hear the revitalization of the mansion, not as an acquiescence to the demands of the bourgeois residents of East Hampton, but as a metaphorical opening of the mansion's front door, swinging wide the broken windows, not to let the outside in, but to let the inside out. Grey Gardens is a bubble of "queer time" that, once enabled to burst, can disrupt both traditional life narratives and traditional ideas of history, burrowing a hole in the generational Stone wall that divides queer culture along lines of visibility.

Central to such a listening position is a recognition of the other cultural reference present in Wainwright's song: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (*Der Tod in Venedig*). Undoubtedly, Benjamin Britten's operatic adaptation is also crucial to opera queen Wainwright. The tale, first published by Mann in 1912, has become a major part in the gay literary canon, but as is the case with Wilde's trials two decades before, its placement

in queer cultural history depends upon the visibility of homosexual attraction, not the particulars of its portrayal. The fictitious famous author Gustave von Aschenbach, the novella's protagonist, is a profoundly tragic figure. On vacation in Venice, Aschenbach sees, and is instantly entranced by the male Polish youth Tadzio. Initially justifying his attraction as an artistic appreciation for Tadzio's physical beauty, Aschenbach gradually becomes obsessed with the boy, following him around and watching him from a distance. Aschenbach believes the boy recognizes and appreciates his attention, but he cannot be certain. Throughout the story, he disturbingly equates his attraction to Tadzio with vague reports of illness throughout the city and his own sense of his feeble health. Tadzio becomes, in effect, Aschenbach's addiction, seeming to sap his bodily well-being, but proving impossible to resist. The novella's consistent referencing of Greek figures and ideals places the Apollonian/Dionysian distinction—the very aesthetic framework which I have suggested as a position from which to understand Wainwright's and Buckley's covers of Cohen's "Hallelujah"—at the core of Aschenbach's conflict. He views himself as rational and controlled, but in Venice, is confronted with overpowering sensuality and extravagant beauty. Centered on the figure of Tadzio, Dionysian irrationality, against which Aschenbach has defined himself, sucks the life from him, but not before he gives himself over to it, suddenly self-conscious of his appearance and beginning to replicate the kinds of foppish men that had previously repulsed him. On the day when he discovers Tadzio will be leaving Venice, Aschenbach sits on his usual beach-side chair to watch the boy:

> The watcher sat just as he had sat that time in the lobby of the hotel when first the twilit grey eyes had met his own. He rested his head against the chair-

> back and followed the movements of the figure out there, then lifted it, as it were in answer to Tadzio's gaze. It sank on his breast, the eyes looked out beneath their lids, while his whole face took on the relaxed and brooding expression of deep slumber. It seemed to him the pale and lovely Summoner out there smiled at him and beckoned; as though, with the hand he lifted from his hip, he pointed outward as he hovered on before into an immensity of richest expectation. And, as so often before, he rose to follow.
>
> Some minutes passed before anyone hastened to the aid of the elderly man sitting there collapsed in his chair. They bore him to his room. And before nightfall a shocked and respectful world received the news of his decease.[153]

At the final opportunity Aschenbach has to see Tadzio, as he once more attempts to translate his vision of the youth into some kind of action, the author collapses, his life, now so tied to his daily, obsessive watching of the boy, pulled from him in response to the impending absence of his obsession. Same-sex desire results in death—hardly an affirmative portrayal for gay men to claim. Further, it is expressed through the ethically nebulous frame of pederasty (that Greek aesthetic celebrating youthful masculinity, implicated in the excised portions of Orpheus's story in the contemporary slicing and dicing of the myth, and, we must remember, distinct from the actively-sexual and abusive concept of pedophilia).

Britten's operatic treatment of the story is frequently hailed as the first explicit portrayal of same-sex desire in opera, though here again, its celebrated position overlooks its tragic content, focusing entirely on the idea of visibility. Before this, his final opera, Britten's evocations of homosexual desire were consistently masked, though quite obvious to anyone without willed blindness to such content. In *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, desire conflates with violence. In *The Turn of the Screw*, it manifests itself in a

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[153] Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, trans., H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage, 1989), 73.

truly terrifying and creepy relationship between Peter Quint and the young Miles, whom

he stalks and calls out to in strikingly disturbing musical passages. Yet *Death in Venice*,

as explicit as it may be, has frequently been understood in ways that diminish its

homosexual content. As Abel notes, "even in this stunning opera [*Death in Venice*], so

clearly homoerotic from start to finish, critics have been reluctant to admit that such a

'base' sensibility could ever pervade the work of England's greatest modern

composer."[154] For Brett, "allegorization became the only way to neutralize

Aschenbach's potent cry to Tadzio of 'I love you' at the climax of act 1; and so music

critics fell over themselves to adopt and elaborate upon the Apollonian/Dionysian

allegory with which Mann himself had clouded some central questions."[155] Brett,

however, understands the appeal of this story to Britten, at least in part, as resulting from

the enforced self-hate that is an inevitable part of the discipline exercised by the

oppressive culture in which the composer lived, a culture in which the closet was

mandatory, despite the "open secret" of Britten's long-term relationship with tenor Peter

Pears:

> In Aschenbach, Britten created a doppelgänger—the dark side of the person he
> always at some level imagined himself to be. If, as many critics insist, *Death in
> Venice* is a testament, then it is a testament to the power, not of love, but of the
> distinctive effects on the personality of the dynamics of the closet.[156]

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[154] Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (New York: Westview Press, 1996), 73.

[155] Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd Edition, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9-26, 21.

[156] Ibid.

Death in Venice, then, serves as a powerful exemplar of "hidden," "invisible," "closeted" queer culture. The story itself contains a strong trope of same-sex desire as illness, while its musical adaptation by Britten, as illustrated by his version's reception, demonstrates a level of metaphorical ambiguity that allows it to be accepted within the notoriously conservative world of classical music, especially opera. Homosexuality exists in the realm of the aesthetic, it is permeated by a particularly devastating, indeed fatal shame, and, especially in the case of Britten's treatment, it contains a level of plausible deniability that masks an internalized sense of abnormality, ugliness, or, indeed, abomination. The innocently taunting cherub Tadzio reveals his demonic truth by leading Aschenbach into an all-encompassing desire that destroys him.

But, as could be predicted, such is not the case for Wainwright. In a single lyrical choice, Wainwright symbolically liberates Tadzio, Aschenbach, Little Edie, Big Edie . . . and the single divisive interloper in the documentary: the East Hampton teenager Jerry.[157] During the filming of the documentary, Jerry has volunteered to do various jobs around the house. The two women's relationships to him are far from unambiguous. Little Edie clearly flirts with him one moment, while railing against his presence the next. She dubs

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[157] Other figures enter into the enclosed space of Grey Gardens: the filmmakers themselves and two guests for Big Edie's birthday, including family friend Lois Wright, whose *My Life at Grey Gardens: 13 Months and Beyond* (independently published, 1978), chronicles her time at the mansion. Additionally, Walter Newkirk, then a student at Rutgers University, entered the mansion to interview Little Edie after the documentary was released. His interview is commercially available on *Little Edie Live! A Visit to Grey Gardens*, an independently produced CD available through Amazon.com, as well as his companion book *MemoraBEALEia: A Private Scrapbook About Edie Beale of Grey Gardens, First Cousin to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008). These other "interlopers" are graciously and enthusiastically welcomed by the Edies.

him "The Marble Faun," after the Nathaniel Hawthorne novel, while suggesting that the

story is "very deep" and Jerry might not understand it.[158] It is entirely unclear if she

intends the moniker as a compliment or insult—indeed, it is unclear if she knows whether

it is a positive or negative association, or even if she remembers the book at all. In one

memorable moment, Jerry delivers a washing machine, eliciting a sudden and

unexplained rage in Little Edie, who begins to describe Jerry as one of "mother's

friends," lamenting that, as long as it is "mother's house," she has no control over what

types of people are allowed in. The stage musical version of the film combines some of

the most significant Jerry-related scenes in the song "Jerry Likes My Corn." This song is

structured around a scene in the documentary—a rather unappetizing scene, at that—in

which Big Edie boils corncobs in an old pot over a hotplate, enthusiastically feeding them

to Jerry. For Big Edie, this moment is profoundly maternal and brings her an enormous

joy. In the song, however, taking dialogue directly from the film, Little Edie raises the

possibility—in her mind, the certainty—that Jerry is looking to sleep with her. Big Edie

responds derisively—"Sex with *you*?" Big Edie has a seemingly contradictory idealized

view of Jerry. She sees him as a child in desperate need of her mothering influence, but

also as a virile sex-machine—"Jerry has a new girl every night." The entire confused

spectacle surrounding the Edies' relationships to Jerry is both structured and magnified

by the incredible generational dissonance underlying it: Big Edie could easily be his

great-grandmother, while Little Edie could be his grandmother. This distinction between

the Edies' perceptions of their temporal positions in typical life narratives and the

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[158] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, ed., Susan Manning (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

realities of their ages in relation to the same narratives underscores the anomalous

relationship with time symbolized by Grey Gardens's decrepitude and isolation from its

community.

I have already observed that the antecedent/consequent verse structure of

Wainwright's song uses a standard musical device that indicates tension and resolution,

but in this case, maintains a melodic and harmonic subversion of teleological motivation

that I have suggested as a loose musical corollary to the kind of temporal isolation

represented by Grey Gardens. Each of the phrases ends with a reference to Tadzio. In

the antecedent, "Honey I'm a roller concrete clover, Tadzio, Tadzio," Wainwright

presents a confusing series of images, the movement implied by "roller" directly

contrasting with the static, immovable implications of "concrete." This contrast echoes

the contradictory notions of time and movement at play in the musical material. The

evocation of "Tadzio" occurs at the end of the phrase, the portion whose music differs

from that of the consequent. The second phrase, then, reaches the resolution denied by

the antecedent with another evocation of Tadzio, which clarifies the meaning of Mann's

character in the context of the Edies' mansion: "Arm wrestle your mother simply over

Tadzio, over you." Here, Wainwright makes Tadzio's role clear. He conflates the youth

with Jerry from the documentary, the one figure around whom the Edies have an explicit

conflict. Another phrase echoing the initial antecedent inserts Wainwright's performing

persona directly into the story, as he warns, "but beware my heart can be a pin a sharp

silver dragonfly." This first-person reference seems further to disrupt musical logic as,

rather than moving to the consequent musical material, it moves to a partial statement of the refrain: "Trying to get my mansions green after I've *Grey Gardens* seen."

In subsequent verses, Tadzio becomes an object of Wainwright's affection, in addition to being a source of conflict in the mansion: "In between tonight and my tomorrows Tadzio where have you been/ In between tonight I know it's Tadzio, Tadzio don't you fight." Wainwright has inserted himself into the mansion, but has equally revised the nature of its relationship with time. Rather than looking both inward and backward, as the Edies do throughout the documentary, Wainwright looks outward and forward, toward the future and his "tomorrows." Likewise, Tadzio is symbolically resuscitated by the question, "where have you been," suggesting that his absence has been unexpected. If we consider this question alongside the significance of *Death in Venice* to the queer canon, we can hear it as a flat denial of the invisible, masked cultural expression of pre-Liberation culture. Such a reading gains in potency as the song progresses. In the third phrase of the second verse—the first real increase of intensity in the song—Wainwright sings in a higher register, insistently repeating the tonic pitch, alternating between two octaves, "Honey can you hear me in between," before returning to the melody familiar from the first verse to sing, "been dragging a dragonfly" (Example 3).

Example 3: Rufus Wainwright, "Grey Gardens,"
Outline of end of second verse: "Honey can you hear me . . ." (author's
transcription).

By this point in the song, several recurring ideas have emerged: asymetrical

musical structures (verses consisting of a parallel period followed by a half period), a

sense of "in between" that appears unpleasant and must be escaped, and which is related

to a heart that is dangerous—described as a silver dragonfly and, by the second verse,

clearly a burden that is being "dragged"—and the ever-present Tadzio who, despite the

apparent danger posed by the Wainwright persona's "heart," must serve as its savior.

The second statement of the refrain adds an additional phrase, resulting in the complete

statement of: "Trying to get my mansions green after I've *Grey Gardens* seen/ Honey

won't you hold me tight, get me through *Grey Gardens* tonight," followed by a series of

repeated calls to "Tadzio." Tadzio has entered Grey Gardens as a *doppelgänger* for

Jerry, but has been transformed into a redemptive figure who will "hold me tight" in

order to help Wainwright "get my mansions green" and ultimately move outward from

the temporal bubble of the Edies' world.

In order to "get through," Wainwright calls upon a literary figure whose attractiveness and homoerotic implications have long culturally conflated same-sex desire with illness, shame and death. Here, however, Tadzio serves as a means to escape an "in-betweenness" that prevents movement toward the future. Central to this movement is caring for a "heart" that has become a dangerous burden; recall that a fundamental characteristic of perceptions of pre-liberation queer identity is the psychological oppression of a love and eroticism that is "unnatural" and culturally unacceptable. Tadzio is a quintessential symbol of such characterizations, as his erotic presence prompts the incredible shame and Dionysian sensuality that metaphorically lead to Aschenbach's death. In Wainwright's hands, *Grey Gardens*—again, a film that stands at the intersection of pre- and post-Stonewall notions of queer culture and their related ideas of self-denying versus self-aware conceptions of identity—becomes less a static temporal bubble between two cultural "eras" and more a dynamic location from which reinvigorating the cultural past, stripping it of its shame and shadow, enables movement toward the future. Claiming Tadzio as a means toward this end symbolically breaks down the wall between pre- and post-liberation conceptions of queer culture. Further, through Wainwright's literary allusion and manipulation of musical expectations, the insertion of Mann's character into the song allows the abnormal time of Grey Gardens to foster a rejection of standard narratives of history, in fact enabling forward momentum, but a momentum that does not depend on pre-existing expectations or structures. It activates "queer time" in relation to non-normative sexualities and the historical narratives through which we understand their articulations throughout time.

Opening the Doors of a Green Grey Gardens

I have engaged in this extended contextualization and creative, intertextual reading of this single—indeed, on its surface, simple—song because I believe it encapsulates several ideas that are crucial both to productive, reparative imaginings of queer culture and history and to the kinds of cultural work I see Wainwright's music as doing. To flesh these implications out, however, I must clearly articulate what I believe it means, in the context of the song, to make one's mansions green. I have suggested that Grey Gardens constitutes a symbol that pulls together several ideas. First, as a documentary released in the mid-1970s that gathered a cult following including gay men who were (and continue to be) attracted to its "campiness," it represents a nexus between pre-Stonewall cultural ideas of artifice, denial, allusion, and deflection and post-Stonewall ideas of self-awareness, celebration of out-of-the-ordinary behaviors, "realness," and self-determination. As such, it is uniquely poised to bridge the gap between these two historically-situated attitudes, typically seen as self-hating versus self-celebrating, and to allow the past to be re-imagined in productive and liberating ways. Second, it encapsulates an anomalous relationship to time, the past and the present seeming to merge to deny linear conceptions of time. This non-linearity, demonstrated by the Edies' unusual lives in opposition to those of their neighbors, resonates with "queer time" and the rejection of standard life narratives. These two ideas—the historical positioning of the film along with its representation of non-linear narrative—create a symbolic potential to revise queer cultural history. Wainwright activates this potential by

inserting a literary figure from the past who functions as a representative of pre-Stonewall conceptions of homosexual desire as sickness, revising his role to make him redemptive, rather than dangerously seductive. There is no hint of pedophilia in Wainwright's evocation of Tadzio. Rather, Tadzio's affection is portrayed as enabling the revitalization of the mansion, same-sex love helping to get Wainwright's mansions green. Further, Wainwright shifts the nature of Grey Gardens's temporal ambiguity, moving it from a locus of the blurred line between the past and the present to an "in-betweeness" in relation to the present and future, his "tonight" and his "tomorrows." By pulling Tadzio from the past into a project that germinates in "queer time" in order to develop a new way of moving to the future, Wainwright disrupts established cultural histories, enabling the potential for alternative conceptions of queer culture.

On one hand, then, making his mansions green involves revising the insularity of Grey Gardens, transforming it into a locus of productive, rather than contained or secretive, alternative historical and life narratives that can emerge into a future defined by possibility and love, not social alienation and hidden, destructive desire. The kind of trope employed in "Grey Gardens" is reflected in a number of his songs. For example, in "Rebel Prince," the song immediately following "Grey Gardens" on *Poses*, Wainwright calls out to tragic gay icon James Dean, describing himself as a servant to his "master," while nevertheless calling to him from his "two-bit hotel" to come close the windows that are "telling me to rid my dirty mind of all of this preciousness." His desire to remain enclosed in an isolated space, clearly away from home, and retain the "preciousness" in his "dirty mind" transforms into a desire for movement when he sings of seeing Dean

struggling against a crowd in order to get to him. By repeating a verse in French, one of

the primary languages of his hometown of Montreal, Wainwright seems to relocate

himself in the city of his childhood. He then sings, "I'm leaving the Roosevelt hotel," the

vision of Dean prompting him to reassert himself and re-enter the world, apparently

returning home. The resurrection of Dean as an explicitly same-sex object of affection

removes the often tawdry post-mortem speculations and investigations into the actor's

sexual life, claiming, essentially, that it's no big thing. Instead, as in his resurrection of

Tadzio, Wainwright turns him into a powerful figure whose affection enables forward

movement. Wainwright exits the Roosevelt Hotel, just as he "gets through" Grey

Gardens, spurred to action by love for a tragic pre-Stonewall figure.

If Tadzio and James Dean serve as individual pre-Liberation images whose

revitalization and revision at the hands of Wainwright enact reparative processes, the title

track of *Release the Stars* both broadens the range of classic figures involved in such

processes and more explicitly describes the power of cultural reparation. "Release the

Stars" immediately evokes a sense of nostalgia in its early 1960s soul ballad sound; the

instrumental introduction and subsequent accompaniment is piano-driven and blues-

inflected, with staccato guitar strikes accenting the backbeat (beats two and four). The

slow but steady tempo presents a gradual and deliberate harmonic motion, the

introduction hovering statically on tonic and the later accompaniment's chord changes

occurring in a measured, clearly audible manner. In typical Wainwright style, the spare

opening builds continuously and consistently to an exceedingly dramatic, cacophonous

climax at the song's close. As the song progresses, swelling brass chords, culminating in

"zinger" hits, thicken the texture while female backup singers accentuate Wainwright's increasingly intense vocal delivery through both textless harmonies and call-and-response style emphases.

"Release the Stars" laments the demise of "Old Hollywood," but in a way that explicitly dramatizes Wainwright's reparative relationship to cultural history. "Grey Gardens" musically opens the mansion's door, allowing access to a revised Tadzio and, by symbolic extension, an alternative to an artificially bifurcated queer history. The chorus of "Release the Stars," on the other hand, pleads with "Old Hollywood" to allow the stars of its golden age to escape from their studio/prison: "Why not just release the gates and let them all come out? Remember that without them there would be no Paramount, no Paramount need to hold on to what isn't yours. Release the Stars." Wainwright's critique of the Hollywood studio system constitutes far more than an assault on an economic model that monopolizes on individuals' images, however. In asserting that the studios "hold on to what isn't" theirs, he implies a greater collective ownership of celebrity images, while concurrently indicating the right of individuals to value these images according to their own needs. In the second verse, he pleads, "oh, can't you see the good that celebrity can do for those in the dark? Yes of course I am speaking in metaphors for something more in your heart. Didn't you know that Old Hollywood is over?" Here, Wainwright expresses in clear terms precisely the kind of reparative motivation I am attempting to explore. The value of "celebrity," when divorced from the controlling framework of the studio, takes on different meanings for "those in the dark." His symbolic embodiment of Judy Garland, a celebrity whose strict

control at the hands of MGM has become a central part of her legend, enacts the reparative potential of "releas[ing] the gates" of Old Hollywood. His reference to the metaphorical "good" enabled by the "release" of the stars specifically relates to the "heart," expressly indicating a subjective, individual reparative process that defies the monolithic interpretive authoritarianism implied by the mass-marketing tactics of the entertainment industry.

To the extent that they can be written, objective queer cultural histories are dominated by tragedy, societal revulsion, and helplessness. According to standard accounts the Stonewall Rebellion provides a crucial turning point, a moment at which victimization transforms into activism. While the riots in New York rightly serve as a political and cultural touchstone, the bifurcation of queer history only reinforces the tragic narrative of the history of sexual difference. For queers, the reclamation of historical tropes of weakness can serve as a powerful rejection of the interpretive dictates of heteronormativity, a breaking down of the wall that separates contemporary LGBT individuals from their cultural history. Wainwright's manipulation of time, history, and cultural memory empowers interpretive freedom and defies master narratives of reception and power. The next chapter turns to his negotiation of another master narrative that has substantive implications for non-normative identities: the musicological construction of "Western Art Music." Such historical narratives are necessarily inscribed on musical technology. Therefore, for populations who have lived at the periphery of musical master narratives, the uses of technology carry added weight. To that extent, my excursion into

the monolith of cultural privilege that is "classical music" draws upon the invocation of one of the most culturally reviled and transgressive literary images: the cyborg. To aid this unexpected image's entrance into my discussion, I offer a brief interlude considering a pop musician who embraces the convolutions of history, musical technology, and gender identity even more explicitly than does Wainwright. Lady Gaga has arguably become even more of a gay icon than Wainwright in recent years, and her uniquely grotesque critiques of musical values and sexual politics provide a useful contemporary frame within which to place the (perhaps) subtler manipulations of history, technology, and identity politics in Wainwright's music.

INTERLUDE
"She's a Monster!"

The 2010 Grammys opened with an emcee declaring on stage that he wanted "the real Gaga." He dragged an "artificial" Gaga by her hair, demanding that he "bought a Lady Gaga, but you sold me a fake." As he exclaimed that the "real" Gaga "has no soul" and "comes complete with five number one singles," Lady Gaga herself appeared on a platform above his head. The first sounds the audience heard from the massively commercially successful pop star were an acoustic rendition of her electronic dance hit "Poker Face," transformed into a piano ballad. The performance quickly lulled, the familiar synthesized sounds began, and Lady Gaga jumped to the stage proper in order to perform the song as her audience expected: a heavily produced and carefully choreographed pop-synth rendition. Her back-up dancers enacted a routine including a variety of familiar poses, evoking stances from pop iconography as diverse as "The Macarena," "Thriller," and traditional "vogue" movements of drag house cultures. The stakes of the performance were set. Lady Gaga as a phenomenon constituted something artificial, "poppy," the absolute bane of Theodor Adorno's aesthetic philosophy.[159] Yet Lady Gaga as a musician—represented by her initial, lyrical entrance onto the stage— constituted something else, something desired by the emcee but hidden by a massive production apparatus. The apparatus—the "pop" version of the song and its intricate

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[159] While notoriously suspicious of any kind of popular music, Adorno's clearest rejection of the mode can be found in Theodor Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary and notes by Richard Leppert, with new translations by Susan H Gillespie (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 437-469.

stage spectacle—however, was short lived, as the emcee cut Gaga off, shouting,

"Everyone's going goo-goo for Gaga! Her mind-controlling, pop music is ruining my

business! Take her away. She's a monster! She's a monster! And she's turning all of

you into monsters." The dancers subdued the singer, dragging her up a set of stairs to a

contraption reminiscent of a meat-grinder adorned with the word "rejected." As the

dancers tossed her into the nightmarish funnel, the set-piece erupted in flames.

Fans of Lady Gaga undoubtedly recognized this spectacle as a fairly standard

tactic of the singer. Lady Gaga has constructed her meteoric career by enacting, while

explicitly critiquing, pop music conventions. However, her performance at the 2010

Grammys illustrates what I believe to be a profoundly powerful expression of the

ambivalent relationship between the arts and the social structures that enable them to

exist. As the emcee ranted about the monstrosity of Lady Gaga, a wall of the set opened

to reveal, presumably, the innards of the meat grinder that had devoured her. Gaga sat at

a piano, dark makeup smeared over her face to indicate residual soot from her

incineration, while her sparkly costume remained mostly unsullied. Across from her,

poised at an interlocking grand piano, sat Sir Elton John, his far more "sooty" face

demonstrating that he had been tossed into the inferno long before. The two singers

launched into a duet version of Gaga's "Speechless." The song morphed seamlessly into

John's iconic "Your Song," the two songs existing together in a remarkable synchronicity

enabled by a steady quarter-note articulation of their common harmonic progressions.

Rejected by the external "business" sensibility of the emcee, Lady Gaga

descended into a fiery hell, only to be united with Elton John, an icon of pop music

whose fame and success have insulated him from the potential mass cultural rejection invited by his sexuality. This concurrence of celebrity occurred a mere three months after Lady Gaga's impassioned speech at the National Equality March for LGBT rights, which she described as "the single most important moment of [her] career," and in which she declared that she "love[d] Judy Garland," while referencing the political potency of the Stonewall Rebellion.

The most potent aspect of this performance, for me, however, is the activation of culturally inflammatory musical technology in the service of uniting identity politics with the injustices of the market economy. Robert Walser has examined the extent to which the piano functions as a "feminine," or indeed "gay," instrument in American culture, a role exacerbated in contemporary rock music when it is placed in contrast with that of the electric guitar.[160] Gaga's forced descent into a hellish world, precipitated by her "pop" transgression, results in her communion with a figure whose is, at the same time, a true pop icon, an potent symbol for an aggrieved sexual minority, and a musician who played a powerful role in bringing the "effeminate" piano back into vogue after its subsumation into the guitar-saturated acoustic world of 1970s and early 1980s popular music.

Lady Gaga's 2009 American Music Awards performance enacted an equivalent dualism. The performance was structured similarly to her Grammys performance, her more recent "Bad Romance" serving as the "pop" antecedent to the piano ballad "Speechless." Sporting a freakish flesh colored bodysuit, carefully placed straps around her crotch creating an illusion of male genitalia, and a strange helmet and breast-piece

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[160] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 130.

constructing an artificial exoskeleton, she and her backup dancers performed stiff, robotic movements until, as "Bad Romance" reached a climax, Gaga tossed off her exoskeleton helmet, revealing her curled blonde hair and the humanity of her expressive face. She picked up her microphone stand and swung it repeatedly into a glass box containing her piano. Breaking the glass, she entered the box for her performance of "Speechless" as the piano's lid burst into flames. Throughout the ballad, Gaga reached for a bottle of booze placed on the instrument's music stand. Ultimately, she grabbed the bottle and smashed it on the piano.

Placing the two performances in conversation illuminates an ambivalent relationship between "authenticity" and alienation centering on the musical symbol of the grand piano. The Grammys performance culminated in a triumphant justification of the musicianship underlying Lady Gaga's overly produced persona, the performative rejection of her persona resulting in communion with Elton John. This narrative affirms the legitimacy of Lady Gaga as a musician who, despite her "poppy" image was a child prodigy who attended Julliard and whose musical talent, precisely and intentionally because of her synthetic image, seems to be unexpected. The American Music Awards performance, on the other hand, seems to render the piano a source of personal tragedy, the piano's entrapment in the glass box directly related to images of violent alcoholism. Their commonality, however, centers on the piano as an antidote to the electronic, produced, seemingly artificial world of Gaga's biggest hits (whose music is frequently formulaic, but whose lyrics, especially in songs like "Poker Face," "Paparazzi," and "Bad Romance" explicitly critique common pop culture values).

While the "pop" world of Lady Gaga is explicitly critiqued over the course of

these performances, their confluence of artificiality (electro-pop) and a realm of

"authenticity," represented by her pianistic collaboration with the commercially

successful John, disrupts simplistic, binary conceptions of aesthetic value—an important

philosophical move in the world of queer experience. In his lengthy reading of Freddie

Mercury's gendered performance and compositional tactics in Queen's "Bohemian

Rhapsody," Michael Long references Walser's examination the gender implications of

the piano in the context of heavy metal:

> According to Walser's informants, real metal musicians (and by extension, real men) play guitars. [Elton] John and [Susie] Quattro's musical gender identities are thus inverted by their association with the piano and electric guitar, respectively. The piano, most of all the curvaceous grand piano, is, of course, effeminate by virtue of its being a marker of musical register, and emblematic of the rarefied (or sissified) atmosphere of the concert hall (home to—I quote a long-standing graffito in my own university music building's stairwell—"music fags"). Mercury was aware of the meaningful weight of both instruments, electric guitar and concert grand . . .[161]

Just as Mercury understood the implications of the guitar and piano during his career,

Lady Gaga (whose stage name is, not coincidentally derived from the Queen song "Radio

Ga-Ga") explicitly plays with the cultural symbolism of juxtaposing electro-pop and the

piano. Long identifies the "sissy" nature of the piano as emanating from its association

with the concert hall. But just as significantly, the piano's gendered symbolism can be

partly attributed to its complex cultural history, particularly its role in symbolically

protecting middle class values in Europe and America during and after the industrial

revolution. I have offered this brief foray into the performance image of Lady Gaga in

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[161] Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters*, 225.

order to suggest just the shallowest excursion into the symbolic implications of music technology, conceptions of authenticity, and sexual politics. These images constitute a dramatic and explicit demonstration of the potentialities of performance tactics that invite reception positions informed by the interactions of technology and musical politics. The following chapter offers a reading of Wainwright's relationship to the piano, the classical music canon, and song traditions that takes some of these implications and extends them much deeper, making connections that are perhaps more unexpected, but that are potentially productive of queer identity politics.

CHAPTER FOUR:
"Schubert Bust My Brain": Musical Cyborgs and Wainwright's Queering of Art Song

Wainwright's eponymous debut album is striking for its confessional quality. While the confessional mode is hardly uncommon in popular music, the frankness with which Wainwright presents love songs whose objects' genders are clearly the same as that of the singer renders his usage of confession rare, if not unique. In "Danny Boy," the album's second song, a bouncy, animated energy, driven by an oscillating accompaniment articulating triple subdivisions of the beat, supports a tale of unrequited love for a straight man. The song's chorus poignantly exposes the dangers inherent, particularly for gay people, in the external expression of internal emotion: "You broke my heart, Danny Boy/ Not your fault, Danny Boy/ I was had at the doorstep/ Played, like a two to a four-set/ Had, like poor Job in the Bible by god." Wainwright's sense of being "had" or "played" is not accusatory; Danny Boy has no desire to hurt Wainwright, and the singer does not blame him. Rather, the singer has been "played" by a larger, unintelligible force. In this case, Job's inconceivable tribulations, meted out by God in an elaborate test of faith, serves as a parallel to Wainwright's unrequited love. Yet despite the song's lyrical expressions of loss and emotional devastation, musically, it is anything but somber and mournful. The texture maintains its energetic triplet pattern, the momentum occasionally slowed to pulses on the beat, only to rev itself up to even greater levels of exuberance. These more restful moments serve to underline the over-arching cheerfulness of the music. In the "pre-chorus" section, the frantic pace slows as Wainwright sings, "And a ship with eight sails could come round the bend/ Or a herd of

bulls charging stoplights red," but suddenly picks up in pace with "I'd be blind," only to pause again for the climactic "You broke my heart, Danny Boy." The song dramatizes the ecstasy of fantasy desire in the face of clear knowledge of the impossibility of mutual love. The driving oscillations of the triplet figuration, in direct opposition to the repeated textual symbol of "two to a four-set," come to symbolize the joy and excitement of fantasy and "blindness" to the realities of unfulfilled desire, sentiments that are magnified as the song fades out while Wainwright blissfully sings nonsense syllables.

This device is not isolated to a single song, but returns in altered form in the final track of the album. "Imaginary Love" uses a similar oscillating triplet figure. Here, however, the tempo is considerably slower, creating a more plaintive "torch song" quality. Yet, even if it is less cheerful than "Danny Boy," "Imaginary Love" is far from melancholy. The musical structure is similar to the Bolero-esque process used in "Oh What A World"—an accompanimental pattern supporting a repetitious vocal line that generates interest through superficial alterations. Against the steady pulse, Wainwright sings a simple rising scalar melody that delineates two parallel phrases. The first phrase, "Every kind of love, at least my kind of love/ Has to be an Imaginary Love to start with," spans a very narrow melodic range, rising from scale degree 1 to scale degree 3 before falling back to 1 with a subdominant harmony. Wainwright's qualifier—"at least my kind of love"—clarifies the stakes of the song's themes. While all loves may begin in the mind before they are expressed externally, as "Danny Boy" suggests, for gay people, the expression of love involves both the revelation of emotional attachment and the revelation of a marginalized identity. Imagined—or imaginary—love maintains a

different kind of potency in such a circumstance, functioning as a doubly protective germinating locus of desire and, therefore potentially more emotionally fraught for LGBT people. The song's second phrase rises to scale degree 5 as Wainwright sings, "Guess that can explain the rain waiting watching game/ Schubert bust my brain to start with." Reaching a dominant harmony as its final sonority, the phrase propels the song into a repetition with Wainwright repeating his text and melody an octave higher. The cyclical structure of the song lyrically places "Imaginary love" in relation to the strange concept of "Schubert bust my brain," both ideas followed by "to start with," implying some kind of subsequent process fostered by them. The increasing intensity generated by the dominant harmony's thrust into a repetition of the melody in a higher register reflects the sense of potentiality embedded in both "imaginary love" and the referencing of Franz Schubert in terms that rhetorically provide the long-dead composer with agency.

While Wainwright draws inspiration from a wide range of "classical" music figures, Schubert's appearance in his oeuvre is particularly significant to some of the central aspects of Wainwright's output and musical background. He specifically conceives many of his songs to be performed solo with the singer at the piano; indeed, he frequently tours without his band. He understands this intimate performance formulation as a contemporary revitalization of nineteenth-century art song traditions. Regarding "Pretty Things" from *Want One*, he says:

> The song is really important because I want to keep the modern lieder [sic] aspect of solo voice and piano alive. I want it to be one of the foundations of my career. I'm very influenced by Schubert. Someone said there's more beauty and expression in two bars of a Schubert lieder [sic] than in a four-hour opera.[162]

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[162] *Want One* Press Materials, DreamWorks Records 2003.

Here, Wainwright singles out and exalts Schubert within the canon of the Lied, a term

commonly used to denote art songs originating in Germanic countries from the beginning

of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth. While, as Carl Dahlhaus

observes, the delineation of the Lied as a unique genre washes over some of the historical

specifics of its artistic lineage, innovations in Schubert's works for piano and voice

nonetheless constitute a stylistic shift that influenced his contemporaries and subsequent

composers.[163] Particularly, Schubert's mixing of strophic structures—in which music is

repeated with different text—and through-composition—in which music is more freely

structured, driven by the text—and his usage of piano accompaniments that innovatively

reflect and interact with specific images in his chosen texts distinguished his works from

the songs of earlier composers, which tended to be simple strophic songs with

unobtrusive accompaniments. Several of the musical characteristics of Wainwright's

songs that I have already discussed might be seen as similar to the unique characteristics

of Schubert: the unconventional form of "Memphis Skyline," the instrumental evocation

of floating sensations and rolling waves in "Waiting for a Dream," or the asymmetry of

"Grey Gardens." But I am less concerned with musical comparisons than in how one

might think productively about Wainwright's referencing of Schubert in ways that play

upon cultural perceptions of the composer, the contexts in which he worked, and the not-

uncontroversial filters through which contemporary audiences hear Schubert's music.

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[163] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 96-98.

Conventional understandings of European music history, almost without fail,

place Schubert in the role of "father" of the Lied. One might conclude that

historiography constructs for Schubert a foundational and authoritative position in

relation to Germanic art song that is parallel to the authoritative position constructed by

musical and cultural production for the fictional Orpheus in relation to opera. Yet such a

patriarchal conception is complicated by predispositions among academic musicians to

understand the genres and techniques favored by Schubert as less serious, less rigorous,

and more domestic than the massive symphonies and intricate piano sonatas and string

quartets of his older contemporary Ludwig van Beethoven. Sir George Grove's

description of Robert Schumann's comparisons of Schubert and Beethoven has become

(in)famous in Schubert circles:

> Another equally true saying of Schumann is that, compared with Beethoven, Schubert is as a woman to a man. For it must be confessed that one's attitude towards him is almost always that of sympathy, attraction, and love, rarely that of embarrassment or fear. Here and there only, as in the Rosamund B minor Entr'acte, or the Finale of the 9th Symphony, does he compel his listeners with an irresistible power; and yet how different is this compulsion from the strong, fierce, merciless coercion, with which Beethoven forces you along, and bows and bends you to his will.[164]

These preconceptions are further fueled by the aesthetic and social conflicts active during

Schubert's life. "Romanticism," fueled in large part by the impulse for complex

expressions of "interiority" and fostered in elite circles, coexisted with "Biedermeier"

aesthetics, valuing simplicity, amateurism, and home life, driven by the confluence of

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[164] Sir George Grove, *Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn* (London: Macmillan, 1951), 238, quoted in Susan McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert's Music," *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 205-233, 213-214.

governmental censorship and repression and the desires for social and domestic

tranquility after the massive traumas of the Napoleonic Wars. Schubert's enormous

output of Lieder, despite his large catalogue of instrumental works and operas, continues

to be viewed as his primary contribution to the musical canon, placing reception of his

works (at least among the academic elite) at a tricky intersection of Romantic notions of

grandeur and Biedermeier notions of domesticity and intimacy.

Wainwright's music offers several specific references to Schubert that serve as

insights into what aspects of the composer's body of work may motivate his own

compositional process. The most explicit, though rare, of these is a public performance

of a Schubert Lied. In January 1996, two years before the release of his first solo album,

Wainwright sang at Montreal's well-known music venue Club Soda. During his

performance, he performed what most online fansites' set-lists refer to as the "Schubert

Song," accompanied by his mother on piano.[165] The song was, in fact, Schubert's setting

of Goethe's "Geheimes" (D. 719), sung in English. Goethe's poem is a tale of secret love,

the poetic speaker reveling in others' inability to recognize the true meaning of his

"sweetheart's flirting glances" ("Liebchens Äugeln"). Schubert's deceptively simple

setting conveys a sense of playfulness through an almost childlike melodic line consisting

of uneven, arcing gestures that frequently fall to the dominant pitch, accompanied by

clipped sets of two chords in the piano, their articulation (quarter-notes on the downbeat,

slurred to eighth-notes followed by eighth-rests) creating a skipping figure (example

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[165] Bootleg recordings of the Club Soda concert float about on the internet. At the time of this writing, a recording of "Schubert Song" is available at http://www.filestube.com/4121169c448f8d0903e9/go.html.

4).[166] For John Reed, this combination "convey[s] musically the idea of complicity," as the harmonic shift to minor at the song's close contributes to "an undercurrent of emotion in the formal gathering, a kind of secret drama."[167] With knowledge of "Danny Boy" and "Imaginary Love," which would be released two years after the Club Soda performance, it is perhaps quite easy to see the appeal such a song might hold for Wainwright. Its playful evocation of amorous secrecy resonates with the homosexual longing conveyed in *Rufus Wainwright*. Yet Wainwright's performance of "Geheimes" seems to ignore many of the musical cues that, in Schubert's setting, construct the youthful excitement of clandestine love. Schubert's tempo marking, "Etwas geschwind, zart" ("Somewhat quick, sweet"), is lost in Wainwright's 1996 performance, the piano chords languidly plodding along, ignoring Schubert's careful, skipping articulation. Wainwright's drowsy voice presents the melody in long, slow lines with generous rubato. While these are undoubtedly performative affectations of a young Wainwright, they lend the song a melancholic air that is largely absent from Schubert's notated score, sacrificing playfulness while adding a brooding quality.

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[166] John Reed refers to this piano figure as a "'tiptoeing' movement" in *The Schubert Song Companion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 238.

[167] Ibid.

Example 4: Franz Schubert, opening of "Geheimes," adapted from Sergius Kagen, ed., "Geheimes," *Schubert: 200 Songs in Three Volumes*, **vol. 1 (New York: International Music Company, 1961), 242.**

Additionally, Wainwright's English text deviates in some significant ways from Goethe's poetry. In the song's second period, a momentary climax, Goethe's text reads, "ich, der Wissende, dagegen,/ weiss recht gut, was das bedeute" ("I, who understand, however, know very well what this means"). Wainwright sings, "I, the keeper of the secret, know the meaning here there-under," shifting the prosody from emphasizing a sustained submediant pitch on the word "dagegen" to emphasizing, instead, the word "secret," highlighting the veiled nature of the poetic speaker's love rather than the transitional word leading to the subsequent clarification of that love. Like adolescent angst and longing, Wainwright's performance de-emphasizes the joyousness of Schubert's setting, focusing its emotive impact on melancholy secrecy. Secrecy and melancholia in Schubert's music may have appealed to Wainwright's formative experiences of sexual difference, but cultural imagery of Schubert himself strengthens the connections between experiences of de-privileged contemporary sexual minorities and the often-schizophrenic ways histories are valued and celebrated. Wainwright's usage of

"Geheimes" pulls out the dark, poignant underpinnings of a generally mischievous and nearly jubilant "original" work. Through contentious recent scholarship, images of the work's originator himself have undergone a similar process, as Schubert scholarship has begun to deepen our understanding of his position within an oppressive culture.

Franz Schubert and the Sexual Politics of Musical Biography and Reception

Among my most prized possessions is a children's book published in 1933, given to me by a friend and colleague after—judging from the stamps populating its inside front and back covers—it had circulated among several Catholic schools before showing up in a used bookstore. Opal Wheeler and Sybil Deucher's *Franz Schubert and his Merry Friends* is a children's biography of the composer featuring Mary Greenwalt's charming illustrations of a smiling, jovial Schubert, interspersed with simple transcriptions of short passages of his music to be played at the piano by the young reader. The book offers an impression of Schubert as blissfully working away on his music for the entertainment of his amiable circle of companions. The cover illustration shows a school-aged Schubert laughing and walking arm-in-arm with a friend as they and another group of children happily head outside at the end of the school day (figure 3). This image fits dominant perceptions of Schubert well: a quaint, jovial fellow making music for the edification and entertainment of himself and his close circle, bewildered and humbled when his music is noticed by others. There are, as one would expect from a children's book, no hints of the composer's crushing depression, the late night drinking and carousing with prostitutes that we know were important parts of the circle's socialization, or Schubert's torturous

illness and death from syphilis. Scholarship during the last two decades has shed light on

Schubert's life that renders the veracious book utterly and spectacularly campy, as the

notion of Schubert's "merry" friends takes on a whole new meaning. While

musicologists continue to uncover the more subversive social, sexual, and political

activities of Schubert's largely homosocial circle of friends, against continuing scholarly

resistance from some quarters, the idyllic image presented by the children's book cover

begins to look less and less like the cultural and personal realities within which

Schubert's revered Lieder were composed. Likewise, these new images of the composer

help elucidate why, as in Wainwright's song, the notion of "Imaginary Love" provides a

powerful linkage between contemporary identity politics and the Biedermeier Viennese
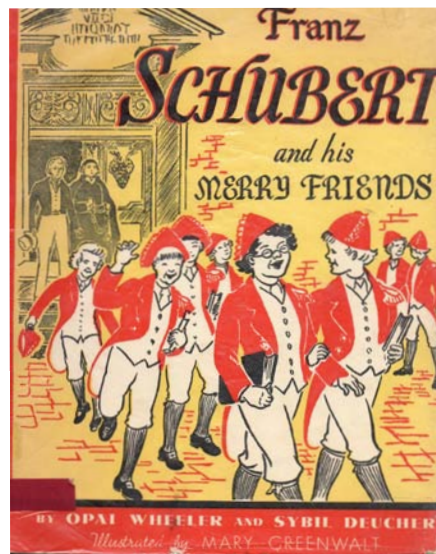
subjectivity of Franz Schubert.

Figure 1: Opal Wheeler, Sybil Deucher, and Mary Greenwalt,
cover of *Franz Schubert and his Merry Friends*

To begin fleshing these ideas out, I must revisit one of the most troubling and distasteful debates in the history of music scholarship. If anyone not personally familiar with institutional academia might have an impression of it as a collection of stodgy intellectuals engaged in civilized debate over big-picture issues, he/she would quickly become divorced from such a conception through examination of the furor in Schubert studies during the first half of the 1990s.[168] The hubbub was initiated when Maynard Solomon, in a now legendary article entitled "Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini," presented documentary evidence culled from personal writings and correspondence of Schubert and his friends pointing to the possibility that members of this close social circle engaged in same-sex sexual activities. Judging from some of the responses this argument generated, Solomon might as well have spit upon the composer's grave. Scholars who clung to an idealized image of Schubert were still recovering from Eric Sams' revelation of Schubert's syphilis.[169] Andreas Mayer offered a vicious critique in which he accused Solomon of being "politically correct" and implied that studies involving minority populations in general smacked of a political agenda and were, therefore, inadmissible in the academy.[170] In his introduction to a special issue of *19th-Century Music* addressing the Schubert controversy, Lawrence Kramer aptly describes

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[168] There is every reason to believe that the "erudite" and self-affirmed "Classical" snob Wainwright is aware, and probably titillated by this scholarly episode.

[169] Eric Sams, "Schubert's Illness Re-examined," *The Musical Times* 121 (1980): 15-22.

[170] Andreas Mayer, "Der psychoanalytische Schubert: Eine kleine Geschichte der Deutungskonkurrenzen in der Schubert-Biographik, dargestellt am Beisipiel des Textes 'Mein Traum'," *Schubert durch die Brille* 9 (1992): 7-31.

Mayer's position: "The political agenda behind this attack on political agendas is both

obvious and chilling."[171] Rita Steblin launched her own campaign against Solomon,

citing possible heterosexual attachments and suggesting that Schubert failed to marry

because his financial circumstances legally prohibited him from doing so.[172] She

critiques some of Solomon's translations while, as he observes in his rebuttal, nonetheless

engaging in some questionable translation herself.[173] Susan McClary describes (and

Kramer confirms) an episode at an annual Schubertiade at New York's 92nd Street Y in

which "some of those who spoke during the course of the day deemed it appropriate to

take gratuitous swipes at [Solomon] ('a pornographer'), with the obvious approval of the

crowd."[174] Her own talk at the event was lambasted in the *New York Times*.[175]

     There is little reason to rehash further all of the specific bitter arguments and

personal jabs this controversy generated, except to note that the discussion in the early

1990s often devolved into nasty ad hominum attacks. The 1993 special issue of *19th-*

Century Music encapsulates a hefty sampling of them. Still, reading this material a

decade-and-a-half after it was written—a decade and a half that has seen a media frenzy

surrounding the murder of Matthew Shepard, increasing portrayals of gays and lesbians

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[171] Lawrence Kramer, introduction to *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 3-4, 4.

[172] Rita Steblin, "Franz Schubert und das Ehe-Consens Gesetz von 1815," *Schubert durch die Brille* 9 (1992): 32-42; Rita Steblin, "The Peacock's Tale: Schubert's Sexuality Reconsidered," *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 3-33.

[173] Maynard Solomon, "Schubert: Some Consequences of Nostalgia," *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 34-46.

[174] Susan McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity," 206.

[175] McClary also relates her experience with the *New York Times* in "Constructions of Subjectivity." The articles in question are Edward Rothstein, "Was Schubert Gay? If He Was, So What?" New York Times (4 February 1992); Ibid., "And If You Play '*Bolero*' Backward . . ." *New York Times* (16 February 1992); Bernard Holland, "Dr. Freud, Is It True That Sometimes, Tea is Only Tea?" *New York Times* (17 February 1992).

(though there is still a dearth of images of transgender, bisexual, intersex, etc. people) in mainstream media, and a truly bizarre series of legalizations and revocations of legalizations of gay marriage in a variety of states—it becomes abundantly clear that everyone, regardless of his/her political or cultural priorities, has an agenda. For Solomon's opponents, the agenda involves a desire to maintain the image of Schubert and his "merry" friends. For his supporters, it is the excavation of an aspect of Schubert's identity that may or may not inform our hearings of his music, but will certainly contribute to the aims of gay history and the gay rights movement. If what we require is concrete documentation of his sexual activities, the issue of Schubert's sexuality will remain unresolved forever. If what we require is concrete documentation of his sexual activities, we have missed the point. We cannot witness Schubert's or any other dead person's sex life. We have to take their word for it. As I have argued, an identifiable queerness requires self-assertion of one's queerness, an act that is impossible for those living in cultures—like Schubert's—in which the terminology was nonexistent. There are gaps in the documentary evidence, but all of Solomon's defenders point out in various ways that his attackers maintain a willed blindness to the possibility that Schubert had homosexual attachments. The burden of proof is heavier for Solomon within a culture dependant on compulsory heterosexuality—a culture in which one is "straight" until proven "gay."

What is clear, however, is that Schubert and his homosocial circle of friends led lives in opposition to the moral and political codes of their culture. Leon Botstein describes the Viennese atmosphere as:

> not only . . . a police state in the sense of the application of control from above. Perhaps the crucial consequences were the deformation of personal behavior, an inability to trust, the reluctance to speak directly and honestly . . . One's private life could be invaded at any moment and one's sense of security undermined.[176]

The governmentally repressive culture of Biedermeier Vienna held private gatherings, including seemingly innocuous events like the celebrated Schubertiades, suspect and, as in the English legal codes under which Oscar Wilde was convicted, the potential for sodomy or other "immorality" served to bolster perceptions of political dissent. Homosociality, as Sedgwick has influentially argued, is never too far from "dangerous" sexuality in nineteenth-century Europe.[177] As Kristina Muxfelt observes:

> The identification of moral infractions with political crimes was thus built into the system: offenses against public morality, or any actions which could be construed to lead to still more harmful criminal offenses, were classified under a rubric conceived as a refinement of the earlier category of political crimes and were handled by the political authorities.[178]

Here, as in England, sodomy served as a rhetorical and legal device helping to prove criminality. Therefore, while the act itself was seldom prosecuted, it functioned as a symbol of deviance that could be understood as threatening to social order. Homosocial gatherings, therefore, pulled together the culturally dangerous potential for homosexual acts and the politically dangerous potential for subversion:

> The relative leniency of the authorities toward isolated homosexual acts among young boys of the uneducated classes is perfectly consistent with the view that the essential threat of nonconformist sexual behavior lay in its political aspect, its

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[176] Leon Botstein, "Realism Transformed: Franz Schubert and Vienna," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22.

[177] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[178] Kristina Muxfelt, "Political Crimes and Liberty, or Why Would Schubert Eat a Peacock?" *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 47-64, 62.

implicit challenge to the ruling moral order. Accordingly, associations of like-minded, educated people in reading societies and political clubs would have posed a far more serious danger than any specific intimate acts because such organizations threatened to lend their members a group identity.[179]

But scholars, including Botstein, have observed how the supposedly non-referential nature of music and the quasi-domestic, piano-centered social space in which much of Schubert's music was cultivated allowed for a symbolic dissent and subversion of Viennese cultural norms, despite the ever-present fear of the governmental spy network.[180]

Some scholars, including Kofi Agawu and James Webster, have asked whether or not any of this matters, whether or not Schubert's sexuality has any bearing on how we might understand his music, concluding, in effect, that it can't or shouldn't.[181] If the entire spectacle of the "gay Schubert" debate seems tiresome and disturbing, here is where it becomes utterly detached from any open and dynamic consideration of reception or meaning. Music, one of the most erotically-charged of the arts, takes the heterosexuality of its creators as a given unless incontrovertible evidence to the contrary is produced. No one questions the impact of Mozart's exploits on his playful musical demeanor, or the potential for Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved" to be found in his

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[179] Ibid., 63.

[180] Ibid. See also, David Gramit, "'The Passion for Friendship': Music, Cultivation, and identity in Schubert's Circle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56-71; Susan McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity"; Kristina Muxfeldt, "Political Crimes and Liberty"; Ruth Solie, "Biedermeier Domesticity and the Schubert Circle: A Rereading," in *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 118-152.

[181] Kofi Agawu, "Schubert's Sexuality: A Prescription for Analysis?" *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 79-82; James Webster, "Music, Pathology, Sexuality, Beethoven, Schubert" *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 89-93.

brooding music. More importantly, however, acknowledgement of Schubert's potentially

non-normative sexuality, even if we are unable to label or confirm it, opens new realms

of interpretation. The implication that established modes of listening, founded as they are

on cultural expectations that presuppose heterosexuality, must remain unquestioned, is

profoundly ominous to queer listeners. My affection for Schubert originated with his

Lieder, but it grew into full-blown love when I encountered McClary's reading of the

"Unfinished" Symphony as an expression of an alternative masculinity.[182] While I

disagree with some of her observations, especially her seeming conviction that the

processes she explores result from conscious intentions on the composer's part, the mere

act of suggesting a sexually-inflected reading enables gay listeners access to a new, more

personal connection to the symphony. Like McClary, Kramer locates alternative

formulations of male subjectivities in Schubert's music. For Kramer, the specific sexual

life of the composer might suggest critical readings, but need not be labeled or fully

unearthed:

> Whatever his personal habits or adventure, however, Schubert did explore
> homoerotic desire in music both implicitly and explicitly. He made homosexual
> subjectivity available in music, and, importantly, made it attractive and
> sympathetic there. If we knew more about his private life, we might be able to
> answer the interesting questions of whether this exploration was rooted in
> experience, fantasy, empathy, or a proto-"gay" sensibility. Lacking the requisite
> knowledge, we can still understand Schubert's homosexual imagination as
> consistent with his counternormative concept of subjectivity.[183]

Critics of approaches like McClary's and Kramer's have claimed that their projects are

"political," to which I (and, I would guess, they) can only respond with, "of course they

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[182] McClary, "Constructions of Subjectivity."

[183] Lawrence Kramer, *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93-94.

are." All acts of criticism are political to a certain degree; to suggest that there is no

political motivation behind some scholars' insistence on an idealized image of Schubert

as a "high art" creator whose music can only be understood in the supposedly "apolitical"

language of musical structure—the same language by which his music never quite

"measures up" to that of Beethoven—is simply a delusion.

Gary C. Thomas famously engages in an examination of Handel that is similar to

Solomon's examination of Schubert, framing his project with the title as "Was Georg

Friedrich Handel Gay?"[184] Yet, after presenting an enormous amount of evidence, he

wisely problematizes the question:

> Like our hapless apologists who ended up reinforcing what they hoped to dismiss, by posing the question in these terms (and for whatever aims we may win by doing so—and they my be considerable), we too end up reinforcing rather than calling into question the binary logic on which it (and its closet home) depends. By attempting to decide ("yes" he was, "no" he wasn't; even "maybe" he was or wasn't) we give assent to the either/or-self/other frame that engenders ("engenders," indeed) homosexual panic and that in effect reinforces the enabling conditions of the closet itself.[185]

The brilliance of Thomas's move here—answering the question, then asking if it should

be asked—lies in its exposure of the cultural predisposition to imagine Handel as

heterosexual. As, over the course of his argument, Thomas's preponderance of evidence

pointing to Handel's homosexual attachments builds, the reader quickly recognizes that

the question, if it is to be couched in such a way, should really be: "why did we assume

Handel was straight?" But by opening up the question for consideration, Thomas

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[184] Gary C. Thomas, "Was Georg Friedrich Handel Gay? On Closet Questions and Cultural Politics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155-204.
[185] Ibid., 181.

demonstrates that we might find new, more interesting ways of understanding Handel's work.   Ultimately, what is at stake in these kinds of debates is a minority population's right to identify with cultural products in unique ways, to engage in "reparative" readings or to enact Brett's call to claim the right to interpret evidence. As Solomon's detractors choose from the evidence he presents in a frantic attempt to disprove a hypothesis he explicitly presents as a possibility, not a certainty, and as they then move to the absurd argument that identity politics has no place in music criticism, we can see their motivations as an attempt to preserve a single music historical narrative. Homosexuality is a "taint" on the idealized image of a quaint, unassuming Schubert and a threat to the "decorum" of the German "Classical" canon. In claiming Schubert as a nexus of "Imaginary Love," Wainwright claims Schubert's queerness, bypassing both petty academic squabbling and motivations for the preservation of static history, asserting his right to reconceptualize the art song tradition in ways that are meaningful to the specifics of his life experience.

Wainwright's reparative relationship to Schubert, expressed through a "popular" music iteration of the Lied, brings with it a host of cultural imagery surrounding art song. In his examination of Schubert's Lieder, Kramer asserts that "song is the most 'performative' of musical genres, which is why its proximity to subject-formation is so intimate and so revealing."[186] The performative nature of song rests in its unique combination of human vocalizations and instrumental sound production. While in his lifetime, Schubert's songs were performed in more formalized settings with a separate

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[186] Kramer, *Franz Schubert*, 26.

singer and accompanist, he frequently performed them himself for his friends, singing along with his own accompaniment. When a single performer takes on both of these roles, as Wainwright does, this combination becomes even more "performatively" rich, a single individual pulling together the biological (his/her voice) and the mechanical (in this case, a piano). Adding voice to the sound of the piano creates a powerful musical hybrid. The piano's support of the voice is unique, in that it provides a far wider range of options—including melodic nuance, harmony, timbre, texture, percussive rhythm, and polyphony—than do other solo instruments. The music resulting from such a performance, in effect, becomes a musical "cyborg," enacting a unique convergence of human vocality and musical machine. Such imagery may seem unexpected, but I believe it may prove useful for understanding song, particularly, but not exclusively, song in which piano and voice are both activated by a single performer. Further, exploring the techno-cultural implications of such a performance configuration illustrates some of the reparative and productive potentialities of the historical image of art song. I will return to "Imaginary Love," as well as to some of Wainwright's other "Schubertian" songs after considering some of the cultural implications of this kind of piano/voice hybridity and the particular musical technology involved.

Schubert's innovations in song composition initiated a new level of musical collaboration between voice and piano during a period that saw an increasing significance of and ambivalence toward human relationships with technology, as well as the emergence of a systematized and scientific approach to chronicling music history (musicology). These musical, academic, and technological changes all brought with

them substantive political and cultural stakes. In invoking the image of "cyborg song," I

hope to begin exploring their linkages and to examine further the reparative significance

of Wainwright's spiritual and artistic relationship to Schubert. The next sections,

therefore, constitute a detour to some of the more grandiose philosophical notions

implicated in nineteenth-century European musical values, as well as dipping into the

cultural significance of particular spaces and contexts in which music was experienced.

Cyborg Song: Piano/Voice Hybridity and the Stakes of Privileged Music Historical Narratives

In accessing a scion of a song tradition that emerged in early nineteenth-century

Europe, Wainwright wades into a cultural pool that is deeply fraught with symbolic and

political controversy. The nineteenth-century German classical canon is a crucial site for

interrogating Western music history's constructions of authority, as much of traditional

musicology's interpretive baggage—its frequent insistence that music is transcendent,

pure, divorced from the inconvenient means by which it is produced and experienced—

can be traced to German composers' attempts to come to grips with the Enlightenment,

Napoleon, and Beethoven. These are precisely the interpretive assumptions that have

constructed Schubert as Beethoven's "feminine" counterpart, his "domestic" music-

making presumed to be less serious than that of the great symphonist. They equally

constitute the assumptions that render the potential of a non-heterosexual Schubert

threatening, and they ultimately underpin the desperation of Solomon's detractors. The

concept of "Absolute music"—music without extra-musical meaning, with no

representational substance—was a nineteenth-century discourse summoning an ideology

of "pure" music which, until very recently, served as conventional wisdom, the

unconditional insistence that music cannot signify, that it refers only to itself. As all

music scholars know full well, the notion of "pure" music, far from universalizing and

transcending context, finds its origin in a specific cultural and historical source. As

Berthold Hoeckner notes:

> . . . absolute music has been central in advancing the idea that German music could transcend its Germanness and become universal . . . Although the standard historical narrative states that music emancipated itself to become a language in its own right during Romanticism, this new musical language remained, nevertheless, inseparable from the language *about* music.[187]

The incorporation of ideological notions of "absolute music" into musicology could

occur only through the denial of the term's own cultural specificity. That methodologies

explicitly favoring the historical "fact" over poststructuralist interdisciplinary

interpretation should become so entrenched, despite its dependence on so massive a

historically-selective memory, is a profoundly disturbing irony. Daniel Chua observes

that, "surely such a radical denial already betrays a historical consciousness. Its

ahistorical stance is therefore a symptom of history, an allergic reaction for which the

only cure is denial."[188]

Schubert's song output occupies a precarious position in that, on the one hand, its

texts place it outside of the purely absolute and, on the other, the possibility that his

sexuality might influence the ways he put musical notes together disrupts the pristine

"universalism" that many traditional musicologists cherish. The violent reactions elicited

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[187] Berthold Hoeckner, *Programming the Absolute: Nineteenth-Century German Music and the Hermeneutics of the Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3-4.
[188] Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

by Solomon's research should be read within this context. Just as conflict between opposing musical ethics become inscribed on "natural" versus "unnatural" sexualities in the murder of Orpheus, just as English sodomy statutes served as means for regulating political sedition, just as the repressive governmental apparatus of Biedermeier Vienna found sexual deviation to be useful for social control, gender and sexuality still function as markers of value for many classical music scholars.

In Chapter One, I examined some ways that reorienting the narrative of *The Wizard of Oz* provides for new approaches to reparative reading. *MadTV*'s placement of the Tin Woodman at the center of the story, or Gregory Maguire's fanciful take on the Wicked Witch enable queer readings beyond the scope of standard understandings. It should not be taken as coincidence that both the mechanical man and the ambiguously gendered witch—who occupies two worlds while questioning the existence of her soul— are both, in most theoretical or humanistic senses, cyborgs. The cyborg image has long signified transgression and deviation from societal standards. The emergence into cultural studies of what later became known—sometimes seriously, sometimes pejoratively—as "cyborg theory" is most often traced to Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto."[189] For Haraway, the cyborg is a hybrid, the amalgamation of either human and animal or organism and technology, which can illuminate certain means of liberation.

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[189] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," reprinted in The *Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993), 271-291; also excerpted in *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Hath Woodward, and Fiona Hovenden (New York: Routledge, 2000), 50-57. See also, Idem, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 314-366.

Haraway's "manifesto" is a conceptualization of a particular form of feminist politics in the information age, yet scholars have embraced her cyborg's convolution of various cultural dualities as a useful metaphor for a wide range of projects exploring the relationships between humans and their technologies; I raise it here, specifically, to explore relationships between human vocality and the technology of the piano.

Chris Hables Gray defines the cyborg as "a self-regulating organism that combines the natural and artificial together in one system. Cyborgs do not have to be part human, for any organism/system that mixes the evolved and the made, the living and the inanimate, is technically a cyborg."[190] In its most productive and idealistic form, the image of the cyborg suggests the extension of human capabilities, the incorporation into daily existence of technology for personal or social improvement. More often, utopian images of technology are accompanied by profound anxiety over the perceived potential for losing some level of humanness, as well as the concurrent potential for social alienation.[191] This ambivalence should strike a resonant tone with the kinds of relationships between dominant cultures and their queer "others" exemplified by writings such as Crimmins'. While biomedical and information technologies of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries obviously offer an enormous amount of scholarly fodder for

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[190] Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (New York: Routledge: 2002), 2.

[191] I am indebted to Emily Smith, a graduate student in the University of Minnesota American Studies Department, for drawing my attention the decidedly ambivalent relationship between Cyborg Theory and Disability Studies, an ambivalence which should have been obvious to me long ago. Most importantly, as Smith has reminded me, for those who already live what Haraway or Gray might call a "cyborg" existence, physical benefits from technology are often accrued at the price of striking social ostracization.

cyborg theorists (or, as Gray terms them, "cyborgologists"), cyborg imagery has played

an important role throughout human civilization. Again, Gray offers a useful

clarification: "In the thousands of years of cities, the borders between human and tool and

the very idea of machine-as-complex-system have been carefully explored, usually in

religion, art, and magic. Cyborgs were a dream long before there were even

machines."[192] In explicating his unique theory of cultural evolution, economist William

McDonald Wallace concurs: "Human anatomy and its techno-culture coevolved for about

two million years and perhaps longer."[193] Wallace's paralleling of anatomy and

technology speaks to a basic dichotomy through which we often view human

relationships to the world. The juxtaposition of the "natural" and the "unnatural"

functions as one of the most fundamental cultural structures that Sedgwick cites as

corollary to the hetero/homosexual binary.[194] The troubling of this dichotomy, therefore,

may serve to start dismantling the majority/minority structures that accompany the

tandem development of humanity and machinery, or at least render them unpalatable. As

Haraway's "Manifesto" suggests, when used productively—or, I would say,

reparatively—the cyborg trope both critiques the dominant use of "the natural," an idea

that has consistently been utilized to regulate behavior and reinforce logics that render

certain groups of people subservient or disenfranchised, and suggests the potential for

redemptive uses of technology. Some of the basic tenets of musicological rhetoric are

implicated in the natural/unnatural dichotomy, and these notions find many of their

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[192] Ibid., 4.

[193] William McDonald Wallace, *Techno-Cultural Evolution: Cycles of Creation and Conflict* (Washington D.C.: Potomac, 2006), 3.

[194] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*.

generative impulses in Schubert's day. Therefore, in order to explore the queer

reparative implications of Wainwright's desire to continue the Lied tradition, it is useful

to delve more deeply into how the implications of musicological assumptions intersect

with the implications of human relationships to technology.

These relationships take on enormous significance in the early nineteenth century.

In his discussion of cyborg imagery in American Romantic literature, Klaus Benesch

draws attention to the crucial notion that common perceptions of the Romantics'

celebration of nature must be tempered with an understanding of their ambivalence

toward technology.[195] The same can be said of European Romanticism. As Benesch

describes:

> The Cartesian-Newtonian philosophical legacy led to an onslaught of mechanical
> paradigms which can best be described as probing the vague and shifting line
> between the living and the non-living, between the body and the machine. By the
> mid-eighteenth century, it had become a popular and widespread practice of
> anthropological discourse to interpret the human body in machinist terms.[196]

These philosophical trends related directly to the social realities that coincided with an

increasing significance of technology in human life. The Industrial Revolution came late

to most of continental Europe, gaining momentum only after roughly 1830.[197] Yet the

massive social changes accompanying industrialization were shockingly clear in the

example of England. During the process of industrialization, English society was

restructured in fundamental ways, as technologies and shifting economics precipitated

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[195] Klaus Benesch, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).
[196] Ibid., 42-43.
[197] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 172-173.

massive breaks in class and cultural identities. Partly in reaction, governments in the

German-speaking world attempted to insulate themselves while cultivating a sense of

domestic tranquility: "Conservatives looked on the English experience with horror and

saw industrialization as the direct cause of poverty, urban squalor, crime, and social

unrest, to say nothing of a vulgar, pushy, and enormously wealthy class of industrialists,

bankers, and speculators."[198] The social upheavals brought on by the Industrial

Revolution provided subject matter for a wealth of cultural products of the period.

The best-known examination of the potential for danger in technology, Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* of 1818, creates a narrative of the

quest for knowledge gone terribly awry. As Shelley's subtitle suggests, *Frankenstein*

plays with a long European cultural tradition of transgressive myths, in which defiance of

a natural order accompanies the mastery of prohibited technologies. Yet Shelley's

nameless monster also is often seen as an origin myth of the cyborg—the union of body

and science through the life-giving power of electricity.[199] Cyborg imagery existed long

before English Romanticism, but Shelley's creation emerges in relation to a society

coping with cultural changes driven in large part by unprecedented alterations in how

humans interact with their technologies. In part, what makes Shelley's monster so

terrifying is that its human component consists of a patchwork of body parts—a

collective of dismembered corpses, rather than a living, autonomous individual. In this

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[198] Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany: 1800-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 39.

[199] See Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, "Cyborgology: Constructing the Knowledge of Cybernetic Organisms," Introduction to *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

way, *Frankenstein* also is linked to larger shifts in European culture. As Erik Davis

notes, changes in human understanding driven by modern philosophy's split between the

physical and mental or spiritual meant that:

> . . . the difference between a living being and a corpse was nothing more than the difference between a wound-up watch and a spent automata [*sic*]. The Catholic Church recognized the threat to religion that Descartes's new mechanistic philosophy posed but was satisfied with the philosopher's dualistic solution: Simply divide the res cogitans, the realm of the mind, from the res extensa, the spatial world of bodies and objects, and insist that never the twain shall meet . . .
> The enormously productive power of Cartesian philosophy ensured that bone-cold mechanism would come to dominate the Western worldview.[200]

This dualism between the transcendent world of mind and spirit and the mundane

realities of physicality played an important role in the German Enlightenment, in

Romantic responses, and consequently, in the establishment of some of the fundamental

assumptions that have come to dominate scholarly approaches to the Western musical

canon. Immanuel Kant's conception of limitations on human understanding, that "any

possible speculative cognition of reason is restricted to mere objects of *experience*," had

profound implications for religion and the general worldviews of subsequent

generations.[201] While Kant never went quite so far as to reject religion, his approach, in

the words of Steven Ozment, "initiat[ed] its moral reconfiguration and ultimate

secularization."[202] The notion that there can be no absolute knowledge was threatening

to many nineteenth-century theologians and thinkers, but it likewise empowered

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[200] Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony, 2004), 156.

[201] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans., Werner Pluhar, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 640.

[202] Steven Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 182.

individual subjectivity in that, "with the denial of any objective standard for knowing or evaluating the world beyond the human mind, the world itself could only be as real and as good as that mind deemed it to be."[203] For philosophers like Hegel, the loss of absolute, transcendent truth was too high a price to pay for such valuing of the individual. As a result, Romantic thinkers reformulated Kantian ideas in order to place absolute knowledge in the realm of reason itself, thereby attempting to mitigate contradictions between the individual and the absolute.[204]

In England, where post-Enlightenment subjective ambivalence came most immediately in contact with the effects of scientific progress, the uses of technological imagery in negotiating the gulf between the individual and the transcendent becomes apparent. As early as 1794, William Blake was exploring the social implications of industrialization in *Songs of Experience*, his companion to his *Songs of Innocence* of 1789. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* presents multiple dualities, prominent among them the relationships between humans and their machines. The binary of the natural/divine and the technological/profane is prominent in the parallel poems "The Divine Image" from *Innocence* and "A Divine Image," *Experience*'s companion to the previous poem:

> "The Divine Image" (*Songs of Innocence*)
>
> To Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
> All pray in their distress:
> And to these virtues of delight
> Return their thankfulness.

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[203] Ibid., 185.
[204] Ibid.

For Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is God our father dear:
And Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
In Man his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew.
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.[205]

"A Divine Image" (*Songs of Experience*)

Cruelty has a Human Heart,
And Jealousy a Human Face;
Terror the Human Form Divine,
And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,
The Human Form a fiery Forge,
The Human Face a Furnace seal'd,
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.[206]

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[205] William Blake, "The Divine Image" from *Songs of Innocence* (1789), in *The Portable Blake*, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York: Penguin, 1976), 91.
[206] Ibid., "A Divine Image," from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, in *The Portable Blake*, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York: Penguin, 1976), 120.

Blake's poetry is obsessed with unresolved dualisms. The second poem presents industrial—indeed, explicitly cyborg—imagery through a poetic form which is, itself, quite mechanized. "A Divine Image" constitutes a seemingly closed system, a series of simple sentence constructions in a circular progression of equivalences, the second stanza reversing the imagery of the first in order to end at its own beginning. "The human form" is both "terror" and a "fiery forge." Therefore, humanity itself unites the abstract emotion with the physicality of industrialization. Yet, as pessimistic as the tone of the second poem may seem, it does not simply negate the optimistic human divinity expressed in the first. Innocence and experience are presented as two sides of the same coin, tracing and ultimately concretizing abstractions through human characteristics. In the first poem, the "human form" is not only love, but also divinity. Taken together, the two poems present humanity at the center of a continuum linking spiritual absolutes with a gloomily physical world of machinery. While forge and furnace are most specifically frightening, even perhaps demonic, their structural association with humanity allows them to retain potential for good and constructs a relation between machine and the divine.

One need not look far to find similar connections between the mechanical and the spiritual in Western music. Such associations are central to our most cherished musical myths and stories. Indeed, it was a fiery forge—in Blake's poetry, the source of human form, terror, and the divine—which, according to legend, provided the basis for our entire musical language. Pythagoras, passing a smithy, detected consonant intervals produced by hammers striking anvils and, "apprehending this came to him *from God*, as a most

happy thing, he hastened into the shop."[207] Subsequently, as most musicians trained in

the Western tradition could relate, Pythagoras recognized that the respective weights of

the anvils correspond to their pitch and, as a result, determined the numerical ratios

defining musical intervals, which ultimately became implicated in notions about the very

ordering of the universe. As Stuart Isacoff relates, for Johannes Kepler, "the answers to

music's great questions could be found in the firmament . . . by realizing the divine

geometry in the mind of God."[208] This is, of course, only the tip of the iceberg of

rhetorical and philosophical musings on the relationships between the sounds produced

by mechanical vibrations and the otherworldly. Concerns—sometimes outright

anxieties—about tuning, ratios, and the "absolute" run rampant throughout music history,

continuing even today in debates over the relative values of equal temperament and just

intonation, often carried out in shockingly moralizing, even metaphysical terms.[209]

What is at stake in these arguments is, of course, the treatment of musical

technology, specifically the tuning of instruments whose mechanisms preclude

spontaneous alterations of intonation by a performer; these debates primarily are

inscribed, both conceptually and practically, on keyboards.[210] By the nineteenth century,

this implicated specifically pianos and their repertoire. Equal temperament and the

standardization of the tonal musical language allowed the rationalization and codification

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[207] John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London, 1776; reprint of 2nd ed., New York: Dover, 1963), in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984), I, 9-10, 5. Emphasis mine.

[208] Stuart Isacoff, *Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 157.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Ibid., esp. 1-8.

of the late eighteenth-century forms that the nineteenth century both celebrated and challenged through priorities that would become the foundation of musicological discourse. These forms, consequently, translated Enlightenment logic directly into musical language, manifested in the symmetry and rationality of what we now call the Classical Style.[211]

But just as importantly, the eighteenth century, with its focus on the physics of sound, began to conceptualize instrumental music as embodied. Just as acoustic properties of music were explained through rationality, musical meaning was increasingly seen as located in its capacity literally to move bodies. Cartesian philosophies rendered instrumental music problematic in that, as Chua notes, "although sound resided in the body, the body itself could not validate musical meaning, since the thinking ego had basically *mechanized* it to death."[212] Therefore, while vocal music, with its inherent capacity for representation, can "authenticate its own being," instrumental music contained the dangerous potential to act as a puppeteer, pulling the strings of human emotion.[213] Chua argues that, "Cartesian dualism set in motion the system of opposition between instrumental and vocal music that was to bedevil the eighteenth century; it delineated in music the contrast of body and soul, passion and reason, object and subject . . ."[214] This philosophical and aesthetic duality of sound created by the human body—in Western classical music, voice—and sound created through a mediating

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[211] See Susan McClary, "What Was Tonality?" in *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 63-108.

[212] Chua, 82. Emphasis mine.

[213] Ibid, 84.

[214] Ibid.

technology—musical instruments—then, constitutes a symbolic site of multiple cultural concerns, especially notions of the body, the transcendent, and authenticity. The union of mechanical and anatomical processes through song places these large-scale issues in conflict, even while compelling their cooperation through performance.

A powerful example of this cooperation can be observed in "Zebulon," from Wainwright's most recent album—an album explicitly designed to contrast his highly orchestrated previous albums with a spare piano/voice sound. "Zebulon" presents a simple harmonic structure, in which a tonic triad (on D) transforms, via dissonant tones, to the supertonic, to the supertonic seventh, and ultimately to a harmony consisting of the supertonic seventh with the dominant pitch in the bass. This chord, in terms of Western harmony, demands resolution. Wainwright's voice moves to tonic, suggesting the needed resolution. However, he subverts this demand by repeating the chord multiple times, each articulation slightly later than the first, even as he vocally sustains the tonic pitch of the expected resolution. Voice, in this case, implies resolution, while the instrumental technology of the piano, sounding its harmonic pitches, offers a differing approach to the passage. The text of the song describes Wainwright's experience of explaining to a former lover his current state: "My mother's in the hospital/ my sister's at the opera". The uncomfortable repetition of the dominant/supertonic seventh sonority exacerbates the song's lethargy, musically illustrating both movement and stasis. When, in the third verse, Wainwright's voice ascends beyond the register of the piano's chords, with the words "all I need is freedom/ Freedom's apparently all I need," the importance of the piano/voice relationship becomes clear. The stable motion of the piano's steady chords

enables the freedom through which Wainwright's voice can escape the narrow register of the song. It facilitates a harmonic structure that is simple and stable enough to allow vocal excess. Still, Wainwright's voice quickly falls back to the lower register with the words "but who's ever been free in this world/ who has never had to bleed in this world." The constancy of the piano's steady articulation, in this case, enables a remarkably expressive range for Wainwright's complex emotive lyrical passages.

"In Uniform": Pianos, Domesticity, and Subjective Empowerment

Wainwright often channels diverse personas in his song writing, but perhaps the most unexpected of his performative subjectivities emerges in "The Art Teacher" from *Want Two*. The song tells the tale of a childhood crush on a male teacher that is fostered during a class trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. While the listener likely initially assumes the speaker's gender to be male, as Wainwright sings "there I was in uniform, looking at the art teacher"—as the text moves to the present tense in subsequent verses, it reveals a female gender—"All this having been said, I married an executive company head." Wainwright creates a middle-aged wealthy housewife character whose memory of the art teacher, a figure that represents self-assertion and creativity—"he asked us what our favorite work of art was. Never could I tell him it was him"—serves to highlight her sense of being trapped in her domestic role—"here I am in this uniformish, pant-suit sort of thing, thinking of the art teacher. Never have I loved since then. Never have I loved any other man." The musical texture is entirely piano-driven, characterized by oscillating broken chords, similar to those in "Danny Boy" and "Imaginary Love," but differing in

their forceful, duple meter consistency. The sound is directly reminiscent of the

repetitive movement and gradual harmonic changes in the music of Philip Glass and it

conveys a sense of endless propulsion, a sort of suspension and lack of rest or resolution.

Additionally, and also in contrast to the previous songs, its timbre consists primarily of an

acoustic piano. On the studio version, a French horn engages in a call and response with

the voice, but the piano itself serves as the primary carrier of musical structure and

texture.

The dominance of the piano is fitting for a song lamenting the entrapment of

bourgeois domesticity, as it carries with it a complex history of social domesticity

reaching to the early nineteenth century. The specific musical technology involved in

song carries a great deal of social significance. The nineteenth-century piano served as a

paradoxical, symbolic site of negotiation between cultural dualities in Biedermeier

Germany and Austria. While, on the one hand, the domestic piano encapsulated ideals of

domesticity and order in a world profoundly shaken by violence and disillusionment, it

maintained the potential to confound social structures and to enable a productive

subjective expression. Consider a correspondence between Robert Schumann and Clara

Wieck in July 1833. Confined to home due to the hand injury that had destroyed his

hopes for a career as a piano virtuoso, Schumann wrote to Wieck:

> As there is no electric current between us to remind us of one another, I have had
> a sympathetic idea, namely that to-morrow, exactly at eleven o'clock, I shall play
> the Adagio from Chopin's Variations, and shall think intensely, exclusively, of
> you. Now my petition is that you will do the same, so that we may meet and

> communicate in spirit. [. . .] If you do not do as I ask you, and a string should break to-morrow at twelve o'clock, be sure that's me.[215]

Schumann's letter endows the piano with an enormous amount of power. The instrument is represented as a transformative tool; through simultaneous performance, it enables Robert and Clara symbolically to escape their respective domestic spaces and commune despite physical separation. Schumann's image of a spiritual doppelganger is constructed through the piano in opposition to the physical containment of the home. In an era in which domestic space was construed as a critical site of social stability, this image takes on great significance. Historians and critics have observed that the nineteenth-century piano served as a symbol of domestic tranquility in the face of great social upheaval and cultural contradictions. It both functioned as a marker of the successful negotiation of a revised socio-economic system and helped to reinforce new ideas of proper behavior. However, while the piano emerged as a powerful symbol of social control, it also manifested a duality that allowed resistance to cultural structures. Occupying an interstitial space bridging the dichotomies—private and public, Biedermeier and Romantic—that characterize historiography of the era, the piano serves as a contradictory image both reinforcing and subverting the political and social culture of the early nineteenth-century German states.

The Biedermeier piano occupied a critical cultural space in an era struggling to reconcile liberal humanist ideals with anxieties fostered by years of violence. The

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[215] Letter of 13 July 1833 to Clara Wieck in *Early Letters of Robert Schumann* ed. Clara Schumann, trans. May Herbert (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), 204. For a discussion of Schumann's injury and treatment, see Eric Frederick Jensen, *Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 68-71.

massive sweep of the Napoleonic wars fundamentally altered how political and social

structures related as, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, "it was now known that revolution

in a single country could be a European phenomenon; that its doctrines could spread

across the frontiers, and, what was worse, its crusading armies could blow away the

political systems of a continent."[216] The bloody "Battle of Nations" at Leipzig in

October 1813 and Napoleon's abdication the following year may have expelled

occupying forces, but French social reforms meant that absolutist rule and aristocratic

privilege would forever remain destabilized.[217] Society was restructured as old notions

of enlightened despotism gave way to Kantian visions of individual freedom and

autonomous subjectivity.[218] But while leaders in the German states recognized that

reform was inevitable and necessary if they were to withstand popular radical impulses,

they understood all too well the dangers of revolutionary zeal among the masses. Martin

Kitchen notes, "they were determined that it should be a revolution from above,

controlled and channeled by the bureaucracy, so that the state could be immunized

against a revolution from below."[219] In Prussia, this took the form of a centralized

administration, which allowed a level of local self-governance and a theoretical, if not

practical, elimination of aristocratic privilege. While stripped of much of its power, the

aristocracr y still exerted influence on policy, delaying to a certain extent the sought-after

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[216] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 91.
[217] Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany: 1800-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 14-26.
[218] Ibid., 14.
[219] Ibid.

bourgeois ideal.[220] In Austria, reforms were largely frustrated by a succession of

ineffectual emperors clinging to the notion of absolutist monarchy, leaving most

substantive decisions to a committee of administrators with little clarity as to the scope of

their authority.[221] This lack of governmental leadership contributed to a deep suspicion

of revolutionary ideas and the establishment of a repressive police state, driven by foreign

minister and later Chancellor Clemens von Metternich.

More generally, throughout post-Napoleonic Europe, the desire for a domestic

tranquility separate from the worlds of politics and work resulted from the uneasy

balance between liberal ideals of freedom and leaders' fears of revolution.[222] Hopes for a

post-Napoleonic social order rested with the establishment and preservation of a middle-

class. With their assault on the aristocratic class system, revolutionary ideals translated

into an increasing focus on the nuclear bourgeois family as a social structure enabling

upward mobility while buffering its members from the frightening world outside. The

bourgeois ideal was not attainable for most of the population, but an orderly household

provided distractions from the poverty and political instability surrounding it. As a sign

of middle-class prosperity and decency, the piano became a ubiquitous trapping of the

bourgeois home.[223] Early nineteenth-century pianos fell into two distinct categories: the

heavy "English" piano with its full, powerful sound, and the smaller "Viennese" piano,

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[220] Ibid., 21.
[221] Ibid., 24.
[222] Ibid., 30.
[223] Alice M. Hanson, *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 118; See also, Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), esp. 119-187; and Ruth Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), esp. 85-152.

celebrated for its clarity and elegance.[224] While efforts were made among pianoforte

companies during the first half of the nineteenth century to make pianos more affordable,

the difficulties of mass-producing such a complex piece of technology kept consumer

costs relatively high.[225] Therefore, the piano served as a clear marker of a certain amount

of affluence, with obvious differences in English and Viennese styles allowing immediate

recognition of whether a particular instrument was imported or domestic. Moreover, as

Richard Leppert has observed, the wildly diverging and often outlandish artwork

adorning the outside of pianos allowed the instruments to serve as even more specific

signifiers of cultural values.[226]

Among the most prominent of the symbolic functions of the Biedermeier piano

was the elucidation and preservation of clearly defined gender roles, which shifted

distinctly with changing economic and social models. Kitchen observes that the new

emphasis on individuality and the establishment of separate spheres of work and home

meant that:

> Schiller's ideal of the conscientious '*Hausfrau*' gave way to a grotesque
> idealization of an ethereal womanhood [. . .] The Biedermeier ideal was that an
> educated, intelligent, and impeccably mannered wife should devote herself to the
> family, provide comfort and affection for its members, and avoid any conflict
> with her spouse.[227]

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[224] David Rowland, "Pianos and pianists c.1770-c.1825," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22-26; Katalin Komlós, *Fortepianos and their Music: Germany, Austria, and England, 1760-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 53.

[225] Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, rev. ver. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 34-42.

[226] Leppert, 1993. See esp. chapter 6: "Sexual Identity, Death, and the Family Piano in the Nineteenth Century," 119-151.

[227] Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany*, 32.

The bourgeois family sought to remove itself from the public sphere, to provide an isolated and protected domestic space. As men left the house for a separate workplace, women were to "devote more time to education and to cultivating their literary, musical, and artistic tastes and talents."[228] Ruth Solie's examination of journals and diaries of young women throughout nineteenth-century Europe illustrates the crucial link between piano-playing and Judith Butler's notion of "girling," a dual process through which society acts upon girls to formulate "appropriate" female behavior, while providing the means by which young women learn to perform their gender and negotiate individual subjectivity within this monolithic framework.[229] For Solie, the cultural ubiquity of the "piano-girl" image involves, "the spread of a popularized, or perhaps I should say vulgarized, form of romanticism that idealized and sentimentalized women at the same time that it idealized and sentimentalized the aesthetic experience, creating a natural link between them."[230] Judging from the words of the girls themselves, the pressure to perform—and thereby continuously to enact the romanticized domestic ideal—could be overwhelming and, at times, even quite terrifying.[231]

The association of piano-playing with, not simply women, but young women, may contribute to understandings of Felix Mendelssohn's seeming ambivalence toward the publication of his sister Fanny Hensel's music. Marian Wilson Kimber effectively notes how nineteenth-century notions of gender and class restricted Fanny's move from private to public music, but she is careful to articulate a distinction between these broad

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[228] Ibid., 33.

[229] Solie, *Music in Other Words*, 86.

[230] Ibid., 91.

[231] Ibid. See esp. Chapter 3: "Girling" at the Parlor Piano," 85-117.

cultural ideas and the relationship between the two composers. She asserts that,

"Mendelssohn's refusal to encourage his sister to publish was partly a desire to save her

from any stresses which might negatively affect her health," apparently overlooking how

this assessment plays into and affirms the romanticized construction of nineteenth-

century womanhood, which was "weak, hyper-sensitive, a bundle of nerves, given to

fainting fits and sudden headaches, to be revived by smelling salts and calmed by liberal

doses of laudanum."[232] Certainly, Felix is not the villain in this relationship that he is

often portrayed to be, but perhaps his reluctance to promote Fanny's publication, despite

her husband William Hensel's apparent support, may also have stemmed in part from a

culturally-conditioned association of Fanny's music-making with the image of her

younger self playing for the family salon.[233] But what is perhaps more important is that,

despite the enduring image of Fanny Hensel as a woman penned-in by bourgeois

domesticity, much of her music, far from a simple reenactment of Biedermeier ideals,

demonstrates the subjective complexity and self-expressive depth associated with

Romanticism. That her music would interact with the "high" art aesthetics of her time is

certainly not surprising, but Fanny Hensel can ultimately serve to disrupt perceptions of a

Biedermeier/Romantic dichotomy. Furthermore, this disruption need not be an isolated

instance, as Solie observes that, while the piano served as a restrictive device reinforcing

conformity to Biedermeier gender norms, young women developed strong attachments to

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[232] Marian Wilson Kimber, "Felix and Fanny: Gender, Biography, and History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51; Kitchen, 33.

[233] For a discussion of Felix Mendelssohn's and William Hensel's conflicting attitudes toward Fanny's publication, see R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 328-329.

the instrument as a solace, protection, and means of self-expression.[234] This is a subversive kind of self-expression, as the solace of the piano is enabled by home music-making and a host of social obligations and pressures associated with it. But, in addition, this self-expression exists within an explicitly gendered framework, in which the piano functions as an explicit means of enabling female domesticity.

While the piano functioned as a symbol of domestic stability in a traumatized and changing world, it allowed pianists to confront their society in unique ways and to engage in individualized self-expression, despite the homogenizing impulses of their culture. Franz Schubert's confrontation with this duality at the end of his life serves as a useful illustration. Bedridden and violently ill, Schubert turned to the piano, composing three sonatas, often considered his best, in the few months before his death. In the second movement of the Sonata in A Major (D. 959), an almost absurdly placid, controlled barcarolle lyricism is suddenly interrupted by what Dieter Hildebrandt has called, "a two-page inferno for the piano . . . Suddenly he seemed to break out of his own musical style, abandoning any sort of structure or harmonic context, dispensing with the most basic piano technique: he simply raged, come hell or high water."[235] For Hildebrandt, the passage is an expression of Schubert's fury against "eternal torture at the keyboard."[236] I would argue, however, that we hear in this movement Schubert using the keyboard to enact a Biedermeier docility that he only uncomfortably replicated in life, simply to reject

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[234] Solie, *Music in Other Words*, esp. 110-113.

[235] Dieter Hildebrandt, *Pianoforte: a Social History of the Piano*, trans. Harriet Goodman (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 44.

[236] Ibid., 46.

it outright in a fiery passage contained and hidden within a framework of carefully

controlled serenity. But the rage of this ternary movement's middle section disrupts the

very framework within which it is expressed. The initial sixteenth-notes of the right hand

continue a metrical value present in the opening section, but the entrance of the left hand

precipitates an increase in the metrical pace. As the right hand becomes more florid, the

left enacts a chromatic descent, enabling a striking tritone modulation. The piano

becomes a vehicle for both performing the domestic ideal and rendering that ideal

untenable. As such, it serves as a contradictory symbol representing both social stability

and the individualism that destabilizes it. For Schubert, a man who fit uncomfortably

into his social world, this dying musical expression magnifies an aesthetic anti-sociality.

When the symbolically and historically saturated piano combines with human

vocality, when the mechanical unites with the anatomical, the resultant musical "cyborg"

both carries along and alters the social weight of private/public, personal/universal

dichotomies. As the figurehead most often placed at the center of art song origins,

Schubert, with his contested personal history, renders their cultural implications unstable.

It is crucial to recall that, while the public performance of art song typically involves

collaboration between a singer and pianist, Schubert's Lieder typically had their

premieres in informal group settings, often with the composer singing and playing at the

same time. Schubert's most celebrated song innovations involve relationships between

piano and voice, external imagery and internal emotion. His use of figurations that

musically represented specific imagery, while simultaneously reflecting inner emotional

development, as well as his innovative ways of creating textures in which the piano and

voice collaborated and responded to one another, brought together vocal expression, with its capacity for representation, and the expression of an instrument that carried with it an unprecedented amount of social and cultural symbolism—an instrument that stands at the center of musical aesthetics and represents both social control and a potent means of personal expression. As an instrument associated, almost from its entrance into the broad market of musical products, with notions of gender, the piano functions as a remarkable example of the gendered implications of technology suggested by the image of the cyborg. Considering Wainwright's close relationship with the historical and musicological construction of Schubert, an examination of Wainwright's music from a perspective informed by thought of the relationship between voice and instrument invites analysis focused on their hybridity, rather than on Western art music structural theory.

"Imaginary Love": Rufus-as-Schubert

In 2007, Wainwright compiled a playlist for Deutche Grammophon's Yellow Lounge series. Yellow Lounge is a periodic event in Berlin, in which DJs play classical music in clubs, the events' playlists occasionally released by the record company. Wainwright's release featured two of his own songs, "Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk," and "Hometown Waltz," in arrangements made for the Fauré Piano Quartet. Wainwright's classical selections—which encompassed the expected (operatic passages from Verdi, Puccini, and Wagner) as well as the unexpected (Haydn and Rameau)— included a single Lied: "Auf dem Flusse," from Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* (D. 911). The inclusion of a section of *Winterreise*, a narrative cycle telling the tale of a

wanderer's increasing sense of alienation from both society and nature after a failed romance, may seem logical for a musician like Wainwright. More than most of the art song canon, *Winterreise* speaks to experiences of social ostracization and identity difference. Additionally, "Auf dem Flusse" displays many of the innovations in collaboration between voice and piano for which Schubert is celebrated. The primary musical texture of the song is provided by a simple alternating pattern in the piano, in which the left hand plays the bass pitch on the stressed part of the beat followed by the right hand completing the harmony with chords on the unstressed half of the beat. As the song begins, the singer doubles the bass pitch at the octave (two octaves if sung by a woman), filling in and embellishing the piano's skips with a largely stepwise motion that provides a subtle evocation of the flowing current of the river observed by the poetic speaker (example 5). At measure 41, as the speaker explicitly draws the crucial symbolic connection between him (/her)self and the river he/she contemplates with "Mein Herz, in diesem Bache erkennst du nun dein Bild?" (My heart, do you now recognize your image in this stream?), the stepwise vocal motion of the song's opening is transferred to the left-hand of the piano, freeing the voice to issue its critical metaphor in a more dramatic, declamatory style (example 6).

Example 5: Franz Schubert, "Auf dem Flusse," measures 5-8

Example 6: Franz Schubert, "Auf dem Flusse," measures 41-49

Muxfeldt reads this passage as a subtle manipulation of doubling and register:

> . . . the expressive power of the melodic doubling of the voice in the left hand
> turns on an extraordinary sensitivity to the register in which the doubling sounds.
> The heart-stopping effect of the hushed drop of the harmonic foundation down a
> half step to D sharp minor at "wie still bist du geworden" ("how still you have
> become") is reinforced by the dramatic drop of the left hand into the lower octave.
> At the rhyming phrase "erkennst du nun dein Bild?" ("do you now recognize your
> image?") the effect is magnified as the bass drops still another octave while the
> singer pushes upward to make an emotional cadence an octave about the earlier
> phrase.[237]

Muxfeldt captures the power of the musical moment perfectly. Still, I find the song to be

far more powerful by maintaining a sensitivity, not simply to conventional musical

notions of doubling and register, but to how those notions play into a collaborative

relationship between piano and voice that renders the poetic speaker's subjectivity mobile

and, thus, more dynamic. The natural imagery of the text symbolically unites with the

inner turmoil of the speaker via the vocal line's text-painting, therefore enabling a further

transference of the imagery to the technology of the piano. As the song progresses from

this point, the piano part grows in intensity, fast arpeggios and accented punctuations

demonstrating an increasing turbulence in the water and, by extension, the speaker's

emotional state. Through Schubert's unique "cyborgization" of the Lied, instrument and

voice, nature and technology, transcendence and physicality, domestic insularity and

subjective empowerment, all unite in this transformative moment in the history of song.

Wainwright, of course, has more technology at his disposal than did Schubert.

The kinds of processes I have tried to contextualize within the nineteenth century take on

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[237] Kristina Muxfeldt, "Schubert's Songs: the Transformation of a Genre," in *The
Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher Gibbs (Cambridge and New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127-129.

strikingly new manifestations with the assistance of a recording studio. Returning to "Imaginary Love" with a deeper understanding of the relationships between technology and emotional expression, absolute transcendence and physical representation, then, provides greater interpretive possibilities when examining the song. Specifically, it enables a reparatively motivated perspective informed by the song's manipulation of timbre, coupled with the weighty cultural and historical implications of piano/voice hybridity. As the ever-present triplet oscillations, accompanied by a heavy, but mostly unobtrusive and simple drum-set, initiate the song's musical texture, they are presented by clearly sythnesized sounds. Wainwright begins his mantra against the texture: "Every kind of love, or at least my kind of love, has to be an imaginary love to start with." As the second phrase begins—"Guess that can explain the rain, waiting, watching game, Schubert bust my brain to start with"—Wainwright's piano quietly and subtly emerges into the oscillating texture. The timbres of the synthetic sound and the piano are so similar as to render the addition of piano nearly undetectable until the second presentation of the song's primary melodic period, when the piano overtakes the timbre of the electronics while Wainwright sings more intensely an octave higher than the initial vocal statement. As the song moves to the bridge, the piano fully overtakes the electronic sound, which transforms into a synth-string timbre, providing momentary, quasi-orchestral countermelodies. The text here more specifically contextualizes the manifestation of "Imaginary Love," describing an inebriated hook-up: "Hoped to look at you in a cab, back of your head across my lap. Oh what grace, green back seat against the red of your face. Hoped to look at you in any old grand hotel. Drunken demands

gave way to reservations. Oh what a room, champagne brings such happy faces, happy

faces." The chronicling of this drunken encounter, in contrast to the synthesized sound

accompanying the abstraction and pseudo-philosophy of the song's opening, is presented

in tandem with "classical" sounds—piano and strings—while maintaining the consistent

rhythm of both the drums and the perpetual triplet figure. Schubert's "busting" of

Wainwright's brain initiates a move from synthetic sound to more "Schubertian" timbres

as "imaginary love" leads to a concrete romantic encounter. These timbres continue to

dominate the song, as Wainwright returns to the initial text and melody. The move from

electronics to acoustic piano (as well as the electronic approximation of acoustic strings)

seems definitive until Wainwright's vocal melody ends. The conclusion of the song

presents a brief return of the initiating timbre of the oscillating figure, but it is only

temporary, as the final phrase ends with a combination of the electric string sounds and

piano. The loss of human voice seems to encourage the re-emergence of new

technologies, but the invocation of Schubert demands their subservience to the "cyborg"

piano-voice combination.

Among the many implications of the image of the cyborg, the potential for

individuals lacking conventional power to obtain power through technology stands as,

perhaps, the most potent. I have suggested that music in general, but most explicitly the

musical technology of the piano, enabled Schubert to engage with his world in ways that

were explicitly denied to him by his society, whether his alienation was sexual, social, or

both. The manipulation of timbre in "Imaginary Love" provides for the explicit

sexualization of the cultural image of Schubert through its referencing of synthetic versus

acoustic sound in the textual movement from abstraction to concrete sexual imagery. On

its surface, the reference can be read as homage to a composer with whom Wainwright

feels a strong musical connection. Yet a reparative motive toward history—or more

accurately in this case, historiography—lends further weight to the timbral moves of the

song. The troubling academic bickering about the particular nature of Schubert's sexual

life further victimizes an individual who, without dispute, endured a variety of serious

hardships, as does the vehement insistence among some to maintain the cultural image of

the cherubic, slightly dowdy, innocent song composer. In channeling the composer, then

using recording technology to highlight the musical technology of the piano, Wainwright

creates a queer-affirmative portrayal of "imaginary love."

Reading "Imaginary Love" as playing with the conflation of historical tropes,

ideals of domesticity, and music technology opens new interpretive paths to

Wainwright's other piano-centric music. If "Imaginary Love" makes the most explicit

textual Schubert reference in Wainwright's output, other songs more directly relate to his

musical impulse to protect and expand the Lied. Many moments in Wainwright's music

for voice and piano demonstrate characteristics of Schubert's innovative song styles. The

gradually altering ostinati of "Poses," like Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade," change

to reflect the protagonist's emotional development, as Wainwright sings of the struggle to

conform to the expected level of "fabulousness" for gay men. The cooperative doubling

of voice and piano in "In a Graveyard," a song ruminating on death and intimacy, recalls

the relationship between piano and voice demonstrated in Lieder such as Schubert's "An

die Musik," or the aforementioned "Auf dem Flusse." But examining the somg

Wainwright most explicitly claims is inspired by Schubert serves to illustrate to power of subtle compositional relationships between voice and piano. "Pretty Things," the song he specifically describes as a Lied, illustrates ways Wainwright combines tropes of queerness with a Schubertian piano/voice hybridity.

"Pretty Things" resonates with Wainwright's notion of gay men and women as "guardians" of beauty that initiated my discussion of "camp" aesthetics in the introduction, but the subtlety of the song's "cyborgization," its relationship between voice and piano, demonstrates a profoundly reparative perspective on some of the musical tropes that characterize Schubert. The instrumental accompaniment of the song, even of its studio version, consists entirely of a rhythmically even, chordal piano part. Structurally, the song presents two distinct ideas, arranged in an AABAAB'AB' format with a short coda consisting of a portion of A. The piano's rhythm and texture remain consistent throughout, but the two discrete musical sections reveal a collaborative relationship with the voice that both lends tension to the song and enables Wainwright's voice and his piano to converse in characteristically Schubertian ways. As the song begins, the piano presents spare chords, their upper pitches sounding a simple motive of an upper leap followed by a return to the original pitch (example 7). The harmonic plan of this section emphasizes the subdominant harmony and plagal relationships, underscored by the opening melodic leap of a fourth. The song describes a sense of alienation that is tied directly to the singer's appreciation for artifice and beauty. As the A section begins, Wainwright sings, "Pretty things, so what if I like pretty things? Pretty lies, so what if I like pretty lies?" While the piano introduction constitutes a simple I-IV-

I progression, the entrance of the voice initiates an alteration, substituting VI for the opening I chord. The vocal line moves in a lyrical, step-wise manner, contrasting with the leaps of the piano. The effect is one of somber introspection. The first moment of dominant harmony occurs in the B section, and initiates a change in both voice and accompaniment (example 8). The piano moves to the dominant harmony, now emphasizing step-wise motion, as the voice takes over the leaping motive previously presented by the piano. The first B section implies distance between Wainwright and an unidentified audience: "From where you are to where I am now, I lay these pretty things." The words "pretty things" overlap with the following A section, together with the consistent accompanimental texture, lending the song a sense of continuity that downplays sectional differences.

Example 7: Rufus Wainwright, opening of "Pretty Things" (author's transcription).

Example 8: Rufus Wainwright, "Pretty Things," initial statement of "B" section (author's transcription).

Nevertheless, the harmonic change marks a significant moment in the song's dramatic momentum. Whereas the opening material enabled a contrast between the lyrical vocal line and the chordal, skipping piano motive, the switching of these roles in the B section alters their characters. With each return of the dominant harmony and the subsequent step-wise movement among the voices within the song's chordal structure, the texture becomes thicker, more pitches added to increase its dissonance. Concurrently, the plagal melodic figure takes on a demanding tone in Wainwright's vocal delivery, each repetition louder than the last. At the second presentation of this material, Wainwright pleads, "make it past your color TV," indicating a disillusionment with the more superficial trappings of popular culture, before singing, "this time will pass, and with it will me and all these pretty things." As the plaintive lyricism of the opening of "Pretty Things" gives way to a more demanding tone, Wainwright's vocal strength emerges from the piano itself, the melodic motive transferred from technology to human voice.

Wainwright appears to present a paradox. He defends his enjoyment of "pretty things," even though he places them in a parallel lyrical position to "pretty lies." His

disparagement of "pretty things" becomes more pointed here, as he casts them as tribulations that will fade away through the progression of history. Yet considering "Pretty Things" in the contexts I have attempted to explore—the notion of an explicitly gay cultural production falling under the troublesome category of "camp," the slippery nature of concepts of authority, family, and place, the perpetual stereotypes of gay masculinities, often divided by tragic pre-liberation and political post-liberation tropes, the volatility of "outing" celebrated historical figures, and the gendered social implications of technology—allows for a more nuanced view. Wainwright de-stigmatizes "campy" artifice (de-contextualized "prettiness") while concurrently recognizing its supposed lack of depth. He does so by explicitly channeling a figure who is seen as the generative force behind the art form the song seeks to recreate, a figure whose debated sexuality has become the source of a perplexing amount of scholarly angst. He channels Schubert's innovations, particularly his careful structuring via motivic manipulation and harmonic cleverness, carried out through the cooperative treatment of the human voice and an instrument that is strongly tied to both gendered domestic roles and the musical means to symbolically subvert them.

CONCLUSION
"Do I Disappoint You?"

The acts of interpretation and criticism are necessarily subjective. As I began this project, I recognized that I placed myself at the mercy of a still prominent community of music scholars who cling to notions of objectivity in a desire to portray their endeavors as scientific and intellectually unassailable. I embrace attempts to quantify and document musical relationships and facts, but I believe equally in the value of motivated interpretive perspectives. I hope that scholars will understand my project for what it is: a rumination intended not only for the academic echo chamber, but for the wide range of individuals whose sexual or gender identities place them at odds with a well-established collection of histories, moral systems, and political tools that would render their experiences and self-knowledge ancillary or deviant. Music can be an object of systematic and quantitative explanation, but it can equally serve as a source of joy, healing, and productive self-exploration. I believe my examinations of several moments in Western cultural history and the ways in which they are most prominently described demonstrate the political and social problems inherent in monolithic and ostensibly objective descriptions of events and facts. I hope that my alternative examinations of historical moments and tropes through the lens of Wainwright's music might suggest tactics for constructing symbolic and fanciful relationships to history that may better serve marginalized individuals.

Neither my musical readings nor my historical perspectives should be taken as definitive. They are options. Abused populations do not have the luxury of contenting themselves with "objective" histories for sustenance. They must create histories, as well

as locate their own cultural imperatives within histories constructed by members of

dominant social groups, institutions, and structures. Wainwright provides a number of

queer-affirming interpretive moves in his music. Recognizing the reparative motivation

behind such acts of musical reinterpretation is, I believe, crucial to fully understanding

his approach to artistic production. But more importantly, such recognition is crucial to

understanding the means by which a reviled minority might recognize itself and

productively affirm itself in the cultural products of the majority that largely reviles it.

Through this project, I have intentionally skirted the methodological practices of a

specific camp of musicological discipline in order to highlight the limitations of static

notions of tradition and objectivity. I have tried to do this both explicitly—by avoiding

the "scientific" and quantitative bent of a long history of musicological processes—and

metaphorically—by turning toward ideas of "reparative" perspectives on historical "fact,"

most eloquently articulated by the literary critical work of Sedgwick.

Throughout my academic musical career, I have found that the quest for an

objectively verifiable reality has stifled the true power of music. I have struggled against

the impulse to formulate scholarly arguments consisting of no more expressive evidence

than "fact," mathematical theories of pitch and rhythm, and current perceptions of

homogenous historical stylistic trends. Certainly, objectivity is not why people enter into

the economically and socially treacherous reality of a music career. Neither can

mathematics and "objective" histories describe the visceral emotional reaction music

elicits in many listeners. I reject outright any theory that might suggest a purely rational

explanation for the emotive power of music. Such a notion necessarily ignores the

historical and geographic differences in music-making and, most importantly, the clear empirical evidence observed by anyone who has experienced music in a crowd: the unpredictability of individuals' responses to particular musical devices.

This should be read as an initial defense against any objections that may be raised to this project, but my desire is not to close with a negative or divisive tone. Indeed, the kind of approach I have taken, I believe, lives quite comfortably beside positivistic scholarship. Few scholars, including those seeking verifiable evidence of particular aspects of music history, would deny that music provides unquantifiable meaning for listeners. I do not believe that this reality prohibits academic scholarship. Rather, I believe that every act of criticism, every act of scholarship, should be taken as an opening to different ways of thinking about cultural artifacts. I have sought to provide an opening leading to approaches that describe potential reparative interpretations of cultural history for LGBT populations. I have sought to begin a dialog on ways sexual and gender minorities might symbolically reclaim a place in histories that have largely denied or reviled their existence. I have sought to articulate a cultural and historical perspective for individuals who, in the words of Wainwright's "Do I Disappoint You?" the opening track of *Release the Stars*, are "tired of being the reason the road has a shoulder."

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